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**An Empirical Investigation of the Academic Performance in Management education:
Case study of the University of Malaya MBA Program.**

Abstract

The Master's of Business Administration (MBA) program is one of the most popular management education program in the country. University of Malaya has been offering this program since 1981. It is known to be among the most comprehensive and rigorous program in the country. This study will examine the academic performance of these MBA students. It investigates the impacts of several variables to the academic performance of the MBA students. Among the variables examined are qualifications (type of degree and undergraduate cumulative grade point average), age (with age and experience as covariates), gender, and ethnicity. Preliminary analysis indicates that qualifications and age have a correlation with the students' academic performance. The paper also discusses the implications of the study to management education especially the admission requirement into the MBA program.

1. Introduction

The University of Malaya's Master of Business Administration programme was first introduced in 1981. It is known to be among the most comprehensive and rigorous programme in Malaysia. The program seeks to equip students with theoretical concepts and analytical tools, which will prepare them for complexities and challenges of an increasingly dynamic and globalised business environment. The admission requirement is a bachelor degree or an equivalent qualification or a professional qualification from a recognized organization and two years of relevant work experience after graduation.

After twenty three years of running the programme, it is felt that a study be conducted to examine the students' performance. The aim of the study is investigate the extent of the relationship between the students' personal attributes (such as age, gender) and other factors (such as years of experience before coming into the programme and qualifications held on entry) and performance in MBA programme. Grade Point Average (GPA) is used to measure the students' performance in the programme.

The factors indicating graduate students performance identified in this paper will assist the MBA Director at University of Malaya in predicting students' success and to identify whether these factors should be considered as part of the admission requirement.

The study is designed to answer the following research questions:

- What is the extent to which the academic performance can be explained by the students' age and gender?
- How does previous qualification affect students' performance?
- What is the extent to which the academic performance is affected by previous experience (the number of years between undergraduate and graduate programmes?)

Following the research questionnaires, the study investigates these four variables and the extent to which the academic performance is affected by these variables (Figure 1).

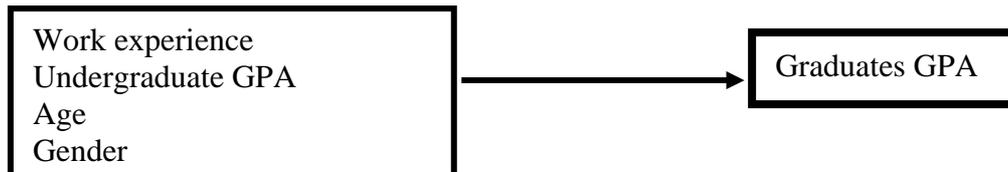


Figure 1: Research Framework

Source: adapted from Dreher and Ryan (2000, 2004) and Ekpenyong (2000).

This paper proceeds by discussing several literature related to the area of research. It then continues with the methodology used to conduct the research. In section 4, the student's demographic profiles are tabled and in Section 5 the findings is presented. Finally, the paper draws to a close with some discussion and conclusions.

2. Related Literature

The review of literature has shown that many studies have investigated the relationship between MBA students' performance and certain precedent variables. Many have investigated the relationship between work experience, undergraduate GPA, selected demographic variables such as age and gender and graduate performance (GPA).

Studies illustrating the relationship between work experience and academic performance indicated conflicting results. McClure, Wells and Bowerman (1986) reported that work experience was positively related to graduate GPA. Apparently, knowledge the students acquire on the jobs enables them to understand better the various business functions, thus they would be able to apply their knowledge in the courses they take in the programme. Therefore, they would do better than those without or having limited work experience and thus obtain better GPA. On the other hand, many studies illustrated the opposite. Graham (1991), Dugan, Grady, Payn, Baydar and Johnson (1996), Maury and Trevelyan (1997). Dreher & Ryan (2000) and Dreher & Ryan (2002), Dreher & Ryan (2004) in their research all found that work experience was not related to GPA.

Most business school uses undergraduate GPA for admission (Carver and King 1994, Abedi 1991). Studies using undergraduate GPA to predict graduates performance found that it has an impact on the graduates' performance. Those with higher scores tend to do better. Wright and Palmer (1994) hypothesized that GPA scores was discreetly associated with graduate performance among the 86 MBA students they studied, but it did not discriminate between moderately low and very low performers. Yang and Lu (2001) in

their studies found that undergraduate GPA was the most important predictor of graduate performance among the five variables they considered. Clayton and Cate (2004) found surprisingly that undergraduate GPA play no significant role in students' performance. Arnold and Chakravarty (1996) noted that undergraduate scores obtained within the last ten years can be used to predict the graduate performance but GPA scores obtained beyond ten years cannot be used.

In most top business schools, the average age of the graduate students is twenty six years old. Ekpenyong (2000) conducted a study on MBA students performance in the University of Ibadan, Nigeria revealed that age is correlated with students performance. Maury and Trevelyan (1997) found that the younger students do better than the older students. According to them the younger students adapt better to the academic environment (which they have left very recently) compared to the older ones who have to cope with the academic environment which they have left for some time.

Three studies (Ekpenyong 2000, Hancock 1999 and Maury and Trevelyan 1997) conducted to examine the relationship between gender and academic performance pointed out that gender had no correlation with students' performance. They found that regardless of gender, males and females students performance are at par with each other.

3. Methodology

The data used for this study is obtained from students enrolled between 2000 and 2002 at the University of Malaya. The admission criteria for the students during this timeframe was basically consistent however, during 2001, GMAT was also required. The GMAT requirement was however abolished in 2002. The students' performance is based on the GPA available when they filled in the application forms. The academic performance is based on the students' GPA or CGPA obtained in semester 2 for the 2003/2004 session. For this paper, performance is categorise as excellent (GPA of 3.7 and above) and pass (3.00 to 3.69).

