

## Academic Performance of APEL Students in Open and Distance Learning

Norfardilawati Musa<sup>1\*</sup> •  
Christina Mary Richard<sup>2</sup> • Harvinder Kaur Dharam Singh<sup>3</sup>  
• Cik Norazlina Mohamad<sup>4</sup> • Rosinah Mahmood<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1-5</sup> Open University Malaysia, Kelana Jaya, Petaling Jaya, Malaysia.

\*Corresponding author. Email: norfardilawati@oum.edu.my

### Article Info:

Received: 27 Feb 2023; Revised: 13 Mar 2023; Accepted: 15 Mar 2023; Available Online: 18 Mar 2023

### Abstract

*Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) has paved greater access to lifelong learning opportunities. The systematic process of assessing prior learning for gaining access to higher education and accreditations for courses is a game-changing movement in Malaysian Education. Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) introduced the Open Entry Admission System in 2006 and gave the mandate to the Open University Malaysia to be the pioneer for operationalising it nationwide. The main objective of introducing APEL in Malaysia is to democratise education and develop human capital. The enrolment of students entering open and distance learning (ODL) institutions through the APEL system has increased over the years. More universities have been appointed to be the assessment centres. However, there is a lack of studies investigating the performance of students who have undergone the APEL system for admission. Thus, this study aims to examine the academic performance of APEL students and how their demographic factors influence academic performance. A quantitative research approach will be employed to collect data on students' academic performance based on the CGPA and demographic information. The population of this study was all learners under the Faculty of Business and Management (FBM). The results showed demographic factors such as age, marital status and type of programme does influence the APEL entrants' academic performance (CGPA) This is significant findings as ODL institutions will be able to take necessary proactive measures to establish appropriate action for curbing dropout rates.*

**Keywords:** academic performance-demography, APEL, open and distance learning.

### 1. Introduction

The Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) has been implemented in Malaysia since 2011. Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) introduced the Open Entry Admission System in 2006. The open entry system introduced was able to pave the way for greater access into lifelong learning opportunities. The motion was in line with the Strategic Plan of Higher Education 2007-2010, which focused on the development of human capital. Open University Malaysia (OUM) has been given the opportunity to be part of the process and was the first open and distance learning (ODL) institution that was given the mandate to implement this system in the country. Through open entry, individuals who did not meet the conventional entry requirements could leverage on their work experience to gain admission in OUM. Centre of Accreditation Prior Learning (CAPL) was then upgraded to Institute for Learning Recognition & Accreditation (ILRA) in 2015.

Due to the increasing number of enrolments through open entry, MQA decided to introduce the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) mechanism in Malaysia in 2016. APEL is defined as a systematic process that involves the identification, documentation and assessment of prior experiential learning, i.e., knowledge, skills and attitudes, to determine the extent to which an individual has achieved the desired learning outcomes, for access to a programme of study and/or award of credits (Sirat et al., 2020).

At present, OUM is appointed by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) as the partner University in the implementation of APEL in Malaysia. It also plays an active role in the development of APEL policies in Malaysia. APEL is divided into two categories, namely, APEL-A (admission) and APEL-C (credits). Since APEL-A is relatively new in its implementation, this study focuses on the performance of students, who have enrolled through APEL entry.

### 1.1. Research Problem

Human capital is the most important investment for developing a country. It is core to innovation and a productive high-income economy. One of the key elements that are needed is the recognition of non-formal learning and informal learning through Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL). APEL provides an opportunity for individuals with working experience who lack formal academic qualifications to pursue their studies in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). In general, knowledge obtained through formal education and working experience will be assessed in APEL's assessment.

There is substantial literature and record about APEL assessment among mainstream HEIs learners, but not with the online distance learners for comparison (Kaprawi et al., 2015; Ooi & Din Eak, 2019; Singh & Md Yassin, 2009). However, APEL involves a complex process of identification, documentation, and assessment of prior experiential learning to determine the extent to which an individual has achieved the desired learning outcomes for access to a programme of study and the award of credits. Furthermore, its implementation has several challenges because the APEL system is still mostly unknown to the general public and presents several barriers to its adoption. These challenges include the APEL conceptualisation process, the APEL process being time-consuming, the varying acceptance from the different disciplines, and the APEL assessors' lack of continuous training (Kaprawi et al., 2015; Ooi & Din Eak, 2019). Many other HEIs from various countries also face these multiple challenges when implementing APEL due to the lack of information on the APEL system that is still relatively unknown to the public (Kaprawi et al., 2015).

