Coping Strategies on Academic
Performance among Undergraduate
Students in Thailand

Linatda Kuncharin* & Dr. Abdul Rashid Bin Mohamad**

*School of Educational Studies, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, MALAYSIA. E-Mail: linatda[at]gmail[dot]com
**School of Educational Studies, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, MALAYSIA. E-Mail: rash[ at] usm[ dot] my

Abstract—The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of coping strategies among Undergraduate students in Thailand. The instrument in this study used the Three Scales of Academic Coping Strategies (Sullivan, 2010), which was translated into Thai language, it contained 56 statements including Approach Coping Strategy, Avoidance Coping Strategy, and Social Support Coping Strategy. The sample consisted of 200 Thai undergraduate students who have been randomly chosen as respondents. A pilot study was conducted to identify the validity of the translated version. The reliability coefficients (Cronbach Alpha) for using coping strategies (Thai version) was Approach Coping Strategy (0.96), Avoidance Coping Strategy (0.95), and Social Support Coping Strategy (0.91). The reliability coefficients (Cronbach Alpha) on the effectiveness of The Three Scales of Coping Strategies was Approach Coping Strategy (0.96), Avoidance Coping Strategy (0.95) and Social Support Coping Strategy (0.95). The finding showed that 86% of the respondents agreed that Social Support Coping Strategy helped them to cope up with academic performance, 84.5% agreed that Avoidance Coping strategy was useful, while 83.5% gave positive responses to Approach Coping Strategy.

Keywords—Academic Coping Strategies; Academic Performance; Coping Strategies; Thai Undergraduate Students; Undergraduate Students.

I. INTRODUCTION

Higher education in Thailand was started in 19th century [Thailand, Commission of Higher Education, 2012]. From the 1960s to 1990s, many public universities were formed by amalgamation of colleges or upgrades of college to universities by Thailand, Ministry of Education. The Higher Education system policies in Thailand were set towards a new autonomous education system in 1997. The Thai government transformed the public universities from their original bureaucratic system to an autonomous public universities system. Under the new autonomous public universities system were allowed to independent set their own regulation with regard to academic affair independently, personal administrations, and managed the budget and asset independently [Teerawut, 2011].

In Thailand, predominantly, universities and colleges provide higher education. The universities and colleges provide two levels of education, the diploma and graduate degrees. According to Thailand Ministry of Education, over 2.2 million students are currently enrolled in the higher education sector and the participation rates of university age students has increased significantly over the last few years, from an average of 26% to the current average of 40% [Thailand, Ministry of Education, 2011]. In recent years, there has been a significant increase in higher education opportunities with the availability of 78 public universities and 89 private universities [Thailand, Ministry of Education, 2011].

Students’ admission to the higher institutions in Thailand is the high school entrance examination taken at the end of Mattayom 6 (Grade 12). Undergraduate students are the students whose age ranges are between 19 to 22 years old [Thailand, Ministry of Education, 2008].

The Ministry of Education (2011) had introduced several strategies to help university students to cope with not only on academic performance but also to help them to provide more opportunities to express and actualize their natural talents and potential. Besides, the ministry also introduced developmental programs to help them in handling their continued personal-social, career, and educational development. The specific objective of Thailand’s Eleventh National Economic and Social Development Plan (2012-2016) related to academic coping strategies included the following:

- To invest in raising the quality academic strategies to address the development of teachers, curricula, instructional media, and information technology.
- To adjust teacher training in academic excellence by developing coping strategies to ensure quality and high moral standards among teachers.
To promote academic coping strategies by using the information technology to enhance learning efficiency.

To develop a quality and standard of academic coping strategies of higher education institutions.

To promote and adjust regulations of academic coping strategies to support the decentralisation of educational administration and management to district education offices and academic institutions.

To encourage the academic coping strategies practice in educational management.

There have been considerable changes in the structure of the management and administration in Thailand in order to support the key teaching and learning changes stipulated by the 1999 National Education Act. Act and National Education Plan (2012-2016) which govern the administration and provision of education and training, the underlying principles in reform of education system emphasise a unified policy, flexibility implementation, decentralisation, quality assurance, improvement academic coping strategies in the professional education of teacher at higher level of education. In the responsive of academic coping strategies among undergraduate students [Thailand, Ministry of Education, 2011], there are certain strategies planned and introduced;

- To promote academic coping strategies and develop Thai undergraduate students living in a knowledge-based society at vocational and higher education levels to be professionals, modern citizens of the world with diverse skills, competitiveness in global markets.
- To support academic coping strategies and create an intelligence capital of the nation.
- To increase academic coping strategies in English so as to remain a priority with government in developing a five year plan (2012-2016) for making English language teaching and learning a central theme for undergraduate students. At the university level, both public and private Thai universities reformed English language strategies in the workplace.

