

Exploring factors influencing on students' intention on institutional persistence

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ABSTRACT

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Higher education always draws mounting concerns from students who are about to seek for reliable institution to study further after graduating from high school. Since the days of increasing establishment of a variety of universities, students have many choices to consider. Noticeably, the number of universities using foreign curriculum is on a progressive rise, creating an upward trend for students who desire to study in an international environment in Vietnam. More money saving than studying abroad and living near family are of common triggers attributed for the strong appeal of this trend. Nonetheless, regardless of its advantages, the challenges in terms of language, culture, or curriculum when studying in those universities are posing an inquiry about the rate of student retention. Finally, limitations and mistakes are definitely inevitable in this study. Subsequent studies concerning about this issue are wished to have better performance. May this paper be a source of reference for those interested.

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1. Introduction

In Vietnamese context, the increase of recently established higher education institutions is deemed to bring more chances for those who failed to join in their desirable university, but still could become a student in other universities or colleges. This unintentionally promotes many students to join in a school environment that is not fit to them, leading to a great growing number of students after a period of time experiencing their studies have a tendency to leave the school. For example, at Ton Duc Thang University, the percentage of students who quit learning halfway account for 25% in comparison with 75% of students keep studying until get graduated (Thanh, 2010 November 11). According to report of Ministry of Education and Training, there were 1,163 students dropping out of college before graduation because of money insufficiency during the academic year from 2011 to 2012. It can be perceived that a majority of students are those who come from other provinces or areas to big cities to keep their studies further, many of them cannot continue their studies due to the lack of ability to finance tuition fee and the basic demands of life when studying far away from home. Additionally, many students state that they fail to pursue their academic commitment since they feel unconnected with major, school's curriculum or environment, dropping out of college is the best way to save time for other joys. Other common reasons are attributed to their boredom of learning or hopelessness of future career if they keep spending time on

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classes (Hau, 2013). As a result, this study serves the purpose of identifying factors affecting student retention at a number of Vietnamese foreign – affiliated universities in Ho Chi Minh City. Thus, the main objectives are raised as follows:

- To identify the factors influencing student’s intention of retaining at Foreign - affiliated universities in Ho Chi Minh City,
- To determine the effect of degree of each factor towards student’s Intention to persist at Foreign - affiliated universities in Ho Chi Minh City,
- To figure out some recommendations to increase student retention rate for Foreign – affiliated universities in Ho Chi Minh City.

2. Literature review

2.1. Institutional commitment

Tinto (1975, 1993) suggested that the level of students’ Academic and Social integration in institutions affects their commitment, which in turn impacts the possibility of student to continue or leave out of school. After entering the college, the experiences of academic and social activities will affect student’s integration into the institutions (Beil et al., 2000). The study of Pascarella and Terenzini (1980, 1983, 2005) found that Academic integration of an individual is correlated to commitment of whether students remain or drop out of the current institution (Beil et al., 2000). Also, in the longitudinal study of Beil, the result showed that Academic and Social integration did not have direct effects on student’s retention, rather Academic and Social integration influenced the level of commitment to the institution. The greater academic and social students integrated to their colleges; the higher value of commitment. Another study by Jones (2010) focused on the impact of Social integration on Goal and Institutional commitment on gender and found that this correlation did exist both on male and female, but stronger than on female, which indicated that men and women were distinct in approach to Social integration. Furthermore, recent research Young et al. (2013) suggested that the future scholars should explore the factors affecting student retention, in which two constructs Academic and Social integration were recommended. Besides, Robinson (1969) cited by Dobbins et al. (2000) and Robinson et al. (1991) found that students who left school usually did not feel the match between their satisfaction and offered curriculum which was referred as a notion of Academic integration. In college environment of diverse cultures and races, Chang (1999) also found that multicultural interactions in school boosted up student persistence, institutional satisfaction, and intellectual range and social self-concept. Students who have negative interactions and experiences tend to become disillusioned with college, withdraw from their peers and faculty members, and ultimately, the institution. Numerous comprehensive studies have concluded that institutional factors, such as faculty – student relationships and innovative teaching methods can significantly motivate and challenge students to learn and stay in school (Lau, 2013). Therefore, there are two hypotheses proposed regarding Academic integration, Social integration and commitment.

