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Relationship between Mentoring Program and Mentees' Study Performance
(Hubungan antara Program Pementoran dan Prestasi Pengajian Mente)

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed at investigating the relationship between mentoring program and mentees' study performance. A survey method was employed to gather self-report questionnaires from undergraduate business students at a research university in Malaysia. The results of SmartPLS path model revealed two important findings: firstly, communication positively and significantly correlated with study performance. Secondly, support positively and significantly correlated with study performance. The result confirms that mentoring program does act as an important predictor of mentees' study performance in the studied organization. In addition, discussion, implications and conclusion are elaborated.

Keywords: communication, support, study performance

ABSTRAK

Objektif utama kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji hubungan antara program pementoran dan prestasi pengajian mente. Satu kaedah soal selidik telah digunakan untuk mengumpul maklumat daripada sekumpulan pelajar sarjana muda perniagaan di sebuah universiti penyelidikan di Malaysia. Dapatan yang diperolehi menggunakan model "SmartPLS path" menunjukkan dua penemuan penting: pertama, komunikasi mempunyai hubungan yang positif dan signifikan dengan prestasi pengajian mente. Kedua, sokongan mempunyai hubungan yang positif dan signifikan dengan prestasi pengajian mente. Keputusan ini mengesahkan bahawa program pementoran bertindak sebagai pemboleh ubah peramal yang penting kepada kemajuan prestasi pengajian mente dalam organisasi kajian. Selanjutnya, perbincangan, implikasi dan kesimpulan dihuraikan dalam kertas penyelidikan ini.

Kata kunci: Komunikasi, sokongan, prestasi pengajian

INTRODUCTION

The term Mentoring is first highlighted in the epic story of 'The Odyssey' written by Homer. In this story, Odysseus tells his loyal and experienced friend, namely, Mentor (a person who has great wisdom and trustworthy) to teach his son, namely, Telemachus (a mentee or protégé who has less experience) about the tips for handling challenging lifestyles before he goes to the Trojan War (Ismail, Hasbullah, Bakar, Ahmad & Junoh, 2006; Merriam, 1993). Based on this classical story, mentoring is often related to as an important field of education (Little, Kearney & Britner, 2010) and/or counseling (Gregson, 1994) whereby mentors are the elderly whom have wisdom, experiences and can be trusted to educate young men who have little experience and knowledge (Little, Kearney & Britner, 2010; Russell & Adams, 1997). Hence, the traditional mentoring concept has been given new interpretations by contemporary educationists, social psycologists and management scholars in order to suit it with the current organizational development and challenges (Ismail et al, 2006; Ismail & Ridzwan, 2012).

In today organizations, mentoring is often seen as a learning method where it encourages comfortable relationship between mentors (i.e., knowledgeable and experienced person) and mentee (i.e., less knowledgeable and experienced person) as an instrument to develop group and/or individuals' potentials in carrying out particular duties and responsibilities, familiarize with new techniques, and care for all aspects of mentees (Cummings & Worley, 2009; Noe, Greenberger & Wang, 2002). There is no one best mentoring program model to fit all organizations, but they are designed and implemented according to the uniqueness of organizational contexts in terms of beliefs, policy, orientations, stresses, strengths and weaknesses (Ismail, Hasbullah, Bakar, Ahmad & Junoh, 2006; Santos & Reigadas, 2005). These factors have affected organizations to design and administer the various types of mentoring program, especially informal relationship (e.g., specific demands, spontaneous and adhoc) and/or formal relationship (e.g., structured and coordinated relationship between mentor and mentee, using standard norms, continuously action plans, time frame, and particular objectives). In organizations, formal and informal mentoring programs are viewed as equally important, but informal mentoring programs are often implemented to complement and strengthen formal mentoring programs in order to achieve organizational strategies and goals (Friday & Friday, 2002; Hansford & Ehrich, 2006; Ismail, Hasbullah, Bakar, Ahmad & Junoh, 2006).

