

PERCEPTIONS OF IN-SERVICE TEACHERS ON OUM AS AN OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING PROVIDER

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports the findings of the research conducted to investigate the gap between factors perceived as important by the in-service teachers and satisfactorily fulfilled by Open University Malaysia. Six factors identified for open and distance learners are (i) access to information and administrative support; (ii) teaching and learning process; (iii) transition; (iv) programme implementation; (v) outreach; and (vi) academic support. A set of questionnaire comprising a section on demography and another section containing 37 items encompassing the six factors were developed by the researchers. Six hundred questionnaires were then distributed to the in-service teachers studying at twenty learning centres throughout the country. The respondents comprise 178 male teachers and 402 female ranging from the age 25 to 49 years old. The overall findings indicated these teachers found five factors are of high importance and satisfaction. A detailed analysis revealed several services which are satisfying such as the online registration procedures; the use of technology for communication; easy access to information online; an enriched learning experience which allow them to perform better; gaining tutors' respect; good interaction between learners and tutors. However, there are areas where the university can improve her services including making support services available at any time and anywhere (not only at the learning centres); providing immediate feedback to request for assistance and information; providing tutor's feedback on their assignments. Although the in-service teachers find low need to have extra tutorial classes; they would like to have special examination clinics. This research has provided Open University Malaysia the opportunity to improve its services as a leading provider in open and distance learning.

Keywords: *Open and Distance Learning, In-Service Teachers, Importance, Satisfaction.*

INTRODUCTION

Like many other countries in the world, Malaysia acknowledges that education plays a crucial role in nation building. Across the globe, enhancing human capital is now seen as a crucial factor in driving knowledge-based economies. In order to enhance human capital, nations give great priority and allocate substantive proportions of annual budgets to education and training. Malaysia is no different from the rest of the world; our Third Outline Perspective Plan (OPP3) recognises that "the successful development of the knowledge-

based economy will, therefore, largely depend on the quality of the education and training system (Economic Planning Unit, 2006).

Ali (2010) suggests that as a result of this 'race' towards creating knowledge-based economies, "universities have had to evolve with the needs of the community – through programmes, infrastructures, delivery methods, technologies and philosophies that can reflect the community's demands and attitudes". He further offers that Open and Distance learning (ODL) has become the primary means by which an unprecedented number of people have had opportunities to attend higher education, unlike previously where the only tertiary education one could get was by attending conventional universities. This transformation in the way higher education is being made available to the masses has played a significant role in upgrading and upskilling of professionals across a large sector of domains, including those in the education domain. The upskilling and upgrading of the current teacher workforce in Malaysia is seen as the way to enhance teacher quality. This particularly fulfills the aim of widening access to affordable and quality education, one of six National Key Results Area (NKRA). The enhancement of teacher knowledge and competencies is believed to be a strong contributory factor resulting in improved student outcomes.

Open and Distance learning is relatively new in the Malaysian education scenario. In 2001, Open University Malaysia was established as the first institution in this nation to implement using her unique blended pedagogy. Since then more than fifty programmes are offered including the Bachelor of Teaching specifically conducted in collaboration with the Teacher Education Division with the purpose of upgrading the academic qualifications of in-service teachers serving primary schools.

OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

The objectives of this study are to:

- (1) examine the extent to which in-service teachers pursuing the Bachelor of Teaching Programme are satisfied with their experiences as adult learners in ODL;
- (2) identify areas of strengths and opportunities for improvement in the Bachelor of Teaching Programme in meeting adult learners needs;
- (3) suggest recommendations on how to further improve the upgrading of in-service teachers via the ODL mode.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This is a survey research using questionnaire as an instrument. Items in the questionnaire pertained to the six factors identified for this study which include: (i) access to information and administrative support; (ii) teaching and learning process; (iii) transition; (iv) programme implementation; (v) outreach; and (vi) academic support. These factors were adopted and adapted from the Eight Principles of Effectiveness for Serving Adult Learners as identified by Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (2000) to suit local conditions.

The questionnaire was divided into two sections. Section A consists of demographic items, and Section B comprises 37 items related to the six factors. Four-point Likert Scale on Importance and Satisfaction was used.

DATA COLLECTION

A total of 4678 in-service teachers who registered for the Bachelor of Teaching (Primary Education) and Bachelor of Teaching (Pre-school) in semester January 2012 was the

population of this research. The samples were obtained using stratified random sampling technique according to six geographical zones in Malaysia, namely:

- (a) North – (states of Perlis, Kedah, and Penang)
- (b) Central – (states Selangor and Perak, and Federal Territory Kuala Lumpur)
- (c) South – (states of Negeri Sembilan, Melaka and Johor)
- (d) East – (states of Kelantan, Terengganu and Pahang)
- (e) Sabah, and
- (f) Sarawak

A total of 600 questionnaires were distributed to various OUM learning centres according to the six zones. Completed questionnaires were returned to the Faculty of Education and Languages and data were analysed using descriptive statistics. Importance-Satisfaction Analysis Chart was computed to determine the in-service teachers' satisfaction as adult learners in ODL mode and to identify strengths and opportunities for improvement of the Bachelor of Teaching programmes.

FINDINGS

Tables 1(a), 1(b) and 1(c) illustrated the demographic background of the respondents. A total of 172 male teachers and 402 female teachers participated in the research. Having more female than male teachers is a common phenomenon in Malaysia. More than 90% of these teachers are below the age of 45; since this is the required age limit for in-service teachers to be sponsored for further study by the Ministry of Education. About 60% of these teachers are well experienced having taught for more than 10 years. About 4% of them have more than 22 years of teaching experience.

