

# Examining Demographic and Psychographic Profiles of Potential First-Class Undergraduates

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## Abstract

Even though the discipline of psychology and education had gained its reputation all along, few studies have been conducted to determine the characteristics of the potential first-class undergraduate students. Thus, this study was designed to examine the demographic and psychographic profiles of the potential first-class undergraduates in a Malaysian public university. The selected respondents comprised of 424 undergraduates who obtained at least 3.67 cumulative grade point average (CGPA) in their academic achievement in the period of their study. This study used a self-administered questionnaire that had adapted from the standardized measures. Validity and reliability of the instruments were found to be satisfactory. The results of the study indicate that the potential first-class undergraduates have the highest level on task orientation whereas time management scores the lowest. Also, the results reveal that more than 99% of the students have either moderate or high levels of psychographic attributes. In addition, the MANOVA results indicate that there are significant differences between male and female undergraduate students in their task orientation and leisure attitude. Likewise, significant differences between ethnic groups are found in task orientation, competitiveness, and general self-efficacy. Thus, the findings of this study are able to assist the higher education providers in providing coaching and mentoring to ensure more effective strategies could be developed to improve students' needs and desires in pursuing their further education.

**Keywords:** achievement motivation, demographic, leisure attitude, potential first-class undergraduate, psychographic, self-efficacy, time management

## 1. Introduction

The success of a nation depends on the younger generations who are equipped with some degree of talent and intelligence, but need to acquire a positive attitude and stable psychographic attributes. Thus, developing human resources that are highly knowledgeable and skilful in their respective fields should become the aspiration and efforts of every developing nation. In line with that, in order to attain the development aims of the state, it is critical that a sustainable human capital development program to be carried out. In Malaysia, higher educational institutions (HEIs) are shown to play a salient part in the evolution of training programs as well as to provide a generation with the knowledge and new skills to cook them more attractive in the employment market (MoHE, 2010). Thus, the focus on building the students' knowledge and skills competencies should be the utmost priority for all higher education providers in the country.

In relation to student's achievements, a successful student in a university is evidently influenced by various factors consisting of academic and non-academic variables. In terms of their academic performance, many empirical studies have shown that a number of factors affect the academic performance of students at all levels, from the elementary level to the university level (Komarraju, Karau & Schmeck, 2009; Megan, 2009). Among the elements that have excited the attention of researchers are pertaining to demographic and psychographic variables. For instance, from previous reviews (e.g., Brunner, 1991; Fan & Chen, 1997; Hayes & Richardson, 1995; Sullivan, 2001) had examined demographic characteristics such as gender, age, race and income as they relate to student's success; and attempted to identify students' motivation, personality, anxiety, attitude and

learning preferences as important factors that have effects on students' academic performance in different settings (Duda & Nicholls, 1992; Gregory, 1999; Nicholls, Cobb, Yackel, Wood, & Patashnick, 1990). Nevertheless, research evidence to support the psychographic studies on its contributions to the academic performance of students in the learning foundations are even limited (Considine & Zappala, 2002; Eamon, 2005; Minnesota, 2007).

An analysis of the literature suggests that, psychographic variables such as achievement motivation, self-efficacy, time management, and leisure attitude are important variables in determining students' overall achievement which has gained substantial support from research (Bandura, 1997; Bandura & Locke, 2003; Burt & Kemp, 1994; Helmreich & Spence, 1983; Lim, 2009; Macan, 1994; Ragheb & Beard, 1982; Schwarzer, 1992). In this context, Wells (1975) pointed out that psychographics adds new dimensions that go beyond the scope of demographics into a variety of previously unfamiliar areas. In that regard, a viable psychographics study will help educational institutions to move away from relying only on demographic considerations to shape academic programmes and delivery as well as to improve on student services and marketing of the programmes.

