

Collaboration for Logistics Education in Malaysia

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Introduction

The era of information and communication technology has triggered the rapid advancement of the logistics industry which leads to strict global competition in distribution of goods and services in the 21st century. Malaysia, like other countries, has decided to focus on the logistics sector as part of its policies to meet globalisation challenges. This is also a step to meet the demands of the industry and to keep abreast with global development since numerous multinational companies are adopting new business models. One of the challenges emphasised by Malaysia is to develop competent human resource/capital, equipped with the right knowledge and right skills. Views from Crawford (1991) and Drucker (1999) state that a competent and knowledgeable workforce are factors that contribute to the competitive advantage in organisations. Therefore, workers with innovative skills, competency and knowledge will become a great asset to their organisation.

The objective of this paper is to highlight the need for higher education institutions which are regulated by the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education, to obtain concrete views from logistics practitioners, professional bodies and government related agencies for the development of Malaysian logistics programmes. The logistics practitioners, professional bodies and government related agencies will set a benchmark to identify and evaluate the quality of logistics services. This is because they are the ones who have knowledge based on their rich experience in logistics. In addition, logistics function outsourcing which is practiced locally and internationally requires tactful and sound skills. With the current atmosphere such as globalisation, emergence of *halal* products, emergence of China and India as business hub and cross-cultural working environments, the wisdom and skills of this group of experts will provide the key information needed for designing, amending and adding new logistics programmes in higher education institutions.

Malaysian Logistics Functional Needs

According to the Third Industrial Master Plan 2006-2020 (IMP3), the Malaysian logistics industry encompasses mainly single specialised service providers such as transport providers, and logistics service providers. The transport service providers include transport operators of air, sea, road and rail, multimodal operators and terminal operators. The logistics service providers, on the other hand, consist of facilitation services (freight forwarders, custom brokers, ship brokers, shipping agents, consolidators, and non-vessel operating common carriers), distribution services (warehousing and transportation, inventory management, and domestic and regional distribution and courier companies), integrated logistics services (third party

logistics providers and lead logistics providers), and business support services [Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) service providers, banking and insurance, education and training, equipment handling, maintenance and repairs, and security].

These two forms of service providers are grouped together and called logistics functions (LeBlanc, 2007; Rahman, 2006; Tamilia, 2000). The effectiveness and efficiency of the service providers in the handling of logistics functions are determined by a continuous acquisition of knowledge via participation in research, seminars, conferences and training. They must equip themselves with the latest knowledge and soft skills to ensure smooth and efficient logistics service delivery which in turn increases their competitive level in global markets. As a result, they are able to gain customer loyalty. The importance of soft skills among the logistics workforce has been emphasised by Centko (1998); Karoly and Panis (2002); Myers et al. (2004).

In order to understand the current needs of the logistics industry in Malaysia, it is critical for the Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia, to work in alliance with other active logistics service providers and professionals in the industry. For example, the logistics practitioners will provide latest inputs regarding logistics knowledge and skills required by the higher education institutions. These higher education institutions will then use these inputs in designing their programmes and curriculum by reconciling the current trends and demands of the logistics activities.

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Furthermore, the logistics programmes should focus on clear understanding and application of the logistics concepts. Throughout the world, there is a trend of growing demand for logistics programmes at colleges and universities (Lancioni et al., 2000). However, the demand for competent

logisticians still exceeds the supply provided by higher education institutions (Mangan and Christopher, 2005).

To enhance logistics programmes, logistics practitioners and logistics educationists have started to realise the importance of collaboration. For example, in the United States, the International Business Machine (IBM) has set up strategic collaboration with four universities namely Michigan State University, Penn State University, Arizona State University and University College, Dublin for joint research and study on advanced supply chain and logistics practices (Closs, 2004). In Malaysia, the IMP3 stresses on the development of human resource requirements for Malaysian logistics graduates. This is stated in the IMP3 itself under Chapter 25, page 731:

“Within the national education system, there are limited programmes on transport and logistics offered by public and private universities, at both diploma and degree levels. Most programmes offered by institutions of higher learning cater for working adults, where entry requirement takes working experience into consideration.”

From the IMP3 statement above, it shows that more programmes in logistics are required for the undergraduate levels. This is to ensure that Malaysia will not be facing any

shortage of logisticians in the future. Not only do we need to increase logistics programmes at undergraduate levels, we would also want to produce logistics graduates who have sufficient skills when they enter the job market. Quality logistics graduates may be produced via programmes which are designed by the collaboration between logistics practitioners and institutions.

