PERCEPTION OF EMPOWERNMENT AMONG INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN THE FACULTY OF EDUCATIONAL STUDIES, UNIVERSITY PUTRA MALAYSIA

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Abstract

Empowerment means enhancement of student's autonomy for decision making. Reports have shown that students who are empowered perform better, and have better relationship with the staff. Therefore this study was carried out to explore the experience of student's empowerment at the Faculty of Educational Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia. Informed by a phenomenological qualitative research design, analysis of various sources of primary data was carried out using semi-structured interviews with international students to understand their opinions and perceptions about empowerment in the Faculty of Educational Studies. Results obtained were analyzed, transcribed and discussed about their perception of empowerment and the effect on performance. The findings showed a sense of dis-empowerment among the informants as a result of a lack of motivation and problems with integration between the students and the staff. Student's reported that they can be empowered by allowing them more freedom in their studies. However, they recommend that management should assist in sensitizing local student's to feel free to socialize with international students for improved performance .Recommendation for enhancing empowerment among international students and directions for further research in this area are discussed.

Introduction

Empowerment can be seen as the aspects of directly or indirectly providing for the marginalised people with organised several activities speaking against such vices, And with a promise to prevent any such future occurrence. This is the only aspect where those affected can be indemnify and reinstated psychologically, mentally, and socially. And not that of granting power to individual since as humans, we already have powers in the wealth of our knowledge and motivation to carry out our jobs effectively. In defining empowerment, we focused on letting this power out; since it encourages people on skills gaining and knowledge to see them through the various obstacles of life as regards to work environment and ultimately, help them develop within themselves or in the society. Empowerment occurs through improvement of conditions, standards, events, and a global perspective of life.

In another perspective, empowerment refers to "the process of gaining power, developing power, taking or seizing power, or facilitating or enabling power" (Parson 1991). It represents both a "process and an outcome involving the individual or groups' ability to pull from within themselves the power to influence or control significant events in their lives" (Nystanga and Dann 2002). Based upon a mutual connection with others, empowerment seeks a "firm sense of purpose, a place to be and belong, an operating fund of esteem, the possibility of choice, connections to resources and ties to others, and a palpable awareness of their achievements" (Saleebey 2001). In addition, the process of empowerment is non-linear, ever-changing, and fluctuates in response to an individual's experiences and relationships with others (Camp 2003). This helping relationship among people supports an individual to generate a range of possibilities, including moving forward toward visions and aspirations; valuing self and others; mutual decision-making using resources, opportunities and authority; and freedom to make choices and accept responsibility (Rapp 1998; Rose 1994).

The word empowerment is derived from diverse perspectives which includes in education, industrial and organizational psychology, service perspectives etc. However, empowerment is often defined as the act of giving people the opportunity to make workplace decisions by expanding their autonomy in decision making (Vogt, 1997). From a service perspective, empowerment gives employees the authority to make decisions about customer service. While in industrial and organizational psychology and management, empowerment is the enhancement of the autonomy of employees in their work or increased involvement that results in increased decision making more generally within the wider agenda and interests of the organization (Wall et al., 2004).

60

Statement of problem

This project paper looks at perceptions of empowerment among international students in the faculty of educational studies and performance in the study place.Reports have shown that students who are empowered perform better than those that are marginalized, as well as having better relationship with staff members and other students. They are more involved in community. In UPM particular, international students are unable to take part in some curricular and extracurricular activities especially. This has led to frustration and aggression, lack of information sharing, lack of team accountability, lack of communication among students and lecturers. Students fear being open to their lecturers and other staff about themselves, their problems and their academic work are hindered. They are afraid of asking questions to better understand their programs for good results. This must be addressed through psychological empowerment in order to improve development within the faculty and the university. In spite of these many advantages of empowerment among student, there is little research in Malaysia and at UPM in particular that looks at international students experiences with empowerment. We know that empowerment is essential for students to thrive, yet we don't know how the students perceive their experiences in terms of being empowerment. Therefore, this study was chosen to address the gap.

Significance of the study

Students' highly motivational empowerment, determines how efficient academics assessment is going to be. The study seeks to understand the need for student's characteristics and empowerment and academic performance improvement at the faculty of education UPM. This is with a view to harness student's perception of empowerment and brings about a solution for improved information sharing, and trust for improved academic performance at the faculty; as well as foster integration among teachers, other staff, international students and the local students.

Objectives of the study

1. To explore the experiences of marginalization and or disempowerment of students at the Faculty of Educational Studies University Putra Malaysia.
2. To determine the roles of lecturers, management and other students on the empowerment strategies at the faculty of educational studies.
3. To determine the students perceptions about, empowerment and its relationship to performance.

Methods of Data Collection.

In agreement with the qualitative intention, I used purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2008). The data was collected using in-depth interview, semi-structured, and face-to-face. An interview guide consisting of a series of eight open-ended questions was used which was designed to help the students describe the nature of their experiences in the faculty .All of the participants were students in our faculty .All respondents were selectedusing a criterion-based approach, while snowball sampling was used in addition to obtainfocus group participants (Creswell, 1998). The criteria for inclusion in the study were four: (a) respondents had to be full-times students; (b) they had to be in their second semester or later as it was assumed that those who had more experiences with their lecturer would be able to provide more in-depth data and four postgraduate students were interviewed. The four informants were chosen based on the experiences and how many semesters they have studied and the informants are two Africa and two Iranians. Two of the informants were married while the other two were single. Their ages ranges from 25 to 36. All are full time students at the Faculty and had been in the faculty for more than one year. The respondents were observed and audio tape was used to record their responses and later their answers were transcribed. The first interview lasted for about 90 minutes, the second an hour, the third 45 minutes while the last lasted for 40 minutes.

Findings, Conclusion and Recommendation

This study observed that empowerment is one means of granting freedom to the students to make their own choice to seek or acquire things without external influence in order to meet the expected demand as well as improving student knowledge .To meet the need for high

performance, students will need a greater measure of empowerment. A high level of empowerment will enable students communicate directly when needed or when there is a need to make decisions related to their work. A lower level of empowerment or no empowerment would mean that the students at the Faculty of Educational Studies have have a low level of performance. Empowerment is about enhancement student's autonomy in their study place, and increased involvement and influence in decision making. There is a need for information at dissemination at the Faculty of Educational Studies in order to achieve ones target. Management should make prompt decisions so as to ensure smooth running and effectiveness in the faculty. For top management to make the right decision, first, they will need to communicate with other staff for informed decision. Giving students autonomy will give go a long way to empower them while assisting to improve their performance. Since top management is busy with other academic activities and issues related to the organization, most of the times decision are hampered before they are communicated. In such case, top management becomes a communication bottle-neck. This produces a lower level of empowerment within the students and the staff, which consequently and negatively impacts not only the students but staff performance. This study contributes to the empowerment literature by proposing that there are different degrees of empowerment, each degree suits different situations. It can be argued that the rating of staff or student performance depends on the level of empowerment given it by the management. When the staff and student achievement is low, the management will need a higher degree of empowerment..

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