

**Programme and Service Evaluation by the Teacher and Non-Teacher Group of Students -  
Implications on Student Persistence in an ODL Institution**

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**Abstract**

*A significant proportion of Open University Malaysia's student population is made up of the "in-service teachers" sponsored by the Ministry of Education. The intake of the "in-service teachers" had stopped since 2013 and the present day students hail from various organizations whereby a majority of these students are self-sponsored. It is crucial for the university to take note of the changes that ought to be implemented to better serve the non-teacher students. This paper reports on the results of a 2015 tracer study (centrally administered by the Ministry of Higher Education) by looking at programme completion rates of the undergraduate "Teacher" and "Non-Teacher" group of students who attended their convocation in September and November 2015. The evaluation of the programmes and services by the two groups of graduates were compared, and areas that differ significantly were highlighted and discussed in the context*

*of improving completion rates. It is important to note that institutions need to be aware that there are tangible and intangible factors related to students' persistence when it comes to finances, as in the sponsored and non-sponsored students.*

**Keywords:** in-service teachers, non-teacher group, completion rates, evaluation of programmes and services

## **Introduction**

It has been proven over the centuries that higher education has the ability to change and induce change and progress in society (UNESCO, 1998). More so in the present knowledge society where higher education is regarded as the essential engine of socio-economic, cultural and environmental change that a society needs for sustainable development of individuals, communities and countries. This formidable task of higher education has landed itself with many challenges. The greatest of these challenges is to effectively prepare its graduates to contribute to the needs of society.

Thus in this era, higher education institutions (HEIs), be it public or private, conventional or non-conventional (as in open and distance learning) institutions need to be cognizant of these developments and rise to the challenge. To do that, it has to have the necessary and reliable information on its performance provided by its learners and graduates; the two groups of its stakeholders who are and had been receiving the services provided by the institution. It is customary to have learners complete an evaluation of the course or programme of study that they

had undertaken. This type of evaluation usually focuses on issues such as course content, instructional materials, use of ICT, course tutors/facilitators and others. In Open University Malaysia (OUM), a yearly Importance-Satisfaction survey is conducted to identify institutional strengths for marketing purposes, and weaknesses for improvement purposes. However, this kind of feedback, though it provides useful information to the institution, it does not measure the outputs and outcomes of education in line with those highlighted by Schomburg (2003). According to him, outputs are identified as attributes such as knowledge and skills, and outcomes as transition to employment, work experience and service to society.

In line with the second quest to obtain outcome-based information, OUM has participated regularly in getting its graduates to respond to the common Tracer Study administered online by the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) starting in 2006. The most recent data was based on the September and November 2015 graduates.

Participation of OUM in such a tracer study is based on four key points. Firstly, to use the tracer study as a tool to gauge the perceptions of learners on curriculum, teaching and assessment which are the key determinants in their approach to learning, and to measure the quality of the outputs and outcomes of the learning process. Secondly, to establish the contributions OUM has made to its learners in their career promotions and in pursuing their studies to a higher level or in gaining entry to other institutions of higher learning. Thirdly, to guide OUM's strategic planning exercise with a view to improve programmes and services to existing students. Finally, tracer study provides the data for benchmarking OUM's performance with other institutions.

This paper aims to compare the results of some of the factors covered in the tracer study for the “in service teacher” and “non-teacher” group of learners. The rationale for this is to identify areas that differ greatly between the two groups of graduates, with a view to introducing minor or major changes so as to improve further on the curriculum, teaching, assessment, support services and also the level of knowledge and skills of its graduates.

As background information, the “in-service teacher” learners differ from that of the “non-teacher” learners in several aspects. As for the teachers, the group is more homogenous – they are all teachers of the primary or secondary schools. They are all given a special loan by the Ministry of Education (MOE), in which the loan is finally converted to scholarship if learners perform well in their studies, i.e. achieving a final CGPA of 2.75 and above upon graduation. In contrast, the non-teacher group is more heterogeneous – they work in different sectors and they have come into OUM with different types of entry qualifications. Unlike the teacher group, the non-teachers have to pay for their fees. Some managed to secure for themselves the special government loan of PTPTN, but a large majority have to pay out of their own pockets.

