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Editorial Statement

Welcome to *Bulletin of Higher Education Research*. In this first debut issue, readers will be acquainted with introductory information about Institut Penyelidikan Pendidikan Tinggi Negara (IPPTN) including its future directions and action plans as well as major activities and events. The primary objective of the bulletin is to disseminate, on a biannually basis, information on IPPTN's activities in particular with respect to ongoing research and significant findings of completed research on various aspects of public and private higher education in Malaysia. In addition the bulletin will report on publications by the institute of materials encompassing university curriculum, governance, human resource development, university-industry partnership, and graduate employment and the labour market. As such, the bulletin will be of considerable value to higher educational institutions and government agencies concerned with the quality and relevance of higher education in a fast expanding global economy. It provides a platform for the exchange of ideas and discourses with a view to enhance and expand research efforts in all aspects of higher education in Malaysia, within a global context.

The Editor-in-Chief.



IPPTN's office in Universiti Sains Malaysia

Introduction to IPPTN

Background:

Institut Penyelidikan Pendidikan Tinggi Negara (National Higher Education Research Institute) was established by the National Council for Higher Education (MPTN) and was officially launched on the 21st August 1997.

IPPTN is to undertake relevant research in complementing the efforts taken in setting up the public and private Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) and in developing them towards achieving excellence in teaching, publications and research.

Rationale of its Establishment:

The Institute is to carry out research to acquire relevant data, to analyse them, to produce reports and make suitable recommendations as required by the MPTN.

Objective of its Establishment:

The Institute is to enhance and expand research efforts in all aspects of higher education research that encompass research on policies, relating to curriculum, administration, human resources and manpower, infrastructure and partnership.

Functions:

The Institute's main responsibility is to undertake research and obtain the relevant data, analyse them, produce the required reports and make recommendations as required by the MPTN and other associated bodies. In other words, the IPPTN acts as a *think tank* to the Higher Education Department, Ministry of Education, Malaysia.

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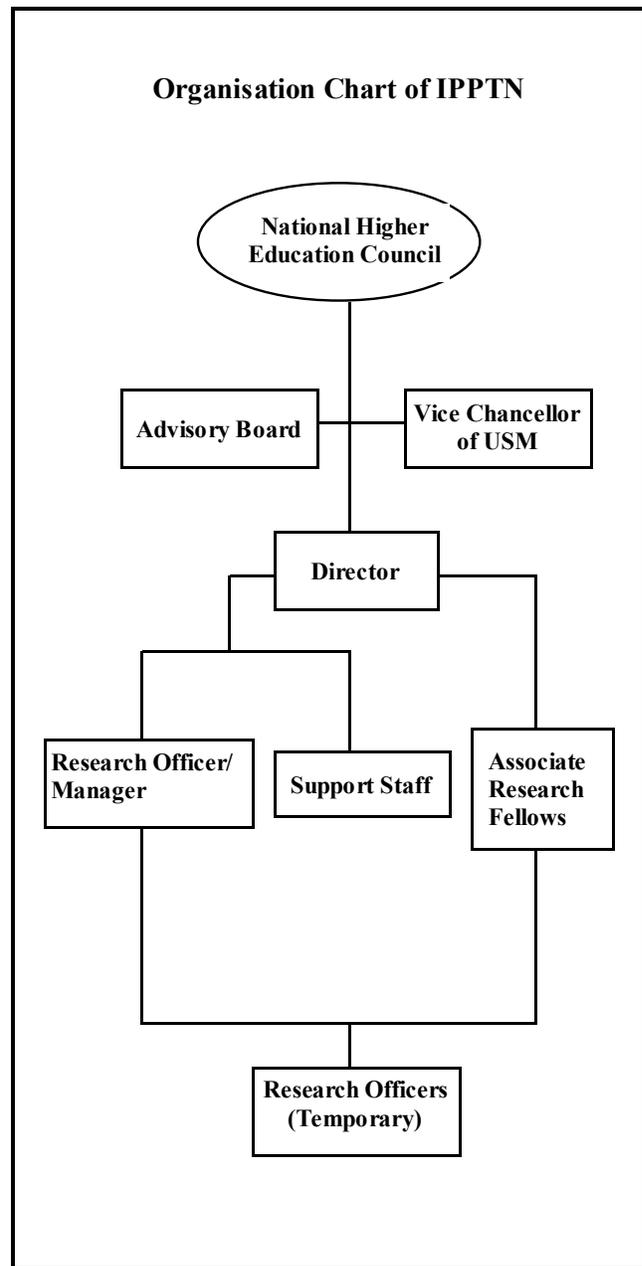
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Business Communication
Thinking Techniques



