

Analysis of Staff Engagement in Representative Elections at a Thai Higher Education Institution: A Case Study of a University Faculty

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Abstract

This study analyzes the complex interactions between organizational structure and democratic practices by examining factors that influence staff participation in representative elections at Thailand's Faculty of Tropical Medicine. Through an investigation of this premier national institution, the research reveals how traditional hierarchical structures in Asian academic settings intersect with modern democratic practices, addressing a critical gap in understanding non-Western academic contexts. Using a mixed-methods approach with 334 participants, the study combines questionnaires and in-depth interviews. The findings show high levels of knowledge (84.52%) but moderate actual participation ($\bar{x} = 3.39$, $SD = 1.40$). Analysis indicates that longer job tenure, greater election knowledge, and regular receipt of information are associated with higher participation. Staff with over 11 years of service exhibited 2.66 times higher participation than their less experienced colleagues. The LINE messaging app emerged as the predominant communication tool. Notably, staff with education below a bachelor's degree demonstrated higher participation rates in both the election process ($OR = 2.130$, $p = 0.003$) and result evaluation ($OR = 2.187$, $p < 0.001$) compared to those with higher education. The study highlights patterns of knowledge sharing, communication effectiveness, and participation dynamics within academic institutions. These findings contribute to understanding participatory behaviors in non-Western academic settings and reveal patterns of institutional governance across diverse contexts.

Keywords Social Participation, Staff Engagement, Academic Settings

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1. Introduction

Higher education institutions worldwide exhibit varying patterns of stakeholder engagement in decision-making processes. Research reveals how different groups participate in decisions that affect them or whose consequences they must live with. Studies indicate correlations between participation patterns and both decision quality and democratic process characteristics (Shattock, 2002; Kezar & Eckel, 2004). Evidence from various countries demonstrates how these decision-making patterns manifest across different cultural settings (Wilkinson, Gollan, Marchington, & Lewin, 2010).

In Thai higher education institutions, governance typically involves various elected positions that contribute to institutional decision-making. These include university rectors, faculty representatives in university councils, deans, and committee members at various organizational levels. These elected officials play important roles in policy formulation, resource allocation, and academic management, creating a structured system of representation and participation. (Jarernsiripornkul & Pandey, 2018)

Studies of participatory governance in higher education institutions have identified several key factors that influence participation patterns across different cultural contexts (Jarernsiripornkul & Pandey, 2018). Research shows that institutional structure, communication channels, and individual motivations interact to shape how staff engage in democratic processes (Meirinhos, Cardoso, Neves, Bezerra, & Rêgo, 2023). In high power distance cultures, participation is often mediated by hierarchical relationships, with factors such as position, seniority, and educational qualifications playing significant roles in determining who participates and how (Kaur & Noman, 2020). Meanwhile, digital communication technologies have been found to potentially reduce participation barriers by providing alternative engagement channels that may be less constrained by traditional hierarchies (Pyrra, 2019). Additionally, individual factors including perceived efficacy, sense of belonging to the institution, and understanding of governance processes have been identified as important predictors of engagement in university contexts (Rehman, Mahmood, Andleeb, Farooq, & Huang, 2023). These theoretical perspectives offer a framework for analyzing participation.

Recent international studies have underscored the crucial role of effective communication in fostering participation in academic governance (Kezar & Eckel, 2008; Wang & Wart, 2007). While the implementation of participatory management through elected representatives can yield substantial benefits, including enhanced transparency and strengthened institutional trust (Boxall & Purcell, 2011), its effectiveness is not uniform and varies considerably across different cultural and institutional landscapes (Kainzbauer & Hunt, 2016).

Moreover, the broader implications of participatory governance in educational institutions for social development have been recognized, with

evidence suggesting that such experiences can increase political engagement and support for democratic freedoms (Le & Nguyen, 2021). This social impact underscores the potential of participatory governance in academia to serve as a model for wider democratic practices, extending its significance in educational institutions.

The theoretical discourse on participatory governance in higher education has been significantly influenced by Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory (Hofstede, 1984). Central to this theory is the concept of power distance which is members of organizations accept and expect that power is distributed unequally. In high power distance cultures like Thailand, organizational hierarchies strongly influence how individuals participate in decision-making processes. This appears in several ways including eniority and experience significantly affect participation, as demonstrated by higher engagement from personnel with longer years of service. Educational qualifications and formal positions also create distinct hierarchical layers that influence participation patterns. Different personnel categories (academic vs. support staff) could reflect formal organizational structures that affect how individuals engage in governance too. This theoretical framework helps explain why factors such as years of service, educational background, and personnel type significantly influence participation in Asian academic institutions, where traditional hierarchical values often interact with modern democratic practices.

