THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL SUPPORT AND STUDENT'S SELF EFFICACY ON ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS MEDIATED BY SENSE OF BELONGING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS

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Abstract: This study investigates the relationship of social support and self-efficacy on the academic engagement of Thai undergraduate students in Chiang Mai, Thailand, mediated by sense of belonging and psychological distress. A total of 267 students (aged between 17 and 24) from three universities in Chiang Mai participated in this study by completing a self-administered questionnaire designed to measure the study's primary variables (social support, self-efficacy, sense of belonging, psychological distress, and academic engagement). The results of the study indicate that the undergraduate students' social support and self-efficacy, directly or indirectly mediated by sense of belonging and psychological distress, have no significant relationship to their academic engagement. Therefore, social support, self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and psychological distress present no predictive value to undergraduate students' academic engagement. However, the results reveal that students' social support and self-efficacy is directly and significantly related to their psychological distress in the opposite direction. This finding indicates that the more social support and self-efficacy undergraduate students have, the less psychological distress they have. The implication of this finding may help undergraduate students ease their psychological distress by promoting their social support and self-efficacy.

Key Words: Academic Engagement, Social Support, Self-Efficacy, Sense of Belonging, Psychological Distress

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Introduction

Higher education is designed to prepare its students for life paths in their chosen career. Most universities' curriculum requires regular participation in the classroom and involvement in assignments. Universities provide skills and higher learning for their students to unite their unique qualities with specific professional skills and knowledge. Researchers and educators have exhibited a growing interest in the concept of engagement as a way to improve students' interest toward learning (Appleton, Christenson, & Furlong, 2008), enhance students' motivation and involvement in school-related activities (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004), increase successful student achievement levels (National Research Council & Institute of Medicine, 2004), understand students' intellectual development (Upadyaya & Salmela-Aro, 2013), and understand links between academic engagement and depression, substance use, and delinquency (Li & Lerner, 2011).

Engaged academic experiences are characterized by positive and fulfilling encounters in students' social lives and their self-efficacy toward learning (Mackinnon, 2011; Schaufeli, Martinez, Pinto, Salanova, & Bakker, 2002). According to Mackinnon (2011), the effects of social support on academic engagement is critical to the design and implementation of involvements, which improve the mental health, and social and educational outcomes for students. Students with high self-efficacy are viewed as having vigor, dedication, and interest (Schaufeli, et al., 2002). High levels of academic engagement are associated with academic outcomes, such as students' learning and grade point average (Carini, Kuh, & Klein, 2006), and persistence in school (Hughes & Pace, 2003). On the other hand, students with low levels of academic engagement, or lack thereof, experience feelings of exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced efficacy (Schaufeli, et al., 2002). Engagement is also a valuable construct for capturing the gradual process by which students drop out of school (Appleton et al., 2008; Finn, 1989). Researchers and educators view engagement as the main theoretical model for intervening with and understanding potential dropouts, to enhance positive performance and encourage school completion (Appleton et al., 2008).

Objectives

Student academic disengagement is present in schools worldwide. In Thailand, academic disengagement is a concern among parents and educators. Although there is no current official report from the Thai government regarding student disengagement, many parents and educators make assumptions to pinpoint the causes of academic disengagement. They extensively discuss the education system, school system, environments, faculty members, teaching methods, social influence, and students themselves. There were a number of studies conducted in Thailand exploring student disengagement from learning. However, these studies were focused on

identifying the problems.

The current study examines the relationship between social support, self-efficacy, sense of belonging, psychological distress, and academic engagement. This study aims to contribute to the understanding of these issues by highlighting the importance of academic engagement and its corresponding factors in education in the Thai cultural context.

Literature Review

Academic engagement refers to students' active involvement in learning activities offered by academic institutions (McCormick, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2013) and in the learning opportunities available in their academic environment (Vekkailia, 2014). Academic engagement is a continuous dynamic and iterative process, which helps or hinders students from engaging in further studies (Harrion, 2013). Academic engagement is considered both a process and an outcome within educational settings. At the same time, knowledge, skills and competences learned or achieved through academic engagement can be considered proximal academic outcomes. Further academic outcomes include students' retention in school, employment success, and lifelong learning (Kahu, 2013).

