ประสบการณ์ความเครียดของนักเรียนโฮมสคูลที่มีต่อการคัดเลือกเข้าศึกษาต่อในระดับมหาวิทยาลัย: การศึกษาเชิงคุณภาพ

Stress Experienced by Homeschooled Students on University Admission: A Qualitative Study. (English)

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บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษามุมมองและลักษณะความเครียดของนักเรียนโฮมสคูลที่มีต่อการสอบเข้ามหาวิทยาลัย รวมไปถึงเจาะลึกว่าครอบครัว ติวเตอร์และกลุ่มเพื่อนสามารถช่วยสนับสนุนและลดทอนความเครียดของเด็กโฮมสคูลได้อย่างไร ซึ่งงานวิจัยนี้เป็นการศึกษาด้วยการวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพแนวปรากฏการณ์วิทยา เก็บข้อมูลด้วยการสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึก โดยมีผู้ให้ข้อมูลจำนวน 5 คน ประกอบไปด้วยเพศชายจำนวน 2 คน และเพศหญิงจำนวน 3 คน คัดเลือกด้วยวิธีแบบเจาะจงและสโนว์บอล ผู้ให้ข้อมูลอยู่ในช่วงอายุ 20 – 23 ปี จบการศึกษาระดับชั้นมัธยมศึกษาตอนปลายหรือเทียบเท่าด้วยรูปแบบการเรียนแบบโฮมสคูล เคยมีประสบการณ์การเตรียมตัวเพื่อการคัดเลือกเข้าศึกษาต่อในระดับมหาวิทยาลัยมาแล้วในช่วง 4 ปีที่ผ่านมา ผลการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลพบว่าผู้ให้ข้อมูลมีลักษณะความเครียดโดยรวมที่ใกล้เคียงกับนักเรียนทั่วไป หากแต่มีความเครียดที่เกิดจากความไม่เข้าใจในระบบการศึกษาแบบโฮมสคูลเพิ่มเติม มีปัจจัยแวดล้อมซึ่งมีอิทธิพลต่อความเครียดในการคัดเลือกเข้าศึกษาต่อในระดับมหาวิทยาลัย ประกอบไปด้วย ปัจจัยจากเพื่อนซึ่งมีบทบาทในการเยียวยาความเครียดผ่านการให้กำลังใจ ปัจจัยจากครอบครัวซึ่งมีบทบาทในการเยียวยาความเครียดหลากหลายวิธี ปัจจัยจากติวเตอร์ซึ่งมีบทบาทในการเยียวยาความเครียดผ่านการช่วยเหลือทางการศึกษา และปัจจัยจากตัวเองซึ่งมีบทบาทในการช่วยเหลือเยียวยาผ่านการทำงานอดิเรก และการเรียนโฮมสคูลทำให้มีเวลาว่างมาก และสามารถจัดตารางเวลาการเรียนและพักผ่อนของตัวเองได้ แต่ทว่าผู้ให้ข้อมูลยังขาดคนเปรียบเทียบผลทางการศึกษาเพื่อประเมินศักยภาพของตนเอง

คำสำคัญ: ความเครียด การเรียนแบบโฮมสคูล การคัดเลือกเข้าระดับมหาวิทยาลัย

Abstract

This research aims to study the perspectives and characteristics of stress experienced by homeschooled students regarding university admission. This includes exploring how family, tutors, and peers can support and reduce stress in homeschooled students. The research is a qualitative study with a phenomenological approach, collecting data through in-depth interviews. The informants consisted of 5 individuals, including 2 males and 3 females, selected through purposive and snowball sampling. The informants were aged 20-23 and had completed high school or its equivalent through homeschooling. They had also experienced preparation for university admission in the past 4 years. The data analysis revealed that the informants had overall stress levels similar to those of regular students, but with additional stress from a lack of understanding of the homeschooling education system. Environmental factors influencing stress during university admission included peer support, which played a role in alleviating stress through encouragement; family support, which helped ease stress in various ways; tutors' support, which provided help with academic assistance; and personal factors, which contributed to stress relief through hobbies. Homeschooling allowed for more free time and flexibility in scheduling study and rest periods. However, the informants lacked of comparison with their peers' academic performance, which could help assess their potential.