Previous literature has shown that there was a consensus among educationists and psychologists regarding psychographic attributes as one of the important factors in determining overall students' performance and their learning process (Noor et al., 2013; Komarraju, Karau, & Schmeck, 2009; Lim, 2009; Megan, 2009; Mohammed Yusof, 2011; Plog, 1994; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Watson, 1996; Vanotegham, 1986). Although significant research in this area has centred on specific variables that can be tied to academic success, such as gender, age, achievement, academic ability, and financial status (Fuller, Manski, & Wise, 1982; Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989; Paulsen, 1990), only a scarcity of researches related to psychographic variables in academic environment exist. Indeed, some researchers argued that psychographics has not achieved broad use in the world of business and academia for several reasons (Plog, 2002). However, it is also important to consider the demographic differences in the way students may respond to the psychographic characteristics. By understanding these differences that may have a considerable impact on student achievements, the higher education providers will be able to tailor the students' needs and desires in pursuing their studies.

Nevertheless, demographic and psychographic profiles are highly complementary approaches that work best when used together (Demby, 1974; Vyncke, 2002). By combining the knowledge gained from both demographic and psychographic studies, higher education providers will be provided with powerful information about their target students. With regards to psychographic characteristics, some of the identified variables are considered as the major factors that may be pertinent to the development of psychographic models, including models and concepts from mainstream psychology, and the associated sub-disciplines of health, leisure, and physical activity (Noor et al., 2003). In addition, Plog (1994) argued that segmentation based on psychographic characteristics could produce clearly defined groups of individuals with similar lifestyles and interests. Thus, consistent with these issues, this study aims to provide additional insights into the psychographic variables of university undergraduates by focusing on two specific objectives: (a) to identify demographic and psychographic characteristics, and (b) to determine differences of the effect of gender, age and ethnic groups on the psychographic characteristics among potential first-class undergraduates in the Malaysian public university.

### *1.1 Research Questions*

The specific research questions addressed in this study included the following:

- a) What are the characteristics of potential first-class undergraduates based on their demographic and psychographic profiles?
- b) To what extent do the levels of each psychographic characteristic (achievement motivation, self-efficacy, time management and leisure attitude) differ among potential first-class undergraduates in terms of gender, age and ethnicity?

## **2. Literature Review**

The literature review is divided into four sections as follows:

### *2.1 Achievement Motivation*

Achievement motivation refers to a person's efforts to master a task, achieve excellence, overcome obstacles, perform better than others, and take pride in exercising talent (Murray, 1938). In other words, it is a person's orientation to strive for task success, persist in the face of failure, and experience pride in accomplishments (Gill, 2000). According to the need Atkinson's (1964; 1974) achievement theory, the individual differences could be categorized into high and low achievers. Higher achievers will select a more challenging task, display a high level of effort, continue to try hard in difficult situations and focus on the pride of success. Low achievers avoid

challenging tasks, exert less effort and persistence when they do take part and focus on shame of failure. Meanwhile, Ames's (1984; 1992) achievement goal theory proposes that people's main achievement concern is to demonstrate high ability and avoid demonstrating low ability. The goals for demonstrating ability that individuals emphasize guided their thoughts, feeling and subsequent behaviours (Weinberg & Gould, 2007; Morris & Summers, 2004).

Furthermore, in order to assess achievement motivation, Helmreich and Spence (1978) developed the Work and Family Orientation Questionnaire (WFO) via combinations of theories concerning achievement motivation. The WFO consists of three dimensions, namely, the mastery of needs, work orientation and competition that contributes to the excellent performance of individuals. It is highly related to personal achievements (Spence & Helmreich, 1983). The WFO has measured that men and women do not differ in the nature of their achievement motives. In addition, numerous researches pertaining to achievement motivation had been conducted in several situations, ranging from grades in college to salaries in business organizations consistently shows an interesting pattern of results. Grades and salaries are higher for people who have higher levels of motivation for work and mastery than if they are low in competitiveness. If they are high in competitiveness, however, performance suffers. It could be implied that highly competitive people may focus so much on the competition, rather than doing a good job, that they perform less well than they would otherwise (Spence & Helmreich, 1983). People with a strong motive to avoid failure tend to avoid these situations. When forced into an achievement situation, a low achiever will choose either very easy or very difficult tasks (Gill & Williams, 2008; Weiss & Chaumeton, 1992).