Theoretical Framework

Three theoretical approaches discussed below dominate the theoretical reasoning of student engagement. The general notion is that students benefit more from a college education if they devote more effort to their studies. If students become involved in class discussions and activities, school facilities and resources, and social integration, they are engaged with and learn from other students and faculty. According to these theories, social support, self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and psychological distress are factors to academic engagement.

Astin (1984) asserted that students learn by becoming involved. He believed that student learning and development are directly proportional to student engagement in academic, social, and extracurricular college experiences. He viewed engagement as an environmental factor affected by choices students make with regard to participating in academic and social activities on campus. This theory implies that students choose educational institutions based on certain environmental characteristics and that students' educational experiences and outcomes vary depending on choices students make about participating in academic, social, and extracurricular activities available to them.

Pascarella (1985) developed a theory wherein a university's structural characteristics and campus culture have direct and indirect effect on student development. In this theory, he suggested that students' growth is affected by five factors: the students' characteristics, the university's structural characteristics, the

campus culture, the pattern of social interaction on the campus, and the quality of effort put forth by the students. Students' characteristics include personality and demographic traits. A student body composed of students with high socioeconomic status presents different opportunities and challenges than students coming from working-class backgrounds. The affiliation, and residential character of universities define their structural characteristics. Business schools that stress management and marketing present models of education, ideology, and knowledge differently from medical schools that stress health and well-being. The two factors, in turn, shape a unique campus culture and environment that represent its school of thought. The pattern of social interaction refers to the frequency, content, and quality of the students' interactions with their peers, faculty members, and administrators. The quality of the students' effort is influenced by these four factors. Work and family obligations, a difference in ideology between the university and its students, and an unsuitable learning environment or social circle might discourage students to be involved with their academic goals.

Tinto's student integration model (1993) focused on social and academic integration and its link to persistence and retention. It should be noted that his theory was intended to explain students' retention from dropping out rather than explain their academic performance. Tinto proposed that students' experiences at an institution, in which they became socially and academically involved, have a direct impact on their commitment to educational goals, the institution, and staying enrolled. Academic integration is understood as students' satisfaction with the academic systems at their university and the way they perceive their own intellectual development. Academic integration was determined by the students' view of their relationships with faculty and peers on campus as it promoted social values and membership in their communities.

The level of social integration was determined by the extent to which students perceive others in the campus environment as caring about them and having an interest in them as individuals. The integration theory Tinto created assumes that students who are more integrated and feel more accepted and valued in the institutional environment are more likely to persist and achieve their educational goals. Likewise, he asserted that students leave colleges because they are insufficiently integrated into university life.

Interrelationships Among the Key Variables

Positive self-efficacy and supportive relationships with others have been conceptualized as resources that promote successful adaptation and engagement in school. (Compas, Hiden, & Gerhardt, 1995; Juang & Silbereisen, 1999). Schools provide an integral role in the lives of students. The social climate of this setting was an important condition influencing both the number of social resources a student

could utilize when problems arose and the likelihood that a student would make use of that network (Cartland, Ruch-Ross, & Henry, 2003).

School life is a period characterized by a challenging array of social, cognitive, and biological changes during which the interconnection between self-efficacy and social experiences serve important roles to motivate students to pursue academic achievement. (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 2001).

Social support is very important for students in their academic development. The characteristics and quality of social support have long been recognized as positively correlated factors to the student's adjustment and engagement. Studies have consistently revealed that students who have more social resources and experienced a higher sense of belonging are more motivated, more engaged in school and classroom activities, and more dedicated to school (Osterman, 2000).

Moreover, students who feel that they belong in their school environments have higher enjoyment and enthusiasm in engaging activities. Students who feel isolated, on the other hand, report greater anxiety, boredom, frustration, and sadness during tasks that directly affect their academic performance (Furrer & Skinner, 2003).

Self-efficacy affects how students relate to their classmates and how connected they feel to the class. Students with a higher level of self-efficacy often experience positive affect and openness in class. It is challenging for a student who does not feel comfortable in the classroom to feel like they belong there. Students who perceive the classroom as competitive rather than inviting, do not feel a strong sense of belonging and this affecting their self-efficacy (McMahon, Wernsman, & Rose, 2009).

