



ACADEMIC DIFFICULTIES IN LEARNING AMONG UNDERGRADUATES IN UNIVERSITI SAINS ISLAM MALAYSIA

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ملخص:

لقد دُرست صعوبات التعلم الطلابية على نطاق واسع على مستوى المدارس ما قبل المرحلة الجامعية، غير أنها كانت محل جدل، وحظيت باهتمام وتركيز أقل على مستوى الطلاب الجامعيين، لذا فقد جاءت هذه الورقة البحثية لتهتم ولتناقش الصعوبات الأكاديمية التي تواجه الطلاب الجامعيين؛ وكان ذلك أثناء تواجد الباحث في إجازته العلمية في ماليزيا لمدة ثلاثة أشهر، حيث أُجريت هذه الدراسة على عينة عشوائية من طلاب جامعة العلوم الإسلامية الماليزية (USIM) (ن = 32) الدارسين بأقسام علم النفس، واللغة الإنجليزية، واللغة العربية، واستُخدمت استبانة صعوبات التعلم الأكاديمي وسيلة لجمع البيانات من أفراد العينة حول أربع أبعاد لصعوبات التعلم وهي: الصعوبات الأكاديمية والصعوبات الفكرية والعاطفية، وصعوبات الإدراك الحسي الحركي وصعوبات الثقة بالنفس. وأظهرت نتائج الإحصاء المستخدم؛ أن نسباً مرتفعة من الطلاب المشاركين في هذه الدراسة كانت لديهم صعوبات فهم المحاضرات، وضعف في الاستيعاب القرائي، وصعوبات التذكر التي كانت العامل السائد للصعوبات الأكاديمية التي يعاني منها نسبة عالية من الطلاب. كما أظهرت النتائج أيضا عزوف نسب عالية من أفراد العينة عن المشاركة في المناقشات الأكاديمية وقلما كانوا يسألون أساتذتهم أو يستفسرون منهم عن نقاط الغموض في المحاضرات بسبب الخجل وتجنب الإحراج، وكذلك أظهرت نتائج هذه الدراسة أن نسبة عالية من الطلاب كانوا يعانون الضغوط النفسية بسبب كثرة المواد الدراسية، وصعوبة في مداومة التركيز أثناء المحاضرات الطويلة، وأيضا هناك نسبة عالية تعاني من ضعف التكامل والانسجام الانفعالي والاجتماعي مع وسطهم الجامعي. ولذا يوصي الباحث بإجراء المزيد من البحوث على بقية الأقسام العلمية والكليات الأخرى والطلبة الجامعيين الليبيين والصعوبات المصاحبة على المستوى المعرفي، وإجراء دراسات مقارنة محلية وأجنبية أكثر عمقاً لدراسة هذه الظاهرة. وتكمن أهمية هذه الدراسة في كونها تظهر أهمية الاهتمام التربوي والإرشاد النفسي لطلبة الجامعة وأصول التدريس الجامعي للطلبة الجامعيين.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الصعوبات الأكاديمية، الطلاب الجامعيين، التدريس متعدد التخصصات.

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Abstract

Students' learning difficulties have been widely researched at school level, but a rare focus has been given to university undergraduates. This paper discusses the results of a study on the above issue conducted among the undergraduates in Malaysia. The sample consisted of 32 students who study in the departments of psychology, English language and Arabic language. A questionnaire was conducted to measure the students' academic difficulties in learning under four dimensions: academic difficulties, intellectual and emotional difficulties, perceptual motor difficulties and behavioural and morale characteristics. It was found that understanding the lectures and weakness in practicing comprehension and memorizing were the major academic difficulties encountered by the participants. The findings revealed that they less participate in discussions and rarely ask questions to clarify their doubts due to shyness and avoid sarcasm. The students also expressed that they feel psychological pressure during their studies and find difficult to concentrate on lectures for a long period. Another major finding of this study was the difficulties they faced in emotional and social integration within the university which deserves an in-depth study. Further, a follow-up research is being conducted to measure the undergraduates' cognitive abilities and its associations with their level of academic difficulties. The findings of this study will have an impact on andragogy and pedagogy of the university system.