A review of current literature pertaining student development programs in higher education highlights that successful mentoring programs have two salient features, i.e., communication and support (Bernier, Larose & Soucy, 2005; Ismail & Ridzwan, 2012). In the context of higher education mentoring program, communication is generally defined as mentors openly delivering information about the procedures, content, tasks and objectives of the mentoring programs, conducting discussions about tasks that should be learned, giving detailed explanations about the benefits of attending mentoring programs and providing performance feedback (Fox et al., 2010; Ismail, Hasbullah, Bakar, Ahmad & Junoh, 2006; Santos & Reigadas, 2005). Conversely, support is broadly defined as mentors provide emotional support (e.g., acquire new knowledge, skills, and attitudes, and guide them to properly apply in daily life) and instrumental support (e.g., assist mentees to adapt campus environments) at varying times to mentees (Davis, 2007; Fox et al., 2010).

Surprisingly, recent studies in university/faculty mentoring programs reveal that the ability of mentors to appropriately implement such mentoring characteristics may have a significant impact on positive mentee outcomes, especially study performances (Bernier, Larose & Soucy, 2005; Ismail & Ridzwan, 2012). In an institution of higher learning context, study performance is usually evaluated by the students' persistence rates, graduation rates, and grade-point average (Granger, 1995; Santos & Reigadas, 2005). Within a mentoring program model, many scholars think that communication, support and study performance are distinct, but strongly interrelated constructs. For example, the ability of mentors to properly implement comfortable communication and provide adequate support have been essential factors that may enhance positive mentee outcomes, especially study performance (Bernier, Larose & Soucy, 2005 ; Tennenbaum, Crosby & Gliner, 2001).

The nature of this relationship is interesting, but not much is known the role of mentoring program as an important predictor of mentees' study performance in the higher education mentoring program research literature (Bernier, Larose & Soucy, 2005 ; Ismail & Ridzwan, 2012; Ismail & Ridzwan, 2012). Many scholars reveal that this situation is due to many previous studies have much emphasized on the internal properties of mentoring program, employed a simple survey method to explains different respondent perceptions toward the implementation of mentoring programs and used a simple correlation analysis to measure the strength of association between mentoring

program and mentees' study performance. The findings of these studies have neglected to quantify the effect size of mentoring program as an important predicting variable in the mentoring program research literature. Consequently, it has not provided adequate information to be used as useful guidelines by practitioners in formulating strategic action plans to improve the design and management of mentoring programs in learning organizations (Davis, 2007; Ismail et al., 2006; Ismail & Ridzwan, 2012). Therefore, it motivates the researchers to further explore the nature of this relationship. Specifically, this study was primarily conducted to measure the relationships: (1) between communication and study performance, and (2) between support and study performance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several extant studies using a direct relationship analysis approach were conducted to examine higher education mentoring activities based on different samples like perceptions of 189 students in 9 departments at the University of California in Santa Cruz (Tennenbaum, Crosby & Gliner, 2001), perceptions of 110 students in Canadian colleges (Bernier, Larose & Soucy, 2005), and perceptions of 127 students at a defence based university in Malaysia (Ismail & Ridzwan, 2012). These studies proved that the ability of mentors to properly implement comfortable communication and provide adequate support in formal and/or informal mentoring activities had enhanced mentees positive outcomes, especially study performance (Bernier, Larose & Soucy, 2005; Ismail & Ridzwan, 2012; Tennenbaum, Crosby & Gliner, 2001).

The empirical studies support the notion of adult learning theories. For example, Chickering's (1969) vector theory of identity development highlights seven important vectors to develop yound adult identities: developing competence, managing emotions, becoming autonomous, developing interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity. Besides that, Levinson's (1978) early adult transition model posits that an individual's life structure would face critical situations when he/she goes through the transformation process from childhood into adulthood. Application of these theories in institutions of higher learning shows that the essence of mentoring program is to enhance positive young adults identities and life styles. For example, the ability of mentors to properly implement comfortable communication and provide adequate support in formal and/or informal mentoring activities may lead to an enhanced positive mentee outcomes, especially study performance (Bernier, Larose & Soucy, 2005; Ismail & Ridzwan, 2012; Tennenbaum, Crosby & Gliner, 2001). Based on the literature, it can be hypothesized that:

H1: There is a positive relationship between communication and study performance
H2: There is a positive relationship between support and study performance

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study used a cross-sectional research design where it allowed the researchers to integrate the mentoring program literature, the pilot study and the actual study as a main procedure to gather data for this study. Using such methods may gather accurate data, decrease bias and increase quality of data being collected (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010). This study was conducted in a Malaysian research university. In order to avoid instrusiveness, the name of the organizations is kept anonymous. At the initial stage of data collection, the survey questionnaires were drafted based on the information gathered from the higher education mentoring program literature. After that, the pilot study was conducted involving 9 undergraduate business students in the university to ensure that all questions were importance, relevance, clear and suitable for an actual study. Hence, a back translation technique was employed to translate the survey questionnaires into English and Malay languages in order to increase the validity and ensure the reliability of research findings (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010).

