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**THE INFLUENCE OF GENDER, AGE AND TENURE IN COMMUNICATION
SATISFACTION IN HIGHER EDUCATION***Pengaruh Jantina, Umur dan Tempoh Lantikan Kerja terhadap Kepuasan Komunikasi di
Sektor Pengajian Tinggi*Khairunneezam Mohd Noor, Siti Suriani Othman, Muhammad Hashim & Kalsom Ali
Faculty of Leadership and Management
Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia

neezam@usim.edu.my

Abstract

This article aims to analyze academics in higher education institutions satisfaction on communication and its differences based demographic backgrounds. The population for the study comprised academics from three public higher education institutions of Malaysia. Using a simple random sampling technique, the researchers drew a sample of 1078 from the estimated 2900 academics in the three participating universities. The findings indicated that the level of satisfaction in communication among academics was moderately high. The differences of communication satisfaction were also analyzed based on demographic differences of age, gender, and tenure. The findings of this study theoretically and practically contribute in terms of understanding the state of communication satisfaction of academics and its variation of demographic backgrounds.

Keywords: communication satisfaction, academics, higher education.

Abstrak

Artikel ini memfokuskan kepada matlamat kajian utamanya untuk menganalisis kepuasan terhadap komunikasi dalam kalangan ahli akademik di institusi-institusi pengajian tinggi Malaysia dan perbezaannya berdasarkan demografi. Populasi kajian terdiri daripada ahli akademik di tiga universiti awam di Malaysia. Menggunakan teknik persampelan rawak mudah, pengkaji berjaya memperoleh 1078 sampel kajian daripada sejumlah anggaran 2900 ahli akademik. Hasil kajian menunjukkan tahap kepuasan komunikasi ahli akademik adalah sederhana tinggi. Perbezaan tahap kepuasan ini juga diukur berdasarkan perbezaan aspek umur, jantina dan tempoh lantikan kerja. Implikasi kajian terutamanya kepada institusi pengajian tinggi awam mahu pun swasta dibincangkan termasuk daripada perbezaan aspek demografi. Hasil kajian ini secara teori dan praktiknya menambah nilai literatur berkenaan kepuasan dalam aspek komunikasi di tempat kerja dan membantu dalam memahami kepuasan kerja ahli akademik di sektor pengajian tinggi.

Kata kunci: kepuasan terhadap komunikasi, ahli akademik, pengajian tinggi.

COMMUNICATION SATISFACTION IN HIGHER EDUCATION: AN INTRODUCTION

Academics in higher education of Malaysia are expected to uphold the nation's aspiration of achieving a world class education level and produce multi-skilled and competent individuals (Hashim, 2012). On top of that, academics are an important player in nurturing the government's aims for the harmonisation and oneness of its people that will then carry the aspiration of the nation towards being a fully developed country in the coming years. Their contribution in disseminating knowledge and cultivating the value of research and innovation has always been scrutinised by the government, the industry and the society. As evidenced by recent key policy decisions, education in the country is being liberalised, as educational achievement is seen to be the cornerstone from which national prosperity can be constructed (Knight and Morshidi, 2011).

An understanding of communication outcomes such as satisfaction, is a prerequisite to an integrative explanation of communication behavior. Not only are such outcomes influential in determining future communication behaviour, they also provide a theoretical framework for grouping and assessing the importance of various process elements (Clampitt and Girard, in Khairunneezam, 2013).

The paper is divided into four sections. The first section discusses the literature on communication satisfaction. The second section confers the methodology used to investigate the state of communication satisfaction among academics in higher education institutions. The consecutive section discusses the findings of the study and last section manifests the conclusion and recommendations for the future studies.

LITERATURE ON COMMUNICATION SATISFACTION

According to Spector (1997), research findings suggest that job satisfaction is not a static state but is subject to influence and modification from forces within and outside an individual; that is his or her own personal characteristics and the immediate working environment. Spector (1997:2) defines job satisfaction as 'the extent to which people like (satisfaction) or dislike (dissatisfaction) their jobs'. Furthermore, Okpara (2006) argues about the significance of understanding the job satisfaction of employees as: '...work is an important aspect of people's lives and most people spend a large part of their working lives at work, an understanding of the factors involved in job satisfaction is crucial to improving employees' performance and productivity'.