The Faculty of Tropical Medicine, Mahidol University, is an organization under the supervision of Mahidol University. It has a vision of becoming one of the world's leading research institutions in tropical medicine and a mission to lead the organization towards international excellence in research, education, and health services in tropical medicine. Recognizing the importance of driving the strategy of being a good governance organization, the internal administration of the Faculty of Tropical Medicine is managed through the Faculty Board (Senior Leadership). The composition of the Faculty committees consists of the Dean, Deputy dean, Assistant dean, Head of Department, Deputy Heads of Department, Hospital Director, who are appointed as ex-officio members, with the majority being members from the academic stream. Therefore, to ensure transparent and fair administration for all staff, the Faculty appointed representatives from various staff lines as additional members of the Faculty Board. These include 4 representatives from the faculty lecturer and 1 representative each from the office staff, hospital staff, and departmental staff, all of whom must be elected. Elections are activities that promote staff participation in organizational management.

As higher education becomes increasingly internationalized (Jampaklaya, Penboon, & Lucktong, 2022), understanding diverse approaches to governance is crucial for effective cross-border collaborations and knowledge exchange. This research is particularly significant for understanding social

development in global South institutions. By examining participation patterns across different staff levels, we gain insights into how institutional processes can either promote or hinder inclusive development. The findings have implications for creating more equitable governance practices in educational institutions, particularly in Asian contexts where traditional hierarchies often intersect with modern democratic practices.

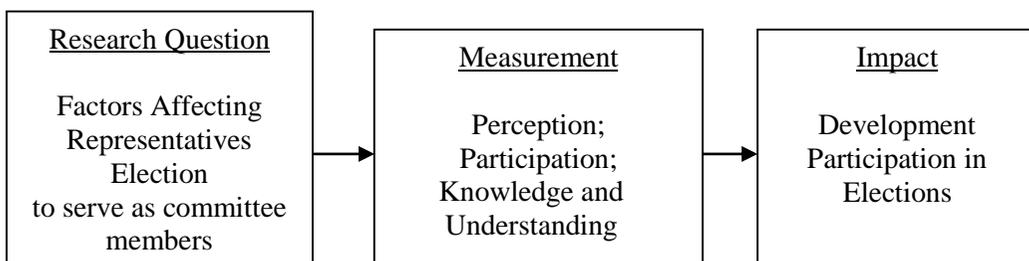
2. Objectives

(1) To examine participatory governance in the Faculty of Tropical Medicine at Mahidol University, with specific focus on factors affecting staff participation in representative elections

(2) To analyze how participation patterns at the Faculty of Tropical Medicine compare with those in higher education institutions in different cultural contexts, particularly examining the intersection of traditional hierarchies and democratic practices

3. Research Methodology

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



3.1 Population and Samples

This study employs a mixed-methods research approach. The quantitative research component utilizes questionnaires, while the qualitative research component involves in-depth interviews. The research population consisted of personnel working at the Faculty of Tropical Medicine who were not on study leave, seconded to work other organizations, or holding administrative positions. This criterion was based on the selection process for representatives from various job categories to serve on the Faculty of Tropical Medicine committee. The total research population was 727 individuals, comprising 78 academic staff members and 649 support staff members (as of May 11, 2023). The sample group included personnel from various job categories. The sample size was determined using formula with a 95% confidence level, resulting in a total of 259 individuals. A quota sampling technique was employed to select the sample, categorized into four groups based on job categories, as follows:

Table 1: Quota sampling

Personnel Category by Affiliation		Population	Sample Group
Academic Personnel		78	28
Support Personnel	Affiliated with Departments/Centers	142	51
	Affiliated with Hospitals	323	114
	Affiliated with Offices	184	66
Total		727	259

3.2 Research Instrument and Quality Assurance

The data collection instrument was a data record form created by the researcher using a google form. It consisted of 4 sections: Section 1 contained 6 general information questions in a closed-ended format, including gender, age, education level, employment type, personnel category, and years of service. Section 2 contained 10 questions assessing personnel's knowledge and understanding of elections, with a total score of 10. Response options were "Yes," "No," and "Unsure." Section 3 contained 12 questions about participation in elections, using a Likert scale format. Section 4 contained 5 questions about receiving election-related information, including closed-ended questions on the frequency of receiving news, channels for receiving news, and election formats (with only one answer choice allowed), as well as an open-ended question for suggesting improvements to the election process, allowing respondents to freely express their opinions. For the qualitative research component, an in-depth interview guide consisting of 12 questions was used. The questions were designed to align with the research objectives. Participants were allowed to express their opinions freely.

