

Academic Skills for the Digital era C1 (BMSW4013)

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Reflective Essay on Challenges Faced as a New University Student Using Gibbs
Reflective Model

Introduction

Transitioning into university life marks a significant change for me that is full of opportunities as well as difficulties. This period of change brought new academic expectations, social dynamics, and personal responsibilities. Thinking back on these experiences is crucial for both academic and personal growth. I will analyse the difficulties I encountered throughout my first year of university in this essay using Gibbs' Reflective Model. The six stages of this model description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion, and action plan were created by Graham Gibbs in 1988 and offer an organised framework for introspection (Gibbs, 1988). I will use this model to analyse the difficulties I faced such as time management, academic writing, digital literacy, admission obstacles and social integration and discuss how these things affected my adjustment to university life.

Description

I faced a major setback when I first started university, I was withdrawn from my course after missing the first few weeks because of personal circumstances. I was at a disadvantage because of this delay, even though I was able to appeal the decision and was reinstated. Moodle, the platform used to manage course materials and submissions was malfunctioning when I returned, so I ran into further issues. I had trouble turning in assignments and accessing class materials when I couldn't access Moodle. I felt unprepared and cut off from the course because of these technical issues. I tried contacting my lecturers and IT support to fix the problem, but the delayed response simply made me feel more stressed. The combination of being withdrawn and dealing with Moodle also made my ability to connect socially and academically with my classmates more restricted. My journey into university life began with a mix of

anticipation and anxiety. I had a very difficult time adjusting to the new environment, academic culture, and independence. The amount of assignments work was one of the biggest obstacles. Unlike college, where assignments were sometimes simple and deadlines more flexible, university coursework requires a higher level of critical thinking, deeper engagement with subjects, and strict attention to deadlines.

Another challenge was digital literacy even though I felt at ease using simple computer tools, academic work demanded a higher level of proficiency. From using Moodle to taking part in online group projects, I discovered that I was finding it difficult to stay up to date with the technology components of my education. This caused me even more stress since I was always feeling overwhelmed by the quantity of information I had to take in and the technical knowledge I needed to get.

Social integration was another major challenge. I had to move from Cardiff to Swansea being away from home and adapt to a new environment. Despite my eager to make new friends, I frequently felt uneasy and alone fearing to be socially rejected and the need to fit in. I had a hard time making social interactions and lasting friendships.

Feelings

A variety of emotions were present at this period. I initially experienced anxiety and discouragement due to my retreat, which I perceived as a personal failure. When I got back, I was full of hope, but the amount of work and unsolved technological issues quickly overwhelmed me. I felt helpless and isolated because I was unable to interact with my classmates or fully engage in the material because of the persistent Moodle problems. The pressure to perform well academically intensified these feelings. Like a lot of other students, I doubted my position in the academic environment and absorbed

a sense of inadequacy. These emotional responses are common for people undergoing significant changes since they frequently lack the coping mechanisms needed to deal with new situations, claims Moon (2019). However, I also had times when I was determined. I saw the circumstance as an opportunity to develop new coping mechanisms and understood that resilience was essential for overcoming these challenges. When I successfully fixed a few of the technical problems, I felt good about myself and became more optimistic.

Evaluation

Positive Aspects:

Reinstatement: The university's willingness to reevaluate my withdrawal demonstrated a positive environment and reaffirmed my commitment to achieving academic success.

Resilience Development: overcoming these obstacles improved my ability to solve problems and made me realise how important persistence is to overcome obstacles.

Acquiring Skills: Although the experience was discouraging, it motivated me to learn about digital tools and resources more actively.

Negative Aspects:

System Failures: During an already difficult period, Moodle's technical problems significantly restricted my academic progress and increased my stress levels.

Missed Opportunities: I felt cut off from my teachers and fellow students since I was unable to attend early lectures and social gatherings.

Mental Strain: These difficulties had a negative overall effect on my mental health, which made it difficult for me to stay motivated.

Analysis

It's critical to take into consideration the challenges that many first-year university students confront in order to completely comprehend the difficulties I faced. One major barrier was the academic shift since it required for more writing, research and critical thinking than I had previously practised. Academic writing at university is fundamentally different from what is typically expected in high school, as it involves not only presenting information but also the critical analysis of sources, constructing solid arguments, and adhering to specific disciplinary conventions (Lea & Street, 1998). This shift can be particularly challenging to students who aren't familiar with academic standards of their chosen field of study (Wingate, 2012).

Research supports the notion that academic writing is a common challenge for new university students. According to Lea and Street (1998), many students struggle with the shift from writing for descriptive purposes in high school to writing for analytical purposes in university. This shift requires a deeper level of engagement with the material, as well as an understanding of how to structure an argument and use evidence effectively. Wingate (2012) further emphasizes that students often face difficulties in understanding what is required of them in academic writing, leading to anxiety and lower academic performance. My own experiences mirrored these findings, as I found the demands of academic writing to be one of the most daunting aspects of my university experience.

Time management is another critical skill that many students, including myself, struggle with when transitioning to university. Effective time management is essential for balancing academic work with other responsibilities, such as part-time jobs, extracurricular activities, and personal commitments. However, research shows that many students find it difficult to manage their time effectively, leading to increased stress and lower academic performance (Macan et al., 1990). In my case, the lack of experience in managing a complex schedule meant that I often found myself rushing to

complete assignments at the last minute, which negatively impacted the quality of my work and my mental well-being.

Social integration is another important aspect of the university experience that can significantly impact a student's overall. Forming connections with peers and support are crucial for both emotional well-being and academic success. However, the process of making new friends and integrating into the university community can be challenging, particularly for students who are introverted or different backgrounds (Wilcox, Winn & Fyvie-Gauld, 2005). My own experience of feeling isolated and struggling to make connections during the first few weeks of university highlights the importance of social integration in the overall university experience.

Conclusion

Reflecting on my first term at university, the challenges I faced were significant, but they also provided valuable learning opportunities. The difficulties I encountered with academic writing, digital literacy, time management, and social integration were common barriers that many new students face, and overcoming these challenges required perseverance, adaptability, and the willingness to seek help when needed. While my initial experiences were marked by stress and self-doubt, they ultimately led to personal growth and the development of important skills that will serve me well throughout my academic and professional career.

Action Plan

To make sure that my time at university is effective and goes more smoothly in the future, I intend to take a few proactive measures. First, to keep honing my academic writing and critical thinking abilities, I will look for academic support options like writing centres and tutoring programs. To improve my comprehension of work at the university

level, I will also utilize internet tools including research databases and academic writing guides (Bailey, 2011).

I'll take use of the university's workshops and online tutorials to increase my digital literacy and become more adept at using the digital tools I need for my coursework (JISC, 2018). I'll also practice using these tools frequently to boost my self-assurance and make sure I'm ready for any digital assignments that come up for my coursework.

I'll keep using time management tools and planners to arrange my tasks and establish reasonable objectives. Larger assignments can be broken down into smaller, more achievable phases to help me keep on track with my job and lessen the chance of procrastinating. To maintain a good balance between my academic work and personal well-being, I will also prioritize self-care by working out frequently, practicing meditation, and relaxing. Lastly, I'll make a conscious effort to connect with classmates, attend events, and join clubs to expand my social network. For emotional and academic success, building a solid support network is crucial, thus I'll prioritize interacting with others and taking part in social activities throughout my university experience (Buote et al., 2007).

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