### *2.2 Self-Efficacy*

Self-efficacy is defined as the perception of one's ability to perform a task successfully (Bandura, 1977, 1986). In other words, self-efficacy refers to a believer that he or she has the ability to perform at a specified level of a certain task. According to Bandura's self-efficacy theory, self-efficacy expectancy, outcome expectancy and outcome value are three basic cognitive mediating processes that determine behaviours. Thus, self-efficacy becomes an important predictor of performance only when one has the requisite skills and sufficient motivation to accomplish the task (Morris & Summers, 2004).

In relation to self-efficacy, research has supported the positive effects of self-efficacy and goal setting on performance across organizational, academic and athletic settings (Bandura & Jourdan, 1991; Early & Lituchy, 1991; Wood & Locke, 1987; Lane & Kyprianou, 2004). For example, Lane and Kyprianou (2004) studied the relationships between self-efficacy, self-esteem, previous performance accomplishments, and academic performance among a sample of 205 students. The results of their study show that there are significant relationship between self-efficacy and self-esteem, and self-efficacy mediated the relationship between performance accomplishments and academic performance. Thus, the findings of the study provide support to the predictive effectiveness of self-efficacy measures in academic settings (Lane & Kyprianou, 2004). Consequently, in regards to the importance of researching student's self-efficacy, the outcomes of the study could assist educators to develop a greater understanding of students' confidence levels on his/her ability to meet certain environmental demands. Furthermore, the information provided can also assist educators and their institutions to design a training programme that appropriate for their students' academic enhancement.

### *2.3 Time Management*

There was no agreement on the definition of time management in past studies. However, based on the literature, time management had been referred to as techniques for managing time (Adam & Jex, 1999; Macan, 1994, 1996) or a way of monitoring and controlling time (Eilam & Aharon, 2003). According to Macan (1994), the main outcome of engagement in the time management behaviours is perceived control of time. Even though there were ample of definitions on time management, perhaps it could be concluded that time management as behaviour that aim at achieving an efficient and effective use of time (Claessens, 2004).

There has been a growing recognition of the importance of time in students' daily life. A good time management will lead to the outcome of the activities being carried out. The activities have no boundary, in which they could be working, projects, or studies. Thus, it's important to develop effective strategies for managing to balance the conflicting demands of time for study, leisure and participating in other academic and non-academic activities. Numerous studies have been carried out on time management. For example, Necati and Sevil (2010) found significant and positive relationships between time management and the academic achievement of students. Likewise, Megan's (2009) finding revealed that failure in managing time will result in low academic achievement. This finding was supported by Britton and Tesser (1991), and Hlavac, Peterson and Piscioneri (2011).

Meanwhile, Konig and Kleinmann's (2006) study indicated that the benefits of time management could mostly be seen in long term periods although some yield results instantly. Hafner and Stock's (2010) study also indicated that by organizing and monitoring time increased one's feeling of control and led to less stress. They could further affect well-being positively. However, Fox (2010) suggests that personal assistant gadgets, calendars, to-do lists, life's inbox, and organization are tools that help in managing time efficiently. In conclusion, previous works related to time management had proven that attention had been given to initiatives in assisting time management. From the viewpoints of management, time management is very important to employers as well as students. It is worth noting that students who manage time well achieve high grades in their studies.

#### *2.4 Leisure Attitudes*

Based on the psychological literature, Crandall and Slivken (1980) defined leisure attitude composing of three components, namely, affective, cognitive, and behavioural. The affective component is a positive-negative inclination towards an attitude object. The cognitive aspect entails the beliefs in an attitude object. The behavioural aspect is based on the tendency to act according to beliefs and feelings. Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) distinguished among beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behaviours. A belief is similar to cognition which describes the knowledge that a person has about an object. An attitude refers to affect or the "general feelings of favourableness or unfavourableness towards some stimulus object" (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975, p. 216). Intonation refers to an individual's purpose for participating in one activity or another. Behaviour is the action of the individual that is observed. Thus, according to Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) theory of attitude, an individual's attitude towards any object is a function of beliefs about the object's attributes and a personal evaluation of these attributes.

