PROFESSIONALISM DILEMMA:
A REVISITED REVIEW AMONG MALAYSIAN POLYTECHNICS LECTURERS

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ABSTRACT

This article generally discusses professionalism and the challenges faced by lecturers in Malaysian Polytechnics. Today, there are some dispute about the level of professionalism among the lecturers. However, this article is not to support or oppose the claim but to provide the lecturers with a view about what is actually being said about professionalism in accordance with previous studies. According to the Suruhanjaya Perkhidmatan Awam (SPA) Polytechnic lecturers are under the designation of the Category A: Management and Professional. Is being part of the establishment is enough for a lecturer to be considered a professional? Each one of the lecturers in the polytechnics needs to deeply understand what 'professional' means in order that polytechnic transformation goals can be successfully achieved by all parties.

Keywords: professionalism, academicians, lecturers, polytechnics

INTRODUCTION

The polytechnic is committed to be a leading technical university in Malaysia by 2015. The institutions will spearhead innovation in the construction of technical knowledge in line with the aspirations of the nation in producing dynamic community-minded, cultured learning and leadership. In building an understanding of professionalism among academicians, particularly in the Polytechnic, a lecturer should be an expert in a particular field. Among the issues to be discussed are the perceptions of academics on the career of a lecturer, professional development, career advancement, as well as the challenges and ethics. Apart from that, this paper tries to dismantle the previous studies related to the term 'academicians' and try to answer the question 'Who are academicians? 'What is an academic?'. The term 'academician' or 'academic' is often defined in one of three definitions, namely "a member of an academy of arts, science or literature" (Cambridge Dictionary of English, Merriam Webster Online Dictionary), 'a scholar well versed in the art of debate "(Free Online Dictionary) , and 'a follower or arts or philosophy and disseminate ideas "(Merriam Webster Online Dictionary).

In the context of this paper the authors want to use the word 'academician' as an alternative term for lecturers. Use of the term 'academician' in the Polytechnic is one thing that is quite foreign and more debatable since generally almost all individuals around the world prefer to use the term 'lecturer' rather than 'academician'. The only exception from Kamaruzzaman and Siti Akmar study (2009) which
describes the development of academic professionalism, and Sin et al. (2005) to test the efficiency of
moral judgment competence of academic staff from institutes of higher education in Malaysia.

Studies related to the nature of career in teaching in Malaysia, for example, a university lecturer (Ahmad
Johari & Olive, 2008; Sunarti & Shamsuddin, 2005) and teachers (Azhar, 2007.) As well as moral and

To be more precise, the discussion will be divided into the four elements: the definition of
professionalism, the concept of professionalism, academic perspective on the career as a lecturer, the
challenge in the career of a lecturer, and moral and ethical values.

DEFINITION OF PROFESSIONALISM

It is appropriate for us to refer to recognized professional bodies around the world to establish the
real meaning of professionalism. Based on the practice of most professional bodies around the world, to
ensure recognition of professionalism among its members, the industry requires its members to meet a
program Continuous Professional Development (CPD). For example, the Institute of Economic
Development, United Kingdom states the following:

The Institute of Economic Development (IED) is committed to developing and promoting the highest
standards of professional conduct, education and training among economic development practitioners.
The aim of the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) scheme is to help members meet their
individual career aspirations and learning goals by providing a structured framework for measuring and
recording their achievements.

(Institute of Economic Development, United Kingdom)

Other than that to ensure professionalism among its members continue to be practiced IED has
outlined a number of ethical codes as follows:

- General Conduct
- Reputation of the Institute
- Applications of Skills
- Confidentiality
- Law
- Personal Gain
- Declaration of Interest
- Injury to Others
- Responsibility
- Training

According to the Cambridge International Dictionary, professionalism is' a combination of all the
qualities associated with people who are trained and competent. This is illustrated in Jarvis' (1983), by
MarFarlane, 2001) assume that professionalism as mastery of a particular field of knowledge or skills and services that are beneficial to society. The scholars hold that ‘professionalism’ is synonymous to expertise (Zulhambri & Threadgold, 2008).

