

## **FACTORS AFFECTING SENSE OF BELONGING AND ITS RELATION TO EDUCATIONAL OUTPUTS OF STUDENT TEACHERS**

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### **Abstract**

The main purpose of the present study was to investigate the factors affecting sense of belonging and its relation to educational outputs of student teachers. Questionnaire survey method was applied and quantitative approach was executed in this study. A total of 720 student teachers (360 males and 360 females) from Yangon University of Education, Sagaing University of Education and University for the Development of National Races participated in this study. The required sample was selected by using random sampling technique. As the research instruments, the sense of belonging questionnaire (SOB) (Dabney Chatwin Ingram, 2012), Factors Affecting Sense of Belonging Questionnaire (FASOB) (Dabney Chatwin Ingram, 2012) and Educational Outputs Questionnaire (EO) (Dabney Chatwin Ingram, 2012) were applied to examine factors affecting sense of belonging and its relation to educational outputs student teachers. In the analysis of data, descriptive statistics, independent sample t-test, one way ANOVA, Pearson's correlation technique and stepwise multiple regression analysis were used in this study. According to the results of regression analyses, it can be concluded that university commitment to diversity, mentor facilitated belonging, supportive housing and curriculum relevance factors were the significant predictors of sense of belonging as well as class participation, frequent meet with professors and satisfaction with the institution factors were the significant predictors of sense of belonging. To sum up, the findings of the study will be useful in assisting administrators, educators, counselors, and researchers to develop strategies to enhance student teachers' sense of belonging.

**Keywords:** social belonging, academic belonging, perceived institutional support, sense of belonging.

### **Introduction**

Sense of belonging, a feeling of connectedness and belief that one is important and matters to others in an organization, ranks third on most people's hierarchy of needs, after psychological and safety needs (Maslow, 1954). In higher education, sense of belonging has been tied to key educational outcomes such as academic self-concept, self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, academic success and persistence (Freeman, Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007; Strayhorn, 2012). The notion of university belonging refers to the sense of membership and relatedness individual students feel with the other students and with the teachers at their university. Students' sense of university belonging is associated with several academic and non-academic outcomes, such as students' motivation to learn, level of academic achievement, and general future orientation.

It is also known that for some students there are many obstacles to completion, including financial constraints, academic difficulties, personal/family issues, and social-psychological challenges although it is well documented that completing university and obtaining a bachelor's degree result in higher earnings and greater access to social capital (Carey, 2005a; Karabel, 2005; Walpole, 2007). (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) defined sense of belonging as among the most basic and essential of human needs and a product of an innate human drive. A sense of belonging plays a role in academic and social outcomes (Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007; Ostrove & Long, 2007; Walton & Cohen, 2007). Belonging to a campus is associated with

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intrinsic motivation, academic achievement, and high expectations for completion and graduation (Anderman, 2002; Goodenow & Grady, 1993).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of the study was to investigate factors affecting sense of belonging and its relation to educational outputs of student teachers.

### **Specific Objectives**

To study the extent of student teachers' sense of belonging with respect to gender, university, education level and age level.

To find out predicted factors are associated with sense of belonging of student teachers.

To highlight student teachers' educational outputs of interests may facilitate their sense of belonging.

### **Scope**

The study was geographically restricted to Yangon Region and Sagaing Region.

### **Definition of the Key Terms**

- **Social belonging:** Feeling socially comfortable and connected with peers as a member of the university community (e.g., can relate to others, can be him/herself on campus, and feels supported and respected by peers on campus). (Dabney Chatwin Ingram, 2012)
- **Academic belonging:** Feeling respected and supported to do well academically. More specifically: (a) believing that professors are caring, supportive, and respectful, and (b) feeling comfortable sharing comments and questions in classes. (Dabney Chatwin Ingram, 2012)
- **Perceived Institutional Support:** Feeling that institutional supports and student services (e.g., tutoring, counseling, and health) are accessible on campus. (Dabney Chatwin Ingram, 2012)
- **Sense of belonging:** Students' subjective feelings of connectedness or cohesion to the institution. (Maestas, Vaquera, and Zehr, 2007)

## **Review of Related Literature**

### **1. Sense of Belonging**

For a person to experience a sense of belonging, they need energy for involvement, need to have an interest and desire (motivation) for meaningful involvement and have the potential to develop a sense of belonging by having shared or complementary characteristics with their environment (Hagerty et al., 1992; Hagerty & Patusky, 1995). Once these antecedents are achieved, the person feels valued, needed and significant within their environment (Newman et al., 2007). These are the attributes of sense of belonging, or more formally, valued involvement and fit (Hagerty et al., 1992). Valued involvement refers to the experience of feeling accepted, valued and needed within their given environment, while fit refers to an individual's perception that they connect with or complement others within their environment (Hagerty et al., 1992; Hagerty & Patusky, 1995; Kestenberg & Kestenberg, 1988; McLaren, Gomez, et al., 2007; Newman et al., 2007). The consequences of sense of belonging include: physical, psychological,

spiritual, or social involvement and growth; attribution of meaningfulness to that involvement; and foundation for behavioral and emotional responses (Hagerty et al., 1992).

