

Eleven Years (1999–2009) of The Malaysian Journal of Distance Education: A Bibliometric Study

Mohd Faiz Hilmi^{1*} and Yanti Mustapha²

¹School of Distance Education, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, Malaysia

²Universiti Teknologi MARA, Department of Finance and Banking,
Merbuk, Kedah, Malaysia

*faiz@usm.my

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to analyse the publication and citation patterns in the Malaysian Journal of Distance Education (MJDE). This study covered articles published in the MJDE from 1999–2009. A bibliometric examination of 143 journal articles published in the MJDE was carried out. Furthermore, this study also compared the citation count of the MJDE with those of five similar journals focused on distance education/e-learning. The approach used in this study was document analysis. Information is presented based on (1) the types of articles published, (2) the methodologies employed and (3) the topic area emphasised. Frequently published topics are reported as part of the findings in this study. This study revealed that conceptual or review articles are receiving the most citations. This result can be used to review current research trends and to explore potential research directions in e-learning and distance education. The findings of this study will help researchers in e-learning and distance education choose research topics.

Keywords: Malaysian Journal of Distance Education, distance education, publication analysis

Introduction

The School of Distance Education (SDE), Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), has been providing distance education programmes in Malaysia since 1971 and recently celebrated its forty-year anniversary. In the last four decades, the distance education program has evolved from a unit under the School of Humanities to a centre administrating programmes offered by other schools in USM and finally to a full-fledged school offering its own undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. Through 2010, 16,321 students have graduated with their first degree. In addition, the SDE has produced many Masters and PhD graduates.

The SDE is a true distance education institution where the students attend classes from their own location through live video conferences streaming through the Internet, and approximately 6,000 of the SDE's current students are scattered all over Malaysia. They attend classes from the comfort of their homes or from anywhere in the world where an Internet connection is available. In its four decades of educating Malaysians through distance education, the SDE has evolved from simply providing notes prepared by lecturers (1971), to the transmission of recorded lectures through over the radio (1979), to distributing pre-recorded audio and video cassettes (1983), to live audio conferences (1988), to live audio (audio and electronic board) conferences (1991), to live video conferences (1993), to online learning portals (2003) to the current live video streaming through the Internet (since 2008).

The MJDE was first published in December 1999 by the School of Distance Education, Universiti Sains Malaysia. It has been published bi-annually in June and December since 2000. The MJDE is an international peer-reviewed journal that focuses on research and the practices of distance education. The MJDE's target readers are policy makers, administrators, academicians, teachers and students within the field of Distance Education. The MJDE covers a wide range of subjects such as the practical usage of technology, e-learning, flexible delivery systems, the application of technology in distance and open learning, innovative teaching methods and lifelong learning and continuing education. For the period covered in this study, from 1999 to 2009, the MJDE was managed by three chief editors. Table 1 lists the chief editors of the MJDE since 1999. The longest-serving chief editor was Rozhan Mohammed Idrus, one

of the pioneer professors in distance education in Malaysia, who served from 2000 to 2005.

Table 1 Chief editorship

| Tenure | Chief editor |
|----------------|-----------------------|
| 1999 – 2000 | Md. Noor Saleh |
| 2000 – 2005 | Rozhan Mohammed Idrus |
| 2006 – 2009 | Hanafi Atan |
| 2010 – 2012 | Zuraini Zakaria |
| 2012 – current | Hanafi Atan |

For the MJDE to publish high-quality research articles and receive more citations in the future, it is important to understand the current situation. This study was conducted with the purpose of answering the following questions: What has been published by the MJDE? How many of the MJDE's articles were cited? How does the MJDE's performance compare to those of similar journals?

The objectives of this study were (1) to understand the bibliometric characteristics of the MJDE and (2) to compare the citation count of the MJDE with those of five similar journals focused on distance education/e-learning. To achieve these objectives, this study reviewed 143 articles published in 21 issues of the MJDE from 1999 to 2009. There was only one issue in 1999 and two issues annually from 2000 to 2009. Editorials and book reviews were excluded from the study.

Data and Methods

The methodology adopted in this study was based on the methods used by Tiew, Abrizah and Kiran (2002), Abdullah and Ab Rahman (2009) and Hussain, Fatima and Kumar (2011). The bibliometric data for the study were obtained from print copies of journal issues published from 1999 to 2009. There are 143 articles published in 21 issues during that 11-year period. From these 143 articles, a range of data was then extracted for analysis. The data collected for analysis were the number of articles, the article type, the number of references in each article, the citation count based on Harzing's Publish or Perish software (Harzing, 2007), and the topic and methods of the study described in each article. The data were collected and tabulated using Microsoft Excel for analyses.

