

An analysis on the Performance of the Malaysian Journal of Distance Education, 1999-2009

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Abstract: The first issue of the Malaysian Journal of Distance Education (MJDE) was published in 1999. After a decade of publication, there is a need to evaluate its performance in certain areas subject area covered, authorship, circulation, its visibility in international databases, acceptance among scholars and some other issues. A total of 21 issue of the journal published during a decade between 1999-2009 were used as the research material. The study revealed that in ten years, MJDE has covered a wide range of topics under the main theme of distance education through contributions from many countries. Its acceptance among scholars in distance education is unquestionable but its visibility in international databases is rather poor. This study examines the strengths and weaknesses of MJDE in the last 10 years of its publication.

Key words: Scholarly journal publishing, MJDE, circulation, authorship, database, Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

Many writers have conducted studies on the development and performance of Malaysian journals. Hashim (2011) published his study on the development of Malaysian scholarly journals between 1847-2997. More than a decade earlier, Tiew (1998) studied the history of Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society (JMBRAS) as well as the development of some of journals published in Malaysia (Tiew, 1999). In a later study, Tiew (2003) conducted a bibliometric study on several Malaysian historical journals. Another prominent researcher in this field, Ngah (1997) studied the visibility of Malaysian scholarly journals in international indexing and abstracting services. Roosfa conducted many studies on selected journals. For example in 2002, he studied the performance of *Akademika*, a journal for sciences and humanities. He then reported on the performance of *Jurnal Filologi Melayu*, *Jurnal Penterjemah* and *Jurnal Psikologi Malaysia*. This study will focus on the development of Malaysian Journal of Distance Education, 1999-2009.

The School of Distance Education (SDE) Universiti Sains Malaysia, previously known as the Centre for Off-Campus Studies was established in 1971 to provide opportunities for working adults to obtain tertiary education. Through this innovative approach, working adults are able to pursue undergraduate courses while remaining in full-time employment. It was the pioneer programme in Malaysia which offered degrees through distance education. Currently, four undergraduate programmes are available via distance education, namely Sciences, Social Sciences, Arts and Management and

students need to spend a minimum of 4 years to complete their programme. Learning and teaching activities and practical classes are conducted at the 12 regional centres located throughout the country (SDE, 2011).

Besides the undergraduate programme, SDE also offers postgraduate programmes by research, namely Master of Arts, Master of Science, Master of Social Science, Master of Science (Environmental Science), Master of Science (Occupational Health and Safety) and Doctor of Philosophy. These programmes are offered either full-time or part-time and the candidates are required to undertake a research project under the supervision of the academic staff. The award of the degree is based on the examination of a thesis submitted at the end of the research component.

Currently, SDE has a total of 73 full-time academic staff members, mostly with doctoral degrees. Apart from teaching undergraduates courses, all members of staff are actively engaged in research projects and capable of providing quality supervision to the postgraduate research students. In line with USM's vision of competing at the global level, SDE is committed to maintaining professional excellence. In 1999, SDE published the first issue of the Malaysian Journal of Distance Education (MJDE). Although, there are other education journals published in this country or in the Southeast Asian Region, MJDE was special because it was devoted exclusively to distance education.

Editorial: The first issue of MJDE was managed by an Editorial Board headed by Rozhan Mohammed Idrus as the Chief Editor, all the board members, faculty members

of SDE, Universiti Sains Malaysia. Rozhan headed the board from the first issue in 1999 until the 14th issue (Vol. 8, No. 1) of the journal in 2006. Among the editorial board in the early issues of MJDE were Hanafi Atan, Abdul Rahman Othman, Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid, Ibrahim Jaafar, Ishak Che Long, Kua Azam Tuan Lonik and Zabidah Ramudin. Hanafi Atan then replaced Rozhan as the Chief Editor from the year 2006 (Vol. 8, No. 2) until 2009 (Vol. 11, No. 2).

An International Advisory Board was also appointed consisting of experts in the field of distance education within Malaysia and abroad. Among the early members of the board were Anthony Dodds (University of Namibia, Namibia), Azahari Ismail (UPM, Malaysia), Ding Xingfu (Central Radio and TV University, China), Ismail Kailani (UTM, Malaysia), Ku Rohana Ku Mahmud (UUM, Malaysia), Mansor Fadzil (OUM, Malaysia), Mohamad Fauzan Nordin (IIUM, Malaysia), Narayanan Kulathuramaiyer (UNIMAS, Sarawak), Szarina Abdullah (UiTM, Malaysia), Tajul Ariffin Noordin (UKM, Malaysia), Terry Evans (Deakin University, Australia) and Takashi Sakamoto (National Institute of Multimedia Education, Japan).

