



Ideal Student Prototype: A Cognitive Linguistic Study

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Abstract: This research aims to describe the ideal student prototype within the Ideal Cognitive Model (ICM), which can represent the conceptual knowledge of an ideal speaker without excluding other concepts. The study is based on cognitive linguistic analysis, examining how the human mind shapes speech. The term "Ideal Student" does not yet have a definition that accurately captures its meaning due to the many individual perceptions and diverse categories people use to define it. As a result, the concept has developed into various prototypes. In this study, the researcher provided commonly spoken concepts, and respondents selected those that matched their own cognition of the term "ideal student." The collected data were then classified and analyzed to identify the ideal meaning within their cognition, using Lakoff's prototype theory. The results are presented in the form of tables and model explanations. The analysis concludes that the top three models within the ideal student prototype are having many soft skills, being diligent, and being active in organizations.

Keywords: Ideal Student, Prototype, Cognitive Linguistics

Introduction

In the KBBI in 2023, students are defined as people or individuals who are studying in higher education (Tamera, et.al, 2023). In another definition, it is further defined that students are people who have more knowledge because they have more education. Meanwhile, according to Knopfemacher, students are prospective scholars who in their involvement with universities (which are increasingly integrated with society) are educated and expected to become intellectual candidates (Kurniawati, 2016). In essence, students are those who are preparing themselves by seeking knowledge in higher education through learning with the aim of becoming human beings with quality and integrity.

Students today are predicted as *Agents of Change*, they are given more trust by society to become agents of change and are directly involved in helping to solve problems that exist in different social classes. Students are required to be more creative, who are not only able to think cognitively but also must be able to think creatively. According to Jannah and Sulianti, students as *agents of change* are the most important subjects in the world of education. This means that students as the young generation of the Indonesian nation must get adequate education to enrich their insights in order to be able to make a change for a

nation (Jannah & Sulianti, 2021). A nation that is rich in insight will become a developed nation. Students also serve as changes that were initially unknown due to the results of teaching activities and the application of positive values developed by public and private professionals. Students must certainly have high competitiveness and a competitive spirit to become a superior generation. Therefore, every student certainly has their own goals, ways and targets during their education, both at the undergraduate and master's levels. They will always try to be an ideal student with all the advantages and targets they want to achieve.

Debrina explained that an ideal student is someone who has criteria that are quite “unique” (unique) such as, neat appearance, polite in speech, critical in responding to situations both in the campus environment and in the community where he is, as well as carrying every aspiration of the community/people who are considered more important, has a smart brain, is responsible, disciplined, diligent and skilled in analyzing a problem that is happening or a problem that he will face later (Gismin& Mansyur, 2018).Meanwhile, according to Nugraha, ideal students are students who take part in significant change movements and have high idealism. In addition, it was also explained that the ideal for students is the process of bringing together the demands of student study age so that it is not more than 5 years with a good grade point average, meeting the qualifications of soft skills and intact character that will be useful for post-campus life (Nugraha, 2016).

From some of the definitions above, it can be said that the ideal student actually does not have a fixed definition. This is because the parameters of “ideal” itself cannot be equated in everyone's mind. Each individual certainly has their own benchmarks about their ideal standards based on what is born from their cognition through the premises that have been passed. In the human mind, both individuals and collective societies have their own definitions of a category. Therefore, the study of cognitive linguistics sees that the ideal concept is a process that exists in the cognition of each individual and society, in the field of cognitive linguistics the concept is known as the Ideal Cognitive Model or Ideal Cognitive Model (Nasution & Casmini, 2020; Rosyid, R & Baroroh, 2020).

Ideal Cognitive Model is a structure that represents the speaker's conceptual knowledge. More clearly, Arimi explains that the Ideal Cognitive Model is a category whose definition is idealized by a speaker, or a group of speech communities. Humans always think prototypically (Azizah, 2022). The prototypical thinking model is applied in many language occasions. When a person utters a certain case he will prioritize prototype talk. This prototype theory can be applied to any category including metabases. Language as commonly known based on its hierarchy, phonology, morphology, lexicology, syntax for example is also qualified with prototype cases in each category. In this case, how does one choose the appropriate expression in defining thoughts through a language.

