

Quantitative Approach on Undergraduates' Student-Life Balance: Intervention for Academic Stress

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate the relationships between social life, academic requirements, institutional support and student life balance amongst Malaysian undergraduate students. A sample size of 200 undergraduate students from both private and public universities located in Malaysia contributed to the research data. Partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) is utilised to assess the influence of social life, academic requirements and institutional support on student-life balance. The results establish that social life and institutional support have a significant positive correlation to student-life balance whereas academic requirements have a significant negative correlation with student-life balance. Future research should focus on collecting qualitative data as it would provide a richer understanding that would assist universities and researchers in discovering other variables that may influence student-life balance. This study contributes to the Malaysian Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013-2025 as the current study is in line with the first objective of MEB, which is associated with student life balance and potential ways to reduce possible psychiatric symptoms among undergraduates.

Keywords: student-life balance, social life, academic requirement, institutional support

1. Introduction

Nowadays, undergraduates undergo tremendous pressure and stress in order to keep up with their academic performances and social life expectation (Bahar et al., 2015). Consequently, they may choose to isolate themselves and perceive themselves as lonely, depressed and anxious (Furr, Westefeld, McConnell, & Jenkins, 2001). The World Health Organisation (2019) has reported that more than 80% of people around the world are experiencing some sort of mental health illness. Furthermore, Carter and Jallah (2019) state that depression is the number one leading factor in causing disability globally. Stress can consequently have a negative impact on one's mental and physical health if it is not well managed (May, Bauer, & Fincham, 2015), and is positively correlated to psychiatric problems such as anxiety and depression (Deb, Strodl, & Sun, 2015). Mustafa (2019) revealed that undergraduates face academic burnout and mental health challenges that can be debilitating. It was found that one out of five undergraduates experienced mental health problems in 2016, compared to one out of ten in 2011 (Bernama, 2016). In addition, National Health and Morbidity Survey 2017 (NHMS 2017) revealed 50% of the students (out of 284,516 respondents) claimed that they experienced examination-related stress and depression due to social life related issue (Ministry of Health, 2018). Generally, local undergraduates are being taught the practical ways of coping with stress through school curriculum. Nonetheless, not many of them are able to apply these interventions into their student life (Roll, 2015).

Student-life balance depends on a student's ability to balance extracurricular activities and academic requirement (Roll, 2015). It helps ensure that undergraduates are able to cope with the academic workload, increasing stress and possibilities of mental health problems in an undergraduate's life (May et al., 2015). Doble and Supriya (2011) postulated that student-life balance is the main concern for higher education institutions nowadays as undergraduates undergo tremendous pressure to keep up with their academic performances and social relationships expectations (Bahar et al., 2015). When undergraduates are unable to balance their social life and academic requirements, they may become more susceptible to mental health disorders which has been associated to depression, anxiety, stress and loneliness (Furr et al., 2001). Previous studies explained that the prevalence of mental health issues increased amongst undergraduates due to a lack of student life balance (Shamsuddin et al., 2013; Ramli et al., 2018, Lau, Wong, & Lim, 2018). Thus, it is crucial for universities to provide institutional

support to assist undergraduates in order to develop student-life balance. The student-life balance may possibly improve an undergraduate's wellbeing while coping with their academic expectations and soft-skill development (Pookaiyaudom, 2015).

Notably, there have been previous conceptual and empirical studies conducted to explore the potential factors influencing student-life balance. Mixed results were found as the research studies were conducted in different environmental contexts and sample populations. The findings obtained were related to specific undergraduate groups in specific study fields. For instance, the undergraduate respondent groups from law faculty (Bergin & Pakenham, 2014), veterinary faculty (Cardwell & Lewis, 2017), matriculation program (Malim, Saikim & Halim, 2018) and physical education faculty (Gomez, Bradley, & Conway, 2018). The study focuses on student-life balance among undergraduates from other different university programs is still insufficient (Shih, 2015). Hence, the current study aims to close the gaps by engaging undergraduates from all relevant faculties (e.g., engineering, science, business, psychology) from various public and private institutions in Malaysia context. Furthermore, there are different manifested variables related to student-life balance with different findings in past studies. Koshkin, Katusheva, Bolvachev and Yablochkina (2014) found that Russian undergraduates perceived student-life balance was associated with personal satisfaction and public recognition variables. Similarly, Lowe and Gayle (2017) found that student-life balance of Scottish college undergraduates was associated to individual's coping strategies and relationships with family members and academicians. Therefore, the present study sought to provide in-depth insights to undergraduates on the contextual-related factors (i.e., social life, academic requirements and institutional support) that affect their student-life balance.

