

ABSTRACT

Background: Higher education has been considered a mainstay for economic self-sufficiency and responsible citizenship. A considerable amount of Western research has identified student engagement as a key element for understanding and predicting students' learning outcomes. However, due to cultural differences in educational philosophies, it remains questionable whether this model receives universal support from different cultures. As more Asian students are coming to the U.S. for higher education, it becomes imperative for American educators to understand how Asian students may differ from domestic American students in their motives to engage in various in-class and outside-of-class activities, as well as how these motives predict their learning behaviors and outcomes so as to better integrate Asian students to the American educational system.

Objective: Building upon existing studies, this research examines cultural variations in the effect of students' interaction goals for engagement (instrumental, identity, and relational goals) on various types of engagement behaviors (behavioral vs. cognitive engagement) and learning outcomes (educational vs. social learning outcomes).

METHODS

Data were collected from both undergraduate and graduate students at The George Washington University. Among 535 participants, 461 (86.1%) were American students and 55 (10.3%) were sojourning students from Asia.

Participants were asked to fill out an online survey questionnaire that measures various types of interaction goals for student engagement, various types of engagement behaviors, as well as various types of learning outcomes.

Statistical analysis techniques, such as t-tests and simple linear regression, are being used to analyze data.

RESULTS

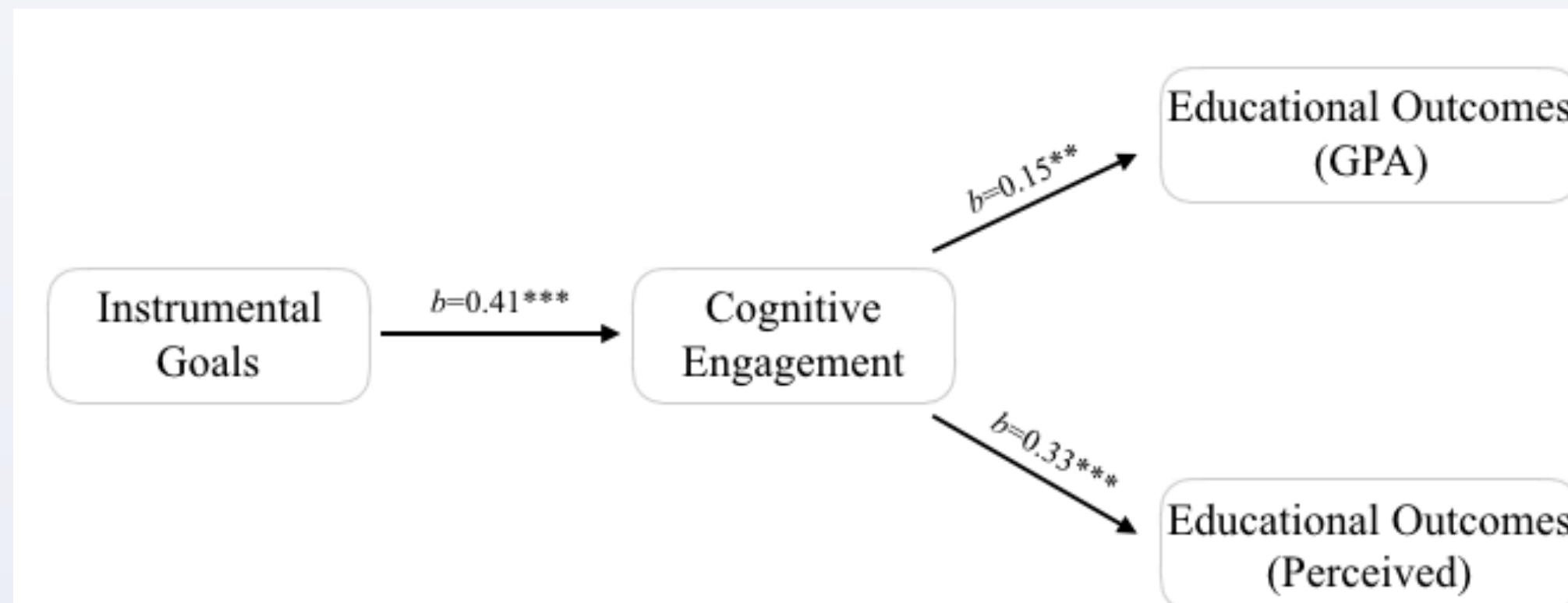


Figure 1. Beta weights for relationships between instrumental goals and cognitive engagement and for relationship between cognitive engagement and educational outcomes. Note. * $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$.

Instrumental Goals — Cognitive Engagement — Education Learning Outcomes

As Fig.1 shows, Instrumental goals are positively related to cognitive engagement; and cognitive engagement is positively related to educational outcomes.

Further, as Fig. 3 shows, instrumental goals have both a direct effect on educational outcomes, and an indirect effect through cognitive engagement.