Suppose the APEL performance or implementation quality is not addressed. In that case, the quality of APEL implementation will be compromised. Malaysia's aim to develop a knowledgeable, innovative and productive high-income economy status to attain advanced nation status will be inhibited (MQA & Ehsan, 2016). Failing to foster lifelong learning and reskilling will lead to long-term unemployment, social cohesion, and well-being (MQA & Ehsan, 2016; OECD, 2016).

Based on the above problem statement, the following subsection explains the research objectives and research questions formulated for this research are:

### 1.2. Research Objectives

- i. To identify whether gender affects the performance of APEL A students
- ii. To examine whether age influences the performance of APEL A students
- iii. To analyse whether marital status affects the performance of APEL A students
- iv. To identify whether programmes influence the performance of APEL A students

### 1.3. Research Questions

- i. Does gender affect ODL APEL students' CGPA?
- ii. Does age affect ODL APEL students' CGPA?
- iii. Does marital status affect ODL APEL students' CGPA?
- iv. Does the programme affect ODL APEL students' CGPA?

## 1.4. Hypothesis

In line with the above ROs and RQs, this study will test the following hypotheses that have been constructed to be tested based on the collected data:

- H1 There is a significant difference in APEL Learners' CGPA based on gender.
- H2 There is a significant difference in APEL Learners' CGPA based on age.
- H3 There is a significant difference in APEL Learners' CGPA based on marital status.
- H4 There is a significant difference in APEL Learners' CGPA based on the programme.

## 1.5. Significance of Study

APEL is one of the Malaysian government's plans to democratise education and develop human capital. As such, by assessing the academic performance of APEL students is crucial in helping the government and involved educational institutions improve this system that aims to pave greater access to lifelong learning opportunities. Besides, this study can help to improve the quality of human capital through the flexibility of this learning by enhancing and/or developing a better flexible learning system.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL)

APEL is a "systematic process that involves the identification, documentation and assessment of prior experiential learning to determine the extent to which an individual has achieved the desired learning outcomes, for access to a program of study and/or award of credits" (Malaysia Qualification Agency, 2020).

With the existence of APEL, Malaysian candidates will have the opportunities to continue their studies at higher education institutions using their respective work experience (Ahmad Izanee Awang et al., 2014; Ooi & Din Eak, 2019) related to the field of study they wish to apply for.

APEL takes into account not only academic qualifications obtained through formal education but also informal and non-formal learning experiences (Malaysia Qualification Agency, 2020); Hargreaves, 2006), which will be assessed through relevant assessments. There are four levels of study that can be applied for admission through APEL, level 3 (certificate), level 4 (diploma), level 6 (bachelor's degree) and level 7 (master's degree).

### 2.2. Open Distance Learning (ODL)

The ODL education system focuses on open access to education and training to free the learners from the constraints of time and place, and offers flexible learning opportunities to individuals and groups of learners (Ghosh, 2012).

According to Arulogun et al. (2020), open and distance learning (ODL) students rely majorly on the use of Information and Communication and Technology (ICT) tools for online facilitation and other activities supporting learning.

Based on AM (2014), ODL has been described as "a process to create and provide access to learning when the source of information and the learners are separated by time and distance, or both." With the existence of the ODL system, learners can study anytime (in their own time), anywhere (at the place of their choice), and anyhow (without face-to-face contact with a teacher).

### **2.3. Academic Performance & Demography**

#### ***2.3.1. Academic Performance and Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA)***

Academic performance/achievement is determined by continuous assessment or CGPA and indicates how well a student, instructor, or institution has met their short- or long-term educational goals (CGPA) [14].

The success of students in educational institutions is measured by academic performance or how well students meet the standards set out by the programme they enrolled [15]. Most of the tertiary institutions use CGPA/GPA and expected GPA to measure their students' academic performance (Masrom & Usat, 2015). CGPA is crucial and a prominent value for future education that can be highlighted as a measurement to determine potential candidate in job hunting as well as students career mobility (Shahiri & Husain, 2015). In other words, Students' performance of CGPA is considered as an important element for students to graduate and pursue a good career.

Academic performance is the key to producing competent graduates. Part of the contribution to a greater height for CGPA comes in the form of self-motivation, teaching and learning process, attitudes towards the course, education institution's services (e.g. library and labs) (Adibah et al., 2019). Besides, students' academic performance is also influenced by various factors such as gender, race, stress and sleep quality (Mok & Tan, 2019), as well as the amount of hours spent on examination preparation and family responsibility (Paul, et al., 2017). It seems like demographic factors contributed significantly to the students' academic performance. However, to what extent do demographic elements affect APEL students' academic performance?

