



Sense of Belonging and Active Engagement within Faith-based Congregational Settings among Khmer Adults Aged 18 Years and Older: A Quantitative Correlational Study

Sarom Mok^{1*}

Royal University of Phnom Penh,
Cambodia

Sothea Lim²

Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport,
Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Ramy Chhun³

Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport,
Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Hok Chour⁴

Ministry of Education, Youth and
Sport, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Chorvy Vong⁵

Royal University of Phnom Penh, Phnom
Penh, Cambodia

***Corresponding author:**

Sarom Mok, Royal University of Phnom
Penh, Cambodia.

✉ moksaromddg@gmail.com

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Abstract

Background: Belonging is a fundamental human need that transcends cultural, geographic, and spiritual boundaries, yet belongingness research has concentrated on secular settings and rarely examines faith-based congregations as a cohesive framework.

Objective: This study addresses that gap by testing the belonging-engagement relationship among Khmer adults in Cambodia and by modeling social support and intrinsic motivation as moderators rather than parallel predictors. This quantitative correlational study investigated the relationship between sense of belonging and active engagement within faith-based congregational settings among Khmer adults aged 18 years and older.

Methods: A convenience sample of 125 Khmer adults completed a confidential online questionnaire using validated self-report instruments; data were analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistics via SPSS.

Results: Sense of belonging was not significantly related to engagement ($r(125) = -0.04, p = 0.663$), and neither commitment-based social support ($b = 0.18, p = 0.125$) nor intrinsic motivation ($b = 0.59, p = 0.095$) moderated that relationship. Both moderators nevertheless exerted significant direct effects on engagement ($p < 0.001$).

Conclusion: These findings indicate that emotional attachment does not automatically translate into behavioral participation, and faith-based organizations should therefore pair inclusive relational climates with clear motivational and structural supports, while psychological research should treat belonging and engagement as distinct constructs.

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INTRODUCTION

Cambodia is a nation of beauty with a tumultuous history, yet it harbors increasing optimism for a brighter future. Cambodia possesses a lengthy history characterized by civil strife, foreign incursion, and genocide ([Chamraeun et al., 2026](#); [Mok et al., 2026](#); [Ngah et al., 2023](#); [Ren et al., 2026](#)). Cambodia is regrettably associated with Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge regime that ascended to power in 1975. During Pol Pot's four-year communist regime, roughly 1.7 million individuals perished as a result of execution, torture, and famine. Cambodia also focused on historical sites and educational institutions. Libraries were obliterated and educational institutions were shuttered ([Hang-Chuon, 2019](#); [Lim, 2023](#); [Ren et al., 2026](#)).

The majority of Khmer are unusually tolerant of various religions and their adherents, despite the fact that nearly everyone in the country observes Theravada Buddhism. There are foreigners of various backgrounds who follow nearly every major faith in a variety of languages. Similar to the expatriate community, a significant portion of this religious activity is concentrated in Phnom Penh; nonetheless, religious groups and missionary organizations are present throughout the nation ([Hang-Chuon, 2019](#)).

Within this setting, engagement in religious communities is shaped by factors beyond common beliefs or spiritual rituals. Research indicates that the fundamental human urge for belonging significantly influences enduring participation in social and organizational settings, including faith-based communities ([Allen et al., 2021](#)). Although religion is fundamental to religious engagement, emotional connection, communal support, and shared identity frequently act as primary motivators for sustained participation. Belonging is not a secondary aspect of religious life; it is essential for integration, involvement, and psychological well-being in faith-based communities ([Baumeister & Bulletin, 1995](#)).

Belongingness is a core concept in psychology research and has been studied extensively in different settings, including educational, occupational, and community settings ([Allen et al., 2021](#); [looti, 2025](#)), yet faith groups provide a unique and under-represented context for the study of this phenomenon. Religious institutions frequently function as more than just places of worship; they also act as social centers where people form meaningful relationships and assume collective obligations. While religious congregations have been an important part of the story of both individual and community well-being in history and psychology, a critical gap in the literature is emerging ([Allen et al., 2021](#); [Hang-Chuon, 2019](#)): the specific role of belongingness in the motivation and maintenance of engagement in these communities is underexplored.

The urgency of addressing this problem lies in the fact that the necessity for belonging is fundamentally embedded in human drive and is expressed through behavioral engagement, including service attendance, ministry participation, involvement in social events, and informal fellowship. Previous studies demonstrate that religious involvement is influenced by belief systems as well as interpersonal interactions and the social frameworks inherent in religious contexts ([Baumeister & Bulletin, 1995](#); [Ryan & Deci, 1985](#)). In faith-based environments, belonging cultivates emotional security, identity development, and a feeling of purpose, which are crucial for enduring participation. Investigating belonging in these locations may inform how emotional and social ties shape congregational involvement, spiritual identity, and overall well-being. Industrial-organizational psychologists should know that the dynamics of belonging in faith-based settings have ramifications that go beyond religious institutions, and the findings of this research may contribute to initiatives to promote engagement, satisfaction, and well-being in different organizational and community contexts ([Baumeister & Bulletin, 1995](#)).

