

The Relationship between Students' Involvement in Moral and Religious Activities and their Academic Achievement at a Faith-based Institution: Evidence from Thailand

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Abstract

The study investigated the relationship between students' participation in moral and religious activities and their academic achievement at a small faith-based university located in Thailand. The methodology used in this study was purposive sampling of secondary data, the subjects being 764 students enrolled in different majors during the 2015-2016 Academic Year. Data was retrieved from the university's software system detailing students' participation in various religious activities and their academic achievement. This data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to examine relationship between students' participation in moral and religious activities and their academic achievement.

The results indicated there was a positive correlation between students' participation in moral and religious activities and academic achievement. The study also showed that there was a statistically significant difference between students' participation in moral activities and academic achievement.

Keywords: *academic achievement, moral activities, religious activities*

Introduction

Educational systems around the world perceive moral and religious values to be a significant component that governs behavior and cultivates uprightness, virtue, and ability to cope with uncertainty and changes in society. These values are integrated either directly or indirectly into curricular programs. In Thailand's higher educational system, the Office of the Higher Education Commission strongly encourages that moral values should be integrated into courses in addition to theoretical knowledge and skills. Pornrungrroj (2014) asserts that morality defines one's character and behavior so that one will be well thought of and admired, and moral values will make a person virtuous, noble, self-disciplined, conscientious, grateful, kind, patient, honest, austere, persevering, and selfless. Additionally, Mooney (2010) argues that a religious person equipped with high moral values is able to endure hardship, withstand criticism, and optimistically confront challenges in a tranquil manner.

In faith-based schools, religious doctrines and moral values are often emphasized in curricular programs. For example, a Christian school may offer holistic education that addresses "the total person as a unified whole, inclusive of his or her physiological, sociological, and psychological environments within a spiritual framework" (McGarrel, 2010, p. 110), and biblical principles are built into courses offered in study programs. The faith-based educational system operated by the Seventh-day Adventist denomination is firmly grounded on the principles of Scripture as articulated by church pioneer Ellen G. White, who wrote that curricula should include three dimensions – physical development, intellectual empowerment, and spiritual nurture – and that these three are inseparable (Thayer, 2008). All these three dimensions must receive equal attention and be harmoniously developed in an individual's life.

White goes on to say that Adventist education is designed to "prepare the students for the joy of service in this world, and for the higher joy of wider service in the world to come" (White, 1903, p.13). This means that Adventist education does not only educate students with the professional skills necessary for life in this world, but also helps shape their characters needed to be eligible for heavenly citizenship in the glorious life to come as promised in the Holy Bible. In a previous study conducted at an Adventist higher educational institution in Thailand, the findings suggested that moral and religious activities have a positive impact on students' academic performance, and the study results suggested that students with higher academic achievement (GPA) were likely to be involved in moral and

religious activities (Kitjaroonchai, 2015). Participating in moral and religious activities did not, as might be thought, serve as a distraction that lowered their academic performance, but instead helped them to persist and improve their performance.

Moral and religious practice drives a person toward goals, and even if the individual is not consciously aware of it, religious commitment becomes a stimulus to academic success. The Bible is filled with texts in relation to walking with God and increasing in wisdom. God requires his followers to have unwavering faith in him. Moses exhorts Israel to

“... love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads” [Deuteronomy 6:4-8, New International Version (NIV)].¹

From this scripture, Moses makes provision for the earnest inculcation of God’s law on the minds of young people by way of parental training, which was designed to associate religion with all the most familiar daily scenes of domestic life. In addition, King David of Israel wrote “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding” (Psalm 111:10). Basically, this verse teaches that the fear of God is foundational to true wisdom; all other kinds of learning are worthless unless built upon a knowledge of the Lord himself. A well-known Biblical promise admonishes believers to “seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33). This scripture claims that when men get their priorities straight – that is, building moral character and seeking God as revealed in the Bible – they will grow in grace and gain intellect.