Keywords: Stress, Homeschooling, University Admission

Introduction

Homeschooling has become increasingly popular in Thailand (Sukrum, 2017), offering benefits such as parental control over the learning process and greater independence for homeschooled students. It can also protect against peer bullying (Pedragosa & Katenga, 2022). However, homeschooled students still face stress, especially from university admission exams (Hauck, 2024; Wilkins, 2022). Some studies, however, suggest homeschooled students experience less stress and depression compared to traditional students (Bennett, Edwards, & Ngai, 2018; Salvo, 2018). Yet, research on stress in homeschooled students, particularly in Thailand, remains limited.

Exploring this could help better support homeschooled students and inform policies to enhance their learning and potential.

Homeschooling in Thailand

Homeschooling in Thailand gained recognition in 1995 as a legitimate educational option and became legally recognized in 2004 when the government passed a law (Chansaengsee, Peungposop, & Junprasert, 2017). Homeschooling parents must then adhere to regulations set by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and report to the MOE, demonstrating that they meet national education standards (Office of the Basic Education Commission, 2019; Office of the Education Council, 2006). Homeschooling in Thailand specifically allows families to choose or create their own curriculum (Office of the Basic Education Commission, 2019), selecting from international programs or customized approaches (Office of the Education Council, 2006). Thai parents often choose homeschooling due to self-efficacy, influenced by their educational background, passion for holistic education, and access to suitable curricula (Duvall, & Delquadri, 2011; Pedragosa & Katenga, 2022). It nurtures students' potential by aligning learning with their talents and interests, fostering autonomy while preparing them for government-recognized diploma exams. Homeschooling supports both Thai and English language skills, promoting cultural heritage and global opportunities (Ren & Phongsatha, 2021). It also addresses cognitive, emotional, and physical development, offering valuable life skills and an enriching educational experience (Purwaningsih & Fauziah, 2020).

While homeschooling offers many benefits, it also presents challenges. Financially, it can be costly and may require a loss of income if parents dedicate time to teaching (Cogan & Lee, 2017). Parents face significant time and effort demands, leading to stress (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013). Homeschooled students may have limited socialization, impacting their social development (Ray, 2019). Additionally, homeschooling lacks resources and extracurricular activities available in traditional schools (Medlin, 2013), and the quality of education can vary depending on the parent's expertise (Ray, 2019). The absence of standardized credentials may also complicate higher education applications (Bennett et al., 2018; Redford, Battle, Bielick, & Grady, 2016), increasing stress, especially during university admission exams.

Stress in University Admission Exams of Homeschooled Students

Many studies highlight the stress, anxiety, and depression senior high school students face during university admission exams in Thailand (Nakprasat, 2022; Palirat & Pityaratstian, 2015; Sidharth, 2023; Somchai & Kanchanatawan, 2024; Tanakornnuwat, 2023). Homeschooled students also face unique stressors, such as uncertainty about their education's acceptance and the lack of standardized curricula and college preparation resources (Redford et al., 2016; Medlin, 2013; Ray, 2019). Moreover, high family expectations contribute to stress (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013). Additionally, homeschooling students, spending most of their time in small groups or at home, often lack key resources like structured content and support systems, which may increase stress during university admissions (Haque, 2023; Vijayakumar & Lawrence, 2021; Wen, 2023). This raises the importance of exploring the stress Thai homeschooled students face during university admission exams and how environmental factors, such as family, tutors, and peers, help alleviate it.

This study is particularly qualitative research that uses a phenomenological approach to explore and understand the stress experienced by homeschooled students during university admission exams. These insights would help parents, educators, and relevant sectors support homeschooled students in managing stress. Understanding these challenges can lead to policies that create supportive environments, promote learning, and help students reach their full potential, benefiting society.

Research Objectives

This research aims to explore the stress experienced by homeschooled students during university admissions, focusing on their perspectives and stress characteristics. It also seeks to identify factors contributing to increased stress and examine how support from family, tutors, and peers may help homeschooled students cope with stress during university admissions.

Research Conceptual Framework

This qualitative study explores the factors contributing to stress among homeschooled students during the university admission exam. It examines how family, tutors, and peers influence stress levels and provide support for stress reduction. The

study focuses on Thai homeschooled students, aged 18-25, living in Bangkok metropolitan areas, with 5 informants. Data will be collected from January 15, 2024, to April 30, 2024.

Research Method

Sampling Procedures

The researchers used purposive and snowball sampling to select five homeschooled students aged 20-23 who had completed high school via homeschooling and were preparing for university admission. Snowball sampling was used due to the small number of homeschooled students and limited accessibility. Informants were selected based on inclusion criteria (aged 18-25, completed homeschooling, actively preparing for university, and willing to discuss stress) and exclusion criteria (outside the age range, unable to speak Thai, or withdrawing from the study).

