



Problems of freshmen in Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

This article sets out to address the question of what are problems of freshmen in Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM). The study focuses on an involving all freshmen of education faculty in UTM. To satisfy the purpose of this study, Mooney problem check list (MPCL) was used. The results shows that Home and Family problems had the highest rate among this population. In contrast, Health and Physical Development problems had the lowest rate among them. Other categories of problems among the students have been discussed in the study. A few suggestions also have been highlighted in the studies for the future research.

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Introduction

“To know how to teach them, we must understand our freshmen better. We must have a clear-eyed view of who they are, where they come from, how they have been instructed, what values they hold, and what their expectations and goals are” Erickson and Strommer(1991).

Every individual's life isn't without problems. Some new problems are natural result of new physical or social environment. Problem situation arise in our interactions with ourselves, with others, and with the social settings, organizations, and institutions of life Egan (2007). In other words, the exposure factors stem from three main aspects: biological, social and psychological. Biological factors include chronic illnesses and genetic predisposition. Social factors include lack or loss of control over one's physical environment and social support networks. Psychological factors include any events or occurrences that an individual consider a threat to his or her coping strategies or resources.

University Technology Malaysia (UTM) as one of high rank universities in Malaysia uses modern equipment, technology and facilities. There are fifteen student colleges that are comfortable. Nevertheless, these facilities cannot solve the problems faced by the first year undergraduate students, who come from different parts of Malaysia to UTM to continue their studies.

Consequently, it is important to category the real problems stand in front of freshmen so that they will be able to become balance generation who could experience helpful life.

Background of Problem

This is obvious that people have problems during every stage of their lives. One of the most important of these stages is student period. Malaysia as developed country in South West Asia has a lot of students in its universities. Between Malaysian universities, UTM is well known because of its rank in the world. People, who come from different parts of Malaysia to UTM, have different values, different social economy status, different parenting skills and different status of education. At certain age, this people come to the university and become student, where they bring along their cultures and their points of

views. In this new environment they face with problems in social, psychological and biological fields.

For instance, according to Viltz(1998), a survey conducted in 1995 about first-year students, collected information about the parents of Grambling State University first-year students. Nearly 8 in 10 of the students reported that both their parents are living with each other. Approximately 20% indicated their parents are divorced or living apart. Three-quarters of our first-year students said their fathers obtained a college degree; 45% of these fathers have at least one graduate degree. In 1995, about 68% of the first-year students reported that their mother has a college degree; nearly 30% of these degree holders have at least one graduate degree. From economical point of view, rich students have accessed to good facilities and equipments. Their parents have had good jobs with high income. So they have had high quality nutrition, have taken well medical service and access to internet, magazines, newspapers, books and satellite programs through TV. While some students who come from poor families have different conditions refer to above resources.

Also regarding to educational background, some students come from boarding school, some from rural area, some from urban area and some from international schools. Students who come from boarding schools could live independently whereas some other may haven't experience of living far from family. Rural students have educated in the closed context and couldn't access to suitable training, whilst urban students have enjoyed from many educational facilities. For instance, the second group have used library, laboratory, sports equipments and experienced teachers, while these conditions may have been a dream for rural students.

Furthermore, they have different values and cultures. Some of them have objective values even as some others have subjective ideals. For example, education itself may be value for some of them, while for others monetary issues may be more important. Also some of them respect to religious values whilst some other might not believe to metaphysics. Besides, there are many criteria between different groups of students. For instance, some students have rational touchstone, against some others who have emotional benchmarking. Another important factor

that caused amongst students is their parents' skills. Parents use different skills for training their children. Some parents, who are educated, know methods for educating their children. They try to introduce valuable books and modern technology. Parents of some families focus on teaching communication skills and growing social dimensions. On the other hand, some other parents have lower education or illiterate and lack of this knowledge and skills.

Aforementioned reasons implied to do a research to investigate the category of problems encountered by freshmen in UTM.