Keywords: Academic difficulties, Undergraduates, Inter-disciplinary



1. INTRODUCTION

Learning process becomes a point of debate as learners feel that they are cruising around a pile of academic, emotional and psychological difficulties. This leads to disorders in learners' personalities. The increase in the proportion of learning among undergraduates in university can be achieved by observing students' complains and changing the curriculum which may include contents and methodology. This will minimize the learning difficulties encountered by students during their studies. Paying attention to difficulties which students experience helps to remedy the difficulties as early as possible and prevent drop-out from courses. Therefore, the results of this study will bring to the attention of the authorities of the Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia: (*USIM*) the major problems facing undergraduate students and also help in identifying those problems that are peculiar to domain of study and those common to both gender. The findings will also help students to have a better understanding of the reasons and sources of their problems. In addition, this findings assist them in how to confront realistically such problems, how to avoid them where possible and evolve more pragmatic ways of dealing with those problems. The findings of the study will therefore assist the university authorities in taking significant steps and proffering permanent solutions to these problems identified and ranked high by the students. In addition, neglecting learning difficulties leads to a bad consequences on the process of learning such as: students' dropouts and anxiety from their university. Furthermore, the findings of this study will have practical importance and will have an impact on andragogy and pedagogy of the university system.

Giving attention to students' feelings and sentiments during the learning process plays an important role in determining the outcome of any efforts executed in the educational process. The characteristics of teaching methods, and the quality of information, and student's personality are three key components that affect the quality, and quantity of student learning. Therefore, the focus on the emotions, thoughts, feelings and perceptions of the students and the difficulties that students undergo during the learning process is more important than emphasizing solely on attendance and stuffed him or her with different information. Some studies have revealed that students who suffer from the weakness of adjustment during the educational process have more difficulties in learning compared to students who are constantly adapting in systematic manner (Mayya, et al, 2004).

The results of studies on stress among undergraduates indicate that students were exposed to stress due to academic workloads, inadequate resources, low motivations, continuous poor performance in academic activities, overcrowded lecture halls, and uncertainty of getting job after graduating from the university, (Agolla and Ongori, 2009). Similar study conducted by Bataineh: (2013) confirmed that excessive academic loads, insufficient time of study, ongoing home works throughout of the semester, performing successive exams, low level of students' motivation, and the high family expectations were the main sources of stress among



students. It was also found that fear of failure was the major source of stress among undergraduate students. Mayya, et al, (2002), concluded that language ability, expectations of achievement, the use of students learning styles and the university lifestyle that require adjustment to a new educational environment are factors that affect student performance and caused him / her difficulties that hinder to accomplish academic tasks. Additionally, students who suffer from the weakness of adjustment during the educational process have more difficulties in learning than students who adapt continuously and systematically (Mayya et al, 2004). Studies also have shown a relationship between learning approaches and problems of learners and academic performance, (Mayya et al 2004)

The previous research highlights the need for studying the learning environment from the perspective of undergraduate learners' difficulties in order to help them to learn effectively and efficiently. Learning difficulties of students have been widely researched at school level, (Cortiella, and Horowitz, 2014). However, a rare focus has been given to the undergraduate students. Furthermore, the main focus of majority of prior studies was on the stress rather than on the difficulties that cause it. Thus, in order to improve the quality of learning process, we should shift away from studying anxiety and stress to studying the difficulties which cause it. This means we should listen to students' complaint that cause them stress and anxiety and help them to overcome their academic and non-academic difficulties.

The various factors that obstruct students' learning are compiled into four basic sections: academic, sociological and morale characteristics, psychological and cognitive, (Al-Rashed, 2003; Omoteso, 2003, Saber, 2003; Alghamdi, 2001). The aim of this study is to detect the learning difficulties of the undergraduate students of the *USIM*. The author of this paper, with his long experience in teaching at university level, have observed that some students were neglectful in organizing the time of the study, and they were low motivated in learning process. Moreover, the researcher remarked the difficulty in seeing the importance of certain topics, in remembering knowledge previously acquired, the difficulties in the practical application of knowledge, and they were stuffed with study materials are the most repeated questions and major discussions among the students during the academic year. For all these observations of researcher, and on the basis of the foregoing recommendations of previous studies, (Mayya, et al, 2004, Omoteso, 2003, Bataineh, 2013, and Mamdouh, 2003), a research study on the Academic Difficulties in Learning among Undergraduates in Malaysia is more demanding.

Study Questions:

This study aimed to answer the following questions:

- 1- What are the most common learning difficulties encountered by the undergraduates of *USIM*?
- 2- Do the majority of students have the same learning difficulties?