A positive affectation creates better opportunities for student relatedness and belonging. Students who believe they will do well in their classes and have confidence would are likely to be more open to involvement in different activities at the school and engage in more conversation with other students. This created friendships and a sense of belonging in which one feels accepted as a member of a group (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003). During the academic year, students faced many situations that can alter their academic achievement and engagement, and cause them psychological distress (Yamashita, Saito, & Takao, 2012). The most common sources of this distress are, among others, their workload and problems associated with their studies, fear of unknown situations, and difficulties in completing their curriculum. In addition, students must have certain personal factors, such as assertiveness, an ability to say no and handle confrontation, self-esteem and social relationships, which involves multiple and significant adaptations that they must adequately and immediately make during their academic life (Lo, 2002; Pourjalia, & Zarnaghash, 2010). If these risks are not recognized, they can negatively affect the student's health, academic self-efficacy, satisfaction with their studies, and, consequently, the quality of their work (Walsh, Feeney, Hussey, & Donnellan, 2010). Several studies have

reported that the quality of social support perceived and received correlate more positively with mental health (Steese, Dollete, Phillips, Hossfeld, Matthews, & Taormina, 2004; Tao, Dong, Pratt, Hunsberger, & Pancer, 2000). Deficits in social support have been linked to psychological distress such as depression, loneliness, and anxiety (Eskin, 2003). Elliot and Gramling (1990) found that social support helped students to cope with depression, anxiety, and stress. Students who received support from others coped with their psychological distress since they felt that someone was there to help them, and encourage them to perform well in academic tasks. By understanding how social support works can help students to pursue learning and cope with psychological distress (Steinberg & Darling, 1994). Likewise, favorable views of oneself and one's abilities appear to be valuable in helping students to avoid emotional difficulties (DuBois, Burk-Braxton, Swenson, Tevendale, & Hardesty, 2002; Jenkins, Goodness, & Buhrmester, 2002). Similar benefits are apparent for the wide-ranging types of external support that a student may receive from tangible assistance such as the opportunity to simply have others listen to and validate one's feelings (Cauce, Mason, Gonzales, Hiraga, & Liu, 1996; Moran & DuBois, 2002). Self-efficacy plays a central role in mediating the social experience of support in determining psychosocial adaptation (Dubois et al., 2002).

Conceptual Framework

This study is built on the hypothetical grounding that the independent variables, "social support" and "self-efficacy," have significant links to the mediator variables, "sense of belonging" and "psychological distress," and have significant links the dependent variable, "academic engagement."

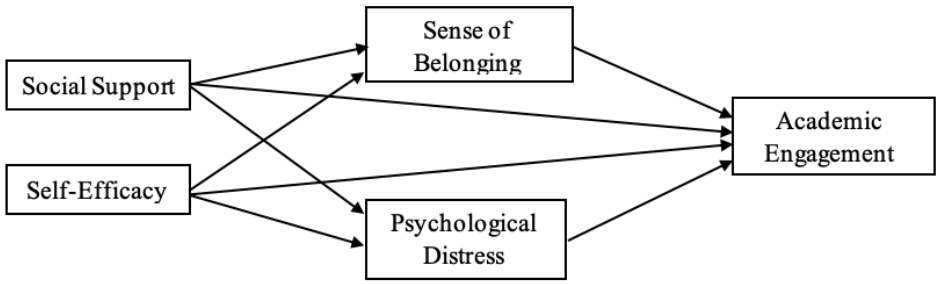

Figure 1: Hypothesized Path Model showing the direct and indirect effect of social support and self-efficacy on academic engagement mediated by sense of belonging and psychological distress

Based on a thorough review of the literature and the conceptual framework of the study, the research questions are as follows: (1) Do social support and self-efficacy influence academic engagement? (2) Do social support and self-efficacy indirectly

strengthen or impede students' academic engagement mediated by psychological distress and sense of belonging?

Research Hypotheses

The conceptual framework allows the study to hypothesize the following in an attempt to address the research questions posed.

H_1: There is a direct effect of social support and self-efficacy on the academic engagement of the students.

