



STUDENT'S FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE OF AMERICAN DEGREE TRANSFER PROGRAM IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

The first year is a very essential year as students transition themselves from the traditional exam oriented school system to a more flexible and holistic education system practiced in American Degree Program in Taylor's University. Therefore, the psychometric validation is executed in order to have a better knowledge of both behavioral and attitudinal dimensions. The overall findings are largely positive with a few aspects of distress expressed such as finance. Meanwhile the respond rates among students who participated in the survey had shown a high percentage. Most of the correlation findings on the other items had found positive correlation with what the students had learned during orientation and the categories of the aspect in university life.

Keywords: First year experience, Freshmen Survey, American Degree, Academic adjustment, Orientation.

1.0 Introduction

In August 1996, Taylor's College Malaysia launched its American Degree Transfer Program catering to students to further their studies in the U.S. The program started with 65 students and 5 fulltime lecturers in the fall semester of 1996. In August 1997, Taylor's ADP sends off their first batch of 40 students to pursue their degrees overseas. Since then, Taylor's ADP has grown in size and moved to the new Lakeside Campus in Taylor's University in 2010. For 20 years, the program has prepared thousands of Malaysian students to gain entry into reputable universities in the United States as well as to Canada and Australia.

Taylor's American Degree Transfer Program (ADP) is a credit – transfer program that offers courses in the fields of engineering, actuarial science, computer science, applied sciences, business and liberal arts. Students complete about two years in ADP and two years in the U.S. While the majority of them transfer to U.S. universities, some also transfer to Canadian and Australian universities. ADP is tailored to the American learning style and the program prepares students for transition to the holistic American education system. In the first two years of the program, they are required to take a wide range of subjects where they are continuously assessed throughout the semester.

The first year is a very important year as students transition themselves from traditional exam oriented school system to a more flexible and holistic education system. Therefore, a lot of studies related to first year experience of university students have been conducted (Birks et al., 2013; Cook & Leckey, 1999; Fazey & Fazey, 2001; Harvey & Drew, 2006; James, Krause, & Jennings, 2010; Kochanowska & Johnston, 2008; Krause & Coates, 2008; Larmar & Ingamells, 2010; Lumsden, McBryde-Wilding, & Rose, 2010; Nutt & Calderon, 2009; Thalluri & King, 2009; Yorke & Vaughan, 2013). Harvey and Drew (2006) had documented an extensive literature review about the first-year experience in higher education. According to the study, the first-year experience contributed to a few

recurrent themes including factors impacting performance, retention, and support for the first-year, including orientation, induction and skill support and also teaching techniques to aid first-year learning behavior. According to Wilcox, Winn, and Fyvie-Gauld (2005), students' experience once they begin their degree will likely contribute to withdrawal. Students leaving universities mainly due to wrong choice of program (Ozga & Sukhnandan, 1998), absence of personal commitment to study, poor teaching, limited contact with academic staff and failure to progress (failed assessments) (Mehdinezhad, 2011). Gale, Ooms, Newcombe, and Marks-Maran (2015) indicated that stress was not a problem but rather support and help from academic staff and mentors is what makes them stay. Orientation had been a common approach for assisting new students in their transition into the university setting (Larmar & Ingamells, 2010). Therefore, this paper aims to seek how first year students' experiences in Taylor's ADP are related to the components they learned during orientation

2.0 The Study

Data Collection Methods

The survey was made for freshman from three different semesters including spring, summer and fall Semester. Survey was made through Google Drive. In spring, 183 freshmen took part in the survey with 152 responses, which is a response rate of 83%. In summer, 94 out of 127 freshmen responded to the survey. The response rate was 74%. In fall, 110 out of 119 freshmen responded to the survey. The response rate was 92%. The first year experience survey questions were obtained from Griffith University and St. Cloud University. The survey was modified to suit program specific to Taylor's ADP. The surveys were divided into 6 categories as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1 Summary of Category

Category	Number of Items
Orientation	7
Facilities/Services	6
Academic Adjustment	14
Social Adjustment	10
Finances	2
Other Skills	11

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to seek how first year students’ experiences in Taylor’s ADP are related to the components they learned during orientation. The objectives for this study include:

- To identify First Year Students issues
- To identify qualities of certain cohorts (based on intakes)
- To determine how to intervene and improve situations
- To identify relevant workshops to help students with soft skills and other skills

Data Analysis

Participants of this survey responded to the questions using Likert-scale ranging from strongly agree, somewhat agree, strongly disagree and somewhat disagree. The responses were analyzed using SPSS v.21. Besides the descriptive analyses, correlation and regression between orientation components and first year experience components were undertaken in order to seek the relationship between the items in both components.

3.0 Findings

Students were required to indicate the extent to which they agreed based on the category and the components given. Majority of the students agreed and somewhat agreed that they are satisfied with the decision to join Taylor’s ADP (92%). On the other hand, about 46% of them strongly disagree/somewhat disagree with the item ‘I wish I was at another program/university’. Generally, the findings for other categories and its components are largely positive (strongly agreed/somewhat agreed). 64% of the participants are male students while female students comprised of 46%, meanwhile most of the participants of this survey aged between 17- 20 years old.

Table 2 Correlation result between Orientation with Academic Adjustment, Social Adjustment, Facilities and Services, Other Skills, Health and Finance

Variable	Orientation; Academic Adjustment	Orientation; Social Adjustment	Orientation; Facilities & Services	Orientation; Other Skills	Orientation; Health	Orientation; Finance
Academic Adjustment	0.994262					
Social Adjustment		0.98764				
Facilities & Services			0.930217			
Other Skills				0.963785		
Health					0.99601	
Finances						-0.95027

P<0.05

Table 2 shows there was strong positive correlation between items in Orientation with Academic Adjustment, Social Adjustment, Facilities and Services, Other Skills, and Health. According to Gerdes and Mallinckrodt (1994), emotional and social adjustment affecting attrition more than academic adjustment. Our study indicated that the highest correlation experienced between Orientation for Academic Adjustment and Social Adjustment. This shows that the students who participated in this survey agreed that what they learned in orientation about the different resources on campus could help them if they are having academic problems and other adjustments to university life throughout their study period. Meanwhile, Finances was found to have a strong negative correlation with Orientation. This demonstrates that there is a mismatch between what the students acquired in the orientation related to finance and it is not sufficient to assist them during their time in the university. This had confirmed with previous study which found financial crisis to be among the four factors for students’ problem in adjusting university life. It is further stated that one factor alone or the combination any of the factors could be the cause for students’ failure to complete their study (Clinciu, 2013).

Conclusion

From this study, it can be concluded that the first year experience among students in ADP Taylor's University is noted to be optimistic, considering that almost all of the components related to orientation and their experience throughout the semester are statistically proven to have a significant strong positive correlation. This study has confirmed that the students' expectation during orientation has matched with the reality.

The finance component is the only component with strong negative correlation to orientation. This shows that the University must take a proactive measurement to procure students' concern related to finance. A large percentage (70%) of students surveyed had indicated that they strongly agree and somewhat agree with the statement "I worry a lot about my university expenses". Therefore financial aids and financial management course can be considered to be beneficial in order to reduce distress among students when it comes to finance matter. However, it is important to acknowledge that student experience will change over time in order for the University to be useful in molding policy and practice that can be applied.

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