

Belonging and Engaging for Successful Transition to University

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Background

This research is part of an ongoing project called Belonging and Engaging for Successful Transition to University (BEST). It is understood that arriving at university can be overwhelming for some students, particularly for those from underrepresented backgrounds. However, a sense of belonging and having the confidence to engage at university is important to succeed in higher education. The aim of this project is to identify ways in which student sense of belonging and engagement can be improved to ensure that more students have a successful transition to university. This knowledge will be shared through the provision of resources to students in their induction week, and to staff.

The project hopes to answer questions such as:

- How can staff build a learning community that encourages a sense of belonging?
- How can students support and include their peers?
- How can students get themselves involved at university?

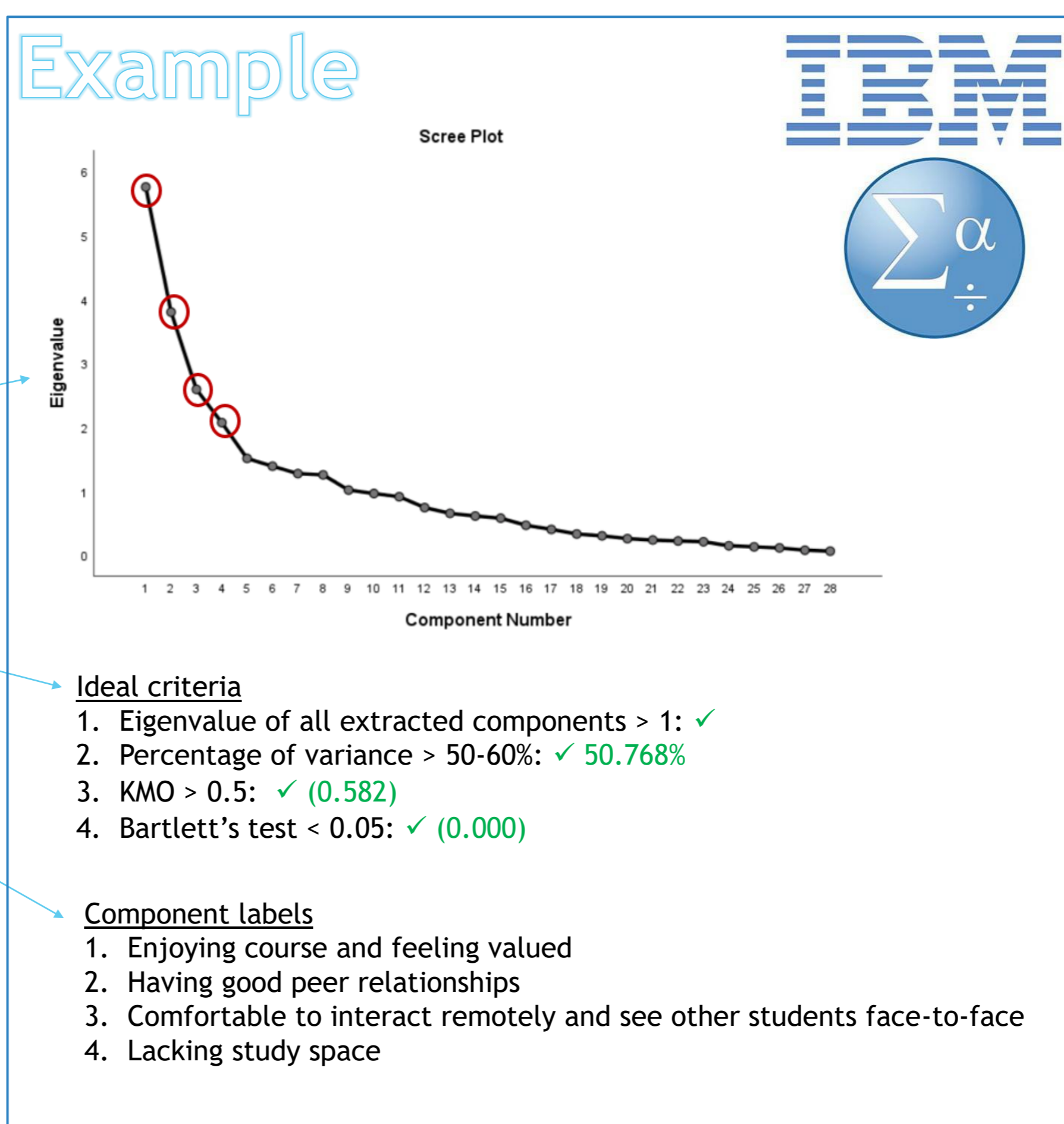
This project has been running for seven years and collects data through surveys sent to students throughout their first year at university. The project now collects data from seven schools at the University of Leeds, one school at the University of Bristol and one school at the University of Glasgow. The project has now collected large amounts of data, which must be analysed to enable the creation of the most effective resources. A programme called SPSS from IBM is used for the data analysis. This research has focused on the survey data from 2020 - 2021 to establish a methodology that can be applied to all data collected.

Methodology

The established methodology is briefly outlined below:

1. Select variables and run principal component analysis (PCA)
2. Identify the number of components to extract
3. Ensure the PCA and components meet ideal criteria
4. Analyse the contribution of each variable to each component to label the component
5. Run linear regressions between the components
6. Analyse output and identify significant results

Example



Results

- This research has found a statistically significant result (0.015) which indicates that men feel more confident and prepared for university than women do.
- This research has found a statistically significant result (0.001) which indicates that those who have taken an access to Leeds course feel more confident and prepared for university than other students in their first year.

Discussion and Next Steps

The results above suggest that demographics have an impact on student sense of belonging. However, at this stage, conclusions cannot be made about the impact of demographics on engaging, and on success. One limitation to the research and a cause of the lack of significant results among the 2020 -2021 dataset may be that fewer people took the second and third surveys. A software called G Power has been used to understand the sample size required to gain more significant results. Thus, it is hoped that once the methodology is applied to all datasets, there will be more significant results.

Thereafter, once all data from the project has been analysed, the results can be used to produce resources that can distribute information to students and staff. The results can be used to target resources to those most likely to struggle with a sense of belonging at university. The results may also indicate ways in which staff can support students.