



Psychology Students Feedback on the Overall Programme Structure in ODL Context: A Case Study at OUM

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Abstract

Generally, the study of students' feedback may serve various purposes such as for programme improvement; accountability and decision making; judgments of merit, worth, and significance of the programme. The ultimate goal of this study is to enhance the effectiveness of online study and delivery. The aim of this paper is to study psychology students' feedback on the overall structure of the Bachelor of Psychology programme offered in OUM. The specific objectives of the study are to determine whether the curriculum matches their needs, whether they can pursue a profession after graduation, whether they are satisfied with the courses, and whether they learned psychology courses as planned. This is a descriptive study and case study technique was utilised. The sample consists of 436 psychology active students throughout the country. Structured questionnaire was used to collect the data and the questionnaires were distributed via Google Drive. The Cronbach Alpha for the instrument was 0.79. The study results indicated that students' feedback was very positive with the overall structure of the psychology programme. The data shows that the mean score for all the items fall into the high category. The score mean ranges from 3.806 to 4.164. This finding indicates that the psychology programme offered in OUM is satisfactory and well accepted by the students.

Keywords: *Feedback, Psychology Students, Overall Structure of the Programme*



Introduction

In the current global educational trend, many universities offer open and distance learning or online education to address the diverse educational needs of students and to stay current with advancing technology. The World Wide Web has made information access and distribution of educational content available to a large portion of the world's population and helped to move Distance Education (DE) to the digital era. DE has become increasingly common in many universities worldwide (Bentley et al., 2012); Lapointe & Reisetter (2008); Landry et al., (2008); Williams & Williams (2010); Coffey & Gibbs (2000) and (2001); Ballantyne et al., (2000); and Jara & Metler (2010). Some institutions facing increasing exponential development and dynamic use of modern information and communication technologies should not suggest to scholars and practitioners in distance learning to pay attention only to the physical framework or infrastructure part of ICT. This means that technology infrastructure and human aspect is equally important. The Practitioners must pay equally dominant attention to students' feedback as a way of making service delivery more effective (Bentley et al., (2012); Lapointe & Reisetter (2008); Landry et al., (2008); Williams & Williams (2010); Coffey & Gibbs (2000) and (2001); Ballantyne et al., (2000); and Jara & Metler (2010). Literature study has indicated that students' feedback, whether on the processes of assessment of instruction or of the quality of academic service delivery, is embedded firmly in all educational processes as a productive venture (Price et al., 2011). Therefore, the growing number of studies and body of literature on the subject on how best to provide quality services to clients in adult ODL programmes should not be ignored. Good feedback practice helps clarify what good performance is (goals, criteria, expected standards). (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Therefore, this paper will share some insight concerning Open University Malaysia (OUM) Bachelor of Psychology Students' feedback about the overall structure of the programme.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study is to determine students' feedback on the overall structure of the psychology programme. The specific study objectives are as follows:

- to determine whether the curriculum matches their needs;
- to identify whether they can pursue a profession after graduation;
- to study whether they are satisfied with the courses; and
- to find out whether they learned psychology courses as planned.



Literature Review

In the educational delivery context, students' feedback is considered as one of the most important components of the improvement process. Periodic review of the educational programme would ensure the programme remains consistent with the institutional mission, needs and criteria. Henderson et al., (2019) propose that feedback needs to be understood as an interaction between practices, context, and individuals. In addition, feedback can be one of the most powerful influences on student learning (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

According to Henderson et al., (2019), students and educator dissatisfaction with feedback practices continues to remain a significant problem in higher education. Furthermore, programme evaluation is essential. One question that always arises is what areas should be assessed? According to Carnegie Mellon University (2016), there are a few important components, and it could be divided into three major components: programme outcomes, direct measures, and indirect measures. In programme outcomes, knowledge skills and abilities identified, and students are able to demonstrate their knowledge skills and abilities upon completion of the programme. Direct measures of the assessment methods are used by the faculty to assess their students' achievement of the program outcomes. This measurement includes exam, case studies, or representation, written assignment, and portfolio. In indirect measures, on the other hand include the student's perception on whether or not they have or achieving a learning outcome (Carnegie Mellon University, 2016).

According to Hattie & Timperley (2007), the process of effective feedback must focus on 3 questions:

- i. Where am I going? (What are the goals?);
- ii. How am I going? (What progress is being made towards the goal?); and
- iii. Where to next? (What activities need to be undertaken to make better progress?)

Good feedback practice helps clarify what good performance is (goals, criteria, expected standards) (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). In general, feedback is a fundamental learning and teaching activity that has a significant impact on student learning and achievement (Gibbs & Simpson, 2004). Therefore, as an educational provider, it is important to carry out student's evaluation or feedback survey for the continuous improvement periodically.