In conclusion, English is the most popular foreign language taught in universities. Since the introduction of English language teaching, many substantial changes have been made to the curriculum in order to make Thailand’s economy more competitive in the global market, and to meet the international community’s expectations and demands [Attapol, 2010].

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Generally, undergraduate students are facing stress with regard to their academic performance problems because they lack of the academic coping strategies to help them cope with stress and academic performance problems [Paitoon, 2012]. Jedsarid & Kasetchai (2011) have examined factors affecting students’ academic achievement at Prince of Songkla University. The aim of their study was to investigate the factors affecting academic achievement of undergraduate students who fell into probation status. Proportional stratified sampling was employed among 390 undergraduate students from different programme. Data were collected via questionnaires and interviews. Binary logistic regression was used to analyse factors affecting academic achievement of undergraduate students under probation condition. The authors found that gender was one of the factors affecting academic achievement besides stress, students’ responsibility, and environmental factors.

In Thai culture, parents expect their children to be excelled in academic since their primary school. Their expectation is higher once their child entered university. It is agreed and understood that obtaining the highest academic credential is prestigious among Thai family and it is always rewards in the long-term. Undergraduate students are encouraged to pursue their studies in order to comply with Thai social norms and/or to gain a higher social status, which is often a ticket for moving to a better life style [Kiatisak et al., 2009]. He also suggested that academic coping strategies, knowledge and personal attributes are the major factors that could lead to their academic achievement, to their advancement, and to their better success in future life.

Passakorn et al., (2009) studied about stress, factors affecting stress, and stress coping among 400 of the first to fourth year students in prince of Songkla University. The finding showed that the academic and educational factors could significantly predict stress for undergraduate students with a coefficient of variation of 38.5% (p<0.01). Four academic coping strategies that related to stress were being practiced by the students. The strategies were the palliative coping behaviour; the emotive coping behaviour; the confrontive coping behaviour; and the subtractive coping behaviour. Some of the undergraduate students consulted their family and friends only if their coping strategy failed [Passakorn et al., 2009].

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of coping strategies on academic performance among Thai undergraduate students. Specifically, the objectives of the study are to:

- Identify the academic coping strategies practiced by Thai undergraduate students.
- Investigate the effectiveness of the Three Scales of Academic Coping Strategies on academic performance among Thai undergraduate students.

IV. METHODOLOGY

This is a descriptive study that examined the academic coping strategies and its effectiveness among Thai undergraduate students. Hence a quantitative study is well suited to “answering questions of who, where, how many, how much, and what is the relationship between specific variables”. However, quantitative research studies typically yield data that do not explain the reasons underlying prevalence rates, relationships, or differences that have been identified by the researchers [Combs & Onwuegbuzie, 2012].
V. Samples

The population for this study were undergraduate students from Ratchamangala University of Technology Srivijaya, who were randomly selected (Table 1). From the second year students, 35 (17.50%) were females and 35 (17.50%) were males. Meanwhile, the randomly selected student samples of third year consisted of 30 (15.00%) females and 30 (15.00%) males, and from fourth year students 35 (17.50%) were females and 35 (17.50%) were males.

VI. The Instrument

The Three Scales of Academic Coping Strategies [Sullivan, 2010] which was based on the original version was translated into Thai language and was used in this study. The instrument consisted of three parts, the background information, the Three Scales of Academic Coping Strategies, and the third part is interview. Only part one and two of the instruments were used, while the third part (Interview Section) was not conducted in this study. The Three Scales of Academic Coping Strategies (Thai version) consists of 56 statements. The Approach Factor was measured using 23 statements, the Avoidance Factor was measured by 19 statements, and the Social Support Factor was measured by 14 statements.