The paper is organized as follows: The paper begins by reviewing the definitions of student-life balance and it is followed by presenting related empirical studies in the association between contextual factors and student-life balance. The next section describes the methods used in this research and followed by research findings and discussions. Finally, the implications of the study for research and management practices, the limitations and directions for future studies are discussed.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Underpinning theory: The Social Ecological Model

The Social Ecological Model (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) in Figure 1 was employed to explain the factors that influence student-life balance. There are five levels of social stimuli which affect individuals' behaviour – "individual", "interpersonal", "organisational", "community" and "public policy" (Glanz, Rimer & Viswanath, 2008). In other words, an individual's behaviour is shaped by social influences. Past researches revealed that there is correlation between an individual's behaviour and social circumstances (Astin, 1993; Costello & Hope, 2016; Ukponahiusi, Okoh, & Oyakhilome, 2019). Individuals are more likely to conform to specific social norms in order to avoid possible mockery (Esiri, 2016). In this context, the Social Ecological Model postulates that social-related stimuli, such as social life, academic requirements and institutional support would influence an undergraduate's behaviour; subsequently, determining the outcome of a balanced or imbalanced student's life.

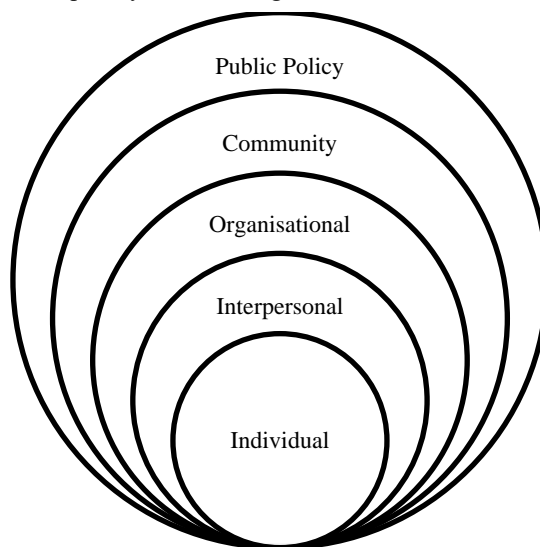


Figure 1. The Social Ecological Model

Generally, undergraduates' academic performance expectations yield different academic outcomes.

Doménech-Betoret et al. (2017) found that undergraduates' academic expectations play a mediating role between academic self-efficacy and academic achievement. This can be viewed as the “individual” level in the Social Ecological Model (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Furthermore, social relationships also play a significant role in determining student-life balance and academic achievement (Astin, 1993; Lowe & Gayle, 2017) whereby the social relationships are part of the “interpersonal” level as explained in the Social Ecological Model. Next, institutional support such as counselling has been associated with determining student-life balance as these services assist undergraduates in coping with academic stress (Ali, Zhou, Hussain, Nair, & Ragavan, 2017). Therefore, institutional support is categorised under the “organisational” level. Additionally, “community” envelopes a society's norms and values. The stigma of mental health illnesses in Malaysia (Malaymail, 2018) may have an indirect impact on undergraduates who experience mental health problems; consequently, impacting student life balance. Lastly, “public policy” such as institutional policies can be introduced in order to assist undergraduates to obtain a balanced student's life. Nevertheless, the current study employs the first three levels of the Social Ecological Model – “individual”, “interpersonal” and “organisational” in explaining student-life balance.

2.2 Student-Life Balance

Student-life balance and work-life balance can be viewed in the same light. A full-time student would be required to have ample of time to cope with academic studies and be involved in extracurricular activities (Roll, 2015). Particularly, many unfamiliar circumstances are experienced by fresh undergraduates, such as attending orientation week in order to be familiarised with the university campus, engaging in various subject enrolments and understanding the faculty policies and procedures and others. Subsequently, the undergraduates are required to adapt to the busy and taxing routine varsity schedules such as attending lectures and tutorials classes, completing coursework assessments and participating in extra co-curricular activities (Bergin & Pakenham, 2014; Yusof, Mcleay, & Burton, 2015). Hence, the efficient time management skills are critical in order to manage one's academic requirements and social involvements during the varsity life (Henderson, Selwyn, & Aston, 2017). Social involvements include an individual's interactions and activities with the social groups (Ahmad, 2015; Coccia & Darling, 2014; Romero, 2017), such as spending time with family members (Lowe & Gayle, 2017), interacting with other undergraduates (Chang, Chapman, Zain, Hutcheson, Lee, & Austin, 2015) and having time for activities that bring joy and relaxation (Pookaiyaudom, 2015). Thus, student-life balance is important to enhance student's ability in managing both academic and social expectations effectively and maintaining a healthy wellbeing.

