

The Professional Development of Academic Staff with Particular Reference to the Teaching-Learning Process

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Rencana ini mengemukakan satu perbincangan umum yang mencuba menyorot kepentingan perkembangan profesyenal kakitangan akademik, dan mengemukakan alasan-alasan tentang perlunya universiti-universiti mengadakan satu polisi yang jelas tentang aspek pendidikan universiti ini. Untuk tujuan kertas ini, istilah "perkembangan profesyenal" diberi definisi sebagai polisi-polisi institusi, amalan-amalan dan program-program yang bermatlamatkan kepada pengetahuan, sikap-sikap dan kemahiran kakitangan akademik, supaya dapat membantu mereka untuk mencapai tahap yang lebih luas dalam usaha mencapai kemahuan-kemahuan mereka, pelajar-pelajar mereka, institusi dan masyarakat umum. Definisi ini terbentuk berasaskan empat tanggungjawab tradisi kakitangan akademik, iaitu: pengajaran, penyelidikan, pentadbiran dan perkhidmatan komuniti, yang seharusnya menjadi landasan rangkakerja perkembangan profesyenal. Lebih spesifik lagi, ianya melibatkan proses di mana seseorang kakitangan akademik mencapai dan mengekalkan komitmen terhadap tujuan-tujuan universiti dan memahami kedua-dua, kemahuan institusi dan pelajar-pelajarnya. Untuk mencapai hal ini, kakitangan akademik perlulah mempunyai ilmu dan disiplin yang diperlukan untuk mengajar dengan cekap, untuk membuat tinjauan dan kajian demi kemajuan pengetahuan, untuk memperkembangkan sikap yang diperlukan untuk memberi sumbangan kepada pentadbiran universiti, dan dengan lain-lain cara, yang melibatkan, masyarakat akademik di dalam dan di luar kampus. Seseorang kakitangan akademik diiktiraf sebagai seorang profesyenal, dan beliau perlulah mempunyai sikap keprofesyenalan di dalam usaha mendekati perkembangan kerjanya. Pihak institusi pula mestilah bertindakbalas dengan positif dan sensitif untuk membantu kakitangan akademiknya mencapai matlamat ini. Walaupun tugas dan fungsi utama kakitangan akademik akan terus berputar di sekeliling pengajaran dan penyelidikan, universiti-universiti di Malaysia masih berada di tahap perkembangan yang memerlukan pengutamaan yang lebih terhadap pengajaran dan latihan. Atas dasar inilah dirasakan amat perlu untuk membantu kakitangan akademik dalam memperbaiki pengajaran mereka dan pembelajaran pelajar-pelajarnya. Tujuan-tujuan program seumpama itu diperturunkan di dalam kertas ini. Langkah-langkah untuk mencapai tujuan-tujuan ini juga dikemukakan.

This article is a general discussion which attempts to highlight the significance of professional development for academic staff, and argues for the need of universities to have a clear cut policy on this aspect of university education. For the purpose of this article, the term 'professional development' is defined as institutional policies, practices and programmes which are directed at knowledge, skills and attitudes of academic staff, so as to assist them, in the pursuit of excellence, to meet more fully their own needs, the needs of their students, the institution and society at large. The basis of this definition is the four traditional responsibilities of the academic staff – teaching, research, administration and community service, upon which framework professional development should operate. More specifically it involves the process by which an academic staff member achieves and retains a commitment to the aims of the University, and understands both the needs of the institution and its students. In order to achieve this, the academic staff member needs to maintain the scholarship and discipline required to teach skilfully, to carry out reflective inquiry and conduct research for the advancement of knowledge, to develop attitudes required to contribute to the university's administration, and in other ways to be involved both within and without the academic community. It is not suggested of course that all academic staff have to achieve excellence in all these four areas, and in practice it is more likely that an academic

excels in one or two of these functions while participating in the others. At the outset also, it should be stated that the concept and practice of professional development is not something new or innovative. Members of the academic staff have always, in differing degrees and ways, been seeking to improve their competence for self advancement and fulfilment, and in the process serve also the needs of their students, the institution and society. Likewise, faculties within the university, and the university itself, also engage in improving their effectiveness, image and value through reviews of the range and quality of educational experiences offered to students, and their relevance to national needs. However, what perhaps has been lacking is the effort to weld the various elements of professional development into a coherent approach which is related to specific institutional and national objectives.

