

# Academic acculturation among International Graduate Students at Mahidol University

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**Abstract-** Acculturation is conceptualized through the use of the term adaption to life in a foreign environment, it has also been shown to influence knowledge, attitudes that shape and influence physical, mental and health behaviors. The purpose of this study is to simultaneously examine associations between factors predicting and academic acculturation among international graduate students. The study is conducted on international graduate students at Mahidol University who enrolled and studying in all graduate programs. Data was collected during the second semester in the first year from all international students studying Master degree, Doctoral degree and Diploma program in the Graduate School. Total 192 self-administered questionnaires were returned. The multiple regression analysis was used to investigate the association between factors and academic acculturation. The result of this study showed the variables, the better their perceived on own health and the more age were significantly related to the academic acculturation ( $b= 0.61$ ,  $p < 0.01$  and  $b= 0.22$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , respectively). Further research should be conducted to investigate class satisfaction, comparison on acculturation and more University expansion in Thailand.

**Index Terms-** academic acculturation, international graduate students, Mahidol University, multiple regression analysis

## I. INTRODUCTION

International mobility has become the hallmark of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as the world increasingly becomes a global village [1], and increasingly becomes a global education emphasises the unity and interdependence of human society, developing a sense of self and appreciation of cultural diversity, affirmation of social justice and human rights, as well as building peace and actions for a sustainable future in different times and places. Education is an important factor to human resource development and it is the key to national development. Every country attempts to expand the coverage of education and to reduce the inequality of education. Thailand is a country

that expands opportunity for education to everyone. All of the university in Thailand including public and private universities develop international courses to be accepted by foreigners.

Higher education international students face many challenges while adjusting to university life. They must learn to operate in new environments, to live on their own, to work with new and unfamiliar people and to handle new stresses and new challenges. These challenges and adjustments are amplified when these students are more than just university students; when these university students are also foreigners they have more pressure to overcome and they have to assimilate to mainstream culture [2].

Thailand is one of the 10-member Associations of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). The ASEAN Vision 2015 aims to create a stable, prosperous and highly competitive ASEAN economic region, in which there is a free flow of goods, services, investment and capital, equitable economic development and reduced poverty and socio-economic disparities. The ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community envisages Southeast Asia bonded together in partnership as a strong community of caring societies and aimed at the vigorous development of regional identity and the preservation of the region's cultural heritage. Thailand's strategic location makes it an investors' gateway to Asia. It is at the center and crossroads of most ASEAN countries and other dynamic markets in Asia such as China and India, allows Thailand access to a burgeoning consumer population overseas aside from its equally huge population of almost 68 million people. To prepare each country's work force for economic integration, ASEAN will encourage investment in education, training, science and technology development, job creation, and social protection. ASEAN will also seek increased cooperation in public health, especially the prevention and control of infectious and communicable diseases [3].

Mahidol University (MU) was founded in 1888 as School of Medical Practitioners, Siriraj Hospital and reorganized in 1943 as University of Medical Sciences. The university originally focused on Health Sciences and expanded to other fields in recent decades. MU hosted the first medical school of Thailand, with its six campuses: Salaya campus, Phayathai campus, Bangkok Noi campus, Nakhon Sawan campus, Kanchanaburi campus and Amnaj-Chareon campus to offer its students more learning opportunities with rural communities. MU entered the Quacquarelli Symonds World University Rankings in 2015 as 295<sup>th</sup> in the world and 2nd in Thailand [4].

In 2008 Academic year, Mahidol University offered total of 371 programs, which comprised of 138 undergraduate programs and 233 post graduate program. Graduate Study Programs ( Graduate Diploma 51 programs, Master degree 150 programs, Higher graduate diploma 4 programs and Doctoral degree 66 programs) [5].

