

## **“Am I Matter for Others?” A Study on Mattering among Students in A Public University**

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University mattering is a type of societal mattering where students feel they matter when the people in a university knows about them, when the people reacts to their requirements, and when students can make a positive contribution to others. According to Rosenberg and McCullough (1981), mattering consists of four distinct elements which include awareness, importance, reliance, and ego-extension. Mattering had not much local study and it's not very popular across the local research. Thus, the researcher decided to conduct this study to access university mattering. This study is designed to investigate the level of mattering among public university students. By using the Revised University Mattering Scale (RUMS) to measure the mattering level of 214 respondent. Descriptive analysis and inferential analysis are utilized in the process of analysis of the data. The result shows the overall level of mattering among university students are above average. In addition, the level of mattering among females are slightly higher than males, and the undergraduates' mattering level is higher than the postgraduates. These findings are consistent with the results of the previous study.

*Keywords:* mattering, university students, gender, undergraduates, postgraduates, public university

University mattering is a type of societal mattering where the university is the larger social entity to which students experience a sense of mattering (France and Finney, 2010). Students feel they matter when the people in a university knows about them, when people react to their requirements, and when students can make a positive contribution to others. Therefore, university student affair department may give various services to them, for example, study areas, counselling centres, and career advising. The university administrators can give these services in order to acknowledge the students, they matter to the university. If students participated in these services, yet don't feel they are recognized, cared for, or

needed, the students will not develop a feeling of mattering.

According to mattering researchers, mattering is important to social integration and mattering influences behaviour because social connections are able to affect someone's psychological well-being (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Elliott, 2009). This is related to the university community because individuals who feel they are part of society adopt the beliefs, goals, and values of that society (Hogg & Abrams, 1988). Thus, it can be hypothesized that students who feel they matter and are integrated into the university community tend to follow the rules and prone to serve

back to the community. In a series of studies conducted by Marshall (2001, 2004) and Marshall and colleagues (Mak & Marshall, 2004; Marshall & Lambert, 2006; Marshall et al., 2010), researchers consistently found that females perceived themselves as mattering more to their parents, friends, and to their romantic partners compare to males. Furthermore, adolescent and young adults perceived themselves mattering more to their mothers than their fathers. In comparison to young adults, adolescents perceived they mattered more to their friends than their fathers.

### **Problem Statement**

Mattering had not much local study and it's not very popular across the local research. Mattering is still considered as a new field of research in Malaysia. As we are aware of classifications and issues that divide us. There are many ethnicity, age, gender, social class, sexual preferences, religion, and politics in Malaysia. This awareness of different experiences, different expectations, and different voices raises a few questions: With all these differences separating us, what connects us? Can a campus community be created that allows all students to find a place of involvement and importance? One of the deepest current concerns in higher education is to find ways to more fully involve students in learning. Universities that focus on mattering urge students to become more involved, motivated to learn, and achieve their goals. Thus, the researcher decided to conduct this study to access university mattering.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Mattering and Age**

Rosenberg and McCullough's (1981) predict that mattering is differentially distributed by age. Mattering may be relatively high among kids and adults but low among teenagers and the elderly. The rationale for this belief is that mattering is

directly related to social roles. Thus, adolescents and the elderly are at life stages where their relevance to others is likely reduced. Adolescents are in transition from childhood to adulthood. Similarly, the elderly, especially after retirement but before the physical decline, is at a life-stage when they are likely to experience loss of social roles and prestige, resources that contribute to perceptions of mattering (Elliott, G. C., Kao, S., & Grant, A., 2004). The result of John Taylor (2001), consistent with Rosenberg's theory, differences in mattering was shown to be patterned by age. Mattering was shown to increase through age 45 and then decline slightly for those aged 46 to 55.

#### **Mattering and Socio-economic Status (SES)**

John Taylor (2001) found compelling evidence that mattering is positively associated with SES. These findings strongly support the argument that society structures the availability of mattering in a pattern that closely corresponds to economic status. In other words, those people who had high education status, high income, and occupational prestige are likely to experience higher levels of mattering.

It is interesting that correlate to self-esteem, the effects of SES are almost entirely mediated through mattering. Thus, it appears that mattering is an important link between social class position and feelings of self-worth. This finding provides further evidence that mattering reflects social status and economic attainment as well as emotional intimacy (John Taylor, 2001).

