

Students' Generic Skills: A Comparative Study between Malaysia and Indonesia

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Abstract: This study compares generic skills (communication, IT, numeracy, learning how to learn, problem solving, working with others, and subject-specific competencies) possessed by undergraduates at the National University of Malaysia (UKM) and the National University of Indonesia (UI). Students' self-reports demonstrated that UI students rated their generic skills higher than UKM students, and that among business management students, those at UKM rated their skills higher than those at UI, while in the economics department, UI students gave higher scores than UKM students. Multiple regression analysis showed that subject-specific competencies, learning how to learn, and numeracy were significantly associated with UI students' academic achievement.

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1. Introduction

Previous studies such as Pumphrey & Slater (2002), Curry, P., Sherry, R., & Tunney, O. (2003), Borthwick & Wissler (2003), Crebert, G., Bates, M., Bell, B., Patrick, C. J., & Cragolini, V. (2004), Bath, D., Smith, C., Stein, S., & Swann, R. (2004), the Business Council of Australia (BCA), (2006), and Jones (2009) have revealed that employers are not satisfied with the employability (or known as 'generic') skills possessed by undergraduate students. This means generic skills not provided sufficiently to students during their university education. Most studies suggest that the development of generic skills are best facilitated by giving students opportunities for practical application, rather than simply talking about or demonstrating what to do. The preferred teaching approach is no longer the lecture style or the slide presentation, where the lecturer simply stands in front of the class, showing slide after slide. Currently, teaching and learning that occurred in the university are student-centred, meaning students have the opportunities to build their generic skills through various classroom activities.

Similar issues regarding higher education have arisen and been discussed widely in Malaysia and Indonesia. The study conducted by Jelas, Z., Azman, N., Ali, M., Nordin, N., & Tamuri, A. (2006) showed that students' overall generic skills were at average level (2–11). Students also perceived that their communication, IT, numeracy, learning how to learn, problem solving, working with others, and discipline-based skills, as developed at university, were at an average level. The results of employers' interviews conducted in Malaysia further show that there is consistent and shared belief that the graduates should have these seven core skills. Similarly, Ambigapathy & Aniswal (2005) reported that

comments from graduates and employers emphasized the importance of generic skills, particularly teamwork, in the curriculum. In Indonesia, Irma (2007) shows that employers ranked communication skills as the most important for the graduate employees, followed by integrity and honesty, working in a group, interpersonal skills, ethical values, good motivation, organizational skills, IT skills, and a high Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA).

These issues have inspired the higher education authorities of Malaysia and Indonesia to help undergraduate students to develop generic skills during their study at university. The education process should emphasize the importance of enhancing students' generic skills, that is, communication, IT, numeracy, problem solving, learning how to learn, working with others, and subject-specific competencies. In order to produce graduates with a high self-learning capacity, these skills need to be part of the teaching and learning methodologies. This incorporation is consistent with the Basic Framework for Higher Education Development (2007), the Malaysian Qualification Framework (2005), & UNESCO (2006).

Although extensive researches from various countries address these issues, few studies examine this situation across national borders. Thus, the present study aims to compare the generic skills possessed by undergraduate students at both the National University of Malaysia (UKM) and the National University of Indonesia (UI). The implication of the study is to identify positive actions to improve the quality of graduates at both universities.

2. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study (Figure 1) illustrates the data resources, the research

process, and the type of data collected to attain the research objective, as described below.

