

## Persistence of the First-Year College Students

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### Abstract

The research was motivated by the phenomenon of first-year college students who experience persistence problems in overcoming difficult tasks during college. Persistence consists of intentional and directed, continuation or reapplication of effort, and temptation to stop. This study aims to express the persistence of first-year college students in the Educational and Guidance Psychology Undergraduate Study Program, Faculty of Education, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesias by involving 85 students by convenience sampling. The instrument used was the persistence questionnaire with the Guttman scale. Data were analyzed by descriptive statistical techniques with the help of SPSS Version.20. The research findings reveal that students' persistence in general is in a moderate condition. The study imply the need of a technique or strategy in improving the persistence of first-year college students and the role of the supervisor in increasing the intelligence of first-year college students.

**Keywords:** *Persistence, intentional and goal-directed, continuation or reapplication of effort, temptation to quit*

### Introduction

New students experienced many changes in the first year of college. In higher education, students are required to be more independent in everything and be able to make their own decisions. It's very different in primary to secondary education they are still guided and directed in full. These changes have caused many adjustment problems and have a negative impact on the process of learning achievement and overall performance in higher education, including differences in academic culture from previous schools, lack of preparation when entering college, and limited interaction between lecturers and students (Rohmah, 2007; Lindsey et al, 2015). Santrock (2003, p. 262) also explains the transition from high school to college involves a move towards a larger school structure and more impersonal interactions. it involves interactions with peers who are more diverse in their geographical backgrounds and sometimes diverse backgrounds ethnicity, which can increase pressure to achieve achievements, for work and good test values.

Another difficulty they experience is facing the challenges of the industrial revolution era 4.0 characterized by cyber-physical and the development of the internet of or for things followed by new technologies in scientific data, robotics, artificial intelligence, cloud, three dimensions and nanotechnology everywhere (Gufron, 2018; Fatmawati, 2018). The era of industrial revolution 4.0 is a challenge for first-year college students to think fast, creative, innovative and target-oriented, so that they are required to be active and friendly to technology. In addition, students are required to have high order thinking related to critical thinking skills, communication that is fluent and understood by everyone, cooperation in completing tasks, creation and inovation to solve problems and creation of useful new products (Pratama & Pramesti, 2018; Dwiningrum, 2018).

If the first-year college students are not able to face challenges and adjust to the conditions above, then they will experience stress. Murphy and Archer (in Duffy & Atwater, 2005) state that high competition among students is one of the stressors for students. If it is associated with some of the above explanations with the results of observations and interviews by researchers, the conditions of first-year college students at the Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia experience stress and difficulties in adjusting to new environments. They were diligent and very quickly in completing assignments at school. However, they became students who often sleep a lot, play games on mobile phones in boarding houses, complete tasks lazily, and have difficulty in finding references. Furthermore, they were also stressed by majors that are not in accordance with interest, pressure to increase GPA as indicator of good academic performance, variety of lecture assignments, midterms, final semester exams, practical tests, unsatisfactory grades, threat of drop outs, chaotic time management, poor self-management, independent living, difficulties in financial arrangements, finding a place to live, disruption interpersonal relationships, conflicts with friends, lecturers, girlfriends and family. The problems faced by students can develop into negative feelings and stress so that they eventually leave the task because of fear and doubtful that leads to the perception of incompetence or hopelessness in completing the task.

If the perception of incompetence or hopelessness in completing this task is always embedded in the mind of the first-year college students, it will have a negative impact on them. For instance, they will not be able to survive in these conditions, so the tasks are not completed and the results are not as expected. Therefore, this first-year college students really needs to improve their perseverance and persistence in completing assignments or several demands from the campus. This resistance and perseverance is called Persistence. Persistence is a continuation of voluntary actions taken to achieve a goal despite obstacles, difficulties or despair (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Hill (2000) argues that persistence is an important factor in creating desire to become a reality.

The basis of persistence is the power of will. Some research results reinforce the theory, namely factors that influence student persistence including social support (parents, peers), stress, socio-cultural integration, no time management, and no clear goals (Guan, et al, 2006; Lavigne, Vallerand, & Miquelon, 2007; Madhlangobe, et al, 2014, Salas, et al, 2014). In addition, the factors that influence students' persistence are the existence of economic factors, where male-type students withdraw or non-persist from women for fear of worrying about accumulating debt, so they choose to work and focus on his family (Cofer & Somers; Markle, 2015).

From these findings, it can be concluded that the persistence of first-year college students experienced a shift and decline. Therefore, this study wants to describe the persistence of first-year college students based on three dimensions, namely; (1) intentional and goal-directed, (2) continuation or reapplication of effort, and (3) temptation to quit.