Belonging is a complex psychological construct comprising emotional, cognitive and social components. It represents a person's sense of belonging, worth, and purposeful connection in a social structure or group ([Riley & White, 2016](#)). Belonging in faith-based environments is relational attachment, shared identity, and emotional integration within the congregation; all of which are qualities of belonging that are beyond religion and theology. Based on the significant links between belonging and motivation, engagement and psychological well-being, this study draws on three theoretical frameworks that address the impact of human needs, motivation and social connection on conduct in communal settings: (1) Maslow's hierarchy of needs; (2) Baumeister and Leary's belongingness hypothesis; and (3) Self-Determination Theory (SDT). According to Maslow, ([1943](#)) hierarchy of needs, human needs begin with physiological and safety demands, then progress to love and belongingness, esteem, and self-actualization, so that belongingness is presented as a fundamental psychological need that must be met

before higher levels of personal growth and fulfilment can be achieved. According to Maslow, (1943); Rojas et al., (2023), belonging entails creating loving relationships and feeling linked to family, peer groups, and communities, and when belonging requirements are not met, it can lead to mental distress and decreased motivation. The paradigm indicates that in faith-based environments, belonging is necessary for meaningful involvement and participation in congregational life.

Baumeister & Bulletin, (1995) belongingness hypothesis posits that the urge to belong is a fundamental human motive, defined by the aspiration to establish and sustain enduring, positive interpersonal relationships that are stable and affirmative, a drive they considered to be universally accepted and on par with physical requirements such as food or shelter. They pointed out that meaningful and lasting relationships are essential for psychological stability, and indicated that in religious communities people participate not just because of shared beliefs, but also because their relationship needs are being met. Congregational involvement provides regular interaction, mutual care, and emotional support, factors that may be more important in keeping people engaged than sharing a doctrinal perspective. In Christian groups, these interpersonal linkages are generally expressed through shared beliefs, communal worship, and service-oriented activities (Baumeister & Bulletin, 1995). This view is consistent with research findings that indicate religious involvement is substantially related to psychological benefits, including lower levels of distress and greater happiness with life (Lambert et al., 2013).

This study also draws on Self-Determination Theory (SDT) developed by Deci & Ryan (2015), which explains how motivation is influenced by the satisfying of three core psychological needs: autonomy, competence and relatedness. Relatedness the need to feel linked to, cared for, and valued by others is particularly crucial to faith-based participation, and environments that foster relatedness are associated with higher levels of intrinsic motivation, better psychological health, and increased persistence in behavior (Ryan & Deci, 1985). Supportive relational contexts that build connection and inclusion in faith-based groups may serve to promote intrinsic motivation to participate in worship, service and leadership roles, since SDT extends belongingness theory by describing how the satisfaction of relational needs not only fulfils belonging but also increases internal motivation, hence sustaining engagement over time.

Together, these theories offer an integrated framework for understanding the function of belonging in faith-based engagement: belonging is a basic psychological need for growth in Maslow, (1943) hierarchy, a core, enduring human motivation according to Baumeister & Bulletin, (1995), and relational fulfilment enhances intrinsic motivation and continued engagement based on SDT. Despite critiques regarding its rigidity, Maslow's (1943) hierarchical model continues to significantly influence the understanding of belonging as fundamental to psychological functioning. Among these frameworks, however, Baumeister & Bulletin, (1995) belongingness hypothesis is most closely connected with the aim of this study and so serves as the principal theoretical underpinning guiding the research objectives, the interactions among variables, and the interpretation of results.

As a key variable, the concept of belonging has been thoroughly examined as an essential psychological construct reflecting individuals' beliefs of acceptance, value, and inclusion within social institutions (Allen et al., 2021). Historically, belonging has been considered an essential human requirement vital for emotional health and social cohesion, with first studies emphasizing the importance of relational attachment and ongoing interpersonal interaction (B. M. K. Hagerty et al., 1992). Recent research advances this understanding by examining belonging across several contexts, including educational, organizational, and community settings, highlighting its importance in motivation and sustained engagement. Empirical studies consistently indicate that belonging yields favorable psychological effects, including emotional well-being, identity development, and dedication to group involvement, and within religious contexts belonging is associated with meaning-making, relational connections, and communal integration.

Zhang et al., (2019) investigated the concept of belonging inside religious institutions and found that organized religious environments promote emotional attachment, social support, and a sense of purpose. Allen et al., (2021) likewise posited that faith groups specifically fulfil individuals' demands for meaning, emotional security, and collective identity, rendering them an advantageous context for study on belongingness. Notwithstanding these potential benefits, recent research suggests that religious activity is frequently driven more by social connections than by religion alone (Baumeister & Bulletin,

1995; Zhang et al., 2019). This undermines the premise that doctrinal conformity is the principal reason for engagement, instead highlighting the significance of social relations.

Faith-based community engagement, as the second key variable, is generally characterized by active involvement in religious activities, including attending services, participating in ministries, and holding organizational roles (Riley & White, 2016). Engagement is defined as a complex construct encompassing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral investment in religious life. Prior research demonstrates that involvement in religious communities is associated with psychological resilience, social cohesion, and emotional well-being (Lambert et al., 2013), and empirical evidence suggests that religious participation both strengthens and is strengthened by social interaction. Son, (2024) discovered that continuous attendance at religious services predicts involvement in both religious and secular organizational activities, implying that religious engagement supports broader social participation, and revealed a reciprocal relationship between organizational involvement and religious service attendance that further underscores the necessity of active participation in building a sense of connectedness.

Likewise, Dougherty & Whitehead, (2011) highlighted the importance of small group participation in megachurches, pointing to its effects on the participants' sense of belonging and commitment to the church. These findings highlight the importance of understanding how faith-based community membership is molded not only by doctrinal adherence but also by a participant's relationship experiences within the group. The idea of belonging has been strongly related with characteristics such as social support and intrinsic motivation, both of which are highly relevant in religious contexts. Faith-based communities are often informal support networks that provide emotional, spiritual, and instrumental resources (Chatters et al., 2015; Purnama et al., 2022). This function can increase the sense of belonging a person has and strengthen the commitment a person has to the community.

