

ASSESSING STUDENT SATISFACTION TOWARDS A TRIMESTER ACADEMIC CALENDAR: A CASE STUDY IN UNIKL MIMET

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ABSTRACT

The trimester semester is offered in University Kuala Lumpur particularly in University Kuala Lumpur Malaysian Institute of Marine Engineering Technology (UniKL-MIMET). The trimester format semester is an optional short ~~semester~~ for students 14-weeks and offered for them during semester break gap. The purpose of this study is to examine the effectiveness of a trimester semester towards students' academic performance and student's satisfaction towards the trimester semester which projected to give benefits and advantages to them. The participants in this study were students which were involved in the trimester system in UniKL Mimet. The results indicate that the stated that their instructors or lecturers could not provide adequate materials or a guidebook to support their learning. Additionally, the students expressed their satisfaction with the trimester semester. This study confirms that appropriate teaching materials employed by instructors facilitate meaningful learning for students throughout the trimester semester.

Keywords: *trimester, semester, academic performance, student's satisfaction, UniKL*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The concept of "semesters" is familiar to most university attendees since many universities in Malaysia operate on this system. Meanwhile for "trimesters", the academic year is divided into three equal segments. These universities divide their academic year into two semesters [1]. The most striking difference is that there is no significant long vacation time for either students or staff. The biggest challenge lies in scheduling teaching to allow academic staff to have at least one trimester free for research and engagement activity. For both students and lecturers, moving from two semesters per year to three per year is a significant change. It is a common knowledge that an 18-week study period does not include the final examination period on all campuses of the University of Kuala Lumpur. Students at University Kuala Lumpur MIMET, on the other hand, have seen a big change in how much time they must study and how their schedules and curriculums have changed because of the amendment made by the Chancellery. The most noticeable change following the implementation of the trimester programme is that the learning timetable becomes compressed and constrained. Students that have registered for 20 to 21 credit hours might face classes from early in the morning until 10 o'clock in the evening. Implementing a 14-week study schedule without limiting credit hours creates difficulties for students and lecturers who must adhere to a strict scheduling routine that continues far into the night. As a result, learners just exhaust themselves studying at a high level for extended periods of time. Since the Academic Department decided to follow Chancellery orders, reducing an 18-week study time to a 14-week study period, requiring students to enrol in a class by limiting credit hours should be made mandatory. As a result, it may assist students in avoiding a decline in their grade point average (GPA) because of tight scheduling. Most students feel that having an 18 week semester will give them enough time to prepare for the examination and to indulge in extra curriculum activities [2].

Additionally, a significant problem for students taking practical courses is the need to learn theory and apply it in a short period of time via practical assessments in a workshop. A student that is a slow learner might feel the 14-week study is a disadvantage for him or her due to an inability to retain what is taught in such a short period. This disadvantage, which makes students feel inadequate at the time, might create dissatisfaction among students with the changes in the academic calendar. However, well-organized lesson plans, due dates or reading lists by lecturers will benefit the students and give them advantages of this compressed format semester to grab opportunities of earning credits in a short week of study. Thus, students who are enrolled in compressed format courses are able to complete their studies in a shorter time. The objective of this study is to evaluate the impact of compressed-format courses on students' academic performance and satisfaction. This study also aims to demonstrate the benefits and advantages of compressed-format courses for students.

1.1 Definition of Academic Probation

Many colleges and universities have implemented academic probation procedures to help students who are at risk of academic failure. Students who have a grade point average (GPA) below a certain level or who fulfil other deficiency criteria are often informed by these regulations that if they do not improve their academic performance, they will be referred for suspension or disenrollment. To prevent disenrollment, these measures may encourage deficient students to study harder or discover the methods they need to improve their grades [3]. According to [4], The cumulative grade point average (CGPA) is a measure of how well a student did in all required semesters. It is used to figure out a student's academic standing. Students with a cumulative grade point average (CGPA) of more than 2.00 are given the terms "Good Standing" or "Pass." However, students with a cumulative grade point average below 2.0 will be put on academic probation for the next semester. The student will no longer be on probation when his or her overall GPA is at least 2.00. The two levels of probation status are referred to as "first probation" and "second probation." Both present the student with varying degrees of warning. For the first time during the first probation term (P1), the student has earned a semester GPA of at least 1.67 but less than 2.00. Second probation (P2): the student's cumulative grade point average is less than 2.00 but more than or equal to 1.67. More than 12 credits will not be allowed to be taken during the Academic Probation Period. Student who received CGPA below than 2.00 after P2 will be dismissed from the University. The first time a student is put on academic probation is easy because it happens right away and only when a student's semester GPA is below 2.0.