To ensure the quality of the instrument, content validity was analyzed by three experts to assess the comprehensiveness of the content, resulting in an index of item objective congruence (IOC) of 0.83. A try-out was then conducted with a sample of 30 individuals with similar characteristics to the target sample to analyze the reliability using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The alpha values were 0.71 for knowledge and understanding of elections and 0.84 for participation in elections, which were acceptable levels (Jump, 1978).

This research was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Tropical Medicine, approval number MUTM 2023-063-01, issued on August 8, 2023.

3.3 Collection of Data

Primary data collection employed both quantitative and qualitative research methods. For the quantitative component, an online questionnaire using Google Forms was distributed to a sample group of personnel at the Faculty of Tropical Medicine. The completed questionnaires were gathered and analyzed using statistical software during September-November 2023. The qualitative component involved in-depth interviews with informants. These interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, with key information noted in interview forms during December 2023. The qualitative data was then synthesized according to the research objectives. Secondary data was obtained through a literature review of relevant documents, articles, websites, and research studies to ensure reliable and accurate information.

3.4 Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used, including percentages, frequencies, means, and standard deviations. Inferential statistics included the independent samples t-test to compare mean differences between two independent variable groups, one-way ANOVA (F-test) to test mean differences among three or more variable groups, and binary logistic regression analysis to study the relationships between dependent and independent variables affecting personnel's participation in elections. For the analysis of in-depth interviews, a narrative approach and grouping technique were employed using content analysis methods. The researcher transcribed the audio recordings of the interviews into text. The information was categorized into themes, and analyzed the interviewees' responses according to the research objectives. The content analysis technique was used to synthesize the data in alignment with the research goals. The findings were then presented in a structured format.

4. Results

4.1 Personal Characteristics of Personnel

General characteristics factors of personnel of the Faculty of Tropical Medicine are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: General characteristics factors of personnel of the Faculty of Tropical Medicine (n=334)

General characteristics factors		Number	Percent
Gender	Male	56	16.77
	Female	278	83.23
Age (years)	18 - 30	51	15.27
	31 - 40	99	29.64
	41 - 50	102	30.54
	≥51	82	24.55
Education Level	Below Bachelor's	55	16.47
	Bachelor's	116	34.73
	Master's	79	23.65
	Doctoral	84	25.15
Employment Type	Government Official	9	2.69
	University Staff	265	79.34
	Employee	60	17.96
Personnel Type	Academic	73	21.86
	Support (Office)	70	20.96
	Support (Hospital)	117	35.03
	Support (Department/Center)	74	22.16
Years of Service (years)	Less than 5	45	39.82
	5 - 10	68	26.35
	11 - 20	133	20.36
	≥ 21	88	13.47

From Table 2, regarding personal factors of 334 personnel, it was found that the majority were female (278, 83.23%), aged 41-50 years old (102, 30.54%), with a bachelor's degree or equivalent (116, 34.73%), employed as university staff (265, 79.34%), support personnel under the hospital (117, 35.03%), and had 11-20 years of service (133, 39.82%).

