

**A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON PSYCHOLOGY
GRADUATE STUDENTS' LEARNING
DIFFICULTIES AND SATISFACTION FROM
THREE TYPES OF UNIVERSITY IN THAILAND**

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Abstract: This study mainly aimed to identify and compare the Psychology graduate students' learning difficulties and satisfaction from three different types of university in Thailand, including Assumption University, Chulalongkorn University and Burapha University. All 99 students who currently study in Psychology graduate program of three universities during 2013-2014 were used as the sample for this study. The study used descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, means, standard deviations, and one way ANOVA to deal with the data. Analyzing of the collected data, the study reported the demographics and other background information of the current Psychology graduate students from three universities; identified their learning difficulties; determined and compared their learning satisfaction from these three different types of University in Thailand. Significant difference of the students' satisfaction between the private university and the public university was found by the study.

Keywords: Learning Difficulty, Learning Satisfaction, Graduate Students, Assumption University, Chulalongkorn University, Burapha University, Thailand

Introduction

Higher education institutions in Thailand comprise public and private universities, institutions, colleges, and community colleges. Those higher education institutions and community colleges were under the jurisdiction of the Commission on Higher Education (CHE), Ministry of Education. As for the universities, according to CHE, there are mainly three types of university, including

private university, public university and autonomous public university. Therefore, comparative studies among three types of university should be very meaningful and reflected future perspectives of Thailand's higher education to some extent.

In Thailand, as the first and biggest international university Assumption University was regarded as the best private university for years, as everyone in Thailand knows. Of course, Chulalongkorn University is no doubt as the best representative for the public university in Thailand, which confirmed the world university rank even. And as for the autonomous public university, Burapha University is regarded as the top typical representative for autonomous public university in Thailand.

Therefore, this study used the graduate students who currently study in graduate school of Psychology program of three universities during 2013-2014 as the target group, investigated on the demographics and background information of the current graduate students from three universities were conducted; identified their learning difficulties; and also compared their learning satisfaction from these three different types of university in Thailand.

Objectives

This research had three main objectives:

1. To identify the Psychology graduate students' learning difficulties from three different types of university in Thailand, including Assumption University, Chulalongkorn University and Burapha University.
2. To determine the Psychology graduate students' learning satisfaction in three different types of university in Thailand.
3. To compare their satisfaction from three types of university in Thailand.

Literature Review

Learning at Graduate School Level

Graduate-level educations in all three universities are very popular, which appealed many Thai and international students to study in. Since graduate school period of learning is very different from their undergraduate experiences in term of leaning depth and learning ways, such as learning at graduate school level needs the

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students know how to conduct thesis/research, how to do attending/presenting papers at international conference beside they must finish their coursework, internship and required school activities. And many graduate students are usually working and studying at the same time, unlike the undergraduate students. Meanwhile, because of so many international students and teachers and multicultural impact in these three universities, there might be many learning difficulties for the graduate students.

Learning at graduate school level also needs the students know how to communicate with different students and faculty members, sometimes to learn in different styles such as group learning, peer learning, self-learning and reaction learning from the classroom etc. in many situation, if the students have an off-campus job, then also requires them to learn how to manage their time for work and study, which may to some degree decide whether or not they can finish they graduate studies on time or as they expected.

A famous international organization called “idealist” had discussed the possibility and challenges of working and studying fulltime in their webpage. According to their discussion, the biggest challenge for graduate students who work and study full time together might be from time management, since they had to follow the graduate school class schedules, complete many out-of-the-classroom requirements, such as field research, practical experience components, or group projects where different students may have different schedules.

Learning Satisfaction Studies

A focus on the students’ satisfaction should be concerned as well. Learning satisfaction study can help the faculty and the university to see the level of students’ satisfaction, to know about their perceptions and feedbacks for their studying programs. In Thailand, ONESQA require all universities need to conduct studies or surveys to test “the level of learners’ and stakeholders’ satisfaction with learning and stakeholders-focused process,” (MBNQA7.2/AU2.111.2 from AU QSQMIPS, 2000) therefore, studying the students’ satisfaction is very necessary and important for all the universities in Thailand, and a comparative study on graduate students’ learning satisfaction among Assumption University, Burapha University and Chulalongkorn University should be also very helpful for the innovation of the graduate school program in Thailand.

