

A Study on the Causes of the Weak Performance among the ex-Alamanda Students: Finding Ways for Academic Improvement

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Abstract

In July 2010, Faculty of Business Management received more than 500 students from Alamanda Campus. It has contributed to the rising number of the existing faculty students which has reached approximately 1500. The current academic performances of these students indicate that 40% of them obtain CGPA below 2.30. This figure indirectly contributes to the statistics of the students under P1 and P2 status. Concomitantly, this portrays the overall poor performance for Business Faculty. Even though the faculty “Kudup Akan Berkembang” Program (hereinafter KAB) could be one the ways to help them to be on track again in their studies, it is not a hundred percent guaranteed without knowing the root causes of the problem. In order to understand why the students are weak in their performance, a study is conducted and aimed at understanding what are the factors that contribute to this poor performance and how to improve the situation. Some suggestions will be given at the end of the discussion to be implemented by the PDCA (Plan, Do, Check and Act) faculty committee. It is hoped that with the analysis and the suggestion proposed, the students would be able to upgrade their academic performance and increase their inner drive to keep on improving as well.

Keywords: Motivation, Student Achievement, Academic Performance

Introduction

Students are the products of the university. Their performances are crucial and should be the main concern of the universities to fulfill the needs in the labour market. In the light of this issue, the Faculty of Business Management, UiTM Jengka, conducted this study to determine the factors that contribute to the poor performance of the undergraduate students specifically those from the Alamanda Campus as these students contribute to the biggest number of enrollment in the faculty. Indirectly their poor performance would affect the overall performance of the faculty.

Problem Statement

In July 2010, more than 500 business and banking students from Alamanda Campus have been transferred to Pahang Campus. They were moved to this campus as their former campus was closed down. Unfortunately, the academic performance of some of these students is quite poor whereby 40% of them are students with CGPA of below 2.3. Since the weak performance of these students would bring negative impact to the faculty academic performance, UiTM Pahang Faculty of Business Management is eager to seek information on the causes of weak performance of students transferred from Alamanda Campus and what can be done to overcome such poor performance.

Literature Review

Fundamentally, grade point average (GPA) is a commonly used indicator of academic performance in which a GPA of 3.0 or higher indicates good academic performance. Nevertheless, many factors contribute to the barriers for students to attain and maintain a high GPA that reflects their overall academic performance during their tenure in the university. These factors could be targeted by the faculty members in developing strategies to improve student learning and improve their academic performance.

Ho (2000) asserts that the academic achievement of students is related to the attitude of students towards the subject, their interests, perception of parental support, time, teachers' influence and socio-economic status. In addition, Womble (2003) stresses that test anxiety, time management, test competence, academic competence and study techniques are among the factors that contribute to an individuals' academic performance. Table 1 describes the definition of these factors.

Table 1: Definition of Factors That Contribute to an Individual's Academic Performance

Elements	Definition...
Test Anxiety	A set of responses like worry, depression, nervousness, task irrelevant cognitions, etc, to a class of stimuli arising from an individual's experience of assessment or testing (Rasor and Rasor,1998)
Time Management	Clusters of behavioral skill sets that are important in the organisation of study/course load (Siebert, 1980)
Test Competency	Reflections of how students cope with the amount of study material for examinations (Kleijn et al., 1975; Topman et al., 1992)
Academic Competence	Students' ability to manage their study load and is used to assess them if they are able to manage the study material in the curriculum (Kleijn et al., 1975)
Study Technique	Knowledge and application of effective study skills or techniques by students(Kleijn et al., 1975)

Devine (1991) indicates that in order to reduce stress levels, students can undergo variety of stress management programmes which help students to improve their academic performance. In addition, ability to manage time such as planning in advance, prioritising work, test preparation and adherence to the schedules contribute to better performance (Kirschenbaum, 1982). In addition, good time management and good study techniques also lead to higher academic performance (Powell, 2004).

Students tend to face difficulties associated with managing the amount of study material that they need to prepare for an examination (Kleijn et al., 1975). However, effective and strategic study techniques could overcome this problem and lead students to achieve a high GPA. Furthermore, another factor that influences student performance is academic competence. It is an indication of whether the curriculum is interesting enough for students to enjoy their classes (Kleijn et al., 1975). Academic competence has a direct relationship with students' academic performance. This denotes that a student with better academic competence would have better academic performance (Kleijn et al., 1975). Last but not least, according to Ewinyi (2005) personal and institutional reasons also add to the factors of low students' academic achievement in which personal reasons are related to intelligence, knowledge and abilities of the individual.

To sum up, early detection and understanding reasons of academic failure may help certain students perform better if adequate guidance on improvement is provided efficiently (Dills, 2006).

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are:

- i) To identify causes on weak performance among ex-Alamanda campus Business students.
- ii) To suggest ways in improving the students academic performance.