VII. Finding and Discussions

7.1. Academic Coping Strategies used by Thai Undergraduate Students

About 172 (86.00%) undergraduate student agreed that social support strategies helped them to cope with academic performance problem (mean = 1.28). Besides, 169 (84.50%) of them agreed that they used avoidance coping strategies to cope with academic performance problem (mean = 1.34) and 167 (83.50%) of the undergraduates’ agreed that approach coping strategies had helped them to cope with academic performance problem (mean = 1.28) (Table 2). It showed that majority of the Thai undergraduates’ applied different strategies in order to cope with their academic performance.

7.2. Effectiveness of the Three Scales Academic Coping Strategies among Thai Undergraduate Students

Table 3 shows mean and standard deviations on the opinions of Thai undergraduate students about the effectiveness of academic coping strategies on academic performance problems (N = 200). The effectiveness of the Three Scales of Academic Coping Strategies had mean ranging from 4.39 to 4.71. The mean scale on the effectiveness of Social Support strategy on academic performance is 4.71, followed by Avoidance coping strategy (mean = 4.53), and Approach strategy (mean = 4.39).

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviations on the Effectiveness of Academic Coping Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Approach Strategy</td>
<td>4.39</td>
<td>1.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance Strategy</td>
<td>4.53</td>
<td>1.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Support Strategy</td>
<td>4.71</td>
<td>1.60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the finding, there is a strongly support that academic coping strategies helped Thai undergraduate students to perform better in their academics performance and coping strategies on academic performance are necessary for Thai undergraduate students. Even though the result showed that there were not much difference between the three strategies practiced by the undergraduates (social support strategy 86%; avoidance strategy 84.5%; approach strategy 83.5%), but social support strategy was popular among them. It was proved that undergraduates preferred to share their difficulties in study with their peers, family and lecturers. There were also undergraduates whom tried to avoid their difficulties by not taking any positive action to solve it (84.5%) besides, the third group whom practiced approach strategy whereby they tried hard to solve their academic problems during their studies. Thus, the result was tallied to the effectiveness of the Three Scale of Academic Coping Strategies which mentioned that the mean score of the social support strategy was 4.71.

VIII. Recommendations

A few recommendations should be highlighted in order to improve the academic performance of the Thai undergraduate students.

8.1. Ministry of Education

Ministry of Education should play a big role in helping the higher institutions in Thailand to produce better and highly academic achievers among the Thai undergraduates. As a government body with full authority, the ministry would be able to share their mission and vision with all the professionals in education, psychology and counselling in order to serve better for the benefit of the undergraduate students.

8.2. University

University itself should consider and introduce more quality and relevance programs involved undergraduate students in all university in Thailand. This is to make sure that all university would be able to produce the best and quality future leaders.
8.3. Parental
Parental direct involvement in their child curriculum and co-curriculum area would be more realistic if both parties, the parents and the university played their role. It is suggested that the parents should also receive training in academic coping strategies should particularly aim to foster positive attitudes, beliefs and actions not only among themselves but also their children.

8.4. Academic Advisor/Counsellor/Mentor
Academic Advisor/Counsellor/Mentor should introduce academic development programme which could help their low achievers students to excel.

IX. Conclusion
This study also suggested that Thai undergraduate students used social support coping strategy most frequently when they faced with academic problems. Besides, Thai undergraduate students tend to practice approach coping strategies and avoidance coping strategy less frequently when they faced difficulties in order to perform well in their academics. Many study have shown that social support coping strategy helped undergraduate students to improve their academic performance by receiving guidance from professors in their class [Welsh, 2010]; needing someone to express their emotions or talking to another student for emotional support [Nattsuda et al., 2013]; talking to someone who can be trusted [Paul, 2012].

Coping strategies can help undergraduate students to enhance their academic performance [Kadhikaran & Kumar, 2012]; improve class attendance, participation, persistence even when faced with setbacks or failure in general, and arm them with stronger more resilient self who can lead to a much more positive learning experience [Aun et al., 2011]; academic coping strategies helped undergraduate students to perform in their academic through academic coping strategies factors i.e. approach, avoidance, and social support [Sullivan, 2010]. In addition, academic coping strategies was also design to help undergraduate students to cope their life those that include physical well-being, emotional, spiritual, and psychological well-being [Yasin & Dzulkifli, 2009]. Normally, emotional coping strategy is usually practiced in the first year of undergraduate students while in later years the trend is changing towards cognitive, confrontive and painful problem solving [Mahajan, 2010].

References