Research Tools

The interview questions were developed based on the Theory of Planned Behavior, the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Ajzen, 2005; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), and the Perceived Stress Questionnaire (PSQ) (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1994), adapted to explore stress and coping strategies among homeschooled students. The PSQ is a reliable and valid tool, showing strong construct, content, and criterion validity, with good internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.75 to 0.85) and test-retest reliability. The questions were also informed by research on stress related to university admissions (Kaewkaewpan, 2020; Wu, Xie, & Jiang, 2022) and reviewed by experts in qualitative research, adolescent psychology, and child development. There are twenty-three questions in the interview. The interview consists of four parts: 1) demographic information (name, gender, age, faculty, university, homeschooling duration), 2) general information about stress related to university admission exams, 3) in-depth information about stress causes and influences (e.g., "What causes stress related to university exams?"), and 4) in-depth information on coping strategies (e.g., "How do you cope with stress related to university exams?").

Data Collection

Before each data collection session, the researchers explained the study, data management procedures, and participation conditions. After the informants provided consent, a session was scheduled at their convenience. The researchers conducted the interviews at the participants' homes, lasting 1 hour and 30 minutes, and requested permission to record the audio. The interview began with introductions and demographic questions to build rapport. The researchers clarified the study's purpose and confirmed there was no compensation, only gratitude. In-depth questions followed, with follow-up questions as needed for clarification or further insight. If the informant felt uncomfortable or wished to end the interview, they could do so without explanation, and no harm would result. The researchers ensured data validity by analysing it immediately, verifying with participants for confirmation, and using data triangulation to compare findings from different sources, ensuring high reliability.

Data Analysis

The researchers used thematic analysis to analyze interview data (Christou, 2023). The process began with familiarization, where the researchers transcribed and reviewed the interview recordings to gain an overview. The next step was generating initial codes by identifying relevant sentences, words, or phrases from the data (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). In the third step, themes were developed by grouping related codes together and discarding irrelevant ones (Christou, 2023). The fourth step involved reviewing and refining the themes to ensure they were comprehensive, consistent, and aligned with the research questions. Finally, the researchers named and defined the themes to ensure clarity and alignment with the data (Dawadi, 2020).

Results

The informants' information was as follows (see Table 1).

Table 1 The Informant's information

Informants	Information
Miss A	Ages 20, has been homeschooled for 12 years. She viewed stress related to university admission as uncontrollable thoughts about the process, and self-competition to excel, which lead to pressure and negative perfectionism.
Mr. B	Ages 22, has been homeschooled for 12 years. He saw university admission stress as a critical opportunity, with a fear of mistakes and a belief that learning method differences contribute to pressure and reduced self-esteem. He also felt this stress was pushing him toward self-reliance due to a lack of support.
Miss C	Ages, 20, has been homeschooled for 12 years. She viewed university admission stress as a singular chance to secure her desired department but experienced mistrust from outsiders toward homeschoolers during the process.
Miss D	Ages, 23, has been homeschooled for 12 years, believed admission stress is common among students, causing both physical and mental discomfort. She acknowledged its lasting impact and unpredictable nature but viewed it as a normal part of life.
Mr. E	Ages 22, has been homeschooled for 12 years, felt pressured and anxious about the admission results, believing it significantly impacted his future career and shaped both his future self and environment.

Themes, Subthemes, and Codes The researchers analyzed and organized the data into the following themes:

Theme 1–Characteristics of Stress on University Admission

Sub-Theme 1. 1– Stress from Outsiders' Misunderstandings of Homeschooling. informants face similar stress to that of traditional students, but also deal with additional stress from outsiders' misconceptions and skepticism about homeschooling, for example, being excluded from certain selection rounds or perceived as "privately tutored".

Theme 2–Factors Influencing Stress on University Admission

Sub-Theme 2.1–The Role of Friends in Coping. Friends play a key role in coping with university admission stress by offering emotional support and sharing information. However, friends can also add to the stress, particularly if they succeed earlier in the admission process.

Sub-Theme 2.2– The Role of the Family in Coping. Families help reduce university admission stress by providing emotional support, offering practical assistance (such as cooking or delivering necessities), and engaging in cultural practices like praying at Buddhist temples and performing charitable acts. Moreover, most informants found their families to be the primary source of support during the admission process. However, the family can still contribute to stress, particularly through intra-family comparisons and differences in goals between informants and their parents.

