

LEVEL OF LEARNING CLIMATE AMONG PART TIME STUDENTS IN A MALAYSIA RESEARCH UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to investigate the level of learning climate in a Malaysia research university. A total of 400 Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) part time students are selected as the respondents of this study. The measurement tool undertaken in the data collection is Learning Climate Scale by Ramdsen (2003). There are five dimensions used to measure learning climate that includes good teaching, clear goals and standards, appropriate workloads, continuous assessment and generic skills. Data of the study are then analyzed using descriptive analysis that includes percentage, frequency and mean score. The finding of the study demonstrates learning climate is viewed as satisfactory among the respondents.

Keywords: Learning Climate, Good Teaching, Clear Goals and Standards, Appropriate Workloads, Continuous Assessment, Generic Skills

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the higher education level, the focus has changed from maintaining learning quality (Penglase, 2004) and creating a knowledge based society (Rowley, 2000) into inculcate an innovation culture. Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) experiences this situation and creativity and innovation culture has turned out to be its strategic agenda. This agenda gives a great challenge to UTM as it needs to improve and maintain the academic performance's qualities. It has also changed the priority of UTM from not only to increase students' intake but also emphasis on quality. In 2010, there is a gradual increase of part time students' intake that is 40 % compared to 33% in 2008. There is a huge possibility that the increment of students' intake due to 'research university' status owned by UTM. As the consequences, a lot of efforts have been made in creating a sustainable academic performance by improving teaching and learning standard. It is getting difficult to practice an innovative culture when most students prefer to memorize information for the aim of passing well in examinations (Fung, 2010; Magno 2011).

The current demand of Malaysia's public universities to produce excellence knowledgeable graduates has also affected learning climate in the universities compound. For example, UTM now aims to become a global and world class university. This demand has certainly changed the old setting of learning environment in UTM into more independent and challenging learning climate. In order to achieve the world class UTM, it is expected that all UTM graduates are capable to become a professional who are competent, creative and versatile. In relation to this aim, part time UTM SPACE students should also be equipped with several generic skills such as effective communication, team working, problem solving and lifelong learning. As highlighted by Richardson (2006), learning climate plays a significant role to influence the students' ability to obtain the generic skills in their learning process at classes.

Although numerous studies are available in the area of learning approaches, research on learning climate in relation to part time students in Malaysian Research University is still lacking. Therefore, the aims of this study are to identify the level of learning climate among part time students. As highlighted by Chan (2010), individual difference has a significant influence to learning outcome that include learning climate.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

A total of 400 UTM SPACE part time students at Kuala Lumpur campus and Johor Bahru campus were randomly chosen to become the respondents of this study. A questionnaire has been adopted as the research instrument to collect data. The questionnaire was organized as follow. Enumerators seek permission from the lecturers to distribute the questionnaire among its students in their classes. Explanations such as the aim of the study and importance of respondents' participation to the findings have been given before responding to the questionnaire. In addition, respondents were also guaranteed that their information would remain confidential. In the questionnaire, respondents are required to answer 24 learning climate items from Learning Climate Scale by Ramsden (2003). A four Likert scale ranging from "extremely disagree" to "extremely agree" is adopted to measure respondents' feedback towards the learning climate items. Back to back translation is used where each item was translated from English to Malay and then retranslated back into English. The back to back translation is used to acquire an accurate translation for all items in the questionnaire. For data analysis, descriptive statistic was employed to investigate the level of learning climate among UTM SPACE part time students.

3.0 ANALYSES AND FINDINGS

Table 1: Frequency, Percentage and Mean Score for Learning Climate

Dimension	Item		SDA	DA	A	SA	SD	Mean
Good Teaching (Mean: 3.11; SD:0.58)	My lecturers motivated me to do my best work.	f	1	11	289	99	0.49	3.22
		%	0.2	2.8	72.2	24.8		
	My lecturers put a lot of time into commenting on my work.	f	3	84	264	49	0.59	2.90
		%	0.7	21.0	66.0	12.2		
	My lecturers made a real effort to understand difficulties I might be having with my work.	f	1	27	248	124	0.58	3.24
		%	0.2	6.8	62.0	31.0		
	My lecturers normally gave me helpful feedback on how I was going	f	5	93	232	70	0.67	2.92
		%	1.2	23.2	58.0	17.5		
My lecturers were extremely good at explaining things	f	1	27	269	103	0.55	3.18	
	%	0.2	6.8	67.2	25.8			
My lecturers worked hard to make their subjects interesting	f	2	43	238	118	0.62	3.18	
	%	0.5	10.8	59.5	29.5			
Clear Goals and Standards (Mean: 2.85; SD: 0.62)	It was always easy to know the standard of work expected.	f	7	104	240	49	0.65	2.83
		%	1.8	26.0	60.0	12.2		
	I usually had a clear idea of where I was going and what was expected of me in this program.	f	1	68	273	58	0.57	2.97
		%	0.2	17.0	68.2	14.5		
	It was often hard to discover what was expected of me in this program. (reverse).	f	24	175	175	26	0.71	2.51
		%	6.0	43.8	43.8	6.4		
My lecturers made it clear right from the start what they expected from students	f	1	39	283	77	0.54	3.09	
	%	0.2	9.8	70.8	19.2			
Appropriate Workload (Mean: 2.37; SD: 0.72)	The workload (e.g. assignment, presentation etc.) was too heavy. (reverse)	f	69	183	135	13	0.77	2.23
		%	17.2	45.8	33.8	3.2		
	I was generally given enough time to understand the things I had to learn.	f	7	112	241	40	0.63	2.78
		%	1.8	28.0	60.2	10.0		
	There was a lot of pressure on me to do well in this program. (reverse)	f	55	203	122	20	0.76	2.27
		%	13.8	50.8	30.5	5.0		
The sheer volume of work to be got through in this program meant it couldn't all be thoroughly comprehended. (reverse)	f	55	231	94	20	0.73	2.20	
	%	13.8	57.8	23.5	5.0			

