

**WORKPLACE SKILLS: A STUDY OF THE SKILLS
TAUGHT IN UiTMCS AND ITS RELEVANCE TO THE
CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY IN SARAWAK**



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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study is to identify the skills taught to the DCE graduates and juxtapose them to a predetermined set of skills which had been benchmarked earlier to make a comparison. It also seeks to explore the level of workplace knowledge and competency of both the DCE students as well as the graduates who are currently employed in the construction industry. This study also has practical considerations whereby the various parties concerned could use the findings to aid their decision-making process. As this study has no intention of inferring the findings to the general population, the snowballing technique was employed to select the respondents which comprised the Part 6 DCE students, the lecturers who taught them, graduates of the same program and their supervisors. The research design used is the ex-post facto survey technique using face-to-face interview and a self-administered questionnaire as the major data collection methods. The findings highlight evidence of a gap in certain skill components between what is taught in the institution and what may be needed in the construction industry. The results show no observable differences in the rating of the three skills components by both the employees and employers. Opinions gathered from the respondents show that they unanimously supported the compulsory implementation of Industrial Training in UiTMCS . Recommendations related to Industrial Training, the teaching and learning of skills in the institution of higher learning and viable research ideas are proposed. Finally, the constraints of implementing an integral approach and the limitations of the study are also discussed.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background of the Study

Meeting the needs of the 21st century labour market promises to be a great challenge for employees, employers, educators and policy makers. Nations aspiring to stay competitive and prosperous in a knowledge-based economy will have to devise policies and strategies which encourage economic growth and increase productivity. According to Thurow (1996), "The skills of the labour force are going to be the key competitive weapon in the 21st century." The ever-changing environment for prosperity, competitive edge and economic well-being requires a workforce that is adaptable, highly literate and multi-skilled. Many studies have been undertaken on the subject of workplace skills (SCANS, 1991; McLaughlin, 1995; Nabi and Bagley, 1998; Sneed and Morgan, 1999; Richens, 1999; Fallows and Stephen, 2000; Conference Board of Canada, 2000; Stewart and Knowles, 2001; Ramlee Mustapha et al., 2001). These studies indicate clearly the employers' concern for reliable and motivated employees with good workplace skills. Malaysian employers too, share the same concern.

In a recent international conference held on technical education and vocational training in Kuala Lumpur (2002), the need for more comprehensive and business-oriented training for Malaysia's future growth was discussed. In order to keep pace with the rising levels of skilled labour in this information era, Malaysia needs to equip its workforce with greater knowledge and training. According to Dr. Ahmad Sipon (1999), Deputy Director-General (Technical Education Department), Ministry of

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

Developing a highly skilled workforce is of utmost importance to ensure the survival of an economy in a dynamic and unpredictable marketplace. The workforce needs to be trained and retrained effectively to be successful and productive. In a study by UNIMAS (1998) entitled 'Technical Manpower Study: Sarawak Manufacturing Sector 1997-2005', it was maintained that the major limitations that hinder the smooth growth of the manufacturing sector in Sarawak was the lack of capital, shortage of manpower, shortage of skilled manpower and ineffective information flow. This pattern may well be true also for the other industries that demand technical and skilled manpower such as the construction industry.

To develop a highly skilled, flexible and competent workforce the training program needs to match the industries' skill requirements. A thorough analysis on the gap between the skill imparted through the training programs and the skills acquired by the trainees is very crucial. This entails a greater commitment and cooperation of all parties involved. The industries' needs must be communicated effectively to the policy makers at the training institutions so that the relevant authorities can design and develop training programs that could meet those needs. For constructive development, a set of knowledge, skills, attitudes and level of competency which is known as Workplace Skill Standards has to be agreed upon. This not only takes into account today's, but more importantly, tomorrow's needs. These standards could serve many functions to all the parties concerned. For the employees or job seekers,