



Research Article

**THE IMPACT OF PERSONAL BACKGROUND CHARACTERISTICS ON
THE SOCIALIZATION OF ETHNIC MINORITY STUDENTS WITH
ACADEMIC ASPECTS
IN UNIVERSITIES IN HO CHI MINH CITY**

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to investigate the impact of personal background characteristics on the socialization with academic aspects of ethnic minority students in higher education institutions in Ho Chi Minh City. A quantitative method was used to measure the extent of the impact of these elements. A survey was conducted with 236 ethnic minority students studying at 14 public universities in Ho Chi Minh City. The results of the structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis indicate that four personal background characteristics affect the learning experiences of ethnic minority students: (1) socio-economic status, (2) preferences, (3) aptitude, and (4) aspirations. Among these, the aspect of aptitude has the greatest impact. These findings can provide valuable insights for relevant and interested stakeholders in formulating effective measures to help ethnic minority students socialize in the higher education environment effectively.

Keywords: academic aspect; Ethnic minority students; Ho Chi Minh City; personal background characteristics; socialization

1. Introduction

The academic accomplishments students achieve during their educational trajectory stand as pivotal indicators for assessing the efficacy of universities and the wider higher education framework. Within this intricate web of influences shaping students' academic trajectories, the aspect of socialization with academic elements within higher education institutions emerges as especially noteworthy. It is widely held that students' socialization with these academic facets profoundly influences the outcomes they attain in their higher education endeavors. This belief underscores the critical role of students' socialization with

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academic elements in determining their academic achievements within the higher education landscape (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Ayalew et al., 2023).

Socialization can be seen as a process requiring continuous interaction between individuals and the aspects influencing those individuals and is regarded as a process stemming from students' interaction with factors or environments, with each group of students having different experiences (Clausen, 1968). According to Tierney (1997), the socialization of disadvantaged students, such as rural and minority students, will differ from that of other students due to their unique characteristics. Stough-Hunter et al. (2023) argue that these students face distinct challenges in accessing and maintaining the learning process at university due to their circumstances and differences in personal background characteristics. Additionally, the socialization of these disadvantaged students in the urban higher education environment poses additional challenges, besides individual characteristics, as urban universities create significantly different environments compared to their rural backgrounds (Bitz, 2011).

Vietnam is a multi-ethnic country with the Kinh ethnic group comprising the majority at 85.3%, while ethnic minorities make up the remaining 14.7% (Truong & Tran, 2024). Despite their smaller proportion of the population, ethnic minorities still play a significant role in the social, economic, and political life of the nation. Therefore, the welfare and education of ethnic minorities are a priority of government attention (Vietnam's Communist Party Online Newspaper, 2023). However, to effectively socialize with academic elements, ethnic minority students must face various challenges such as language limitations, self-esteem issues, and economic difficulties (Nguyen, 2007; Ngo et al., 2021).

Currently, there is limited research focusing on the socialization of ethnic minority students in the university environment and the influence of their personal background characteristics on this aspect. Most studies tend to narrow down to dimensions such as academic difficulties, adaptation to academic disciplines, adaptation to general communication environments in the classroom, ethnic minority students' learning abilities in the initial stage, adaptation to group study, etc. (Tran, 2010; Nguyen, 2019; Pham, 2019; Ngo et al., 2021). Therefore, this study aims to investigate the influence of personal background characteristics on the integration into academic activities of ethnic minority students in Ho Chi Minh City. These findings also provide crucial information for stakeholders in developing feasible measures to help ethnic minority students effectively socialize with the university environment.

2. Research model and method

2.1. Research model

As Weidman (1989) articulates, undergraduate socialization can be understood as a process shaped by students' interactions with fellow members of the college community in various settings characterized by differing levels of normative influence. Essentially, this

suggests that students are influenced by their environments through interpersonal and intrapersonal social dynamics, leading to the process of socialization (Weidman, 1989). Despite the longstanding nature of this concept, it remains relevant in contemporary research aimed at comprehending socialization within university contexts, as demonstrated by studies conducted by Emily (2017) and Caregnato et al. (2022).

In the scope of this study, the socialization of ethnic minority students aligns with Weidman's framework, albeit with a narrower focus on university environments. This conceptualization encompasses the process whereby individuals interact, adapt, and negotiate their roles within the higher education setting. It involves self-regulation to align with university expectations while also fostering innovation to meet its objectives. Upon entering university lecture halls, students bring with them deeply ingrained values, cultures, and beliefs, profoundly shaping their experiences and personal growth. As highlighted in the concept of socialization, transitioning into the university milieu entails engaging with various aspects. This study specifically delves into the academic ones, focusing on institutional regulations and responsibilities, as suggested by Weidman (1989) and Caregnato et al. (2022).

