

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) and Students' Failure in Bachelor of Corporate Administration Programme

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ABSTRACT

Students' failure is one of the most debatable topics in tertiary education in Malaysia. Failure in certain courses might delay students' progress to graduate-on-time (GOT). This will result in increased cost, time and resources to both the university and student. From an academic perspective, a higher rate of failure will give a negative impression that the course is tough for students to pass. This study aims to investigate the factors contributing to students' failure based on the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT). The students of Bachelor of Corporate Administration (BCA) from the Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies, UiTM were selected to participate in an online survey. SCT has identified three main factors that influence students' failure namely, behavioural, environmental and personal factors. Findings of the study showed that for behavioural factors: students' attendance, total hours spent to study, participation in the classroom, understanding level and students' effort to complete the course are among the reasons that lead to the failure. Additionally, the nature of syllabus, teaching techniques, students learning time and assessment methods are the environmental factors that may lead to failure. Finally, personal factors are represented by individual roles, dispositions and commitment to perform in a particular course. This study concludes that the use of SCT can explain student failures more systematically. The result of the study is able to help the university and lecturer to enhance the teaching and learning approach, revise the assessment method and redesign the programme curriculum. These efforts are deemed pivotal in reducing student failures while maintaining its quality.

KEYWORDS: *Students' Failure, Behavioural Factors, Environmental Factors, Personal Factors, Social Cognitive Theory, Higher Learning Institution.*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the significant ways to enhance human capital in numerous fields. The quality of education in tertiary education reflects the employees' expertise and their quality for the job market in the country. In this aspect, Malaysia has always aimed to become one of the best destinations for higher education ("Redesigning Malaysia's Higher," 2018, para. 1).

With 20 Public Universities, 37 Polytechnics and 105 Community Colleges, the country has targeted to enrol 200,000 international students by 2020 and 250,000 in 2025 ("Redesigning Malaysia's Higher," 2018, para. 7). In supporting this aspiration, there is a dire need to preserve the quality of Malaysian Tertiary Education. Malaysian Qualification Agency has been established as one of the efforts to monitor the education quality delivered by the public and private universities in Malaysia. However, many elements may muddle the teaching and learning quality of tertiary education.

One of the disturbing elements that may divert the quality of education in tertiary education is students' failure rate. In an education setting, students' failure is a debatable topic because this circumstance affects the teaching staffs directly and the overall education system. In regards to this issue, the teaching staffs have been looking into various approaches to teaching and learning among students in tertiary education (Biggs, 1999; Biggs, 1991; Watkins 1982). In the education system, students' failure will lead to an additional monetary cost to the university (Dobson & Sharma, 1999). Enhancing academic quality is pivotal to attract more potential students to enrol. The success and failure of an individual are normally analysed using the psychological theories i.e., Bandura, 1999; Zimmerman, 1989, etc. In the academic arena, understanding and having knowledge related to psychology will enhance the learning process and improve teaching methods based on learners' ability and learning environments.

In the past, many academicians had been focusing on finding the best teaching methods to be applied, either on approach to teaching (Biggs, 1989), considering the approach to study (Watkins, 1982) and the teaching system (Biggs, 1991). Aysan, Tanrıöğen and Tanrıöğen (1996) discovered that when intervention techniques were used with failing students, their performance improved in the subsequent school year. However, the introduction of outcome-based education has changed this setting whereby the educators are now trying their best to identify the expected learned products and design the curriculum and assessment around the anticipated student learning environment (Erlich & Russ-Eft, 2011; Somerville, 2007). As such, students nowadays are tested with different assessment methods to define their abilities and competencies.