By experiencing a higher level of sense of belonging, people have better social and psychological functioning and fewer mental health issues (Anant, 1966; McLaren & Challis, 2009; Mellor et al., 2008; Steger & Kashdan, 2009). The benefit of experiencing high levels of sense of belonging is that individuals often feel motivated to perform (Goodenow, 1993a, 1993b). For example, when student teachers feel they belong in the university community this promotes positive educational outputs such as academic success and effort in studies. Motivated student teachers put more effort into university, which leads to more positive campus performance (Sanchez et al., 2005). Those who do not feel accepted, important or cared for are less motivated to attend university and achieve academically (Sanchez et al., 2005).

## **2. Sense of Belonging in the University Context**

Applying the study of belonging to the university context is complicated because university campuses have multiple contexts; for instance, social contexts with friends, academic contexts in classrooms and with professors, and institutional contexts such as student support services and curricular offerings. Hurtado, Milem, Clayton Pedersen, and Allen (1998) note that “university campuses are complex social systems defined by the relationships between the people, bureaucratic procedures, structural arrangements, institutional goals and values, traditions, and larger socio-historical environments”. The university environment has many sub-contexts and is also shaped by larger socio-historical forces, suggesting that a multi-faceted approach to the study of belonging in university would be appropriate.

The factors affecting sense of belonging of student teachers are

- 1. Extracurricular Activities**
- 2. University Commitment to Diversity**
- 3. Relatedness to Peers**
- 4. Mentor Facilitated Belonging**
- 5. Unsupportive Professor Lowered Belonging**
- 6. Live on Campus**
- 7. Supportive Housing**
- 8. Orientation Facilitated Social Adjustment and**
- 9. Curriculum Relevance.**

The educational outputs of measures are

- 1. Expectation to Graduate**
- 2. Expected Retention**
- 3. Hour Spent Studying**
- 4. Class Participation**
- 5. Frequent Meet with Professors and**
- 6. Satisfaction with the Institution.**

## Method

### Participants

A total of 720 second year to fifth year student teachers participated in this study. The selected sample of second year to fifth year student teachers for this study is described in the following table.

**Table 1 Numbers of Participated Student Teachers and Selected Universities**

Grade Level	YUOE			SUOE			UDNR		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
2.1	31	30	61	30	30	60	30	30	60
3.1	30	30	60	30	30	60	30	30	60
4.1	30	30	60	30	30	60	30	30	60
5.1	29	30	59	30	30	60	30	30	60
Total	120	120	240	120	120	240	120	120	240

### Instruments

In this study the questionnaire consists of four sections. The first section elicited the demographic characteristics of the participants. The purpose of second section was to gather data about sense of belonging of student teachers. The questionnaire for student teachers' sense of belonging has a total of 14 items and is composed of 3 subscales.

The purpose of third section was to gather data about factors affecting sense of belonging of student teachers. The questionnaire for factors affecting sense of belonging of student teachers has a total of 42 items.

The purpose of fourth section was to gather data about educational outputs of student teachers. The questionnaire for student teachers' educational outputs has a total of 15 items.

Pilot testing was done with a sample of 80 second year to fifth year student teachers from Yangon University of Education in third week of December, 2018 to test whether the wording of items, statements and instructions were appropriate, relevant and clear for them. And then, the wordings and phrases of some items were modified to adapt with students' understanding levels. After conducting the pilot study, the internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha) of sense of belonging was 0.431, factors affecting sense of belonging was 0.638, and educational outputs was 0.586. The questionnaire was administered to the selected 720 second year to fifth year student teachers from Yangon University of Education (YUOE), Sagaing University of Education (SUOE) and University for the Development of the National Races of the Union (UDNR) during the first week of January, 2019.

## Results

### 1. Student Teachers' Sense of Belonging from all Selected Universities

To investigate all the students' sense of belonging, descriptive statistics was carried out and the results showed that the mean scores (%) for student teachers' social belonging and academic belonging were highest in all belonging types. The mean score (%) for student teachers' perceived institutional support was lowest in all belonging types. It could be interpreted that student teachers are socially comfortable with their peers, teachers and other staff members at the university.