This study is critical in that the intake of the “in-service teachers” has come to an end since 2013, and the information gathered from this study would assist the institution to review and implement some changes in its programmes and services to cater to the needs of the non-teacher learners.

### **Objective of the study**

Drawing on the data obtained in the Tracer Study conducted on to the September and November 2015 graduates of OUM, this paper aims to:

1. To compare the results of the study between the “teacher” and the “non-teacher” group of graduates; and
2. To recommend some initiatives that could contribute towards improvements in the graduation rates of the non-teacher group of learners.

## **Methodology**

### **I Instrument**

The questionnaire used in the tracer study consists of five main sections: (i) Graduates Demography; (ii) Graduates ‘experience related to academic services (Curriculum, Assessment, Counseling Service, Teaching Staff, Facilities and Basic Knowledge Acquired), (iii) Effectiveness of the Programme, (iv) Further Studies, and (v) Employment. For the purpose of this study, the analysis is limited to the first three parts. Graduates are given the link to submit their responses to the online survey that is hosted by the MOE Website.

### **II Data Analysis**

The data for OUM graduates was requested from the MOHE a few months after the graduation date. Data analysis was limited to discrete data analysis using Excel software and

the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) Version 22. This study has focused its analysis on: (i) Academic Performance in terms of CGPA and Graduation rate, (ii) Use of Counseling Service (iii) Evaluation of Graduate Experience, and (iv) Effectiveness of OUM Programmes. Reliability and Validity test were not carried out as the instrument developed by MOHE has been in use since 2006.

## Results

### I: Profile of Respondents

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variables		“In-service Teachers”		Others (Non-Teachers)	
		Frequency	Percent (%)	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	1353	29.5	443	30.6
	Female	3234	70.5	1004	69.4
Age	16 – 24	0	0	27	1.9
	25 – 34	1460	31.8	705	48.7
	35 – 44	2306	50.3	532	36.8
	45 – 54	821	17.9	161	11.1
	55 – 64	0	0	17	1.2
	65 and Above	0	0	5	0.3
Income	RM500 and Below	16	0.3	14	1.0

	RM501 - RM1000	32	0.7	33	2.3
	RM1001 - RM1500	26	0.6	75	5.2
	RM1501 - RM2000	61	1.3	124	8.6
	RM2001 - RM2500	139	3.0	135	9.3
	RM2501 - RM3000	563	12.3	261	18.0
	RM3001 - RM5000	2228	48.6	490	33.9
	RM5001 and Above	1522	33.2	315	21.8
CGPA	2.00 - 2.32	45	1.0	218	15.1
	2.33 - 2.66	434	9.5	287	19.8
	2.67 - 2.99	1288	28.1	354	24.5
	3.00 - 3.32	1791	39.0	369	25.5
	3.33 - 3.66	938	20.4	191	13.2
	3.67 - 4.00	91	2.0	28	1.9
	BTPE (In-service teachers)	4418		-	-
	BTPS (In-service teachers)	169		-	-
Programme Code	BAC	-	-	49	
	BBA	-	-	145	
	BCOM	-	-	6	
	BCS	-	-	2	
	BECHE	-	-	84	
	BEEA	-	-	50	
	BEST	-	-	22	
	BETESL	-	-	40	

BHM	-	-	2
BHRM	-	-	146
BIM	-	-	128
BIS	-	-	85
BIT	-	-	59
BITA	-	-	3
BITE	-	-	1
BITM	-	-	25
BITN	-	-	30
BITS	-	-	9
BM	-	-	3
BMC	-	-	7
BMIT	-	-	1
BMMG	-	-	30
BMT	-	-	3
BNS	-	-	367
BOSHM	-	-	77
BPSY	-	-	38
BSS	-	-	6
BTM	-	-	26
BTRM	-	-	3

A total of 6941 OUM graduates out of the 9133 (76%) from various programme levels submitted their responses. The largest group of 6103 (88%) are graduates from the bachelor degree



programmes. Out of this, 75% are the “in service teachers” and the remaining 25% of the other graduates.