In relation to leisure attitude, Ragheb and Beard (1982) developed the Leisure Attitude Scale. This instrument effectively measured the three components of attitudes related to leisure: cognitive, affective and behavioural components. Ragheb and Beard (1982) used the Leisure Attitude Scale to examine the relationships between the leisure attitudes and demographic variables among a sample of 1 042 students. The resulting correlations were generally small and non-significant. All correlation coefficients were smaller than 0.15; thus, suggesting a little association between leisure attitudes (total scale and subscales) and gender, age, education or income. These results were consistent with Lim's (2009), Watson's (1996) and Vanotegham's (1986) findings, which revealed that there was no significant difference in leisure attitude between male and female students. In summary, based on the literature reviewed, it could be concluded that there were no significant differences in leisure attitudes when comparing samples based on gender, age and marital status.

### **3. Method**

#### *3.1 Sampling*

This study was conducted in Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) which is located in the northern region of Malaysia. In this study, undergraduate students with potential first-class are targeted. The potential first-class undergraduates are those who obtained Cumulative Grade Point Averages (CGPA) of between 3.67 and 4.00 during the period of their study. They were selected from a total of 3 939. The list of potential first-class students (the Dean's list award) was obtained from the university's Academic Affairs Department.

#### *3.2 Instruments Development*

A quantitative approach by using self-completed questionnaires was utilized for data collection. The questionnaire consists two sections on demographics and psychographics information. Section one is about the demographic information regarding gender, age, ethnic groups and marital status. A single item measure was used to capture the information pertaining to each of these variables. Section two of the instrument is related to psychographic characteristics which were developed by the researchers through adaptation from several sources to measure achievement motivation, general self-efficacy, time management and leisure attitude. The Likert scales of five points were used where (1) indicates "strongly agree" and (5) indicates "extremely disagreed" with the statements.

##### *3.2.1 Achievement Motivation*

The Work and Family Orientation Questionnaire (WFO) developed by Spence and Helmreich (1983) was utilized to measure achievement motivation. The WFO consists of 19 items to assess three dimensions of achievement motivation, namely, mastery skills (8 items) that focused into the preference for challenging, intellectually demanding and thought-oriented jobs, work (6 items) that assessed positive attitude toward work, and competitiveness (5 items) that measured the desire to win over others. Spence and Helmreich (1983) reported satisfactory reliabilities for WFO with alpha coefficients ranging from 0.50 to 0.76. They also

reported that comparisons of scores of selected groups of students and prediction of college grades provided evidence for the validity of the WOFO scales.

### 3.2.2 General Self-Efficacy

The general self-efficacy scale developed by Schwarzer (1992) was used in this study. The adapted self-efficacy scale for this study consists of 9 items that focused on students' perception on their confidence to overcome various constraints in coping with daily hassles as well as the adaptation after experiencing all kinds of stressful life events (Schwarzer, 1992). The self-efficacy scale was reported with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.76 to 0.90 in samples from 23 nations. Criterion-related validity was also reported based on positive correlation studies with favourable emotions, dispositional optimism and work satisfaction (Schwarzer, 1992).

### 3.2.3 Time Management

The time management scale developed by Macan (1994) was selected for this study. Four adapted items from the perceived control of time were used to measure on how one has control over one's time in daily life. The Macan's scale was tested for reliability and validity and found to be psychometrically sound (Macan, 1994). In this study, the measured variable for the time management component is calculated by the sum of the total perceived control of time scores.

### 3.2.4 Leisure Attitude

In this study, two dimensions of leisure attitudes adapted from Ragheb and Beards (1982) were used. Six items of the cognitive dimension were used to measure the individual's general knowledge and beliefs about leisure, its characteristics, virtues, and how they relate to the quality of one's life, while another six items of the affective components measured the individual's feelings towards his or her own leisure, the degree of liking or disliking for leisure activities. The measured variables are based on the sum of the total scores of each component of the scales of 12 items. The Cronbach alpha reliabilities reported for each subscale was  $\alpha=0.91$  for cognitive,  $\alpha=0.93$  for affective, and  $\alpha=0.94$  for both of the subscales (Ragheb & Beards, 1982).