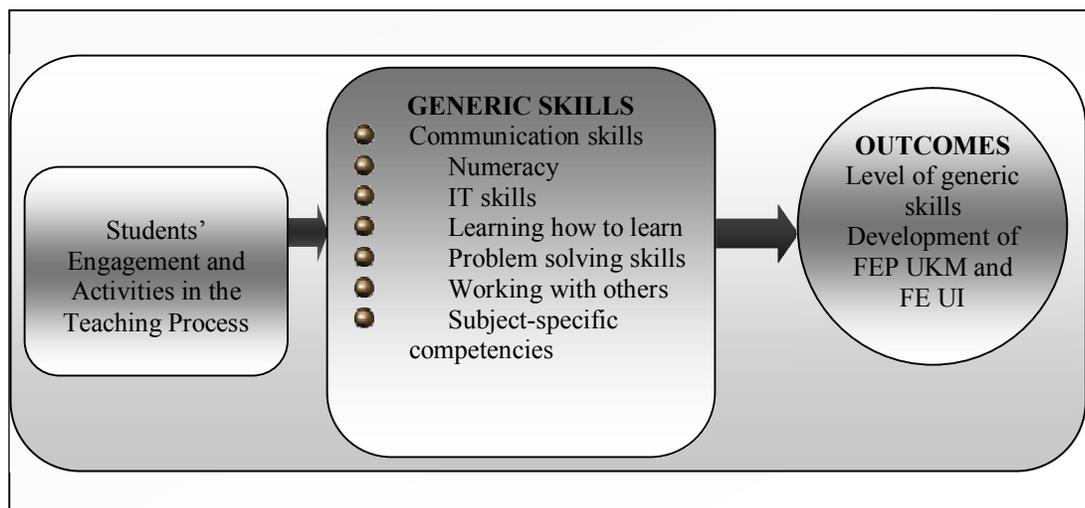


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of The Study (adapted from Jelas et al., 2006; Bennett et al., 2000; LTSN, 2002; Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), 2000; Washer, 2007)

The conceptual framework shown in Figure 1 illustrates how students' engagement and activities generated in the classroom develops the generic skills. The model of generic skills discussed in this paper refers closely to that developed by Jelas & Azman (2005). Generic skills defined as set of skills or abilities essential for fulfilling three potential outcomes of higher education, namely, the needs and requirements of employers in the marketplace, lifelong learning, and good citizenship. In this study, the generic skills consist of seven skills: communication, numeracy, IT, learning how to learn, problem solving, working with others, and subject-specific competencies (Jelas & Azman, 2005; Bennett, N., Dunne, E. & Carre, C., 2000; Cornford, 1999). The section below elaborates the seven generic skills as displayed in the conceptual framework.

2.1 Communication skills

Communication skills are necessary to enable graduates to deliver their ideas as individuals and group members. As Morreale, S. P., Osborn, M. M., & Pearson, J. C. (2000) indicate, these skills combine a diversity of elements in order to produce good decisions, solutions, and negotiations (1–3). Communication skills refer to one's ability to use active listening, writing skills, oral communication, presentation skills, and questioning and feedback

skills to establish successful communication (Mayer Committee, 1992; as cited by the Scottish

Qualification Authority, 2003; Bennett, 2000; Washer, 2007; Jones, 2009).

2.2 Numeracy

The definition for numeracy is aggregate skills, knowledge, beliefs, thinking patterns, and related communicative and problem solving processes that individuals need to effectively interpret and handle real-world quantitative situations and problems (Gal, 1997; Jelas et al.; 2006; Washer, 2007).

2.3 Information Technology

IT skills refers to the ability of 'individuals to apply technology such as computers, software applications, databases, and other technologies to achieve a wide variety of academic, work-related, and personal goals (Mayer Committee, 1992; as cited by the Scottish Qualification Authority, 2003; ACRL, 2004; Washer, 2007). Harrington & Elander (2003) contends that the application of technology in teaching and learning is to provide manifold opportunities for teachers and learners to develop their lifelong learning.

2.4 Learning How to Learn

The definition of learning "how to learn" is acquiring the set of skills and knowledge required to learn efficiently and effectively in any learning situation (QCA, 2000). Learning demands processes, understandings, and skills that acquired through teaching and learning. When one has gained mastery in learning how to learn, one can learn effectively

and efficiently at any age. Thus, such competency is essential to the concept of lifelong learning and the self-managed learner (Smith, 1982; Jelas et al., 2006; Washer, 2007).

2.5 Problem Solving Skills

Problem solving skills constitute the ability to tackle problems systematically, for the purpose of working towards solutions and learning from this process (Jelas et al., 2006; Washer, 2007). The ability to solve problems will have great impact on the success of students' 'real life' endeavours (Cook & Slife, 1985). QCA (2000) explains the purpose of these skills as to enable students to tackle problems systematically in the workplace, working towards appropriate solutions and learning from this process.