In the context of Malaysia, in which education has been identified as a crucial strategy for development, and where the share of governmental current expenditure devoted to education and training is around 25 per cent of the total budget, the country's universities cannot but give appropriate priority to the professional development of their academic staff. This is necessary if the universities are to contribute more effectively to the twin objectives of the New Economic Policy, that is, the eradication of poverty, and the balanced participation of all racial communities in the growth and diversification of the economy. This contribution which the universities can make is in turn dependant on the role and output of their own academic staff, whose knowledge, experience and skill are the institution's principal and most valuable assets. To fulfill its institutional responsibilities, the university must ensure that such resources are conserved and effectively used. Equally important, the university has an obligation to provide opportunities for the development of the capabilities and careers of its academic staff. Furthermore the university exists in a social, political and intellectual environment that is continuously undergoing change. This in turn results in the changing needs of society and students, and academic staff must be provided with opportunities to update and extend their knowledge, widen their experience and develop new skills. Such ends can be attained through a policy and programme of professional development which is carefully thought out and also comprehensive in scope.

Besides the fundamental need for universities and their academic staff to respond positively to national needs and aspirations, there are also a number of other factors and developments which argue for the formulation of a coordinated professional development policy. In the first place, university education in Malaysia is an extremely expensive business. In 1976, for instance, higher education accounted for 15 per cent of the total current expenditure allocated to the Ministry of Education. This constituted the fastest growing component of the Ministry's current expenditure as the 1976 total represented 184 per cent increase over that of 1972 when all post secondary education was lumped together with higher education. Another indication of the cost of university education is represented in the unit cost of current expenditure for the various levels of education as shown by the 1976 figures in Table 1.

TABLE 1
Unit Cost Per Student by Level of Education

Level of Education	Unit Cost Per Student In MS
Primary	260
Ordinary Secondary	383
Fully Residential Secondary and Science Schools	1,931
Technical - Vocational	944
Teacher Training	3,140
University	6,448

In terms of development expenditure, a comparison by levels of education of the actual expenditure spent during the period of the Second Malaysia Plan (1971-75) and the allocation of the Third Malaysia Plan (1976-80) in Table 2 illustrates the same point.

TABLE 2
Development Expenditure on Education in Malaysia

Activity	Second Malaysia Plan Actual Expenditure		Third Malaysia Plan Allocation	
	\$ Million	%	\$ Million	%
Primary	104.9	16	354.1	22
Secondary	202.1	30	378.7	23
Vocational –				
Technical	124.2	18	262.8	16
Higher Education	205.1	30	508.2	30
Others	39.6	6	167.5	10
Total	675.9	100	1,671.3	100

Given the extent of the cost of university education, it is not surprising that there is growing demand for accountability, and both academic staff and their institutions need to be more sensitive to outside pressures and expectations.

One important development which provides another compelling reason for professional development is the extremely rapid expansion of university education in Malaysia. Up till 1969 the country had only one University, but between 1969 and 1972 four other universities were established. The consequent multifold increase in student numbers¹, and the need to recruit a large number of suitable academic staff to meet this new situation, brought with it new problems. Not only were there so many more students to deal with, but the nature of the student body has also become far more heterogeneous. The days when university education tended to favour the urban based students from English medium schools was rapidly replaced by a much broader base. Now, more and more Malay medium school graduates with rural background found it possible to enter universities. This change resulted also in a greater mix of students in terms of ethnic origin and socio-economic backgrounds.

On the academic staff front, the immediate concern was to find suitably qualified men and women. As the supply of such highly qualified personnel was small, various training programmes were started in which potential academic staff were provided with fellowships to obtain post graduate and professional qualifications. As these people completed their studies, they considerably increased the ranks of the junior academic staff, but, since the stock of senior and more experienced staff was small, the ratio of junior to senior academics became even wider than before. This inevitably gave rise to issues and problems related to the professional duties and responsibilities of academic staff. In addition to all this, the implementation of the national policy of replacing English with Malay as the principal medium of instruction created another set of problems. For academic staff whose mother tongue is Malay, it was mainly just a matter of getting used to

new terminologies, particularly in the sciences. But for the others, they had a more fundamental problem of having firstly to learn what in effect is a second language, and for the purpose of being able to use it in teaching they must also master the nuances and subtlety of the language.

