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Effectiveness of Citra Education in Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia from Students' Perspective

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Abstract

Higher education in Malaysia has evolved rapidly and become more stable over the decades. This situation demands a shift from the standard approach in higher education to a more flexible one. The development of the higher education's curriculum should also focus on the education system that enables student to understand shared values and the sharing of experience as well as aspiration. As a multi-cultural country, Malaysia develops its higher education curriculum in a multicultural context as it is vital to instill values of patriotism and unity to help students grasp national goals, be proficient in the national language, and grow into globally minded individuals with a proud Malaysian. Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) address this through the Citra Education with a wider and more compact learning approach to develop students with great character and broad knowledge across multi disciplines. The Citra Education is compulsory to all students as a requirement for graduation. This article explores the effectiveness of Citra Education from the students' perspective via a self-administered questionnaire (n=297). Generally, the majority of the UKM students agreed that Citra Education is effective in achieving the intended objective.

Keywords: General Education, CITRA Education, Effectiveness, MPU Courses.

Introduction

Higher education in Malaysia has been expanding rapidly and is seen to be more stable over the decades. For the past 10 years, the increasing numbers of students' enrolment were more apparent, more promising global acknowledgement in terms of publication, research findings, paten, quality of the institution, as well as the growing number of international students. This situation requires the higher education to move away from the standard approach to a more flexible approach in order to allow the Higher Education Institute to provide various career pathways and to have different excellent institute models. In order to strengthen the higher education even more, in the year 2013, the Ministry of Higher Education has outlined the Malaysian Education Development Plan 2015-2025 (Higher Education) or MEDP (HE).

Through the MEDP (HE) 2015-2025, the aspiration of the Ministry of Higher Education covers three aspects; the graduate's quality, the institution's quality and the overall system. The Ministry intends to improve the rate of employability among graduates from 75% (2013) to more than 80% in 2025. This challenge needs to be carried out in order to improve the learning

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experience among students by widening the industrial networking in constructing the curriculum and the implementation of the academic programs; intensifying learning through experiences as well as learning through servicing in order to enhance skills that are suitable for the 21st century and also, to benefit the use of technology in improving personalized learning. This situation takes into consideration several matters as follow:

- i. Design an integrated system for the Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) to assess student's achievement that is more holistic, with entrepreneurial skills and well balanced. This new system not only assesses understanding and thinking skills (the current approach) but also includes other main attributes that cover student's aspiration; ethics and spirituality; leadership skills; national identity, and language proficiency; and
- ii. Create opportunities for students to master entrepreneurship skills and through sabbatical leave, industrial networking, business incubator, and special route policy to businesses pioneered by students.

The Malaysian Education Development Plan outlines 10 leaps to achieve student's aspirations. This move will lead to a continuous excellence in the higher education system especially those related to quality and efficiency as well as the influence of the global environment that is increasingly shaping the landscape of higher education.

Challenges of Developing Higher Education Curriculum

In developing the higher education curriculum and having Malaysia as a country of diversity, the formation of patriotism and unity needs to be emphasized in order for students to understand the national aspiration, high command of the national language and to become a universal citizen with outstanding Malaysian identity, ready and willing to sacrifice for the sake of harmony and well-being of the family, community, nation and global. This effort is currently carried out through the General Studies courses (MPU) and co-curriculum programs that focus on sports, community engagement and learning through delivery of services.

At the same time, especially in terms of delivery of the courses, higher education institutions should apply methods that use research, student-centered, and ICT-based teaching as aids. High Impact Education Practices (HIEP) such as learning through experience and learning through delivery of services are suitable in building national unity and 21st century competency. (Higher Education Plan 2015-2025).

Besides that, higher education curriculum development should also focus on the education system that allows students to understand the common values and to share experiences and aspiration. For example, students' aspiration in the Malaysian Education Development Plan 2015-2023 has six attributes, namely ethics and spirituality, leadership skills, national identity, language skills, and knowledge. These six attributes are also for students of higher education. Every graduate will have the knowledge, morale, behavior, mindset and manners in becoming a noble human being. They will become a universal citizen with an outstanding Malaysian identity, ready and willing to sacrifice for the sake of harmony and well-being of their family, community, nation and global.

