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Assessing different perceptions towards the importance of a work-life balance: a comparable study between thai and international programme students

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Abstract

This paper has the objectives of evaluating the different perceptions of Chulalongkorn students who are registered within Thai and International Curriculum towards the understanding and awareness of the concept of Well-being with a key focus on the importance of a Work Life Balance (WLB). Sixty five questionnaires were distributed among students who undertook courses offering aspects of WLB as part of the Introduction of Recreation for Thai curriculum and Effective Career Management for International Curriculum during second semester 2013. Data analysis was processed by statistical programming software and accordingly categorized into groups of data by thematic analysis. The findings revealed that two groups of students had a high awareness of WLB importance and stated that this concept is essential to ensure an optimal and valued life as well as the development of knowledge and skills from the educational system. However, both of them stated the problem of limited WLB in practice due to an overload of university's assignments and projects but they have acknowledged a desire to adopt the WLB concept through recreational activities outside of and after their studies. Furthermore, students who has undertaken Thai curriculum perceived that most of the university's facilities and activities offered definitive aspects of a WLB more than other groups held the general perception that the university should improve those ones. The paper delivers an in-depth Discussion ending with a conclusion encompassing all aspects noted and then looks further to the importance and future implications of this research which presents the extra-curricula activities that university should conduct to improve students' quality of life and WLB.

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1. Introduction

In recent times, Work-Life Balance (WLB), the concept of balancing work and leisure-time in harmony with physical, emotional, and spiritual health (Simmons 2012), has become an essential concern for many organisations. The reason being that better work-life balance employees are more influenced towards job retention and focus (Susi and Jawaharrani 2010), as well as overall satisfaction in work and life (Guest 2002). Such claims are supported by numerous studies including Greenhaus *et al.* (2002), Guest (2002) and Wong and Go (2009), many of which identify that individuals are more likely to have an improved quality of life, mental health or well-being when he or she can balance both their working lives and life outside of work. Additionally, further content acknowledge the ability of a WLB to influence a healthy lifestyle, highlighting the importance of leisure and recreation to encourage well-being (Godbey 1999), to act as a stress buffering role (Coleman 1993; Coleman and Iso-Aloha 1993; Trainor *et al.* 2009) and foster a higher quality of life (Lloyd and Auld 2002) and equally as important, to increase work productivity and efficiency (Guest 2002).

In addition to the concern for WLB by organisations and business, there is also a risen awareness concerning academic lifestyles, several studies focusing on WLB regarding the condition of teachers (Bubb and Earley 2004), academic and support staff aspects (Doherty and Manfredi 2006) and the viewpoint of students in many levels such as highschool (Tausig and Fenwick 2001); college (Doble and Supriya 2010); and doctoral students (Martinez *et al.* 2013). In regard to students, it was revealed by Doble and Supriya (2010) that a balanced student lifestyle can be accomplished by effective time management, healthy eating, being active, setting goals and priorities, encouraging successful degree completion (Brus 2006; Stimson and Filer 2011; Matinez *et al.* 2013). However, some may struggle to obtain life balance from individual factors such as personality, personal control and ability to cope under stress and pressure, gender, age and so on (Guest 2002). Students can also be caught in a state of imbalance within educational domains primarily due to a lack of time and overloaded schedules (Matinez *et al.* 2013) such as keeping up with schoolwork (Misra and McKean 2000), excessive homework (Frazer and Kohn 1986; Doble and Supriya 2010) and assessment deadlines (Misra and McKean 2000). All of which further impose stress upon students, as noted such 'unwell-being' holds the potential to negatively impact both physical and mental impairment (Murphy and Archer 1996) and is in conflict with student productivity and effective time management. According to Grund *et al.* (2014) it is not only academic success that is sufficient for students, on the contrary, they should hold a keen focus on leisure time and other activities also in order to be successful students. Hence, it can represent the connection to WLB by the context that students should concentrate on school's work along with leisure time. As Chulalongkorn University, the first university of Thailand has a focal point from University Desired Characteristics of Graduate stated in the university's policy that students should maintain their well-being and deal with pressure along with aspects of education in order to be valuable in a global society (Chulalongkorn University Council 2010). This also implies that ideally students may be better for not only focusing on an academic perspective, but also taking into consideration their well-being and other aspects of a work-life balance. However, there are limited studies concerning the perceptions of Chulalongkorn students on whether they perceived their life balance to be influencing their well-being or characteristics of such.

Considering the relationship between WLB and well-being, this research aims to examine the connection of these two aspects along with leisure and recreation as the supportive approach for students well-being by assessing different perceptions toward the importance of WLB from a comparative study between Thai and International Programme Students that evaluates the differences of their WLB, self-leisure management for well-being by using recreational activities. Additionally, assessing the perceptions of these two groups towards the activities and facilities that university are offering in order to discover if the activities and facilities are sufficient to encourage students' WLB and well-being.

2. Objectives

- To examine relations between work life balance and relevant context including well-being and leisure and recreation
- To assess the different students' perceptions towards the concept of work-life balance and the activities and facilities that university provide for.

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