Finally, it is important to stress and to recognize that an academic staff member is a professional. As such he must treat his involvement in the university as a profession, and adopt a professional approach to the development of his career.² In the context of a university this means that the academic staff member needs to harmonize his role and function with the aims and objectives of the institution, which as has been mentioned earlier is fundamentally to serve society. More specifically the university aims to convert "raw" human material through a process of maturation so that they emerge better able to serve society. Through this process, three distinct characteristics of human capital development can be expected.

1. *Vocational*, in which the graduates can better contribute in the context of a job or profession.
2. *General*, where the graduates are better informed and act as more responsible members because of their development whilst at university.
3. *Intellectual*, whereby graduates are able to preserve and extend the corpus of knowledge and understanding within specific disciplines. In addition they should also have developed the discipline of the mind so that they possess the capacity for critical, analytical, sequential and creative thinking and expression.

While it is expected that the academic is to act in harmony with such aims and objectives, it must also be expected that the institution will respond positively and sensitively to assist its academic staff to achieve this end. This institutional responsibility and obligation takes the form of the following objectives:

1. Helping its staff to improve their current performance in their existing roles. There are few staff whose performance could not be improved in some way, or who could not be encouraged to use new methods and techniques to advantage. It should be emphasised that improving current performance involves the development of strengths rather than remedying weaknesses. In this context, for many members of the teaching staff, improvement is directed in the area of teaching ability, while for others it may involve management training.
2. It is well accepted that society, knowledge and the organization of higher education are all rapidly changing, and there is no reason to believe that the pace will slacken. Hence the university must provide opportunities for staff to prepare themselves for changing duties and responsibilities. For academic staff this involves among other things advancing subject knowledge by research, opportunities in management, consultancy and the like.
3. Helping to prepare staff for advancement either in the university itself or in education generally. The development and advancement of abilities must be a major aim in any professional development policy, and this could involve preparation for organizational or administrative responsibility.
4. Assisting staff to achieve enhanced job satisfaction. One of the most difficult problems for management is how to consistently maintain a high level of effectiveness particularly among staff who have little chance of advancement. To some extent this is solved by many staff who give of their best from the motives that first brought them into the field of education. Nonetheless, the university can provide some of the ingredients for job satisfaction. This includes an understanding of the nature of the institution and its important role, an understanding of the importance of the individual academics' role, proper training and preparation for tasks to be performed, as well as encouragement and recognition of good work.

In order to achieve the above aims, the university needs to ensure that it has a fair and rational policy in the following areas:

1. The provision of advanced academic and professional training opportunities.
2. The provision of a programme to assist staff to become more effective teachers.
3. The provision of funds, facilities and infrastructure for research.
4. The provision of opportunities to enjoy sabbatical leave, to attend conferences and short courses, the taking up of consultancy work, and secondment to industry, commerce or the public sector.
5. Since the management of a modern university is both difficult and highly complex, opportunities need to be provided to academics who are seconded to administration. This would involve the extension of knowledge relevant to management such as a programme of training in specific management techniques. Equally important, is the need to assist the professional administrators to understand more fully the nature and the sensitivities of the academic world.