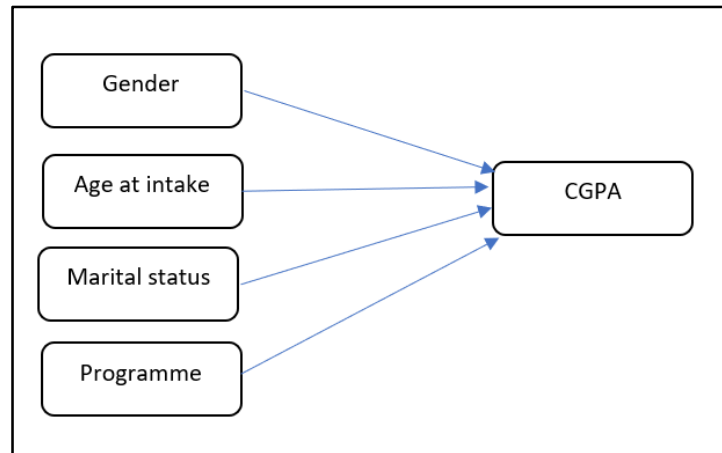
#### ***2.3.2. CGPA and Demography***

Demographics are categorised based on biological aspects, social, economic, geographical, residence, and culture (Febrianto et al., 2019). Demography serves the purpose of revealing potential coping or adopting strategies. Owolabi (2020) recognises two important demographic characteristics, such as marital status and year of participation. Unmarried students tend to be more active on social media, and the first-year batch of students are mainly victims of cyberbullying. There is a call to have strategies to address the issues of these two-demographic backgrounds. Identifying biological aspects such as age, Finnish's RPL candidates are mainly older and have a diverse background (Heinonen & Tuomainen, 2020). This gives their research team information to develop better methods in assessment strategies between their students and assessors.

Meanwhile, Universiti Malaysia Pahang (UMP), noted their students' academic performances are affected and they have difficulties adapting to self-directed learning-based degree programmes when they are from matriculation and diploma educational backgrounds (Zakaria et al., 2019). Furthermore, their study indicated that there were no mean differences between CGPA and gender. Therefore, it is yet to be known how demographic factors affect APEL entrants' performance.

### **3. Methodology**

This study employed a quantitative study method to investigate the impact of gender, age, marital status, and programme towards the academic performance of APEL entrants in OUM as shown in Figure 1. The purposive sampling was done to select the Faculty of Business and Management (FBM) as it is one of the faculties with a large number of learners. Focusing on one faculty only will save time and cost. A total of 3142 student data on gender, age at intake, marital status, student enrolment, programme, and CGPA were collected from the university's information system records. The data was analysed using descriptive and mean rank analysis with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).



**Figure 1.** The effect of demographics on CGPA for APEL entrants

#### 4. Result and Discussion

The collected data was analysed based on demographic elements which included gender, age at intake, marital status, student enrolment, programme, and the Cumulative Grade Points Average (CGPA), as shown in Table 1 – Table 4 below. While Table 5, shows the APEL Learners Enrolment in the Faculty of Business and Management starting from May 2007 – January 2022 (as of August 2022).

As of January 2022, the Faculty of Business reported 3,142 APEL students who are actively registered in their respective programmes. 54.71% (1719) of the APEL Learners are female (Table 1). In Table 2, at the point of intake, almost half of the APEL learners were in the group 21-30 years of age (48.7%), followed by the age group 31-40 years (36.6%). Marital status in Table 3 shows that 47.8% of the learners are married and 44.2% are single. 4.1% of them did not state their marital status. The faculty has a total of 15 programmes as listed in Table 4. A large number of APEL learners are registered under the Bachelor in Management (BIM) representing 31.9% followed by the Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) with 16.65%.

**Table 1.** Gender

|        | Gender |        |
|--------|--------|--------|
|        | N      | %      |
| Male   | 1423   | 45.29% |
| Female | 1719   | 54.71% |

**Table 2.** Age at Intake

|                    | Age at Intake |        |
|--------------------|---------------|--------|
|                    | N             | %      |
| 20 years and below | 50            | 1.59%  |
| 21-30 years        | 1488          | 47.39% |
| 31-40 years        | 1155          | 36.76% |
| 41-50 years        | 387           | 12.32% |
| 51-60 years        | 49            | 1.56%  |
| 61-70 years        | 11            | 0.35%  |
| Above 70 years     | 2             | 0.06%  |

**Table 3.** Marital Status

| <b>Marital Status</b> |      |        |
|-----------------------|------|--------|
|                       | N    | %      |
| Single                | 1366 | 43.48% |
| Married               | 1526 | 48.57% |
| Divorced              | 98   | 3.12%  |
| Widowed               | 17   | 0.54%  |
| Others                | 135  | 4.30%  |

