

FACTORS AFFECTING THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF STUDENTS AT ACADEMIC INSTITUTION

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ABSTRACT

Measuring of academic performance of students is challenging since students' performance are the product of socio-economic, psychological and environmental factors. This study investigates the factors affecting academic performance of students at College of Business of University Utara Malaysia located in Kedah State, Malaysia. A quantitative approach was used to collect the data in the selected area of study. Where, out of 135 sets of a questionnaire distributed, only 117 sets were completely returned and analyzed, yielding a response rate of 87.7%. This study revealed that teaching style, English language and communication, language assessment, students' academic stress, students' self-concept are all playing a significant role on the students' academic performance at College of Business, Universiti Utara Malaysia. As the students' academic stress, the study has concluded that pressure from parents and parents' involvement were significantly the most associated factors with students' academic performance.

Keyword: *Factors, Academic, Students, Performance, Colleges, University, Malaysia*

1. INTRODUCTION

There are number of factors that affecting the academic performance among the students of COB in UUM. Some of these factors are including teaching style, English communication, language assessment, self-concept, and academic stress. As we already know, all of students are from various school backgrounds. Because of this, we are curious to know what makes some students perform well and while others not? Before answering this question, we should first understand what does it mean by academic performance! According to a reporter from Cambridge University in (2003) stated that academic performance is frequently defined in terms of examination performance. From this reporter, it can be stated that performance either in tests or coursework and performance in examinations of undergraduate students could characterize the academic performance. Further, there was another a report on higher education performance, which was produced by the University of Minnesota in (2007) indicated that the most reliable predictor of student success in college is the academic preparation of students in high school. The study intends to focus on the students' performance at university level. As we may already know that students' academic performance is directly related to students' growth and development of knowledge in an educational situation where teaching and learning process takes place. Pandey (2008) defined academic as the performance of the students in the subject they study in the school. Academic performance determines the student's status in the class that gives students an opportunity to develop their talents, improve their grades and prepare for the future academic challenges. Some studies had been generated by some scholars identified and analyzed numerous factors which had significant affect on the students' academic performance in various institutions and centres of learning. For instance, studies by Siegfried and Fels (1979) and Anderson and Benjamin (1994) had identified factors like students' mastered skills and teaching style are playing a significant reol with students' performance while a research carried out by Devadoss & Foltz (1996) concluded that one of the affecting factors was parents' involvement. Another study by Aripin et al. (2008) stated students' self-concept and learning stress had positive relationship with the issue of students' performance any institution or University. As factors that have a significant effect on the students' academic performance in various settings. The utility of these studies lies in the need to undertake corrective measures that improve the academic performance of students. Obviously, Student's academic performance is a matter of concern to educators and students themselves. The ways in which an individual characteristically acquires retains and retrieves information are collectively referred to as his or her learning style (Felder and Henriques, 1995). Unfortunately, the way students acquire the information to perform well academically is too often ignored.

This study is assigned for the academic students. It can be assumed that not all the students are showing a lack in their academic performance level but only small portion of the students. Although, there have been so many efforts done regarding the student's academic performance yet there is still low level. Furthermore, even though the management of COB in UUM has provided many facilities, additional learning related to the subject and other supporting infrastructure to the student in order to enhance their student academic performance but there are still some deficiencies in their efforts where they still need some improvement and guidance. By the fact, the university is lack