The focus of this research was to ascertain the correlation between students’ active involvement in a faith-based university’s religious activities and their academic achievement. Throughout the school year, the university provides various moral and religious activities that students may choose to avoid or attend. Some sponsored students may attend moral and religious activities in order to retain their scholarships. On the other hand, there are students who participate in these activities because of their desire to have a close relationship with God.

To address these concerns as well as to revisit other researchers’ findings on the positive impact of students’ involvement in moral and religious activities, this research intends to restudy and examine if moral and religious activities organized by a faith-based institution have a positive impact on students’ academic achievement. To investigate the possible value of moral and religious activities that are provided to students, the findings could serve as a current reference point for further development of students’ character and academic attainment.

Review of Literature

Morality

Morality is defined in the Oxford Dictionary of English [Soanes & Stevenson (eds.), 2005] as “principles concerning the distinction between right and wrong or good and bad behavior.” Gert (2012) claims that morality is to be understood in both a descriptive and normative sense; morality in the descriptive sense refers to a code of conduct endorsed by an individual or group, whereas in the normative sense it refers to a code of conduct, given specified conditions and put forward by all rational individuals. Thus, different individuals or groups have endorsed different or incompatible codes of conduct that lead to their designated norms (Luco, 2014). Morals are created and define society, philosophy, religion, or individual conscience (Elci, Sener, & Alpkan, 2011) to comply with ethical principles. From a Christian perspective, morality is based on God’s character and laws outlined in Biblical doctrines, and true morality are modeled by Christ. All other attempts at developing moral

¹ All Biblical quotations in this article are from the New International Version.

virtues are distorted shadows of the principles embodied in the character of God and communicated to humans in the Bible. Thus, morality and ethics should not differ from one person to another, for God and the Bible are their true source. The highest rule found in the scriptures, sums up the core doctrine of Christianity that human beings must love their God and their neighbors (Luke 10:27). Any individual who complies with this rule and perceives that God is the source of morality, will, it is anticipated, act and live a moral life.

In Buddhism, morality has to do with the Five Precepts, namely 1) no killing; 2) no stealing; 3) no lying; 4) no adultery; and 5) no imbibing intoxicating drinks (Sellmann, 2009). Buddhists believe that moral development can be secured when a person has control over his own actions or refrains from exercising thoughts or actions that yield negative effects on one's fellows. Making moral decisions can lead to positive feelings and emotional enhancement (Malti, Keller, & Buchmann, 2012). Muslims perceive that morality derives from the Qur'an, which is "a work of moral admonition and the Muslims should accept the Qur'an for it is the basis of their ethics and it contains potentially the answers to all the questions of everyday life" (Halstead, 2007, p.284). To many Muslims expressing the concept of morality is inseparable from the principles of life outlined in the Qur'an.

From various definitions given for 'morality' from different perspectives, it can be concluded that morality is a virtuous code of conduct and noble principles practiced and valued by different groups of people that uplifts their behavior as they encounter conflicts which need individual judgment.

Religiosity and Faith-based Education

The literature on religious orientation defines the terms 'religiosity' and 'religiousness' as one's adherence to the practice of faith or religion (Singhapakdi et al. 2000; Conroy & Emerson, 2004; Elci, Sener, & Alpan, 2011), whereas Holdcroft (2006) posits that the concept of religiosity crosses several academic disciplines and varies from one professor to the other. Holdcroft depicts this concept of religiosity with examples such as "a theologian will perceive religiosity from the view point of faith", while Christian educators will focus on discipleship as an individual commitment in following Jesus and the Bible. Thus, religious education is the study of strategies and methods for teaching how to be a disciple and a discipler of others. Psychologists would address the concept of religiosity as "devotion, holiness, or piousness," and sociologists would include "church membership, church attendance, belief acceptance, or living the faith" (Holdcroft, 2006, p. 89). Regardless of concepts from different academic disciplines, religions provide an individual devotee with a "compelling reason for the adepts to follow the moral rules" (Elci, Sener, & Alpan, 2011, p. 1370).

