

**Athens Institute for Education and Research
ATINER**



**ATINER's Conference Paper Series
SOS2015-1785**

**Liberal Education Management in Malaysia
Public Universities: Educators' and Students'
Perspective**

**Aishah Tamby Omar
Universiti Malaysia Sabah
Malaysia**

**Asmiaty Amat
Universiti Malaysia Sabah
Malaysia**

**Anantharaman Govindasamy
Universiti Malaysia Sabah
Malaysia**

An Introduction to
ATINER's Conference Paper Series

ATINER started to publish this conference papers series in 2012. It includes only the papers submitted for publication after they were presented at one of the conferences organized by our Institute every year. This paper has been peer reviewed by at least two academic members of ATINER.

Dr. Gregory T. Papanikos
President
Athens Institute for Education and Research

This paper should be cited as follows:

Tamby Omar, A., Amat, A. and Govindasamy, A. (2016). "Liberal Education Management in Malaysia Public Universities: Educators' and Students' Perspective", Athens: ATINER'S Conference Paper Series, No: SOS2015-1785.

Athens Institute for Education and Research
8 Valaoritou Street, Kolonaki, 10671 Athens, Greece
Tel: + 30 210 3634210 Fax: + 30 210 3634209 Email: info@atiner.gr URL:
www.atiner.gr

URL Conference Papers Series: www.atiner.gr/papers.htm

Printed in Athens, Greece by the Athens Institute for Education and Research. All rights reserved. Reproduction is allowed for non-commercial purposes if the source is fully acknowledged.

ISSN: 2241-2891

13/01/2016

Liberal Education Management in Malaysia Public Universities: Educators' and Students' Perspective

Aishah Tamby Omar
Universiti Malaysia Sabah
Malaysia

Asmiaty Amat
Universiti Malaysia Sabah
Malaysia

Anantharaman Govindasamy
Universiti Malaysia Sabah
Malaysia

Abstract

The Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia began to strengthen Liberal Education among Malaysia public universities. However, there are some challenges in term of managing infrastructures and human resources. Therefore, this study examined the perceptions of students and lecturers towards Liberal Education. The target population is the lecturers and students from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Universiti Malaysia Sabah dan Universiti Malaysia Kelantan. For the quantitative research, Students Perceptions Questionnaire developed by Duke (2002) was used as the main instrument which consists of 35 items. The sample size of the students was 1,071. For qualitative, interview protocol was designed for the Dean, Deputy Dean and Lecturers. From this study, the students stated that the process of teaching and learning and the existing curriculum are still not able to assist them to improve their communication skills. In addition, infrastructure such as lecture halls and reading materials are still in deprivation. For lecturers, human resource management issues needs to be addressed immediately. This study had examined the current nature of Liberal education in Malaysian public universities, which is a relatively unexplored area in Malaysia. The findings are useful to the university administrators and government policy makers, notably The Ministry of Higher Education as a policy reference guide.

Keywords: Higher education, Liberal education, Management.

Introduction

Liberal Education is a field of studies that is offered by universities all over the world. This shows the importance of an engaged and practical liberal education for all students (Jones 2005). In developed nations such as America and Europe, Liberal Education is compulsory for the undergraduates as it is perceived to be a crucial element in producing global and wholistic graduates. While in Malaysia, almost all the public universities has implemented a curriculum that incorporate elements of Liberal Education. Centres like Centre for Citra University (UKM), Centre for Language Studies and Generic Development (UMK), Centre for Promotion of Knowledge and Language Learning (UMS) are just some examples of Centres that offer Liberal Education courses.

Liberal Education aims to broaden the students' knowledge base and enhance their social awareness through the study of a wide range of issues, it enables students to make connections across different fields of knowledge and to broaden their horizons and fosters the students' capacity for life-long learning (Curriculum Development Council & Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority 2007). Hence, in order for a nation to achieve the aims of Liberal Education, a support system that includes an efficient handling of the human resource, curriculum, academic facilities and the teaching outcomes must be carried out.

It appears that in most of the Malaysian public universities which have integrated Liberal Education into their curriculum; the challenges lie ultimately in the implementation and management of these courses. Students fail to connect the learning outcomes of the Liberal Education courses with their major courses (Debrew 2008). In a management perspective, it is found that the focus of Liberal Education was more on the academic achievement rather than to enhance their social awareness through the study of a wide range of issues and the foster students' capacity for life-long learning. Zaboroska (1995) once underlined how important Liberal Education is on a long term basis. Another challenge that is frequently mentioned about implementation of Liberal Education is the amount of time needed to enhance Liberal Education, which in turn encumbers all efforts to measure the efficacy of the courses. Hence, the most significant role of the educators is to observe the efficacy of Liberal Education from the perspective of the students' soft skill.

