

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS UNIFORM POLICY AT AN INTERNATIONAL COLLEGE IN BANGKOK

Islam Elbasouni¹
Watana Vinitwatanakhun²

Received: 5th May 2020

Revised: 9th January 2021

Accepted: 9th February 2021

Abstract: The purpose of this study was to use a framework of andragogy to identify the perceptions of international college students towards their school's uniform policy, and to compare the students' perceptions based on their age group, nationality, and level of conformity. This study focused on 178 undergraduate students studying at the international college of a Thai university in Bangkok during the fall semester of the 2019-2020 academic year. All data was obtained through a questionnaire which was completed by the students. A quantitative comparative method was used to analyze the data. The research findings indicate that overall, students perceive the uniform policy to be partially andragogical, and that some aspects of the policy were perceived to be less andragogical than others. The findings also showed that there is a significant difference in the students' perceptions according to nationality and conformity levels, but no significant difference according to age group. Based on the results of this study, the recommendation for administrators is to identify the variables which influence the perceptions of their students and consider them before modifying, implementing, or enforcing uniform policies at their institutions. This will help administrators ensure that students perceive the policy as one which is suitable for their learning context.

Keywords: Andragogy; Uniform Policy; Education

¹ M.Ed. Candidate, Master of Education in Educational Administration, Assumption University, Thailand. izzyelbasouni@gmail.com

² Assistant Professor, Ph. D, Lecturer, Graduate School of Human Sciences, Assumption University, Thailand. watan54@gmail.com

Introduction

School uniforms are common for primary and secondary (K-12) students in many parts of the world, but not usually as common for undergraduate students who are studying at universities. Contrastingly, undergraduates throughout Thailand are required to wear obligatory uniforms at their universities (Royal Thai Government Gazette, 2008). Like K-12 students, undergraduates are often full-time students who spend most of their time in school; however, they remain distinct from their younger counterparts, as they are not children and are generally afforded more freedom and autonomy in society. Some polls suggest that Thai undergraduate students support having uniform policies (Lamubol, 2013). However, recent incidents of nonconformity appear to show a need for administrators in Thailand to evaluate and possibly modify their uniform policies (Thaitrakulpanich, 2017). Identifying the perceptions of modern-day university students towards the uniform policies is important for administrators who want to understand the implications of such policies. The purpose of this study is to investigate how a group of undergraduate students at an international college of a university in Bangkok perceive their university's uniform policy as adult learners.

Objectives

1. To identify the age groups and the nationality of the undergraduate students at the ISM
2. To determine the ISM students' conformity levels
3. To determine the perceptions of the ISM students towards the university's uniform policy
4. To compare the ISM students' perceptions of the university's uniform policy according to their age group, nationality, and level of conformity

Literature Review

Self-Monitoring Theory

Sociologists and psychologists generally define conformity as the personality trait of agreement, obedience, or compliance with group norms. The social psychologist Richard Crutchfield defines conformists most universally as those who yield to group pressure (1955). Mark Snyder created a personality test called the Self-Monitoring Scale (SMS), which is meant to measure both the ability and willingness of individuals to yield to group pressure. The SMS has been used to quantify the extent to which people can change their behavior

based on their social situation. Snyder's SMS instrument appropriates two categories. The categories are "high self-monitors" on one side of the scale and "low self-monitors" on the other. Snyder explains that different individuals "self-monitor" then adjust their actions to certain extents in social settings to achieve some measure of agreeableness. Additionally, not all individuals monitor and conform to their surroundings in the same manner (1974). An individual who is high in self-monitoring and uses social cues to regulate his/her own self presentation behaves in a conformist manner because high self-monitoring individuals change what they say or do based on social pressure. Contrastingly, low self-monitors tend to conform less, and generally express themselves (both physically and verbally) based on how they feel, regardless of their social situation (Snyder, 1979). Snyder developed the Self-Monitoring Scale (SMS) to help categorize individuals as low or high self-monitors. Because this study seeks to determine the students' level of conformity, Snyder's SMS is used. Based on their answers to the SMS the students are designated one of two statuses: low-self monitors who are unable or unwilling to conform regardless of social setting; or high self-monitors who modify behavior to suit social queues and group expectations.

Not every instrument or theory can provide a comprehensive measurement for every context of conformity. For instance, the psychologist Herbert Kelman argues that there are several types of conformity: compliance, identification, and internalization (1958): while Robert J. Smith (1967b) presents the theory that within this same spectrum, there is more than one type of nonconformist at the other end. Like Snyder, Smith firmly believed that an individual's level of conformity can be located on a measurable spectrum, with conformists leaning more heavily towards one end and nonconformists towards the other (1967b). Smith created his own instrument, known as the Nonconformity Scale (NS). The NS measures an individual's tendency to align their beliefs or behaviors with their surrounding social influence. Though less prominent than Snyder's SMS, Smith's NS also provides a means by which to identify conformists because it quantifies the extent to which individuals conform to group norms or social pressures. Smith's NS places individuals into three personality categories: conformers, independents, and anti-conformers, whom Smith describes as "rebels" (1967a). The conformers are those who are more apt to change their behavior or beliefs in accordance with their surrounding group or authority. The anti-conformers (rebels) are at the opposite end, are

unlikely to agree, and in fact resist compliance with norms. The independents are in between the two confines respectively - they are those who are less inclined to match their beliefs and behaviors to others' but do not resist influence as strongly as rebels. This study utilizes Snyder's instrument, but will also invoke some ideas from Smith in the discussion.