2.6 Working with Others

The definition for working with others is the ability to meet one's own responsibilities and work cooperatively in a pair or a group for achieving shared objectives (QCA 2000, Jelas et al. 2006; Washer 2007). Learning to become valuable members of a team are one of the most vital skills for employability (Mayer Committee, 1992); QCA 2000). The ability to work as a team member will have a great impact on the student's ability to produce new ideas and deal with any situation in real-life work.

2.7 Subject-Specific Competencies

Subject-specific competencies are defined as the knowledge, capabilities, and dispositions required to organize and provide information at the appropriate level of the study relating to the subject content taught (Jelas et al. 2006; Washer 2007). This means that every graduate must have specific subject knowledge related to his/her selected discipline, and must understand both how to link this information to other disciplines and how it can be applied in a real-world setting.

2.8 Evaluation of Generic Skills

Self-report provided by the students were used to evaluate the practice and development of generic skills. These reports described the ways that students' engaged and carried out activities in the process of learning in order to acquire generic skills. The level of generic skills identified are compared and analysed. As the final part of the conceptual framework shows, the outcomes of the study include the development of students' generic skills at both universities.

3. Research Objectives

The purpose of the study was to compare the practice of generic skills among undergraduate students in the Economics Faculty at the National University of Malaysia (FEP UKM) and the Economics Faculty at the National University of Indonesia (FE UI). The study aims to:

- (1) investigate and compare the level of generic skills practised by undergraduate students in FEP UKM and FE UI based on the self-reports;
- (2) identify the differences and similarities in the generic skills practiced by these students;
- (3) investigate the differences and similarities of generic skills practiced by undergraduate students across different departments in FEP UKM and FE UI; and
- (4) investigate the correlation and relationship between generic skills and students' academic achievements in FEP UKM and FE UI.

4. Research Method

The target population of this study was all students in FEP UKM and FE UI. Purposive random sampling used to define the study sample. The total sample used in the study was 689 students—355 students from FE UI and 334 selected randomly from FEP UKM. Questionnaires were conducted to elicit students' self-reports regarding their level of frequency in practicing generic skills. The students were asked to respond to each statement about their practice of generic skills using a 5-point Likert scale (never, rarely, sometimes, often, and very often; see Table 2). For example, to obtain the students' level of practicing communication skills for statement A1 (made a class presentation), they were asked to rate their level of practice as never, rarely, sometimes, often, or very often. The mean score of the respondents' level of generic skills was calculated and interpreted in three levels, as shown in Table 3.

Table 1. Generic Skills Score Rating

Students' Questionnaire (5-point Likert Scale)	
1.	Never
2.	Rarely
3.	Sometimes
4.	Often
5.	Very Often

Table 3. Interpretations of Mean Scores

Mean Score	Interpretation
1.00 to 2.33	Low
2.34 to 3.66	Medium
3.67 to 5.00	High

As Table 3 shows, a mean score between 1.00 and 2.33 indicates a low level of generic skills, a mean score between 2.34 and 3.66 a medium level, and a mean score between 3.67 and 5.00 a high level of generic skills.

4.1 Reliability and Validity of Instruments

A reliability analysis demonstrated that all constructs of generic skills included in the study had a high Cronbach alpha coefficient (>0.7) and corrected-item correlation ($>.300$). This analysis shows that there is a consistency of instruments between the study conducted by Jelas et al. (2006) and this study.

Factor analysis conducted to confirm that the items in each construct yielded strong factor loading upon the construct itself. The results show that communication competencies yielded factor loading in the range .628 to .716, IT skills in the range .624 to .731, numeracy in the range .612 to .724, learning how to learn in the range .522 to .719, problem solving in the range .482 to .707, working with others in the range .596 to .657, and subject-specific competencies in the range .658 to .773. These findings confirm that the items in each construct explain and measure according to their intended purpose.