This study employs the personal background characteristics identified by Weidman (1989) to examine how ethnic minority students in Ho Chi Minh City engage with academic elements within higher education institutions. While Weidman (1989) identifies five core personal characteristics, operational definitions are not provided. Thus, this study integrates insights from existing literature that delineate these characteristics, drawing from the works of Nguyen (2007), Tran (2010), Pham (2019), and Caregnato et al. (2022), with adaptations tailored to the context of minority students in Vietnam, as detailed in Table 2. Specifically, socio-economic status denotes a person's social and economic position, encompassing factors such as their income and wealth as well as that of their parents. In the study, it is gauged by factors like tuition affordability, access to educational resources, and family financial support. Aptitude refers to natural talent or skill, assessed through interest in competitions, networking with similar individuals, and applying one's talents at university. Preferences are individual inclinations, evaluated by liking the study environment, forming relationships based on personal preferences, and seeking like-minded connections. Aspirations encompass hopes and ambitions, measured by post-graduation plans, relationship-building goals, desire for success, eagerness to learn, and academic achievement goals. Values are principles or beliefs important to an individual, assessed through personal community values, adapting to the study environment, confidently expressing personal values, and learning positive values at university. Figure 1 illustrates the research model.

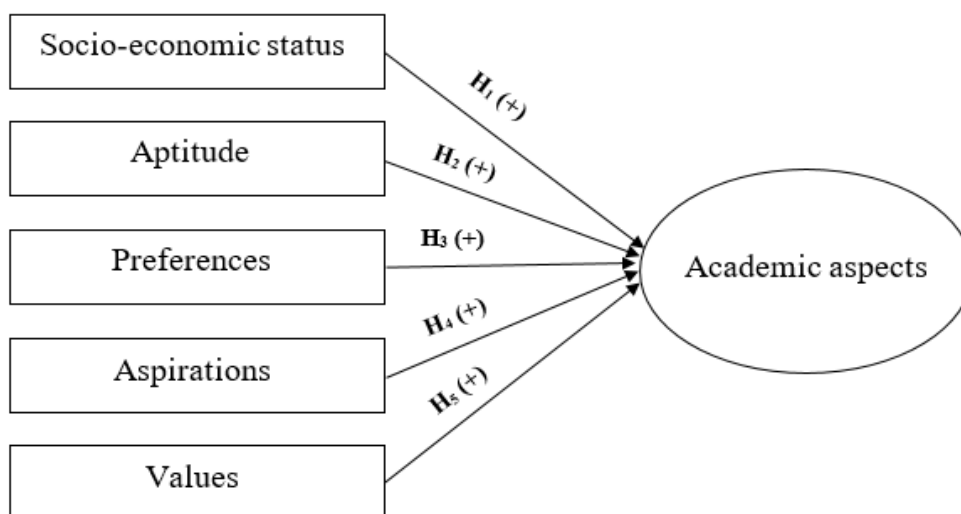


Figure 1. The research model

2.2. Research method

The study employed a quantitative method. Research questions were measured using Likert scale levels. The study underwent several steps, including Cronbach’s Alpha reliability testing, exploratory factor analysis (EFA), confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and structural equation modeling (SEM), to assess the model and provide research outcomes.

Data were gathered from 236 ethnic minority students (with a response rate of 60.2%) enrolled in 14 public universities in Ho Chi Minh City. Among them, first-year students comprised 66 individuals (28%), second-year students comprised 49 individuals (20.8%), third-year students comprised 68 individuals (28.8%), and fourth-year students comprised 53 individuals (22.5%). Statistical analysis revealed a significant gender imbalance among the survey participants, with a notably higher number of female students, specifically 169 (71.6%), compared to 67 male students (28.4%). Detailed information regarding the participants is provided in Table 1.