#### **Mattering and Gender**

According to John Taylor (2001), women report higher levels of mattering than men. This finding represents a significant anomaly. The fact that, compared to men, women in this study report higher levels of

depressive symptoms and equivalent levels of self-esteem would suggest differences in mattering favouring men. Thus, although evidence from this study makes clear that among both men and women higher levels of mattering are importantly linked to lower rates of depression, this association does not aid in explaining observed gender differences in depression. However, if women had levels of mattering equal to men, they would experience even higher rates of depression than observed here.

Another study conducted by Dixon Rayle (2005) to evaluate the hypothesis that female adolescents would report higher mean scores of perceived mattering than male adolescents would. The test approached significance for general mattering and interpersonal mattering. As expected, females reported significantly higher levels of general mattering ( $M = 3.42$ ;  $SD = .63$ ) than did males ( $M = 3.16$ ;  $SD = .68$ ) and higher levels of interpersonal mattering ( $M = 3.56$ ;  $SD = .65$ ) than did males ( $M = 3.01$ ;  $SD = .70$ ). Although there was a difference of score between males and females, the result showed that no significant differences were found between males and females for general mattering and interpersonal mattering.

### **Mattering and Depressive symptoms**

Talking about depression, mattering also correlate with some of the depressive symptoms. Mattering is significantly and negatively associated with depression. The analysis also shows that mattering is differently related to depression by gender, such that mattering is associated with declines in depression for women but not for men. This finding was unexpected given the fact that women report both higher levels of mattering and depressive symptoms (John Taylor, 2001). A stronger feeling of mattering has been predicted to be positively related to self-esteem and well-being and negatively related to depression and anxiety.

According to Taylor, J., & Turner, R. (2001), Findings on the social distribution of mattering indicated that mattering scores mirrored the social distribution of depressive symptoms, except in the case of gender where a higher level of both mattering and depression was observed among women. Both cross-sectional longitudinal analyses confirm that mattering is significantly and negatively associated with depression. The longitudinal findings also revealed that changes in mattering over time of changes in depression. Of particular importance is our finding that the relationship of mattering to depression is conditioned by gender. Variations in mattering contribute uniquely toward understanding variations of depression among women but not among men.

### **Mattering and Social Support**

Findings reported here indicate that the connection between mattering and social support is also fundamental. The experience of being supported by others contributes to perceptions of mattering. Likewise, feelings of being needed and appreciated by others must in some way condition perceptions of the availability of social support. Mattering was found to be highly correlated with all types of social support. Factor analyses revealed especially high degrees of empirical overlap between mattering and both spouse/partner social support and social support from friends. In each case, this confound was substantially greater among men in comparison to women. The correlation between mattering and perceived social support was statistically significant. Not only that, the correlation between mattering and self-consciousness was also had a significant difference and positively correlated. On the other hand, the correlations of mattering with public self-consciousness were lower than with private self-consciousness (John Taylor, 2001).

### **Mattering and Self-esteem**

Mattering was held constant, a significant negative association between gender and self-esteem was observed. The finding of John Taylor (2001), indicates that if men and women experienced equal levels of mattering, men would be substantially advantaged relative to women with respect to self-esteem. According to K. Rentzsch, M. P. Wenzler, A. Schütz (2016), mattering was positively related to self-esteem. Individuals who feel that they are important to others usually have higher self-esteem.

### **Schlossberg's Theory of Marginality and Mattering**

The sociologist Morris Rosenberg and his colleagues suggest that "mattering is a motive: the feeling that others depend on us, are interested in us, are concerned with our fate, or experience us as an ego-extension exercise a powerful influence on our actions" (Rosenberg and McCullough, 1981). According to Rosenberg and McCullough (1981), mattering consists of four distinct elements:

1. Awareness - Awareness is a cognitive experience. We matter because other people acknowledge our existence (Elliott, 2009; Elliott et al., 2004). Awareness is experienced when other people remember our name or greet us.
2. Importance - the belief that others care about what we think, want, and what we have to say. In other words, we feel we matter when other people's behaviour is supportive and caring. For example, other people indicate we matter by providing advice and emotional support, making sure our needs are met, and listening to our problems (Elliott, 2009).
3. Reliance - the realization that others depend or rely on us or rely on our efforts. It is the feeling that we matter because others depend on us or need us (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981).