Measures

The survey questionnaire used in this study had three sections. Firstly, communication was measured using 4 items that were adapted from mentoring communication system literature (Ismail & Ridzwan, 2012; Yamnill & McLean, 2001; Young & Cates, 2005). Secondly, support was measured using 7 items that were adapted from mentoring support system literature (Ismail & Ridzwan, 2012; Rayle, Kurpius and Arredondo, 2006; Vieno et al., 2007). Thirdly, study performance was measured using 7 items that were adapted from undergraduate student performance literature (Ismail & Ridzwan, 2012; Rayle, Kurpius and Arredondo, 2006). All items used in the questionnaires were measured

using a 7-item Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree/dissatisfied" (1) to "strongly agree/satisfied" (7). Demographic variables were used as controlling variables because this study focused on student attitudes.

Sample

A convenient sampling technique was employed to distribute 150 self-report questionnaires to undergraduate business students in a Malaysian research university. This sampling technique was chosen because the management of the organizations had not given the list of undergraduate students and this situation did not allow the researchers to randomly select respondents for this study. From the survey questionnaires distributed, 136 usable questionnaires from the institutions of higher learning were returned to the researchers, yielding 90.7 percent of the response rate. The survey questionnaires were answered by participants based on their consents and on voluntarily basis. The number of this sample exceeds the minimum sample of 30 participants as required by probability sampling technique, showing that it may be analyzed using inferential statistics (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010).

Data Analysis

The SmartPLS 2.0 was employed to assess the validity and reliability of the instrument and thus test the research hypotheses (Henseler et al., 2009). The main advantage of using this method may deliver latent variable scores, avoid small sample size problems, estimate every complex models with many latent and manifest variables, hassle stringent assumptions about the distribution of variables and error terms, and handle both reflective and formative measurement models (Henseler et al., 2009). The SmartPLS path model was

TABLE 1: Respondents' Characteristics (n=136)

Respondents' Profile	Sub-Profile	Percentage
Gender	Male	19.9
	Female	80.1
Age	19 to 21 years old	73.5
	22 to 24 years old	23.5
	25 to 27 years old	2.9
Education	Matriculation	75.0
	STPM	7.4
	Diploma	17.6
Year of Study	Year 1	12.5
	Year 2	8.8
	Year 3	77.2
	Year 4	7
Academic Achievement	CGPA 1.32 and Below	1.5
	CGPA 2.33 to 2.66	2.9
	CGPA 2.67 to 3.00	28.7
	CGPA 3.33 to 3.66	50.7
	CGPA 3.67 to 4.00	15.4
Faculty	School of Management	54.4
	School of Economics	20.6
	School of Accounting	25.0

Note:

STPM : Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia/ Higher School Certificate

CGPA : Cumulative Grade Performance Achievement

employed to assess the magnitude and nature of the relationship between many independent variables and one or more dependent variables in the structural model using standardized beta (β) and t statistics. The value of R2 is used as an indicator of the overall predictive strength of the model. The value of R2 are considered as follows; 0.19 (weak), 0.33 (moderate) and 0.67 (substantial) (Chin, 1998; Henseler et al., 2009). Thus, a global fit measure is conducted to validate the adequacy of PLS path model globally based on Wetzels, Odekerken-Schroder and Van Oppen's (2009) global fit measure. If the results of testing hypothesized model exceed the cut-off value of 0.36 for large effect sizes of R^2, showing that it adequately support the PLS path model globally (Wetzels, Odekerken-Schroder and Van Oppen, 2009).

Results

Sample Profile

Table 1 shows the respondents' characteristics. The majority of the respondents were female (80.1 percent), their ages vary from 19 to 21 years (73.5 percent), the highest education level amongst the respondents were matriculation certicate holders (75.0 percent), third year students (77.2 percent), students achieving CGPA between 3.33 to 3.66 (50.7 percent), and students who study in School of Management (54.4 percent).