H₁: Academic integration has significant effect on Goal commitment and Institutional commitment.

H₂: Social integration has significant effect on Goal commitment and Institutional commitment.

2.2. Goal commitment and Institutional commitment on Intention to persist

Goal commitment is considered a factor that is —argued to be central to an individual's decision to drop out of higher education (Tinto, 1975). Given levels of institutional commitment, the lower the individual’s commitment to the goal of college completion, the more likely to drop out. According to Tinto (1993), commitment acted a mediator between integration and retention. The studies by Zea et al. (1997) and Beil et al. (2000) all support for the mediational role of the model proposed by Tinto (1975,1993, 2005), which indicated that Academic integration and Social integration did not directly influence on retention, rather affected the extent to which students committed to institutions, then ultimately leading

to student's decision of whether to stay or drop out. In other research, Naskrent and Siebelt (2011) also concluded that commitment played a central factor of donor retention as it created a foundation for an individual to sacrifice and continue attaching to the object. Sandler (2000) studied about the retention among non-traditional aged students at a private urban research university. His result showed that institutional commitment had the greatest direct impact on the intent to persist. Mbuva (2011) stated in his paper, goal commitment was the second determinant determining African American student's decision of drop out or stay at college. Nora et al. (1997) cited by Strauss (2001) studied on retention of Hispanic students and his findings supported the direct impact of institutional commitment on students' retention. The study by Cabrera et al. (1992, 1993) and Cabrera and Hengstler (1990) also supported the correlation between Goal commitment and Institutional commitment on Intention to persist. Hence, the hypothesis is proposed as below:

H3: Goal commitment and Institutional commitment has significant effect on Intention to persist.

2.3 Social and Cultural capital on Intention to persist

Social and Cultural capital developed from family and surroundings probably imposes an impact on college student intention. Students with high level of traditional Social and Cultural capital are more likely to feel —an entitlement to postsecondary education (McDonough, 1997) and may not only see —college attendance as an entitlement but may display persistence as well (Berger, 2000). Although some aspects of cultural capital have been determined for its impacts on retention, a comprehensive quantitative analysis has not been carried out (Wells, 2008). There are some studies regarding the effect of cultural capital on student retention. Berger (2000) stated that students who possessed higher level of cultural capital tended to stay at colleges compared to those with lower possession of Social and Cultural capital will possibly drop out. In other words, students with higher levels of organizational cultural capital will be more strongly associated with persistence at institutions. Moreover, the study of Wells (2009) resulted in the positive correlation between Social and Cultural capital possession and the likelihood of student's persistence. Access to various forms of capital is also associated with gender and ethnicity, which must be taken into consideration (Longden, 2004); however, in this study, the research only focuses on the impact of cultural capital on student retention because ethnicity and gender factors in Vietnamese international universities are not exceptionally outstanding. According to the discussion above, there is a hypothesis proposed:

H4: Cultural capital has significant effect on Intention to persist.

2.4 Career outcome expectation on Intention to persist

The concept of Career outcome expectations has received relatively little empirical attention (Fouad & Guillen, 2006). As SCCT stated, Career outcome expectation was an indicator to encourage student's incentive to involve in their college works. If an individual optimistically expects about their future career, it turns out a strong stimulation for students to study harder, vice versa, those who negatively think of the career outcome will tend to avoid engaging in school works, which leading to drop out. Study by Betz and Vuyten (1997) indicated that outcome expectations are effective predictor of students' career indecision and college retention. An empirical research by Concannon and Barrow (2010) insisted the correlation between students' Intention to persist and Career outcome expectation of both men and women majoring in engineering. The results showed that an engineering student who supposed the outcome of college completion could not attain for a desirable future career, he or she would tend to discontinue with the program. Additionally, the result also showed that COE placed greater importance on women than men. Another research result indicated that outcome expectations resulted from the perceived effectiveness of a higher education associated with the goal of accomplishing a degree have reliable foundation for forecasting the Intention to persist of the students beyond freshman (Kahn et al., 2002) as cited by Feldt and Woelfel (2009). Supporting this correlation, Hoyt and Fredrick (1998) indicated that student's declaration of a university major or occupation had an effect on their persistence. If

students' expectations were satisfied, it led to the higher possibility of intent to persist. Additionally, Peterson (1993) cited by Hoyt and Fredrick (1998) found that self – efficacy of students' career was correlated to Academic integration and Social integration. Thus,

H5: Career outcome expectation has significant effect on Intention to persist.