Adult Learning Theory (Andragogy)

Andragogy is defined as the art and science of helping adults learn (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005) and refers to methods, theories, and approaches relating to the education of older learners. Malcolm Knowles made several assumptions about how adults perceive and interact with their learning environment (Knowles, 1980). The word "perceptions" is a broad term as perceptions can include feelings, views, or judgements. As this study focuses on the adult status of undergraduates, perceptions will be defined and measured within the framework of Knowles's adult learning theory. The assumptions Knowles makes about adult learners are based on principles described in his work. One major principle is that of Rationale, which assumes that adult learners need to understand the motive and must know the reasons for whatever they must learn or do in their learning environment (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005). Older learners want to be aware of the justification behind any lesson, method, procedure, or practice meant to facilitate their learning or help their education. In the context of this study, this assumption means that the students would want to know the reasons for having to follow a uniform policy. A second principle about adult learners is what Knowles refers to as "self-concept". Self-Concept is the assumption that as people grow and mature, they gradually move from a position of dependency to a position of self-directedness. Unlike dependent youth, older learners generally want to be responsible for their own decision-making, including decisions made in their educational environment (Knowles, 1984). Following the assumptions of self-concept, the students would want to be self-directed regarding which attire will best help facilitated their education. They would want to have a say in any policy which dictates what their daily classroom clothing should be. Another principle about adult learners is the principle of "orientation", which refers to the idea that school subjects and routines for adult learners must be problem centered. Older learners want their educational activities and procedures to have immediate applicability in a real-life situation or to resolve a real-life problem for them (Knowles, Holton, &

Swanson, 2005). The implication of this assumption is that the uniform policy must be problem-centered for the students and they must be able to immediately orient the policy as a solution to a problem in their daily lives. Wearing the uniform needs to be a practice which resolves some current, modern, real-life problem for them. Finally, the principle of diversity pertains to the fact that older learners are less homogenous than their younger counterparts. They come from different backgrounds, and have diverse ideas about which lessons, skills, or practices are important or necessary for their learning (Knowles, 1984). This assumption is used mainly to argue that educators should draw on the diverse experience of the learners. In the context of the present study, diversity is a question of whether the uniform policy is suitable in that it is inclusive and takes the student body's variety into consideration. Hence in this study the perceptions of the students are not defined as general opinions regarding the policy; rather, they are specifically measured to determine whether the students believe that the policy is in accord with andragogical principals or at odds with them. In other words, it is whether the students perceive the policy to be suitable for them because it adheres to or fulfills the andragogical principles and assumptions aforementioned. The present study attempts to determine the perceptions of the students towards the uniform policy based on the mentioned andragogical principles. It frames perceptions based on the following specific questions:

- Are the students aware of the reasons for having a uniform policy?
- Regardless of whether they know the reasons or not, do the students believe that there are good reasons for having a uniform policy?
- Do the students feel that any staff member has made some attempt to explain the rationale behind the uniform policy (attempted to fulfil their need to know)?
- Do the students believe that administrators consider the views of students when setting uniform policy?
- Are the students satisfied with their current role (if any) in uniform related decision making?
- Do the students feel any resentment towards having to dress according to the guidelines of the uniform policy?
- Do the students believe that wearing a uniform has any useful application in their daily lives?

- Do the students believe that the uniform is practical in that it helps the students learn better in some way?
- Do the students believe that the uniform policy is useful (problem-based) for the immediate contemporary classroom (oriented in that it is not outdated)?
- Do the students feel that the uniform policy is reasonable for and considerate of the various types of students found in the student body (transgender, foreign, employed, etc....)?

Conformity and Cultural Influence

Cultural context and its influence on an individual's willingness to conform must be considered due to two reasons. First, adherence and acceptance of Thai school uniforms is as much a cultural phenomenon as it is a social one. Second, this study is focused on an international college, and compares Thai students' perceptions of policy to non-Thai students' perceptions, thus making cultural influence a relevant factor. Smith and Bond explain that one of the variables which greatly influences an individual's level of conformity is cultural upbringing. Between Western society and other societies (i.e., Asian cultures) there exists a strong contrast in how much individuals are willing to conform (1993). A meta-analysis of various conformity studies across 17 countries looked at the relationship between collectivism/individualism and conformity levels. The study shows that collectivist countries show higher levels of conformity; and while conformity has declined in individualist countries such as the U.S.A, it has not shown the same rapid decline in collectivist countries (Bond & Smith, 1996). A Western upbringing often champions values of individualism and personal choice. In many Eastern cultures however, the family or community usually comes first, and challenging widely held, time-tested family traditions and norms is frowned upon. Smith and Bond's discoveries about cultural influence and upbringing are relevant to this research as the setting of this study is a university in Thailand. Psychologists consider Thailand to have a collectivist culture, and Thai students grow up in an environment in which they are encouraged to consider the needs of the family and overall social group before their own individuality.

Examples of Thailand's collectivism may be seen in how Thai leadership has historically endorsed collectivist values over individualistic ones. Despite

rapid modernizations and some changes in values, traditional communitarian figures continue to preach conformity for the greater good. For instance, many contemporary norms still carry remnants of the twelve Thai state decrees, mandated in the 1940s by military ruler Plaek Phibunsongkhram. The decrees urged citizens to live their lives and regulate their actions for the greater good of Thai society, not through individuality (Numnonda, 1978). Contemporary Thai leaders continue to draw on these ideas of collectivism to rally the support of the public (Sirivunnabood, 2019). A specific example of how these cultural pressures are still alive today, is the resurgence of Prime Minister Prayuth's renewed 2018 version of his predecessor's mandates, called "Thai Niyom", or Thai-ism in English. Some of General Prayuth's mandated core principles explicitly preach conformity, and the sidelining of individualism for the sake of the group. For instance, mandate number 2 encourages Thai citizens to endure and "sacrifice" with a positive attitude for the sake of the common good, while mandate 12 advocates "putting the public and national interest before personal interest" (Ngammuk, 2016). Within the confines of this cultural context, it is possible that Thai students are less likely to be non-conformist and more likely to agree with societal norms and socially accepted practices. However, while we must keep the culture in mind, changing demographics, foreign peers and teachers, world-wide connectivity, and other contemporary factors also play a significant role in the level of conformity displayed by modern-day Thai students. The question of how much students in Thailand are happy to conform to longstanding uniform policies is not a simple one, as cultural norms and emerging modern values both play a role in forming their perceptions.

Policy, Evaluation, and Feedback

According to the Cambridge Dictionary (2019) a policy is any principle agreed upon by a group or organization and meant to provide guidance or achieve specific results. Many schools have strict procedures for developing university policies (New York University, 2018), but policies are not laws etched in stone; rather, they are dynamic guidelines which change over time depending on a variety of factors. Some of the factors which may trigger a change or review of policy are a changing economy, changes in political atmosphere, changes in values, or changes in demographics. The ultimate goal of any university policy should be to make things operate more efficiently and effectively towards a specific outcome (The University of Sydney, 2016).

