GENERIC SKILLS OF TRAINEE TEACHERS AT TEACHER EDUCATION INSTITUTE

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to identify the level of generic skills among trainee teachers at one of the Teacher Education Institutes in Malaysia. A total of 104 trainee teachers of final semester Program Ijazah Sarjana Muda Perguruan (PISMP) participated in this study. Data were collected using a questionnaire which was adapted from generic skills questionnaire developed by the SCANS (2001), Mohd Sattar (2009), Kamaruddin (2010), Soft Skills (KPTM 2006) and Malaysian Quality Framework (MQA), 2005). Among the variables studied were the skills of communication, critical thinking and problem solving, teamwork, continuous learning and information management, leadership, moral and ethics, entrepreneurship and self-confidence. Results of the study show the level of generic skills of these trainee teachers is very good. The results indicate there is a positive relationship between the generic skills and achievement. Apart from that, the results also show there is a difference between generic skills and gender but no significant difference with race factors. The importance of teamwork, being given responsibility and collaborative learning emerged as the most important factors for effective learning in the three contexts under consideration. Finally, this paper ends with suggestions and recommendations with respect to further initiatives to enhance the employability of the graduates.

Keywords: Generic skills, trainee teachers, achievement

1. Introduction

In this era of globalization, generic skills are one of the important skills for future teachers who will enter the working world. The trainee teachers need to be equipped with the skills required by the job market. It is important that these future teachers have acquired the generic skills in order to be competitive in the job market when they graduate.

Acquiring teaching skills and knowledge in the field of education alone is not sufficient, but they also need to acquire generic skills as well. This coincides with the government’s efforts to provide knowledge and skilled workers, in line with the National
Education Philosophy i.e. between contents is to produce individual who are balanced in terms of physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual.

Generic skills is a general skills that can be used in a lot of work and not specific to an occupation or industry alone i.e. from lower levels to higher levels (Ahmad, et.al. 2004; Mohd.Zaki, 2004; Cotton, 2001). The level of mastery of these skills will determine on problem solving, report writing, working in group, learning new knowledge and managing stress when they need to operate in a successful change (Mohd. Zaki, 2004).

At present, educators need to admit, face and address the life skills or the generic skills crisis for the happiness and success of students and the productiveness and success of the society (Abdelhalim, 2015). The role of teachers or educators has becoming very vital and complex to ensure that the demand for the generic skills to be fulfilled. He argued that whether it is the 21st century skills, soft skills, life skills, social skill or generic skills, all carry about the same meaning as defined by World Health Organization (1993) as “abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life i.e. communication/interpersonal skills, decision-making and critical thinking skills, coping and self-management skills” (pg. 1).

Trainee teachers who have academic knowledge must be equipped with generic skills so that they have the initiative to find and master new knowledge in accordance with what is needed in the workplace. Application of soft skills among future teachers should be implemented directly through the development of a curriculum specifically designed or indirectly (embedded) through the existing curriculum at the university (Will, Sue and Deborah, 2005)

Thus, the IPG trainee teachers’ graduates can compete in an ever-changing job market. Generic skills will ensure an individual to remain relevant and competitive in a challenging era of globalization. Generic skills are also very useful for university graduates as a set of generic skills needed in the world of work (Kwok, 2004; Gibb and Curtin, 2004).

Therefore, in addition to endeavor to obtain the degree, teacher will also be involved in extra-curricular activities and work experience as their teaching practice in building skills to prepare for the world of work or in other words to meet the market needs in getting a job.

This study is conducted to identify the level of the generic skills of trainee teachers at a selected teacher education institute. This purpose will provide information for respective body to enhance the development of generic skills among students at teacher education institute. This paper is also aimed to examine the level of generic skills of teacher trainees and their academic achievement in terms of their Grade Point Average (GPA) of previous semester. Since it is contested if there is any significant between the two, the researcher strongly believed that this study would be able to provide and contribute new knowledge in relation to generic skills. This research will also discover the relationship (if any) between generic skills and gender and students’ race.

2. Background of the Study

The issue of graduates’ lacking of generic skills has become a global issue in the 21st Century. Generic skills are so much needed in own and foreign countries. It is to make sure that the graduates from every institutes own the technical skills and can face any challenges in the
alter workplace. The most things that worried the employer is the graduate do not have the generic skills (Cotton, 2001). It is the responsibility of the education sector to pick-up this matter as generic skills can be taught during teaching and learning processes. Basic education at preschool level will be the best point to inculcate generic skills even though teachers will find it difficult to make the children understand. Children spend more time being away from home daily. Parents should also be given the responsibility to ensure their children been equipped with these skills.