4.2 Knowledge and Understanding

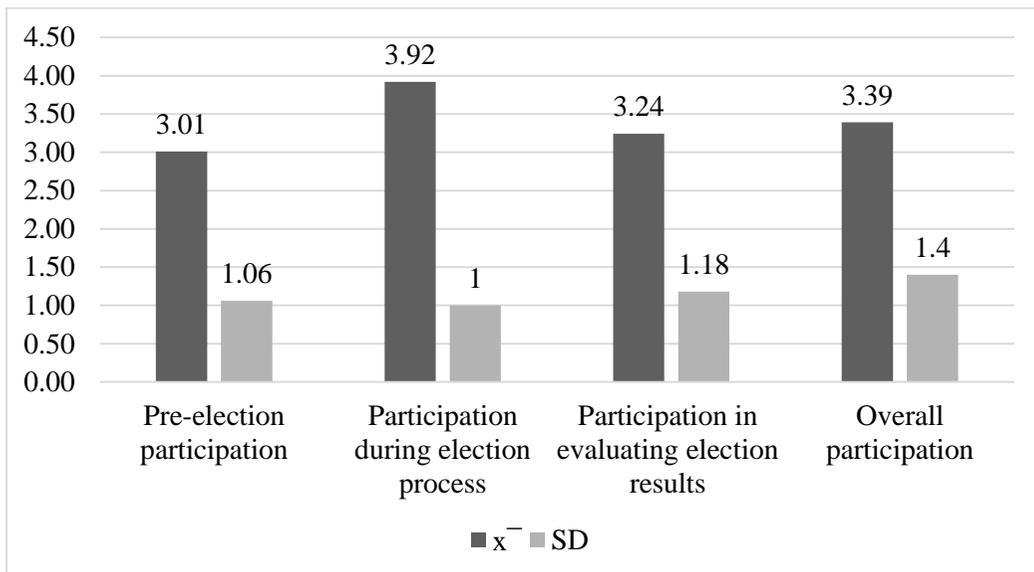
From 334 personnel and 10 questions (10 points total), it was found that most personnel scored 10 points (131, 39.22%), followed by 8 points (67, 20.06%), and 9 points (58, 17.36%), respectively. Considering the level of knowledge and understanding of personnel towards the election, it was at a high level overall (84.52%). When considering each question, most showed a high level of knowledge and understanding for 8 questions, and a moderate level for 2 questions, where personnel answered "unsure" the most, with similar percentages of 20.06% and 16.77%, respectively.

4.3 Participation Factors

The representative election process at the Faculty of Tropical Medicine follows a structured approach consisting of three main phases. In the pre-election phase, the Faculty announces vacant positions, calls for nominations, and verifies candidate eligibility. Candidate information is then disseminated through multiple channels including LINE messaging app, email, and official notices. The election process itself utilizes an online voting system that allows personnel to cast votes remotely through a secure platform, which was implemented to increase accessibility and participation. This online method requires voters to authenticate their identity before accessing the ballot, and they can vote within a designated 3-day period. After voting closes, the post-election evaluation phase includes result verification, announcement of elected representatives, and collection of feedback on the election process through online surveys. This three-phase approach (pre-election, election process, and evaluation of election results) provides the framework for analyzing participation patterns throughout the representative selection process.

Participation was categorized into 3 aspects of pre-election period, the election process, and the evaluation the election results. Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of participation levels across the three aspects of the election process. As shown, participation during the election process had the highest proportion of high-level participation, while pre-election participation had the lowest.

Figure 2: The distribution of participation levels from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest) across the three aspects of the election process.