Sub-Theme 2.3–I am the one who can support my students: Tutor Factors. The results indicate that tutors have some influences on coping with stress by offering academic assistance, such as providing exam or interview preparation tips, offering praise, and other forms of support. However, some informants reported that tutors did not have any effect on their stress, possibly due to learning styles that do not rely on direct tutor involvement or a mindset that perceives tutors as adhering strictly to the curriculum without offering additional support.

Sub-Theme 2.4–I'm a Survivor, I Not Gon' Give Up…I'm Not Gon' Stop…I'm gon' work harder: Oneself factor. All informants reported that they have coping mechanisms for dealing with the stress of university admissions through activities such as hobbies, including watching movies, listening to music, and traveling. In addition, to engaging in hobbies, other positive mental skills such as resilience and self-efficacy contribute to coping with the stress of university admissions.

Theme 3–Effect of Homeschooling on the Stress of University Admissions

Sub-Theme 3.1–Born free to follow your heart: Duration of Homeschooling. All informants reported that one benefit of homeschooling is the flexibility it provides in managing their schedules, subjects, study durations, and pace. This autonomy reduces

stress during university admissions due to informants perceived high level of control over their academic environment.

Sub-Theme 3.2–All the Lonely People…where Do They All Belong?: Self-reliance from Homeschooling. Some informants noted that a disadvantage of homeschooling is the emphasis on self-reliance since each informant studies the choice of subjects and follows a unique path. This lack of shared experiences with peers means informants have fewer opportunities for comparison and experience limited support throughout the process. However, homeschooling also precludes comparisons with academically successful peers or those with accolades, which can help reduce stress.

Discussion

The results showed that homeschooled informants experience stress similar to traditionally schooled students but also face additional pressure from misunderstandings about homeschooling. This often leads to the need to prove their abilities, which increases stress (Crockett, Pollmann, & Olvera, 2022). Intergroup bias, such as sarcastic comments, contributed to feelings of guilt and self-blame, intensifying stress (Ruch & Proyer, 2008). Informants selected support sources based on their specific needs and the effectiveness of those sources in managing stress, emphasizing that social support must align with these needs to be effective (Cutrona, 1990). Support from family, friends, and tutors was crucial in helping informants cope with stress. These findings are explored further in the following sections.

*Friends Factor***.** One objective of this research is to explore how friends influence stress and stress management during university admissions for homeschooled informants. Results revealed that friends play a crucial role in coping with stress by offering emotional support and sharing helpful information, such as tutor recommendations, which can reduce stress (Green, Faizi, Jalal, & Zadran, 2021). However, friends can also indirectly increase pressure by showing enthusiasm for admission preparation, making informants feel compelled to work harder. This aligns with Festinger's (1954) theory of upward comparison, where individuals measure themselves against others for self-improvement (Diel, Hofmann, Grelle, Boecker, & Friese, 2024). Moreover, the absence of friends also led to instability in self-assessment,

increasing stress (Festinger, 1954; Kristensen, Larsen, Urke, & Danielsen, 2023). However, some informants found the lack of peer comparison beneficial, as it prevented stress from unfavorable comparisons and helped maintain confidence (Diel et al., 2024; Stangor, Jhangiani, & Tarry, 2015). In sum, friends play three main roles in the lives of homeschooled informants: 1) offering emotional support and encouragement during academic and university admission challenges (Salvo, 2018), 2) providing valuable information and advice on academic preparation and exams (Diel et al., 2024), and 3) acting as social comparison figures, motivating students to work harder and strive for success (Salvo, 2018). These roles highlight the complex impact friends have on homeschooled informants' stress levels and academic efforts. *Family Factor.* This research also explores how family influences the stress of homeschooled informants during university admissions. The results indicate that family plays a crucial role in managing stress by providing guidance and support. This supports existing literature suggesting that family can be a buffer against stress (Kaewkaewpan, 2020; Shilpa, Premakala, Kunnath, Babu, & Joseph, 2019). The homeschooling model, with its strong parental involvement, often reduces stress, aligning with Green and Hoover-Dempsey's (2007) findings on parental engagement. One informant noted that religious practices helped alleviate stress, consistent with Granqvist's religion-as-attachment model (Granqvist, Mikulincer, & Shaver, 2010). However, family can also contribute to stress, such as when informants feel jealous of successful relatives, which triggers stress, as explained by upward comparison theory (Li & Wang, 2023). Additionally, conflicting goals with parents also created stress, supporting Buelens and colleagues (2005), who found value conflicts within families increase stress levels. In summary, family members, including parents, siblings, and relatives, influence both the increase and reduction of stress in homeschooled informants during university entrance exams. Stress can rise due to high parental expectations, comparisons with successful relatives, and misunderstandings about homeschooling. However, parental involvement in exam preparation can help alleviate this stress.

