

An Assessment of the Readiness in Pursuing Diploma among Pre Diploma Students in Universiti Teknologi MARA Pahang

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the readiness of the pre diploma students in pursuing diploma in Universiti Teknologi MARA(UiTM) Pahang. It is essential for potential diploma students to be ready with the academic involvement in a higher learning institution like UiTM. Pre diploma students in UiTM can be grouped into two separate fields namely commerce and science with different course duration. However, this study will only concentrate on pre diploma commerce students due to some limitations. This exploratory study will employ a survey design involving convenience sampling and data will be analyzed using descriptive statistics. The findings will be beneficial to academic staffs and policy makers in designing and implementing efficient pre diploma programmes.

Keywords: *readiness, pre diploma students, commerce*

Introduction

The philosophy of Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) states that “every individual has the ability to attain excellence through the transfer of knowledge and assimilation of moral values so as to become professional graduates capable of developing knowledge, self, society and nation.” This philosophy shows that UiTM believes that each and every individual has the capability to achieve academic excellence. In essence, UiTM is performing its corporate social responsibility by offering pre diploma programmes to potential students who have achieved low grades in Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM). Here, education could provide a brighter future for these students, as found by Baum and Ma (2007) in their study that suggested positive correlation between higher levels of education and higher earnings. As such, obtaining a college education is perceived to fulfill both goal and value on students today (Wimberley and Noeth, 2005).

According to Sirin (2005), opportunities should be given to students who come from low socioeconomic background, as parents’ socioeconomic status has been proven to give a strong impact on students’ academic achievement. Many of the low income earners (those parents who work as fisherman, farmer, rubber tapper or any other low-paid job) could not afford to send their children for additional tuition, private college or any other tertiary education. As a result many of these students came out as low achievers and their true potential are not realized. This is supported by Baum and Ma (2007), when they found that students whose parents went to college are significantly more likely to go to college themselves than those whose parents did not go to college. Furthermore, children of college graduates display higher levels of school readiness indicators than children of parents who did not graduate from college.

Interestingly, the requirement to enroll, particularly in Pre Diploma Commerce programmes in UiTM, is to obtain a minimum of three credits including Bahasa Melayu and to pass Maths and English for the course duration of one semester (UiTM Pahang, 2011). According to a personal communication with the pre diploma (Commerce) former Programme Head, Puan Roslilee Abdul Halim, approximately 80% of these students will successfully pursue their study to the next level. In addition, problems do arise as these students are labeled as very weak, lack basic knowledge, low self-esteem, lack confidence, very reserved kind of people, and sometimes misbehave. This has raised some issues on their readiness to pursue their diploma level. Therefore, this paper will demonstrate the unequivocal value for students to have readiness level before pursuing to diploma programme and to suggest to UiTM the corrective actions that can be adopted.

College Readiness

College readiness can be defined as the level of preparation a student needs to enroll and succeed (without remediation) at a postsecondary institution that offers a higher level of education (Conley, 2009). In order for students to be able to cope and adapt to new learning challenges (and eventually perform academically), they should have some degree of readiness. Apart from that, three critical variables in the process of change readiness stressed by Walinga (2008) are appraisal, focus and perceived control. In contrast, Greene and Forster (2003) highlighted that in order to be “college ready”, students must pass three crucial hurdles: they must graduate from high school, they must have taken certain courses in high school that colleges require for the acquisition of necessary skills, and they must demonstrate basic literacy skills. Therefore, it is vital for the students to make changes before pursuing a higher educational level. This change process is actually referred to as “an individual and group sense-making process, taking place in a social context that is the product of constant and ongoing human production and interaction in organizational settings” (George & Jones, 2001).

Duncan et al. (2007) investigated the association between three main elements of school readiness (school entry academic, attention, and socio emotional skills) to later academic achievement. They identified that the strongest predictors of later achievement are school-entry math, followed by reading, and attention skills. However, measures of socio emotional behaviors, including internalizing and externalizing problems and social skills, were found insignificant to later academic performance, even among children with relatively high levels of problem behavior. The patterns of association were found similar on both gender and socioeconomic backgrounds. Similar cases can be seen in community colleges in the United States where they have high enrollments of low-income and minority students. The research showed that 72% of their students needed at least one remedial math course, and after three years, only 23% of those students had successfully completed the remedial math sequence (McClenney, 2009).