The existence of this MKI concept is born from the categorization that forms a prototype in the minds of the community (Islami & Arimi, 2022). Prototypes are born because of differences that cannot be explained by componential analysis, so this theory was born as a solution to the gap in semantic analysis that cannot be explained by lexemes that do not have clear meaning components. Therefore, it is necessary to look at the

categorization and prototypes of ideal students in the perspective of society to formulate an ideal concept for students.

Research on prototypes has been conducted by several researchers before, including Tasliati. In her research, she studied the semantics of the prototype of the word “stealing” in Indonesian. The results of her research show two major points, first, the prototype of the word “stealing” is supported by three elements, namely taking other people's goods without permission; knowing that the goods belong to others; and utilizing the goods for personal gain. Secondly, the elements that support the meaning of the word stealing show that the intentional factor is the element that most determines an action is categorized as stealing (Tasliati, 2020).

The relevance of this research to the research to be carried out is the prototype study that will be used in this study. But what distinguishes is the object of research. Where the research makes the word “stealing” as its object, while the object in this research is the term “ideal student”. The next research was conducted by Devita Maliana Sari. The research was entitled “Prototype of Virginity in the Perspective of Twitter Users”. The results obtained are the meanings of “virginity” for the most Twitter users are “crown” and “privacy”. These two things are considered prototypes of the word virginity because they are the most data. In terms of study, the research has similarities with this research. What distinguishes the two is the object under study (Sari & Baskoro, 2020).

Zakiah et al. also conducted research on prototypes. They studied the prototype of the lexeme “corruption”. The research focuses on corruption variables that affect the degree of corruption itself. The research is different from this research in terms of object and theoretical focus. Zakiah focuses on the semantic study of Tomaszczyk's prototype with the lexeme corruption as the object. While this research uses Lakoff's theory with the object of study of the term “ideal student” (Zakiah, Fiaji, & Zulvarina, 2018).

Departing from the many interpretations and categories in defining the form of “ideal students,” it is evident that no comprehensive prototype-based linguistic study has yet explored this concept in the context of higher education. Most existing research on prototypes has focused on lexical semantics involving concrete terms such as “stealing,” “virginity,” or “corruption.” These studies have provided valuable insight into how language users categorize meanings based on typical features. However, they fall short in applying prototype theory to abstract sociocultural constructs like the concept of an “ideal student.”

This gap becomes more significant when considering the strategic role students play in shaping national development and cultural narratives. The absence of research on the prototypical categorization of student ideals particularly from the students' own cognitive perspectives limits our understanding of how such abstract categories are formed, shared, and evolve across educational communities. The novelty of this research lies in its application of the Ideal Cognitive Model (ICM) to a culturally embedded and socially dynamic concept, namely the “ideal student.” Unlike prior studies that center on static lexical items, this research investigates a role-based conceptual category, which is shaped by societal expectations, educational discourse, and student self-perception. The study

bridges a gap between cognitive linguistic theory and educational identity construction, thereby opening new avenues for the interdisciplinary application of linguistics.

The contribution of this research is threefold. First, it advances the use of prototype theory in cognitive linguistics by extending it to abstract social roles rather than lexical items. Second, it provides a culturally grounded prototype of the ideal student, derived from authentic cognitive responses of Indonesian students. Third, it offers practical insights for educators and policymakers in designing curricula and programs that align with students' evolving perceptions of excellence and achievement. In terms of its academic position, this study stands at the intersection of cognitive linguistics, educational discourse, and cultural studies. It positions itself as both a theoretical exploration of ICM and a practical examination of student identity within an Indonesian sociocultural framework. By capturing how students themselves define ideal traits, the research challenges top-down definitions often imposed by institutions, thereby advocating for a more student-centered approach in higher education.

The objectives of this research are to (1) identify and categorize the prototypes associated with the term "ideal student" based on student cognition; (2) analyze the conceptual structures that underlie these prototypes using Lakoff's Ideal Cognitive Model; and (3) explore the sociocultural implications of these prototypes in the context of Indonesian higher education. Through these objectives, the study aims to contribute both to the theoretical refinement of prototype categorization and to the practical understanding of student ideals in contemporary academic settings.