## Method

This research used a quantitative approach (Creswell, 2013; Sudijono, 2007) in terms of its characteristics since the research consisted of collecting data by using specific questions, analyzing the results of quantification by using statistical analysis, interpreting the results of the study, comparing with previous studies, and writing research reports and its evaluations. The research took place at the Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia. The reason was based on the compatibility between the problems faced by students with the theme of the researchers, namely having the same characteristics and identified persistence profiles.

The study population was first-year college students in the Bachelor of Educational Psychology and Guidance Study Program, Faculty of Education, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia 2016/2017 academic year. Samples used non-probability sampling with the type of sample used is convenience sampling means that participants are chosen because they are willing and represent the characteristics needed in the study (Creswell, 2013). The selection of research samples was based on

the following considerations; they must be first-level students in the Bachelor of Educational Psychology and Guidance Study Program, Faculty of Education, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia 2016/2017 academic year: (1) including in the age of late adolescents who must have the ability to adapt in a new environment and can survive in facing of obstacles and difficulties to achieve a goal, (2) experience academic competition and are preparing themselves to be able to face very fierce academic competition so that they can survive and improve their cognitive abilities, (3) there are no research that has described persistence. The sample selection was also based on the normal distribution using the Z score.

The instrument used is the Guttman scale persistence questionnaire (Creswell, 2013; Arikunto, 2006) which has two alternative answers namely "yes" and "no". The researcher conducted a questionnaire readability test for students who were not used as samples, then tested the validity and reliability of the questionnaire using the Rasch Model. Based on the categories of validity and reliability coefficients using classification according to Sumintono & Widhiarso (2013), the level of trust and reliability of instruments belong to the special category, thus the persistence instruments of first-year college students can produce scores consistently and can also be used by researchers.

Data were analyzed by descriptive statistical techniques with the help of SPSS Version.20. This descriptive analysis answers the research questions, namely the persistence of first-year college students in general, and then describes persistence based on three dimensions namely intentional and goal-directed, continuation or reapplication of effort, and temptation to quit.

## Results and Discussion

The overall descriptive analysis results ( $M = 23.8$ ,  $SD = 4.4$ ), 65.88% of first-year college students have moderate persistence, and 17.65% of first-year college students have high persistence, but 16.47% of first-year college students have low persistence. This study shows that most first-year college students have moderate persistence.

Descriptive analysis results based on intentional and goal-directed dimensions illustrate ( $M = 4.92\%$ ,  $SD = 1.58$ ) 64.71% new year students have moderate persistence, 18.82% first-year college students have high persistence, but 16.47 first-year college students have low persistence. The results of this study indicate that most first-year college students have moderate persistence.

Furthermore, on the dimension of continuation or reapplication of effort based on the results of the analysis revealed ( $M = 6.75\%$ ,  $SD = 1.54$ ) 68.24% new year students have moderate persistence, 20% first-year college students have low persistence, and 11.76% first-year college students have high persistence. Different in the temptation to quit dimension ( $M = 11.2\%$ ,  $SD = 2.39$ ), first-year college students have moderate persistence at most among the other dimensions which is 72.95%, then 16.47% first-year college students have high persistence, and 10.59% first-year college students have a low persistence.

The results of this study indicate that the persistence of first-year college students is in the moderate category, as well as viewed from the persistence dimension consisting of intentional and goal-directed, continuation or reapplication of effort, and temptation to quit in the medium category. This means that the first-year college students in the Bachelor of Educational Psychology and Guidance Study Program, Faculty of Education, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia 2016/2017 academic year have a good ability to survive in completing tasks, adjust to the campus environment and cooperate with friends. However, this condition sometimes has not been consistent or has not been implemented repeatedly, so that the persistence that is owned can decrease to low. Although the percentage of persistence in the category is higher than the low category, it is possible for the lower category to be higher if the persistence of the first-year college students is not increased. This happens because it is influenced by several factors. The Castles's research (2004) showed that the strong coping strategies and life-challenger are the most important factors in increasing persistence.

In other case, McDermott, et al (2015, p. 4) shows the results of their research, first-year college students who have persistence is characterized by setting higher academic goals, feeling more able to determine how to achieve goals, having the ability and strategies to solve problems when experiencing academic stress, and showing academic achievement. In addition, McDermott, et al. also relates that there is a significant relationship between persistence and high expectations for achieving high academic goals. Furthermore, the results of Guan, et al (2006) emphasize that the goals of achievement and social goals influence the persistence of first-year college students and their findings show that first-year college students have many goals because they want to succeed in education.

