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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v9-i2/7297>

DOI:10.6007/IJARPED/v9-i2/7297

Received: 15 March 2020, Revised: 30 April 2020, Accepted: 11 May 2020

Published Online: 04 June 2020

In-Text Citation: (Muniyandi et al., 2020)

To Cite this Article: Muniyandi, V., Ismail, R., & Awang, M. (2020). Gap and Potential of Student Retention for Malaysian Education Studies. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 9(2), 242–249.

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Vol. 9(2) 2020, Pg. 242 - 249

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Gap and Potential of Student Retention for Malaysian Education Studies

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to find out the research gap relating to student retention in Malaysia. Studies on student retention in the Malaysian context are also examined. Results from various disciplines, various study samples, factor studies that contribute to retention rates and ways of improving student retention in institutions of study from various countries have been analysed. This is to add information to the studies on the research gap in Malaysia. This study contributes to the understanding of researchers on the potential of research and the need for research on student retention conducted in Malaysia due to the scarcity of such studies.

Keywords: Student Retention, Research Gap, Research Potential.

Introduction

A number of recent issues in educational institutions are discussed and some of them relate to the issue of student retention in educational institutions. Although the phenomenon of student retention is a major concern for educational institutions and educators, theories and models with systematic studies have not been developed since the early 1970s (Berger, Ramirez & Lyons, 2012). Berger, Ramirez & Lyons (2012) stated that the development of studies relating to student retention is chronologically divided into nine periods. According to him, these nine eras were then divided into two eras, the pre-1960s and the second ones from the 1960s to the present.

Prior to the 1960s, there were not many systematic studies on student retention and this was a global concern until studies and theories of retention were developed (Berger, Ramirez & Lyons, 2012; Aljohani 2016; Caruth 2018). Also in the late 1960s, the issue of sustainability became a major concern and began was discussed in colleges and universities (Demetriou & Schmitz-sciborski, 2011). Although the early 1970s and 1980s were at the forefront of establishing the theoretical foundations of studies relating to student retention, the focus of the past decade has placed theoretical frameworks and concepts into practice (Aljohani, 2016). According to Berger, Ramirez & Lyons (2012), studies relating to the theory of sustainability found a place in the study by Spady's (1970, 1971). The integration of students into the academic and social systems affects the success of students whether they remain or drop out from institutions of learning (Spady, 1970). This theory of student retention is a theory derived from the

application of classical sociological theory that has been developed and followed by 'Tinto's Student Integration Theory' (1975). 'Tinto's Student Integration Theory' (1975) was later revised after applying, supporting, criticising, reviewing and finally producing the 'Tinto's Student Integration Theory' (1993). This theory remains the most prominent theory in student retention studies because its design is suitable for investigating student retention processes in institutions of learning (Tight, 2019; Manyanga, Sithole, & Hanson, 2017; Kerby, 2015; Demetriou & Schmitz-sciborski, 2011; Metz, 2005). Tinto (1993) has developed a theory of student retention that focused on the role played by the academic and social systems.

In the 1970s, the term retention was widely used (Aljohani, 2016). According to Tinto (1975, 1993), sustainability is defined as student success in a process that involves, integration between the academic and social systems. Student retention means that students remain consistently from the commencement of the course until graduation (Manyanga, Sithole, & Hanson, 2017). Cotton et al. (2017) pointed out that retention is the result of an institution's ability to retain students in order to continue student learning. Student retention is the institution's ability to retain students from enrolment to graduation (Kerby, 2015). Therefore, retention in the context of this study is related to retention based on the experience of college students which will enable them to remain relevant to graduate school. Although studies on student retention are widely conducted abroad, the lack of research in Malaysia has led to studies in this area.

Studies on Student Retention in Malaysia

A study conducted by Rose & Said (2018) at Private Institutions of Higher Learning identified the relationship between cognitive factors, institutional factors and social factors to student retention in private universities in Malaysia. Data were collected from 200 study samples. Quantitative design was performed to analyse the relationship between independent and dependent variables. The findings showed that goal commitment, academic support and time management have a significant relationship with student retention. The ability to retain students will create a competitive advantage for any Malaysian higher education institution (Rose & Said, 2018).

In addition, a study was also conducted by William, et al. (2013) at the Private Institution of Higher Learning which was aimed to identify factors that influence the retention of students in private institutions of higher learning. Private institutions of higher learning (IPTs) are, in fact, competing and struggling to maintain a competitive market in education especially in retaining existing students in these institutions (William, et al. 2013). The findings of the study by William, et al. (2013) revealed that factors of academic integration, social integration and financial factors are factors that influence student retention. However, motivational factors did not influence student retention at this institution. Meanwhile, Youp (2018) in his study found that motivational factors influence student retention as well as academic integration factors and financial factors. The case study at Open University Insights was conducted based on the findings from the secondary data obtained. This study is expected to raise awareness of the management of Private Institutions of Higher Learning on the dimensions that need to be taken into account in formulating effective strategies for retaining current students at their respective institutions.