Methodology

This research is mixed research, meaning that it combines qualitative and quantitative types of research. According to Creswell in Tasliati, mixed research is research that combines qualitative and quantitative forms (Sina, 2024). In order to produce data that can be accounted for its validity, the researchers collected data through the questionnaire method. Respondents in this study amounted to 94 people who were active students at different levels, namely undergraduate and master's degrees, where the results of the questionnaire became the main data in this study. These active students certainly have different cognitions about who the ideal student figure is. The questionnaire contains a choice of 12 types of ideal student categories. Each respondent was asked to choose 3 categories and types of ideal students according to them. But on the other hand, researchers also allow respondents to fill in other types of ideal students according to their perspectives if they feel they have their own types besides those that have been prepared, of course this is done in order to get maximum results in formulating the prototype of the ideal student.

Data analysis techniques are carried out through three stages, namely data collection, data analysis and data presentation. The data in this study are presented in verbal and visual form. The visual form in this study is a table containing data from the classification of ideal student prototypes according to respondents. While verbal data is a description of the data that has been collected in the form of written text to further explain the prototype data.

Result and Discussion

The findings of this study emerge from an in-depth analysis of data gathered through questionnaires distributed to 94 active university students from various academic levels, including both undergraduate and graduate programs. These students were asked to cognitively engage with the concept of the “ideal student” and to select three categories from a list of ideal student attributes that they believed most accurately reflected the prototype. Additionally, respondents were given the opportunity to contribute their own ideas beyond the given categories, allowing for more organic and individualized input.

This mixed approach enabled the researchers to capture not only the commonly held conceptions but also the nuanced and evolving perceptions of student excellence in a contemporary academic and social context. The data were then analyzed through the lens of cognitive linguistics, specifically Lakoff’s Ideal Cognitive Model (ICM), in order to uncover how these conceptualizations align with cultural expectations and internalized values among students. The aggregated results are organized and presented in the following table:

Table 1. Respondent data on ideal student type

No	Prototype	Number of respondents
1	Smart	24
2	Diligent	33
3	Graduated on time	29
4	Have a cum laude GPA	19
5	Have a lot of soft skills	45
6	Have many achievements	23
7	Focus on college only	6
8	Active in organization	31
9	Studying while starting a business	15
10	Active in social activities	28
11	Active in scientific research	21
12	Have many fans	5
13	Proficient in many languages	1
14	Can manage time well	1
15	Think long term and future	1

The table above reveals insightful trends regarding students' cognitive perceptions of what constitutes an ideal student. The highest frequency of responses points to category (5) “Having a lot of soft skills,” which garnered a score of 45. This dominant choice underscores the evolving expectation of student excellence in modern educational and professional settings. Rather than focusing solely on academic metrics, students today value competencies such as communication, adaptability, teamwork, emotional intelligence, and problem-solving abilities. These traits are increasingly seen as indispensable tools for

navigating a rapidly changing global workforce and are reflective of a shift toward more holistic personal development.

Ranked second is category (3) “Diligent,” with 33 respondents selecting this attribute. This result reaffirms the enduring belief in perseverance, consistency, and hard work as key indicators of student success. Diligence is interpreted not only as the ability to complete academic tasks with discipline but also as a mindset that enables students to endure and excel in the face of long-term challenges. The emphasis on this trait suggests that while modern students embrace diverse skill sets, traditional values such as effort and persistence remain central to their ideal prototype.

Following closely is category (8) “Active in organizations,” chosen by 31 respondents. This preference reflects the cognitive awareness among students that involvement in campus or community organizations cultivates leadership, responsibility, and experiential learning. Such activities offer opportunities to practice real-world skills, navigate group dynamics, and engage in problem-solving scenarios attributes that are vital for both academic and professional achievement. The prominence of this trait in the prototype indicates an appreciation for balanced student identity one that integrates academic dedication with social engagement and active contribution to collective goals.

