

National Conference on Skills and Competencies in Education 2005

The development of graduates' workplace skills and competencies is the responsibility of educational institutions, industry as well as the graduates themselves. This was one of the messages conveyed to the participants of the recently held National Conference on Skills and Competencies in Education 2005.

Organised by the School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia, the two-day conference held in the university's main campus, on 29 and 30 November 2005 was attended by about 100 participants. The conference was designed to act as a meeting of minds to examine problems, issues, challenges and prospects on the skills and competencies learnt, acquired and disseminated in primary, secondary and tertiary education. Participants included academicians, teachers, teacher educators, researchers, administrators and students.

The conference, in which IPPTN acted as one of the major co-sponsors, featured prominent speakers including Dato' Prof. Ibrahim Ahmad Bajunid from UNITAR and Assoc. Prof. Omar Osman from the Corporate Division, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Dr. Ng Chern Soon from PSDC, as well as research papers from local and international educators.

An issue high on the agenda was how to successfully incorporate the teaching of skills and competencies in the curriculum. Some of the participants demonstrated that skills such as communication, ICT, creativity and problem solving are lacking among students and current graduates and more efforts had to be made by educators to improve these skills.

One the ways in which the skills can be improved is through industrial attachment. According to Assoc. Prof. Mohd Ridzuan Nordin and Raihani Md Kassim from KUTKM, their study indicated that there are areas of opportunities to enhance the competencies development of undergraduates through industrial attachment. These include better students' preparation including good communication skills, positive attitudes, and closer working relationship between university and organisation to develop common understanding and expectations.

Another, perhaps somewhat less familiar, way is through the study of philosophy, as presented by Assoc. Prof. Zailan Morris from Universiti Sains Malaysia. In her paper, she identified certain intellectual skills that could be attained



Dato' Prof. Ibrahim delivering his keynote speech

from the study of philosophy which will prove useful at the workplace and will be appreciated by employers as assets. The study of philosophy, she said, "cultivates an inquiring mind by engaging with the big questions dealt with by philosophers, and trains students to ask the necessary and crucial questions which is an important step in problem solving".

Organisational problem solving skills may also be enhanced through entrepreneurship programs. A group of researchers from Universiti Utara Malaysia, who presented a paper on 'The importance of entrepreneurship education to organisations and nation', found that entrepreneurship education graduates are suitable and important to most organisations. Exposure to entrepreneurship education in higher education, they said, is consistent with the government's effort to create more entrepreneurs among graduates.

In addition to the issue of teaching skills and competencies in education, many other related issues were presented and discussed including classroom assessment techniques, the role of economy and the relevance of programmes offered in institutions of higher learning to the industry. All in all, the conference proved to be an enriching experience for teachers, teacher educators, researchers and administrators – from primary, secondary and higher education levels – who got together to share experiences.

Reported by:

□ Munir Shuib, Azreen Zainul and Noraini Mohd Yusof