Guidelines for Enhancing Institutional Commitment of Students at Risk of Dropping Out of Walailak University

Wilunsiree Thorrarit [1,*], Chawalit Kerdtip[1] and Nopadol Nimsuwan[2]

[1]Educational Administration, Faculty of Education,
Prince of Songkla University, Pattani Campus, Pattani 94000, Thailand
[2]Educational Foundation, Faculty of Liberal Arts,
Prince of Songkla University, Hatyai Campus, Songkla 90110, Thailand

[*]Corresponding author's e-mail: yayasiree1993@gmail.com

Abstract

This research aims to 1) identify the level of engagement factors for students at risk of dropping out of Walailak University, 2) compare the factors in the institutional engagement of students at risk of dropping out of Walailak University classified by gender, department of study, and year, and 3) find ways to strengthen engagement with students at risk of dropping out of Walailak University. This research was conducted using an explanatory sequential mixed method design. The procedure was divided into 2 phases and carried out with a sample group of 202 students at risk of dropping out of Walailak University during the academic years 2016-2019. For Phase 1's quantitative part, descriptive statistics were employed for data analysis which included percentage, arithmetic average, standard deviation, and t-test and f-test. In case of statistically significant differences, multiple comparisons were made by the least significant difference (LSD). For Phase 2's qualitative part, the instrument used was a focus group discussion for seeking ways to strengthen commitment to the institution. The data was analyzed using content analysis.

The results of the research can be summarized as follows: 1) Students at risk of dropping out of Walailak University expressed a high level of overall institutional commitment, 2) Students at risk of dropping out of Walailak University, categorized by gender and department, demonstrated no relationship with the institution as a whole. However, students of different years of study showed statistically significant ties to the institution at level .05, and 3) The approaches which demonstrated a strengthening of the engagement of students at risk of terminating their studies at Walailak University were in six areas, namely: 1) relationships with peers, seniors and juniors, 2) rapport with teachers, such as training skills where teachers play a role in mentoring students, 3) atmosphere in the educational institution, such as improving environments, educational materials and technology, 4) a sense of institutional ownership, 5) institutional engagement, and 6) belief in the institution, such as encouraging students to have a more balanced quality of academic life, and well-being.

Keywords: Commitment, Students at risk of dropping out, Walailak University

Introduction

The university's ultimate goal is to pioneer, seek, maintain and pass on knowledge to create and nourish progress (Office of the Higher Education Commission: OHEC, 2008). The prominent mission of a higher education institution is what distinguishes it as a place which provides quality teaching to produce not only competent but also good graduates to fulfill society's demands and to serve as an indispensable force for national development. It is commissioned to equip learners with knowledge and intellect to further advance an educated society. For all of its intents and purposes, education not only cultivates benefits for the educated and grants access to quality life and well-being, but also enormously serves Thai society as a whole. Therefore, education plays an unmistakably significant role in shaping society, raising people's awareness of their responsibility to serve as a constructive member and to propel the country's economy and society (Wattananarong, 2006).

Higher education is characterized by its duty to produce students with specific attributes. Its underpinning factors comprise the educational institution's administration, curriculum development, quality of lecturers and various student-related factors including an individual's factors, such as family and environment. These factors are inseparably intertwined with students' success. Nevertheless, Thailand's current higher educational system, which is allocated a substantial amount of educational funds, is facing the issue of students dropping out, resulting in the government being deprived of the opportunity to produce graduates who contribute to the country. Besides, it shows a lack of effectiveness in educational administration both on the part of the educational institution itself and the government (Sinlarat, 2012).

Presently, there is an increasing trend of higher-education students who are dropping out worldwide and this has become a huge challenge for educational institutions' policy makers (Marginson, 2016). Educational institutions are the foundation for providing knowledge, life experience, security and cultivating relationships with friends, teachers and other members of staff. However, it has been found that most students exhibit only slight institutional affiliation. Many studies, such as the one by Khamphon and Apibunyopas (2018), found that the students who formed negligible commitment to the educational institution were more susceptible to immature study termination or dropping out altogether.

Walailak University is a public university committed to its mission to produce graduates equipped with not only competency but also high ethical standards by shaping students to become well-equipped modern individuals who can benefit the country and global community. They must appreciate a democratic ideology, develop versatility, and cultivate a broad perspective together with recognized attributes of a scholar and sophisticated professional whose special expertise and skills are profoundly augmented and can be applied to the degree in which they can effectively perform responsibilities, uphold the "educated man" status, conscience, moral standards and professionalism.