Authorship: In a decade, 141 articles were published in 21 issues of MJDE. In terms of authorship, 62 papers or about 44% were contributed by single authors and another 79 (56%) papers from multiple authors. Table 1 shows the authorship of articles published in MJDE. The names of the top ten most prolific contributors is shown in Table 2. They published 64 articles (45%).

Table 1: Authorship in MJDE 1999-2009

Author	Articles
Single author	62
Co-author (2 authors)	38
(3 authors)	31
(4 authors)	2
(5 authors)	3
(6 authors)	1
(8 authors)	4
Total	141

Table 2: Most prolific contributors

Prolific contributors	Articles
Rozhan M Idrus	11
Hanafi Atan	9
Zuraidah Abd Rahman	8
Abu Daud Silong	7
Gordon Joyes	6
Md Noor Saleh	6
Ahmad Mohamad	5
Nazirah Ahmad Azli	5
Daing Zaidah	4
Bahaman Abu Samah	3
Total	64

Rozhan M. Idrus and Hanafi Atan who were the first and the second Chief Editors of the journal are the two most prolific contributors to the journal. Both of them published an average of one paper per year. Zuraidah Abd Rahman who is also in the editorial board is the third on the list.

This is not a healthy practise in a scholarly journal. Monopoly of contribution to a journal by its own editorial board members reflects badly on the journal, especially its system of peer review. The readers and contributors will question its status as a refereed journal. It will also give the impression that the journal is a faculty journal, not a national or an international journal. A more in-depth analysis of the contributors of the journal revealed the real problems faced by MJDE, especially the acquisition process. It appears that the editorial board solved their problem in getting papers by publishing their own papers. The contributors may also publish as many papers as they want if there are no other papers available. The publisher of the journal faced difficulties in getting papers, especially from contributors from outside the centre as early as 1999 when they wanted to publish the maiden issue of the journal.

In the first issue, the Chief Editor published three coauthored papers, Md Noor Saleh (the Dean of SDE) published two single author papers and another paper which he coauthored with two authors. Hanafi Atan, the second Chief Editor published two coauthored papers in this issue. The same scenario can also be observed in the 3rd, 5th, 7th and 9th issues. The Chief Editor, Rozhan Mohammed Idrus together with Hanafi Atan, Zuraidah Abdul Rahman and Nazirah Ahmad Azli coauthored two papers in the 3rd issue of the journal.

There was not only inbreeding among them but they also allowed the same practice from contributors from outside the centre. In the 5th issue MJDE published three papers coauthored by Abu Daud Silong. Two of the papers were coauthored by Abu Daud Silong with Daing Zaidah Ibrahim and Bahaman Abu Samah. In the 7th issue, Hanafi Atan and Rozhan Mohammed Idrus coauthored two papers with another different authors. In the 9th issue, Rozhan Mohammed Idrus published two coauthored papers.

The first paper he coauthored with another three authors and in another paper he coauthored with another seven authors. In the 19th issue, MJDE published three articles by Gordon Joyes and another two article by the same author in the next issue. On the other hand, analysis on the origins of the contributors reveals the strength of MJDE. The 141 papers published in MJDE were contributed by 203 writers both local and foreign. The majority of the contributors (126 or 62%) were from abroad

and the rest (77 or 38%) were locals, mainly from Malaysian universities. Local contributors are mainly from USM with total number of 34 researcher. Detail of the contributors from local universities and institutions is shown in Table 3.

Table 4 shows the biggest number of foreign contributors were from India (21) followed by Australia (13), United Kingdom (13) and China and Hong Kong (12). This is a positive development for MJDE as it indicates that the journal is well accepted by foreign scholars and researchers in the field of distance education. Acquisition seems to be one of the major problems faced by MJDE.

Table 3: Number of contributors from local universities and other institutions

Universities/Institutions	Articles
USM	34
UM	10
UiTM	7
UKM	7
UUM	4
KUTHO	2
UTAR	2
Curtin University	2
UPSI	1
OUM	1
IUM	1
UNITEN	1
MUST	1
UMS	1
Others	3
Total	77

Table 4: Number of foreign contributors by country

Foreign contributors	Articles
India	21
Australia	16
United Kingdom	13
China and Hong Kong	12
Turkey	8
USA	8
Oman	6
Canada	5
Uganda	3
Saudi Arabia	3
Bahrain	3
Ghana	3
Nigeria	3
Bangladesh	3
Trinidad and Tobago	2
New Zealand	2
UAE	2
Netherlands	2
Jordan	2
Philippine	2
Botswana	1
Kerya	1
Qatar	1
Indonesia	1
Mauritius	1
Swaziland	1
South Africa	1
Total	126

The problem reflected by the inconsistency of number of articles published in each issue and the thickness of the journal as shown in Table 5.