Mau & Mau (2006) revealed that first-year college students who have persistence are proved to be better at academic achievement, have high locus of control, and come from families that have high socioeconomic status and higher levels of education for parents. This means that the role of parents is very useful to increase persistence and as a role model for their children, thus children become more confident in their ability to achieve the desired goals. The role of parents is called the existence of social support, in accordance with what was mentioned by Peterson and Seligman, factors that influence or increase persistence, one of which is social support. Sources of social support come from family, friends or close friends, and the community. However, the main source of social support is from the family (parents), such as the feeling of belonging, the friendship between family members, and especially from parents who provide physical and psychological comfort for their children.

The results of other studies prove that there is a significant relationship between social support of parents and academic achievement. It means that the greater the social support of parents perceived by students, the better academic achievement students can achieve (Maslihah, 2011; Fibrianti, 2009). Therefore, social support, especially from parents, plays an important role and influential factors to improve students persistence as evidenced by good students academic achievement.

Relating to first-year college students who have high persistence, Littig & Sanders (1979) from the results of his research show that first-year college students who have persistence can be seen from three indices, namely: time spent solving puzzles (problems), number of attempts to solve puzzles (problem), and willingness to keep trying when there is a failure. However, based on the three persistence indices used by Littig & Sanders, it does not have a significant relationship with locus of control. Moreover, the three persistence indices are factors that influence persistence. According to Peterson & Seligman, time and effort to achieve goals, and continue to try in achieving the goal even though it never fails, it is called the effortful behavior. This means that individuals who have high persistence tend to try a lot to achieve planned goals compared to individuals who have low persistence.

In contrast, first-year college students who do not have persistence or are in the low category are caused by several factors, as mentioned by Hill (2000). There are several symptoms of reduced persistence, namely: failure to recognize and clearly define what is desired, procrastination, lack of interest in obtaining special knowledge, self-satisfaction, weakness due to neglect in the choice of motives that support the action, and so on. In line with the opinion of Peterson & Seligman, states that some external factors have been shown to reduce persistence, especially by reducing intrinsic motivation.

Some studies that prove the lack of intrinsic motivation are actions to achieve goals by doing tasks for money, gifts and rewards, and losing interest in carrying out tasks for self-interest and because they are less willing to devote their own free time to completing the task (Deci, Harackiewicz, Lepper, Greene, & Nisbett in Jozsa & Morgan, 2014). Contributions from the results of the study of Jozsa & Morgan (2014) prove that changes in cognitive persistence correlate with changes in GPA, which means that changes in deteriorating values correlate with a decrease in motivation. This means that if this intrinsic motivation does not exist, then persistence will decrease even if it does not exist

even though persistence begins if there is a clear goal accompanied by one's own desires or hopes for not being willing.

Activities carried out based on rewards, namely wanting gifts, rewards and money indirectly will form persistence but do not last long because when the reward is no longer available and the persistence is slowly reduced and disappear. It is different if we do activities to achieve goals sincerely and on our own, then the persistence persists. It can even increase if every action is always updated. In accordance with several explanations of the results of previous studies, it is confirmed by Meier & Albrecht (2003) that there are three stages in the persistence process, namely; decision objectives, implementation, and evaluation.

Then, there are moderate persistence differences in terms of dimensions between intentional and goal-directed Zscore results, continuation or reapplication of effort, and temptation to quit. 72.94% of first-year college students have moderate persistence in terms of temptation to quit dimensions, 68.24% of first-year college students have moderate persistence in terms of continuation or reapplication of effort dimensions, and 64.71% of first-year college students have persistence reviewed from intentional and goal-directed dimensions. This happens due to several factors.

#### *Temptation to quit*

In the temptation to quit dimension, individuals experience the temptation to stop in achieving goals, this is caused by internal factors, namely boredom or inferiority and site factors, namely the difficulty of the task or influence of others (Peterson and Seligman, 2004). Every student will usually experience such a situation. To ensure they do not continuously experience the situation, it is necessary to have a strong determination and cooperation with others who tend to increase persistence. In accordance with the factors that influence persistence according to Peterson and Seligman (2004), one of which is social support. Social support is needed from parents, friends, closest people who have a positive influence to increase the persistence of first-year college students.

In addition, if viewed from its development, first-year college students are also referred to as late adolescents. They experience the development of the ability to understand others (social cognition), establish friendships, and collaborate with peers (Hurlock, 2012). Collaboration is an indicator of this dimension and the main process in social interaction, for example, through collaboration in learning groups all difficult problems and tasks will easily be overcome and resolved. Furthermore, the determination indicator of this dimension is marked by the sincerity of the heart to get out of negative energy (lazy, afraid, and unable), rise from failure, and find a solution if it fails. Finally, indicators of this dimension are habits. This habit indicator is characterized by the behavior of carrying out an activity continuously / repeatedly, carried out consciously and with clear objectives. In accordance with mentioned by Hill (2000) that persistence is the result of a habit. The mind absorbs behavior patterns from habits and becomes part of everyday experience.