Part of the process for changing or developing policy is to conduct an evaluation of the policy. To evaluate something is to systematically investigate and determine that thing's worth or integrity using a set of criteria (American Evaluation Association, 2012). Conducting evaluation often involves obtaining feedback from various parties. According to the American Evaluation Association (2018) one of the guiding principles for conducting an ethical evaluation is to ensure that a range of perspectives and interests are considered. An ethical evaluation should include feedback from those who are affected by the policy, regardless of their status or rank. The feedback obtained during the evaluation process can be qualitative or quantitative, if it addresses questions related to the policy being investigated (Virginia Tech, 2015).

Specific feedback regarding policies should be used to assist administrators in making decisions related to any policy changes. Ion & Iucu (2015) explain that the process of policy development and implementation within education institutions should be based on research, and that in today's educational environment it is imperative that educational policy at higher learning institutions be evidence-based. They further explain that while research conducted for the sake of policy implementation may be less likely to attract funding or be considered for publication in prestigious journals, it is essential for building solid foundations within institutions. Logermann & Leišytė (2015) conducted a cross-national study to examine whether institutions met the standard for achieving student engagement through their involvement in course evaluations. According to their findings, the role of student engagement in the form of feedback was largely dependent on the institution itself. In other words, influence and utilization of student feedback was more prominent when university administrators make more of an effort to promote and include student evaluations. They argue that students must be seriously perceived as stakeholders by the administrators, and therefore should actively be encouraged to assess their educational environment (Logermann & Leišytė, 2015). The same argument may be made for student feedback regarding university policies, and student engagement in the form of feedback is just as important for determining the effectiveness of policy at higher learning institutions. The students' engagement and participation help to provide data which may qualify as evidence for improving mandatory policies. At the very least, conducting research as part of the evaluation/feedback loop provides

some insight to administrators who want to evaluate their policies based not on arbitrary values, but on evidence (Ion & Iucu, 2015).

Uniforms for Undergraduate Students in Thailand

Schools in many countries implement stringent uniform policies for primary and secondary students, but Thailand is exceptional in that it demands the same from undergraduate university students nationwide (Royal Thai Government Gazette, 2008). There is very little deviation from the standard uniform style regardless of a school's tier, location, or source of funding (Ministry of Education Thailand, 2018). This is especially true for university students, as they must wear black or navy blue, and do not share the ability to wear a variety of colors (maroon, khaki, green, etc...), which is sometimes afforded to younger students in private schools. According to a publication in the Royal Thai Government Gazette (2008), the grounds for a nationwide uniform policy date back to an 80-year-old tradition, which was a decree in The Royal Thai Government Gazette in the year 1939. The code was updated in 2008 but remained a blanket policy imposed on most students, young and old alike. Despite modernization, more foreign teachers, a growing number of international students, and other changing demographics (Ministry of Education Thailand, 2018), universities throughout Thailand conform to this code when establishing the uniform policy for their students. Most university uniforms are similar in color, cut, and style across institutions. The nuanced differences lie in the emblems and logos which change based on the institution.

Currently, perceptions towards the traditional uniform policies are becoming more diverse, resulting in some policy adjustments within some universities. Perhaps the most salient example of changes in uniform policy can be seen in Bangkok University's (2015) decision to create a third and fourth category of uniforms, outside of the traditional male/female dichotomy. When questioned about this change to the policy, representatives of the university explained that their intent wasn't to liberalize uniforms, but to "maintain uniforms" (Head, 2015). Nonetheless, some praised the university's decision and considered it an unprecedented progressive step towards diversity and inclusion (Stout, 2015). Regardless of the administrators' intentions, the move to include new uniform categories illustrates that under the pressure of changing perceptions and student needs, officials are willing to modify and adapt the uniform policy. In a similar but unrelated incident, Chulalongkorn University's board of

directors gave conditional approval for a transgender student to wear a female's uniform to class (Panyasuppakun, 2019). The examples presented are not revolutionary reversals of customary uniform policies. But with such precedents in place, it is apparent that administrators are involved in discussions about updates to the uniform policies of their universities. However, without knowledge of the student populations' perceptions, such discussions and evaluations cannot be comprehensive.

Relevant Previous Studies

One recent study explored how uniforms at Thai universities influence the students' conformity to rigid hierarchal traditions within educational institutions. Bunyawanich, Järvelä, and Ghaffar, (2018) interviewed university students from two different Thai universities to understand their perceptions towards uniforms in relation to a variety of social spheres. Although their study was not conducted within the framework of andragogy, it nonetheless provides insight for understanding how positive perceptions of a uniform policy's rationale and negative perceptions of its inclusivity do not have to be mutually exclusive. In other words, the Bunyawanich, Järvelä, and Ghaffar study depicts how students may perceive a uniform policy to be beneficial in one area of their lives, yet simultaneously detrimental in another area. In a different study, a researcher at Rowan University found that students' perceptions towards having to follow uniform rules is dependent on the amount of time they have spent wearing uniforms in the past (Mimmo, 2012). The participants were selected to represent two separate groups. The first group consisted of those who have previous experience following uniform rules in schools. The second group consisted of those who have no previous experience following uniform rules in school. Mimmo measured their attitudes towards uniform policies and found a significant difference in the responses of the two groups. This could be meaningful to studies conducted in Thailand, as all Thai undergraduates have had extensive experience following uniform rules (required in all Thai K-12 schools). Mimmo concluded that perceptions towards school uniform requirements could be a consequence of students lacking participation experience in a school which mandates uniforms. His conclusions suggest that those with a history of participation will have more positive perceptions towards uniform policies. If the trend in Mimmo's study holds true cross-culturally, then Thai students should show an overwhelmingly positive attitude towards their uniform

policies. They may perceive the policy to be suitable regardless of how well the policy aligns with Knowles's andragogical assumptions. However, perceptions may also depend on their age group or willingness to conform, two variables which Mimmo did not consider in his study.