It is evident that undergraduates may undergo high levels of stress when coping with their academic requirement, especially when there is lacking of supports and assistance from their social groups (Shamsuddin et al., 2013; Bergin & Pakenham, 2014; Lowe & Gayle, 2017; Ramli, Alavi, Mehrinezhad, & Ahmadi, 2018). Hence, student-life balance is important to enable the undergraduates to enjoy their university life and overcome the possible stressors faced. Notably, many higher education institutions provide counselling services and training programs to undergraduates in order to develop and maintain their student-life balance (Ahmad, 2015; Ali et al., 2016). Previous studies also found that institutional support, particularly in counselling has significantly decreased psychiatric symptoms such as depression, stress and anxiety problem among undergraduates (Biasi et al., 2017; Murray et al., 2016). It is imperative to stress on student-life balance practices in order to prevent undergraduates from becoming more susceptible to mental health illnesses.

2.3 Social Life

Social life is commonly defined as an individual's interactions and undertakings with the outside world (Ahmad, 2015; Romero, 2017). It is derived from the second level of the Social Ecological Model – “Interpersonal”. This social stimulus has the potential to alter a student's behaviour, predicting student-life balance. A student's social life consists of relationships with family members (Doble & Supriya, 2011; Lowe & Gayle, 2017), relationships with other peers (Chang et al., 2015; Trautwein & Bosse, 2016) and partaking in social activities for stress relief and leisure (Choi & Yoo, 2016; Pookaiyaudom, 2015).

Undergraduates have been consistently associated with academic-related anxiety, depression and stress, and these symptoms may negatively impact an undergraduate's academic performance (Ramli et al., 2018; Shamsuddin et al., 2013). A good and consistent social life is important in improving undergraduates' wellbeing (Pookaiyaudom, 2015). Past research found that familial support should be strengthened in order to improve student-life balance (Doble & Supriya, 2011). Family acts as a cushion for undergraduates when they are facing difficulties. They always provide guidance and support to the undergraduates to go through the challenging situations. However, Laidlaw, McLellan and Ozakinci (2016) found that many undergraduates are more likely to

seek peer support when they are experiencing difficulties. Sometime, peer groups may not have the solution and means to assist undergraduates as needed (Laidlaw et al., 2016). Hence, a strong familial relationship is vital to provide full support and assistance to the undergraduates in times of difficulty. Nonetheless, many undergraduates do not prioritise familial relationships in their social life. They prefer to seek assistance from peer groups instead (Roll, 2015). Furthermore, it was also found that peer groups assist undergraduate students to keep track of their involvement in the universities. The peer groups also help students to relax and take their minds off study stress. This is an important aspect of social life as it allows students to focus on their academic requirements when they are supposed to.

Although a student's social life is important, Astin (1993) hints that there are advantages and disadvantages regarding the influence of peer groups. They may influence the undergraduates to learn and adopt some adverse habits and behaviours such as avoidance attitudes, drug abuse and absenteeism and others in order to deal with the problem (Kidwell, Eddleston, & Kellermanns, 2018). This may be a slippery slope as bad habits are difficult to break (Kidwell et al., 2018). It is crucial for undergraduates to find the appropriate social life related activities and social network development with good peers. Good understanding of the importance of their social life as it may help with their mental wellbeing and student-life balance (Pookaiyaudom, 2015).

2.4 Academic Requirements

Generally, the undergraduates are required to be disciplined and organised in order to fulfil the academic (i.e., modules) requirements, such as attending lectures, tutorials, examinations and completing continuous coursework (Bergin & Pakenham, 2014; Yusof et al., 2015). In this context, academic requirement variable is related to the basic level of the Social Ecological Model – “Individual”. Good management of time is necessary in order to achieve high academic success (Gomez et al., 2018). An undergraduate who aims to achieve a good overall grade for a subject would be required to meet all aspects of the module requirement and face major academic-related stress (Koch, 2018). In addition, there is a positive correlation between undergraduates who perform well in pop quizzes and their overall grades achievement. The continuous assessment such as quizzes and assignments is to assist the undergraduates to gain additional insights and understanding of the module content, retain information and achieve good scores during their final examination (Tse & Kane, 2018). However, individual differences always affect the expectations of academic achievement (Karaman & Watson, 2017). Some undergraduates may aspire to strike for excellent academic performance whereas some undergraduates may aim to meet the minimum acceptable requirements. Huang and Gove (2015) found that majority of Asians students tend to put a strong emphasis on academic achievements and experience high level of academic stress and burnout; consequently, discontinuing their undergraduate degree (Mustafa, 2019).