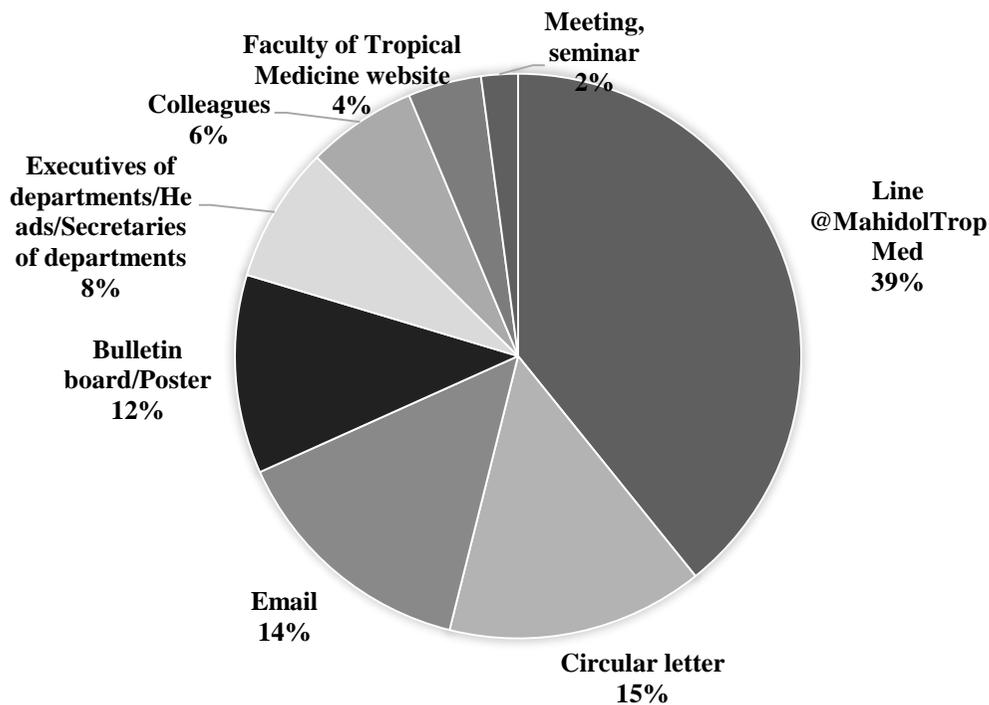


From Figure 2, the overall level of personnel participation in the election of representatives to serve as committee members of the Faculty of Tropical Medicine was moderate ($\bar{x} = 3.39$, $SD = 1.40$). When considering each aspect, participation during the election process had the highest mean level as high ($\bar{x} = 3.92$, $SD = 1.00$), followed by participation in evaluating election results at a moderate mean level ($\bar{x} = 3.24$, $SD = 1.18$), and pre-election participation also at a moderate mean level ($\bar{x} = 3.01$, $SD = 1.06$), respectively.

4.4 Awareness of Election Information

As shown in Figure 3, it was found that most were aware of election news every time (250, 74.85%). The channel that provided the most election news was the @LINE channel (194, 20.97%). The communication channel that allowed personnel to be aware of news easily and accurately was also the @LINE channel (130, 38.92%). The preferred election method was online voting (212, 63.47%), and most personnel felt that there was no need to improve the election news channels of the Faculty of Tropical Medicine (278, 83.23%).

Figure 3: Illustrating the preferred communication channels for election information.



4.5 Factors Related to Participation in Election

The independent variables can be categorized into 3 aspects: personal factors, knowledge and understanding factors, and awareness of election information factors. The dependent variable was participation in 3 aspects of pre-election participation, participation during the election process, and participation in evaluating the election results. The variables were assigned 2 values each to predict the likelihood of the independent variables affecting personnel participation in the election. The independent variable values were assigned as follows: Personal factors - Gender (male/female), Age (18-40 years/≥41 years), Education (≤Bachelor's/≥Master's), Employment Type (Government official and university staff/Employee), Personnel Type (Academic/Support), Years of Service (≤10 years/≥11 years); Knowledge and understanding factors (Low to moderate level/High level); Awareness factors (Aware of information every time/Aware of information sometimes). The dependent variable values were assigned as follows: Pre-election participation (High participation/Low participation), Participation during election process (High participation/Low participation), Participation in evaluating election results (High participation/Low participation). After assigning the variable values, each single variable was analyzed using Binary Logistic Regression statistics, and the Crude

Odds Ratio, 95% confidence intervals (CI), and p-value were presented. The analysis results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Analysis of factors related to personnel participation in the election, categorized by aspect (n=334)

Factors	Pre-election participation		Participation during election process		Participation in evaluating election results	
	Crude OR (95% CI)	p-value	Crude OR (95% CI)	p-value	Crude OR (95% CI)	p-value
General characteristics factors						
Gender						
Male	1.090 (0.594-2.003)	0.780	1.380 (0.691-2.752)	0.360	1.864 (1.038-3.350)	0.035*
Age						
18 - 40 years	0.973 (0.613-1.542)	0.906	0.712 (0.437-1.160)	0.171	1.486 (0.963-2.292)	0.073
Education Level						
≤ Bachelor's	0.984 (0.622-1.557)	0.945	2.130 (1.292-3.510)	0.003*	2.187 (1.411-3.389)	<0.001*
Employment Type						
Government Official and University Staff	1.141 (0.622-2.094)	0.669	0.823 (0.427-1.584)	0.558	0.979 (0.560-1.713)	0.941
Personnel Type						
Academic	0.680 (0.380-1.217)	0.192	0.480 (0.276-0.834)	0.008*	0.486 (0.283-0.835)	0.008*
Years of Service						
≤10 years	0.707 (0.430-1.163)	0.171	0.474 (0.287-0.783)	0.003*	1.048 (0.666-1.649)	0.841
Knowledge and Understanding factors						
Knowledge and understanding						
Low to Moderate Level	1.144 (0.669-1.954)	0.623	0.434 (0.253-0.746)	0.002*	0.797 (0.479-1.328)	0.384
Related to Awareness of Election Information factors						
Awareness of Information Sometimes	0.299 (0.157-0.569)	<0.001*	0.087 (0.049-0.155)	<0.001*	0.090 (0.044-0.183)	<0.001*