## 2. Comparison for Sense of Belonging of Student Teachers by Gender

The result of the independent sample *t* test indicated that there were no significant differences in social belonging, academic belonging and perceived institutional support of student teachers by gender. It might be due to the fact that student teachers in the university had equal opportunity to learn and participate in all activities.

## 3. Comparison for Sense of Belonging of Student Teachers by University

In addition, it was necessary to observe whether student teachers are significant differences in sense of belonging of student teachers with respect to university, descriptive statistics was computed. Then, ANOVA was computed to investigate whether there were any significant differences in sense of belonging of student teachers by university or not.

**Table 2 Comparison for Sense of Belonging of Student Teachers by University**

Variable	University	N	Mean	SD	F	p
Social Belonging	University 1	240	15.04	1.81	7.403**	.001
	University 2	240	14.81	1.69		
	University 3	240	15.40	1.54		
Academic Belonging	University 1	240	8.97	1.19	16.059****	.000
	University 2	240	8.74	1.31		
	University 3	240	9.35	1.11		
Perceived Institutional Support	University 1	240	16.23	2.49	43.980****	.000
	University 2	240	16.43	2.62		
	University 3	240	18.07	1.91		

Note: \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

Again, post-hoc comparison was computed using Tukey HSD test to find out the differences which university were highest in social belonging, academic belonging and perceived institutional support.

**Table 3 Results of Tukey HSD Multiple Comparisons for Sense of Belonging of Student Teachers by University**

Variable	(I)University	(J)University	Mean Difference (I-J)	P
Social Belonging	University 3	University 2	2.937**	.001
Academic Belonging	University 3	University 1	3.229**	.001
		University 2	5.138****	.000
Perceived Institutional Support	University 3	University 1	7.673****	.000
		University 2	6.822****	.000

\*\*\*\*The mean difference is significant at 0.001 level.

\*\*The mean difference is significant at 0.01 level.

## 4. Comparison for Sense of Belonging of Student Teachers by Education Level

The ANOVA results showed that there were no statistically significant differences in social belonging, academic belonging and perceived institutional support of student teachers by education level. It could be interpreted that student teachers of all education levels have equal sense of belonging to the university.

### 5. Comparison for Sense of Belonging of Student Teachers by Age Level

The ANOVA results showed that there were no statistically significant differences in social belonging, academic belonging and perceived institutional support of student teachers by age level. It could be concluded that student teachers in all age-groups had equal opportunities to learn and participate in all activities.

### 6. Factors Affecting Sense of Belonging of Student Teachers from all Selected Universities

To investigate the factors affecting sense of belonging of student teachers, descriptive statistics was carried out and the results showed that the mean scores (%) for university commitment to diversity was highest in all factors. The mean scores (%) for unsupportive professor lowered belonging was lowest in all factors.

### 7. Comparison for Factors Affecting Sense of Belonging of Student Teachers by Gender

In order to test factors affecting sense of belonging of student teachers with respect to gender, descriptive statistics was conducted. And then, the independent sample *t* test was used to find out whether these differences in factors affecting sense of belonging of student teachers were significant or not. The result indicated that there were no significant differences in factors affecting sense of belonging of student teachers by gender. It could be interpreted that all student teachers experienced same classroom and campus climates.

### 8. Comparison for Factors Affecting Sense of Belonging of Student Teachers by University

To find out the differences in factors affecting sense of belonging of student teachers by university, descriptive analysis was computed. Then, ANOVA was computed to investigate whether there were significant differences in factors affecting sense of belonging of student teachers by university or not.

**Table 4 Mean Comparison for Factors Affecting Sense of Belonging of Student Teachers by University**

Factors	University	N	Mean	SD	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Extracurricular Activities	University 1	240	37.98	6.21	36.968***	.000
	University 2	240	36.68	6.57		
	University 3	240	41.36	5.66		
University Commitment to Diversity	University 1	240	24.21	2.35	19.113***	.000
	University 2	240	23.98	2.46		
	University 3	240	25.26	2.45		
Mentor Facilitated Belonging	University 1	240	12.00	7.59	17.886***	.000
	University 2	240	11.23	7.56		
	University 3	240	15.06	7.12		
Lives on Campus	University 1	240	1.99	1.34	64.670***	.000
	University 2	240	2.10	1.70		
	University 3	240	3.27	.97		
Supportive Housing	University 1	240	7.91	1.34	20.861***	.000
	University 2	240	8.03	1.20		
	University 3	240	8.55	.92		

Factors	University	N	Mean	SD	F	p
Orientation Facilitated Social Adjustment	University 1	240	6.63	2.22	10.940***	.000
	University 2	240	7.03	2.06		
	University 3	240	7.48	1.58		
Curriculum Relevance	University 1	240	3.73	.72	22.169***	.000
	University 2	240	3.52	.77		
	University 3	240	3.94	.60		

Note: \*\*\*p<0.001

### 10. Comparison for Factors Affecting Sense of Belonging of Student Teachers by Education Level

To find out the differences in factors affecting sense of belonging of student teachers by education level, descriptive analysis was made. Then, ANOVA was computed to investigate whether there were significant differences in factors affecting sense of belonging of student teachers by educational level or not.

