

The Effect of Adjustment Training Based on Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy on Adjustment to University

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of the Rational Emotional Behavioral Therapy Based Adjustment Training on the adjustment level of undergraduates. Participants involved 30 undergraduates from different cities of Turkey. The data were collected using University Life Scale. This quasi-experimental study was conducted as a psycho-educational group activity in the drama room of the university. The effectiveness of the psycho-education program was examined with experiment-control group, pre-test, post-test and follow-up measures and the program was organized as 12 sessions. Posttest and follow-up results showed that those in the experimental group had a higher adjustment score than the participants in the control group. The results of the research showed that Rational Emotional Behavioral Therapy Based Adjustment Training contributed to the adjustment of first-year students coming from different cities.

Keywords: rational emotive behavior therapy, undergraduates, adjustment to university, university adjustment training

1. Introduction

The transition to university life brings with it several problems along with many changes. Psychological problems experienced by university students, ways of coping with these problems, and attitudes and forms of seeking help in the face of these problems have been subject to many research (Cherian & Cherian, 1998; Dyson & Renk, 2006; Erdur- Baker & Bıçak, 2006; Erkan, Özbay, Cihangir-Çankaya, & Terzi, 2012; Thurber & Walton, 2012; Topkaya & Meydan, 2013). One of the problem areas expressed in research in this regard is adjustment to university life (Aktaş, 1997; Özkan & Yılmaz, 2010; Rahat & İlhan, 2016). Erdoğan, Şanlı and Şimşek-Bekir (2005) have expressed that university students have a problem of adjustment in the issues such as society's student view, friendship relations, values of surrounding people and attitudes of their friends to events. In another study (Karahan, Sardoğan, Özkamalı, & Dicle, 2005), it is emphasized that there is a relation between the level of adjustment of university students to university life and their level of shyness. Özkan and Yılmaz (2010) have stated that the levels of self-love of the individuals, feeling loneliness, and problem in relation to the opposite sex are related to the adjustment, and the students with adjustment problems have reported more intense level of problem in these areas. In their study on freshmen, Dyson and Renk (2006) have pointed out that depressive symptoms and stress are associated with adjustment. Cherianve Cherian (1998) have asserted that 85% of undergraduates have experienced adjustment problems while Thurber and Walton (2012) have indicated that some of these problems might lead some physical and psychological problems, lead to anxiety problems in the future, and even be related to dropout. Moreover, academic life (Baker, 2004) and the process of making new friends (Salami, 2011) can make university life complicated.

As can be seen, the adjustment problems to the university life are an important problem that have negative consequences. The adjustment problems experienced by the university students also cause them to have difficulty in many areas (Cherian & Cherian, 1998; Dyson & Renk, 2006; Erkan, Özbay, Cihangir-Çankaya, & Terzi, 2012; Thurber & Walton, 2012). This situation can be related to psychological resilience. For this reason, services provided for university students not to experience adjustment problems are within the psychological help services, which is the most important of roles and functions of psychological counseling services provided by universities (International

Association of Counselling Services, 2005).

Moreover, adjustment to university was classified under academic, personal, emotional, social, relations with the opposite sex, and adjustment to university life categories as proposed by Alçadağ, Kağmıcı, Suna, and Tezer (2003). The first studies on adjustment to university life generally addressed it in terms of academic achievement (Compas, Wagner, Slavin, & Vannatta, 1986; Terenzini, 1987; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1978). In the following period, it was emphasized that adjustment to university was a multidimensional concept (Baker, McNeil, & Siryk, 1985; Baker & Siryk, 1984, 1986). Therefore, adjustment to university was evaluated as a multidimensional concept in this study.