The university has established a system and mechanisms for orienting the students towards becoming virtuous and competent in order for them to live a pleasant life by aiming at making students "an educated man", meaning an individual possessing intellect and virtue, within the physical environment, fundamental facilities and services necessary for living. (Crittenden & Peter, 2018; Faure et. al., 1982). In addition, the university promotes student activities and projects to nurture and develop students' attributes, conviction in good deeds,

overall contentment, ability to develop themselves, and dedication to communal affairs at Walailak University (1993). Over the past several years, Walailak University has been undergoing a major crisis of students dropping out at higher levels than in the past. Data from the Center for Educational Services of Walailak University revealed a high average of 26.50 percent of students who dropped out in every faculty from the academic years 2007 to 2014. The highest percent was at 32 percent in the 2008 academic year, followed by 31 percent in both academic years 2007 and 2009. This data demonstrated a significant proportion of student's who dropped out during these years. According to the cause-and-effect-model study of Walailak University's student dropout rate (Khamphon & Apibunyopas, 2018), the issue was found to stem from a myriad of factors including economic and social backgrounds, academic applications, social applications, commitment to goals, and student's institutional engagement. Research demonstrated that the student's institutional engagement variable exerted a direct influence in a reverse direction with student dropout rate. The students who were satisfied with the teachers' teaching methods and personalities as well as the institution's environment at a low level were highly prone to drop out of the university.

Hirschi's Social Bonds Theory is based on the basic assumption that humans naturally tend towards delinquency. Hirschi assumes that the stronger the degree of social control and the denser the network of social bonds are, the more likely people are to behave in accordance with standards. By "social bonds" Hirschi understands elements of social cohesion (bonds). The commitment is important to socially accepted norms and institutions (Wickert, 2019). This theory was developed based on the research titled "The Cause and Effect of Walailak University's Student Dropout" conducted by Khamphon and Apibunyopas (2018) with a particular focus on the finding asserting that students with negligible engagement with an institution were highly susceptible to drop out. With regard to this, important questions were asked concerning factors related to institutional engagement of students running a risk of dropping out of Walailak University. Questions related to what levels of students' institutional engagement the students identified with and the answers to these questions shall serve as a guideline to strategize approaches to fostering institutional engagement further. Each factor most certainly contributes to student engagement with their institution but to different degrees.
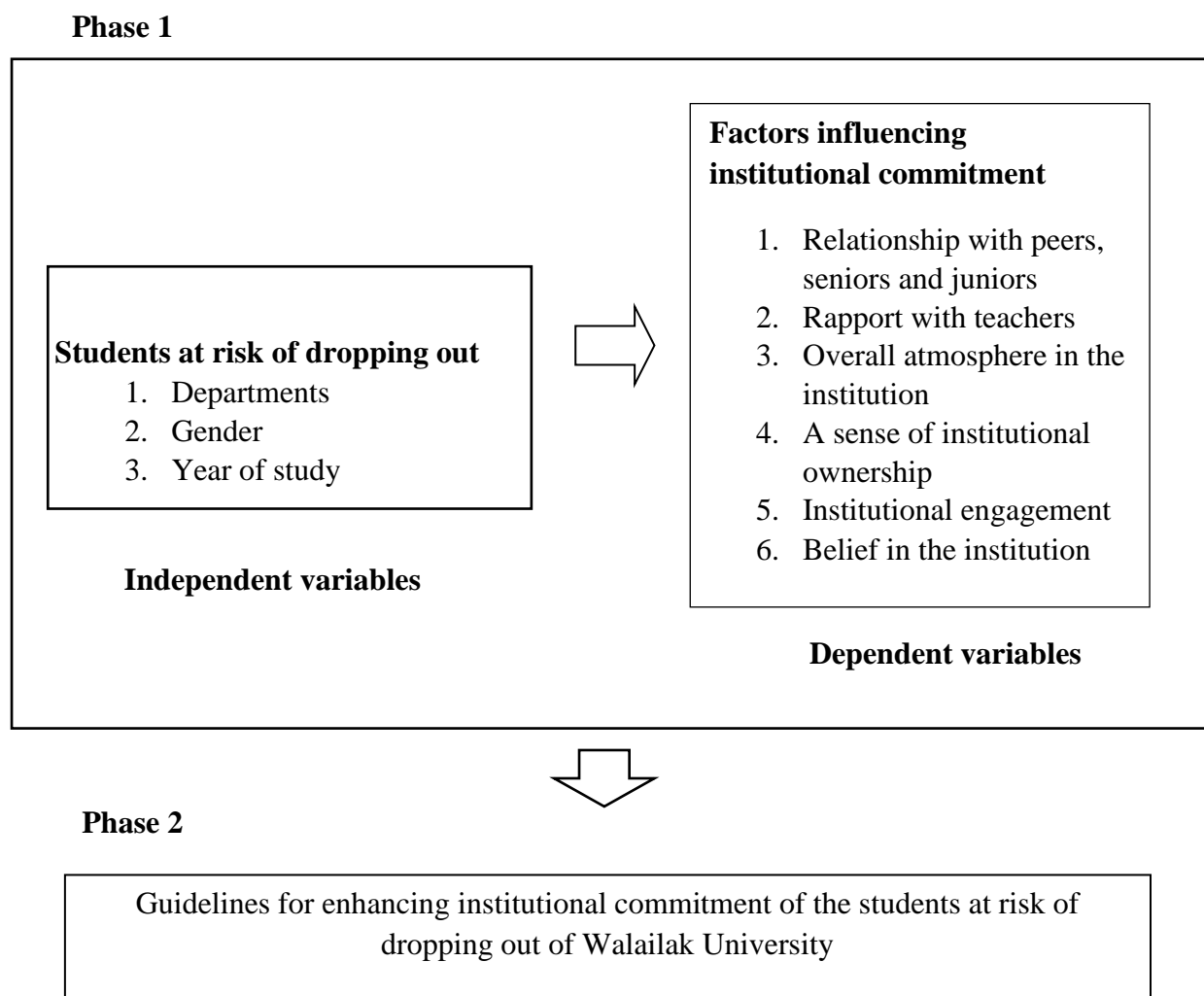
For all the reasons mentioned above, the researcher was interested in investigating the guidelines for creating institutional engagement and how these relate to students running a high risk of dropping out of Walailak University by employing a mixed research method to ensure data reliability. Because of the aforementioned reason, the researcher conducted this study to investigate factors creating institutional engagement so that they could serve as guidelines for promoting students' institutional engagement. Furthermore, emerging data shall also be further revised and improved to further advance the students' academic excellence and education services to enable curricular program completion and to continually strengthen institutional engagement, while at the same time attempt to reduce premature study termination, relocation, percentage of re-enrollment in another institution or even failing to graduate.