On the other hand, communication satisfaction is a general concept that covers the communication and feedback between executives and employees, horizontal and vertical communications, work related information and communication among departments. Communication satisfaction carries a personal meaning, where even two people working under same department and same conditions may have different opinions (Engin and Akgöz, 2013). In accordance with the content of the research conducted, communication satisfaction can sometimes be considered as criteria, while it can also be considered as a theory constructing concept or a function that improves communicational skills (Engin and Akgöz, 2013).

In researches conducted, communication satisfaction has been defined in many different ways. Thayer (1969, in Engin and Akgöz, 2013) defined communication satisfaction as 'the personal satisfaction a person experiences when communicating successfully' while Engin and Akgöz (2013) viewed it as 'an individual's satisfaction with various aspect of the communication occurring in his organization'.

Recent research explores identified organisational factors including communication in different contexts of education workers and the relationship with overall job satisfaction. For instance Oshagbemi (1997a) through his study of academics in UK higher education indicated that about 70 per cent of the respondents which were selected among university academics were satisfied with their co-workers' behaviour, the job itself and supervisor. In the same study, Oshagbemi (1997b) also found that higher education academics were dissatisfied with communication. Zemblays and Papanastasiou (2004, in Khairunneezam 2013) examined job satisfaction and motivation among academics in Cyprus. Findings of their study indicated that Cypriot academics chose this career because of several factors including communication climate among colleagues. A study among academic advisers in the USA by Donnelly (2006), among other things, indicated that academic advisers are most satisfied with communication.

In the Malaysian context, Khairunneezam (2004) in his study among academics in a secondary school in Johore State found that teachers had a low level of satisfaction with communication. Santhapparaj and Syed's (2005) study of job satisfaction of academics in private universities in Malaysia found that communication had a positive and significant effect on job satisfaction. On the other hand, fringe benefits have negative effect on academics' job satisfaction. Accordingly, Ch'ng, Chong and Nakesvari (2010) in their investigation among lecturers in three established private colleges in Penang State, Malaysia found that communication and several other variables are significant in determining the job satisfaction.

The above findings of satisfaction on numerous organisational antecedents of job satisfaction including communication satisfaction among academics globally and in Malaysia particularly, reveal the importance of having a thorough investigation among Malaysian higher education academics' about their state of satisfaction on organisational antecedents. Based on this scarcity, there is a dreadful need of evidence of communication satisfaction context among academics in the higher educational setting. Therefore, the current article is aimed to fill a gap in the literature pertaining to the current communication satisfaction level among academics in the Malaysian higher education. The paper is anticipated to explore the riposte of these two research questions:

1. What is the level of communication satisfaction among academics in Malaysian higher educational institutions?
2. What is the difference of the level of communication satisfaction among those academics in terms of gender, age, and tenure in the current university?

METHODS & MATERIALS

The population for the study comprised academics from three public higher education institutions of Malaysia. Using a simple random sampling technique, the researchers drew a sample of 1078 from the estimated 2900 academics in the three participating universities. These respondents represent 37.2 per cent of the overall samples. The respondents included a wide range of university faculties, departments and academic units in each participating university. The Deputy Vice Chancellor and the Registrar of all Malaysian public universities were contacted and invited by the researchers to encourage academic staff members' participation in the study. Consent for conducting the study had been given by three public universities in Malaysia. Deans and head of each department, faculty and school in the participating universities were contacted through phone calls and emails to obtain their assistance on disseminating the cover letter of invitation to participate in the study, participation information sheet, and hyperlink for the online survey designed for the study to their academic staff

members. The procedure of contacting those key persons was repeated three times, by no other mean, to keep reminding academics about the survey.

The scale of '*Communication Satisfaction*' was used in the quantitative study in order to investigate academics' satisfaction with communication. Four items included in this measure were adapted from Spector (1997)'s JSS questions and the instrument of Khairunneezam (2013), which measure communication satisfaction. Each respondent's completed survey was then automatically computed and saved, and the results were downloaded into SPSS 20.0 for quantitative analysis. Some items in these scales were negatively worded in order to maintain reliable answers from respondents. These negatively worded questions were then reverse-coded before doing the reliability checking. The reliability coefficient of the communication satisfaction measure were 0.72 as reported by Khairunneezam (2013).