- 3- Do the academic learning difficulties dimensions vary among students attached to different "educational" departments in *USIM*?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

1-2 Differentiating learning difficulties from learning disability or mental disability and some other concepts :

The term "learning difficulty" is often used in an educational setting to denote a problem from the point of view of not reaching certain academic attainments. Learning difficulties also has been used for educational purposes; as an alternative term for "learning disability" and for "intellectual disability", to purify the learning process from any negative meaning such as term disability, (Emerson, & Heslop, 2010). Therefore, the distinction between intellectual disability, learning disability and the learning difficulty, is still a controversial topic of discussion. Although these terms are used interchangeably as discussed above, there is a big difference between learning difficulties and learning disabilities, as follows: Learning disabilities – is a general term referring to sensory disability or mental disability. In more details, it is a general term referring to individuals who have difficulty in knowledge, in understanding, in communication, and in the use of terms to express their needs or complex stuff, as a result of certain disabilities; these individuals require attribution or high support to help them to learn, (Holland, 2011). The term of learning disability has three international standards (mental disability-IQ-imbalance in the social aspect of adaptation and the early start of IQ) see (Emerson, & Heslop, 2010). This concept is unintended in this study. Also there is another term used which is Academic problems: it is a vague and open expression. Although the term academic problem is wide open idiom, it was defined in some studies as follows: "the difficulties experienced by students that hinder their studies, and lead to lower level of academic attainments, and difficulty to follow-up lectures. The previous studies had used the word difficulty when they defined problems, which means using learning difficulty is more appropriate, precise and accurate to use in educational and psychological studies. On the other hand, the term learning difficulty is often used in educational settings, (Holland, 2011); it refers to individuals who have specific hard and unbreakable exertion with learning as a result of the educational environment, and academics requirements, or as a result of the difficulty of five language skills such as writing, reading, speaking, listening, and comprehension, and they do not have any physical, sensory, mental, moral disabilities or sickness.. Hence, students who have learning difficulties are normal individuals and emotionally, intellectually and socially healthy.

2-2 Previous studies:

Omoteso, (2003), reported difficulties of rehearsing and memorizing, cognitive and behavioural difficulties were factors contributing more to the significance recorded relation with Self-regulated Learning among undergraduate students. Furthermore, Makarmi, (2000), explained that the most common problems among



Iranian University students were anxiety, frustration, and tension caused by dealing with the opposite sex. Some of the most serious problems encountered by undergraduates included difficulty in social problems and academic problems. Sex was found to be a factor in determining problems encountered by students as female students encountered more problems than the males. Pineteh, (2013), revealed that academic writing challenges the students in universities. Zeenath, and Orcullo, (2012), identified affective consequences of academic procrastination among undergraduates.

Alameri, (2003) emphasized the difficulties related to the relationship between academic staff and students. She states that some professors are fanatic or extremist or radical in giving students' estimation. She also reports the non-availability of sufficient textbooks for elective courses and lack of facilities in laboratories and no sufficient time given for studying in laboratories. Al-Ghamdi, (2001) pointed out some problems such as that the non-suitable schedule of studying, pressure of monthly tests, variations in behaviour of faculty members with students, repetition pattern in some subjects, , poor motivation for study, and a sense of anxiety in near final exams. Al-rashed, (2003) states that students faced difficulties due to bad distribution of study schedules, the failure of the college academic advising, and family responsibilities. Very interesting study of Saber, (2003) done at a Teachers College in Dammam revealed that the lack of skills to perform non-participation in activities, withdrawal, shyness, absence from the college were the major causes for academic difficulties. He, further, refers to some cognitive problems such as difficulty in concentration, lack of understanding, poor ability to resolve problems associated with teaching materials and curriculum and emotional problems, such as frustration and low ambitions and sense of satisfaction. Ongori, and Agolla, (2009) found that the academic workload, inadequate resources, low motivation, poor performance in academic activities, overcrowded lecture halls, and uncertainty of getting job after graduating from the university lead to stress among students.

The above previous studies have paid wider attention to different issues related to learning difficulties in colleges and schools, and a little attention given to the university undergraduates. The main focus of previous studies was on the scarcity of educational AIDS, teaching tools and scarcity of study manuals. Instead, the current study has turned its lance towards academic difficulties, intellectual and emotional difficulties, perceptual and motor difficulties and behavioural and moral characteristics.

