

**The Academic Experience in the Context of the Psychosocial Adaptation Process to
University Studies: A Qualitative Research Conducted Among First-Year University
Students During the Confinement of the COVID-19 Pandemic**

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Abstract

This qualitative study focused on the academic experience of first-year students in Québec universities during the COVID-19 confinement. Transitioning to university studies requires a psychosocial adaptation process, which can facilitate the academic experience. With the rise of COVID-19 in March 2020, confinement was mandatory, leaving students to study from home without any social adaptation, which may result in academic challenges. Following the psychosocial adaptation process to university studies and a phenomenological methodology, this research will study which strategies were used by the ten participants to meet the university academic demands in the COVID-19 confinement context, which coping skills were used, and what worked.

Key words: Adaptation process, university studies, academic, COVID-19, qualitative methodology, phenomenological approach.

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Introduction

The transition from high school to university represents a significant life transition for students, and often one that comes with high anticipation. This transition can be stressful, but also very exciting as the university contexts allow for further educational development, creating social relationships, and for some students, involve relocating to a new home.

Transition refers to the capacity to navigate change without having total control or knowledge about what this change entails (Barber et al., 2015; Kozhukhar, 2017). A transition from high school to university tackles important changes in students' lives, and includes new requirements to be met, especially from an academic standpoint (Gomes et al., 2018; Barber et al., 2015). Students must adapt to evolve in an unknown environment, as well as develop the capacities needed to meet the new and challenging academic demands (Barber et al., 2015; Gomes et al., 2018; Mikami et al., 2019).

When students begin university, they may be faced with stressful situations created by this complex psychosocial experience (Gomes et al., 2018). From an academic standpoint, the research indicates that first-year university students are ill prepared for a milieu requiring the development of critical and independent ways of thinking (Kouvela et al., 2017; Shamionov et al., 2014).

However, in March 2020, the entire concept of in-person learning was removed, and everything became online to reduce the spread of a lethal virus, otherwise known as COVID-19. Students had to live this transition online using various platforms, such as Zoom or Teams, and did not experience the university campus life, which can affect their academic learning and social abilities.

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This qualitative research will examine the psychosocial adaptation process to university studies among first-year students. As such, this thesis will be presented in four sections. The first section will present a literature review of the topic, and will end with the Samson and colleagues (2023) model of the psychosocial adaptation process to university studies. The second section will describe the research objectives and the methodology used in the study. This section will include the sampling method and the participants, the instruments, the analysis method, and will end with the ethical requirements. The third section will refer to the article of the thesis. Lastly, the fourth section is a summary of the study, including the conclusion, limitations and recommendations for future research.

Literature Review

The following section will explore the key factors that support the research objectives, with a particular focus on how first-year students adapt to university studies from a psychosocial perspective.

Adaptation and Adjustment to University

According to Savickas (1997), adapting refers to the learning or understanding process in order to fit in (Savickas, 1997). Adaptation suggests a certain flexibility to respond to a specific environment, and thus holds a particular emphasis on the relationship between the individual and the environment. In a social context, adaptation corresponds to the individual's adjustment with the norms and values of a society or group. Therefore, as first-year students in the university context, being able to adapt will allow them to meet their current needs, and implement meaningful goals associated with being a part of this new environment (Fisher et al., 2020; Kozhukhar, 2017; Savickas, 1997).

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Academic requirements in university are significantly demanding, and require a lot of adjustment from prior studying methods. One aspect that aids with meeting these new academic challenges refers to the psychosocial aspects of university (Fisher et al., 2020). The following section will examine the different aspects of adaptation to university, all the while focusing specifically on the academic demands and requirements.

Academic Adaptation to the University Environment. Entering a university environment as first-year students can be both exciting and worrisome as there is a lot more pressure to adapt at such a higher academic level (Adams & Proctor, 2010; Gomes et al., 2018). First-year university students report that trying to adapt to a university milieu resembles trying to experience succeeding in an “alien environment” based on the newfound sense independence and academic demands. The academic requirements in university can become a significant stressor for students, especially those in their first year. For instance, research states that stress levels are higher for first-year university students compared to those in their second or third year (Dyson & Renk, 2006; Postareff et al., 2017).

The following section will examine some challenges associated with adapting to the new university academic demands, such as creating contact with professors and peers, and being unprepared for a new sense of autonomy (Dyson & Renk, 2006; Salami, 2011; Schutze & Bartyn, 2020).

Contact with Professors and Peers. During secondary education, students and professors have more extended familiarity due to smaller class sizes, fostering a sense of comfort. However, this changes in the university as class sizes significantly expand, potentially challenging this sense of familiarity (Kouvela et al., 2017; Schutze & Bartyn, 2020). Based on numerous studies, first-year university students reported lacking the skills to properly communicate and interact

with professors and peers (Kouvela et al., 2017; Schutze & Bartyn, 2020; Wrench et al., 2013).

For instance, researchers explain that due to the increased number of students in university classrooms, students tend to be intimidated and thus refrain from asking questions to professors to avoid feeling insecure, shame, or even embarrassment (Kouvela et al., 2017). This can become a problematic barrier to adapt academically for first-year university students.

Unprepared for a New Sense of Autonomy. One of the various difficulties also First-year university students commonly face challenges related to adjusting to increased autonomy, which differs from their prior academic experiences (Schutze & Bartyn, 2020). In this new environment, professors and teaching assistants generally do not issue warnings for missed deadlines or guideline violations, with consequences reflected in students' grades. Research indicates that many first-year university students struggle to adapt to this newfound independence, often resulting in academic setbacks (Schutze & Bartyn, 2020; Wrench et al., 2013).

Furthermore, the use of computers, including social media platforms like Facebook, is more prevalent in university classrooms, where professors typically do not monitor students' online activities. This heightened social media engagement during lectures has been linked to decreased concentration and lower academic performance, as documented in the literature (Vivian et al., 2014).

Additionally, first-year university students must develop effective time management and independent study skills to excel academically. University-level coursework demands greater precision, attention to detail, and the ability to comprehend and retain extensive information. Lastly, the competitive nature of the university environment can be overwhelming for

newcomers who may lack the self-confidence required to navigate and thrive in this challenging academic landscape (Kouvela et al., 2017; Schutze & Bartyn, 2020; Wrench et al., 2013).

Thus, first-year university students are dealt with a lot of challenges upon transitioning from high school to university and adapting to that new reality, especially from an academic standpoint. If they lack the proper skills to adjust to such a new setting, they may be faced with academic failures, and in some cases, dropout (Gomes et al., 2018).

Coping Strategies for Academic Adaptation. One aspect that aids students to better adapt and adjust academically is the social aspect of university. The following section will focus on psychosocial adaptation, and the ways in which it can be beneficial for first-year university students, especially developing a sense of belonging, and the measures universities take to allow for such an adaptation.

Psychosocial Adaptation to the University Environment. The literature demonstrates that upon arrival to university, students expect for their social environments and interactions to differ from their high school experiences. These new interactions will shape students' psychosocial processes, which can affect their social and academic integration outcomes (Bowman et al., 2019; Salami, 2011).

Increased Sense of Belonging. Research indicates that “belonging” is an innate and significantly strong fundamental human need shaping individuals' emotional responses, overall health, as well as cognitive processing. Belonging improves resilience towards feelings of distress, promotes life satisfaction, and influences one's sense of identity. Additionally, it allows for greater academic success, overall functioning, and well-being (Bowman et al., 2019; Kozhukhar, 2017).

The Effects of Study Groups. At the university level, students are very often required to complete projects or assignments in groups, which may be a different study method than high school. For instance, research indicates that working in groups in higher educational levels can facilitate social learning interactions amongst students and increase student engagement. Social learning is beneficial for developing problem-solving skills, motivation, patience, and learning to collaborate with other diverse individuals coming from different cultural and educational backgrounds (Sleeman et al., 2019).

Measures Put in Place by Universities to Help Students Adapt. To facilitate students' transition, universities have introduced comprehensive integration programs, activities, and workshops such as campus orientation visits. These orientation activities, collectively referred to as "Integration Week" or "Frosh," serve as a platform for students to acquaint themselves with university staff, assessment methods, essential dates, and upcoming events. This process encourages social interaction among students, potential classmates and professors, and enables students to explore the campus and forge new social bonds with peers (Adams & Proctor, 2010; Bowman et al., 2019; Briggs, 2012).

The Importance of a Psychosocial Adaptation. By adapting to the university environment and meeting their peers, first-year university students may be less overwhelmed, and thus feel less alone (Briggs, 2012; Salami, 2011). By being on campus and making new interpersonal connections, first-year university students are given the opportunity to envision themselves in this new environment, develop a sense of student identity, and become active members of their university community. The research states that following a positive psychosocial adaptation, students claimed to be more encouraged and enthused to begin this new experience (Briggs, 2012; Bowman et al., 2019; Salami, 2011; Sleeman et al., 2019).

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In sum, adjusting to the university environment as first-year students is a crucial moment wherein they learn to become and act autonomously, as well as form their student identity (Briggs, 2012). It is within that period that students must learn to manage their work, social life, newfound study methods, and engage with the university environment in order to adapt academically and feel a sense of belonging. Ultimately, this will lead to a better psychosocial adaptation (Schutze & Bartyn, 2020). However, the opposite may also be true in the case of a lack of psychosocial adaptation to the university environment.

Lack of a Psychosocial Adaptation to the University Environment. There are instances wherein a psychosocial adaptation is not experienced positively for first-year university students, which can result in negative feelings and distress. The following section will examine the effects of a lack of psychosocial adaptation to the university environment, especially regarding students' academic grades, their mental health, and socializing online rather than in person.

Academic Repercussions. As stated by the literature, when there is a lack of psychosocial adaptation for first-year university students, it can result in lower academic outcomes (Mikami et al., 2019; Postareff et al., 2017; Shamionov et al., 2014). From an academic standpoint, an unsuccessful psychosocial adaptation may significantly compromise students' academic attainment, ongoing participation at university, their well-being, as well as predict lower social and academic engagement (Bowman et al., 2019; Wrench et al., 2013).

Impaired Mental Health. The literature states that insufficient adaptation to university can negatively impact first-year students, causing performance anxiety, loneliness, and stress. This can result in poor engagement with academic life, including a lack of connection to the academic community (Adams & Proctor, 2010; Gomes et al., 2018). Inadequate psychosocial

adaptation may lead to feelings of alienation, associated with emotional distress, physical and mental health issues, anxiety, low self-esteem, dissatisfaction, and high dropout rates. Students may also exhibit unhealthy eating habits, sleep disturbances, and increased uncertainty (Thomas et al. 2021; Wrench et al., 2013).

Socializing Online. In instances of low psychosocial adaptation, students may favor online socializing over in-person interactions. Research explains that in-person social learning interactions are more beneficial than online connections as collaborative work does not necessarily foster genuine connections, potentially leading to loneliness and a lack of belonging. Online socialization can exacerbate anxiety and hinder authentic self-expression. A study by Mikami et al. (2019) found that first-year university students who had more online friends and interactions experienced lower academic success, reduced well-being, and increased psychopathology symptoms. Furthermore, developmental research on peer influence suggests that interactions on social networking sites may lead to reduced social cues, psychological distance, academic underperformance, program dropout, heightened anxiety-like symptoms, and a weakened sense of university attachment (Mikami et al., 2019; Sleeman et al., 2019; Thomas et al., 2021).

In sum, a psychosocial adaptation for first-year university students possesses many benefits. It can help them to get better acquainted in their new environment, develop new friendships, prevent mental health and psychological difficulties, as well as aid their academic transitions. When there is a lack of such adaptation, it can result in feelings of distress, lack of belonging, as well as lowered academic outcomes. Ultimately, the emergence of the COVID-19 confinement disrupted students' ability to fully adjust to the university requirements, especially academically, as the psychosocial elements of adaptation were removed.

The Emergence of COVID-19

The first case of COVID-19 was discovered in January 2020, in the city of Wuhan, China (World Health Organization [WHO], n.d.). This disease is caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, resulting in respiratory problems (WHO, n.d.). Individuals suffering from this virus can recover without necessarily needing treatment, but it is also plausible that those infected can react otherwise and become seriously ill, requiring urgent medical attention. This virus can be more dangerous for people with immune deficiencies. According to medical professionals and experts, the best way to avoid catching it is to wear a face mask and to practice social distancing (WHO, n.d.). Following the global preventions taken to avoid falling ill, in March 2020, all students were informed that they must leave their university premises and that their education would continue remotely (Audet et al., 2021; Talsma et al., 2021).

Being a First-Year University Student During COVID-19. Following the COVID-19 outbreak, universities decided that classes will continue on an online platform, mainly via Zoom and Teams in order to protect themselves from this virus (Audet et al., 2021; Talsma et al., 2021). This transition to online learning meant that first-year university students had to create a study environment in their home, which often resulted in using a shared space with other family members, usually characterised by being noisy and distracting. Attending university online now meant a significant reduction in socialization opportunities, lack of access to university campus, its facilities, and in-person support (either from peers, professors, or university services) (Talsma et al., 2021).

Based on the literature's indications of the importance of a psychosocial adaptation on academic achievements, one can question how first-year university students managed to adapt to such challenging demands when the social experience is completely removed and lived

differently. The following sections will analyze the COVID-19 confinement's effects on first-year university students with regard to their underdeveloped academic skills, the influence on poverty on such an adaptation, impaired mental health, being a student away from home, and the effect of online social networks during the pandemic.

Underdeveloped Academic Skills. A critical concern faced by first-year university students is the underdeveloped self-regulation skills required for these new academic demands, now that everything shifted to being online (Audet et al., 2021; Talsma et al., 2021). Students may face time management difficulties and a diminished understanding of how to access courses materials online. In a study by Audet and colleagues (2021), when students were asked how they would be able to navigate this new format of learning, they reported anticipating lower success in communicating with their professors and peers, lack of social support, decreased adjustment, and feared academic failures due to the lack of a quiet place to study (Audet et al., 2021). This switch to online learning may completely alter how students organize themselves, review course materials, prepare for examinations and assignments, and could lead to negative effects on their well-being and academic success (Audet et al., 2021; Talsma et al., 2021).

The Influence of Poverty. Living in impoverished communities can have negative effects on students' education (Simamora, 2020). Notably, university students come from diverse economic backgrounds and living conditions. The shift to online education during the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted disparities, with not all students having access to fast, affordable, and reliable internet connections, hindering online learning. Additionally, not all students possess personal computers, relying on smartphones, which may not fully support online content (Adnan & Anwar, 2020; Gaeta et al., 2021; Simamora, 2020).

Studying from home can also strain parents' finances as students require better internet, potentially exacerbating low socioeconomic status as a barrier to academic success (Simamora, 2020). Moreover, the absence of a quiet study environment affects motivation and learning. The literature also states that having access to ventilation, natural light, and tranquility positively influence online learning, as students in low socioeconomic households often struggle to focus due to these external factors (Baglow & Gair, 2019; Birmingham et al., 2021; Gaeta et al., 2021; Simamora, 2020).

Impaired Mental Health. The literature indicates that students' well-being and mental health have been deteriorating at record-breaking rates due to the COVID-19 outbreak (Audet et al., 2021; Talsma et al., 2021). First-year university students may be vulnerable to negative consequences regarding their academic outcomes, self-efficacy, lack confidence and sense of belonging, as well as experience constant social isolation, thus hindering their interpersonal skills. Research indicates that students self-reported increased feelings of anxiety, stress, depression, frustration, boredom, lack of motivation, and a decreased sense of competence (Audet et al., 2021; Talsma et al., 2021).

Being a Student Away from Home. Many international students were compelled to relocate during the academic year due to the COVID-19 confinement, often unable to return home due to flight restrictions (Birmingham et al., 2021). Consequently, they faced a loss of daily contact and social interactions with peers, classmates, and roommates while stranded in a foreign country. Research suggests that this abrupt change can lead to profound loneliness. Some students found themselves in residences with limited internet and computer access, which they previously had on campus. This isolation from their homes, family, and friends can result in severe psychosocial effects, hindering academic performance. Thus, being isolated in an

unfamiliar environment can significantly reduce students' emotional well-being, leading to uncertainty, boredom, and anxiety, ultimately affecting motivation and academic outcomes (Ammar et al., 2020; Gaeta et al., 2021).

Creating New Social Networks and Forming New Relationships Online. The literature indicates that the confinement of COVID-19 carries negative effects on students' social participation and life satisfaction (Ammar et al., 2020; Bailey, 2021). Therefore, students must form new social networks and new relationships online. To do so, they must find new ways of socializing with others, all the while being physically isolated from their university campuses and any form of in-person socializing.

The research explains that students found new ways of socializing through the breakout rooms on Zoom (Bailey, 2021). Students used these moments to socialize with others as they were not being observed or listened to by their professors. This way of connecting with other students brought a sense of social presence and connectivity within students, which is an important component of academic adaptation and overall sense of belonging, especially during times of complete isolation (Bailey, 2021).

Summary

The transition from high school to university can be challenging due to increased academic demands, impacting students' sense of belonging and well-being. Positive psychosocial adaptation is crucial, facilitating socialization, academic success, and a smoother transition. However, with the emergence of the COVID-19 confinement, students must adapt to online learning without access to psychosocial support, while academic demands remain high.

This thesis will focus on the first-year university students' strategies to succeed academically without the psychosocial adaptation process. The research questions ask: were they

able to meet these academic requirements? And most importantly, which coping skills were used, and what worked? In order to answer these questions, this thesis will look at the theoretical framework brought forth by Samson and Siam (2011).

Theoretical Framework

Samson and Siam's (2011) coping model used the concepts of Moos and Tsu (1977) as well as Cohen and Lazarus (1979) to create a life transition task-based coping model (Samson & Siam, 2011). This model is based on cognitive appraisals that allow individuals to assess the impacts of life transitions. In addition, this assessment is mediated by the personal history and context of the individuals. This coping model is determined by tasks that individuals must perform in order to regain a sense of normalcy. Included in this model are five components: the individual's background and social contexts, cognitive assessments of the life transition, adaptive tasks, coping skills, and the final outcome, which is either positive or negative (Samson & Siam, 2011). Samson and Siam's model can be adapted to university studies as it explores life transitions; wherein attending university studies can be considered as such, especially for first-year students.

Component 1: Individuals' Social Context and History

The first component of the task-based model focuses on the individual's social context, which involves the students' history, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, life transitions, and the quality of their social support. These different aspects may impact how individuals react and perceive certain life transitions. Therefore, individuals' social context and history can highly influence how first-year university students adapt to this new academic environment (Samson et al., 2023; Samson & Siam, 2011).

Component 2: Primary and Secondary Cognitive Appraisals

The second component focuses on whether the transition is perceived as a source of stress for individuals, which may be influenced by their social context and history. As such, the cognitive appraisal is not universal, and thus differs within individuals. There are two types of appraisals: primary and secondary (Samson & Siam, 2011).

The primary cognitive appraisal refers to the initial perception of the transition, which can be understood as threatening, destabilizing, or irrelevant (see Figure 1) (Corr, 1992; Samson et al., 2023; Samson & Siam, 2011). For first-year university students, this may resemble feelings of anxiety, fear, and apprehension, and thus may impede the adaptation process to university studies. With time, first-year university students become more aware of the academic requirements needed at university, and this new environment becomes gradually more familiar. This progression evolves into the secondary cognitive appraisal (Achille & Samson, 2021; Samson et al., 2023; Samson & Siam, 2011).

The secondary cognitive appraisal refers to the process wherein individuals begin the accomplishment of adaptive tasks in order to allow for an adaptation to occur. It is within this cognitive appraisal that individuals assess their personal resources needed to deal with the multiple challenges this life transition possesses (Samson & Siam, 2011; Samson et al., 2023). Therefore, first-year university students identify parts of their lives that must be gradually rebuilt in order to better adapt themselves to the university life.

Component 3: Adaptive Tasks

The third component refers to the adaptive tasks, which encompass the main aspects that must be taken in order to cope. These adaptive tasks are essential when undertaking life challenges, and ultimately allow for the adaptation process to occur. In the university context, the

main adaptive tasks are academic, vocational, psychological, and social. The adaptive tasks can be done either simultaneously or progressively. Moreover, the accomplishment of one task can facilitate that of another. Thus, the achievement of these tasks depends on the individuals and their way of assessing the situation, their personal background, and their overall coping skills (Samson et al., 2023; Achille & Samson, 2021; Samson & Siam, 2011).

Component 4: Coping Skills

The fourth component consists of the coping skills, which are the cognitive or behavioral abilities to undertake specific and concrete ways to perform adaptive tasks. Such skills can refer to the ones needed to acquire new knowledge, seek relevant information, requesting emotional support and reassurance, setting explicit goals, or participating in group activities (Samson et al., 2023; Achille & Samson, 2021; Samson & Siam, 2011).

Component 5: Outcome

Lastly, the fifth component consists of the outcomes of the entire adaptation process. The outcomes can either be positive or negative. A positive outcome signifies a new sense of normalcy attained by the individuals following a life transition. However, a negative outcome in the face of a life transition could be described as a persistent feeling of distress or maladaptation (Samson & Siam, 2011).

Summary

Beginning university studies can be perceived as very stressful for first-year students, and thus required an adaptation process to a new way of living. Such an adaptation entailed the active involvement of first-year university students, all the while being able to meet the new academic requirements. At first, the life transition is apprehended and seen as fearful, but eventually becomes a part of the students' new reality. The adaptation process allowed for first-year

university students to undertake adaptive tasks and coping skills, ultimately leading to the development of a new sense of normalcy.

Objective and Research Questions

To our knowledge, little research has been done to study the psychosocial adaptation of first-year university students during the pandemic. The purpose of this research was to describe the academic experience and adaptation in the context of the COVID-19 confinement.

Considering students were isolated in their own homes during this transition to university, this research examined their adaptation process with a focus on meeting university's academic demands whilst the psychosocial adaptation process has been removed. More specifically, this qualitative thesis has:

- 1) Described and examined what strategies have been used by students in order to meet the university academic demands during the confinement;
- 2) Described, in a context where social integration is absent, which coping skills worked, and why.

Methodology

This research specifically focused on the participants' descriptive experiences of their first-year of university studies. Moreover, considering this research did not verify a particular hypothesis, it followed a qualitative methodology. The following section will discuss the two major research paradigms, and describe a qualitative data analysis method using a phenomenological approach.

The Two Major Research Paradigms

A quantitative research methodology model falls under the umbrella of a holistic deductive paradigm. This paradigm asserts that outside the individual, there is an independent

reality that exists, one that can be observed, explained, as well as measured. This approach is said to be “deductive” as it is based on the development of a hypothesis aimed at explaining a particular phenomenon, by being tested, and either proved or disproved (Tomiak et al., 2007).

Quantitative research often includes large samples that can be generalized to the entire population, and uses predetermined response categories to obtain observable and quantifiable results. Nevertheless, there are some difficulties that coincide whilst using this approach. Considering the reality is fragmented into variables, the researcher cannot develop a complete view of the phenomenon at hand, and is thus limited to specified aspects of the measured reality (Samson, 2001; Tomiak et al., 2007).

Other than the deductive paradigm, there is also the holistic inductive one. Qualitative research methodology belongs to the second paradigm. Contrary to the previous approach, the inductive paradigm views reality as a construct of the individual based on their emotions, values, and culture. Typically, it is characterized by the recognition of the subjective nature of reality, one that is unique to each individual. This approach is said to be inductive, holistic, and naturalistic. It is inductive as the researcher puts aside all preconceived explicative theories. It is holistic as well considering the researcher does not limit their interest to a specific notion of the experience that is of interest; rather, it comprises an open angle to the phenomenon concerned. Lastly, it is naturalistic as the researcher focuses on the experiences lived by the participants (Samson, 2001; Tomiak et al., 2007).

For this approach to be deductive, researchers must put aside the scientific theories learned in order to achieve a certain degree of innocence (Samson, 2001). Therefore, the researchers must be aware of their own biases and subjectivity in order to be open to a new one: those of the participants. In addition, there are no hypotheses to be tested in qualitative research

as the sole source of information relies on the significance of individuals' particular experiences. Rather, there are open research questions to be explored. Considering there are no hypotheses to confirm, the research is limited to a small number of participants in order to generate a wealth of information and a deep understanding of the phenomenon studied. With this perspective, generalizations cannot be made, but findings can be transferred to other similar contexts. In sum, the researcher aims to understand the reality from the participants' points of view (Samson, 2001).

Description of the Qualitative Methodology: Phenomenological Approach

Within the holistic inductive paradigm is the phenomenological methodology. Phenomenology was brought forth by Edmund Husserl in the 20th century, and this approach is used as both a philosophy as well as a methodology (Klein & Westcott, 1994). The phenomenological approach is also referred as the "study of consciousness" as it focuses on the analysis of the description of human experiences from research participants (Hein & Austin, 2001; Klein & Westcott, 1994).

A phenomenological reduction marks the starting point of such methodology, wherein it invites the researcher to remove (or deduct) every other fact other than how the participants perceive the experience. In other words, reduction in phenomenology apprehends the reality of the world, and allows for greater connectedness between the researcher and participants, as one's experience is not taken for granted (Samson, 2001). In doing so, this approach aims to reveal structures that can be transferred for other groups of individuals. The main focus of this methodology is to grasp the experience as it is lived and acknowledged by the participants (Hein & Austin, 2001; Samson, 2001).

According to Husserl, the foundation of human knowledge relies on one's subjective experiences. This means that reality is not a part of the objective world, but rather can be understood by how individuals perceive it to be. Thus, phenomenological research produces results that are descriptive. More specifically, the researcher considers the experience of the participants as the sole source of knowledge. In sum, this approach is used to understand the subjective human experiences or meaning by maintaining a naturalistic attitude (Hein & Austin, 2001; Klein & Westcott, 1994; Samson, 2001; Tomiak et al., 2007).

Seeing that this research objective is to develop an understanding of the academic experience among first-year university students in the context of COVID-19, we opt for a phenomenological methodology. This research will be qualitative in nature as it aims to describe and understand the subjective experience of participants. To do so, this research will follow the Empirical Phenomenological Psychological (EPP) data analysis method proposed by Karlsson (1993).

The EPP method can be divided into five stages. The first stage refers to reading each participant's self-report questionnaires and testimonies in order to develop an empathetic understanding of their subjective experience. The second stage will involve separating each participant's verbatim into individual units of meaning. It will be during the third stage that each unit of meaning will be interpreted to then abstract the main meanings. Then, the fourth stage focuses on the interpretation and analysis each unit of meaning in order to extract the fundamental elements of the experience perceived by the participants. Lastly, it will be during the fifth stage that the common and inherent elements of the participants' testimonies will be identified and described (Karlsson, 1993).

Participants

Participants were recruited through the use of social media, such as Instagram, and emails on behalf of the first author. Those who were willing to participate and who met the following inclusion criteria were selected for the study: (1) being a first-year university student during the semesters of Fall 2020 or Winter 2021, and (2) having experienced the transition from prior education online. The first author was seeking around eight to ten participants, all coming from universities in Québec.

Ten participants were selected for this study. From these participants, eight had been first-year university students during the Fall semester of 2020, and two participants were from the Winter semester of 2021. See table 1 for an overview of participants' demographic information. All participants signed an informed consent form prior to the semi-structured interviews, offered in both English and French, which were conducted online via Zoom.

Ethical Aspects

This research has been approved by the Office of Research Ethics and Integrity of the University of Ottawa, on June 12th, 2022, file number S-10-22-8514. In order to guarantee the anonymity of the participants, their names have been replaced by fictitious designations. Information regarding details of the field of study or demographic characteristics deemed necessary for the interpretation of the results was associated with the quotes from the participants.

**The Academic Experience in the Context of the Psychosocial Adaptation Process to
University Studies: A Qualitative Research Conducted Among First-Year University
Students During the Confinement of the COVID-19 Pandemic**

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Abstract

This qualitative study focused on the academic experience of first-year students in Québec universities during the COVID-19 confinement. Transitioning to university studies requires a psychosocial adaptation process, which can facilitate the academic experience. With the rise of COVID-19 in March 2020, confinement was mandatory, leaving students to study from home without any social adaptation, which may result in academic challenges. Following the model of the psychosocial adaptation process to university studies and a phenomenological methodology, this research studied how the ten participants met the university academic demands in the COVID-19 confinement context, which coping skills were used, and what worked.

Key words: Adaptation, university, academic, COVID-19, qualitative methodology,
phenomenological approach.

About the Author

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Introduction

The transition from high school to university represents a significant life transition for students. Once in university, as freshmen, they must engage in a psychosocial adaptation process to an unknown environment (Barber et al., 2015; Gomes et al., 2018). More specifically, this psychosocial adaptation process helps the students meet those new and challenging university academic requirements, which are completely different than those experienced during their time in high school (Samson et al., 2023). However, in March 2020, due to the mandatory confinement imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the life transition from high school to university took place in a virtual environment. Indeed, students were deprived from a campus life, and confined to their rooms or apartments. As such, they had to set aside all of their preconceived expectations of what a university life would represent for them.

This qualitative research aimed to explore the psychosocial adaptation process to university studies among first-year students during the COVID-19 confinement. More specifically, how did these freshmen meet the academic requirements in this very unusual context of confinement? As such, this article is divided into four parts. The first part refers to a literature review of the different aspects of a psychosocial adaptation process to university studies. The second part presents the theoretical model and the methodological approach that was utilized, and the third part describes the results of the qualitative data analysis. Finally, the article concludes with a discussion of the results obtained, in light of current knowledge.

Literature Review

The following section will explore the key factors that support the research objectives, with a particular focus on how first-year students adapt to university studies from a psychosocial perspective.

Academic Adaptation to the University Environment

First-year university students report that trying to adapt to a university milieu resembles trying to experience succeeding in an “alien environment” based on the newfound sense of independence and academic demands (Adams & Proctor, 2010; Gomes et al., 2018). The research states that stress levels are higher for first-year university students compared to those in their second or third year, especially as students must develop a new sense of independence and autonomy to properly adapt (Dyson & Renk, 2006; Postareff et al., 2017).

The psychosocial adaptation process to university implies many aspects. Firstly, the research indicates that first-year university students have to become more autonomous in the way they manage their studies. Moreover, they have to integrate in a new social environment, and deal with the psychosocial challenges, such as stress and anxiety.

A New Sense of Autonomy. One of the most important concepts of becoming a first-year university student is the development of autonomy and independence (Schutze & Barty, 2020). In other words, developing time management, organizational skills, learning to study independently, efficiently, and in a productive manner in order to properly adapt to the academic requirements. It is during that time that first-year university students learn to form their student identity and become active members of their university’s communities (Briggs, 2012; Gomes et al., 2018).

Psychosocial Adaptation to the University Environment. Upon arrival to university, students expect for their social environments and interactions to differ from their high school experiences. These new interactions will shape students’ psychosocial processes, which can affect their social and academic integration outcomes (Bowman et al., 2019; Salami, 2011).

The Importance of a Positive Social Adaptation to the University Environment. By being on campus and making new interpersonal connections, first-year university students are given the opportunity to envision themselves in this new environment, connect with professors, and to become active members of their university environment. The literature states that as a result of a positive social adaptation, students claim to be more encouraged and enthused to engage in this new experience (Briggs, 2012; Bowman et al., 2019; Salami, 2011; Sleeman et al., 2019).

To facilitate this new adaptation process, universities have implemented several integration programs, activities, and workshops to welcome their students and to provide the necessary services and resources (Adams & Proctor, 2010). This process, also known as “Integration Week”, or “Frosh”, encourages students to become familiar with their university campus, with their peers, and aids the interaction process with potential classmates and professors (Bowman et al., 2019; Briggs, 2012).

Lack of a Social Adaptation to the University Environment. From an academic standpoint, an unsuccessful social adaptation may significantly compromise the students’ academic attainment, ongoing participation at university, their well-being, as well as predict lower social and academic engagement (Bowman et al., 2019; Wrench et al., 2013). The literature also shows that a lack of a social adaptation to university can result in performance and social anxiety, loneliness, reduced self-esteem, and stress (Adams & Proctor, 2010; Gomes et al., 2018; Thomas et al., 2021; Wrench et al., 2013). First-year university students may fear of poorly engaging with the many facets of university learning, belonging to an academic community, and may lack the necessary skills for time management and the competing demands. Without a positive social adaptation process, first-year university students may feel a sense of

alienation, which is associated with increased levels of emotional distress, physical pain, mental and physical illness, anxiety, low self-esteem, greater dissatisfaction, and dropout rates (Adams & Proctor, 2010; Bowman et al., 2019; Gomes et al., 2018; Wrench et al., 2013).

In sum, a social adaptation for first-year university students possesses many benefits. It can help them to get better acquainted in their new environment, develop new connections, prevent mental health and psychological difficulties, and above all, facilitate meeting the academic requirements. However, the confinement provoked by the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic plummeted the first-year university students in a social desert that forced them to adapt to an unexpected environment.

The Emergence of the COVID-19 Pandemic

As one of the main consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, a mandatory confinement was put in place throughout Québec, including all education institutions (World Health Organization, n.d.). As such, students were informed that they must leave their university premises and that their education would continue remotely (Audet et al., 2021; Talsma et al., 2021). This confinement, which began in March 2020, only ended during the fall of 2022, meaning that the first-year university students who started in the fall of 2020 spent two years of their university studies online.

This transition to online learning meant that first-year university students had to create a study environment in their home, which often resulted in using a shared space with other family members, usually characterized by being noisy and distracting. Attending university online now meant a significant reduction in socialization opportunities, lack of access to university campus, its facilities, and a loss of the universities' essential equipment and services (Talsma et al., 2021).

A critical concern faced by first-year university students is the underdeveloped self-regulation skills required to meet the new academic demands, now that everything shifted to being online (Audet et al., 2021; Talsma et al., 2021). Students may face time management difficulties, poor contact with professors and peers, lack a quiet environment to study, and a decline of social support (Audet et al., 2021; Talsma et al., 2021).

Impaired Mental Health. The literature suggests that students' well-being and mental health have been deteriorating at record-breaking rates due to the COVID-19 outbreak (Audet et al., 2021; Talsma et al., 2021). First-year university students may be vulnerable to negative consequences regarding their academic outcomes, self-efficacy, confidence and sense of belonging, as well as experience constant social isolation, thus hindering their interpersonal skills. Research indicates that students self-reported increased feelings of anxiety, stress, depression, frustration, boredom, lack of motivation, and a decreased sense of competence (Audet et al., 2021; Bailey, 2021; Talsma et al., 2021).

Summary

The transition from high school to university can be very challenging. The literature shows that the process of psychosocial adaptation to that life transition is facilitated by many factors, one of them being a positive social integration to the university environment. However, as the COVID-19 confinement emerges, students are now deprived from a campus social life.

That specific problematic of adapting to university studies requires an understanding of this unique process. The model of the psychosocial adaptation process to university studies provides a comprehensive description of all the aspects required of that specific life transition. This theoretical framework model revolves around the notion that adaptation to life transitions is achieved by accomplishing a non-linear series of adaptation tasks (Samson et al., 2023).

Theoretical Framework: The Psychosocial Adaptation Process to University Studies

The model of the psychosocial adaptation process to university studies is based on cognitive appraisals that allow first-year university students to assess the emergence of life transitions. This model includes five components: the first-year university students' background and social contexts, cognitive assessments of the life transition, adaptive tasks, coping skills, and the final outcome, which is either positive or negative (Samson & Siam, 2011; Samson et al., 2023).

Component 1: First-Year University Students' Social Context and History

The first component focuses on the first-year university students' social context, which involves the individuals' history, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and the quality of their social support (Samson et al., 2023). These different aspects may impact how students perceive and adapt to the emergence of life transitions.

Component 2: Primary and Secondary Cognitive Appraisals

The second component focuses on whether the transition is perceived as a source of stress for first-year university students, which may be influenced by their social context and history. Indeed, the cognitive appraisal is not universal, and thus differs within students. There are two types of appraisals: primary and secondary.

The primary cognitive appraisal refers to the initial perception of the transition, which can be perceived as threatening, destabilizing, or irrelevant (see Figure 1) (Corr, 1992). With time, this transition and the new environment become gradually more familiar, leading this progression to evolve into the secondary cognitive appraisal.

The secondary cognitive appraisal refers to the process wherein first-year university students begin the accomplishment of adaptive tasks in order to allow for an adaptation process

to occur. It is within this cognitive appraisal that individuals assess their personal resources needed to deal with the multiple challenges necessitated by this life transition (Cohen & Lazarus, 1979; Samson et al., 2014).

Component 3: Adaptive Tasks

The third component refers to the adaptive tasks, which encompass the main aspects that must be taken in order to cope. These adaptive tasks are essential when undertaking life challenges, and ultimately allows for the adaptation process to occur. The adaptive tasks can range from academic, social, psychological, and vocational. They can also be achieved either simultaneously or progressively. Moreover, the accomplishment of one task can facilitate that of another. Thus, the achievement of these tasks depends on the first-year university students and their way of assessing the situation, their personal background, and their overall coping skills (Achille, 2021).

Component 4: Coping Skills

The fourth component consists of the coping skills, which are the cognitive or behavioral abilities to undertake specific and concrete ways to achieve adaptive tasks. Such skills can refer to integrating socially with peers, joining study groups, or seeking professional help (Achille, 2021).

Component 5: Outcome

Lastly, the fifth component consists of the outcomes of the entire psychosocial adaptation process to university studies. The outcomes can either be positive or negative. A positive outcome signifies a new sense of normalcy attained by the first-year university students. However, a negative outcome could be described as a persistent feeling of distress or maladaptation (Samson et al., 2023).

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The objective of this research aims to understand how first-year students adapted to the university studies in the context of the COVID-19 confinement. More specifically, the research question asked how did the absence of a campus social life impact the university academic requirements?

Methodology

This research specifically focused on the participants' descriptive experiences of their first-year of university studies. Moreover, considering this research did not verify a particular hypothesis, it followed a qualitative methodology. Qualitative research methodology views reality as a construct of the individuals based on their emotions, values, and culture (Samson, 2001; Tomiak et al., 2007). Typically, it is characterized by the recognition of the subjective nature of reality, one that is unique to each individual. This approach is said to be inductive, holistic, and naturalistic, as it recognizes the subjective nature of reality and is seen as a construction of the individual based on emotions, values and culture (Samson et al., 2023; Tomiak et al., 2007).

Data Analysis Method

A qualitative data analysis method was used to analyze the data, in line with the holistic inductive paradigm. More precisely, we opted for a phenomenological methodology. Phenomenology was implemented by Edmund Husserl in the 20th century, and this approach is used as both a philosophy and a methodology (Klein & Westcott, 1994). This type of methodology uses phenomenological reduction marks, wherein the researcher removes or deducts every other fact other than how the participants perceive the experience. In other words, reduction in phenomenology apprehends the reality of the world, and allows for greater

connectedness between the researcher and participants, as one's experience is not taken for granted (Samson, 2001).

The main focus of this methodology was to grasp the experience as it was lived and acknowledged by the participants (Hein & Austin, 2001; Samson, 2001). Phenomenological research produced results that are descriptive. More specifically, the first author considered the experience of the participants as the sole source of knowledge. This approach was used to understand the subjective human experiences or meaning by maintaining a naturalistic attitude (Hein & Austin, 2001; Klein & Westcott, 1994; Samson, 2001; Tomiak et al., 2007).

To do so, this research followed the Empirical Phenomenological Psychological (EPP) data analysis method proposed by Karlsson (1993). The EPP method is divided into five stages. The first stage involved reading the participants' self-report questionnaires and testimonies to develop an empathetic understanding of their subjective experiences. The second stage involved separating each participant's verbatim into individual units of meaning. During the third stage, each unit of meaning were interpreted to abstract the main meanings. During the fourth stage, each unit of meaning were interpreted and analyzed in order to extract the fundamental elements of the experience perceived by the participants. Lastly, during the fifth stage, the common and inherent elements of the participants' testimonies were identified and described (Karlsson, 1993). The current study was approved by the University of Ottawa research ethics board.

Delimitations

For this study, certain delimitations were put in place in order to ensure that the study remained achievable and focused (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). Delimitations were needed and used in this study by the first author in order to define the scope and limitations of the study (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018).

Firstly, as the interviews were offered both in person and online, the first author chose to only focus on first-year students from Québec universities, which created geographical delimitations. Secondly, as this study focused solely on first-year university students who had lived their first year of university online, it also created temporal and population delimitations, as not every student interested was able to be a part of the study. Due to the resource and length of article constraints, a sample size delimitation came into place as only a maximum of ten participants were allowed for this study. Considering the qualitative methodology behind this research, methodological delimitations were installed as certain approaches could not be used. Lastly, no language delimitations were present as the first author offered the interviews both in English and in French.

Participants

Participants were recruited via the use of social media, such as Instagram, and emails on behalf of the first author. The first author sent emails to Québec universities in December, 2022, to allow for the research objectives to be sent to students, but there were no responses from the universities. Consequently, in January, 2023, the first author referred to social media to gather participants, and displayed a message on Instagram Story, which was broadcasted by other people. Participants reached out to the first author voluntarily, as they saw the Instagram Story on their Instagram accounts, by messaging the first author through Direct Messages, and requested to be a part of the study.

Those who were willing to participate and who met the following inclusion criteria were selected for the study: (1) being a first-year university student during the semesters of fall 2020 or winter 2021, and (2) not having experienced a university or any other prior education online. The first author was seeking around eight to ten participants, all coming from universities in

Québec. Approximately twenty two people reached out to the first author, and solely ten participants were selected for this study. From the twenty two individuals who reached out to participate, ten participants were excluded from participating as they were not first-year university students during the semesters of the emergence of the pandemic, while two others were not students from universities in Québec. The remaining ten participants were selected for this study.

From the ten participants who were selected, eight had been first-year university students during the fall semester of 2020, and two participants were from the winter semester of 2021. See Table 1 for an overview of participants' demographic information. All participants signed an informed consent form prior to the semi-structured interviews, offered in both English and French, which were conducted online via Zoom. The interviews started in January, 2023, and ended in February, 2023.

Instruments

A sociodemographic questionnaire, both in English and French, was used to collect the participants' demographic information, which included their age during their first year of university, when they first started university, their highest level of education prior to university, as well as their current university statuses (See Appendix A). To capture the participants' perceptions about their experience of being first-year university students during the confinement of COVID-19, a semi-structured interview guide was elaborated which followed an extensive literature review. Six topics were discussed, namely (1) participants' academic experience during the confinement of COVID-19; (2) contact with professors during the confinement of COVID-19; (3) contact with their peers during the confinement of COVID-19; (4) support from their respective universities during the confinement of COVID-19; (5) their coping skills to meet the

academic requirements during the confinement of COVID-19, and (6) strategies developed during the confinement of COVID-19 (see Appendix B).

Results

Demographic Data

A total of ten participants were selected for this qualitative study, and the average age during their time as first-year university students was 18.9 (see Table 1). Out of these ten participants, eight of them had requested for the semi-structure interview in English, whereas two of the participants asked for it in French. All of the participants had requested to do the interviews online rather than in person. Eight of the participants had started their university studies during the fall semester of 2020, and two participants were first-year students during the winter semester of 2021.

Prior to attending university, three of the participants were in high school, six of them were in CEGEP (collège d'enseignement général et professionnel), and one participant was an international student in Baccalauréat Français. During their first year in university, seven participants attended Concordia University, two attended McGill University, and one participant attended Université de Montréal. Lastly, seven participants are still in the same program as they were during their first year, whereas three participants changed programs, and all of them are still in university.

Qualitative Data Analysis

After the end of the interview period, the first author followed the five stages of the EPP. Firstly, the first author transcribed the participants' verbatims to develop a deeper and empathetic understanding of their experiences (Karlsson, 1993). Secondly, the first author divided the verbatims into individual units of meaning, which lead to the third stage, wherein the main

meanings of the verbatims were extracted (Karlsson, 1993). Then, the first author interpreted and analyzed each unit of meanings. Lastly, the inherent elements of the participants' testimonies were identified and described, which lead to the development of the qualitative data analysis (Karlsson, 1993).

The qualitative data analysis indicated that the COVID-19 confinement was reckoned as a threat to the participants, and more particularly for their academic performances. The qualitative data analysis focused on the impacts of the COVID-19 confinement, more specifically the general context in which the academic adaptation took place for the participants. Additionally, the qualitative data analysis described the coping strategies used or developed by the participants in the context of adapting to the imposed confinement of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The General Context of the COVID-19 Confinement

Based on the participants' discourses, the qualitative data analysis indicated that as a result of the COVID-19 confinement, their social lives were absent. More specifically, the participants indicated that they felt "robbed" of the university experience, as access to campus was forbidden for security measures. The qualitative data analysis focused on three main themes resulting from the general context of the COVID-19 confinement onto the participants, particularly: life on campus, the contact with professors, and the connection with other students.

The General Context of the COVID-19 Confinement: Life on Campus. The qualitative data analysis indicated that participants did not experience a general university life as first-year students in the way they had envisioned. More particularly, as lacking a life on campus, the participants experienced a restricted access to campus facilities, campus activities, as well as an increased feeling of isolation.

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The participants experienced a lack in their university experience as all access to campus facilities was restricted. This negatively impacted the participants as they felt to have not fully been able to live their perceived expectations of university. Participants 2 and 5 explained: “I felt like I had never made the transition properly to university [...] I remember the transition was hard”. Participant 6 shared: “I had no sense of liberty to go out and meet people, I couldn’t even play sports”. The lack of accessibility to the universities’ facilities impacted the participants’ studying process as well. Participant 10 expressed that: “We didn’t have the student centre anymore, no libraries were open, I had to study at home”.

Moreover, most if not all university-based activities promoting socialization and career opportunities were cancelled. As such, not being able to socially enjoy the university environment had a detrimental impact for the participants, especially regarding their perception of being active members of their university community, and feeling actively involved as university students. As described by Participant 8: “I missed a lot of school events such as Frosh, and I never got to experience the competitions of my program [...] university did not feel real”.

Furthermore, lacking a campus life has affected the participants’ feelings of isolation and loneliness. More specifically, many participants expressed feeling alone and lost throughout their studies. Participant 9 summarized this feeling well which was reported by several participants: “it was just an absolute disaster [...] so much loneliness and very isolating from the rest of the world”.

In sum, the participants revealed that they were not able to properly experience the transition to university, could not study appropriately, and were not able to take advantage of their university’s resources. This lack of student life on campus has impacted the way in which participants perceived their academic experiences.

The General Context of the COVID-19 Confinement: Contact with Professors.

A second subtheme observed through the qualitative data analysis was the lack of contact with professors. As classes were solely online during the confinement, the participants expressed having little to no contact with their professors, as “everything felt robotic, unreal, dehumanizing, and fake” (Participant 9). The participants expressed feeling discomfort, uncertainty, and a resistance to ask for help to their professors, as explained by Participant 2: “I felt so uncomfortable communicating with my professors since I’ve never met them before [...] I didn’t feel like it was appropriate to ask for help and I felt robbed of that.”

Additionally, some participants described reaching out to professors as “a last resort” based on the perceived lack of support and response from them (Participant 7). Participant 9 described this perception very well: “I was constantly waiting for them to respond, and I felt like I was annoying to them to always email them, which gave me less incentive to want to communicate”.

As indicated by the qualitative data analysis, the participants did not feel encouraged nor motivated to reach out to their professors for further academic aid. With this lack of social interactions, leaning on professors had turned unfamiliar, intimating, and negatively impacted the participants. Moreover, the participants explained lacking this contact and connection with their peers as well.

The General Context of the COVID-19 Confinement: Connecting with Other

Students. The qualitative data analysis indicated a lack of interpersonal relationships within participants during the COVID-19 confinement. The participants reported a lack of overall socialization with online classes, unmotivated to create friendships, and expressed a fear to lose their social skills altogether.

The majority of participants expressed the near impossibility of creating friendships through Zoom and a lack of camera use in class. This exacerbated the lack of the expected social networks of being university students. As explained by Participant 8: “it was intimating to reach out to people since nobody turned their cameras on”. As such, without being able to properly know who the participants were talking to or who was in their class, it became difficult for them to create interpersonal relationships online. The participants voiced that the sole goal became to pass their classes, and thus abandoned the hope of creating friendships. As participant 10 expressed: “When you don’t see anyone, no camera, nobody talks to each other, it’s impossible to connect. Nobody was really trying to make friends, people were just trying to pass their classes”. The participants explained that this absence of friendships and social environment was, for all of them, the hardest to live with and to adjust to.

With this lack of expected direct contact during university studies, participants shared a lack of motivation to create friendships or engage in interpersonal relationships with their peers. The participants explained that attending university came with the underlying notion of making new friendships, and as a result of the pandemic and the confinement, they felt robbed of that. As Participant 1 described: “I was really looking forward to university to be able to meet new people but there was no chance to do that. I felt robbed of that”. Participant 9 explained: “it was impossible to make meaningful connections with others, I had no idea who was in my class since I only saw their names [...] online connections didn’t feel real”.

Following this lack of social connections, some participants feared losing their social skills abilities, as Participant 6 pointed out: “I was basically scared to be around people. So how do you make friends when you’re always scared? [...] There was no creating relationships, so what’s the point?”. Participant 8 also explained that a loss of interpersonal relationships affected

him: “I lost the tools to express myself, to approach someone, to make new friends [...] I felt like I couldn't speak anymore”.

This lack of social contact resulted in a decrease in motivation for participants to attend classes and even attempt to socialize, whether it was with their peers or professors. The lack of a social contact was interpreted by the participants as being a driving factor for their academic standings. Participants explained that connecting socially with others influenced how they studied, how they stay motivated as well as focused in class. The participants explained that a lack of social contact and connection with others completely disrupted their lives and their experience as first-year university students.

In sum, the participants experienced a different university environment than they had expected by not having access to a life on campus. By having classes online, their contact with professors and their peers were very minimal. In such an unusual environment, the participants only sought to pass their classes, and did not try to create social interactions with others. In turn, this affected the way in which they viewed their studies. Thus, the COVID-19 confinement greatly impacted their ability to experience the social aspects of university, and henceforth affected their academic experience as well.

The Academic Experience in the Context of the COVID-19 Confinement

The qualitative data analysis indicated that as a result of the COVID-19 confinement, the lack of campus life, and an absence of social contact, the participants' academic experiences were also impacted by the general context described above. More specifically, through the participants' discourses, the qualitative data analysis found for half of the participants, their academic experiences had been challenging. However, the other half of the participants

discussed the opposite. The qualitative data analysis focused on aspects that hindered their academic experience in general.

The Academic Experience in the Context of the COVID-19 Confinement: Academic Challenges. Some of the participants explained being able to succeed academically during their first year as university students. One of the reasons is related to easier access to class notes and materials as everything is online. Participant 4 explained: “Academic requirements were actually way easier for me because I had access to everything”. Other participants indicated that their academic adaptation was achieved through the ability of working at their own pace, and not having lost time going to and from classes. Participant 8 also expressed that his environment aided the academic process: “I was alone at home, in a comfortable environment without any noise [...] it was my best academic year”. Lastly, Participant 5 expressed a newfound learning for time management by attending university online: “ I did very well during the pandemic because I had all the time in the world to study, and I didn’t lose time for transport and being with friends”.

The participants expressed being able to succeed academically as they have invested in time management, organizational skills, and using technology to further help them in their studies. By not having access to the universities’ facilities, proper contact with professors, or relying on their friends to study in groups, they resorted to a more independent way of studying for their university courses.

However, five participants explained that the lack of campus life, contact with professors, and a lack of interpersonal relationships negatively affected their grades during their first year as university students. The participants indicated that not being able to “feel like a real student”

(Participant 2) impacted their motivation levels in class, and at times, resulted in academic failure.

Participants explained that online classes meant harder exams, while others expressed not being able to stay focused during online lectures, felt unprepared, too lonely to study, and lacked the proper space or environment to succeed. For instance, Participant 9 explained being unprepared and lacked the proper motivation: “I was not able to meet those academic requirements [...] I was so unprepared and felt so alone, I couldn’t message anyone in my class. It affected my grades and my motivation to do better”. Participant 7 explained the difficulty of studying when living in a dorm with roommates: “As an international student, I was in a dorm and I couldn't do my exams at home because my roommate was sleeping next door, so I had to adapt a lot and it wasn't easy”.

The qualitative data analysis demonstrated that during the COVID-19 confinement, the participants were faced with academic challenges. Not being able to attend classes in person, not contacting professors, lacking the proper use of the universities’ facilities, and the inability to create interpersonal relationships have shifted the way in which they viewed their academic experiences.

Consequently, the participants explained having to develop a sense of independence, autonomy, and make use of their external and environmental resources. The qualitative data analysis demonstrated that the academic adaptation was easier and more feasible for the participants who were able to develop or rely on these three themes.

For instance, the participants turned to time management, organizational skills, technology, and their access to privacy and a comfortable environment to face these challenges.

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Using and developing these skills have aided them in their academic experiences, in a very new and unfamiliar confinement environment.

Nevertheless, despite the differences in the participants' academic adaptation or lack thereof, all of the participants indicated that certain aspects of university life online affected their experience.

The Academic Experience in the Context of the COVID-19 Confinement: Aspects that Hindered the Academic Experience. The qualitative data analysis demonstrated that all of the participants indicated that some aspects did hinder their academic experiences in general. More specifically, according to the participants, reaching out to academic advisors negatively affected their grades, vocational choices, as well as university experience as a whole. Based on the participants' verbatims, their respective universities were not able to support the participants properly regarding academic advisors. The participants had been taught that for vocational choices or general questions, advisors were able to help, but this was not how the participants perceived the experience. Interestingly, all participants across all universities expressed undergoing long wait times, a lack of attention and support from the academic advisors, as well as increased vocational uncertainties.

For instance, Participant 2 expressed: "My university lacked constant communication. I would send an email and I would get a response two weeks later". This experience was reciprocated by all of the participants. Participant 7 also stated that "It was a disaster. There was a lot of delay in making an appointment with an advisor". The participants expressed feeling an increase in uncertainty as to how to navigate the universities' services online without the proper help from their academic advisors. Other participants questioned the advisors' flexibility to set up meetings, such as detailed by Participant 4: "My academic advisor was never available, and

when she was, there was zero flexibility [...] it feels lonely to not have that support. I met with her once in three years”.

Furthermore, all of the participants identified feeling “left out” when they were able to reach the academic advisors. Participant 8 expressed: “They were always busy, they didn't answer, and when they answered, I only had ten minutes with them and it felt like they didn't even want to help me”. Participant 9 reciprocated that experience and pointed out: “I’d wait in a Zoom meeting room without knowing how many people were before me. And once it was my turn, I didn’t have their full attention [...] it felt like they didn’t want to be here”.

Lastly, the participants expressed that this lack of attention, communication, organization, and support from the academic advisors heightened their vocational uncertainties. Participant 4 explained: “I was supposed to graduate now, but I was never able to reach advisors to guide me through which courses to take so now my graduation is delayed. It was just awful”. Other participants expressed not knowing which courses to take as their emails were left unanswered (Participant 7).

In essence, the participants voiced that their universities did not adapt to the changes required from the COVID-19 confinement regarding support from academic advisors. The participants explained feeling unsupported by their universities and their academic advisors during these challenging times of adjustments. In sum, all of the participants underwent a negative academic experience when reaching out to academic advisors. It hindered their trust in the system, made them feel an increased sense of loneliness and isolation, and made it very difficult for them to know which decisions to make regarding their academic courses and vocational choices.

The Coping Strategies Used or Developed by Participants

As the life on campus had become restricted, the participants had to adapt to an unknown and unexpected university environment. Considering the contact with professors and their peers was lacking as well, the participants had to depend on coping strategies to navigate their new academic milieu. The qualitative data analysis was able to identify which coping strategies were used by the participants, and how it impacted their academic standings.

The Coping Strategies Used or Developed by Participants: Effective Coping Strategies. During this period of high uncertainty, participants explained having gone through multiple helpful and effective coping strategies, such as developing time management skills, the use of the extra resources available, a quiet place to study, and a support network.

For instance, the first coping strategy identified by the qualitative data analysis was the ability to manage their time in an effective way. Indeed, being able to learn to manage their time was very helpful for the participants' academic experiences considering all time dedicated for social interactions or transit was absent. Participant 3 described being organized as a default for the lack of socializing: "It was kind of easy to organize myself, we didn't have time to go out and socialize so I only had time for school and study, that's pretty much all I could do". The qualitative data analysis also highlighted the use of time management, which aided the participants in their academic adaptation despite the lack of a social environment. Most of the participants expressed that studying from home reduced the time lost in transit, which allowed for better organization. As Participant 5 explained: "Yes, it was hard because I was alone and couldn't interact with people, but it was kind of good for me because it helped me manage my time and get organized, I also didn't waste time with transport".

A second coping strategy identified by the qualitative data analysis was the use of the technology and extra resources available during online exams and assignments. As unconventional as it may seem, some of the participants referred to cheating as a coping strategy in order to improve their academic grades. Participant 4 indicated: “I’m at home doing my exams so it definitely helped academically because we were able to cheat, and the system wasn’t up to date”. Participant 8 was able to summarize a view shared by multiple participants: “Not having stress, having my notes next to me, seeing my results gave me even more motivation and confidence to succeed”.

Additionally, a third coping strategy identified by the qualitative data analysis referred to the material resources at the disposition of some of the participants, such as the comfort of being in a familiar environment. Indeed, for some of the participants, this was one of the main reasons behind their academic adaptation. Participant 3 explained studying better at home, as it is a safe and comfortable environment where disturbance and noise are kept to a minimum: “I’m very lucky to have my own space: I don’t share a room, I have my own laptop [...] so I think being able to have my own space is what truly helped me through this”. On the contrary, the lack of material resources was detrimental for some participants. For instance, Participant 1 indicated that differentiating between her personal and school lives was almost impossible: “It was very hard for me because everything was happening in the same place, in my apartment! So it was very hard for me to focus to do something for school, where do I go?”.

Lastly, social support from family and friends added a lot of value to the participants’ academic adaptation in the context of the confinement, as it reduced loneliness, isolation, and at times increased their motivation. Participant 7 detailed his views on social support during the

pandemic: “What helped a lot was telling myself that I was not alone in this kind of situation. I realized that all the students felt the same way, and that was my support”.

In summary, the participants had to rely on pre-existing coping skills or develop new coping strategies to better adapt to this confined and unexpected university experience, specifically regarding the academic requirements. Their life on campus was nonexistent, and so were interpersonal relationships, whether it was with professors or their peers. As such, to cope, some of the participants referred to their time and organizational skills, or pre-existing social support networks. That being said, some of the participants were not able to benefit as much from these coping strategies as they lacked a sense of independence, autonomy, external and environmental resources in order to properly adapt. As such, their expected perceptions of a university life had negatively affected their academic experiences.

Discussion

For first-year university students, the arrival to university represented a significant life transition, and furthermore, the confinement imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic deeply disturbed it (Samson et al, 2023; Scott, 2023). The aim of this qualitative analysis was to explore how first-year university students met the academic requirements in the context of the COVID-19 confinement. This discussion will describe the different impacts of the confinement produced by the qualitative data analysis, and how it adds to the current knowledge.

General Context: The Social Impacts of the Confinement

The current scientific knowledge showed that social integration played a crucial role in the process of adjusting to university life, influencing various aspects of the student experience (Bowman et al., 2019; Kozhukhar, 2017; Salami, 2011). Research has demonstrated that engaging in social activities, such as peer interaction and participating in social and academic

groups, can positively impact students' transition to university and facilitate the learning process (Achille, 2021; Bowman et al., 2019; Kozhukhar, 2017; Samson et al., 2023). Indeed, the research highlighted that following a lack of social adaptation, students may experience an impaired mental health wherein they find themselves feeling isolated, feeling an increase of stress and anxiety, as well as a decreased sense of belonging (Thomas et al., 2021; Wrench et al., 2013).

As much as a social integration could be positive, the absence of a social life could have negative impacts for first-year students' adaptation process to university studies. Indeed, in the context of the COVID-19 confinement, the qualitative data analysis showed how participants were deprived of a social life. For instance, the participants shared that they felt they had no choice but to not socialize as “online connections did not feel real” (Participant 1). Furthermore, the participants disclosed a lack of motivation to even try to develop social relationships during the confinement as “everyone shut off their cameras and did not expect much” (Participant 3). As such, the participants felt like they were “on their own” (Participant 9).

General Context: The Psychological Impacts of the Confinement

The results of qualitative data analysis were congruent with the current scientific knowledge. Indeed, without the social aspects of the university experience, the participants “did not feel like real students” (Participant 2). The participants shared feeling isolated from the rest of the world: “I felt like I was in a mental jail, I was so lonely” (Participant 1). Other participants expressed similar feelings with the lack of a social life, such as Participant 6: “I was alone, I was not seeing my friends, I was studying every single hour of the day, and I had so much stress of being a first-year university student online [...] my anxiety and depression took over me”.

These results confirmed what the literature indicated regarding the psychological impacts of a lack of a positive social adaptation to the university environment. Following a lack of social adaptation, students may experience an impaired mental health wherein they find themselves feeling isolated, lack the proper motivation to adjust academically, feel an increase of stress and anxiety, as well as a decreased sense of belonging (Thomas et al., 2021; Wrench et al., 2013). The lack of a social aspect to the university experience had multiple psychological impacts onto the participants. They felt an increase of isolation and loneliness as a result from the confinement. Thus, the lack of a social campus life was the most significant source for the participants' psychological suffering.

General Context: The Academic Impacts of the Confinement

In the context of the adaptation to university studies, the scientific literature indicated the importance of autonomy and independence, such as developing time management and organizational skills to properly adapt to the academic requirements (Schutze & Bartyn, 2020). The results from the qualitative data analysis showed a lack of concentration and motivation for the participants: "there was so much uncertainty I felt like my grades did not matter" (Participant 9). This resulted in the participants lacking an expressive value to their studies, as the lack of motivation to succeed did not make the university academic aspect feel like a "priority" (Participant 10).

The insufficiency of social relations weighed heavily on the participants' academic attainments as they did not have in-person access to their professors, assistants, and peers. As such, the qualitative data analysis indicated that the absence of a social life negatively impacted the participants' adaptation process to university, especially meeting the academic requirements.

General Context: The Vocational Impacts of the Confinement

According to the scientific literature, vocational projects require students to develop vocational maturity, understand themselves and their environment to make informed choices aligned with their interests, abilities, and values (Samson et al., 2021; Samson et al., 2023; Scott, 2023). Family and school support, including guidance from teachers and counseling services, are crucial for fostering students' vocational development (Scott, 2023). Conversely, a lack of vocational maturity can lead to increased stress, potentially resulting in academic challenges, dropouts, dissatisfaction, or low self-esteem (Scott, 2023). The research also indicates that during times of confinement, the presence of a vocational project has been observed to heighten participants' motivation to study (Scott, 2023).

The results from the qualitative data analysis were congruent with the scientific literature, as it highlighted a decrease of interest for the participants regarding their vocational projects. Indeed, the participants expressed a lack of support from their academic advisors, leading to vocational and academic uncertainties: “I wanted help on what to do for my future, but I wasn’t able to receive any [...] the academic advisors were nowhere to be found [...] and now I feel like I just lost two years in a program I didn’t like” (Participant 10).

In sum, the qualitative data analysis highlighted the importance of a social aspect to the adaptation to university studies, and its critical impact on students when such an aspect is absent. It impacted the psychological, vocational, and academic aspects. As such, this demonstrated that within the process of adaptation to university studies, all of these aspects were interdependent. This is confirmed by the theoretical model of the psychosocial adaptation process to university studies.

The Model of the Psychosocial Adaptation Process to University Studies

The following section follows the aspects included in the model, as described in the first part of the article. In addition, each of these aspects' descriptions takes into account the participants' experiences.

Cognitive Appraisals

The model of the psychosocial adaptation process to university studies is essentially based on how first-year university students cognitively appraise their arrival to university. According to this model, first-year university students could cognitively appraise that transition as threatening, benign, positive or irrelevant (Samson et al., 2023). The qualitative data analysis showed that participants not only perceived that transition as a source of stress, but that it was worsened by the COVID-19 confinement. Indeed, they were deprived of the social environment that could help and support that life transition.

The main challenge faced by the participants was to adapt to the university studies and to meet the academic requirements without the social support usually provided by a life on campus. One of the aspects that influenced the participants' cognitive appraisals were their socioeconomic backgrounds. The participants who lived in a less favorable socioeconomic environment perceived the arrival to university as a threat. However, those who lived in a more favorable socioeconomic environment perceived this arrival as less stressful. Nevertheless, for all of the participants, despite their socioeconomic background, that transition was perceived as threatening. Lastly, according to the participants, there were no secondary appraisals as they always perceived their university experiences in confinement as a continuous source of stress. In other words, the participants expressed being in a chronic crisis as first-year university students in the context of the confinement.

The following section demonstrates the difficulty for the participants to accomplish the social, psychological, academic, and vocational adaptive tasks.

The Social Adaptive Task

According to the model, the social aspect played a significant role for the adaptation process to university studies. That social aspect includes the development of interpersonal relationships with peers, professors, teaching assistants, and the administrative personnel (Samson et al., 2023). The qualitative data analysis demonstrated that the total absence of a social aspect to the university experience kept the participants in a state of crisis. Indeed, as the accomplishment of the social task was completely absent, the qualitative data analysis showed that it had a direct negative impact on the participants' psychological, vocational, and academic aspects as well.

The Psychological Adaptive Task

As the model indicates, the psychological task involves the maintenance of a psycho-affective balance (Samson et al., 2023). In other words, a social life helped students to develop a sense of psychological well-being (Samson et al., 2023). However, as demonstrated by the qualitative data analysis, the participants were not able efficiently accomplish psychological adaptive tasks due to the absence of the social aspect of the process.

The lack of social aspect to the university psychosocial adaptation process had multiple psychological impacts onto the participants. Despite the virtual contact possible in the remote university experience, the participants felt isolated, lonely, and experienced a lack of motivation to create and maintain social relationships with their peers. Consequently, the lack of a social campus life also interfered with the participants vocational projects and academic requirements.

The Vocational Adaptive Task

According to the model, the psychosocial process to university studies implies the development of a vocational project. Such a project is developed by interacting with other students, professors, assistants, and sometimes specialized professional resources (Samson et al., 2023). However, in the context of the COVID-19 confinement, the participants found it difficult to become more aware of their vocational aspirations. Indeed, with the confinement and a lack of a campus social life, the participants shared feeling a lack of student identity and a lowered sense of belonging as active members of their respective university communities (Participant 2).

The Academic Adaptive Task

Lastly, the model discussed the academic adaptive task. The accomplishment of this task requires students to meet the university academic requirements, and to develop the sufficient autonomy to do so (Samson et al., 2023). However, the participants found it difficult to meet those requirements. The absence of a social campus life was the main barrier. The participants were deprived from direct contact with professors, teaching assistants, and their peers. They were left to fend on their own. The virtual teachings and classes were not able fill the absence of the social contribution to the academic university life.

In sum, the qualitative data analysis showed that the lack or the accomplishment of an adaptive task has an impact on the entire process of the psychosocial adaptation to university studies. As such, the COVID-19 confinement highlighted the importance of the accomplishment of the social task for the adaptation process to occur. Without it, it resulted in negative academic, psychological, and vocational impacts for the participants. However, the qualitative data analysis indicated that some specific coping skills helped the participants to mitigate the negative consequences of the confinement.

The Model of the Psychosocial Adaptation Process to University Studies: Coping Skills

According to the model, the coping skills are cognitive or behavioral abilities to undertake specific and concrete ways to achieve adaptive tasks (Samson et al., 2023). The scientific literature also confirmed that previous coping skills developed prior to a specific adaptation process could be helpful. As such, upon arrival to university, first-year university students must have engaged in a newfound sense of autonomy and independence, as academic requirements differed from those expected in prior education, specifically high school (Schutze & Bartyn, 2020; Wrench et al., 2013).

The qualitative data analysis demonstrated three crucial coping skills that facilitated the process of meeting the academic requirements for the participants: developing a sense of autonomy, independence, and making use of external and environmental resources.

According to the current research, the cognitive coping skills of autonomy and independence are needed for the adaptation process to university to occur in a normal social context (Schutze & Bartyn, 2020). The qualitative data analysis indicated that those cognitive coping skills are not only important and needed, but became crucial in this unusual confinement environment where a social life was absent. The participants who demonstrated a sufficient sense of autonomy and independence were able to meet the university academic requirements.

Moreover, the participants who found sufficient social support from their family and friends were able to limit, at least partly, the absence of the social campus life. For instance, that kind of social support developed prior to the arrival to university prevented the participants from an increase sense of isolation and loneliness. Additionally, the participants' socioeconomic backgrounds provided them with the necessary material resources to cope with some aspects of the confinement, such as a comfortable and quiet place to study.

The Model of the Psychosocial Adaptation Process to University Studies: Outcomes

The last component of the model is the outcome of the psychosocial adaptation process, wherein first-year university students either experienced a positive or a negative outcome. A positive outcome refers to the new sense of normalcy in the university environment, whereas a negative outcome represents persistent feelings of inadequacy (Samson & Siam, 2008).

The qualitative data analysis showed that for every single one of the participants, this outcome was overall negative. They were not able to develop a new sense of normalcy, they expressed persistent feelings of inadequacy in that environment, and felt a massive lack of a campus social life, as they “felt robbed of the university experience” (Participant 1). As such, this study demonstrated the crucial importance of the social aspect to the psychosocial adaptation process to university studies, and specifically regarding the academic aspects.

Advantages of Being an Online First-Year University Student

As described by the qualitative data analysis, the participants expressed the negative impacts of the confinement restrictions onto their first-year as university students. Nevertheless, some of participants detailed a few advantages of being online students, especially regarding the development of crucial life skills. For instance, participants learned how to manage their time, their organization, as well as deepen their autonomy: “It taught us skills that will be useful and important in the future. Learning how to manage your time and be independent could also be an advantage”(Participant 4). Additionally, Participant 10 described the advantages of being “able to study from anywhere and not waste time in transport”. Furthermore, the participants also discussed the advantages regarding easier access to resources, in turn aiding their academic developments: “ One advantage of technology is the extra resources [...] I could watch YouTube videos that are super helpful and not provided by the university” (Participant 1). Lastly,

Participant 12 described the advantage of higher accessibility: “Being able to have classes online makes you save time [...] you can meet whenever you want with professors, you don’t need to match their office hours with your schedule” (Participant 12).

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

There are several limitations to this study that must be considered, as it specifically focused on the experience of first-year university students in the context of the COVID-19 confinement. In the qualitative research context, the results are only transferable to that specific group of students. Another limitation of this study is the lack of representation of Québec universities, including francophone institutions. Most of the participants in this research were students at Concordia University, which can skew the results. Moreover, this research also lacks a representation of francophone students considering most of the participants were anglophones.

Lastly, out of the ten participants, only one participant was an international student, which represents as both an advantage and a limitation to this research. The current study brought forward a notable advantage by effectively illustrating the experiences of local students. Nevertheless, it is crucial to recognize that the research's scope was bounded by its exclusive concentration on domestic students, thus giving rise to a constraint stemming from the absence of inclusion of international students' viewpoints. This gap in the research highlighted a potential path for prospective research, that of examining into the distinctive perspectives and encounters of international students within the contextual framework being explored.

Another implication for future research should be to study the experience of students who had already done two or three years of university prior to the confinement. By doing so, future research could examine the differences in university experiences between these students and first-year students who did not have an active social campus life.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in a study pertains to the level of assurance one has in the data, interpretations, and methods employed to uphold the study's quality (Connelly, 2016). Following the criteria adopted by Guba and Lincoln (1994), this study's credibility was increased by presenting an extensive and accurate description of the participants' experiences, as well as taking time to analyze the participants' verbatims (Connelly, 2016; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The process of peer auditing with the first author's thesis supervisor, coupled with triangulation, was also employed to validate the emerging codes and themes.

Moreover, this study was transferable only to students in North America who did their first year of university online. Lastly, this study exhibited high confirmability as participants volunteered willingly, and the data analysis involved semi-structured interviews using the EPP method (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). The research relied solely on the participants' experiences, which ensured transparency and minimizing biases. These practices enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, making the study's outcomes verifiable and reliable (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019).

Conclusion

The complete lack of a campus social life due to the pandemic restrictions completely altered the participants' entire process of adaptation to university studies. As such, the academic aspect was directly and severely impacted by this absence. This highly unusual context underlined the crucial importance of demonstrating a great sense of autonomy and independence. Additionally, the results underlined how environmental resources could be of vital help and support in times of crisis.

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Appendix A – Sociodemographic Questionnaire (English)

1. In which year did you start your university studies? _____
2. How old were you when you first started university? _____
3. Before attending university, what was your highest level of education?
 - a. High School
 - b. DEC
 - c. Other: _____
4. Are you currently in university?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
5. Are you currently in the same program as you were when you first applied to university?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

Appendix B – Questionnaire Sociodémographique (Français)

1. En quelle année avez-vous commencé vos études universitaires ? _____
2. À quel âge avez-vous commencé vos études universitaires ? _____
3. Avant de commencer vos études universitaires, quel été votre diplôme le plus élevé ?
 - a. École secondaire
 - b. DEC
 - c. Autre : _____
4. Êtes-vous actuellement étudiant à l'université ?
 - a. Oui
 - b. Non
5. Étudiez-vous toujours dans le même programme que lors de votre inscription aux études universitaires ?
 - a. Oui
 - b. Non

Appendix C – Interview Guide (English)

1. Can you please describe your experience as a first-year university student in a confinement context due to the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. Can you please describe if you able to meet the new university academic requirements in a confinement context due to the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. Can you please describe how you felt reaching out to your professors and the teachers' assistants, in a confinement context due to the COVID-19 pandemic, when you had questions about class lessons or about the learning process?
4. How was the socialization development with peers in this confinement context due to the COVID-19 pandemic? From an academic standpoint, how was process of studying in groups and creating relationships?
5. Within this confinement context due to the COVID-19 pandemic, how was the process of reaching out to the university's services (i.e.: for academic help, and other kinds of support)?
6. How did the confinement affect your university life, specifically from an academic point on view (in a context where almost all relationships are virtual) ?
7. Overall, how did you adapt to the academic requirements in a context of confinement with a virtual access to professors, assistants, support services, and peer support? In other words, what kind of coping strategies did you develop throughout this process?
8. How was your social life affected throughout your first-year as a university student within this confinement context due to the COVID-19 pandemic?
9. With this new way of online-learning, how did your organize yourself (your time, your classes, your homework, assignments, personal time...)?

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10. What has helped you, on a personal level, throughout your studies as a first-year university student?
11. According to you, what kinds of advantages can result from this new way of online learning as a first-year university student?
12. Lastly, how was your mental health during your first year online and how is it now?

Appendix D – Guide d’Interview (Français)

1. Pouvez-vous décrire votre expérience en tant qu’étudiant/e universitaire dans un contexte de confinement dû à la COVID19 ?
2. Comment avez-vous répondu aux nouvelles exigences académiques universitaires dans un contexte de confinement dû à la COVID19 ?
3. Pouvez-vous décrire ce que vous avez ressenti en contactant vos professeurs et les assistants enseignants lorsque vous aviez des questions sur le matériel de cours ou sur le processus d'apprentissage, tout en étant dans ce contexte de confinement dû à la COVID19 ??
4. Comment s'est déroulée la socialisation avec les pairs dans ce contexte de confinement dû à la COVID19 ? D'un point de vue académique, comment s'est passé le processus d'étude en groupe et de création de relations ?
5. Dans ce contexte de confinement dû à la COVID19, comment s'est déroulé le processus de prise de contact avec les services de l'université (par exemple : pour de l’aide académique ou d'autres types de soutien) ?
6. Comment le confinement a-t-il affecté votre vie universitaire, notamment d'un point de vue académique (dans un contexte où presque toutes les relations sont virtuelles) ?
7. Comment vous êtes-vous adapté aux exigences académiques dans un contexte de confinement avec un accès virtuel aux professeurs, assistants, services de soutien et socialisation avec vos pairs ? En d'autres termes, quels types de stratégies d'adaptation avez-vous développées tout au long de ce processus ?
8. Pouvez-vous décrire votre vie sociale lors de votre première année à l’université dans ce contexte de confinement dû à la COVID19 ?

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9. Avec cette nouvelle version d'étude en confinement, comment vous-êtes-vous organisé (avec votre temps, vos cours, vos devoirs, vos projets, votre temps personnel...) ?
10. Sur le plan personnel, qu'est-ce qu'il vous a aidé avec vos études en tant qu'étudiant.e en première année d'université ?
11. Selon vous, quels types d'avantages peuvent découler de cette nouvelle façon d'apprendre et d'étudier en ligne en tant qu'étudiant.e universitaire de première année?
12. Dernièrement, comment était votre santé mentale pendant votre première année en ligne et comment est-elle maintenant ?

Figure 1

The Psychosocial Adaptation Model to University Studies (Samson et al., 2023).

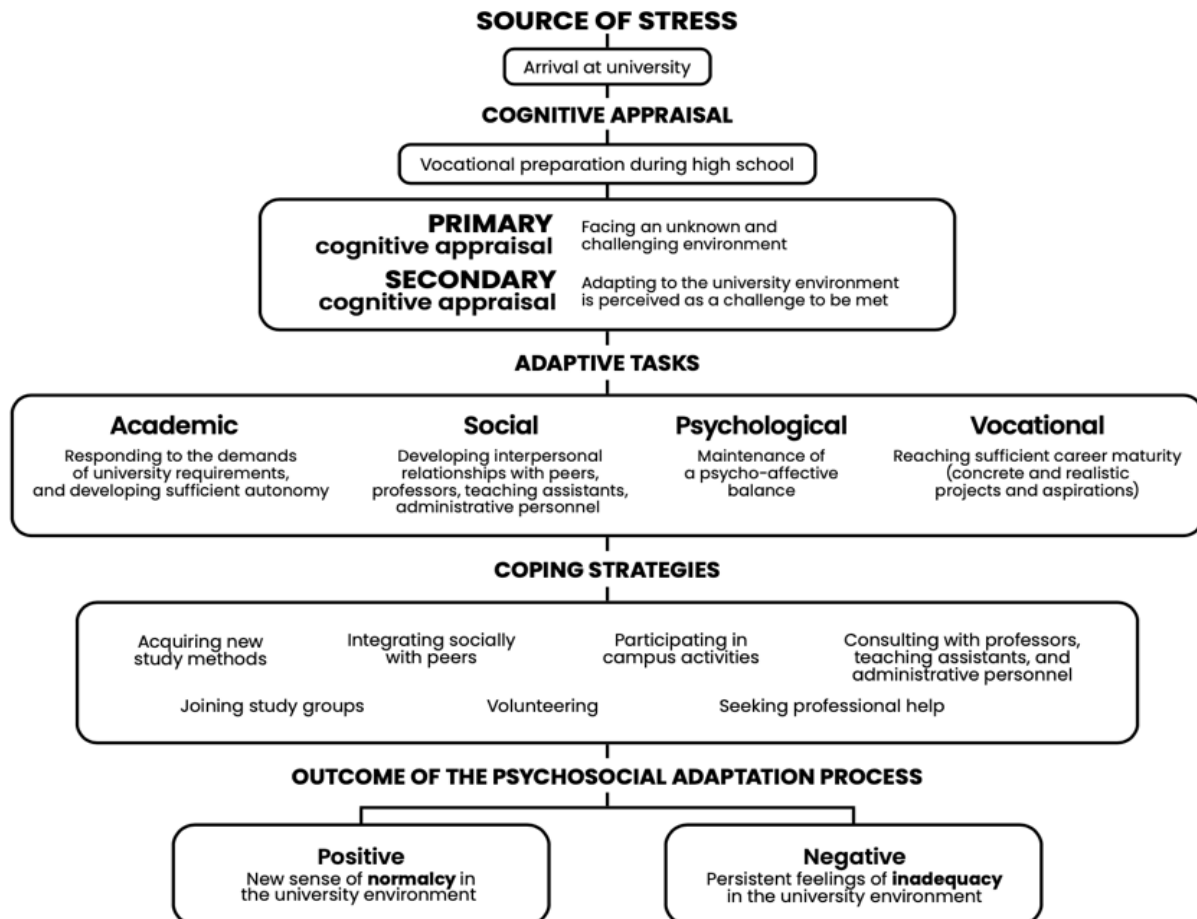


Table 1***Demographics of Participants at the Time of Study***

Semester as a first-year university student:	
Fall 2020	8
Winter 2021	2
Average age:	18.9
Highest level of education prior to university:	
High School	3
CEGEP	6
Baccalauréat français	1
Still attending university:	
Yes	10
No	0
Same program as during their first-year:	
Yes	7
No	3
University attended during their first-year:	
McGill University	2
Concordia University	7
Université de Montréal	1
Language of interview:	
English	8
French	2

Conclusion

In conclusion, the transition from high school to university is a significant change for students, requiring them to reconstruct their identities and acquire new academic skills.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic and the shift to online learning disrupted this transition and deprived first-year university students of the traditional university experience. The lack of psychosocial adaptation to the university environment, coupled with the challenges of online learning, had a detrimental impact on students' academic attainment, well-being, and mental health.

First-year university students typically develop a sense of autonomy and independence, learning to manage their time, and adapt to the academic demands. However, the transition to online learning posed additional challenges, as students struggled with time management, limited contact with professors and peers, and a lack of a conducive study environment. The absence of social interactions and campus life further hindered their psychosocial adaptation and academic integration.

The COVID-19 confinement disrupted the participants' university experiences, leaving them feeling “robbed” of the expected university life. They lacked access to campus facilities, missed out on socialization opportunities, and experienced increased isolation and loneliness. The limited contact with professors created discomfort and hindered their ability to seek help or form meaningful connections. Similarly, the lack of interpersonal relationships among peers made it difficult to create friendships and affected their motivation and engagement.

Previous research supports the importance of social aspects in university studies for academic adaptation, emphasizing the significance of peer interaction and participation in social and academic groups. The qualitative data analysis revealed the profound impact of the COVID-

19 confinement on first-year university students. The absence of the expected university environment and social interactions resulted in feelings of alienation, reduced motivation, and decreased academic performance. Participants expressed a sense of being disconnected from the university community and struggled to adapt to the new online learning format.

Overall, the findings highlight the importance of psychosocial adaptation and the role of social interactions in the academic and personal development of first-year university students. The COVID-19 pandemic and the shift to online learning have underscored the need for universities to provide support and resources to help students navigate these challenges effectively. Interactions with academic advisors played a crucial role in academic adaptation, and the participants reported a lack of support and accommodation for online students from their universities' services. Future research and interventions should focus on strategies to enhance psychosocial adaptation, promote social connections, and address the unique needs of first-year university students in an online learning environment.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research Directions

There are several limitations to this study that must be considered, as it specifically focused on the experience of first-year university students in the context of the COVID-19 confinement. In the qualitative research context, the results are only transferable to that specific group of students. It could be interesting to study the experience of students who had already done one or two years of experience within the university context prior to the confinement. By doing so, future research could examine the differences in university experiences between these students and first-year students who do not have an active social campus life.

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730–746. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2012.744814>

Appendix A – Sociodemographic Questionnaire (English)

1. In which year did you start your university studies? _____
2. How old were you when you first started university? _____
3. Before attending university, what was your highest level of education?
 - a. High School
 - b. DEC
 - c. Other: _____
4. Are you currently in university?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
5. Are you currently in the same program as you were when you first applied to university?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

Appendix B – Questionnaire Sociodémographique (Français)

1. En quelle année avez-vous commencé vos études universitaires ? _____
2. À quel âge avez-vous commencé vos études universitaires ? _____
3. Avant de commencer vos études universitaires, quel été votre diplôme le plus élevé ?
 - a. École secondaire
 - b. DEC
 - c. Autre : _____
4. Êtes-vous actuellement étudiant à l'université ?
 - a. Oui
 - b. Non
5. Étudiez-vous toujours dans le même programme que lors de votre inscription aux études universitaires ?
 - a. Oui
 - b. Non

Appendix C – Interview Guide (English)

1. Can you please describe your experience as a first-year university student in a confinement context due to the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. Can you please describe if you able to meet the new university academic requirements in a confinement context due to the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. Can you please describe how you felt reaching out to your professors and the teachers' assistants, in a confinement context due to the COVID-19 pandemic, when you had questions about class lessons or about the learning process?
4. How was the socialization development with peers in this confinement context due to the COVID-19 pandemic? From an academic standpoint, how was process of studying in groups and creating relationships?
5. Within this confinement context due to the COVID-19 pandemic, how was the process of reaching out to the university's services (i.e.: for academic help, and other kinds of support)?
6. How did the confinement affect your university life, specifically from an academic point on view (in a context where almost all relationships are virtual) ?
7. Overall, how did you adapt to the academic requirements in a context of confinement with a virtual access to professors, assistants, support services, and peer support? In other words, what kind of coping strategies did you develop throughout this process?
8. How was your social life affected throughout your first-year as a university student within this confinement context due to the COVID-19 pandemic?
9. With this new way of online-learning, how did you organize yourself (your time, your classes, your homework, assignments, personal time...)?

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10. What has helped you, on a personal level, throughout your studies as a first-year university student?
11. According to you, what kinds of advantages can result from this new way of online learning as a first-year university student?
12. Lastly, how was your mental health during your first year online and how is it now?

Appendix D – Guide d’Interview (Français)

1. Pouvez-vous décrire votre expérience en tant qu’étudiant/e universitaire dans un contexte de confinement dû à la COVID19 ?
2. Comment avez-vous répondu aux nouvelles exigences académiques universitaires dans un contexte de confinement dû à la COVID19 ?
3. Pouvez-vous décrire ce que vous avez ressenti en contactant vos professeurs et les assistants enseignants lorsque vous aviez des questions sur le matériel de cours ou sur le processus d'apprentissage, tout en étant dans ce contexte de confinement dû à la COVID19 ??
4. Comment s'est déroulée la socialisation avec les pairs dans ce contexte de confinement dû à la COVID19 ? D'un point de vue académique, comment s'est passé le processus d'étude en groupe et de création de relations ?
5. Dans ce contexte de confinement dû à la COVID19, comment s'est déroulé le processus de prise de contact avec les services de l'université (par exemple : pour de l’aide académique ou d'autres types de soutien) ?
6. Comment le confinement a-t-il affecté votre vie universitaire, notamment d'un point de vue académique (dans un contexte où presque toutes les relations sont virtuelles) ?
7. Comment vous êtes-vous adapté aux exigences académiques dans un contexte de confinement avec un accès virtuel aux professeurs, assistants, services de soutien et socialisation avec vos pairs ? En d'autres termes, quels types de stratégies d'adaptation avez-vous développées tout au long de ce processus ?
8. Pouvez-vous décrire votre vie sociale lors de votre première année à l’université dans ce contexte de confinement dû à la COVID19 ?

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9. Avec cette nouvelle version d'étude en confinement, comment vous-êtes-vous organisé (avec votre temps, vos cours, vos devoirs, vos projets, votre temps personnel...) ?
10. Sur le plan personnel, qu'est-ce qu'il vous a aidé avec vos études en tant qu'étudiant.e en première année d'université ?
11. Selon vous, quels types d'avantages peuvent découler de cette nouvelle façon d'apprendre et d'étudier en ligne en tant qu'étudiant.e universitaire de première année?
12. Dernièrement, comment était votre santé mentale pendant votre première année en ligne et comment est-elle maintenant ?

Appendix E – Recruitment E-mail (English)

Anaëlle Haddad is a Master's student at the university of Ottawa in the faculty of Education, and studies Counseling Psychology. She is writing her Master's thesis about first-year university students and their psychosocial adaptation to university during the confinement of the COVID-19 pandemic. More specifically, her thesis has a particular focus on academic requirements, how students experienced their first year without social adaptation, and how it has impacted them. This research objective is to better understand how first-year students managed the academic demands of university remotely where social integration was absent, yet the academic demands remained the same. Anaëlle is searching for eight to twelve participants to complete her Master's Thesis. The selection of participants will be based on a first come first serve criterion.

More specifically, this qualitative thesis will:

- Describe how first-year university students experienced their arrival to university in a context of social isolation
- Analyze if students were able to meet the academic demands? If so, what helped and what was missing?
- Describe, in a context where social integration is absent/lived differently, how/if first-year university students were able to meet the university's academic demands.

Your participation will require to take part of a two-part interview with Anaëlle Haddad, which will be done either in person or by Zoom, based on your preferences. The first part of the interview will require you to complete a socio-demographic questionnaire, which will take approximately 5 to 10 minutes. The reason the socio-demographic questionnaires are not sent prior to the interview

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is to allow you ask questions should you have any. Once the questionnaire is done, the second part of the interview will begin, which requires you to answer 12 questions, lasting about 60-75 minutes. Overall, the study will take a maximum time of 85 minutes (1 hour and 25 minutes at most).

If you would like to participate or have any questions or concerns, please contact Anaëlle Haddad.

In order to participate, you must:

- Have been a first-year university student during the Fall semester of 2020 or the Winter semester of 2021
- Have gone through the transition from high school/CEGEP to university online

Confidentiality is guaranteed. Your name will not appear throughout the research nor in the writing of this research.

Appendix F – E-mail de recrutement (Français)

Anaëlle Haddad est étudiante de maîtrise à l'Université d'Ottawa dans la faculté d'éducation et étudie la psychologie du counseling. Elle rédige sa thèse de maîtrise sur les étudiants universitaires de première année et leur adaptation psychosociale à l'université pendant le confinement de la pandémie du COVID-19. Plus précisément, sa thèse porte sur les exigences académiques, comment les étudiants ont vécu leur première année sans adaptation sociale, et comment cela les a impactés. Cet objectif de recherche est de mieux comprendre comment les étudiants de première année ont géré à distance les exigences académiques de l'université où l'intégration sociale était absente, mais les exigences académiques sont restées les mêmes. Anaëlle Haddad est à la recherche de huit à douze participants pour compléter sa thèse de maîtrise. La sélection des participants sera basée sur un critère premier arrivé, premier servi.