IPPTN's Future Directions and Action Plans

As a *think tank* to the Higher Education Department, Ministry of Education, IPPTN seeks to :

1. conduct research focusing on national and industrial needs, policy evaluations, comparisons of public and private institutions, themes related to private institutions such as human resource development, the fostering of research competency and curriculum development.
2. organize internationalisation activities involving building linkages with overseas research organizations and inviting visiting professors from abroad.
3. act as a central depository of documents and materials of higher education, and centre for national and international reference.
4. publish materials on higher education.

Major Activities in 2002-2003

IPPTN has successfully initiated a number of major activities in the past 2 years including publication of a monograph and studies on higher education in Malaysia involving several experts from various universities and government agencies. Some of these studies have been successfully completed while a few others are currently ongoing.

Publication of monograph

In line with its mission to develop excellence in teaching, publications and research on higher education, the institute has produced its first monograph entitled *Kampus USM Cawangan Seri Ampangan: Harapan dan Tanggapan Komuniti Setempat* (USM Seri Ampangan Campus: Hopes and Perceptions of the Local Community).



COMPLETED STUDIES

Since 2002, three studies have been successfully completed by IPPTN's researchers.

1. Unit Costs Analysis of Polytechnic Education in Malaysia.

Funded by the World Bank through the Technical Education Department of the Ministry of Education, this study was conducted to achieve two primary objectives:

- a. To design research procedures and instruments for the determination of unit costs of each student per year, per graduate and per course for polytechnic education.
- b. To train staff of polytechnics in determining unit costs of each student per year, per graduate and per course for polytechnic education.

Four polytechnics representing different regions and years of establishment were chosen as the sample for this study. They are Politeknik Johor Bharu (PJB), Politeknik Sultan Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah (POLIMAS), Politeknik Sultan Hj. Ahmad Shah (POLISAS) and Politeknik Ungku Omar (PUO).

One of the findings of this study indicates that direct costs per student tend to be higher in older polytechnics because of the higher emolument and related costs. However these older polytechnics have lower indirect costs or overheads per student. Including annualised costs of building and equipments in the cost per student calculation will significantly alter and inflate the cost figure and the worst affected are the younger polytechnics. This was due to the fact that development costs, in relative terms, are higher for the later ones. The study also found that students staying in campus accommodation are highly subsidised, even considering basic costs alone.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ahmad Nurulazam Md. Zain from National Higher Education Research Institute, Prof. Dr. Mohd. Adam Bakar from Universiti Malaysia Sabah, and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mohamed Dahlan Ibrahim from Universiti Teknologi MARA were researchers of the study.

2. Unemployment Problems among Graduates.

This study was carried out to identify the problem of graduate unemployment in Malaysia. The study focused on the characteristics of unemployed graduates and the steps that should be taken by institutions of higher learning to overcome the problem. Data was collected from focus group interviews, psychological profiling and a postal questionnaire survey.

Continued on page 5 (Graduates).

Special Report

PSYCHOLOGICAL ATTRIBUTES OF GRADUATES

Assoc. Prof. Dr. See Ching Mey

In the study on unemployment problems among graduates conducted by IPPTN, an analysis was made on the graduates' psychological attributes. In any research on unemployment among graduates, it is necessary to include an instrument to measure psychological attributes that point out differences between those who are employed and those who are unemployed. Internal influence such as an individual's evaluation of his psychological attributes is an important phenomenon that must be reviewed to ensure a deeper understanding and interpretation of the results from the study.