**Table 5 Mean Comparison for Factors Affecting Sense of Belonging of Student Teachers by Education Level**

Variable	Education Level	N	Mean	SD	F	p
Extracurricular Activities	Second	181	38.33	5.95	5.236**	.001
	Third	180	37.31	6.78		
	Fourth	179	39.78	6.36		
	Fifth	180	39.28	6.49		
Mentor Facilitated Belonging	Second	181	14.19	7.08	3.769*	.011
	Third	180	12.70	7.54		
	Fourth	179	11.54	7.70		
	Fifth	180	12.60	7.88		
Supportive Housing	Second	181	8.04	1.29	5.617**	.001
	Third	180	7.94	1.19		
	Fourth	179	8.27	1.14		
	Fifth	180	8.40	1.12		
Orientation Facilitated Social Adjustment	Second	181	7.38	2.01	3.603*	.013
	Third	180	7.01	1.91		
	Fourth	179	6.71	2.00		
	Fifth	180	7.16	2.03		

Note: \*p<0.05, \*\*p<0.01

Again, post-hoc comparison was computed using Tukey HSD test to find out the differences which education level was higher in above significant factors than those of others.

**Table 6 Results of Tukey HSD Multiple Comparison for Factors Affecting Sense of Belonging of Student Teachers by Education level**

Variable	(I)Year	(J)Year	Mean Difference (I-J)	p
Extracurricular Activities	Fourth year	Third year	4.262**	.004
	Fifth year	Third year	3.393*	.038
Mentor Facilitated Belonging	Second year	Fourth year	10.209*	.011

Variable	(I)Year	(J)Year	Mean Difference (I-J)	<i>p</i>
<b>Supportive Housing</b>	Fifth year	Second year	3.254*	.043
		Third year	4.212**	.004
<b>Orientation Facilitated Social Adjustment</b>	Second year	Fourth year	6.701*	.017

\*\*The mean difference is significant at 0.01 level.

\*The mean difference is significant at 0.05 level.

**10. Comparison for Factors Affecting Sense of Belonging of Student Teachers by Age Level**

To find out the differences in factors affecting sense of belonging of student teachers by age level, descriptive analysis was made. Then, ANOVA was computed to investigate whether there were significant differences in factors affecting sense of belonging of student teachers by age level or not.

**Table 7 Mean Comparison for Factors Affecting Sense of Belonging of Student Teachers by Age Level**

Variable	Age Level	N	Mean	SD	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
<b>Extracurricular Activities</b>	(17-18)	205	38.01	5.95	3.604*	.028
	(19-20)	306	38.56	6.72		
	(21-23)	259	39.80	6.38		
<b>Lives on Campus</b>	(17-18)	205	2.50	1.30	3.508*	.030
	(19-20)	306	2.32	1.55		
	(21-23)	259	2.69	1.54		

Note: \**p*< 0.05

Again, post-hoc comparison was computed using Tukey HSD test to find out the differences which age-group was higher in extracurricular activities and lives on campus factors than those of others.

**Table 8 Results of Tukey HSD Multiple Comparison for Factors Affecting Sense of Belonging of Student Teachers by Age level**

Variable	(I)Age	(J)Age	Mean Difference (I-J)	<i>p</i>
<b>Extracurricular activities</b>	(21-23)	(17-18)	3.095*	<b>.031</b>
<b>Lives on campus</b>	(21-23)	(19-20)	6.088*	<b>.036</b>

\*The mean difference is significant at 0.05 level.

**11. Comparison for Educational Outputs of Student Teachers from all Selected Universities**

To investigate all the educational outputs of student teachers, descriptive statistics was carried out and the results showed that the mean scores (%) of expectation to graduate factor was highest in all educational outputs. The mean scores (%) of expected retention factor was lowest in all educational outputs

**12. Comparison for Educational Outputs of Student Teachers by Gender**

To find out the differences in educational outputs of student teachers by gender, descriptive analysis was made. And then, the independent sample *t* test was used to find out whether there were any significant differences in educational outputs by gender were or not.

