THE INFLUENCE OF NEW SYLLABUS AND FACTORS AFFECTING STUDENT'S ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the impact on the new syllabus towards the students' academic performance and to investigate the factors such as study habits, study self-concept, stress, and English Language and Communication (ELC) affecting the students' academic performance on Fundamentals of Management course. A total of 243 respondents from the Diploma in Accountancy UiTM Pahang Jengka Campus has participated in this study who were first semester students. A questionnaire survey was employed and descriptive analysis was conducted to analyze the data by using SPSS version 21. The results of this study discovered that the faculty is unable to sustain the 0% failure rate as compared to the previous semester due to modifications to the syllabus. The self-study concept indicated as the most significant factors that contribute to the students' academic performance with the overall mean score is 3.36. The study also revealed that study habits, stress, and ELC are important factors in determining students' academic performance in this course. This study is expected to assist the university in formulating and revising the syllabus in line with the students' ability and understanding of this course. Also, it can provide a guideline and control mechanism especially for the lecturers in the teaching and learning process to ensure the course will be delivered excellently which will lead to improving students' academic performance.

Keyword: Academic performance, Self-study concept, Study habits, Syllabus.

Introduction

The Fundamentals of Management (MGT162) is a compulsory course that needs to be taken by Diploma in Accountancy students at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Pahang Jengka Campus. Before the new syllabus was introduced, this course was taken by the second-semester students' who had a foundation knowledge in management courses. Previously, the Diploma in Accountancy students need to take two management courses throughout their study; Introduction to Management (MGT153) course in the first-semester and MGT162 in the second semester. Nevertheless, starting from the Academic Session of September 2019 to January 2020, the new syllabus for this course was introduced whereby the first semester

students of Diploma in Accounting need to take the MGT162 with some modifications towards the syllabus. Many subtopics were removed from this course in line with the suitability of students who may lack basic knowledge on the management course especially for students who are from the science stream, arts stream, and religion stream during their secondary school. Also, the MGT153 course was removed from the Diploma in Accountancy program study plan.

Usually, a new syllabus is introduced to adapt to the current situation as well as to suit the level of knowledge and understanding of the student who is taking the course. It is also a guide to proceed in the way of learning as it contains the course structure and assignments, exams, review sessions, and other activities required for students to learn the course. Lecturers can also use the syllabus as a planning tool in the teaching and learning process. An easy-to-understand syllabus may improve students' understanding which in turn helps to increase students' academic performance. As the syllabus is a key element for students in their learning process, it is important to ensure that the new syllabus is well organized, comprehensive, and easy to understand for achieving quality teaching and learning. Generally, most of the Diploma in Accountancy students have an excellent result at SPM level and high English proficiency. Therefore, there should not be a problem for students to understand the terms used in this course since the content is delivered completely in the English language. However, some studies have found that the syllabus changes can jeopardize the students' excellent results (Nakhanu, 2017; Sharma, Stewart, Wilson, & Gökalp, 2013). This is because the changes made do not correspond to the current situation and level of ability of the students. Therefore, the purpose of this study is 1) to examine the impact on the new syllabus towards the students' academic performance whether they can retain a 0% failure rate as a previous semester, and 2) to investigate the factors such as study habits, study self-concept, stress, and English Language and Communication (ELC) affecting the students' academic performance on this course. This study is expected to assist the university in formulating and revising the syllabus in line with the students' ability and understanding of this course. Besides, it can provide a guideline and control mechanism especially for the lecturers in the teaching and learning process to ensure the course will be delivered excellently which will lead to improving students' academic performance.