Miglietti and Strange (1998) studies learning & teaching styles with classroom environment variables, their study finally concluded that students’ learning and satisfaction were positively impacted by student-centered instruction, regardless of their age.

Yan (2012) conducted a study in about learning satisfaction at Graduate School of Education, Assumption University, which found the means of students’ learning satisfaction level was about 4.17, which meant “satisfied”.

Graduate School Student Survey

In order to collect the information about graduate student satisfaction and experience, most higher education institutions in the world will conduct some kind of graduate student survey. Therefore, there are a lot of resources and questionnaires used to do Graduate Student Survey. Reviewing the latest related studies found the following scholars from different famous universities had developed and used Graduate Student Survey for their studies.

Mark(2003) conducted a USC Graduate Student Survey, used a questionnaire developed by the Office of Student Outcomes Research, adapted from Ohio State University’s survey in 1998. Jed Marsh (2010) used the Graduate Student Survey, asked questions about graduate students’ experiences at Princeton University. Both researchers’ survey focused the university facilities, library, services, instruction, courses offered, advising, school activities and the university climate as well. Mark’s (2003) findings showed that the three highest correlates of overall satisfaction are overall quality of instruction, amount of contact with faculty, and the sense of community on campus.

The Canadian Graduate and Professional Survey (CGPSS) was one of the important surveys, which were undertaken in 2007, 2010 and 2013. The survey results were used for purposes of improving the graduate student experience in Canada by several scholars. Spence, Nicholas(2009) used the survey, conducted another study named with “Exploring the Utility of the 2007 Canadian Graduate and Professional Student Survey: Student Satisfaction at the University of Western Ontario”, he also focused the graduate students’ general satisfaction with the university, advisors, and field of study; their satisfaction with the program, quality of interactions and coursework; their professional skills development and research experience; and their perception towards university resources and student life. Some of his findings were very enlightening for this study, including (1) The role of the advisor is significant in promoting and maintaining student satisfaction; (2) The amount of coursework, overall quality of teaching and availability of courses are important drivers for satisfaction; (3) Advice and activities within academia are indispensable; and (4) Students place higher value on library services than other university resources.

Huizi Zhao’s (2012) used the same survey, did a research entitled with “Exploring the Canadian Graduate and Professional Student Survey (CGPSS): Results from 2007 and 2010 for Ontario Universities” showed that graduates remain satisfied with their education, although satisfaction has dropped slightly since 2007. While what influences graduate students’ satisfaction with their universities included, programs of study, academic experiences and faculty supervisors; the quality of teaching and learning; and school activities and so on.

Background of Three Universities

Assumption University (AU) as the first and biggest

international university in Thailand, has been providing education to the youth of the Thai and other nations since 1969. About 19,870 students including a fairly large complement of foreign students drawn from 75 countries of the world are studying in Assumption University (AU). Assumption University uses English as the official medium of instruction for all the programs.

Chulalongkorn University (CU) officially abbreviated as CU and commonly abbreviated as Chula, is the oldest university under the Thai modern educational system, founded in 1917 by King Vajiravudh (Rama VI) who named it after his father, King Chulalongkorn (Rama V), according to "History of Chulalongkorn University". It is one of the best universities in Thailand and Southeast Asia according to World Science & Engineering University Portal: THES- World University Ranking (2013).

Burapha University (BUU) is located in the coastal town of Bangsaen, Chonburi Province, established on 8 July 1955 originated from Bangsaen Educational College which was the first regional tertiary educational institute. Subsequently, it became a campus of Srinakharinwirot University and was renamed Srinakharinwirot University, Bangsaen Campus on June 29, 1974. On July 29, 1990, it was again renamed Burapha University and later became a Thailand's major autonomous public university on January 9, 2008.

Conceptual Framework

Based on the research objectives, the conceptual framework was used to depict how each objective was developed and related to the others. As Figure 1 showed, the research objectives were in fact connected and the findings for each objective would be served as the feedbacks to Graduate School of Education, Assumption University.