5. Research Findings

Table 4. Comparison of Mean, Standard Deviation, and Level of Generic Skills between FEP UKM and FE UI

Generic Skills	UKM			UI		
	Mean	S.D.	Level	Mean	S.D.	Level
Communication	3.48	.526	Medium	3.73	.557	High
Information Technology	3.59	.747	Medium	3.82	.879	High
Numeracy	3.50	.548	Medium	3.50	.597	Medium
Learning How to Learn	3.61	.513	Medium	3.64	.574	Medium
Problem Solving	3.62	.558	Medium	3.66	.573	Medium
Working with Others	3.69	.505	High	3.82	.565	High
Subject-Specific Competencies	3.58	.552	Medium	3.59	.594	Medium
Overall Generic Skills	3.60	.440	Medium	3.67	.453	High

5.2 The differences and the similarities of generic skills practised by undergraduate students across the department at FEP UKM and FE UI

The MANOVA test revealed that business management students in FEP UKM rated learning how to learn ($F = 5.288$ and $\text{sig.} = .022 < .05$), problem solving ($F = 4.358$ and $\text{sig.} = .038 < .05$), subject-specific competencies ($F = 6.159$ and $\text{sig.} = .014 < .05$), and overall generic skills ($F = .118$ and $\text{sig.} = .011 < .05$) more highly than business management students in FE UI. However, there was no significant difference in ratings of generic skills between business management students in FEP UKM

The data collected were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) MS-Window version 15. The analysis conducted using descriptive statistics portray and compare the development of students' generic skills between FEP UKM and FE UI. Inferential statistics enabled the researcher to decide whether there were differences between the groups of respondents as well as to investigate whether there was any relationship between students' CGPA and their generic skills. The inferential statistics used in this study include MANOVA, Pearson correlation, and multiple regressions. The findings regarding the students' practice of generic skills in the FEP UKM and the FE UI are explained in the following section.

5.1 Levels of students' generic skills in FEP UKM and FE UI

According to the findings, the students in FE UI showed a higher performance in generic skills than those in FEP UKM. Undergraduate students in FE UI obtained a higher mean score for generic skills (3.67) than those in FEP UKM (3.60). A closer examination of the ratings given to generic skills found that undergraduate students in FE UI gave a higher mean score for communication, IT, numeracy, learning how to learn, problem solving, and working with others than students in FEP UKM (see Table 4).

and FE UI in terms of communication ($F = 1.064$ and $\text{sig.} = .303 > .05$), IT ($F = .163$ and $\text{sig.} = .687 > .05$), numeracy ($F = .955$ and $\text{sig.} = .330 > .05$), or working with others ($F = .463$ and $\text{sig.} = .497 > .05$) (see Table 5).

The comparison of generic skills between students of accounting in FEP UKM and FE UI, as displayed in Table 6, found that there is no significant difference between the two groups in communication ($F = 1.618$ and $\text{sig.} = .205 > .05$), IT ($F = .605$ and $\text{sig.} = .437 > .05$), numeracy ($F = .726$ and $\text{sig.} = .381 > .05$), learning how to learn ($F = 2.764$ and $\text{sig.} = .098 > .05$), problem solving ($F =$

2.228 and sig. = .137 > .05), working with others (F = .027 and sig. = .869 > .05), subject-specific competencies (F = 2.217 and sig. = .138 > .05), and

overall generic skills (F = 2.289 and sig. = .132 > .05).

Table 5. The Different Ratings of Generic Skills between Business Management Students at UKM and UI

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Mean	Sum Mean Square	F	Sig.
Communication	Buss. Manag. FEP UKM	3.62	.274	1.06	.303
	Buss. Manag. FE UI	3.71			
IT	Buss. Manag. FEP UKM	3.77	.050	.163	.687
	Buss. Manag. FE UI	3.74			
Numeracy	Buss. Manag. FEP UKM	3.57	.257	.955	.330
	Buss. Manag. FE UI	3.52			
Learning how to learn	Buss. Manag. FEP UKM	3.73	1.220	5.28*	.022
	Buss. Manag. FE UI	3.60			
Problem solving	Buss. Manag. FEP UKM	3.75	1.041	4.35*	.038
	Buss. Manag. FE UI	3.63			
Working with others	Buss. Manag. FEP UKM	3.80	.108	.463	.497
	Buss. Manag. FE UI	3.76			
Subject-spec. comp.	Buss. Manag. FEP UKM	3.72	1.442	6.15*	.014
	Buss. Manag. FE UI	3.58			
Overall generic skills	Buss. Manag. FEP UKM	3.71	2.461	.118*	.011
	Buss. Manag. FE UI	3.64			

* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

Table 6. The Different Ratings of Generic Skills between Accounting Students at UKM and UI

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Mean	Sum Mean Square	F	Sig.
Communication	Accounting FEP UKM	3.52	.457	1.618	.205
	Accounting FE UI	3.62			
IT	Accounting FEP UKM	3.67	.190	.605	.437
	Accounting FE UI	3.61			
Numeracy	Accounting FEP UKM	3.55	3.179	.726	.381
	Accounting FE UI	3.51			
Learning How to Learn	Accounting FEP UKM	3.60	.751	2.764	.098
	Accounting FE UI	3.49			
Problem Solving	Accounting FEP UKM	3.64	.603	2.228	.137
	Accounting FE UI	3.53			
Working with Others	Accounting FEP UKM	3.69	.008	.027	.869
	Accounting FE UI	3.68			
Subject-Spec. Comp.	Accounting FEP UKM	3.54	.709	2.217	.138
	Accounting FE UI	3.43			
CORE	Accounting FEP UKM	3.61	.417	2.289	.132
Overall Generic Skills	Accounting FE UI	3.52			

* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

Table 7. The Different Ratings of Generic Skills between Economics Students at UKM and UI

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Mean	Sum Mean Square	F	Sig.
Communication	Economics UKM	3.35	19.819	72.01*	.000
	Economics UI	3.95			
IT	Economics UKM	3.51	14.988	40.94*	.000
	Economics UI	4.03			
Numeracy	Economics UKM	3.43	6.834	21.26*	.000
	Economics UI	3.78			
Learning How to Learn	Economics UKM	3.55	6.654	21.58*	.000
	Economics UI	3.90			
Problem Solving	Economics UKM	3.49	9.069	27.75*	.000
	Economics UI	3.89			
Working with Others	Economics UKM	3.62	9.705	33.05*	.000
	Economics UI	4.04			
Subject- Spec. Comp.	Economics UKM	3.49	6.075	16.35*	.000
	Economics UI	3.82			
GENERIC SKILLS	Economics UKM	3.50	9.558	44.02*	.000
	Economics UI	3.91			

* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

However, the analysis of differences revealed that economic students in FE UI gave higher ratings compared to economic students in FEP UKM for the following skills: communication ($F = 72.016$ and $\text{sig.} = .000 < .05$), IT ($F = 40.940$ and $\text{sig.} = .000 < .05$), numeracy ($F = 21.263$ and $\text{sig.} = .000 < .05$), learning how to learn ($F = 21.589$ and $\text{sig.} = .000 < .05$), problem solving ($F = 21.589$ and $\text{sig.} = .000 < .05$), working with others ($F = 33.050$ and $\text{sig.} = .000 < .05$), subject-specific competencies ($F = 16.356$ and $\text{sig.} = .000 < .05$), and overall generic skills ($F = 44.023$ and $\text{sig.} = .000 < .05$) (see Table 7).

5.3 The correlation and relationship between students' academic achievement and their generic skills in FEP UKM and FE UI