Notwithstanding comprehensive studies on belonging, engagement, and motivation, considerable deficiencies persist. Initially, there exists a paucity of empirical research investigating the correlation between sense of belonging and faith-based community participation as a cohesive framework. Secondly, limited research examines social support and intrinsic motivation as moderating factors influencing this association. Third, faith-based congregational contexts are inadequately represented in belonging research, which has predominantly concentrated on secular settings such as workplaces and educational institutions, while the function of belonging in the distinct context of religious communities has been relatively overlooked. Ultimately, methodological constraints such as dependence on self-report instruments and cross-sectional designs hinder comprehension of the temporal interplay of these variables. Hence, there is an urgent need for empirical investigation to investigate the relationship between sense of belonging and active participation in religious communities. Bridging this gap will boost both academic knowledge and practical execution in the fields of psychology, religious leadership and organizational growth.

The current research is based on belongingness theory, which states that humans have an innate need to form and maintain meaningful interpersonal relationships (Baumeister & Bulletin, 1995), and extends prior work linking belonging to psychological well-being and engagement in generalized community and educational settings (Allen et al., 2021; Riley & White, 2016). Its novelty therefore lies in three scientific contributions that move beyond the descriptive replication of previous empirical studies. First, it transfers the belonging–engagement relationship from the secular settings in which it has predominantly been tested into a faith-based congregational context and examines the two constructs as a single cohesive framework rather than as separate literatures.

Second, instead of treating social support and intrinsic motivation as parallel predictors, it models them as moderators, thereby specifying the conditions under which relational attachment is, or is not, converted into observable participation. Third, it tests this model among Khmer adults in Cambodia, a population and a religious landscape that remain absent from the belongingness literature. The value of this study is thus that it fills a significant gap in the understanding of how faith-based organizations generate connection, purpose, and emotional support among members, since religious congregations have long been a source of social connection and care in communities although the psychological and relational variables that foster belonging and facilitate deeper engagement are not well known.

Taken together, this quantitative correlational study investigated the relationship between sense of belonging and active engagement within faith-based congregational settings among Khmer adults aged 18 years and older, while also assessing whether social support and intrinsic motivation served as moderators of this relationship. Three research questions guided this study: (1) *Does sense of belonging have a good correlation with faith-based community engagement and involvement in congregations?* (2) *Does social support influence the relationship between sense of belonging and engagement in faith-based communities?* and (3) *Does intrinsic motivation influence the relationship between sense of belonging and engagement in faith-based communities?*

The study investigates the role of belonging in participation to understand the process that fosters thriving and inclusiveness in congregational life. In doing so, this study thus provides a timely and necessary exploration of the role of emotional ties in faith-based settings in fostering active participation, along with practical implications for practitioners and theoretical advancement for researchers working at the intersection of psychology, spirituality, and community engagement. This study will also provide practical importance for religious leaders, administrators and community organizers, as it gives evidence-based insights for bolstering relational bonds, fostering inclusive congregational cultures and enhancing member participation. By acknowledging this relationship between belonging and engagement, leaders may create an environment in which people feel recognized, valued and motivated to actively participate in the mission and development of the community.

METHOD

Research Design

This study uses a quantitative correlational research design to evaluate the association between sense of belonging and faith-based community engagement in congregational contexts. The correlational approach is acceptable since the study is intended to measure the extent and direction of relationships between variables in the absence of manipulation and experimental control. The independent variable is a sense of belonging, while the dependent variable is faith-based community engagement and involvement. This study investigates the potential moderating effects of social support and intrinsic motivation on the relationship between engagement and a sense of belonging. This design enables the investigation of the relationships between psychological and behavioural constructs in the context of faith-based communities.

Because it makes it easier to measure and statistically analyse correlations between variables using well-established correlational procedures, a quantitative correlational methodology is a good fit for answering the research goals of the study (Mukaka, 2012). While preserving rigour and being in line with the goal of the study, this nonexperimental technique offers a suitable methodological framework for analysing relational patterns. This design choice also responds to the way belonging has previously been investigated. Prior research on belonging has used both experimental and survey-based methodologies to investigate causal mechanisms and correlational correlations.

While experimental approaches, such as Zhang et al., (2019), provide control over contextual variables, they frequently rely on hypothetical settings, which may restrict ecological validity. Survey-based research, while more representative of real-world experiences, are usually cross-sectional and rely on self-report measures, which limits causal inference. Despite these limitations, research repeatedly shows that belonging is an important determinant of involvement and relational commitment. The present study therefore adopts a cross-sectional, survey-based approach and interprets its findings as correlational rather than causal.

Target Population and Research Samples

The demographic of interest for this study is Khmer adults 18 years of age and older currently involved or related to a faith-based community in Cambodia, especially in Phnom Penh City. Faith-based community involvement is defined broadly to encompass participation in religious services, ministries, programs, or other congregational activities. The period of involvement is not specified as a minimum. The person may be involved to whatever extent. The necessary sample size was calculated using the G*Power 3.1 statistical power analysis software. A bivariate correlational model was selected in accordance with the main research concerns of the study.

The analysis was run at an alpha of 0.05, power of 0.95, and a medium effect size. G*Power revealed a minimal required sample size of 125 Khmer adults, based on these characteristics. Non-probability convenience sampling technique is used in the investigation. Research samples were recruited through online channels including social media channels (e.g., Facebook, Telegram, and WhatsApp) and online groups and communities related to faith-based engagement. Convenient sampling seemed acceptable given the exploratory nature of the study, lack of an accessible sampling frame for faith-based communities, and the feasibility of obtaining a geographically diversified sample through online recruitment. This approach reduces generalisability but is often utilised in correlational studies of psychological and social phenomena.