In this context, programme feedback is about understanding the programme through a routine, systematic, deliberate gathering of information to uncover and/or identify what contributes to the 'success' of the programme and what actions need to be taken in order to address the findings of the evaluation process (Frye & Hemmer, 2013; Henderson et al., 2019). This study would focus on educational programme evaluation mainly from the OUM undergraduate psychology students' perspective.

In the literature study, it found that some interesting research was done to find out any different responses between online and traditional courses student. The study concerning online, and traditional course students found that students' reasons for taking online courses included flexibility to accommodate work and family schedules, the ability to avoid commuting to the university and more online courses being available to them (Dobbs et al., 2017). Besides, the study found that both online and traditional students agreed that traditional courses were easier, and they learned more in that format. They also concurred that online courses required more effort. Experienced online students indicated that the



quality of their courses was good, while traditional students who had never taken an online course felt that the quality of online courses was lower. So, how about ODL students in Malaysia? How do they perceive online study education programme?

In another study, students who enrolled in a massive open online course or MOOC were motivated to take other courses in this format based on their perception that it was useful for achieving their goals. In addition, their motivation was high if the course was posted on a platform that was easy to use (Aharony & Bar-Ilan, 2016). This study also found that as the students proceeded through the course, they gained confidence. In addition, blended learning offers the familiar face-to-face instruction and some of the conveniences of DE which may be why participants are interested in this model. Meanwhile, distance education is an educational experience where instructors and learners are separated in time and space (Keegan, 2002). It can happen away from an academic institution and can lead to a degree or credential (Gunawardena et al., 2008). Since this is a case study in OUM, it is important to explore how OUM learners perceived or gave feedback to the programme which they enrolled, particularly for the psychology undergraduate programme.

In terms of theoretical framework, this study would be based on a logic model. It found that the logic model is useful for university to conduct programme evaluation. In addition, its appropriateness for each context should be able to assess if we think logically (Soleiman et al., 2014). In order to provide a clear framework for evaluators, attention to the basic principles of proposal writing is essential. To achieve a better conclusion, it is important to give the proposed format to reviewers for comments and advice. The logic model is rooted within the complexity theory and theory of change. It uses components to describe the sequence of activities thought to bring about change and talked about the link between these activities and the results of the programme (Soleiman et al, 2014).

According to Soleiman et al. (2014), the common components of a logic model can be seen as below:

- i. Situation: it is important in stating the main problem and considering the background of the programme from many dimensions, such as social, political, economic and so on;
- ii. Inputs: it refers to resources such as staff, money, time, equipment, partnerships and so on that are invested in the programme;
- iii. Outputs: it includes activities, services, products and all of what is reached at the end of the programme, including a variety of products from books, workshop groups, graduates, etc.; and
- iv. Outcomes: ultimate desires of taking a programme, which include short-term such as changes in knowledge, attitudes, and skills; medium-term such as changes in behaviours, decision-making, etc.; and long-term (impact) such as changes in social, economic, and environmental conditions.

Based on this logic model, besides identifying the main problem in the current situation and context, determination of the ultimate outcomes and choosing the best strategy for achieving the level of outcomes are considered. It seems that the logic model is simple and more applicable for today's educational organisations. Preparing appropriate and measurable indicators for a logic model evaluation programme is the key for a successful evaluation. Providing the indicators must be done with the participation and viewpoints of the main stakeholders of the programme, such as learners, faculty members, etc.



Research Methodology

In terms of research design, this is a quantitative study by using a descriptive study approach. Since, the study was carried out in OUM, then it has become a case study which the research is mainly focused on OUM psychology learners. In order to achieve this research goal, a survey method via questionnaire was used in this study. The collected data will then be analysed with SPSS. The result would be shown in terms of mean and frequency.

Samples and Sampling Selection

The sample population of this study is OUM psychology undergraduate students. A total of 800 questionnaires had been distributed and sent to all learners taking the Bachelor of Psychology with Honours nation-wide. It covers all learning centres from Klang Valley, East Coast, Northern region, Southern region, and East Malaysia comprising Sabah and Sarawak. The samples involve those who are still active in the system. They include senior learners who have enrolled for at least 2 semesters at OUM, regardless of their age, gender, ethnicity and geographic location. Convenience sampling technique is used in this study.

Based on the questionnaire sent, a total of 258 female participants (58.77%) and 181 male participants (41.23%) had responded and returned the completed questionnaire to the researchers.

Survey Instrument

The instrument used in this research is a questionnaire. It is divided into several parts, such as respondents' profile, learning materials, tutors, assessment matters and the overall aspects of this programme. However, in this paper, only the overall programme structure components or construct will be analysed and discussed. The questionnaires were distributed to the samples via Google Drive and e-mail.

Finally, the collected data was analysed and shows the mean score. The scale used in this survey ranging from 1 to 5: 1.00–2.33 as low level of satisfaction, 2.34–3.66 as medium and 3.67–5.00 considered as high level of satisfaction.

Reliability Result

The reliability of the survey instrument was high. The Cronbach Alpha indicated 0.79 for the overall structure of the programme.