A large number of college students in Thailand study in public universities where religious beliefs and faith are segregated from the academic facet. However, a small portion of students are enrolled in parochial colleges where religion is emphasized and integrated into the curriculum. A faith-based school's main mission is to inspire students to have a close relationship with God and to achieve academic success. A faith-based school is designed to direct the "process of human development toward God's objective for man: godliness of character and action. It bends its efforts to the end 'that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works'" (Christian Education, 2015, paragraph 12).

Religion and Academic Achievement

Many individuals believe that moral and religious practices have little or no connection with academic achievement because they are social norms which can be rigorously observed or ignored. They believe that academic achievement results from intelligence and diligent study. However, a plethora of research findings support the idea that moral and religious practice yield a positive impact on achievement due to the fact that religious doctrines empower devotees to be hardworking, productive, self-disciplined, prudent, and sober in all actions, and that these qualities tend to bring success in life (Regnerus, 2000; Jeynes, 2003; Jeynes, 2007; Brown & Taylor, 2007; McCullough &

Willoughby, 2009; McKune & John, 2009; Mooney, 2010; Erickson & Phillips, 2012; Kitjaroonchai, 2015).

Mooney's (2010) and Erickson and Phillips' (2012) studies revealed that religious activities had a positive impact on educational attainment, and Jaynes (2007) posited that students attending religious schools had higher levels of academic achievement than those who are in public schools due to differences in school culture such as school atmosphere, level of school discipline, racial harmony, more homework, less school violence, and support from caring teachers. Jaynes asserts that these traits were shown to be positively correlated with student academic achievement. Jaynes' study is congruent with the findings of Astin et al. (2003) whose study affirmed that spiritual and religious engagement yield positive outcomes, such as academic performance, psychological well-being, leadership development and satisfaction with college life. According to theologians and philosophers, religion is perceived to be an instrument to shape an individual's life to pursue serenity and utmost peace that secularism cannot provide (Astin et al., 2003).

McFarland, Wright and Weakliem (2011) claim that "religion links with education in which educated individuals may be suited to promote and explain their religious beliefs by convincing a congregation that in order to be successful in life, they need to cling with unwavering faith developed upon religious doctrines." They further state that "bible and prayer groups often deal with how central religious tenets relate to the problems of daily life" (p. 169), and that these activities will put devotees at ease when faced by life's dilemmas. Religious beliefs and ideas encourage people to be "hardworking, productive, self-disciplined, economical, prudent, and sober" (Elci, Sener, & Alpan, 2011, p. 1370). Religion gives believers solace and serenity in time of trouble, thereby enabling them to deal better with stressful events that might otherwise negatively impact their academic achievement (Mooney, 2010). Religion may provide a resource for explaining and resolving conflicts and enhance self-development with a clear purpose in that a person is motivated to accomplish personal goals.

In evangelical Christian schools, Biblical principles are integrated into the educational philosophy and school curricula. The Bible teaches that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge" and "the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding (Proverbs 1:7; 2:6). Scripture also teaches believers that when they lack wisdom, they can count on God and seek understanding (James 1:5), and the messages in the sacred book contain a large volume of encouraging words helping believers to accomplish greater goals by inviting God to intervene. Involvement in church activities strengthens families as well as socialization among students (Regnerus, 2000).

Nedley posits that in a faith-based school setting, nurturing spiritual faith and reading spiritual materials on a daily basis could enhance the brain function as well as intellectual empowerment, so students' academic performance can improve (Nedley, 2010). The parochial schools operated by the Adventist Church in North America demonstrate that young students attending the Adventist school system (a conservative Christian denomination) consistently outperformed their peers in public schools in the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. This advantage is attributed to several stimulating factors that contribute to academic achievement, one of which is spirituality (Thayer & Kido, 2012). This research initiative attempts to document the academic achievement of elementary and secondary school students in the Adventist schools in North America, and examines the various factors that are related to achievement.