From the literature review above, the research carried out for this paper is to determine the perception of lecturers and students on the management and implementation of Liberal Education in public universities in Malaysia. Besides, the views of the different stakeholders can help management identify the current needs of the new generation that will influence the process of teaching and learning Liberal Education. In addition, the response from these stakeholders will also act as an effective guide for communication on Liberal Education between other universities. Finally, this paper also documents the methods used by lecturers and students to achieve the main goals that characterize Liberal Education.

Literature Review

Liberal Education

Liberal Education is a learning approach that prepares students to face diversity and challenges whether at the national level, within the community, organisation and within the individual him/herself. Also, Liberal Education means exposure to basic knowledge (Mayhew 1960) of values, attitudes and social skills that enable students to live in a community setting. Liberal Education can provide students with a broader knowledge of the world (such as science, culture, and society) as well as an in-depth study on specific areas of interest. Through the method of integrated teaching, a student can be nurtured to think critically and creatively (Conant 1945) as well as being more receptive or open to new perspectives. Among other advantages that can be derived from Liberal Education is the ability to express ideas effectively through writing and oral communication (Conant 1945). The University Association of American Colleges (2002) states that education is one of the liberal platforms that prepare students to meet the challenges of the 21st century. The acquisition of Liberal Education also enables a nation to produce responsible citizens (Conant 1945, Mayhew 1960). Liberal Education in universities is versatile and varies according to the needs and requirements of students from different periods of time. However, the concept and spirit of Liberal Education still continues in the teaching and learning process despite the changes that occur.

The definition of Liberal Education for the purpose of this research is that of an educational experience by students who take Liberal Education courses offered by the university based on several options. The courses offered include courses on values, ethics, culture and skills according to the needs of the students. These courses are mandatory for the students to complete their degrees. The keys to achieving Liberal Education goals lie in the teaching and learning processes. These processes of teaching and learning must be supported by various parties especially the teaching staff as implementing the Liberal Education courses through a variety of teaching methods will help create interest amongst the students. Teaching methods that are creative and innovative will stimulate the students' minds helping them improve their communication skills. According to Coniam (2011), the teaching and learning of Liberal Education will typically encourage students to get information about current issues for debate and discussion. During the discussion of these issues, students must produce their views, suggestions and values shared by different groups of people.

Liberal Education appears to complement the academic courses in the institutes of higher learning because it is considered holistic and global. However, it relies heavily on the implementation of its courses. A study conducted by Kwan and Wong (2012), found that the students began to perceive that their learning environments were moderate constructivist naturally during the process of teaching and learning. Their response was due to the fact that no current issues were discussed (Harmes and Miller 2007) in the teaching and learning process.

The students are of the opinion that teaching liberal education should be an exploration and practical which should include such activities like public speaking and writing (Harmes and Miller 2007). Students also request for more two way discussion among the lecturer and the students (Harmes and Miller 2007). However, some students did claim that some of the Liberal Education courses did challenge their thinking (Harmes and Miller 2007). The students suggested that the teaching and learning process in Liberal Education courses should include the integration of technology (Harmes and Miller 2007).

Skills

Liberal Education is perceived to provide the greatest benefits to students of higher learning as it emphasizes current general knowledge and relevant skills to produce students who are well-balanced and harmonious in terms of cognitive, affective, physical and spiritual abilities (Sabri and Arip 2001). The principle of Liberal Education is that a student must be exposed to a wide range of knowledge other than the courses they are majoring in at a university. The exposure allows a student to be more creative, critical and logical especially in the areas of problem solving. Smith and Morgaine (2004) observed that Liberal Education can teach students to develop strength of mind and intellect when they are exposed to other fields of study. The exposure can help strengthen the thinking and observation that will help them in turn to make distinctions.

Among the other objectives of Liberal Education, is the formation of students who are able to communicate effectively (Boyer 1990, Conant 1945). Gaff (1995) found that communication is a basic skill that can impact the professional field and our daily lives. In addition, forming students who are critical is the desire and ultimate goal of Liberal Education (Gaff 1995, Hersh 1997). Critical thinking is also one of the main features required when you want to make decisions and solve problems as an individual, group or organization (AACN 1998).