The literature review showed that there was a limited number of studies on intervention programs regarding the adjustment to university (Yöntem & İlhan, 2015). However, it was possible to find studies on some topics that could be regarded as the elements of adjustment to university such as academic adjustment, social adjustment, emotional adjustment, and relations with the opposite sex. When the relevant studies were examined, it was observed that cognitive therapy based interventions were effective in the development of elements of the adjustment. For example, cognitive behaviorist therapy interventions were reported to be effective in academic motivation, learning, and exam anxiety (Laconte, Shaw & Dunn, 1993; Silverthorn et al., 2017). In other words, academic adjustment can be improved through cognitive therapy based interventions. In addition, social adjustment was reported to be improved through cognitive behaviorist therapy interventions (Çapri & Gökçakan, 2008; Heppner et al., 2004; Yöntem & İlhan, 2015). Moreover, it was also expressed that cognitive behaviorist therapy was effective in emotional adjustment (Engels, Garnefski, & Diekstra, 1993; Lyons & Woods, 1991; Oci, Hanson & Miller, 1993). Finally, some studies argued that cognitive behaviorist therapy models were important predictors in relations with the opposite sex (Clifton, 1995; Kalkan & Ersanlı, 2008; Nemati, 1996; Stiles, 2004; Yöntem, 2017). As can be seen, cognitive behaviorist therapy interventions can be an effective intervention method for adjustment to university in overall. Therefore, an adjustment training based on rational emotive behavior therapy, one of the cognitive behaviorist therapy schools, was developed with regards to undergraduates' adjustment problems and its effectiveness was evaluated within the scope of this study. Thus, adjustment to university was aimed to be improved through a single intervention program. The psychoeducation program developed within the scope of this study can be used by the field practitioners working at psychological counselling units of universities. Additionally, this program will contribute to literature. Therefore, it would be useful to mention the theoretical foundations of the developed program.

According to Ellis (1995), at the root of mental problems lies the negative evaluation of the individual about himself/herself. In ABCDE model, which was built by Ellis on this basis, A refers to any triggering event while B refers to the irrational belief about the event. This belief about the event leads to emotional and behavioral consequences, C. D refers to the counter-evidence against these irrational beliefs, and E refers to new and functional thoughts and behaviors that emerged as a result of a more logical thinking about the event (Ellis & Harper, 2005). It is not possible for an individual to realize his or her true potential if he or she is does not make positive inferences while evaluating herself/himself. In other words, the most important factors affecting the individual's emotional state are beliefs, thoughts, and inferences. The psychological counseling process focuses on teaching the skills of identifying and changing learned irrational beliefs. The REBT process is focused on training, the therapist is a teacher, and the client is in the student role. The psychological counselor cooperates with the client in the process, gives him/her homework and teaches ways of thinking rationally. The client practices the skills discussed in the course of therapy in daily life (Ellis & Bernard, 1985; Ellis & Dryden, 2007; Ellis, 1995). Taking this into account, the participants were given homework assignments related to the content of the training given at the end of the sessions, while the participants were given REBT-based training during the sessions (Table 1).

2. Method

2.1 Data Collection Tools

2.1.1 University Life Scale (ULS): University Life Scale (ULS), which was developed by Aladağ, Kağmıcı, Tuna, and Tezer (2003) to measure freshmen's adjustment levels to university was used. The scale was composed of 48 items under 6 dimensions. The items are rated on a 7-point Likert scale. The dimensions are adjustment to university environment, emotional adjustment, personal adjustment, relations with the opposite sex, academic adjustment, and social adjustment. Cronbach alpha coefficients of the dimensions were estimated as .80, .79, .76, .73, .70, and .63, respectively.

2.2 Participants

This study was conducted at a state university in Turkey during 2016-2017 academic year. The participants were chosen among those who came to study from different cities to prevent the experimental environment from being

affected by physical and psycho-social structure. First of all, the demographics of undergraduates were examined, and 86 students were determined to coming from other cities. In the following step, a meeting with these undergraduates was held. University Life Scale was administered to all undergraduates at the beginning of the meeting. The undergraduates were asked to fill in this form using a nickname. Then, a written consent was granted from 20 undergraduates who were willing to take part in the psychological counseling process. After a while, two undergraduates expressed that they didn't want to take part in the experimentation process. After the sessions started, two undergraduates were expelled by the researcher since they didn't obey the group rules and one undergraduate wanted to resign from the process. As a result, a total of 15 participants were involved in experimental group under two groups of 7 and 8. The undergraduates in the control group were chosen among the student whose scores were close to those in experimental group. The nicknames were used for selection of students. A written consent was granted from the undergraduates in the control group as it was for experimental group. Experimental group involved 6 (40%) male and 9 (60%) female undergraduates while the control group had 7 (46.66%) male and 8 (53.34%) female undergraduates.