Psychological states influence a person's behaviour. These states stimulate, motivate and reinforce human behaviour. An understanding of the psychological state of the graduates provides significant information that can assist in remedial actions for alleviating the unemployment crisis among graduates. As an adjunct, such information is valuable for career counselling at an earlier stage of their lives.

Nineteen categories of positive psychological attributes were selected for this study:

1. initiative
2. see and grab opportunities
3. courageous
4. information seeking
5. emphasis on high quality job performance
6. commitment to job
7. efficiency
8. systematic planning
9. problem solving skills
10. self-confidence
11. self-assurance
12. provide confidence in others
13. use strategic influence
14. socialization
15. assertiveness
16. uphold values
17. thinking skills
18. accepting change and
19. self-presentation

Three categories of negative psychological attributes - anxiety, negative feelings, and depression - were selected as well. There are five items in each category of attributes. The content validity of the items and categories was scrutinised and approved by a review group of psychologists and counsellors. The reliability of the categories was tested. The correlation coefficient of the categories is in the acceptable range of 0.60- 0.87.

A number of 561 respondents completed the instrument

of whom 275 were employed respondents and the remainder (272) were not gainfully employed. Of these 272 respondents, 152 were actually unemployed while 120 were enrolled in the Graduate Re-skilling Scheme (GRS).

With the standard average score set at 16 for the positive attribute categories, the results indicate that the mean scores of all the categories are above this standard average score except for the category "use strategic influence" (mean = 14.9). However if the standard average score was set to 12 for the negative attribute categories, only category "anxiety" (mean = 13.14) is above this average score.

On comparing the group means, it could be seen that the means for the unemployed respondents are higher in 12 positive attribute categories except for category "initiative" (18.29 vs. 17.77), "see and grab opportunities" (19.80 vs. 19.54), "information seeking" (20.72 vs. 20.67), "efficiency" (18.39 vs. 18.29), "thinking skills" (18.31 vs. 17.84), "accepting change" (17.21 vs. 16.37), and "self-presentation" (20.44 vs. 20.21). The means for all three negative attribute categories for the unemployed were higher than the working respondents.

Student's *t*-tests revealed significant differences between the employed and the unemployed respondents in the categories of "initiative", "commitment to job", "accepting change", "anxiety", "negative feelings" and "depression". The means for the working respondents are higher in the "initiative" and "accepting change" categories but unemployed respondents showed higher means in the "commitment to job", "anxiety", "negative feeling" and "depression" categories.

The results reveal that both the employed and unemployed respondents consistently rated themselves above the standard average score in all positive attribute categories except for the category "use strategic influence". This implies that they share the belief that they are well qualified to meet all the expectations and requirements of the regular job market and simply lack the influence to get them the job they want.

The mean score for the "anxiety" category is above the standard average score for all the respondents. There are significant differences between the two groups in the three negative attributes. Unemployed respondents generally show higher means than employed respondents. While accepting that naturally those who face unemployment should show greater anxiety, it is clear that the extent and depth of such anxieties in such a group, if left unresolved, will see a drastic increase in mental health problems.

Generally, the unemployed respondents have higher means in the 12 positive attribute categories with significant differences in the "initiative" and "accepting change" categories. Logically, if the unemployed respondents really have the better psychological attributes that they claim to have, they should have been selected for some

form of employment. As this did not happen, it suggests that the unemployed generally over-rated themselves or are not realistic in their self assessment. If this psychological state is allowed to persist, they will become increasingly dissatisfied and present dysfunctional behaviours. Furthermore, the unemployed respondents need to make efforts to take initiatives and to accept change. Other attribute categories include “see and grab opportunities”, “information seeking”, “efficiency”, “thinking skills” and “self-presentation”.

It is important for institutions of higher learning to produce graduates that are aware of the needs and expectation of the job market and at the same time, realistic in evaluating their abilities and potentials to match themselves with their eventual career choice and career opportunities. Such graduates should also be ready and able to identify their weaknesses, and limitations in order to grasp opportunities to develop and grow.

