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International Students’ Depression and Academic Achievement

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In recent years, internationalization in higher education has gained increasing importance. Although the implementation of internationalization practices across campuses is mixed, the overall trends in higher education are leading administrators and faculty to consider the benefits of internationalizing the campus, the curriculum, and the student body. George Mason University’s strategic goal for the 2014 is “to expand the number of International students by at least 20% while improving the integration of international and domestic students in extracurricular as well as academic activities” (George Mason University (2008). Strategic Goals for 2014, Goal 5:Strategic Action b). With this plan developing certain measures need to be taken into consideration in order to accommodate the needs of an ever growing international student population at GMU.

Recent studies have pointed out depression as a main reason for International students’ drop out and suicide. International students face stress and anxiety due to relationship failures, low grades and homesickness. They face stress in trying to make new friends and in adapting to a new culture. Language is another barrier that they face and it affects their grades. Excellent students become average students in the United States because of the language proficiency level (Lee, 2010). Sumer et al (2008) suggest that social support and English proficiency levels are predictors of International students’ depression. Buddington (2002) emphasizes in the findings of his study that depression and anxiety negatively affect International students’ academic achievement.

At GMU, the English Language Institute provides individualized attention to the International students due to the structure of its program. Students who are enrolled at the ELI usually have 20 hours of intensive English per week. They meet daily with a Core teacher who teaches them reading, writing, and research skills, and the remaining hours are focused on oral communication skills and other content-based courses. So the students meet the same Core instructor daily. In the content-based courses, the students are introduced to the American culture, adaptation to life in the United States, and other current topics. The ELI also provides students with an advisor who can assist them in selecting their majors after they are done with their English courses. At the ELI, there are maximum15 students per class and students interact with other international students from different countries. In sum, The ELI’s “ mission is to provide quality instruction in English as a Second Language (ESL) that will develop the language and academic skills, as well as the cultural awareness needed for the academic, personal and/or professional purposes of its students. In addition to classroom instruction, students receive a wide variety of support services designed to facilitate their transition to life and study at a college or university in the United States” (ELI Website). When students get admitted in a major at GMU, they stop taking ELI courses.

Non-ELI international students usually apply to academic programs at GMU immediately from their countries because their English language proficiency is at the academic level. This category of International students is supported by the Office of International Programs and Services (OIPS) which provides them with orientation prior to their arrival in the United States and continues to support them during their stay. OIPS assists students in their student visas, travel, housing, academics, and organizes several cultural activities for them. These non-ELI International students are enrolled on regular academic courses and have the opportunity to interact with American students. Although the OIPS organizes activities for both ELI and non-ELI international students, however, these activities and events are optional so the students may choose not to participate whereas at the ELI, all students have to participate in the activities that the ELI organizes.

The literature does not provide any research about the importance of the enrollment of international students at an English Language Institute on campus prior to their enrollment in an academic program to prepare them academically. There is no research related to international students at GMU who receive support from different resources. Due to this gap in the literature, my research study aims at investigating international students’ experiences at Mason and their academic achievement as related to their levels of depression.

**Method**

*Sample.* The participants in this study were the whole international student body enrolled at GMU. The participants were either former ELI students or not. Their majors, gender, or ethnicity were not of importance to our research therefore no particular choice was made. As a result, 150 students took the test. Out of the 150 respondents, 50 former ELI students and 50 non-ELI students were selected to participate in the research.

*Measures.* A online depression test was developed for data collection, and it was sent out to students online through the International students’ listserv. The depression test asked them to identify whether they were ELI students or not and their current GPA. The results from the test were then collected and entered in SPSS. The results of students’ depression were represented by levels ranging from 1 being very depressed to 7 being not depressed.

*Procedures. I*nternational students were sent the online survey via the listserv as mentioned earlier. Taking the test was totally voluntary, and the students were not asked to provide their names. The students were reminded by email a couple of times to take the test. An SPSS data sheet was created to represent the students’ scores, being former ELI students or not, and their current GPAs.