3. METHODOLOGY:

The aim of this section is to clarify the methodology of the study. It gives an account of selection of instruments, determining instrument's validity and reliability, study design and describing the sample that were used for data collection and the statistical methods used to analyse the data.



3.1 Tools and instruments:

A self-administered questionnaire was developed to collect information. The questionnaire consisted of four sections with the purpose of measuring the responses under different four dimensions: Academic difficulties, consist of 18 items; Intellectual and emotional difficulties, contain 17 items; perceptual motor difficulties, contain 12 items, and behavioural and moral characteristics, consist of 17 items. All items were measured on 3-Point *Likert Scale*, ranging from (2-Yes or strongly agree, to 1- Somehow agree/disagree, and 0 - No or strongly disagree). The Questionnaire was developed based on some earlier review of studies. It's Cronbach Alpha scales reliability value was 0.78 (Mayya, et al, 2004 and Basim et al, 2007). Furthermore, statistical package for social science (*SPSS*) package has been used as well. A pilot study was carried out to ensure the validity and reliability of the instrument.

3.2 Validity:

The questionnaire was previously reliable (Cronbach Alpha 0.78) (Mayya, et al, 2004 and Basim et al, 2007). However, the students proposed 8 additional difficulties that they considered as important in their studying system, and some amendments have been made on the Questionnaire by the researcher, the content validity for the instrument were additionally determined through the help of 10 experts in the relevant field. Nine of them approved the questionnaire items without comments. However, the items of the questionnaire were also adjusted and evaluated according to the rest of arbitrators' comments. Moreover, the Cronbach Alpha for reliability was conducted and the total reliability was (0.64).

Table (nr. 1): Reliability values for learning difficulty scale

Category	N. of items	Alpha Value
Academic difficulties	18	0.63
Intellectual and emotional difficulties	17	0.62
Perceptual motor difficulties	12	0.62
Behavioural and moral characteristics:	17	0.61
Total	64	0.64

3.3 Sample:

Sampling method applied in this study was a convenient random sampling. The sample of the study included: (N = 32) healthy students; 9 Males and 23 Females. Mean age (21.53 years old) , (SD = 0.507). The participants were selected from undergraduate students, from three departments namely: (Psychology students = 10), (English Education students = 12), (Arabic Studies students =10); from Faculties of Major Language studies and Leadership and Management from *USIM*.



The informed consent was obtained, participants were informed of the purpose of the study and the importance of their participation in this study.

3.4 Study design:

This study was non-experimental in nature and employs a cross-sectional design. In this study, survey study design was used. According to John (2005), survey study designs are procedures in quantitative study in which investigators administer a survey to a sample or to the entire population of people in order to describe the attitudes, opinions, behaviours or characteristics of the population. In this procedure, survey studies collect quantitative, numbered data using questionnaire and statistically analyse the data to describe trends about responses to the questionnaire and to test study questions. They also interpret the meaning of the data by relating results of the statistical tests back to the previous reviewed studies. It was nonetheless appropriate in a study that aims to determine different dimensions of academic learning difficulties among undergraduate education students of *USIM*.

3.5 Data analysis:

The quantitative data collected through the survey questionnaire were analysed statistically using (*SPSS*) version 17. In relation to the interval data collected, relevant measures of descriptive statistic, correlation Chi-Square goodness of fit test, K^2 , and the *Kruskal Wallis Test* were engaged. These processes of deriving statistical results would lead to the interpretation and drawing of conclusions.

4.1 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS:

To answer the first and the second questions of this study, thirty-two undergraduates were sampled from "educational" departments in *USIM*. The data collected was analysed as follows: For answering the first question, a descriptive statistic "frequencies and percentages" was conducted to identify the most common learning difficulties among the faculty students. Thus students' answers on the items of the questionnaire were also arranged. In addition, for answering the second question of this study, which is "to confirm or cannot be confirmed" that the faculty' students have learning difficulties, and whether the number of students who experience learning difficulties was equal to the number of students who did not experience learning difficulties. For measuring this aim, the null hypotheses was evaluated, using the (*Chi-Square goodness of fit test: K^2*) on frequencies of students' responses (*Yes/ No*), and the results had exposed and discussed in the following manner:

Firstly, answering the first question which was: (what are the most common learning difficulties encountered by the undergraduates of *USIM* and the second question (do the majority of students in the *USIM* have the same learning difficulties?).



