TUTORIALS IN THE POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES (PUP) OPEN UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

The Students' Preferred Approaches and Expectations

Sub-theme: Providing Appropriate Support and Quality Assurance

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ABSTRACT

Tutorial is one of the student support services often provided by open and distance teaching institutions. These are regularly scheduled meetings between a tutor and his/her students which may include individual consultation sessions, either face-to-face or through telephone; a more formal 'lecture format'; optional participation in small groups in study centers; self-initiated and organized discussions with fellow students or even voluntary or obligatory participation in seminars.

As active participants in the learning process, students affect the manner in which they deal with the materials to be learned. Students must take an active role in the distance delivered course by independently taking responsibility for their learning. In open and distance learning, there is great emphasis on the ability to learn and to continue independently and autonomously, to communicate to others deliberately and on a differentiated basis, to collaborate with others in group, to show social sensitiveness, to accept social responsibility, to be ready and willing to be flexible and to have experience of flexibility (Peters, 2002).

Likewise, effective open and distance learning requires both knowledge of learner styles and advanced preparation on the part of the teacher. The teacher, subject facilitator, or tutor has a responsibility to provide students with a variety of opportunities from which they can attain their educational goals. Furthermore, if he chooses open and distance education as a medium, then the responsibility also includes full understanding the challenges the students experience in their studies and developing methods to help them succeed. One of this is the provision of an effective tutorial system. Just like many other open and distance education institutions, the Polytechnic University of the Philippines Open University believes that tutorials should be participatory events, not only straight lectures.

This study was conducted to determine the expectations and preferred approaches on tutorials of the Master in Educational Management students of the PUP Open University during Summer of School Year 2004. The entire population from the three (3) Metro Manila learning centers was considered for this study. Of the one hundred eighty-one (181) students enrolled during the period, one hundred and forty-three (143) accomplished and returned the questionnaire. In view of the nature of the research problem, this investigation used the descriptive method, employing the questionnaire and interview as data gathering tools. The survey instrument focused on the personal profile of the respondents, their attendance in tutorials, reasons for attending or not attending tutorials, as well as their expectations and preferred approaches in tutorials.

Background of the Study

This study was conducted to determine the preferred approaches and expectations on tutorials of the Master in Educational Management students of the Polytechnic University of the Philippines Open University (PUP OU) during Summer of 2004. The entire population from the three (3) Metro Manila learning centers was considered for this study. Of the one hundred and eighty-one (181) students enrolled during the period, one hundred and forty-three (143) accomplished and returned the

questionnaire.

In view of the nature of the research problem, this investigation used the descriptive method, employing the questionnaire and interview as data gathering tools.

The survey instrument focused on the personal profile of the respondents, their attendance in tutorials, reasons for attending or not attending tutorials, as well as their preferred approaches and expectations in tutorials. The questionnaire also attempted to establish the relationship between their profile and attendance in tutorials.

The questionnaires were distributed to the respondents through the registrars of the Metro Manila learning centers during the registration period of Summer 2004 and collected during the final examination day. Interview, whenever possible, were also carried out.

Relevant data and information gathered by the researcher were treated with the following statistical methods: (1) frequency counts; (2) percentage distribution; (3) ranking; (4) weighted mean and; chi-square test.

Summary of Findings

Specifically, the study attempted to answer the following sub-problems:

1. What is the demographic profile of the respondents as regards:

1.1 Gender

Of the one hundred and forty-three (143) respondents, one hundred and twenty-one (121) or 84.6% were females and twenty-two (22) or 15.4% were males.

1.2 Age

Fifty-three (53) students or 37.1% belong to the age bracket of 21-30 years old, followed by forty-eight (48) students or 33.6% belonging to the age bracket of 31-40. Twenty-six students (26) or 18.2% belong to the 41-50 age bracket while the oldest group of respondents belonging to the age bracket of 51 years and above comprised of only sixteen (16) students or 11.1%

1.3 Civil Status

Ninety-eight (98) or 68.5% were married, 43 or 30.1% were single, 1 or .7% was a widower and 1 or .7% was separated.

1.4 Number of dependent children

Seventy-six (76) or 53.1% have 0-1 dependent child, fifty (50) or 35% have 2-3 dependent children, and seventeen (17) or 11.9% belong to the bracket with four (4) and above dependent children.