Instrument: Mooney Questionnaire

The Mooney problem check list (MPCL) was used to identify personal problems that students encounter in college. The MPCL consists of 230 items divided into Tinto(1975) areas with about 20 items each. Of particular interest were the student responses to: Health and physical development, finances, living conditions, and Employment, social and recreational problems, Psychological social relation, Personal relationships and emotional, Marriage and sexual, Family, Moral and religious, adjustment to college work, the future, vocational and educational, and curriculum, teaching procedure. The results of the data analyses indicated that the problems most identified by students were of Family problems, Marriage and Sexual problems, and Social and Personal relationships. Selected recommendations from this study included: (1) development of early problem screening strategies; (2) implementation of individualized educational service plans (IESP); and (3) expansion of student support personnel. In summary, the information gained from the study provided a better understanding of the relationships between pre-college attributes and personal problems of developmental college freshmen. Dealing with increasing numbers of college students who present with serious psychological problems has been identified as a significant college for counseling centers in the current decade Sharkin(1997).

Previous Research

In a review of the literature, studies showed student problems at most levels of the academic hierarchy; undergraduate, graduate, and professional levels, across variable of race, gender, socioeconomic status and academics. According to Fenty (2009), freshmen' success in college is influenced by students' pre-college characteristics, institutional characteristics, and post secondary experience. Many studies have used the Mooney Problem Check List to analyze student problems. Some other researchers, such as, Cusick(1980), Mayes A N and McConatha(1982), Koplik & Devito(1986) and Burkes(1995), represent such research during the last two decades.

Indeed, the literature abounds with verification studies and research concerning the problems of university populations but there is little original research about the problems of Malaysian college freshmen. The need for data regarding this population is equally as important. According to Tinto(1975) mentioned that students enter college and universities with varying patterns of personal, family, and academic characteristics and skills. These include initial dispositions and intentions concerning college attendance and personal goals.

Tinto(1987,1975) made the following statement on adjustment to college when he stated that: "At the very outset, persistence in college requires individuals to adjust, both socially and intellectually to the new and sometimes quite strange world of college. Most persons experience some difficulty in making that adjustment. For many, the period of

adjustment is brief and the difficulties they encounter are minor. Difficulty in making the transition to college arises from two distinct: (1) to separate themselves from past forms of association characteristics of the local high school and its peer groups along with first-time separation from the family of upbringing (2) the difficulty arising from the individual's need to adjust to the new and often more challenging social and intellectual demands which college imposes upon may help prepare new students for college, the preparation is rarely perfect. The transition to college rarely is without a period of sometimes quite difficult adjustment." (PP. 47-48). The same research conducted by Bragg(1994) posited that individual characteristics, prior experiences, and goal commitments along with the individual's integration into the academic and social systems of the institution directly impact upon student retention and success. Included in this process are aspects of the student's life both past and present. Other factors along with integration or the inability to integrate into the social environment of the college impacted upon student attrition and retention. These were external factors such as cost and benefits, individual characteristics, and goal commitment (Bragg,1994).

In another study, Mayes A N and McConatha(1982) used the MPCL and found that the students ranked the top four problem areas to be: 1) Adjustment to College Work (ACW), 2) Social-Psychological Relations (SPR), 3) Personal-Psychological Relations (PPR), and 4) Finances, Living Conditions, and Employment (FLE).

Koplik & Devito(1986) used the MPCL to compare Problems of freshmen in the classes of 1976 and 1986. A summary of their findings indicated:

✓ **Health and Physical Development (HDP).** The students from the class of 1986 were more concerned about being overweight and not getting enough sleep, exercise, outdoor air, or sunshine. In both the 1986 and 1976 classes there were more women than men who were concerned about being tired much of the time.

✓ **Finance, Living Conditions, and Employment (FLE).** The students of 1986 evidenced more concern about financial problems than students in the 1976 class.

✓ **Social and Recreational Activities (SRA).** More students in the class of 1986 indicated concerns regarding personal appearance and not having enough time to them. In both classes, more men than women felt awkward making a date, and more women than men wanted to improve themselves and travel.

✓ **Social-Psychological Relations (SPR).** For both classes, more women than men felt too easily hurt and complained of speaking without thinking. In the class of 1976, more women than men complained of loneliness, and in the class of 1986, more women felt inferior, and more men wanted to be popular.