In the university, students' failure occurs when they are unable to deliver their best performance in continuous assessments and final examination. This unwelcomed achievement might upset the quality of tertiary education, which also implies deficiencies in the academic system. Besides, academic failure can be affected by the psychological state of the individual students, such as motivation (Cherif, et al., 2014; Zimerman 1989). In Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), failure rate is one of the performance indicators in identifying and categorizing the successfulness of a faculty in achieving its objectives. It is stipulated that, the higher the rate of failure, the higher the possibility for the key performance indicator to not be achieved. Therefore, the failure rate can obstruct the "graduate-on-time" (GOT) aspiration. On the same note, the United Kingdom, for instance, has acknowledged that failure rate affects the Quality Assessment Ratings of the institution that eventually interrupts the recruitment of the graduates (Ling, Heffernan, & Muncer, 2003).

The high failure rate in academic performance is also experienced by the Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies, UiTM from the Bachelor of Corporate Administration (BCA) programme. Due to the high rate of failure of BCA students, the faculty is unable to achieve its quality objective, which is to have at least 90 per cent of students graduating on time. The low percentage of GOT signifies the delay in studies for which it affects the institution's KPI and the students' readiness to enter the job market. A few courses such as Company Secretarial Practice, Advanced Financial Reporting and Corporate Governance and Ethics have been recorded as the critical courses for BCA programme. These courses are offered to final year students and are categorised as core subjects to be taken if the students plan to pursue a professional programme, the Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators

(ICSA) or wish to work in the secretarial field. Therefore, this study was carried out as an initial effort to understand the causes for students' failure in the tertiary education specifically for BCA programme. Besides, this study also aims to examine the application of the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) in identifying the factors that lead to the academic failure among the BCA students and recommend the appropriate strategies that can be implemented in helping the students who failed the course.

The objective of the study is to investigate the behavioural, situational and personal factors that contribute to students' failure. The next section reviews the relevant literature related to social cognitive theory and factors that contribute to the students' failure. Section 3 explains the research method used in this study. Section 4 summarises the finding and discussion. The last section concludes the paper.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Social Cognitive Theory

Social cognitive theory (SCT) proposes a transaction between cognition, behaviour and environment (Bandura, 1997). SCT can be utilised to explain the factors contributing to student's failure. This theory proposes that there are a few crucial factors that influence an individual's behaviour, which include self-efficacy, outcomes expectancies as well as other constructs such as goals and socio-structural factors (Conner & Norman, 2005). The SCT is an extension to the Social Learning. It suggests that learning occurs in a social context with a dynamic and reciprocal interaction of a person, environment and behaviour (LaMorte, 2018). The reciprocal interaction is assumed to influence the students' personality, behaviour and environment that they are in.

SCT explains students' behaviour by using the triadic reciprocal causation in which the model identifies three determinants; behaviour, cognitive and other personal factors, and environmental events (Bandura, 1988). Erlich and Russ-Eft (2011) also acknowledged self-efficacy as the main part of the social cognitive theory which affects persons' self-confidence to achieve one's goals as proposed by Bandura (1997). Besides, Harinie, Sudiro, Rahayu and Fatchan (2017) observed the element of the motivational process in SCT to be adopted in the process of entrepreneurship learning. In this study, SCT had been utilised by focusing on the three elements to determine the reasons for failure among students, which are behavioural, environmental and personal factors.

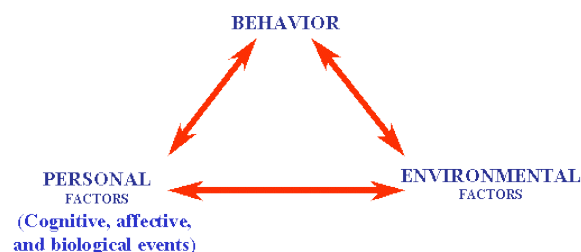


Figure 1.0: Social Cognitive Model
Source: Pajares (2002)

2.1.1 Personal Factors

The students need to personally initiate and direct their effort to obtain knowledge and skill rather than just depending on others such as teachers or other agents of instruction (Zimmerman, 1989). This is consistent with the outcome-based education whereby students are expected to initiate learning since the learning process has shifted from lecturers to the students. As the person being described as self, three elements involved under these personal factors are self-regulated learning strategies, self-efficacy perceptions of performance skill and commitment to academic goals (Zimmerman, 1989). Thus, students are expected to believe in his or her abilities to learn and perform well academically (perform the behaviour correctly).