Findings

The study is to determine students' feedback on the overall psychology programme structure. The data is presented in the table below. This construct (overall structure of the programme) comprises six items. Interestingly, the result demonstrated that 439 respondents perceived the overall psychology programme structure offered in OUM very positively. The data shows that the mean score for all the items fall into the high category. The score mean ranges from 3.806 to 4.164. All those items are as follows: the structure of the programme perfectly fits my need; the programme will help me in building my career after graduation; satisfied with the courses offered in this programme; enjoy study psychology programme; learned psychology courses as expected; and the programme offered via ODL suits my need. The findings can be seen in Table 1 below.

**Table 1**

Learners' Feedback about the Overall Psychology Programme Structure (N = 439)

| No. | Question | Mean | Level |
|-----|--|-------|-------|
| 1. | The structure of the programme perfectly fits my need. | 3.918 | High |
| 2. | The programme will help me in building my career after graduation. | 4.073 | High |
| 3. | Satisfied with the courses offered in this programme. | 3.964 | High |
| 4. | Enjoy study psychology programme. | 4.164 | High |
| 5. | Learned psychology courses as expected. | 3.943 | High |
| 6. | The programme offered via ODL suits my need. | 3.806 | High |

Note. Indication: mean 1.00–2.33 Low, mean 2.34–3.66 Medium, mean 3.67–5.00 High

Discussion

Generally, as observed, online learning has become the key to a new trend of education particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic situation. In fact, online learning/ e-learning has become one of the most popular ways of gaining access to an education (Huey Siew, 2016). In terms of terminology, the terms distance learning was given by Greenberg (1998 as cited in Mahmood et al., 2016) as “a planned teaching/learning experience that uses a wide spectrum of technologies to reach learners at a distance and is designed to encourage learner interaction and certification of learning” (p.36). In this ODL environment, many researchers would like to know whether the ODL students are happy and satisfied with the programme that they enrolled. Therefore, it is important to carry out an empirical study to get their feedback on the overall programme structure which they registered. As such, a case study was carried out in OUM.

Meanwhile, the attainment of the programme’s educational objectives, student outcomes and continuous improvement is an important element in the programme accreditation and continuous improvement process, (Oduaran, 2017). This practice is also aligned with the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) requirement. Probably, students’ feedback on the improvement of adult higher education via ODL is significant particularly to the educational provider.

In this descriptive study, it is proudly noted that all the respondents involved in this study have given a very positive feedback to the Bachelor of Psychology programme structure offered by OUM. All the items (mean scores) have shown high level of scores. In other words, OUM psychology degree is well accepted, recognised and valued very positively by its learners. This result is also significant and meaningful to OUM particularly as an ODL provider in the country. Without a doubt, ODL has gained a strong trust and confidence among Malaysians. This finding has confirmed the result of a similar study conducted by Seok et al., (2010). In general, instructors and students indicate that teaching and learning online was effective. Female students responded more positively to most questions concerning effectiveness, and instructors also found it to be more positive (Seok et al., 2010).



Besides this, another study found ODL education programme to be well-accepted by the society. Blended learning (BL) was examined by Kurt & Yildirim (2018) to determine students' satisfaction and what they considered to be important features of the blended format. The finding of their research indicated that the Turkish students who participated, almost unanimously felt that BL was beneficial to them, and that their own role and the instructors' role were central to their satisfaction. The researcher stated, "the prominent components in the process have been identified as face-to-face lessons, the features of online course materials, LMS used, design-specific activities, process-based measurement and evaluation, student-student interaction, and out-of-class sharing, respectively" (p. 439). DE has a growth potential and offers the opportunity to reach many people (Fidalgo, 2012); hence, it can be used as a technique for mass education (Perraton, 2008). According to Perraton (2008), DE can be adapted to the needs of current and previous generations who did not complete their education. DE can also reach individuals who live in remote locations and do not have the means to attend school. In fact, this mission and vision was also shared by ODL institutions in Malaysia.

Recommendations and Suggestions for Further Studies

In relation to this research topic, we would like to recommend that future study could include elements such as effective management, academic support, and subject matter delivery. So, the study outcomes probably could provide more insight for the stakeholders who are involved in ODL or fully online education. Finally, in the near future, the study also could look into the general public readiness to take ODL or fully online education programme.

Conclusion

This study has provided useful information regarding undergraduate psychology students' feedback on the overall structure of the psychology programme. The study covered mainly on the structure of the programme perfectly fits my need; the programme will help me in building my career after graduation; satisfied with the courses offered in this programme; enjoy study psychology programme; learned psychology courses as expected; and the programme offered via ODL suits my need. It is proud to note, the study shows that ODL learners have a very satisfactory perception on the overall structure of the Bachelor of Psychology programme at OUM. Therefore, the learners demonstrate a strong interest in enrolling themselves in the online programme, instead of taking the conventional education programme.

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