In Pursuit of Mastery: Understanding Postgraduate Taught Experience in UiTM Negeri Sembilan

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ABSTRACT

Postgraduate education is pivotal in shaping future professionals, yet student satisfaction remains a key concern for institutions. Despite growing recognition of the importance of a supportive learning environment, gaps in understanding the postgraduate experience persist. This study aims to explore postgraduate students' taught experience in UiTM Negeri Sembilan, focusing on teaching and learning, student engagement, and institutional support. A survey was conducted with 64 students using a 41-item questionnaire, analysed through descriptive statistics. The findings revealed that students reported high satisfaction levels across various dimensions, including teaching quality, engagement opportunities, and resource availability. Effective organisation and management of programmes further contribute to a positive learning environment. These insights highlight the need for continuous alignment between curriculum and industry demands to maintain relevance. The study recommends enhancing student engagement through interactive learning opportunities and improving resource allocation to meet evolving postgraduate needs. Future research could focus on cross-institutional comparisons to develop best practices for postgraduate education.

INTRODUCTION

Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Negeri Sembilan is a branch granted the authority to autonomously oversee postgraduate programmes. While obtaining managerial authority, all decisions are still subject to the faculty's decision-making and approval. UiTM Negeri Sembilan has autonomously managed a graduate study centre for about three years, with nine faculties. The management level of the centre consists of a Head of Study Centre, Coordinator, Administration, and Committee for each faculty, providing assistance to the centre. Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Negeri Sembilan provides both full-time and part-time educational programmes. The curriculum offered at the Master's level is a Master's by Research, whereas at the doctorate level, it is a PhD. Despite being in its early stages of autonomous operation, UiTM Negeri Sembilan has demonstrated exceptional proficiency in managing all aspects of the study process, including student registration, DRP sessions, and VIVA matters, with great success.

Nevertheless, ensuring the satisfaction of postgraduate students with the facilities provided is a challenging task. It is the university's responsibility to provide the best service to students. Ariffin et al. (2022) showed that the personal development of students is influenced by several factors provided by their university, including the education system, available resources, and skills. These factors are believed to contribute significantly to supporting students in improving their motivation, behaviour, and academic achievement. Moreover, it is commonly recognised that postgraduate students generally have diverse backgrounds, with many already involved in professional employment. As a result, their expectations are different from those of undergraduate students. Therefore, the objective of this study was to gain a comprehensive understanding of the direct experiences of Master's and PhD level students in UiTM Negeri Sembilan postgraduate study centre, including their involvement in all educational activities and utilisation of the provided facilities.

Research Objectives:

1. To identify the level of postgraduates' taught experience in UiTM Negeri Sembilan.

   i. To identify the level of teaching and learning experienced by postgraduates' students in Negeri Sembilan.
   ii. To identify the level of engagement experienced by postgraduates' students in Negeri Sembilan.
   iii. To identify the level of community experienced by postgraduates' students in Negeri Sembilan.
   iv. To identify the level of assessment and feedback experienced by postgraduates' students in Negeri Sembilan.
   v. To identify the level of dissertation (research work) experienced by postgraduates' students in Negeri Sembilan.
   vi. To identify the level of organization and management experienced by postgraduates' students in Negeri Sembilan.
   vii. To identify the level of resources experienced by postgraduates' students in Negeri Sembilan.
   viii. To identify the level of support experienced by postgraduates' students in Negeri Sembilan.
   ix. To identify the level of skills development experienced by postgraduates' students in Negeri Sembilan.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding the postgraduate taught experience in UiTM Negeri Sembilan requires a holistic approach that considers individual teaching and learning experiences, engagement, community, assessment and feedback, dissertation on research work experience, organisation and management, resources, support services, and skill development to ensure positive learning outcomes and overall satisfaction. Several studies have explored these aspects, revealing that students often have realistic expectations of university education, including developing academic and social skills (Ariffin et al., 2022; Hassel & Ridout, 2018). This involves establishing clear policies and procedures for scheduling, assigning, and monitoring the use of facilities such as labs and other instructional spaces. Additionally, students' expectations, perceptions, and personal development in university education are important factors that can impact their overall experience and growth. At the postgraduate level, teaching and learning experiences are deeply intertwined with the supervision skills of academic researchers and the appropriateness of curriculum development. Effective supervision combined with a well-suited curriculum creates an environment where postgraduate students can thrive both academically and professionally. Supervisors help students navigate the challenges of the curriculum, whereas a thoughtfully developed curriculum ensures that students are equipped with the necessary tools and knowledge to succeed in their research and future careers (David & Hill, 2021).