## 3.3 Procedure

Permission to collect data from the potential first-class undergraduate students was obtained from the Dean of the respective schools. The questionnaires were distributed by two trained research assistants to all the students who attended the Dean's List Award ceremony. Before answering the questionnaire, the respondents were informed about the purpose of the study. The respondents were provided with general instructions and they were told that their responses were confidential. A total of 800 questionnaires were distributed, 424 (53.0%) were returned and 404 (50.5%) were deemed usable. Unusable questionnaires were defined as those with significant amounts of missing data or data incomplete in response sets.

## 3.4 Data Analysis

The descriptive analysis was performed on all demographic variables to obtain frequencies and percentages, and averages, standard deviations and *t*-test were used to measure the psychographic characteristics. The Multiple Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was applied to determine whether the means of the dependent variables varied due to demographic differences. In the MANOVA model, the demographic variables were entered as independent variables and psychographic variables were entered as dependent variables. The Pillai's Trace test was used for the interpretation of the MANOVA results (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998).

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Profile of Respondents

As shown in Table 1, the sample consisted of 69 (16.3%) males and 355 (83.7%) females. Most of their ages ranged between 21 and 23 years old (70.54%). In addition, identification of students based on their ethnicity indicated that 210 (52.0%) were Malays, 161 (39.9%) were Chinese, 25 (6.2%) were Indians, and 8 (2.0%) were the others. The majority of the respondents were not married (98.3%).

Table 1. Profile of respondents

Demographic	Class	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender ( <i>N</i> = 424)	Male	69	16.27
	Female	355	83.73
Age (year) ( <i>N</i> = 404)	18 – 20	56	13.86
	21 – 23	285	70.54
	24 – 26	46	11.39
	More than 27	17	4.21
Ethnic ( <i>N</i> = 404)	Malay	210	51.98
	Chinese	161	39.85
	Indian	25	6.19
	Others	8	1.98
Marital status ( <i>N</i> = 404)	Single	397	98.27
	Married	7	1.73

#### 4.2 The Level of Psychographic Characteristics among the First-Class Potential Students

The results as tabulated in Table 2 show that the potential first-class students had the highest level of task dimension with a mean score (*M*) of 4.162 of the maximum 5 and a standard deviation (*SD*) of 0.556; followed by leisure attitude, self-efficacy, competitiveness and mastery skills, while time management scored the lowest with a mean of 3.105 and a standard deviation of 0.633.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of psychographic characteristics overall respondents

Psychographic characteristics	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Skewness		Kurtosis	
			Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Task/work	4.162	0.556	-0.881	0.121	2.083	0.242
Competitiveness	3.652	0.614	-0.087	0.121	-0.083	0.242
Self-efficacy	3.692	0.617	0.346	0.121	1.383	0.242
Time management	3.105	0.633	0.391	0.121	0.402	0.242
Leisure attitude	4.156	0.658	-0.797	0.121	0.953	0.242
Mastery skills	3.322	0.450	0.234	0.121	0.289	0.242

In addition, the overall psychographics level was computed for each dimension to identify the categorization of students based on the following groups of mean scores:

- a) Low, if the mean score (*M*) is less than 2.44,
- b) Moderate, if the mean score (*M*) is between 2.45 and 3.44, and
- c) High, if the mean score (*M*) is more than 3.45.

A summary of the levels of overall psychographic characteristics among the potential first-class students is displayed in Table 3. A total of 74.5% of potential first-class students reported with high level of psychographic characteristics; about 25% reported with moderate level and less than 1% reported with low level of psychographic characteristics.

Table 3. Levels of psychographic characteristics among the first-class potential students

Psychographic level	Frequency	Percent (%)
Low	3	0.7
Moderate	100	24.8
High	301	74.5
Total	404	100.0

#### 4.3 Differences of the Effect of Gender, Age and Ethnic Group on Psychographic Characteristics

Table 4 summarizes the results of the investigation comparing the dependent variables of psychographic characteristics with the influence of the independent variables of demographic factors. The results of Pillai's test in Table 4 indicate significant main effects for students' gender and ethnicity with the task/work orientation, competitiveness, mastery skills, self-efficacy, time management, and leisure attitude. However, the results found no significant main effects for students' age with all the psychographic characteristics measured.

