THE IMPACT OF STUDENTS’ SATISFACTION ON THE PSYCHOLOGICAL SENSE OF COMMUNITY AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

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Date of receipt : 09/11/2022
First Review : 19/01/2022
Second Review : 22/02/2022
Acceptance : 27/04/2022

ABSTRACT

A psychological sense of community is vital to increase engagement in studies and social activities while pursuing higher education. The primary aim of the present study is to examine the impact of students' satisfaction in terms of experiences with faculties, campus facilities, and extracurricular activities on the undergraduate students' psychological sense of community. A purposive sampling method administered a self-report survey to 468 undergraduate students (18 to 25 years). Students' satisfaction scale (24 items) and the Collegiate Psychological Sense of Community Scale (14 items) were used as the instrument. The data were analyzed via Statistical Package for Social Studies (SPSS) version 28. Multiple regression analysis to identify the impact of students' satisfaction with the psychological sense of community. Findings shows that there is significant impact of students' satisfaction in terms of campus facilities ($\beta = .92, p = .027$) and extracurricular activities ($\beta = .46, p = .031$) on the psychological sense of community among undergraduate students. However, the result showed that experience with faculty did not significantly predict undergraduate students' psychological sense of community ($\beta = .016, p = .693$). Results of this study were discussed concerning potential mechanisms through the increase of students' satisfaction with an enhanced psychological sense of community. The implications of the study and recommendations for future research are presented. In sum, it recommended that more focused attention be given to increasing the psychological sense of community among undergraduate students.
Keywords: Psychological sense of community, Students’ satisfaction, Undergraduate student

INTRODUCTION

The psychological sense of community refers to a feeling that members have of belonging and a shared faith that members’ needs will be met (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p. 9, as cited in Spanierman, Soble, Mayfield, Neville, Aber, Khuri, & De La Rosa, 2013). Specifically, in higher education studies, the psychological sense of community is defined as the psychological sense that one is a valued member of the college community and belonging facilitates numerous positive outcomes for students (Martin & Kilgo, 2015; Edman & Brazil, 2009; Graunke et al., 2012; Holloway-Friesen, 2018). Moreover, the past study also proposed multiple dimensions that foster the psychological sense of community, where the student residence has been linked to the psychological sense of community (Cheng, 2004).

Apart from that, the psychological sense of community has been associated with positive outcomes among undergraduate students. The feeling of belonging was linked with increased engagement in campus activities, positive perceptions of course content, and higher academic self-efficacy (Kuh, 2016; Holloway-Friesen, 2018). Cheng (2004) also found that the psychological sense of community was associated with student-faculty members and student-peers’ relationships that make positive social connections on campus. Besides that, students’ residential also plays a role in their psychological sense of community (Cheng, 2004). On the other hand, other researchers also found that on-campus undergraduate students reported a greater sense of community than off-campus students (Lounsbury & DeNeui, 1996). Lounsbury and DeNeui (1996) justified that a greater sense of community among the undergraduate students was due to greater access to campus extracurricular activities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Before the birth of social media, students’ dissatisfaction with their institution had always been hushed within an affected target group. However, recently, their dissatisfaction has been amplified via social media, especially regarding their complaints about on-campus facilities, experiences with faculties, administrative
operations, and learning environments that did not meet their expectations. Such a phenomenon is assumed to be the cause of students' low sense of community on campus. Specifically, this research aims to examine various aspects of students' satisfaction to identify specific factors contributing to their overall psychological sense of community.

The results of this study can assist higher education providers in offering better tailored in-campus experiences to students. Previous studies prove a correlation in students' satisfaction with in-campus experiences provided by their institution, such as emphasized components of student services, general experience with faculty, campus facilities, extracurricular activities, administrative operations, living and learning environment, health, safety and security, student recruitment, and financial aid with their perspective towards the institution (Carey, 2016; Burgess, Senior, & Moores, 2018; Shahsavar & Sudzina, 2017; Chang, 2012; Kelso, 2008). According to Griffith (2011), numerous higher education institutions attempt to determine the predicting variables of student satisfaction that will foster students' psychological sense of community and, in turn, help to improve students' overall academic and social success.

The psychological sense of community is a condition that binds individuals together toward a common cause or experience and the preferred within a community (Toma & Kezar, 1999). Apart from obtaining an academic outcome, undergraduate students are also looking for a sense of belongingness that helps boost their engagement in study and extracurricular activities, which in turn hinderance them from dropping out of institutions (Brazzell, 2001). According to Boyer (1990), colleges or universities should practice six critical criteria to establish positive campus community experiences: an educationally purposeful community, an open community, a just community, a disciplined community, a caring community, and a celebrative community. Also, McDonald (2002) proposed that the researchers and the college/universities administrators set a common goal for the institutions to develop better campus communities by including real-life community-building experiments.

Firstly, the psychological sense of community on campus must be established from different perspectives, such as teaching and learning environment and collaboration among faculties, staff, and students (Brown, Brown, & Littleton, 2002). Secondly, since learning on a college/university campus takes place in a social setting, community members should accept
personal obligations to membership. Furthermore, the college/university should acknowledge out-of-class activities as an essential aspect of students' college experience, such as involving students in various activities to promote the quality of the community. Finally, the institution should cherish and celebrate shared rituals and practices that respect tradition and change.

Secondly, these common goals represent the best efforts made to date by researchers to articulate the concept of community in today’s higher education environment (Brown, Brown, & Littleton, 2002). The student affairs administrators can address appropriate topics while offering community-building programs in the higher educational setting based on the abovementioned ideas. For example, the student affairs administrators may need to identify the fundamental principles of community that can be applied in the campus environment, identify factors that are related to students' psychological sense of community, the benefits of campus activities involvement in predicting the psychological sense of community, and identify the roles of student affairs administrators in enhancing student satisfaction.

Also, community colleges should focus on their efforts to increase student satisfaction and their psychological sense of community (Windham et al., 2014). These efforts can foster a higher level of participation, reducing the students' dropout rate. Hence, the management team must carry out early interventions for first-year students upon their arrival on campus. Additionally, increased student participation in-campus relates to growing students' collegiate psychological sense of community (Schuetz, 2008). In other words, colleges/universities must implement strategies to reach out to students. At the same time, they are in-campus as it will positively impact their satisfaction and psychological sense of the on-campus community.

Furthermore, researchers recommended that institutions identify the current plans to increase students' satisfaction and collegiate psychological sense of community (Hossler, Ziskin, & Gross, 2009). Other researchers also recommend that administrators not solve all retention problems with a single solution (Windham et al., 2014). But improve student satisfaction by identifying relevant variables such as campus facilities, overall experience with faculty, student services, extracurricular activities, administration, and operations.
Therefore, the relevant variables of students' satisfaction mentioned above can be valuable to inform students' psychological sense of community that leads to retention and development efforts. There are three research questions to be answered for the present study. First, the role of demographic factors such as gender, years of study, and residence type that may affect the students' satisfaction with the college/university have not been controlled in the past studies. For example, a freshman's connectivity to the campus activities will be influenced by the residence type (e.g., on-campus or off-campus), which will affect their satisfaction with the college/university. Thus, the current study has adequately controlled the measured factors such as experiences with faculties, campus facilities, and extracurricular activities.

Second, few studies with undergraduate students have explored the importance of the psychological sense of community on related outcomes such as students' mental health and academic performance. For example, a positive psychological sense of community is associated with intrinsic motivation, positive self-efficacy, and high student persistence (Kirk & Lewis, 2015). However, previous research does not control demographic factors such as gender, years of study, and residence type, which may affect the students' psychological sense of community. Thus, the current study aimed to explore the differences in demographic factors on students' psychological sense of community.