Curriculum

Curriculum refers to a tailored program of study prepared by taking into account various aspects in the process of learning and individual development. Learning outcomes are a measure of the success of the curriculum goals. In Liberal Education, lifelong learning is the ultimate goal (Hersh 1997). This is because the frequency of changes in technology and aspects of life in society indicates that students should learn about dealing with changes as part of their curriculum. This is why Liberal Education was identified as the basis for the beginning of the process of any kind of education (Flannery and Newstad 1998)

Liberal Education has its own curriculum based on the current needs and requirements of the society and economy. The curriculum that is created must be clear and convey ideas efficiently to enable everyone to understand it easily. The curriculum is used as a guide in the implementation of the teaching and learning system of Liberal Education. Modification or adaptation of the curriculum can be performed in accordance with the objectives and needs of

the students. A Liberal Education curriculum covers the areas of research that aim to help students develop their understanding of themselves, society, nation and the world (Dominguez 2004) further. To ensure the effectiveness of the curriculum and the teaching and learning of Liberal Education, the teaching staff or lecturers should work together and be responsible for the implementation of the curriculum (Jiang 2005).

A Liberal Education curriculum has to be focused on the learning outcomes. Cronon (1998) states that results of Liberal Education can be seen when an individual is able to relate personally with their academic endeavours, communicate creatively and integrate concepts by connecting them with the outside world. Every student who takes Liberal Education courses will have skills that can be used in the outside world (Smith and Morgaine 2004). Although courses vary from their major courses, the students have to be alert and make connections between what they have learnt with the outside world. Liberal Education does not pose a problem for the students because it clearly provides a way to overcome the challenges of the external world, which may not be taught in the courses of their own majors. In fact, Liberal Education can help cultivate freedom of opinion and expression, better communication and listening skills plus to uncover other hidden talents.

Basically the Liberal Education curriculum that was created by our national institutes of higher learning meets the current needs of the individual, society and state. However, problems arise at the implementation level. Research conducted by Leung Lai Sim (2013) was to test if the process of Liberal Education met the objectives of the existing Liberal Education curriculum. The findings show that the teachers leaned more toward exam-oriented methods. A study by the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse (2005) found that Liberal Education courses are holistic, do not have continuity or meaning. As a result, a study by Muffo (2001) observes that a Liberal Education curriculum provides little value to the students. Students stated that there is a gap between the aims of the course and the reality of it (Harmes and Miller 2007).

Management

Management is one of the processes involved in planning, organizing, leadership and control. To ensure the successful implementation of Liberal Education, a comprehensive management support is needed. An effectiveness of planning is crucial to the success of the learning process. Top management also plays an important role in explaining the goals, vision and mission of Liberal Education courses. Finally, monitoring and continuous improvement should also be implemented to strengthen the teaching processes. The success of Liberal Education depends on how the universities manage and control the implementation (Stewart and Schlegel 2009). According to Hayakawa (2014), the effectiveness of colleges and universities management can also help students benefit from Liberal Education. Infrastructure and learning facilities for students is also a major contribution to the success of Liberal Education implementation.

In addition, Ferrall (2011) observes that the management and implementation of Liberal Education is at risk. Risk is defined as the inefficiencies in human resource management. In Liberal Education, human resource management is very important. Restrictions upon the number of teaching staff also lead to the deterioration of the teaching quality in Liberal Education courses. When there are restrictions on the number of educators in the Liberal Education course, the burden of teaching duties will be borne by the few respective lectures who are greatly outnumbered by the large number of students. As Liberal Education courses are compulsory for every student, there arise problems in the implementation of the courses as the teaching staff is overburden (Warren 1990). Ferrall (2011), cites the fact that lecturers spend too much time teaching and none on producing publications because the increased work load teaching a huge number of students in Liberal Education courses does not allow them to do a research and publication.

