

Political Skill among Thai Students: The Comparison of Gender, Place of Origin, and Age

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Abstract: The purposes of this study were to examine political skill among Thai students and compare political skill differences in terms of gender, place of origin, and age. This study used an 18-item of a modified Thai version of Political Skill Inventory to measure political skill. Samples in this study were gathered from 60 business students in a selected public university in Bangkok. Results indicated that the greatest political skill dimension among Thai students was “apparent sincerity” followed by “interpersonal influence”, “social astuteness”, and “networking ability”, respectively. To compare gender, place of origin, and age differences in political skill, independent samples t-test was conducted. Findings revealed no significant differences between male and female students and people with different places of origin in political skill. However, this study found a significant difference between students with different age in interpersonal influence dimension of political skill. Student aged between 18-25 years had less interpersonal influence skill than student aged above 25 years. This study was noteworthy to be the first study in Thai context that attempted to explore political skill difference between people with distinctive place of origin.

Keywords: Political skill, Gender difference, Place of origin, Age difference, Thai student.

INTRODUCTION

The investigation on measuring political skill has been rapidly growing since the early 2000s when Ferris *et al.*, [1] developed the Political Skill Inventory to assess individual political skill encompassing four essential dimensions: social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability, and apparent sincerity. Since then, the importance of political skill has been highlighted in numerous studies. Prior research indicated that political skill had an impact on the quest of collective activities and imaginative majors and careers [2]. In addition, a recent study found that political skill and adjustment-seeking self-efficacy had an influence on adjustment-seeking behavior, which was critical for personal success in today’s business [3].

Political skill is viewed as an individual’s social ability to influence other people to behave in the way that heighten one’s or organization’s desired goals. Political skill is thought to be an essential skill for individual success [4]. To focus on each dimension of political skill, Champoux [5] noted that “apparent sincerity” is the most critical dimension to be successful

in social interactions. This premise is confirmed by the work of Braddy and Campbell [6], which “apparent sincerity” was found to be the most essential ability of leaders to succeed in today’s organizations. Phillips and Gully [7] argued that two dimensions of political skill, networking ability and apparent sincerity, reflect great political skill. Nevertheless, many scholars suggested that developing political skill in all dimensions was best for individuals to be successful in workplace as working in the organization nowadays requires a politically skilled person to interact effectively in distinctive social situations [5].

Business students who are to become a professional in business firms and corporations are required to have sufficient political skill to increase their opportunities for career advancement and success [8]. However, the investigation on measuring political skill among college students has been rarely focused despite this topic is critical for students’ future success, particularly Thai context. Additionally, the emphasis on examining demographic variables differences in Thai context has been also overlooked. Therefore, this present study aimed at exploring political skill among

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students and comparing gender, place of origin, and age differences in political skill in Thai context.

LITERATURE REVIEWS

The concept of today's political skill was originally shifted from Thomson and Tuden's quadratic-categorization of decision situations model in 1959 in which attempts to political utilization or influence was constantly involved with decision making [9]. Pfeffer [10] constructed his work in power and politics in organization based on Thomson and Tuden's model, and coined the term "political skill", and stressed that this factor among other necessary factors is required for employees' success in organizations. Also, Mintzberg [11] noted that political skill involved the exercise of power in the organization. Ferris *et al.*, [1] described that political skill refers to an individual's social capability possessed to influence other people to behave in the way that fulfill one's or organization's desired goals and is considered as an essential skill for individual success. The Political Skill Inventory was developed to measure four key dimensions of political behaviors: social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability, and apparent sincerity [4]. The instrument was expanded from a unidimensional, six-item measure of political skill initiated by Ferris [12] in which the diagnosis of political spectators and self-efficacy was the main emphasis. The 18-item of Political Skill Inventory developed by Ferris *et al.*, [1] was initially aimed at assessing political skill in four dimensions. The first two dimensions of political skill – social astuteness and interpersonal influence – were constructed to measure a personal capacity to assess and recognize social events and choose the most proper way and influential behavioral approaches to cope with those situations. Specifically, social astuteness refers to ability to understand how others' behaviors influence social connections. Interpersonal influence alludes to an individual's ability to influence and engage others using a convincing interpersonal approach and charisma. Colle [9] noted that these dimensions are comparable to the characteristics of social intelligence. The final two dimensions of political skill – networking ability and apparent sincerity – were develop to evaluate how the individual utilizes this capacity to accomplish positive results for oneself or an organization. To focus on each dimension of political skill, networking ability relates to the ability to form and utilize individuals' connections, which enhance an individual's positive involvement needed to support an individual's influence on others. Apparent sincerity refers to an individual's ability to be straightforward, open, honest, and unpretentious with others [6].