Despite all the claims and evidence by numerous research studies that religiosity has a positive impact on learners' academic achievement, there are researchers who argue that religious students might be less satisfied with their college learning experiences when observing their teachers' inconsistent adherence to their religious faith (Tobin & Weinberg, 2007; Ecklund, 2008). Students whose faith is challenged might have higher levels of anger and stress which decreases their academic performance (Schafer, 1997; Winterowd et al., 2005). In his research, Schafer (1997) found that students' academic performance drops in their first year of college, including that of students who

participate in religious activities. He said that students who are involved in religious activities may perform well in high school, but when it comes to college, religious activities have minimal or no positive influence on academic performance. In fact, Baker (cited in Correa, et al., 2015) reiterated that students with a religious background who enroll in college do not experience any significant impact on their academic performance as a result of participation in religious services.

In light of these assertions that religion plays a positive role in learners' academic attainments which are argued by a host of researchers in previous studies, primarily conducted in Western countries, this present study attempts to fill this identified research gap. It also examines whether morality and religiosity have a positive impact on students' academic achievement in a Buddhist country like Thailand. The researchers anticipate that this current study will also extend one author's previous research findings that show a correlation between students' ethical and moral activities and academic achievement in a recent study conducted at a Christian institution in Thailand.

Definition of Terms

Moral Activities: Activities organized by the university which attempt to promote fundamental principles of right-living and positive moral behavior, such as community service projects, assemblies, club meetings, and fundraising projects.

Religious Activities: Activities that present a Biblical perspective to promote spiritual growth and faith in God as revealed in the Bible, such as morning devotions, spiritual programs on Friday evening, chapels on Wednesday, Saturday worship, and Bible study.

Academic Achievement: Students' performance outcomes and learning results in the form of grades and cumulative grade point average (CGPA).

Study Objectives

This study aims to investigate:

1. The relationship between students' involvement in moral and religious activities and their academic achievement
2. The differences between students with high academic achievement and those with average and low academic achievement in regards to their involvement in moral and religious activities.
3. The differences between students' involvement in moral and religious activities among students pursuing various programs of study.

Research Questions

This study endeavors to answer the following questions:

1. Is there any significant correlation between students' involvement in moral and religious activities and their academic achievement?
2. Are there any significant differences between students with high academic achievement and the ones with average and low academic achievement with regards to their involvement in the moral and religious activities organized by the university?
3. Are there any significant differences between students' involvement in moral and religious activities among students pursuing different majors?

Methodology

Participants

The participants in this particular study were the population of 764 residential students who enrolled in different majors of study during the 2015-2016 academic year at a small faith-based university in Thailand. The researcher chose students who resided in the university dormitories due to the concrete and existing data related to their moral and religious activities and worship attendance credits that was already recorded in the software system and could be analyzed.

Design

The design of this study was quantitative in nature. The data retrieved from the university's software system was analyzed to investigate the relationship between the two variables: worship attendance participation (measured by worship credits) as the independent variable and academic achievement (CGPA) as the dependent variable.

The present study sought to determine if engagement in moral and religious activities had any impact on students' academic achievement, and had the additional purpose of adding to the findings of a previous study (Kitjaroonchai, 2015) that examined the correlation between students' involvement in moral and religious activities and their academic achievement. Thus, the researchers obtained up-to-date data of students' moral and religious attendance which were recorded in the software, and investigated their relationship to student academic achievement as measured by CGPA. Student participate in such activities as dormitory worships, vespers, Sabbath worships, community service on Saturday afternoon, chapel programs, family group experiences, student assemblies, departmental worships, and small groups or clubs. Student attendance at these activities was recorded by a software system and was also closely monitored by residence hall deans and their student assistants. Students who faithfully attended all these activities may obtain up to 200 worship credit points per semester for attending various programs related to moral and religious activities, and the total scores were tabulated as percentages. Some of these regulated activities are mandatory, whereas some are optional, and students may choose either to attend or not to attend.