Table 1 The Range of CGPA Mapped to the Academic Standing
Source: [4]

Academic Standing	CGPA Range
Good Standing (GS)	$CGPA \geq 2.00$
Probation 1 (P1)	$1.67 \leq CGPA < 2.00$
Probation 2 (P2)	$1.67 \leq CGPA < 2.00$ after P1
Failed and Out (F&O)	$CGPA < 1.67$ or $CGPA < 2.00$ after P2

1.2 Academic Trimester System

The term "trimester" has its roots in Latin, with "tri" meaning three and "mester" pertaining to months. [5] The academic year is divided into three terms, each lasting between eight to sixteen weeks, and separated by breaks. Some countries use this system as a quarter system and maintain the original three-month duration of each trimester. During each trimester, students typically take fewer courses than during a semester, but the courses are more intensive and cover more material in a shorter amount of time. At the end of each trimester, students are evaluated in the same way as in a semester, and their grades are used to calculate their overall GPA. According to [6], the overall duration is longer resulting in fewer modules in each trimester. The students have better opportunities to do well and, even in the last trimester, to raise grades. However, there are some downsides of trimesters as stated by [7], is that the academic timetable can be extremely tight. Midterms and exams come in quick succession, reading

weeks are scarce or non-existent, and there's little time for exam periods or buffer days between terms. According to [8], Sage Creek High school believes that "there are plenty of reasons why our school functions on the trimester system. Each trimester has the same number of credits as a semester, so one could potentially take three years' worth of a language in two years". However, some universities also believe that the trimester model presents a unique opportunity to hasten your academic journey and earn your degree in a shorter timeframe. Additionally, depending on your program, trimesters may provide greater flexibility in managing your studies alongside other commitments. It's also possible that your program structure may allow for a lighter course load, permitting you to distribute your units of study across the three trimesters. [9]

1.3 Academic Semester System

The word "semester" has roots in Latin, meaning "six months." It is commonly used to describe a system of education, such as in summer programs. Under this system, an academic year is divided into two equal parts, known as semesters, each typically lasting between 14 to 16 weeks. The learning methodologies, course content, and assessment procedures vary by course. [5] The majority of universities, both public and private, operate on a semester system. This system allows for regular assessment of students, providing opportunities for improvement while reducing the burden of a comprehensive end-of-year exam. The semester system also reduces the burden of syllabus. [10] believes that It provides an opportunity to students for continuous learning and assessment or feedback and a better paced understanding of the subject. He also stated that a semester system allows greater freedom and scope for designing and delivering a variety of courses that the students can pick flexibly to enhance the quality of their learning. However, [11] believes that there are a few disadvantages of the semester system such as the semester systems increase the workload as it has evaluations twice a year, there will be room for extra classes as the hours are packed and lastly the semester system restricts co-curricular activities as the teachers and the students are too busy with their busy class schedules.

1.4 Active Learning

Active learning encompasses a variety of instructional strategies that emphasize the significance of student participation and initiative in learning. It harnesses the benefits of methods based on the learner's interest; research-based/problem-based learning; and various methods of evaluating the learner. This supports the development of the learner's critical thinking abilities [12]. According to [13] classified into four categories; (i) Active learning as a mode of instruction that encourages students to explore subject matter via student-centred activities. (ii) Active learning necessitates the presentation of ideas and views in small groups that eventually coalesce into a class-wide debate; hence, it arouses students' intrinsic interest. (iii) Active learning enhances team-based collaboration, communication, cooperation, and collegiality abilities. (iv) Active learning breaks down barriers of race, class, and IQ by bringing students from different backgrounds together with the teacher.

[14] in their research stated that when students cooperate in finding or exploring new knowledge or information, they trigger intrinsic motivation for their own learning. In addition, for an effective active learning is via student-teacher interaction. According to [15] student-teacher engagement is the core of every effective classroom management strategy. For instance, an active learning environment in the classroom would be helped by a good relationship and mutual understanding between the teacher and the students. So, teachers who are changing their classrooms by using evidence-based teaching methods like active learning, formative evaluation, and including everyone would do well by building trust as early as possible and often (vice versa)[16]. Furthermore, according to [17] In this setting of active learning, trust, student commitment to active learning, and general engagement all contributed much more to academic achievement than any other factor. Even though global attitudes about the ability to learn are still important for predicting student engagement, his study shows that the course experience (i.e., students building trust in their teacher) was more important for predicting student performance in his sample.