Figure 2. Beta weights for relationships between social goals and behavioral engagement, and for relationships between behavioral engagement and social outcomes. Note. * $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$.

Social Goals — Behavioral Engagement — Social Learning Outcomes

As Fig.2 shows, social goals are positively related to behavioral engagement; and behavioral engagement is positively associated with social learning outcomes.

Moreover, as Fig. 4 shows, social goals have both a direct effect and an indirect effect through behavioral engagement on social learning outcomes.

Variables	American Students		Asian Students	
	M	SD	M	SD
Cognitive Engagement	4.10	0.59	4.02	0.57
Behavioral Engagement	3.10	0.77	2.97	0.52
Instrumental Goals	4.50	0.51	4.05	1.06
Social Goals	4.05	0.77	3.78	0.98
Self-Enhancement Goals	4.13	0.69	3.70	0.87
Self-Efficacy Goals	3.97	0.78	4.00	0.93

Table 1. Means and standard deviations for engagement and interaction goals for engagement between American and Asian students.

As Tab.1 demonstrates, no significant differences for cognitive engagement or behavioral engagement. For interactional goals, American students put higher value on instrumental, social, and self-enhancement goals than Asian students.

Moreover, as Tab.2 shows, the relationship between engagement and learning outcomes (both types) are more pronounced for American students than Asian students.

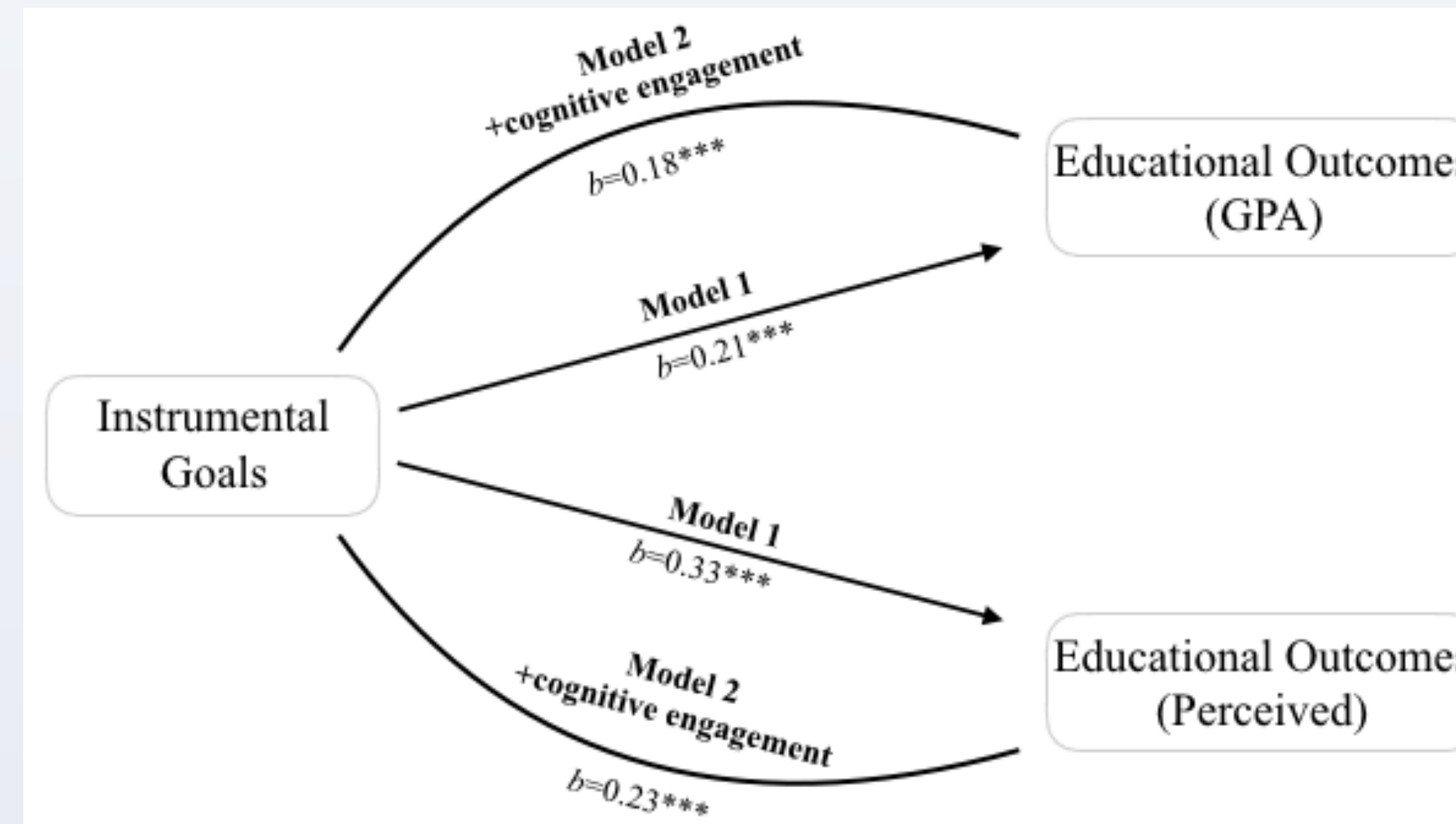


Figure 3. Mediation model with cognitive engagement as mediator. Note. * $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$.

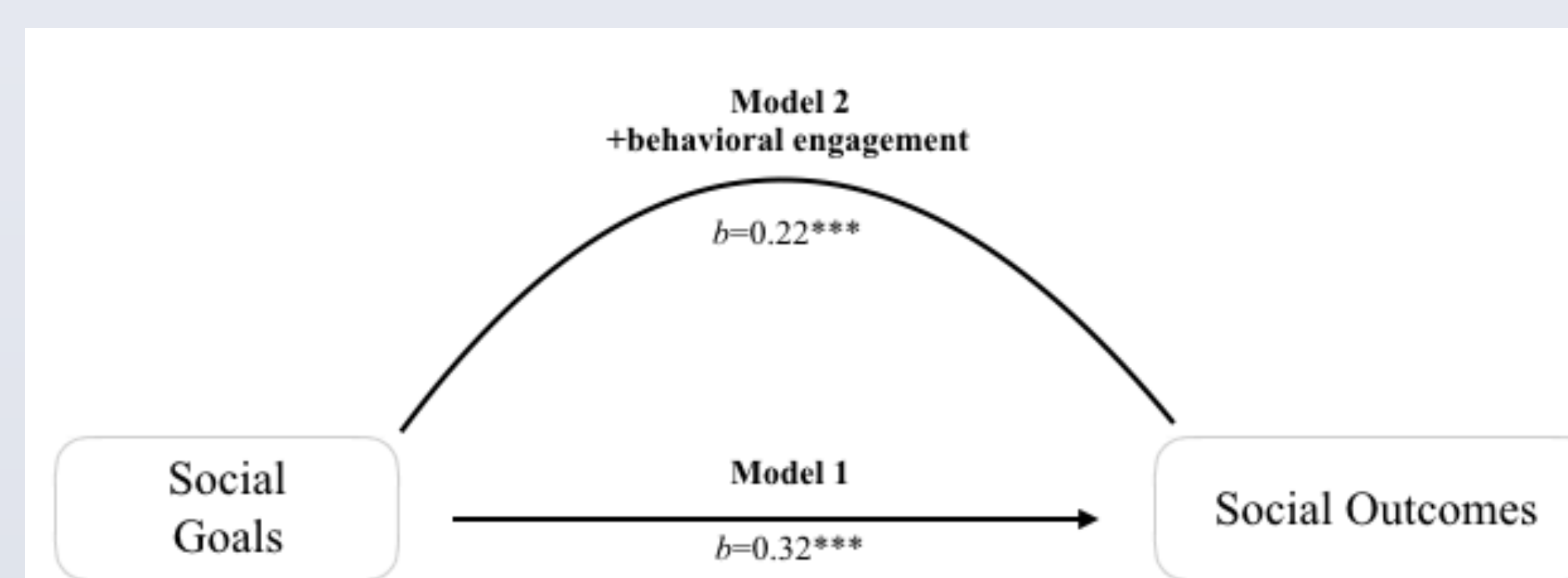


Figure 4. Mediation model with behavioral engagement as the mediator. Note. * $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$.

Relationships	American Students	Asian Students
	B	B
Cognitive Engagement—Educational Outcomes (GPA)	0.14**	0.43*
Cognitive Engagement—Educational Outcomes (Perceived)	0.36***	0.28*
Behavioral Engagement—Social Outcomes	0.44***	0.38**

Table 2. Beta weights for relationships between engagement and outcomes between American and Asian students. Note. * $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$.

Cultural Variations (American & Asian Students)

DISCUSSION

Findings in this study demonstrate that cognitive engagement leads to higher educational learning outcomes and behavioral engagement predicts higher social learning outcomes.

This study also reveals that interaction goals can help explain the relationships between engagement and outcomes. Therefore, educators promote student engagement by encouraging students to place higher emphasis on certain interaction goals, and eventually create desired learning outcomes.

More importantly, this study identifies a cultural difference in the model. In general, the model is more suitable for American students than for Asian students.

With an increasingly globalized education system, it is important for educators to recognize that student engagement is better at predicting American students' success than Asian students. For Asian students, while they may not be different in types of student engagement, they have different reasons for engagement, and instructors should consider predictors other than student engagement to assess their learning outcomes.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank Dr. Meina Liu, Associate Professor of Communication, for her support and weekly meetings to help me revise my research, instruct my data analysis and overall paper in general.