There have been numerous studies conducted to measure an individual's conformity to group norms. The most well-known conformity study was conducted by Solomon Asch on 50 university students. Asch found that the majority of the participants (75%) conformed to the group answer at least once while one quarter of the participants never conformed to the group on the clearly incorrect answer (Asch, 1951). Asch's research is a classic example of the power of group influence within a university setting. It was also this type of study which was analyzed in the meta-analysis study conducted by Bond and Smith (1996). Crutchfield (1955) attempted to improve Asch's experiment by removing the factor of "embarrassment" in a group setting and separating participants into different cubicles. Deutsch & Gérard (1955) also attempted to recreate a similar experiment with different variations and design. Both aforementioned studies yielded results which were dissimilar to, and contradictory of Asch's original experiment. Many years later, Perrin and Spencer replicated Asch's experiment but found that less than 1 percent of the subjects conformed to the incorrect majority answer (1980). They argued that Asch's experiment showed much greater levels of conformity because the setting and cultural norms in 1951 were different from those of the 1980s, when values such as free thought and questioning group leanings were more socially acceptable. Asch himself, was able to recognize the infirmity of conformity assessments when he conducted follow-up interviews (Asch, 1956). These attempts to replicate classical studies of conformity exemplify the difficulty of measuring conformity levels accurately. Results of similar studies tend to vary due to complexities created by the environmental, social, and temporal factors.

In summary, the results of previous studies may not be decisive, but they do demonstrate specific trends. First, Bunyawanich, Järvelä, & Ghaffar's study illustrates how positive perceptions towards uniform rules within one domain or as related to one principle, do not have to be accompanied by similar perceptions within a different domain or principle. It is possible for students to believe that there is good rationale behind uniform policies while

simultaneously believing that the policy is not inclusive and detrimental to the student body's diversity. Additionally, Mimmo's study implies that previous exposure is a major variable in influencing perceptions towards uniform rules. However, the question of how much weight or sway this variable holds in Thailand remains unanswered. Finally, conformity related studies indicate that data for measurements of conformity levels can fluctuate due to contextual variance. Minute changes in replicated experiments will have a significant impact on results. Culture is obviously a major variable, but other factors such as time-period (Perrin and Spencer, 1980), or the physical layout of the room (Crutchfield, 1955) can change the participants' self-monitoring and adjustment of responses. All these factors must be taken into consideration when attempting to understand the implications of this current study.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework of this study. The study was conducted on a sample population of undergraduate university students from the ISM. The students were categorized according to the three independent variables which are age group, nationality, and conformity level. Each independent variable is identified separately, and each has two categories. Each student is designated one of the two categories within each variable. Conformity levels are determined by a score on Snyder's SMS. The dependent variable is a measurement of whether the students perceive the uniform policy to be andragogical or non-andragogical. An andragogical policy is one which is suitable for older learners because it observes and complies with andragogy's assumptions about adult learners; specifically, the assumptions related to the principles of: rationale, self-concept, orientation, and diversity as explained in the theoretical framework. A non-andragogical policy is not suitable for older learners because it does not adhere to or fulfill the assumptions of these four andragogical principles.

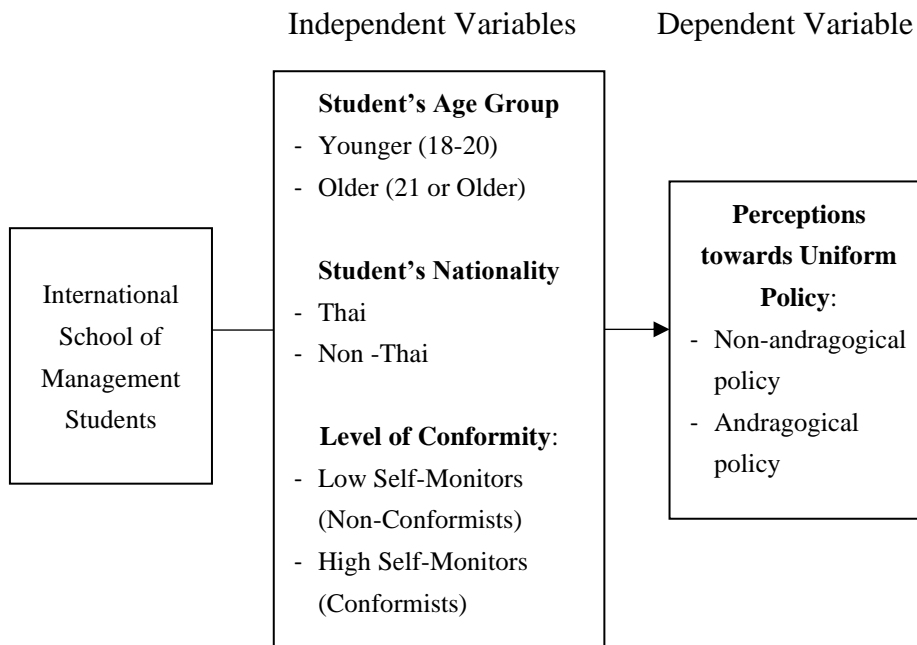


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

Method/Procedure

This research follows a quantitative, comparative design. Independent Samples t-test (Two-tailed) is used to compare the data. This study is conducted using 178 undergraduate students from the International School of Management (ISM) in The University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce (UTCC). The students who participated had to be studying either full-time or part-time during the 2019/2020 academic year which began in August of 2019. The questionnaire utilizes an adoption of a previous instrument as well as original instrumentation. Part I of the instrument is designed for gathering demographic data, which includes age and nationality. Part II of the instrument is adopted from social psychologists Mark Snyder and Steve Gangestad's 18-item self-monitoring scale (1986). Part II is used to measure the students' personality trait of self-monitoring as an indicator of their willingness and ability to conform. This part categorizes the students based on their conformity level. Part III contains original items designed by this researcher to measure the students' perceptions towards the uniform policy based on the andragogical principles which make assumptions about adult learners. The items were specifically devised to measure perceptions towards

mandatory uniforms within the framework and understanding of the four andragogical principles.