Literature Review

The new syllabus and academic performance
The syllabus is "a list of the topics, books, etc. that students should study in a particular subject at school or college" (Oxford Learners Dictionary, 2020). It is an outline and summary of topics to be covered in an education or training course. The use of a syllabus is crucial in facilitating lecturers to plan their lessons in ensuring the teaching and learning process goes smoothly as scheduled. It can also help students to find out the content of the course and ongoing assessments they will need to take throughout the semester. Hence, it can enable them to plan their study efficiently to get better academic performance. Many studies

have been conducted related to the new syllabus and academic performance. Sharma et al. (2013) found that there is a relationship between the new syllabus and students' academic performance in physics subject. Besides, Nakhanu (2017) investigated the influence of syllabus changes in Mathematics in Kenya and discovered that it has a significant effect on student performance. Vergel, Quintero, Restrepo, Fonseca, Santos, and Oviedo (2018) also examined the influence of modification curriculum designs on students' failure rates in medical schools in Colombia. However, the result shows that there is no significant relationship between the changes in the syllabus with students' academic performance.

Study self-concept and academic performance

The relationship between self-concept and academic achievement in the psychological literature is much discussed, it showed that students who are excel in school also good in study self-concept (Omran & Saleh, 2019; Soleymanpoor, Nazari, Kohi, Farahbakhsh, & Rudy, 2017). Also, Kumari and Chamundaeswari (2013), claimed that there is a significant and positive relationship between self-concept and academic achievement of students in different categories of schools followed by different systems of education at the higher secondary level. They concluded in the study that there is a significant and positive relationship between self-concept and academic achievement of students at the higher secondary level. There is a significant relationship between components of susceptibility and competence with academic achievement. Parents and teachers must raise self-esteem in the students using appropriate methods. Doodman, Zadeh, and Changizi (2017) stated a positive relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement, people with high self-esteem were far better in the study progress. According to Rady, Kabeer, and El-Nady (2016), it is recommended to implement a psycho-educational program formal and informal curriculum for all parents, teachers to develop students' self-esteem and self - confidence. On top of that, Aryana (2010), highlighted school authorities especially counselors and teachers should aware of students' self - esteem and academic achievement because their failures are a result of effort rather than abilities. So, they probably have greater persistence to overcome failures rather than develop helpless attitudes.

English language and academic performance

There are many studies on the relationship between academic performance and English language skills in higher education and concluded empirically that there is a correlation between language competency and academic achievement (Li, Chen & Duanmu, 2010). The English language has been one of the most widely used medium of communication and instruction among many countries (Bachore 2015; Haghdoost, Kashanian, Maleki, & Sadeghi, 2013). According to Milton (2016), all the teaching, learning, and assessment processes in India are preferably done in English. The English language has also been practiced in classroom activities and examinations, so they need to acquire it. Furthermore, Ali, Lemma, and Motbaynor (2019) stated that it is good to revisit and revise the quality of English language subjects taught at primary and secondary schools. But if students who have had studied in regional language and had little exposure to English learning are likely to suffer from academic stress due to lack of expected English ability (Milton, 2016). Aina, Ogundele, and Olanipekun (2013) claimed language proficiency in English is significantly

related to academic performance. Academic subjects like Science, Mathematics, and English often require the use of language functions. The more language functions with which students are adept, the more effective their thinking can be. Racca and Lasaten (2016) also agreed that the more students are proficient with the English language, the more they are likely to perform well in their academic subjects. Besides, a study Omran and Saleh (2019) also exposed that there is a relationship between stress and academic performance. The result of their study revealed that most of the respondents were lack of English proficiency which will lead to lower academic performance.

