

Effective Teaching Approaches to Enhance Understanding among University Students

Nik Zam Nik-Wan, Syuhaila Razak, Suzana San, Noraida Saidi and Siti Dalina Tumiran
Faculty of Accountancy, Universiti Teknologi MARA Kelantan, Bukit Ilmu Machang, Kelantan, Malaysia.
nikzam@kelantan.uitm.edu.my

Keywords: Academic performance, Effective Teaching.

Abstract: Students' academic performance plays a vital role in producing the best quality graduates who will form the major source of human capital. Their ability to practically apply what they have learnt during lectures promotes the quality of their learning process further. Unfortunately, students sometimes faced some difficulties in understanding the lessons taught by their lecturers. Failure to understand what have been taught could cause the students to easily forget not only what they have learnt in university once they graduated but they also tend to forget what they have learnt in the earlier semester and interrupt the progression of the learning process throughout their academic years. This preliminary study aims to identify the real essence of the problems faced by the students in understanding the lessons taught during lectures. Understanding their experiences and listening to their opinions and suggestions could probably reveal the teaching and learning approaches that would truthfully solve their learning problems effectively. This preliminary study employed qualitative approach utilising focus group discussion. It was known that lack of focus during lectures could disrupt students' ability to understand the lessons. Once the effective teaching and learning approaches are identified, it can be developed into teaching techniques, modules or tools that will be usable by the lecturers to improve their teaching and learning processes.

1 INTRODUCTION

Students' academic performance plays a significant role in producing the best quality graduates who will form the major source of human capital. They will also be responsible for country's economic and social development (Mushtaq & Khan 2012, Ali et al. 2013). The academic performance of students studying in higher institutions is commonly being evaluated based on their Grade Point Average (GPA) and Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA). Even though academic performance is not the ultimate criteria viewed by the industries in employing new recruits, it is still a key criterion that students need to achieve in order to obtain their qualifications either for Diploma, Bachelor or Master Degree.

Furthermore, their ability to practically apply what they have learnt during lectures would promote also the quality of their learning process further. Unfortunately, students sometimes faced some difficulties in understanding the lessons taught by their lecturers. Failure to understand what have been

taught could cause the students to easily forget not only what they have learnt in university once they graduated but they also tend to forget what they have learnt in the earlier semester and interrupt the progression of the learning process throughout their academic years.

This preliminary study aims to identify the real essence of the problems faced by the students in understanding the lessons taught during lectures. Understanding their experiences and listening to their opinions and suggestions could probably reveal the teaching and learning approaches that would truthfully solve their learning problems effectively. Once the effective teaching and learning approaches are identified, it can be developed into teaching techniques, modules or tools that will be usable by the lecturers to improve their teaching and learning processes.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Özpeynirci et al. (2013) notify that students who do not understand the content of lessons are unable to see the whole picture of the course and this led to students' failure in accounting lessons. Michelene et al. (1989) identified that 'good' students learn with understanding and they can generate many explanations guided by their accurate monitoring of their own understanding. Whereas 'poor' students do not generate sufficient self-explanations, failed to monitor their learning accurately, and subsequently rely heavily an example.

However, the learning process is a complex process because it requires full commitment from the students. Hence, the full support from the university includes providing a good learning environment is a must. Barbra (2006) found a strong correlation exist between learning facilities and students achievement. Previous studies also suggested that the quality of the learning facilities showed a positive impact on the performance of the students (Mushtaq & Nawaz Khan 2012, Lumpkin 2013, Mersha et al. 2013, Korir & Kipkemboi 2014). On the other hand, Harb & El-Shaarwi (2006) found that the most important factor that would affect students' performance is their competency in English. Students that possess good English communications and understanding skills would have better academic performance

Additionally, Uline & Tschannen-Moran (2008) revealed that students could not focus on lectures when having classes in inadequate facilities in term of air temperature and quality, lighting, acoustical control as well as school design classifications and features. Mark (2002) concluded that spatial configurations, noise, heat, cold, light and air quality could effect on students' and lecturers' ability to perform well. Saidi et al (2015) notify students' required environment includes the classrooms which are conducive with air-conditioner or fan, spacious room with enough tables and chairs as well as far from noisy areas which can disturb the learning process.

Texas Women's University (TWU n.d.) identified that students' concentration is most often affected by three factors namely priorities and attitudes, environment and individual physical condition. Boredom and dislike, large tasks, motivations, anxiety, daydreaming and personal worries are some of the internal things that can disrupt students' concentration. Meanwhile University of New England (UNE n.d.) informs that students' ability to concentrate depends on their interest in the subject or activity, their motivation, level of relaxation or

enjoyment and level of distraction either from the environment or from their own thoughts.

Raychaudhuri et al (2010) stated that the presence of trained teacher in school had positively influenced the student's academic performance in addition to a low ratio of teacher-student because teacher can take care of students in class very well. In contrast, Rasul & Bukhsh (2011) found that lack of proper guidance from lecturers affects negatively towards their performance in examination (Mushtaq & Nawaz Khan, 2012).