Part II of the instrument is the 18-item SMS adopted from Snyder and Gangestad. To test his theory of self-monitoring, Snyder originally developed a 25-item instrument, which had a reliability of .70 in a sample of 192 university students (Snyder, 1974). Snyder and Gangestad later modified their instrument to an 18-item SMS. Their revised SMS, the improved version of Snyder's original SMS, is used for this study. Snyder and Gangestad's updated 18-item measure of self-monitoring has an internal consistency (coefficient alpha) of +.70, higher than that of the original 25-item measure (1986). Part III of the instrument is composed of 16 original items. All items were analyzed and validated by three experts using the Item Objective Congruency (IOC) index. The experts were selected based on the fact that they possessed PhDs in an education related field and had considerable experience and familiarity with instrumentation and the research process. To verify the reliability of Part III, a pilot study was conducted on a sample of 31 undergraduate students studying at an international college in Thailand. The pilot study showed a coefficient alpha of .89, which is within the acceptable range of a reliable instrument (Cronbach, 1951). The current study reinforces the reliability of Part III, as it shows a coefficient alpha of .91. All questions in Parts II and III use a 5-point scale.

Findings/Results

Research Objective One

Research objective one was to identify the age groups and the nationality of the undergraduate students at the ISM. All 178 participants (100%) answered the questions correlating with this data, which are found in Part I of the questionnaire. Based on the answers, there were 104 younger students (ages 18-20) and 74 older students (ages 21 or older) who participated in this study. Approximately 58% of the participants belonged to the younger group, and approximately 42% belonged to the older group. There were 85 Thai students (approximately 48% of the total) and 93 Non-Thai students (approximately 52%) who participated in the study. These findings are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1: *The Age Groups of the Undergraduate Students at ISM*

Age Group	Number	Percentage
Younger Students (18-20)	104	58.4
Older Students (21 or Older)	74	41.6
Total	178	100

Table 2: *The Nationality of the Undergraduate Students at ISM*

Nationality	Number	Percentage
Thai	85	47.8
Non-Thai	93	52.2
Total	178	100

Research Objective Two

Research objective two was to determine the students' conformity levels. The measurement of conformity was based on the sum of each participant's responses to the SMS items. All 178 participants (100%) answered the questions correlating with this data, which are found in Part II of the questionnaire. Based on the answers to the questions in Part II, there were 90 students who scored between 18 and 54, which is considered to be very low or low on the self-monitoring scale. These students were found to be in the non-conformist category, and are approximately 51% of the total number of students who participated in the study. There were 88 students who scored between 55 and 90, which is considered to be high or very high on the self-monitoring scale. These students were found to be in the conformist category and are approximately 49% of the total. Table 3 presents the findings for the students' conformity levels.

Table 3: *The Conformity Levels of the Undergraduate Students at ISM*

Conformity Level	Number	Percentage
Non-Conformists	90	50.6
Conformists	88	49.4
Total	178	100

Research Objective Three

Research objective three was to determine the perceptions of the students towards the university's uniform policy. All 178 participants (100%) responded to the items correlating with this data, which are found in Part III of the instrument. The measurement of perceptions is based on participants'

responses to 16 original items. The items are meant to determine whether the students perceive the uniform policy as a policy which fulfills the needs of adult learners according to the assumptions from the four andragogical principles discussed earlier. The four principles are rationale, self-concept, orientation, and diversity, as defined and explained in the theoretical framework of this paper. Items with a score between 3.51 and 5 are interpreted as very high or high. None of the 16 items had a score of very high or high. A very high or high score indicates that the uniform policy is perceived to fulfill the need of the students based on the assumptions of andragogy. Items with a score between 2.51 and 3.5 are interpreted as moderate. Fifteen items had a moderate mean score. A moderate score indicates that the uniform policy is perceived to partially fulfil the need of the students based on the assumptions of andragogy. Items with a score between 1 and 2.5 are interpreted as low or very low. Only 1 item, which is item 27, had a low score. A low or very low score indicates that the uniform policy perceived to be unfulfilling of or at odds with the need of the students based on the assumptions of andragogy. The mean, standard deviation, and interpretation for each item are specified in Table 4.

Table 4: *Means and Standard Deviations of Students' Perceptions towards the Uniform Policy*

No	Item	Mean	SD	Interpretation
19	The university has good reasons for requiring all students to wear uniforms.	3.05	1.13	Moderate
20	I know the exact reasons for why I must wear a uniform.	3.10	1.13	Moderate
21	The university has tried to explain the reasons for why I must wear a uniform.	2.70	1.16	Moderate
22	The university takes the students' views into consideration when setting rules and requirements for the uniforms.	2.80	.95	Moderate
23	I am satisfied with my current role in uniform related decision making.	3.01	.91	Moderate
24	I don't feel bad about having to follow the uniform policy.	3.23	1.08	Moderate
25	Having to wear a uniform is practical or is useful for me in my daily life.	2.91	1.09	Moderate
26	Having to wear a uniform is practical for some students and helps them in some way.	3.14	1.10	Moderate
27	Having to wear a uniform helps students to learn better.	2.06	1.21	Low

No	Item	Mean	SD	Interpretation
28	Uniform rules are NOT outdated and wearing a uniform is suitable for a modern classroom.	2.83	.95	Moderate
29	The uniform policy is reasonable for male students.	2.81	1.03	Moderate
30	The uniform policy is reasonable for female students.	2.67	1.03	Moderate
31	The uniform policy is reasonable for transgender students (ladyboy/tomboy/etc).	2.53	1.02	Moderate
32	The uniform policy is reasonable for Thai students.	2.85	.99	Moderate
33	The uniform policy is reasonable for foreign students.	2.61	1.03	Moderate
34	The uniform policy is reasonable for students who have special conditions (older students, students who work full-time, etc).	2.82	1.00	Moderate

Overall perceptions were calculated by using the means of all responses to items 19-34 for each student. There were 57 students (32%) who scored between 1 and 2.5, placing them in the very low or low category. These students perceive the policy to be unsuitable as it does not fulfill student needs according to the andragogical assumptions about older learners. One hundred students (56%) scored between 2.51 and 3.5, placing in the moderate category. These students perceive the policy to be only partially andragogical. The policy may fulfill some student needs according to the andragogical assumptions, but it is only partially suitable as it does not completely meet the criteria of andragogical assumptions. Twenty-one students (12%) scored between 3.51 and 5, placing in the high or very high category. These students perceive the policy to be andragogical (i.e., consistent with the andragogical assumptions), and therefore suitable for older learners. Table 5 illustrates the overall perceptions of the students towards the uniform policy.