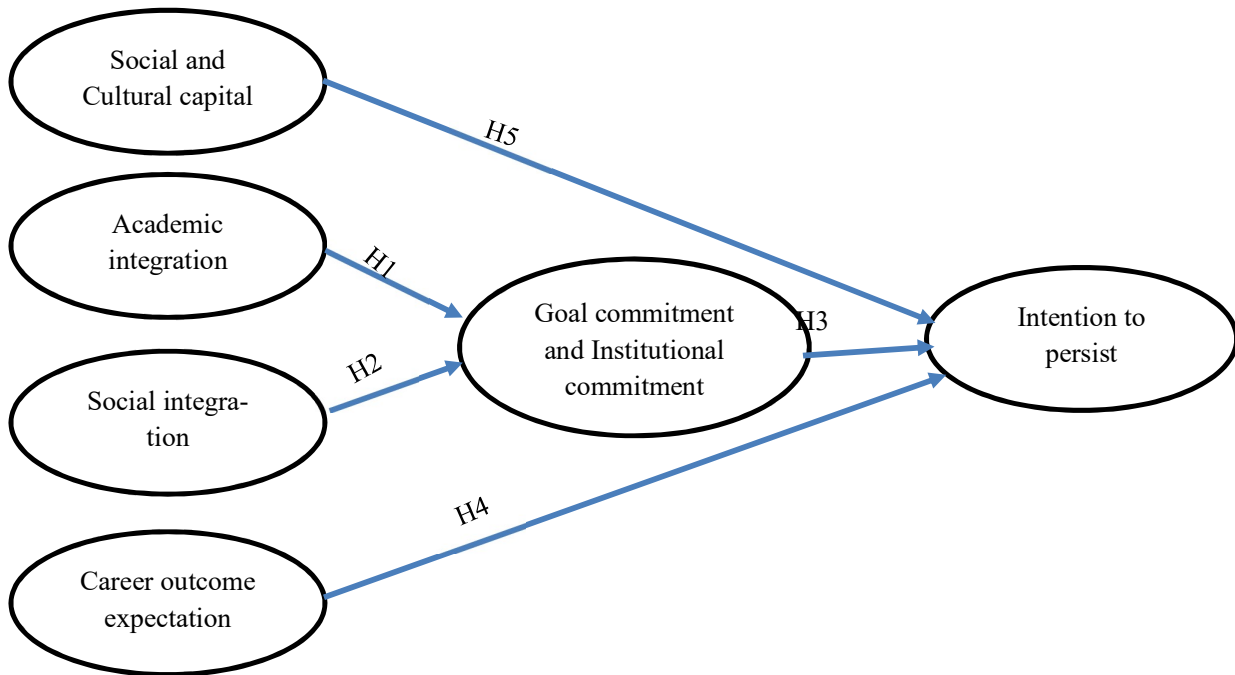


Fig. 1. Research conceptual model

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Qualitative research

The measurement scales deployed in this research are widely applied in various scholars and contexts. In specific, they are used to examine factors affecting student retention mostly in the Western countries where higher education system is highly developed and very different from Vietnamese education scheme. Hence, there is a vital need to implement a qualitative research to adjust these measurement scales in an appropriate and understanding manner of Vietnamese students and Vietnamese context. The target of interviewees consists of staffs working in the office affairs and students studying in foreign – affiliated universities in Ho Chi Minh City. The qualitative questions are raised to exploit the general views and deep understanding of targets towards factors affecting student's retention. The framework of quantitative questions includes general questions, detailed questions and suggested concepts and measurement scales. Since students chosen to interview are fairly new with the theoretical concepts which take time to comprehend, so researcher would prepare drafted related theories and measurement scales in order to help them clearly understand so then they could stimulate their own views and opinions. The main purposes are to explore new items to fully supplement the questionnaire and adjust the adapted scales to better fit with the understanding of the crowd.