Stress and academic performance
The effects of psychological factors like stress on academic performance have been extensively investigated by the previous study (Mansour, Ayman, Dawani & Hania, 2008; Ramlee, Osman, Salahudin, Yeng, Ling, & Safizal, 2016; Zajacova, Lynch & Espenshade, 2005). A high level of stress is also associated with reduced self-esteem among college students (Edwards, Burnard, Bennett, & Hebden, 2010). According to Alyami, Melyani, Al Johani, Ullah, Alyami, Sundram, Hill, and Henning (2017), generally, the study indicated that aspects of grade achievement are associated with self-esteem, academic self-efficacy, and perceived stress. Many studies relating to stress conducted in different countries revealed different results. Omran and Saleh (2019) did a study towards 135 undergraduate students at University Utara Malaysia and found that there is a relationship between stress and academic performance. There are many studies related to stress and academic performance in various countries. For example, Hong, Lee, Grogan-Kaylor, and Huang (2011) discovered that students in Korea are under the strong pressure of examinations. This stressful university life puts students at risk for unhealthy behavior by using alcohol, tobacco, and drug abuse. The students may also develop unhealthy eating habits by skipping meals due to studying. In Malaysia, a cross-sectional study conducted by (Teh, Ngo, Zulkifli, Vellasamy & Suresh, 2015) has found that the prevalence of stress among undergraduate students in that country is severe. Shkulaku (2015) stated the workload of undergraduate study with more than five subjects per semester, work on the assignment, group project and examinations identified are causing academic stress in Albania. Students in India with academic stress are also having negative attitudes because of various reasons, such as career development and high expectation of academic results (Ray, Halder & Goswami, 2012).

Study habits and academic performance
Study habits are strategies used to acquire knowledge, skill, and idea among learners. According to Crede (2008), study habits that consist of good study routines include the frequency of a student involved in a studying session, revisiting learning materials, self-assess, practice in describing materials, and studying in a conducive environment is one of the determinants that ease the study process. An emphasis given towards study habits is based on theories that indicate an improvement in academic performance among students is through a good study habit. Many researchers revealed that there is a significant relationship between good study habits and academic achievement (Alimohamadi, Deghani, Almasi, Ashtarani, Jonbakhsh, Paymard & Khalil, 2018; Akpan & Salome, 2015; Chamundeswari, Sridevi & Kumari, 2014; Ebele & Olofu, 2017). Also, having good study habits skills such as note-

taking, consistently studying, and being organized for tests while eliminating distractions from television or home phone calls can lead to good academic performance (Tschumper, 2006). Furthermore, a study by Cernal and Pavliushchenko (2015) stated that study habits are a major contributor to academic achievement. The findings of this study also show that cultural aspects in one place can influence study habits and thus affect academic achievement. This proves that study habits are a value that can be instilled in students. Besides, a study conducted by Benwari and Nemine (2014) discovered that study habits including intensive reading, accomplishing homework, and assignment positively affect the academic performance of Economics students in senior secondary schools in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. Also, studying with friends and others and a good environment facilitating students' learning process. Moreover, research conducted by Hart and Keller (2005) in Hong Kong stated that students have to bear the utmost obligation towards their low academic performance due to low motivation, inappropriate study habit patterns, and inattentiveness to the school work. Alos, Caranto, and David (2015) also did a study towards 74 fourth-year nursing students in the Philippines and revealed that study habits have a positive influence on academic performance This finding shows that there is a direct relationship between study habits and academic performance.

Research Methodology

This section outlines the research design and approaches to accomplish the research objectives. The population for this study comprises of Diploma in Accountancy students UiTM Pahang Jengka Campus. A total of 243 students who are in their first semester participated in this study. A questionnaire survey that is designed based on previous literature is used as the research instrument in this study. This approach is employed as it is considered to be an effective approach in analyzing large samples and it permits respondents to express their views without being influenced by others. The questionnaire is developed to obtain all information needed to achieve the objective of this study. The questionnaire was structured into 2 sections; section A and B. Section A was designed to measure the factors that contribute to students' academic performance which include study habits, study self -concept, stress, and English Language and Communication (ELC). A 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) was used. For each statement, respondents were required to indicate their level of agreement with the statements. The input for the statements was derived from Omran and Saleh (2019), Alos et al. (2015), and Ramlee et al. (2015). Section B was designed to obtain the demographic information of the respondents. The data were analyzed using SPSS. A descriptive analysis was conducted to analyze the data.