Table 5: *Students' Overall Perceptions towards Uniform Policy*

Perceptions	Range	Number	Percentage
Non-andragogical Policy	1.00 - 2.50	57	32
Partially Andragogical Policy	2.51 - 3.50	100	56
Andragogical Policy	3.51 - 5.00	21	12
Total		178	100

Research Objective Four

Research objective four was to compare the students' perceptions of the university's uniform policy according to their age group, nationality, and level of conformity. A comparative statistical analysis (Independent Samples t-test) was used for all comparisons. Starting with overall perceptions, the data for the first independent variable of age group yielded a significance value of $p = .93$, indicating that between younger ISM students (those who are 18 - 20 years of age) and older ISM students (21 or older), there is no significant difference in overall perceptions towards the uniform policy. These findings are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: *Differences in Students' Overall Perceptions according to Age Group*

Age Group	N	Mean	SD	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Younger (18-20)	104	2.82	.68	.08	.93
Older (21 or older)	74	2.83	.70		

The data for the second independent variable of nationality reveals that when comparing Thai students to non-Thai students, there is a significant difference in overall perceptions towards the uniform policy ($p = .04$). The Thai students had a mean of 2.71 and found the uniform policy to be less andragogical than the non-Thai students, who had a mean of 2.92. For the final independent variable of conformity level, the results show that there is a significant difference between non-conformists and conformists ($p = .002$). The non-conformists had a mean of 2.66 and found the uniform policy to be less andragogical than the conformists, who had a mean of 2.98. These findings are displayed in Table 7 and Table 8 respectively. This data also indicates that when measuring overall perceptions through the framework of andragogy, the conformity level of the students was the variable which resulted in the greatest difference between their views towards the uniform policy. Additionally, their nationality showed that there were differences in their perceptions, but their age group did not have the same impact as there was no significant difference between the younger group and the older group.

Table 7: *Differences in Students' Overall Perceptions according to Nationality*

Nationality	N	Mean	SD	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Thai	85	2.71	.51	-1.98	.04*
Non-Thai	93	2.92	.80		

Table 8: *Differences in Students' Overall Perceptions according to Conformity Level*

Conformity Level	N	Mean	SD	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Non-Conformist	90	2.66	.59	-3.22	.002*
Conformist	88	2.98	.74		

In summary, the findings indicate that of the three independent variables, the one which showed the biggest difference between overall perceptions was the students' level of conformity. Whether the student was a non-conformist, or a conformist played the most significant role in whether the student perceived the uniform policy to be suitable or unsuitable for adult learners. Additionally, the overall perceptions were significantly different according to the variable of nationality. This means that perceptions of whether the policy was suitable for adult learners or not were different based on whether the student was Thai or non-Thai. However, the variable of age group did not make a significant difference in overall perceptions.

Thus, the students' views regarding the suitability of the policy for adult learners were not significantly different based on their age groups. While the differences in students' overall perceptions of the uniform policy matter most, one can further understand which principle of andragogy has the greatest influence on those perceptions by dividing the data according to each andragogical principle and analyzing them separately. After separating the data based on each andragogical principle and comparing the students' perceptions in this manner, the data shows mixed results. Regarding whether the policy was andragogical in that it adhered to the principles of rationale and orientation, there were significant differences in students' perceptions, or views on the policy's suitability for adult learners. In contrast, there were no significant differences in perceptions regarding whether the policy was andragogical in how it adhered to the principles self-concept and diversity.

Discussion

The Diversity of the ISM and Policy Evaluation

The findings and conclusions of this study outline several points of discussion about the undergraduate students at the ISM. Aside from the obvious variable of the students' age, the variable of nationality creates greater variety in the ISM classroom. First, there is a large number of international students enrolled at the ISM. Having such a large non-Thai population of students is largely since the ISM is an international college. However, it is important to note that international colleges are also open to Thai students, and not all international colleges will have a similarly high population of non-Thai students. In addition to nationality, the personality trait (variable) of conformity is dispersed almost equally amongst the students. According to the students' answers to the SMS part of the questionnaire, approximately half are either unwilling or unable to conform to norms according to social queues. It is important for administrators to consider the ISM students' levels of heterogeneity when enforcing policy. The students are stakeholders, and their collective active feedback regarding the policy should be a function of the quality evaluation process (Logermann & Leišytė, 2015). In this study, the target of the evaluation is the uniform policy of the university, and one of the objectives was to determine how different the student body is in terms of their willingness to conform. As mentioned by (Ion & Iucu, 2015), policymakers must apply an evidence-based approach when implementing policy. Thus, the findings detailing the heterogeneous nature of ISM students may be employed by administrators during any deliberation regarding the policy. The findings are especially beneficial if deliberation is focused on whether any changes are warranted in order to make the policy more suitable for their students.

The Conformity Levels and Cultural Influence on the Conformity of ISM Students

In the meta-study conducted by Bond and Smith (1996) findings indicated that conformity levels were higher in some societies due to collectivist cultural beliefs. The impact of culture on conformity levels was taken into consideration, and the results of this study did show that Thai students scored slightly higher on the conformity scale than non-Thais. Despite this, the objectives of this study were meant to identify conformity levels separately from, and regardless of the variable of nationality. When comparing variables in this manner, Thais who were categorized as non-conformists answered

similarly to non-Thais who were also non-conformists. Therefore, the notion that “Thai Niyom” (Ngammuk, 2016) would influence or unify Thai students was not evident from the results of this study. These findings do not refute the previous social studies of collectivism or collectivist culture (Smith & Bond, 1993), but based on the ISM students’ answers to the questionnaire, there was no evidence that “Thainess” or any cultural factor related to being Thai played any role in influencing the students’ perceptions towards the uniform policy. From the conclusions of this study, it is reasonable to presume that Thai students at the ISM answered honestly from their own individual perceptions as opposed to providing an answer of “sacrifice” (Ngammuk, 2016) meant to uphold the integrity or communitarian norm of having a uniform policy.