Acculturation is the process whereby the attitudes and/or behaviors of people from one culture are modified as a result of contact with a different culture. The acculturation process affects a range of behaviors, value, and beliefs. Acculturation has also been shown to influence knowledge and attitudes that shape and influence physical, mental and health behaviors [6]. Psychologists have considered the effects of self-concealment, social support, academic stressors, gender, English fluency, etc. on acculturative stress [7]. Psychosocial outcomes are therefore an essential aspect of school adjustment that, indirectly, may also become important to academic achievement [8]. If they cannot adjust to those factors, they will increase stress, associated with lower level of anxiety and depression and with a poor quality of life, that is the major course in suicide [9-11].

Factors which may influence on academic acculturations among international graduate students can be classified into individual factors and program support factors to identify effects of factors on academic acculturation, multiple regression analysis applied.

## II. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

- 1) To describe factors which include sex, age, marital status, length in Thailand, smoking, drinking, religion, experience in abroad, language abilities, anticipated degree, perceived on own health, facilities and activities of international graduate students at Mahidol University.
- 2) To identify the relationship between factors on academic adjustment of international graduate student at Mahidol University.

## III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was surveyed among international students in Mahidol University who enrolled and studying in the first year in all international graduate programs. Data was collected during the second semester from all international programs. Master degree, Doctoral degree and Diploma program in the Graduate School of Salaya

Campus, Phayathai Campus and Bangkok Noi Campus in 2012 academic year of making the population of this study, agreed to and signed the consent form included in this study.

### A. Study Design

A self-administered cross-sectional descriptive study was conducted to measure factors: sex, age, marital status, length stay in Thailand, smoking, drinking, religion, experience in abroad, language abilities, anticipated degree, perceived on own health status, facilities and activities that may influence academic acculturation of MU international graduate students.

### B. Tools

A self-administered survey questionnaire was reviewed from researcher and selected some part of the National Latino and Asian American Study (NLAAS) [12], and The Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) by Robert W. Baker, Ph.D. and Bohdan Siryk, MA [13], and was modified to the purpose of the study by researchers

There were 25 items of 5-Likert scale measuring a student's success in coping with the various educational demands characteristic of the college experience and were classified into four item clusters: motivation (6 items), application (4 items), performance (9 items) and academic environment (6 items). It included 13 positive statements and 12 negative statements. The statements were used with the five respondent options such as "strongly agree, agree, uncertain, disagree, and strongly disagree". Content validity and reliability were used to evaluate the quality of questionnaire. Three experts on international graduate students validated the content validity. The pre-test among international students at Chulalongkorn University, Institute of Dermatology, and Rangsit University were conducted for reliability analysis. The overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient test was 0.894. Before data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the University Human Research Ethics Committee.

## IV. RESULTS

Among 192 who responded to the self-administered questionnaire, 56.3% were male. Their age ranged from 21- 56 years with an average of 32 years. Considering their length of stay in Thailand, 64.4% have stayed 7-9 months. Most of them anticipated for Master's degree (84.4%) followed by Doctoral degree and Certificate (14.1% and 1.5%, respectively). Half of them received a fully support for both study fee and accommodation. For religion 52.1% were Buddhist, Christ and Islam were almost the same proportion (15.1% and 14.6% respectively). Regarding marital status, 51.1% were single.

Almost all of them (97.9%) do not use English as their mother tongue language. The most common mother tongue languages were Burmese/Myanmar (20.8%) followed by Dzongkha and Nepali language (15.6% and 13.5%, respectively). Current place of living while studying, 81.8% rented house or apartment.

Experience before participated in the Graduate Studies, 77.6% had no working experience and 69.3% have never had experienced on going to other countries before participated in the Faculty of Graduates Studies About their health problem, 85.4% had no health problem and 46.8% had no changes on their weight as compared to the weight on their arrival at MU. For the current status of smoking and alcohol consumption, 88.3% and 53.1% were non-smoker and non-alcohol drinker respectively. Considering the positive health behavior 61.5% were occasionally exercised.