1.5 Proximity of place of work to the learning center

Forty-six (46) respondents or 32.1% worked within 10-19 km. away from the learning center followed by forty (40) or 28% who were working 30 km. and above away from the learning center. Thirty-one (31) or 21.7% of the respondents were working within 0-9 km. away from the center, while twenty-six (26) or 18.2% within 20-29 km. Away.

1.6 Proximity of residence to the learning center

Fifty (50) or 34.9% lived over 30 km. away from the learning center, followed by forty-eight (48) or 33.6% of the respondents who were living within 10-19 km. away from the learning center, twenty-four (24)

or 16.8% of the respondents were living within 0-9 km. away from the center, while twenty-one (21) or 14.7% within 20-29 km. away from the learning center.

1.7 Enrolment status

One hundred and ten (110) or 76.9% of the respondents were old students who have enrolled in the system for more than one semester, while thirty-three (33) or 23.10% of the respondents were new students or have just recently enrolled in the program.

2. What is the percentage rate of PUP Open University students who are attending/not attending tutorials?

Sixty-five (65) or 45.5% of the respondentsere attending tutorials, while seventy-eight (78) or 54.5% did not attend any tutorial session at all.

3. What are the reasons for attending/not attending tutorials?

3.1 Reasons for attending tutorials

Students attended tutorials mainly for academic reasons, with "listening to the tutor explaining the course materials' being cited as the main reason, followed by "receiving guidance from tutors on assignments,' 'exchange viewpoints with tutors,' and 'receiving guidance from tutors on study skills.' "Receiving guidance from tutors on examination' and 'getting psychological support from tutors and other students' got the same rank, while other social factors like 'getting some psychological support from tutors and students,' 'making more friends,' and 'getting a feeling of belonging to a group' were clearly of limited concern to students.

3.2 Reason for not attending tutorials

'No time' was the primary reason cited by the respondents, immediately followed by 'no tutorial session available.' Other reasons given were 'lack of information,' 'not interested' or 'not needed at the moment' even 'lack of money' were also cited as some of the reasons.

4. What is the preferred approach of tutorial session of those attending/not attending tutorials?

4.1 Preferred approach of those who attended tutorials.

The most preferred approach was clearly for the tutor to 'lecture to the whole group,' followed by their 'leading the whole group discussion using a question and answer approach.' Approaches requiring more active participation and interaction among them, such as role play simulation, small group discussion, and particularly student presentation seem to be less popular.

4.2 Preferred approach of those who did not attend any tutorial session.

From among those who did not attend any tutorial session, the most preferred approach was that for the 'tutor to give individual guidance to students,' followed by the 'tutor leading whole group discussion using a question and answer

approach and 'organizing small group discussions.'

Just like those who were attending tutorials, 'students' presentation' and 'students' participation in role play/simulation' seem to be less popular to them as well. The most preferred approach among those students who were attending tutorials which was for the 'tutor to lecture to the whole group,' however, ranked the least among those who never attended any tutorial session at all.

5. What are the expectations of those who attended tutorials? those who did not attend any tutorial session?

The expectations of both groups related to 'acquiring more knowledge and better understanding of the course' ranked first, followed by 'getting greater insights into what had been studied.' There was also a considerable expectation that such meetings would lead to enhanced achievement, particularly in 'continuous assessment.' Finally, expectations related to 'enhancing their study skills' and 'building up social relationship' ranked the least.

6. What is the rate of effectiveness of tutorials attended?

A weighted mean of 1.88 for the effectiveness of tutorials attended which can be interpreted as Good was derived from the responses given.

7. Is there a significant relationship between the demographic profile of respondents and their percentage of attendance?

7.1 Relationship Between Students' Attendance in Tutorials and their Gender

The computed chi-square values was 0.2167 which was less than the tabular value of 3.841 at the .05 level of significance with 1 degree of freedom. This would lead to the acceptance of the null hypothesis which indicates that the respondents' attendance in tutorials was not affected by their gender.

7.2 Relationship Between Students' Attendance in Tutorials and their Age

The computed chi-square value at .05 level of significance with 3 degrees of freedom which is 1.192 is less than the tabular value of 7.815. This result would mean acceptance of the null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between the students' age and their attendance in tutorials.