Because the sample was obtained through non-probability convenience sampling, several sources of bias require acknowledgement. Recruitment through Facebook, Telegram and WhatsApp limited participation to Khmer adults who have internet access, use social media, and belong to online groups connected with faith-based engagement, so that adults in rural provinces, older adults, and members of congregations with little online presence are likely to be under-represented. Participation was additionally self-selected, since adults who already feel connected to, or are already active in, a faith-based community are more inclined to respond to a survey of this kind than those who are only nominally affiliated; this may compress the observed variability of both the sense of belonging and the engagement scores. The concentration of faith-based activity in Phnom Penh further narrows the geographical reach of the sample. For these reasons the sample is not representative of the wider population of Khmer adults, and the findings are to be read as a description of the relationships among the variables within this particular group rather than as estimates that may be generalised to all faith-based communities in Cambodia. Probability-based or congregation-based sampling would be required before such generalisation could be justified.

Research Instruments and Development

The sense of belonging, religious participation, intrinsic religious drive, and religious commitment study variables were operationalised using self-report measures that were selected on the basis of theoretical fit and previous evidence of reliability and validity in similar research contexts. The operationalisation of engagement also responds to constraints identified in earlier work. Notwithstanding significant evidence associating interaction with favorable outcomes, methodological constraints persist. Numerous research depends on self-reported attendance and participation, which may be influenced by social desirability bias.

Moreover, engagement is sometimes defined in a limited manner, emphasizing attendance frequency while neglecting relationship or leadership participation. These constraints underscore the necessity for research that investigates involvement as a whole behavioral construct shaped by psychological and social elements, including a sense of belonging. The instruments described below were accordingly selected to capture involvement in its behavioural, cognitive, and attitudinal dimensions rather than attendance frequency alone.

Sense of Belonging Inventory (SEBE-I)

The SEBE-I was utilised to evaluate the sense of belonging (B. Hagerty & Patusky, 1995). The SEBE-I is a comprehensive self-assessment instrument designed to evaluate individuals' subjective sense of belonging. The instrument comprises two subscales: (1) Psychological Experience of Belonging (PEBE), which assesses internal experiences of acceptance, inclusion, and significance; and (2) Antecedents of Belonging (ANBE), which evaluates relational and environmental elements that promote belonging.

The SEBE-I has been shown to have high internal consistency across different populations when evaluated psychometrically. Convergent and criterion validity has been supported by relationships with loneliness, social support and interpersonal closeness, and a stable multidimensional structure has been supported via factor analytic investigations. It chooses the SEBE-I for this study because of its theoretical fit with conceptions of belongingness and as an appropriate tool for exploring relationship experiences in faith-based communities.

Religious Involvement Inventory (REIN-I)

Religious participation was evaluated using the REIN-I (Hilty & Morgan, 1985). The REIN-I examines the behavioural, cognitive, and attitudinal elements of religious involvement, including personal faith, orthodoxy, social conscience, religious knowledge, life purpose, and church participation. Responses are measured on a Likert-type scale, with higher scores indicating greater religious participation. Research has substantiated the construct, converging correlations with converging religious legitimacy. Convergent correlations. The RII was selected because it encompasses both individual and collective aspects of religious participation, aligning with the study's focus on engagement within congregational settings.

Age Universal Religious Orientation Scale (AURE-S)

Intrinsic religious motivation was assessed via the AURE-S (Gorsuch & Venable, 1983). The AURE-S differentiates intrinsic religious orientation, representing internalised faith motivation, from extrinsic orientations, indicating utilitarian or socially driven engagement with religion. This study primarily concentrated on the intrinsic subscale, as intrinsic motivation was examined as a moderating factor. The intrinsic internal consistency of the intrinsic subscale has shown across the intrinsic subscale. Discriminant validity across convergent validity. The AUES-S was chosen to measure religious motivation in adult populations because of its theoretical applicability and empirical backing.

Religious Commitment Inventory-10 (RECO-I10)

Religious commitment was assessed using the RECO-I10 (Worthington et al., 2003). The RECO-I10 measures the degree to which people incorporate religious beliefs in their daily lives, reflecting both intrapersonal commitment (beliefs and values) and interpersonal commitment (public religious activities). Items were assessed on a 5-point Likert scale with higher scores indicating higher religious devotion. The internal consistency of the RECO-I10 was good and the test-retest reliability was high. Correlations with religious behaviours and psychosocial consequences have shown construct, discriminant, and concurrent validity. The RECO-I10 was chosen to measure participants' level of religious internalisation and behavioural expression, which is conceptually related to participation and perceived support in religion communities.

Cultural Adaptation and Pilot Testing of the Research Instruments

The four instruments described above were developed and validated in Western populations, and they were used in this study in the form in which they were originally published. A formal cross-cultural adaptation procedure, comprising forward translation and back-translation, expert-panel review of conceptual equivalence, and cognitive interviewing with a small group of Khmer adults, was not undertaken, and no separate pilot administration was conducted before the main survey was distributed. The psychometric adequacy of each instrument within the Cambodian sample was instead examined after data collection through internal consistency analysis, the results of which are reported in Table 1.