Thus, we feel we matter when others seek us out for advice or support.

4. Ego-extension is an individual's belief that others have an emotional investment in him or her, that he or she would be missed if they went away, or that their individual successes or failures would bring joy or disappointment to others (Rosenberg and McCullough 1981).

### **Significance of the Study**

The researcher found out that there is no local study on mattering. The significance of this study was to try to conduct a study by applying the mattering theory to local public university students. Therefore, the researcher is creating a method to compare gender differences of public university students' perceptions about whether they feel they matter and are valued in the university. Besides, the researcher also trying to access the level of mattering between undergraduate and postgraduate students in this public university.

### **Research Questions**

Based on the objective of the study, the following questions are built:

1. What is the level of mattering among public university students?
2. Is there a significant difference in mattering between male and female students in a public university?
3. Is there a significant difference in mattering between undergraduate and postgraduate students in a public university?

### **Methodology**

This research is conducted in the form of descriptive research. This type of research aimed to describe a situation, issues or problem. This is also quantitative research by using a questionnaire to collect data from the selected sample from the population at one time. The researcher

prepared and distributed a set of questionnaires to the samples of the study in order to find out the level of mattering and its relationship towards other demographic factors such as gender and level of qualification. The researcher would like to compare the difference between demographic factors varies the level of mattering scale.

The sample selected in this study is university students at a public university in Malaysia. Therefore, the researcher decided to conduct an online survey by using the respective public university students' personal email which is *siswamail* to reach all the public university students. A Google Form was created including all the item of the questionnaire and the link is distributed to all the *siswamail* users. The instruction of each instrument is provided and the confidentiality of the information shall be informed for the purpose of research only. The researcher frequently checks the result submitted by the students and promote the questionnaire through *siswamail* constantly until a sufficient number of respondents obtained.

### **Instrument**

An instrument in the form of a questionnaire was used in this study for the purpose of gathering data. A questionnaire comprising two parts was distributed to each sample. Part A consists of questions regarding on respondent's demography information. For Part B, the modified and translated version of the Revised University Mattering Scale (RUMS) developed by Megan Katharine France (2011) is used.

**Demography.** Part A in the questionnaires includes the items related to the personal information of the respondents such as their age, gender, and level of qualification. There are two options regarding their level of qualification: Undergraduates and Postgraduates. The respondents are required to state and select the responses

that describe their background while the identities and other forms of personal information remain anonymous.

**Revised University Mattering Scale (RUMS).** The original RUMS was developed by Megan in 2011, and it is a 34-item questionnaire created to evaluate and assess four components of university mattering which include awareness, importance, reliance, and ego-extension. This instrument was introduced to measure the mattering scale for James Madison University (JMU) students. In this study, the researcher had modified all the item that mentioned about JMU to the respective public university. Besides, the researcher also translated all the item into Malay version in order to help local students understand each of the items and answer accurately. The original statements which are in English version remained in the instrument.

Respondents were given particular instructions to consider people around their university community such as peers, faculty staff, lecturer, etc. in general when answering the questionnaire. Respondents were asked to answer each statement by using a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree) to indicate the degree to which they agreed with the statement. There were eight negative items and the items were reverse scored. Thus, the higher the scores indicate higher university mattering levels (Megan K., 2011). The total scores for all the items were ranging from a minimum of 34 to a maximum of 204 scores.

### **Reliability of RUMS**

According to Megan K. (2011), the reliability was calculated as coefficient omega instead of Cronbach's Alpha which often used to measure internal consistency. Coefficient omega was .91 suggesting adequate reliability. However, there were changes that have been made on the

inventory that had been adapted to this study, thus, the Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency was checked by the researcher. The result showed the inventory that had been adapted from RUMS ( $\alpha = .92$ ). It can be considered appropriate and has a good consistency.

### Sample

The sample for this study consisted of a number of 214 students from a public university. All of the students are currently pursuing their respective studies in their respective faculties in the public university. The sample was collected randomly from the public university students' personal email which is *siswamail* and was given a brief instruction stated in the questionnaire. All of the respondents completed the questionnaire independently and the result was submitted to the researcher.