A study by Carter, (2016) applied descriptive statistics and correlations to study the relationship between dependent variables and independent variables between teaching and non-teaching elements with five constructs such as academic experience, teaching quality, campus life and campus facilities influence student retention of institution. Given that this study was conducted in a study institution in Malaysia with a majority ethnic Chinese population, the homogeneous characteristics of the respondents group should be considered for future studies. The results show that high mean scores are reflected in the element of academic experience, followed by the quality of teaching. As such, there are only a few studies related to student retention in Malaysia that have encouraged researchers to look at and explore this aspect to fill the gaps in research in our country.

Research Gap on Student Retention

Studies on sustainability over the last century have begun to be considered by scholars. Many of the studies relating to retention were focused on sample studies involving black students (Xu & Webber, 2016), Hispanic students (Montalvo, 2013), American Indian students (Shotton, Oosahwe, & Cintron, 2007), Indigenous students (Hutchings, Bainbridge, Bodle & Miller, 2018), students with disabilities (Kilpatrick et al., 2017), non-traditional students including low socio-economic groups, off-campus education, part-time students (Sadowski, Stewart, Pediaditis, 2017; Roberts, 2011; Simpson, 2013; Davidson & Wilson, 2013), rural students (Hlinka, 2017), graduate students (Pearson, 2012), community college students (Hutto, 2016), college students (Pellew, 2016; Mosley et al., 2016; Caruth, 2018) and technical and vocational education (TVET) students (Van der Bijl & Lawrence, 2018) were conducted outside Malaysia. Therefore, these studies are important to provide an overview of the gap between studies on student retention involving various samples in Malaysia.

A number of studies have focused on various disciplines of knowledge in specific fields of education or subjects such as Computer Science (Giannakos et al. 2016) and Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) or STEM (Hilts & Bernacki, 2018). There are also studies that examine the relationship between student retention and aspects of institutional image learning (Angulo-Ruiz & Pergelova, 2013) and the role of non-academic staff (Roberts, 2018).

Studies relating to factors that influence student retention rates in educational institutions are also conducted (Demetriou & Schmitz-sciborski, 2011; Tinto, 2007; Chrysikos, Ahmed & Ward, 2017; Hutto, 2016; Hafer et al., 2018 ; Bowman et al., 2018; Kerby, 2015; Hlinka, 2017; Davidson and Wilson, 2013; Pratt, Harwood, Cavazos & Ditzfeld, 2017; Van der Bijl & Lawrence, 2018; Pellew, 2016; Weiss & Robinson, 2013; Xu & Webber, 2016). Therefore, through these studies it is possible to identify the main factors that influence student retention and the resulting model framework can be tested in the Malaysian context.

Studies on ways to improve student retention in institutions have also been conducted such as studies relating to ways or things to do to retain students in institutions of learning (Cotton, Nash & Kneale, 2017; Holt & Fifer, 2016). Furthermore, various measures in terms of marketing and measures to promote student resilience in the institution as well as ways to help students in terms of personalisation at the institution have been proposed. These studies are important to provide an insight into the gaps in the study of the various disciplines, the various

samples, the factors that influence student retention and the ways in which student retention affects institutions of learning in Malaysia.

Research Potentials on Student Retention in Malaysia

There is great potential to conduct research on student retention in Malaysia because research in this field can be extended and further explored, especially in identifying the theoretical, empirical (method of data collection and statistical analysis) and practical research gaps. The theoretical research gap can be filled by explaining the existing theory or variables and testing the theory of sustainability in the Malaysian context. Empirical gaps can be expanded for study purposes in Malaysia due to the scarcity of studies on retention in various institutions, involvement of various sample studies, factor studies that contribute to retention rates in Malaysia and using various methods of data collection and statistical analysis to test each variable. There exists a great opportunity for conducting this research because of its practical research gap on how the results of this research can be practiced and developed in the context of research in Malaysia to contribute to new research.

Conclusion and Future Agenda

Overall, the objective of this study is to increase the understanding of the research gap relating to student retention especially in Malaysia. The findings of this study show that there is a gap in research on student retention in Malaysia. The findings of this study not only contributed to the literature review by providing preliminary research on student retention at educational institutions in Malaysia but have also contributed to the understanding of researchers on the importance of research on student retention which was conducted in Malaysia. The implications, trends and climate of the country together with the knowledge-based education system require students to move quickly through the process of adjusting to graduate school to reduce student dropout rates. Therefore, the findings of this study can also have implications for the individual and the relevant parties to design and provide retention strategies and programmes at their respective institutions. Overall, this study has added information to the study of the research gap in Malaysia and the addition of this information can assist in future research.

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