Those checks are informative in their own right: the SEBE-I and the RECO-I10 retained the high reliability documented in earlier validation studies, whereas the AURE-S produced a lower coefficient than the range reported by its developers, and the REIN-I required its frequency items to be separated from its participation items before both subscales reached an acceptable level. These patterns indicate that a number of items may not function in the Khmer context exactly as they do in the populations for which the scales were constructed. The absence of formal translation, adaptation and pilot testing is therefore acknowledged as a methodological limitation of the present study, and full adaptation and pilot procedures are recommended before these measures are administered again in Cambodian congregational settings.

Data Collection Procedures

The data for this study was gathered using an anonymous, self-administered online survey conducted on SurveyMonkey. Participants were enlisted via social media channels, such as Facebook, Telegram, and WhatsApp. A recruiting leaflet outlining the study's goal, eligibility criteria, and participation conditions was disseminated electronically on several platforms. The flyer featured a QR code and a direct survey link, enabling participants to access the survey via their personal devices. When

participants accessed the survey, they were first offered with an informed consent page that explained the study's aim, procedures, potential risks and benefits, confidentiality protections, and the voluntary nature of participation.

Research samples gave their agreement electronically before going to the survey items. The survey's initial screening questions confirmed the eligibility criteria. The survey was anticipated to need between 10-20 minutes for completion. Participation is optional, and individuals may withdraw at any moment without consequence. No personally identifiable information was gathered, and all comments were documented anonymously. Subsequent to data collection, survey results were downloaded and securely stored on a password-protected and encrypted USB drive managed by the researcher. Access to the data was limited exclusively to the researcher and, if required, the dissertation chair or statistician for analytical purposes. The thumb drive was housed in a secure place accessible solely to the researcher. All data were preserved for seven years post-study completion. Upon the conclusion of the retention period, all electronic data shall be irrevocably erased to guarantee total and irreversible eradication.

Data Analysis and Statistical Procedures

Statistical analyses were carried out to answer each study question using relevant inferential approaches. All analyses used a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$. The intended statistical analyses for each study question are outlined.

Descriptive Statistics Analysis Techniques

Descriptive statistics were employed to summarise the participant demographic data and critical study variables (Kaliyadan & Kulkarni, 2019). To offer an overview of the sample, measures of central tendency and variability including means, standard deviations and frequency distributions were reported.

Pearson Product-moment Correlation Analysis Techniques

Pearson product-moment correlation studies were performed to investigate the association between sense of belonging and involvement in faith-based communities. This approach evaluated the strength and direction of linear relationships between continuous variables and established statistical significance. The use of Pearson correlation aligned with previous studies demonstrating that perceived belonging correlates with congregational involvement (Michaels et al., 2022). This analysis was suitable for assessing connections among the investigated variables.

Moderation Analysis Techniques

To evaluate whether social support moderates the link between sense of belonging and faith-based community involvement, moderation analyses were performed using regression-based approaches. This research tested if sense of belonging significantly predicts social support, and if social support predicts faith-based community involvement. Moderation was tested by examining indirect effects using the proper statistical criteria.

The moderation models were specified in the same way for both moderators. Faith-based community engagement was regressed on the sense of belonging as the predictor, on the moderator, and on the product term formed by the predictor and the moderator, with commitment-based social support entered as the moderator for Research Question 2 and intrinsic motivation entered as the moderator for Research Question 3. The two moderators were examined in separate models rather than simultaneously, consistent with the research questions, which treat social support and intrinsic motivation as distinct moderating conditions. A moderating effect was inferred only where the coefficient of the interaction term reached statistical significance at the level of $\alpha = 0.05$. For every term in each model the unstandardised coefficient (b), the standard error (SE), the z value and the p value are reported, as presented in Tables 6 and 8.

The distributional properties of the study variables were examined before the regression output was interpreted. Normality was assessed using the Shapiro-Wilk test for the variables entering the moderation analysis, and, as shown in Table 7, the sense of belonging ($W = 0.975$, $p = 0.016$), intrinsic motivation ($W = 0.937$, $p < 0.001$) and engagement ($W = 0.932$, $p < 0.001$) each departed significantly from a normal distribution. Given a moderate sample of 125 participants, the coefficients are reported

as they were obtained, and the non-normality of the variables is treated as a constraint on the precision of the estimates rather than as a ground for transforming the data. Formal diagnostics for multicollinearity and homoscedasticity did not form part of the analytical procedure adopted here, so the non-significant interaction terms are interpreted as indicating the absence of a detectable moderating effect within this sample rather than as conclusive evidence about the population. Both points are acknowledged as limitations of the present analysis.

For reliability analysis, Cronbach's alpha was used to evaluate the reliability of internal consistency. Table 1 provides the reliability coefficients for each metric. Before performing inferential analyses, it was crucial to evaluate the study instruments' reliability to make sure each scale showed sufficient internal consistency. For every multi-item construct, internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha (α). For research purposes, it is generally accepted that items within a scale are sufficiently consistent in measuring the same underlying construct when $\alpha \geq 0.70$. Table 1 below displays the reliability coefficients for each metric.

Table 1

Presenting the Comparison of the Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficients (n=125)

No.	Research Tools	Original Authors /Developers	Cronbach's Alpha Reliability	
			Reported	Present Study
1.	SEBE-I	B. Hagerty & Patusky, (1995)	0.84-0.98	0.95
2.	RECO-I10	Worthington et al., (2003)	0.82-0.96	0.92
3.	AURE-S	Gorsuch & Venable, (1983)	0.80-0.85	0.75
4.	REIN-I	Hilty & Morgan, (1985)	0.70-0.87	0.81

Table 1 above shows that the SEBE-I (27 items) had excellent internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.95$), which is consistent with previous research reporting reliability coefficients ranging from 0.84 to 0.98 depending on population and version (B. Hagerty & Patusky, 1995). The RECO-I10 (10 questions) demonstrated strong reliability in the current sample ($\alpha = 0.92$), consistent with previously reported values of 0.82 to 0.96 (Worthington et al., 2003). To address decreased reliability when frequency items were included with the complete set, the REIN-I measure was split into two subscales.