of research in facing the problem among the student. The university did not properly survey the problem area in detail with experts. This can be the reason why the university still could not achieve their target in their student's performance. Though, the management has been giving additional program or relevant courses to the students in order to increase and enhance their student's productivity, but their performance still does not satisfy the UUM. For the study environment, College of Business (COB) of University Utara Malaysia (UUM) have been upgraded with air conditioner and ergonomic flexibility facilities to student but students still felt not very comfortable to do their work. Lastly, for the university culture, it can be said that the students are not involved in process of discussion even though there had been many soft skills programs conducted for their development and improvement. In short, we can say that COB UUM's students could not execute well their performance as expected by the university. Although the university has done so many efforts in improving the student academic performance, the student performance level is still the same, and there is not much improvement as expected by the university. Thus, UUM's vision towards becoming a prominent management university, however, might be slowed down due to low student academic performance. Therefore, this study attempts to find out the factors affecting the performance of students at the College of Business of University Utara Malaysia and it is also important to understand how the variables such as Language assessment, Students' Self-concept, English language and communication, teaching style, and students' academic stress which are affecting the students' academic performance of the College of Business at UUM.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Academic achievement or (academic) performance is the extent to which a student, teacher or institution has achieved their short or long-term educational goals (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Academic_achievement). This performance can be measured by many tools such CGPA, skills, etc. There are many empirical studies carried out to examine the factors affecting college students' performance. A research carried out by Ali et al. (2013) supported the above sentence by stating students' academic gain and learning performance is affected by numerous factor including gender, age, teaching faculty, students schooling, father/guardian social, economic status, residential area of students, medium of instructions in schools, tuition trend, daily study hour and accommodation as hostelrys or day scholar. It is believed that learning styles have a significant relationship with the academic performance (Rienties et al., 2012; Desmedt & Valcke, 2003). A study by Wenglinisky (2001) stated that many quantitative studies which focused specifically on teaching conformed to a similar pattern finding little relationship between teacher inputs and student' achievement. Therefore, it can be observed that teaching style have a direct impact on student's performance because teachers are the most individual that students believe because whatever input they got from their teachers, they will practice it. Canto-Herrera, & Salazar-Carballo (2010) indicated that there is a significant relationship between beliefs about constructivist teaching and each of the five categories of teaching styles of teachers of mathematics were found, and relationship between teaching style "delegator" and student academic achievement was found.

English language and Communication is also another important factor that has an impact on the students' performance. A study by Mosha (2014) revealed that students were highly motivated to learn English for future expectations such as local and international communication, academic advancement and employment prospects. However, students' performance was affected by shortage of English teachers and absence of teaching and learning materials. The findings showed that presence of under-qualified, untrained, and trained teachers in schools who were incompetent as a result they skipping to teach some difficult topics in the syllabus. Study findings also indicated that students' infrequent use of English language at school and home, large class size, teacher's responsibilities, poor conducive teaching and learning environment in the home support environment and poverty were contributing factors for English poor" (p.64). Besides that, Mushtaq & Khan (2012) found that students' performance depends on many factors such as learning facilities, gender and age differences, etc. that can affect student performance (Hansen, 2000). Harb and El-Shaarawi (2006) found that the most important factor with a positive effect on students' performance is student's competence in English. If the students have strong communication skills and have a strong grip on English, it increases the performance of the students. The performance of the student is affected by communication skills; it is possible to see communication as a variable which may be positively related to performance of the student in open learning" (p.2). Another factor to determine the students' performance is Language Assessment. Stevens et al. (2000) examined the relationship between language proficiency and student performance on content standardized tests, comparing the type of language assessed on language tests and the language used on content tests. Based on their findings, Stevens et al. (2000) argued that there is a need for the development of language proficiency assessments that measure students' academic language proficiency. Solnyshkina et al. (2015) said that the impact of the Language Assessment courses in Kazan Federal University piloted in 2012-2014 as part of implementation of ProSET was studied by the authors at four levels (reactions, learning changes, behaviour and results). Some positive changes were observed in students' views on language assessment" (p.1228).

Academic stress is one of the most significant factors responsible for students' academic performance is their academic stress. Lal (2014) justified that academic stress is mental distress with respect to some anticipated frustration associated