Majority of the employers all over the world find out most applicants lack of the generic skills. Meanwhile, according to Mohd.Zaki (2004) & Robinson (2000), it is hard to get employees which master the generic skills. The latest trend is most employers like to focus on the generic skills that graduate master and the knowledge they gained rather than a piece of degree certificate. They also emphasize on other skills such as communication skills, team working and problem solving skills (ACCI, 2002; GCA, 2006; Zainudin, et. al. 2005). Therefore, most employers put the hope on the institutes to focus on the development of generic skills amongst their students. Those undergraduates are hoping to be trained systematically with the knowledge and the skills that needed in the industry to increase the employability. However the "Diploma Disease" has declined the call for generic skills urgency (Ronald, 1980). "Diploma Disease" focuses on learning for certification purpose. If no serious action taken by the education authority, these will slower the process of humanizing the human in education.

Moreover, according to Philips (1997), employers often suggest the importance of students out of the school system is equipped with the skills to make decisions and to think critically and creatively. Based on their experience many students who are employed less initiative, not imbued with a culture of knowledge that can push their lifelong learning and rely on others to make decisions for them.

Their increased rate of unemployment among graduates is also reported. (Berita Harian, 2007). The report highlights aspects of maturity think, personality development, leadership, intellectual culture, soft skills among the students who should fall within the integrated education is sometimes not prominent throughout the study, especially to the students in university.

This shows the generic skills among university students showed less effectiveness. Graduates also less dominate skills such as personality or ethics, and problem solving and critical thinking. In addition, graduates are also said to be less mastery of language or communication skills. Therefore, this study was conducted to see the truth of the phenomenon especially at Teacher Education Institutes. Shulman (2011) emphasized that the central of teaching is the ability for teachers transfer and transform students. It is therefore important for educators to provide and to offer the best teaching practices to their students to ensure the transfer and transform processes to occur (pg. 2). Badrock, Pattison and Harris (2010) highlighted that generic skills required skilled and trained educators to teach the skills to students. Both of these really emphasized the importance of teachers' and educators' role in developing generic skills. The teaching quality indirectly reflected the learning quality of the students. However, there is no indication to confirm the best time in the academic calendar to teach generic skills. Should the skills to be incorporated in the curricular or not is still contentious (pg.3). A research conducted by Ballentine and Larres, (2007) discovered that teaching generic skills can be incorporated in
teaching via corporative learning. They also discovered that students with different abilities have improved their generic skills through corporative learning. As the technology has developed at a very rapid speed, research discovered the possibility of teaching generic competencies through virtual learning (Gvaramadze, 2012). This finding has provided an alternative mechanism to teaching generic skills and possibility of non-face-to-face teaching and learning of generic skills. The world of teaching and learning is evolving. The most important is to sustain the real purpose of education regardless of medium and methodology ever changing. To sustain real purpose of education is also referring to sustain and enhance these skills to students. As we can observe the role of educators are central to the success of it.

3. Methodology

This study employed survey research design. Survey design was chosen as Creswell (2005) mentioned that survey design is suitable to identify trends in attitudes, opinions, behavior or characteristics. This research is a cross-sectional survey as it tried to measure generic skills of 104 final semester teacher trainees at a selected teacher education institute. The instrument used in this research was adapted from generic skills questionnaire developed by the SCANS (2001), Mohd Sstar (2009), Kamaruddin (2010), Soft Skills (KPTM, 2006) and Malaysian Quality Framework (MQA, 2009). The instrument consists of Part A and Part B. Part A consists of five items on demographic and Part B consists of 55 items on generic skills including communication, critical thinking and problem solving, teamwork, continuous learning and information management, leadership, moral and ethics, entrepreneurship and self confidence. To achieve these they were asked to apply the five-point Likert scale ranging from (5) representing “strongly agree” to (1) representing “strongly disagree” to a series of statements designed to determine their perceive levels of the generic skills. Prior to distribution, students were informed of the purpose of the study and were assured that the result of the study will be used for research purposes only. The researchers administered the instrument.

4. Results of the Study

This part discusses the results of the study based on the research questions. The discussion is based on the literature.