Tutor Factor. According to the objective, results revealed that tutors also play a key role in helping homeschooled informants cope with stress during the university admission process by offering support such as interview advice and well-organized

lesson plans. This finding suggests that tutor support can forestall academic burnout (Hoferichter & Raufelder, 2021). Furthermore, the praise from tutors helped reduce stress, with informants viewing tutors as experienced professionals whose positive reinforcement boosts preparedness and motivation (Cameron & Pierce, 1994), ultimately lowering stress (Ern, Ziyamdeen, Zeidi, STamilselvan, & Mohan, 2019). However, some informants felt that tutors had little impact on their stress levels, possibly due to a preference for self-study or the belief that the tutor's role is primarily instructional rather than offering emotional or motivational support. It could be concluded that tutors play a supportive role in helping homeschooled informants with their studies and preparation for university admissions by providing valuable information, as well as offering acceptance and encouragement. However, tutors' role in supporting homeschooled informants is not as clearly defined as that of family and friends.

Oneself Factor. All informants reported that engaging in hobbies, such as listening to music or reading, plays a significant role in coping with stress during the university admission process. These activities help improve mood, reduce stress, and aid in further preparation. The researchers identified that engaging in hobbies reflects primary control engagement, an emotion-focused coping strategy (Thomsen Compas, Colletti, Stanger, Boyer, & Konik, 2002), followed by problem-focused management (Hrynzovskyi, Khan, Srivastava, & Khan, 2023). Additionally, some informants noted that traits such as resilience, self-compassion, and self-efficacy were effective in reducing stress. It is suggested that academic self-efficacy helps individuals reinterpret challenges, leading to lower perceived stress levels (Chemers, Hu, & Garcia, 2001). In sum, key psychological factors that can help homeschooled informants reduce stress include self-resilience, emotion-focused coping strategies, self-compassion, and self-efficacy.

Research Implications.

The findings suggest several key implications (Engchun, Sungtong, & Haruthaithanasan, 2017):

1. *For Families*: Allocate resources for homeschooling, educate others to reduce misconceptions, and collaborate with children on university admissions. Families,

homeschooling networks, and Educational Service Area Offices should work together to develop curricula and establish homeschooling centers.

2. *For Peer Groups*: Friends should understand homeschooling and provide essential information and mutual support for university preparation.

3. *For Teachers/Tutors*: Teachers and tutors should offer academic support and guidance on university admissions, motivation, and encouragement. Public agencies should create channels to support continuous learning within family communities.

4. *For the Community*: Community members should understand homeschooling to reduce biases and foster a supportive environment.

5. *For National Policy*: The Thai government should raise awareness of homeschooling and clarify university admission regulations for homeschooled students. Education officers should assess the needs of homeschooling families and communicate clearly.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Studies.

This study demonstrated important implications but also several limitations. Firstly, it used snowball sampling, which, while useful for reaching hard-to-access populations, has drawbacks such as potential bias, limited control over sample size, lack of diversity, and ethical concerns regarding privacy (Atkinson & Flint, 2001; Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981; Heckathorn, 1997; Sadler, Lee, Lim, & Fullerton, 2010). For future research, convenience sampling may be considered with caution, or purposive sampling could be used to target participants with specific expertise, ensuring more focused results (Etikan, 2016). Secondly, this study involved a small sample size, limiting the generalizability of the findings to the broader homeschooling population. Future studies should aim to recruit a larger number of participants to enhance the validity and applicability of the results. Thirdly, the study relied on informants' recollections of their university admission experiences, which may have resulted in omissions or gaps in the data. Future studies should consider using a mixed-methods approach, combining surveys and qualitative interviews, to gather more comprehensive data. This approach can offer deeper insights into the underlying mechanisms of stress and the factors that help reduce stress among homeschooled students.

In conclusion, the findings indicate that homeschooled students experience stress during university admissions, particularly due to comparisons and sarcasm from others who misunderstand homeschooling. However, support from family, friends, and tutors can help reduce this stress.

Ethical Approval

The study was approved by the Research Ethics Review Committee for Research Involving Human Subjects of Chulalongkorn University. (protocol code 660217; April 29, 2024) for studies involving humans.

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