The Ministry of Higher education should realize that the present generation is facing challenges that are complicated that are never experienced before such as economic crisis and global warming. Hence, graduates should be exposed to relevant and suitable knowledge and technical expertise in order to overcome these challenges, and increase resilience as well as the ability to

make ethical decisions. Higher education, therefore, must be able to prepare future graduates to face these current and future challenges.

The latest study by Malaysian Education Development Plan shows that graduates change jobs 10 times on average throughout their lifetime. The same study also shows that 65% of primary school students of today will work in fields that are currently non-existent. Therefore, in order to be prepared at facing such rapid global economic changes, Malaysia needs to educate its students to have ethical and moral strengths, a relevant outlook on life and worldview, as well as the skills to solve current problems and future challenges. Graduates must practice lifelong learning in order for knowledge and skills to constantly develop. They need to think critically, and always open to accepting changes, ideas and new actions. They should also be able to manage life and have the ability to lead the community. The Malaysian Education Development Plan reports that some graduates do not have the mastery of critical thinking and communication skills, as well as language skills (especially English). In addition, budget constraints and the increase in the cost of higher education also need to be addressed by increasing the productivity and effectiveness of the higher education system and HEIs in line with the financial sustainability. The Ministry of Higher education also needs to see more productive collaboration between academia and industry, especially in research, development and commercialization.

In this era of globalization, strengthening the country's education system has become the main pillar in developing the country. In the effort to strengthen the education system, the curriculum should always be updated in order for students' knowledge and skills to be in line with the needs of the times. Based on the National Education Philosophy that is adapted according to the development of education at primary level up to higher education, the present and future generations need to be guided as self-preparation to live through the era of rapidly developing technological world. The millennial generation is a very valuable national asset in determining the pattern of society and the country. They should be provided with a relevant and advanced curriculum so that the knowledge and skills acquired will enable them to overcome various challenges. The role of industry advisory groups is important for the survival of academic programs. Industry advisors are defined as parties appointed by the HEIs to provide input, advisory services and strategies at improving the quality of teaching and learning as well as working networks with the relevant industries. Without any industrial networking, it is feared that the curriculum of the academic program will not be in line with the latest developments and, as such, may lead to a situation where graduates are not well prepared for the real challenges after entering the workforce. The success of graduates is, of course, the utmost priority so that academic programs at IPT remain sustainable and are always the top choice. (Dr Nurul Aini Mohd Ahyan dan Dr Muhammad Abd Hadi Bunyamin - Julai 11, 2020 (Berita Harian))

Current Necessity – IR 4.0 and 10 C Skills

There are several issues pertaining to failures in job employment among graduates and its relation to soft skills. According to Mustapa Mohamed (Bernama, 2007), this matter is related to issues like low mastery of the English language, poor leadership skills, lack of spirit of togetherness, and weak communication skills. According to Muhyiddin Yassin (Bernama, 2007), students of higher education should equip themselves with generic skills such as problem-solving skills, or producing something through sparks of creative ideas and innovation. Students should also take a more creative approach in exploring knowledge through various resources and not just within the context of classrooms. He also emphasized on the importance of mastering skills in leadership as well as organizational management skills that can be acquired

and enhanced through active participations in clubs and associations at the university.

The demand for soft skills is very high, especially in the job market. Employers are, constantly, ensuring the success of their business by recruiting and maintaining employees having various skills, good personal traits along with some technical skills. Esa, Abd. Hadi and Mohd Salleh (2007) carried out a study to determine whether co-curricular activities carried out in polytechnics in Malaysia apply generic skills in preparing students to become future employees who are have potentials to meet the needs of the local industries. Studies have found that polytechnic graduates do have good mastery of the generic skills after acquiring them through co-curriculum activities which meet the needs of the industry in Malaysia. In Malaysia, Generic Skills (GS) cover various contexts including life and work whilst GS, collectively, consists of six main elements; namely, skills, human skills, thinking skills, personal skills, business skills, and community skills.