Study Findings

The gender, program of study, year of study, and subject major as retrieved from the university's software system are summarized in Table 1 on the following page. The majority of the records examined were English majors, which made up 30.5% of the total sample, while the smallest group was students from the Faculty of Science (4.5%).

Table 1. *Demographic Characteristics of Research Subjects (N = 764)*

	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Female	503	65.8
Male	261	34.2
Program of Study		
International	342	44.8
Thai	422	55.2
Year of Study		
Freshman	190	24.9
Sophomore	256	33.5
Junior	136	17.8
Senior	182	23.8
Study Major		
Business	197	25.8
Education and Psychology	91	11.9
English	233	30.5
Nursing **	165	21.6
Science	34	4.5
Theology	44	5.8

Note: ** Only freshman and sophomore nursing students were included in this study

Table 2 shows the relationship between students' involvement in moral and religious activities and their academic achievement (CGPA).

Table 2. *Relationship between Worship Credits and Academic Achievement*

Learning Achievement Level (CGPA)	N	Average Worship Credits	Std. Deviation
0.00 - 1.99 (Low Achievement)	66	34.63	28.07
2.00- 2.99 (Average Achievement)	333	58.37	33.37
3.00 - 4.00 (High Achievement)	365	84.02	31.41
Total	764	68.57	35.80

As can be seen from Table 2, the analysis reveals that students who regularly attend moral and religious activities ($M = 84.02$) have higher levels of academic achievement. Interestingly, as the mean score of moral and religious activities involvement (worship credits) increases, the mean score of academic achievement increases accordingly as demonstrated in Figure A.

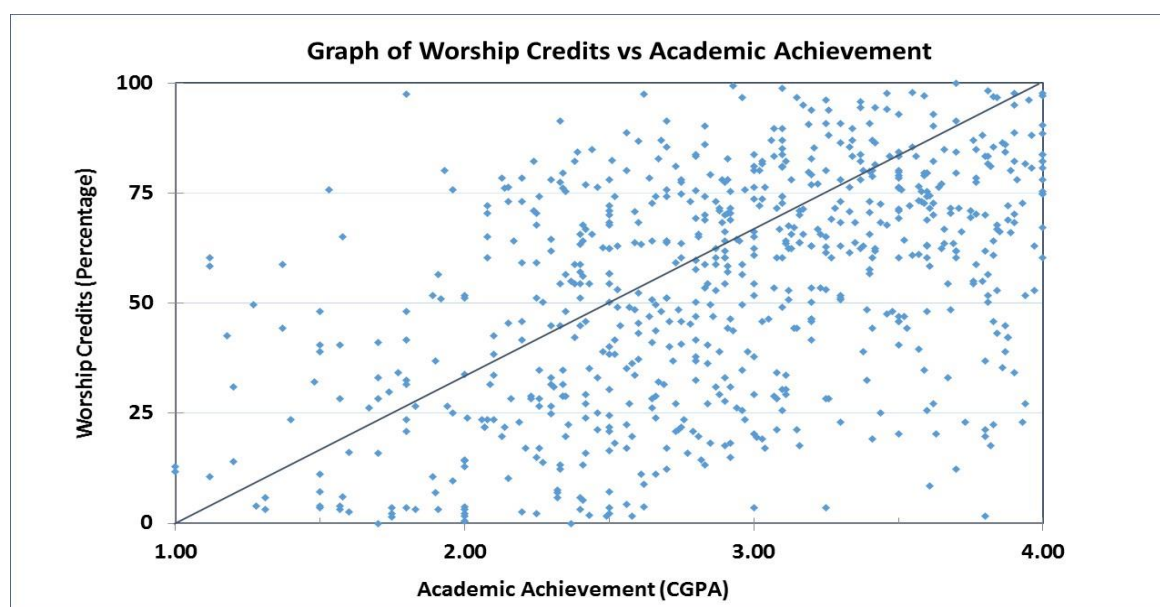


Figure A. Scatter Plot and Line Graph of Worship Credits vs Academic Achievement

To investigate whether there is any significant correlation between their involvement in moral and religious activities (Research Question 1) and student academic achievement (CGPA), Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (Pearson's r) was used to analyse the data; the statistical results are shown below in Table 3.

