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A SURVEY REPORT ON THE ITM SARAWAK MENTOR- MENTEE PROGRAM: WHAT THE MENTEES SAY

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LOW KUEK LONG

*Eden
Mentee*

BACKGROUND

A committee comprising of lecturers and administrative officers within the Institut Teknologi MARA, Sarawak Branch Campus was formed under the chairmanship of Encik Abdul Rahman Deen, Deputy Principal, Student Affairs. The Committee set out to study the relevance-effectiveness of the Mentor-Mentee Program (MMP) re-introduced in this campus in July 1987. The reporters are members of the investigating team who specifically study the case based on the mentees' responses to a questionnaire survey.

PROCEDURE

A four-page questionnaire written in Bahasa Malaysia (full text and figures in appendix) was distributed to final year students of ITMCS at random. These students were given about two weeks to complete the questionnaire. For some items with multiple-choice responses, the respondents were allowed to give more than one answer. There were also some respondents who volunteered multiple answers to a few open-ended questions. Responses of similar content were grouped and re-phrased.

The participants in this questionnaire survey study were not of a strictly controlled group, and no records of subjects' variables were made. However, these students were chosen because they participated in the Program from its implementation in July 1987 to June 1989. Out of the 50 sets of questionnaire distributed, 31 sets were returned. No other form of interview was conducted.

All responses were duly tallied and recorded for analysis and discussions.

FINDINGS

Question 1 *From your viewpoint, what is the real objective of the Mentor-Mentee System?*

Twenty-one respondents, who formed the majority, felt that the system was meant

for encouraging students to mix around for their own development. Twelve students felt that the objective was to train students to interact. Two students offered four other opinions not included in the list of choices: to foster closer relationship between staff and students; no clear objective; system not beneficial; and system sounds good only in theory.

The rest of the responses were:

1. to improve students involvement in ITMCS activities (10),
2. to prepare guidelines in academic fields (9),
3. to help students adjust themselves in ITMCS (8),
4. to make available counselling and religious knowledge (4),
5. to help students financially (2),
6. to assist students in getting services from ITMCS, such as transportation, accommodation, etc. (2).

Question 2 How many activities did you participate in during the following semesters: July-December 1987, January-June 1988, July-December 1988, January-June 1989?

The data showed that 21 did not participate in any of the activities in the first schedule while 8 did in one to three activities. In the second schedule, 14 reported not having participated in any while 16 did in one to three occasions. During the third schedule, 12 reported zero participation while 16 did participate one to three times. In the last schedule, 19 were not active at all while 9 participated in one to three activities. A minority of 3.2%-9.7% reported having participated in more than six activities throughout the four schedules.

Question 3 What is your opinion on the activities organized by your mentor?

Only 2 respondents found the organized activities beneficial, 3 found them interesting while 14 found them not interesting, and 14 also found them boring.

Question 4 Elaborate on one of the activities you participated in for which you consider beneficial.

Six of the respondents did not elaborate but just cited the activities they considered beneficial to them. One appreciated dinner, two appreciated telematch, and three considered the Mentor-Mentee Day beneficial. The others either abstained from answering (14 subjects) or offered criticism (11 subjects). Those who criticized directly felt that the activities were not beneficial to them (8 respondents) or that none of the activities was interesting and beneficial or boring (2 respondents). One

criticized indirectly by suggesting that games should be encouraged.

Question 5 *If you were absent in these activities, please state your reasons.*

The majority (20) gave "clash of time" as the reason. Five claimed that they did not know about the activities, one claimed that (s)he forgot, and none claimed being unable to afford the activities. Although 13 claimed that they had other reasons, only 10 attempted to explain. The reasons given were:

1. activities organized not important (2),
2. not interested in the activities (2),
3. some activities boring to both mentor and mentee (1).

The other five respondents reasoned either by excusing or blaming:

1. never having met the mentor (2),
2. no activities organized (2),
3. mentor not interested (1).

Question 6 *What new activities do you suggest would benefit you? Six respondents abstained. However, the responses elicited from the rest of the subjects may or may not be suggestions on new activities but on what they felt were beneficial to them. The 24 respondents' answers were:*

1. picnics or games (5),
2. academic seminars or debates (3),
3. general counselling (3),
4. academic counselling (2),
5. host family program during semester breaks (2),
6. social outings (2),
7. educational trips/tours (2),
8. dinners (1),
9. regular mentor-mentee meetings (1),
10. mentor-mentee telematch (1),
11. visitation of mentor's house (1).