Objective

　　　1. To investigate levels of the factors influencing institutional commitment of students at risk of dropping out of Walailak University.

　　　2. To compare the factors influencing institutional commitment of students at risk of dropping out of Walailak University, categorized by gender, department and years of study.

　　　3. To seek guidelines for promoting institutional commitment among students at risk of dropping out of Walailak University.

Research conceptual framework

　　　The research was titled "Guidelines for Enhancing Institutional Commitment of Students at Risk of Dropping Out of Walailak University". Factors influencing institutional commitment were constructed from data gathered from Hirschi's Social Bonding Theory (cited in Wickert, 2019) Becker's Side-Bet Theory (1960), and research by Porter et al. (1976) as well as Neumann and Finaly-Neumann (1990). The research conceptual framework below illustrates definitions, concepts, and theories concerning institutional commitment and students at risk of dropping out of the university.

Phase 1

Phase 2

Figure 1 Research conceptual framework

Research methodology

Phase 1: Quantitative research

1. Research population and sample

The research population was comprised of 408 Walailak University students at risk of dropping out of the university in during the academic years 2016 to 2019.

The research samples were divided into the following groups:

1) 24 students at risk of dropping out in academic year 2016

2) 31 students at risk of dropping out in academic year 2017

3) 82 students at risk of dropping out in academic year 2018

4) 65 students at risk of dropping out in academic year 2019

All four groups amounted to a total research sample size of 202 students whoe were systematically derived from a calculation formula developed by Yamane (1973 cited in Wanichsupawong, 2003) and random sampling using stratified sampling with the students in each year of study.

2. Research instrument

For the research instrument applied in this study, the researcher reviewed a variety of concepts, theories, and research related to organizational commitment. The correctness of the content, suggestions, and content validity were done according to the Index of Consistency (IC). The consistency between the questions and the main idea is between 0.67 to 1.00. The valid questionnaires were tested on 30 samples, and rated to find out the reliability based on Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The final questionnaires completed by the study sample had a 0.789 level of reliability.

The study was conducted using a questionnaire developed by the researcher featuring components concerning the factors influencing institutional commitment among students at risk of dropping out of Walailak University. It was constructed based on an extensive review of literature focusing on the study's scope which is institutional commitment of students with susceptibility to university dropout. The questionnaire was aimed to collect data to ultimately formulate guidelines for promoting commitment to an institution among students at risk of dropping out. The questionnaire's reliability scored 0.789.

3. Data collection

Prior to data collection, with official support from the Educational Administration, Faculty of Education, Prince of Songkla University Pattani Campus, the researcher officially requested permission from Walailak University to distribute the questionnaire in the data collection process. To ensure the respondents' comprehension upon completing the questionnaire, the researchers distributed each of the 202 copies in person and were able to retrieve 202 complete copies afterwards, accounting for 100 percent of questionnaires returned.