According to a study by Sesmiyati (2016), student engagement is significantly enhanced by students' willingness, need, desire, and active participation in the learning process. This factor helps create a conducive learning environment at the postgraduate level where students must fully engage with their learning and research activities, as active participation is key to their success. Both students and supervisors play essential roles in fostering a positive learning environment. Supervisors need to create a supportive atmosphere during consultations, which motivates students to improve their abilities in both learning and

research. In addition, a strong collaboration between the university and its graduate student organisations is fundamental to creating an inclusive and supportive community for postgraduate students. This collaboration allows students to thrive academically and personally, fostering a culture of shared learning, support, and engagement. The supervisor's role is integral in complementing the efforts of student organisations by mentoring students, advocating for their well-being, and encouraging them to actively participate in the academic and social life of the university. Together, these relationships create a holistic environment conducive to success and fulfilment at the postgraduate level (Conrad, 2003; Beeson et al., 2019).

Furthermore, competent assessment and feedback are essential at the postgraduate level for improving student performance. Assessments help evaluate students' depth of knowledge and research abilities, while feedback provides the necessary guidance to refine their academic skills. By offering constructive, timely, and detailed feedback, supervisors can help students excel academically, develop critical research skills, and build the confidence to contribute meaningfully to their academic fields (Rigopoulos, 2022). This continuous feedback also directly impacts the dissertation process. Competent feedback serves as a scaffold, helping students navigate the complexities of their research with more ease. When students feel supported and receive consistent feedback, they are less likely to feel overwhelmed, which directly contributes to greater satisfaction with the overall postgraduate experience (Turhan & Karadağ, 2019).

Effective organisation and management practices are essential in creating a conducive environment to utilise educational facilities optimally. Research indicates that effective supervision and good management significantly impact students' overall satisfaction, and positive learning outcomes (Stone, 2008; Zeng et al., 2013). Moreover, the study on Mauritian students abroad highlights the importance of various management aspects, such as effective usage of campus resources, to maximise the impact of satisfaction rating and address the differential needs of students. (Ammigan, 2022).

The availability of resources in the learning environment is a significant factor in students' satisfaction with their courses and learning strategies (Andrew, 2010). Resources such as databases, facilities, equipment, and support services significantly influence the experiences of higher-degree students in all educational activities and the utilisation of provided facilities (Jolly, 2022). Resources such as internet access, IT support, and support services are associated with overall university satisfaction for international students (Ammigan, 2018; Ammigan, 2022; Zeng et al., 2013). A few studies investigate the Higher Degree by Research (HDR) student experience within Australian universities, focusing on key areas such as supervisory relationships, challenges faced by international students, engagement with research communities, balancing life contexts, administrative challenges, thesis by publication, and industry-based research. The findings emphasise the importance of universities being more proactive in supporting the unique needs of HDR students in the evolving educational landscape (Ammigan, 2018; Brownlow et al., 2023).

Skill development plays a vital role in shaping the educational experiences and outcomes of higher degree students, emphasising the need for universities to focus on supporting and enhancing students' skills throughout their academic journey. Research has shown that skill development is significantly related to students' overall satisfaction and positive learning outcomes in their research degree experiences (Zeng et al., 2013). Specifically, supervision has been found to relate to students' perceived skill development and overall satisfaction, highlighting the importance of effective supervision in fostering skill enhancement among higher-degree students (Zeng et al., 2013).

METHODOLOGY

A survey approach was employed to assess the level of postgraduate taught experience among the postgraduate students in UiTM Negeri Sembilan campus. 64 postgraduate students participated in the survey using a simple random sampling technique. The questionnaire used was adapted from the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (2023) by Leman (2023), encompassing 41 items rated on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (definitely agree) to 5 (definitely disagree). Prior to the main study, a pilot test involving 30 postgraduates' students was conducted to validate the questionnaire's validity and reliability. In accordance

with Ahady et al. (2017), Table 1 presents the findings for interpreting the Cronbach alpha value, indicating a highly reliable measurement based on the obtained results.