Finally, it must be noted that the results of this study may not be an absolute reflection of the students’ conformity levels at all times. As revealed by the previous attempts to replicate the results of Asch’s classical study, a modification in room layout, questionnaire format, or time period, could result in data which shows a different ratio of conformists to non-conformists. Additionally, Snyder’s SM is only one of many personality tests which can be applied. Other tests may yield other results. For instance, if the SM instrument included categories like those in Smith’s Nonconformity Scale (1967b). Smith’s categorization would effectively define a substantial number of students as “independents”, or those who are neither conformists nor non-conformists (Smith, 1967a). Smith’s method would also designate some non-conformists as “rebels” who would generally resist compliance with norms of any policy regardless of the policy in question. Due to the complexity of measuring specific personality traits, there remains a possibility, however small, that the nearly equal ratio of conformists to non-conformists at the ISM may not occur under different conditions. Thus, further studies conducted during different semesters, or simultaneously using two different instruments/scales would be helpful in determining more concrete trends in the ISM students’ conformity levels.

The Perceptions of Students towards the Uniform Policy

The overall perceptions of the majority of the students towards the uniform policy is that it is partially andragogical. While this means that the students don’t find the uniform policy to be perfectly suitable, it does not mean that they feel this way towards every aspect of the policy. The students perceive

some principles of andragogy to be more lacking than other principles, and this is illustrated by the mixed responses to the questionnaire. The students' slightly discrepant perceptions are consistent with the study conducted by Bunyawanich, Järvelä, and Ghaffar's (2018), which found that students may perceive different aspects of their school uniform in different ways. Likewise, this study finds that the ISM students do not perceive all the different aspects of the uniform policy to be equally andragogical. The orientation aspect of the uniform policy was perceived to be less andragogical than any other aspect. It is this aspect which must be focused on. Nearly half of the students believe the uniform policy to be impractical, and the uniform to be of little benefit to them in daily life. Thus, the policy doesn't fulfill andragogy's principle of orientation (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005), and cannot be deemed suitable for the students based on this principle. Moreover, the students cannot be satisfied by simply being told that wearing the uniform is good for them or benefits them in a manner they cannot immediately envision. They must be able to orient the policy's benefits immediately because adult learners need the processes of their education to have immediate application in their daily lives (Knowles, 1984).

In addition to determining the overall perceptions of the students towards the uniform policy, this study found that there were significant differences in perceptions between certain groups of students. The conformity levels of the students showed the greatest difference in how students perceived the policy. Conformists found the policy to be more andragogical than non-conformists. This is due to the fact that the high self-monitoring conformists are more proficient in aligning their views with the official or expected views (Snyder, 1974). In contrast, the low-self monitoring non-conformists are less willing to align their views, resulting in more frequent disagreement with the policy. In short, the students generally did not perceive the policy to be andragogical, but the ones who are non-conformists ranked it significantly less so than their conformist counterparts; therefore, administrators must take the conformity levels of their students into consideration when attempting to understand how those students perceive the policy.

Besides the variable of conformity, a significant difference in perceptions between Thai students and non-students was also noted. Despite this finding, the results of this study are incongruent with the results of Mimmo's (2012).

Mimmo's study concluded that students with a history of wearing uniforms would later show more favorable attitudes towards uniforms. In this study the Thai students, who have a history of wearing uniforms throughout their years of education, diverged from Mimmo's reported trend and displayed perceptions which were less favorable towards the suitability of the uniform policy. This may be due to the non-representative nature of the ISM students; or, it may be an indication that the perceptions of modern day Thai students are changing as exemplified by the recent controversies surrounding university uniforms (Head, 2015), (Panyasuppakun, 2019). Thus, while the findings of this study demonstrate that perceptions do significantly differ based on the variable of nationality, drawing an absolute conclusion as to why Thai students found the uniform policy less suitable for adult learners requires further investigation, possibly by conducting a similar study on strictly Thai undergraduate population at different universities.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Administrators

Using the ISM classroom as a model, this study revealed the extent to which an international college classroom may have a mixed demographic and mixed views. Uniform policy implementation and enforcement should be approached with this finding in mind, and administrators who wish to conduct ethical evaluations of their uniform policy should consider the variety of students who will be studying at their colleges. This study also reveals that the conformity levels and nationality variables resulted in a significant difference in student's perceptions towards the uniform policy. Administrators should make some effort to determine these levels for students at their colleges, as they are meaningful in identifying the variations in the perceptions of their students and will make any policy change more relevant to the students at their specific college. Most importantly, the study reveals that the university students generally perceive the uniform policy as one which is only partially suitable for adult learners, and therefore lacking in some way. Modifying the policy to make it more suitable for the learners would be beneficial. For instance, instituting changes focusing on the orientation of the uniform is likely to change the students' perceptions more drastically than instituting changes focusing on the self-concept aspect. Administrators may consider these findings to be research-based evidence that there is room for

reviewing and improving the policy in order to make it more suitable for adult learners.

Recommendations for Future Researchers

This study utilized Snyder's SMS to categorize students as conformists or non-conformists and found the proportions of each to be nearly equal. Previous researchers have found that it is difficult to replicate the results of conformity measurements, as responses may vary based on several factors. A follow-up study at the ISM or a similar school would be beneficial in verifying the students' conformity levels. Moreover, this study was conducted on one international college within a larger non-international university. Future researchers can conduct similar studies on other, preferably larger international colleges in Bangkok to determine any conflicting findings or consistent trends. A similar study conducted on a larger population will provide a bigger picture of international students' perceptions throughout Thailand. Finally, because this study focuses on an international college population, it cannot draw any conclusions about undergraduate students in Thailand overall. To obtain a clearer picture of how university students in Thailand perceive mandatory uniform policies, researchers may improve the instrument and conduct perception studies based on an andragogical framework at any university, including non-international universities.

