

## The Impact of Teamwork Skills on Students in Malaysian Public Universities

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**Abstract:** Teamwork is an essential soft skills that need to be applied to every student in the national education institutions. The application of these skills is in line with the government's plan in the National Education Blueprint (Higher Education) 2015-2025 which aims at producing a holistic graduate who could be characterized by an entrepreneurship and balanced process of education. This study aims to identify the impact of teamwork in the process of teaching and learning in the compulsory subjects in the Malaysian Public Universities. This study employed a quantitative method through a survey using questionnaires. A total of 424 respondents were randomly selected to make comparisons between the two public universities, namely Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM) and the Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka (UTeM) which are consisting of various ethnic groups, religions and field of study. Results showed a positive impact of teamwork skills on student's in the process of teaching and learning in both public universities. The teamwork skills could help to enhance the added-values on students, build their self-confidence and help to improve their communication skills and interaction with the others. In addition, the study also showed that the implication of teamwork skills on the students could expose and help them to develop critical and creative thinking to solve problems related to their tasks and improve the quality of learning process. In conclusion, this study suggests that the implementation of teamwork skills should be included together with the other prescribed soft skills with varied learned-centred activities.

**Key words:** Impact, soft skills, teamwork, Malaysian Public Universities, quality

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### INTRODUCTION

In the current fast changing environment due to globalization and rapid advances in the information and communication technology, organizations are pressured to search for methods that will improve organizational performance and maximize goal achievement. There is an increasingly urgent need for a country's human capital that meets the current needs of the organization and the job market. Thus, soft skills have become an important element to produce an efficient and excellent human resource. It is observed that modern management has become increasingly focused around the idea of the team to accomplish their work targets, organizational goals and objectives. It is in line with the National Education Blueprint (Higher Education) 2015-2025, the first surge aimed at producing graduates with a holistic characteristic by entrepreneurship and balanced human capital. This study aims to identify the impact of teamwork skills as embedded soft skills which have been introduced to

students who took the university compulsory subjects in the public universities. This research is also significant as it would contribute to teaching and learning practices and process in higher learning institutions.

**Problem statement:** The success of organization and group work depends on cooperation, commitment and understanding among its members. Application of teamwork skills and collaborative learning are methods of group learning which involves small group of people. This model of learning is proven effective to develop student's cooperation and commitment towards their work and also develop their cognitive, psychomotor and affective soft skills. The strategic plan of The Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) offers a guideline which proposes that elements of soft skills be embedded in learning process in order to increase the quality of teaching and learning as well as in human capital development. In order to examine the impact of the teamwork skills, a comprehensive study must be conducted the effectiveness of its application in

the teaching and learning process in the public universities. In addition, the Ministry of Higher Education also realizes that this soft skills must be evaluated with a comprehensive assessment and measurement but less study has been conducted to measure its impact and effectiveness to the students especially when these soft skills need to be implemented together with the Outcome Based Education (OBE) curriculum (Shakir, 2009; Affandi *et al.*, 2012).

### **Literature review**

**Definition of teamwork skills:** The term teamwork has been briefly discussed by many scholars in business and organizational management. Ralph Lewis defined group as a group of people who work together to achieve a goal in 1994. From this definition, Lewis categorized a component of teamwork into two parts, namely, man who work together and second; to achieve a goal. While the word team is defined as a group of people of worker who work together, cooperate, depends on each other, uphold responsibility and committed to the team in achieving the same goal in organization. According to Dyer (1987) teams are collections of people who must rely on group collaborations if each member is to experience the optimum of success, goal achievement and also defined a team as a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to:

- . A common purpose
- . Specific performance goals which are an integral part the purpose
- . A common approach to how the team works together to achieve the team's purpose
- . Mutual accountability

From the above definition, it shows distinguish characteristic between group and team. In this part, I refer to the definition that is given by The Oxford Dictionary of Current English which elaborate 'group' as "number of persons close together or belonging or classed together" while 'team' as "set of persons working together as team or in common action, willingness to act for group's rather than individual benefit, combined effort, co-operation" (Alauddin, 2004).

In the other word, teams have a close and mutual social communication rather than group. Relying on these characteristics, teams normally encouraged to develop skills and apply what they learn on the job. They are proactive in most relationships; receive the support of the team as well as keep commitments collectively.

Essentially, the message of teamwork is delegation and empowerment. Team working is all about passing responsibility over to working teams, so that they can get on with what they have to do without continually having

to refer to higher levels in their organization. That means that the teams need to be given enough authority to make day-to-day decisions about their work and enough power to make sure that things are done properly (Ahmad, 2004).

From the above concept and definition, teamwork can be summarized as a group of people that work collectively and interdependently to accomplish a goal. It has the power to control at least part of the operation and has open and effective communication.