2.1.2 Behaviour

Since the personal factors comprise the elements of self-efficacy, outcomes, expectations and goals (Lent, Brown & Hackett, 1994), a person's behaviour then determine the goals. In the triadic reciprocity, goals are pivotal in self-regulatory behaviour. The behaviour in the SCT relates to the strategy implemented by the students in which the strategies designed to control the behaviour (Zimmerman, 1989). As such, the outcomes received by the student after they learn and did well in the exam indicate that the students are provided with chances to experience successful learning (results of performing the behaviour correctly).

2.1.3 Environment

It is assumed that the environment influences the personality and behaviour of a person. This is consistent with the model of SCT in which there is an interaction between these three factors. Normally, environment has a significant impact on the learning settings of the students. The influence of environment may be stronger than the behavioural or personal at certain points during behavioural interaction sequences (Zimmerman, 1989). In the events of learning, environment has always been considered as one of the factors that supports students' learning ability (an environmental condition that influences students to learn better).

2.2 Other factors contributing to academic failure

Many contributing factors influence students' rate of failure in the academic world. Wimshurst et al. (2006) found that there are other factors which may lead to academic failure. Such factors include among others the subjective nature of grading, moderation of assessment, inconsistent moderation and monitoring processes and the role of academics in the enhancement of quality of teaching and learning.

Furthermore, Ling, Heffernan and Muncer (2003) through a network analysis have revealed the several perceived causes lead directly to exam failures such as sickness, lack of intelligence and lack of preparation. Students are also linked to poor time management and mind wandering in the exam with failure. Najimi, et al. (2013) have found that the most important factors affecting educational failure from students' point of view are curriculum, lecturers, learning environment, family and socio-economic factors. This is supported by Roman (2014) who revealed that the main causes of student failure are internal and external factors, such as family situation, social pressure and economic pressure as well as discipline difficulties, teacher exigency and pedagogical. Besides, Cherif, et al. (2014) highlighted that motivation is the leading cause behind students' failure including students' attitude, study habits, academic readiness and others.

Based on the review of prior literature, Ersoy (2016) in his study has concluded that individual's failure in developing his/her behaviours can be a great loss for the family, country and humanity. He also explained that the reasons for failure were not only related to family and school but also individual characteristics of students, school resources and institutional environment that affected educational outcomes. Finally, students' preparation to enter the university may also affect their achievement as discussed by McInnis, James and Hartley (2000). Therefore, this study aims to examine the behavioural, environmental and personal factors contributing to students' failure.

3 METHODS

3.1 Sample, data collection and instruments

This paper focuses on the students' failure for the Bachelor of Corporate Administration programme at the Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA. This programme is offered to diploma holders from various universities. To enrol in the programme, the minimum required diploma CGPA is 2.50 and there are other requirements which need to be fulfilled. The programme consists of numerous disciplines such as administration, management, law, corporate governance, accounting, taxation and mathematics. Moreover, the minimum duration of the study for this programme is 3 years. Other than that, this programme provides feeders for a professional programme, the ICSA, a professional qualification that grants students to become a Chartered Secretary.

This study adopted a cross-sectional study design. This design is suitable in exploratory and descriptive research to collect data about event, situation or people (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Purposive sampling technique is adopted for this study. The purposive sampling technique utilizes the method of choosing participant deliberately due to the qualities the participant possesses (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016). Since this study had specifically chosen students who failed any courses in the BCA programme, this sampling technique was considered suitable.

The selected respondents were the BCA students who had failed any subjects in any of the semesters from the year 2016 until 2018 examination. An online questionnaire comprises of 5-point Likert scale and open-ended questions had been distributed to BCA students using the Google Form. The online questionnaire was used because it is easy to get responses from the existing students in the Faculty and those students who have graduated. This approach had also assisted the researchers to get a faster response as suggested by Ilieva et al. (2002). Overall, 64 students had participated by responding to the online questionnaire.