Methodology

This research was conducted by using a qualitative and quantitative approach. Three public universities in Malaysia such as Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia and Universiti Malaysia Kelantan were chosen. Universiti Malaysia Kelantan was chosen because it has implemented a similar model of Liberal Education that is used by Universiti Malaysia Sabah. For the qualitative approach, a structured interview was used. A total of ten lecturers consisting of Deans, Deputy Deans and Lecturers were subjects of this research. The quantitative approach used a survey method. A set of questionnaires which was distributed to 1,071 students who took Liberal Education courses from the above mentioned. The instrument of research consists of two parts; the first part involves demographic information such as which faculty, university, number of years of study, gender and race. The next section is a research tool adapted from Duke (2002), the Student Perceptions Questionnaire. The instrument consists of 35 questions and is composed of seven subscales of skills, teaching and learning, curriculum, facilities management, valuation, lecturer, and self-management. Each item was measured using six Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = moderate disagree, 3 = somewhat disagree, 4 = somewhat agree, 5 = moderately agree, 6 = strongly agree). Through the qualitative method, data was analyzed by organizing and categorizing according to the focus and purpose of the study outlined. For quantitative, the data was analyzed using SPSS Version 21 for a descriptive analysis. The Cronbach alpha was 0.86 for all the items. For each subscale, the Cronbach alpha was as follows: 0.92 skills, teaching and learning 0.66, 0.60 curricula, facilities management 0.70, 0.64 guest lecturers 0.70, 0.75 and self-management.

Research Findings

Qualitative Analysis

This section shows the qualitative analysis obtained from the interviews.

Human Resource Management

Among the problems encountered in implementing these Liberal Education courses is the insufficient number of teaching staff. At times the restraint and quotas set by a particular institution in an effort to find qualified candidates to teach has led to the problem aforementioned. Consequently, an imbalance between the ratio of the students to lecturers arises. This ultimately leads to ineffective learning and teaching of the Liberal Education courses in these universities. The generally accepted ratio at the moment is one lecturer to sixty students. Aside from this, there are logistics problems caused by great numbers of students taking Liberal Education courses. A teaching staff or lecturer has to commit some time for travelling to the destination where the infrastructure is able to house the numbers of students for each teaching session. As a result the teaching staff, apart from being overburdened by teaching responsibilities, does not fulfil their academic postgraduate supervisory capacity. For the Centre, only a few postgraduate programmes were offered. It's a benefit to lecturers who teach the postgraduate programme. Those lecturers who don't have a postgraduate programme face a supervision problem. Thus, the lectures have to share a postgraduate supervision with others faculties. Lack of student's supervision will affect the lecturer's promotions in the future.

Leadership Management

As far as the universities are concerned, Deans, Deputy Deans and Heads of Liberal Education convey all information and discussion through meetings. There is only a tersely worded explanation of the course outline without touching on the goals of Liberal Education. There is also a distinct absence of activities connected to the Liberal Education courses that can generate more interest. There is obviously room for improvement to enable a top down flow of communication from top management to the teaching staff and subsequently to the students which will improve the overall implementation of the courses. There also exists the problem of some courses not meeting the goals of Liberal Education which can be resolved through the involvement of stakeholders from the industry or other arenas where the skills taught are actually put into practice. Efforts should also be made to monitor the progress of students taking the Liberal Education courses that is not in place.

Management usually resolves complaints collectively after identifying the type often dismissing any complaint that does not comply with MQA or ISO standards. Complaints that are compliant will be considered and appropriate action taken. Thus far, the complaints received were related to the large number of students, technical and logistic problems. There were also complaints that were outside the jurisdiction of the Liberal Education management team such as examination timetables.

An administrator for Liberal Education courses will determine the number of meetings with coordinators of the courses in a year. There are coordinators who have meetings every month or six times a year. The coordinator will report on the courses at the meeting mostly from the administrative, human resource, discipline of the students and other programs not connected to the content of the course. Aside from the coordinators, the Deputy Dean of Academics will attend all cluster meetings regularly every month and more when needed.

The Training of Trainers program was one of the activities undertaken to increase cultural knowledge among the teaching staff of Liberal Education. The aims of the program are to provide training for the teaching staff. There were presentations of research papers in seminars, conferences and other platforms. Courses and collaboration with other agencies and fund raising was also carried out. In addition, there were courses organized by the university on new policies for the knowledge of lecturers. There was also a seminar specifically on Liberal Education that provided opportunities for educators to present articles based on research.

Descriptive Analysis

Demographic Factors

This section reveals the results of the descriptive analysis in the demographic profile factors associated with the study subjects from the universities involved. The factors are gender and race.

Institutes of Higher Learning

There were 276 (25.8%) respondents that comprised of students from the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia of which 320 (29.9%) respondents were students from Universiti Malaysia Sabah and the 475 (44.4%) respondents were students from University Malaysia Sabah. Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents by universities.