3.2. Quantitative research

This study employed convenience-sampling method. Questionnaires were delivered to students studying in foreign – affiliated universities via 2 main channels: online and offline. With online channel, researcher created an Internet survey in terms of Google docs form, then sent the link to respondents, this method is perceived as time saving and convenient. With the offline channel, researcher directly delivered questionnaires to students in terms of paper at foreign – affiliated universities in Ho Chi Minh City, this

method is quite time consuming, but the advantage is that researcher could observe whether surveyed people answer seriously or not. Normally, with a small simple size, it will equivalent with the less accuracy of data. On the other hand, the bigger the sample size is the more accurate the data will be, but it is quite time – consuming and costly to collect a large amount of data. In fact, the appropriate sample size can depend on the analysis method and the number of items in questionnaire. If SEM is employed to analyze data, Hair et al. (1998) suggested the number of questionnaires needed is at least from 100 – 150. Hatcher (1994) supposed that the number of questionnaires should be more than 5 times the number of observed variables. Tabachnick and Fidell (2003) suggested that the minimum sample size is 300. After considering about time, financial ability and the number of items, researcher aims to collect 350 questionnaires. The time for data collection lasted 2 two weeks from 17th March to 31st March 2015. As a result, the process of quantitative research will go through several stages as following:

- Reliability Test and Exploratory Factor Analysis.
- Confirmatory Factor Analysis
- And Structural Equation Modeling

4. Results and Findings

4.1 Reliability and Validity Test:

After testing reliability for each construct separately, there are four items which are considered to be eliminated because they do not meet the requirements or would increase the overall value of Cronbach's Alpha after its removal. In addition, after six rounds of factor analysis, the result ends up as Table 1.

Table 1

Pattern Matrix^a

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
COE32	.917								
COE31	.864								
COE33	.723								
COE34	.709								
COE35	.617								
COE30	.568								
SCC39		.911							
SCC38		.773							
SCC40		.733							
SCC37		.694							
SCC41		.667							
PI8			.785						
PI9			.782						
PI11			.766						
PI10			.605						
PI13			.503						
GIC27				.768					
GIC28				.739					
GIC29				.689					
GIC23				.573					
GIC24				.565					
A11					.839				
A12					.823				
A13					.777				
A14					.613				
ITP48						.861			
ITP47						.860			
ITP45						.773			
ITP46						.632			
FI18							.777		
FI19							.757		
FI22							.697		
FI20							.606		
FI16								.817	
FI17								.655	
FI15								.626	
FI14								.530	
SCC44									.749
SCC43									.682
KMO				0.906					
Sig.				0.000					
Total variance explained				59.324					