Note: *Significant with p-value < 0.05

95% confidence intervals (CI) (n = 334)

Reference group: Gender=Female, Age= \geq 41 years, Education= \geq Master's, Employment Type=Employee, Personnel Type=Support, Years of Service= \geq 11 years, Knowledge and Understanding Factor=High Level, and Awareness Factor=Aware of information every time

4.6 Personal factors

For pre-election participation, it was found that factors of gender, age, education level, employment type, personnel type, and years of service were not significantly different in relation to pre-election participation of Faculty of Tropical Medicine personnel. For participation during the election process, it was found that personnel with an education level below a bachelor's degree or equivalent had 2.130 times higher participation than those with a master's degree or higher, which was statistically significant (OR=2.130, 95% CI=1.292-3.510, p-value=0.003). Academic personnel had 0.480 times lower participation than support personnel, which was statistically significant (OR=0.480, 95% CI=0.276-0.834, p-value=0.008). Personnel with 10 years of service or less had 0.474 times lower participation than those with more than 11 years of service, which was statistically significant (OR=0.474, 95% CI=0.287-0.783, p-value=0.003). For participation in evaluating election results, it was found that male personnel had 1.864 times higher participation than females, which was statistically significant (OR=1.864, 95% CI=1.038-3.350, p-value=0.035). Personnel with an education level below a bachelor's degree or equivalent had 2.187 times higher participation than those with a master's degree or higher, which was statistically significant (OR=2.187, 95% CI=1.411-3.389, p-value<0.001). Academic personnel had 0.486 times lower participation than support personnel, which was statistically significant (OR=0.486, 95% CI=0.283-0.835, p-value=0.008).

The statistical finding that personnel with \leq 10 years of service showed 0.474 times lower participation than those with $>$ 11 years of service is consistent with insights from in-depth interviews conducted with 5 staff members who have \leq 10 years of tenure. These interviews revealed that newer personnel lack in-depth knowledge about the roles and responsibilities of elected representatives, which affects their participation levels. As one interviewee stated, 'I understand that elections are important, but I'm not sure how elected representatives practically help staff members in their day-to-day work.'

4.7 Knowledge and understanding factors

For pre-election participation and participation in evaluating election results, it was found that the level of knowledge and understanding, whether high or low to moderate, was not significantly different in relation to pre-election

participation and participation in evaluating election results of Faculty of Tropical Medicine personnel. For participation during the election process, it was found that personnel with a low to moderate level of knowledge and understanding had 0.434 times lower participation than those with a high level, which was statistically significant (OR=0.434, 95% CI=0.253-0.746, p-value=0.002). The finding that personnel with low to moderate levels of knowledge and understanding had 0.434 times lower participation than those with high levels is corroborated by qualitative data from in-depth interviews. Interviewees identified that key factors stimulating participation are the perceived direct impact or benefits to oneself and the ability of representatives to voice concerns for personnel. Several interviewees expressed uncertainty about how their participation would affect their daily work, reflecting limited understanding of representatives' roles in decision-making processes.

4.8 Awareness of election information factors

It was found that being aware of election information sometimes had 0.299 times, 0.087 times, and 0.090 times lower effects on pre-election participation, participation during the election process, and participation in evaluating election results, respectively, compared to personnel who were aware of election information every time. This was statistically significant (OR=0.299, 95% CI=0.157-0.569, p-value<0.001), (OR=0.087, 95% CI=0.049-0.155, p-value<0.001), and (OR=0.090, 95% CI=0.044-0.183, p-value<0.001), respectively. The significant relationship between information awareness and participation across all aspects aligns with qualitative insights from interviews that highlighted the importance of effective communication in promoting election participation. Interviewees indicated that personnel need clear, easy-to-understand information accessible through various channels. As one interviewee stated, 'A good election requires everyone to be informed. Official circulars are good, but there should be regular public relations, complete information, and easy-to-understand infographics, because not everyone can read such formal language.' Additionally, interviewees expressed confidence in the election process transparency but concerns about candidate potential. While online elections offer convenience, some worried about technological access and transparency issues.