with academic failure or even unawareness to the possibility of such failure. Another a study by Bisht (1980) defined academic stress as a demand related to academics that tax or exceed the available resources (internal or external) as cognitively appeared by the student involved. According to her, academic stress reflects perception of individual's academic frustration, academic conflict, academic pressure and academic anxiety. A conducted study by Lal (2014) mentioned that "*academic stress is mental concerning some anticipated frustration associated with academic failure or even unawareness to the possibility of such failure*" (p.123). This academic stress happens because student has too many of things to take care, so for the consequences that this academic stress will affect their performances. Focusing on students' self-concept as another factor which has an influence on students' academic performance, past studies by (Bandura, 1997; Villarroel, 2001; Boulter, 2002) stated that self-concept is one of the most significant factors affecting the students' academic performance. Cokley (2000) defined academic self-concept as a student's view of his or her academic ability when compared with other students. Sanchez & Roda (2004) identified in their study that academic self-concept and measures of academic performances are having a close relationship. Self -concept means how someone thinks about herself or himself. Some of the past studies had proven that academic performance has a positive correlation between self-concept and their studies are accepted that a more positive self-concept is associated with higher levels of performance. For instance, Hansford and Hattie (1982) found a significant correlation between academic self-concept and students' performance in a study of junior high school students. Also, a study by Lyon and MacDonald (1990) found academic self-concept a significant predictor of the high performance of sixth-grade students. Zahra (2010) generated a study on self-concept and academic achievement to find the linkage between the two using a sample of 1500 female Bachelor's degree students of 15 degree colleges of Rawalpindi and Islamabad. The study included females only, who belonged to third and fourth year's students 100 from each the college. Her results for academic self-concept indicated that on average female' students had a positive academic self-concept. They also had a positive physical, social and general self-concept. DeFreitas & Rinn (2013) stated that overall academic self-concept is a cognitive and affective evaluation of the self that can influence actual academic performance. Gerardi (2009) did study of 98 first-year engineering students at City University of New York (CUNY), found that academic self-concept was the best predictor of academic success as measured by Grade Point Average (GPA) in minority and low socioeconomic status college students. Crawford (2013) found out in his study that students' self-concept influences their academic performance; however, the level of effort exerted by students in learning to a large extent contributes significantly to students' self-concept in boosting with the academic performance. To summarize the above review of literature, it can state that there exists a positive connection between teaching style, English language and communication, academic stress, language assessment, self-concept with students' academic performance. Thus, this study was aimed at investigating how these factors affecting academic performance of students at College of Business (COB) of University Utara Malaysia located in Kedah State, Malaysia.

3. RESEARCH METHOD\

A quantitative approach was designed to explain the prediction of English Language and Communication (ELC), Teaching Style (TS), Language Assessment (LA), Students' Academic Stress (AS), Students' Self-concept (SS) on the students' academic performance at College of Business, Universiti Utara Malaysia. A sample of 135 questionnaires was distributed 135 students from different schools at College of Business. Of these, only 117 sets were completely returned and analyzed, yielding a response rate of 87.7%. The approached students were briefed clearly about the questionnaire, and it took about 15 minutes to fill this questionnaire. The distributed questionnaires were filled by both local and international students at College of Business at Universiti Utara Malaysia. The constructs in this research questionnaire are using a five-point Likert scale to measure for independent variable and dependent variable. All measurement items are adopted from a study conducted by Omran et al. (2015) with some modification and adding few new items. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.0 was used for the data processing and statistical analyses.

4. RESULTS ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Table (1) presents the demographic factors of the respondents. All three categories; gender, degree level and student (Local/International) are explained through cross-tabulation. For the very first category of degree level; BSc has total 125 students out of which 105 were local, and 20 were international. From 105 local students 12 were males while 93 were females and from International students, 17 males and only 3 females who are holding a BSc degree. As per those who are holding MSs Degree, only one female from the Local community and 1 male member from the international community was obtained. For PhD degree holders, 3 local males and 7 females considered as key respondents while from international community, 4 students participated in this survey. Out of 142, 15 males and 101 females belong to local community while 21 males and 5 females belong to international community.

Table 1. A crosstabulation between gender, students' nationality and educational level

| Degree level | Gender | Students' nationality | | Total |
|--------------|--------|-----------------------|---------------|-------|
| | | Local | International | |
| BSc degree | Male | 12 | 17 | 29 |
| | Female | 93 | 3 | 96 |
| | | 105 | 20 | 125 |
| MSc degree | Male | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| | Female | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| PhD degree | Male | 3 | 3 | 6 |
| | Female | 7 | 1 | 8 |
| | | 10 | 4 | 14 |
| Total | Male | 15 | 21 | 36 |
| | Female | 101 | 5 | 106 |
| | | 116 | 26 | 142 |

Table (2) presents the findings for the crosstabulation of gender, age and student level. Based on the degree type, out of 142 in BSc type, 26 males are aged between 18-23 years, while 3 are in the range of 24-30 years old. As per female' gender, 88 females' students are aged between 18-23 years and only 10 of them are aged between 24-30 years doing the same degree. Concerning the MSc Degree, only 1 male and 2 females have provided involved in this study by providing their feedback on the given survey. However, their ages are ranged between 24-30 years. With regard to those holding a PhD degree, there were 6 males and 7 females are in age range of 18-23 years and only one female aged between of 24-30 years of age, doing her PhD.