Regarding the criteria for professionalisme, Flexner also gave opinions (1914), by Shamsuddin et al. (2006) together with Rice and Duncan (2006). According to Flexner (1914), by Shamsuddin et al. (2006), a lecturer’s career basically involves intellectual activity with large individual responsibility. They obtained raw data from scientific knowledge and this learning provides knowledge that have earned, they can practice. They have educational techniques that can be communicated and have a tendency to self-organization and self-motivation.

Rice and Duncan (2006) look at a career as a value system and as an ideology, the knowledge set by the code of ethics and commitment to efficiency, as contained in their study:

- Experts in the field of complex knowledge and skills used in the service of others
- Accountability to the community and career: meet the minimum standards of competence and ethics
- Controlled by a code of ethics
- Demonstrate commitment to the efficiency and the integrity of the moral and professional features in a career
- Be autonomous in their practice and career recognition and accepting responsibility to an institute of professional conduct by a certificate, license, and accreditation
- Fostering professionalism: to contribute to the profession

There are previous studies that define ‘professionalism’ as two key concepts involved the acquisition of skills and knowledge, as well as ethics and responsibility. Evetts (2003), argues that the idea of professionalism is a system of values and ideologies through sociological analysis. Professionalism is also seen as a value system that contributes to the stability and civilized social system.

**CONCEPT OF PROFESSIONALISM**

Cervero (through Sunarti & Shamsuddin, 2005) suggests three important dimensions to the concept of professionalism, the opinion of a career, career definition, and how professionals build their careers. About a career, there are three views: the view function, conflict and critical. On the definition of a career, Cervero (through Sunarti & Shamsuddin, 2005) presents a static approach, and socio-economic processes. Professionals develop their skills using three models: Technical Rationale, Knowing-in-action, and reflection-in-action.
Nik Yusry (2008), in the discussion stated that Islamic professionalism framework should be based on our obedience to the values held by *al-Asma ul Husna* or 99 Names of Allah and the *Sunnah* or *Hadith*. For example, the struggle toward perfection, an effective system of records, accountability (*Al Mas’ulah*), bow to Allah (*al Ubudiyyah*), and who can be trusted. From this functional view agreed to states that academicians feel positive in their career. Flexner (1915, by Sunarti & Shamsuddin, 2005) stressed via static approaches said that academicians feel their careers have been able to meet the six criteria proposed are:

(a) Professional activities are based on intellectual action in line with personal responsibility,

(b) The practice of career is based on knowledge, not routine activities,

(c) The existence of practical practice and not just theory,

(d) Have a technique that can be taught,

(e) Career is managed in-house,

(f) Career is encouraged by the generosity (altruism), where professional members working together for the betterment of society.

Using Reflection-In-Action means lecturers use past experience in solving their own problems in their careers. The academics must also recognize that there will be problems of uncertainty and they may not be able to be solved only using purely theoretical.

**PERSPECTIVE ON THE ACADEMIC CAREER AS A LECTURER**

Ahmad Johari and Olive (2008) in their study at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) shows that respondents from academicians feel that the lecturer should act as a facilitator in the learning process than with teaching as a method of knowledge delivery. This means that lecturers should consider teaching and learning as a process for learning facility. This position is the result of the interaction of respondents with their teaching environment. The study of Sunarti and Shamsuddin (2005) shows that the respondents give a function of their careers, their career defining static approach, and build their expertise through reflection-in-action model.

Avis and Bathmaker (2004) tested the perception of trainees on teaching and learning in a new university based in the United Kingdom. They found a relationship between critical pedagogy and activities that affect performance.

Avis et al. (2002) discusses the concept of professionalism in which they relate didactic pedagogy and professional community. Walker (2001) has raised the issue of professional identity crisis in which academics should prepare students to work in the future. Walker (2001) also proposed the idea as "critical professionalism" in which academics should be creative agencies in fostering a culture of learning for students.
Wood and Harding (2007) suggests the application review and monitoring of co-workers, and self-reflection to evaluate the performance of lecturers in the teaching process. Review colleagues have been proposed to guarantee the quality and purpose of the rewards while colleagues are monitoring for the development and dissemination of professional practice.