TABLE I Cronbach Alpha Value's Interpretation

Cronbach's Alpha	Interpretation
$\alpha > 0.9$	excellent
$\alpha > 0.8$	good
$\alpha > 0.7$	acceptable
$\alpha > 0.6$	questionable
$\alpha > 0.5$	poor
$0.5 > \alpha$	unacceptable

TABLE II Cronbach Alpha Value of Postgraduate Taught Experience

Dimensions	N of Items	Cronbach Alpha
Teaching and Learning	7	.886
Engagement	5	.856
Community	3	.869
Assessment and Feedback	4	.924
Dissertation (research work)	4	.842
Organization and Management	4	.879
Resources	5	.909
Support	3	.760
Skills Development	6	.932

FINDINGS

Table 3 below shows the interpretation of mean score in indicating the level of postgraduate taught experience among postgraduate students at UiTM Negeri Sembilan. The interpretation of mean score was adapted from Best (1997). Based on the interpretation of mean score, the result revealed the nine dimensions; teaching and learning, engagement, community, assessment and feedback, dissertation (research work), organization and management, resources, support, and skills development was at 3.67 – 5.00. This means the nine dimensions of postgraduate taught experience in UiTM Negeri Sembilan were at a high level.

TABLE III Interpretation of Mean Score

Level	Mean Score
Low	1.00-2.33
Moderate	2.34-3.66
High	3.67-5.00

TABLE IV Cronbach Alpha Value of Postgraduate Taught Experience

Dimensions	Mean	Std. Deviation	Level of Interpretation
Teaching and Learning	4.64	.525	High
Engagement	4.50	.708	High
Community	4.23	.866	High
Assessment and Feedback	4.43	.722	High

Dissertation (research work)	4.49	.677	High
Organization and Management	4.40	.720	High
Resources	4.26	.757	High
Support	4.29	.736	High
Skills Development	4.42	.714	High

DISCUSSION

The study's findings highlighted a high level of postgraduate taught experience in each dimension.

Teaching and Learning

The findings showed a high level of teaching and learning experienced by postgraduates. The findings aligned with Maulana et al. (2023), which showed that students feel highly satisfied with the teaching and learning experience. The postgraduate curriculum is frequently planned according to the current academic advancements and industry requirements. Research indicated that a curriculum that met current industry needs enhanced student satisfaction and their perception of education's value (Khan et al., 2022). UiTM places a strong emphasis on updating its curriculum to reflect current trends in the industry could be a factor in the respect students hold for their educational experience. Collectively, this element contributes to the favourable perception of the postgraduate teaching and learning environment in UiTM.

Engagement

The findings showed that engagement among postgraduate students in UiTM Negeri Sembilan was perceived at a high level. Engagement played a critical role in students' overall academic success and personal development. High engagement levels were often linked to enhanced motivation, collaboration, and a deeper sense of belonging within the academic environment (Cayubit, 2022). The high engagement reported in this study suggested that students actively participate in various educational activities, likely due to the opportunities provided by the university for research involvement, academic discussions, and participation in conferences. Such opportunities allow postgraduate students to expand their networks and gain valuable insights that contribute to their academic growth.

Community

This finding also showed a high sense of community among postgraduate students in UiTM Negeri Sembilan. The university's efforts to create regular social and academic events, such as seminars and group research projects, fostered a sense of camaraderie and shared purpose among students. The creation of a strong academic community provided students with a support system that could help them navigate their postgraduate journey more effectively (McCulloh, 2022). UiTM Negeri Sembilan's postgraduate and administration initiatives to promote a collaborative and inclusive environment have likely contributed to this positive outcome. This supportive community is essential for student well-being, as it reduces feelings of isolation that can sometimes accompany postgraduate studies.

Assessment and Feedback

The dimension of assessment and feedback was also demonstrated at a high level. Effective assessment and timely, constructive feedback were essential for student learning and development. Postgraduate students in UiTM Negeri Sembilan reported high satisfaction levels with the assessment and feedback they received. This was consistent with a past study indicating that clear and actionable feedback enhances students' academic performance and research output (Gabriel, 2022). The institution's commitment to providing detailed feedback that helps students improve their work could be a significant factor contributing to this high score. Furthermore, the use of formative assessments to guide student progress appears to be a key strength in the postgraduate programmes.