All instruments except for demographic questionnaire were answered using a 5-point Likert scale of disagree very much (coded as 1), disagree (2), neither agree nor disagree (3), agree (4), and agree very much (5). The researchers created a questionnaire in order to collect data on the personal characteristics of the respondents. Measures of gender, age and tenure in the university were included.

Descriptive analysis such as frequency, percentage and mean are used to explain the level of each of the variables included in the online study. To determine the level of communication satisfaction, frequencies and percentages of responses were calculated and mean and standard deviation results of satisfaction were analysed. The mean value of responses were computed and categorised into 3 interval level of responses accordingly to the work of Khairunneezam (2004, 2013). The interval level of responses were 1= low (mean score of 1.00-2.33), 2= moderate (2.34-3.67) and 3= high (3.68-5.00).

The usage of mean comparison is to identify the demographic influence on the responses. In this study, analysis of variance (ANOVA) and t-test are used to test whether there are significance differences on the level of communication satisfaction and the levels of the satisfaction between different demographic backgrounds of academics. Post-hoc tests were conducted after ANOVA was run in order to compare the differences of all investigated variables by different demographic backgrounds.

For the purpose of comparing findings based on demographic backgrounds, the demographic variable was divided into several sub-groups. Gender was divided between male and female, age were divided into five groups according to their age (Group 1: 25 and under; Group 2: 26 to 35; Group 3: 36 to 45; Group 4: 46 to 55; Group 5: 56 and over). Respondents were also divided into four groups according to their tenure in the current university (Group 1: 10 years and under; Group 2: 11 to 20 years; Group 3: 21 to 30 years; Group 4: 31 years and over).

FINDINGS ON ACADEMICS' SATISFACTION WITH COMMUNICATION

This section describes the findings of academics' satisfaction with communication in the current study.

Academics' Overall Satisfaction with Communication

The results of each questions used in the measure were depicted in Table 1. All responses for negatively worded questions were reverse-coded. Respondents moderately agreed that communications seem good within their organisations (Mean= 3.42, SD= 0.94). They also moderately agree that the goals of their organisations are clear to them (Mean= 4.13, SD=

6.83). It is also found that respondents mostly agreed that they feel that they know what is going on with the organisation ($f= 466$, $\%= 43.2$). Respondents also mostly agreed that work assignments are fully explained to them ($f= 384$, $\%= 35.6$).

Based on the findings in Table 1, a further analysis was undertaken to investigate the overall level of satisfaction with communication. The result shows that respondents had a moderate level of satisfaction with communication (Mean=3.30, SD=0.82). The findings of the quantitative study support the outcomes of the qualitative study that communication was a perceived as a moderate driver towards job satisfaction of academics. The findings also reiterate the outcome of Rad and Yarmohammadian (2006) where the employees in University Hospitals in Isfahan, Iran have a moderate level of satisfaction with communication.

Table 1: Frequencies and Percentages and Mean Scores for Questions on Satisfaction with Communication (N=1078)

| No. | Questions | Means | S.D. |
|---|---|-------|------|
| 1. | <i>Communications seem good within this organisation.</i> | 3.42 | 0.94 |
| 2. | <i># The goals of this organisation are not clear to me.</i> | 3.36 | 1.05 |
| 3. | <i># I often feels that I do not know what is going on with the organisation.</i> | 3.24 | 1.07 |
| 4. | <i>#Work assignments are not fully explained.</i> | 3.16 | 1.11 |
| Overall Mean for Communication Satisfaction | | 3.30 | 0.82 |

Note: SD=standard deviation, #= Negatively worded question.

Differences in Satisfaction with Communication among Academics by Gender

Table 2 shows the t -test results for satisfaction with communication among academics by gender. t -test results indicated that there was a significant difference in scores for male academics (Mean=3.34, SD=0.86) and female academics [Mean=3.23, SD=0.79; $t(1041)=2.18$, $p<0.05$]. Thus, it can be concluded that male academics are significantly more satisfied in terms of communication compared to female academics.