The Achievement Motivation Theory by McClelland (1961) states that achievement, power and affiliation are important factors to influence one's motivation to achieve good academic performance. Particularly, the achievement factor will affect undergraduate's innate satisfaction by scoring good grades. In addition, the undergraduate is motivated to perform well in his or her academic achievement due to the need of attainment of power of influence on others. The undergraduate is viewed to have relative worth as compared with others in attaining decision making power. Thus, he or she is rewarded with a leadership role for group assignment tasks (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008). The undergraduate is more likely to be motivated to achieve good academic performance in order to attain power over others (i.e., influence others). Past studies proposed that there is a positive relationship between student leadership (i.e., power to influence others) and academic achievement (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Xie et al., 2019; Zhang, 2017).

Besides, an undergraduate is also motivated to achieve good academic performance in order to gain the support and affiliation from peers. Affiliation involves the aspects of being accepted and the sense of belonging that one has with their peers (McClelland, 1961). Strayhorn (2018) found that an undergraduate is more likely to be motivated to perform well academically in order to be accepted by “high achiever” peers. Nonetheless, such demanding expectation and excellent academic requirement are considered as a stressful process which could have negatively impacted undergraduates' emotional stability. They spend more time to cope with academic workloads and neglect their student-life balance (Cardwell & Lewis, 2017). As a result, the academic-related demands that surpass the adaptive reserves that students can access causes academic stress. Undergraduates would experience different types of stress that can affect their mental, social and academic performance. Hence, it is crucial to achieve a balance between academic requirements and student-life balance (Cardwell & Lewis, 2017).

2.5 Institutional Support

In the recent years, institutional support has been considered as an important academic services to the

undergraduates (Strepparava et al., 2016). Institutional support which includes the tutoring, study skills, career advice, counselling, library resources and well-designed physical spaces for learning are sufficiently resourced and abundant. The most important aspect is to ensure that undergraduates know of the existence of these supports and feel comfortable making use of them (Lunenburg, 2010; Roll, 2015). The higher institution should have sufficient amount of expertise and resources to support different needs and expectations from undergraduates, such as financial stability, adapting to local customs, establishing a network of peer support, and overcoming language barriers (for international students) in order to adapt to the tertiary learning life. The institutional support services must be equipped to address emotional or psychological concerns possibly caused by adjustment issues faced by the undergraduates. The inclusive, supportive learning environments for students are really the foundation for sustainable student-life balance (Strepparava et al., 2016).

Particularly, institutional support from local universities including e-counselling on student-life balance (Kok, 2016), general counselling on individual's well-being (Thuryrajah, Ahmed, & Nathan, 2018), as well as the supporting staff from student affairs, career services, counseling centres, academic departments and others must work together to support the positive experiences of students as well as the educational mission of the institution (Ammigan, 2019). Thorley (2017) found that universities that are unable to provide institutional support facilities to the undergraduates experienced a higher percentage in student dropouts rate, as compared to those universities which provide the timely and accessible counselling services in the campus. Notably, the institutional support plays a significant role in assisting student to de-stress from depression and anxiety (Strepparava et al., 2016; Ramli et al., 2018). The undergraduates should be encouraged to seek assistance at the right time. Assurance is given that they would be understood and helped through the institutional support facilities. Such timely and consistent institutional support services are essential to develop undergraduates' emotional intelligence (Rai & Khanal, 2017) and equip them with relevant stress coping strategies in order to overcome encountered challenges. Similarly, counsellors are also able to provide guidelines on how to live a balanced student's life (Britt et al., 2016). When the undergraduates are happy and feel well supported, it boosts retention rates because they feel able and motivated to complete their academic journey. Happy undergraduates are also more likely to become active alumni, to proceed to more advanced degrees, and even eventually to hire other students from their alma mater (ICEF Monitor, 2020). Thus, institutional support plays an important role in contributing to student-life balance and improving their wellbeing.

2.6 Based on the Review of Existing Literatures, We Hypothesized:

H1: There is a significant positive relationship between social life and student-life balance among Malaysian undergraduates.

H2: There is a significant negative relationship between academic requirements and student- life balance among Malaysian undergraduates.

H3: There is a significant positive relationship between institutional support and student-life balance among Malaysian undergraduates.