Methodology

A set of questionnaire was used to identify some information pertaining to weak performance among students who are exclusively from Alamanda Campus. This set of questionnaire contains a mixture of open-ended and close-ended questions such as the reasons that have contributed to their weak performance in order to get in depth information about certain related reasons. Independent variables used in this study are self-attitude, lecturer's involvement, friends influence, family problems and environment. The Cronbach- α of 0.62 obtained for the scale in the study indicated an acceptable level of internal reliability. A total of 88 students which involved both programmes – Diploma in Business Study (BM 111) and Diploma in Banking (BM 112) were randomly chosen and asked to participate in this study. Data received were then tabulated and analysed based on frequency, percentage and mean counts.

Findings

This section reports the findings of the study. 34% of male respondents and 66% of female respondents were involved in this study. This is shown in Figure 1 below. This is commonly based on the university admission which is dominated by the female students.

Figure 1: Percentage of Gender among Respondents

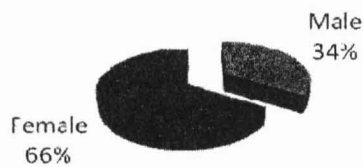
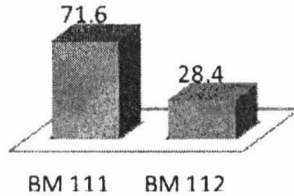


Figure 2 shows that majority of the respondents involved in this study is from BM 111 program which is 71.6% whereas another 28.4% is from BM 112 program. Majority of the students who is weak in their academic performance is from BM 111 program.

Figure 2: Percentage of Respondents According to Program



As can be seen from Table 2 below, 50% of the respondents is from Selangor and Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur. Others are from all over Malaysia. It can be said that majority of the students who is weak in their studies come from these two states.

Table 2: Percentage and Frequency of the Origin of Respondents

		Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Johor	9	10.2
	Melaka	4	4.5
	Negeri Sembilan	4	4.5
	Selangor	28	31.8
	WP KL	16	18.2
	Pahang	3	3.4
	Perak	6	6.8
	Kedah	4	4.5
	Perlis	1	1.1
	Terengganu	5	5.7
	Pulau Pinang	2	2.3
	Kelantan	4	4.5
	Total	86	97.7
Missing	System	2	2.3
Total		88	100.0

Causes of Weak Performance

Table 3 shows the causes of weak performance among respondents according to the highest mean to the lowest. There are many causes which are related to the normal problems faced among students in higher education. Students were asked to put the answer which is related to them according to the Likert Scale numbered 1 – Strongly Disagree, 2 – Disagree, 3 – Do Not Know, 4 – Agree and 5 – Strongly Agree. The findings are as below.

Table 3: Causes of Weak Performance according to the Mean

No	Causes	Mean
1	I have been lazy.	4.1
2.	I have always done last minute work.	3.5
3.	I have not focused on my studies.	3.5
4.	I have not seriously studied for my final examination.	3.4
5.	I have not fully understood the lecture.	3.3
6.	I like to have fun with my friends.	3.3
7.	I have been quite weak in calculation subject.	3.2
8.	I have been influenced by negative attitude of my friends.	3.1
9.	I dislike my lecturer.	2.9
10.	I have been quite weak in reading subject.	2.7
11.	Alamanda Campus is not suitable for me.	2.6
12.	I dislike the programme offered.	2.6
13.	I had insomnia problem.	2.4
14.	I have fallen in love with someone.	2.4
15.	I have had family problems.	1.9

It is evident that the main cause of the weak performance among students is because of their lazy attitude which scores the highest mean (4.1). Furthermore, it was found that having family problems has not been the cause of their weak performance in studies with the mean of 1.9.

This statement can be supported with the findings from Table 4 below. It was found that a total of 81.8% of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed that the lazy attitude had caused their poor academic performance.

Table 4: Percentage of the Lazy Attitude among Respondents

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	1	1.1
	Disagree	8	9.1
	Do Not Know	7	8.0
	Agree	39	44.3
	Strongly Agree	33	37.5
	Total	88	100.0

It is proven that there are two causes which are interrelated to the main cause. As they liked to apply the last minute study (3.5), it had also made them cannot focus on their study (3.5). It can be shown in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Percentage of the Last Minute Study among Respondents

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	6	6.8
	Disagree	19	21.6
	Do Not Know	10	11.4
	Agree	32	36.4
	Strongly Agree	20	22.7
	Total	87	98.9
Missing	System	1	1.1
Total		88	100.0

It was found that 59% of the respondents replied that they agreed and strongly agreed on the statement of last minute study has led to their poor academic performance. On the other hand, only 28% of the respondents put disagree and strongly disagree as the causes of the problem.