*Data Analysis.* The research question was addressed through the following questions:

1. Is there a difference in Levels of depression between ELI and non-ELI International students at GMU?
2. Is there an association between ELI and non-ELI students and academic achievement?
3. Can the international students’ level of depression predict their academic achievement?

Data was analyzed using SPSS 18 for Windows. The research questions were addressed as follows:

The first research question was addressed using Independent samples t-test with International students’ Levels of depression as the dependent variable and the ELI / non-ELI students’ groups as the independent variables. The second research question was addressed using a Chi-Square test for association between two categorical variables, ELI / non-ELI students and their academic achievement. As for the third research question, it was addressed using simple linear regression with the students’ academic achievement being the dependent variable and the students’ levels of depression as being the independent variable.

**Results**

*RQ1. Is there a difference in Levels of depression between ELI and non-ELI International students at GMU?*

H0: μ1 = μ2

Ha: μ1 ≠ μ2

α = .05

The Levene’s test for equality of variance shows that there is no statistically significant difference between ELI and non-ELI students’ levels of depression, *t*(98) = .696, *p* = .488. Therefore, both ELI and non-ELI students have the same levels of depression.

*RQ2: Is there an association between ELI and non-ELI students and academic achievement?*

The results from the Chi-square analysis of the association between the ELI / non-ELI students and academic achievement show that there is no statistical significant association between both categories, *X2*(2) = .185, *p* = .91.

*RQ3. Can the international students’ level of depression predict their academic achievement?*

Based on the simple linear regression conducted by SPSS, the correlation coefficient (R = .019) is not statistically significant at the .05 level, *F* (1, 98) = .036, *p* = .85. This means that there is no linear relationship between the International students’ depression levels and their academic achievements.

**Discussion**

Based on the responses of 100 international students at GMU, there is no difference between the levels of depression of ELI students as opposed to non-ELI students. This suggests that despite the different kind of support that ELI students receive from the ELI to adapt to academic life and the culture in the United States, and despite the support that OIPS provides to non-ELI students, there is no difference in the depression levels that both International students suffer from as a result of being in a different country and culture.

Unlike what Buddington (2002) proved in his research, this study that being an ELI or non-ELI student does not affect a student’s academic achievement. Therefore, the instruction and the academic preparedness that ELI students receive at the ELI does not make a difference in their academic achievement. Therefore, enrollment at the ELI prior to enrollment in academic programs may not provide additional preparation to students as opposed to International students who enroll in academic programs at Mason without prior enrollment at the ELI. This theory may not apply to students whose English language proficiency level is very low and need English language instruction to get admission at Mason.

The study also showed that students’ academic achievement is not related to their levels of depression. Therefore, depression is serious if it leads the person to harm himself or herself, but it seems that at GMU the students’ academic achievement is not affected by their level of depression. This could be attributed to the OIPS and the ELI staff who monitor students closely and provide counseling for them.

*Limitations.* The study yielded several limitations :

* The sample size (100 students) as compared to the total number of International students at GMU was small. Using a larger sample in another study may lead to more accurate results.
* Participants in this study may not recall all the answers to the questions or pretend to remember them, and that may affect the accuracy of their answers in the test which may in turn influence the study’s reliability.
* Participants were not supervised while taking the test which accounts for their honesty in filling it and not making somebody else complete it.

**Reflections**

This final paper was a great example of how to analyze data for a research paper. I would have preferred to have an existing data set and analyze it, but despite having to create my own data sets, I learned a lot from this paper. One important thing I learned is what type of test to use in which situation. The course material was of big support to make this project complete. The exercises that we worked on in class, the readings and the homework were all useful in completing this project. As I mentioned earlier, I would have preferred to work with a real data set for my final project because my answers turned out to be illogical based on the data sets that I have generated.

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Appendix A – APA Tables

Table 1.

*Comparisons of Mean Scores of Levels of Depression in Relation to Students’ Groups*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |  |  | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
| Levels of Depression | *N* | *M* | *T* | *p*-value | Lower | Upper |
| ELI | 50 | 4.04 |  |  |  |  |
| Non-ELI | 50 | 3.76 | .696 | .488 | -.519 | 1.079 |

Table 2.