H_2: There is an indirect effect of social support and self-efficacy on the academic engagement of the students mediated by sense of belonging, such that the more social support and higher self-efficacy the students have, the higher their sense of belonging will be. The higher the sense of belonging they have, the higher their academic engagement will be.

H_3: There is an indirect effect of social support and self-efficacy on the academic engagement of the student mediated by psychological distress, such that the more social support and higher self-efficacy the students have, the lower their psychological distress will be. The lower the psychological distress they have, the higher their academic engagement will be.

Methodology

Procedure and Participants

This study used convenience sampling in the selection of potential participants. With the permission of the relevant authorities from three universities, invitations to participate in this study were posted on the notice boards to meet at the designated area and time. Direct invitations were extended during inconvenient times such as short breaks between classes and after-school periods. Students who partook in the study, were fully briefed on the study topic and the data collection process, and were provided with a consent form to read. All consented participants then received the measurement package. Upon completion, the participants were debriefed. The participants were assured that the data collected from them will be kept confidential and will only be used for research. 267 Thai undergraduate students were recruited from three different universities in Chiang Mai: 88 (33%) from Chiang Mai University, 85 (31.8%) from Payap University, and 94 (35.2%) from Maejo University. Of the 267 respondents, 114 (42.7%) were men and 153 (57.3%) were women. Their ages ranged from 17 to 24 years. 109 (40.8%) students were in their first year, 99 (37.1%) in their second year, 36 (13.5%) in their third year, and 23 (8.6%) in their fourth year.

Research Instruments

1. Interpersonal support evaluation list (ISEL): to measure students' social support. The ISEL was developed by Cohen and Hoberman (1983). This instrument

is a self-report survey consisting of 40 questions with a 4-point scale ranging from "definitely false," "probably false," "probably true" to "definitely true." The scoring follows the Likert scale (1-2-3-4) accordingly. Items 3, 6, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 17, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30, 34, 35, 36, 39, and 40 are reverse scored; that is (4-3-2-1) accordingly. The score is calculated by finding the sum of the items. Total scores have a range of 40 to 160. Higher scores indicate higher levels of potential support resources.

2. General self-efficacy scale (GSE): to measure students' self-efficacy. The GSE was developed by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995). This instrument is a self-report consisting of 10 questions with a 4-point scale ranging from "not at all," "hardly true," "moderately true" to "exactly true." The scoring follows the Likert scale (1-2-3-4) accordingly. The score is calculated by finding the sum of the items. Total scores have a range of 10 to 40. Higher scores indicate higher levels of self-efficacy.

3. Sense of community index-2 (SCI-2): to measure students' sense of belonging. The SCI-2 is, revised version of the sense of community index, developed by Chavis, Lee, and Acosta (2008). This instrument is a self-report consisting of 24 questions with a 4-point scale ranging from "not at all," "somewhat," "mostly" to "completely." The scoring follows the Likert scale (1-2-3-4) accordingly. The score is calculated by finding the sum of the items. Total scores have a range of 24 to 96. Higher scores indicate higher levels of sense of belonging.

4. General health questionnaire (GHQ): to measure students' psychological distress. The GHQ was developed by Goldberg and Blackwell (1970). This study used GHQ-28 version which is a self-report consisting of 28 questions with a 4-point scale ranging from "less than usual," "no more than usual," "rather more than usual" to "much more than usual." The scoring follows the Likert scale (1-2-3-4) accordingly. The score is calculated by finding the sum of the items. Total scores have a range of 28 to 112 Higher scores indicate a higher severity of psychological distress.

5. School engagement measure (SEM): to measure students' academic engagement. The SEM was developed by Fredericks, Blumenfeld, Friedel, and Paris (2005). This instrument is a self-report consisting of 15 questions with a 5-point scale ranging from "never," "on occasion," "some of the time," "most of the time" to "all of the time." The scoring follows the Likert scale (1-2-3-4-5) accordingly. Items 2, 4, and 6 are reverse scored; that is (5-4-3-2-1) accordingly. The score was calculated by finding the sum of the items. Total scores have a range of 15 to 75. Higher scores indicate higher levels of academic engagement.