In particular, because the frequency items reduced the overall alpha when combined, 44 isolating the 2-item frequency subscale from the 7-item participation subscale increased internal consistency. Both REIN-I subscales showed good reliability after this modification ($\alpha = 0.75$ for the 2-item frequency subscale and $\alpha = 0.74$ for the 7-item involvement subscale), which is in line with reliability estimates that have previously been reported to range from 0.70 to 0.87 (Hilty & Morgan, 1985). The AURE-S – Intrinsic Subscale (10 items), on the other hand, yielded a lower reliability estimate in the current study ($\alpha = 0.75$) compared to previous research reporting coefficients of roughly 0.80 to 0.85 (Gorsuch & Venable, 1983).

Ethical Considerations

All procedures including data analysis were performed in compliance with the ethical standards of the American Psychological Association APA (2017). Research sample confidentiality was respected during the analysis and only aggregated data were disclosed. The data were objectively analysed; the results were accurately reported and were not fabricated, falsified, or selectively published.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This sub-section presents the results of the study into two domains: (1) Results of Descriptive Statistics; and (2) Results of Inferential Statistics (to display the results of each research question).

Results of Descriptive Statistics

Every study variable, such as Engagement (ENGA), Sense of Belonging (SEBE), Intrinsic Motivation (INMO), and Social Support (SOSU) (commitment), had descriptive statistics calculated. Presented are

the observed ranges, means, medians, and standard deviations. Table 2 below summarises descriptive statistics for every variable.

Table 2

Presenting the Study Variables (n=125)

No.	Study Variable	Descriptive Statistics				
		M	S.D.	Median	Min.	Max.
1.	ENGA	1.86	0.62	1.65	1.00	3.75
2.	SEBE	3.25	0.56	3.28	1.77	3.96
3.	INMO	3.88	0.42	3.93	2.51	4.32
4.	SOSU	3.96	0.89	4.27	1.40	5.00

As shown in Table 2 above, the ENGA scores ranged from 1.00 to 3.75 based on replies from 125 participants (M = 1.86, SD = 0.62, Median = 1.65). The SEBE varied from 1.77 to 3.96 (M = 3.25, S.D. = 0.56, Median = 3.28). 125 individuals provided the INMO scores, which varied from 2.51 to 4.32 (M = 3.88, S.D. = 0.42, Median = 3.93). The SOSU (commitment) values varied from 1.40 to 5.00 (M = 3.96, S.D. = 0.89, Median = 4.27).

Results of Inferential Statistics

An overview of the results for each research question and related hypothesis investigated in the study is provided in this section. Results include pertinent descriptive data, inferential test results, and significant values arranged according to the study topic. Based on the results of the statistical analysis, each paragraph indicates whether the related null hypothesis was accepted or rejected.

Table 3

Presenting the Results of All Study Variables Using Pearson Correlation (n=125)

No.	ENGA	SEBE	INMO	SOSU
1. ENGA	(0.74)	-0.04	-0.47***	-0.71***
2. SEBE		(0.92)		
3. INMO		-0.08	(0.65)	
4. SOSU		0.06	0.52***	(0.90)

As indicated in Table 3 above, correlation analysis revealed no significant association between the SEBE and faith-based community participation, $r(125) = -0.04$, $p = 0.663$. No relevant association between levels of the ENGA and differences in the SEBE was not found in this sample with no significant effect size.

Results for Research Question 1

Research Question 1 was asked: ***“Does sense of belonging have a good correlation with faith-based community engagement and involvement in congregations?”***

The first research question looked at whether a sense of belonging was connected with faith-based community engagement and involvement.

Table 4

Presenting the SEBE and the ENGA Correlation (n=125)

No.	Study Variable	M	S.D.	1	2
1.	SEBE	3.25	0.56	-	
2.	ANGA	1.86	0.62	-0.04	-

Based on Table 4 above, research samples reported a lower level of the ENGA (M = 1.86, S.D. = 0.62) and a moderate SEBE (M = 3.25, SD = 0.56), according to descriptive data. The correlation analysis

did not find a significant association between the SEBE and faith-based community participation ($r(125) = -0.04, p = 0.663$). The effect size was small suggesting that differences in the SEBE were not meaningfully related to levels of the ENGA in this sample. Also, a Pearson product-moment correlation revealed no statistically significant link between the SEBE and ENGA ($r(126) = -0.04, p = 0.663$). Contrary to the study's hypothesis and current literature, there was no statistically significant association between sense of belonging and involvement.

This conclusion contrasts with previous research, which identified belonging as a crucial predictor of engagement and involvement in educational, organisational, and religious contexts. According to belongingness theory, individuals are driven to participate in group activities when their needs for connection and acceptance are addressed. The current research indicates that in modern congregational settings, this relationship might not be direct. One possible reason is that whereas engagement indicates observable behavioural action, a sense of belonging reflects an emotive or relational experience. People may feel a sense of belonging to a religious community, but they may not consistently participate in it.

Results for Research Question 2

Research Question 2 was asked: ***“Does social support influence the relationship between sense of belonging and engagement in faith-based communities?”***

In order to investigate Research Question 2, a moderation analysis was carried out to ascertain whether the connection between the SEBE and faith-based community engagement and involvement was mediated by commitment-based social support.

