

**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN A PRIVATE
HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION
IN MALAYSIA**

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was two fold. Firstly, it was to provide an in depth qualitative analysis of the perceptions of the two major stakeholders in a small private higher education institution (PHEI) on teaching staff professional development. Secondly, it was to understand how these perceptions affected the development of appropriate strategies. This study employed the generic qualitative research approach. The samples used were two administrators and three full time teaching staff, purposively selected in the small college studied. Two instruments for data collection were used, namely semi-structured video recorded interview and document analysis. A content analysis of documents provided by the participants and gathered by the researcher was made. These provided data and method triangulation.

Among the major findings of this study were that the administrators generally have a slightly different understanding of teaching staff professional development construct and activities related to it compared to the teaching staff themselves. Secondly, the administrators had certain reservations on the effectiveness of formal forms of teaching staff professional development to affect behaviour and contribute to better teaching. Thirdly, due to constrains faced by the small college, formal teaching staff development was given based on principles of essentiality, incrementalism and selectivity. Fourthly, the Internet was widely used by the teaching staff for personal professional development in absence of the formal form. In addition to the Internet, informal conversations between colleagues also played a role. Fifth, counselling

techniques to promote student's motivation were agreed by both stakeholders as the most important area for teaching staff professional development.

In conclusion, further studies in other small colleges should be conducted to study the situation prevailing in those colleges. There was a need to align conceptual understanding through explicit communication on teaching staff professional development between both stakeholders to reduce dissatisfaction and increase cooperation. In addition, a clear communication of intention on any strategies adopted was also vital. Provision of full individual access to Internet facilities and a formation of a formalised discussion platform for more systematic interaction between staff on teaching staff professional development issues should be made to exploit their existing preference.

PEMBANGUNAN PROFESSIONAL DI SEBUAH INSTITUSI PENGAJIAN TINGGI DI MALAYSIA

Abstrak

Kajian ini mempunyai dua tujuan. Tujuan pertama ialah untuk memberi satu analisis kualitatif mendalam terhadap persepsi dua kumpulan *stakeholder* institusi pengajian tinggi swasta (IPTS) kecil mengenai pembangunan profesional tenaga pengajar. Tujuan kedua pula ialah bagi memahami bagaimana persepsi ini memberi kesan terhadap pembangunan strategi yang bersesuaian. Kajian ini menggunakan pendekatan kajian kualitatif generik. Sampel yang digunakan adalah dua orang pentadbir and tiga orang tenaga pengajar sepenuh masa yang dipilih berdasarkan persampelan bertujuan. Dua instrumen pengumpulan data yang digunakan ialah temubual separa berstruktur yang direkodkan menggunakan video, dan analisis dokumen. Analisis kandungan dibuat terhadap dokumen minit mesyuarat staf. Penggunaan sampel dan instrument pengumpulan data bertujuan untuk mendapatkan triangulasi data serta metod.

Dapatan kajian yang utama adalah seperti berikut. Pertama, pentadbir lazimnya mempunyai pemahaman yang agak berbeza berkenaan konsep pembangunan profesional tenaga pengajar serta aktiviti yang terbabit berbanding dengan tenaga pengajar. Kedua, pentadbir memiliki kesangsian terhadap keberkesanan pembangunan profesional tenaga pengajar bercorak formal dalam memberi kesan terhadap perilaku tenaga pengajar berkenaan. Kesangsian ini juga meliputi sumbangan pembangunan profesional tenaga pengajar bercorak formal ini kepada pengajaran yang lebih baik. Ketiga, akibat kekangan kolej kecil, pembangunan

profesional tenaga pengajar secara formal dilaksanakan berdasarkan prinsip keperluan, secara meningkat dan terpilih. Keempat, Internet digunakan secara meluas oleh tenaga pengajar bagi pembangunan professional masing-masing. Disamping Internet, perbualan harian diantara rakan sekerja juga turut berperanan. Kelima, teknik kaunseling untuk menggalakkan motivasi pelajar dipersetujui oleh kedua-dua pihak berkepentingan sebagai bidang yang paling penting dalam pembangunan profesional tenaga pengajar.

Sebagai rumusan, kajian lanjutan di kolej kecil perlu dilakukan untuk mengetahui keadaan di kolej berkenaan. Terdapat keperluan menyelaraskan pemahaman mengenai konsep pembangunan profesional tenaga melalui komunikasi yang jelas antara *stakeholders* berkenaan bagi mengurangkan perasaan tidak puas hati serta meningkatkan kerjasama antara mereka. Disamping itu, komunikasi jelas mengenai tujuan mana-mana strategi yang terima pakai adalah penting. Penyediaan capaian penuh individu ke Internet serta penyediaan wadah perbincangan bagi interaksi lebih sistematik antara rakan sekerja berkenaan isu berkaitan pembangunan profesional tenaga pengajar perlu diadakan bagi mengeksploitasikan kecenderungan sedia ada mereka.