Table 2. A crosstabulation between gender, age and educational level

| Degree Level | Gender | Age | | Total |
|--------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------------|-------|
| | | 18-23 years old | 24-30 years old | |
| BSc Degree | Male | 26 | 3 | 29 |
| | Female | 86 | 10 | 96 |
| | Sub Total | 112 | 13 | 125 |
| MSc Degree | Male | - | 1 | 1 |
| | Female | - | 2 | 2 |
| | Sub Total | - | 3 | 3 |
| PhD | Male | 6 | 0 | 6 |
| | Female | 7 | 1 | 8 |
| | Sub Total | 13 | 1 | 14 |
| Total | Male | 32 | 4 | 36 |
| | Female | 93 | 13 | 106 |
| | Sub Total | 125 | 17 | 142 |

Table (3) provides a summary of Mean values with their ranking for the overall teaching style key factors. The first factor is "Difficulty in Understanding" is among the top issues which are affecting the academic performance of the students. Its mean value is 4.19. The next factor is timely completion of class and students rank it at second and agree that lecture is ended on time-mean value is 4.01. the third factor is the timely arrival of the teacher in the class and it seems students are agreed that teacher is coming to the class on time. The fourth factor is showing the teaching viewpoint about the teaching methodology, and it appears to be ok as mean value is 3.90 near to agree point. The fifth factor is measuring "Information Enhancement" with the mean value of 3.61(near to agree on point) means that students are getting reasonable information from the lectures. While in factor 6th "timely completion of the course", students disagree with the point that there is a timely completion of the course by the teachers (mean value=2.23). The seventh-factor' measure "online learning" of the students and again they seem to disagree on this point that online learning is sufficient to provide the answers to their queries. The last factor measuring "willingness to teacher extra" has a mean value of 2.12 which seems students disagree with the point that teachers are all time ready to teach the

extra classes. From the overall stated findings, it is concluded that in teaching style there is a need for improvement in factors 1, 6, 7 and 8 which can improve academic performance of the students indirectly.

Table 3. Shows the ranking factors of Teaching Style that affecting student academic performance

| Items | Mean | Rank |
|---|------|------|
| There is a difficulty in understanding what explained if there is no clear link between the different parts of the lecture | 4.19 | 1 |
| Lecturer completes the course in time | 4.01 | 2 |
| Lecturer comes to the classroom in time | 3.96 | 3 |
| Students are satisfied with the teaching methods of the lecturers | 3.90 | 4 |
| Lecturer enhances the information of the students | 3.61 | 5 |
| Lecturer teaches according to the | 2.23 | 6 |
| The information provided by the lecturer on online learning website always is helping to find answers to any questions I have after a lecture | 2.19 | 7 |
| Lecturer teaches additional periods willingly | 2.12 | 8 |

Table (4) presents the outcome for the key factors of “English language and Communication”. As per the ranking of all factors, express issue (Mean=4.26) was on the top, convenience in discussion was ranked the second one (Mean=3.76), followed by vocabulary issue (mean=3.70). The fourth factor and fifth factors are explaining the world difficulty and understandability (Mean=3.63 & 3.50). While gap in understanding and overall English Language issue comes at 6th and 7th ranking. While the students are facing minor issue in spoken English. As per the stated findings, all the key factors need serious attention under the title of English Language and Communication.