Table 1. The numbers and percentages of participants

Year 1		Year 2		Year 3		Year 4		Total	
Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
17	49	12	37	20	48	18	35	67	169
(25.8%)	(74.2%)	(24.5%)	(75.5%)	(29.4%)	(70.6%)	(34.0%)	(66.0%)	(28.4%)	(71.6%)

3. Findings

3.1. Scale reliability

Following the assessment of Cronbach’s Alpha coefficients, the study proceeded to eliminate items with inter-item correlations below 0.3 (Hoang & Chu, 2008). The reliability coefficients of the scales were relatively high, indicating that observed variables within the same factor contributed significantly to forming the latent factor. As a final result, items

TNHT3, TNHT9, ST2, ST3, and GT6 were removed from the research model, while the remaining items were subjected to EFA. Specific data are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Reliability test results of the dependent variable scales from survey data from 236 ethnic minority students from 14 public universities in Ho Chi Minh City

Items	Total variable correlation	Cronbach's Alpha coefficient if variable type	Average scale if variable type
Socio-economic status (KTXH), Cronbach's Alpha = 0.874			
KTXH1: I can afford my university tuition	0.612	0.865	14.24
KTXH2: I have enough money to have access to educational resources (computers, books, specialized equipment, etc.)	0.634	0.860	14.13
KTXH3: I get monthly support from my family	0.689	0.851	13.64
KTXH4: I do not need to worry about financial matters	0.737	0.843	14.44
KTXH5: I can afford to participate in extracurricular activities and entertainment with friends	0.822	0.827	14.28
KTXH6: My family and I do not need to borrow any financial resources to pay for my education	0.592	0.869	14.56
Aptitude (NK), Cronbach's Alpha = 0.865			
NK1: I am interested in competitions and events about ethnic groups organized by the university	0.402	0.883	16.83
NK2: I have aptitude related to my ethnicity	0.641	0.848	17.30
NK3: People like me because of my aptitude	0.824	0.814	17.38
NK4: I know how to apply and develop my aptitude at my university	0.665	0.845	17.50
NK5: I have certain aptitude	0.705	0.836	17.29
NK6: I connect with people who share my aptitude	0.766	0.827	17.26
Preferences (ST), Cronbach's Alpha = 0.608			
ST1: I really like the environment I am studying in	0.306	0.578	17.88
ST2: I build relationships based on personal preferences	0.135	0.643	17.89
ST3: I seek and connect with people who share my preferences	0.054	0.671	17.90
ST4: I like hanging out with friends	0.650	0.427	18.24
ST5: I rarely change my preferences	0.349	0.560	18.11
ST6: My friends all share my preferences	0.651	0.428	18.25
Aspirations (KV), Cronbach's Alpha = 0.870			

KV1: I have plans after graduation	0.345	0.912	21.12
KV2: I look forward to building more relationships in the future	0.754	0.833	20.42
KV3: I look forward to success in the future	0.744	0.834	20.32
KV4: I am eager to learn more	0.790	0.829	20.22
KV5: I look forward to higher academic achievement	0.814	0.824	20.22
KV6: I want to connect with people who have the same aspirations as me	0.679	0.846	20.51
Values (GT), Cronbach's Alpha = 0.831			
GT1: I have my values associated with my people	0.691	0.785	17.51
GT2: I adjust myself to fit the environment I am studying in	0.746	0.774	17.42
GT3: I am loved by everyone around me thanks to the unique values associated with my people	0.708	0.781	17.66
GT4: I confidently express personal values in my university	0.707	0.782	17.64
GT5: I have learned good values at my university	0.680	0.787	17.67
GT6: I am well aware of my self-worth	0.130	0.888	16.77
Academic aspects (CIT), Cronbach's Alpha = 0.866			
TNHT1: Perform the tasks and requirements of the courses	0.802	0.830	14.44
TNHT2: Establish relationships with lecturers	0.352	0.871	14.13
TNHT3: Establish relationships with classmates	0.165	0.887	14.23
TNHT4: Adapt to the university's timetable and rules	0.666	0.845	14.57
TNHT5: Set learning goals for yourself	0.676	0.845	14.66
TNHT6: Do group exercises	0.839	0.825	14.49
TNHT7: Participate in scientific research projects	0.821	0.837	14.76
TNHT8: Use academic language in learning	0.824	0.827	14.39
TNHT9: Carry out administrative procedures and processes at the university when required	0.230	0.877	13.36

3.2. *Exploratory factor analysis (EFA)*

EFA was conducted through two iterations of varimax rotation. The study eliminated 9 items (TNHT1; TNHT2; TNHT4; TNHT8; NK1; NK2; NK6; ST1; KV1) and retained 25 items for CFA. The total extracted variance was 73,625% (>50%) and all factor loading coefficients were >0,5, meeting the condition. Eigenvalue=1,433 (>1) and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure was 0,827 (0,5<KMO<1). These indices indicate that the survey questions met statistical requirements.