Byrd and Macdonald (2005) explored the college readiness from the perspectives of older first-generation college students who transferred from community colleges. They found that it is life experiences that contribute to academic skills, time management, goal focus, and self-advocacy. In this context, Murray (2011) suggested that high school should be a gateway to a better life, not as gatekeeper. It is gathered that the teaching and learning process are not only the matter, but students self learning is also one of the perspectives that should be in the discussion of readiness in pursuing diploma program among pre-diploma students. Krouse and Krouse (1981) as cited in Zimmerman (1994), explained the importance of students to control themselves. They reasoned that underachievement will arise that relate to the students who fail to control themselves effectively. With the different environments such as campus life, classroom and examination compared to secondary school, pre-diploma students are expected to fit accordingly to this course. They must be able to compete and perform well in their studies in order to further their studies to diploma level.

Research Methodology

This survey was designed to measure the readiness in pursuing diploma among pre diploma commerce students in UiTM Pahang. All items were measured using five-point Likert scales that were anchored from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Respondents were informed that if they did not wish to proceed, they could stop at any time they wanted. They were also informed that all data provided would be treated strictly confidential and that anonymity would be preserved.

Survey questions were provided in English in order to ensure better understanding among respondents and to avoid misinterpretation of terms and meanings if translated in Bahasa Melayu (Malay Language). The questionnaire was divided into four sections. Section A is on the motivational level, whereas Section B is on the readiness towards current programme (pre diploma). Meanwhile, Section C concentrates on the readiness towards diploma programme and Section D specifies on the personal demographic of the respondents.

A total of 200 questionnaires were administered using convenience sampling and 185 completed questionnaires were returned. Data were then entered into Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 18. The analysis started with the summary of motivational level, readiness towards current and diploma programme and personal demographics.

The frequencies and percentages were then computed to analyze respondents' profile in terms of age and gender. The overall profile of respondents was analyzed using descriptive analysis such as means and standard deviation for each variable obtained. There are many negative skewness values in the three tables (Table 2, Table 3 and Table 4) that indicate a clustering of scores at the high end. Skewness is not an essential part in the analysis as the survey has a large sample of 185. This is supported by Tabachnick and Fidell (2007) as "with reasonably large samples, skewness will not make a substantive difference in the analysis".

Findings and Analysis

This research used questionnaire to gather information from prospective respondents. As discussed earlier, 200 forms were distributed and 185 responded that contributed to 93.5% of response rate.

Table 1: Summary of Personal Demographic

<i>Personal Demographic Variables</i>	<i>Categories</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
Age	18	167	90.3
	19	10	5.4
	20	8	4.3
	Total	185	100%
Gender	Female	136	73.5
	Male	49	26.5
	Total	185	100%

A total of 185 respondents have participated in the survey and most of them belong to the 18 years of age group (Table 1). This indicated that they have just completed their SPM examination. The number of female respondents was higher than the male respondents with 136 (73.5%) to 49 (26.5%) respectively.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Motivational Level

	N	Mean	SD	Skewness	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error
I like to study in UiTM	185	4.66	.68	.18	.18
I like to make new friends	185	4.28	.78	-1.01	.18
I am willing to work hard	185	3.99	.78	-.55	.18
I have self confidence	185	3.74	.76	-.04	.18
I am a good student	185	3.69	.88	.12	.18
I can perform well in my studies	185	3.69	.81	-.14	.18
I have self esteem	185	3.49	.72	.05	.18
Valid N (listwise)	185				

Table 2 indicated the result for motivational level. It showed that the respondents like to study in UiTM with the highest mean of 4.66 and they also like to make new friends with 4.28. The pre diploma students are willing to work hard with 3.99 and have self confidence with 3.74. The respondents also believed that they are good students (3.69), can perform well in their studies (3.69) and have self esteem (3.49). It showed that the respondents have high motivational level to proceed to the next level of obtaining a diploma. As the respondents were from the Faculty of Business Management, it is believed that they are keen to work in related area as what they are studying now. As cited in Wimberley and Noeth (2005), students indicate that they want to attend college and pursue careers in professional fields such as business, computer science, teaching and medicine. This finding also confirmed that the pre diploma students are motivated, have self confidence and self esteem to further their studies to the diploma level.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for Readiness Towards Current Programme