Result and Discussion

Demographic Profiles

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

	Item	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	74	30.5
	Female	169	69.5
Ethnicity	Malay	243	100
	Others	0	0.0
Religion	Muslim	243	100
	Others	0	0.0
Age	18-21	242	99.6
	22-25	1	0.4
Family income	< RM2000	58	23.9
	RM2000- RM4000	73	30.0
	RM4001- RM6000	48	19.8
	> RM6000	64	26.3

Table 1 demonstrates that 30.5% of the respondents were male whereas 69.5% were female. All of the respondents were Malay and Muslim. The majority of the respondents were between 18 to 21 years old since they were intake by using SPM certificate. Most of the respondents were from B40 family income which means below than or equal to RM4000 per month (53.9%), followed by above RM6000 (26.3%) and between RM4001 to RM6000 were the least (19.8%).

New syllabus and academic performance

Table 2: Final Examination Results of the Respondents For MGT162 Course

GRADE	A+	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	D+	D	Total
Frequency	6	77	40	31	38	12	13	18	5	3	243
%	*2.5*	*31.7*	*16.5*	*12.8*	*15.6*	*4.9*	*5.3*	*7.4*	*2.1*	*1.2*	*100*

Table 2 indicates that there is the highest number of students scored A in this course with 31.7%, followed by A- with 16.5%. The students who scored B+, B, and B- were 12.8%, 15.6%, and 4.9 % respectively. The result also shows that there were a small number of students who obtained C+ (5.3%) and C (7.4%) for this course. Unfortunately, there were 3.3% of the students failed in this course. This result demonstrated that, by introducing the new syllabus, the faculty failed to sustain the 0% failure rate as compared to the previous semester. This is might due to the fact that the students do not have the basic knowledge in management courses since they were taking this course in their first-semester as compared to

previous semester students. The result of this study is similar to the study by Sharma et al. (2013) and Nakhanu (2017) which revealed that there is a relationship between the new syllabus and students' academic performance. However, it is inconsistent with the study by Vergel et al. (2018) who did not found any relationship between the changes of the syllabus with students' academic performance. Therefore, the first objective of this study showed that the faculty is unable to sustain the 0% failure rate as the previous semester. The faculty needs to review the syllabus and investigates if there have any flaws in the new syllabus that has been introduced to the students. They also need to see the suitability of the students in terms of the level of their knowledge in the management course.

Study self-concept and academic performance

Table 3: Summary of Descriptive Test for Study Self-concept

	Item	Mean	Std Deviation	Rank
1)	I participate in class the discussion	3.90	0.694	1
2)	I feel comfortable in a large class group	3.21	0.951	3
3)	I feel comfortable speaking in front of the class	3.17	0.938	5
4)	I make efficient use of time	3.32	0.713	2
5)	I am confident I can master skills-competency	3.21	0.665	4

Table 3 shows the highest mean for study self-concept is "I participate in class the discussion" with a mean equivalent to 3.9 and a standard deviation of 0.694. This is because most of the students were always ask their lecturers during the teaching and learning process since there was a lack of basic knowledge of management. This is a good sign that the study's self-concept by always participate in class discussion will lead to high academic performance. The second highest mean score is "I make efficient use of time" with the mean score 3.32 and the standard deviation is 0.713. Every student needs to use their time wisely and scheduling their time with attending lecture and tutorial classes, doing assignments, and participating in curriculum and university activities since the method of study at university is different from secondary school. The result indicates that the use of time efficiently will lead to higher academic performance. The lowest mean for the self-study concept is "I feel comfortable speaking in front of the class" with the mean and standard deviation score is 3.17 and 0.938 respectively. It shows that the students were lack of confidence in presentation skills since they were first semester students. Normally the confidence level can be developed from time to time when they have been exposed to more presentations of assignments. The result of this study is congruent with the previous study which revealed that there is a significant relationship between the self-study concept and students' academic performance (Doodman et al., 2017; Kumari & Chamundaeswari, 2013; Rady et al., 2016; Soleymanpoor et al., 2017). The overall mean score for the study's self-concept is 3.36. It is a good indicator that the majority of the respondents were responsible for their studying without direct

supervision from the lecturers. However, the lecturers need to continuously monitor and encourage them to participate in class activities to build their self-confidence.