In the case of Malaysian universities it can be said that most of the above categories of activities which constitute professional development are practised to varying degrees in some form or other. However, the one category which merits special attention is in the area of teaching-learning effectiveness. For a while yet in Malaysia, although the main role and function of an academic staff will continue to revolve around teaching and research, we are still at a stage of development which requires greater priority in teaching and training. Furthermore, professional development in the discipline through the scholarly activity of research and publication can be served well through the department and discipline structures of the University. But in its instructional programme there is urgent need for improvement by paying attention to teaching not only as an art, but also as a systematic rational exercise. The practice where an academic staff member teaches what he wishes, and how he wishes is a luxury Malaysia cannot afford. Yet it is not uncommon that little or no attempt is made by staff of higher status to influence, let alone direct what most junior staff do. Likewise, it is not uncommon when staff are teaching courses in the same subject for each to take little interest in what the other is doing. Many subjects are the responsibility of a single person, who teaches and examines their students without consultation with, or reference to any other person. In this situation although there is no doubt that academics are both competent and capable persons, they can be encouraged to improve opportunities for student learning. Indeed many academic staff enjoy teaching, are concerned with the quality of their teaching, and take considerable pride in their courses. Nevertheless, improvement is necessary because for the most part introduction to university teaching for the academics has been based upon the example of their teachers, coupled with their own trial and error experience. It is also true that there is a general low level of knowledge among university dons regarding learning theory and teaching research. The Ph.D which is the clear passport for an academic position is a research degree, and has nothing to do with preparation for teaching. Similarly the academic's perception of his identity lies mainly with his discipline and research efforts. He does not normally think of himself as a professional teacher who is knowledgeable about the field of teaching.

On the other side of this coin is the learning process. As indicated earlier, the expansion of student enrolment in Malaysia has turned the university from a place for the privileged few, to one that must solve the problems of providing education for the privileged many. Against this development, what and how the university is to educate the many become crucial questions. This is particularly so for the professional and occupational roles of a university graduate have also changed. They are no longer comparatively few and reasonably calculable, and not only has the number of possible roles multiplied, the nature and manner of individual roles themselves continually change.

Many undergraduates nowadays face a multitude of problems while at the university. For example, the first year at university is often a critical one. For many a student it is a point of transition from a sometimes protective family, school and socio-cultural setting, into one in which he

must begin to establish an independent identity and purpose. During this year he begins to formulate some ideas of what this particular educational experience may offer him. But sitting in a huge class in an impersonal atmosphere, and finding great difficulties in following the lecture can be a most discouraging experience. This will be made worse if there is no regular accompanying faculty contact in small groups. The process of learning which the freshman, and indeed even a senior student, has to undergo is therefore of particular significance. And this consists of two parts. Firstly, there is the academic part which deals with curriculum, teachers, teaching, examination, classroom, laboratories and library. The second is the non-academic part dealing with counselling, housing, medical attention, social, cultural, religious and recreational activities. Both are equally important for success in dealing with some issues of learning in one part is often dependent on equivalent success in the other. It is thus vitally important that the university should develop an integrated approach to enhance the students' opportunities in effective learning, by exploring new ways of utilizing the community's resources for learning. This can take the form of alternative teaching methods, the involvement of the best teachers in freshmen classes, the use of halls of residence as a living-learning environment, and the like.

Against all this background, teaching certainly goes beyond the innate abilities and talents of the occasional outstanding lecturer, and includes other components such as systematic course design, a clear statement of objectives for student learning, fair examination and evaluation, and skill with a variety of instructional alternatives. Not all of these approaches, of course, will be appropriate in every course, but some skill in selecting alternatives and using them pertinently is not only desirable but attainable. Likewise there is also no single best way of teaching; each teacher must develop a style and a method which is compatible with his personality, the nature of the student body, and the characteristics of his discipline. Consequently, a planned programme in teaching-learning effectiveness should be of great advantage. Such a programme can be organized in an attempt to achieve at least some of the following aims:

1. To work with academic staff and the administration to improve the institutional environment with respect to the teaching-learning process.
2. To work with academic staff members to improve curricula and courses.
3. To assist academic staff in clarifying goals, develop new areas of expertise, and discovering new ways of interpreting and presenting their disciplines.
4. To assist in the preparation of tutors and graduate assistants for their instructional roles.
5. To undertake research, both basic and applied, in order to expand the body of knowledge about teaching and learning at the tertiary level.

The actual implementation of such aims takes various forms, but in the main they can be classified as follows:

1. **An Induction Programme for New Staff**

This is a process of assimilation of the new staff into the university which is an important facet of an effective staff development policy. This induction programme is designed to familiarise the individual with his work, his colleagues, his surroundings, as well as general aspects relating to the university as a whole, and its relationship to society and nation. The aim is to give the new members of staff an overall view of their place in the university, and to emphasise the role they can play in its functioning. At the same time this programme also aims to assist the new members to be aware of the opportunities and understand the constraints which apply to them within the overall structure.