3.3. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)

The results of the analysis of the components of the scale (Figure 2) all achieved convergent validity, discriminant validity, uni-dimensionality, and reliability.

CFA was conducted with the 25 retained items. Statistical results showed that the model fit table evaluated the suitability of the structural model with parameters such as $\chi^2/df=2.242$ (<3); CFI=0.910; TLI=0.896; GFI=0.847; RMSEA=0.073 (Baumgartner & Homburg, 1996). The analysis results met convergence, discriminant validity, unidimensionality, and reliability criteria ($CR>0.7$; $AVE>0.5$; $MSV<AVE$). Thus, all items met the criteria for inclusion in SEM testing.

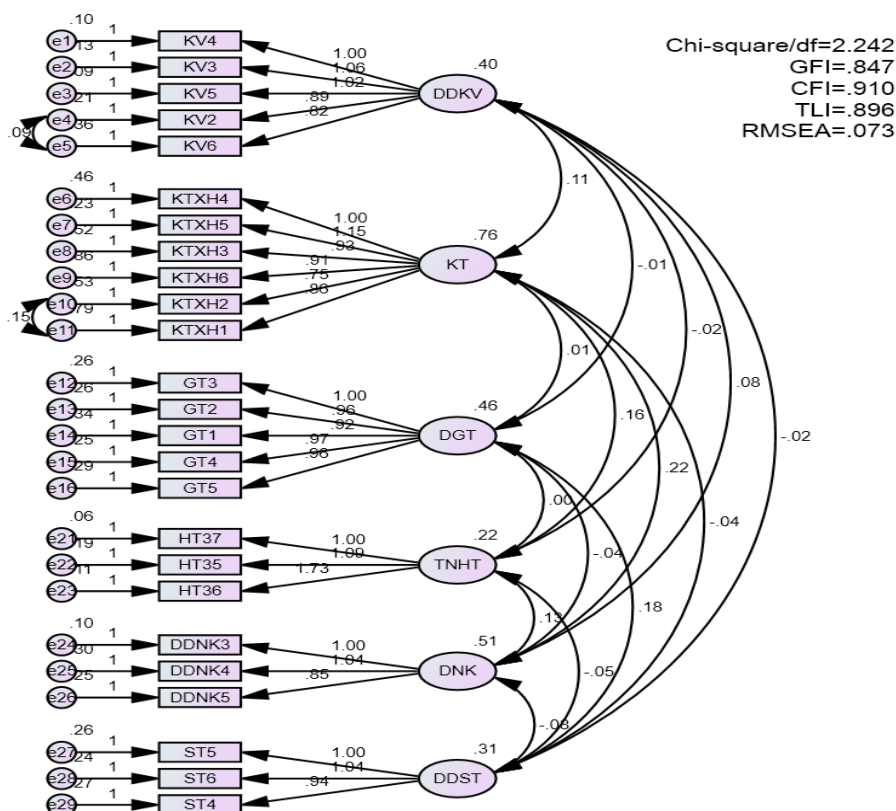


Figure 2. Results of CFA testing of survey data from 236 ethnic minority students from 14 public universities in Ho Chi Minh City

3.4. Structural equation modeling (SEM)

The results of the SEM analysis have elucidated the relationships between the latent variables in the initial research model. Ultimately, four out of the five personal background characteristics significantly influence the socialization of ethnic minority students, including (1) socio-economic status, (2) aptitude, (3) preferences, and (4) aspirations, while the remaining factor showed no statistically significant influence ($p>0.05$).

The SEM analysis also revealed that the aptitude characteristic has the most significant impact, with a correlation between aptitude and the socialization of ethnic minority students

at $p=***$ (0.000); the standardized coefficient ($\beta = 0.310$) is the highest among the four influencing characteristics. Table 3 and Figure 3 provide detailed information.

Table 3. Testing the relationships between concepts in the (standardized) model data from a survey of 236 ethnic minority students from 14 public universities in Ho Chi Minh City

	Accreditation		Estimate	S.E.	C.R	p
TNHT	<---	KTXH	0.164	0.039	4.184	***
TNHT	<---	NK	0.192	0.048	3.979	***
TNHT	<---	ST	-0.128	0.071	-1.805	0.071
TNHT	<---	KV	-0.130	0.049	-2.686	0.007
TNHT	<---	GT	0.049	0.053	0.924	0.355