4. Data analysis

Data from the questionnaires were analyzed using quantitative data analysis software. Data from Part 1, regarding the questionnaire respondents' demographic data, were categorized into gender, department and year of study before being analyzed for descriptive statistical data,

namely a percentage, an average, and the standard deviation. Likewise, data from Part 2, providing insight into guidelines for promoting institutional commitment among the Walailak University students at risk of dropping out of the programs, were analyzed for Arithmetic Mean and standard deviation. Additionally, a t-test and One-way ANOVA was also conducted, with data categorized into department and year of study, to compare the factors influencing institutional commitment among Walailak University students at risk of dropping out of the programs together with multiple comparisons using least significant difference (LSD).

Phase 2: Qualitative data
The method employed for qualitative data collection was a Focus Group Discussion.
1. Focus group discussion participants
Nine (9) Walailak University students with susceptibility to program dropout were recruited through purposeful selection means on the basis of criteria as follows:
- Obtained a GPA lower than 2.00
- Requested to drop out of the program or not be recognized as "registered" in the term surveyed
- Represented 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th year students in the Schools of Humanities and Social sciences, Schools of Sciences and Technology, and Schools of Health Sciences

2. Research instrument development
An interview form intended to develop the guidelines for promoting institutional commitment among Walailak students at risk of dropping out was constructed based on review of literature including documents, textbooks and research articles falling under this study's scope. As a result, the conceptual framework emerged, featuring these six principle aspects: 1) relationship with peers, seniors and juniors, 2) rapport with teachers, 3) overall atmosphere within the educational institution, 4) a sense of institutional ownership, 5) institutional engagement, and 6) belief in the institution.

3. Data collection
For the process of data collection, the researcher was in charge of moderating the discussion by presenting the underlining factors influencing institutional commitment among Walailak University students at risk of dropping out to the participants. The discussion topics were: 1) How do you develop the relationship between your friends and your lecturers in the institution?, 2) How do you get yourself to engage more?, and 3) How can the institution help cultivate students' sense of belonging? The participants engaged in a discussion related to these questions and the data that emerged from the discussion was processed, analyzed and presented in text form.

4. Data analysis
Data was analyzed using a content analysis method, distinguishing and categorizing content or concepts emerging from the focus group discussion. Results were then put through the process of regrouping until patterns arose. The patterns were developed into guidelines for

promoting institutional commitment among Walailak University students at risk of dropping out of the university.

Results

        Objective 1: To investigate levels of the factors influencing institutional engagement of students at risk of dropping out of Walailak University. Investigation of the overall factors influencing institutional commitment revealed that the students at risk of dropping out of Walailak University demonstrated a high level of institutional commitment. Nevertheless, the average scores of students' institutional commitment in terms of the atmosphere in an educational institution were relatively lower compared to the other aspects as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 The average scores, standard deviation (S.D.) and levels of the factors influencing institutional commitment among the Walailak University students at risk of dropping out of the programs, overall and in each aspect

Factors influencing institutional commitment	$\overline{X}$	$S.D$	Levels of commitment factors
1. Relationship with peers, seniors and juniors	4.39	0.34	High
2. Rapport with teachers	4.45	0.39	High
3. Overall atmosphere in the institution	3.89	0.45	High
4. A sense of institutional ownership	3.95	0.47	High
5. Institutional engagement	4.26	0.42	High
6. Belief in the institution	4.19	0.34	High
Total	4.19	0.22	High

        From Table 1, it was found that students at risk of dropping out of Walailak University had a high level of institutional commitment overall ($\overline{X} = 4.19$, SD = 0.22)

        Objective 2: To compare the factors influencing institutional engagement of students at risk of dropping out of Walailak University, categorized by gender, department and years of study.

        1．Gender: The gender of the Walailak University students at risk of dropping out of university did not demonstrate different levels of the overall institutional commitment.

        Deeper investigation on the aspect basis suggested that, for institutional engagement, male students had more factors influencing institutional commitment, compared to female students at a statistical significance of .05 as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Analysis results of the comparison of levels of the factors influencing institutional commitment among Walailak university students at risk of dropping out of the programs, categorized by gender

Factors influencing institutional commitment	Male		Female		t	Sig 1 tailed
	$\overline{X}$	S.D.	$\overline{X}$	S.D.		
1. Relationship with peers, seniors and juniors	4.37	0.33	4.43	0.35	-1.166	0.123
2. Rapport with teachers	4.21	0.33	4.16	0.35	1.000	0.159
3. Overall atmosphere in the institution	3.87	0.45	3.92	0.47	-0.606	0.272
4. A sense of institutional ownership	3.94	0.47	3.96	0.45	-0.214	0.415
5. Institutional engagement	4.30	0.43	4.16	0.37	2.163	0.016*
6. Belief in the institution	4.46	0.39	4.40	0.38	1.995	0.023*
Total	4.19	0.22	4.17	0.23	0.626	0.266

** $P < 0.01$, * $P < 0.05$

From Table 2, it was found that the students' at risk of dropping out of Walailak University did not vary by gender in relation to their institutional commitment.