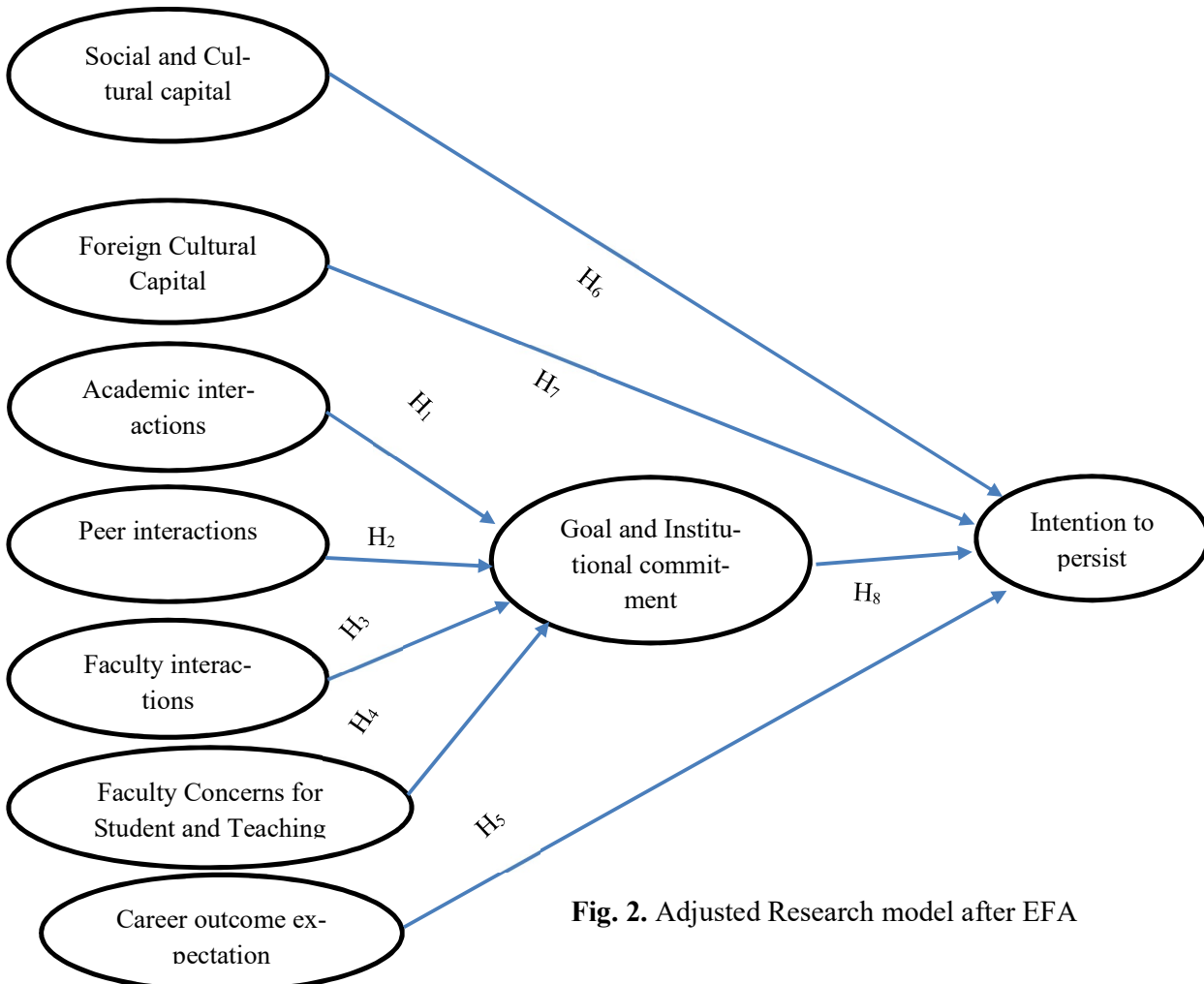
Barlett's test of Sphericity is significant < 0.05 (Sig. = 0.000), so H_0 hypothesizing that observed variables are uncorrelated is rejected, it means that the observed variables do exist correlations in the population. The value of KMO is 0.906 which is much higher than 0.5. Total variance explained is also satisfactory with 59.324% ($> 50\%$). All the factor loadings are greater than 0.5, ranging from 0.53 to 0.917, and there is no cross factor – loading. Therefore, this result meets all requirements for an acceptable factor analysis. Finally, 39 remaining items are clustered into 9 constructs instead of 6 constructs as initially proposed. As a result, the study is adjusted into the new theoretical model as following:

Table 2

Hypotheses after EFA

Hypothesis	Statement
H ₁	Academic integration has a significant effect on goal and institutional commitment.
H ₂	Peer interactions have a significant effect on goal and institutional commitment.
H ₃	Faculty interactions have a significant effect on and institutional commitment.
H ₄	Faculty concern for student development and teaching have significant effect on and institutional commitment.
H ₅	Career outcome expectation teaching has a significant effect on intention to persist.
H ₆	Social and cultural capital have significant effects on intention to persist.
H ₇	Foreign cultural capital has a significant effect on intention to persist.
H ₈	Goal and institutional commitment have significant effects on intention to persist.