4.9 Participation during the election process and participation in evaluating the election results

From the crude odds ratio, it was found that the independent variables of gender, education level, personnel type, and years of service were related to personnel participation in the aspects of participation during the election process and participation in evaluating election results (p-value < 0.05). These variables were then analyzed for the relationship between multiple variables using Binary

Logistic Regression statistics, presenting the Adjusted Odds Ratio, 95% CI and p-value. The analysis results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Binary Logistic Regression analysis of factors related to participation in the election of Faculty of Tropical Medicine personnel (n=334)

Factors	Participation during election process		Participation in evaluating results	
	Adjusted OR (95% CI)	p-value	Adjusted OR (95% CI)	p-value
Gender				
Male	-		1.652 (0.871-3.135)	0.125
Education Level				
≤Bachelor's	1.289 (0.611-2.720)	0.505	1.279 (0.724-2.259)	0.396
Personnel Type				
Academic	0.483 (0.226-1.033)	0.061	0.612 (0.305-1.228)	0.167
Years of Service				
≤10 years	0.376 (0.204-0.691)	0.002*	-	
Knowledge and understanding				
Low to Moderate Level	0.411 (0.210-0.804)	0.009*	-	
Awareness of Information				
Sometimes	0.095 (0.051-0.178)	<0.001*	0.102 (0.049-0.210)	<0.001*

Note: *Significant with p-value < 0.05

For participation during the election process, it was found that personnel with ≤10 years of service had 0.376 times lower participation than those with ≥11 years, which was statistically significant (Adjusted OR=0.376, 95% CI=0.204-0.691, p-value=0.002). Those with a low to moderate level of knowledge and understanding had 0.411 times lower participation than those with a high level, which was statistically significant (Adjusted OR=0.411, 95% CI=0.210-0.804, p-value = 0.009). Being aware of election information sometimes had 0.095 times lower participation than being aware every time, which was statistically significant (Adjusted OR=0.095, 95% CI=0.051-0.178, p-value<0.001).

For participation in evaluating election results, it was found that being aware of election information sometimes had 0.102 times lower participation than being aware every time, which was statistically significant (Adjusted OR=0.102, 95% CI=0.049-0.210, p-value < 0.001).

5. Discussion

Our study examined knowledge levels, participation patterns, and factors influencing staff engagement in representative elections within a Thai higher education institution. Through the lens of Hofstede's power distance theory, our analysis reveals distinctive characteristics of participatory governance in Thai academic settings that both reflect and challenge existing understandings of democratic practices in high power distance cultures.

5.1 Theoretical Framework and Context

Our analysis extends both Hofstede's (1984) power distance theory and place-based theories of participation in academic governance. In high power distance cultures like Thailand, hierarchical relationships typically manifest with limited participation from lower levels and strong respect for authority and seniority (Hofstede, 1984; Nakata & Sivakumar, 2001). However, our findings reveal three notable patterns that challenge traditional structures: 1. Support staff exhibited higher participation (35.03%) than academic staff (21.86%) 2. Staff with lower educational qualifications showed more active participation (OR=2.130, p-value=0.003) 3. Informal communication platforms like LINE (38.92%) proved more effective than formal channels. This disruption of traditional hierarchical patterns is further supported by research on LINE application usage among seniors in Songkhla Province (Nurrai, 2021), which found that digital platforms facilitate more egalitarian communication spaces, with social interaction ($\beta = .308$) and security ($\beta = .234$) as key adoption factors. These findings align with Hofstede's (1984) observations about how technological changes can moderate traditional power distance relationships. The Faculty of Tropical Medicine presents a distinctive case study for analyzing participation patterns, being Thailand's only specialized Tropical Medicine Faculty. The participation dynamics observed here align with Krashinsky's (2024) findings on how local environmental factors influence participation, while supporting Lappie and Marschall's (2018) argument that institutional context independently affects democratic participation patterns.