English language and academic performance

Table 4: Summary of Descriptive Test for The English Language

Item	Mean	Std Deviation	Rank
1) Easily to understand the presented books and I am not facing difficulty in expressing things in my own words	2.38	0.851	4
2) I am not usually discussing the course material in my first language with friends	2.19	0.716	5
3) I understand many things and just small things that I miss or cannot comprehend	2.75	0.842	1
4) I am not struggling for using a proper English language because my language is good enough for university level	2.44	0.904	3
5) It is easier for me to express my thoughts in spoken English	2.56	0.940	2

Table 4 shows an overall mean is at 2.46 for the English language. The highest mean is at 2.75 and the standard deviation is at 0.842 refer to "I understand many things and just a small thing that I miss or cannot comprehend". Most of the respondents claimed that they were not that bad in English language proficiency. The second highest mean is at 2.56 and the standard deviation is at 0.940 for "It is easier for me to express thoughts in spoken English". Most respondents agreed they were able to express verbally their opinions in the English language. This finding is in agreement with the study by Aina et al. (2013) who found reported that English proficiency is highly related to academic performance. The lowest mean is at 2.19 and the standard deviation is at 0.716 for "I am not usually discussing the course material in my first language with friends". It shows that the respondents normally practice the English language. Racca and Lasaten (2016) agreed that the more proficient students are in the English language, the more likely they are to perform well in their academic subjects.

Stress and academic performance

Table 5: Summary of Descriptive Test for Stress

Item	Mean	Std Deviation	Rank
1) I am given enough time to do assignment	2.66	0.844	3
2) Competition does not create stress among us	2.49	0.892	5
3) The complexity of work that makes me able to understand it in a little time	2.56	0.828	4
4) My academic stress at the beginning and middle semester goes from high to low and it is not affecting my academic performance	2.98	0.916	2
5) My parents didn't put pressure on me to become excellent students	3.73	0.926	1

Table 5 shows an overall mean is at 2.88 for stress. The highest mean is at 3.73 and the standard deviation is at 0.926 refer to "My parents didn't put pressure on me to become an excellent student". Most of the respondents agreed their parents are not putting pressure on them to be an excellent student. It shows that most respondents do not feel pressured with parents' expectations since students with academic stress are having negative attitudes due to various reasons, such as career development and high expectation of academic results (Ray et al., 2012). The second highest mean is at 2.98 and the standard deviation is at 0.916 for "My academic stress at the beginning and middle semester goes from high to low and it is not affecting my academic performance". Most respondents agreed they obtained manageable stress throughout the semester and it does not affect their academic performance. It is supported by a study in Malaysia conducted by Teh et al. (2015). They found that the prevalence of stress among undergraduate students in that country is severe. The lowest mean is at 2.49 and the standard deviation is at 0.892 for "Competition does not create stress among us ". Most of the respondents agreed they did not feel stress because need to compete with others. It was found out that the workload of undergraduate study with more than five subjects per semester, work on the assignment, group project, and examinations identified is causing academic stress (Shkulaku, 2015).

Study habits and academic performance

Table 6: Summary of Descriptive Test for Study Habits

	Item	Mean	Std Deviation	Rank
1)	I do not only study when there is a quiz or test	2.63	0.863	5
2)	I am not feeling tired, bored, and sleepy in class	3.35	0.842	1
3)	I do not study only when I like	2.83	1.037	4
4)	I am not disturbed when studying	3.19	0.976	2
5)	I am always prepared before I go to class	3.18	0.731	3