2.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper focuses on the satisfaction of the students about the trimester at UniKL Mimet. These students comprised of both male and female students from UniKL Mimet. A descriptive analysis was used to find the Mean for the relevancy of a trimester semester towards students' academic performance and student's satisfaction on the trimester course which projected to give benefits and advantages to them.

The participants approached were under the probation programme and students that were undergoing the trimester semester. By using a random sampling approach, a researcher may reliably get a statistically valid and representative cross-section of the student population because each sample has an equal chance of being picked. Random sampling is ideal for this study since the researcher is interested in designing an instrument that would assess student satisfaction to a trimester academic calendar. Table 2 shows the Percentage of Respondents by Gender. The percentage of male respondents was 59.1%, while the percentage of female respondents was 40.9%. It can be said that the percentage of male respondents was higher. The number of male respondents was higher because more male students participated in the short course.

Table 2: Percentage of Respondents by Gender

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	26	59.1	59.1	59.1
Valid Female	18	40.9	40.9	100.0
Total	44	100.0	100.0	

Table 3: Percentage of Respondent by Programme

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
BMO	30	68.2	68.2	68.2
Valid BOE	7	15.9	15.9	84.1
DMM	7	15.9	15.9	100.0
Total	44	100.0	100.0	

According to Table 3 above Bachelor of Maritime Operations (Hons.) had the highest number of respondents answering the questionnaire at 68.2%. The other respondents were from Bachelor of Offshore Engineering (Hons) and Diploma in Maritime Management which cover 15.9% for each programme respectively.

Table 4: Percentage of Respondents by Semester

Semester				
1	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
3	7	15.9	15.9	15.9
4	8	18.2	18.2	34.1
Valid	15	34.1	34.1	68.2
5	10	22.7	22.7	90.9
6	4	9.1	9.1	100.0
Total	44	100.0	100.0	

The highest number of respondents were from semester 4, comprising 34.1% of the total respondents. This is followed by semester 5 students, who represent 22.7% of this study. Semester 3 students are ranked third with 18.2%. Semester 1 students ranked fourth with 15.9%, while the majority of the respondents were from semester 6, representing 9.1

The survey consists of five-point likert scale ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. The data collected then was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to find the relevancy as well as the satisfaction of the students. SPSS is capable of identifying larger data sets in less time and delivering quantifiable results for examination purposes. The main points of the research will be shown in a simple visual analysis, chart, and table made with descriptive statistics and Microsoft Excel.

3.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 The effectiveness of implementing the trimester programme on students at UniKL Mimet.

Table 5 below shows theoretical concepts are explained clearly (3.8182) holds the highest mean for the effectiveness of the programme followed by the required tests, quizzes, projects, papers and reports accurately measured students' attainment (3.7955). The two lowest, ranked effectiveness are academic advisor helped deciding to take this short course (2.8409) and the "Real-world" projects and examples are used effectively in teaching (3.1136).

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
The course objectives are clear to you from the start of the course	44	2.00	5.00	3.7273	.84533
The study materials / guidebook was provided to you at the beginning of the course.	44	1.00	5.00	3.1364	1.15317
The course was organized in a manner that helped me understand underlying concepts	44	1.00	5.00	3.5227	.97620
The required tests, quizzes, projects, papers and reports accurately measured my attainment of these learning outcomes	44	1.00	5.00	3.7955	.82348
Theoretical concepts are explained clearly	44	1.00	5.00	3.8182	.89632
"Real-world" projects and examples are used effectively in teaching.	44	1.00	5.00	3.1136	1.24295
The course met my expectations for the quality of the course	44	1.00	5.00	3.7273	.87241
Academic advisor helped deciding to take this short course at an appropriate time	44	1.00	5.00	2.8409	1.23784
Valid N (listwise)	44				

Meanwhile Table 6 displays the overall Mean of the effectiveness of trimester programmes on students. Based on the descriptive statistics, the grand mean analysis for objective 1 is 3.4602 classes on the High scale in mean score table. Thus, we may infer that the UniKL MIMET student benefited greatly from the short semester.