3. Research Framework

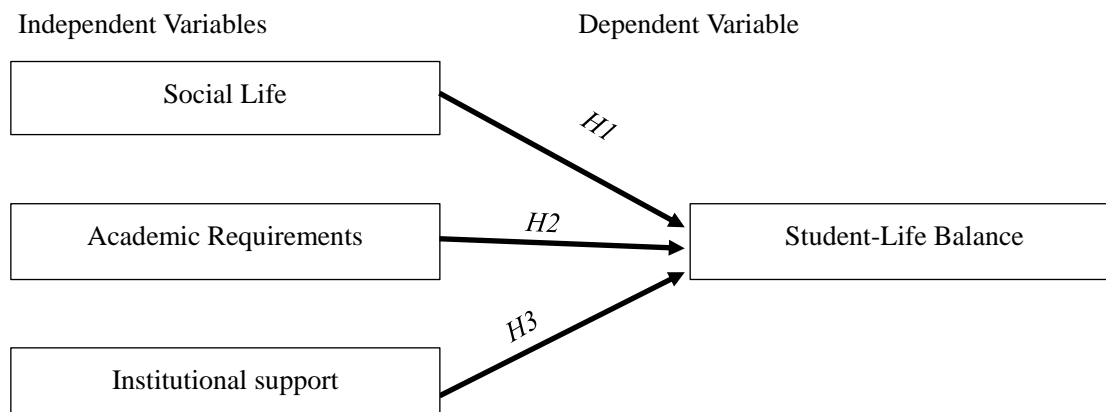


Figure 2. Research Framework

Figure 2 indicates the research framework which specifies the suggested variables that predict student-life balance in Malaysian undergraduate undergraduates. The three variables that may predict student-life balance are social life, academic requirements and institutional support.

3. Methodology

A quantitative, cross-sectional research design was utilised in order to determine the correlations between student-life balance and each independent variable (i.e., social life, academic requirement and institutional support) (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 2010). The target population is Malaysian undergraduates from private and public universities. Purposive sampling was employed as participants are required to meet certain criteria before being eligible to participate in this research. An informed consent form was included in the initial sections of the questionnaire, which consisted of a declaration of voluntary, anonymous, and confidential nature of the study involvement.

A total of 200 undergraduates participated in this study. These participants consisted of 60 male respondents and 140 female respondents. 50.5% of respondents were from the local private universities whereas the remaining 49.5% were from the public universities. 17% of the respondents were in first year of their studies, 29.5% were second-year undergraduates, 32% were third-year undergraduates and 21.5% were final year undergraduates. A majority of the participants were majoring in the field of psychology (21.5%), followed by education (14.5%), science (12%), medical (9.5%), engineering (9%), business psychology (6%), business (4%), hospitality (3%), accounting (2.5%), economics (2%), marketing (2%) and others (14%).

4. Research Instruments

All the measuring items for both independent and dependent variables were in the form of a five-point Likert scale, where “1” refers to “strongly disagree”, “2” refers to “disagree”, “3” refers to “neutral”, “4” refers to “agree” and “5” refers to “strongly agree”.

4.1 Social Life

This section consisted of eight items of The Law Student Perceived Stress Scale (LSPSS) (Bergin and Pakenham, 2015) that were utilised to develop the measuring items for this variable. The sample items were “I have little recreation time for the things I enjoy” and “I engage in leisure activities even when I have upcoming due dates”. The composite reliability value of social life is 0.860.

4.2 Academic Requirements

Six items were adapted from the Law Student Perceived Stress Scale (LSPSS) by Bergin and Pakenham (2015) to measure academic requirements. The adapted item was “The amount of material to be learned is too much in the given time period”. The composite reliability value of academic requirements is 0.882.

4.3 Institutional Support

Seven items were used to measure institutional support (Ahmad, 2015; Ali et al., 2017). The sample items were “I can always find an official in my university to advise me on academic matters”; “The staff respect the terms of confidentiality when I disclose information to them”. The composite reliability value of institutional support is 0.838.

4.4 Student Life Balance

Eight items were adapted in order to evaluate student-life balance (Pookaiyaudom, 2015). The item example was “I am aware that having a good student-life balance helps me to cope with pressure and control stress”. The composite reliability value of student-life balance is 0.904.

5. Data Analysis

5.1 Convergent Validity

Convergent validity was determined by applying average variance extracted (AVE) which is the squared loadings of all indicators related with the construct. This measure assesses the extent to which a set of indicators represent the construct. The AVE should be more than 0.50, which is 50% of each construct (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt 2017). The indicator loadings, composite reliability (CR) and AVE are presented in Table 1. The loadings that meet the recommended value, between 0.50 to – 0.70 are retained. Items SL1, SL2, SL3, AR6, IS1, IS2, IS3 and SLB1 with low loadings were eliminated. Moreover, all four constructs met the minimum cut-off values for CR and AVE, as all CRs are greater than 0.70 and all AVEs are greater than 0.5 after the process of item elimination.

