DEVELOPING A THINKING SKILLS ASSESSMENT TOOL TO EVALUATE STUDENTS IN INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING

RESEARCH MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE (RMI)
UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA
40450 SHAH ALAM, SELANGOR
MALAYSIA

BY

PARMJIT SINGH
ROSLIND THAMBUSAMY
ZAMALIA MAHMUD
IMRAN HO ABDULLAH

MAY 2013

Contents

2. Letter of Offer (Research Grant)

Surat Kami : 600-RMI/SSP/FRGS 5/3/Fsp (66/2010)
Tarikh : 24 Ogos 2010

Prof. Madya Dr Parmjit Singh
Fakulti Pendidikan
Universiti Teknologi MARA Kampus Seksyen 17
40150 Shah Alam

Y. Bhg. Prof/Prof. Madya/Dr./Tuan/Puan

KELULUSAN SKIM GERAN PENYELIDIKAN FRGS FASA 02/2010

Tajuk Projek	:	Developing A Thinking Skills Assessment Tool to Evaluate Students in Institutions of Higher Education
Kod Projek	:	600-RMI/SSP/FRGS 5/3/Fsp (66/2010)
Bidang	:	Sains Sosial
Tempoh	:	01 September 2010 – 31 Ogos 2012 (24 bulan)
Jumlah Peruntukan	:	RM 30,000.00
Ketua Projek	:	Prof. Madya Dr Parmjit Singh

Dengan hormatnya perkara di atas adalah dirujuk.

2. Sukacita dimaklumkan pihak Kementerian Pengajian Tinggi melalui surat JPT.S(BPKI) 2000/011/010 Jilid. 4 (4) telah meluluskan cadangan penyelidikan Y. Bhg Prof/Prof. Madya/Dr./Tuan/Puan untuk di biayai di bawah Skim Geran Penyelidikan Fundamental (FRGS) Fasa 02/2010.

3. Bagi pihak Universiti kami mengucapkan tahniah kepada Y. Bhg. Prof/Prof. Madya/Dr./Tuan/Puan kerana kejayaan ini dan seterusnya diharapkan berjaya menyiapkan projek ini dengan cemerlang.

4. Untuk tujuan mengemaskini, pihak Y. Bhg. Prof/Prof. Madya/Dr./Tuan/Puan adalah di minta untuk mengisi borang setuju terima projek penyelidikan dan menyusun perancangan semula bajet yang baru seperti yang diluluskan. Sila lihat lampiran bagi tatacara tambahan untuk pengurusan projek.

Sekian, harap maklum.

"SELAMAT MENJALANKAN PENYELIDIKAN DENGAN JAYANYA"

Yang benar

MUSTAFAR KAMAL HAMZAH
Ketua Penyelidikan (Sains dan Teknologi)

4. Report

4.1 Proposed Executive Summary

As clichéd as it may sound, and no matter how much universities may denounce these claims, the fact remains that the majority of employers decry the quality of the graduates who appear before them as potential employees, particularly in the area of thinking skills (Morshidi Sirat et. al., 2008). Despite the formidable array of A's on their transcripts, these graduates fail to impress in the fundamental work-related skills. With increasing work complexity and job mobility in modern economies, there is a greater for people to develop skills that allow them to adapt to and operate in a variety of workplaces. As a result, there has been a growing interest in the development and assessment of generic skills (Kearns, 2001).

When students apply for admission to a university in Malaysia, a battery of screening assessment processes are duly conducted. The formidable array of pre-entry requirements would normally include nationally endorsed secondary school examination grades, Malaysian English University Test (MUET) scores, interviews and written placement tests conducted by the faculties themselves. The objective here is to ensure the candidate is a good fit with the requirement of the university or selected course of choice. As such, if there is a screening process at the ENTRY POINT, why is there no a screening process at the EXIT POINT (as they graduate) with the objective that the candidate is a good fit with the needs of the working world? Would these not help to ensure that the product of a university, ie. The graduate is not defective or of a dubious nature and unable to perform in the real world despite having an impressive academic transcript? In view of this, we are proposing a Thinking Skill Assessment Instrument which would act as an indicator of generic thinking skills in graduating students at exit level. The premise is that such a tool would benefit immensely all the stakeholders involved in the higher education sector in knowing exactly the calibre of graduating students in their avatar as future employees.

The rationale behind the exit tests is this test will add value to these skills imparted by their university experience, and the institution will be able to identify these skills gained by their graduates and track the programs of study in which those skills are being well developed.

4.3 Introduction

This study is premised on the contention that there is a lack of appropriate screening methods and tools to ensure the quality of graduating university students which is ironic considering the intensity of the screening mechanisms in place select and sanction entry to the university. Other than academic achievements, no other forms of formal screening are practiced and thus, in due course, results in the massification of undesirable fresh graduates with low employability capabilities flooding the job market. At the outset, it must be established that the unemployment concern has long been haunting Malaysian fresh graduates in spite the fact that it is no longer something new to the Malaysian context. By the wake of 2006, for example, 20,217 unemployed graduates registered with the Malaysian Ministry of Human Resources' Career Assistance Program to aid them find suitable employment. (Ministry of Human Resources, 2009). Even as recent as late 2011, 40,000 graduates remain jobless, having to resort to part time, freelance, and odd jobs to sustain their living conditions (Bernama, Education Transformation Needful, 2012). The predicament is clear and neither the government nor the employers are holding back the truth: many of the graduates are simply unwanted. The usage of the word unwanted is most appropriate here, as the lack of job opportunities is not the primary reason for such a disturbing trend of unemployment. The origin of the problem seems to point to the graduates themselves.

The second consideration is the fact that many other countries have long since formalized generic skills assessment tools to gauge their fresh graduates' employability. Australia, for instance, has in place a centralized generic skills assessment tool entitled "Graduate Skills Assessment" or the "GSA" (Hambur, Rowe & Luc, 2002). Other instances include England, with the Cambridge Thinking Skills Assessment (TSA Cambridge, 2008), and Work Keys System assessment by the American College Testing Center for Education and Work (Saterfiel & McLarty, 1995).

By coopting these two considerations, this research aims to develop a critical thinking assessment tool that is to be used as a centralized and plausible yardstick to measure the employability of university graduates in relation to their generic critical thinking skills. This study is guided by and structured on three focal objectives which are to: