

Identification of Factors Affecting Cadets' Self-Adjustment in Academic and Non-Academic Contexts

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Abstract

Introduction: Self-adjustment is essential for cadets entering state-run educational institutions with strict discipline. Adaptation involves managing academic pressures and non-academic challenges, such as physical training, dormitory life, and hierarchical systems. Internal factors like emotional maturity and external support significantly influence adaptation. However, holistic studies on cadet adjustment remain limited. **Objective:** This study aims to analyze essential factors shaping cadets' self-adjustment within a strict semi-military education environment. **Method:** Using a qualitative approach, the research draws upon in-depth interviews to identify cadets' adaptation strategies toward academic pressure and dormitory routines. **Result and Discussion:** Findings indicate Academic Conflict (27%) as the primary challenge, addressed through Strategies and Character (38%), with peer support enhancing resilience. Vision and Mentality (27%) highlight that successful adjustment relies on Character Maturity and holistic balance beyond academics. **Conclusion:** Cadet adaptation is a transformative process where environmental pressures foster social networks and integrity, aligning with civil service ideals

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Introduction

Every individual encounters changes and transitional phases throughout their life journey. Adjusting to these changes is an essential process that influences psychological well-being, performance, and success across various aspects of life. In the educational context, transitions between levels often present academic and social demands that are far from simple—particularly in governmental education institutions, which emphasize strict discipline and highly structured living arrangements (Schlossberg, 2018); (Rahayu & Arianti, 2020). These conditions make the adaptation process for cadets more complex compared with regular university students.

Self-adjustment or adaptation involves changes in behavior, attitudes, and coping strategies to face new environmental demands. In higher education, this ability becomes a fundamental determinant of students' success in meeting academic and social expectations. Schneiders emphasizes that self-adjustment enables individuals to function optimally for themselves and their environment. For cadets, this adjustment encompasses academic, social, and personal–emotional dimensions that must be achieved simultaneously (Pamardi & Widayat, 2019); (Sari & Jayanti, 2020)

Social support is a significant external factor in the adjustment process, particularly peer support, which has been shown to strengthen adaptive capacity and foster a sense of security. However, in governmental education settings, support from authorities is sometimes perceived as a form of control, potentially creating additional pressure (Ababiel et al., 2023); (Khan & Sultan, 2023). Moreover, emotional maturity, self-efficacy, and social competence as internal factors are key determinants of successful adaptation, especially in dormitory life, which demands intensive interaction and tolerance for diversity.

Academic stress resulting from learning demands, time management challenges, and high expectations has a significant impact on cadets' psychological and physical conditions. In governmental education institutions, this pressure is intensified by physical and professional demands, making unmanaged academic stress a barrier to comprehensive adjustment (Assya'bani, 2025); (Ghania & Prihatsanti, 2025); (Rohmah & Mahrus, 2024). The transformation from civilian youth into cadets involves not only a change in educational status but also immersion into a new, disciplined, and collective lifestyle, where academic success must be balanced with physical endurance and the ability to adapt to non-academic training (Arnett, 2020); (Edi Irwanto, 2023)

The “two-world dilemma” illustrates the dual expectations placed upon cadets to excel both academically and non-academically. On one hand, they must cope with a complex curriculum; on the other, they must meet the rigorous standards of physical activities, discipline, and strict hierarchy in dormitory life (Wahyuni, 2023). The interaction between physical fatigue and academic pressure often results in problems such as decreased concentration or reduced physical performance, which in turn exacerbates stress (Sakius, Minarni, & Hayati, 2024); (Simanjuntak & Novalina, 2021)

National studies show a high prevalence of academic stress among general university students, and this rate is assumed to be even higher among cadets due to the added physical demands and intensive character-building programs. Imbalanced academic and non-academic pressures may trigger anxiety, depression, and sleep disturbances. However, research that holistically examines cadets' self-adjustment and integrates these two domains remains very limited (Nalyarti, 2025).

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The conceptual framework of this study refers to self-adjustment theory, which emphasizes behavioral, emotional, and social adaptation to achieve balance between the individual and the environment. In governmental education institutions, internal and external factors interact in complex ways, requiring multidimensional adjustment (Nubiasyanti & Prihartanti, 2018). Understanding cadets' ability to balance intellectual demands and physical training is still insufficient, making it necessary to examine the factors that influence cadets' self-adjustment in these two domains (Pamardi & Widayat, 2014).

This study aims to identify and describe the internal and external factors that contribute to cadets' adaptive abilities, both inside and outside the classroom. The main research question is: "What factors influence the self-adjustment process of cadets within their academic and non-academic contexts?" The findings are expected to provide an empirical basis for designing a more balanced, effective, and humane training system that supports cadet success.

Method

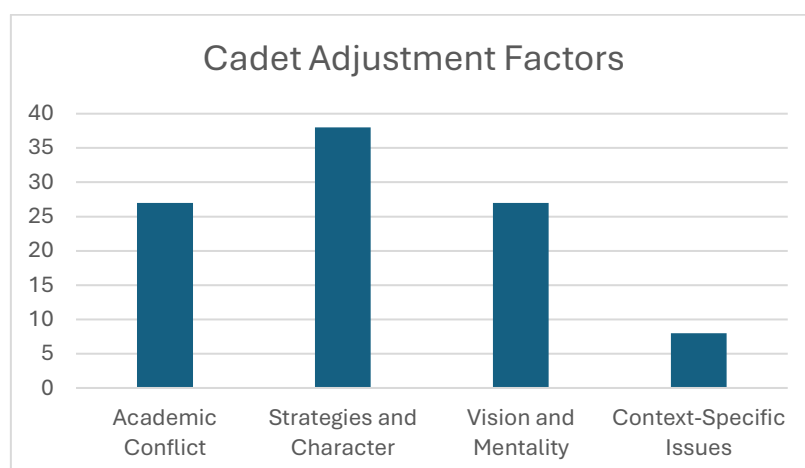
This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive design, aiming to gain an in-depth understanding of cadets' subjective experiences in adjusting to dual academic and non-academic demands. This approach enables comprehensive and contextual exploration of perceptions, strategies, as well as internal and external factors that influence the adaptation process. The research was conducted at a governmental education institution in Indonesia that implements an integrated training system, with the site selected purposively based on its relevance to the study's focus.

The research participants consisted of active cadets selected using purposive sampling, referring to individuals considered to possess rich and relevant experiences concerning the topic. The number of participants was determined based on the principle of data saturation, wherein data collection was discontinued once no new significant information emerged. In similar studies, sample sizes commonly range between 10 and 20 participants to achieve saturation.

Data were collected through methodological triangulation, including semi-structured in-depth interviews, field observations of cadets' academic and non-academic activities, and documentation analysis involving official institutional records. Data analysis employed the interactive model by Miles and Huberman, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data validity was maintained through source and method triangulation, as well as member checking with participants to ensure the accuracy of interpretations.

Result and Discussion

Thematic analysis of the interview and observation data produced six main themes that serve as the most influential factors in fostering solidarity, namely:



Picture 1. The factors influencing cadets' self-adjustment

Qualitative findings indicate that the factors influencing cadets' self-adjustment within both academic and non-academic contexts can be grouped into six main themes. These themes were further consolidated into four clusters with the following relative percentages: Strategies and Character (38%), Academic Conflict (27%), Vision and Mentality (27%), and Specific Issues (8%).

The most frequently occurring adjustment factor is academic conflict, accounting for 27%. This primarily relates to the demanding nature of complex and applicative courses. Cadets consistently identified subjects requiring high precision, strong data-analysis skills, and deep understanding of formulas as the main triggers of academic stress. This is reinforced by a statement from Participant 5:

"Statistics involves a lot of calculations... It is difficult to connect the theory with its application, especially when processing data using software such as SPSS or Excel."

This finding aligns with the concept of Academic Stress, defined as psychological pressure caused by learning demands (Fitriani & Anggraini, 2021). Within a semi-military educational setting, academic stress is further intensified by:

1. **Highly Dense and Technical Curriculum:** The requirement to master extensive theoretical material while simultaneously applying it using software (SPSS/Excel) reflects a gap between theory and practice (skill gap). Studies show that dense curricula requiring advanced technical skills are a major source of adjustment pressure.
2. **Total Institution Environment and Schedule Conflicts:** Heavy practical assignments often clash with strict non-academic routines (duties, training). In a total institution environment, conflicts between academic and non-academic demands create both physical and mental fatigue (Anggraeni & Hidayati, 2024).

The second factor influencing cadets' self-adjustment is Strategies and Character, accounting for 38%. This cluster combines Collective Learning Strategies (19.23%) and Character Maturity (19.23%). These factors form the core of successful adjustment.

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Cadets cope with academic and non-academic pressures by relying on horizontal support through collective study initiatives and knowledge sharing. These strategies serve a dual function: as an effective learning method and as a social coping mechanism. As stated by Participant 4:

"We handle it by studying together... outside academic hours... we share knowledge with each other."

Participant 1 added:

"We help each other and stay motivated... the sense of togetherness among cadets itself becomes a source of positive energy."

This phenomenon highlights the importance of peer support within a total institution setting, providing positive energy to balance institutional pressure. Theoretically, peer support is crucial in dormitory-based education. Studies among government-institution cadets show that high self-efficacy and psychological resilience are strongly influenced by emotional support and the quality of peer relationships, which act as buffers against environmental pressures.

Cadets' adjustment success is not measured merely by GPA but by Character Maturity, which includes discipline, responsibility, and integrity. The institution's goal is to develop individuals who grow holistically and with integrity as future civil servants. Participant 2 stated:

"Being able to meet the demands of discipline, responsibility, and academic achievement without losing one's identity... growing holistically as a resilient and integral future correctional officer."

This character development aligns with the concept of Holistic Character Formation, which is a central vision of governmental education in Indonesia. Integrity and responsibility are non-technical competencies (soft skills) considered essential for future civil servant career success.

The third factor, Vision and Mentality, serves as the philosophical framework for adjustment and accounts for 27%. This cluster combines the Ideal Cadet Formation (15.38%) and Ethical Values/Enjoying the Process (11.54%), describing the mindset guiding cadets throughout their training. Cadets are directed to achieve Holistic Balance, meaning balanced development across academic, physical, and mental dimensions. This vision emphasizes well-roundedness—requiring cadets to be intellectually competent, physically resilient, and emotionally mature.

This concept discourages focusing on only one aspect. As Participant 8 stated:

"The ideal cadet is one who maintains holistic balance—between academics, physical fitness, and mental strength."

Research on government-institution education shows that curricula are designed to harmonize cognitive competence with character-building through physical and ethical activities. Smooth adjustment occurs when cadets adopt the right mentality—approaching

the process with happiness, humility, and respect for humanity. Participant 7 noted:

“Going through the educational process with joy, discipline, and humility.”

Participant 4 reinforced this:

“Growing into a strong individual without losing one’s sense of humanity.”

This positive attitude acts as a mediating variable in the adjustment process. The ability to interpret strict routines as a process of formation rather than pressure indicates high psychological resilience. Resilience enables cadets to reduce stress perception and maintain internal motivation despite adversity.

The fourth factor, Specific Issues, accounts for 8%. Although the smallest in percentage, this factor emphasizes the importance of holism. There is awareness that unbalanced excellence—whether purely academic or purely physical—is considered suboptimal and may lead to stress. This finding reinforces the holistic vision: within the governmental training system, well-roundedness is essential. Failure to achieve balance—such as overemphasizing academics at the expense of physical or social domains—can lead to burnout and hinder long-term adjustment.

As stated by Participant 1:

“Excelling in only one area without paying attention to others can make the educational process less optimal and potentially stressful.”

This underscores that governmental education systems value well-roundedness over narrow specialization.

Conclusion

This study finds that cadets’ self-adjustment in semi-military educational institutions is shaped by four key clusters: Academic Conflict, Strategies and Character, Vision and Mentality, and Specific Issues. Academic Conflict arises from demanding technical courses and schedule clashes with non-academic routines, creating fatigue and academic stress. Despite these challenges, collective learning and strong peer support serve as the most effective coping mechanisms, enhancing resilience and fostering character maturity such as discipline, responsibility, and integrity. A balanced mindset—integrating academic, physical, and emotional development—helps cadets interpret pressure as personal growth. Specific Issues highlight the need for holistic balance to avoid burnout. Overall, cadet adjustment is a transformative process that strengthens character, social cohesion, and readiness for civil service roles.

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