**Table 4.** Number of APEL Learners by Programme

| <b>Programme</b> |      |        |
|------------------|------|--------|
|                  | N    | %      |
| DIM              | 181  | 5.76%  |
| DIA              | 11   | 0.35%  |
| DHRM             | 57   | 1.81%  |
| BM               | 37   | 1.18%  |
| BIM              | 1004 | 31.95% |
| BBA              | 523  | 16.65% |
| BAC              | 405  | 12.89% |
| BBF              | 1    | 0.03%  |
| BCOM             | 142  | 4.52%  |
| BHRM             | 511  | 16.26% |
| BTRM             | 13   | 0.41%  |
| MM               | 76   | 2.42%  |
| MBA              | 142  | 4.52%  |
| MCC              | 14   | 0.45%  |
| MHRM             | 25   | 0.8%   |

Table 5 depicts that a total of 14,326 students enrolled/entered through APEL since 2007. Currently, 28.24% (4,402) of the students are actively registered in the FBM programmes. 21.04% (3,280) have completed and graduated from their studies. However, a large number of learners 4,406 (28.27%) are dormant, meaning they have not registered for more than 3 semesters, and 20.31% (3,166) have quit their study programmes. Considering the numbers under dormant and quit categories, close to half of the APEL population in FBM (48.58%) have dropped out of their studies. Some of the conceivable reasons could be that the learners had difficulty coping with their learning and the nature of the open and distance learning may be challenging for learners who have left school some time ago, family and work responsibilities and time management issues and so forth. Despite that, it is worth noting that many learners have also successfully completed their programmes and are at par with their counterparts who have come in through the normal entrance requirement. The entry path into programmes may vary but the learning process, services and the path to completion are the same for APEL and normal entry learners.

**Table 5.** APEL Learners Enrolment in Faculty of Business and Management (from May 2007 – January 2022) as of August 2022

| Active | Graduated | Quit | Dormant | Terminated | Deceased | Total  |
|--------|-----------|------|---------|------------|----------|--------|
| 4402   | 3280      | 3166 | 4406    | 4          | 20       | 15,586 |

**4.1. Gender effect on ODL APEL students' CGPA**

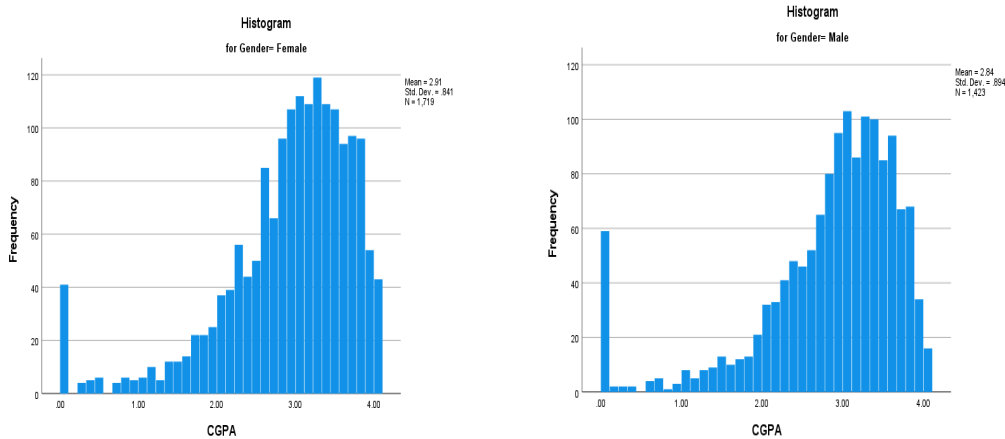
H1: There is a significant difference in APEL learners' CGPA based on gender.

A Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used as the sample size is larger than 50. The test indicated the data significantly deviated from a normal distribution (Table 6). The distribution of CGPA for male learners and female learners skewed towards the right as depicted in the histogram (Figure 2) and did not follow a normal distribution. It could be because the sample consists of only APEL learners and excluded mainstream entry learners in the population and dropout learners had zero values for CGPA, which affected the mean value of CGPA.

**Table 6.** Tests of Normality

|      |        | Kolmogorov-Smirnov <sup>a</sup> |      |      | Shapiro-Wilk |      |      |
|------|--------|---------------------------------|------|------|--------------|------|------|
| CGPA | Gender | Statistic                       | df   | Sig. | Statistic    | df   | Sig. |
|      | Male   | .127                            | 1423 | .000 | .853         | 1423 | .000 |
|      | Female | .103                            | 1719 | .000 | .884         | 1719 | .000 |

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction



**Figure 2.** Normality Testing Gender and CGPA

As such, a non-parametric test was performed. Mann-Whitney U test (Table 8), indicated that there is no statistical difference in the CGPA between male learners (Mean Rank = 1537.22) and female learners (Mean Rank = 1599.87),  $U=1174292.5$ ,  $p=.054$ . Though the mean rank of female learners is higher by 62.65 than the male learners (Table 7), it was not significant enough. Hence, there is no difference in the academic achievements between both male and female groups of learners.