According to Chang, Peng Kee, Fauziah Ahmad and Faridah Ibrahim (2011), mass media has explained several weaknesses of the local graduates, specifically from the aspect of lacking important skills and that have affected their chances of being hired. They are said to be incompetent at effective communication, less receptive towards learning process and also having low self-confidence. Therefore, mastering emotional intelligence and soft skills are crucial as soon as these students enter the working world. Specifically, today's globalized working world demands an individual to own a wide range of skills. This includes the ability to adapt, work as a team, solve problems, be creative, and have high ability to deal with contingency situations, responsible and have effective communication skills (NCVER, 2003)

In line with the global change moving towards the Industrial Revolution 4.0 and 21st century learning, the world today is oriented towards reducing dependency on human energy and focusing more upon the elements of informative communication technology (ICT), including the use of robots or automatic system. In order to guarantee the sustainability and continuation of the quality of education, HEIs need to combine manual and automation in the curriculum in order for the workforce to meet the needs of the market. Thus, not only does learning process needs to be interesting and fun, it must also be able to produce critical, creative and innovative graduates (Dr. Nurul Aini Mohd Ahyan and Dr. Muhammad Ab Hadi Bunyamin – July 11, 2020, Berita Harian)

Founder and Executive Chairman of WEF, Klaus Schwab in his book *The Fourth Industrial Revolution* explained that Industry 4.0 has changed the way people work and live. This change is driven by three main technology domains, namely physical, digital and biological that cross the nine pillars of Industry 4.0, including simulation and virtual reality, vertical and horizontal systems integration, the Internet of Things (IoT) industry, cyber security, cloud computing, additive manufacturing, supply chain, big data analysis and automation robots (Dr Afandi Ahmad, Berita Harian, 11 June 2017)

Facing the challenges of Industry 4.0 or the Fourth Industrial Revolution, university students must withdraw from the normal practice. The World Economic Forum (WEF) underlines the importance of mastering the 4C elements which are Critical Thinking & Problem Solving, Communication, Collaboration and Creativity at all levels of study, including at higher education level. If in schools, the Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) is now the core, therefore, students at the university level need these skills even more. The 4C skills must be honed in every corner of life, in college residences, lecture halls, across volunteering and entrepreneurial activities and even on the sports field.

The nine cores of Industry 4.0 can be summed up in one word, that is complex. The complexity of problems is measured through the width of the range of conflicts involved, the depth of analysis and knowledge required, the complexity of unique issues, the need to comply with set standards, the needs of users and various stakeholders, the impact of solutions on various aspects such as economic, environmental, social, political, ethical, health and sustainability. Thus, it is clear that students are no longer tied down to the field of study and exams alone. Cognitive flexibility is essential in order to tackle complex problems aggressively and holistically.

For Industry 4.0, being smart is never enough. Besides being skillful in their actions and having full of wisdom in their speech, excellent employees also need to be emotionally intelligent. Emotional intelligence is the ability to identify and manage one's own as well as other people's emotions based on the three main pillars; namely, awareness, network and emotional control. Thus, emotional intelligence is the key to successful social and professional relationships.

CITRA Education Framework

UKM's Citra Education framework is an extensive education system that spans across various disciplines. Such approach is to provide an opportunity to students from different backgrounds to learn and know the fields of knowledge beyond their own. The exposure to the expansion of knowledge is beneficial in order to ensure UKM graduates are able to master their respective fields of specialization and at the same time, have extensive knowledge and relevant competencies.