Plus spécifiquement, cette thèse qualitative compte :

- Décrire comment les étudiants universitaires de première année ont vécu leur arrivée à l'université dans un contexte d'isolement social
- Analyser si les étudiants ont été en mesure de répondre aux exigences académiques. Si oui, qu'est-ce qui a aidé et qu'est-ce qui manquait?
- Décrire, dans un contexte où l'intégration sociale est absente/vécue différemment, comment/si les étudiants universitaires de première année ont pu répondre aux exigences académiques de l'université.

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Votre participation nécessitera de prendre part à une entrevue en deux parties avec Anaëlle Haddad, qui se fera soit en personne, soit par Zoom, en fonction de vos préférences. La première partie de l'entretien vous demandera de remplir un questionnaire socio-démographique, ce qui vous prendra environ 5 à 10 minutes. La raison pour laquelle les questionnaires socio-démographiques ne sont pas envoyés avant l'entretien est pour vous permettre de poser des questions si vous en avez. Une fois le questionnaire rempli, la deuxième partie de l'entretien commencera, qui vous demandera de répondre à 12 questions, d'une durée d'environ 60 à 75 minutes. Globalement, l'étude durera au maximum 85 minutes (1h25 au maximum).

Si vous souhaitez participer ou avez des questions ou des préoccupations, veuillez contacter Anaëlle Haddad.

Pour participer, vous devez :

- Avoir été étudiant en première année universitaire à l'automne 2020 ou à l'hiver 2021
- Avoir traversé la transition de l'école secondaire/CÉGEP à l'université en ligne

La confidentialité est garantie. Votre nom n'apparaîtra pas tout au long de la recherche ni dans la rédaction de cette recherche.

Appendix G – Consent Form (English)

Title of Study: The Academic Experience in the Context of the Psychosocial Adaptation Process to University Studies: A Phenomenological Research Conducted Among First-Year University Students During the Confinement of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Anaëlle Haddad (Principal Investigator)

M.A Student in Education: Counseling Psychology, University of Ottawa

Professor André Samson (Supervisor)

Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa

Invitation to Participate: I am invited to participate in the abovementioned Master's thesis qualitative research study conducted by Anaëlle Haddad, under the supervision of Professor André Samson.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of the study is to better understand how first-year students manage academic demands of university remotely. The objectives of this study are to better understand social isolation within academic requirements, and how students lived that experience wherein social integration is absent/lived differently.

Participation: My participation will consist of completing a sociodemographic questionnaire (taking approximately 5-10 minutes to complete) and a self-report questionnaire with open-ended questions (taking approximately 60-75 minutes to complete), which will be over the course of one

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session, lasting at most 1 hour and 25 minutes. The responses will be recorded for transcript revision by the researcher. During these questionnaires, I will be asked to talk about my isolation during the pandemic of COVID-19, my experience as a first-year university student, my socialization with peers, and my academic standings.

Risks: My participation in this study will entail that I volunteering to discuss personal information about my academic experience as a first-year university student during the pandemic. I have received assurance from the researchers that refusal to answer, option to withdraw, and identities will not be revealed.

Benefits: My participation in this study will raise awareness on my experience in university, and knowing that I am not alone going through this transition. With this research, the community and society will be more aware of the experience of first-year university students throughout the pandemic, and how they managed to adapt academically. With the COVID-19 confinement, the social support of adaptation to university was ultimately removed, but the academic requirements remained the same, which could have been very difficult for some students. With this research, individuals will be aware of such an experience, and perhaps alter teaching requirements, should there need be, for future generations.

Confidentiality and Privacy: I have received assurance from the researchers that the information I will share will remain strictly confidential. I understand that the contents will be used only for the researcher's Master's thesis research and that my identity will be protected, as anonymity is guaranteed. I understand that my identity will be protected in the publications under code names, such as "Participant 1", "participant 2".

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Conservation of Data: The data collected from the questionnaires will be kept in a secure manner at the researcher's home, and her supervisor will not have access to said data. The data will be stored on a password protected computer, and will be kept for 5 years (December 2027).

Voluntary Participation: I am under no obligation to participate and if I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences. If I choose to withdraw, all data gathered until the time of withdrawal will be removed from the dataset and not used in the study.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher or their supervisor. If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Office of Research Ethics and Integrity via email (ethics@uottawa.ca) or telephone (613-562-5387).

It is recommended that I save a copy of this consent form for my records.

Acceptance: By signing my name below, I agree to participate in this research study.

Participant's name: _____ Date: _____

Participant's signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix H – Formulaire de Consentement (Français)

Titre de l'étude : L'expérience académique dans le contexte du processus d'adaptation psychosociale aux études universitaires : une recherche phénoménologique menée auprès d'étudiants universitaires de première année pendant le confinement de la pandémie du COVID-19

Anaëlle Haddad (Chercheuse principale)

Étudiante à la maîtrise en éducation : Psychologie de l'orientation, Université d'Ottawa

Professeur André Samson (Superviseur)

Faculté d'éducation, Université d'Ottawa

Invitation à participer : Je suis invité(e) à participer à l'étude de recherche qualitative de mémoire de maîtrise mentionnée ci-dessus, menée par Anaëlle Haddad, sous la supervision du professeur André Samson.

But de l'étude : Le but de l'étude est de mieux comprendre comment les étudiants de première année gèrent les exigences académiques de l'université à distance. Les objectifs de cette étude sont de mieux comprendre l'isolement social dans le cadre des exigences académiques et comment les étudiants ont vécu cette expérience où le soutien social est absent / vécu différemment.

Participation : Ma participation consistera à remplir un questionnaire sociodémographique (d'une durée approximative de 5 à 10 minutes) et de participer à un entretien d'auto-évaluation avec des

questions ouvertes (d'une durée approximative de 60 à 75 minutes), qui se dérouleront au cours de une séance d'une durée maximale d'1h25. Les réponses seront enregistrées pour la révision de la transcription par la chercheuse. On me demandera de parler de mon isolement pendant la pandémie de la COVID-19, de mon expérience en tant qu'étudiant(e) de première année universitaire, de ma socialisation avec mes pairs et de mes résultats scolaires.

Risques : Ma participation à cette étude impliquera que je me porte volontaire pour discuter d'informations personnelles sur mon expérience académique en tant qu'étudiant(e) universitaire de première année pendant la pandémie. J'ai reçu l'assurance des chercheurs que le refus de répondre, la possibilité de se retirer et les identités ne seront pas révélés.

Bénéfices : Ma participation à cette étude aura pour effet de prendre conscience de mon expérience à l'université et de savoir que je ne suis pas le(a) seul(e) à traverser cette transition. Grâce à cette recherche, la communauté et la société seront plus conscientes de l'expérience des étudiant(e)s universitaires de première année tout au long de la pandémie et de la façon dont ils (elles) ont parvenu à s'adapter sur le plan scolaire. Avec le confinement du COVID-19, le soutien social à l'adaptation à l'université a soudainement été retiré, mais les exigences académiques sont restées les mêmes, ce qui aurait pu être très difficile pour certains étudiants. Grâce à cette recherche, les individus seront conscients d'une telle expérience et modifieront peut-être les exigences d'enseignement, le cas échéant, pour les générations futures.

Confidentialité et vie privée : La chercheuse m'a donné l'assurance qu'elle traitera l'information que je partagerai avec elle de façon strictement confidentielle. Je m'attends à ce que le contenu ne soit utilisé que pour la recherche de mémoire de maîtrise de la chercheuse et que mon identité sera protégée, car l'anonymat est garanti. Je comprends que mon identité sera protégée dans les publications sous des noms de code, tels que « Participant 1 », « Participant 2 ».

THE ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COVID-19 CONFINEMENT

Conservation des données : Les données collectées à partir des questionnaires ainsi que l'entretien enregistré seront conservées de manière sécurisée au domicile de la chercheuse, et son superviseur n'aura pas accès à ces données. Les données seront conservées sur un ordinateur protégé par un mot de passe, et seront conservées pendant 5 ans (décembre 2027).

Participation volontaire : Je n'ai aucune obligation de participer et si je choisis de participer, je peux me retirer de l'étude à tout moment et/ou refuser de répondre à toute question, sans subir de conséquences négatives. Si je choisis de me retirer, toutes les données recueillies jusqu'au moment du retrait seront supprimées de l'ensemble de données et ne seront pas utilisées dans l'étude.

Pour tout renseignement additionnel concernant cette étude, je peux communiquer avec le chercheur ou son superviseur. Pour tout renseignement sur les aspects éthiques de cette recherche, je peux m'adresser au Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche de Université d'Ottawa au (613) 562-5387 ou ethique@uottawa.ca.

Le chercheur me recommande de garder/imprimer/sauvegarder une copie du formulaire de consentement.

Acceptation : En signant mon nom ci-dessous, j'accepte de participer à cette étude de recherche.

Nom du participant : _____

Date: _____

Signature du participant : _____

Date: _____

Signature de le chercheuse principale: _____

Date: _____

Appendix I - Ethics Approval Certificate

06/12/2022

Université d'Ottawa

Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

University of Ottawa

Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

CERTIFICAT D'APPROBATION ÉTHIQUE | CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS APPROVAL

Numéro du dossier / Ethics File Number

S-10-22-8514

Titre du projet / Project Title

The Academic Experience in the
Context of Psychosocial
Adaptation Process to University
Studies: A Phenomenological
Research Conducted Among
First-Year University Students
During COVID-19.

Type de projet / Project Type

Thèse de maîtrise / Master's
thesis

Statut du projet / Project Status

Approuvé / Approved

Date d'approbation (jj/mm/aaaa) / Approval Date (dd/mm/yyyy)

06/12/2022

Date d'expiration (jj/mm/aaaa) / Expiry Date (dd/mm/yyyy)

05/12/2023

Équipe de recherche / Research Team

Chercheur / Researcher

Affiliation

Role

Anaëlle HADDAD

Faculté d'éducation / Faculty of Education

Chercheur Principal / Principal Investigator

André SAMSON

Faculté d'éducation / Faculty of Education

Superviseur / Supervisor

Conditions spéciales ou commentaires / Special conditions or comments

550, rue Cumberland, pièce 154 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154
Ottawa (Ontario) K1N 6N5 Canada Ottawa, Ontario K1N 6N5 Canada

613-562-5387 • 613-562-5338 • ethique@uOttawa.ca / ethics@uOttawa.ca
www.recherche.uottawa.ca/deontologie | www.recherche.uottawa.ca/ethics

06/12/2022

Université d'Ottawa

Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

University of Ottawa

Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

Le Comité d'éthique de la recherche (CÉR) de l'Université d'Ottawa, opérant conformément à l'*Énoncé de politique des Trois conseils* (2014) et toutes autres lois et tous règlements applicables, a examiné et approuvé la demande d'éthique du projet de recherche ci-nommé.

L'approbation est valide pour la durée indiquée plus haut et est sujette aux conditions énumérées dans la section intitulée "Conditions Spéciales ou Commentaires". Le formulaire « Renouvellement ou Fermeture de Projet » doit être complété quatre semaines avant la date d'échéance indiquée ci-haut afin de demander un renouvellement de cette approbation éthique ou afin de fermer le dossier.

Toutes modifications apportées au projet doivent être approuvées par le CÉR avant leur mise en place, sauf si le participant doit être retiré en raison d'un danger immédiat ou s'il s'agit d'un changement ayant trait à des éléments administratifs ou logistiques du projet. Les chercheurs doivent aviser le CÉR dans les plus brefs délais de tout changement pouvant augmenter le niveau de risque aux participants ou pouvant affecter considérablement le déroulement du projet, rapporter tout événement imprévu ou indésirable et soumettre toute nouvelle information pouvant nuire à la conduite du projet ou à la sécurité des participants.

The University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board, which operates in accordance with the *Tri-Council Policy Statement* (2014) and other applicable laws and regulations, has examined and approved the ethics application for the above-named research project.

Ethics approval is valid for the period indicated above and is subject to the conditions listed in the section entitled "Special Conditions or Comments". The "Renewal/Project Closure" form must be completed four weeks before the above-referenced expiry date to request a renewal of this ethics approval or closure of the file.

Any changes made to the project must be approved by the REB before being implemented, except when necessary to remove participants from immediate endangerment or when the modification(s) only pertain to administrative or logistical components of the project. Investigators must also promptly alert the REB of any changes that increase the risk to participant(s), any changes that considerably affect the conduct of the project, all unanticipated and harmful events that occur, and new information that may negatively affect the conduct of the project or the safety of the participant(s).

Germain ZONGO

Responsable d'éthique en recherche / Protocol Officer

Pour/For **Barbara GRAVES** Président(e) du/ Chair of the **Comité d'éthique de la recherche en sciences sociales et humanités / Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board**

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