4.1. The Generic Skills Level of Teacher Trainees

The results showed that the mean of generic skills of the respondents is 4.42 that are considered in high category (4.01 – 5.00). This might happen due to the teaching training modules or curriculum at Teacher Training Institute has fulfilled the construct of generic skills such as communication skills, group working skills, problem solving skills, adapting skills, long life learning, ethic and moral and
also self-confidence. All these constructs are being applied during the teaching and learning either in or out the classroom and also during the on-going assessment that are being practiced at the Teacher Training Institute.

Table 1. The Generic Skills Level of Teacher Trainees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Generic Skills</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>3.77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2 The Correlation between Generic Skills and Performance

Using the Spearman Rho correlation in the analysis, the result indicated that, the trainee teachers’ generic skill and achievement is correlated. According to Table 2, \( r \) [104] = .565, \( p = 0.006 \) (\( p>0.01 \)). The result shows that there is positive correlation between generic skills and achievement. Therefore, it is believed that higher generic skills of the trainee teachers, the higher achievement of the trainees in their learning performance.

Table 2. The Correlation between Generic Skills and Achievement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Achievement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Generic skills</td>
<td>0.565</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant</td>
<td>0.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3 The Generic Skills Based On Gender Factor

The t-test shows that there is a significant difference on gender among the respondents, \( t \)(103) = 34.451, \( p = .000 \) (\( p>0.05 \)). This indicates that among man and woman teacher trainees, they have a different generic skill level. (Table 3)

Table 3. The T-test Analysis Based on Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Gender 34.451 103 0.000

p>0.05

4.4 The Generic Skills Based on Race

The result shows that there is no significant different between race in generic skills among teacher trainees. F (24.727) = .828 and p=0.743 (p˃0.05). (Table 4)

Table 4. Analysis of Generic Skills by Race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>F value</th>
<th>DK Between</th>
<th>DK in Group</th>
<th>level of Sig in-group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>24.727</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0.743</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.0 Findings and Discussions

The findings of the study indicated that the level of the generic skills of the teacher trainees were good as the mean score was 4.42 of five Likert Scale. The finding reflected the process of teaching and learning at the institute as well as the overall activities conducted at the institute. Not forgetting the co-curriculum activities, which are made compulsory for all teacher trainees. These activities were meant to equip teacher trainees to be a whole person as claimed by the National Education Philosophy. This also explained the institute’s role to ensure the generic skills were instilled among teacher trainees. The result of this study also discovered there is a positive relationship between generic skills and academic achievement. The better the academic achievement (GPA score) the higher the generic skills score. The similar findings were found with a research by Badcock, Pattison and Harris, (2010) which indicated that academic achievement, GPA, positively related to generic skills like critical thinking, problem solving and communication. Teaching and learning with understanding will enable students to realize what is obtained and gathered in the classroom in real life. Teachers who teach with understanding will realize that students appreciate his teaching by showing good attitudes. These findings revealed that generic skills needed to be understood, learnt and taught properly and meaningfully. The skills required good cognitive ability and critical thinking. The generic skills studied, for example, critical thinking and problem solving require higher order thinking. This also reflects the importance for teacher trainees to be exposed with higher order thinking skill in order to be critical and ability to solve problems. Teacher workplace, the school, is a very challenging place and teacher trainees need to be prepared with any uncertainties. One way is to ensure these generic
skills to be nurtured from the beginning of their academic year. The study also discover there is no significant difference between generic skills and race (F = 24.73 and p = 0.743). The three main races among teacher trainees attended the teacher education institute are Malay, Chinese and Indian. Finally, the research discovered that there is a significant difference of generic skills score between male and female teacher trainees. Female students showed higher score of their generic skills as compare to male students.

6.0 Conclusions

In conclusion, the effort to conduct this research is beneficial mainly to the teacher education institute as well as education related bodies. The life skills “crisis” is happening when mismatches between what is acquired in the classroom is different from what is demanded in real life especially workplace. It is vital for the teacher education provider to consider seriously towards inculcating the studied generic skills to all individuals trainees as well as other generic skills. The findings of this research provide precious information for respective authority to reconsider the content of the syllabus offered as well as to give more attention to produce mechanism to ensure the generic skills are nurtured during the training period. Hopefully the skills will last and manifested when the teachers are posted at schools. This proposal will only be successful with the collaboration of the educators and the provider. The study provides new information on generic skills profiles among teacher trainees. It will be worth to study in future the extent to which various generic skills were reflected in teaching and learning processes. The knowledge on generic skills among students can be added by investigating whether students’ generic skills profiles differ across discipline.

References