Table 4. Shows the ranking factors of English Language and Communication that affecting student academic performance

| Items | Mean | Rank |
|--|------|------|
| Easily to understand the presented books, but facing difficulty in expressing things in my own words | 4.26 | 1 |
| Usually discussing the course material in own first language with friends | 3.76 | 2 |
| I have to use a dictionary all the time because my vocabulary is not good enough | 3.70 | 3 |
| The use of some words in project management make it harder to understand | 3.63 | 4 |
| Difficulty in understanding the presented books in the program | 3.50 | 5 |
| I understand some things, but there is a lot that I miss or cannot comprehend | 3.49 | 6 |
| Struggling for using a proper English language because my language is still not good enough for university level | 3.42 | 7 |
| Difficulty in expressing thoughts in spoken English | 3.08 | 8 |

Concerning the students’ academic stress, Table (5) shows that the factors “pressure from the parents to study” was ranked by the respondents as the first factor (mean=4.16), followed by parental involvement (mean=3.92) while time shortage and workload-stress link were ranked as the third one (mean=3.75). Another important factor which are causing the students’ academic stress was ranked by the respondents about their priorities and they are presented in Table (5) below.

Table 5. Ranking factors of students' academic stress that affecting student academic performance

| Items | Mean | Rank |
|--|------|------|
| Pressure from parents | 4.16 | 1 |
| Parents involvement | 3.93 | 2 |
| Time shortage | 3.75 | 3 |
| Workload-stress link | 3.75 | 3 |
| Competition Factor makes me work hard badly | 3.67 | 4 |
| Competition creates stress among us, academic students | 3.60 | 5 |
| Sleeping Issue | 3.57 | 6 |
| Complexity of work that makes me unable to understand it in a little time | 3.51 | 7 |
| My Academic stress at the beginning and middle semester goes from low to high and affect my academic performance | 3.46 | 8 |
| Increasing Strictness from parents | 3.42 | 9 |

Table (6) presents the key factors for "students' self-concept". For the class participation, students are agreed that they are playing their roles while responding in the class discussion (Mean= 4.22) and it was ranked as the first factor. The second-ranked factor was "my research skills are adequate" with (mean=4.14). For the level of comfort, speaking in class and efficient usage of time they seem to be ok (these responses are stating the point of "agree" on the scale). However, the major problem seems to be in the ranking factors of 8 and 9 which are explaining the point that students are not good to express their ideas with other (mean=2.42) and the level of skills (mean=2.12). So as for the students' concept level is concerned there is a great need to put the focus on factors 8 and 9 for the improvement of their academic performance.

Table 6. Shows the ranking factors of Students' self-concept that affecting student academic performance

| Items | Mean | Rank |
|---|------|------|
| I participate in class discussion | 4.22 | 1 |
| My research skills are adequate | 4.14 | 2 |
| I feel comfortable in a large class group | 4.13 | 3 |
| I feel comfortable speaking in front of the class | 4.11 | 4 |
| I make efficient use of time | 4.06 | 5 |
| I feel prepared enough for academic challenges | 3.90 | 6 |
| I am not afraid to be evaluated | 3.80 | 7 |
| I enjoy expressing ideas to others | 2.42 | 8 |
| I am confident I can master skills-competency | 2.12 | 9 |

5. CONCLUSION

This study was aimed at examining the main factors students' academic performance for both local and international students who are enrolled at College of Business at Universiti Utara Malaysia. The study was focused on five important independent variables namely English language proficiency and communication, academic stress, teaching style, methods of assessment and academic self-concept. Overall, this study revealed that these five variables are having a predictable positive relationship with students' academic performance in any academic institutions or organizations. A list of important items under each variable was included in the conducted survey, and the respondents were asked to rank their effecting priority under each variable with relation to the student' academic performance. About teaching style, the study concluded that factors like (difficulty in Understanding and timely completion of lecture) were the top effective factors for students' academic performance. Concerning the English language proficiency (Expression issue and convenience in discussion) were found to be the top ranked factors. As the students' academic stress, the study has concluded that pressure from parents and parents' involvement were significantly the most associated factors with students' academic performance. There are many limitations in this study that limit its generalizability. The study relied only on quantitative approach by just targeting students. Therefore, it will be suggested if mixed methods to be conducting in the next research with considering academic lecturers as well as this will provide a comprehensive justification for the factors affecting academic performance. Another limitation is the

sample size, the sample population in this current study was selected from one college (named college of business) amongst 3 colleges at the University and hence there is limited generalizability of our results.

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