2. Department: Walailak University students at risk of dropping out in different departments did not demonstrate different levels of the overall institutional commitment, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Analysis results of the comparison of levels of the factors influencing institutional commitment among Walailak university students at risk of dropping out of various departments, categorized based on schools

Factors influencing institutional commitment	Humanities Social science		Sciences Technology		Health science		F	Sig 1 tailed	Paired differences
	$\overline{X}$	S.D.	$\overline{X}$	S.D.	$\overline{X}$	S.D.			
1. Relationship with peers, seniors and juniors	4.35	0.36	4.35	0.36	4.51	0.28	2.80	0.184	-
2. Rapport with teachers	4.11	0.35	4.23	0.34	4.25	0.28	3.30	0.142	-
3. Overall atmosphere in the institution	3.76	0.43	3.95	0.47	4.97	0.43	4.09	0.638	-

Factors influencing institutional commitment	Humanities Social science		Sciences Technology		Health science		F	Sig 1 tailed	Paired differences
	$\overline{X}$	S.D.	$\overline{X}$	S.D.	$\overline{X}$	S.D.			
4. A sense of institutional ownership	3.89	.47	3.96	0.48	4.05	0.39	1.40	0.417	-
5. Institutional engagement	4.26	0.44	4.23	0.42	4.43	0.35	0.90	0.597	-
6. Belief in the institution	4.45	0.38	4.43	0.42	4.46	0.34	0.20	0.054	-
Total	4.14	0.26	4.19	0.20	4.26	0.19	3.60	0.069	-

** $P < 0.01$, * $P < 0.05$

From Table 3, it was found that the students who studied in different departments and who were at risk of dropping out of Walailak University were not different in their institutional commitment.

3. Year of study: Based on years of study, Walailak University students at risk of dropping out of the university demonstrated overall institutional commitment at a statistical significance of .05.

In the aspect of the relationship with peers, seniors and juniors, Pairwise-comparison analysis of the factors influencing institutional commitment among Walailak University students at risk of dropping out of the programs using the Least Significant Different Test (LSD) revealed that 1st year students demonstrated a higher level of the relationship among peers, senior and junior friends than 4th year students as displayed in table 4.

Table 4 Analysis results of the comparison of levels of the factors influencing institutional commitment among Walailak university students at risk of dropping out, categorized based on years of study

Factors influencing institutional commitment	Year 1		Year 2		Year 3		Year 4		F	welch	Sig 1 tailed	Paired differences
	$\overline{X}$	S.D.	$\overline{X}$	S.D.	$\overline{X}$	S.D.	$\overline{X}$	S.D				
1.relationship with peers, senior, junior	4.28	0.31	4.33	0.33	4.49	0.32	4.43	0.34	2.734		0.045*	(1,3) (3,4)
2.Rapport with teachers	4.15	0.38	4.14	0.33	4.27	0.31	4.37	0.23		0.663	0.577	-
3.Overall atmosphere in institution	3.74	0.42	3.87	0.44	3.91	0.48	4.32	0.21		2.323	0.076	-
4.A sense of institutional ownership	3.86	.47	3.94	0.48	3.95	0.51	4.20	0.23		3.749	0.058	-

Factors influencing institutional commitment	Year 1		Year 2		Year 3		Year 4		F	welch	Sig 1 tailed	Paired differences
	$\overline{X}$	S.D.	$\overline{X}$	S.D.	$\overline{X}$	S.D.	$\overline{X}$	S.D				
5. Institution engagement	4.25	0.42	4.21	0.42	4.26	0.46	4.33	0.28	0.377		0.770	-
6. Belief in institution	4.43	0.39	4.40	0.47	4.46	0.38	4.51	0.25	0.492		0.006*	(1,4) (2,4)
Total	4.13	0.24	4.18	0.21	4.20	0.22	4.34	0.14	4.945		0.002*	(1,4) (2,4)

** $P < 0.01$, * $P < 0.05$

From Table 4, it was found that the students at risk of dropping out of Walailak University categorized by different years of study were not different in their institutional commitment. When considered individually, it was found that their level of engagement with teachers was different. When using the Least Significant Different Test (LSD) it was found that there was significant statistical difference at 0.05.