2. **An Initial and Continuing Teaching Methods Programme**

This takes the form of an orientation which examines teaching from the learner's point of view, provides basic guidance on the preparation of teaching materials, examines the role of the teacher, and considers the different forms of communication.

This is then followed by further sessions designed to permit a more rigorous examination of selected aspects of the practice of teaching with some of its related underlying theories. The purpose of such sessions is to raise the level of appreciation and sensitivity regarding the teacher's role, and to help develop in the teacher a professional attitude and approach. Thus the structure and content are directed towards the development of the practical exercise of professional skills, techniques and the arts of teaching.

3. **A Consultation Service**

This is to offer a variety of basic services intended specifically to assist teaching staff improve their teaching. These services are characterized by a high level of consultation, feedback and one-to-one interaction. Given the sensitivities of academic staff, such services may well be the most significant in terms of producing meaningful change. Examples of these services include:

- (a) Videotape feedback service which provides a teacher to be videotaped in different teaching situations. He then reviews the tape with a Teaching Resource staff for the purpose of identifying teaching behaviours, and developing strategies for increasing effectiveness of the teaching style.
- (b) Designing of student feedback questionnaires to help lecturers obtain feedback and evaluation by students regarding their courses and their instructional styles.
- (c) Assistance in test construction, grading and analysis such as helping staff improve their abilities in constructing multiple choice examinations.

4. **A Learning Skills Programme**

This is aimed at providing assistance to students in developing their study, reading, writing and other learning skills. For the academic staff member it is important to recognise that learning at university level does not depend only on his performance in the lecture theatre or tutorial room, but that there is need to pay particular attention to the learning and study skills of students. In this the staff can help the students improve their skills.

5. **Research Activities**

In a university context, if a programme in teaching-learning effectiveness is to be credible and gain wide acceptance, it has to be accompanied by related and relevant research and cognate activities. Basic and empirical research into a variety of teaching-learning problems can be conducted. This would include topics such as student success in relation to various background variables, the performance of particular groups of students, the problems of transition from school to university, and longitudinal studies following students through their university careers and into their first jobs. In addition encouragement and support must be given to staff who wishes to spend time to develop or innovate teaching methods. This may range from the production of a self instructional programme in a particular course, the collection and organization of materials for language courses, to the making of a series of videotapes.

In conclusion, it can be said that professional development for the academic staff is a positive factor in university education, for it both reflects as well as takes effect on fundamental issues in higher education. However, policies and programmes by themselves are not enough unless there is also genuine commitment to them particularly by the top administrators and academics. It is they who can do most to create a climate favourable to professional development, and provide encouragement to individuals to develop themselves. Institutional commitment implies a change of attitude and careful thought about institutional purposes and values, and it also requires the kind of management which will ensure that professional development policies, procedures and programmes are oriented towards achieving designated objectives. The academic staff on their part must also be ready and willing to change their attitude and perception of their role, and not be

clouded by an excessive sense of academic autonomy. Professional development is not an infringement of academic freedom, indeed such a programme if properly thought out and implemented can serve to protect academic freedom, for the more effective functioning of the university will certainly contribute to a more positive public perception of the role and function of the institution and its staff. Nevertheless, within the limits of various constraints, particularly financial, which every university must operate under, professional development must be accompanied by a reward system which indicates institutional recognition, and which will serve to meet the needs and anxieties of new and established staff alike. Finally, it must be stressed that professional development is not the only answer to meeting changing perspectives and needs, but it is an approach which should be considered seriously. It is after all realistic to recognize that institutional needs and goals may be fostered through the aspirations and self interest of individuals. Thus it is a collective responsibility which all must share, the result of which are institutional policies, practices and procedures to facilitate the further development of staff so that they may more effectively serve their own, their students', the institutional and national needs.

Note

¹In 1969, the number of full time students totalled 6,672. By 1973 this number had increased to 11,810, and in 1978 the total had gone up to 24,509.

²The term 'professional' is being used in its broadest sense and relates to an individual who is well prepared and continually preparing in his vocation, who acts responsibly and with dedication, and who has the maturity and perception to evaluate the results of his own efforts.