A Study on Collaboration

One strategy that can be implemented in order to produce competent logisticians is via collaboration between logistics practitioners, higher education institutions, government logistics agencies and professional bodies such as the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport (CILT). Figure 1 below shows the relationships among the above mentioned entities. In Figure 1, the collaboration among the four entities (logistics practitioners, higher learning institutions, government agencies and professional bodies) is essential to produce holistic as well as marketable logistics programmes. Furthermore, these programmes will serve to improve the skills of logistics graduates and enable them to apply their knowledge and skills in the industry. Failure to provide adequate and competent logistics graduates will slow down the growth of economy in a country (Amuna, 2003).

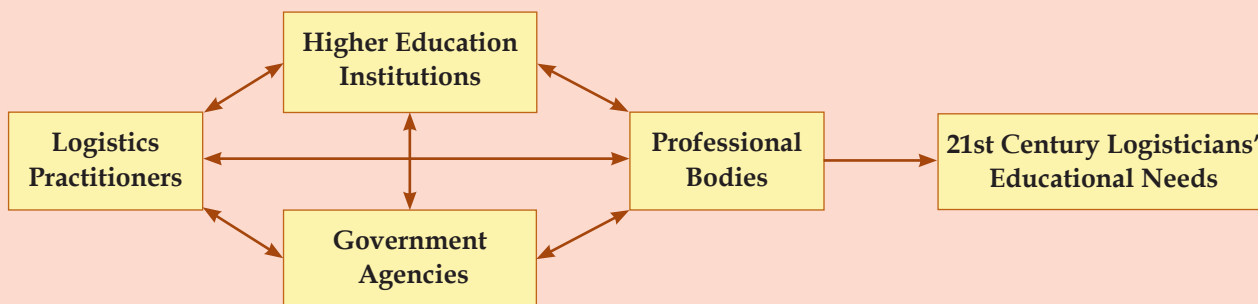


FIGURE 1: Collaboration among logistics practitioners, higher education institutions, government agencies and the professional bodies that contribute to the logisticians’ educational needs

Logistics practitioners can play their roles by providing relevant inputs to higher education institutions based on current issues. The importance of developing an effective logistics curriculum related to current issues can be traced back to the views of Berkovski and Gottschalk (1997); Hoek (2000); and Closs (2000). They emphasised the need for current higher education institutions to revise their curricular so that they can produce competent logistics graduates. The logistics practitioners who are involved in day-to-day logistics operations are the right source of input. Their views and opinions will help higher education institutions in designing marketable logistics programmes. Furthermore, the role of practitioners as academicians will promote effective transfer of actual knowledge and skills required by the graduates (Clinebell and Clinebell, 2008). On the other hand, professional transport and logistics bodies such as the CILT can be the “precursor” or initiator for conducting seminars and conferences related to logistics

issues. The goal of the seminars and conferences is to formulate resolutions on reducing the gap between higher education institutions offering logistics programmes and the needs of knowledge, skills and competencies required by logistics practitioners in the actual working environment. Such seminars and conferences will trigger ways on how to develop strategies for preparing competent logistics workforce. This will facilitate the development of holistic logistics programmes.

Meanwhile, the role of government agencies under the Ministry of Transport Malaysia such as the Port Klang Authority, Road Transport Department, Department of Civil Aviation, and other agencies could provide useful inputs regarding logistics trends and patterns in Malaysia. Inputs from the government could be new policies and regulations (locally and internationally), new global business trends, current world economic and political climates and new

technologies that may influence human resource development in the field of logistics.

Further research needs to be conducted on how collaboration in logistics education can be implemented so that institutions of higher learning in Malaysia will be able to produce competent logisticians. As stated by Lambert et al. (1998), there is a need for a comprehensive logistics syllabus from higher education institutions in order to meet logistics challenges and demands.

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Conclusion

Logistics programmes need to be developed in accordance with the global business trends. Logistics graduates must be able to apply logistics knowledge and skills they acquired from higher education institutions in the working environment. Competency can be achieved by these graduates when they are able to transform logistics knowledge and skills into meaningful performance that match with the logistics needs. Collaboration between educational system, logistics practitioners, government and logistics professional bodies will ensure holistic and marketable logistics programmes that will be able to meet the demand in the logistics industry.

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