WCES 2012

Identity and personality development for desirable characteristics of Mahasarakham University graduate students

Wilailak Ounjit (Laila)

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Mahasarakham University, Kantarawichai District, Mahasarakham, Thailand

Abstract

This quantitative research studies the identity of students at Mahasarakham University in order to prepare instruction in the subjects relating to personality and social etiquette requirements for leadership in the University’s revised curriculum. It also aims to promote personality and identity development in accordance with Mahasarakham University’s policy on desirable characteristics of graduate students. Data were collected using a self-report questionnaire given to students in years 1-5 from 18 faculties in 96 majors, totalling 6,117 respondents. This study was carried out using student’s personality development policy related to Thai culture and tradition. In addition to curriculum goals, Thai universities also have responsibility for setting policy goals for students’ personality and social development. This is in contrast to western university traditions where personal and social values are a matter of individual choice. The research findings were discussed in terms of self-concept, self-understanding and self-awareness. In conclusion, when comparing the identities of male and female students, it was found that male students expressed their identity or individuality more often than female students, and it was noted that the only identity that male and female students shared in equal measures was that of self-concept.

© 2012 Published by Elsevier Ltd. Selection and/or peer review under responsibility of Prof. Dr. Hüseyin Uzunboylu

Open access under CC BY-NC-ND license.

Keywords: Identity, Personality, Desirable characteristics of graduate students, University students

1. Introduction

At present, the term “identity” is discussed extensively in Thailand, especially in the academic world. This word is similar to the word “uniqueness” in Thai, but the two words have overlapping meanings. According to the 1999 Royal Institute dictionary, the word “uniqueness” means similar or common characteristics; for example, the Thai language is a unique characteristic of the country. However, the term “identity” has not been recorded in the dictionary. Several textbooks define the meaning of this term as the English word “identity” (I’den-ti-tee). This term in Thai consists of two words: “self” and “characteristic”. Therefore, the term identity means the specific characteristics of an individual or thing that allows it to become known or recognized.

* Wilailak Ounjit (Laila), Tel.: +66 437754369
E-mail address: rock_river_arms@yahoo.com
2. Problem Statement

Mahasarakham University is determined to achieve academic excellence through studies of local wisdom and the integration of individuals’ intellectual growth and self-development in academia, ethics, and morality. All of these are deemed characteristics that are part of the university’s “identity” and are in accord with “specific characteristics” under its philosophy “the wise should be available to the public”. The identity of Mahasarakham University students is determined as “MSU FOR ALL (dependable)”, which stands for:

M=Moral - characteristics of persons with integrity, ethics, and virtue
S=Social Responsibility - characteristics of a person with good discipline, and personal and social responsibility
U=Unity - characteristics of a person with loving kindness, unity, and generosity.

Accordingly, this research entitled “Identity and Personality Development for Desirable Characteristics of Mahasarakham University Graduate Students” was conducted because Mahasarakham University has recently expanded curricula in bachelors’, masters’ and doctoral programs, as well as improving the new curriculum for the School of General Education. As a result, student numbers have increased, with a resulting diversity in terms of identity and personality. In order to produce University graduates in accordance with the desired characteristics of Mahasarakham University, an educational institute that recognizes the importance of forming good personality, the researcher subsequently plans to use a conceptual framework of identity and personality as a study guideline. This will be accomplished by using the University’s philosophy that requires its graduates to learn, become competent in analyzing and implementing data, live responsibly and peacefully, and become productive members of society. Nine desirable characteristics of Mahasarakham University’s graduate students have been determined, as follows:

1) Adheres to moral/ethical principles/professional ethics, 2) Has good academic/professional quality, 3) Cherishes values, culture, country, organization and local community, 4) Is patient, courteous and humble, 5) Is devoted to the public/adhering to self-sufficiency principles, 6) Has healthy state of well-being and a good personality, 7) Has discipline and respect for rules, social mores and is able to live peacefully and happily in society, 8) Has the ability to analyze and use wisdom in solving problems systematically and has discernment in making good choices, 9) Being knowledgeable/up-to-date/sophisticated/eager to learn/able to apply knowledge appropriately to daily life (Mahasarakham University, 2009).

