

Conceptualization of Educational Persistence within Malaysian Higher Institution

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ABSTRACT

Psychological constructs have been empirically linked to academic performance (as measured by Grade Point Average) and its improvement. Focal amid these psychological constructs are Goal Orientation, Self-Regulated Strategies, Disposition to Persevere and Attention. However, researches have been dedicated on the relationship of a few of these variables to academic performance but have not been examined as a single framework incorporating the theoretical models of all these variables. This study thus investigates a composite integrated model of the above mentioned variables to assess the learning quality of students termed as Educational Persistence. Its attainment warrants the utilization of a questionnaire developmental model. This study conceptualizes Educational Persistence for Malaysian higher education based on Cohen and Swerdlik (2002) questionnaire development model.

KEYWORDS

Conceptualization, Educational Persistence, Higher Education, Psychological Constructs

INTRODUCTION

The primary aim of higher education (HE) is to educate otherwise referred to as professionalization (Altbach, 2011; Astin, 1985; Barnett, 2007; Boud & Falchikov, 2006). It entails progression to higher order domains of cognitive learning such as synthesis and evaluation of learning content (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Bloom, 1956) and inculcating interpersonal and intrapersonal skills essential in the twenty-first century (Barnett, 2007). Service to the society and research activities (Boud & Falchikov, 2006) are two other primary aims of higher education. Professionalization is greatly influenced by the dictates of the contemporary labour market and this is apparent in the pedagogical process. However, interpersonal and intrapersonal skills are influenced by psychological variables. In addition, the prevalent learning theory is constructivism whereby students' actively construct their own knowledge, meaning and skills (Au, 2009) and this results in their learning quality regarded as either educational, performance, or practice approach (A. W Chickering, 1969; Tam, 2001). Constructivism leads to both active and problem based learning. In a social context, it can lead to cooperative or collaborative learning. Zainal Shah (2011) and Raskin (2008) conclude that constructivism is a combination of cognitive (thinking) and affective (feeling) tendencies drawing a

combination of humanistic, existential and phenomenological philosophical ideas. These affective tendencies have psychological underlying roots.

The seven higher learning outcomes of Chickering (A.W. Chickering, Gamson, & Poulsen, 1987) can be used as an indicator of the learning quality. These are:

1. **Achieving competence:** Mastery of content or discipline and its specialization;
2. **Managing emotions:** From those that interfere with learning (anger, anxiety, hopelessness (Au, 2009) to those that assist it (optimism, hopefulness);
3. **Mature interpersonal relations:** Respecting differences, working with peers;
4. **Moving from autonomy to independence:** Moving from needing assurance and approval of others to self-sufficiency, problem solving, and decision making;
5. **Establishing identity:** Self-esteem and self-efficacy;
6. **Developing purpose:** From Who am I? and Where am I? to Where am I going?
7. Developing integrity.

It is evident from literature search that more emphasis and assessment is given to the first outcome stated as achieving competence. The remaining six learning outcomes are equally important as it develops the students to be responsible professionals. These six outcomes are also linked to the valuable benefits (by-products), in relation to the function of HE which is instilling critical thinking (rooted in liberal education) in the students in order for them to understand and integrate with the society. In addition, these valuable by-products or benefits furthermore trains HE students to:

1. Be better decision makers;
2. Inculcate lifelong learning tendencies;
3. Be more informed and accessible to better social, health, financial health privileges;
4. Possess more self-confidence, discipline and perseverance.

The last six outcomes of A. W Chickering (1969) model of HE learning outcomes and the benefits of HE listed above portray the importance of intrinsic qualities of HE students. These are summarized as psychological variables.

MALAYSIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

As the context of the study is Malaysia, a brief overview of Malaysia and her educational setting is necessary. Malaysia gained independence on the 31st of August, 1957. Then the whole of Malaysia, some straits in Indonesia and Singapore were one single country. Till date, Malaysia is a multicultural and multilingual country comprising Malay (28.3%); Chinese (24.6%); Indian (7.3%) and the indigenous settlers. As at independence, some pre-independence colleges and technical schools had gained the status of university such as Universiti Malaya, Universiti Putra Sultan idris and present day Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (Ujang, 2009). The ministry of HE presently has an estimated 500 post-secondary educational institutions operating in Malaysia. These include 20 government funded universities of which 5 are research universities. There are also 20 private universities as well as 300 private colleges; polytechnics and community HEs that offer certificates and diplomas for more technical-based courses (Lee, 1999). Zaini Ujang went further to explain that Malaysian HE has evolved overtime through four phases of establishment, expansion, consolidation and globalization phases. These phases have strengthened Malaysian HE quality to produce graduates that can critically argue and prefer solutions to matters arising to aid that technological advancement and be globally competent and relevant.

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