Table 1. *Distribution of Respondents According to Institutes of Higher Learning*

Institutes of Higher Learning	Numbers	Percentage
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia	276	25.8
Universiti Malaysia Kelantan	320	29.9
Universiti Malaysia Sabah	475	44.4
Total	1,071	100.0

Source: Authors' estimations.

Years of Study

The distribution of respondents by years of study revealed that the majority of 687 (64.1%) respondents were students. 374 (34.9%) were students from second year while a total of only four respondents (0.4%) were in the third year and the remaining six (0.6%) were fourth year students. Table 2 shows the distribution of respondents by years of study.

Table 2. *The Distribution of Respondents by Years of Study*

Years of Study	Total	Percentage
1	687	64.1
2	374	34.9
3	4	0.4
4	6	0.6
Total	1,071	100.0

Source: Authors' estimations.

Gender

The distribution of respondents by gender records a total of 314 (29.3%) male respondents while the rest of 757 respondents (70.7%) were females. Table 3 shows the distribution of respondents by sex

Table 3. *The Distribution of Respondents by Gender*

Gender	Total	Percentage
Male	314	29.3
Female	757	70.7
Total	1,071	100.0

Source: Authors' estimations.

Nationalities

The distribution of respondents by nationalities reveals that there are more than 15 types of students who participated in this study. Malay students record the highest number with a total of 474 (44.3%), followed by the Chinese students with a total of 198 respondents (18.5%) and the Dusun people with a total of 84 (7.8%) respondents while other nations students a total of 56 students (5.0%). Table 4 shows the distribution of respondents by nationalities.

Table 4. *The Distribution of Respondents by Nationalities*

Nationalities	Total	Percentage
Malay	474	44.3
Chinese	199	18.5
Indians	35	3.3
Kadazan	36	3.4
Dusun	84	7.8
Bajau	54	5.0
Bugis	58	5.4
Suluk	9	0.8
Sino Kadazan	17	1.6
Iban	24	2.2
Bruneian	25	2.3
Others	56	5.0
Total	1,071	100.0

Source: Authors' estimations.

Item Analysis

This section shows the results of the descriptive analysis and the mean frequency analysis for all items in each section.

Skills

Table 5 shows the analysis of seven subscale items. The analysis reveal that the item (1), namely "Liberal Education courses broaden my knowledge" have the highest mean value of 4.87, while the item with the lowest mean value "Liberal Education courses help me think critically" registering a mean of 4.53. A high mean value indicates that the item is a popular choice for respondents for this research and vice versa.

Table 5. Analysis for Skill Item

No.	Statement	1	2	3	4	5	6	Mean
1	Liberal Education broadens my knowledge	5 (0.5%)	27 (2.5%)	58 (5.4%)	251 (23.4%)	400 (37.3%)	329 (30.7%)	4.87
3	Liberal Education helps me think critically	8 (0.7%)	30 (2.8%)	119 (11.1%)	323 (30.2%)	412 (38.5%)	178 (16.6%)	4.53

Source: Authors' estimations.

Teaching and Learning

Table 6 shows the analysis for the teaching and learning item that has eight (8) subscale items. The analysis reveal that item 11 which is "Multimedia technology should be used in teaching Liberal Education courses" had the highest mean value of 5.02 while the item that had the lowest mean value which is 3.64 for item 34 that says "I am ashamed to express an opinion during classes". High mean values indicate that the item is the popular choice for respondents in the study.

Table 6. Analysis for Teaching and Learning Item

No.	Statement	1	2	3	4	5	6	Mean
11	Multimedia technology should be used in teaching Liberal Education courses	3 (0.3%)	9 (0.8%)	57 (5.3%)	209 (19.5%)	408 (38.1%)	385 (35.9%)	5.02
34	I am ashamed to express an opinion during classes	94 (8.8%)	114 (10.6%)	248 (23.2%)	332 (31.0%)	194 (18.1%)	89 (8.3%)	3.64

Source: Authors' estimations.

Curriculum

Table 7 shows the analysis of the curriculum item with four (4) subscale items. The analysis reveals that item number 17 which says "The Contents of the Courses follow Current Developments" had the highest mean value of 4.43 while the item that had the lowest mean value is item 14 which is "The Courses are Very Difficult" registering a mean of 3.79. The highest mean value

indicates that the item is the most popular choice for respondents in this study and vice versa.