2.3 Procedure

This study was conducted with the participation of freshmen at a university in Turkey. Two groups, experimental and control, were created for the study. The experimental group was administered the REBT-based adjustment training program while the control group was provided with no intervention. A quasi-experimental experimental-control group, pretest, posttest, and follow-up measures 2X3 design was used in the study.

It is emphasized in literature that a certain of time period should be passed before conducting any study on freshmen's adjustment. The preliminary symptoms of adjustment problems emerge in the first three months according to DSM-5. Therefore, the intervention began in February with the intention of passing the minimum time period and not interrupting the training due to the semester break.

University Life Scale was administered as the pretest. One week later, 12-session training program was implemented to the experimental group. After the sessions ended, University Life Scale was administered to experimental and control groups as the posttest. Two months later, the same scale was administered to all groups as a follow-up to test whether the effect of training program on the adjustment of undergraduates was independent from time and long-term. SPSS 21.0 was used for the analysis of the data.

The group psychological counseling process consisted of 12 sessions. The program involved activities to develop drama, coping, and communication skills in addition to REBT process. The program was implemented in drama class. The summary of the sessions of REBT-based adjustment training can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Session summaries of REBT-Based adjustment training

Session	Activities
1	Group members met each other, group rules were introduced, expectations from the group and the process were explained, and positive and negative aspects of university were emphasized.
2	Being able to distinguish between thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, exemplifying thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, realizing the relationships among thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, realizing thoughts, emotions, and behaviors regarding an event, realizing others' thoughts, emotions, and behaviors regarding the same event, homework.
3	Coping with negative emotions, expressing oneself in a positive manner, giving constructive feedback to the events, homework.
4	Presenting information about A-B-C model, exemplifying A-B-C model in regard to adjustment to university, homework.
5	Informing about irrational beliefs, disseminating Ellis's irrational beliefs list to the group members and reading it together, discussing the relationship between adjustment to the university environment and irrational beliefs, homework.
6	Participants' self-evaluation on irrational beliefs, sharing the unreasonable beliefs with the group members, comments on each other's irrational beliefs, homework.
7	Informing about D and E in the A-B-C model, informing about the self-help form created under the A-B-C model, and sharing the discussion provided by adding D and E to the A-B-C model within the context of adjustment to the university in order to change the irrational beliefs in the university environment. Use of refuting techniques on irrational beliefs. Homework.
8	Giving information about communication skills in the context of adjustment to the university. Homework.
9	Discussion of irrational beliefs about academic life. Educational guidance on academic skills. Homework.
10	Giving behavioral duties in the context of irrational beliefs and playing target behaviors in the group through drama. Homework
11	Evaluation of behavioral tasks. Reconsideration of irrational beliefs. Homework.
12	Group members' evaluation of themselves and the process, sharing their emotions and thoughts about ending the process, and finalizing the process.

Finally, data obtained from three different times were analyzed using Repeated Measures ANOVA. Significance level was set as .05 for all analyses. Bonferroni correction and Post-Hoc multiple comparisons were made to detect the source of the significant differences. Moreover, effect sizes of program on dependent variables was estimated. Cohen's (1988) criteria was used for that. According to Cohen, effect size (η^2) between 0.2 and 0.5 is weak, 0.5 and 0.8 is mediocre, and 0.8 or bigger is strong.