**Table 9 Mean Comparison for Educational Outputs of Student Teachers by Gender**

Educational Outputs	Gender	N	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Expectation to Graduate	Male	360	2.83	.02	-2.711**	.007
	Female	360	2.90	.02		
Frequent meet with Professors	Male	360	16.31	.25	2.637**	.009
	Female	360	15.44	.21		

Note: \*\* $p < 0.01$

The result of the independent sample t-test indicated that there were significant differences in expectation to graduate and frequent meet with professors factors by gender. However, there were no significant differences in expected retention, hour spent studying, class participation satisfaction with the institution factors by gender. Female student teachers always placed the high expectations on their work than males. However, male student teachers were easily familiar with the people around them. So, it could be concluded that female student teachers were high in expectation to graduate and male student teachers were high in frequent meet with professors.

### 13. Comparison for Educational Outputs of Student Teachers by University

To find out the differences in educational outputs of student teachers by university, descriptive analysis was made. Then, ANOVA was computed to investigate whether there were significant differences in educational outputs of student teachers by university or not.

**Table 10 Mean Comparison for Educational Outputs of Student Teachers by University**

Variable	University	N	Mean	SD	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Hour Spent Studying	University 1	240	2.92	1.15	11.731***	.000
	University 2	240	2.93	1.11		
	University 3	240	3.36	1.17		
Class Participation	University 1	240	7.13	7.59	9.508***	.000
	University 2	240	6.83	1.97		
	University 3	240	7.59	1.74		
Frequent Meet with Professors	University 1	240	15.65	4.03	46.918***	.000
	University 2	240	14.16	3.97		
	University 3	240	17.81	4.45		
Satisfaction with the Institution	University 1	240	9.48	2.01	25.035***	.000
	University 2	240	9.48	1.86		
	University 3	240	10.48	1.43		

Note: \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

### 14. Comparison for Educational Outputs of Student Teachers by Education Level

To find out the differences in educational outputs of student teachers by education level, descriptive analysis was made. Then, ANOVA was computed to investigate whether there were significant differences in educational outputs of student teachers by education level or not.

**Table 11 Mean Comparison for Educational Outputs of Student Teachers by Education Level**

Variable	Education Level	N	Mean	SD	F	p
Satisfaction with the Institution	Second	181	10.15	1.68	4.747*	.003
	Third	180	9.45	1.88		
	Fourth	179	9.91	1.89		
	Fifth	180	9.74	1.88		

Again, post-hoc comparison was computed using Tukey HSD test to find out the differences which education level was higher in satisfaction with the institution factor than that of others.

**Table 12 Results of Tukey HSD Multiple Comparison for Educational Outputs of Student Teachers by Education Level**

Variable	(I) Education Level	(J) Education Level	Mean Difference (I-J)	P
Satisfaction with the institution	Second year	Third year	5.872**	.004

\*\*The mean difference is significant at 0.01 level.

### 15. Comparison for Educational Outputs of Student Teachers by Age Level

To find out the differences in educational outputs of student teachers by age level, descriptive analysis was made. Then, ANOVA was computed to investigate whether there were significant differences in educational outputs of student teachers by age level or not.

**Table 13 Mean Comparison for Educational Outputs of Student Teachers by Age Level**

Variable	Age Level	N	Mean	SD	F	p
Satisfaction with the Institution	(17-18)	205	10.16	1.67	5.277**	.005
	(19-20)	306	9.64	1.88		
	(21-23)	259	9.77	1.96		

Again, post-hoc comparison was computed using Tukey HSD test to find out the differences which age level was higher in satisfaction with the institution factor than that of others.

**Table 14 Results of Tukey HSD Multiple Comparison for Educational Outputs of Student Teachers by Age Level**

Variable	(I) Age Level	(J) Age Level	Mean Difference (I-J)	P
Satisfaction with the institution	(17-18)	(19-20)	4.320**	.006

\*\*The mean difference is significant at 0.01 level.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

This study produced some findings that merit further research. Several issues limit the interpretation and generalizability of these findings. Firstly, Results were drawn solely from self-reported data collected at one time. Survey results were limited to a small sample of student teachers from only University of Education. Moreover, exploratory findings from only University

of Education may not be adequate to know student teachers' experiences and perspectives in other university contexts.

Further research should investigate bachelor, master and diploma levels as education level and samples from different universities: University of Art and Science, University of Distance Education, and other Institutes should be selected. Longitudinal research should be done and following up the qualitative interviews with the student teachers would be useful to inform strategies for promoting student teachers' sense of belonging.

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