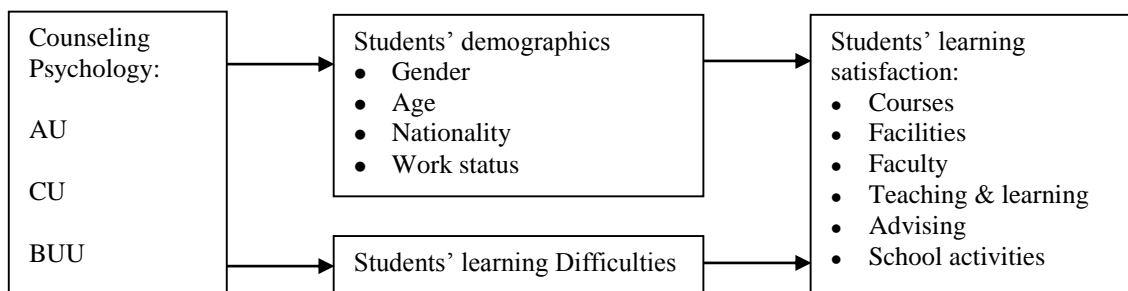


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of This Study

Procedure

Instrument

In order to conduct this study, a questionnaire consisting of 3 parts was distributed to all the current students study in the 2nd semester of academic year 2013 in Counseling Psychology Graduate's program, Assumption University, Chulalongkorn University and Burapha University by email or hardcopies. The 3 parts of the questionnaire were:

Part I asked Psychology graduate students demographics including gender, age, nationality and work

status.

Part II included questions with regard to Psychology graduate students' learning difficulties. Respondents were required to rank the learning difficulties that they encounter during the program studying time in their university, in Thailand.

Part III had 30 questions, with regard to Psychology graduate students' learning satisfaction towards courses, facilities, faculty, teaching and learning, advising, and school activities, in Graduate School of Psychology, Assumption University, Burapha University and Chulalongkorn University. Each item also had a 5-point for the respondents to choose.

The reliability of the questionnaire was calculated by using Cronbach's Alpha, which reached .89 as the result.

Sample

All the current Psychology graduate students study in the 2nd semester of academic year 2013 in Graduate School of Psychology, Assumption University, Chulalongkorn University and Burapha University were used as the sample for this study. The researchers started to distribute the questionnaires to all the students by emails or hardcopies during January–April, 2014. Totally, 99 questionnaires were returned validly from the graduate students who were studying in Graduate School of Psychology of three different universities.

Findings

Based on the research objectives and analyzed data from instrument, this study had the following findings:

Part I: Findings about Psychology graduate students' demographics including gender, age, nationality and work status.

Analyzed the demographic data of the respondents, 66

or 66.7% were female, 33 or 31.3% were male students as Table 1 showed, which reflected Female students are double than the male students in graduate program of Psychology.

Table 1: Respondents' Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Female	66	66.7
Male	33	31.3
Total	99	100.0

Of the respondents, 21 or 21.2% of the students were 20-35 years old, 36 or 36.4% were 26-30 years old, 17 or 17.2% of the students were 31-35 years old, and 25 or 25.2% of them are more than 36 years old as Table 2 showed. Most students are adults and they were more mature than the undergraduate students.

Table 2: Respondents' Age

	Age	Frequency	Percentage
Years old	20-25	21	21.2
	26-30	36	36.4
	31-35	17	17.2
	36+	25	25.2
Total		99	100.0

Table 3 showed among the respondents, 32 or 32.3% of the students were studying at Graduate school of psychology at Assumption University (AU), 43 or 43.4% were from Burapha University (BU), and 24 or 24.2% of the students were studying at Chulalongkorn University.

Table 3: Respondents' University

University	Frequency	Percentage
AU	32	32.3
BU	43	43.4
CU	24	24.2
Total	99	100.0

Moreover, Table 4 showed that 82 or 82.8% of respondents were Thai, only 17 or 17.2% were International students. This showed the local Thai students were still regarded as the majority of study body at three universities.

Table 4: Respondents' Nationality

Nationality	Frequency	Percentage
Thai	82	82.8
International	17	17.2
Total	99	100.0

Lastly, Table 5's results of the respondents' work status showed 55 or 55.5% of respondents were working during their graduate study time, while 44 or 44.5% of them were not working during their studying at three universities. Therefore, we can see most graduate students in fact are working and studying at the same time at graduate school level from three different universities.

Table 5: Respondents' Work Status

Work status	Frequency	Percentage
Work	55	55.5
Not work	46	44.5
Total	99	100.0

Table 6 was further explaining the reasons for working and study at the graduate school level, as seen,

40% of students working due to the need of finance for the graduate study, 30.9% of them considered the work experience's importance, therefore also worked and study at the same time, the rest 29.1% of students were working during their graduate study time because of their personal interests and family business requirement.