One respondent felt that any activity was a waste of time.

Question 7 *What other problems do you face?*

The respondents felt that the problems were due to:

1. *mentors not being concerned (19),*
2. *being given short notice (9),*
3. *not having a suitable place to meet (7),*
4. *not being able to get effective counselling service because the mentor was unfamiliar with ITMCS (6),*
5. *not being given the choice of mentor (3).*

Two respondents offered three other reasons. Both of them felt that one problem was the non-availability of the mentor. One felt that non-cooperation among some mentees contributed to the problems. The other felt that another problem was the little involvement from both the mentor and the mentees.

Question 8 *What do you suggest can overcome the problems involving the mentor-mentee system?*

Nine suggestions were offered by 16 respondents, but 15 abstained.

The suggestions were:

1. *mentors be more concerned (4),*
2. *meetings between mentor and mentees be more frequent (3),*
3. *mentors be more responsible (2),*
4. *mentees be given the choice of mentors (2),*
5. *more activities (2),*
6. *mentors be genuinely concerned (1),*
7. *mentors be more quipped with information on a ITM system (1),*
8. *longer time be allocated to the Program (1),*
9. *reduce other activities (1).*

Question 9 *The Mentor-Mentee Day had been held at the end of each semester. Do you agree that it should be held at the end of the semester?*

Four respondents did not reply, 12 answered YES, and 15 answered NO.

Question 10 *If you do not agree, please suggest when it is most suitable.*

Five suggested the middle of the semester while 11 suggested the beginning of the semester. And two had other suggestions: end of the semester and before the final examinations. One stated that the Mentor-Mentee Day was not necessary at all, and 12 abstained.

Question 11 *Have you derived any benefit from the Mentor-Mentee System?*

Six answered YES, 24 answered NO, and one abstained. Those who answered in the affirmative offered the following explanations:

1. *having an opportunity to interact with mentor (2),*
2. *knowing something they did not know before (1),*
3. *having an opportunity to interact with fellow mentees within the same grouping (1),*
4. *having a chance to voice problems (1),*
5. *being able to reduce racial/ethnic polarization (1).*

Question 12 *How often do you meet your mentor to discuss your problems and seek guidance?*

None of the respondents did so more than three times, 5 did so between one and three times, and 225 claimed that they never did.

Question 13 *What sort of problems do you usually discuss with your mentor?*

The responses were:

1. *academic (12),*
2. *family (3),*
3. *financial (92),*
4. *self-adjustment (2),*
5. *social (1),*

Three respondents abstained. Of the eight respondents who claimed to have other sort of problems, none of them disclosed the nature of their problems. Three of them explained that they never discussed their problems with their mentors, two explained that they would seek advice from friends, and the other three made no further comments.

Question 14 *From your experience, can your mentor really help you in solving your problems?*

While nine answered positive, 18 answered negative, and four abstained.

Question 15 *From your experience, how do activities help you in improving your academic performance?*

Six respondents directly negated by claiming that no activities had helped to improve their academic performance. Two indirectly negated by suggesting that

mentors should help mentees solve academic problems, and that the prizes should be awarded to the top achievers of the group. Eight respondents offered the following answers:

1. extra classes or tutorial sessions (3),
2. academic activities, though insufficient so far (3),
3. educational tours/visits and career guidance seminars (2),

The remaining 15 respondents abstained.

ANALYSIS/DISCUSSION

When the MMP was re-introduced in 1987, its objectives were based on the perceived needs of the students by the administration. Accordingly, meaningful interaction between lecturers and students outside the classroom was lacking; non-academic guidance from full-time counselling staff was inadequate; and students face problems from peer pressure, to adjustment, to socializing, to mishandling independence, to some other unidentified problems. The administration felt that when the students could not cope with these problems, their discipline and academic performance would be effected. The MMP was, therefore, meant to be an individualized advisory system. The mentor was assumed to be someone a mentee could relate to at a personal level, and someone expected to provide individual attention to a mentee. That is, the mentors were to serve as auxiliaries to the full-time counselling staff.