**Table 7.** Mean Rank of CGPA based on Gender

|      |        | Ranks |           |              |
|------|--------|-------|-----------|--------------|
| CGPA | Gender | N     | Mean Rank | Sum of Ranks |
|      | Male   | 1423  | 1537.22   | 2187468.50   |
|      | Female | 1719  | 1599.87   | 2750184.50   |
|      | Total  | 3142  |           |              |



**Table 8.** Mann-Whitney U Test for Gender and CGPA

| <b>Test Statistics <sup>a</sup></b> |             |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|
|                                     | CGPA        |
| Mann-Whitney U                      | 1174292.500 |
| Wilcoxon W                          | 2187468.500 |
| Z                                   | -1.927      |
| Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)              | .054        |

a. Grouping Variable: Gender

Based on this finding, it's confirmed that Hypothesis 1 developed for RQ1 is rejected. In other words, there is no significant difference in APEL Learners' CGPA based on gender. In general, the result is contradicted with most of the past research which suggested that female students performed better or more successful than male students (Dayioglu & Turut, 2007; Ghavami & Khajehpour, 2011; Khwaileh & Zaza, 2010; Orabi, 2007; Parajuli & Thaoa, 2017).

However, the finding of this RQ1 supported research conducted by Adigun et al (2015) and Goni et al (2015) that gender has no significant differences in students' performance, although in the literatures have mentioned that gender is one of the factors to have considerable effects on students' academic performance. This probably due to the category of students (adult learners) that contributed to the insignificant difference between gender as explained by Vasiliu (2020). According to Vasiliu (2020), students' academic performance based on gender only showed significant difference when compared with students' age, where students above 27 years old (regardless of their gender) showed fluctuating performance, but with higher values than younger students (below 26 years old).

#### 4.2. Age effect on ODL APEL students' CGPA

H2 - There is a significant difference in APEL learners' CGPA based on age.

Table 10 shows the Kruskal-Wallis test,  $H(6) = 95.791, P = .001$ . The null hypothesis is rejected. Hence, APEL learners' age at intake demonstrates a statistically significant difference in CGPA. Based on Table 9, APEL learners in the 51-60 years of age (Mean rank = 1924.12) reported the highest CGPA performance compared to the 41-50 years age group (Mean rank = 1806.22), 31-40 years age group (Mean rank = 1669.01) and the other age groups.

**Table 9.** Mean Rank of CGPA based on Age at Intake

|      |                    | <b>Ranks</b> |           |
|------|--------------------|--------------|-----------|
|      | Age At Intake      | N            | Mean Rank |
| CGPA | 20 years and below | 50           | 1039.24   |
|      | 21-30 years        | 1488         | 1439.99   |
|      | 31-40 years        | 1155         | 1669.01   |
|      | 41-50 years        | 387          | 1806.22   |
|      | 51-60 years        | 49           | 1924.12   |
|      | 61-70 years        | 11           | 1760.09   |
|      | Above 70 years     | 2            | 1309.00   |
|      | Total              | 3142         |           |



**Table 10.** Kruskal-Wallis Test for Age at Intake

| <b>Test Statistics<sup>a,b</sup></b> |        |
|--------------------------------------|--------|
|                                      | CGPA   |
| Kruskal-Wallis H                     | 95.791 |
| df                                   | 6      |
| Asymp. Sig.                          | .000   |

a. Kruskal Wallis Test  
b. Grouping Variable: Age at Intake

The finding for this RQ2 supported the H2 developed for the study, which, there is a significant difference in APEL Learners’ CGPA based on their age. This result parallel with research implemented by Vasiliu (2020) and Navarro et al (2015).

**4.3. Marital status effect on ODL APEL students' CGPA**

H3: There is a significant difference in APEL learners’ CGPA based on marital status.

Based on Table 12, the Kruskal-Wallis test showed that there was a statistically significant difference in CGPA between the different groups of marital status,  $H(4) = 13.944, P = .007$ . The null hypothesis is rejected. Hence, the APEL learners demonstrate a statistically significant difference in CGPA between marital status. Based on Table 11, married learners (Mean rank = 1630.25), as well as divorced learners (Mean rank = 1618.02) performed better than single learners (Mean rank = 1512.62). 135 learners did not specify their marital status (mean rank = 1478.06).