Continuous Evaluation (Mean: 2.45; SD: 0.63)	To do well in this program all you really needed was a good memory. (reverse)	f	134	231	32	3	0.62	1.76
		%	33.5	57.8	8.0	0.8		
	My lecturers seemed more interested in testing what I had memorized than what I had understood. (reverse)	f	32	183	166	19	0.71	2.43
		%	8.0	45.8	41.5	4.8		
	Too many lecturers asked me questions just about facts. (reverse)	f	14	170	192	24	0.66	2.56
		%	3.5	42.5	48.0	6.0		
	The assessment methods employed in this program required an in-depth understanding of the course content.	f	4	35	305	56	0.52	3.03
		%	1.0	8.8	76.2	14.0		
Generic Skills (Mean: 3.06, SD: 0.57)	The program developed my problem-solving skills.	f	2	36	284	78	0.55	3.10
		%	0.5	9.0	71.0	19.5		
	The program sharpened my analytic skills.	f	3	49	267	81	0.59	3.06
		%	0.8	12.2	66.8	20.2		
	The program helped me develop my ability to work as a team member.	f	2	31	274	93	0.56	3.14
		%	0.5	7.8	68.5	23.2		
	As a result of my program, I feel confident about tackling unfamiliar problems.	f	1	42	289	68	0.53	3.06
		%	0.2	10.5	72.2	17.0		

Table 1 indicates the findings on all learning climate dimensions that include good teaching, clear goals and standards, appropriate workload, continuous evaluation and generic skills. Based on the all dimensions mean score, good teaching dimension has reported the highest (M= 3.11, SD= 0.58). It explains that majority of respondents have a positive reaction towards the lecturers' teaching approach. It can be seen when ninety-three percent of respondents (M=3.24) agree that the lecturers have tried to help them in understanding difficult topics taught in the classroom. In addition, more than half of respondents claims that the lecturers have motivated them to perform the best work (M=3.22, 97%). Respondents also believe that the lecturers always give feedback to their achievement (75.5%) and spend time to comment on students' coursework (78.2%).

On the other hand, findings on generic skills dimension has also demonstrated at a high level (M= 3.06, SP= 0.57). It proves that teaching and learning process have helped the respondents to gain important generic skills in the classroom. As presented in Table 1, majority of respondents believe that the program helps them to improve their generic skill especially ability to work in a group (91.7%, M=3.14), planning skills (90.8%, M=3.12) and problem solving skills (90.5%, M=3.10). However, there is a small group of respondents (22.3%) highlight that the program does not help them to improve their writing skills (M=2.89). In addition, the mean score for clear goals and standards dimension is also at a high level (M=2.85, SP= 0.62). This result explains that respondents have a clear understanding on goals and standards underlined by lecturers towards the program. However there are confusing findings when half of respondents had a clear (50.2%) and another half of them do not clear (49.8%) with the expectation of the program they have joined.

For continuous evaluation dimension, the mean score reports differently from good teaching dimension and generic skills dimension. The value of 2.46 (SD=0.63) has clearly indicated that the generic skills dimension is practiced at a moderate level. Almost all respondents believe that good memory will ensure their excellence in completing the program (91.3%, M=1.76). However, there is an inconsistent finding when almost half of respondents assume that the lecturers prefer to test their memory (46.3%) rather than their understanding on the topics (53.8%). This inconsistent result can also be identified when almost fifty percent of respondents believe that the lecturers only question on facts (54%) rather than the practicality of topic learnt (46%). However, majority of respondents agree that the methods of coursework assessment have given a focus on evaluating their in-depth understanding (M=3.03, 90.2%)

Based on the results in Table 1, the appropriate workload dimension demonstrate a moderate level (M= 2.37, SP= 0.72). Some of respondents highlight that huge amount of coursework has impeded them to effectively perform the coursework (M= 2.22). Furthermore, more than fifty percent of respondents view the course workload was too difficult to achieve. However, there are some respondents who admit that they was given sufficient time to understand the topic learnt in the classroom (M= 2.78).

4.0 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, it can be revealed that learning climate in UTM SPACE has satisfied the respondents' learning need. However, there is a space for improving several learning climate dimensions in order to boost satisfaction among students. From all learning climate dimensions investigated in this study, appropriate workload dimension and continuous evaluation dimension have reported to a moderate level. However the detailed items analysis on good teaching dimension, clear goals and standards dimension and generic skills dimension indicates that there is a need for improvement. For example, even though good teaching dimension demonstrated the highest level of learning climate but it demands the lecturers to constantly give feedback towards students' achievement (Duff *et al*, 2004). Furthermore, it is advised that the lecturers should allocate ample time to comment on students' coursework. Besides for clear goals and standards dimension, the lecturers are required to explain clearly the learning outcome program in the first meeting with students. It because majority of respondents complaint that they face a difficulty to identify the lecturers' expectation and assessment method. Meanwhile the results for generic skill dimension, there a minority of respondents believes that they need to improve their writing skills.

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