Table 1. Results of Measurement Model

Construct	Items	Loadings	AVE	CR
Social Life	SL4	0.548	0.557	0.860
	SL5	0.685		
	SL6	0.864		
	SL7	0.747		
	SL8	0.842		
Academic Requirements	AR1	0.672	0.605	0.882
	AR2	0.835		
	AR3	0.572		
	AR4	0.863		
	AR5	0.895		
Institutional Support	IS4	0.806	0.567	0.838
	IS5	0.845		
	IS6	0.648		
	IS7	0.697		
Student-life Balance	SLB2	0.708	0.574	0.904
	SLB3	0.818		
	SLB4	0.806		
	SLB5	0.754		
	SLB6	0.731		
	SLB7	0.653		
	SLB8	0.817		

Note: SL1, SL2, SL3, AR6, IS1, IS2, IS3 and SLB1 were deleted due to low loadings.

5.2 Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity is utilised to ensure that each construct in the framework is truly distinct from other constructs. It safeguards the variables of the same framework from interfering with one another (Hair et al., 2017). Two types of discriminant validity were utilised in this research – Fornell and Lacker's Criterion (1981) and Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT). Fornell and Lacker's Criterion was used to compare the square root of AVE with the latent construct correlations. The square root of AVE is significant if it is greater than the latent variable (Hair et al., 2017). All variables established satisfactory discriminant validity where the square root of AVE (diagonal) is larger than the correlations (off-diagonal) for all measures, as seen in Table 2. On the other hand, HTMT examines the correlations between the constructs and the ratio of correlations within the constructs (Hair et al., 2017). Table 3 depicts all values fulfilled the criterion proposed by Kline (2011) where the value of HTMT should not be more than 0.85. This indicates that discriminant validity was established (Hair et al., 2017).

Table 2. Discriminant Validity

	Social Life	Academic Requirements	Institutional Support	Student Life Balance
Social Life	0.746			
Academic Requirements	-0.08	0.778		
Institutional Support	0.314	-0.006	0.753	
Student Life Balance	0.445	-0.611	0.452	0.757

Note: Diagonals represent the square root of the AVE while the off-diagonals represent the correlations.

Table 3. HTMT Criterion

	Social Life	Academic Requirements	Institutional Support	Student Life Balance
Social Life	0.264			
Academic Requirements	CI.90 (0.215, 0.617)	0.395		
Institutional Support	CI.90 (0.279, 0.742)	CI.90 (0.243, 0.737)	0.305	
Student Life Balance	CI.90 (0.348, 0.801)	CI.90 (0.468, 0.845)	CI.90 (0.324, 0.929)	0.498

5.3 Assessment of Structural Model for Collinearity Issues

It is crucial to analyze the issue of collinearity at the beginning of the structural model assessment as lateral collinearity has the potential to mislead the findings of a research (Ramayah, Cheach, Chuah, & Memon, 2018). Although discriminant validity is assessed, it only ensures that vertical variables do not overlap. However, horizontal variables may still have the potential to measure the same construct. Table 4 depicts the results of the lateral collinearity test. All inner VIF values of each variable are less than 5, signifying lateral collinearity is not a concern in the present research (Hair et al., 2017).

Table 4. Lateral Collinearity Assessment

	Student-life Balance (VIF)
Social Life	1.117
Academic Requirements	1.007
Institutional Support	1.110

5.4 Hypothesis Testing

Relationship (Hypothesis)	Std Beta	Std. Error	t-value	Decision	R ²	f ²	Q ²	q ²
Social Life → Student- life Balance (H1)	0.285	0.130	2.201**	Supported	0.646	0.327	0.302	0.039
Academic Requirements → Student-life Balance (H2)	-0.586	0.120	4.897**	Supported		0.963		0.269
Institutional Support → Student-life Balance (H3)	0.358	0.138	2.588**	Supported		0.206		0.063