Table 6: Grand Mean

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Summean1	44	2.38	4.88	3.4602	.64236
Valid N (listwise)	44				

3.2 The students' satisfaction towards the trimester programme offered.

Table 7 shows taking this short course will cut down my credit hours for the upcoming semester holds the highest mean for the effectiveness of the compressed course (4.2045) followed by students satisfied with their decision to participate in this course (3.8864). The two lowest ranked effectiveness of the short course are taking this short course should allow me to finish degree more quickly (3.2273) and students are able to improve their pointers during the short course (3.3864).

Table 7: Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I am satisfied with my decision to participate in this course.	44	1.00	5.00	3.8864	1.08297
Taking this short course should allow me to finish degree more quickly.	44	1.00	5.00	3.2273	1.39540
Taking this short course will cut down my credit hours for the upcoming semester.	44	1.00	5.00	4.2045	1.02480
If I had an opportunity to take another short course, I would gladly do so.	44	1.00	5.00	3.5227	1.30275
My choice to participate in the short course was a wise one.	44	1.00	5.00	3.6364	1.12252
The lecturers are punctual in terms of the educational activities' dates and times.	44	1.00	5.00	3.6364	1.01365
I was able to improve my pointer during the short course.	44	1.00	5.00	3.3864	1.18549
I was able to concentrate on one course or two courses at one time.	44	1.00	5.00	3.8409	1.09848
The information and material given throughout the compressed course was excellent.	44	1.00	5.00	3.5909	1.14766
I don't mind studying more than one chapter in a week.	44	1.00	5.00	3.5000	1.08906
Valid N (listwise)	44				

Based on Table 8 below, grand mean analysis for objective 2 of this study is 3.6432. Based on mean score table, the grand mean analysis for objective 2 is classified as high. Thus, from this descriptive analysis we can deduce a conclusion that students were satisfied with the short semester offered to them.

Table 8: Grand Mean

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Summean2	44	2.00	5.00	3.6432	.74783
Valid N (listwise)	44				

5.0 CONCLUSION

Aim of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of implementing trimester programme on student and examine students' satisfaction regarding a trimester programme offered. The data was collected using a quantitative method which has been distributed to 47 students that took the short course in the university. Only 44 students responded to the survey given via WhatsApp application. The result obtained from the collected data shows that there are several key points that need to be highlighted in order to enhance the effectiveness of the short course in UniKL MIMET. From the results in Table 5, the students stated that their instructors or lecturers could not provide adequate materials or a guidebook to support their learning. Next, the students also expressed their disappointment about the lack of exposure for them to "real-world" projects or examples. Therefore, the lecturer or instructor should provide tasks or assignment which expose the students to real-world environment. For example, by interviewing a company to complete the task or assignment given.

One possible justification is that students are better able to concentrate throughout the course of a seven-week semester. During the short course period, no student was permitted to take more than two courses; they were required to concentrate only on those two courses. With more time spent together in class each day, students were able to get to know one another and foster a more welcoming atmosphere. This promoted higher classroom participation and in-depth discussions, which gave the impression of a stronger understanding of the course material. It may have finally cleared the way for enhanced student performance.

Another factor contributing to the effectiveness of the short course is that theoretical concepts are explained clearly. Based on the statistical result, 20.5% of students strongly agree and 50% of the students agree with the statement, which equates to 70.5% when combined. Theoretical concepts help students see why one strategy is effective while another is unsuccessful. The experience of others is imparted to the student via theory. Theoretical knowledge may give students a greater grasp of a topic by allowing them to place it in its proper perspective and comprehend the reasoning behind it.

On the other hand, through this paper, the researcher was able to conclude that students who took the trimester semester were satisfied. The result obtained indicates that by taking the trimester semester offered, students will cut down on their credit hours for the upcoming semester. Cutting down credit hours for the upcoming semester is crucial for students who need to focus on their final year project, which is time consuming and puts a lot of pressure on them. Students can focus more on their final year project or other core subjects and project for tomorrow's success by reducing credit hours.

Finally, the students are most satisfied with their lecturers' ability to deliver the educational activities' dates and times. An organised lecturer who follows their teaching planner closely allows students to understand their lecturer's rhythm very well. Redundant tasks, assignments, quizzes, and exams given to students at the same time are doable if both sides reciprocate and cooperate fully in making the course a success. Thus, students are able to carefully follow their lectures, and a healthy study atmosphere is produced achieving the students' satisfaction.

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