*Chi-Square Tests – ELI/Non-ELI Students and Academic Achievement*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Pearson Chi-Square | *df* | *p-*value |
| .185 | 2 | .91 |

*n* = 100

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Table 3.

*Summary of Linear Regression Analysis for Variable Predicting International students’ Academic Achievement*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Independent Variable | *df* | Mean Square | *F* | *p*-value |
| Level of Depression | 1 | 2.417 | .012 | .851 |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  | B | SE B | β | *p*-value |
|  | -.006 | .03 | -.019 | .851 |

a. Predictors (Constant), Level of depression

Appendix B- SPSS tables

Question 1:

| **Group Statistics** | | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | ELI or NonELI student | | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
| Levelof depression | dimension1 | ELI Student | 50 | 4.04 | 2.176 | .308 |
| NonELI student | 50 | 3.76 | 1.836 | .260 |

| **Independent Samples Test** | | | | | | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | |
| F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
| Lower | Upper |
| Levelof depression | Equal variances assumed | 1.943 | .167 | .696 | 98 | .488 | .280 | .403 | -.519 | 1.079 |
| Equal variances not assumed |  |  | .696 | 95.302 | .488 | .280 | .403 | -.519 | 1.079 |

Question 2:

| **ELI or NonELI student \* academic achievement categories Crosstabulation** | | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | | | academic achievement categories | | | Total |
| 1-1.99 | 2-2.99 | 3-4 |
| ELI or NonELI student | ELI Student | Count | 5 | 17 | 28 | 50 |
| Expected Count | 5.0 | 18.0 | 27.0 | 50.0 |
| Std. Residual | .0 | -.2 | .2 |  |
| NonELI student | Count | 5 | 19 | 26 | 50 |
| Expected Count | 5.0 | 18.0 | 27.0 | 50.0 |
| Std. Residual | .0 | .2 | -.2 |  |
| Total | | Count | 10 | 36 | 54 | 100 |
| Expected Count | 10.0 | 36.0 | 54.0 | 100.0 |

| **Chi-Square Tests** | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Value | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
| Pearson Chi-Square | .185a | 2 | .912 |
| Likelihood Ratio | .185 | 2 | .912 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | .089 | 1 | .766 |
| N of Valid Cases | 100 |  |  |
| a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 5.00. | | | |

Question 3:

| **Variables Entered/Removedb** | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Model | | Variables Entered | Variables Removed | Method |
| dimension0 | 1 | Levelof depressiona | . | Enter |
| a. All requested variables entered. | | | | |
| b. Dependent Variable: Academic achievement | | | | |

| **Model Summaryb** | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Model | | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
| dimension0 | 1 | .019a | .000 | -.010 | .59216 |
| a. Predictors: (Constant), Levelof depression | | | | | |
| b. Dependent Variable: Academic achievement | | | | | |

| **ANOVAb** | | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Model | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
| 1 | Regression | .012 | 1 | .012 | .036 | .851a |
| Residual | 34.364 | 98 | .351 |  |  |
| Total | 34.376 | 99 |  |  |  |
| a. Predictors: (Constant), Levelof depression | | | | | | |
| b. Dependent Variable: Academic achievement | | | | | | |

| **Coefficientsa** | | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. |
| B | Std. Error | Beta |
| 1 | (Constant) | 2.939 | .130 |  | 22.623 | .000 |
| Levelof depression | -.006 | .030 | -.019 | -.189 | .851 |
| a. Dependent Variable: Academic achievement | | | | | | |

| **Residuals Statisticsa** | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation | N |
| Predicted Value | 2.8996 | 2.9331 | 2.9169 | .01123 | 100 |
| Residual | -1.03312 | 1.10043 | .00000 | .58916 | 100 |
| Std. Predicted Value | -1.544 | 1.445 | .000 | 1.000 | 100 |
| Std. Residual | -1.745 | 1.858 | .000 | .995 | 100 |
| a. Dependent Variable: Academic achievement | | | | | |