3. Purpose of Study

1) To study the identity of Mahasarakham University students.
2) To prepare instruction in the subjects relating to personality and social etiquette for leadership in the School of General Education’s revised curriculum.
3) To promote personality development and identity formation that is in accordance with the desirable characteristics of Mahasarakham University’s graduate students.

4. Operational Definition

Identity means the specific characteristics of students that are in accordance with desirable characteristics of Mahasarakham University’s graduate students.

Personality means a common personality of all individuals as shown to others. This may differ due to environment and genetics.

Desirable characteristics of graduate students means characteristics that are prominent, unique and in accordance with quality standards for graduate students according to the philosophy of Mahasarakham University. University students mean students of Mahasarakham University at the bachelors’ level.
5. Conceptual Framework and related Literature

The conceptual framework or related theory in this research consists of:
1) Identity concept
2) Personality concept and theory
3) Desirable characteristics of Mahasarakham University’s graduate students

Figure 1. Identity and Personality Development of Desirable characteristics of University’s Graduate Students

6. Methods

This is a quantitative research study, with the following scope:

6.1. Population and Sample Group

The population and sample group used for collecting data was composed of students in years 1-5, from eighteen faculties and 96 majors, totaling 6,117 persons and therefore considered to be a multiple-group and multiple-level population.

Table 1. Students classified by year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>5,319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>584</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6,117</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.2. Research tool

The tool used in collecting data was a questionnaire, designed by the researcher, relating to identity and personality development in accordance with desirable characteristics in Mahasarakham University’s graduate students.

7. Findings and results

Identity of Mahasarakham University Students

Information relating to the self-identification of Mahasarakham University students was as follows:

1) Identity of Mahasarakham University students in terms of self-concept

It was found that moderate to high levels of students were easily bored and distracted. Interestingly, most students felt uncomfortable when they had to make their own decisions, but they did not shy away from having to work alone, i.e., they wanted to become less dependent. At the same time, students did not feel that they were easily agitated when displeased and they experienced both extreme levels of happiness and sadness. Few students claimed to have had the courage to get to know new friends. This correlated with their feelings when questioned by lecturers; the students were able to answer but they did not have the courage to do so. In addition, moderate level students struggled with sleeping problems because they thought about so many things before bedtime. Some students reported feeling so frustrated that they sometimes wanted to scream out loud.

2) Identity of Mahasarakham University students in terms of self-understanding

It was found that students had high levels of self-esteem, expressed as positive thoughts or feelings of self-respect. This was in line with students’ reporting that they did not feel that they were worthless. At the same time, most students expressed knowledge and understanding about the need to plan their future beyond graduation. The students’ views of social activities were positive. For example, they expressed openness in listening to others’ opinions.

It was notable that some students lacked confidence or were uncertain whether or not they were doing the right thing. However, they were very comfortable with their own identities i.e., they were comfortable with themselves and did not feel that they had to imitate the behavior of their friends. This suggested that their friends’ behavior did not have much impact on their decisions. The students felt that they did not have to pretend to do something they did not want to do, though they felt they could be themselves most when they were alone. Nevertheless, the students understood that they lacked a certain degree of confidence.

3) Identity of Mahasarakham University students in terms of self-awareness

Students do not think that they are lazy. They reported feeling hesitant when they had to make a decision or to do something, but they were willing to tell others if they did not agree with their opinions. Further, it was found that students were aware that they could fully use their capabilities in doing things, and if they were being asked to do something they did not want to do, they could refuse to do it. The students also tended to avoid doing anything difficult because they were afraid of failure. They felt that they were competent, but that other people may not recognize this, or did not have confidence in them. In relation to their inner state, the students felt that they were competitive to a moderate level, and believed that there were solutions to all problems. In other words, they had positive attitudes toward life in general.