Several analyses were conducted in this study. First, the articles were counted based on types or categories of topics. Second, the references cited in each article were counted. Third, the citations received by each article were counted utilising Publish or Perish software (Harzing, 2007). Fourth, the topics and methods of articles that have been cited were summarised. Finally, this study compared the number of articles cited with the numbers of cited articles for similar journals in this field.

Results and Discussion

Publication Analysis

From 1999 to 2009, the MJDE published 143 articles. Table 2 presents the number of articles and their types (review or conceptual, quantitative, qualitative, case study, how to or conceptual and mixed method). The categorisation of articles is adapted from Hussain, Fatima and Kumar (2011), Bakri and Willet (2008) and Tiew, Abrizah and Kiran (2002). As Table 2 shows, the majority of articles published were review or conceptual articles.

Table 2 Summary of method applied

| Method | Frequency |
|--------------|-----------|
| Review | 7 |
| Quantitative | 4 |
| Qualitative | 3 |
| Case Study | 2 |
| How To | 1 |
| Mixed Method | 1 |

Reference Analysis

Table 3 presents the reference count for articles published in the MJDE. Articles published in the MJDE cited between 3 and 54 references, with an average of 17 references cited per article. The majority of the articles published cited between 11 and 20 references. In addition, 87% of the articles cited no more than 30 references.

Table 3 Reference count

| References | No of articles |
|------------|----------------|
| 3 to 10 | 40 |
| 11 to 20 | 59 |
| 21 to 30 | 26 |
| 31 to 40 | 14 |
| 41 to 50 | 3 |
| 51 to 54 | 1 |

Citation Analysis

The citation count has become a standard measurement of a researcher's productivity. There are several scholarly indexes that give citation counts, such as Thomson Reuters' Web of Science (WOS), Scopus and Google Scholar. WOS and Scopus are subscription-based indexing services, whereas Google Scholar is freely available to anyone. Due to its open access nature, Google Scholar is widely used. Furthermore, software capable of producing citation analysis, Publish or Perish, was created using the Google Scholar database (Harzing, 2007). According to Publish or Perish software, 18 articles published in the MJDE have been cited between 1 and 5 times. The article with the highest number of citations is by Windeknecht (2004) and titled "Productive Diversity in Changing Realities of Distance Education: Is Online Group Assessment the Answer?" Table 4 summarises the citation count of articles published in the MJDE within the analysis period.

Table 4 Citation count (as of August 2011)

| Times cited | Articles |
|-------------|---|
| 5 | Windeknecht (2004) |
| 4 | Silong, Ibrahim and Abu Samah (2001); Cable, Goodliff and Miller (2007); Embi, Mustapha and Abdul Aziz (2001) |
| 3 | Pandian (2004); McNaught (2004); Dass (2001); Krithivasan, Baru and Iyer (2005) |
| 2 | M. H. Abdullah (2004); Gaba (2005); Fleming and Cribb (2004) |
| 1 | Sutton (2004); Joyes (2006); Thang and Murugaiah (2009); Dzakiria (2004); Walker-Gibbs (2004); Ku Mahamud, Mohd Alipiah and Johari (2000); Danaher, Harreveld and Li (2000) |

Topic and Method Analysis

Because citation count is an important indicator of a researcher's productivity, it is necessary to understand what topics that are being cited. Therefore, further analyses were conducted to understand the topics and methods featured in the articles. According to Zawacki-Richter, Bäcker and Vogt (2009), research in distance education focused on instructional design and individual learning processes. Topics and methods are summarised in Table 5. Most of the articles that have been cited were review or conceptual articles. However, all 18 articles were on diverse topics, and no one topic emerged as significant. A summary of topics is as follows:

1. Course Design
 - (a) Development
 - (b) Implementation
2. Cultural Influence
3. Graduates Employment
4. Learning Process
5. Development & Implementation
 - (a) Module
 - (b) Teaching & Learning Model
 - (c) Policy Developments
6. Learners
 - (a) Problems & Supports for Distance
 - (b) Learning Practices
 - (c) Control
 - (d) Student Readiness (Time Management)
7. Research Methodology
8. Social Presence in Online Conferences
9. Technology