4. Demographic Profile of Students

From Table 1, it can be observed that the male and female ratio among the MBA students is approximately one to 0.93. This ratio is different from the undergraduates whereby there are more females than male students in most business and accountancy programmes in Malaysia. In terms of age, 50.9 percent are between 26 to 33 years old. This is expected as at this age group, most people are holding management as well as executive position and hence need business and management skills to be able their work more effectively and efficiently.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Students

Profile		Frequency	%
Gender	Male	150	51.9
	Female	139	48.1
	Total	289	100.0
Age	25 and below	77	26.6
	26-28	78	27.0
	29-33	69	23.9
	34 and above	65	22.5
	Total	289	100.0
undergraduate CGPA	CGPA 3.7 – 4.00	33	11.4
	CGPA 3.0 – 3.69	133	46.0
	CGPA 2.70 - 2.99	56	19.4
	CGPA 2.00 – 2.69	64	22.1
	Others	3	1.0
	Total	289	100.0
Years of experience	2 years and below	74	25.1
	3 - 4 years	87	30.1
	5 -7 years	61	21.1
	8 years and above	67	23.2
	Total	289	100

In its quest to be an excellence center of learning, the Faculty enrolls undergraduate students with good qualification. This is reflective from the Table above, whereby nearly 57 percent of the students obtain CGPA of 3 and above. Nevertheless, the faculty does accept students with lesser qualifications if they have extensive work experience. Forty four percent of the students have more than five years of relevant working experience.

5. Findings

Nearly seventy eight percent (224 out of 289) of the students obtained a pass (3.00 to 3.69).whereas the reminder had a CGPA of 3.7 and above. The relationship between the student's performance and gender, age, work experience, undergraduate qualifications are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Relationship between Performance and gender, age, work experience, undergraduate qualifications

Gender	excellent		pass	
	Freq	%	Freq	%
Male	32	49.2	118	52.7
Female	33	50.8	106	47.3
Total	65	100	224	100.0
Age				
25 and below	22	33.8	55	24.6
26-28	12	18.5	66	29.5
29-33	23	35.4	46	20.5
34 and above	8	12.3	57	25.4
Total	65	100.0	224	100.0
Undergraduate CGPA				
CGPA:3.70-4.00	15	23.1	18	8.0
CGPA:3.00-3.69	31	47.7	102	45.5
CGPA:2.70-2.99	9	13.8	47	21.0
CGPA:2.00-2.69	8	12.3	56	25.0
Others	2	3.1	1	0.4
Total	65	100	224	100
experience (years)				
2 years and below	20	30.8	54	24.1
3 - 4 years	17	26.2	70	31.3
5 -7 years	15	23.1	46	20.5
8 years and above	13	20.0	54	24.1
Total	65	100.0	224	100.0

The Table illustrated that there are more female, those aged 29 to 33, with undergraduate CGPA of 3.00-3.69 and work experience of less than two years obtained excellence performance compared to the other categories.

The study also found that only one variable i.e. undergraduate qualification had a significant relationship with performance. The Pearson Correlation value was 0.167 (at 0.01 level; 2-tailed) and it was significant at 0.004. The other variables were found to be insignificant.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

Many past studies (Graham 1991, Maury and Trevelyan 1997, Dreher & Ryan 2004) have shown that MBA students performance is influenced by several variables such as age, gender, ethnicity, GMAT scores, work experience and undergraduate qualifications. This study focuses on four variables namely age, gender, work experience and undergraduate qualifications. These four variables were chosen as the information is available from the students admission form. Future research would include GMAT scores and ethnicity.

The study found that undergraduate qualification was significantly related to their MBA performance. The better their undergraduate qualification are the better they perform in

the MBA. This finding is similar to Carver and King 1994, Abedi 1991, Wright and Palmer 1994 and Yang and Lu 2001.

In addition, this study has illustrated that performance was not influenced by work experience. This supports Maury and Trevelyan (1997) and Dreher & Ryan (2004) findings, however it contradicts with McClure, Wells and Bowerman (1986). They found that the more work experience a student has the better he/she will perform.

The variable age was also found not to be a determinant factor for students' performance. This contradicts with Ekpenyong (2000) who found performance to be significantly influenced by age. This finding of study however is comparable to Ekpenyong (2000), Hancock (1999) and Maury and Trevelyan (1997) as they also found gender had no influence on performance.

The results of the study have several implications to researchers as well as business schools directors. These results suggest that there is a need to consider work experience as an admission standard in a more thorough approach. This study as well as many others has shown that work experience is not related to performance. The question that arises then is why almost all business schools include it as an admission criterion. In most schools including University of Malaya, the minimum working experience is two years. It is time for researchers and admission directors to take a more active role in determining if work experience as an admission standard is accomplishing results.

Besides work experience, most business schools require students to obtain good qualifications at their undergraduate level. This admission criterion should be adhered to strictly to ensure that schools get quality students. Directors of admission should perhaps put this as the main selection criterion.

The assumption made here is that graduates who excel in their performance would do better in their career. We expect that they would be able to use all the theories and lessons obtained during their class to perform better at their workplace. Eventually we anticipate that they will be industry and corporate leaders. At this point of time, there is little evidence that illustrates the relationship between prior work experience, MBA performance and career achievement. Perhaps future research could be taken to address this issue in detail.

The major limitation of this study is the use of the latest CGPA as a dependent variable. Future research should consider the final CGPA. At the moment, it is not possible to do so as the admission forms prior to year 2000 is not in digital form. In a couple of years, students enrolled in year 2000, 2001 and 2002 would have graduated hence their final CGPA can be used as an indicator.

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