Regarding the self-identification of Mahasarakham University’ students, it was found that students had a high self-concept level, followed respectively by self-understanding and self-awareness. When comparing the self-identity of male and female students, it was found that male students expressed their identity more than female students in terms of self-understanding and self-awareness. It was notable that the only similarity that male and female students shared was identity in terms of self-concept.
8. Discussions

Identity and Personality Development for Desirable Characteristics of Mahasarakham University Graduate Students

The identity of Mahasarakham University students with regard to self-concept; defined as personal identity or individuality. A process of “selection” and “expression” allowed the person to see whether and how he or she was similar or different from other persons or other groups through a system of symbol application, intended to demonstrate a combination of emotions and feelings. Identity, in terms of self-concept, was very clear in this exercise, i.e., students expressed themselves regarding when they were easily bored, easily distracted, and easily upset as well as if they were displeased, or felt overwhelmed by happiness or sadness. This was in accord with the definition of identity as formed when there was common feeling in terms of certain recognition towards the self. This meant the self- acceptance of expressing themselves to people to see whether and how they were similar or different from other groups or persons. When we define ourselves and try to show how we behave towards other people or in society it becomes a process of “selection” and “expression” that enables us to know “whether and how we were similar or different from other persons or groups”. Through a system of symbol application, it is a combination of emotions and feelings within us and the process of the external world that enables humans to extract meaning relating to their identity and purpose in society.

The identity of Mahasarakham University students with regard to self-understanding; in this category it was found that students had a high level of understanding in regard to self-esteem. This was the beginning of positive thoughts and feelings or self-respect, defined by Prasannam (2007), as “Identity,” or “feelings and thoughts that a person had towards himself regarding ‘who he was.’” This was formed during the interaction between the self and others through the way we perceived ourselves and were perceived by others. Identity requires awareness within us and a fundamental understanding of certain choices, such that we express ourselves and willingly accept our chosen identity. The importance of self-expression is the identification of whether and how we have identity similar to certain groups and different from other groups, and “who we were” in others’ point of view, and their point of view towards people around them such as the openness in listening to others’ opinions. It was notable that most students lacked confidence or were uncertain of whether they were doing the right thing. However, the students tended to be certain about which type of person they were, and were able to assert themselves by not having to imitate the behaviors of their friends. The students claimed to feel that they did not have to do or pretend to do something they did not want to do. Nevertheless, the students felt they could be themselves most when they were alone, and admitted that they lacked confidence to some degree.

The identity of Mahasarakham University’s students with regard to self-awareness; it was found that the students felt hesitant when they had to make a decision or do something but were willing to challenge others if they did not agree with their opinion. It was also found that students were aware that they could utilize their own abilities to accomplish tasks; they did not succumb to pressure or persuasion that would attempt to change their viewpoint. The students also avoided doing anything difficult because they were afraid of failure. This finding is in accord with Ramitanont (2007), who stated that identity was not something that accidentally or naturally occurred, but that it was formed by the culture over time, and that the culture was a social construct. Where students are concerned, society is composed primarily of their friends and lecturers and other people with whom they interact. It eventually became a circuit of culture how people treated each other. At the same time, students can unknowingly be co-opted and regulated by their cultures. For example, students may feel less confident and hesitant when they have to make a decision or do something but are willing to openly disagree with others if they do not agree with their opinion.

Furthermore, it was found that students were fully aware that they were capable of doing things on their own and if they were being persuaded to do something they did not want to do, they could refuse to do it. This was deemed as an attempt to create meaning through various symbolic systems of representation, such as presentation of ability in order to gain acceptance from friends and lecturers. However, these symbolic systems of representation required a context of social space as well.