Table 6 shows the highest mean for study habits is "I am not feeling tired, bored, and sleepy in class" with a mean equivalent to 3.35 and the standard deviation 0.842. It is essential for students to be attentive and always concentrate in class so that they can grasp the knowledge delivered by their lecturers. When they understand the content of the course, they will perform better in any assessment which will result in a good grade. The second highest mean score is "I am not disturbed when studying" with a mean equivalent to 3.19 and the standard deviation of 0.976. It shows that respondents are highly focused while studying and have good self-discipline. The lowest mean for study habits is "I do not only study when there is a quiz or test" with a mean equivalent to 2.63 and the standard deviation 0.863. It indicates that most respondents study when it is near to assessment. Since the respondents are first semester students, they might not be familiar with the university academic calendar that has so much difference with the school calendar. Therefore, they are not able to manage their time well and do revision only when they need to be assessed by the lecturers. The result of this study is consistent with the past researches which discovered that there is a significant relationship between study habits and students' academic performance (Akpan & Salome, 2015; Alimohamadi et al., 2018; Chamundeswari et al., 2014; Ebele & Olofu, 2017). The overall mean score for the study habits is 3.04 that indicates most of the respondents have good study habits towards this course. However, the lecturers need to remind them periodically regarding the university academic calendar and the lesson plan of the course so that they can manage their time well and study constantly.

Conclusion

The result of this study explored that the failure rate for this course is 3.3%. Although the failure rate is relatively small and still under the Key Performance Indicator of this university, the faculty is unable to sustain the 0% failure rate as compared to the previous semester. Therefore, the faculty needs to review the syllabus and investigates if there have any flaws in the new syllabus that has been introduced to the students. The highest mean score among the

factors that contribute to students' academic performance is the self-study concept with the overall mean score is 3.36. This is because the majority of the respondents have the initiative to manage their time efficiently. They can schedule their time with classes, assignments, and studying for quizzes, tests, and final examinations. They were also actively participated during class and always discuss between them. This finding is consistent with the study by Soleymanpoor et al. (2017) which found that the students who have good self-positive or initiatives at school will have better academic results. The second highest of the overall mean score is the study habit factor with the overall mean is 3.04. The result shows that majority of the respondents were energetic during the teaching and learning process and always prepare themselves for classes, assignments, quizzes, and tests. This finding is congruent with the study by Tschumper (2006) that discovered good study habit skills including studying consistently and able to eliminate distractions will lead to good academic performance. Focus and give full attention during class is very important for students to understand the lesson and obtain a good grade. The second-lowest factor that contributes to the students' academic performance for this study is stress with the overall mean score is 2.88. The study revealed that the workload of undergraduate study with more than five subjects per semester, work on the assignment, group project, and examinations identified are causing academic stress. This is consistent with the study by Shkulaku (2015) who discovered that a lot of assignments and group projects will lead to low academic performance. Nevertheless, the majority of respondents claimed that they acquired moral support from their parents and have not been pressured to be excellent students. Therefore, the lecturers and faculty need to revise the syllabus in terms of continuous assessment to suit students learning time and the learning outcomes so that they can manage their time effectively. The study also revealed that the English language and communication (ELC) is an important factor that contributes to the students' academic performance. The lowest overall mean score (2.46) shows that the English proficiency of the respondents was still at the intermediate level since English is not the mother tongue language in this country. Most of the respondents have difficulty in understanding the terms used in the textbook or reference book and they were usually discussing the course material in their first language with their friends. This result is congruent with the study by Omran and Saleh (2019) who confirmed that the majority of the respondents had difficulty expressing thoughts in spoken English. Therefore, UiTM students must use fully English in the teaching and learning process to enhance their English proficiency. Lecturers are encouraged to simplify the terms used in the management course by providing many examples to enhance students' understanding. They also need to find an attractive learning method to make the teaching and learning process more interesting and easier to be followed by the students. This study is only confined for first semester students of Diploma in Accountancy UiTM Pahang Jengka Campus. Therefore, future research must include other students who took this course in other branches so that the result can be generalized. Besides, future research must also include other factors that contribute to the students' academic performance such as school-related aspects, religiosity, teaching-related aspects, and other variables that suit the students' academic performance. Finally, this study is expected to provide insight into the university in formulating and revising the syllabus in line with the students' ability and understanding of this course.

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