Model Measurement

The confirmatory factor analysis was employed to assess the psychometric of survey questionnaire data. Table 2 shows the results of convergent and discriminant validity analyses. All constructs had the values of average variance extracted (AVE) larger than 0.5, indicating that they met the acceptable standard of convergent validity (Henseler et al., 2009). Besides that, all constructs had the values of AVE square root in diagonal were greater than the squared correlation with other constructs in off diagonal, showing that all constructs met the acceptable standard of discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2009).

TABLE 2: The Results of Convergent and Discriminant Validity Analyses

Variable	AVE	Communication	Support	Study performance
Communication	0.7995	**0.8941**		
Support	0.7222	0.5764	**0.8498**	
Study Performance	0.7480	0.5046	0.6457	**0.8649**

Table 3 shows the factor loadings and cross loadings for different constructs. The correlation between items and factors had higher loadings than other items in the different constructs, as well as the loadings of variables were greater than 0.7 in their own constructs in the model are considered adequate (Henseler et al., 2009). In sum, the validity of measurement model met the criteria.

TABLE 3: The Results of Factor Loadings and Cross Loadings for Different Construct

Construct/ Item	Communication	Support	Study performance
Communication			
COM1	**0.899616**	0.491731	0.461788
COM2	**0.887932**	0.530601	0.486555
COM3	**0.894876**	0.513803	0.423698
COM4	**0.894528**	0.523965	0.433471
Support			
SUP1	0.534710	**0.874576**	0.546341
SUP2	0.473784	**0.870048**	0.538255
SUP3	0.489773	**0.870586**	0.600955
SUP4	0.522633	**0.831418**	0.512540
SUP5	0.449120	**0.809673**	0.516856
SUP6	0.397444	**0.838150**	0.600629
SUP7	0.558591	**0.852350**	0.521307
Study Performance			
PERFORM1	0.436870	0.527929	**0.810324**
PERFORM2	0.485356	0.558773	**0.894276**
PERFORM3	0.464456	0.600027	**0.910351**
PERFORM4	0.400099	0.548826	**0.878038**
PERFORM5	0.353947	0.524829	**0.866080**
PERFORM6	0.451242	0.563800	**0.878550**
PERFORM7	0.460158	0.579991	**0.811296**

Table 4 shows the results of reliability analysis for the instrument. The values of composite reliability and Cronbach's Alpha were greater than 0.8, indicating that the instrument used in this study had high internal consistency (Henseler et al., 2009). These statistical analyses confirmed that the measurement scales met the acceptable standard of validity and reliability analyses as shown in Table 2.

TABLE 4: Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha

Construct	Composite Reliability	Cronbach Alpha
Communication	0.940997	0.916517
Support	0.947879	0.935821
StudyPerformance	0.954000	0.943505

Analysis of Constructs

Table 5 shows that the mean values for the variables are between 4.5 and 5.7, showing that the levels of communication, support and study performance are ranging from high (4) to highest level (7). The correlation coefficients for the relationship between the independent variable (i.e., communication and support) and the dependent variable (i.e., study performance) are less than 0.90, showing the data are not affected by serious collinearity problem (Hair et al, 2006).

TABLE 5: Pearson Correlation Analysis and Descriptive Statistics

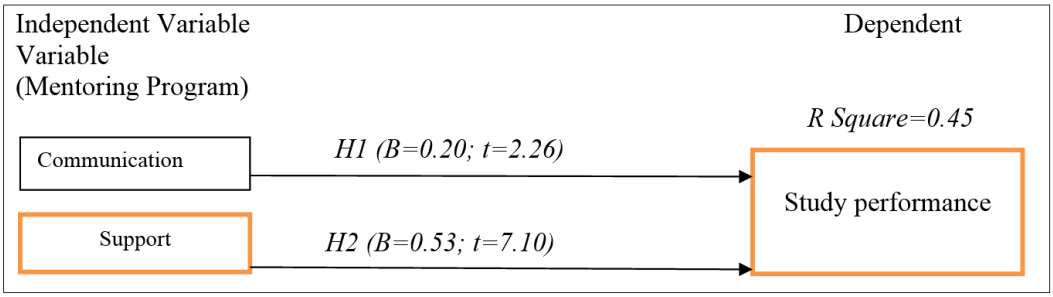
Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Pearson Correlation analysis (r)		
			1	2	4
1. Communication	5.7	.81	1		
2. Support	4.5	.84	.57**	1	
3. Study performance	5.4	.91	.50**	.63**	1