In terms of gender, there is not much of a difference in the distribution of male:female graduates, and both are reflective of the male:female ratio of the total learner population. The teacher group of graduates are relatively older compared to the non-teacher group of graduates. As far as income is concerned, the teacher group enjoys relatively higher incomes as indicated by the 81.8% in the more than RM3000 per month category as compared to a 55.7% of the non-teachers in the same category. From the performance point of view, which is measured by the CGPA, the teacher graduates generally perform better than the non-teachers as indicated by the ratio of 61:41 of teachers: non-teachers achieving CGPA greater than 3.0

## II. Graduation Rates

Due to the nature of the data captured, excel software was used to determine On-time Graduation Rate and Graduation Rate at various points in learners study period. For the on-time graduation, 13 semesters is taken as the cut-off point. Thus, learners who graduate within less than 13 semesters (those who have been granted credit transfers, exemption of credits, etc) are captured under this category.

Table 2: Graduate Rates

<b>Graduation Status</b>	<b>“In-service Teachers”</b>	<b>Others (Non-Teacher)</b>
On-time Graduation Rate	97.6%	50.9%

Graduation Rate a year later	99.2%	78.6%
Graduation Rate two years later	99.6%	90.5%
Graduation Rate three years later	99.8%	95.3%

A very high majority of the “in-service teachers” graduate on time, within 13 semesters, and only 2.4% continued on to complete their studies within 3 years after the 13 semesters. For all other students, graduating on-time (within 13 semesters) is a bigger challenge. Only 50.9% of the non-teacher learners graduated on time. A quarter of them took an additional year to graduate. About 5% of the students took more than seven years to graduate. This observation is a cause for concern; as the longer the delay in graduating, the higher the risk of learners falling out of the track. Certain measures are needed to further support them where possible.

### III: Use of Counseling Services

Table 3: Use of Counseling Services

Counseling Service	“In-service Teachers”	Percent (%)	Others (Non-Teachers)	Percent (%)
Yes	631	13.8	262	18.1
No	3956	86.2	1185	81.9
<b>Total</b>	4587	100	1447	100

There is a greater use of the counseling services by the non-teacher group of graduates. This is not totally unexpected as the non-teacher graduates are much younger, they are also more diverse. Many of them have a smaller income. But on the whole only 13.8% and 18.1% of the

teacher and non-teacher group of graduates respectively had used the counseling services. This suggests that as the profile of the student changes from the teacher to the non-teacher group, OUM has to improve and even scale up the services to meet the increasing demand of such a service.

#### IV. Learner Experience related to Academic Services

Table 4: Learner Experience related to Academic Services

<b>Learner Experience</b>	<b>“In-service Teachers”</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Non-Teachers</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>p-value Sig (2 tails)</b>
Curriculum	4.46	578.189	4586	4.29	242.226	1446	0.000
Assessment	4.40	477.457	4586	4.30	224.982	1446	0.000
Tutors	4.44	568.220	4586	4.22	230.961	1446	0.000
Facilities	4.27	483.243	4586	4.20	226.925	1446	0.000
Average	4.38			4.25			

In general, all graduates, teachers and non-teachers are satisfied with the academic services {which include Curriculum, Assessment, Tutors (Teaching Staff) and Facilities} provided by OUM, as indicated by the average means of 4.38 and 4.25 out of 5. However the t-test indicates that there is a significant difference in the satisfaction level in all four items, between the teacher and non-teacher group of graduates. The relatively higher rating given by the teachers is a pattern that is generally seen throughout the data captured in all the previous tracer studies. This implies that OUM needs to work harder to increase learner satisfaction, particularly in the academic

service provision. One area that needs to be highlighted is tutors, where the difference in the level of satisfaction is greatest. This result raises concern for OUM to improve the quality of tutors and tutoring. As for the teachers, tutorial attendance is compulsory, while for the non-teachers, it is not. While the flexibility is something that learners would love to have, the flexibility also tempts learners to procrastinate and not come to tutorials, especially when the tutors are not performing up to their expectations. These learners become more critical, thus explaining the lower satisfaction level. An important implication of this observation is that if the teachers had performed much better by having regular tutorials, the satisfaction level of the non-teachers can be increased by replicating the face-to-face tutorials online, for example. This is especially more critical when OUM is going more into online learning. Presently the ratio of e-tutors to learners is 1: 100 and to ensure greater satisfaction, OUM may want to consider reducing the ratio further to 1:30 similar to that in the face-to-face environment.