Table 1 The most common academic learning-difficulties

The academic difficulties of which students complain	<i>N</i>	<i>Resp</i> <i>ponses</i>	<i>Freque</i> <i>ncies</i>	<i>Percen</i> <i>tage</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>K²valu</i> <i>e</i> <i>x²(1)=</i>	<i>p</i> ≤ .05
Weakness in answering questions concisely	32	Yes No	29 3	90.6 9.4	1	21.125	.000
Weakness in comprehending meaning of some words	32	Yes No	28 4	87.5 12.5	1	18.000	.000
Teachers postpone students' questions	32	Yes No	28 4	87.5 12.5	1	18.000	.000
Weakness in understanding long sentences	32	Yes No	26 6	81.8 28.2	1	12.500	.000
Weakness in academic reading	32	Yes No	22 10	68.8 31.2	1	4.5	.034
Weakness in practicing comprehension and memorizing	32	Yes No	26 6	81.3 18.7	1	12.500	.000
Weakness in reading quickly with good understanding	32	Yes No	26 6	81.3 18.7	1	12.500	.000

1) Results demonstrated that the most common *academic learning difficulties* among students of English, Arabic, and Psychology departments in *USIM* were as shown in table-1: There was almost unanimous high agreement by students on the fact that they are experiencing: weakness in answering questions concisely (90.6 %), weakness in comprehending meaning of some words (87.5 %), they report that teachers postpone their questions (87.5 %), weakness in understanding long sentences, (81.8 %), weakness in academic reading (68.8 %), weakness in practicing comprehension and memorizing skills (81.3 %), weakness in quick reading skills (81.3 %). In addition, the null hypothesis was rejected on these responses of questions: $\chi^2(1) =$ is greater than: $p \leq .05$. This means that there are significant indications or signs of *Academic Learning-Difficulties* amongst students of *USIM*. These results endorse the findings of Papanastasiou, and Zembyl. (2008), who reported that the academic studies, make students to become nervous, stressful, and anxious. And a study of Omoteso, (2003), which revealed difficulties in rehearsing and memorizing, difficulties cognitive and behavioural skills. The study of Mayya, et al, (2004) clarified that the excessive academic loads, insufficient time to study, the on-going work throughout the semester, number of exams, academic work load, low motivation and poor performance in home work were typical problems among undergraduate students. Ongori, and Agolla, (2009), and Pineteh, (2013), revealed that academic writing challenges students in universities. Mayya, et al, (2002), concluded that the language ability, expectations of achievement, educational



environment are factors that affect the students' performance and caused them difficulties that hinder accomplishment of academic tasks.

Table 2 The most common affective and intellectual learning-difficulties

The affective and intellectual difficulties of which students complain	<i>N</i>	<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>K²value</i> <i>x²(1)</i> =	<i>p</i> ≤ <i>.05</i>
Dreading from sarcasm of my question	32	Yes No	27 5	84.4 15.6	1	15.13	.000
Fearing of making mistakes during discussions	32	Yes No	27 5	84.4 15.6	1	15.13	.000
Emotional ties affects my performance in studies	32	Yes No	25 7	78.1 21.9	1	10.1	.001
Teachers' negative attitudes affect my studies	32	Yes No	25 7	78.1 21.9	1	10.13	.001
Some of compulsive thoughts distract my attention during lectures	32	Yes No	22 10	68.8 31.2	1	4.5	.034
Hard to remember what I understood in previous lessons	32	Yes No	22 10	68.8 31.2	1	4.5	.034

2) Moreover, *the most common affective and intellectual learning-difficulties* which were ranked first from the point of view of *USIM* students are: fear from sarcasm of question (84.4 %), fear of making mistakes (84.4 %), emotional ties (78.1 %), teachers' negative attitudes (78.1 %), compulsive thoughts (68.8 %) and hard to remember previous lessons (68.8 %). In addition, the null hypothesis was rejected on these results: $x^2(1)$ is greater than: $p \leq .05$, which means that there are significant indications or signs of *affective and intellectual learning-difficulties* amongst students of the *USIM*. These results are supported by the study of Saber, Mamdoh, (2003), who confirmed that students have problems such as non-participation in activities, withdrawal and shyness, lack of attendance, negative perception tendency, cognitive problems such as difficulty in concentration, lack of understanding, poor ability to resolve problems associated with teaching materials and curriculum. A study by Mayya, et al, (2004) claimed that the high family expectations was the main source of stress among students. It was also found that fear of failure are the major sources of stress among undergraduate students. Also (Makarmi, 2000) reported that the most common problems among Iranian University students were anxiety, frustration, and tension caused by dealing with the opposite sex. These results were supported by similar reviewed studies, that found the academic loads, and insufficient time to study. (Marwan, 2013).