Table 7. Analysis for Curriculum Item

No.	Statement	1	2	3	4	5	6	Mean
14	The Courses are Very Difficult	49 (4.6%)	94 (8.8%)	272 (25.4%)	356 (33.2%)	223 (20.8%)	77 (7.2%)	3.79
17	The Contents of the Courses follow Current Developments	13 (1.2%)	26 (2.4%)	126 (11.8%)	373 (34.8%)	383 (35.8%)	149 (13.9%)	4.43

Source: Authors' estimations.

Facilities Management

Table 8 shows the item analysis for management with six (6) items. The analysis revealed that item 29 "Appropriate facilities such as lecture comfortable lecture halls" has the highest mean value of 4.62 while the item that recorded the lowest mean value at 3.89, is item 25, namely "Learning Materials for Courses are Scarce". A high mean values indicate the popularity of the item in this study and vice versa.

Table 8. Analysis of Facilities Management

No.	Statement	1	2	3	4	5	6	Mean
25	Learning Materials for Courses are Scarce	35 (3.3%)	82 (7.7%)	269 (25.1%)	364 (34.0%)	220 (20.5%)	101 (9.4%)	3.89
29	Appropriate facilities such as lecture comfortable lecture halls	31 (2.9%)	29 (2.7%)	103 (9.6%)	283 (26.4%)	328 (30.6%)	297 (27.7%)	4.62

Source: Authors' estimations.

Assessment Component

Table 9 shows the analysis item for assessment in Liberal Education courses that consists of two (2) items. The analysis reveals that item 20 which is "I love exams / tests that are given in the form of objectives" recorded the highest mean value of 5:45 while the item that had the lowest mean value that is 2.76 is item 21, which is "I love exams / tests that are given in the form of essays". The highest mean values indicate that the item of choice is the most popular for respondents in the study and vice versa

Table 9. Analysis of Assessment Component

No.	Statement	1	2	3	4	5	6	Mean
20	I love examinations that are given in the form of objective.	11 (1.0%)	12 (1.1%)	38 (3.5%)	98 (9.2%)	173 (16.2%)	738 (68.9%)	5.45
21	I love exams / tests that are given in the form of essays	359 (33.5%)	140 (13.1%)	209 (19.5%)	181 (16.9%)	123 (11.5%)	59 (5.5%)	2.76

Source: Authors' estimations.

Lecturers

Table 10 shows the analysis of the teaching item in which the Lecturers have four (4) items. The analysis reveals that item number 23 that is "Lecturers are open while teaching and during learning sessions" with a mean value of 4.85 while the item that had the lowest mean value of 2.54 is item 27 that is "Lecturer does not explain how to apply the content for future use". High mean values indicate that the item was popular in this study and vice versa.

Table 10. Analysis of Lecturers Item

No.	Statement	1	2	3	4	5	6	Mean
23	Lecturers are open while teaching and during learning sessions	6 (0.6%)	13 (1.2%)	90 (8.4%)	232 (21.7%)	416 (38.8%)	314 (29.3%)	4.85
27	The lecturer does not explain how to apply the content for future use	377 (35.2%)	196 (18.3%)	221 (20.6%)	149 (13.9%)	72 (6.7%)	56 (5.2%)	2.54

Source: Authors' estimations.

Self-management

Table 11 shows the item analysis for self-management that consists of four (4) items. The analysis reveals that item 33 which is "I do not have enough time to study Liberal Education courses" received the highest mean value of 3.69 while the item that had the lowest mean value is item 31 with 3.62, which is "I feel pressured doing assignments for Liberal Education courses" and item 32, namely "I feel pressured by the examinations in the Liberal Education courses" with 3.62 points each. High mean values indicate that the item is popular among the respondents in this study and vice versa.

Table 11. *Analysis for Self-Management Item*

No.	Statement	1	2	3	4	5	6	Mean
31	I feel pressured doing assignments for Liberal Education courses	98 (9.2%)	121 (11.3%)	259 (24.2%)	304 (28.4%)	183 (17.1%)	104 (9.7%)	3.62
32	I feel pressured by the examinations in the Liberal Education courses	97 (9.1%)	132 (12.3%)	249 (23.2%)	303 (28.3%)	188 (17.6%)	102 (9.5%)	3.62
33	I do not have enough time to study Liberal Education courses	80 (7.5%)	120 (11.2%)	251 (23.4%)	323 (30.2%)	190 (17.7%)	107 (10.0%)	3.69

Source: Authors' estimations.

