PERCEPTIONS OF MSC. LEARNING SCIENCES GRADUATES ON THE PROGRAM

Phillip Sim Zhi Liang

Master of Science
(Learning Sciences)
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PERCEPTIONS OF MSC. LEARNING SCIENCES GRADUATES ON THE PROGRAM

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This project is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for a Master of Science (Learning Sciences)

Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SARAWAK
(2015)
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ABSTRACT

PERCEPTION OF MSC. LEARNING SCIENCES GRADUATES ON THE PROGRAM

Phillip Sim Zhi Liang
Masters of Science
(Learning Sciences)
2015

The study traced UNIMAS MSc. Learning Sciences graduates to find out their perceptions on the program, specifically on the individual courses offered, how the program has impacted on their works, careers and lives; and also to capture comments on how the program could be further improved. Open-ended questionnaires were emailed to 9 respondents who were selected through the Snowballing method, and the data were coded to highlight potential areas of improvement. The findings showed that overall, graduates are satisfied with the courses offered, and they have experienced positive changes in their works, careers and lives. Nevertheless, a few issues were discovered, and suggestions were made in order to rectify or improve the program. Future researches could focus on addressing the gap of increasing the value of the program to non-teaching professions.

Keywords: Perception, Learning, Post Graduate, Course Improvement
ABSTRAK

PERSEPSI GRADUAN MSC. SAINS PEMBELAJARAN TERHADAP KURSUS TERSEBUT

Phillip Sim Zhi Liang
Sarjana Sains
(Sains Pembelajaran)
2015

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengesan persepsi graduan UNIMAS MSc. Sains Pembelajaran terhadap program tersebut, khususnya mengenai kursus-kursus yang ditawarkan, sejauhkah mana program ini memberi impak kepada graduan dalam pekerjaan, kerjaya dan kehidupan masing-masing; dan juga untuk memperoleh komen-komen bagi memperbaiki program ini. Soal selidik terbuka dihantar secara emel kepada 9 responden yang telah dipilih melalui kaedah pendorong, dan data telah dikodkan untuk menunjukkan kawasan-kawasan yang berpotensi bagi tujuan peningkatan mutu program. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa pada keseluruhannya, graduan berpuas hati dengan kursus yang ditawarkan, dan mereka telah mengalami perubahan positif dalam pekerjaan, kerjaya dan kehidupan mereka. Walau bagaimanapun, beberapa isu telah ditemui, dan cadangan telah disyorkan untuk memperbaiki atau meningkatkan mutu program ini. Kajian masa depan boleh menumpu kepada kaedah-kaedah meningkatkan nilai program ini untuk golongan profesion bukan pengajar.

Kata Kunci: Persepsi, Pembelajaran, Graduan, Naik Taraf Kursus.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION OF STUDY

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to find out the perceptions of Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) MSc. Learning Sciences graduates on the program, specifically on how their lives were influenced after the completion of the program.

Perceptions on a program may differ from one study to another. However, it is important to identify how graduates perceive the program in order to find out if the program has brought positive improvement, or lack thereof, on their work, career and life. Through this study, it was expected that the data collected could be used to further improve the program from the viewpoints of the users themselves.

Conventional wisdom believes that good planning and execution of a Master program would allow the students to obtain the intended benefits. At the same time, according to the Model of Communication (Shannon and Weaver, 1949) a successful communication is happens when the recipient provides feedback which correctly corresponds to the initial message conveyed by the sender. The message sender could exert detailed effort in reducing or eliminating impedances (or called “noise”) which could obstruct the delivery of the message or distort the original meaning of the message. This is done by choosing suitable mode to deliver the message, reducing potential distractions in the surrounding, and designing the content of the message to allow the respondent to comprehend the message easily (Inskip, MacFarlane and Rafferty, 2008). Finally, the
communication is perceived to be successful from the feedback of the recipient, which indicates that one understood the message and had responded accordingly.

The Model of Communication could be related to the program, such that the objective of the program is to communicate and deliver the Learning Sciences knowledge to the students. The purpose of this study was to collect the feedback from the graduates after they completed everything the program has to offer, and find out how they perceive the program has changed their work, career and life. The feedback in this study was valuable for the program’s improvement in order to better facilitate the program delivery to future graduates.

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

MSc. Learning Sciences is one of the many Master degrees by coursework offered by the Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development, FCSHD UNIMAS to qualified applicants. Started in the year 2012, as on the time of this writing, MSc. Learning Sciences has witnessed the graduation of its first two batches (or called Cohorts) of graduates in November, 2014.