✓ **Personal-Psychological Relations (PPR).** Greater difficulty with worrying and laziness was reported by the class of 1986. Women more than men indicated that they were taking things too seriously, were moody, and experienced lack of self-confidence.

✓ **Courtship, Sex, and Marriage (CSM).** More men than women in both classes complained of too few dates. In the class of 1986, students were more fearful of losing the one they loved.

✓ **Home and Family (HF).** All students in the class of 1986 reported more sickness in the family and greater parental sacrifice than students in 1976.

✓ **Morals and Religion (MR).** Wanting to feel closer to God and not going to church enough were the concerns reported more frequently in the class of 1986.

✓ **Adjustment to College Work (ACW).** The class of 1986 reported more problems in this area. Many 1986 students felt unprepared for the demands of college.

✓ **Future: Vocational and Educational (FVE).** The 1986 students worried more over their future. This research study found statistically significant relationships that indicated that the identified problems of students a decade apart changed. It also showed that women and men in this study evidenced different kinds of problems.

Bragg (1994) examined the complexities of adjustment to college and its relationship to students intent-to-persist. She did a random sampling of freshmen who completed a modified version of the Anticipated Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire at the University of Oklahoma.

Table 1: Descriptive Analysis of Frequency and Percentage of each Problem Category

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Health problems	123	89.8
Financial, Lifestyle and Career Related problems	128	93.4
Social and Recreational Problems	133	97.1
Psychological Social Relation problems	128	93.4
Personal Relationships and Emotional Problems	133	97.1
Marriage and Sexual problems	134	97.8
Family problems	135	98.5
Moral and Religious problems	128	93.4
Adapting to Academic work problems	126	92
Future Career Adapting problems	133	97.1
Curriculum and Method of Teaching problems	128	93.4

The instrument measured overall academic, social and personal adjustment, student satisfaction, and institutional/goal commitment scores. Seven students were interviewed for in dept accounts of student experiences. Bragg found that students need extra assistance with personal and academic adjustment.

Negative experiences, such as poor adjustment to college academic work, home sickness, loneliness, and stress tended to be problems experienced by these students during their first weeks of college. Freshmen who considered dropping out were less committed to their career goals and to the institution

They had significantly lower scores in all adjustment areas and were far less satisfied with their first semester. As a result, Bragg recommended that early intervention, such as study skill workshops, faculty mentoring, and semester-long orientation courses could be utilized to assist students during their first semester of college.

Result

Table 1 shows the frequency and percentage of respondents that answered 'yes' based on problem categories.

As illustrated in table 1, the highest rate related to family problems (98.5%), while the least respondents 'rate was related health problems (89.8%). More than 90% of respondents had problem at least in one category.

Conclusion

Based on the research data, a summary can be done regarding the research question, where the five highest problem categories are Family problems(98.5%), Marriage and Sexual problems (97.8%), Social and Recreational problems (97.1%), Personal Relationships and Emotional problems (97.1%), Future Career Adapting problems (97.1%).

In a nutshell, the category of problem which is the highest among freshmen in UTM is Family problems. This may be result of internationalization. One of the specifications of internationalization is rapid changes in all aspects of communications, and social concepts like family are affected in this way.

Suggestions

From results of this study, some suggestions can be gained. Smart managing of self and time, are two ways to reduce freshmen' problems. Thus the students must be taught smart ways in managing time. Also, these individuals should have an arranged studying method and daily routine to avoid procrastinated work from piling up. University administration should extend and promote counselling services for students who lack time management. Alternatively, administration should arrange programs for freshmen to strengthen religion beliefs or spirituality. Every religion teaches us to do not evil. By having a strong and continuous religious or spirituality education, our mind and body will be in peace. Hence, even if there are any challenges or problems that need to be faced, we will be able to face it without hesitance. Finally, involvement of freshmen in extra curriculum activities cause good and effective communication among them. These extra curriculum activities sometimes lead to community of practice, which in turn improve quality of study among these population.

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