#### *Continuation or Reapplication of effort*

The dimensions of continuation or reapplication to effort have three indicators, namely: self-reliance, clarity of plan, and accurate understanding (Hill, 2000; Lopez, 2009). The indicator of self-reliance is self-confidence in the ability to do something that has been planned. Self-reliance in this study is characterized by being able to persevere in completing tasks even though they have failed, always be enthusiastic and not discouraged, able to complete difficult tasks. This ability causes not all first-year college students to be able in arranging it, so that it can be seen from the results of the study that there are 20% of students who have low persistence.

The clarity indicator for the plan is marked by an organized plan, which is able to determine when to stop and continue on a plan and be able to determine who will be asked about the plan if there are obstacles. Furthermore, accurate understanding indicators are characterized by being able to gather clear information for the preparation of plans and be able to measure standards and abilities of oneself to carry out activities on plans that have been prepared.

### *Intentional and Goal-directed*

In detail, in this dimension there are two indicators that should be achieved by the first-year college students, namely clarity of goals and desires (Hill, 2000; Lopez, 2009). The indicators of clarity of purpose are strong motives for overcoming various difficulties and initial steps and most important in developing persistence. Adolescence is often known as the period of seeking identity, by Erikson called the ego identity (Bischof, in Ali & Asrori, 2009, p. 16). Erikson's identity development theory consists of four identity statuses, namely: identity diffusion, identity foreclosure, identity moratorium, and identity achievement (Santrock, 2012, p. 439). Late adolescence according to Marcia (in Papalia, Olds, & Feldman, 2013; Santrock, 2012) is more in the moratorium and turns into an achievement of finding or finding their own identity and making commitments. When late adolescents have found their identity, then they have been able to set clear goals, especially for late adolescents who are sitting in college or called as students. This is characterized by how they are able to achieve goals, one of which is being able to adjust to a new environment (campus).

If first-year college students already possess this dimension, then each step is slowly directed towards that goal, so that it can survive and persist in achieving it. On the contrary, if the first-year college students do not have this dimension, especially do not have clear desires and goals, then the attitude that will be shown by the student will be laziness and not persistence about the challenges or obstacles towards the goal. In the study, the research subjects were students at Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia. Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia is one of the State Universities surveyed by Supriadi and Kartadinata (in Akhmad, 2017; Ilyas, 2010). The main motivation for college students is to get a decent job after graduation. Based on the subculture of college students at Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia included in the vocational category.

This means their orientation with the aim of higher education as a ladder to enter the workforce. Referring to the results of the study in accordance with the research subjects that have been observed and interviewed in the Educational and Guidance Psychology students, namely their orientation to study for work, Akhmad's (2017) study confirms that the new vocational orientation of Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia students includes sufficient categories and identity status Cultural prospective teacher students are still relatively low. Even though high identity status is very important for teachers to show professional performance and have reliability in global competence. In addition, if other subcultures such as the academic subculture need to be improved so that their persistence also increases. Where the academic subculture has the characteristic of crossing in harmony with the purpose of education, namely college to get knowledge by learning, going to the library and participating in activities with the aim of self-development.

The implication of this finding is for early level students to understand the factors that influence persistence, so that they can anticipate and increase their persistence, for academic supervisors to increase the persistence of new students acting as facilitators and counselors for these students. For the next researcher, it is necessary to do a technique or strategy to improve the persistence of first-year college students, then need to use other research designs to get more results that are specific. Research has several limitations in implementation. The instrument used is only a questionnaire regarding the persistence of first-year college students, preferably added with qualitative data so that the data obtained becomes stronger.

The findings of this study have parallels with the results of Zaleski's research (in Peterson & Seligman, 2004) found that individuals who have close and supportive relationships are more persistent and exert effort than individuals who do not have close and supportive relationships, meaning first-year college students need to get social support from parents, friends, closest people who bring a positive influence to improve persistence.

## Conclusions

Based on the findings of the research conducted in this study, it can be concluded that first-year college students have moderate persistence. Reviewed from the dimensions, first-year college students have moderate persistence at most on the temptation to quit dimension compared to intentional and goal-directed dimensions, continuation or reapplication of effort. This study is important because it increases our understanding of the factors that hinder success of first-year college students and the presence of the industrial revolution era 4.0, which is a challenge for us to remain confident and persistence for success.

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