4.2. Adjusted research model after EFA

**Fig. 2.** Adjusted Research model after EFA

After EFA, 9 constructs with 39 items extracted from the result of pattern matrix would go through Confirmatory factor analysis. The software of AMOS 20.0 was employed, demonstrating the results as following: The results show that most of criteria are acceptable: CMIN/df = 1.783, TLI = 0.91, CFI = 0.919, AGFI = 0.807, and RMSEA = 0.51, except only GIF = 0.835 which is less than 0.9. The comparison of CFA results is summarized as the below table:

Table 3
Comparison between criteria and CFA results (round 1)

	Criteria	CFA results
CMIN/df	≤ 2	1.502
GIF	≥ 0.9	0.901
TLI	≥ 0.9	0.951
CFI	≥ 0.9	0.959
AGFI	≥ 0.8	0.873
RMSEA	≤ 0.8	0.40

As can be seen from the table, the measurement model is not totally fit with the data. Therefore, some indexes will be considered in order to improve the model fit.

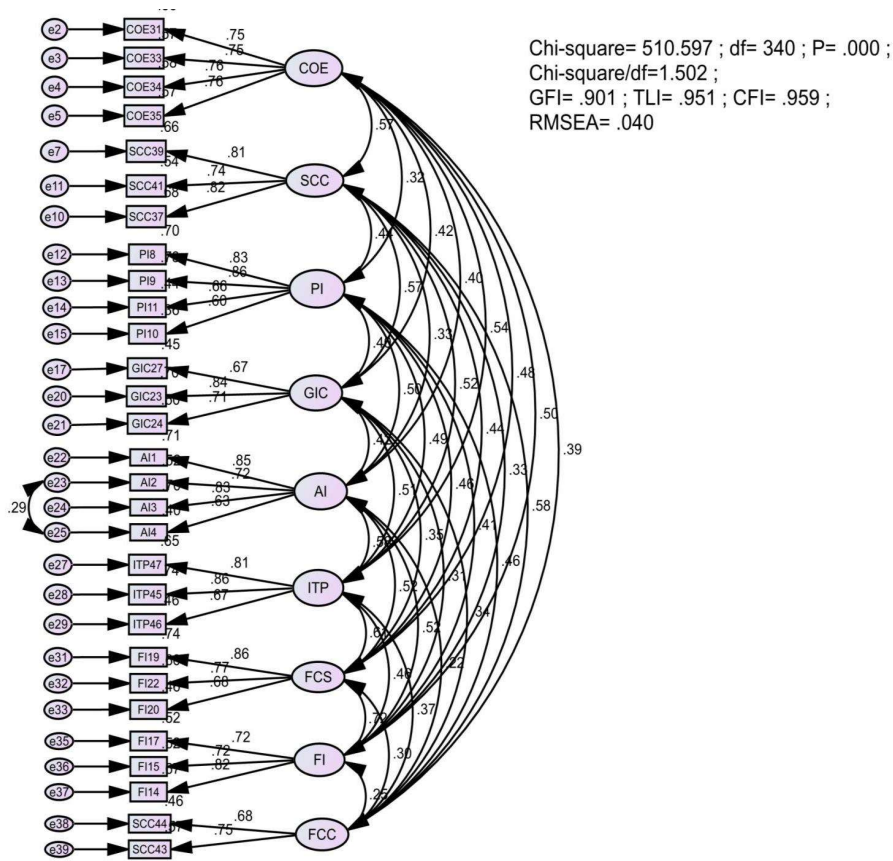


Fig. 3. Standardized measurement modeling

According to Standardized Regression Weights, all the estimates are greater than 0.5, which are considered satisfactory to access the initial evidence of convergent validity (Hair et al., 2010). Therefore, there is no item deleted from this list. However, some items with standardized loadings less than 0.7 will be considered and combined with standardized residuals to be candidates for elimination to better the model fit.