4.0 FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study present the factors of BCA students' failure in academic based on the main elements of SCT namely the behavioural, environmental and personal factors.

4.1 Descriptive Results

4.1.1 Courses

Based on the profile analysis, most of the respondents were final year students. 26.6 per cent of the respondents were the students who failed Company Secretarial Practice, 17.2 per cent were the students who failed Advanced Financial Accounting and Reporting, followed by

15.6 per cent of students who failed Company Secretarial Practice II. Further, 9.4 per cent of the respondents were the students who failed Taxation II while 7.8 per cent were those who failed International Business Environment. The remaining percentages were those who failed Corporate Governance and Ethics (4.7%) and Corporate Strategic Management (3.1%). In addition, the remaining respondents failed other subjects such Company Law, Management Principles and Practices, Financial Accounting, Commercial Law, Introduction to Public Administration, Introduction to Quality Management, and Management Information System at 1.6% each.

4.1.2 Course Assessments

61.3 per cent of the respondents revealed that assessments of the course involved are 40 per cent continuous assessment and 60 per cent final examination while the remaining percentage of the respondents revealed that the assessment of the course involved is 50 per cent continuous assessment and 50 per cent final examination. The higher the components of knowledge in the course assessments reflect the tendency for failure rate to escalate. Based on 2016 until 2018 examination results, the failure of the students was mainly caused by poor achievement in tests and final examinations.

4.2 Behavioural factors contributing to students' failure.

The behavioural factors indicated in this study are students' attendance, total hours spent to studies, participation in the classroom, understanding level and students' effort to perform for the course. This study found that 43.8 per cent were absent once for the course that they have failed, 34.4 per cent were absent for 2 to 3 classes, 1.6 per cent were absent for more than 3 times while 20.3 per cent have attended the whole classes conducted for that particular semester. Moreover, in terms of total hours spent for the independent study in a week, 56.3 per cent spent 2 to 4 hours to study, 26.6 per cent spent 5 to 8 hours to study, 9.4 per cent spent more than 8 hours to study in a week and 7.8 per cent spent less than 1 hour to study in a week. Besides, in terms of participation in the classroom, 42.2 per cent have moderately participated in classroom activities followed by 40.6 per cent who actively participated in classroom activities or discussion. It was also discovered that 9.4 per cent of the respondents had not participated in classroom activities or discussion, while 6.3 per cent revealed that they were very active in the classroom and 1.6 per cent had not participated in any of the classroom activities or discussion.

Besides, students' effort was assessed based on the level of understanding for the particular course, efforts to keep updating the notes and reading materials as well as preparation to revise the topics covered in the final exam. Based on the findings, only 29.7 per cent understood the course materials. The other respondents who are represented by 37 per cent were not sure whether they understood the course material, 7.8 per cent did not understand the course material, and 4.7 per cent did not have any understanding at all. This finding reflects that the majority of the BCA students did not fully understand the course materials. Furthermore, 50 per cent of the respondents had sometimes updated the notes and course materials, 31.3 per cent usually updated the notes and course materials, followed by 10.9 per cent who always kept the notes and course materials updated. Meanwhile, 6.3 per cent rarely updated the notes and course materials and 1.6 per cent had never updated the notes and the course materials.

Finally, in terms of preparation for the final exam, only 32.8 per cent of the students prepared themselves for the final examination and 1.6 per cent of them prepared very well for the final examination. The other respondents who are represented by 43.8 per cent moderately prepared for the final examination, while 15.6 per cent were not prepared for the final

examination and 6.3 per cent did not preparing for the final examination at all. Additionally, 20.3 per cent of the respondents have disclosed that they have skipped topics to be studied for the final examination.

4.3 Environmental factors contributing to students' failure.

Environment factors are giving focus on the external elements that affect students' performance in academic. The researchers in this study assessed the environmental factors based on the organization of syllabus, the lecturer's notes, lecturers' delivery, students' learning time, the relevancy of the assignments and feedback of the assignment. Findings shows that 39.1 per cent of the respondents agreed and 9.4 per cent of them strongly agreed that the syllabus was well-organised. However, 35.9 per cent moderately agreed that the syllabus was well organised, followed by 14.1 per cent who disagreed and 1.6 per cent who strongly disagreed with the same element.