Objective 3: To seek guidelines for promoting institutional commitment among Walailak University students at risk of dropping out of the university.

The research results suggested that Walailak University students at risk of dropping out demonstrated a high level of overall institutional commitment. It can be seen that despite being categorized by a Grade Point Average (GPA) as students at risk of dropping out, the students were significantly identified with two aspects of the factors constituting a high level of institutional commitment namely: a rapport with teachers and the relationship with peers, seniors and juniors. On the contrary, the overall atmosphere within the educational institution, as demonstrated in the data, appeared to be the factor at the lowest level of institutional commitment. Consequently, the research would like to propose guidelines for enhancing institutional commitment of students at risk of dropping out of Walailak University as follows:

Guidelines for enhancing institutional commitment in the aspect of relationship with peers, seniors and juniors

1) Organize activities in which peers, seniors and juniors can all cooperate in their design and participation.

2) The activities organized should motivate collaboration between seniors and juniors or overall teamwork skills.

3) Promote a meaningful and positive relationship between seniors and juniors through various activities, i.e., casual meetings or lesson reviews.

Guidelines for enhancing institutional commitment in the aspect of rapport with teachers

1) Promote activities upholding the tradition of paying respect to teachers such as hosting the Teacher's Day Observation Ceremony.

2) Teachers actively acknowledge and act upon their roles in providing students support and encouragement to succeed in every aspect of university life, as well as demonstrate a willingness to help students who are facing problems.

3) The institution should require that teachers complete a student counseling training to augment this area of field-specific knowledge as well as guide teachers in different

techniques useful for helping students facing problems, whether they are susceptible to drop out or need help in any way. With this new focus, the teachers' responsibility beyond class teaching will be emphasized.

Guidelines for enhancing institutional commitment in the aspect of the overall atmosphere in an educational institution

In terms of the atmosphere within an education institution, every aspect should be developed as well as the learning atmosphere in order to genuinely promote learning. For instance, classroom conditions, communal spaces serving as sitting or study areas, computers and audio-visual aids for education should meet students' needs both in terms of quantity and quality. Also, security systems and other facilities should be provided as follows:

1) It is essential that the institution provide and support fundamental facilities for student activities, i.e., club rooms, activity venues accommodating student activities, etc. The support given will significantly facilitate and allow students to cooperate as a team, growing a sense of belonging, love and unity among the students, as well as cultivating management skills, which is of a great benefit to not only the students themselves but also the institution.

2) The institution should step up its effort to establish a standard environmental management system and create a facilitative learning atmosphere, accompanied by effective implementation, continual result monitoring, which altogether satisfies the students.

Guidelines for enhancing institutional commitment in the aspect of a sense of institutional ownership

1) Organize the university's events encouraging equal participation from the students of all years to reinforce a sense unity among the students and pride in the institution.

2) Promote institutional ownership by planting a seed of pride in the institution among the students such as doing activities with the institution's alumni.

Guidelines for enhancing institutional commitment in the aspect of institutional engagement

1) Provide support enabling students to exercise their capacity to produce work contributing to the common good of society.

2) Give students opportunities to showcase their talents beyond the academic area, such as through sports, music, etc.

3) The institution must strive to accommodate students' constructive needs, i.e. well-equipped laboratories, well-maintained sports facilities, etc.

Guidelines for enhancing institutional commitment in the aspect of belief in the Institution

1) The institution should make it a mission to create a well-balanced life for students within the spheres of academic functions, daily life and activities for constructive activities.

2) The institution facilitates students' creation of academic work and publication of research establishing the students' credibility valued by outside sectors.

Conclusions and Discussions

In this section, the researcher would like to discuss the crucial topics emerging from the analysis which are as follows:

1) The research suggested that the overall institutional commitment of students at risk of dropping out of Walailak University registered at a high level, indicating that the university has sufficiently developed and implemented policies reinforcing institutional commitment among the students. In terms of overall institutional engagement, the gender and department variables did not generate any impact on the overall institutional engagement at a statistical significance of 0.05. This phenomenon may be ascribed to the fact that, regardless of sex, department or year of study, both male and female students gained an equal access to the university services and benefits as well as absolute freedom to engage in any constructive activities related to individual capacities or interests. In relation to this, both gender and department variables empirically carried no weight in the overall institutional commitment. This phenomenon is in consistency with that posited in the study by Wongsuraset (2009) investigating "Employee engagement towards Kasikornbank Public Company Limited in Zone 32". The study's findings likewise suggested that individual characteristic variables namely: sex, age, years of professional experience, and salary rate did not exert any statistically significant influence over organizational commitment. Nevertheless, the variable of year of study of students at risk of dropping out generated a marked impact on the overall institutional commitment of the students, at a statistical significance level at 0.05. One highly sensible explanation involves the period of a freshman students' adjustment to tertiary level education implicitly varying from one program to another and also varying due to their individual experiences in campus life. During this transitional period, little or none of the institutional commitment might not yet be conceived. Gradual development of institutional commitment started forming and becoming more solidified when students' progress to senior years of study, owing to the post-adjustment period of academic and campus life, constant participation in activities, more well-established rapport with teachers and a bigger circle of friends. This phenomenon evidently conceptualizes commitment as a feeling consolidating in relation to time together spent in activities or an amount of shared experience which is consistent with the concept proposed by Steers and Porter (1983) that there are four substantial factors governing institutional commitment, namely: 1) Individual characteristics, 2) Characteristics of responsibilities and roles an individual plays in them (i.e., the responsibility being characterized by its high value and specific roles), 3) Organizational structure, and 4) Work experience.

2) It is quite evident that the relationship established among peers, seniors and juniors in the institution significantly affects institutional commitment among the students at risk of dropping out of Walailak University. Despite students' susceptibility to premature termination of study, relationships with friends have a tremendous influence over attitude, feeling and behavior of the students. It is essentially due to the fact that the essential proportion of students' time on a regular basis throughout the entire period of tertiary education in the institution is spent with friends. Little by little, they establish a long-cultivated connection among friends whom they have met in the activities (i.e., extracurricular activity, casual study, tutoring or other institutional functions). Having friends or forming groups of friends are correlated with the feeling of being accepted and social engagement. Students benefit in various ways from making friends who possess positive character traits such as trustworthiness, generosity and sincerity from whom they can seek advice or form tightened friendships with. These relationships are more likely to make students feel committed to the university as a place

providing a good society and friends. In other words, friendship leads to commitment to one's institution which is in compliance with the study by Meesaen (2015) investigating students' commitment to the university of Dhurakij Pundit University which looked at undergraduate students in the regular program ranging from 1st to 4th year of study. The findings revealed a correlation between the relationship with friends and institutional commitment among the Dhurakij Pundit University undergraduate students at a statistically significant level of 0.05. This may be because the relationship with friends is perceived as important and exerting a profound influence over students in a university, especially as the students are of the same age as proposed by Newcomb (1962) pointing out that a student's friends extremely dominate their tertiary level attitude, skills, capacity and personality. A student's friends were also categorized as the most prominent external force on the student's life. This is in alignment with another study by Astin (1993) which arrived at the conclusion that the relationship with friends does dictate how thoughts, feelings and behaviors of students are shaped or altered.

3) It can be said that the rapport between students and teachers undoubtedly generates an impact on institutional commitment among the students at risk of dropping out of Walailak University since students normally maintain frequent interactions with their teachers. The more students struggled academically, the more frequently they interacted with their teachers. This was evidenced by the teachers constantly extending a helping hand to the students in need. Additionally, the institution's small group learning setting increased the interaction between the students and the teachers. Therefore, close interaction contributed to a good rapport.

The teachers were perceived as being respectable, reliable and impressive by the students. Furthermore, the students also reported their faith in the teachers' credibility, expertise and ability to give advice. These all contributed to the entrenched rapport. As posited by Tinto (1997) for effective teaching to occur, it is essential that teachers navigate their teaching under a teamwork perspective and assign students active participation roles in directing their learning. Within this setting, the teachers shall be in charge of creating a challenging learning atmosphere by providing knowledge related to self-directed learning or learner autonomy so that the students are able to make a decision concerning how they potentially learn best. A well-developed rapport between the teachers and the students also significantly facilitated the students' learning atmosphere. When problems arise, teachers are the first source of advice that students seek, regarding either personal or academic matters. Therefore, an excellent rapport between teachers and students and the students' institutional commitment are closely intertwined which is in consistency with the study by Meesaen (2015) which investigated students' commitment to the university of Dhurakij Pundit University among undergraduate students in the regular program ranging from 1st to 4th year of study. In his study, it was found that the quality of rapport between students and teachers affects institutional commitment among the undergraduate students. Furthermore, Ryan (1960, as cited in Meesaen, 2015) stated that rapport with students was in fact one of a teacher's defining traits expressed through various actions such as genuinely understanding students, offering help when needed, taking students' problems to heart-either personal or academic matters, complimenting well-executed work, acknowledging and being receptive to students' abilities and opinions, and giving encouragement and support as deemed appropriate.