Discussion and Recommendations

From these analyses, there is obviously some weakness in the implementation of Liberal Education courses in the three universities that need to be addressed and improved upon.

Human Resource Management

This study shows that the main challenges faced by Liberal Education in three (3) of Malaysia's public universities is human resource management. The unlimited number of students not constrained by the number of lecturers is challenging to overcome. The ratio as suggested by MQA cannot be met because of an excess of students entering the university not in tandem with the number of lecturers being hired to teach. In addition, most lecturers do not have the specific expertise to teach other courses within the Liberal Education framework. Therefore, human resource management in these universities should carefully provide a provision for hiring and dismissal taking into accounting the expertise of existing courses in Liberal Education. The recruitment of more lectures with the correct expertise for a single Liberal Education course will help lessen the burden of each lecturer and meeting the goals that Liberal Education and MQA dictate finally could be achieved.

The career development prospects of the teaching staff in Liberal Education is very important. Currently, Liberal Education teaching staff share the same criteria for performance evaluation as other lecturers in other faculties who have smaller numbers of student to contend with. This research reveals that there is dissatisfaction among the lecturers teaching Liberal Education courses only as they are unable to concentrate on research, publications and community service because of the imbalance in the work demands due to the overly large number of students in their teaching capacity. Among the

suggestions mooted to overcome this problem is that the performance evaluation for these lecturers should be different from the other faculties. As such, the requirements for promotion also needs to be tailored to suit the Liberal Education lecturers in view of their different job demands. Also suggested is that more allocation for research into the issues related to the implementation of Liberal Education to further understand and improve the current situations should be undertaken by higher management of these universities.

The lack of postgraduate supervision also among the problems uncovered by this research is related to the fact that some Liberal Education courses are conducted by a separate unit that is not a faculty such as The Centre for Promotion of knowledge and Language Learning at Universiti Malaysia Sabah. The lack of supervision has significantly lowered the chances for promotion amongst the teaching staff in this centre. Proposals to solve this problem include creating collaborations with other faculties to form group supervision of students who need particular expertise that lecturers teaching Liberal Education possess which has been successfully implemented in Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

Leadership Management

Leadership is a major milestone for the successful implementation of Liberal Education. In this study, the function of the Dean , Deputy Dean of Academic, Coordinators is similar in every public university in Malaysia. It is proposed that there is improved efficiency in making decisions about and for Liberal Education. This can only be done if the regard for Liberal Education among the heads as mentioned above is strengthened. In addition, the study also highlighted other problems such as the lack of infrastructure and proper facilities as well as current reading materials on Liberal Education courses. It is the responsibility of the lecturers to update and provide the latest materials or current issues for references. In addition, teaching staff should encourage or assist students in using library databases or go online to get information about a particular course of study. Organizing seminars, forums, carnivals can provide exposure to students about the importance of Liberal Education as well. Publication on Liberal Education by teaching staff can also provide students with readers as guides. Finally, effort has to be made to encourage other stakeholders to provide their views to improve Liberal Education courses to meet the needs of the current job market.

Curriculum

Teaching methods, assessment and learning outcomes is the driving force to achieve the goals of any curriculum. There is a need to ensure that the teaching and learning methods are compatible with the ultimate goal of Liberal Education. In addition, the course evaluation form should also include the spirit of Liberal Education so that they can distinguish between a major course and a Liberal Education course. The main constraint in Liberal Education curriculum is to produce students who are able to integrate what they have learnt to the real world. As it is difficult to assess a student's

progress in a very short period of time, it is suggested that on-going assessment throughout the course can help students see the progress of their self-actualization clearly. Courses that encourage social engagement and integration of teaching should have the basic facilities to integrate the use of technology in order to upgrade their skills to a sophisticated level. Finally, monitoring of Liberal Education curriculum according to the needs of the latest generation should run parallel with the goals and requirements of it.

Conclusion

While problems or constraints faced by public universities in Malaysia are quite similar, the field of Liberal Education has experienced improvements from time to time. In the context of the opportunities and challenges in management and the execution of Liberal Education, there are two challenges: the first being the need to identify the original mission and goals of Liberal Education and combine them with the latest innovations to make it into a framework that can generate a holistic student that is distinctively Malaysia. Secondly, courses must conform to the requirements and needs of the 21st century liberal education that is focused on innovation. It must be underlined that the findings of this research should not be treated as a general overriding conclusion except pertaining to the subjects from three institutes of higher learning in Malaysia. This study has some limitations that may pave the way for future researchers especially where relationships between the variables are concerned.