The strength of the relationship between generic skills and students' CGPA in FEP UKM and FE UI were analysed using Pearson Correlation. Table 8 shows that there was no significant

correlation between students' CGPA and communication ($r = -.028$, $\text{sig.} = .644 > .05$), IT ($r = -.005$, $\text{sig.} = .933 > .05$), numeracy ($r = -.042$, $\text{sig.} = .486 > .05$), learning how to learn ($r = .022$, $\text{sig.} = .715 > .05$), problem solving ($r = .051$, $\text{sig.} = .395 > .05$), working with others ($r = -.068$, $\text{sig.} = .260 > .05$), subject-specific competencies ($r = -.048$, $\text{sig.} = .425 > .05$), or overall generic skills ($r = -.017$, $\text{sig.} = .782 > .05$) at FEP UKM. At FE UI, however, there was a significance correlation between CGPA and communication ($r = .273$, $\text{sig.} = .000 < .05$), IT ($r = .120$, $\text{sig.} = .033 < .05$), numeracy ($r = .153$, $\text{sig.} = .006 < .05$), learning how to learn ($r = .287$, $\text{sig.} = .000 < .05$), problem solving ($r = .182$, $\text{sig.} = .001 < .05$), working with others ($r = .260$, $\text{sig.} = .000 < .05$), subject-specific competencies ($r = .332$, $\text{sig.} = .000 < .05$), and overall generic skills ($r = .286$, $\text{sig.} = .000 < .05$).

Table 8. Pearson's Correlation of between Generic Skills and Students' CGPA at UKM and UI

Correlation between Two Variables		FEP UKM		FE UI	
		r	Sig.	r	Sig.
Communication	CGPA	.028	.644	.273**	.000
Informational Technology	CGPA	.005	.933	.120*	.033
Numeracy	CGPA	.042	.486	.153**	.006
Learning How to Learn	CGPA	.022	.715	.287**	.000
Problem Solving	CGPA	.051	.395	.182**	.001
Working with Others	CGPA	.068	.260	.260**	.000
Subject-Specific Competencies	CGPA	.048	.425	.332**	.000
GENERIC SKILLS	CGPA	.017	.782	.286**	.000

**Significant at .01; *Significant at .05

The multiple regression with stepwise method was used to investigate the FE UI sample according to the seven independent variables, communication, IT, numeracy, learning how to learn, problem solving, working with others, and subject-specific competencies, across the dependent variable of the students' CGPA. The result of this analysis showed that three of the independent variables were significantly associated with students' CGPA: subject-specific competencies, learning how to learn, and numeracy. Subject-specific competencies were the main predictor of students' CGPA, while learning how to learn was the second predictor, and numeracy the third. The strength of the three predictors was $R^2 = .159$, which constitutes the combined contribution of the three predictors of students' CGPA. This means that the three predictors contributed 16% to students' CGPA, with a

significance of $p = .00 < 0.01$. The subject-specific competencies, as the main predictor, yielded $\beta = .312$, $t = 3.889$, with a significance of $p = 0.00 < 0.01$, and contributed 12.4% to students' CGPA. This means that if the score of the subject-specific competencies increases by one unit, then the students' CGPA should increase by .312 units. The second predictor, learning how to learn, yielded $\beta = .241$, $t = 3.512$, with a significance of $p = .00 < 0.01$, and contributed 2.2% to students' CGPA. This means that if the learning how to learn score increases by one unit, then the students' CGPA should increase by .154 units. The third predictor was numeracy, which yielded $\beta = .154$, $t = 2.21$, with a significance of $p = .028 < 0.05$, contributing 1.3% to students' CGPA. This means that if the numeracy score increases by one unit, then the students' CGPA should increase by .154 units (see Table 9).

Table 9. Multiple Regression Analysis of Subject-Specific Competencies, Learning How to Learn and Numeracy, Toward Students' CGPA in FE UI

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.	R2	Contribution	Co linearity Statistics	
								Tolerance	VIF
Constant	2.504	.118		21.2	.000	-	-	.670	1.493
Sub.-Spec. Comp.	.157	.032	.312	4.88	.000	.124	12.4%	.578	1.731
LHTL	.127	.036	.241	3.51	.001	.146	2.2%	.561	1.784
Numeracy	.083	.038	.154	2.21	.028	.159	1.3%	.670	1.493

$R = .353(a), .382(b), .399(c)$

$R^2 = .124(a), .146(b), .159(c)$

Adjusted $R^2 = .122(a), .140(b), .151(c)$

Constant = 2.504

Standard Error = .118

6. Discussion

The results presented in this study shed light on the differences and similarities between students' generic skills in FEP UKM and FE UI. In general, the findings indicated that both groups (FE UI and FEP UKM) were able to distinguish clearly between the seven components of the generic skills-set (communication, IT, numeracy, problem solving, learning how to learn, working with others, and subject-specific competencies). These students were able to reflect their own level of generic skills, and to identify which of the seven skills they practised.

