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Professionalism Practice among Lecturers in Polytechnic in Malaysia

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Abstract
This study was carried out by using a questionnaire survey. The Cronbach's Alpha value for the questionnaire was calculated as 0.956, a value of which is considered as reliable. Descriptive statistical analysis was carried out by using SPSS software version 22.0 in order to identify the level of professional practice. The results of the descriptive analysis showed that the level of professional practice among polytechnic lecturers was generally at a moderate level.Certain attributes such as publishing practices, collaborative networks and research, however, were found to be at a medium low level. However, the practice of work ethics, course contents and pedagogy are all at a highly satisfactory level. This situation clearly shows a pattern which portrays that lecturers' common practices are the highest mean score while the rest of the new assessment elements in the scheme of educational service for higher education (PPPT) such as research, collaborative networks and publications have not been fully mastered by polytechnic lecturers.
Keywords: Professionalism, Professional Practices, Polytechnics in Malaysia.

Introduction

Polytechnics, pioneered by Politeknik Ungku Omar, Perak in 1969, are governed by the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia and have been in operation for nearly half a century. Since then, various reforms and improvements in services have been carried out such as the inclusion of polytechnics into the Ministry of Higher Education from the Ministry of Education in 2004. Similarly, changes occur in service schemes from the Scheme for Educational Service Officer (DG) to the Scheme for Higher Educational Service Officer (DH) in 2008. The PPPT scheme has an appraisal system for promotion that indirectly assesses lecturers' level of professionalism, namely the Polytechnic Excellence scheme, which all employees need to go through as outlined for promotion purposes. This situation is different from the previous scheme which merely fixes annual performance marks and service periods for promotion purposes. After a decade of

implementation of the PPPT scheme and the Polytechnic Excellence System, researchers hope to see the stage, pattern and trends of lecturers' professionalism based on identified attributes

Research Purposes

This research was carried out to examine levels of professional practices among polytechnic lecturers based on seven attributes , namely, course contents, pedagogy, supervision, publication, research, collaborative network and work ethics. This research also analyzes the highest and the lowest mean score reported by respondents. 45 relevant items are listed to measure the professional practices in question. Nevertheless, there is no evidence indicating the contribution of the attributes in professional practice. Therefore, descriptive analysis is used to determine the rank order of the attributes' mean score. By implementing the analysis it is hoped that it will show the pattern or trend of polytechnic lecturers' professional practice.

Methodology

The questionnaire used consists of seven (7) attributes with forty-five (45) items, namely course content practices (5 items), pedagogy (9 items), supervision (6 items), research (8 items), publication (6 items), collaborative network (6 items), and work ethics (5 items). The reliability value of Cronbach's Alpha for this questionnaire is 0.956. The research sample consisted of 1490 male and female lecturers from 17 polytechnics, which can be categorised into four different types (Premier, conventional 1, conventional 2 and METrO). The lecturers are experts from different fields, namely, engineering and non-engineering; have different degrees of academic qualifications, namely, graduate and postgraduate; and have covered different teaching experiences. The findings were analyzed using the SPSS 22.0 software. In this study, descriptive analysis is used to describe the level of polytechnic lecturers' professional practice involving mean score and standard deviation. Meanwhile, level interpretation based on Nunally (1994) ie low level with mean between 1.00 - 2.00, medium low with mean between 2.01 to 3.00, medium high with mean between 3.01 to 4.00 and high with mean between 4.01 and 5.00.

Finding

The results of the study indicates that, the level of professional practices among polytechnic lecturers are at the level of medium high with the mean value of 3.54 and the standard deviation of 0.51. However, various different levels were noticed if the attributes are viewed individually. Out of seven (7) attributes that were analyzed, three (3) attributes were at the highest level , namely, work ethics with a mean score of 4.27 and a standard deviation of 0.51; course content with a mean score of 4.24 and a standard deviation of 0.48; and pedagogy with a mean score of 4.09 and a standard deviation of 0.45. Only one attribute is at a moderate high level, namely, supervision with a mean score of 3.91 and a standard deviation of 0.94. Meanwhile, three attributes are at the medium low mean score, namely publication with a mean score of 2.70 and a standard deviation of 1.01; collaborative network with a mean score of 2.87 and a standard deviation of 1.00; and research with a mean score of 2.88 and a standard deviation of 0.94.

Table 1 : Mean Score and Standard Deviation for Levels of Professional Practices among Polytechnic Lecturers in Malaysia.