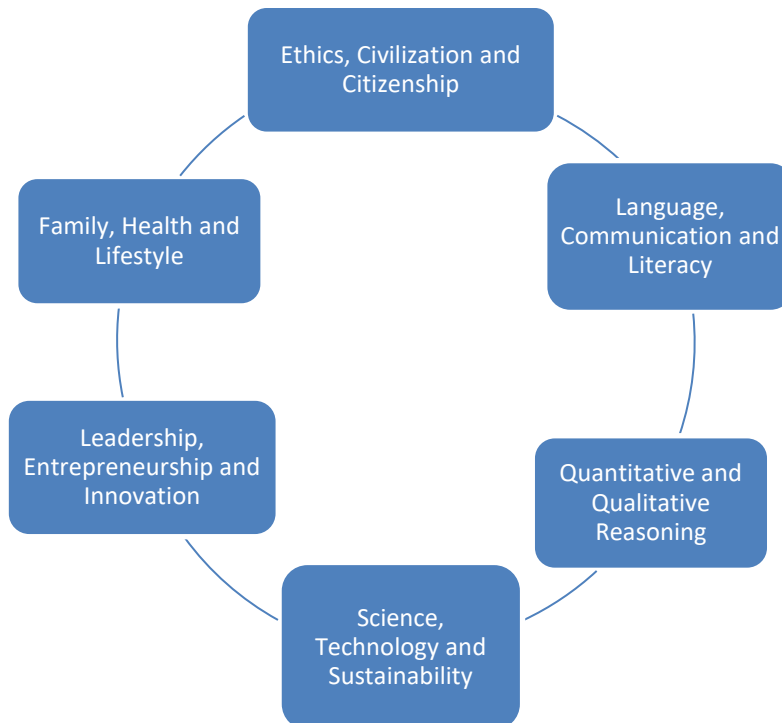


Figure 1: The Six Domains of UKM Citra Education

The six domains of UKM Citra Education in Figure 1 are the identity of UKM students. Each of the six domains are interrelated with one another. Figure 2 shows the relationship between all the domains concerned. The domain of Ethics, Civilization and Citizenship is the basic domain that is considered as the core item of UKM Citra Education. Students need to be given sufficient exposure to the aspects of values, integrity, citizenship and civilization that will help build a strong personal identity in the students. The domains of Language, Communication and Literacy, Leadership, Entrepreneurship and Innovation and Quantitative and Qualitative Reasoning are considered as the learning domains of which students need to be required in order to obtain the knowledge and basic skills of developing human civilization. The Family, Health and Lifestyle, Science, Technology and Sustainability domains, on the other hand, provide students the opportunity to gain knowledge and skills in the application aspects within the family as well as the community and are aware whilst having the knowledge of the contribution of science and technology in terms of sustainability of human civilization. As for that reason, Citra Education relevantly brings students to a more comprehensive aspect of learning and is oriented towards shaping the mind, building the character of the students throughout their studies and also in life after graduating. Indirectly, Citra Education helps in forming the self-identity or branding of respected UKM students.

Objectives of UKM Citra Education

General

- Helping the university to produce graduates with characteristics that can carry the image of UKM Citra, having a national identity and mastering the soft skills that meet the current and future needs.

Specific

- Ensuring that graduates acquire a holistic educational foundation so that they can be independent and able to adapt in an ever-changing environment.
- Producing graduates who are competent, competitive, resilient and meet the needs of the job market.
- Producing graduates who are capable of becoming global citizens who are able to work in groups and have cross-cultural communication skills.
- Producing graduates who not only have knowledge in their specialization discipline but also knowledge in other fields that provide added value to one's self-development and career paths.
- Producing graduates who are ethical and with integrity as a person, worker and citizen.

Methodology

This study employs a quantitative method via a survey questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed in two languages. The main instrument for collecting the data is a questionnaire that was constructed by the researchers based on the previous literature (Saadeddine 2013; Thomson, Eodice & Tran, 2015) and also from the researchers' experiences. This instrument has been validated by an expert and coordinator of MPU and has been tested for its reliability through a pilot study. The reliability of the instrument used in this study is 0.94. The questionnaire was prepared in two languages and implemented online through several links.

The data collected using a self-reported questionnaire based on the perception and self-reporting by students who had attended MPU courses. In terms of structure, the questionnaire consists of five (5) main parts namely:

- 1) Demographic including information on the MPU courses taken
- 2) MPU courses delivery method
- 3) Perception on;
 - a) Content, methods and assignments given in MPU courses (12 items)
 - b) Effects after studying the MPU course (10 items)
 - c) Learning MPU courses during the pandemic (8 items)
 - d) The overall Impact of learning MPU courses (7 items)
- 4) Items on achievement factors in MPU courses
- 5) Item about choice – whether to take up MPU subjects or not.