DECLARATION

Name: Mohd Redza Bin Badaruddin

Matric Number: CGS 00057106

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own work except for quotations and summaries which have been duly acknowledged.

Signature:

Date: 19 October 2008

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an introduction to the study. It deals with the research topic background, focus of the research, my personal background influencing the motive of the study, the purpose of the study, research questions, a list of key terms, the significance and the limitations of the study.

1.2 Background of the study

In recent decades, there has been an expansion of the private higher education sector in Malaysia. This phenomenon can partly be seen as the result of a global trend in the commodification of education, especially in the higher education sector. Observed from another perspective, the Malaysian government is playing an active role in fostering the expansion and establishment of private higher education institutions (PHEI) through the policy of democratisation of higher education that would increase the accessibility of institutions to the population (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2001). As private higher education becomes more established, questions concerning the quality of education provided in these institutions are raised. In response, an accreditation agency and a new ministry have been established to provide the government with policy direction, registration,

monitoring and data collection of these PHEI. In the initial monitoring phase, much of the emphasis seems to centre on the provision of adequate physical facilities or infrastructure of the institutions. Lately, there appears to be a shift of emphasis to other aspects such as staff professional development activities, administration of institutions and continuous quality improvement (Sharifah Hapsah Shahabudin, 2006).

The concern of the Malaysian government on the importance of this aspect is evidenced in a statement in 2004 by the then Minister of Higher Education Dato' Dr. Shafie Mohd Salleh at the officiation of an accreditation campaign by the National Accreditation Board (LAN). In his speech, the minister recommended that PHEI provide career packages that include the provision of training and development. This would in turn, contribute to higher quality of teaching to enhance the achievement of the course objectives offered in PHEI (Shafie Mohd Salleh, 2004). In addition, in a briefing meeting on the proposed Malaysian Qualification Framework (MQF) and the Malaysian Qualification Agency (MQA), academic staff training and development is listed among the nine aspects that are emphasised to assure the quality of the Malaysian higher education sector (Sharifah Hapsah Shahabudin, 2006).

The emphasis on teaching staff professional development brings forth the question of the relationship between teaching staff professional development and its effect toward the quality of the institutions, specifically, the enhancement of students' achievement and quality education. Evidence of a relationship between teaching staff training or development activities and students learning can be gleaned

from studies done in the United States. Nevertheless, these studies are done in relation to teaching in primary or secondary education rather than at the higher education level.

Researches carried out during the 1990's suggested an association between teacher's professional development and significant changes in practices in the classroom (Teaching teachers, 2005). Specifically, the elements of professional development that significantly affects changes or improvement in teaching techniques are that which relates to method by which students learn a particular subject, instructional practices that are directly related to the subject matter or the strengthening of the teacher's knowledge of subject matter content.

In another study by Thomas Carpenter and colleagues (1989), it is concluded that students' achievement in both the basic and advanced level are significantly higher when teachers' training are focused on two factors (as cited in Teaching teachers, 2005). These are training on students learning strategy and the ability to effectively gauge students learning.

It is acknowledged that, it is vital for teaching staff of educational institutions, in particular, higher education institutions to be qualified and trained in the specific subject area taught and are versed in pedagogy (Beaty, 1998). Nevertheless, the reality is not consistent with this ideal. It has been commented that while academics or teaching staff of higher education generally possess subject area qualification, what they lack is qualification in pedagogy (Beaty. 1998. p. 100). In addition, it is

argued that experience in itself does not ensure teaching quality or a professional approach to teaching (Beaty, 1998).

This comment is also relevant in the Malaysian context in relation to a point made in a strategic planning literature by the Ministry of Education (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2001). It states that private higher education sector in Malaysia is facing difficulties in obtaining teaching staff who are fully qualified in terms of academic qualification, professional qualification and teaching experience. Additionally, it is stated that the majority of PHEI do not have staff development programmes for the teaching staff predominately due to the high cost of conducting it.

As such, there is a need to further scrutinise this situation in depth for other factors that may illuminate the perspective of the parties involved.

1.3 Personal interest in the focus of the research

My interest in the topic of professional development in PHEI, specifically among teaching staff, primarily stems from my experiences and observations of being involved in the higher education sector. In my personal experience of working as a lecturer in small private colleges, there seems to be limited systematic efforts to provide professional development plan for the teaching staff. The main reason seems to be the cost factor. For the teaching staff who are committed to a career in education, the move to more established and larger higher education institutions or government owed institutions would seem to be an attractive alternative.