Findings seemed to show that the MMP failed to meet these general objectives. Among the popular responses elicited, the group seemed to show a generally negative tendency towards the whole program. The majority of the respondents did not seem to support the need of a mentor for the students. At worst, the failure of the program seemed to point a finger at the mentors.

As a group, the respondents expected the MMP to contribute towards their development-socially and academically, in that order. They did not seem to expect to receive much personal and spiritual counselling nor financial aid in the program. However, activities organized under the MMP received less than lukewarm responses throughout the four schedules. This was explained by that most of them viewed the activities as non-beneficial, not interesting, or boring. Not being able to participate in those activities due to time factor was given as a popular reason. Their placing great importance to the need of social development was consistent with their perception of what activities they considered beneficial. Their suggestions or opinions were mostly those social by nature. Besides giving negative responses, a great number of the students abstained from answering the questions. We would

not know whether this behaviour was prompted by their generally negative tendency towards the whole program. As one respondent articulated, the system sound good only in theory.

Data seemed to tell us what was not needed. Question 12, for example, elicited responses showing that only five students consulted the mentor one to three times, 25 did not seem to have the need to do so. And the one abstained from answering perhaps shared the same feeling with the 25. Responses from Question 14 revealed that 18 did not feel that a mentor could help them solve their problems. Although responses to Question 13 seemed to be inconsistent with responses to Question 12 and 14, and responses to Question 12 also seemed to be inconsistent with those to Question 14, these inconsistencies were only in frequencies or figures. The general feeling that they did not see the need of having a mentor remained relatively consistent. As five of them put it down, they never discussed their problems with their mentors, or that they would seek advice from friends.

The respondents seemed to perceived the MMP as mentor-dominance or mentor-figure oriented, as they frequently held a mentor responsible for a perceived failure in the program. Among the data elicited in Question 5, for example, two of these reasons given as to why they did not participate in the program activities were: never having met the mentor, and mentor not interested. Responses to Question 7 seemed to strongly blame the mentor as the problem in the MMP: mentors not being concerned (61.29%); mentor not being able to counsel effectively (9.35%); mentor not being available (3.23%);. Two other reasons held the mentor partly responsible: mentee not being able to choose mentor (9.68%); little involvement between mentor and mentee (3.23%). It was also stated that the mentor did not help mentees solve their academic problems, and that some encouragement in the form of prizes should be awarded to the top achievers in the group (6.54%)

CONCLUSION

Both the administration and the students recognized the need of helping the students develop socially and academically. However, the MMP might not be the answer. As our findings showed, 77.42% of the respondents claimed that they did not derive any benefit from the program. Although 19.45% claimed having derived some benefits from the program, their reasons for saying so pointed to social but hardly to academic interactions. Our findings also showed that the social activities organized by the administration or the mentor were not well received by the mentees. All indications also seemed to lead us to conclude that the mentor did not fill the bill of one who could help the students develop socially or academically within the MMP.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There exists a need to re-assess the goals or objectives of the MMP. If the program were to be re-introduced, the administration should clearly identify the needs of the mentees to be able to define and specify the roles of both the mentees and the mentors. A needs analysis is, therefore, the first step that should be taken. Only then would the needs be realistic rather than perceived. That is to say that a survey interview of the students on their needs and expectations is logically the basis of planning or designing a MMP. Another direction that could be taken is to give the students the option of signing up to participate in the program. In other words, only those who have a genuine desire, need, or purpose in such a program would participate in the program. Likewise, mentoring should be a matter of personal commitment, social function, and professional performance. The mentors should have some positive attitudes for the program to volunteers their services and play a positive role. And those mentors who volunteer to participate in the program should be adequately trained or equipped to be able to function and contribute effectively.

APPENDIX

SOAL SELIDIK (MENTEE)

Arahan

1. Sila tandakan (√) pada kotak yang disediakan. Anda boleh menanda (√) lebih daripada satu kotak jika perlu.
2. Bagi soalan-soalan tanpa pilihan, anda boleh menjawab di ruangan yang disediakan.