Third, the previous studies showed differences between variables and failed to describe those differences adequately, especially in the Malaysian setting. Also, the research topic regarding the influence of students' satisfaction on students' psychological sense of community is minimal, especially in Malaysia. Further study is needed to understand better the impact of students' connectivity to the campus by identifying the factors that increase students' satisfaction and psychological sense of community. By considering the demographic factors and the effect of students' satisfaction on students' psychological sense of community as a factor of interest in student retention and overall development, there are essential research gaps to be fulfilled in the present study. Thus, the objective of the present study aims to examine the impact of students' satisfaction in terms of experiences with faculties, campus facilities, and extracurricular activities on the undergraduate students' psychological sense of community. We also hypothesized that there would be a significant impact on students' satisfaction in terms of experiences with faculties, campus facilities, and
extracurricular activities toward the psychological sense of community among undergraduate students.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A quantitative survey was conducted among undergraduate students using self-administrated questionnaires. A survey research design is adopted as it can help to provide standardized information to describe variables or the relationships between variables.

Respondents

The current study explores students’ satisfaction with the psychological sense of community among undergraduate students. Based on the literature review, it is essential to investigate the impacts of students’ satisfaction and the psychological sense of community in predicting students’ overall achievement or outcomes, such as positive life satisfaction, better academic performance, positive mental health status, and well-being, or positive self-efficacy (Kirk & Lewis, 2015; Warner & Leierer, 2015; Jason, Stevens, & Ram, 2016).

Sample Size

The sample size of the present study is calculated by Raosoft's sample size online calculator. Based on Raosoft's sample size calculation, the population of 3000 numbers of undergraduate students in Southern University College results in a minimum required sample size of 341 students for the confidence level of 95%. However, the psychology and social science research's response rates are usually below 100% due to the method used in data collection, especially for online surveys and other voluntary participation issues. Oversampling is suggested to ensure the minimum sample size is achieved to prevent potential problems during the data collection process (Bartlett et al., 2001). Hence, after the data screening process, the present study has recruited 467 undergraduate students to suggest the best practices for creating and maintaining a positive psychological sense of community through students' satisfaction.

Instrument

The students' satisfaction was measured by three subscales: experiences with faculties, campus facilities, and extracurricular activities. All the three subscales utilize four-point Likert-type items where 1 represents "very often", and 4 represents "never." First, the subscale of experiences with faculties consisted of twelve items (e.g., "asked lecturers for information related to the courses you were taking"). Second, the subscale of campus
facilities consisted of eight items (e.g., "used the library as a quiet place to read or study materials you brought with you"). Third, the subscale of extracurricular activities consisted of four items (e.g., "attended meeting of campus society, club, organization, or student union"). All the items of each subscale were transferred into reverse scoring. Analysis of the questionnaire was carried out such that a higher score on each subscale reflected a higher-level sense of students’ satisfaction. In Table 1, the reliability of the Student Satisfaction Scale in terms of experience with faculties, campus facilities, and extracurricular activities were 0.718, 0.754, and 0.907, respectively. In sum, the reliability of the Student Satisfaction Scale was considered high and reliable, which a Cronbach value greater than 0.70 (Uma Sekaran, 2020).

The Collegiate Psychological Sense of Community Scale (Lounsbury & DeNeui, 1996) measured the college sense of community. The questionnaire consisted of 14 questions such as "There is a sociable atmosphere on campus" and "There is a strong feeling of togetherness on campus." The four-point Likert scale with choices ranging from 1 representing "strongly disagree" to 4 representing "strongly agree." All items were summed to indicate the level of students' psychological sense of community, with minimum scores of 14 and a maximum of 70. In the present study, the Cronbach's alpha of psychological sense of community was 0.813, which indicated high reliability (alpha value > 0.70), as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Level of Reliability for Each Instrument

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Reliability</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Satisfaction Scale</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience with faculties</td>
<td>.718</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus facilities</td>
<td>.754</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extracurricular activities</td>
<td>.907</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Sense of Community Scale</td>
<td>.813</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Procedure

The researchers have distributed the hard copies of the questionnaire to the undergraduate students. The participants were recruited via face-to-face distribution of the questionnaire. This survey was administered on campus, and it takes approximately 10-15 minutes to complete the questionnaire. After informed consent was obtained, the participants were asked to participate in the study voluntarily, and they may withdraw from the survey anytime without any terms and conditions. All the participants were inducted voluntarily, and they
were adequately briefed about the scope of the research. Confidentiality and anonymity were addressed accordingly.