Construct Validity

All other constructs reach the standard of tests, reliability, convergent and discriminant tests are satisfactory with Career outcome expectation, Social and Cultural capital, Faculty interactions, Peer interactions, Academic integration, and Faculty concern for student development and teaching. However, only Goal and Institutional commitment construct is not acceptable in terms of convergent validity with AVE less than 0.5 (0.468). Hence, one item with the lowest standardized loading of this construct would be deleted to reach the acceptable AVE. The result shows that AVE of Goal and Institutional commitment is still less than 0.5 after deleting one item. Therefore, one more item with lowest standardized loading will be eliminated next. Finally, after the removal of 2 items (GIC28, GIC29), one item at a time, the result show that all criteria are satisfactory:

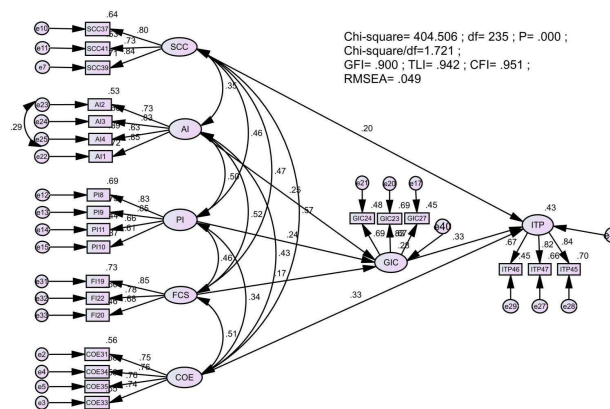
Table 4
Convergent and discriminant validity (GIC28, GIC29 deleted)

	CR	AVE	MSV	ASV
FI	0.819	0.533	0.508	0.202
COE	0.886	0.566	0.279	0.181
SCC	0.881	0.604	0.341	0.212
PI	0.832	0.504	0.263	0.200
GIC	0.784	0.550	0.341	0.181
AI	0.854	0.596	0.360	0.207
ITP	0.889	0.672	0.375	0.260
FCS	0.867	0.621	0.508	0.244
FCC	0.680	0.515	0.315	0.136

Table 5
Construct Correlation matrix (square root of the AVE on the diagonal) (GIC28, GIC29 deleted)

FI	COE	SCC	PI	GIC	AI	ITP	FCS	FCC
0.73								
0.453	0.752							
0.27	0.528	0.777						
0.428	0.322	0.436	0.71					
0.3	0.439	0.584	0.409	0.742				
0.515	0.375	0.311	0.513	0.419	0.772			
0.474	0.487	0.493	0.512	0.498	0.6	0.82		
0.713	0.414	0.397	0.481	0.344	0.545	0.612	0.788	
0.254	0.344	0.561	0.45	0.34	0.232	0.358	0.306	0.718

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)



The results of Regression weights table also support all remaining relationships (P – value < 0.05). Thus, they are statistically significant.

Table 6
Regression Weights: (Group number 1 - Default model)

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
GIC	←	AI	0.24	0.082	2.919	0.004
GIC	←	PI	0.19	0.063	2.993	0.003
GIC	←	FCS	0.11	0.053	2.074	0.038
ITP	←	SCC	0.195	0.074	2.635	0.008
ITP	←	COE	0.347	0.083	4.171	***
ITP	←	GIC	0.415	0.087	4.767	***

Finally, the standardized regression weights table illustrates the degree of effect of independent factors on dependent factors. In short, Career outcome expectation has strongest impact on Intention to persist (0.331), followed by the effect of Goal and Institutional commitment on Intention to persist (0.327). Social and Cultural capital also affects Intention to persist with smallest regression weights (0.200). Meanwhile, Academic integration, Peer interactions, and Faculty concern for student development and teaching all influence on Goal and Institutional commitment, with regression weights of 0.246, 0.237, and 0.168 respectively.

Table 7
Standardized Regression Weights: (Group number 1 - Default model)

			Estimate
GIC	←	AI	0.246
GIC	←	PI	0.237
GIC	←	FCS	0.168
ITP	←	SCC	0.2
ITP	←	COE	0.331
ITP	←	GIC	0.327

In addition to the direct effects on Goal and Institutional commitment, Academic integration, Peer interactions, and Faculty concern for student and teaching also had indirect effects on Intention to persist. The degree of impacts of these three factors is quite similar, while indirect effect of Academic integration on Intention to persist is 0.08, which indirect effects of Peer interactions and Faculty concern for student development and teaching on Intention to persist is slightly smaller, with 0.077 and 0.055 respectively.