REFERENCES

- American Evaluation Association. (2012, April 29) Retrieved from https://web.archive.org/web/20130528153823/http://www.edtech.vt.edu:80/edtech/id/eval/eval_purpose.html
- American Evaluation Association. Guiding Principles PDF (2018).
- Asch, S. E. (1951). Effects of group pressure upon the modification and distortion of judgments. *Organizational influence processes*, 295-303.
- Asch, S. E. (1956). Studies of independence and conformity: I. A minority of one against a unanimous majority. *Psychological monographs: General and applied*, 70(9), 1-70.
- Bangkok University. (2015, June 07). Bangkok University is open for all gender students, especially alternative gender. [Facebook status update]. Retrieved from

- <https://www.facebook.com/bangkokuniversity/posts/10153278909855272>.
- Bond, R., & Smith, P. B. (1996). Culture and conformity: A meta-analysis of studies using Asch's (1952b, 1956) line judgment task. *Psychological bulletin*, 119(1), 111.
- Bunyanawich, S., Järvelä, M., & Ghaffar, A. (2018). The Influence of Uniform in Establishing Unity, Hierarchy, and Conformity at Thai Universities. *Journal of Education and Training Studies*, 6(7), 28-37.
- Cronbach, L. J. (1951). Coefficient alpha and the internal structure of tests. *Psychometrika*, 16(3), 297-334.
- Crutchfield, R. (1955). Conformity and Character. *American Psychologist*, 10(5), 191-198.
- Deutsch, M; Gérard, H. B (1955). A study of normative and informational social influences upon individual judgment. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 51(3), 629.
- Head, J. (2015, Jun 09). Bangkok University transgender students get new uniform rules. *BBC News*. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world/asia>.
- Ion, G., & Iucu, R. (2015). Does research influence educational policy? The perspective of researchers and policymakers in Romania. In *the European Higher Education Area* (pp. 865-880). Springer, Cham.
- Kelman, H. C. (1958). Compliance, identification, and internalization three processes of attitude change. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 2(1), 51-60.
- Knowles, M. S. (1984). *The adult learner: A neglected species*. Houston, Texas
- Knowles, M. S., Holton, E., & Swanson, R. (2005). *The adult learner: the definitive classic in adult education and human resource development*, 6th edn.
- Krejcie and Morgan, (1970). *Abbreviated Table of Sample Sizes Required for Selected Population Size Educational and Psychological Measurement*. Homewood, IL: The Dorsey Pr.
- Lamubol, S. (2013, Sep.28). University uniforms challenge – And academic freedom. *University World News*. Retrieved from <https://www.universityworldnews.com/>.
- Lennox, R. D., & Wolfe, R. N. (1984). Revision of the self-monitoring scale. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 46(6), 1349-1364.

- Logermann, F., & Leišytė, L. (2015). Students as Stakeholders in the policy context of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education Institutions. In *The European Higher Education Area* (pp. 685-701). Springer, Cham.
- Mimmo, J. (2012). Student perceptions of school uniforms: a comparative study of students participated in school uniforms and those who did not.
- Ministry of Education, Thailand (2018). Educational Statistics 2016. Retrieved from <http://www.en.moe.go.th/enMoe2017/index.php/educational-statistics/educational-statistics-2016>.
- New York University. (2018) Developing University Policies. Retrieved from <https://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/developing-university-policies.html>.
- Ngammuk, P. (2016). A Comparison of the Twelve Core Values of Thai People Defined by the Head of the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) Found in Thai Private and Public University Students. *Online Submission*.
- Numnonda, T. (1978). Pibulsongkram's Thai Nation-Building Program during the Japanese Military Presence, 1941-1945. *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 9(2), 234-247. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20062726>.
- Panyasuppakun, K. (2019, Jan 18). Chula reviews student's right to wear female clothes. *The Nation*. Retrieved from <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/>.
- Perrin, S., & Spencer, C. (1980). The Asch effect: a child of its time? *Bulletin of the British Psychological Society*, 32, 405-406.
- Policy. (2019) In Cambridge Dictionary. Retrieved From <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/policy>
- Royal Thai Government Gazette (1939). Student Uniform Act. Retrieved from <http://www.ratchakitcha.soc.go.th/DATA/PDF/2482/A/642.PDF>.
- Royal Thai Government Gazette (2008). Student Uniform Act. Retrieved from <http://www.ratchakitcha.soc.go.th/DATA/PDF/2551/A/028/44.PDF>. English Translation http://thailaws.com/law/t_laws/tlaw0492.pdf

- Sirivunnabood, P. (2019). The Rules Change but the Players Don't: Factional Politics and Thailand's March 2019 Elections. *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 41(3), 390-417.
- Smith, P. B., & Bond, M. H. (1993). *Social Psychology across cultures: Analysis and perspectives*. Hemel Hempstead, England: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Smith, Robert J. (1967a) Explorations in Nonconformity, *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 71:1, 133-150.
- Smith, Robert J. (1967b) Further Evidence for Two Varieties of Nonconformity. *Psychological Reports* 20 (3), pages 885-886
- Snyder, M. (1974). Self-monitoring of expressive behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 30(4), 526-537.
- Snyder, M. (1979). Self-monitoring processes. In *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 12, pp. 85-128). Academic Press.
- Snyder, M., & Gangestad, S. (1986). On the nature of self-monitoring: Matters of assessment, matters of validity. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 51(1), 125.
- Stout, D. (2015, Jun 10). A Thai University's New Dress Code Accommodates Transgender Students. *Time*. Retrieved from <http://time.com/>.
- Thaitrakulpanich, A. (2017, Feb 08). Chula Students Want #chulassicpark-era uniform rule to go extinct. *Khaosod News*. Retrieved from <http://www.khaosodenglish.com/>.
- The University of Sydney. (2016) "What is Policy?" Retrieved from sydney.edu.au/legal/policy/what/index.shtml.
- Virginia Tech "Evaluation Purpose". (2015, May 28) Retrieved from https://web.archive.org/web/20130528153823/http://www.edtech.vt.edu:80/edtech/id/eval/eval_purpose.html