Findings and Discussion

This study is part of a survey study that was carried out online using Google Form and distributed to UKM students who have taken the Citra Education courses at UKM. Complete responses were obtained from 297 students. The demographics of respondents are as below.

i. Gender

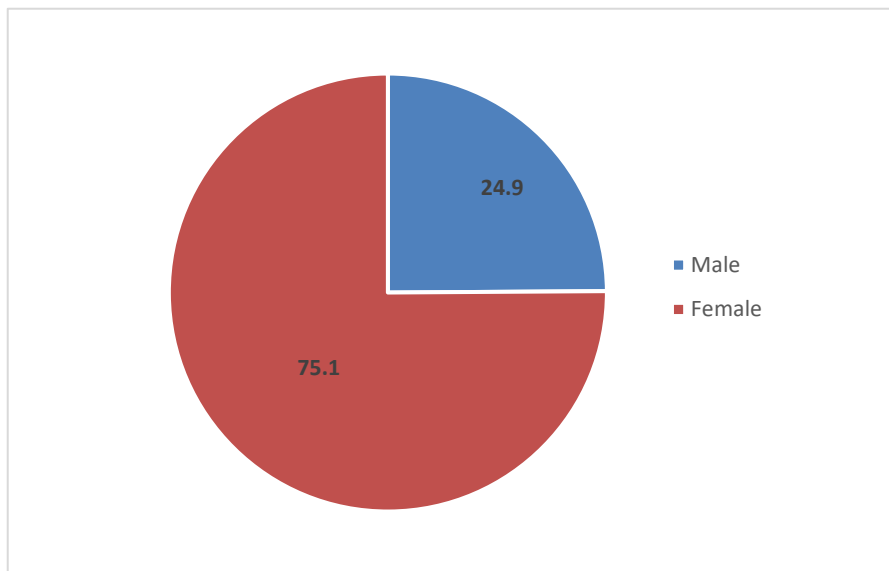
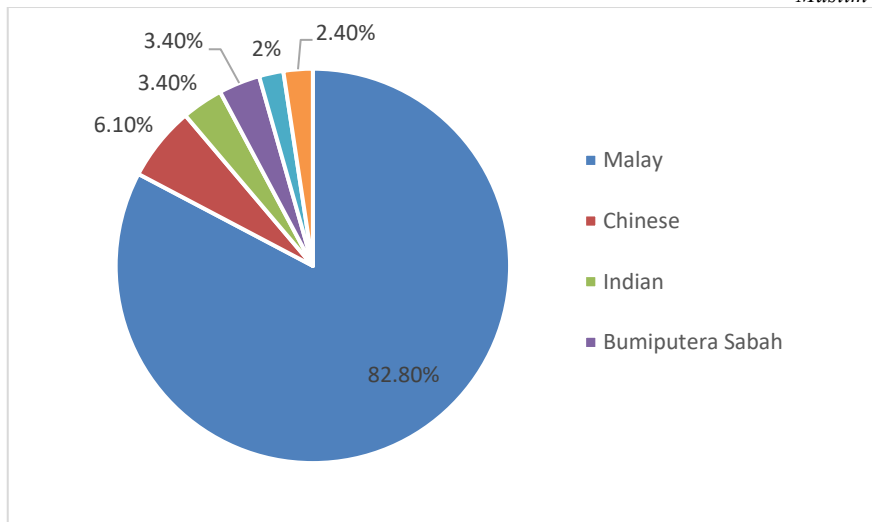