Table 2: t -Test Result for Satisfaction with Communication among Academics by Gender

| Variable | Group | | | | Levene's test for equality of variance | | df | t -test for equality of means | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|---------------|------------------|------|--------------------|------|--|------|------|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| | Male ($n=533$) | | Female ($n=510$) | | F | Sig. | | t | p |
| | M | SD | M | SD | | | | | |
| Communication | 3.34 | 0.86 | 3.23 | 0.79 | 3.68 | 0.06 | 1041 | 2.18 | 0.03** |

Note: n =total respondents, M = Mean, SD =standard deviation, F = Value for Levene's test for equality of variance, df = Degree of Freedom, t = t -test value, p = significant value. ** Significant at $p<0.05$

Investigation on the relationship between communication satisfaction among academics in a range of countries by various demographic variables have been done by several researchers. For instance, Aktaruzzaman, Clement and Hassan (2011) among university academics in Bangladesh, Brown (2008) among academics in Northern Caribbean University in Jamaica, and Noordin and Jusoff (2009) among academics in Malaysian universities. The current study extends the past research studies by exploring the differences of satisfaction with communication among different subgroups of gender, age, tenure in organisation, and management position.

Differences in Satisfaction with Communication among Academics by Age

Table 3: One-Way Analysis of Variance for Satisfaction with Communication among Academics by Age

| Source | <i>SS</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>MS</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>Sig.</i> |
|----------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|-------------|
| Between Groups | 16.72 | 4 | 4.18 | 6.07 | 0.00** |
| Within Goups | 622.82 | 905 | 0.69 | | |
| Total | 639.54 | 909 | | | |

Note: *SS*= Sum of Squares, *df*= Degree of Freedom, *MS*=*Mean Square*, *F*=*F*-Value, *Sig*=significant value.
** Significant at $p<0.05$

Table 3 above shows the ANOVA results for satisfaction with communication among academics by age groups. The ANOVA test indicated that there was a statistically significant difference at the $p<0.05$ level in satisfaction with communication among the five different age groups [$F(4, 905)=6.07, p<0.05$]. Table 4 below shows the results of post-hoc analysis for satisfaction with communication among academics by age groups. It is observed that the highest mean value of satisfaction scored by those who were between 46 and 55 years old ($M=3.62, SD=0.91$), while the lowest mean scored by the group of 25 and under ($M=3.22, SD=0.61$).

Table 4: Post-Hoc Analysis for Satisfaction with Communication among Academics by Age

| Age Groups (years) | <i>n</i> | <i>Mean</i> | <i>SD</i> | 25 & under | 26-35 | 36-45 | 46-55 | 56 & over |
|--------------------|----------|-------------|-----------|------------|-------|-------|-------|-----------|
| 25 & under | 47 | 3.22 | 0.61 | - | | | | |
| 26-35 | 442 | 3.24 | 0.80 | NS | - | | | |
| 36-45 | 255 | 3.23 | 0.87 | NS | NS | - | | |
| 46-55 | 142 | 3.62 | 0.91 | * | * | * | - | |
| 56 & over | 24 | 3.30 | 0.73 | NS | NS | NS | NS | - |

Note: n =total respondents, SD =standard deviation, NS= not significant. * indicates significance at $p<0.05$

Post-hoc comparison using Tukey HSD test indicated that academics between 46 to 55 years old were significantly have higher mean of satisfaction compared to those of 25 and under, 26 to 35 years old and 36 to 45 years old. No significant difference existed between academics in any of the other groups of age.

Differences in Satisfaction with Communication among Academics by Tenure

Table 5: One-Way Analysis of Variance for Satisfaction with Communication among Academics by Tenure

| Source | SS | df | MS | F | Sig. |
|----------------|--------|-----|------|------|---------|
| Between Groups | 9.56 | 3 | 3.19 | 4.57 | 0.003** |
| Within Groups | 626.56 | 898 | 0.70 | | |
| Total | 636.12 | 901 | | | |

Note: SS= Sum of Squares, df= Degree of Freedom, MS=Mean Square, F=F-Value, Sig=significant value. ** Significant at $p < 0.05$

Table 5 above shows the ANOVA results for satisfaction with communication among academics by tenure groups. The ANOVA test indicated that there was a statistically significant difference at the $p < 0.05$ level in satisfaction among the four different tenure groups [F(3, 898)=4.57, $p < 0.05$].