**p < 0.01

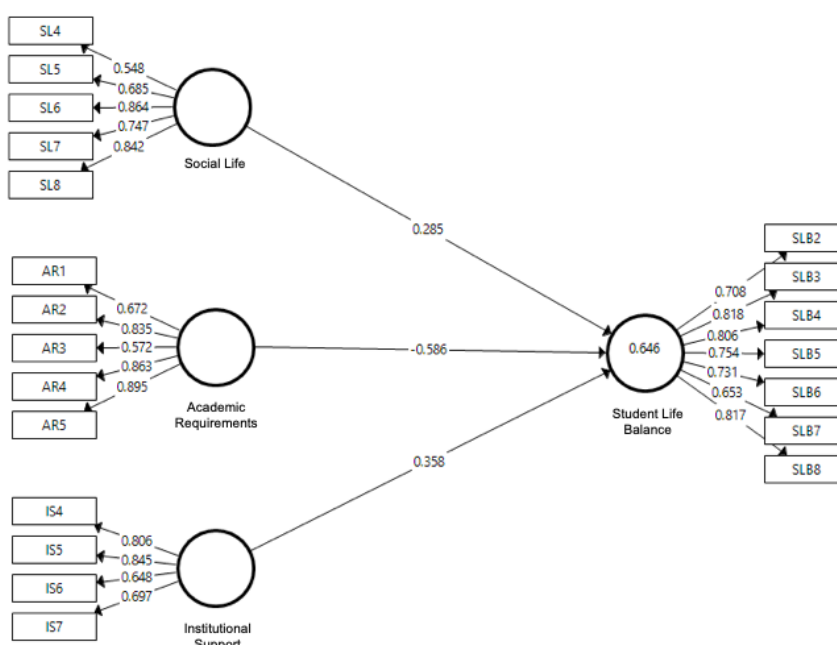


Figure 3. Results of Path Analysis (structural model)

6. Discussions

The current study explained that social life has a significantly positive relationship to student-life balance and *H1* was supported. The findings were consistent with previous literatures that a good and consistent social life with family and peers encourages better wellbeing for undergraduates (Doble & Supriya, 2011; Laidlaw et al., 2016; Pookaiyaudom, 2015; Roll, 2015). Strong family support and establishing dependable peer groups networking enable undergraduates to cope with study stress as well as improving their student-life balance. A good family relationship signifies that undergraduates would be more willing to share their problems (e.g., academic related anxiety, depression and stress) with their family members, (Pookaiyaudom, 2015; Ramli et al., 2018; Shamsuddin et al., 2013). Moreover, social support from family, parents and peer can help in building the individual's self-esteem in order to be mentally strong to face problems (Bovier et al., 2004). Social support can have a direct effect on mental health and promote internal resources and coping abilities. It can also have a buffering effect thereby reducing the negative impact of external stressors on mental health (Bovier et al., 2004). Particularly, many undergraduates face different types of challenges during the transitions from high school to college/ universities. With the good support from social life, they are more resilient and confident to face adversities and achieve student-life balance (Hickman et al., 2000). Social life also includes the involvement of leisure activities that contribute to a balanced student's life (Zhang & Zheng, 2017). Generally, most of the leisure activities assists individuals to relieve stress, promote physical and mental health in one's life (Choi & Yoo 2016; Pookaiyaudom, 2015).

There is a significant negative relationship between academic requirements and student life balance, *H2* was supported and corroborated with past literatures (Bergin & Pakenham 2014; Gomez et al., 2018; Koch, 2018; Yusof et al., 2015). Generally, undergraduates are required to invest their extra time and efforts in order retain academic-related information and meet the academic expectations (Gomez et al., 2018). However, spending too much time on academic-related tasks may adversely influence student-life balance. Undergraduates are required to be equipped with self-discipline, time management skills and organisation skills in order to fulfil the academic requirements (Henderson et al., 2017). Furthermore, the undergraduates will have different expectations towards the academic performance achievement, particularly, familial pressure and self-fulfilling prophecy could be the additional contributing factors to affect their high academic-related expectation (Huang & Gove, 2015). In this context, some of the undergraduates are able to cope with the high academic expectation requirements while some of them may encounter academic burnout and decide to discontinue their tertiary studies (Mustafa, 2019). According to Brown, Anderson Johnson and McPherson (2016), undergraduates always perceive tertiary education as a highly stressful process which requires high demand of physical and mental readiness and involvement. Hence, a stable student-life balance is very important to reduce negative symptoms such as poor sleep quality, poor appetite, emotional distress, acute stress and depression among the undergraduates.

The findings also explain the positive relationship between institutional support and student life balance; thus, *H3* was supported. This is in accordance with past literatures where the institutional support is critical to provide timely assistance and guidance to the undergraduates in their varsity life (Britt et al., 2016; Furr et al., 2001; Lunenburg, 2010; Roll, 2015). Moreover, undergraduates who had access to institutional support felt safe and supported, less lonely, and were able to de-stress from academic related burdens (Furr et al., 2001; Strepparava et al., 2016; Thorley, 2017). Undeniably, familial support should be strengthened in order to enhance better student-life balance among undergraduates. However, many undergraduates do not prioritise family support when they encounter difficulties (Doble & Supriya, 2011; Laidlaw et al., 2016). Hence, institutional support is crucial in order to provide undergraduates with a 'safe space' to share their emotions and burdens, as counsellors are able to provide sound advice, coaching and support to the undergraduates. This would ultimately assist undergraduates in coping with their academics and social life while developing their emotional, social and vocational skills (Lunenburg, 2010) as well as their student-life balance.

