

Academic Staff Development at the University of Malaya: A Case Study of UMLIC

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Abstrak

Pusat: Peningkatan Pembelajaran Universiti Malaya (UMUC) yang beroperasi dari 1996 hingga 2000 telah ditubuhkan untuk tujuan meningkatkan kemahiran pensyarah dalam pengajaran dan pembelajaran serta kemahiran lain yang diperlukan untuk berfungsi sebagai seorang pensyarah profesional. Artikel ini akan membicarakan sejarah penubuhan UMLIC, peranan dan operasinya dalam pembangunan staf di Universiti Malaya.

Introduction

Challenges facing higher education are similar all over the world. The need to cater for large number of students, to provide programmes that meet the demands of the workplace, the diversity of student bodies and budget reductions are all typical problems that universities are trying to solve. The University of Malaya (UM) being the oldest university in Malaysia has similar problems. In order to keep the university as the provider of quality education and services and at the same time attract good "brains" to join the university as teaching staff, University of Malaya has to change.

The University of Malaya, in its newly formulated (in mid 90s) corporate mission aspires to "become a premier university striving for excellence in advancing and disseminating knowledge as well as upholding and respecting the wishes and aspirations of the people and the nation".

In order for the university to continuously sustain a body of academic excellence, one of the strategies is to develop the human resources within the university through staff development programmes to promote a learning and teaching culture. A centre dedicated to staff development was deemed necessary. Thus, the University of Malaya Learning Improvement Centre (UMLIC) was conceptualized in January 1996.

The purpose of this paper is to describe the process of reengineering academic staff development system at the University of Malaya from 1995 to 2000 through staff development. According to Yang (1995), process reengineering is the fundamental rethinking and redesigning of existing process tasks and operating structures to achieve dramatic improvements in process performance. Champy (1995) defines reengineering as a particular way of using our minds, of minding our businesses, and anyone can learn it. In order to achieve the status of a learning organization, as an organization is continuously improving (Senge, 1990; Brooks, 1993), UM has to continuously build and promote a body of academic excellence. As defined by the university, excellent scholars should possess the following qualities (CUM Corporate Mission, 1995):

1. a constant thirst for knowledge;
2. a constant endeavour to maximise their potential especially in their field of specialization;
3. readiness to exploit and to apply their knowledge for developing the mind and intellectual ability of their undergraduates;
4. keen to see that knowledge is also used for the well being of the society in which they live and the progress of universal human civilization;
5. endeavour to maintain the supremacy of knowledge and are upto-date in their field of specialization;

6. recognition especially from colleagues in the same fields of specialization at the national and international level;
7. always maintain the integrity of their knowledge as academicians; and
8. always encourage, inspire and guide students and show exemplary character, personality and commitment.

Academic Staff Development At The University Of Malaya

Academic staff development was a critical issue in the university that required immediate attention. The university believed that as an academician, a lecturer must not only be proficient in his/her area of expertise, he/ she must also master the basics of teaching and learning in higher education, research, publications and other areas that will make him/her an academic. Academic staff development at the University of Malaya was guided by the following mission and objectives (Academic Staff Development concept paper, 1995).

By December 31, 2000, all academic staff in the University of Malaya will have full access to quality training and guidance in Instructional Systems Design and Development and management of learning. The training they receive will result in lecturers who will:

- give high quality teaching by systematically applying principles of teaching and learning and adopting state-of-the-art technology;
- provide students with high quality learning experience, materials and contents;
- guide students in their quest for knowledge and academic excellence; and
- critically evaluate and improve their performance and their students' performance.

Since the mission was to improve learning and performance of students through the performance of lecturers, a centre for academic staff was proposed in early 1995 and was called University of Malaya Learning Improvement Centre.

The University Of Malaya Learning Improvement Centre

The University of Malaya Learning Improvement Centre was established under the Chancellery in July 1996. The primary purpose of UMLIC was to design, develop and produce materials and activities intended to address learning and performance requirements. As an instructional systems design and development centre, UMLIC was to contribute to the development of the University of Malaya through the design and development of learning innovation and improvement at the local, regional and international levels.

UMLIC's Mission

The mission of UMLIC was to apply technology to the teaching and learning processes especially in the design and development of comprehensive delivery systems. Its objectives were;

1. to provide training and technical assistance in areas of instructional systems design, development and its management to the university staff;
2. to design and develop learning innovation and improvement; and
3. to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of instruction through the application of research and technology (UMLIC concept paper, 1995).

UMLIC was to function as a catalyst for learning and development among the academic staff, providing consultation to individuals and organizations with the aim to improve learning and performance.

Research on Staff Development in Higher Education

Initially UMLIC was established to function as the training provider for academic staff. However, with research into system and staff development, it became apparent that something cannot be changed without affecting other changes. If this was not taken into consideration, the mission to become a learning organisation would fail. Research was conducted into the development and evaluation of a learning organisation. This research also looked at several universities in the United Kingdom, Singapore and Malaysia that had functioning staff development programmes.

For the staff development programme to be effective it is crucial that all the other systems necessary for UMLIC to function were in place. Such systems we're:

the staff development committee at the university level;

the academic staff development and training policy and its monitoring;

academic staff appraisal and reward system; the quality assurance system;

the staff development budget; and the facilities for UMLIC.

The following sections will describe the functions of the staff development committee and the implementation of UMLIC's programmes.

The Staff Development Committee

The staff development (SD) committee was formed in May 1996. Its mission was " to ensure the development and satisfaction of the academic staff to enable them to provide quality teaching and re-

search to students, society and the academic world, in line with the university's mission". The committee was chaired by the Vice Chancellor, and had members representing all faculties, academies and the main library. The Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic), Deans of Faculties, Directors of Academies and Directors of Centres and the Head of Library were members of the committee.

The SD committee had an external advisor, the Director of Staff Development Unit from the University of Sheffield and an internal advisor, the former Dean of Education, who was the project leader for the UMLIC development project. Our link with the University of Sheffield was sponsored by the British Council CICHE link programme to develop the learning centre.

The functions of the SD committee were to propose:

academic staff development policy;

academic staff appraisal and reward policy; academic staff development strategies; budget for staff development; and

to establish faculty staff development committees.

Faculty Staff Development Committees

The academic skills of professional lecturers could be developed with strong and explicit encouragement from the faculty. The faculty staff development committee was responsible for identifying the faculty needs and requirements for continuous training and development of their staff. The faculty committee was chaired by the Dean, and the members were the academic staff who were subject matter experts or staff who had good practices to share with others. Several of the members of the faculty staff development committee were also UMLICs Learning Consultants.

Learning Consultants

UMLIC Learning Consultants were representatives from the faculties, who worked closely with UMLIC to provide the necessary help through training and consultancies. Learning Consultants were selected by the Deans.

Consultants were change agents who were the link between the faculty staff development committee and UMLIC. Their roles included identifying the needs at the faculty level and providing the necessary solutions. Learning Consultants were called upon from time to time to give training.

The University of Malaya Staff Development Programmes

Research into the needs of the academic staff was conducted in November 1995. The aim of the research was to find out what the academic staff would identify as the skill most needed to function as academicians. The skills that were identified were teaching skills, specifically, course design, group learning, testing and evaluation, instructor and student interaction, and information technology.

The needs analysis indicated a gap in the knowledge and skills of the respondents in the areas of teaching and learning and in the use of information technology for teaching and learning and research. The findings for teaching and learning varied from faculty to faculty and by academic positions. Interestingly, the medical and dental faculties scored very high on the teaching and learning requirements. Senior lecturers and new lecturers were equally interested in learning more about teaching. Most professors indicated that they were satisfied with their teaching skills. Thus, initial focus of UMLIC was the development of new lecturers and later enhancing the skills of senior lecturers.

New Lecturers Professional Development Programme

Induction programmes for new lecturers were conducted yearly by the Human Resource Department. The purpose of the induction programme was to orientate the new staff to the university and to enable them to work towards their confirmation. Previously, there was very little focus given to the development of the teaching and learning skills. If there was any teaching skills development at all, it was often provided ad hoc. The Faculty of Education often received requests from new lecturers who realised that they did not have the skills or knowledge to do the job of professional teachers. Realising that there was a need for a formal training programme to equip lecturers with the skills necessary to carry out their job professionally UMLIC was given the mandate to design a programme for them.

It was agreed by the staff development committee, the learning consultants and UMLIC that any programme conducted at UMLIC should be followed-up at the faculty level. Such programmes for new lecturers would require that each of the participants attending GMLIC's staff development programme would have a mentor at the faculty who would help the lecturers transfer the learning to their work environment. It was also agreed that UMLIC cannot be providing the training centrally if there was no support at the faculty, because the transfer of knowledge would not be complete.

The pilot programme was launched on December 13, 1996. The first group of new lecturers spent 66 hours of training, both in the classroom setting and on the job. The programme was designed to give as much support as possible to the new lecturers to learn the necessary skills of teaching and learning, use of IT in instruction, and development of counselling skills and personal skills. The programme for the new lecturers required that each participant in the programme be assigned a mentor by the faculty staff development committee. The mentor was from the faculty staff development committee or from the senior lecturers in the same professional field.

The mentors were responsible for making sure that the new staff were able to apply what they learned at UMLIC into their teaching. Mentoring involved the mentors scheduling meetings with the participants and attending the participant's class to appraise and help the new lecturer to reflect and act. Mentoring and peer evaluation were planned to ensure that the learning was transferred to the actual work environment. Although it was a lot of work for both the participants and the mentors, the experience, however, helped both parties to learn and improve themselves.

Senior Lecturers Enhancement Programmes

Several enrichment programmes were also conducted to meet the need of senior lecturers and academic managers. Workshops, seminars and talks were popular with this group. The seniors found that the informal sessions at IJMLIC helped them to network and at the same time learn new skills. Some of the areas that were of interest to the seniors included ways to improve teaching and learning, use of IT in the classroom and professional development, evaluation systems, management and personal skills. In 1999 about 210 lecturers, attended the programmes at UMLIC. On average, each attendee participated in at least two different programmes in that year.

Special Request Programmes

UMLIC received several requests from various faculties to conduct in-house programmes. From 1997 to 1999 special programmes for the Faculties of Economics and Administration, Dental, Engineering, Science, Arts and Social Sciences, Law, Computer and Information Technology were provided. These programmes were related to teaching and learning, personal improvement, research, supervision and use of information technology' in teaching and learning.

Special Request Programmes From Other Institutions

Several programmes for other institutions were delivered by UMLIC. Over a period of three years UMLIC was invited to conduct at least five sessions of training in pedagogical skills and enhancing the learning environment for INTI College, training at least 150 lecturers. UMLIC was also involved in the training of lecturers from the Colleges involved in conducting University of Malaya external programmes, such as IKIP and KUSZA. Several seminars that UMLIC organized and conducted externally were well attended by other higher education institutions.

Information Dissemination

UMLIC was involved in planning activities to disseminate knowledge on higher education. UMLIC's premier national conference on Staff Development in Higher Education in March, 1997 was officiated by the Minister of Education then, Dato' Sri Najib Tun Razak. The conference attracted many staff developers from other public and private universities and colleges. Several invited speakers from other universities shared their experiences in staff development and their strategies for the 21st Century. The conference deliberations were well covered in the local papers and the statement made by the Minister on the needs of trained lecturers in higher education sparked discussions among the staff developers and the academics.

UMLIC produced the first monthly newsletter *Berita UMLIC* in November 1996 to announce the coming events and to let the campus know of the existence of the learning improvement centre for academic staff.

International Cooperation

UMLIC was involved in two Committees for International Cooperation in Higher Education (CICHE) programs under the

leadership of the then Dean of the Faculty of Education. The first project in 1996 was to study staff development centres in the universities in the United Kingdom. A link was established with the University of Sheffield which resulted in the establishing of UMLIC. The second project with Robert Gordon University, Scotland, which was started in 1998 was a curriculum development program for teaching in higher education. The study was to develop a certification program for teachers in higher education.

UMLIC Staffing and Facilities

UMLIC started its operation in July 1996, initially with a Director and a Clerk. The Director, an academician trained in the field of instructional systems technology was seconded from the Faculty of Education to serve for two terms from July 1996 to July 2000. Logistics and operation support was provided by the training department in the Human Resource Department. The first year of operation involved a lot of planning and learning. The office renovation and acquisition of equipment were carried out in early 1996. The office and training room facilities were ready by end of the year. Support from the management especially the Chancellery was overwhelming. UMLIC was given the budget to furnish the training room with the latest technology and equip the library with relevant books, videos and training modules.

Conclusion

The University of Malaya saw the need for a staff development centre to ensure that a learning culture was promoted especially when it aspired to be a premier university. UMLIC had played a very important role in improving teaching and learning in the University of Malaya. UMLIC, with the help of both local and overseas learning consultants had trained many academic staff and had provided consultancy in areas of teaching and learning, research and publications, academic advisement and personal development both

within and outside the university. UMLIC had made a name for itself as a centre referred to by other higher education institutions for help in training their lecturers. Change in an organization such as the University of Malaya takes time and patience. Developing and maintaining a learning culture requires continuous support from all especially the top management.

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