Statistical Analysis

First, frequency and percentage distributions were employed to analyze the respondents' demographic data. Next, a reliability analysis was conducted to assess

the internal consistency of the questionnaires. Means and standard deviations were then utilized in the analysis of the respondents' scores. Next, correlation was employed to assess the relationship between the variables. Lastly, path analysis via multiple regression analysis was employed to test the hypothesized direct and indirect impacts of social support and self-efficacy on academic engagement mediated by sense of belonging and psychological support.

Results of the Study

Reliability of the Questionnaire

Reliability analysis was conducted on five questionnaires. The purpose of the reliability analysis was to maximize the internal consistency of these two measures by identifying those items that are internally consistent (i.e., reliable), and to discard those items that are not. However, no item was removed because it would interfere with the significant findings; one relationship between variables changes from being significant to insignificant.

Table 1: Cronbach's Alphas for the Five Questionnaires

Variables	Cronbach's alphas
Social Support	.75
Self-Efficacy	.78
Sense of Belonging	.93
Psychological Distress	.79
Academic Engagement	.68

The following Table 2 presents the means and standard deviations of scores from five questionnaires.

Table 2: Means and Standard Deviations for the Computed Variables

	Mean	S.D.	Mid-point
Social Support	3.03	.57	2.50
Self-Efficacy	3.23	.31	2.50
Sense of Belonging	2.57	.64	2.50
Psychological Distress	1.70	.53	2.50
Academic Engagement	3.19	.79	3.00

As seen in Table 2, the mean and mid-point exhibit that the respondents reported having an above average level of social support and self-efficacy, an average level of sense of belonging and academic engagement, and a below average level of

psychological distress.

Correlation Analysis to Test for Relationship between Variables

Correlation analysis was done to measure the significant relationship between two variables. The purpose was to find out which variables are connected and how they interact.

Table 3: Pearson Correlation of the Computed Variables

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Social Support	-				
2. Self-Efficacy	.04	-			
3. Sense of Belonging	-.01	.07	-		
4. Psychological Distress	-.26**	-.15*	-.10	-	
5. Academic Engagement	-.06	.03	.11	0.01	-

**. Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

As displayed in Table 3, two statistically significant relationships were found between social support and psychological distress ($r = -.26$, $p < .01$), and between self-efficacy and psychological distress ($r = -.15$, $p < .05$). These two relationships were found to be negative relationships; the findings indicated that the more social support or self-efficacy the respondents have, the lower their psychological distress will be.

Path Analysis to Test the Hypothesized Path Model

In order to test the hypothesized direct and indirect relationships, path analysis via multiple regression analysis was conducted.

The analysis involved the following steps: (1) regressing the dependent variable of academic engagement by the predictor variables of social support, self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and psychological distress; (2) regressing the mediator variable of sense of belonging by the predictor variable of social support and self-efficacy; and (3) regressing the mediator variable of psychological distress by the predictor variables of social support and self-efficacy.

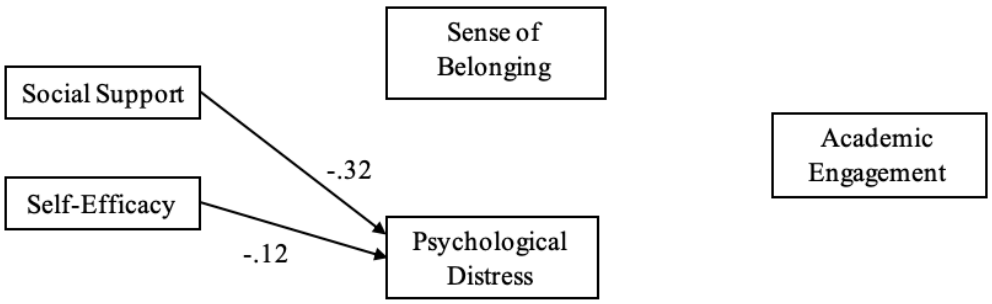

Figure 2: Results of path analyses of the direct and indirect influence of social support and self-efficacy on academic engagement mediated by sense of belonging and psychological distress