Coverage: In the 10 years period, the articles published in MJDE covered a wide range of sub-disciplines in distance education. The most frequently published topics and sub topics in MJDE shown in Table 6. It is apparent that MJDE has become an important platform for scholars to

Table 5: Number of articles and the thickness of MJDE, 1999-2009

Issue No.	No. of articles published	Page No.
1 (1)	6	76
2 (1)	4	92
2 (2)	6	77
3 (1)	6	85
3 (2)	6	101
4 (1)	6	106
4 (2)	7	120
5 (1)	7	107
5 (2)	7	88
6 (1)	8	142
6 (2)	6	110
7 (1)	8	109
7 (2)	7	112
8 (1)	7	101
8 (2)	7	115
9 (1)	8	126
9 (2)	7	143
10 (1)	8	141
10 (2)	7	100
11 (1)	6	90
11 (2)	7	95
Total	141	2236

Table 6: The most frequently published topics and sub topics in MJDE (in alphabetical order)

Topics and sub topics	Frequencies
Adult	5
Non-formal education; adult learners in cyberspace	
adult learners' achievement; adult learning theory	
adult students	
Computer	3
In distance education; computer competencies	
computer-assisted instruction	
Distance education	25
Against HIV and AIDS; assessment and the role of teacher	
audio instructions; audiographics teletutorial	
content and page design; evaluation; facilitation of	
for womens' development in Malaysia in South Africa	
information technology; internet technology; learner support	
system; nutrition course; online learning modules	
satellite based; television programmes; tutors competencies	
use of video programmes; distance education programme	
Post graduate students at Universiti Sains Malaysia	
distance education research in India; distance education video	
conferencing effectiveness; distance teacher education	
In Australia and China; distance technical education	
Distance learning	9
Continuous support experiences in South Africa	
interaction in; regional collaboration; theoretical approaches;	
distance learning programme; engineering; reflections and	
reactions; teachers	
E-educator	2
Tutors' perceptions; training module	

Table 6: Continue

Topics and sub topics	Frequencies
e-learning	15
Career development; public relations courses	
research methodology; e-Learning for development	
e-Learning design for localisation and personalization	
e-Learning development planning and managing	
e-Learning programs setting up and maintaining	
electronic distance learners academic performance	
e-Management; e-Tutor training material design	
e-Tutors: training	
Online conference	12
Online education and the job market; online empathy	
training tool; online group assessment; online learning	
models of delivery system; support tools; online learning	
community; online learning environment; practices	
online learning material; supporting developers	
online learning support; students perspectives; online	
pedagogy; tutors' perceptions; online tutor training	
in higher education	
Web base learning	6
web learning environments; web-based courseware	
web-based training; web-based training model	

Table 7: Libraries collection of MJDE

Perpustakaan	Jurnal Pengajian Umum yang disimpan (bil.)
USM library	4 (2), 5 (1), 5 (2), 6 (1), 6 (2), 7 (1), 7 (2), 8 (1), 8 (2), 9 (1), 9 (2), 10 (1), 10 (2), 11 (1), 11 (2)
UUM library	2 (1), 2 (2), 3 (1), 3 (2), 4 (1), 4 (2), 5 (1), 5 (2), 6 (1), 6 (2), 7 (1), 7 (2), 8 (1), 8 (2), 9 (1), 9 (2)
National library	2 (1), 2 (2), 6 (1), 6 (2), 7 (1), 7 (2), 8 (1), 8 (2), 9 (1), 9 (2), 10 (1), 10 (2), 11 (1), 11 (2)
UTM library	3 (1), 3 (2), 4 (1), 4 (2), 5 (1), 6 (1), 6 (2), 7 (1), 7 (2), 8 (1), 9 (1), 9 (2), 10 (2), 11 (1), 11 (2)
UPSI library	2 (2), 3 (1), 3 (2), 4 (1), 5 (2), 6 (2), 9 (2), 10 (2), 11 (1), 11 (2)
UITM library	11 (1), 11 (2)

discuss various issues in distance education. Subjects covered and discussed in MJDE proved that there are serious debate, articulation, discussion and finding taking place and presented in MJDE.

Circulation: In terms of circulation, MJDE is not very well circulated. Table 7 show its distribution among major research libraries in the countries. All of the libraries including The National Library holding incomplete set of MJDE. Some authors who published their works in MJDE

sent their articles to the Malaysian Abstract and Indexing System (MyAIS). MJDE journal is not listed in any international index and abstract data bases.

CONCLUSION

This study revealed the strengths and weaknesses of MJDE. MJDE is well accepted by scholars in the field of distance education. The journal has become a platform for scholarly communication in its field. On the other hand, MJDE is weak in manuscript acquisition and peer review system. The publisher and the editorial board need to pay more attention to overcoming these two weaknesses.

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