Table 5 Topics and methods

| Article | Times cited | Topic | Method | Article length (No of pages) |
|----------------------------|-------------|--|--------------|------------------------------|
| Windeknecht (2004) | 5 | Teaching and Learning Model | Case Study | 19 |
| Silong et al. (2001) | 4 | Learner Control | Mixed Method | 27 |
| Cable et al. (2007) | 4 | Policy Developments | Qualitative | 20 |
| Embi et al. (2001) | 4 | Technology | Review | 13 |
| Pandian (2004) | 3 | Learning & Teaching Practices of Distance Learners | Quantitative | 26 |
| McNaught (2004) | 3 | Cultural Influence | Review | 17 |
| (Dass, 2001) | 3 | Problems & Supports for Distance Learners | Quantitative | 21 |
| Krithivasan et al. (2005) | 3 | Distance Education Model | Review | 20 |
| M. H. Abdullah (2004) | 2 | Social Presence in Online Conferences | Qualitative | 22 |
| Gaba (2005) | 2 | Graduates Employment | Quantitative | 10 |
| Fleming and Cribb (2004) | 2 | Course Design & Development | Review | 16 |
| Sutton (2004) | 1 | Technology | Review | 21 |
| Joyes (2006) | 1 | Technology | Review | 15 |
| Thang and Murugaiah (2009) | 1 | Module Development & Implementation | Qualitative | 20 |
| Dzakiria (2004) | 1 | Research Methodology | How To | 19 |
| Walker-Gibbs (2004) | 1 | Learning Process | Case Study | 11 |
| Ku Mahamud et al. (2000) | 1 | Student Readiness (Time Management) | Quantitative | 8 |
| Danaher et al. (2000) | 1 | Course Design & Implementation | Review | 16 |

Comparison with Selected Distance Education/E-learning Journals

In addition to analysing the bibliometric characteristics of the MJDE, this study was also compared the number of articles cited with the numbers of cited articles for similar journals. The MJDE was first published in 1999, and it was among the earliest journals in distance education/e-learning. Since then, numerous other journals have been introduced. The International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning (IRRODL) was first published by Athabasca University in 2000. In 2001, the Malaysian Educational Technology Association (META) published the first issue of The Malaysian Journal of Educational Technology (my.JET). In 2002, The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology (TOJET), sponsored by Sakarya University in Turkey, published its first issue. The Asian Society of Open and Distance Education published the first issue of the Asian Journal of Distance Education (AJDE) in 2003. The Malaysian Educational Technology Association (META) began a new journal and published the first issue of The Malaysian Online Journal of Instructional Technology (MOJIT) in 2004.

Even though the MJDE was the first to publish among the 6 journals, it is not highly cited. Table 6 summarises the citation analysis conducted in September 2011 using Harzing's Publish or Perish software. The TOJET received the highest number of citations 195, followed by the IRRODL with 95. The single most frequently cited article was published by the IRRODL and cited 234 times. It is possible that the MJDE might not be highly cited due to the nature of its publication. The MJDE is distributed only in print; the full text of the articles was not available online until recently. This is different from the TOJET and the IRRODL, for which the full text of articles has been consistently available online.

Table 6 Comparison of selected Distance Education/E-learning Journals
(Data as of September 2011)

| Journal | First published | Access | Citation count | Highest citation | Host | URL |
|---------|-----------------|--------------|----------------|------------------|---|--|
| MJDE | 1999 | Printed copy | 18 | 5 | School of Distance Education, Universiti Sains Malaysia | http://pppjj.usm.my/mjde/ |
| IRRODL | 2000 | Open Access | 95 | 234 | Athabasca University | http://www.irrodl.org/index.php/irrodl |
| my.JET | 2001 | Open Access | 7 | 5 | Malaysian Educational Technology Association (META) | http://www.freewebs.com/mjet/ http://www.myjet-meta.com/ |
| TOJET | 2002 | Open Access | 195 | 45 | Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology | http://www.tojet.net/ |
| AJDE | 2003 | Open Access | 38 | 28 | The Asian Society of Open and Distance Education | http://www.asianjde.org/ |
| MOJIT | 2004 | Open Access | 43 | 8 | Malaysian Educational Technology Association (META) | http://pppjj.usm.my/mojit/ |

Conclusions

The MJDE has been publishing research reports on distance education/e-learning since 1999. Since then, it has been managed by four chief editors. The analyses and comparison presented in this article revealed several characteristics of the MJDE, both strengths and weaknesses. By understanding these characteristics, exploiting the strengths and resolving the weaknesses, the MJDE will not only continue to publish excellent research on distance education/e-learning but also improve its visibility and therefore increase its citation count.

The MJDE is published by the SDE, the faculty of which comprises outstanding researchers on e-learning and distance education, including two prominent professors in distance education. This group of experts should continue to conduct research on this topic and publish articles in the MJDE.

As other journals with high citation counts are accessible online, the MJDE should consistently make all its articles available online, thus making it easier for researchers to access and cite those articles. Because the MJDE has recently made all articles available online, the citation count is expected to increase.

Review articles are being cited and therefore the submission of review articles should be encouraged. A special review issue can cater to such a purpose.

Finally, continuous improvement will ensure that the MJDE continues to be an important publication on distance education/e-learning. The editorial team of the MJDE must continuously monitor, observe and learn from similar journals in this field; innovate; and make changes accordingly. The publication of quality articles that can be easily accessed will ensure that the MJDE will be an important source of information on e-learning and distance education.

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