This phenomenon may not only lead to the high staff turnover rate in such institutions but be a contributing factor that is not conducive to the further growth of such institutions that is frequently located in the non major cities of Malaysia. If left unchecked, this may lead to further concentration of educational institutions in major cities such as Kuala Lumpur, Penang or Johor Bahru. If such geographical concentration and uneven development of institutions be allowed, then the aim of genuinely increasing accessibility of higher education, that is one of the stated aims of the higher education policy in this country, may to a certain extent be undermined.

Moreover a high staff turnover rate may be disruptive to students' learning. In addition, as argued in the previous section, professional development has important significance on student's achievement and provision of quality education. Therefore, it is also a matter of equality that regardless of the size of institution or geographical location that a student is enrolled in, the student would have assurance of accessibility to quality education. As a consequence, I believe that the area of teaching staff professional development, that has a direct bearing on the provision of quality education, should be analysed in depth.

1.4 Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was two-fold. Firstly, to provide an in depth qualitative analysis of the perceptions of the two major groups of stakeholders in a PHEI on teaching staff professional development. Secondly, to comprehend how this understanding affected the development of appropriate strategies or programmes for professional development. The two major groups identified were the teaching staff

who were directly related to the core activity of education institutions and the administrators who were ultimately responsible in making the decision for the development or adoption of professional development strategies.

1.5 Research questions

The primary research questions of this study are listed as follows.

1. How do the administrators and the teaching staff of a PHEI view teaching staff professional development in a small college?
2. Are the stated views of the administrators and those of the teaching staff congruent with their own actions or strategies?

1.6 Setting of the study

The PHEI that was selected for this study can be categorised as a non-university PHEI or more commonly known as college or institute. This categorisation is based on the categories used by the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education and used generally in literature produced by the Ministry (Sektor Pengurusan IPTS, 2007). On the whole, this category consists of 483 institutions or colleges registered with the ministry, as per the year 2007 data. The primary factor for the selection of the institution is purposive and fits the criteria of a small college and in its initial stage of development. This is in addition to the absence of systematic professional development activities for the teaching staff. Specifically, this study only concentrates on the scenario of a small college that in the same time is in its initial development stage. Although the selected college can be deemed small

per se, it must be mentioned that it is a subsidiary of a larger PHEI. However, in terms of its operations and management there is a distinct differentiation between the main campus and this college. As such, the activities and policy of the colleges are different.

The college of study started operations in 2003. At present, there is around 38 teaching and administrative staff currently in employment. The student population is 256 students. All of these students are taking diploma, pre-university and professional degree courses in different disciplines. This includes Cambridge G.C.E. Advanced Level, Diploma in Business Administration and Association of Certified Chartered Accountants degree course. The college is located at the outskirts of a major city and is surrounded by its suburb.

1.7 Definition of key terms

In this section, the definition key terms in this research are determined. Initially, the conceptual definitions are elucidated followed by the operational definitions.

1.7.1 Academic staff / faculty member / teaching staff

Conceptually, the terms academic staff and faculty member are generally used interchangeably (Austin, 2002). Their fundamental roles in the context of developing countries as cited in a study by D'Cruz-Endeley (1995) are teaching, research and

community service. However, it is argued that teaching role is the most significant with research being minor and community service insubstantial.

In the context of this study, the term teaching staff refers to staff from the academic department whose task is primarily teaching as compared to those involved primarily in administrative work.

1.7.2 Administrator

The Concise Oxford English Dictionary (2001) defines administrator as a person who attends to the organisation or administrate in the running of a system or a business.

As it relates to this study, administrator is defined as the management personnel in the college who is involved in the decision-making, specifically the position of Principal or Chief Executive Officer and the Head of Academic Department.

1.7.3 Professional development / faculty development / staff development

Shuman (2005), suggests that the term faculty development and professional development be used interchangeably to explain the same phenomenon. Nicholls (2001), associate both elements of personal development and institutionally led activities in his definition of professional development that is continuous throughout one's professional career. From the view point of the Malaysian Quality Assurance

Division literature on quality assurance code of practice, discussion of professional development are concentrated on the systematic institutional provision and recognition of academic staff development including mentoring and training to upgrade academic skills identified as teaching, research and provision of expert consultation services (Quality Assurance Division, 2004).

In this study, the term professional development refers to systematic continuous activities, either led by the college or individual initiatives, for personal development that are recognised and supported by the college in terms of incentives provided.