	N	Mean	SD	Skewness	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error
My lecturers are very helpful during my studies	185	4.45	.71	-1.36	.18
My classmates are very helpful during my studies	185	4.15	.85	-1.36	.18
I can cope with the programme that I am taking now	185	3.76	.79	-.54	.18
The course is challenging	185	3.64	.83	-.16	.18
The subjects during this programme are difficult	185	3.22	.91	.03	.18
I have problem when classes are conducted in English	185	3.16	1.14	-.17	.18
I have problem in learning calculation subject(s)	185	3.14	1.09	-.02	.18
I have problem in learning theoretical subject(s)	185	3.09	.92	-.13	.18
Valid N (listwise)	185				

Table 3 also confirmed that the respondents agreed that their lecturers and classmates are very helpful during their studies with mean value of 4.45 and 4.15 respectively. The National Research Council (2003) stated that, an educator seems to observe a good feedback in the classroom if assessments are conducted with proper accountability. They also can cope with the pre diploma programme that they are undertaking now (3.76). However, they felt that the course is challenging (3.64). Most of the respondents thought that the subjects in this programme are difficult with mean value of 3.22. In addition, they have problem when classes are conducted in English (3.16), learning calculation subject(s), with

mean value of 3.14, as well as having problem in learning theoretical subject(s) which has a mean value of (3.09).

Conley (2007, p. 1) has mentioned that “research shows a mismatch between high school preparation and college expectations”. Conley (2007) further explained that transition to college is difficult for students who achieved low grades in Maths, Science or language arts. Thus, this fundamental difference will not ensure that they are prepared for the academic demands of college. Due to the constraints particularly in English and Mathematics, it is proven that this issue is prevalent in higher institution like UiTM. In another context, Sue Lin (2006) argued that positive motivation and attitude toward learning English in UiTM can be developed by using Microsoft Power Points.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics for Readiness Towards Diploma Programme

	N	Mean	SD	Skewness	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error
I am ready to pursue to diploma level	185	4.25	.84	-1.13	.18
I am ready to meet new friends next semester	185	4.23	.80	-.82	.18
I can complete the diploma programme within 3 years	185	4.21	.86	-1.03	.18
The diploma programme is challenging	185	4.15	.80	-.84	.18
I am ready to meet new lecturers next semester	185	4.10	.85	-1.00	.18
I am ready to learn new subjects	185	4.07	.86	-.81	.18
I am ready to work hard	185	4.05	.86	-.52	.18
Valid N (listwise)	185				

The result in Table 4 showed that the pre diploma students are overwhelmingly ready to further their diploma level with a high mean value of 4.25. They are also ready to meet new friends (4.23) and are positive that they can complete the diploma programme within 3 years (4.21). Most of the respondents are expecting the diploma programme to be challenging, with a mean value of 4.15. The respondents are also ready to meet their new lecturers (4.10) and to learn new subjects (4.07). Above all, they are ready to work hard with a mean value of 4.05. These findings are supported by Conley (2007) that emphasized on college courses require students to be independent, self reliant learners who recognize when they are having problems and know how to seek help from professors, fellow students or other sources.

Conclusion

The results of this study showed that overall, the pre diploma commerce students from the Faculty of Business Management are ready to pursue their diploma level although most of them are having difficulties in learning calculation and theoretical subjects. With this, it is necessary that UiTM should take early planning steps to help these students to reach their goals. Furthermore, this study clearly shows that the respondents are eager to start their diploma education. Thus, findings of this study alert educators and the policy makers in UiTM to develop a diploma readiness plan that serves as a road map that is

flexible and always open to revision. This is to ensure that the students, particularly the pre diploma students have ample time to consider and explore their diploma education.

Pre diploma programmes can be considered as a stepping stone before embarking to the diploma level and the students must be equipped with all aspects including academic and non-academic perspectives to become diploma ready. Taking quality learning as an example, it is expected that capability approaches to learning can be adopted (Syed Marzuki, 2003; Syed Marzuki & Abdullah, 2006). In general, UiTM should be aware that it is essential to help make diploma readiness a reality for all pre diploma students.

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