The Effect of Sport Involvement on College Adjustment

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Some colleges and universities in the United States have experienced difficulties in maintaining student retention (Bushong, 2009; Marcus, 2012; Scott, 2014), and this phenomenon may lead to a major decline of tuition revenue. Although many colleges have utilized a variety of programs (e.g., first-year seminar, learning community) to maintain student retention, the high rate of student dropout among first and second year college students has become one of the serious problems (Barefoot, 2004). For instance, approximately 40 percent of college students drop out without earning a degree due to a lack of college adjustment (Sung, 2015). This is consistent with previous research conducted by Gan, Hu, and Zhang (2010) indicating maladjustment is a major cause of dropout. In addition, college students who struggle to adjust to a college tend to have low levels of physical and psychological well-being (LaBrie, Ehret, Hummer, & Prenovost, 2012). College adjustment (e.g., social, emotional, and academic adjustment) refers to the experiences of college students to adapt to a demanding college life (Chiu, 2013). Since adjusting to a college is one of the stressful experiences among incoming college students, many college freshmen experienced social and emotional maladjustment (e.g., feeling homesick and lonely, having psychological distress, low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression) which, in turn, causes academic maladjustment (e.g., student dropout) (Chiu, 2013; Feldt, Graham, & Dew, 2011; Gan, Hu, & Zhang, 2010; Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994; Kaya & Weber, 2003; Koo, Sung, & Martinez, 2015; LaBrie et al., 2012).

Many scholars in the field of leisure sport support that regularly participating in leisure activities can improve physical and psychological health (Kilpatrick, Hebert, & Bartholomew, 2005; Taliaferro, Rienzo, Pigg, Miller, & Dodd, 2009). Particularly, college students in the United States can easily participate in various college recreation programs (e.g., intramural sports, club sports, group fitness, personal training, outdoor recreation programs) during their college years since most colleges provide the best possible leisure circumstances (e.g., college recreation center) for their students across the campus (Kim, Sung, Koo, & Dittmore, 2015; Lindsey & Sessoms, 2006). Participating in college recreation programs has positive impacts on various areas including but not limited to, increasing retention rate (Noeldner, 2001; Miller, 2011; Scott, 2014), increasing overall college satisfaction (Downs, 2013), improving the quality of student’s college life (Kimball & Freysinger, 2003), enhancing academic performance (Noeldner, 2001), improving psychological well-being (e.g., reducing rates of hopelessness and depression), reducing suicide rates (Taliaferro et al., 2009), and improving satisfaction through academic experience (Forrester, 2006). In addition, college students can make new friends while participating in college recreation programs (Kondric, Sindik, Furjan-Mandic, & Schiefler, 2013; Noeldner, 20001; Scott, 2014).

Sport involvement is defined as “the perceived interest in and personal importance of sports to an individual” (Shank & Beasley, 1998, p. 436). An individual highly involved in sport is more likely to exhibit positive behaviors such as watching sports games and participating sport activities (Armstrong, 2002). Ko, Kim, Kim, and Lee (2010) also stated highly involved college students in recreational sports have high levels of motivation for participating in recreational sports. Since participating in college recreation programs provides benefits on social (e.g., making a new friends), emotional (e.g., improving psychological well-being by reducing rates of hopelessness and depression), and academic aspects (e.g., enhancing academic performance) for college students, sport involvement could be considered as one of the potential outlets that facilitate students to adapt a demanding college life. However, a paucity of research has been conducted to identify whether sport involvement directly or indirectly triggers college adjustment. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to investigate the relationship between sport involvement and college adjustment, including social, emotional, and academic adjustment.

Previous studies in higher education identified the relationship among social, emotional, and academic adjustment. Koo et al. (2015) found that social adjustment had a positive effect on emotional adjustment. They also indicated student’s psychological well-being (e.g., emotional adjustment) was considered as one of the significant facilitators to
achieve educational goal (e.g., academic adjustment). This is consistent with the research from Sung (2015) which indicated that non-academic environment factors such as sense of belonging, college satisfaction, and social relationship had a positive impact on academic performance. Collectively, the following research hypotheses were proposed:

- **RH1**: Sport involvement has a positive impact on social (H1a), emotional (H1b), and academic adjustment (H1c).
- **RH2**: Social adjustment has a positive impact on emotional (H2a) and academic adjustment (H2b).
- **RH3**: Emotional adjustment has a positive impact on academic adjustment.

The survey method was utilized for this study. Reduced personal involvement inventory (PII) developed by Zaichkowsky (1994) was used to measure sport involvement. Specifically, this scale consists of 10 different types of semantic items scored on 7-point Likert type scale: To me (object to be judged) is (1) important and unimportant; (2) boring and interesting; (3) relevant and irrelevant; (4) exciting and unexciting; (5) means nothing and means a lot; (6) appealing and unappealing; (7) fascinating and mundane; (8) worthless and valuable; (9) involving and uninvolving; (10) not needed and needed. College adjustment scale emerged from Kaya and Weber (2003)’s study to measure social adjustment (7 items) and academic adjustment (6 items), and from Koo et al. (2015)’s study to measure emotional adjustment (5 items). All items of college adjustment were measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). Finally, demographic questions such as gender, age, grade, and ethnicity were included at the beginning of the questionnaire.

The data will be analyzed using SPSS 20.0 and Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) 20.0 version. Descriptive statistic will be conducted to identify frequency, mean, and standard deviation of the data. Internal consistency will be examined using Cronbach’s alpha to verify the reliability of each multi-item construct. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) will be employed to identify factorial structure of observed variables. Finally, structural equation modeling (SEM) will be employed to examine the hypothesized relationship among the constructs.

This study is one of the first known studies to identify the impact of sport involvement on college adjustment in higher education. Although this study is in progress, the researchers expect the results of this study may theoretically extend the existing studies on sport involvement by identifying its association with college adjustment. In addition, the findings may provide a better understanding of sport involvement (e.g., participating in sport activities) for college administrators to provide the best possible leisure circumstances by developing more effective recreational programs in order for college students to not only adapt to a demanding college life but also improve the quality of college life which, in turn, enables colleges or universities to maintain student retention.