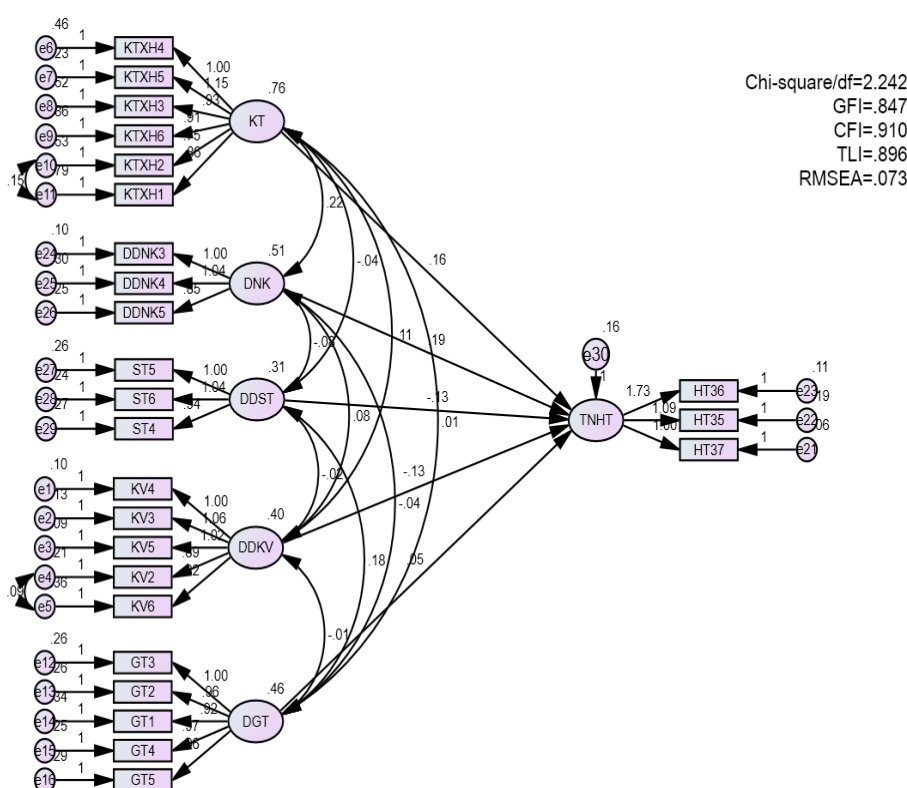


Figure 3. Results of SEM testing of survey data from 236 ethnic minority students from 14 public universities in Ho Chi Minh City

Finally, the study conducted Bootstrap validation with replacement sampling, with a sample size of 500 iterations to assess the stability of the statistical estimates, as detailed in Table 4. The results indicate that the estimated model is reliable, with factor analysis coefficients having values of $|CR| < 2$ (in the case of $CR=2.6$, statistical properties still exist, $p>5\%$, with very minor deviations). The conclusion is that the estimated model can be trusted, which aligns with the expected outcome when analyzing the linear structural equation model (SEM).

Table 4. *Bootstrap testing results of survey data from 236 ethnic minority students from 14 public universities in Ho Chi Minh City*

Parameter			SE	SE-SE	Mean	Bias	SE-Bias	CR
TNHT	<---	KT	0.060	0.002	0.307	0.005	0.003	1
TNHT	<---	NK	0.063	0.002	0.285	-0.004	0.003	0.3
TNHT	<---	ST	0.085	0.003	-0.148	0.003	0.004	0.75
TNHT	<---	KV	0.059	0.002	-0.182	-0.008	0.003	2.6
TNHT	<---	GT	0.071	0.002	0.067	-0.004	0.003	1.3

As a whole, the findings of this research underscore a positive correlation between individual background characteristics and the socialization process of ethnic minority students with academic facets within higher education institutions in Ho Chi Minh City. These background characteristics include (1) socio-economic status, (2) aptitude, (3) preferences, and (4) aspirations. Notably, the degree of influence varies across these characteristics, with aptitude emerging as the most influential factor. These outcomes are consistent with certain prior studies by Nguyen (2007), Pham (2019), and Ngo et al. (2021), which highlight that ethnic minority students' academic engagement, such as participation in group activities and interaction with peers and instructors, may be constrained by psychological barriers. Furthermore, our findings resonate with research conducted by Tran (2010) and Nguyen (2019), indicating that economic limitations impede students' access to educational resources and learning aids. Many students are compelled to undertake part-time employment to meet tuition and living expenses, thereby impacting their academic pursuits.