Table 3. *Correlation between Student Attendance at Moral and Religious Activities (Worship Credits) and Academic Achievement*

Variable	Descriptive Statistics			Correlation	
	n	M	SD	Worship Credits	Academic Achievement
Worship Credits	764	68.57	35.80	—	.475**
Academic Achievement	764	2.90	0.67	.475**	—

Note: ** $p < .01$, significant correlation

The analysis shows in Table 3 that there is a significantly moderate positive correlation between student involvement in moral and religious activities and their academic achievement as designated in the form of worship credits ($r = 0.475$, $p < 0.01$). In other words, moral and religious activities organized by the university seem to play a positive role in students' learning performance. The graph in Figure A shows that as students' involvement in moral and religious activities increases (measured by worship credits), their academic achievement (CGPA) also improves. This finding is congruent with Mooney's (2010), and Erickson and Phillips' (2012) studies which found that attending religious activities can boost learners' performance at school.

To respond to research question number 2 about significant differences among the three groups of learners (low, average, and high achievers) with regards to their involvement in moral and religious related activities, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) test was conducted on the data. The results of this analysis are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Analysis of Differences between Learners' Involvement in Moral and Religious Activities and their Academic Achievement

(I) Learning Achievement	(J) Learning Achievement	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1 Low Achievement	2	-23.74*	4.31	.00	-34.32	-13.16
	3	-49.39*	4.28	.00	-59.89	-38.89
2 Average Achievement	1	23.74*	4.31	.00	13.16	34.32
	3	-25.65*	2.43	.00	-31.60	-19.70
3 High Achievement	1	49.39*	4.28	.00	38.89	59.89
	2	25.65*	2.43	.00	19.70	31.60

Note: * $p < .05$, significant difference

As can be seen in Table 4, a one-way ANOVA statistical analysis shows that there are significant differences among the three groups of learners and their attendance at moral and religious activities at $\alpha = .05$. Students with high academic achievement showed statistically significant differences from the other two groups in their participation in moral and religious activities. The finding of this current study is congruent with the previous study of one of the researchers (Kitjaroonchai, 2015), that actively attending ethical, moral, and religious activities increases students' academic achievement.

In order to respond to research question number 3, that is, to determine if there are any significant differences between students' involvement in moral and religious activities and their study major, a one-way ANOVA analysis was performed, and the results are shown in Table 5 and Table 6.

Table 5. Analysis of Differences in Involvement in Moral and Religious Activities by Major (Overall)

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Worship Credits * Faculty	Between Groups (Combined)	66054.62	5	13210.92	10.98	.00
	Within Groups	911802.46	758	1202.91		
	Total	977857.08	763			

Note: * $p < .001$, significant difference

The one-Way ANOVA test shows a statistically significant difference between groups [F , (5, 758) = 10.98, $p < .001$].

Table 6. Analysis of Differences in Involvement in Moral and Religious Activities by Major (Details)

Dependent Variable: Worship Credits

Least Significant Differences (LSD)

(I) Major of study	(J) Major of study	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Business	Education	-15.17	4.40	.00	-23.80	-6.54
	English	-13.09*	3.36	.00	-19.68	-6.50
	Nursing	-3.27	3.66	.37	-10.46	3.91
	Science	-14.04*	6.44	.03	-26.68	-1.40
	Theology	-37.81*	5.78	.00	-49.17	-26.46
Education	Business	15.17*	4.40	.00	6.54	23.80
	English	2.07	4.29	.63	-6.34	10.49
	Nursing	11.90*	4.53	.01	3.00	20.79
	Science	1.13	6.97	.87	-12.55	14.82
	Theology	-22.64*	6.37	.00	-35.15	-10.14
English	Business	13.09*	3.36	.00	6.50	19.68
	Education	-2.07	4.29	.623	-10.49	6.34
	Nursing	9.82*	3.52	.01	2.89	16.75
	Science	-0.94	6.37	.88	-13.44	11.56
	Theology	-24.72*	5.70	.00	-35.91	-13.53
Nursing	Business	3.27	3.66	.37	-3.91	10.46
	Education	-11.90*	4.53	.01	-20.79	-3.00
	English	-9.82*	3.53	.01	-16.75	-2.89
	Science	-10.77	6.53	.10	-23.59	2.06
	Theology	-34.54*	5.88	.00	-46.09	-22.99
Science	Business	14.04*	6.44	.03	1.39	26.68
	Education	-1.13	6.97	.87	-14.81	12.55
	English	0.94	6.37	.88	-11.56	13.44
	Nursing	10.77	6.53	.10	-2.06	23.59
	Theology	-23.78*	7.2	.00	-39.32	-8.23
Theology	Business	37.81*	5.78	.00	26.46	49.17
	Education	22.64*	6.37	.00	10.14	35.15
	English	24.72*	5.70	.00	13.53	35.91
	Nursing	34.54*	5.88	.00	22.99	46.09
	Science	23.78*	7.92	.00	8.23	39.32

Note: * $p < .05$, significant difference

There was a statistically significant difference between groups as determined by one-way ANOVA [$F(5,758) = 10.98, p < .001$]. An LSD post-hoc test revealed that there were significant differences ($p < .05$) between learners with different majors of study in regards to their involvement in moral and religious activities. However, these differences varied from one major to another. For example, science majors showed statistical differences against only two other majors (business and theology), English majors showed statistical differences against three majors (business, nursing, theology), while theology majors showed statistical differences against all other majors.

Discussion

In this study, the findings demonstrate that participation in moral and religious activities have a positive impact on students' academic achievement. The study results revealed that students who participate in the moral and religious activities likely have higher academic achievement. This affirms the previous research finding of a significant positive correlation between academic achievement and ethical and moral activities involvement in a Christian institution (Kitjaroonchai, 2015). The results also correspond with those of Jeyne (2007), Mooney (2010), Sumari, Hussin, & Siraj (2010), and Erickson and Phillips (2012), who found that active engagement in moral and religious activities can improve students' academic achievement. Mooney (2010) further claimed that religious activities have important subjective effects on college students' satisfaction and how they choose to invest their time in academic improvement. From the researchers' perspective, the current study findings can be explained as follows.

Participation in well-structured moral and religious activities may improve college students' academic performance because religious principles encourage practitioners to achieve their life goals despite the hardships that cross their paths. As Mooney (2010) asserted, religion provides believers with serenity in times of trouble, thereby empowering them to better deal with discouragement. Students who actively participate in religious activities would form a "locus of control" in which they will establish self-discipline and balance in life in regards to their work and initiative (Fagan, 2010). This locus of control refers to "the belief that one's action and efforts, rather than fate or luck, shape the result of one's efforts." This belief, in turn, is linked to "the effort that students put forth and the importance they assign to working hard." (Fagan, 2010, p. 8). This implies that students who are sincere in their religious faith can better cope with stress, and when they regularly nurture their spiritual growth, their brain function as well as intellectual empowerment will be enhanced (Nedley, 2010). Students enrolled in a residential religious school typically invest in a considerable amount of time in forming a code of ethics and moral disciplines to nurture their growth, which leads them to persistence in achieving their learning objectives. Fagan (2010) claims that the cultural values of religious communities provide a significant pathway to academic success for young adolescents, since these religious values have either indirect or direct influence on students' academic achievement. Regnerus (2000) also found that in addition to nurturing social bonds with family and community, a higher level of involvement in church activities is associated with a level of social control and motivation toward educational attainment, enabling students to do better in math and reading skills. The Analysis of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health showed that increased religious attendance positively correlates with higher grades among young learners (Mark & Glen, 2003).

Implications and Applications of the Findings for Faith-based Educational Institutions

The primary focus of faith-based institutions is equipping students to be successful academically as well as morally. They not only focus on helping students to develop a Christ-like character, but they also help students to develop other important life skills. For a student to imitate "God in His judgment," and to obey the command found in Philippians 1:10 to "approve things that are excellent", he must have the "aesthetic as well as the moral perceptions and inclinations to prefer the best in all areas of his experience" (Horton, 1992). Students who pursue a holistic life will strive to excel in everything they do, including academic achievements, as well as in their behavior. In addition, Fagan (2010) mentions that those students who actively participate in religious activities have better school performance such as class attendance, more time spent in homework, have greater social skills, and develop high-valued habits. With these thoughts in mind, a faith-based institution may consider providing a variety of religious activities which boost intellectual power as well as enhance moral values among these young learners.

The overall results indicate that student participation in religious activities enhances academic performance. The study also shows a wide range of significant differences between learners with different majors of study in regard to their engagement in religious activities. The degree to which

students participate in religious activities varies by field of study. According to the research findings, theology majors exhibited the highest level of differences, which means they had the highest level of religious activities participation. One possible reason for this difference is the nature of the program of study. The courses themselves may motivate them to attend more religious activities, or might have given them opportunities to initiate or take part in religious activities. Another possible reason is because the students are Christians, and so involvement in religious activities is part of their lifestyle.

Since moral and religious activity plays a vital role in students' lives and in their academic achievement, a faith-based institution should work to foster or enhance student engagement in such activities which are meaningful to their learning and daily lives. The primary focus of the institution should be holistic student development, particularly in religious and spiritual life. Braskamp (2007) mentions that to create a supporting and challenging environment, every member of the community should work together and become models in a "mentoring community." It should be the responsibility of every faculty member to participate in shaping the lives of students. With this notion, a faith-based institution may provide community service projects in which students have a sense of personal value and commitment to a life of service for others. In addition, students' ultimate goal is to achieve their own life objectives. Thus, providing a friendly environment where teachers and mentors help students develop their confidence and commitment in their learning process is essential. Braskamp (2007) suggests that for a college to succeed in nurturing holistic development, faculty should address the "issues of meaning, purpose, religious, spiritual and moral growth" while working with students in the classroom as well as in their everyday associations with students.

Limitations and Recommendation

There are two limitations in regards to this current study. First, the generalizability of the research findings is limited due to the fact that the subjects used for this study were from one faith-based institution in Thailand living in a campus environment where moral and religious principles are embedded in curricular as well as co-curricular activities. It should be noted that half of the participants are from Christian families, which is an extraneous variable that is not accounted for in the data analysis. Second, the data sources used for this study are quantitative in nature. Hence, a qualitative study should be conducted with these subjects to furnish cross-validation of the findings and a more extensive discussion regarding the impact of moral and religious activities on academic performance. A study on the impact of morality and religiosity on students' subsequent employment after leaving the university should also be conducted to examine if morality and religious activities in a faith-based setting have had any impact on their professional behavior.

Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the relationship between attendance at moral and religious activities and students' academic achievement at a faith-based higher educational institution. The research findings showed that there is a positive correlation between students' participation in moral religious activities and their academic achievement as measured by cumulative grade point average. The findings also showed statistically significant differences in participation in such activities by major. Hence, morality and religious principles must be incorporated in study programs to nurture the spiritual development of students as whole persons. These principles will help them live meaningful lives in a fast-changing, competitive, and anomic society where moral standards and religious values are often neglected.

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