In Thai context, The Political Skill Inventory was employed to measure political skill among Thai military officers. Promsri [13] modified this scale measurement from 7-point rating scale to 5-point rating scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strong agree." This study collected data from 176 military officers of a

selected military unit in which both commissioned and non-commissioned officers were equally selected. Results of this study found that the greatest ability of political skill based on four dimensions was "apparent sincerity" followed by "social astuteness", "interpersonal influence", and "networking ability", respectively. In addition, this study indicated no significant effects of Thai military officers' ranks and their educational levels on political skill.

Although prior empirical and theoretical work has concluded that political skill is a personal difference relating to the understanding of an individual to view and react to social situations [14], the focus on scrutinizing demographic variables differences in particular gender difference was ignored and barely studied [8]. In addition, the study on political skill in Thai context has been overlooked despite this topic is critical for individual success in organizations. As a result, this present study aimed at examining political skill among students and comparing gender, place of origin, and age differences in political skill in Thai context. Research hypotheses were proposed based on curiosity and attempted to enhance the body of knowledge in this area as follows:

H₁: There was a significant difference in political skill between male and female students.

H₂: There was a significant difference in political skill between students with different years of age.

H₃: There was a significant difference in political skill between students with different places of origin.

METHODOLOGY

This present study was a descriptive study, which a self-administrated questionnaire was used to measure political skill of respondents. Samples were drawn from 60 business students who studied in both full-time and part-time program at a selected public university in Bangkok. An 18-item of The Political Skill Inventory originally developed by Ferris *et al.*, [1] was modified based on the work of Promsri [13], which the range of scale was minimized from 7-point rating scale to 5-point rating scale ranging from 1= strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. This modified version was utilized to measure political skill. The Cronbach's alpha score of the modified PSI in Promsri's study [13] was 0.85 indicating the high reliability of the scale measurement. To test the internal consistency of this scale when used with different groups of participants, a Cronbach's alpha test was repeatedly conducted, and demonstrated the highly acceptable of the scale, which the alpha scores of 0.94 [15]. To test research hypotheses of this study, independent samples t-test analysis was computed.

RESULTS

Of 60 students who completed the questionnaire, there were 31 females (51.7%) and 29 males (48.3%). More than a half of these respondents were originally from Bangkok (66.7%), and had their age between 18-25 years (71.7%). About a half of them had registered as a full-time student (51.7%). Also, almost a half of this group of students reported that they had 3-4 family members (45%).

To examine political skill among students encompassing social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability, and apparent sincerity, descriptive statistics were used. This study found that the total mean score of political skill among Thai students was at a moderate level ($M = 3.30$, $S.D. = .680$). Results indicated that "apparent sincerity" ($M = 3.42$, $S.D. = .781$) was rated as the highest dimension of political skill followed by "interpersonal influence" ($M = 3.31$, $S.D. = .736$), "social astuteness", ($M = 3.28$, $S.D. = .776$) and "networking ability" ($M = 3.25$, $S.D. = .734$), respectively.

Table-1: Mean and Standard Deviation for Political Skill among Thai Students (n =60)

Political Skill Dimension	Mean	S.D.
Social Astuteness (SA)	3.28	.776
Interpersonal Influence (II)	3.31	.736
Networking Ability (NA)	3.25	.734
Apparent Sincerity (AS)	3.42	.781
Overall for Political Skill (PSI)	3.30	.680

To compare gender, place of origin, and age differences in political skill, analysis of independent samples t-test was conducted. Table-2 showed no

significant difference in political skill between male and female students ($t = -1.143$, $p = .258$). Hence, research hypothesis #1 was rejected.