Table 6: Percentage of lack of Focus in Studies among Respondents

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	3	3.4
	Disagree	20	22.7
	Do Not Know	16	18.2
	Agree	42	47.7
	Strongly Agree	7	8.0
	Total	88	100.0

In Table 6, a total of 55.7% of the respondents felt that they did not focus on their studies compared to 26.1% who disagreed and strongly disagreed with the statement.

Table 7: Percentage of Weak in Calculation Subjects among Respondents

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	12	13.6
	Disagree	22	25.0
	Do Not Know	10	11.4
	Agree	28	31.8
	Strongly agree	16	18.2
	Total	88	100.0

Another important finding from the study is the cause of weak in calculation subjects among them (Table 7). Majority of the respondents (50%) felt that they were very weak in calculating subjects which has led to the poor academic performance especially for two papers taken in the previous semester namely Financial Accounting (ACC 115) and Business Mathematic (MAT 140). A number of students failed the two papers and this had influenced their CGPA grade which is below 2.00.

Table 8: Percentage of Did Not Seriously Study for Final Exam among Respondents

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	5	5.7
	Disagree	23	26.1
	Do Not Know	9	10.2
	Agree	36	40.9
	Strongly agree	15	17.0
	Total	88	100.0

Table 8 indicates that 57.9% of the respondents stated that they agreed and strongly disagree which they did not seriously study for their final exam. While 31.8% disagree and disagree with the statement.

Table 9: Percentage of Feedback on the Important Role of an Academic Advisor

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Yes	80	90.9
	Not Sure	8	9.1
	Total	88	100.0

Table 9 demonstrates that 90.9% of the students felt that the role of an academic advisor was very important to them. This shows that the students really need someone who could help and advise them in improving their academic performance.

Discussion

From all the results, it is shown that the main cause of the poor performance among students is from their own personal negative attitude which is lazy. This statement is significant with the findings from Table 5, 6 and 8 which clearly indicates that students' negative attitude in studies can lead to the poor academic performance. It is understood that the location of the campus which is situated in the middle of the city has influenced the students to have their teenagers' social life without concerning about their studies. This factor is believed to have caused students not to seriously prepare for their final exam and could not focus on their studies.

On the other hand, some of the students admitted that they had problems with calculation subjects namely Business Mathematics and Financial Accounting (taken in part 1 and part 2) compared to the reading subjects which had led to their poor results in these two subjects in previous semester. This is proven from the mean demonstrates in Table 7 above. This reason indirectly has led to their low CGPA as well.

Based on the findings, there are some suggestions given to the faculty to help students in their studies. The role of the Academic Advisor which indirectly refers to the Mentor (in Faculty of Business Management) is extremely important. It starts with the first step which is explaining the objectives to be achieved in their study. Students have to be clearly advised regarding their academic planning and their future within the 3 years of the programme and the consequences of getting low grades. It is hoped that students will know about what is expected from them which indirectly makes them realise that they have no choice except to struggle in their study and change their bad attitude. The mentor has to recommend them the best way to perform well in their studies especially in improving themselves in the calculation subjects which they are clearly weak in. Besides, the Faculty with the help from the Mathematic and Statistic Department and the Faculty of Accounting need to keep on collaborating in organising programmes and activities to help students in these calculation subjects. The aim of the programme is to suggest the best way for the students to study for Mathematics and Accounting subjects.

Secondly, the mentor should personally meet their students and guide them honestly to overcome their negative attitudes. These students need to be treated as a friend. It should be remembered that teenagers do not prefer to be ordered and directed all the time. They will listen only if they feel comfortable with their mentor. So, the mentor should avoid from becoming an authoritative person but make students feel that their mentor is one of the important persons in their life. Students should be given an ample time to think about the truth in the real academic life so that they will realise that there is an urgent need to change and make the turning point in their lives.

Conclusion

The results of this study has highlighted the importance of evaluating individual personal factors such as laziness, last minute study, could not focus in study, weak in calculation subjects as well as did not seriously study for final examination among the students. These factors are directly related to how students cope with the amount of study material for examinations (test competency), students' ability to manage their study load (academy competency) as well as the knowledge and application of effective study skills or techniques by students (study techniques). Last but not least, time management is also a significant factor in evaluating students' academic success.

The bottom line is that test competence and academic competence have been important factors associated with academic performance. These factors need to be understood further in order to help the students in enhancing their academic performance. Indeed, the collaboration effort with the Mathematic and Statistic Department and Faculty of Accounting need to be prolonged in order to help students in the calculation subjects. Furthermore, efficient counseling services regarding these techniques together with stress management programs could also assist students in achieving academic success.

This study is subject to several limitations. First, the result of analysis did not indicate in detail each variable given as the questions are not based from any well-developed questionnaire. It is realised that there are some other important questions which were not included. Second, this study is made specifically for the ex-Alamanda students which the findings are only relevant to them. There is no comparison study made between them and the business students from the main campus.

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