Note: Significant at **p<0.01 Reliability Estimation is Shown in a Diagonal

Research Objectives 1 and 2

The SmartPLS path model analysis was utilized to answer the first and second objectives of this study. Figure 1 shows the outcomes of SmartPLS path model for testing the direct effects model. In terms of exploratory of the model, the inclusion of communication and support in the analysis had explained 76 percent of the variance in dependent variable. Specifically, the results of testing hypothesis highlighted two important findings: first, communication significantly correlated with study performance (β=0.20; t=2.26), therefore H1 was supported. Second, support significantly correlated with study performance (β=0.53; t=7.10), therefore H2 was supported. In sum, the result confirms that communication and support act as important determinants of mentees' study performance in the organizational sample.

FIGURE 1: The Outcomes of SmartPLS Path Model



Note: Significant at t >1.96

In order to determine a global fit PLS path model, we carried out a global fit measure (GoF) based on Wetzels, Odekerken-Schroder and Van Oppen's (2009) guideline as follows: GoF=SQRT{MEAN (Communality of Endogenous) x MEAN (R^2)}=0.58, signifying that it exceeds the cut-off value of 0.36 for large effect sizes of R^2. This result confirms that the PLS path model has better explaining power in comparison with the baseline values (GoF small=0.1, GoF medium=0.25, GoF large=0.36). It also provides strong support to validate the PLS model globally (Wetzels, Odekerken-Schroder and Van Oppen's (2009).

Discussion and Implications

The findings of this study confirm that mentoring program does act as an important predictor of mentees' study performance in the studied organizations. In the context of this study, mentors have appropriately plan and implement mentoring activities based on the university policies and procedures. Majority respondents perceived that the levels of communication, support and study performance are high. This situation explains that the ability of mentors to appropriately implement communication and support in formal and/

or informal mentoring activities has enhanced mentees' study performance in the university.

This study presents three major implications: theoretical contribution, robustness of research methodology, and practical contribution. In terms of theoretical contribution, the results of this study highlight that communication and support have been important predictors of mentees' study performance. This result is consistent with studies by Tennenbaum, Crosby and Gliner (2001), Bernier, Larose and Soucy 2005), and Ismail and Ridzwan (2012). With respect to the robustness of research methodology, the survey questionnaires used in this study have met the acceptable standards of validity and reliability analyses. This may lead to the production of valid and reliable findings. In regards with practical contributions, the findings of this study may be used to improve the design and management of mentoring programs in organizations. This objective will be achieved if management emphasizes on the following aspects: firstly, training content and methods for mentors should be properly designed and implemented to improve mentors' competencies in teaching, counseling and guiding students who have different ability levels. Secondly, mentoring groups based on students' academic achievement should be formed in order to ease mentors fulfilling different mentees' needs and expectations. Thirdly, mentors who show high commitment to mentoring activities should be given an adequate recognition. Fourthly, learning activities should be diversify in order to attract students who have different interests and capabilities to actively involve in mentoring programs. Fifthly, religion based ethical values should be emphasized in mentoring activities in order to safeguard mentees from engaging in moral decadencies and preparing them to be good citizens in future. If these suggestions are given more attention this may motivate undergraduate students to support higher education mentoring program goals.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that the ability of mentors to properly implement communication and support in mentoring programs has motivated mentees to enhance their study performance in the studied organization. This result has also supported and broadened higher education mentoring program research literature mostly published in Western countries. Therefore, current research and practice within higher education student development program needs to consider communication and support as important components of undergraduate mentoring program domain. This study further suggests that the capability of mentors to practice comfortable communication and provide adequate support in mentoring relationships will strongly induce subsequent positive mentee outcomes (e.g., self-efficacy, engagement, psychosocial and ethics). Therefore, these positive outcomes may lead to maintained and enhanced the performance of higher learning institutions in an era of global competition.

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