In terms of the notes provided by the lecturers to the students, 28.1 per cent of the students agreed that the notes were easy to understand and 4.7 per cent of them strongly agreed that the notes were easy to understand. However, 37.5 per cent of the respondents moderately agreed, 21.9 per cent disagreed and 7.8 per cent strongly disagreed that the notes were easy to understand.

Furthermore, a majority of the respondents approved that the lecturers were good in teaching and explaining the contents of the courses. 29.7 per cent agreed and 28.1 per cent strongly agreed that the lecturers were good in his or her teaching delivery. Meanwhile, 23.4 per cent moderately agreed the lecturers were good in his or her teaching delivery, followed by 10.9 per cent disagreed and 7.8 per cent strongly disagreed on the same element. From the findings, it seems that the syllabus, notes and lectures delivery were not the main factors contributing to the BCA students' failure. Instead, the personal factors are more likely to be the determinant to the success or failure of a student. Stajkovic and Luthans (1998) explained this manifestation in the concept of self-efficacy, people beliefs in their capabilities to affect the environment control their actions in ways that produce the desired outcomes.

Apart from that, 15.6 per cent of the respondents strongly agreed and 43.8 per cent agreed that the element of face-to-face activities was sufficient. However, 28.1 per cent moderately agreed that the face-to-face activities were sufficient, while 9.4 per cent disagreed and 3.1 per cent strongly disagreed that the face-to-face activities were sufficient for the BCA students.

In terms of the assignments provided for students, 12.5 per cent of the respondents strongly agreed and 40.6 per cent agreed the assignment had been assigned with sufficient time. However, 29.7 per cent moderately agreed that the assignments were given within sufficient time, while 7.8 per cent disagreed and 9.4 per cent strongly disagreed on the same matter. In terms of relevancy of the assignment, 48.4 per cent agreed that the assignments were appropriate, in line with the course objectives, and 9.4 per cent strongly agreed that the assignments were appropriate to the course objectives. Nonetheless, 29.7 per cent moderately agreed that the assignments were appropriate to the course objectives, followed by 9.4 per cent disagreed and 3.1 per cent strongly disagreed that the assignments were appropriate to the course objectives.

Moreover, 40.6 per cent agreed that the assignments, projects and tests were returned by the lecturer timely, and 9.4 per cent strongly agree that the assignments, projects and tests were returned by the lecturer timely. Apart from that, 31.3 per cent moderately agreed that the assignments, projects and tests were returned by the lecturer timely, followed by 10.9 per cent

disagreed, and 7.8 per cent strongly disagreed that assignments, projects and tests were returned by the lecturer on time. Concerning that, 29.7 per cent of the respondents agreed and 15.6 per cent strongly agreed that the comments made on the assignment were useful. Next, 37.5 per cent moderately agreed, while 7.8 per cent disagreed, and 9.4 per cent strongly disagreed that the comments made on the assignment were useful.

4.4 Personal factors contributing to students' failure.

Based on the open-ended questions provided to the respondents, 25 per cent of the respondents revealed that they have failed the course because of too many academic loads and 22.22 per cent revealed that they have poor time management. Furthermore, 20.14 per cent exemplified that they were busy with clubs or association activities, while 26.7 per cent revealed that they did not score their test and assignment, and 11.8 per cent did not score the final examination. Finally, 1.39 per cent of the respondents claimed that they failed because they were on medication and 0.7 per cent had difficulty in understanding the entire courses.

4.5 Discussion

SCT is a psychological theory that focuses on three elements namely behavioural, environmental and personal factors. This theory started with the concept of the self-efficacy that believes the individual goals can be achieved within a particular setting (Bandura, 1977). This theory has been adopted worldwide in addressing the global threat by focusing on society-wide changes (Bandura, 2019).