Self-perception on ability of both English and Thai languages, about half considered themselves (53.1%) at the good level of speaking, 60.9% was at the good on reading English and 57.8% at good level on writing. Ability on Thai language, most of them were at the poor level on both speaking and reading (84.9% and 89.1%, respectively)

Considering special activities organized for international graduate students in each faculty, of 16 faculties all took their students for field trip in Bangkok, VISA extension services and provision of scholarship. However, 12 out of 16 (75.0%) had all of their international programs set up field trip outside Bangkok for their students. Thai class was also provided to all international programs in each faculty, but 87.5% of the faculty had been set up among all international programs and the rest were only for some of international programs in the faculty. Some international programs in 13 faculties or 81.3% invited guests to deliver special lecture to their students. About half of them (56.3%) had no English class for International students, are presented in Table I below.

TABLE I: Special Activities For The International Graduate Students Provided of 16 Faculties

Activities	number	percent
Special Lecture	30	93.8
Field trip in Bangkok	24	75.0
Scholarship provided	24	75.0
Field trip outside Bangkok	20	62.5
VISA service	20	62.5
English class for International students	16	50.0
Thai Language class for International students	6	18.8

Top three availability of facilities in each departments for students of international program are computer room (93.7%) was the most common, followed by student lounge and printer (81.2% and 75.0%, respectively)

A self-administered questionnaire adapted from the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) was used to assess the academic acculturation of the MU international graduate students. Total of 25 rating scale items was set up to measure academic acculturation. Combining the response to strongly agree and agree as

well as disagree and strongly disagree was used for the following descriptive findings.

Out of the total, 192 respondents, 83.3% of international students had been keeping up date on academic work and 83.9% knew why they are studying and what they want at MU. 39.6% of them found difficulty in academic work and 63.0% had not been functioning well during examinations. About seven-tenths (68.2%) satisfied with the level of academic performance. About 30.7% felt that they had not working hard at course work. 80.2% always kept well-defined academics goals and purposes. Half of them (52.1%) were really smart enough for the academic work. Majority (85.9%) well perceived that getting a college degree is very importance. 41.7% had been very efficient in spending study time lately and half of them enjoyed writing papers. About half (57.8%) have had much motivation for studying lately and 60.4% have no doubts on the value of MU education.

It was found that 65.6% were satisfied with the number and variety of courses available at college, and almost half (46.4%) doing well enough academically for the amount of work the put in. About two-thirds (72.4%) satisfied with the quality or the caliber of course available at MU. Most of them (88.5%) attended classes regularly, 87.5% of them enjoyed academic work at MU and 86.5% satisfied with program for the semester.

Half of them (53.6%) agreed that their interest were not related to any of the program course work and 53.1% faced a lot of trouble getting started on assignments. More than two-thirds of them (81.8%) satisfied with the professors in the course and 76.0% satisfied with their academic situation at MU. Almost half of respondents (44.8%) informed that it was difficult to express the ideas due to language differences.

An overall of academic adjustment were analyzed by using score, 53.6% were at moderate level of academic adjustment. 39.1% were at poor level and the other were at good level of academic adjustment, shown in Table II below.

TABLE II: Level of Academic Acculturation of 192 International Graduate Students

Level of academic acculturation	number	percent
Poor	75	39.1
Moderate	103	53.6
Good	14	7.3

According to the steps on variable selection as mentioned in objective, the univariate regression analyses between each independent variable and academic acculturation were performed, as shown in Table III. The next step, selected variables with p-value < 0.05 by stepwise variable selection into the model for a multiple regression analysis.

For the result of final model of academic acculturation, the better they perceived on own health and the more age were significantly related to the academic acculturation ( $b=0.61$ ,  $p < 0.01$  and  $b=0.22$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , respectively).