The surveys were anonymous, and the responses were kept confidential for research purposes only. However, some participants participated in the study through an online survey due to the Movement Control Operation (MCO) in March 2020. The online survey was developed using Google Form, and all the data were recorded in Microsoft Excel and imported into IBM's SPSS 28 for analysis.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

Data were analyzed using the statistical computer package, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 28.0. Multiple regression was used to examine the impact of students' satisfaction with experiences with faculties, campus facilities, and extracurricular activities on the undergraduate students' psychological sense of community. An alpha level of .05 and .01 was used for all statistical analyses.

**RESULT**

A total of 468 undergraduate students consisting of 310 females (66.2%) and 158 males (33.8%), were involved in this study. All the respondents were aged 19 to 25 years old, and 70% of them were senior students with years two and above who stayed off-campus.

Calculations were done to perform the statistical description analysis to explain the students' satisfaction (experiences with faculties, campus facilities, and extracurricular activities) and the psychological sense of community among undergraduate students. In Table 1, the mean score and standard deviation for the three subscales in Student Satisfaction Scale was extracurricular activities with the lowest score (mean = 2.0160, SD = .82924), campus facilities with the highest score (mean = 2.3137, SD = .45077), and experiences with faculties (mean = 2.2783, SD = .45773). Lastly, the Psychological Sense of Community’s mean score and standard deviation were 2.7578 and 0.34222, respectively. Further analysis was carried out to examine the impact of students' satisfaction on the psychological sense of community among undergraduate students.
Table 2. The Mean and Standard Deviation of Students’ Satisfaction (Experiences with Faculties, Campus Facilities, and Extracurricular Activities) and Psychological Sense of Community.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Satisfaction Scale</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience with faculties</td>
<td>2.2783</td>
<td>.45773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus facilities</td>
<td>2.3137</td>
<td>.45077</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extracurricular activities</td>
<td>2.0160</td>
<td>.82924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Sense of Community Scale</td>
<td>2.7578</td>
<td>.34222</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 3, multiple linear regression was conducted to predict undergraduate students’ psychological sense of community based on student satisfaction in terms of experience with faculties, campus facilities, and extracurricular activities. The results showed that campus facilities ($\beta = .092, p = .027$) and extracurricular activities ($\beta = .046, p = .031$) had significant influence on undergraduate students’ psychology sense of community. However, the result showed that experience with faculty did not significantly predict undergraduate students’ psychological sense of community ($\beta = .016, p = .693$).

Overall, the result indicated that students' satisfaction explained 4.3 percent ($R^2 = 0.043$) of the psychological sense of community variance, as exhibited in Table 10. The analysis results for testing the hypothesized influence of students' satisfaction in campus facilities and extracurricular activities were significant. However, the impact of students' satisfaction in terms of experience with faculties on the psychological sense of community was not substantial.

Table 3. Multiple Regression Predicting the Influences of Students' Satisfaction on The Psychological Sense of Community.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Psychological Sense of Community</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Students’ Satisfaction</strong></td>
<td>$B$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience with faculties</td>
<td>.026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus facilities</td>
<td>.092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extracurricular activities</td>
<td>.046</td>
</tr>
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Note: *$p < .05$
DISCUSSION

Based on the result, the analysis results for testing the hypothesized influence of students’ satisfaction in campus facilities and extracurricular activities were significant. However, the impact of students’ satisfaction in terms of experience with faculties on the psychological sense of community was not substantial. The effect size of students’ satisfaction with campus facilities and extracurricular activities toward the psychological sense of community is small, which means that the subscales are not the main predictor of the psychological sense of community. Also, the current finding showed no significant influence on students’ satisfaction in experiences with faculties which causes the students’ satisfaction to have a minor impact on the psychological sense of community due to the students’ lack of physical contact with the faculty members and school closure during the pandemic. Besides, when the students lack social interaction with their lecturers or classmates, it will cause them not to build or maintain the quality of a good relationships.