This study aims to identify the factors contributing to academic failure among BCA students of UiTM from SCT perspective. Based on the data analysed, it is fair to regard that behavioural factors has contributed to the academic failure of BCA students. This can be seen when the lack of preparation among respondents as one of the factors leading to their academic failure. This result is consistent with the study conducted by McInnis, James and Hartley (2000) where up to two-third Australian students claimed that they were not well-prepared to study, one-third were not ready to choose a course when they entered the institution, and half of them claimed that they found it difficult to motivate themselves to study. This reflects that students should be mentally prepared to enter the university. They should understand the programme enrolled and courses offered to excel in their studies.

In contrast, it is fair to conclude that environmental factors were not the main contributors to BCA students' failure even though these factors were claimed to affect the students' achievement in academic. This result can be related to the study by Sonmez and Akpınar (2017) that found no relationship and no effect between academic performance and physical environmental factors. Furthermore, these results supported the limitation of SCT where changes in the environment does not necessarily lead to changes in an individual.

On the other hand, personal factors that focuses on individual roles and dispositions such as ability to manage academic load, time management and capability of performing in continuous assessment and final examination had been considered as one of the major contributors to the failure of the students in this study. This is supported by Zimmerman's (1989) aspiration who considered self-efficacy as the key personal influence. Besides, Stajkovic and Luthans (1998) has also agreed with this concept of self-efficacy, people beliefs in their capabilities may affect the environment that produces the desired outcomes. This result is also consistent with Mussoa, et al (2019), that reveals the subjective competence, relevance of the task, task attraction, emotional factors, and learning strategies contributes to the achievement in mathematics that supports the social cognitive theory.

Identifying and recognizing the factors of students' failure is important to ensure that the quality of the education system and students produced is preserved. Various tools can be used to predict students' failure as suggested by Jayaprakash and Jaiganesh (2018) such as Naïve Bayes Algorithm, rule-based classifier, student performance prediction system and ensemble learning. Their study proposed that students' demography, educational history, psychological data, personal detail and other environmental variables as measurement parameters. Early prediction of failure will be helpful to the lecturer and university in identifying a trend in academic performance and implementing an initiative to assist the students to perform in high failure subjects.

To improve the performance of the students especially in the continuous assessment, the teaching and learning strategies can be modified. Sanz-Peres (2019) suggested the exam-like problem be incorporated in class activities and the midterm test divided into two tests. This suggestion showed improvement in the result of the students that eventually increased the passing rate of chemical subjects. This approach might reduce the burden of students in the final examination and encourage continuous learning.

5.0 CONCLUSION

This study focuses on the three factors affecting students' failure among the BCA students by utilising the SCT. The results highlighted that behavioural and personal factors are the major contributors to their failure as compared to the environmental factors. This study offers an initial step before any further efforts and strategies can be implemented by various parties, such as the faculty's top management, the lecturers and the students in helping to reduce the failure rate. The data obtained was limited to the result of the final examination and students' feedback on how they failed the courses. Besides, this study obtained the data mainly through the use of online questionnaire. Therefore, future research may include other sources of data which could be used to generate more enriched, informed and representative findings to explain students' failure. This study is not correlational. Because the main objective of the study is only to identify the SCT factors that may lead to students' failure.

For this study, the utilisation of SCT provides some guidance on the factors that lead to the students' failure in the university. However, such utilisation is restricted as this study is an ongoing and only applied minimal aspects of the SCT in explaining students' failure specifically to the BCA students. Further research should include the reciprocal triadic influence of the elements of the theory and its influence on the failure rate of students in a bigger scale. It is further proposed that gap analysis on SCT can be done for the success and failure factors of the students.

Besides, the data for this study can be enhanced by having data from other methods such as an interview or focus group with the students to obtain more informed results. An experiment of learning activities might as well be beneficial to enhance the current teaching pedagogy to reduce failure rates among tertiary education students. Therefore, it can be concluded that the adoption of SCT can explain students' failure in a more systematic way, which can improve teaching and learning approach for the better educational system, especially in reducing students' failure.

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