Dissertation

The findings revealed that students view the dissertation process with a high satisfaction level. Dissertation work was a critical component of postgraduate studies, often determining the depth of learning and research skills acquired. UiTM Negeri Sembilan's postgraduate centre emphasised providing structured support during the dissertation process, such as regular meetings with supervisors and access to research facilities. At the same time, students were provided with clear guidelines and sufficient resources to carry out their research. According to Melati et al. (2024), research facilities provided essential resources that contributed to a conducive learning atmosphere, positively impacting students' motivation and academic success. As a result, it further enhances their confidence in completing their dissertations successfully.

Organisation and Management

The strong agreement among students on the effective organisation and management of postgraduate programmes led them to experience a high satisfaction level with their learning experience. This means the students were satisfied with the university's administrative processes. Effective organisation and management were pivotal in ensuring students had access to the needed resources and that academic activities ran smoothly (Asad et al., 2022). UiTM Negeri Sembilan's postgraduate centre efficiently handles student registration, DRP sessions, and VIVA examinations. The transparent communication of deadlines and requirements also contributed to the high scores in this dimension. This emphasised that well-managed programmes might reduce student stress and create a structured environment conducive to learning.

Resources

According to the findings, students rated resources such as libraries, online databases, and technological tools provided in UiTM Negeri Sembilan at a high level of satisfaction. Previous studies demonstrated that digital resources and library resources such as online repositories and journals provided essential support for postgraduate researchers (Ajiboye et al., 2023; Njoroge & Mutwiri, 2022). This might facilitate access to a broader range of materials and enhance their research experience. The availability of modern databases, extensive IT infrastructure, and various educational tools allowed students to carry out their research effectively. The university's dedication to keeping these resources up-to-date is likely a key factor contributing to high satisfaction levels in this area.

Support

The results above showed postgraduate students in UiTM Negeri Sembilan perceived support as high satisfaction, either academic or non-academic. Daulay et al. (2022) stated that services like counseling, career guidance, and academic mentoring are crucial in helping students manage their workload and personal lives. This demonstrated that the dedicated staff's comprehensive support network for postgraduate students in UiTM Negeri Sembilan plays a significant role in creating a positive experience and promoting student well-being. The support systems not only enhance academic performance but also foster a sense of belonging and motivation among students, contributing to their overall personal and professional growth.

Skills Development

Finally, the findings indicated that postgraduate students in UiTM Negeri Sembilan experienced a high level of skills development throughout their postgraduate studies. The university's commitment to providing workshops, seminars, and other skill-building activities likely contributed to the positive perception among students (Lazzari et al., 2022). Besides, Adedokun and Oyetunde-Joshu (2024) also signified strong supervision and mentorship in research methodologies, critical thinking, and academic writing were key outcomes of postgraduate education. These skills helped students solve complex problems, engage in academic activities, and contribute to their fields in a meaningful way. As a result, postgraduate programmes that prioritised such development not only prepared students for future academic pursuits but also equipped them with the skills necessary for success in a wide range of careers.

IMPLICATIONS

This study presented several important implications for improving postgraduate education in UiTM Negeri Sembilan. The students' high satisfaction levels with teaching, learning, and programme management highlighted the need for universities to continue updating their curricula to reflect both academic advancements and industry needs. This ensured that students were well-prepared for the workforce and perceived their education as valuable. Additionally, the effective organisation and management of postgraduate programmes were shown to reduce student stress, suggesting that maintaining these standards was crucial for a positive learning experience. The findings also emphasised the need for better resource allocation to enhance student engagement and academic success, particularly in providing digital tools and research support. Building a stronger sense of community through academic and social activities could help foster collaboration and reduce the feelings of isolation that often accompany postgraduate studies. Furthermore, implementing continuous feedback systems and offering targeted skill development opportunities would provide students with the support they need to excel both academically and professionally. These implications pointed to areas where universities could focus on improving the overall postgraduate experience.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that postgraduate students in UiTM Negeri Sembilan are generally satisfied with the quality of teaching, learning, and the organisation of their programmes. The alignment of the curriculum with industry trends and effective resource management have contributed to this positive experience. However, there are opportunities for further enhancement. It is recommended that the curriculum continues to evolve in line with industry developments, while digital resources and research support should be expanded to meet the diverse needs of students. Additionally, fostering a stronger sense of community through academic and social activities could help alleviate feelings of isolation among postgraduates. Future efforts should also focus on providing more targeted skill development programmes and ensuring timely feedback to support students' academic and professional growth. Comparative studies with other institutions could offer insights into developing best practices for postgraduate education.

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