Table-2: Gender Differences in Political Skill (n = 60)

Variable	Males (n=29)		Females (n=31)		t	P-Value
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		
Political Skill	3.19	.722	3.39	.639	-1.143	.258

Table-3 examined the comparison on place of origin differences in political skill. Findings demonstrated no significant difference in political skill

between respondents who were originally from Bangkok and countryside ($t = .311$, $p = .757$). Therefore, research hypothesis #2 was rejected.

Table-3: Place of Origin Differences in Political Skill (n = 60)

Variable	Bangkok (n=40)		Upcountry (n=20)		t	P-Value
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		
Political Skill	3.31	.769	3.26	.469	.311	.757

When comparing age differences in political skill, findings revealed no significant difference between respondents with different age groups. Thus, research hypothesis #3 was rejected. However, when placing an investigation on each dimension of political skill, results found that respondents with different groups of age were significantly different in

interpersonal influence dimension of political skill. Table-4 revealed that students aged between 18-25 years had less interpersonal influence skill than students aged above 25 years. This can be concluded that the older had a greater interpersonal influence skill than the younger.

Table-4: Age Differences in Political Skill focusing on Interpersonal Influence (n = 60)

Political Skill Dimension	18-25 years (n=43)		Above 25 years (n=17)		t	P-Value
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		
Interpersonal Influence	3.18	.696	3.64	.643	-2.260	.028*

* Significant at .05 level

CONCLUSION, DISCUSSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The objectives of this present study were to measure political skill among Thai students and to

examine gender, place of origin, and age differences in political skill. Results found that the overall of political skill among Thai students was at a moderate level, which implied that Thai students had a sufficient ability

to recognize and understand others, and could employ this understanding to influence others to behave in ways that benefit their objectives. Also, findings revealed that “apparent sincerity” obtained the highest mean score at a high level, which can be concluded that Thai students had great ability to be non-manipulative, honest, and unassuming with others. According to Champoux [5], this dimension is a vital key to determine success in social interaction among individuals. This finding was consistent with Promsri’s study [13] and Braddy and Campbell [6], which “apparent sincerity” was reported as the greatest political skill dimension. However, among these four dimensions of political skill, “networking ability” was rated as the lowest dimension of political skill, which implied that Thai students had satisfactory ability to form and utilize individuals’ networks, which boost their positive experience required to strengthen their influence on others.

Results demonstrated no significant difference in political skill between males and females, which indicated that male students and female students had the same level of political skill. This can be described that as they were a business student at the time of data collection, they might have been provided sufficient knowledge on how to behave effectively in social interaction. This finding supported Maroulis’s work [8], which no gender difference in political skill was found. For place of origin difference, this study also found no significant difference in political skill between students who were originally from Bangkok and upcountry. This can be explained that as they were educated in school and college, they eventually learned and realized the importance of political skill that links to their success. Even though the overall political skill was found no significant difference in terms of students’ age, one dimension of political skill, interpersonal influence, showed significant difference between students with different age groups. This can be concluded that elder students have greater ability to influence and engage others using a convincing interpersonal and charismatic style than younger ones. This finding contributes a body of knowledge in this area.

For the limitations, sample sizes in this study were problematic as they were collected from two groups of business students in one selected public university. Generalization was limited and needed to be conducted with cautions. The next study should expand its sample size to be more appropriate and ensuring a sampling approach for data collection. Also, this study focused on a few demographic variables. The future study should increase the variables and conduct the comparison study to examine the difference in political skill.

For research implications, the university can use information based on findings of this study to set the training and workshop on political skill enhancement for career success for their students. As

can be seen, the level of three dimensions of political skill was at moderate level, which needs to be improved through training programs.

For the originality and value of this research, this study was one of the few in this area to explore the difference in political skill between males and females in Thai university. In particular, most political skill research focusing on gender differences has been conducted in western cultures rather than eastern cultures, and Thai context has been rarely investigated. Moreover, the comparison between people who were from different places of origin was remarkably ignored in prior political skill research. This study was claimed to be the first study in Thai context focusing on students in the university that placed an emphasis on places of origin differences in perceived political skill.

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