Figure 3: UKM Respondents Demographic

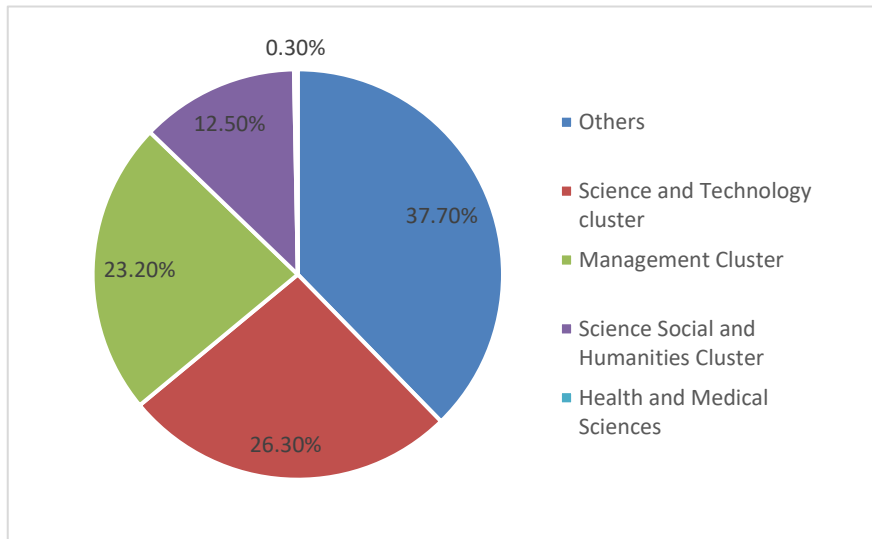
Pie chart shows 75.1% are female respondents and 24.9% are male.

ii. Race

Pie chart below shows the different races involved: 82.8% Malay, 6.1% Chinese, 3.4% Indian, 3.4% Bumiputera Sabah, 2% Bumiputera Sarawak and 2.4% Others.



iii. Study Program Cluster



Pie chart shows 37.7% Others, 26.3% Science and Technology cluster, 23.2% Management cluster, 12.5% Science Social and Humanities cluster.

iv. Perception of Citra Education Course Content

Questions		Score 4 & 5	
		n	%
1	are interesting	26	90.
		8	2
2	are relevant to me and my life	23	78.
		3	4

3	are effective in enhancing my knowledge on culture and society	24 3	81. 8
4	are effective in giving awareness to me on the importance of living in community	27 4	92. 2
5	enhance my knowledge on culture and society	26 5	89. 2
6	enhance my knowledge on nation and the world	24 1	81. 1
7	produce matured students	24 5	82. 5
8	enhance the feeling of social responsibility	25 6	86. 2
9	enable group teamwork	26 0	87. 5
10	affect self-development positively	26 9	90. 6
11	promote critical thinking through its approach	24 5	82. 5
12	are interesting and effective in terms of its course learning	26 5	89. 2
13	are needed for every student	26 6	89. 6

Table 1: Perception of students towards the Citra Education Course Content

Majority of the UKM students chose to agree and strongly agree (over 90%) that the Citra Education course on the topic 'Citra Education' is very interesting, gives awareness on the importance of social life, and also has a positive impact on self-development. The range of responses for agree and strongly agree for all items were from 78.4% to 92.2% which denotes that majority of students have a very positive response towards Citra courses that they enrolled in.

v. Effects of Citra Education

Questions		Score 4 & 5	
		n	%
1	I understand better about life and plural society	22 7	81 .3
2	I am more involved in community work	22 0	78 .8
3	My perspective on world technology development and information	22 4	80 .2

4	I am more expert in the application of leadership theories in my daily live.	2 0 3	72 .7
5	I am more capable of covering issues such as global and climate change	1 9 7	70 .6
6	I am capable of instilling philosophy and ethics in my daily life.	2 0 3	72 .7
7	I am more tolerant towards diversity in socializing (capability, look, skin color, race, etc)	2 3 4	83 .8
8	I am more confident to be an entrepreneur/ expert in organizing and applying the principles of entrepreneurship	1 9 7	70 .6
9	I appreciate the importance of religious practices in my daily life	2 3 3	83 .5
10	I have a high level of self-confidence to be in the society	2 3 8	85 .3

Table 2: Self-perceived effects of students towards Citra Education

In general, students also agree and strongly agree that Citra Education gives an impact on social values, information technology and leadership. The percentage of those who agrees (score 4 and 5) is in the range of 70-85%.

vi. Implementation of Citra Education during the Covid-19 Pandemic

Questions		Score 4 & 5	
The course and assignments of MPU subjects....		n	%
1	was managed well in terms of time allocation	2 3 0	77 .4
2	was managed well in terms of learning load (reading, preparation etc)	2 3 8	80 .1
3	was delivered effectively in terms of various methods of teachings; lectures, case study etc.	2 4 4	82 .1
4	was delivered effectively in terms of online technology usage	2 4 9	83 .8
5	was managed well in terms of testing and evaluation	2 4	82 .1