The data indicates that the dominant cognitive prototype of an ideal student is one who possesses a wide range of soft skills. This finding reflects a paradigm shift in how student excellence is conceptualized not merely as mastery of academic content, but as the development of interpersonal, communicative, and adaptive competencies that enable individuals to function effectively in diverse social, professional, and cultural contexts. From a cognitive linguistic perspective, this suggests that the conceptualization of “student” in the minds of respondents is no longer restricted to traditional classroom performance, but is intrinsically linked to broader, multifaceted dimensions of human capability. The prominence of soft skills in the ideal student prototype signals a cultural and educational awareness that success in the 21st century demands more than intellectual prowess. Traits such as leadership, collaboration, emotional intelligence, conflict resolution, and effective communication are increasingly recognized as essential tools for navigating complex real-world problems. This aligns with the national and global discourse positioning students as “agents of change” individuals expected not only to absorb knowledge but also to apply it in socially transformative ways.

Moreover, the prioritization of soft skills resonates with employability demands in today’s labor market, where employers frequently seek graduates who can integrate seamlessly into dynamic teams, adapt to change, and engage constructively with stakeholders. University students, therefore, perceive soft skills not as optional extras, but as fundamental attributes that amplify the value of their academic credentials and increase their social capital. By acquiring and refining these skills, students are better equipped to contribute to society not only as conveyors of scientific knowledge, but also as empathetic leaders, active citizens, and creative problem solvers who can respond to the evolving challenges of their communities. In essence, the cognitive model of the ideal student centered on soft skill mastery reflects an integrated understanding of education that

transcends rote learning. It reveals how modern students internalize the need to be holistic individuals who balance academic knowledge with character, adaptability, and active engagement with the world around them.

As students, of course we are familiar with the proverb “Rajin Pangkal Pandai”. In the 2023 KBBI, the definition of diligent is like to work (study and so on); getol; earnestly work; always try hard (Rifki, et.al, 2023). With the development of the times, science and technology, we are no longer required to just be smart individuals, but also diligent. If we reflect on the proverb, of course we realize that to become someone who is smart, not only requires a high IQ, but must be diligent. Therefore, being diligent is one type that is considered to be the prototype of the ideal student.

The stories of successful scientists, scholars, and intellectual figures throughout history are often deeply intertwined with qualities such as perseverance, earnestness, resilience, and a profound love of learning. These traits are not merely complementary to their intellectual capabilities but serve as the very foundation upon which their academic and scholarly achievements were built. One powerful example that continues to inspire generations of students and seekers of knowledge is that of the eminent hadith scholar, Syihabuddin Abul Fadhl Ahmad, more famously known as Ibn Hajar Al-‘Asqalani. A towering figure in the Islamic intellectual tradition, Ibn Hajar's legacy is a testament to the transformative power of diligence and self-discipline in the pursuit of knowledge.

It is narrated that during his formative years of study, Ibn Hajar encountered a period of great difficulty in memorizing the hadiths transmitted by his teacher. Frustrated and disheartened by his inability to retain the lessons, he withdrew from his learning and wandered into a secluded cave to reflect. There, he observed a natural phenomenon that would dramatically alter the course of his academic journey: drops of water falling persistently from the ceiling of the cave onto a solid rock. Over time, the continuous dripping of water had carved a hollow in the stone, a vivid metaphor of how consistency and repetition, even from a seemingly weak source, can overcome the hardest of obstacles.

Moved by this moment of reflection, Ibn Hajar came to a powerful realization. If soft water could penetrate and reshape a solid rock through steady perseverance, then so too could knowledge penetrate the human mind with consistent and determined effort. Inspired by this epiphany, he immediately returned to his teacher, apologized for his momentary lapse, and vowed to dedicate himself fully to his studies. True to his word, Ibn Hajar became a paragon of scholarly dedication. His magnum opus, “Bulugh al-Maram”, a comprehensive collection of hadiths focused on Islamic jurisprudence, continues to be studied and revered across the Muslim world centuries after its compilation.

This story, often cited in traditional Islamic pedagogy, exemplifies the virtue of diligence not just as a moral value but as a cognitive and behavioral strategy essential to academic success. It underscores the idea that persistence in learning despite challenges, slow progress, or initial failures is a hallmark of intellectual excellence. In the context of this study, the story of Ibn Hajar provides a living prototype of the “diligent student,” reinforcing the finding that diligence is not only valued culturally and historically, but continues to be cognitively perceived as one of the defining traits of an ideal student.

The next most frequently selected prototype category is “active in organizations,” which garnered significant recognition from respondents. In the context of Indonesian higher education, organizational involvement among students is not only common but also widely encouraged as part of holistic student development. This reflects a broader cultural and institutional understanding that academic achievement alone is no longer sufficient in preparing students for the complex demands of real-world environments. Being active in student organizations ranging from intra-campus associations to national youth movements provides learners with practical platforms to cultivate a variety of essential life skills that are often inaccessible in formal classroom settings.

Students who participate in organizations are generally exposed to dynamic social interactions, conflict resolution situations, collaborative projects, and public engagement initiatives. These experiences contribute to the maturation of their emotional intelligence and social awareness, as they learn to navigate interpersonal differences, lead initiatives, negotiate responsibilities, and deliver results under pressure. Organizational settings simulate the professional world in a microcosm, where students must think critically, communicate effectively, and assume accountability skills that are increasingly recognized as indispensable in the 21st-century workforce.

Moreover, students who are actively involved in organizational life tend to develop strong leadership capabilities. This is because they are consistently entrusted with roles that require coordination, planning, team management, and decision-making. Whether they serve as committee heads, event coordinators, or executive board members, their roles demand not just responsibility but also strategic thinking and vision. These leadership roles offer them the opportunity to build confidence, assertiveness, and the ability to inspire and manage others competencies that significantly enhance their personal and professional profiles.

The importance of organizational experience is further underscored by recruiters and employers who often place substantial value on leadership and extracurricular involvement as indicators of a candidate’s readiness to contribute meaningfully beyond technical expertise. In this light, students who actively engage in organizations are seen not only as competent learners but as proactive individuals who embody initiative, resilience, and adaptability traits that align closely with the cognitive prototype of an ideal student. Hence, it is unsurprising that “active in organizations” emerged as one of the top three prototypes in this study. It affirms a shift in student cognition and societal expectations where academic excellence is complemented by social contribution and experiential growth. This finding reinforces the cognitive linguistic argument that the prototype of the ideal student has expanded to accommodate a more integrative understanding of what it means to be truly “educated” one who learns, leads, and lives with purpose within and beyond the academic institution.

In addition to the dominant categories identified through the questionnaire, several respondents introduced their own prototype concepts that, while less frequently mentioned, offer rich insights into the evolving cognitive model of the ideal student. Among these personalized responses, three notable traits emerged: (1) proficiency in multiple

languages (bilingual or multilingual competence), (2) effective time management, and (3) a strong orientation toward long-term planning and future goals. Although only mentioned by individual respondents, these attributes reveal a forward-looking perspective that complements the broader prototype categories and speaks to the aspirational ideals held by students in a rapidly globalizing world.

The first of these, multilingual proficiency, reflects the increasing importance of linguistic capital in a world defined by transnational communication, cultural exchange, and competitive global markets. Students who are fluent in more than one language possess not only the practical advantage of navigating diverse linguistic environments but also demonstrate cognitive flexibility, cultural intelligence, and a readiness for international collaboration. In cognitive linguistics, multilingualism is often associated with enhanced metalinguistic awareness, which allows individuals to reflect more deeply on language use and meaning construction. From an employability standpoint, multilingual graduates are better equipped to engage in diplomacy, research, business, and global networks, making this skill a valuable asset in defining one's professional identity.

The second trait, effective time management, is a critical metacognitive skill that reflects a student's ability to organize, prioritize, and execute tasks efficiently. This competency is foundational to academic success and personal well-being, as it enables students to balance coursework, extracurricular involvement, and personal responsibilities without experiencing burnout. Time management also reflects self-discipline, a trait that is cognitively linked to goal-directed behavior and intrinsic motivation. Within the framework of the Ideal Cognitive Model, this attribute reveals a dimension of student identity that is structured around autonomy, control, and the strategic allocation of cognitive resources.

The third prototype thinking long-term and being future-oriented suggests a vision-driven mindset that transcends short-term academic performance. Students who exhibit this trait do not merely complete assignments for grades; rather, they view their educational journey as an investment in personal growth, career development, and societal contribution. They are guided by clear goals and aspirations, which lend meaning and direction to their present efforts. This kind of future orientation aligns with the concept of "idealization" in ICM, where individuals project mental models of success that influence current decision-making. It also reflects an understanding that education is not just about acquiring knowledge, but about crafting a trajectory that is coherent, impactful, and aligned with one's values. Although these three categories were not widely cited in the dataset, their presence reveals the diverse and evolving nature of student cognition. They signal a cognitive expansion of the ideal student prototype to include global readiness, personal regulation, and visionary thinking qualities that are increasingly relevant in the 21st-century educational landscape. As such, these traits, though peripheral in frequency, are central in significance and warrant deeper exploration in future research.

If we examine the data closely, it becomes evident that the least selected prototype categories are (12) "having a lot of fans," with a total score of 5, and (7) "focusing on lectures only," with a total score of 6. These findings carry significant implications regarding the evolving values and cognitive orientation of students toward the concept of academic and

personal excellence. The low preference for “being famous” indicates a collective perception that popularity or social visibility does not equate to genuine quality or substance in the academic context. In other words, fame is seen as a superficial attribute that, while possibly desirable in some social contexts, is not regarded as essential let alone sufficient in defining the prototype of an ideal student.

Moreover, the minimal support for the category “focusing only on lectures” reveals a critical shift in student cognition, where classroom learning is no longer considered the sole or even primary domain of intellectual and personal development. This reflects a growing awareness that real-world competence requires more than passive absorption of material delivered in formal lectures. Students now recognize that exclusive reliance on academic content, without engaging in practical experiences, extracurricular involvement, or skill development beyond the classroom, leads to a narrow and incomplete formation of student identity.

This perception is well captured in the widely circulated student idiom “jangan menjadi mahasiswa kupu-kupu,” an abbreviation for “kuliah–pulang–kuliah–pulang,” referring to students who attend lectures and return home immediately, without participating in any enriching activities outside the classroom. The idiom functions not only as a humorous critique but also as a cultural commentary on the expectation that students must actively seek diverse learning contexts in order to be considered intellectually and socially mature. It critiques the passive student archetype and emphasizes the need for initiative, curiosity, and multidimensional growth.

Interestingly, this finding is further reinforced by the fact that the category “having a cumlaude GPA” once considered a primary indicator of academic excellence did not rank high in this study. Instead, it placed near the bottom of the hierarchy of ideal traits, suggesting that students today perceive GPA as an insufficient and perhaps outdated measure of overall quality. While academic performance remains important, it is no longer the defining criterion of the ideal student prototype. The cognitive implication here is profound: students are internalizing a more holistic and multifactorial model of excellence, one that values adaptability, interpersonal skills, and active contribution over rigid academic conformity or symbolic status. This marks a paradigm shift in student values, where being an ideal student is not about chasing grades or popularity, but about building a meaningful, capable, and resilient character suited for the complexities of contemporary life.

Beyond the dominant and least selected categories, the remaining six types exhibit scores that are relatively close to one another. This clustering suggests that these attributes while not perceived as core traits are still cognitively relevant to the broader conceptualization of an ideal student. These categories represent what in prototype theory are often referred to as “peripheral members” of a category: traits that are recognized as valid, yet do not hold central status within the collective cognitive model. Their presence indicates variability in individual perceptions, possibly shaped by personal experience, field of study, or institutional culture. Although these types do not emerge as prototypical, they should not be overlooked. Their inclusion reveals that the ideal student is not understood

monolithically; rather, it is a flexible and expandable concept influenced by contextual and cultural nuance. These middle-ranking attributes may gain prominence over time, particularly as educational paradigms continue to evolve. Their intermediate scores also suggest that, while not universally accepted, these traits are still seen as beneficial or even necessary in specific academic or professional settings.