The program was designed to improve the learning abilities of people from all walks of life. Its target group included learners from all professionals. Adopted from the Learning Sciences discipline, MSc. Learning Sciences is a master degree by coursework which learners will complete 12 distinctive courses in order to graduate. Unlike conventional pedagogy, MSc. Learning Sciences differentiated itself by centering the learning experience on its learners and empowering them to teach and learn collectively in a community of common interest. This was one of the key features in this program,
and this study has found out how the students who have completed the degree utilized this distinctive learning experience.

Often times, each program offered by the universities and colleges will cater for a specific discipline which is usually related to a particular field or area of occupation. For example, the Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree is a program designed for business administrators to improve in their business operations and management, while Master of Engineering reflects a higher degree of understanding and competency in the field of engineering. This leads to the question of the positioning of the MSc. Learning Sciences program, as what would be the equivalent career if MBA is to business managers?

In general, there was no fixed occupation which corresponds to MSc. Learning Sciences program. This was due to the fact that learning is all-encompassing activity and learning sciences was a discipline which specializes in unveiling our understanding on all forms of learning activities. Despite that, it could be the interest of the Faculty to realize the extent to which MSc. Learning Sciences has affected the graduates in their work-related activities, career, and life. The study was expected to allow the Faculty to properly appraise the value of the program and also to adapt the learning materials and processes with the students' diverse backgrounds in order to improve their advantages in terms of productivity and career advancement.
1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

FCSHD, as mentioned, has witnessed the first two cohorts of students graduated in MSc Learning Sciences last year (2014) and are currently accommodating four newer cohorts. The students have attended all the 12 courses, completed all the projects and assignments and assessed through written examination as well as presentations before being awarded with grades. In relation to this study, what has been practiced is that during the final examinations, students are given feedback forms. They were required to provide comments and feedbacks on the courses they have attended by grading the quality of teaching, learning materials, facilities and infrastructures as well as offering general thoughts on the overall learning experience. The written documents were collected and assessed by the Faculty to allow necessary improvements and amendments on the courses.

Nevertheless, it was noted that there was no known study conducted in terms of the perception of the graduates on MSc. Learning Sciences program. Moreover, it was unclear whether the graduates have benefitted from completion of the program concerning their work-related activity, career, and life in general. A comprehensive study in this topic should provide a clearer image on what the graduates think about the individual courses they have completed in the program, and if they have experienced a positive change in productivity, or other work-related knowledge and skills through the improvement of learning abilities as a result of completing the program. Hence, there was a gap of information which when uncovered may be helpful in further improving the program’s effectiveness.
Knowledge and skills acquired through absorbing theories and practices in Learning Sciences program was believed to improve human’s learning ability. However, as mentioned in the Model of Communication, how much have the graduates acquired throughout all the courses completed, and how do they think they have benefitted from it? Ideally, the graduates would find what have been taught are relevant and significant to their work and life. Hence, this study was interested in showing the perceptions of the MSc. Learning Sciences graduates on how each course has changed the learning ability.

One of the methods of judging whether MSc. Learning Sciences is valuable to working graduates’ career is to collect data on how they have been influenced by the program. The main benefit of MSc. Learning Science is to improve one’s learning ability, and thus it was assumed that graduates equipped with learning sciences knowledge will fare better in their work-related activity and career. This study provided the necessary cues to this issue as it showed the outcome of Learning Sciences program from the users’ perspectives.

Finally, this study gathered perceptions from the graduates on thoughts, comments and general feedbacks on the MSc. Learning Sciences program. Open-ended questions were designed to allow respondents to provide comments on areas which may not be realized from the previous literatures and existing concerns, especially from the viewpoint of the users rather than the management. The graduates provided primary sources of information as they have first-hand experience on the program, and their input could assist the Faculty in providing a more comprehensive educational service to the students.
1.3 OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

1.3.1 General Objective

This study was to find out the perceptions of MSc. Learning Sciences graduates on the program.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

1. To find out the perception of MSc. Learning Sciences graduates on each course offered by the Learning Sciences program.

2. To find out the perceptions of MSc. Learning Sciences graduates on the impact of the program on their work-related activities after graduation.

3. To find out the perceptions of MSc. Learning Sciences graduates on the impact of the program on their careers after graduation.

4. To find out the perceptions of MSc. Learning Sciences graduates on the impact of the program on their lives after graduation.

5. To find out the perceptions of MSc. Learning Sciences graduates on how the program could be further improved.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What were the perceptions of MSc. Learning Sciences graduates on the program?

2. What were the perceptions of MSc. Learning Sciences graduates on each course offered?

3. What were the perceptions of MSc. Learning Sciences graduates on the impact of the program on their work-related activities after graduation?