Table 4. Results of MANOVA for gender, age and ethnic group

Test	Variable	Value	F-value	Sig.	Partial Eta square
Pillai's Trace	Gender	0.044	2.952	0.008	0.044
	Age	0.043	0.938	0.532	0.014
	Ethnic	0.270	6.444	0.000	0.090

$p$ -value < 0.05

#### 4.4 Differences of the Effect of Gender on the Psychographic Characteristics

A one-way MANOVA was conducted to analyze the differences in the variables measured between two gender groups. As shown in Table 5, the results reveal that there were significant differences between the gender groups for the task/work orientation subscale ( $F$ -value = 5.907,  $p$ -value = 0.016). Likewise, for the leisure attitude subscale, the result also indicates significant differences between male and female students ( $F$ -value = 5.049;  $p$ -value = 0.025). A comparison of means as shown in Table 7 revealed that female students reported higher mean score ( $M$  = 4.192) for task orientation than male students, and female students also reported higher scores ( $M$  = 4.189) for leisure attitude.

Table 5. Results of MANOVA for gender

Source	Variable	Mean Square	F-value	Sig.
Gender	Task orientation	1.804	5.907	0.016
	Competitiveness	0.346	0.916	0.339
	Mastery skills	0.486	2.416	0.121
	Self-efficacy	0.423	1.112	0.292
	Time management	0.111	0.278	0.599
	Leisure attitude	2.167	5.049	0.025

$p$ -value < 0.05

#### 4.5 Differences of the Effect of Ethnic Group on the Psychographic Characteristics

A one way MANOVA was conducted to analyze the differences in the variables measured among four ethnic groups. As shown in Table 6, the results reveal that there were significant differences between the ethnic groups for the task/work subscale ( $F$ -value = 23.108;  $p$ -value = 0.000). The results of the post-hoc Tukey test showed that Malay students reported higher mean scores (Table 7) than Chinese and Indian groups on the task

orientation ( $M = 3.60$ ), competitiveness ( $M = 3.840$ ), self-efficacy ( $M = 3.894$ ) and leisure attitude ( $M = 4.405$ ).

Table 6. Results of MANOVA for ethnic group

Source	Variable	Mean Square	<i>F</i> -value	Sig.
Ethnic	Task orientation	6.132	23.10	0.000
	Competitiveness	5.976	17.82	0.000
	Mastery skills	0.355	1.768	0.153
	Self-efficacy	6.506	19.43	0.000
	Time management	0.374	0.933	0.425
	Leisure attitude	9.922	27.381	0.000

*p*-value < 0.05

Table 7. Mean and standard deviation of scores on psychographic characteristics for gender and ethnic group

Variable	<i>n</i>	Task orientation		Competitiveness		Mastery skills		Self-efficacy		Time management		Leisure attitude	
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Gender</i>													
Male	69	4.015	0.616	3.716	0.654	3.399	0.442	3.763	0.735	3.142	0.737	3.995	0.761
Female	335	4.192	0.539	3.638	0.606	3.306	0.450	3.677	0.591	3.098	0.610	4.189	0.632
<i>Ethnicity</i>													
Malay	210	4.360	0.454	3.840	0.592	3.357	0.469	3.894	0.553	3.080	0.680	4.405	0.520
Chinese	161	3.915	0.553	3.417	0.537	3.261	0.405	3.433	0.612	3.119	0.565	3.867	0.677
Indian	25	4.053	0.636	3.472	0.668	3.385	0.523	3.640	0.580	3.280	0.661	3.835	0.698
Others	8	4.271	0.806	3.975	0.744	3.422	0.477	3.764	0.533	2.950	0.563	4.438	0.714

## 5. Discussion and Conclusions

The findings of this study provide some evidence pertaining to the personality and motivation of the potential first-class students in University Utara Malaysia. The results indicate that psychographic and demographic variables are crucial factors that identify and reflect students' academic achievement at the university. In this study, six psychographic variables were identified to assess students' leisure attitude, self-efficacy, time management and achievement motivation. Demographic information such as gender, age, and ethnicity was also collected. The findings regarding the demographic variables imply that the potential first-class students can be segmented according to their perceptions of the psychographic characteristics. The findings of this study revealed that a majority of the potential first-class students were female within the ages of 21 to 23 years old and from Malay ethnic group. This was not a surprising result when comparing to the actual compositions of students currently exist in UUM based on their gender, ages and ethnicity.