Professional Practices	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Course Content	1490	4.24	0.48	High
Pedagogy	1490	4.09	0.45	High
Supervision	1490	3.91	0.63	Medium high
Research	1490	2.88	0.94	Medium low
Publication	1490	2.70	1.01	Medium low
Collaborative	1490	2.87	1.00	Medium low
Work Ethics	1490	4.27	0.51	High
Overall Mean		3.54	0.51	Medium high

Based on the descriptive analysis of the seven attributes that involved forty-five items, the results show that fifteen (15) items were at a medium low level; thirteen (13) items at a medium high level; and seventeen (17) items were at a high level.

The Lowest Level of Professional Practice according to Mean Score

Table 2 below shows ten lowest items (with mean score between 2.81 and 2.52) which involves three attributes of the seven attributes, namely, research, publication, and collaborative network. Five of the ten lowest items are from the aspect of publication; three items are from the aspect of research; and two items are from the aspect of collaborative network.

Table 2: Professional practices based on the lowest mean score.

No.	Sub-construct	Questionnaire Items	Mean Score
1	Research	Use software such as envivo for statistical purposes for qualitative analysis.	2.52
2	Publication	Become “correspoding author” for indexed journals to be published.	2.52
3	Publication	Display the analysis of the results of the study according to the requirements of indexed journals.	2.61
4	Collaborative Network	Obtain external funding for polytechnic programs. at various levels	2.64
5	Collaborative Network	Establish collaborative research network with other higher learning institutions within and outside the country.	2.66
6	Research	Check plagiarism using Turnitin or other software.	2.69
7	Publication	Write journal articles according to the standards of writing of indexed journal.	2.69
8	Publication	Identify journal publication procedures at various levels.	2.69
9	Research	make references using endnote or mendeley in academic writing.	2.76
10	Publication	write a book or a chapter in a book.	2.81

This study looks at the pattern for the ten items that are at the lowest level based on the mean score obtained. The lowest item that has been identified is the practice of using envivo software

for statistical purposes for qualitative analysis (min = 2.52) which is under the research attribute. This is most likely because technical lecturers are less likely to conduct social science research which is a qualitative study. This is followed by rarely being the corresponding author for the indexed journal to be published (mean = 2.52). The new polytechnic excellence scheme does not make the corresponding author as one of the requirements items in the assessment for promotion; hence, it has not been the priority of polytechnic lecturers. The lowest third item is the weakness in analyzing the results of the study according to indexed journal requirements (mean = 2.61). Publication is a newly introduced element in polytechnics; this may be due to the mastery of knowledge in conducting analysis is not yet fully mastered and the exercises provided are not sufficient for them to practice at a high level. The fourth lowest item is the practice of collaborative networks. Polytechnic lecturers are still lacking in obtaining funds from outside to diversify programs at polytechnic level (mean = 2.64). This may be due to the ability of polytechnic lecturers who are not yet competent in establishing collaborative networking with outsiders. Programs at polytechnics were previously 100% funded by the government. However, after a number of polytechnic programs based on Work Based Learning, collaborative network has improved between polytechnics and industrial partners and other stakeholders.

The fifth lowest item is also from the collaborative network attribute which is lacking of network research collaboration among polytechnic lecturers with educational institutions within and outside of the country (mean = 2.66). An earlier system in polytechnics that did not encourage research and limited financial possibilities are reasons for research culture conducted with institutions within and outside of the country to be at a medium low level. The practice of checking plagiarism using Turnitin or other software that was not very frequently done (mean = 2.69) makes it to be the lowest sixth item. This is much related to the mastery of research and writing of polytechnic lecturers. Due to lack of writing practice among lecturers, the weakness in following the standardized journal writing standard (mean = 2.69) may also be due to the same reason. It is also similar to the lowest eighth item, namely the weakness in identifying journal publication procedures at various levels (mean = 2.69) which is due to lack of writing practice due to the lack of mastery as well as ecology of learning in polytechnics that are less supportive to publishing practices. The ninth and tenths of the lowest items also involve publication practices where the practice of using endnote or mendeley in academic writing (min = 2.76) is still low. A possible reason is that lecturers may still use the old way of writing a reference because they do not know the existence of endnotes and mendeley or lack of exposure and training for using endnote and mendeley in library writing and study reference writing. The last item is related to writing practice that is still at a low level which is not frequently writing a book or a chapter in a book (mean= 2.81). This may be due to the lack of encouragement from superiors in this matter, whereby references in polytechnics are still very low compared to universities. The polytechnic libraries still have not subscribed to online journals; WiFi facilities are also quite limited and are not widely available in polytechnic campuses.