Table 3 The most common behavioral and moral learning-difficulties among the undergraduates' sample

The behavioural and moral difficulties of which students complain	N	Response	Frequency	Percentage	df	K^2 value $\chi^2(1)=$	$p \leq .05$
Teachers' respect of some students without others	32	Yes No	28 4	87.5 12.5	1	18.00	.000
I have other concerns with academic interests	32	Yes No	26 6	81.3 18.7	1	12.5	.000
I usually studying carelessly	32	Yes No	23 9	71.9 28.1	1	4.5	.034
I sometimes repeat the same error	32	Yes No	23 7	71.9 28.1	1	6.13	.013
I apologize for mistakes quickly	32	Yes No	7 25	21.9 78.1	1	10.13	.001

3) Furthermore, *the most common behavioural and moral learning-difficulties* which were ranked first from the point of view of *USIM* students are: Teachers' respect (87.5 %), other concerns with academic interests (81.3 %), studying carelessly (71.9 %), repeating the same error (71.9 %), delaying apologize (78.1 %), The null hypothesis was rejected on mentioned questions: $\chi^2(1) =$ is greater than: $p \leq .05$, which means that there are significant indications or signs of *Behavioural and Moral Learning-Difficulties* amongst at least more than fifty present of the students of the *USIM*. These results are supported by the study of Ameri, Fatima (2003), that highlighted difficulties caused by attitudes of professors towards students. and by the research of Al-Ghamdi, Mohammed, (2001) who proclaimed some of learning problems such as: variations in behaviour of faculty members with students, repetition pattern in some subjects, poor motivation for study, and a sense of anxiety in near final exams. And also the study of Saber, Mamdouh (2003) claimed emotional problems such as feeling of frustration and low ambitions, low sense of satisfaction and social problems. Al-Rashed, (2003) found students have difficulty in setting decisions, feeling of disregard of their status and bad distribution of studying schedules. Recently, Peretomode and Ugbomeh, (2013), confessed that the most serious problems encountered by undergraduates were social problems and academic problems.

**Table 4 The most common perceptual and motor learning-difficulties**

I find it difficult to do multiple things simultaneously:	32	Yes No	23 9	71.9 28.1	1	6.13	.013
The similarity of the pronunciation of words makes hard to be distinguished	32	Yes No	22 10	68.8 31.2	1	4.50	.034
I understand the lecture by remembering the information written on the blackboard	32	Yes No	10 22	31.2 68.8	1	4.50	.034
I always compare what has been explained in the lecture, with what I read	32	Yes No	8 24	25 75	1	8.00	.005
During the lecture, I could identify the main focus of the lecturer	32	Yes No	8 24	25 75	1	8.00	.005

- 4) Additionally, *the most common perceptual and motor learning-difficulties* which were ranked first from the point of view of *USIM* students are: difficulties doing multiple things simultaneously (71.9 %), distinguishing of similar words' pronunciation (68.8 %), weakness in understand the lecture (68.8 %), weakness in comparing lectures that have been explained with what has been read (75 %), weakness in identifying the main focus of the lecturer (75 %), In addition, the null hypothesis was rejected on these findings: $\chi^2(1)$ = is greater than: $p \leq .05$. This means that there are significant indications or signs of *Perceptual & Motor Learning-Difficulties* amongst at least more than fifty present of the students of the *USIM*. These findings related to academic difficulties of undergraduates are rarely mentioned in the previous studies, except the study of Omoteso, (2003), which revealed difficulties in rehearsing and memorizing, difficulties cognitive and behavioural skills. And the study by Saber, (2003) who concluded that cognitive problems such as difficulty in concentration, lack of understanding, poor ability to resolve problems associated with teaching materials were the most common student problems.

Secondly: For answering the second question: do the majority of students in the departments *USIM* have the same learning difficulties on the questionnaire used? the static measures *Chi-Square goodness of fit test: "K²"* had used the data collected, to ensure whether all students experience the same difficulties.