The role of counselling as an intervention strategy for unemployment among graduates should be seriously considered and encouraged. Counselling can help alter unrealistic perceptions and allow for voluntary remedial actions. Counsellors in Malaysia however need to be trained to improve their skills in performing psychological and career assessment for graduates that will help them match skills, personality, interest and values to the chosen programme or careers.

oOo

Continued from page 3 (Graduates).

A comparison of the job seeking behaviour between the employed and unemployed graduates showed that the unemployed graduates generally lack initiative. The findings also showed that 70.8 percent of the Malay respondents looked for government jobs as compared to 46 percent Chinese and 38.1 percent Indian respondents. The preference for government jobs among the Malays indicated that they have not adjusted to the change in the economy where more jobs were found in the private sector instead of the public sector. Many of the unemployed graduates attributed their lack of ability to find a job to external factors such as gender discrimination and lack of connection.

The study recommends that every institution of higher learning should have a career counselling unit or a placement unit which helps students to look for employment by raising their career awareness, sharpening their job seeking skills, and training them to be self-employed. In the preparation of graduate for employment, each institution of higher learning should pay greater attention to the acquisition of communication skills, English language proficiency, and entrepreneurial skills. Specifically, the practical training, industrial training and co-curriculum programmes

should be improved. To ensure that graduates are in touch with the reality of the job market, it is recommended that there should be a counsellor for every 500 undergraduates. At another level, institutions of higher learning should work closely with industry to ensure that there is a match between supply and demand of the right kind of human resources. In short, institutions of higher learning should produce graduates with the right kind of personalities, knowledge and technical skills.

3. Kolej Universiti Kejuruteraan Utara Malaysia and Sub-regional Development: Community Hopes and Expectations

The above study was commissioned by the Kolej Universiti Kejuruteraan Utara Malaysia in September 2002. The study was framed within the context of “universities and regionalism”, a theme actively pursued by researchers at the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies (CURDS), University of Newcastle, United Kingdom, and at the Department of Regional Economic and Social Development, University of Massachusetts Lowell, Lowell, USA. Robert Forrant of University of Massachusetts Lowell for instance noted that the importance of higher education in the regional development process has been widely recognised since the early 1970s in many countries, and interest in considering universities as ‘growth engines’ intensified as the pace of globalisation quickened. IPPTN researchers, having being exposed to important discourses at Lowell on this theme, have embarked on this second study, the first being a case study of the Seri Ampangan Engineering Campus of Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang.

Kolej Universiti Kejuruteraan Utara Malaysia was established by the federal government on 25 July 2001. This engineering-based public institute of higher education is located in Perlis, one of the least developed areas/states in Malaysia. The university college is given the task to produce highly skilled engineers to meet the manpower needs of the nation as outlined in the Second Industrial Master plan.

The main objective of the study therefore was to identify and analyse community hopes and expectations of the university college in particular with respect to its potential contributions to sub-regional development.

Based on secondary and primary data, an action plan was subsequently prepared. This plan stressed the importance of this university college being “in the north” and “for the north”. For that matter its engagement with the community must be undertaken on a sustainable basis and there should be a continuous learning process between the university college and its community. In this way the university college will remain relevant to the sub-regional development process.

ONGOING STUDIES

1. Ethnic Integration in the Public Institutions of Higher Learning (PIHL)

Does ethnic relations between students of Malay, Chinese, Indian, Bidayuh, Melanau, Kadazan and 200 other ethnicities really exist harmoniously in Malaysia ?

Students of PIHLs today are children born after the May 13th 1969 who benefit from the implementation of the NEP, a national policy that aims at bridging the socio-economic gap between races in the country. However, the print media reports, coffee shop 'social discourses', office ramblings right to serious Parliamentary debates have alluded to the existence of the ethnic polarisation in PIHLs.

Students form ethnic cliques in studying, socialising, eating out and spending time. They are all Malaysian citizens divided by a lack of common ties. If this is Malaysian's social scenario, the nation's unity is certainly fragile. A nation faced with vulnerable unity issues amongst its people will inevitably be confronted with tensions and conflicts, which may eventually lead to social and political instability. All these have dire consequences to the nation's peace and development.

Many students new to the PIHLs campus environment have come from pastoral community background of medium to low social classes and hailed from school systems of single ethnic dominance.