		4	
6	was taught by highly knowledgeable experts	2 5 2	84 .8
7	was taught by qualified lecturers	2 6 9	90 .5
8	was incorporated with elements of global learning experiences and collaboration from international lecturers	2 1 9	73 .7

Table 3: Implementation of Citra Education courses during the Covid-19 Pandemic

Throughout the spread of covid-19, Citra Education course was well managed in terms of time, technology and qualified lecturers involved.

vi. Overall Impact of Citra Education course

Questions		Score 4 & 5	
The course and assignments of MPU subjects....		n	%
1	capable of stimulating my interest to continue to dwell in to the things learned.	29 2	98.3
2	capable of giving effect and high impact towards my level of understanding	29 7	100. 0
3	capable of giving effect and high impact towards my communication skills	29 2	98.3
4	capable of giving effect and high impact towards my awareness as Malaysian citizen	29 5	99.3
5	capable of giving effect and high impact towards my thinking skills	29 4	98.9
6	capable of giving effect and high impact towards my development of identity	29 5	99.3
7	do not give any impact towards the development of my knowledge, skills and self	19 5	65.7
1	capable of stimulating my interest to continue to dwell in to the things learned.	29 2	98.3

Table 4: Overall Impact of Citra Education course to students

Overall, as in Table 4, the Citra Education course has the effect of stimulating students to deepen the things they have learned, improves thinking skills as well as communication skills, and the formation of identity which shows more than 95% respondents. Among the contributing factors to the success of Citra Education are easy-to-learn courses, innovative teaching methods as well as manageable assessment methods.

viii. Probability of Taking Citra Education course

Majority of students (68.7%) agree to take the Citra Education course and 29% of the respondents are likely to take it. Based on the chart above, it was found that a total of 205 students (68.8%), would definitely take the Citra Education courses if given the choice,

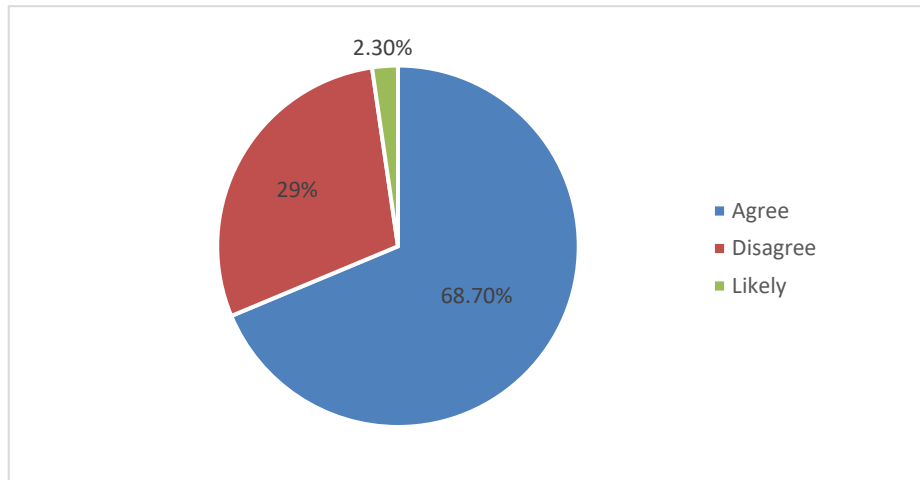


Figure 4: Probability of Taking Citra Education Course If Given the Choice

whilst 86 students (28.9%) would probably take the Citra Education courses if given the choice and only 7 students (2.37%) would not take Citra Education courses if given a choice, including taking it only if it is a requirement.