Table 5

The

	Sum of dimensions	Departments	N	Mean Rank
Chi-Square	4.385	English	12	16.71
df	2	Arabic	10	12.00
		Psychology	10	20.75
Asymp. Sig.	.112	Total	32	

differences between students in learning difficulties

The results indicate that the majority of students have the same learning difficulties. The null hypothesis was accepted in all group students, (English, Arabic, and Psychology students). " K^2 " = 4.385, $DF = 2$, $p = .112$ is greater than: $p \leq .05$. Thus, we can infer that students experiencing the same academic learning difficulties, with confidence level of (.05), namely the ones that had been measured in this study. Such findings of this study confirm the results of earlier research related problems of learning among undergraduate students in other colleges, Makarmi , 2000; Al-rashed, 2003; Mamdouh ,2003).

4.2 To answer the third question of this study, " Do different academic learning difficulties are common among students of English, Arabic, and Psychology departments in *USIM*?". *Kruskal Wallis Test* was computed to confirm the differences between the academic departments in learning difficulties.



Table 6 The differences between academic departments in learning difficulties dimensions

Difficulties of Learning Test Statistics: a,b,c,d	Academic A-1 to A-18	Intellectual & motional B-1 to B-17	Behavioural & Moral C-1 to C 17	Perceptual & Motor D-1 to D 12
Chi-Square	6.468	2.322	7.980	1.101
df	2	2	2	2
Asymp. Sig.	.039	.313	.019	.577

a. Kruskal Wallis Test

b. Grouping Variable: English, Arabic, Psychology

The *Chi-Square* shows no significant differences were found related to different departments on the intellectual & emotional learning-difficulties " K^2 " = 2.32, $DF = 2$, $p = 0.313$ and on the perceptual & motor learning-difficulties " K^2 " = 1.101, $DF = 2$, $p = 0.577$; the value of *Chi-Square* is greater than: $p \leq 0.05$. This means all three study departments have the same: intellectual & emotional and perceptual & motor learning-difficulties. On the other hand, the *Chi-Square* shows significant differences related to the department nature on the: academic learning-difficulties " K^2 " = 6.468, $DF = 2$, $p = 0.039$, and behavioural & moral learning-difficulties " K^2 " = 7.980, $DF = 2$, $p = 0.019$; the value of *Chi-Square* is greater than: $p \leq 0.05$. The fact indicates that students from all three departments of *USIM* don't experiencing academic and behavioural & moral learning-difficulties in the level; Psychology students are more prone to academic and behavioural & moral learning-difficulties with mean rank of 20.75 compared to the Arabic and English departments mean rank of 12.00 and 16.71. This can be attributed to the nature of the discipline of psychology students, understanding the nature of their work and they were more sensitive and more responsive to ethical and behavioural difficulties than their peers in other disciplines. There is no clear evidence for this conclusion in the previous studies; consequently, conducting follow-up studies on the different departments and deferent universities, using a large samples is required to make sure of significance of these differences. Most of the findings of this study confirm the results of previous research related to problems of learning among undergraduate students. In addition, this study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of learning-difficulties amongst undergraduate students and proposes guidelines to develop an intervention system.



5 – CONCLUSION

In general, the learning difficulties that have been measured in the present study are spread and common learning difficulties encountered by the majority of undergraduates. However, some of those difficulties differ from one discipline to another; for example, the academic and behavioural and moral learning-difficulties are more spread among psychology students than Arabic and English departments of *USIM*.

6 - LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Selection of a small sample drawn from one university in Malaysia can be considered as of the important limitation of this study. Thus these findings cannot be generalized for students in other university degree programs. A follow up study with a larger, stratified random sample would expand knowledge of learning difficulties among under graduate students. Another limitation was the fact that participants were predominantly female. Therefore, inclusion of equal number of male students would facilitate the generalizability of these findings.

7- RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is recommended that further research with larger sample consist of different genders disciplines and number of universities will enrich the understanding of learning difficulties among under graduates. Developing an intervention system based on the findings is also recommended. In addition, there is a need to develop a comprehensive definition which explains the difference concepts associated with the concept of learning difficulties, and to develop and codify comprehensive and unified scale of learning difficulties, to be provided to the universities with cognitive test system for scientific measurement and sorting students based on these tests. Further research is recommended on other study departments and universities. It is recommended also that university decision makers have to provide students with a psychological, social and academic counselling in order to decrease the learning-difficulties amongst undergraduate students. So they can achieve better in academic tasks. Decision makers have to involve students and their teachers in different academic activities to reduce the gaps between them; and have to provide students with suitable teaching and learning methods as well in order to enhance their academic achievements.



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