Decisions about cliques may appear to demonstrate ethnic polarisation in the PIHLs but it is submitted, it may be more of a manifestation of a coping mechanism involved to facilitate settling into new life experiences. If this hypothesis is correct, ethnic polarisation does exist but it forms a transient social statement. It persists amongst the first year undergraduates, but gradually diminishes when they are in the second or third year of study.

Based on the hypothesis above, the pattern of interaction amongst students of different ethnicities in the PIHL campuses will be studied especially by focusing on their campus lives, while studying, during recreation, co-curriculum activities and in their networking effects.

To further strengthen the above study, the extent of ethnic divide amongst students, the shared values and public opinions and their commitment to nation state will also be measured.

The research team hopes that the approach to this study will map out various patterns of social relationships occurring in the PIHLs and the reasons for the existence. The findings will aid the research team in formulating strategies and programmes that aim at developing harmonious multi-ethnic community amongst the various races. This is the best manifestation of the slogan "unity is not uniformity".

2. A Study on the Performance of Ex-matriculation Students at the National Institutions of Higher Education

The matriculation programme in Malaysia was introduced in the 70s which was fully offered and managed by three universities, namely, UM, UKM and USM. The main objective of the programme was to rapidly increase the number of bumiputra students in the field of sciences, engineering and medicine. Subsequently, other universities such as UPM, UNIMAS and UIAM also offered the programme to include not only the sciences but also the art disciplines. However, from June 2000, the matriculation programme was taken over by the Ministry of Education (MOE). It is hoped that with a sole management under the MOE, a certain form of uniformity is maintained in terms of student intake, curriculum development, teaching and learning processes, facilities for teaching, co-curriculum activities and accommodation. To assist the ministry in the implementation of certain policies, a study on the performance of MOE ex-matriculation students at the national institutions of higher education is inevitable. The general perception among the academic community at universities regarding the academic performance of the ex-matriculation students is that the performance is below satisfaction, compared to other students with other entry qualifications; albeit considered excellent. The study to be carried out by IPPTN is expected to be used as indicators on the strength or weaknesses of the programme under MOE. It will also assist the MOE to plan strategies related to policy matters, guidelines and teaching and learning approaches in order to improve the performance and competitiveness of the ex-matriculation students at institutions of higher education.

The objectives of the study are to determine the academic performance of the ex-matriculation students at universities and to relate the contributing factors to the trends of the performance. Based on these factors, suggestions for improving the performances will be forwarded.

The study began in April and is expected to end in December 2003. The research is headed by Prof. Hj Ibrahim Che Omar who is assisted by experts from USM, UPM, UKM, UMS, UUM and The Matriculation Section, MOE.

3. University Curricula: An Evaluation of the Preparation of an Entry-level Workforce

This research is headed by Associate Professor Dr. Ambigapathy Pandian, and assisted by experts and researchers from Institut Penyelidikan Pendidikan Tinggi Negara, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Kolej Damansara Utama and Kolej Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman. Fourteen people are involved in carrying out the research, which commenced in March 2003 after the research proposal was approved by the Department of Higher

Education at the Ministry of Education.

The main objective of the research is to evaluate and assess the extent to which the implementation of the curricula at Public/Private Institutions of Higher Education has been able to help graduates acquire the skills, expertise and characteristics required by employers in line with the requirements of the workplace. Meanwhile, the main issue in the research is how the curricula at Public/Private Institutions of Higher Education can be improved and enhanced so that these institutions of learning can produce graduates who are able to fulfill the needs of the job market in the early stages. The scope of the research includes sending out questionnaires to employers, final year students at Public/Private Institutions of Higher Education and also to university management in order to collect the necessary data.

To date, the research team has managed to conceptualise the research design and also construct instruments for data collection, which is made possible by first carrying out pilot tests. Samples for the research have also been selected. The research team has also managed to identify the activities and tasks which need to be carried out and also to divide the research into more manageable areas, thus making it possible for the members of the team to gauge the real progress they are making on the research.