### Statistical Analysis

In order to obtain the results of the study based on the questionnaire related to the level of mattering scale among the respondents, data analysis was conducted. The data obtained in this research is analysed using computer software which is known as Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for Windows. The types of statistical analysis such as descriptive analysis and inferential analysis (mean, median, standard deviation and T-Test) are utilized in the process of analysis of the data.

### Data Analysis and Findings

In this study, 214 respondents are obtained from a public university in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The data on demographical analysis is analysed in the form of a percentage (%) and frequency. The finding shows the frequency and percentage of 214 respondents involved in this study. The majority of the sample is made up of female respondents, which is 159 of them (74.30%), while male respondents consist

of 55 of them (25.70%). From a total number of 214 respondents, 8 respondents did not state their age. The mean or average age of the remaining respondents ( $n = 206$ ) in this study is 24.34 years old and the mode age is 21 years old. The youngest respondent in this study is 19 years old and the oldest is 50 years old. Regarding the ethnicity, a majority of the respondents is comprised of Malay students, which is 112 of them (52.30%), followed by Chinese with 57 of them (26.60%), the second least number of respondents are in the "Others" category, 30 of them (14.00%), and the minimal number of the respondents are Indian with the quantity of 15 of them (7.00%). The result also shows the frequency of the respondents' current level of study, 70.10% or 150 respondents are undergraduates whereas 64 respondents or 29.90% of them are postgraduates.

Besides, this finding shows the respondents' profile according to their respective faculties, the most number of respondents come from the Faculty of Science, which makes up 42 of them (19.60%), the second-highest number of respondents is from the Faculty of Education, which makes up 27 of them (12.60%) and the third-highest number of respondents is followed by those from the Faculty of Business & Accountancy, which are 20 of them (9.30%). Besides, Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences and Faculty of Engineering make up of 18 respondents (8.40%) respectively. Next, 16 respondents (7.50%) are from the Faculty of Economics & Administration, followed by 10 respondents (4.70%) from the Academy of Islamic Studies and Institute of Graduate Study. There are 8 respondents (3.70%) are come from the Faculty of Medicine and 7 respondents (3.30%) come from the Faculty of Languages & Linguistics. Both Faculty of Built Environment and Faculty of Computer Science & Information has 6 respondents (2.80%) participating in this study. Also, the third least number of respondents is from the Faculty of Law,

which is 3 (1.40%), while the second number of respondents is from the Cultural Centre, which makes up of 2 respondents (0.90%). Last but not least, there is only 1 respondent (0.50%) respectively from Academy of Malay Studies, Institute of Educational Leadership, and Sport and Exercise Sciences Centre. There are 18 respondents (8.40%) that did not state their faculty which contribute to the missing data.

### Level of Mattering among University Students

To access the level of mattering among the students, a descriptive statistic was utilised. Based on the result from Table 1, the total level of mattering among public university students (N=214) is with a mean score of 113.90. It ranged from 52 to 181 and with a standard deviation of 24.24.

Table 1  
*Descriptive Statistics of Mattering (N=214)*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness Statistic	Skewness Std. Error	Kurtosis Statistic	Kurtosis Std. Error
Total Mattering Level	214	52.00	181.00	113.85	24.24	-.09	.17	.09	.33
Valid N	214								

### Level of Mattering by Gender

To see the differences between male and female students in mattering, T-test was used to test the hypothesis. Table 2 shows

the mean differences between males and females.

The null hypothesis:

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no significant difference between male and female students in mattering.

Table 2  
*Group Descriptive Statistics of Mattering (N=214)*

	Group	N	Mean	SD	SE
Total Mattering Level	Male	55	108.70	24.45	3.30
	Female	159	115.60	23.99	1.90

We found out that there are no significant differences ( $t = -1.85$ ,  $df = 212.00$ , two-tailed  $p = 0.07$ ) in mattering between males (M = 108.70, SD = 24.45) and females (M = 115.60, SD = 23.99). The significant T-test obtained is 0.07 which is greater than the  $p$ -value ( $p < 0.05$ ). Therefore, the null hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>) where there is no significant difference between the male and the female students in mattering is accepted.