Gaining insight into the specific individual background characteristics that shape the socialization process of ethnic minority students with academic elements within higher education institutions holds significant implications for stakeholders. This knowledge enables them to develop targeted strategies aimed at fostering a more conducive environment for these students to engage with academic aspects effectively. For instance, recognizing that aptitude emerges as the most influential factor impacting the socialization of ethnic minority students with academic elements in higher education institutions suggests that interventions should focus on identifying and nurturing students' inherent talents and abilities. Secondary schools catering to these students can implement programs and initiatives designed to identify and enhance aptitude, thereby laying a solid foundation for their academic journey. Similarly, universities play a pivotal role in facilitating the socialization process of ethnic minority students. Higher education institutions can offer a diverse array of activities and opportunities tailored to accommodate students with varying talents and interests. These activities should not only encompass academic pursuits but also embrace aspects of ethnic minority cultures, thereby promoting a sense of belonging and cultural appreciation among students.

4. Conclusion

The findings derived from a sample of 236 ethnic minority students shed light on the pivotal role played by four key personal background characteristics—namely (1) socio-economic status, (2) aptitude, (3) preferences, and (4) aspirations—in shaping the socialization process of these students with academic aspects within higher education institutions. Notably, among these factors, aptitude emerges as the most influential determinant, exerting a significant impact on how ethnic minority students engage with academic elements within the higher education landscape.

An essential consideration in this study is the limitation imposed by the small sample size, this may be why the statistically significant influence of the value factor has not been found, which may restrict the comprehensive reflection of ethnic minority students' socialization with academic aspects within higher education institutions in Ho Chi Minh City and the exploration of all pertinent personal background characteristics. Future research endeavors could mitigate this limitation by expanding the sample size and broadening the scope, thereby facilitating a more robust validation of these findings. Additionally, diversifying the participation of ethnic minority students could offer richer insights into their socialization experiences within university contexts. Moreover, there exists a potential avenue for extending the research trajectory by investigating the influence of additional characteristics, such as personality traits and parental backgrounds, on various facets of the learning environment. Exploring the university context from alternative perspectives, such as organizational culture and climate, could also yield valuable insights into the socialization dynamics at play.

It is imperative to note that this study represents an initial exploration into the influence of select personal background characteristics on the socialization of ethnic minority students with academic aspects in higher education institutions. It serves as a foundational stepping stone for future in-depth investigations aimed at enriching our understanding of the factors influencing the academic achievements of ethnic minority students in contemporary university settings, particularly within the context of Vietnam. Through concerted efforts to expand and deepen research endeavors, the ultimate objective is to contribute meaningfully to the enhancement of academic outcomes for ethnic minority students in today's university landscape.

❖ **Conflict of Interest:** Authors have no conflict of interest to declare

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**TÌM HIỂU SỰ ẢNH HƯỞNG CỦA CÁC ĐẶC ĐIỂM NỀN TẢNG
CÁ NHÂN ĐẾN SỰ HOÀ NHẬP VÀO CÁC HOẠT ĐỘNG HỌC TẬP
CỦA SINH VIÊN DÂN TỘC THIỂU SỐ TẠI THÀNH PHỐ HỒ CHÍ MINH**

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TÓM TẮT

Bài viết này nhằm tìm hiểu sự ảnh hưởng của các đặc điểm nền tảng cá nhân đến sự hòa nhập vào các hoạt động học tập của sinh viên dân tộc thiểu số tại các trường đại học ở Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh. Phương pháp định lượng được sử dụng nhằm đo lường mức ảnh hưởng của các đặc điểm nền tảng cá nhân. Nghiên cứu khảo sát 236 sinh viên dân tộc thiểu số đang học tập tại 14 trường đại học công lập ở Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh và kết quả nghiên cứu mô hình phương trình cấu trúc (SEM) cho thấy có bốn đặc điểm nền tảng cá nhân ảnh hưởng đến trải nghiệm học tập của sinh viên dân tộc thiểu số, bao gồm: (1) tình trạng kinh tế - xã hội, (2) sở thích, (3) năng khiếu, và (4) khát vọng. Trong đó, đặc điểm năng khiếu có ảnh hưởng lớn nhất. Kết quả khảo sát là những thông tin tham khảo hữu ích cho các bên liên quan trong việc đưa ra những biện pháp để giúp sinh viên dân tộc thiểu số hòa nhập vào môi trường giáo dục đại học một cách hiệu quả.

Từ khóa: hoạt động học tập; sinh viên dân tộc thiểu số; Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh; đặc điểm nền tảng cá nhân; sự hòa nhập