**Table 11.** Mean Rank of CGPA based on Marital Status

|      |                | <b>Ranks</b> |           |
|------|----------------|--------------|-----------|
| CGPA | Marital Status | N            | Mean Rank |
|      | Single         | 1366         | 1512.62   |
|      | Married        | 1526         | 1630.25   |
|      | Divorced       | 98           | 1618.02   |
|      | Widowed        | 17           | 1502.71   |
|      | Others         | 135          | 1478.06   |
|      | Total          | 3142         |           |

**Table 12.** Kruskal-Wallis Test for Marital Status

| <b>Test Statistics<sup>a,b</sup></b> |        |
|--------------------------------------|--------|
|                                      | CGPA   |
| Kruskal-Wallis H                     | 13.944 |
| df                                   | 4      |
| Asymp. Sig.                          | .007   |

a. Kruskal Wallis Test  
b. Grouping Variable: Marital Status

Based on the study findings, it can be concluded that marital status has significant difference in APEL Learners’ CGPA. As such the H3 of the RQ3 is accepted. The results also supported findings by other research on the impacts of marital status on students’ academic performance (Owen, 1999; Surajo & Umar, 2019; Thomas et al., 2012). However, Surajo and Umar (2019) found that marital status has

negatively influenced students’ academic performance. This is different with the study’s findings and other studies conducted by Al-Mutairi (2010), Smith and Naylor (2001) and Thomas et al (2012) – married students outperforming single students. Among the reasons identified by these studies are the family commitment make the students motivated and be serious in their study, support as well as families’ expectation of their study also influenced students’ seriousness and focus during the study.

**4.4. Programme effect on ODL APEL students' CGPA**

H4 - There is a significant difference in APEL learners’ CGPA based on the programme.

In Table 14, the Kruskal-Wallis test showed that there was a statistically significant difference in CGPA between the 15 programmes,  $H(14) = 131.191, P= .000$ . Hence, the APEL learners demonstrate a statistically significant difference in CGPA between the programmes. Based on Table 13, master’s degree programmes have a higher mean ranking than bachelor’s degree programmes. The diploma programmes have lower mean ranks in their CGPA. The order of CGPA performance for the master’s degree is Master in Management (MM) (Mean rank = 2325.34), Master in Human Resource (MHRM) (Mean rank = 2271.52), Master in CC (Mean rank = 2227.32) and Master in Business Administration (MBA) (Mean rank = 2122.82). The passing grade for master’s programmes is Grade B (CGPA = 3.0) which is higher than the required passing grade for bachelor’s programmes. In addition, the entry requirement for APEL students for the master’s degree programme is to possess a diploma or its equivalent academic qualification with 5 years of working experience. Higher education background help

**Table 13.** Mean Rank of CGPA based on Programme

|      |           | Ranks |           |
|------|-----------|-------|-----------|
| CGPA | Programme | N     | Mean Rank |
|      | DIM       | 181   | 1146.78   |
|      | DIA       | 11    | 1137.50   |
|      | DHRM      | 57    | 968.16    |
|      | BM        | 37    | 1746.66   |
|      | BIM       | 1004  | 1502.16   |
|      | BBA       | 523   | 1549.98   |
|      | BAC       | 405   | 1929.33   |
|      | BBF       | 1     | 618.50    |
|      | BCOM      | 142   | 1446.60   |
|      | BHRM      | 511   | 1376.75   |
|      | BTRM      | 13    | 1683.27   |
|      | MM        | 76    | 2325.34   |
|      | MBA       | 142   | 2122.82   |
|      | MCC       | 14    | 2227.32   |
|      | MHRM      | 25    | 2271.52   |
|      | Total     | 3142  |           |

**Table 14.** Kruskal-Wallis Test for Programme (Test Statistics a,b)

|                  | CGPA    |
|------------------|---------|
| Kruskal-Wallis H | 292.655 |
| df               | 14      |
| Asymp. Sig.      | .000    |

a. Kruskal Wallis Test

b. Grouping Variable: Programme

The results achieved for RQ4 supported the H4 developed for this study. Based on the literature, course level (Simpson, 2006; Woodman, 2001), course programme [39] influenced students’ academic performance. Basic knowledge and experience before enrolling or registering for the chosen programme

also has contributed to the significant difference in students' CGPA (Henriksson & Wolming, 1998). This is in line with the finding of RQ4, when the academic performances of postgraduate students outperforming the required passing grade for bachelor's programmes, as the APEL's entry requirement for the master's degree programme is to possess at least diploma or equivalent academic qualification with 5 years of working experience.