Table 6: Reasons for Working and Study at The Graduate School Level

Work status	Frequency	Percentage
Finance need	22	40.0
Work experience need	17	30.9
Others (personal interest, family business)	16	29.1
Total	55	100.0

Part II: Findings about the Psychology graduate students' learning difficulties from three different types of university in Thailand, including Assumption University, Chulalongkorn University and Burapha University.

Investigation of the students' learning difficulties, the results (from top to low) as ranked by the graduate students of psychology from three different types of university in Thailand, including Assumption University, Chulalongkorn University and Burapha University were: 1). Conducting thesis/ research; 2) Internship; 3) Communication with faculty (English/Thai); 4) Attending/presenting at international conference; 5) Attending school activities; 6) Cross culture influences and 7) coursework; for graduate students at Graduate School of Psychology from three universities in Thailand. The detailed frequency and percentage of each item were shown in the following Table 7.

(See Table 7 on the next page)

Part III: Findings about the Psychology graduate students' learning satisfaction in three different types of university in Thailand.

Table 8 revealed the graduate students' learning satisfaction in three different types of university in Thailand in general. As Table 8 shown, according to overall mean scores, the graduate students' learning satisfaction at Graduate school of psychology at Assumption University (AU) was 3.5229, 3.9958 Chulalongkorn University (CU), and 3.7828 from Burapha University (BU), which indicated that the students though from three different universities were "satisfied" with their studied programs.

Meanwhile, since the researchers divided the graduate students' learning satisfaction from Graduate School of Psychology, Assumption University, Chulalongkorn University and Burapha University into 6 key elements, including "courses, facilities, faculty, teaching and learning, advising, and school activities", and overall. Therefore, it was also very necessary to report the graduate students' learning satisfaction towards these 6 key elements from three universities.

Table 7: Respondents' Rank of Their Learning Difficulties

Learning Difficulties		Frequency	Percentage
1.	Conduct thesis/research	39	39.3
2.	Internship	20	20.2
3.	Communication with the faculty (English/Thai)	12	12.1
4.	Attending /presenting at international conference	11	11.1
5.	Attending school activities	9	9.1
6.	Cross culture influence	4	4.1
7.	Coursework	4	4.1
Total		99	100.0

Table 8: Students' Satisfaction towards 7 Key Elements from Three Universities

	University	Courses	Facilities	Faculty	Teaching Learning	Advising	School Activity	Overall
AU	Mean	3.2396	3.5000	3.8828	3.8688	3.3125	3.2750	3.5229
	S. D.	.74408	.75728	.60236	.63978	.52009	.76832	.78738
	N	32	32	32	32	32	32	32
BU	Mean	3.5397	3.1382	4.1908	4.0762	3.6411	3.5395	3.7828
	S. D.	.75062	.92188	.74533	.56904	.59085	.64665	.57905
	N	43	43	43	43	43	43	43
CU	Mean	3.4028	3.7361	4.5938	4.4917	4.0774	3.3083	3.9958
	S. D.	.78006	.63686	.32814	.43331	.40621	.76210	.72883
	N	24	24	24	24	24	24	24

From this Table 8, it was easy to find each university's strength and weakness of their graduate psychology programs as their students' satisfaction scores showed. Among three universities, graduate students from Chulalongkorn University showed their highest satisfaction towards school facilities, faculty members, teaching and learning, advising and overall, which acknowledged the advanced position of Chulalongkorn University as the no.1 public university in Thailand. Graduate students from Burapha University showed their higher satisfaction towards course, faculty member, teaching and learning, advising, school activities and overall compared with the ones from Assumption University. And apparently, as graduate students' satisfaction scores showed, the graduate psychology program from Assumption University may face some challenges and need to get more improvement.

Part V: Findings about the comparison of the

Psychology graduate students' satisfaction from three types of university in Thailand.

Table 9 showed the one way ANOVA report for the comparison of the graduate students' satisfaction from three types of university in Thailand. Since the significance .001, which indicated there are significant difference among the graduate students' satisfaction from three types of university in Thailand.

In order to see the differences of students' satisfaction among three universities, the researchers did multiple comparisons as Table 10 shown. Significant difference of the students' satisfaction (.001) was found between Assumption University and Chulalongkorn University only.