4) The atmosphere within the education institution appeared to produce an impact on institutional commitment among the students at risk of dropping out of Walailak University. In this context, atmosphere within an educational institution is defined as classrooms, buildings, libraries, laboratories, student canteens as well as services and benefits, equipment and technologies, facilities and overall atmosphere within the university accommodating students' learning. All of these factors in creating an ideal atmosphere should be recognized as one of the institution's priorities. Furthermore, there must be a well-established management system to keep the inside environment adequately organized, clean and sanitary in order to properly support the learning and teaching activities. Hence, optimizing the students' learning atmosphere is seen as a necessity to improve students' overall satisfaction and institutional commitment. On this matter, Pimpa (2004) defines an institution's internal atmosphere as every single component existing in an educational institution entity, whether it is animate or inanimate, natural or artificial, physical or social. The definition, thus, also extends to teaching and relations with members of staff within an educational institution as well as a myriad of systems involved in activities bringing about behavioral change in students' development in terms of both attitude and experiential aspects. Likewise, Wattananarong (2012) posited that a suitable physical environment was primarily what an institution must provide students with, which included uncrowded classrooms, adequate canteen space and safe and clean recreational areas.

Similarly, Khamkerd (1998) conceptualized institutional atmosphere as a condition deriving from the interaction between individuals and the environment within the school, which has an impact on an individual's feeling. It is the condition both invisible to the eyes and abstract in its nature but a reflection of an individual's feelings. To put it simply, "good atmosphere" occurs when humans immerse themselves in a particular environment and feel a sense of pleasantness. Schools producing such an atmosphere will amplify collaboration and happiness. On the other hand, Sinnoi (2007) found that the first factor affecting dropout students was that the students could not understand what their lecturer taught them and students could not keep pace with text book reading.

5) A sense of institutional ownership, institutional engagement and belief in an institution generated an impact on institutional commitment of the students at risk of dropping out of Walailak University. This finding may be explained by the fact that to be enrolled in an educational institution, students must basically prove themselves to be knowledgeable and competent to the degree qualifying them to get into the desired university. The enrollment success subsequently creates self-pride which, as a consequence, reinforces pride in the institution and a sense of institutional ownership. It also promotes self-esteem by appropriately providing opportunities for students to showcase their capabilities and talents, which will strengthen one's sense of belonging to the institution (Eggert, 1994). Entering the equation is also students' satisfaction with services in diverse spheres, including the teaching and learning, extracurricular activities, the university's internal atmosphere as well as the university administration's effectiveness in the period during which the students are studying. These factors result in a sense of belonging to the institution, perception of the university as a second home, love and bonding, and the desire to uphold the university's reputation and be part of it. Also, the students will feel dissatisfied or even offended when someone poorly comments on

the university and be willing to cooperate as the university requires. On the other hand, if students lack pride in the university, their cooperation in any institutional functions or activities shall be scarce and they will not recommend the institution to any of their relatives or friends. This is in strong consistency with the study by Galliher et al. (2007) which maintained that promoting students to recognize their abilities, developing self-pride and the feeling of being well-recognized by others from both inside and outside the institution contributes to institutional commitment following self-pride.

Suggestions

The researcher suggests the following implementations based on this study:

1) The institution should promote activities co-organized by students in which students have to actively engage in the process of designing the activities on the basis of close collaboration and teamwork with peers, seniors, and juniors.

2) The institution should provide opportunities for teachers to augment their knowledge about student counseling so that they can provide advice for the students facing problems or needing help and be able to truly fulfill their role as a teacher beyond the classroom setting.

3) The institution should place importance on the learning atmosphere within the institution as it dramatically affects institutional commitment. Every aspect of the environment as well as the overall atmosphere should be organized in a way which will facilitate the students' learning. The internal environment needs to be managed to maintain the institution's beauty and safety. Audio and visual aids for education should be sufficiently supplied so that learning and teaching activities as well as other activities can run smoothly.

4) The institution should organize important events in coordination with the students in order to cultivate love, pride and a sense of institutional ownership such as a Foundation Day Ceremony, constructive freshmen orientations, homecoming ceremonies, and other activities with the university alumni.

5) The institution should provide students with opportunities to showcase their talents or abilities in any constructive activities related to their interest, such as sports, music and other activities.

6) The institution should make it a mission to enhance students' well-being in the aspect of academic performance, daily life and any other activity contributing to personal and common good.

Suggestions for future study

1) It is highly recommended that a further study be conducted to focus on institutional commitment, particularly in the aspect of atmosphere within an institution, so that the results can be applied to further the institutional commitment among the students.

2) For the purpose of early reinforcement of institutional commitment, a study under this topic should be conducted with 1st year student samples.

3) Research should be conducted into the factors influencing students' development of pride in an institution and a sense of institutional ownership.

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