Furthermore, the results indicated that most of the students surveyed (99.3%) had either moderate or high levels of overall psychographic attributes. This could be implied that students who excelled in their academic performance also possessed some good psychological traits and behaviours in terms of task or work performance, competitiveness, self-efficacy, time management, leisure attitude and mastery skills. The outcome of this study is expected as it is believed that potential first-class students to have unique characteristics that are different from other categories of students. They are assumed to possess a positive thinking and behaviour in their engagement in academic and non-academic activities, and able to exhibit his or her interest and confidence towards undertaking the challenging tasks. Generally, in this study, the potential first-class students portray a positive attitude towards the tasks or works that they have to encounter and believe the importance of leisure activities that leads to the quality of life. However, based on their perceptions, they seem to be relatively poor in terms of managing their time as compared to other psychographic characteristics. In congruence with this perspective, research has found students' academic goal orientations in school to be consistent with their beliefs about the



causes of school success (Nicholls et al., 1990). Thus, the information provided by this study is vital for higher education providers develop a better understanding of certain psychological factors which could have an impact on students' success in their academic performance.

In relation to achievement motivation, although Spence and Helmreich (1983) has found in their study that men and women do not differ in the nature of their achievement motives, yet the findings of this study indicate that female students desire to work hard and are satisfied with their performance as compared to male students. In addition, female students are also found to like their leisure activities and more experiences, perhaps they believed that leisure activities are beneficial to individuals and society, particularly for the purposes of health enhancement, academic productivity, general self-improvement and a good opportunity for socializing contact. However, the findings of this study were in contrast with the findings from Ragheb and Beard (1982), Lim (2009), Watson (1996), and Vanotegham (1986) which revealed that no significant difference in leisure attitude between male and female students. Probably, inconsistency of the results between this study and the previous studies was due to discrepancy of research design in terms of sampling and measurement scales used.

Meanwhile, the findings of this study seem to support the fact that cultural background does play an important role in influencing students' psychological behaviours (Lim, 2009; Watson, 1996; Vanotegham, 1986). The initial test for ethnic groups' differences revealed that there were significant differences between the ethnic groups of psychographic characteristics in terms of task orientation, competitiveness, and self-efficacy, and leisure attitude. Specifically, the findings indicated that Malay students portrayed their desire to work hard and to perform well, enjoy interpersonal competition situations, have a sense of being able to deal effectively with a particular task assigned to them and positive leisure attitude as compared to the Chinese, Indian, and other ethnic groups. Thus, the knowledge from this study can provide valuable input to the university management in facilitating, coaching and mentoring in order to ensure more effective strategies could be developed to improve students' needs and desires in their studies. Furthermore, this study also can provide meaningful information to the higher education providers to plan the training programmes accordingly to target the specific type of students as well as to enhance a greater degree of students' satisfaction.

### 5.1 Limitations

This present study has its limitations. First, the students recruited as sample were from one university and focused solely on the potential first-class students. Therefore, the results of this study might not be applicable to all university students in Malaysia. Most probably, studies conducted at other universities or with students from other categories could likely yield different results. The second limitation of this study is that almost all variables were based on data from self-reported sources. The data collected was solely based on students' perceptions on variables measured. Therefore, it is doubtful whether the respondents answer the questions honestly or they respond in a 'socially desirable' way. As such, the answers provided by the respondents may be inaccurate and lead to bias in their response to the questionnaire. Typically, this may affect the measurement of attitudes on self-reported surveys, which contain both dependent and independent variables (William, Cote, & Buckley, 1989).

### 5.2 Suggestions for Future Study

Although the research questions of this study were successfully investigated, the results of this study raise a number of important questions for further investigation. The present study should be replicated utilizing students from other higher institutions (public and private) as well as sample from other categories of academic achievement levels. Perhaps a comparative study among potential first-class students and other categories of students will be able to provide better insights to the higher education providers in structuring training programmes and enhancing the development of their prospective students. It is also recommended that a qualitative approach can be utilized to collect data that may clearly clarify on individuals' leisure attitudes, motivation, self-efficacy, and time management.

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