1.7.4 Private higher education institution / college

PHEI in Malaysia are required to be registered with the Ministry of Higher Education. The Ministry have categorised PHEI into six categories namely non-university ranked private institutions or colleges, university, university college, distance learning university, foreign university branch campus and local university branch campus (Sektor Pengurusan IPTS, n.d). These are based on the registration of the institution with the Ministry. Among these categories, the majority of students in PHEI are enrolled in colleges with a reported total 185,647 students enrolled in 2005. In comparison to all other categories, each only has total enrolment of below 40, 000 at the same year. In this diversity, the common characteristics of PHEI are that they generate funds from students' fees, shareholder's capital, and other business enterprise ventured by the institution (Faridah Haji Hassan & Nooraini Mohamad Sheriff, 2006).

For the purpose of this study, all references to colleges or PHEI would follow the definition of college used by the ministry that is based on the college's registration.

1.7.5 Small college

In discussing the contemporary challenges confronting private colleges Faridah Haji Hassan & Nooraini Mohamad Sheriff (2006) relate the term small private colleges as having student enrolment ranging from 400 to 500 students. On the other hand, in a conversation with the researcher, Mahani Zainal Abidin the then Deputy Director General of Private Higher Education Management Sector, Ministry of Higher Education says it is reasonable to state that a college with students number below 300 be categorised as a small college (personal communication, March 30, 2007).

In this study, the term small college refers to colleges that have an enrolment below 300 students.

1.7.6 Strategy

According to the Concise Oxford English Dictionary (2001), strategy is defined as a planned design in accomplishing a certain long term objective.

For the purpose of this study, strategy refers to any clearly defined plan that either the administrators or the teaching staff have, in order to achieve professional development objectives in the long run.

1.7.7 Action

The Concise Oxford English Dictionary (2001) defines action as “the process of doing something to achieve an aim”.

In the context of this study, action refers to any undertakings or activities that are done by either by the administrators or the teaching staff to bring about short term professional development aims. In other words, it specifically refers to the absence of meticulous planning.

1.8 Significance of the study

Primarily, the study is noteworthy in that it is an analysis of the perspectives of the teaching staff and administrators of a small private college with regard to adopting teaching staff professional development. Generally, studies are conducted in the context of higher education institutions that can be generally categorised of as being medium to large institutions with students’ enrolment numbering more than five hundred. By studying a small college, a specific understanding can be gained on the situation that prevails in such settings.

Apart from that, the study aims to identify the types of activities or strategies that can be adopted by the college studied as perceived by the teaching staff and administrators. The administrator's understanding on the importance and the contribution of teaching staff professional development will most likely influence their willingness to allocate time and financial resources towards that end. On the other hand, the understanding of the teaching staff on the importance of professional development to improve quality of teaching and ensuring students learning would directly affect the level of motivation for attendance in any teaching staff professional development activities or strategies adopted. Besides, for the management board of the college, the findings may aid in the identification of the areas that need training or improvement. Over and above, these perspectives will be significant in relation to the views expressed in Malaysia government's strategic planning for the education sector for the period 2001 to 2010 on the possibility of providing support for the PHEI teaching staff development programme (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2001). This study will highlight the possible avenues or means of support that will be needed.

Beyond that, a better understanding can be gained on perspective of the two main stakeholders studied in the highly competitive environment of PHEI. It is usually connoted generally, that the perception of for-profit institutions are highly geared towards the maximisation of profit at the cost of other concerns. Thus there is the tendency to forgo costly programmes such as systematic teaching staff professional development.

1.9 Limitations of the study

The study was carried out in one small college that will remain anonymous. As such, the findings will not be applicable to other colleges. The two participant administrators selected are the only administrators in the college. The three participants selected are only from among the full-time teaching staff that have been in employment for more than three years and fit the purpose of the research. Part-time teaching staff are specifically excluded primarily because they are less likely to be involved and be acquainted to any information on teaching staff professional development in the college.

Selection of the participants, besides years of experience, was based on the willingness of the participants to be involved in the research. Therefore, any part-time teaching staff or those who did not have sufficient years of experience in the present college were excluded. The understandings of the participants are only representative of their views during the period of data collection between August and September 2007. Apart from the interview, documents that were analysed for the purpose of the study are only those obtained from the participants voluntarily and that which was kept by the researcher in the course of his employment. Therefore there was a possibility that not all documents are available for analyses. However all effort is made to collect as comprehensive a collection of documents as possible.

Additionally, the researcher is an employee of the college. Nevertheless his job capacity and functions is not directly related as a teaching staff or administrator. However, being an employee of the college, there are biases. Steps to minimise bias

and assumptions was made by acknowledging bias and attempting to follow closely the transcribed interview.