3. Results

Table 2. Mean and standard deviations of ULS and Its dimensions and ANOVA results

Variable	Group	N	Pretest	Posttest	Follow-u p	Source of Variation	F	P	Eta ²
General Adjustment	Control	15	252.33± 20.10	255.73± 19.61	256.86± 19.78	Group*Measure	18.51	.00	.58
	Experimental	15	251.66± 17.07	268.00± 11.63	271.53± 13.09	Within Subjects	49.32	.00	.78
Personal Adjustment	Control	15	39.60± 2.35	39.33± 2.25	39.68± 2.14	Group*Measure	21.97	.00	.62
	Experimental	15	38.66± 1.67	41.33± 1.67	41.86± 2.29	Within Subjects	15.07	.00	.52
Adjustment to University Life	Control	15	64.66± 7.24	66.80± 7.52	67.40± 7.73	Group*Measure	9.64	.00	.42
	Experimental	15	63.06± 6.69	67.93± 5.28	69.20± 5.60	Within Subjects	64.27	.00	.82
Emotional Adjustment	Control	15	44.86± 3.99	45.06± 4.09	45.13± 4.10	Group*Measure	9.14	.00	.40
	Experimental	15	45.80± 3.51	48.66± 2.05	49.06± 1.87	Within Subjects	12.87	.00	.48
Relations with the Opposite Sex	Control	15	37.00± 3.42	37.53± 3.52	37.93± 3.01	Group*Measure	11.65	.00	.46
	Experimental	15	36.20± 1.69	39.20± 1.93	39.73± 2.21	Within Subjects	28.89	.00	.68
Academic Adjustment	Control	15	36.40± 5.96	36.40± 5.96	36.26± 5.82	Group*Measure	3.72	.04	.22
	Experimental	15	39.00± 4.65	39.26± 4.36	39.86± 4.29	Within Subjects	2.01	.15	.12
Social Adjustment	Control	15	29.80± 5.48	30.60± 5.30	30.80± 5.23	Group*Measure	3.63	.04	.21
	Experimental	15	28.83± 7.93	31.60± 5.72	31.91± 5.55	Within Subjects	10.80	.00	.44

Repeated Measures ANOVA analyses showed that the main effect of time (pretest, posttest, follow-up) on ULS total score and scores obtained from its dimensions was significant. As can be seen in Table 1, from pretest to follow-up, the effect of time*group interaction was significant in general adjustment (F(1/28)= 18.51, p < .01), personal

adjustment ($F(1/28)=21.97, p < .01$), adjustment to university environment ($F(1/28)=9.64, p < .01$), emotional adjustment ($F(1/28)=9.14, p < .01$), relations with the opposite sex ($F(1/28)=11.64, p < .01$), academic adjustment ($F(1/28)=3.72, p < .01$), and social adjustment ($F(1/28)=3.63, p < .01$). Moreover, when the effect sizes were examined, it was observed that general adjustment ($\eta^2 = .58$) and personal adjustment ($\eta^2 = .62$) had mediocre effect size while adjustment to university environment ($\eta^2 = .42$), emotional adjustment ($\eta^2 = .40$), relations with the opposite sex ($\eta^2 = .46$), academic adjustment ($\eta^2 = .22$), and social adjustment ($\eta^2 = .21$) had weak effect size. To sum up, the change in the scores obtained from ULS and its dimensions differed significantly among pretest, posttest, and follow-up and between groups (control/experimental).

4. Discussion

According to research findings, there was an increase in all the adjustment areas in the experimental group, while an increase was observed in all the areas except academic adjustment in the control group. This situation shows that adjustment to the university environment has increased over time. However, it was observed that experimental group had a significantly better improvement in all adjustment areas compared with the control group. These findings shows that the implemented psycho-educational program had a facilitator and accelerator effect on adjustment.

There was a significant increase in all the adjustment areas in all areas, especially in the experimental group, but it is an important finding that the academic adjustment didn't not increase in the control group unlike the other adjustment areas. This finding is similar to the results of some research indicating that the interventions based on cognitive approach may be an effective method in increasing academic self-perception, academic motivation and achievement, and in reducing learning and test anxiety (Laconte, Shaw, & Dunn, 1993; Silverthorn et al., 2017). It is possible to make an interpretation that the undergraduates in the experimental group, with the applied program, improved their academic adjustment by improving their academic self-perceptions as a result of turning irrational thoughts into rational thoughts about academic adjustment. Moreover, it can be stated that an increase in academic adjustment is not possible without an intervention.