CHALLENGES IN THE CAREER OF A LECTURER

In facing the challenges of the teaching profession, global change (Abdul Rahim, 2001), adaptation and adjustment of new faculty members (Nor Wahiza, 2005), dissatisfaction against working conditions and lower status than teaching and conducting research. Abdul Rahim (2001) expressed concern about the challenges faced by teachers in a globalized world. He said to meet the challenges, teachers need to master and be proficient in English.

On the issue of adoption and adaptation of new academicians, Nor Wahiza (2005) reported that respondents surveyed face the following problems: not able to meet all the demands of employment and working conditions dissatisfaction. Based on the study of senior academicians, new academicians only meet minimum standards in teaching components in their careers. They feel that they are lagging in research. These things cause them dissatisfaction with their working conditions and are considered not conducive to their professional development.

Lomas and Nicholls (2005), also states that teaching activities have a lower status than if academics do research. They expressed concern that academics only convey their knowledge to students in deductive. In an effort to improve the quality of teaching, Lomas and Nicholls (2005) also emphasizes the need for monitoring of colleagues while teaching.

Hemmings and Kay (2008), in their test of self-effectiveness aspect of the lecturer, specialist in research and publications at a university in Australia think that awards such posts, promotions and professional recognition is more awarded to those who publish the scientific research rather than just focusing on teaching and service activities alone.

The Sarvan and Karakas (2001) study focused on the emotional aspects of academic growth among academics at a Turkish university. They found that there are three factors related to emotional experiences among academics, the personal development factor with dimensions of academic ability and scientific competence; related factors dimension formal, informal and academic and contextual factors with HRM systems, the physical environment and resources and a supportive scientific climate.

MORAL & ETHICAL

MacFarlane (2001) stated the view that ethics is a fundamental value to career lecturers. Avis and Bathmaker's study (2004) stated that 'the ethical care and respect' is important as a lecturer.

Studies on academics in a government-funded universities carried out by Shamsuddin et al. (2006) suggests that ethics are a very important aspect in a career as a lecturer. Academicians view religion as a core value with an importance of self-monitoring in the care of avoiding unethical practices.
There are two studies related to ethics in Malaysia, Sin et al. (2005) and Shamsuddin et al. (2008). This research is to determine the level of moral competency assessment in 1,000 academics in institutions of higher learning in Malaysia. The findings indicate that those with higher levels of moral judgment have the following characteristics: women, the highly educated, senior lecturer who had served 10 years or more, high religious commitment, a higher code of ethics, and has training related to ethical development.

CONCLUSION

Previous studies that have been debated by researchers before this greater understanding of the concept of professionalism in several approaches, among others, the use of the term 'academician', discussions on aspects of the teaching career, and the centrality of the moral and ethical dimensions in their careers.

Use of the term 'academician' in this paper requires attention because this term describes lecturers expertise in certain areas, and not just in meeting the minimum qualifications to hold a job as a lecturer in the polytechnic. Through this statement it can be understood that the lecturer is only considered as an academician if he is really an expert in the field that he teaches.

Discussions on the teaching aspect of asserting dominance conclude that the role not only teaches-academics, but is also active in research, publishing and community services. The review of past studies shows the majority also agreed that emphasis should be given to research rather than the teaching component alone. Previous studies have also noted the research priorities among new lecturers in order to enhance their professionalism.

The researchers also pointed out the moral and ethical priority to the enhancement of professionalism. They specifically recommended that in the Malaysia Polytechnic, academics should consider ethics as important in their careers and serve as a self-monitoring mechanism as a way to prevent unethical practices. This argument is expected to be transformed into a guide for the development of the system among the candidate’s interview for Malaysian Polytechnic lecturer.
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