7. Implications

This research sought to provide useful insights on student-life balance and raise awareness regarding the importance of mental health and wellbeing among undergraduates. It is crucial to maintain a consistent and healthy social relationship that would assist undergraduates to cope with academic stress in order to improve student-life balance. Undergraduates prioritize their family time in order to strengthen the foundation of familial relationships (Lowe & Gayle, 2017). By doing so, undergraduates would develop a close relationship with all family members and share their true varsity experiences (either pleasant experience or adversities) with them. This may reduce their stigma on mental health issues and provide a supportive platform for those experiencing mental health illnesses (Malaymail, 2018). Furthermore, the undergraduates should be equipped with self-discipline and proper time management skills in order to ensure their academic requirements are met

(Henderson et al., 2017). Students should take the initiative to approach lecturers whenever they are facing an academic-related problem as this would assist them in reducing possible stressor and ultimately improve student-life balance. Notably, the undergraduates should be trained to approach proper assistance whenever they encounter a problem. This would develop undergraduate's emotional stability while developing resourcefulness; thus, providing a competitive advantage when they enter the workplace (Lunenburg, 2010; Rai & Khanal, 2017).

In a similar vein, university managements could take initiative and acquire feedback in order to understand the specific types of assistance are required from the undergraduates. Workshops can be arranged to equip undergraduates with the skills required to improve student-life balance (Lunenburg, 2010). The timely institutional support is able to provide guidance to the undergraduates on how to manage the academic workloads and socialization expectations. Quality institutional support is essential to enhance the global images of Malaysian universities in the eyes of international students and increase the likelihood of Malaysia being an education hub in the Asian region (Cheng, Mahmood, & Yeap, 2013). It is our responsibility to highlight good institutional support which is recommended by international students in order to create positive word-of-mouth reviews (ICEF Monitor, 2020). Therefore, international students would be further compelled to pursue their studies in Malaysia due to the affordability of tuition fees, quality of education offered (Cheng et al., 2013) and excellent standard of institutional support provided (ICEF Monitor, 2020).

Moreover, local education policies should place more emphasis on yielding well-rounded undergraduates instead of emphasizing on academic achievements alone. Generally, the academic achievement is viewed as fundamental in labelling an undergraduate's educational qualification and capabilities (Aziz, 2018). However, in the recent years, iCGPA (Integrated Cumulative Grade Point Average) has been implemented by the local higher education institutions in order to produce a more well-balanced graduates (The Star, 2018). iCGPA aims to develop the undergraduates on eight different soft-skill dimensions, particularly on communication, knowledge and problem-solving skills. University managements could incorporate iCGPA into the curriculum in order to increase the emphasis on those areas instead of academic achievements alone. University managements are urged to incorporate the government proposed "2u2i" program in order to introduce an enhanced student-life balance among undergraduates. This program introduces two years of university academic learning and two years of industrial practical which enable the undergraduates to gain hands-on knowledge and work experience instead of overly focusing on the academic requirements (The Star, 2018). This would improve an undergraduate's socialization skills and develop peer support networking which is useful to cultivate student-life balance.

Additionally, this study contributed to the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 objective: "understanding the current performance and challenges of the Malaysian education system" (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). The findings of the current study reveal that the relevant factors associated with student-life balance and potential ways to reduce possible psychiatric symptoms faced by the undergraduates. Consistent, timely and supportive counselling services should be accessible by every undergraduate when assistance is needed. The focus should be on creating a supportive and positive varsity culture, devoid of bullying and unrealistic academic pressures and deadline. A positive culture is one that promotes good student-life balance practices, connectedness and meaningful teamwork among undergraduates, and opportunities for developing professional capabilities.

8. Limitations and Research for Future Recommendations

Although this research aims to understand the factors influencing student-life balance amongst Malaysian undergraduates, the sample size which consisted of only 200 participants underrepresented the population. Thus, results obtained were not generalizable in other industries. In this current study, Google Forms was utilised in order to enable the participants to respond to the questionnaire online. However, the researcher was unable to control the socially desirable response sets which could influence the validity of results obtained. Future researcher should consider the collection of qualitative data in order to obtain in-depth descriptions of student-life balance within a Malaysian context.

9. Conclusion

In conclusion, the main objective of this study was to examine the relationship between social life, academic requirements, institutional support and student-life balance amongst Malaysian undergraduates. Results of this study revealed that all three independent variables have a significant correlation to student-life balance. Specifically, social life and institutional support have a significantly positive relationship with student-life balance whereas academic requirements have a significantly negative relationship with student-life balance.

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