Alos et al. (2015) conducted a research to identify the factors affecting academic performance of the student nurses. They identified that teacher-related factor which included teacher expertise of the subject matter and ways of lectures being conducted pose high impact of the students' academic performance followed by study habits and school related factors. Mushtaq & Khan (2012) notified that proper guidance which included the guidance from the parents and teachers show a positive impact on the student performance. There is also positive perception on the influence of teacher-related factor on students' academic achievement (Leng, 2006).

Consequently, lecturer competency, teaching methods and quality of learning materials had a positive influence on students' academic achievements (Yousef 2016). Meanwhile, Handy & Poliment (2015) suggest that active learning is an effective learning tool that could increase student understanding and retention. According to Baeten et al. (2016) most students preferred teacher direction, cooperative learning and knowledge construction and student-centre-learning is identified to enable deep understanding within students.

3 METHODS

This preliminary study employed qualitative approach utilising focus group discussion to identify the problems faced by the students in understanding the lessons taught during lectures as well the teaching and learning approaches preferred to solve the problems notified. The focus group was formed based on their ability to answer several questions related to accounting courses that was designed according to level of difficulties. The focus group comprised of twenty (20) students enrolled in Diploma in Accountancy in Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Kelantan Branch. Students were asked to notify the problems that they faced during lectures which would disrupt their focus and learning capabilities. Qualitative information collected during

this study was coded and analysed using Microsoft Excel. Microsoft Excel were considered to be appropriate because it enable the researcher to analyse the data in the original language in which the focus group discussion were conducted and without the need for transcripts to be translated first prior to the analysis where it would lost its 'originality'.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Feedback received from the focus group were analysed and coded to form several themes which summarised the problems faced by the participants in understanding the lessons taught during lectures.

4.1 Physical and Mental Health

Physical health and mental state of the students seems to be the main criteria that could distract their focus during lectures and disrupt their ability to understand the lessons taught during classes. Seven of the participants mentioned that they were very stress when too many assignments and assessments were cramped at the end of the semester. During lectures, they were thinking too much about the tasks to be completed and did not focus on the lessons taught. Sleepless nights spent to prepare the assignments and assessments had distracted their focus during lectures. Meanwhile five of the participants stated that they cannot focus during lectures because they were worried about monetary issue which relates to expensive textbooks, house rental and increased cost of basic necessity such as food.

Students also cannot concentrate during lectures when their physical health and condition are poor. Five of the participants brought up the issue that they cannot concentrate during class because they were hungry. Rushing to morning classes caused them to miss their breakfast. Tight classes schedules prevent the participants to take some meals since they had to rush from one class to another class. Usually, this issue had already taken into consideration when the classes' schedules were constructed. However, when lecturers decided to conduct replacement as well as additional classes they might overlook the interruption on the students' timetables. In connection to the monetary issue, there are participants who cut off their budget by cutting down their food consumption.

Furthermore, classes which were conducted under tight schedules coupled with replacement and additional classes, it had dragged the class hours to

late in the evening causing the students to be too exhausted to even listen to any lecture. The participants mentioned that their tiredness during daytime because of too many classes had made them to be too tired to do revision at night as well. Because of that they were unable to revise what they have learnt earlier as well as to prepare for the new topic to be learnt next day.

4.2 Surrounding Environment

In support of previous literatures (Mark 2002, Saidi et al. 2015, Uline & Tschannen-Moran 2008) the participants also noted that classrooms atmosphere, classrooms facilities and teaching and learning facilities did disturb the learning process. The weather which was too hot accompanied by malfunction air-conditioners or fans in the classrooms had disturbed their level of concentration that influenced their level of understanding on the lesson taught by the lecturer. One participant mentioned that inadequate teaching and learning facilities such as LCD projectors could also disturbed their learning process since the lecturers' efforts are limited and the cannot fully mobilized the teaching approaches as planned.

4.3 Lecturers' Attitude and Characters

Undeniable, lecturers play important roles in students learning process. Lecturers' attitudes, characters as well as teaching techniques could influence students learning process positively or even negatively.

"I prefer the lecturer who provides details explanation about certain topics. Because sometimes lecturers would assume that students already knew what they are going to teach and they did not provide detailed explanations".

[Translated Transcript: Participant: XXX- 4197]

"I personally dislike when some lecturers keep on saying ["you have learnt the topics before, how can you forget?"] And that the topics had being taught two to three semester ago. In the meantime we took various subjects with hundreds of formulas and methods to be remembered. Different student[s] different capabilities. Maybe some can recall but most can't. Show us guide us so we can be better".

[Original Transcript: Participant: XXX- 7524]

Lecturers' behaviours could discourage and demotivate the students in the learning process and it

could happen unintentionally without the lecturers realising it.

“Students are afraid to ask the lecturer if they did not understand because the lecturer will ask them back or the lecturer would ask the student to go back and study”.