Table 6: Post-Hoc Analysis for Satisfaction with Communication among Academics by Tenure

| Tenure (years) | n | Mean | SD | 10 & under | 11-20 | 21-30 | 31 & over |
|----------------|-----|------|------|------------|-------|-------|-----------|
| 10 & under | 723 | 3.26 | 0.83 | - | | | |
| 11-20 | 147 | 3.46 | 0.87 | * | - | | |
| 21-30 | 29 | 3.68 | 0.90 | * | NS | - | |
| 31 & over | 3 | 3.50 | 0.00 | NS | NS | NS | - |

Note: n=total respondents, SD=standard deviation, NS= not significant. **indicates significance at $p < 0.05$

Table 6 above shows the results of post-hoc analysis for satisfaction with communication among academics by tenure groups. It is observed that the highest mean value of satisfaction scored by those who have worked between 21 to 30 years (M=3.68, SD=0.90), while the lowest mean scored by the group who have worked for 10 years and less (M=3.26, SD=0.83). Post-hoc comparison using Tukey HSD test indicated that academics tenure between 21 to 30 years had significantly higher mean of satisfaction compared to those who have worked between 11 to 20 years and 10 and under. No significant difference existed between academics in any of the other groups of age.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the findings above, respondents showed a moderate level of satisfaction with communication. These findings support the outcome of Rad and Yarmohammadian (2006). It is understandable why moderate level of communication satisfaction is the result. In a previous study by Khairunneezam (2013), issues like poor flow of communication and misinterpretation of messages between academics and the administration staff was spoken of as a significant issues impeding job satisfaction among academics. Spector (1997) asserts that communication in the organisation is a critical aspect that should be carefully promoted and monitored in any organisation; any occurrence of communication breakdown among the members in the organisation, will influence the way how each person interact with each other and how important information is shared among them. It will then influence the attitude and behaviour of each person in the organisation, including the level of job satisfaction.

Then, males were more satisfied with communication than females. Evidenced in the past studies in communication satisfaction by Khairunneezam (2013), most of female academics shared their dissatisfaction with communication compared to the male academics. In regards with the Malaysian context, the current study finding reiterates the outcomes of Ch’ng et al. (2010) where Malaysian male workers have a greater satisfaction with communication than female workers. It may be because males are treated with higher levels of responsibility and so are included in the communication flow and processes more so.

Also, in the findings of the paper, it was found that older academics were more satisfied than the younger counterparts, and senior academics were more satisfied than juniors. Again, it can be said that when academics became older and had a longer tenure in the university, they also may be included more so that their junior counterparts. In addition their maturity and understanding may have contributed to their satisfaction as these academics regarded ‘conflicts in regards to communication’ to be something positive, rather than as a negative or hindrance and hence see it as a source of creativity in doing their daily tasks at the workplace (Khairunneezam, 2013).

The current study extends the work of Hunt and Saul (1975) by exploring the differences of satisfaction with communication among different demographic subgroups of gender, age, and tenure. These findings regarded as a significant contribution towards the body of knowledge in communication satisfaction especially in research among academics in Malaysian public higher education institutions. It is worth future studies exploring the relationships of communication satisfaction with consequences variables like organizational commitment, intention to leave, occupational stress, organisational citizenship behaviour, perceived organisational support, and absenteeism. Through the future work on these correlations, it is hoped that better intervention could be implemented by the university to create and maintain an optimum level of communication satisfaction among academic staff. In Islam, good communication among persons especially who work under the same organization will reflect integrity and embeddedness, contribute towards better relationship or *ukhuwwah*, better working productivity, and blessing from Allah SWT. As mentioned by Allah SWT in al-Qur’an:

“Quran informs us what should be the best speech. Allah says in the Quran, “And who is better in speech than someone calls to God, acts with integrity, and says, ‘I am of those who submit’.”

(al-Fussilat, verse 33)

In this sense, it clearly shows that Islam provides instruction in respect of fundamental elements of communication. It must be emphasised that the results in this paper are based on academics

in participating public universities and it is not possible to generalise to academics in other higher education institutions in Malaysia. Further similar works need to be done in the broader area of Malaysian higher education with segregation and focus among private and public university academics.

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