References

- American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) (1998) *The essentials of baccalaureate education for professional nursing practice*. Washington, DC: AACN.
- Association of American Colleges and Universities (2002) The learning students need for the 21st century. In AACU National Panel Report, *Greater expectations: A new vision for learning as a nation goes to college*, 39-46. Retrieved from bit.ly/1OcdBQc.
- Boyer E (1990) Making the connections: the search for our common humanity. In M Clark, S Wawrytko (Eds), *Rethinking the Curriculum: Toward an Integrated, Interdisciplinary College Education*. New York: Greenwood Press.
- Duke CR (2002) Learning Outcomes: Comparing Student Perceptions of Skill Level and Importance. *Journal of Marketing Education* 24 (3): 203-217.
- Harmes CJ, Miller BJ (2007) *What Do College Students Think about General Education and Assessment?* (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from bit.ly/1ORj67y.
- Conant J (1945) *General education in a free society*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
- Coniam D (2011) The double marking of Liberal Studies in the Hong Kong public examination system. *New Horizons in Education* 59(2): 1 – 12.

- Cronon WJ (1998) "Only connect": The goals of a liberal education. *The American Scholar* 67: 73-80.
- Curriculum Development Council & Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (2007) *New Senior Secondary Curriculum And Assessment Guide (Secondary 4-6): Liberal Studies*. Hong Kong: Education and Manpower Bureau.
- Flannery C, Newstad R (1998) The classical liberal arts tradition. In D Glyer, DL Weeks (Eds.) *The Liberal Arts In Higher Education: Challenging Assumptions Exploring Possibilities*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc.
- Gaff J (1995) Trends and innovations in general education reform. In J Haworth, C Conrad, (Eds) *Revisioning Curriculum in Higher Education*, 128-139. Needham Heights, MA: Simon & Schuster Custom Publishing.
- Hayakawa M (2014) The search for a new role of liberal education in an age of globalization: the challenge of transferable skills to liberal knowledge at Japanese colleges and universities. *Asia Pacific Education Review* 15(1): 89-97.
- Hersh R (1997) Intentions and perceptions. *Change* 29(2): 16-23.
- Debrew J (2008) *Perceptions and Meanings of Liberal Education: A Qualitative Comparison of Two Types of Nursing Graduates* (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from bit.ly/1Of9kXx.
- Jiang YH (2005) From liberal education to general education: the development of an idea of University Education. *A Journal for Philosophical Study of Public Affairs* 14: 37-64.
- Jones RT (2005) Liberal education for the twenty- first century: Business expectations. *Liberal Education* 91(2): 32–37.
- Leung LS (2013) An inquiry of teacher’s perception on the relationship between high-order thinking nurturing and liberal studies public assessment in Hong Kong. *Hong Kong Teacher’s Centre Journal*, 12: 183 – 215.
- Mayhew L (1960) *General Education, An account and Appraisal: A Guide for College Faculties*. New York: Harper & Brothers.
- Sabri Haron M, Arip Kasmoo M (2001) *Mengenal Pengajian Umum* [Understanding of General Studies]. Bangi, Selangor: Pusat Pengajian Umum.
- Muffo J (2001) *Focus group: Student attitudes toward the core curriculum*. Retrieved from bit.ly/1ORj67y.
- Smith CL, Morgaine C (2004) Liberal studies and professional preparation: the evolution of the child and family studies program at Portland States University. *Child & Youth Care Forum* 33(4): 257 – 274.
- Stewart KD, Schlegel KW (2009) Expecting more on elevating academic standards in public universities. *Liberal Education* 95(1): 44 – 49.
- Warren T (1990) *Liberal Arts Presidents on Teacher Education*. USA: University Press of America.
- University of Wisconsin-LaCrosse, General Education Design Team (2007) *Final report and recommendations*. Retrieved from bit.ly/1Of9DBs.
- Ferrall VE (2011) *Liberal at the Brink*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Kwan YW, Wong AFL (2014) The constructivist classroom learning environment and its associations with critical thinking ability of secondary school students in liberal studies. *Learning Environment Research* 17(2): 191-207.
- Zaborowska R (1995) Senior nursing students’ self-reported college experiences and gains toward liberal education goals. *Journal of Nursing Education* 34(4): 155-161.