4. Enhancing Quality of Faculty in Private Institutions of Higher Learning

In view of the increasing importance of education industry to the national economy, there are increasing concerns at the Ministry of Education as to whether Malaysia has the necessary infrastructure – particularly that of human resources, to achieve its aspirations of becoming a centre of educational excellence in the region. A survey amongst the public institutions of higher learning (IHL), sponsored by the Department of Higher Education, was completed early this year. The report raises alarms as to the state of human resources in the institutions, particularly the newly established university colleges. This subsequently raises questions about the state of human resources in private institutions of higher learning.

IPPTN has recently forwarded a proposal to the Department of Higher Education to examine private institutions of higher learning. It seeks to address the following questions:

- What is the proportion of faculty in private IHLs PhD?
- What are the problems faced by private IHLs in their Human Resource Development?
- What are the Human Resource Development policies in private IHLs, particularly that related to graduate training in their faculty?
- What can the government do to assist the private IHLs in their faculty development?

The project is undertaken by researchers from the Centre for Policy Research, and School of Educational Studies,

and is expected to be complete within six months of approval by the Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education. Currently the project is awaiting approval.

Guidelines on Submission of Manuscripts

1. Manuscripts should be written in English, typed using Times New Roman 12 point font, and double spaced on only one side of A4 size paper with ample left and right margins on Microsoft Word.
2. The length of the manuscripts should not exceed 1000 words. An abstract of about 150 words should be included.
3. Authors are responsible for obtaining permission to use any published material. The publisher shall not be held responsible for the use of such material.
4. Citations in the text should include the author's last name and date of publication, e.g. (Ashton, 2001). If quotations are used, page numbers should be indicated, e.g. (Ashton, 2001:30).
5. Endnotes may be used.
6. Include tables and figures within the text. Number tables and figures consecutively.
7. The reference list should be arranged in alphabetical order and should include only works cited in the text. Examples:

Yule, G. (1996). Pragmatics. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wolfe, R.N. & Johnson, S.D. (1995). Personality as a predictor of college performance. Educational and Psychological Measurement, 2., 177-185.

Watkins, D. (1998). A cross-cultural look at perceptions of good teaching: Asia and the West. In J.J.F. Forest (Ed.), University teaching: International perspectives. New York: Garland.

8. All submissions should include a cover page containing the title, name of author(s), designation, affiliation, mailing/E-mail address and telephone/fax number. A brief biographical note of the author(s) should also be included.
9. Manuscripts submitted must not be those already published or those which have been offered for publication elsewhere.
10. Manuscripts received will be acknowledged but not returned.
11. Submission of a manuscript will mean that the author agrees to transfer copyright of his/her article to the publisher if and when the article is published. Authors who wish to send their articles to be published elsewhere should seek the written agreement of the publisher.
12. Manuscripts may be sent via e-mail attachment or via post together with the diskette.

News in brief

Past events

Workshop on unemployment problems among graduates

The workshop was held at Pan Pacific Hotel, KLIA on 10 February 2003 and was officiated by the director of the Higher Education Department, Professor Hassan b. Said. The aim of the workshop was to present research findings and recommendations on how to solve unemployment problems among graduates and to consolidate and enhance the final report of the study.



Accomplishment

The Director of IPPTN, Professor Morshidi Sirat was recently admitted as a member of the Consortium of Higher Education Researchers (CHER) by its board of governance.



CHER, which is based in Kassel, Germany was founded in 1988. CHER aims at developing activities in the field of research on higher education. It seeks to stimulate cooperation in research projects and to develop further the internationalisation of higher education research. IPPTN and CHER share the same objectives.

Forthcoming events

IPPTN will be co-hosting the Third International Literacy Conference (LitCon 2003) which will be held on 15-17 August 2003 at Park Royal Ferringhi Beach, Penang. The conference themes are:

- ✎ Ways of knowing, thinking & expressing
- ✎ Literacy environments
- ✎ Language learning and teaching
- ✎ Innovations and special needs.

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Calling for news and short articles

Bulletin of Higher Education Research welcomes short articles, opinions, comments and information about people and events related to higher education in public and private institutions in Malaysia and abroad. Please address your correspondence to:

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