(See Table 10 on the next page)

Table 9: One way ANOVA Report

Satisfaction	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	3.135	2	1.568	7.873	.001
Within Groups	17.124	86	.199		
Total	20.259	88			

Table 10: Multiple Comparisons of Students' Satisfaction among Three Universities

(I) university	(J) university	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
	CU	-.47292*	.12049	.001
BU	AU	.25991	.11071	.069
	CU	-.21301	.11971	.211
CU	AU	.47292*	.12049	.001
	BU	.21301	.11971	.211

Discussion

1. About Learning Difficulties and Possible Reasons

This study found the Psychology graduate students of psychology from three different types of university in Thailand, ranked their learning difficulties as: 1). Conducting thesis/research; 2) Internship; 3) Communication with faculty (English/Thai); 4) Attending/presenting at international conference; 5) Attending school activities; 6) Cross culture influences and 7) coursework. And findings from the report of students' work status showed most students are working and study at the same.

As mentioned in literature review, graduate school period of learning is very different from their undergraduate experiences in term of leaning depth and learning ways, such as learning at graduate school level needs the students know how to conduct thesis/research, how to do attending/presenting papers at international conference beside they must finish their coursework, internship and required school activities. And many graduate students are usually working and studying at the same time, so those students will feel more difficult, as A Study on Students' Learning Styles, Learning Difficulties and Satisfaction at Graduate School of Education, Assumption University of Thailand" (Yan, 2012) also proved. As the study found, there are many international students learning in these three universities, therefore, how to communicate with the faculty and how to deal with the cross culture influence will be part of the graduate students' learning difficulties sometimes.

2. About Learning Satisfaction in Three Universities

According to this study's finding, Psychology graduate students from Chulalongkorn University showed their highest satisfaction towards school facilities, faculty members, teaching and learning, advising and overall, which acknowledged the advanced position of Chulalongkorn University as the no.1 public university in Thailand. This confirmed Chula as one of the best universities in Thailand and Southeast Asia according to World Science & Engineering University Portal: THES-World University Ranking (2013).

Graduate students from Burapha University showed their higher satisfaction towards course, faculty member, teaching and learning, advising, school activities and overall compared with the ones from Assumption

University. And apparently, as graduate students' satisfaction scores showed, the graduate psychology program from Assumption University may face some challenges and need to get more improvement. In fact, the Graduate School of Psychology, Assumption University of Thailand also realized some of the problems from the students' satisfaction study, such as their Five-Year Strategic Plan (2014 – 2018, p12) reported the school weakness including Poor background in the psychology field of newly recruited students; most students are part-time students having less time for participating in day-time learning activities; and based on the teaching-load and the responsibility in supervising the thesis and dissertation work for the students, it is difficult for lecturers to do research work in each semester and so on.

3. About the comparison of the satisfaction study from three different types of university in Thailand

This study found a significant difference of the students' satisfaction between the private university and the public university. But no significant difference of the students' satisfaction was found between the public university and the autonomous public university, or between the autonomous public university and the private university.

According to the Commission on Higher Education (CHE), Ministry of Education, these three types of university receive different governance as Table 11 showed. Private university and autonomous public university are independent in academic, personnel and financial administration, which is different from public university. Though all three types are under the jurisdiction of the Commission on Higher Education (CHE), private university gets no financial support from CHE at all. That's why, private universities in Thailand usually face more challenges and difficulties in students' and lecturers' recruitments comparing with the other two types of university, but of course, all of them have to reach the standards as CHE set up in the policy, and when CHE comes for monitoring and evaluating them.

Table 11 showed the details of those differences among three universities as mentioned above.

(See Table 11 on the next page)

Table 11: Different Universities' Governance

Type of Univ.	Autonomy/Regulation				CHE Roles		
	Academic Admin.	Personnel Admin.	Financial Admin.	Policy	HE standards	Financial support	Monitoring & evaluation
Autonomous Public Univ.	<i>Auto</i>	<i>Auto</i>	<i>Auto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Public Univ.	<i>Auto</i>	<i>Partial Auto</i>	<i>Gov. regulate</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Private Univ.	<i>Auto</i>	<i>Auto</i>	<i>Auto</i>	✓	✓	<i>Non</i>	✓

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