[Translated Transcript: Participant: XXX- 0587]

“When we asked questions on the area that we did not understand, the lecturer asked us to go back and read back the book. We as students, when we were told to do that, then we did not want to ask questions anymore”.

[Translated Transcript: Participant: XXX- 4596]

5 CONCLUSIONS

It was known that lack of focus during lectures could disrupt students’ ability to understand the lessons taught. However, the possible reasons that could lead to loss of focus are yet to be discussed. It was identified in this preliminary study that students’ physical and mental health and surrounding environment such as weather; noise could steal away the students’ attention during class. Undeniable, lecturers play important roles in students learning process. Lecturers’ attitudes, characters as well as teaching techniques could influence students learning process positively or even negatively.

However, since this study is at its preliminary stage and limited to a specific time scope more participants are considered to be necessary for future research.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The study is financially supported by ARAS research grant, 600-IRMI/DANA /5/3/ARAS (0160/2016) Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia.

REFERENCES

- Ali, N., Jusoff, K., Ali, S., Mokhtar, N., & Salamat, A. S. A. 2009. The Factors Influencing Students' Performance at Universiti Teknologi MARA Kedah, Malaysia. *Management Science and Engineering*, 3(4), 81-90.
- Alos, S. B., Caranto, L. C., & David, J. J. T. (2015). Factors Affecting the Academic Performance of the Student Nurses of BSU. *International Journal of Nursing Science*, 5(2), 60-65.
- Baeten M., Dochy F., Struyven K., Parmentier K., & Vanderbruggen A. 2016. “Student-centred learning environments: an investigation into student teachers’ instructional preferences and approaches to learning”. *Learning Environ Res*. 19. 43-62
- Barbra, Z. E. 2006. "Georgia School Principals' Perceptions of the Impact of School Facilities on Student Achievement". Electronic Theses & Dissertations. Paper 214.
- Harb, N., & El-Shaarwi, A. (2006). Factors Affecting Students' Performance. *MPRA Paper No. 1362*.
- Korir, D. K., & Kipkemboi, F. 2014. The Impact of School Environment and Peer Influences on Students' Academic Performance in Vihiga County, Kenya. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 4(5), 240-251.
- Leng, Q. M. (2006). *Hubungan antara Sikap, Minat, Pengajaran Guru dan Pengaruh Rakan Sebaya dengan Pencapaian Matematik di Kalangan Pelajar Tingkatan Empat Di Daerah Batu Pahat, Johor*. University Teknologi Malaysia.
- Lumpkin R. B. 2013. School facility condition and academic outcomes. *International Journal of Facility Management*, 4(3), 1-6.
- Mark, S. (2002). Do School Facilities Affect Academic outcomes?. National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities available at <http://www.edfacilities.org>. pubs retrieved on 20 August 2015.
- Mersha, Y., Bishaw, A. & Tegegne, F. 2013. Factors Affecting Female Students’ Academic Achievement at Bahir Dar University. *Journal of International Cooperation in Education*, 15(3), 135-148.
- Mushtaq, I., & Khan, S. N. 2012. Factors Affecting Students' Academic Performance. *Global Journal of Management and Business Research*, 12(9), 17-22.
- Michelene T.H. Mirloi C., Bassok M., Lewis M. W., Reimann P., Glaser R. 1989. Self -Explanations: How Students Study and Use Examples in Learning to Solve Problems, *Cognitive Science* 13, 145-182.
- Saidi, N., San, S., Nik Wan, N. Z., Razak, S., Abu Bakar, R., & Zakaria, R. A. (2015, 1 December 2015). *Learning Experiences among Excellent Accounting Students in UiTM Cawangan Kelantan*. Paper presented at the Academic Symposium of Social Science, UiTM Kelantan.
- Özpeynirci R., Yücenurenb M., Dumanc H &, Apak I. (2013) *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 103, 1181 – 1188
- Rasul, S. & Bukhsh, Q. (2011). A study of factors affecting students’ performance in examination at University level. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 15, 2042-2047
- Raychaudhuri, A., Debnath, M., Sen, S., And Majumder, B., G. (2010). Factors Affecting Students’ Academic Performance: A case study in Agartala Municipal Council Area. *Bangladesh e-Journal of Sociology*, 7(2), 34-41.
- Texas Women University (TWU n.d.) http://www.twu.edu/downloads/counseling/A-4_How_to_Develop_Better_Concentration.pdf

Uline, C. & Tschannen-Moran, M. (2008). The walls speak: the interplay of quality facilities, school climate, and student achievement. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 46(1), 55-73.

University of New England (UNE n.d.)
https://www.une.edu.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0020/13826/improving-student-concentration-and-memory.pdf

Yousef D. A. 2016. Learning styles preferences of statistics students: A study in the Faculty of Business and Economics at the UAE University". *Quality Assurance in Education*. 24(2). 227-243.