Although FE UI students demonstrated a higher rating for generic skills compared to those at FEP UKM, both faculties need to encourage the development of communication, IT, numeracy, learning how to learn, problem solving, working with others, subject-specific competencies, and overall generic skills of their students. Graduates are able to comprehend and analyse work situations with a critical mind and use their generic skills to succeed in

their career, satisfy their employer, and contribute to their country. Since there is lack of communication skills among undergraduate students, it is important for FEP UKM to encourage lecturers to implement learning activities that aim to improve students' communication skills. (to ensure a minimum mean score of 3.67 to 4 that is, the lowest part of the 'high level' banding of generic skills, according Bennett et al.'s (2000) interpretation of mean scores).

This study revealed that students in FE UI rated their communication, IT, working with others, and overall generic skills more highly than the students in FEP UKM. There are various explanations for this: first, the competition between universities in Indonesia is greater than in Malaysia. As a top faculty at the University of Indonesia, FE UI attempts to maintain the quality of its graduates at a higher level than other universities in Indonesia. A second reason is that the job market in Indonesia is more competitive than in Malaysia, a situation that obliges FE UI to provide its students with

employability competencies in order to be prepared for the competition. A third explanation is that FE UI is the oldest faculty among all the universities of Indonesia, established 54 years ago, in comparison to FE UKM, which was established only 37 years ago. This means that FE UI has had a longer period to become aware of the skills needed by students to compete in the job market after graduating.

Another common issue in higher education is the relationship between students' generic skills and their CGPA (BCA, 2006; Ellis et al., 2005). Unfortunately, this study demonstrated that generic skills have no relationship with students' CPGA in FEP UKM. This result implies that generic skills not embedded into any kind of grading systems at FEP UKM. At FE UI, meanwhile, students' generic skills made a small positive contribution to their CGPA, indicating that generic skills are included in the grading systems at FE UI.

The findings of this study raise an important issue for universities and other institutions. Both UKM and UI should provide students with generic skills during their university education. The limited generic skills revealed by this study are therefore of concern. Specifically, our study questions the assumption that generic skills are an inevitable outcome of time spent during their university education, and as discussed, this raises an issue that has received considerable attention both within and beyond HE institutions. Lecturers should make the connections between various sections of the syllabus, in order to forge stronger links between content knowledge and generic skills. At the same time, the promotion of generic skills should be one of the strengths of graduate training at university.

Graduates should leave higher education being better and stronger than as they enter it, and this improvement should be attributable to the undergraduate curriculum, rather than simply to the fact that three to five years have passed. Graduates need to be equipped with generic skills that they can use to 'sell themselves' to employers. By practising these generic skills in and outside of the classroom will enable students to become more effective, independent learners during their studies, and will enhance their employment prospects following graduation. As a result, university graduates should leave with three main attributes, namely employability, life-long learning, and good citizenship (QCA, 2000; Jelas et al., 2006; Washer, 2007; Star & Hammer, 2007). In short, this study contributes to the issues surrounding the development of generic skills at university, and its results may be used to inform, support, and plan innovations within the university curriculum and teaching at both universities.

7. Conclusion

This study was conducted at the National University of Malaysia (UKM) and the National University of Indonesia (UI) to identify the level of generic skills being developed through the courses at each university, particularly those offered in the second and third year of the BEd (Hons) undergraduate programme, as well as to monitor students' general awareness and engagement in these skills. The study concludes that there are similar trends in students' generic skills practiced at the National University of Malaysia and the National University of Indonesia. However, both universities did not give great emphasis on the practice of generic skills. The authorities of the universities should consider the manners in which students' generic skills can be assessed. In addition, authorities should decide whether to impose certain level of generic skills as a requirement for completing a degree programme within their institution.

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