Table 5

Presenting the Study Variables of SEBE, SOSU and ENGA (n=125)

No.	Study Variable	Descriptive Statistics				
		M	S.D.	Median	Min.	Max.
1.	SEBE	3.25	0.56	3.28	1.77	3.96
2.	SOSU	3.96	0.89	4.27	1.40	5.00
3.	ENGA	1.86	0.62	1.65	1.00	3.75

Referring to Table 5 above, the SEBE was the predictor variable, the SOSU was the moderator, and the ENGA was the dependent variable. Research samples reported lower levels of the ENGA ($M = 1.86, S.D. = 0.62$) and intermediate levels of the SOSU ($M = 3.96, SD = 0.89$) and the SEBE ($M = 3.25, SD = 0.56$). The results showed that the SOSU did not significantly mitigate this link, while having a large direct association with involvement.

Previous research has demonstrated the role of the SOSU in increasing involvement through relational reinforcement and perceived encouragement. According to the current research, commitment-based social support significantly increases engagement, but it does so on its own rather than by enhancing or diminishing the impact of belonging. Regardless of their general sense of belonging within the congregation, this trend suggests that people may participate in faith-based activities because they perceive support and encouragement from others.

Table 6

Presenting the Moderation Analysis Results (n=125)

No.	Predictor	b	SE	z	p
1.	SEBE	-0.00	0.10	-0.00	0.998
2.	SOSU	-0.50	0.05	-11.00	<0.001
3.	SEBE x SOSU	0.18	0.12	1.58	0.125

Table 6 displays the moderation analysis results. The link between the SEBE and the ENGA was not significantly moderated by the commitment SOSU, as indicated by the lack of statistical significance in the interaction between the SEBE and the commitment SOSU ($b = 0.18, SE = 0.12, z = 1.58, p = 0.125$). The commitment SOSU had a statistically significant main influence on involvement ($b = -0.50, SE = 0.05$,

$z = -11.00$, $p < 0.001$). Conversely, the SEBE main effect ($b = -0.00$, $SE = 0.10$, $z = -0.00$, $p = .998$) was not statistically significant. The null hypothesis, which claimed that the SOSU does not influence the association between the SEBE and faith-based community engagement and involvement, was not rejected in light of these results.

Results for Research Question 3

Research Question 3 was asked: *“Does intrinsic motivation influence the relationship between sense of belonging and engagement in faith-based communities?”*

In order to investigate Research Question 3, a moderation analysis was carried out to ascertain whether the connection between the SEBE and faith-based community engagement and involvement was mediated by the INMO. The SEBE was the predictor variable, the INMO was the moderator, and the ENGA was the dependent variable. Table 7 below presents descriptive statistics for the study variables used in this investigation.

Table 7

Presenting the Descriptive Statistics among the Study Variables (n=125)

No	Study Variable	M	S.D.	Media n	Min.	Max.	Shapiro-Wilk W	Shapiro- Wilk p
1.	SEBE	3.19	0.45	3.21	1.73	3.95	0.975	0.016
2.	INMO	3.75	3.36	3.82	2.42	4.22	0.937	<0.001
3.	ENGA	1.76	0.60	1.59	1.02	3.73	0.932	<0.001

In term of moderation results, Table 8 below displays the moderation analysis.

Table 8

Presenting the Moderation Analysis Results (n=125)

No.	Predictor	b	SE	z	p
1.	SEBE	-0.14	0.14	-1.03	0.310
2.	INMO	-0.91	0.18	-5.60	<0.001
3.	SEBE x INMO	0.59	0.36	1.69	0.095

As shown in Table 8 above, the link between the SEBE and the ENGA was not significantly moderated by the INMO, as evidenced by the non-significant interaction between the SEBE and the INMO ($b = 0.59$, $SE = 0.36$, $z = 1.69$, $p = 0.095$). With $b = -0.91$, $SE = 0.18$, $z = -5.60$, $p < 0.001$, the primary impact of intrinsic drive on the ENGA was statistically significant. The SEBE main effect ($b = -0.14$, $SE = 0.14$, $z = -1.03$, $p = 0.310$) was not statistically significant.

The results showed that whereas the INMO had a strong direct correlation with the ENGA, it did not significantly reduce this relationship. From the standpoint of self-determination theory, the ENGA motivated by personal fulfilment and internal meaning is reflected in the INMO. This study's large main effect is consistent with earlier studies showing that those who are intrinsically motivated are more likely to participate consistently. The absence of a moderating effect, however, implies that the INMO functions as a direct motivator of the ENGA rather than as a process that modifies the influence of belonging.

Table 9.

Presenting the Study Variables Using Descriptive Statistics and Correlations (n=125)

No.	Study Variable	M	S.D.	1	2	3	4
1.	SEBE	3.25	0.56	-			
2.	INMO	3.88	0.42	-0.10	-		
3.	SOSU	3.96	0.89	0.07	0.53***	-	
4.	ENGA	1.86	0.62	-0.05	-0.48***	-0.072***	-

The means, standard deviations, and Pearson product-moment correlations between the ENGA, the SOSU, the INMO, and the SEBE of faith-based community participation are shown in Table 9 above. In addition to lower levels of involvement ($M = 1.86$, $SD = 0.62$), participants indicated moderate levels of the INMO ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 0.42$), the SOSU for commitment ($M = 3.96$, $SD = 0.89$), and the SEBE ($M = 3.25$, $SD = 0.56$). Relationships between the research variables were examined using Pearson product-moment correlation analysis. The SOSU for commitment had a negative correlation with engagement ($r(125) = -0.72$, $p < 0.001$) and a positive correlation with the INMO ($r(125) = 0.53$, $p < 0.001$). The ENGA and the INMO motivation had a negative correlation ($r(125) = -0.48$, $p < 0.001$). The INMO ($r(125) = -0.10$, $p = 0.455$), the committed SOSU ($r(125) = 0.07$, $p = 0.511$), and the ENGA ($r(125) = -0.05$, $p = 0.663$) did not substantially connect with a SEBE.