**The embedded soft skills of teamwork in Malaysian Public Universities:** The Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) Malaysia had introduced and implemented the soft skills to undergraduates of Institutes of Higher Learning in Malaysia. Seven generic soft skills are communication skills, creative thinking and problem solving skills, teamwork skills, lifelong learning and information management, entrepreneurship, professional ethics and moral and leadership skills. Each skill has been detailed out with the Compulsory Soft Skills (Kemahiran Insaniah Mesti-KIM) and the additional Soft Skills (Kemahiran Insaniah Tambahan-KIT).

Based on MOHE's module, teamwork skills component is defined as a skill that involves the ability to cooperate with others from variety sociocultural background to achieve similar objective.

**Methodology of teamwork skills:** The guideline endorsed by MOHE introduced few models and developments which can be adapted with curriculum designs of the programs for its implementations, evaluation and monitoring activities. These soft skills can be implemented in the formal teaching and learning process through stand alone subject model or embedded model. Compare to the stand alone subject model, the embedded model need to be implemented in a systematic and well-planned process by the lecturer in the curriculum design and learning activities.

This study does not focus to measure the implementation of the key elements in the teamwork skills but it will discover the student's perception on the impact of these skills as the added values and the embedded skills to their learning activities.

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**Research design:** This study used a survey descriptive method which aimed to compare difference nature of student's ethnic background, religion and field of study on the impact of teamwork skills.

**The selection of respondents:** This study utilized a simple random and stratified cluster sampling. Respondents are

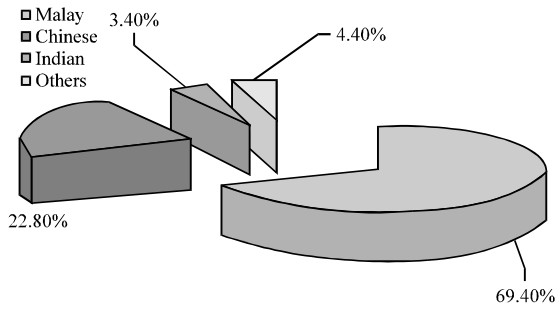


Fig. 1: UTeM's respondents ethnic

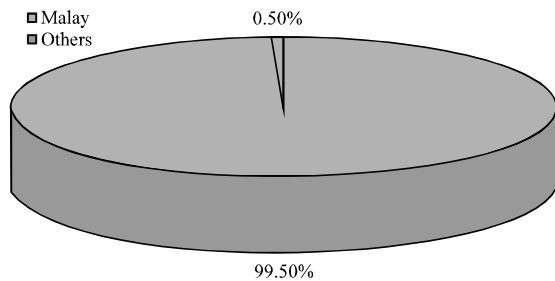


Fig. 2: USIM's respondents ethnic background

undergraduates from two public universities of different backgrounds who took compulsory university course, namely ethnic relations. They represented by multi-ethnic groups and religions and difference field of studies. A total of 480 respondents were selected and distributed to each university, 240 respondents from eight faculties of USIM whereas the other 240 respondents from five faculties of UTeM. Most of USIM respondents (99.1%) were Malays whereas UTEM was represented by multi ethnic groups. There are about 62.7% were Malays, 28% were Chinese and 5.9% of them were Indians while 3.4% were the others (Fig. 1 and 2).

**Instruments:** This research utilized a set questionnaire that has been modified from a previous research model as an instrument of the study. The questionnaire is divided into six sections. Likert scale of measurement (1-5) was designed as the following; strongly disagree, disagree, unsure, agree and strongly agree.

**Data collection and analysis:** There are 5 phases in data collection process of the study. The first phase involves the collection of data and literatures, the construction of domain and sub-domain of the instrument and gathering information on the number of students from the two universities. Finally, field work study was conducted at the selected universities. Questionnaires were distributed

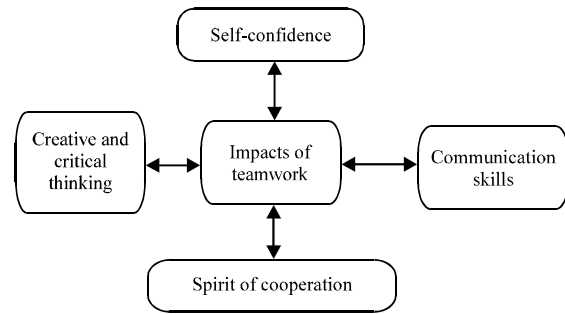


Fig. 3: The research framework

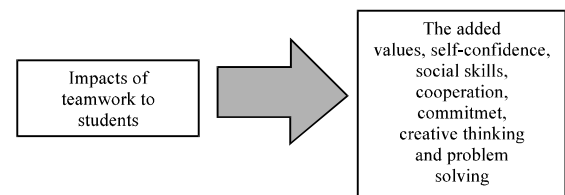


Fig. 4: The research framework

during the lectures and the students were given about 15 mins to answer all questions. Of the 480 questionnaires distributed, 424 forms were successfully recollected, representing by 213 (88.75%) of USIM respondents and 211 (87.9%) of UTeM respondents. This means that a total of 88.3% of questionnaire distributed have been received. The collected data were analyzed using Statistical Packages for the Social Science Version 12 (SPSS 12.0). Data are presented in frequency, percentage or mean.