Table 1(a): Distribution of Respondents According to Gender

Gender	Frequencies	Percentages
Male	178	30.7
Female	402	69.3
Total:	580	100.0

Table 1(b): Distribution of Respondents According to Age

Age Range	Frequencies	Percentages
25 – 29 years old	78	13.6
30 – 34 years old	148	25.7
35 – 39 years old	179	31.1
40 – 44 years old	122	21.2
45 – 49 years old	48	8.3
Total:	575	99.9

Table 1(c): Distribution of Respondents According to Teaching Experience

Teaching Experience	Frequencies	Percentages
3 – 6 years	34	5.9
7 – 10 years	191	33.0
11 – 14 years	142	24.5
15 – 18 years	142	24.5
19 – 22 years	47	8.1
More than 22 years	22	3.8
Total:	578	99.8

Importance-Satisfaction Quadrant Analysis was used to visualize the relationship between importance and satisfaction ratings. In the quadrant analysis, the overall mean for satisfaction was plotted against the overall mean for importance, for each factor.

Table 2: Importance-Satisfaction Gap Analysis

	Importance			Satisfaction			Gap
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	
1 Admin support	578	3.4714	.39524	582	3.2415	.40344	.23
2 Teaching learning	577	3.4350	.40925	582	3.2352	.40850	.20
3 Transition	577	3.1022	.55960	579	2.8261	.52901	.28
4 Program	575	3.4003	.43458	577	3.1161	.46278	.28
5 Outreach	580	3.4931	.38130	581	3.2821	.38507	.21
6 Academic support	578	3.4167	.40649	580	3.1270	.40930	.29

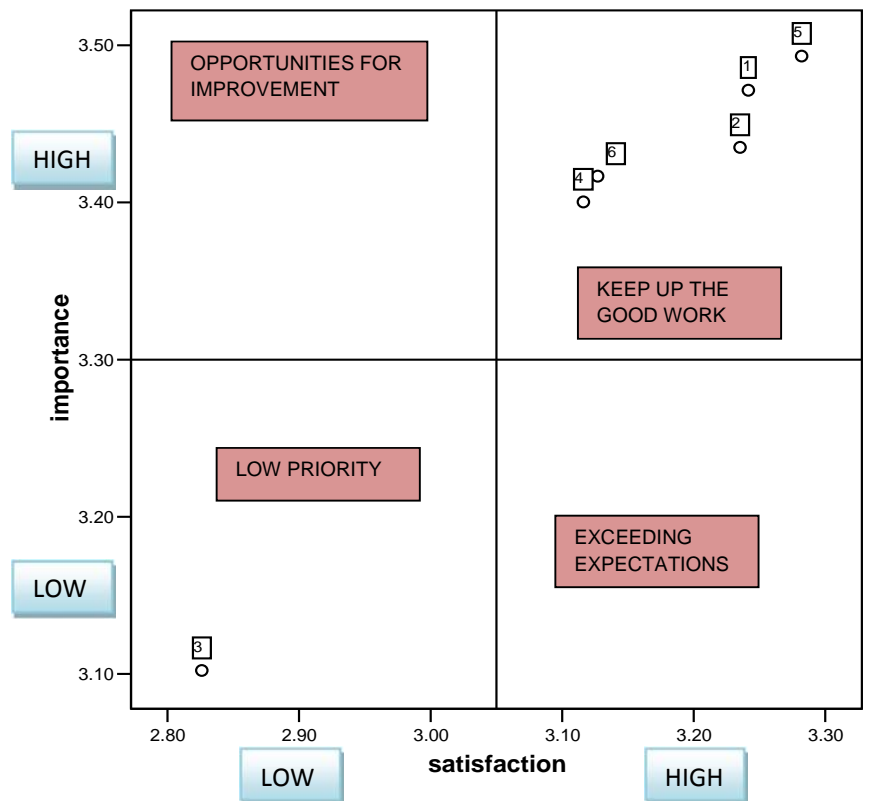


Figure 1: Relationship between Importance and Satisfaction for Each Factor

Table 2 indicates the gap analysis between factors perceived as important by the in-service teachers and satisfactorily fulfilled by OUM as a training provider. The low difference of not more than 0.30 clearly indicates OUM's good performance.

Quadrant analysis depicted in Figure 1 indicates that OUM programmes did well in the delivery of teaching and learning process to the adult learners with five factors are within the High Importance, High Satisfaction quadrant. These five factors are:

- (1) Factor 1: Access to Information and Administrative Support
- (2) Factor 2 : Teaching & Learning Process

- (3) Factor 4 : Program Implementation
- (4) Factor 5 : Outreach
- (5) Factor 6 : Academic Support

A detailed analysis revealed several services which are satisfying such as:

- (1) easy online registration procedures;
- (2) use of technology for communication;
- (3) easy access to information online;
- (4) enriched learning experience which allow learners to perform better;
- (5) gaining tutor's respect;
- (6) good interactions between learners and tutors.

However, there are areas where OUM can improve her services including:

- (1) making support services available at any time and any place (not only at the learning centres);
- (2) providing immediate feedback to requests for assistance and information;
- (3) providing tutor's feedback on learners assignments;

Although announcements and reminders for submission of assignments and re-registration for the following semester were made online through OUM portal; some of these teachers still missed the deadlines. They suggested for OUM support staffs to remind them personally on such matters. Action has been taken by sending out sms and emails as reminders besides the usual online channel.

Transition is the only factor which is in the Low Importance, Low Satisfaction quadrant. The in-service teachers find low need to have extra tutorial classes; but they would like to have workshops on study skills and special examination clinics. OUM should also enhance its academic counseling service.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this research indicates that OUM has performed well in providing support and services to the in-service teachers currently enrolled as ODL learners. Besides, fulfilling their needs satisfactorily; OUM also ensures the programmes offered are of quality. Furthermore, this research has provided OUM the opportunity to improve her services as a leading provider in ODL.

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