In short, this sub-section revealed the study's statistical findings in respect to the specified research questions. Descriptive statistics, Pearson product-moment correlations, and moderation analyses were used to investigate the links between sense of belonging, intrinsic motivation, commitment social support, and faith-based community participation. The results were presented objectively, including hypothesis decisions and corresponding significance levels, without commentary.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrated a more intricate interplay among sense of belonging, intrinsic drive, commitment-based social support, and faith-based community participation than originally posited. In contrast to predictions based on belongingness theory and previous studies in secular and organisational settings, the sense of belonging did not demonstrate a significant correlation with participation in faith-based communities. Despite individuals indicating moderate to high levels of perceived belonging, these views did not correspond with increased observable engagement behaviours, including participation in church services, volunteer activities, or leadership roles.

Given the significant body of research that positions belonging as a fundamental motivator of engagement, commitment, and participation in educational, organisational, and community settings, this conclusion was surprising. According to earlier studies, people are more inclined to devote time and energy to group responsibilities and activities when they feel connected, appreciated, and accepted (Allen et al., 2021; Baumeister & Bulletin, 1995). In religious contexts, belonging has also been linked to identity creation, emotional integration, and long-term engagement (Dougherty & Whitehead, 2011). The lack of a significant association in this study implies that engagement behaviours in modern faith-based congregations may not be predicted by belonging alone.

The characteristics of the congregational context itself offer one route to interpreting this divergence from belongingness theory. Zhang et al., (2019) investigated the concept of belonging inside religious institutions and found that organized religious environments promote emotional attachment, social support, and a sense of purpose; their research technique revealed how group traits, such as ideological homogeneity, may impact belonging experiences, illustrating that contextual influences shape individuals' perceptions of belonging within faith-based cultures. Read against the present findings, the belonging reported by participants may therefore reflect the relational climate of the congregation rather than an individual disposition that converts directly into participation.

A potential explanation for this disparity resides in the divergence between affective attachment and behavioural participation. Although members may feel emotional connection and relational acceptability in their congregations, participation is likely more significantly affected by structural, role-based, or motivating variables than by perceptions of belonging alone. Faith-based involvement frequently necessitates time availability, role clarity, leadership invitation, and alignment with congregational standards, characteristics that may function independently of perceived affiliation.

This explanation corresponds with research indicating that religious engagement is influenced by both relational attachment and the organisational dynamics and opportunity structures present within congregations (Son, 2024). Son, (2024) used longitudinal data to show a reciprocal association between service attendance and organizational participation, highlighting the mutual reinforcing of engagement practices over time. These findings emphasize the fluidity of religious involvement and show how persistent relational and behavioral variables influence continued participation. Because the present

study is cross-sectional, such reciprocal and time-dependent processes could not be captured, which may partly account for the absence of the association predicted by belongingness theory.

Both commitment-based social support and intrinsic motivation showed strong main impacts on engagement, in contrast to sense of belonging. It is clear that internalised motivation and relational reinforcement play significant roles in influencing participation since participants who reported higher levels of intrinsic motivation and stronger perceptions of social support tended to report distinct patterns of engagement. However, there was no significant moderating effect of social support or intrinsic drive on the connection between engagement and belonging.

These findings imply that although social and motivational support systems have an impact, they do not always increase or decrease the effect of belonging on engagement as first proposed. When considered collectively, the results suggest that motivational orientation and social reinforcement processes that function alongside, rather than through, belonging may be more important in driving involvement within faith-based groups than belonging as a direct antecedent. Sense of belonging may act as a background relational condition that enables other mechanisms like motivation, job assignment, or leadership engagement that more directly affect participation behaviours, rather than as a direct predictor of engagement.

CONCLUSION

This study improves understanding of participation in faith-based communities by examining the roles of belongingness, intrinsic motivation, and commitment-based social support. The findings indicate that sense of belonging was not significantly related to engagement, while intrinsic motivation and social support had significant direct effects but did not moderate the belonging–engagement relationship. These findings challenge the assumption that emotional connection alone promotes behavioral participation and highlight engagement as a process shaped by relational, motivational, and structural factors.

Therefore, faith-based leaders should combine inclusive relational environments with meaningful participation opportunities, supportive relationships, and strategies that strengthen intrinsic motivation. Future research should include more diverse populations, culturally adapt and pilot-test research instruments, and employ longitudinal or mixed-methods designs to clarify how belonging, motivation, social support, and engagement develop over time. Structural Equation Modeling may also be considered to verify the proposed relationships and provide a more comprehensive understanding of engagement within faith-based communities.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Sarom Mok contributed to the conceptualization, research design, data collection, data analysis, and preparation of the manuscript. Sothea Lim, Ramy Chhun, Hok Chour, and Chorvy Vong contributed to the development of the study, interpretation of the findings, review of the literature, and critical revision of the manuscript. All authors participated in reviewing and refining the final manuscript, approved the final version for publication, and agreed to be accountable for the accuracy and integrity of the work.

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