**Theoretical framework:** This study utilized a combination model of teamwork that has been introduced by Finn (2008) and Kelly (2008) as research theoretical framework. Research framework of the study is shown in Fig. 3. A summary of research framework can be explained as the following (Fig. 4).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Impact of teamwork on students:** The study discusses about the impact teamwork skills on USIM and UTeM's students in teaching and learning process. Comparison between the two categories of students in terms of the focus and background of university shows some interesting findings.

The findings of this study revealed the impacts of teamwork skills in teaching and learning process in the university, particularly in USIM and UTeM (Table 1). The findings showed that the soft skills of teamwork

Table 1: Impacts of teamwork skills on students of public universities

Impacts of teamwork skills	Mean	
	USIM	UTeM
Added values to students	3.97	3.97
Help to build self-confident	3.99	3.97
Improve communication skills and interaction with others	4.07	4.05
Increase spirit of cooperation and commitment on task	4.06	4.04
Improve creative and critical thinking	4.07	4.03
Help to solve problems	3.99	4.00
Improve quality of work	4.18	4.19
Improve quality of learning process	4.08	4.08
Total mean	4.05	4.03

contributed to positive impacts on students in both public universities. The impact of the teamwork skills on students help to add values to the students, build self-confidence, helping to improve communication skills and interaction with others and enhance the spirit of cooperation and commitment to the tasks given. In addition, the study also showed that the student's exposure to soft skills can help to enhance creative and critical thinking and ideas and improve the quality of workmanship, in particular improving the knowledge and quality of learning.

Generally, the findings show that there is no great distinction between USIM and UTEM respondents in the impacts of implementing teamwork skills in teaching and learning process. Students also agreed that this skill could increase knowledge in subject being discussed as well as increased the quality of learning. This method of learning is also suitable especially in completing the course task through the sharing of references. A large number of students in the lecture or class session could also make the teamwork skills as relevance and suitable approach especially in conducting university's compulsory courses.

The results also revealed that no statistical significant differences were found between students in two difference universities in the impact of the teamwork skills as all respondents showed the positive effects. USIM and UTeM respondents showed their similar level of agreement and mean score in the statement "the teamwork skills add values to students" and "the teamwork skills help to improve quality of learning process".

The student from both university also showed approximately similar mean score in other statements in particular its impact on building student's self-confident; communication skills and interaction with others; enhance the spirit of cooperation and commitment to the tasks given; creative and critical thinking and ideas and improve the quality of works. UTeM mean scores are higher than USIM in the last two statements whereas USIM mean scores are greater than UTeM in the other 4 statements. Minor differences were found in the mean scores of the

respondents from these two universities are due to the difference percentage in the first two positive level of Likert scale, namely strongly agree and agree between USIM and UTeM.

In general, the study revealed that the implementation of soft skills in students is vital as preparation for them to meet with the current demand of the work market and environment. Findings of the study is also in line with the previous study on the important of soft skills, in particular the team work skills to meet the needs of industry and job specifications (Ahmad, 2004; McIntosh, 2008; Leroux and Lafleur, 2006). Enhancing the soft skills in students is essential to increase chances of their employability after graduation and increases their self-confidence before starting on any career (Ahmad, 2004; Zepke and Leach, 2010; Nachiappan *et al.*, 2009; Shakir, 2009; Raybould and Sheedy, 2005).

In brief, this study suggests that the implementation of teamwork skills should be included together with the other prescribed soft skills with varied learned-centred activities to optimize its impact on the teaching and learning process in the university. The findings also gave implication to the lecturers to ensure the successful of teamwork skills in education process.

The teamwork skills in teaching and learning process in university should be continued through varied learned-centred activities. The implementation of teamwork skills should be included together with the other prescribed soft skills for example, Communication Skills (CS) Critical Thinking and Problem Solving Skills (CTPS) Lifelong Learning and information management skills (LL) as well as Moral and Professional Ethics (EM). This is needed because all the skills are necessary to optimize the effectiveness of its teaching-learning process which in line with the philosophy of outcome-based education.

Conduct more activities which encourage active involvement on the part of the students such as brain storming group discussions, negotiation, presentation on student's field work and outdoor activities.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, based on the findings of the study, it could be concluded that the implementation of teamwork skills in the teaching-learning process at USIM and UTeM is good. The study also proved the impacts of teamwork skills in teaching-learning process in these public universities. Nevertheless, a systematic and effective approach is needed so the objectives and the goal of teamwork building could be well achieved.

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