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IMPLEMENTATION OF MPU COURSES IN MALAYSIAN INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
<p>Article history: Received: 23 Feb 2024 Revised: 3 March 2024 Accepted: 20 March 2024 Published: 1 April 2024</p>	<p>Introduction to Mata Pelajaran Umum (MPU) courses since 2013 at Institutions of Higher Learning (IPT) in Malaysia are based on the branch of Philosophy of Science, involving the fields of Humanities, Pure Sciences, and Social Sciences. However, these MPU courses have garnered attention from some quarters who believe that they are not important and should not be mandatory for students due to several factors, including subject overload and the plethora of assignments already undertaken by students. Some argue that students should only focus on subjects directly related to their chosen courses. Therefore, this paper aims to identify the implementation of MPU courses in Malaysian Institutions of Higher Learning and analyze their implementation. This study utilizes a descriptive design and employs a qualitative content analysis approach. Findings indicate that MPU courses add value to students besides having a positive impact on their personal development and are relevant for them. In conclusion, MPU courses should continue with some improvements to align with the National Education Philosophy to produce well-rounded students in terms of physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual aspects (JERI).</p>
<p>Keywords: Mata Pelajaran Umum (MPU), Institutions of Higher Learning (IPT), National Education</p> <p></p>	

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INTRODUCTION

The MPU course is a set of subjects mandated for students in universities, whether in Public Institutions of Higher Learning (IPTA) or Private Institutions of Higher Learning (IPTS), aimed at enhancing the quality of human development among students. Its implementation is now also based on High-Impact Educational

Practices (HIEPs) to support institutions in forming an integrated curriculum aligned with current needs (Ruzaini Ijon et al, 2021).

The question then arises: what is the implementation of MPU courses in Malaysian Institutions of Higher Learning? What is the effectiveness of MPU courses for students? How can MPU courses be beneficial to students? To answer these questions, two objectives are proposed. Firstly, to identify the implementation of MPU courses in Malaysian Institutions of Higher Learning. Secondly, to analyze the implementation of MPU courses in Malaysian Institutions of Higher Learning. This study employs a descriptive design and uses document analysis as the method of data collection, while qualitative content analysis is used to analyze the data. Therefore, this paper will discuss the implementation of MPU courses in Malaysian Institutions of Higher Learning and how effective they are for students. Accordingly, the discussion in this paper is divided into four main sections: First, the concept of MPU courses; second, the implementation of MPU courses; third, the effectiveness of MPU courses; and fourth, the conclusion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

MPU Course Concept

Understanding of the MPU course can be examined based on the concept of MPU as explained by the Ministry of Higher Education (2016), as well as the scope and objectives of offering MPU courses. MPU Concept as generally referred to in current academic planning suggests that general education should be expanded to include aspects of skill development such as communication skills, competency, appreciation of moral values and history, as well as exposure to broader areas of general knowledge beyond the boundaries of traditional disciplines. This includes exposure to new fields such as arts, philosophy, and foreign languages. The emphasis on expanding general education, in principle, is in line with producing graduates with broad, balanced, and holistic thinking.

Thus, general education refers to pre-undergraduate programs aimed at equipping students with preparatory knowledge for living in modern society. This knowledge includes an understanding of moral values, history, and responsibilities in society, mastery of soft skills, broadening knowledge based on Malaysia, and the ability to apply knowledge in daily life (Ministry of Higher Education, 2016).

Scope and Objectives of Offering

Students in higher education institutions (IPT) require various intellectual skills to enable them to participate effectively in society. MPU aims to provide students with specific skills. In addition to exposure to the characteristics of intellectual skills, MPU courses also serve as complementary courses to those offered in specialized programs for students. Therefore, the objectives of introducing MPU are as follows:

- i. Alignment of Compulsory Subjects with General Studies Subjects in IPT
- ii. Nation-Building
- iii. Mastery and Expansion of Soft Skills
- iv. Strengthening and Broadening Knowledge in Malaysia
- v. Application of Soft Skills

Based on the objectives outlined, MPU has been divided into four groups, namely:

- U1: Appreciation of philosophy, values, and history,
- U2: Mastery of soft skills,
- U3: Expansion of knowledge about Malaysia,
- U4: Practical community management skills such as community service and extracurricular activities
(Ministry of Higher Education, 2016).

The objectives of any implementation are important to ensure that what is planned and designed can effectively achieve its objectives. According to Ruzaini Ijon et al. (2021), among the objectives introduced by MPU is to

enable students to instill moral values that can be practiced in their daily lives. MPU can also be introduced to align Compulsory Subjects (MPW) with MPU in IPT to ensure good quality that can contribute to nation-building and the practice of soft skills among students (Ng & Iswandi, 2017).

Studies by Roselina (2009), Shaharuddin et al. (2010) argue for the need for continuous research by relevant authorities on the aspect of soft skills among students. Fairuzza et al. (2011) believe that soft skills are among the elements highly emphasized by potential employers. Failure to highlight these elements leads to difficulties for graduates of public and private higher education institutions in finding suitable employment. Studies by Shaharuddin et al. (2010), for example, found that management skills and globalization among students at public higher education institutions are at a low level, thus requiring reevaluation by various university stakeholders in curriculum development for students.

Implementation of MPU Courses

The implementation of MPU courses in higher education institutions (IPT) can be understood by examining the background of MPU course offerings in IPT and the structure of MPU course implementation in IPT. Background of MPU Course Offerings in IPT. MPU is the result of restructuring the Compulsory Subjects (MPW) that were used before the implementation of MPU. There were several issues related to MPW, including the lack of patriotism among IPT students, especially in private higher education institutions (IPTS), inconsistency in MPW taught in public and private higher education institutions, and the outdated MPW curriculum that needed improvement. Therefore, the Ministry of Education Malaysia has reviewed the curriculum of MPW offerings in all IPTs in the country, including establishing a research team to restructure MPW (Ministry of Higher Education, 2016). Based on observational and focused group studies conducted by the research team, a new MPW structure known as General Studies (MPU) has been introduced. In addition, bilateral discussions were conducted among various parties such as students, professional bodies, owners of IPTS and IPTA, as well as the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA). Therefore, through these discussions, an agreement to implement MPU in all IPTs including IPTA and IPTS was reached and endorsed.

Structure of MPU Course Implementation in IPT

The implementation of MPU courses involves structures at the Bachelor's, Diploma, and Certificate levels. Students are required to pass and complete groups U1, U2, U3, and U4 as a requirement to complete their studies. Details of the MPU course implementation structure, such as Schedule 1 below:

Schedule 1: Structure of MPU Implementation

Academic Level	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 or 3 credits for each course in group U1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 or 3 credits for each course in groups U2 and U3 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 credits for each course in group U4				
	U1	U2	U3	U4	Total Credit
*Bachelor Degree, *Sijil Siswazah dan *Diploma Siswazah (Level 6 KKM)	2 courses (4-6 credits)	1 courses (2 or 3 credits)	1 courses (2 or 3 credits)	1 courses (2 credits)	10 – 14
*Diploma Lanjutan (Level KKM)	1 courses (2 or 3 credits)	1 courses (2 or 3 credits)	1 courses (2 or 3 credits)	1 courses (2 credits)	8 – 11
Diploma (Level 4 KKM)					
Sijil (Level 3 KKM)	1 courses (2 or 3 credits)	1 courses (2 or 3 credits)	1 courses (2 or 3 credits)	-	6 – 9
* The offering of MPU for Advanced Diploma, Graduate Certificate, and Graduate Diploma programs is mandatory for students who have not previously taken MPU at the previous level of study. The total credits required to be taken are as follows at Stage 3, which is 6-9 credit hours.					

(Kementerian Pendidikan Tinggi, 2016).

Table 2: Implementation of Groups U2, U3, and U4

U2 (2 or 3 credit)	U3 (2 or 3 credit)	U4 (2 credit)	Medium of Instruction	
Leadership Skills and Human Relations	Malaysian Economy	Community Service	Malay	English
Creative and Innovative Skills	Government and Public Policies of Malaysia	Co-curricular Activities	✓	✓
Writing Skills	Organizational Behavior in Multiracial Malaysian Society	Or others as suggested by MOHE and IPT	✓	✓
Thinking Skills	Comparative Religion		✓	✓
Entrepreneurial Skills	Comparative Ethics		✓	✓
Or others as suggested by MOHE and IPT				✓
Note: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Courses U2-U4 are determined by the IPT. ❖ For non-citizen students who did not obtain credit in the Bahasa Melayu course at the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) level, it is COMPULSORY to take the National Language A course as a component of U2. 				

(Kementerian Pendidikan Tinggi, 2016).

Table 3: Course Code Assignment Method

U1	U2	U3	U4
1 = Hubungan Etnik 2 = TITAS 3 = B.M. Komunikasi 1 4 = B.M. Komunikasi 2 5 = Pengajian Malaysia 1 6 = Pengajian Malaysia 2 7 = Pengajian Malaysia 3	1 = Bahasa Kebangsaan A Or others as suggested by MOHE and IPT	Or others as suggested by MOHE and IPT	

(Kementerian Pendidikan Tinggi, 2016).

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Current Implementation

The current implementation involves a 100% assessment based on continuous assessment. This assessment method aligns with the guidelines outlined by the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE), which emphasize the implementation of continuous assessment and summative assessment in courses involving the use of techniques and approaches of High Impact Educational Practices. Additionally, assessment is based on examination assessments conducted through tests, presentations, and project implementation. Assessment also includes questioning and inquiry-based methods such as case studies, research, simulations, reflection, experiential learning through visits, engagement, and so on (Ministry of Higher Education, 2016).

The implementation of MPU as outlined by the MOHE in 2016 has made provisions that MPU components are divided into four main groups: firstly, U1: Appreciation of philosophy, values, and history; secondly, U2: Mastery of soft skills; thirdly, U3: Expansion of knowledge about Malaysia; and finally, involving U4: Practical

community management skills such as community service and extracurricular activities (Ministry of Higher Education, 2016).

Effectiveness of MPU Courses in IPT

The provision of MPU courses is fundamentally aimed at preparing students for modern society. The application of moral values as individuals and members of society, soft skills, and language skills are among the important knowledge encompassed in the course (Ruzaini Ijon et al., 2021). There have been many studies conducted by researchers to measure the effectiveness of MPU courses on students. Studies by Abd Rashid (2015), Hamidah et al. (2011), Ng and Iswadi (2017), Nurul Farhanah (2019), and Noor Aziera et al. (2020) concluded that the provision of MPU courses has a positive impact on the development of students' humanity and is relevant to students.

In addition, other studies often conducted by researchers on MPU courses also focus on the effectiveness of the courses for students. According to Ruzaini Ijon et al. (2021), studies on the effectiveness of MPU courses have been conducted to examine the effectiveness of MPU courses in public and private universities, including by Zarina et al. (2010), who found that students' personality skills and knowledge increased after taking MPU courses. Faridah Che Husain and Fakhroladabi (2012) argue for the connection between the formation of conscience indirectly embedded in the TITAS course curriculum in educating students' morals and ethics. Similarly, a study conducted by Ateerah Abdul Razak et al. (2022) found that students acknowledged the existence of tolerance values in the MPU curriculum and that it was able to educate students to apply moral values in daily life.

This view is supported by Abd. Rashid (2015) through a study on TITAS courses in IPTS, which background engineering students are interested in and have a positive perception of MPU courses. He suggested that student-centered learning methods and the use of e-learning are among the teaching aspects that need attention from MPU course instructors.

A study by Nor Azlina Endut et al. (2019) also shows that MPU educates students to have good character and concerns with current issues. A study by Suzy Aziziyana Saili et al. (2018) supports the need to provide a platform for social interaction for students from various backgrounds. These researchers suggest the need for interethnic dialogue to improve social relations among students. This is in line with a study conducted by Sakinatul Raadiyah Abdullah et al. (2022), which examined the effectiveness of the Appreciation of Ethics and Civilization course in fostering racial harmony.

Moreover, MPU courses can be a platform for further enhancing interactions among students from various backgrounds. This is due to the structure of MPU courses, which are seen as capable of producing holistic graduates, instilling patriotism and Malaysian identity values, as well as mastering soft skills towards meeting job employability (Ministry of Higher Education, 2016).

CONCLUSION

The main purpose of this study is to discuss the implementation of MPU courses in Malaysian IPTs and the effectiveness of these courses for students. The findings of this study found that there are many values and positive impacts resulting from the implementation of MPU courses. The main findings of this study identified three importance of implementation. First, the integration of knowledge in MPU subjects and course structure helps to build balanced individuals and holistic graduates; second, it helps students to master soft skills and educates students to apply moral values in daily life; and third, it enhances social relations and strengthens students' identities through patriotism, Creativity Skills in 21st Century Learning

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