The Highest Level of Professional Practice According to the Mean Score

Table 3 below shows the top ten items of the entire 45 items. Only three attributes of professional practices out of the seven attributes are included in the 10 items that have the highest mean, namely, work ethics, course content and pedagogy, with mean between 4.18 and 4.39. Out of the 10 items, 4 items are under work ethics, 5 items under course content and 1

item under pedagogy. This shows that most of the items of work ethics and course content are at high levels.

Table 3: Ten Professional Practices Based on the Highest Mean Score

No.		Questionnaire Items	Mean Score
1	Work Ethics	Safeguarding secrecy and confidential data based on the Official Secrets Act.	4.39
2	Work Ethics	Use public property and utilities properly and responsibly.	4.37
3	Work Ethics	Comply with the standard operating procedure (SOP) in carrying out their duties as lecturers.	4.33
4	Course Content	Comply with standard operating procedure (SOP) in delivering course content.	4.26
5	Course Content	Deliver course content clearly and in detail for all the subjects taught.	4.25
6	Course Content	Organize course content to achieve learning outcomes for each course.	4.23
7	Course Content	Associate course content clearly to be applied in current situations.	4.23
8	Course Content	Explain in depth and in detail the facts, concepts and principles relevant to the course.	4.21
9	Pedagogy	Deliver course content systematically and clearly.	4.19
10	Work Ethics	Communicate professionally with all staff members and students.	4.18

Ten professional practices based on the highest mean score are safeguarding secrecy and confidential data based on the Official Secrets Act; using public property and utilities properly and responsibly; complying with the standard operating procedure (SOP) in carrying out their duties as lecturers; complying with standard operating procedure (SOP) in delivering course content; delivering course content clearly and in detail for all the subjects taught; organizing course content to achieve learning outcomes for each course; associating course content clearly to be applied in current situations; explaining in depth and in detail the facts, concepts and principles relevant to the course; delivering course content systematically and clearly; communicating professionally with all staff members and students.

Discussion

From the findings of the above analysis, it is found that professional practices of polytechnic lecturers are at a moderate level as a whole. However, there is a trend in which these items are not scattered according to the attributes. It is found that all attributes of work ethics and course

content and some pedagogical attributes are at high levels. This is similar to that of the group at a medium low level where all items of the publishing attributes and most of the research and collaborative network items are at a medium low level while the rest is at medium high.

This trend demonstrates that ethical practices, course content and pedagogy among polytechnic lecturers are at a high level, in tandem with Shaari (2010) findings that lecturers who practice knowledge and pedagogy will be able to make teaching more interesting and easier to understand. It is supported by Kleickmann et al (2013) who stated the practice of course content is the key to educator competence that affects student progress. However, it would not be possible if educators' ethics of work were low. Hamid (1994) also pointed out that the development of discipline and work ethics should be enhanced in order to create a more productive and quality public service. This shows that work ethics is important and it should be adopted into public service. Work ethics practice is very important among polytechnic lecturers because it will determine the direction and meaning of the thoughts, actions and responsibilities entrusted to them.

The aspect of publication, research, and collaborativenetwork are still at an unsatisfactory level. Publication is to produce products and knowledge in the form of scientific or academic writing. The production and quality of publications can prove that polytechnics are one of the contributing institutions of writing that can be referred to by various parties. While the number of publications is increasing at higher Education institution (HEI), its proportion is very low compared to the number of lecturers, which is 18,000 (Ministry of Higher Education, 2006). According to Ujang (2008) the quality of lecturers of HEI can be measured through the number of citations against their publication. The practice of publication in polytechnics as deemed by polytechnic lecturers is still at a medium low level which is in line with Yusof et al's (2009) study that found several factors preventing the practice of publication in Kolej Universiti Islam Malaysia (KUIM), namely, lack of manuscripts; lack of information in the production of manuscripts; lack of information on the importance of writing; lack of motivation to write and to publish.Latiff (2013) & Ismail et al. (2014) study finding states that the practice of writing original and free from plagiarism is still lacking and is yet to be realized in Malaysian HEI.because they carelessly carry it out. Latiff also emphasizes good and creative publication resulting from processing of mind that is not confined and suppressed by insistence or instruction of their superiors.