The results indicated that there was no direct relationship between social support (Beta = -.09; $p > .05$) and self-efficacy (Beta = .03; $p > .05$) with academic engagement. There was no indirect relationship between social support and academic engagement mediated by sense of belonging (Beta = -.04; $p > .05$, Beta = 0.09; $p > .05$). There was no indirect relationship between self-efficacy and academic engagement mediated by sense of belonging (Beta = .11; $p > .05$, Beta = .09; $p > .05$). There was no indirect relationship between social support and academic engagement mediated by psychological distress. However, there was a statistically significant negative relationship between social support and psychological distress (Beta = -.32; $p < .01$, Beta = .01; $p > .05$). There was no indirect relationship between self-efficacy and academic engagement mediated by psychological distress. However, there was a statistically significant negative relationship between self-efficacy and psychological distress (Beta = -.12; $p < .05$, Beta = .01; $p > .05$).

Summary of Findings

The results revealed that there is a significant negative relationship (1) between social support and psychological distress and (2) between self-efficacy and psychological distress. However, the results demonstrated that (1) no significant relationship between social support and academic engagement, (2) no significant relationship between self-efficacy and academic engagement, (3) no significant relationship between social support and sense of belonging, (4) no significant relationship between self-efficacy and sense of belonging, (5) no significant relationship between sense of belonging and academic engagement, (6) no significant relationship between psychological distress and academic engagement, (7) no significant, indirect relationship between social support and academic engagement mediated by sense of belonging or psychological distress, and (8) no significant, indirect relationship between self-efficacy and academic engagement mediated by sense of belonging or

psychological distress.

Discussion

Measures of social support, self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and psychological distress were used to determine the functional relationship of these variables with academic engagement. Unlike in other study findings or hypotheses of this paper, these variables appear not to have a predictive relationship to undergraduate students' academic engagement. More specifically, the first and second hypotheses are not supported. The third hypothesis is partially confirmed in that social support and self-efficacy indicated a significant negative relationship with psychological distress. This implies that when participants report higher levels of social support and self-efficacy, they experience less psychological distress. However, they display no significant, indirect relationship to academic engagement mediated by psychological distress.

The results of this study contrast with existing theories and previous research. In a broad sense, literature from multiple disciplines and schools of thought make a case that social support, self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and psychological distress are important factors for academic engagement. However, these factors might not be as important as other related variables such as the university's environment, climate, coursework, facility, or faculties within the Thai context. As part of their culture, Thais practice the principle of collectivism. By being collectivist, the youth are often taught by their parents that they are part of the whole. While Thais often conformed themselves to the will of the group, they also receive support from others in the same community. Since the idea of social support and belonging are fostered in the micro community (e.g., family and neighborhood), the macro community (e.g., university, organization, and city) focuses on other matters such as improving facilities, technology, and personnel or businesses developments When the macro community experiences a project failure, it affects the morale of the members of the community which often leads to fighting within the group and taking measure of self-protection from blame and responsibility. The macro community often attempted to solve the problems by minimizing resources expenses (e.g., dismissing employees). It often overlooks the importance of relationships and support because fostering social support and belonging is the responsibility of micro community. Losing members of the group or befriending new strangers can be stressful for Thais. Likewise, when Thais encounter difficulty in their lives, they seek help and advice from closest associates (e.g., family and friends) before seeking help from strangers (e.g., authority figures).

Furthermore, this study examined these variables with generalized definitions instead of specific aspects of the variables. This study explored academic engagement as a whole rather than as specific engagements such as behavioral, cognitive, and emotional engagement. Additionally, other variables were examined

in a similar manner. It was possible that had these variables been examined in greater detail, this sample of participants might have engaged differently from samples of other research. Respondents of this study reported having above average levels of behavioral engagement and emotional engagement. On the other hand, respondents reported having below average levels of cognitive engagement. This finding presented that respondents showed effort and task completion, and they felt satisfaction and interest toward academic activities. However, they may not be motivated to develop skills. Thai students are trained to place their trust in their teachers and to believe their words without question. While being collectivist, they are reserved, quiet, obedience and respectful, and avoid standing out or initiating serious discussion that might lead to conflict. They often feel threatened by uncertainty as individuals. This leads to avoidance of challenging experiences and appreciation for conformity to social norms and rules. Thai students often play close attention to and carry out all instructions from their teachers. They seldom take initiative, preferring to wait and see. They might occasionally ask others to decide for them. These aspects of Thai students may explain the differences between their levels of behavioral engagement and cognitive engagement.