This nuanced understanding offers a deeper view into the gradience of category membership within cognitive models. It supports the theoretical stance that category boundaries are not fixed but fuzzy, and that prototype strength may vary across time, community, and cultural context. By identifying these peripheral traits, this study contributes to a more comprehensive mapping of the conceptual field surrounding the notion of the “ideal student.”

This research introduces a novel application of prototype theory and the Ideal Cognitive Model (ICM) to a domain that has been underexplored in cognitive linguistics: the abstract and culturally embedded concept of the “ideal student.” While previous studies on prototypes have predominantly focused on lexical semantics or moral concepts, this study investigates a role-based, identity-oriented category that is central to educational discourse and social development. The study contributes to cognitive linguistics by extending the scope of prototype theory beyond lexical items into the realm of social roles and cultural expectations. It also enriches educational studies by presenting empirical data on how students themselves conceptualize excellence and success, thus offering a bottom-up perspective that complements top-down institutional frameworks. Furthermore, the research provides practical insight into curriculum development and student mentoring programs by identifying which traits are most valued cognitively by students today.

This research addresses the lack of linguistic-cognitive analysis on how abstract student-related roles are categorized within the minds of actual students. It fills the gap where academic excellence is often evaluated through institutional standards like GPA or participation, without considering how students themselves define and prioritize qualities associated with “ideal” performance and character. The study offers a student-centered understanding of educational values that are more aligned with real-world readiness and holistic development. The results of this study open pathways for further research into cognitive categorization of other academic and social roles, such as “ideal teacher,” “ideal leader,” or even “ideal graduate.” Future studies may incorporate qualitative data, such as narrative interviews or focus groups, to complement the quantitative findings and deepen understanding of the motivations and cultural narratives behind student responses. Additionally, comparative studies across cultural or institutional contexts could explore how educational systems influence the formation of such prototypes. In doing so, researchers may further investigate how shifting societal demands such as the influence of digital literacy or sustainability awareness begin to reshape what students consider “ideal” in future educational landscapes.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the data analysis derived from the questionnaires distributed to 94 respondents, this study concludes that the cognitive prototype of the “ideal student” is primarily characterized by three dominant attributes: possessing a wide range of soft skills, being diligent, and being active in organizational life. These three categories emerged with the highest scores soft skills (45), diligence (33), and organizational activeness (31) indicating that students collectively perceive the ideal student not solely through academic performance but through a more holistic integration of interpersonal, personal, and social competencies. This answers the main research question regarding which traits most accurately represent the prototype of an ideal student in a contemporary academic context. From the researcher’s perspective, these findings reflect an important shift in student cognition regarding academic identity. Today’s students increasingly value personal development, leadership potential, and practical readiness over rigid academic benchmarks such as GPA. Furthermore, the emergence of three new proposed prototype categories time management, multilingual proficiency, and future orientation demonstrates that students are internalizing global challenges and demands into their self-concept as learners. These traits, although less frequent, reflect the aspirational ideals that complement and enrich the prototype structure, revealing that students envision themselves not only as knowledge receivers but as future-oriented agents of change.

However, this study is not without limitations. The research was conducted using a closed-ended questionnaire method, which, although useful for capturing quantitative trends, may not fully reflect the depth of reasoning behind students’ choices. The sample was also limited to a specific demographic context, which may not represent broader or cross-cultural perspectives on student ideals. Additionally, the absence of qualitative data restricts the ability to explore the nuances of student cognition and emotional resonance related to these prototype traits.

Therefore, future researchers are encouraged to expand this study by incorporating qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus group discussions, to capture the lived experiences and personal narratives that inform students’ prototype construction. Comparative studies across universities, regions, or even countries could also provide a more diverse and inclusive understanding of how educational, cultural, and institutional factors shape student ideals. Further exploration into related conceptual roles such as “ideal teacher,” “ideal graduate,” or “ideal leader” would also enrich the field and provide a broader framework for applying prototype theory in educational discourse.

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