Maphosa & Mudzielwana, (2014) stated that as academic researchers, professionalism in teaching and learning can be enhanced by sharing the findings through publications, conferences and presentations. Practice of publication in polytechnics can also be enhanced by providing writing workshops to provide exposure, motivation or encouragement to authors to produce manuscripts. Rewards can also be made to hold a Book Launching Ceremony which is published annually. During this event, every writer who has produced a lot of books or citations will be rewarded as an incentive for them to continue producing books or articles. Support from management is also expected in the form of finance to facilitate publication of either within or outside the country. Polytechnics are also suggested to have their own publisher to facilitate publication as stated in the University Constitution as stipulated in Act 30.

As an HEI that runs an industry-based study program, polytechnics should always strive for strategic collaboration with outsiders especially the industry, but this practice is still low among polytechnic lecturers. Adzmi, (2013) outlines the importance of collaborative networks between technical and vocational education teachers (PTV) in encouraging and motivating to acquire as

much knowledge, skills and experience as possible. Strategic collaboration with industry polytechnics should be extended to all programs and not limited to specific programs. Similarly, the scope of collaboration with Malaysian Technical University Network (MTUN) should be expanded so that more lecturers can engage themselves (Transformasi Politeknik, 2013). In this regard, polytechnic lecturers are encouraged to intensify collaboration in various forms such as holding a focus group with industries and outsiders at the levels of program, department and polytechnic (Wahab & Zakaria 2010). Polytechnic management should also manage to obtain accreditation of Dublin Accord or similar in order to implement collaborations with institutions or agencies abroad. Collaboration involving lecturers lending by Locum Tenants, and the development of certain curricular programs should be intensified across polytechnics and not only to premier polytechnics. In expanding regional networks, TVET programs such as seminars, competitions,*Corporate Service Responsibility* (CSR), Lecturers' Industrial Attachment Program (SIPs) and staff exchanges need to be encouraged over time.

Seng (2005) agreed that research can be adopted as an approach to professional development that is believed to contribute to the enhancement of the quality of educators' practices and subsequently improve their institutions. To ensure polytechnic excellence as a regional and global TVET institution, research activities at polytechnics should be at a level of which we can take pride. However, in reality, research activities in polytechnics are still at a low level. This is in line with the findings of Jantan (2014) who stated that the real purpose of the lecturers in carrying out research activities is due to certain factors and only to meet the needs of certain parties. Therefore, the real purpose of conducting research remains unclear among lecturers and is not effectively implemented. According to Ismail (2010), it is difficult to carry out research activities due to lack of support and most lecturers do not want to cooperate in conducting research activities. This is because there is a lack of understanding about the importance of carrying out research in helping them to improve their quality of work. This situation is further aggravated by the lack of initiatives by lecturers and institutions alike to improve the skills and knowledge on research activities. Staff development activities have little to do with research skills and knowledge. In addition, it is difficult to obtain advice from research experts especially in research activities due to lack of expertise in the field (Jantan, 2014). In 2011, polytechnics only managed to get two funding for the *Fundamental Research Grantt Scheme* (FRGS) out of 22 submitted applications (Mohammad & Abdullah, 2013).

In his research, Hassan (2015) found that lecturers in polytechnics faced time constraints to carry out research. According to the planning of Management for Budget Estimation (ABM),for a Polytechnic's job, a lecturer has an average teaching time of 16 to 18 hours a week. Apart from a busy timetable, lecturers are forced to fill their time with co-curricular activities, examine assessments and evaluate students' assignments, perform clerical duties, carry out meetings and institutional programs and handle other non-professional tasks. Lecturers are also instructed to attend meetings, invigilate examinations, attend various courses and become officers in institutional activities and activities. The workload faced caused lecturers to experience time constraints to carry out research, publication and collaborative networks.

Conclusion

A clear pattern of professional practices among polytechnic lecturers can be improved by carrying out improvements on polytechnic learning ecology such as restructuring trainings that are more

relevant to the needs of knowledge related to publication, research and collaborative networks which can be implemented by polytechnic management, the Polytechnic Education Department and the Ministry of Higher Education. Improvements in terms of physical facilities as well as colleagues' interaction and support can also be a motivating force in improving professional practice among lecturers. This effort is important and can help lecturers face the challenge of strengthening the professionalism of lecturers to ensure that students receive high quality teaching and learning for their success

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