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Time management skill and stress level among audiology and speech sciences students of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

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Abstract

This is a preliminary attempt to investigate possible factors that may influence the academic performance in the clinical year students of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Audiology and Speech Sciences Programs. Thirty eight students (i.e. 92% of the overall clinical year students) volunteered as subjects. Their academic performance was based on their Cumulative Grade Point Average. Self-reported time management skills and perceived stress levels were evaluated using a set of questionnaires. The results highlighted that none of these factors have a significant effect on their CGPA. However, more in-depth study on larger target group should be carried out to determine other possible factors that may affect the students' academic achievement.

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1. Introduction

A total of 229 graduates have been produced since the establishment of Audiology and Speech Sciences Program, Faculty of Health Sciences, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) in 1994. These two programs trained the undergraduate students for four academic years. Students from these programs will be exposed to their actual clinical years starting from their third year first semester. As with most tertiary education, students' academic performances in these two programs are measured by the Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA). CGPA shows

the overall students academic performance where it considers the average of all examinations' grade for all semesters during their tenure in a tertiary education (Ali & Syafena, 2009).

Scholarly literatures have shown that time management and stress are among contributing factors which impinge on students' academic performance and achievement. Generally, time management refers to the development of processes and tools that increase efficiency and productivity while psychological stress is defined as emotional factors which dominate the outcome of one's action (Encyclopedia Britannica Online, 2011). Although everyone has stress in their lives, people respond to stress in different ways. Some people seem to be severely affected while others seem calm, cool, and collected all the time.

Studies by Floyd (2010), Lo (2002) and McHalffey and Pannbacker (1992) showed that students who are involved in clinical education setting are prone to develop stress and anxiety, which later interrupt in their academic performance. Not only that, stress in the educational years may lead to impairment in the practicing years of the professional (Lincoln et al., 2004). Britton and Tesser (1991), Dipboye and Phillips (1990) and Zimmerman (1990) reported that time management is one of the most important skills in organizing the course load and the ability to manage time efficiently will help students in performing better in their studies.

Pre-clinical and clinical years are different as students will be exposed to diverse experiences. They need to apply the learnt basic skills and theoretical knowledge from the lectures in their pre-clinical years. Not only that, they also need to demonstrate their acquired mastery skill and combining the information gained in the pre-clinical years in their clinical practice. Furthermore, the aspects of judgment would also be different between pre-clinical and clinical years. The knowledge and experiences are different as the time goes by and these aspects will affect the confidence level of the students in their clinic practice. Therefore, these combining aspects may become factors that can affect the academic performance of Audiology and Speech Sciences students during their clinical years.

As part of the Audiology and Speech Sciences Department academic staffs, the researchers found that the academic performance of the majority of students decline as they started their clinical years. However, no study has been done to investigate the possible causes that may affect or influence the students' academic performance during their clinical years. As a preliminary study, this study focuses only on two possible fundamental causes (i.e. self-reported time management and stress level) that may be the reasons of the decline in the students' academic performance. It is hoped that the findings from this study will contribute towards the ground of knowledge in overcoming these influential factors.

2. Methodology

We targeted all clinical year students, who were in their third and fourth year of Audiology and Speech Sciences Program enrolled in semester 2 for academic session 2010-2011. The exclusion criteria employed in this study was any clinical year students who had withdrawn from the clinical courses for the involved semester. The number of respondents involved were 38 students (23 students were from third year and 15 from fourth year).

This study was conducted in the second week of semester 2 for academic session 2010-2011. Therefore, the CGPA in Semester 1 of the same academic session of the students were obtained from their academic records.

The questionnaire used in this study was divided into three parts: Part A – Part C. Part A contains 5 demographic items, Part B contains 5 time-management items and Part C contains 10 items on perceived stress scale (with permission from Cohen et al., 1983). The questions in Part B focused on the respondent's time management. The questions were on the usage of time manager tool (calendar, to-do list), time allocation for study and leisure and perceptual rating of respondent's time management skill. Questions in Part C focused on the perceptual rating of respondent's emotion on particular situations and self-confidence in controlling when things happen out of respondent's expectations and in uncontrolled situations. A Likert scale ranging from 0- 4 was used for items in Part B and Part C. The scale ranges from 0 represents 'never', 1 represents 'almost never', 2 represents 'sometimes', 3 represents 'almost often' and 4 represents 'very often'. The content of the questionnaire was validated by 3 lecturers from the Audiology and Speech Sciences Department and the Health Psychology Unit. A pilot study was conducted to determine the intrinsic reliability of the items in each part of the questionnaire. The findings of the pilot study showed a Cronbach Alpha value of 0.6 for Part B and 0.8 for Part C which meant that the items have acceptable and good reliability. The data was analysed using SPSS version 17. The factors studied were described using descriptive statistics and liner correlation.