Other findings showed that relations with the opposite sex, adjustment to the university environment, personal, social, and emotional adjustment increased in both control and experimental group. However, this increase was significantly different in favor of experimental group, which indicated the effectiveness of the implemented program. When the areas are examined, it can be observed that they are similar areas and involve communication and social skills. This finding is consistent with the literature. For example, Yöntem and İlhan (2015) found that their REBT-based Social Problem Solving Training was effective in increasing the participants' adjustment areas mentioned previously. Moreover, it was indicated that REBT-based Group Counseling Program improved undergraduates' problem solving perceptions (Çapri & Gökçakan, 2008). Heppner et al. (2004) observed a positive change in undergraduates' psychological adjustment and problem solving skill in their scores measured before, during, and after a counseling session at a psychological counseling and guidance center of a university. Moreover, they expressed that the more improvement in the problem solving skill during the counseling was, the more positive changes occurred on psychological adjustment and career.

Even if they aren't based on REBT, Psychoeducational programs are known to be beneficial in the development of students' social self-perceptions (Silverthorn et al., 2017). Moreover, findings obtained from the research on the effectiveness of REBT (Engels, Garnefski, & Diekstra, 1993; Lyons & Woods 1991; Silverman, McCarthy, & McGovern, 1992; Oci, Hanson & Miller, 1993) evidenced that REBT was used in the treatment of many emotional and psychological disorders and yielded positive results. For example, Jacobs and Croake (1976) found that in group therapies in which REBT was applied, rational thinking increased and a series of psychological problems including anxiety decreased. Similarly, Gossette and O'Brien (1993, 1994) reported that REBT was more effective than other therapy approaches in reducing the anxiety levels of shy and introvert individuals. These findings shows that REBT helps reduce social and emotional problems.

It is known that the concept of self is possible to be developed by REBT, which is important for personal adjustment (Knaus & Boker, 1975). Koç (1997) reported that self-acceptance levels of students who had low self-acceptance levels in the beginning increased through a REBT-based group counseling program. Additionally, investigating the effect of REBT in increasing the self-acceptance level of visually-impaired people, Koç and Tutkun (2001) found that REBT was effective in increasing the self-acceptance levels of visually-impaired people. Laconte, Shaw, and Dunn (1993) conducted REBT-based psychological counseling on middle school students with emotional disorders and observed that students' self-esteem and success increased.

It is also known that cognitive processes are an important predictor of the relations with the opposite sex (Clifton, 1995; Nemati, 1996; Stiles, 2004; Yöntem, 2017). Kalkan and Ersanlı (2008) found that their program based on

cognitive therapy positively affected marital adjustment. According to Christensen and Senk (1991), cognitive distortions decrease communication in relationships and lead to problems since they lead to blame and accuse the partner. In addition, having irrational thoughts and lack of communication skills reduce the adjustment in relationships (Ellis, 1986; Sharp & Ganong, 2000).

When the findings of the research and the literature are considered together, it can be concluded that REBT-based adjustment education program has enhanced the adjustment of university students. Moreover, this effect can be considered as permanent independent from the time. This indicates that the REBT-based adjustment training program developed within the scope of the study can be used in the psychological counseling units of universities. Additionally, REBT-based studies are thought to be beneficial in the interventions for university students' adjustment problems as well as emotional, personal, social, relations with the opposite sex, and academic problems. Moreover, the adjustment education program developed within the scope of this research can be adapted to different age groups and used in different teaching areas and in different environments where adjustment problems are experienced. However, the placebo group was not used in the study. Therefore, Hawthorne effect (McCarney et al., 2007) was not controlled in this study. In future research, this effect can be controlled using the placebo group. Finally, the sample size is limited in this study. The future studies are recommended to involve larger samples.

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