Table 8
Standardized total/direct/indirect effects on Intention to persist

Construct	Total Effect	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect
Career outcome expectation	0.331	0.331	0
Goal and Institutional commitment	0.327	0.327	0
Social and Cultural capital	0.2	0.2	0.00
Academic integration	0.08	0	0.08
Peer interactions	0.077	0	0.077
Faculty concern for student development and teaching	0.055	0	0.055

Table 9
Results of Hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Statement	Result
H ₁	Academic integration has a significant effect on goal and institutional commitment.	Supported
H ₂	Peer interactions have a significant effect on goal and institutional commitment.	Supported
H ₃	Faculty interactions have a significant effect on and institutional commitment.	Not supported
H ₄	Faculty concern for student development and teaching have significant effect on and institutional commitment.	Supported
H ₅	Career outcome expectation teaching has a significant effect on intention to persist.	Supported
H ₆	Social and cultural capital have significant effects on intention to persist.	Supported
H ₇	Foreign cultural capital has a significant effect on intention to persist.	Not supported
H ₈	Goal and institutional commitment have significant effects on intention to persist.	Supported

5. Conclusion

This study was executed aiming to explore the factors influencing student's Intention to persist in foreign – affiliated universities in Ho Chi Minh City. With this purpose, the study was conducted on students studying in five universities using foreign curriculum in teaching. Students who were surveyed are mostly freshmen, sophomores and juniors. Four independent factors and one dependent factor were initially proposed in the research model to have effects on students' Intention to persist. The study employed qualitative results of one - on - one discussion with six students of various universities in order to adjust measured scales adopted by various scholars researching on the same concern and concurrently supplement some more items to fully represent the factors. Subsequently, quantitative method was employed via delivering questionnaires to the target respondents. More than three hundred valid questionnaires were used for data analysis and produced desired results.

The reliability test, explorative factor analysis (EFA), confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and structural equation modeling (SEM) was respectively conducted to eliminate inappropriate observed variables, cluster factors, confirm validity and model fit, and finally come up with the ultimate result. It is noticeable that seven independent constructs were formed during EFA instead of five ones as initially which are Academic integration, Peer interactions, Faculty interactions, Faculty concerns for students and teaching, Career outcome expectation, Social and Cultural capital, Foreign cultural capital. Additionally, Goal commitment and Institutional commitment interestingly merged together to form only one common factor named Goal and Institutional commitment instead of separating into two distinct constructs. This result then went through CFA, some items were eliminated to achieve the fit of model and ensure validity standards. SEM is the final step to figure out the results as follows:

Out of 8 factors, six of them are proved to have positive impact on students' Intention to persist, they are Academic integration, Peer interactions, Faculty concerns for students and teaching, Career outcome expectation, Social and Cultural capital, Goal and Institutional commitment. Meanwhile, Career outcome expectation has strongest effect on Intention to persist at a degree of 0.331. With a slightly less effect than Career outcome expectation, Goal and Institutional commitment positively impact Intention to persist at a degree of 0.327. Besides, Social and Cultural capital also have less considerable effect on Intention to persist (0.200). Moreover, Academic integration, Peer interactions, Faculty concern for student development and teaching also impose an indirect impact on students' Intention to persist. This result can be understandable because most of students' intentions to learn are to achieve good occupation after their graduation. Meanwhile attaining a degree of university is also a goal of many students, which then attach them with their registered institution.

In respect to Goal and Institutional commitment, Academic integration has the strongest effect on it at a degree of 0.246, followed by the effect of Peer interactions with 0.237. Faculty concern for student development and teaching is proved to have smallest impact on Goal and Institutional commitment, at a degree of 0.168. This result reveals that before affecting Intention to persist, Academic integration and Peer interactions plays a vital role in strengthening students' commitment to the school and their studying goal. Faculty concern for student development and teaching is also affective, but its effect does not strongly present as other two factors.

In short, the results demonstrate the appropriateness of initially proposed model and hypotheses; the model is fit with the quantitative data. Overall, Academic integration and Social integration (including Peer interactions and faculty concern for students and teaching) positively affect Goal and Institutional commitment. Besides, Career outcome expectation, Goal and Institutional, and Social and Cultural capital directly influence students' Intention to persist.

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