#### V. Basic Knowledge Acquired

This section measures some of basic knowledge and skills that all graduates have acquired from their programme. The list includes: ICT, Malay Language, English Language, Communication, Critical and Creative Thinking, Problem Solving and Analytical Skills. Additional measures include Ability to work in a Team, Positive Values and Awareness about Current Issues.

Table 5: Graduate Knowledge and Skills Acquired

Knowledge and Skills	“In-service Teachers”	Standard Deviation	Others	Standard Deviation
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ICT	4.39	0.637	4.40	0.693
Malay Language	4.60	0.560	4.60	0.646
English Language	<b>3.33</b>	0.797	<b>3.97</b>	0.802
Communication	4.18	0.667	4.22	0.728
Critical and Creative Thinking	4.17	0.626	4.24	0.691
Problem Solving	4.23	0.611	4.30	0.664
Analytical	4.12	0.634	4.23	0.691
Teamwork	4.43	0.601	4.41	0.693
Positive Values	4.45	0.593	4.43	0.657
Awareness about Current Issues	4.34	0.611	4.33	0.686

In terms of knowledge and skills acquired, graduates generally rated acquisition of the English Language as lowest. This is particularly so for the teacher group. The differences could be due to poor score in English Language at SPM/O-Level where only 11% of “in-service teachers” scored A and B (equivalent) compared to 27% of the non-teachers having low scores in English Language. In English Language Skill as well as in Communication, Creative and Critical Thinking, Problem Solving and Analytical Skills, the teacher group is less satisfied than the non-teacher group. This observation appears to suggest that the face-to-face meetings have not been very effective in equipping learners with the above skills. It is worth mentioning at this point that the teacher learners are not very keen on online learning; they spend less time in myVLE as compared to the non-teachers (Latifah et.al, 2010). Taken together this suggests that the online learning has to a certain extent improves learners’ skills as mentioned above. Greater efforts towards improving the online learning will most likely lead to greater satisfaction in the context of acquiring those important skills.

## **Conclusion**

This study is of great importance to OUM as the learner landscape has changed since 2013. The composition of OUM learner population is gradually shifting from the majority of “in-service teachers” to almost all non-teacher population by 2017, when all the present teacher learners complete their studies. Based on the results of the tracer study of the 2016 graduates, there are some significant differences between the satisfaction levels of the teacher from the non-teacher graduates. What these gaps imply is that there is a need for OUM to improve in certain aspects of the programmes and services in order to improve learners’ graduation rates. It is tempting to suggest that finance plays a significant role in the graduation rate of its learners, and this is of no surprise as previous studies on OUM learners by Latifah et. al. (2006) did identify finance as one of the factors contributing to attrition. This finding is further supported by Noor Hassline and Noor Zuleika (2014), via a quantitative interview of dormant students from the Faculty of Applied Social Science. In the latter study, they found that the highest factor contributing to non-completion or attrition was learner commitment, in which they find themselves overwhelmed with too many responsibilities (54.5%), followed by financial problems (36.3%); career related (27.2%) and online learning which was not what learners expected (18.1%). In another study by Li and Killian (1999), the patterns of attrition at a Midwestern research university was examined and it was found that students’ financial status is an important factor in persistence in higher education. Li and Killian’s results also revealed that they usually had more than one reason for leaving. The most often endorsed reasons for leaving were grouped as academic factors, personal factors, and financial factors. Having established the fact that finance is one of the factors contributing to non-completion, OUM should do even more to help its

learners. The results, prompts OUM to review and improve the academic support given to its learners. The complaints channel, e\_CRM should be professionally managed so that all learner enquiries and complaints be addressed in a timely and an efficient manner. The move towards increasing its online learning may be more favourable to the learners as the non-teachers are younger, more adept at using technology, and who most probably appreciate the flexibility of not having to come to the face-to-face tutorial sessions. However, learning from the experience of the teacher learners, it appears that the face-to-face tutorials have helped them perform better, and this means that for the online learning, the face-to-face interaction should be replicated online for the non-teachers.

The one thing that OUM should leverage on is the better command of the English Language of the non-teacher learners. Since English is not an issue, OUM should concentrate on providing adequate learning resources for its learners, so as to help them in the learning process. The non-teacher learners are more critical of their tutors, thus there must be a closer monitoring of the performance of the e-tutors to ensure that learners are provided with helpful feedback so that they can continuously improve their learning.

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