7.3 Relationship Between Students' Attendance in Tutorials and their Civil Status

There is a significant relationship between students' attendance in tutorials and their civil status. A computed chi-square value at .05 level of significance with 1 degree of freedom which is 4.1248 is greater than the tabular value of 3.481. And so the null hypothesis was rejected.

7.4 Relationship Between Students' Attendance in tutorials and the Number of their Dependent Children

The computed chi-square value is .3550 which is

less than the tabular value of 5.991. The result would lead to the acceptance of the null hypothesis. This indicated that the students' attendance in tutorials was not affected by the number of their dependent children.

7.5 Relationship Between Students' the Learning Center

Attendance in Tutorials and the Proximity of their Place of Work or Residence to the Learning Center

There is no significant relationship between the proximity of the students' place of work to the learning center and their attendance in tutorials as indicated by the computed chi-square value of 0.7268 which is less than the tabular value of 7.815.

7.6 Relationship Between Students' Attendance in tutorials and the Proximity of their Residence to the Learning Center. The computed chi-square value of 1.2603 is less than the tabular value of 7.815. This indicated that students' attendance in tutorials was not affected by the proximity of residence to the learning center. The result would lead to the acceptance of the null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between students' attendance in tutorials and the proximity of their residence to the learning center.

7.7 Relationship Between Students' Attendance in Tutorials and their Enrolment Status

The enrolment status of the respondents affect their attendance in tutorials. The computed chi-square value at .05 level of significance with 1 degree of freedom is 6.8522 which exceeded the tabular value of 3.841. This would lead to the rejection of the null hypothesis.

Interview

The interview discussions reflected views similar to those indicated in the questionnaires. Support for assessment was mentioned frequently as they want to know how they are progressing in their studies. Students prefer a knowledge-based, tutor-centered approach as they raise the issue of being tired after work and that the tutor taking a more directive approach, particularly lecture was favored.

On the other hand, lack of information and unavailability of tutorials were raised as reasons for not attending.

Conclusions

Based on the foregoing findings, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Most of the respondents were female, between 21-30 years old, married with 0-1 dependent child, are working within 10-19 km. away from the learning center, and living over 30 km. away from the center. Majority were old students.

2. Attendance in Tutorials

The higher rate of non-attendance in tutorials among PUP Open University students indicates poor utilization of this particular support system.

3. Reasons for attending / not attending tutorials

3.1 Reasons for attending

Students attended tutorials mainly for academic reasons, other social factors like 'getting some psychological support from tutors and students,' 'making more friends,' and 'getting a feeling of belonging to a group' were clearly of limited concern

to students.

3.2 Reasons for not attending tutorials

Lack of time is the primary reason cited by majority of the respondents which can be attributed to the fact that the respondents were working adults and therefore have multiple roles which can in turn affect their performance in their studies. Non-availability of tutorials was also a reason for non- attendance.

4. Preferred Approach of students attending/not attending tutorial sessions

4.1 Preferred approach of those attending tutorials

Students who attended tutorials preferred more tutor-centered formats.

Approaches requiring more active participation and interaction among them such as role play simulation, small group discussion, and particularly student presentation seem to be less popular.

4.2 Preferred approach of those not attending

Students who did not attend any tutorials prefer a more personalized interaction as their most preferred approach is for the 'tutor to give individual guidance to students.'

The most preferred approach among those students who were attending tutorials which was for the 'tutor to lecture to the whole group' ranked the least among those who never attended any tutorial session at all.

5. Expectations of those attending/not attending tutorials

The students expect that tutorials would lead to enhancement of knowledge and learning skills particularly learning to learn, and other skills such as searching, structuring information, management of time and autonomy in learning. There was also a considerable expectation that such meetings would lead to enhanced achievement, particularly in 'continuous assessment' and would lead to enhancement of collaborative skills such as working in group and planning together. However, this concern seem to be the least among their expectations.

6. Rate of Effectiveness of Tutorial Session Attended

The tutorials offered in the Open University was good.