### Level of Mattering by Current Level of Study

To see whether there is a significant difference between the undergraduate students and the postgraduate students in the level of mattering, T-test was used to test the hypotheses that have been built. Table 3 shows the mean difference between the undergraduate students and the postgraduate students in the level of mattering.

The null hypothesis:

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no significant difference between undergraduate and postgraduate students in mattering.

Table 3  
*Group Descriptive Statistics of Mattering (N=214)*

	<b>Group</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>SE</b>
Total Mattering Level	Undergraduates	150	116.10	22.42	1.83
	Postgraduates	64	108.60	27.53	3.44

The significant value obtained from T-test ( $t = 2.10$ ,  $df = 212.00$ , two-tailed  $p = 0.04$ ) between undergraduates ( $M = 116.10$ ,  $SD = 22.42$ ) and postgraduates ( $M = 108.60$ ,  $SD = 27.53$ ) in mattering. The significant T-test obtained is 0.04 which is smaller than the  $p$ -value ( $p < 0.05$ ). Therefore, the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) is rejected because there is a significant difference between undergraduate and postgraduate students in mattering. In essence, the result indicated that the level of mattering among undergraduates are higher than postgraduates.

### Discussion

In general, the overall level of mattering among participants are above average. This finding shows that mattering is essential among university students. The second finding from this study shows that there are no significant differences in mattering between males and females. This finding is consistent with the previous literature which shows there were no significant relationships found between mattering and gender (Kathleen M. Connolly, 2003). Similarly, the results of the study conducted by Dixon, et.al (2009) indicated that male and female adolescents were not statistically significant to perceived mattering.

The results from the current study show that the level of mattering among females is slightly higher than males. In a previous study, Marshall (2001) found that female adolescents perceived themselves mattering more to others than male adolescents among 553 high school adolescents. Schlossberg (1989) noticed

that mattering may play out diversely for college-age individuals depending on their gender, with women reporting a higher level of mattering to others than men (Dixon Rayle, 2005; Dixon Rayle & Myers, 2004; Marshall, 2001; Taylor & Turner, 2001).

The finding also shows that there is a significant difference between undergraduates and postgraduates in mattering where the level of mattering among undergraduates are higher than postgraduates. This can be used to explain that undergraduates believe that they are significant to others in the university, they need to feel appreciated, and need to see that they matter to others in their lives. Undergraduates are more concern about recognition compare to postgraduates. Unfortunately, there is no previous research done in this perspective to prove the consistency of the current study result.

### Recommendations and Conclusion

In this part, the researcher proposed recommendations for the study that had been conducted to improve the weaknesses of current research. Additionally, the recommendations are also intended for improvement in further studies on aspects of mattering.

First and foremost, the number of participants should be increased to obtain a more generalized finding. The researcher has only 214 participants in this study, which may not adequately generalize the result to other university students. Participants from different universities

should be included to obtain a more precise result of the study.

Besides, inventory that used to measure mattering in future research should be unified. The researcher found out that there is a lot of inventory to access the level of mattering and different instrument was used to measure mattering in different studies. The validity and reliability of each instrument that had been developed and used in past research are questionable. Therefore, this study recommended that further studies should select a better, more valid and reliable instrument to measure the level of mattering.

The next suggestion is to examine and see how mattering relates to the individual well-being such as life satisfaction in the university. This recommendation is suggested because this aspect is less studied in the current study. The current study is more about looking at how mattering affected by the demographic variables of students at university. Therefore, the next researcher can study further on the aspect of well-being as it relates to the mental health of a student. Furthermore, the next researcher can also conduct a study by focusing on mattering and some common mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, and stress. With such a study, it helps the researcher to see the effects of mattering on individual well-being more in-depth. Not only that, but the suggested study also helps to make the research about mattering be one of the most popular topics and varies the area of mattering studies.

Last but not least, researchers also hope that this study can be used as a piece of new and additional information to counsellors and the university community in order to implement programmes to strengthen the level of mattering among students. Indeed, the aspect of mattering is a new psychological research area that requires more researchers to involve in conducting more future studies. In conclusion, it is

hoped that all suggestions that have been raised and stated in this section can be used as a guide by the next researchers to obtain more comprehensive and precise research results on mattering.

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