5.2 Levels of Knowledge, Understanding, and Participation

Our results reveal a high level of understanding about the election process (84.52%) among personnel, yet actual participation remained moderate ($\bar{x} = 3.39$). This knowledge-action gap echoes findings in other fields globally, such as environmental behavior (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002) and health practices (Kelly & Barker, 2016), suggesting a universal challenge in translating awareness into engagement.

The study found moderate engagement across different election stages, with over 70% of personnel consistently aware of election news and more than

80% satisfied with current information channels. This suggests that information availability is not a primary barrier to participation, supporting Kezar and Eckel's (2004) emphasis on effective communication in fostering participation in academic governance.

5.3 Factors Influencing Participation

5.3.1 Job Tenure and Participation

Our analysis reveals that personnel with ≤ 10 years of tenure showed 0.474 times lower participation than those with > 10 years (OR=0.474, 95% CI=0.287-0.783, p-value=0.003). This significant finding aligns with international studies linking tenure to organizational commitment (Dee, 2004; Moore & Sagaria, 1991), while reflecting unique aspects of Thai organizational culture where experience and seniority play important roles in institutional participation (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979).

5.3.2 Understanding and Participation

Personnel with higher levels of understanding about the election process demonstrated greater participation, consistent with global political science research linking knowledge to engagement (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). This underscores the need for ongoing education about governance processes, supporting Birnbaum's (2004) argument that effective shared governance requires both structural mechanisms and a culture of engagement.

5.3.3 Communication Patterns and Digital Tools

The effectiveness of informal platforms like LINE suggests that digital tools can help bridge traditional hierarchical gaps. This mirrors findings from Thai studies showing that online media platforms are particularly effective in promoting political participation (Phruekthisarikorn, Chayanon, Srisorn, & Chalong, 2022; Kulachai, Lerdtomornsakul, & Homyamyen, 2023). Unlike Western institutions where formal channels dominate through official memoranda and institutional emails (Wang & Wart, 2007), informal platforms were most effective in our context.

Personnel with consistent news awareness participated more actively in all election stages, with those receiving regular information showing significantly higher participation than those who received information only occasionally (OR=0.090, 95% CI=0.044-0.183, $p < 0.001$). The effectiveness of the LINE messaging platform (preferred by 38.92% of participants) demonstrates how digital tools can enhance institutional communication while respecting cultural norms.

5.4 Implications for Practice

Our findings suggest several strategies for improving participatory management in educational institutions globally:

- (1) Bridging the gap between understanding and participation by emphasizing the direct impact of participation on individuals' work lives
- (2) Implementing mentorship programs to encourage newer staff in governance participation
- (3) Providing ongoing education about governance processes through workshops or easily accessible online resources
- (4) Exploring diverse communication methods, such as infographics or regularly used channels, to reach all staff members effectively
- (5) Balancing digital technology implementation with maintaining confidence in the process, addressing concerns about transparency and access

5.5 Broader Implications

This study demonstrates how democratic practices within academic institutions can reflect and influence broader social development. It aligns with recent international research showing that education cultivates political interest, promotes the acquisition of political knowledge, and fosters supportive attitudes towards political freedoms (Le & Nguyen, 2021). By developing election participation within academic institutions, we not only benefit internal management but also strengthen democratic culture in the organization and society at large.

5.6 Social Development Implications

Our findings highlight how institutional democratic practices can promote social equity in educational settings. The higher participation rates among long-tenured staff and the effectiveness of digital communication platforms like LINE suggest potential pathways for enhancing inclusive participation. These insights are particularly relevant for other institutions in the global South seeking to balance traditional hierarchies with democratic governance.

5.7 Limitations and Future Research

While our research provides valuable insights, several limitations should be noted. The single-institution focus may limit generalizability, though the findings likely resonate with similar institutions in Southeast Asia. The cross-sectional nature of the data prevents analysis of long-term trends in participation patterns. Additionally, while the LINE platform emerged as significant, rapid technological changes may affect the relevance of specific digital tools over time.

6. Conclusion

This study examines participatory governance in a Thai university setting, revealing three key factors of tenure length, knowledge levels, and

digital communication access. Our findings challenge conventional assumptions, as personnel with lower educational qualifications showed higher participation levels than those with advanced degrees, suggesting that in hierarchical Thai society, education doesn't directly translate to increased institutional engagement. Digital tools like LINE messaging emerged as significant channels that can potentially reduce hierarchical barriers. These findings provide insights for developing culturally responsive approaches to participatory governance in international academic institutions.

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