7. Relationship Between Students' Profile and their Attendance in Tutorials

Among the seven (7) demographic variables, only nt status and higher chi-square value which indicate that the students' attendance in tutorials is affected by these factors. Other factors like gender, age, number of dependent children, proximity of place of work and residence to the learning center had lower chi- square value which led to the acceptance of the null hypothesis.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, the following recommendations are hereby presented:

1. Most students complained about the non-availability of tutorials. To address this problem, the Open University administration should conduct a massive information campaign about this support activity and adapt the term "tutorial" for teacher-to-student and student-to-student interaction.

2. Since lack of time for study is one of the reasons cited by the respondents, information on topics such as time management, study strategies and stress

Management should be provided to

students.

3. Utilize peer support by encouraging students to form into groups particularly those who are working in the same institution. It can do a lot in encouraging each other in completing the requirements for each course.
4. Various methods can be used to connect with students which include telephone contact from tutor, a letter inquiring how the students are progressing in their study within the semester, computer conferencing, internet chat rooms, etc.
5. Leaflets on student support as a form of communication can be developed. A one-page straightforward text without requiring particular responses from the student. This is a simple example aimed at students who appear to be falling behind with their independent studies straightforward text without requiring particular responses from the student. This is a simple -

   example aimed at students who appear to be falling behind with their independent studies.
6. Through the PUP ICT Center, tutorials may now be conducted in the network environment using synchronous (simultaneous and asynchronous delayed) technologies. Facilitators may use network technologies as an alternative to normal telephone tutoring.

   Examples of these are:

   * Conference calling. It involves more than two people linked by phone known as audio-conferencing or tele-conferencing. This is having a facilitator linked to students separately in different locations.
   * One-to-one e-mail. A system where tutors are

     Offline and log-on only every two or thee days
7. Facilitators should clearly identify the means for

   communicating with students by providing them with contact numbers or other means of getting in-touch during the orientation period.
8. More staff development programs for facilitator on effective group work skills should be provided. Some of the group methods which can be used are:

   * Snowballing or pyramiding: Set students a task of some kind either on their own or in groups of two and allow them two or three minutes to work on the task. Then ask them to get together with another person or pair to discuss the results of their task for another minute or so. Then after a few more minutes combine the twos or form into fours or eights or into the plenary group to report back taking as long as seems useful.
   * Brainstorming: Set the group a problem and ask them to suggest solutions but do not allow any discussion of the solution until they seem to have run out of further ideas. Then group the ideas if possible and discuss them in the plenary session. Suggest solutions but do not allow any discussion of the solution until they seem to have run out of further ideas. Then group the ideas if possible and discuss them in the plenary session.
   * Soap Boxing: Give students a range of topics to choose from and ask individual volunteers or pairs of volunteers to talk about the topic for a minute either for or against it. The other students can debate or just heckle until the topic is exhausted. It is important to choose

     Appropriate topics this method is appropriate

to accidental topics related to a particular course.

* Concept cards or hot-seating: Individual volunteers talk for a few minutes to the whole group about particular concepts or topics possibly drawn from a selection generated by students and placed as slips in a hat.
* Games: Games can be a very powerful method for group work but can require much preparation. Possibly the simplest examples are straightforward quizzes run between teams
* Role plays or simulations: these are useful variations on the games theme Where students are invited to play appropriate roles for example, to be a tutor marking an assignment and giving feedback.

9. Facilitators should be encouraged to undergo trainings on the use of modern technologies which can be used in conducting tutorials.
10. The PUP administration should address and Improve the teacher-student ratio in the open university by decreasing the number of students under each facilitator thereby giving them more opportunity to interact with their students.
11. Similar studies may be conducted for the other groups of PUP Open University students for comparison of results.
12. A follow-up study on the following can be conducted:
    - 12.1 Relationship between students' attendance in tutorials and their preferred tutorial approach.
    - 12.2 Relationship between students' attendance in tutorials and their expectations.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Carmencita I. Castolo is currently, a subject specialist in Open University of the Polytechnic University of the Philippines. She is an active member of the ICDE and AAOU. At present, she is also a member of the Advisory Council of the UNESCO Asia and Pacific Region Bureau for Education on Open and Distance Learning for Higher Education. Recently, she was appointed Editorial board member of the Asian Journal on Distance Education in Japan.

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