TABLE III: Univariate Regression Model For Academic Acculturation of 192 International Graduate Students.

	b	S.E	p-value	95% CI of B		Log likelihood (LL)	p-value
				LL	UL		
Perceived health status	0.64	0.07	0.000	0.50	0.77	-685.23	0.000
const.	55.51	3.58	0.000	48.44	62.57		
Social Relationship	0.43	0.13	0.001	0.18	0.68	-715.41	0.001
const.	71.50	5.00	0.000	61.64	81.35		
English speaking proficiency (Good <sup>§</sup> )						-719.82	0.130
Moderate	-2.27	1.50	0.130	-5.22	0.68		
const.	89.22	1.02	0.000	87.20	91.23		
Age (years)	0.35	0.11	0.002	0.13	0.56	-715.94	0.002
const.	77.11	3.53	0.000	70.15	84.06		
English reading proficiency (good <sup>§</sup> )						-720.94	0.891
moderate	0.21	1.54	0.891	-2.82	3.24		
const.	88.07	0.96	0.000	86.17	86.96		
Marital status (Single <sup>§</sup> )						-716.00	0.002
Non-single	4.66	1.46	0.002	1.77	7.54		
const.	85.92	1.01	0.000	83.92	87.92		
English writing proficiency (Good <sup>§</sup> )						-720.49	0.324
Moderate	1.50	1.52	0.324	-4.49	1.49		
const.	88.78	0.98	0.000	86.84	90.73		
Length in Thailand(months <sup>§</sup> )	0.23	0.35	0.521	-0.47	0.92	-720.76	0.521
const.	86.33	2.93	0.000	80.56	92.11		
Religion (Buddhist <sup>§</sup> )						-718.94	0.260
Christian	-4.32	2.18	0.049	-8.63	-0.03		
Islam	-1.62	2.21	0.465	-5.98	2.74		
Others	-0.82	2.03	0.687	-4.82	3.19		
const.	89.19	1.03	0.000	87.15	91.23		
Drinking (No <sup>§</sup> )						-719.76	0.300
Occasionally	-0.91	1.53	0.552	-3.92	2.10		
Frequently	-6.59	4.35	0.132	-15.17	1.99		
const.	88.75	1.03	0.000	88.73	90.78		
Anticipated degree (Master degree <sup>§</sup> )						-720.98	0.064
Doctoral degree	12.41	5.98	0.064	0.61	24.22		
const.	87.59	0.81	0.000	85.99	89.18		
Sex (Male <sup>§</sup> )						-715.41	0.241
Female	-1.77	1.51	0.241	-4.74	1.20		
const.	88.93	0.99	0.000	86.96	90.89		
Smoking (Non-smoking <sup>§</sup> )						-719.82	0.817
Ever smoke	-1.65	2.59	0.526	-6.75	3.46		
Currently smoke	-0.10	2.90	0.973	-5.82	5.63		
const.	88.31	0.82	0.000	86.69	89.94		

Note: § Reference group

TABLE II: Univariate Regression Model For Academic Acculturation of 192 International Graduate Students. (Cont.)

	b	S.E	p-value	95% CI of B		Log likelihood (LL)	p-value
				LL	UL		
Experience in abroad (No <sup>b</sup> )						-715.94	0.975
Yes	0.05	1.63	0.975	-3.16	3.26		
const.	89.14	0.90	0.000	88.35	89.91		
Facilities	-0.17	0.42	0.689	-1.00	0.66	-720.90	0.689
const.	88.95	2.12	0.000	84.76	93.13		
Activities	-0.68	0.47	0.146	-1.61	0.24	-719.91	0.146
const.	93.10	3.47	0.000	86.25	99.95		

Note: § Reference group

## V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

For academic acculturation, out of 192 respondents, 83.3% of international student had been keeping up date on academic work and 83.9% knew why they are studying and what they want at MU. On the other hand, 39.6% of them found difficulty in academic work and 41.7% informed of unable to use the study time effectively. Almost half of respondents (44.8%) faced difficulties to express their ideas especially in class discussion due to language differences. Therefore the program has to pay more attention to those who found difficulty in academic work, unable to use the study time effectively and those who are rather in difficult to express an idea during discussion in class due the language differences and ability on speaking English being used as the common language at MU. Tutorial classes and English class apart from the curriculum are suggested to set up for international students who do not use English as the common language in their home country.

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