Limitations

There were several limitations in the present study that should be noted. First the path model hypothesized relationships between the model's variables and mediators. As such, the path analysis conducted to test these relationships was essentially correlational and not experimental. As such, the path analytic results can only be interpreted in terms of relationships and not in terms of causality.

Second, most of the literature and measurements underpinning the present study were Western-based and might not be relevant to Thai culture. The literature on social support, self-efficacy, sense of belonging, psychological distress, and academic engagement, which was based on a Western perspective, might not adequately present the Thai undergraduate students' perspective. Likewise, psychometric properties of measurement to assess these variables were normally tested within the Western context but not within the Thai context. Western-based literature and measurements may not be directly relevant to Thai undergraduate students, and thus, the validity of the present study's findings might be questionable.

Additionally, the hypotheses of this study were based on assumptions inherent to the finding of other studies from other cultures. Reasonable attempts were made to fulfill the assumptions of the model within the boundaries of existing studies represented in the current literature. While the statistical model used was robust, and the sample size of participants was adequate, the actual relationships between social support, self-efficacy, sense of belonging, psychological distress, and academic engagement were not known. It is also possible that there are confounding variables

that were not identified in this study.

Finally, the study was conducted with a generalized framework and participants instead of comparing specific groups such as genders or departments. Other limitations included variables regarding the university environment and Thai culture. Campus space and life could be different at different universities in different cities or cultures. Measured as a group, one group might value social support and self-efficacy while another group might not. Most psychological concepts, including social support, self-efficacy, sense of belonging, psychological distress, and academic engagement, were difficult to measure because it attempted to quantify a very subjective and qualitative experience. The very process of measuring human conditions and experiences was wrought with difficulty and complications and was unlikely to be without error.

Recommendations

As Western-based measurements may be neither reliable nor valid measures of non-Western cultures, future research should be directed to test the psychometric properties of these measurements or create measurements within the Thai cultural context. Validating the psychometric properties of these measurements within a non-Western context might encourage more research to be conducted in an Asian context, and thus contributed to the development of knowledge that focuses on the variables of interest from the Asian perspective.

In this respect, these variables should be examined in future studies. Additional areas of study would be beneficial to determine if social support, self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and psychological distress have predictive relationships toward different types of engagement or in different levels of education. Investigating variable specific subtypes and their relationship with academic engagement would be a beneficial addition to the research.

Due to the nature of quantitative research, students' perspectives and overall experiences were not addressed. Hearing from the students' viewpoints on how they felt would foster a better learning environment, in which specific issues might be properly addressed and examined. This would be conducive not only to students' learning experiences but also to their overall well-being.

Conclusion

Engagement is attracting a great deal of interest from many practitioners across different fields to promote productivity in society. In some respects, the desire of people to find ways to increase motivation and commitment of themselves and other people to what they deem worthwhile as longstanding aspiration. However, there is a cause of concern about the lack of motivation that has often been characterized in disengagement. Unmotivated individuals tend to opt out, do the bare minimum

required, and can be difficult to control. They frequently look bored, surrender easily, and distract others.

The hypotheses of this paper started from a basic notion and worked to explore the less examined idea that the understanding of engagement and its antecedents can be useful for other human experiences and conditions. Although the results may not support the hypotheses of this study, there are significant findings that social support and self-efficacy are significant predictors and potential influences on psychological distress.

On a broad level, the findings of this study could be used to support work on developing more ways of measuring engagement and related concepts in multiple disciplines. It could be used as support for educational institutions to pursue more programs and initiatives to promote engagement in the student population. It can also be used by mental health practitioners as a concept to observe, assess, and address with their clients in order to aid in conceptualization, diagnosis, and potential treatment. These findings illuminate the concept of academic engagement and its relation to people, systems, well-being, and a multitude of other potential relationships. Further work in this area should take academic engagement into consideration as one of the important facets of life.

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