## 5. Conclusion

The findings of this study highlighted the impacts of demographic elements measured. Although gender does not significantly difference in APEL Students' CGPA, it is relatively difference when compared with the age of the students. The insignificant difference in term of gender among students being studied, probably due to the nature of the programmes offered by the Faculty of Business and Management itself. However, the other three demographic elements showed significant difference in the CGPA scored by APEL students. The results of this study are useful in the range that the complete the strategies concerning the way in which we can ameliorate and maintain a more adequate level of academic performance, and it also helps to improve or overcome the attrition rate among the APEL-A entrants. However, there are a number of knowledges that can be further investigated to support the findings of this current study by recommending future research that is related to this topic. In-depth exploration through qualitative data helps to identify the reasons behind this such findings. Besides, by involving APEL-A students from different faculties and programmes will help explore the extent to which such patterns produce similar results.

## References

- Adibah, N., Hasan, A., Ahmad, N., Aina, N., & Razak, A. (2019). Factors That Significantly Affect College Students' CGPA. *International Academic Research Journal of Social Science*, 3(1), 77–81.
- Adigun, J., Onihunwa, J., Irunokhai, E., Sada, Y., & Adesina, O. (2015). Effect of Gender on Students' Academic Performance in Computer Studies in Secondary Schools in New Bussa, Borgu Local Government of Niger State. *Journal of Education and practice*, 6(33), 1-7.
- Al-Mutairi, A. (2010). Factors affecting business students' performance in Arab Open University: The case of Kuwait. *International Journal of Business Management*, 6(5), 146 - 155.
- AM, S. (2014, December). The challenges of distance learning education system in Karnataka State for higher level education. In *Nitte University, Fourth International Conference on Higher Education: Special Emphasis on Management Education*.
- Arulogun, O. T., Akande, O. N., Akindele, A. T., & Badmus, T. A. (2020). Survey dataset on open and distance learning students' intention to use social media and emerging technologies for online facilitation. *Data in Brief*, 31, 105929.
- Awang, A. I., Yaacob, N. A. N., & Noor, K. M. (2014). A comparative study on the persistency and performance of flexible and normal entry learners.
- Cheng, S., & Siow, H. L. (2018). Accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL): An alternative entry route to higher education in Malaysia.
- Dayioglu, M. & Turut, S. (2007). Gender differences in academic performance in a large public university in Turkey. *Higher Education*, 53(2), 255-277. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-005-2464-6>.
- Febrianto, N. F., Arilia, L., Rahmawati, F., Muharromah, G. L., & Ridlwan, A. A. (2019). The Effect of Religiosity, Demography, and Motivation on Student Sharing Behavior Patterns. *Journal Intellectual Sufism Research (JISR)*, 2(1), 55–59. <https://doi.org/10.52032/jisr.v2i1.47>.
- Ghavami, S.D. and Khajehpour, M. (2011). Gender differences in factors affecting academic performance of high school students. *Procedia - Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 15, 1040-1045.