I conclude that the identity of Mahasarakham University students is an arrangement of behavioral forms for the students to express themselves socially towards different social situations so that they will be accepted by their
interactive partners. Feungfoosakul (2000) compared social situations to performance of characters in a play. The characters in this context were “students,” who played their roles and acted according to audiences’ expectations. The performance stage was like the front regions while the back region, which was the identity of characters or “students,” had been changed. As in real life, humans needed to express themselves and their identity in various forms that could change depending on their interactive partners and depending upon the social backdrop. The management of a person’s identity will allow the other party to recognize who the person is in a short period of time and help smooth social interaction, because identity is not something that can be quickly understood. Information about the identity will allow the other party to recognize what the expectations are of the other person with whom they are interacting. Identity is therefore something that occurs during social interaction. It requires self-understanding, self-awareness and self-concept.

The key factors of “identity” found during this study all accord with Apinya Feungfoosakul (2000) were as follows: factors correlated with age, timing dimension and sport. For example, male students expressed their identity more than female students in terms of self-understanding and self-awareness, and male and female students expressed their identity in terms of self-concept equally. If we understand these factors, it will lead to the explanation of personal identity and social identity expressed by Mahasarakham University students with regard to self-understanding, self-awareness and self-concept. The aforementioned identity will be expressed as the “personality” of Mahasarakham University students in the aspects of physical, intellectual and emotional personalities. This will eventually lead to the future development of desirable characteristics among Mahasarakham University’s graduate students.

9. Thai Culture and Tradition vs. Identity and Personality Development of Mahasarakham University Students

Culture is something that indicates the difference of a person, groups or persons, or a community. It allows people to see how they are different from animals and helps us to understand things that we see. Culture determines certain acts which may be acceptable in one society but unacceptable in another. Therefore, the identity of Mahasarakham University students in the aspects of self-concept, self-understanding and self-awareness, as well as physical, intellectual and emotional personalities, all has a cultural basis, particularly in Thai culture, as it determines forms of institutions with different characteristics such as the institution of family, community, school and university. Culture also determines human behavior. The way people behave truly depends on the culture of their social institutions. The culture of a university, which is an educational institution, plays an important part in instructing and training its students to become good citizens of the society and their country. Culture helps control the society and creates peace and order. Thus, the meaning of culture also comprises faith, beliefs, values, and norms, as well as action and penalties when such norms and values are violated.

It can be seen that university students in Thailand have an identity that has been limited by culture such as the university’s uniform that students have to wear. Each university has its own uniform, which indicates the different identity of each educational institution. For Mahasarakham University, some lecturers are very strict about the university’s uniform policy, and students not wearing uniforms may be prohibited from attending classes. Moreover, there have been cases in which students have become pregnant while studying, and the Ministry of Public Health has proposed the Reproductive Health Protection Bill which allows pregnant women to study and in essence asks the Cabinet to approve and enact it. The issue has been broadly criticized about its appropriateness, especially among the network of sexual identity representatives, who stated that even though the main point of this Bill was to protect women from being sexually harassed and to protect the right of students who are pregnant, it could become a double edged sword. Critics say that it may encourage students to engage in sexual activity and that it will particularly damage the culture of preserving sexual purity and what is deemed as “appropriate behavior” for Thai women. One representative in the network of sexual identity said that “no one wants to see their child get pregnant at such an early age or get pregnant while they are still studying because they are not ready for that. They are still in school and need to study. It is absolutely inappropriate for students to get pregnant, raise their child and study at the same time. The network of sexual identity therefore requests the Ministry of Public Health to reconsider the appropriateness of this law before it will promote school-age pregnancy.”
In addition, there is a group of people who see that culture directly relates to personality. This group of people supports the view that cultural patterns of people in each society result from teaching and training at an early age, and that is the reason why cultural patterns are different. Leaders in this group included Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict (1970).

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the General Education and the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of Mahasarakham University, Thailand for giving me the opportunity to present this paper. Furthermore, I would also like to acknowledge all of the students (whose names I cannot list) and offer my sincere appreciation for providing me with the information for this research. Last but certainly not least, thank you to my family for their continual love and support throughout this research project.

References