Discussion

Generic Skills are among the elements that allow a student to be accepted in the global working world, in various fields including science, engineering, business, education and many more. From another perspective, Generic Skills are not only required in the educational program but also needed in the organizational context in order to improve the standard of excellence in services as well as to increase the level of respect for a country as a reflection of the quality of services exhibited (The British Council, 2007). In the context of certain individual's development, Generic Skills are currently seen to be very important due to intense level of competition especially in the global economy, the need to create knowledge and an even a wider cross-border communication, and increase in the need for human capital with abilities in various fields (Kumar, 2012). Having said all that, therefore, the process of Generic Skills adoption is clearly the responsibility of all parties. This responsibility is deemed very important as a guarantee for the country's integrity through the contribution of the country's highly skilled human capital. Developed countries such as United Kingdom, Australia, Germany, France, Denmark, Canada, Singapore, New Zealand and the United States are at the forefront in the practice of Generic Skills (NCVER, 2003). Through the implementation of these Generic Skills, the quality of the country's human capital can be guaranteed to contribute, not only at the national level, but also at the international level. Nevertheless, in the move to apply these Generic Skills, local patterns that are rich in religion and cultural aspects also need to be given serious attention. This is important in order to highlight the Generic Skills that are rich in national identity as well

as to use the skills acquired from the world abroad, as items that are intelligently shared.

In a study done by Lazerson, Wagener & Shumanis (2000) showed only 1/3 of 1400 higher learning institutions in the United States evaluate their students on high-level learning skills, affective development or professional development. As such, Oblinger & Verville (1998) stated that Higher Education Institute students are weak at some skills such as writing, oral communication, team-work, and life-long learning. This statement is supported by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (2008) which proposed that employers tend to look for graduates will high abilities and skills in problem solving, teamwork, communication and leadership.

In Malaysia, the main failure of getting a job is due to lack of soft skills or human skills that employers are looking for. A study by Haslinda, Muhammad Nubli and Zarina (2005) revealed that the marketability of these graduates are evaluated in various aspects and the possibility of employers looking for potential employees with multi skills without having to provide them with service trainings. A study conducted by the Academic Development Centre (CADE), Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) found that issue related to people and skills, remained ranked 10th during the interview session, as compared to the academic-related issues found to be at the eighteenth mark (Mohamad Shatar and Azali Mohamad, 2008). This shows that matters related to formation of General Skills in students should be given serious attention.

Chan Yuen (2000) asserted that present organizations no longer require a lot of labor but, rather, they need highly knowledgeable and skilled workforce. This is because knowledgeable and highly skilled employees will guarantee the survival of an organization. Mohd Faizal (2005) presented the characteristics of knowledgeable and highly skilled workers who are versatile, creative, able to face continuous technological changes and ready to follow the lifelong learning process, and also workers need to familiarize themselves with the use of the latest technology to avoid any complications in this era of globalization. Hence, it can be summarized that the importance of mastering soft skills among employees in order to perform more effectively and efficiently at work has been recognized by an organization. Higher Education Institutions should, therefore, take the initiative to prepare students who can meet the basic requirements laid by employers.

According to Lukman (2005), HEIs that are of quality should not face difficulties in producing graduates who are able to demonstrate quality in the academic field as well as other skills including leadership, communication skills, good moral values and many more. According to Sharifah Hapsah (2005), the quality assurance at HEI is to ensure graduates produced have technical and practical skills, professionalism, technical skills, management skills as well as life-long learning skills. Therefore, Generic Skills function as skills that every student needs to possess. These skills are not only focused on what these students learn in their fields (Lizzio & Wilson, 2004). These skills include communication skills, teamwork skills, and problem - solving skills. In order to produce such students, HEIs need to instill elements that can motivate students through the teaching and learning process.

Conclusion

Overall, the implementation of Citra Education in UKM is going on well and in accordance with the philosophy and concept of MPU. In fact, the rebranding of MPU to Citra Education means that Citra Education at UKM has been given a cross-disciplinary emphasis. Through open-ended questions in the survey, the respondents have stated some weaknesses of the Citra Education

courses. Among them are the total amount of credit that is too large and burdening the students, the number of courses offered are limited which has caused students to scramble to register for a course. In general, suggestions offered by the students include improving the Citra course in terms of a more interesting teaching and learning sessions, lesser burdening assignments, and diversifying assessment methods. Thus, these are the things that need improvements in the near future for Citra Education course in UKM.

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