According to a previous study, there is a reciprocal relationship between the psychological sense of community and satisfaction with the environment (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990; as cited in Salahia, Chasemi, Azarpour & Clelland, 2018). They believe that individuals who have a strong psychological sense of community will have a more positive perception of their environment, such that their satisfaction with the environment increases. The study also revealed that the length of attendance in a university measured by years spent in university was inversely related to the psychological sense of community (Salahia et al., 2018). Therefore, the result showed no significant impact on students’ satisfaction in terms of experience with faculties on the psychological sense of community due to campus closure during the pandemic. Also, all the classes have been shifted to online mode without direct contact between lecturers and students.

At the same time, all the extracurricular activities have been cancelled or postponed due to safety and health concerns. This situation led the students to have limited chances to participate actively in the related events/activities. Thus, the lack of campus-community engagement will reduce students’ satisfaction levels. Therefore, it decreases the influence on students’ satisfaction, which will cause a long-term adverse effect on the psychological sense of community. Additionally, physical contact and direct interaction among students play a vital role in building up the psychological sense of community. Good bonding serves
as the opportunity for students to interact with each other, form lifelong bonding and friendship, spend meaningful time with the university community members, and experience the campus atmosphere and facilities (Roberson, 2018).

**IMPLICATION**

The present study has produced significant findings important to future investigations of the relationship between students' overall satisfaction and the undergraduate students' psychological sense of community. The results underline the necessity to raise attention among the universities to increase students' satisfaction by enhancing the experience with faculties, campus facilities, and the platform provided for extracurricular activities. Remarkably, the university should increase students' satisfaction by monitoring the teaching and learning qualities, improving campus facilities, and maintaining community ties across semesters to help the students experience the benefits of the campus community. The psychological sense of community is vital as it connects to academic support services, especially during the pandemic when the university implements online learning for all classes. As a matter of fact, the psychological sense of community can be one of the essential factors to prevent dropout risks among the undergraduate students.

**LIMITATION**

The limitation of the present study is that the selection of research participants may not have captured the full range of student opinions and not have generalized to all other contexts. The questionnaire was solely based on a self-report from a single source, and thus, the obtained findings may open the possibility of a common method bias (Creswell, 2018). Then, the data were collected anonymously to reduce this risk. The current study has a cross-sectional research design. Additionally, the survey was distributed in both physical and online settings due to the pandemic of COVID-19 and movement control operations, which might lead to inconsistency in data collection.

**FUTURE RESEARCH**

Given the current study results in Malaysia contexts, future researchers are recommended to explore the interaction of varied factors of student satisfaction on the psychological sense of community or compare these issues before and after the pandemic of Covid-19. Based on the limitations mentioned above,
triangulation, repeated measurements, and non-self-reporting measurements can be done in future studies. Also, longitudinal and qualitative studies can be carried out in future studies to overcome some of the limitation issues as mentioned above. On the other hand, a survey conducted by the Statistics Department in 2019, 72% of Malaysians are chose not to continue their studies after the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) (Halid, 2022). This alarming issue is an essential task for the higher education institutions to nurture the younger generations the pros of getting a formal education for better career prospects and our country’s future productivity.

CONCLUSION

Overall, this finding indicated that students' satisfaction explained 4.3 per cent of the psychological sense of community. Specifically, the result showed that campus facilities and extracurricular activities significantly influenced undergraduate students' psychological sense of community. However, the experience with faculty did not considerably predict undergraduate students' psychological sense of community. Although the impact of students' satisfaction on the psychological sense of community is not strong, nurturing these three variables would significantly impact students' dropout risks. Most higher education institutions focus more on the enrollment rate but lack attention paid to the dropout rate, especially for junior students. One of the dropout reasons may be the students' lack of a psychological sense of community in campus life, which will indirectly affect their decision to study further. Education aims to produce a holistic individual. Therefore, a balance between academic achievement and life should be concerning.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We would like to acknowledge the participating undergraduate students for their cooperation throughout the study. This study was funded by Southern University College Research Fund (SUCRF), Johor, Malaysia.

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