Soalan

1. Pada pandangan anda, apakah objektif-objektif sebenar sistem mentor-mentee daripada yang berikut-

Memperbaiki penglibatan pelajar di dalam kegiatan-kegiatan di ITM Cawangan Sarawak

10

Menolong pelajar menyesuaikan diri di ITM Cawangan Sarawak

8

Menggalakkan penglibatan kakitangan di dalam perkembangan pelajar.

21

Melatih pelajar untuk berinteraksi	12
Menolong pelajar dari segi kewangan	2
Menolong Pelajar mendapatkan perkhidmatan dari ITM Cawangan Sarawak seperti pengangkutan, tempat tinggal dan yang lain-lain	2
Menyediakan tunjuk-ajar di bidang akademik	9
Mengadakan kaunseling di bidang agama	4
Lain-lain	2 sila nyatakan
.....	
.....	
.....	

2. Berapa banyakkah aktiviti-aktiviti yang anda hadiri pada semester-semester berikut:-

(i) Semester I 1987/88
(Julai-Disember)

0	21
1 hingga 3	8
4 hingga 6	2
lebih dari 6	0

(ii) Semester II 1987/88
(Januari-Jun)

0	14
1 hingga 3	16
4 hingga 6	1
lebih dari 6	0

(iii) Semester I 1988/89
(Julai-Disember)

0	12
1 hingga 3	16
4 hingga 6	3
lebih dari 6	0

(iv) Semester II 1988/89
(Januari-Jun)

0	19
1 hingga 3	9
3 hingga 6	2
lebih dari 6	0

3. Apakah pendapat anda mengenai aktiviti-aktiviti yang di anjurkan oleh mentor anda?

Berfaedah	2
Menarik	3
Kurang menarik	14
Membosankan	14

4. Daripada aktiviti-aktiviti yang diadakan, jelaskan aktiviti yang mendatangkan faedah kepada anda.

.....

.....

.....

5. Jika anda tidak menghadiri aktiviti-aktiviti yang diadakan, sila nyatakan sebab-sebabnya

Percanggahan masa

20

Tidak tahu

5

Tidak ingat

1

Tidak mampu kerana dikenakan bayaran

0

Lain-lain

13

sila nyatakan

.....

.....

.....

6. Apakah cadangan aktiviti-aktiviti baru yang bermanfaat untuk anda

.....

.....

.....

7. Apakah masalah-masalah lain yang dihadapi oleh anda?

Pemilihan

3

Mentor tidak mengambil berat

19

Masa yang singkat

9

Aktiviti-aktiviti yang terlalu banyak untuk anda melibatkan diri

3

Tidak ada tempat sesuai untuk bertemu

7

Tidak mendapat khidmat kaunsel yang efektif kerana pihak mentor kurang pengetahuan tentang "selok-belok" ITM

6

Lain-lain

2

Sila nyatakan

.....

.....

.....

8. *Apakah cadangan-cadangan untuk mengatasi masalah-masalah di atas dan sistem mentor-mentee?*

.....

.....

.....

9. *Setakat ini, hari mentor-mentee biasanya diadakan di penghujung semester. Adakah anda bersetuju ianya dikekalkan?*

Ya

12

Tidak

15

10. *Jika anda tidak bersetuju pada soalan di atas sila nyatakan waktu yang lebih sesuai.*

Awal semester

11

Cuti pertengahan semester

5

Lain-lain

3

Sila nyatakan

11. *Setakat ini, adakah faedah yang anda dapati dari sistem mentor-mentee?*

Ya 6 sila nyatakan

.....

.....

Tidak ada faedah

24

12. Berapa kali anda berjumpa mentor anda untuk membincangkan masalah-masalah serta mendapatkan bimbingan

0

1 hingga 3 kali

4 hingga 6 kali

lebih dari 6 kali

5

5

0

0

13. Sekiranya anda berjumpa mentor untuk membincangkan masalah-masalah, apakah jenis masalah-masalah tersebut?

Keluarga

Sosial

Penyesuaian diri

Kewangan

Akademik

Lain- lain

3

1

2

2

2

8

Sila nyatakan

.....

.....

.....

14. Daripada pengalaman anda, dapatkah mentor anda membantu anda di dalam mengatasi masalah-masalah anda?

Ya

9

Tidak

18

15. Pada pandangan anda, bagaimanakah aktiviti-aktiviti dapat membantu anda di dalam meningkatkan pencapaian akademik anda?

.....

.....

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