- Ghosh, S. (2012). Open and distance learning (ODL) education system-past, present and future—a systematic study of an alternative education system. *Journal of Global Research in Computer Science*, 3(4), 53-57. [12]
- Goni, U., Ali, H. K., & Bularafa, M. W. (2015). Gender difference in students' academic performance in colleges of education in Borno State, Nigeria: Implications for counselling. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 6(32), 107-114.
- Hargreaves, J. (2006). *Recognition of prior learning, at a glance*. National Centre for vocational Education Research (NCVER).
- Heinonen, A., & Tuomainen, S. (2020). Enhancing assessment in the recognition of prior learning with digitalisation. *Language Learning in Higher Education*, 10(2), 403–420. <https://doi.org/10.1515/cercles-2020-2027>.
- Henriksson, W., & Wolming, S. (1998). Academic performance in four study programmes: a comparison of students admitted on the basis of GPA and SweSAT scores, with and without credits for work experience. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 42(2), 135-150.
- Kaprawi, N., Razzaly, W., & Ali, W. N. S. W. (2015). Implementation framework system for Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) in Higher Institutions in Malaysia. *Jurnal Teknologi*, 77(33).
- Khwaileh, F. and Zaza, H. (2010). Gender differences in academic performance among undergraduates at the University of Jordan: Are they real or stereotyping? *College Student Journal*, 45.
- Malaysian Qualification Agency (2020). *APEL Learners' Handbook*. [https://www2.mqa.gov.my/portalapela/dokumen/Apela\\_learners\\_%20handbook\\_L3-L7\\_120721.pdf](https://www2.mqa.gov.my/portalapela/dokumen/Apela_learners_%20handbook_L3-L7_120721.pdf).
- Masrom, M., & Usat, S. (2015). Use of online social networking and academic performance of students. In *Encyclopaedia of Information Science and Technology*, (3rd ed.) (pp. 2654-2661). IGI Global.
- Mok, E. Y. L., & Tan, K. W. (2019). Understanding academic performance based on gender, race, stress and sleep quality. *Trends in Undergraduate Research*, 2(2), e1-6. <https://doi.org/10.33736/tur.1972.2019>.
- MQA & Ehsan, S. D. (2016). *Guidelines to good practices: Accreditation of prior experiential learning for credit award*. Malaysian Qualifications Agency.
- Navarro, J. J., García-Rubio, J., & Olivares, P. R. (2015). The relative age effect and its influence on academic performance. *PLoS one*, 10(10), e0141895.
- OECD (2016), *The survey of adult skills: Reader's companion*, (2nd Ed.) OECD Publishings. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264258075-en>
- Okegbemiro, J. O. (2021). *Effects of blended and e-learning on academic achievement of business education students in word processing* [Doctoral dissertation, Kwara State University, Nigeria]
- Ooi, L.H. and Din Eak, A. (2019), Implementation and challenges of accreditation of prior experiential learning: admissions (APEL-A): The assessors' perspective, *Asian Association of Open Universities Journal*, 14(1), 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1108/AAOUJ-01-2019-0003>.
- Orabi, I. (2007). *Gender differences in student academic performance and attitudes*. American Society for Engineering Education. <https://peer.asee.org/gender-differences-in-student-academic-performance-and-attitudes.pdf>
- Owen V. (1999). Exploring beliefs about academic performance achievement. *The Uganda Education Journal*, 2, 57.
- Owolabi, R. (2020). Cyberbullying, demography and coping strategies among Nigerian Students. *Covenant Journal of Communication*, 7(1), 84–107. <https://doi.org/10.47231/fyss8780>
- Parajuli, M., & Thapa, A. (2017). Gender differences in the academic performance of students. *Journal of Development and Social Engineering*, 3(1), 39-47.

- Paul, G. K., Chowdhury, R., Sabiha, M., & Ferdous, S. J. (2017). Determine the factors which influence the academic performance of university female students: A case study in MBSTU. *Journal of Science and Technology*, 7(1 & 2): 147-155.
- Shahiri, A. M., & Husain, W. (2015). A review on predicting student's performance using data mining techniques, *Procedia Computer Science*, 72, 414-422.
- Simpson, O. (2006). Predicting student success in open and distance learning, *Open Learning*, 21(2), 125- 138.
- Singh, D.H.K. and Md Yassin, J. (2009), *Initial experience in implementation of open entry and recognition of prior learning in OU Malaysia*. Open University Malaysia. Retrieved April 14, 2017, from [http://eprints.oum.edu.my/201/1/Initial\\_experience.pdf](http://eprints.oum.edu.my/201/1/Initial_experience.pdf) (accessed 14 April 2017).
- Sirat, M., Alias, A.K., Jamil, H., Saad, W.Z., Yusoff, M.S.B., Shuib, M., Selvanathan, M., Muftahu, M. & Ghasemy, M. (2020). *Flexible learning pathways in Malaysian Higher Education*. Report for the Flexible Learning Pathways in Higher Education.
- Smith, J., & Naylor, R. (2001). Determinants of degree performance in UK universities: a statistical analysis of the 1993 cohort. *Oxford Bulletin of Economics and Statistics*, 63(1), 29-60.
- Sundar, P. P., & Kumar, A. S. (2013). Evaluation of regional benchmark impact in EDM. *International Journal of Computer Science Issues (IJCSI)*, 10(2 Part 2), 531.
- Surajo, M. S., & Umar, R. T. (2019). Influence of course load and marital status on academic performance of business education students in North-West, Nigeria. *Fudma Journal of Sciences*, 3(2), 149-153.
- Thomas, J., Raynor, M., & Al-Marzooqi, A. (2012). Marital status and gender as predictors of undergraduate academic performance: A United Arab Emirates context. *Learning and Teaching in Higher Education: Gulf Perspectives*, 9(2).
- Vasiliu, D. (2020). The Academic performance model for emerging-adult students. *Postmodern Openings*, 11(1), 162-177.
- Woodman, R. (2001). *Investigation of factors that influence student retention and success rate on Open University courses in the East Anglia region* [M.Sc. Dissertation, Sheffield Hallam University, UK]
- Zakaria, R., Satari, S. Z., Damahuri, N. A., & Khairuddin, R. (2019). Descriptive analysis of students' CGPA: A case study of Universiti Malaysia Pahang. *IOP Conference Series: Materials Science and Engineering*, 469(1). <https://doi.org/10.1088/1757-899X/469/1/012100>