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**WORKLOAD OF ACADEMIC STAFF IN MALAYSIAN PUBLIC
UNIVERSITY: PERSPECTIVES OF TOP MANAGEMENT**

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Abstract

Defining workload in academic raises many challenging issues because of the unique nature of academic work and different nature of disciplines. Today's academic staffs are under stress as they need to respond to the global demands and their responsibilities now are no longer confined within the boundaries of teaching and learning. Different job specifications between institutions or between academic staff themselves in the same institution cause problems nowadays and raise the issue of injustice. Due to this, the objective of this paper is to examine the workload of academic staff in Malaysian public universities from the perspective of top management. The methodology used for this research is socio legal research. The primary data is interview with the top management of public universities. The finding shows that the workload for academic staff is different between universities, vary according to rank and only been provided in general even though they receive the same scheme of salary. Workload of academic staff somewhat deviated from the teaching and learning where the weights allocated to teaching are relatively low. Therefore, most of the academic staff are more likely to focus on other workload such as research, consultancy and publications which have more weightage of marks for yearly performance appraisal and also to ease the promotion. Less focus on teaching can interfere the quality of teaching and produces graduates who are less capable.

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1. Introduction

It is undeniable that public universities play an important role in developing human capitals that are knowledgeable, skill full, innovative and high spiritual to become a high income nation. In order to achieve this, stay relevant and compete in the global marketplace, Malaysia has evolved from a production-based to knowledge-based economy (Grapragasem et al., 2014). According to Abdullah (2012), higher education is one of the main drivers of the envisioned 'high-income knowledge-based economy.' Educational indicators for the period between 2007 - 2020 were designed to measure the achievements of those strategies (Abdullah, 2012).

The growth of this knowledge-based economy has led not only to competition among employers worldwide for the best brains but also among the institutions that train the best brains (Selvaraj et al., 2014). As the status of higher education is changing according to the needs of globalization, it goes parallel with the responsibilities of academic staff (Sidek et al., 2012). This is because the role to educate and train the students in public universities were given to academic staffs. This is supported by Yeon et al., (2015) who said that academic staffs also play an important role in nurturing the success of the desired human capital. The need to educate and train today's students has changed the workload of academic staff in the university. The responsibilities of an academic staff are no longer confined within the boundaries of teaching, research and service. This has been supported by Sidek et al. (2012), who said that their work is not only classified by teaching, research and services, but it goes beyond that. In other words, the academic work has expanded from traditional teaching to include few other tasks (Coaldrake & Stedman, 1999).

This has also led to the changes of national education policy and institutional development in Malaysia (Hee, 2007). Academic staff have to follow the vision, mission and objectives of their universities. Besides that, academic staff in public universities must also fulfil their key performance indicators (KPIs) towards national agenda of the National Higher Education Strategic Plan (PSPTN). In 2013, the Ministry of Higher Education (Ministry) thus began developing the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015–2025 (Higher Education) or the MEB (HE) which was constructed on the five aspirations i.e. access, quality, equity, unity and efficiency towards becoming a high income nation (Ministry of Higher Education, 2013). Based on this Blueprint, by 2025, the Ministry aspires to increase access to enrolment in higher education and this aspiration covers three aspects: quality of graduates, quality of institutions, and quality of the overall system. Although currently there is a lack of comprehensive data to effectively assess equity in the system, the Ministry aims to ensure that all Malaysians have the opportunity to fulfil their potential regardless of background. The Ministry is also committed to ensuring that enrolment in universities reflects the mix of Malaysia's ethnicities. The aim is to create an education system that provides students with shared values, shared experiences, and common aspirations by embracing diversity. In terms of efficiency, the Ministry aims to maximise the return on investment in higher education and to maintain the current levels of Government expenditure per student across public institutions.

Academic staff in public university is confined with the new implementation of policies imposed by the Ministry to initiate performance measurement among them. The performance indicator has been implemented in Malaysia since the imposition of National Higher Education Strategic Plan 2007-2020.

There are different indicators applied by the public university in Malaysia in terms of assessing the performance. However, the criteria tested by almost all public universities may include teaching and learning, research and publication, administrative work, and consultation (Abdullah, 2012). The measurement used in evaluating the performance is the KPIs. It is believed that by imposing the performance indicator, it has created burden of workload, especially to the academic staff as they need to comply with several requirements to achieve their KPIs and surplus target (Mohd Makbul, 2014). The workload and KPIs for academic staffs usually been allocated by the top management of the university in general. The exact workload for each individual academic staffs will be determined by the dean of each faculty. This is because only the dean of each faculty who knows the actual workload for the said faculty. Due to this, the workload for academic staffs who are receiving the same salary might be different from one university to another university, from one faculty to another faculty or from one staff to another staff.

2. Problem Statement

In order to ensure that Malaysian higher education stand in rank with other world's class university, the government has classified Malaysian public universities into several categories namely APEX University, Research University, Focused University and Comprehensive University. APEX University is defined in the National Higher Education Plan (NHEP) as centre of academic distinction, led by visionary, motivated and committed leaders, consist of talented and renowned academic staffs, filled with local and international students who possess a high standard of academic excellence, and equipped with state-of-the-art facilities (Ministry of Education, 2007). The aim of Research Universities is to enhance the development and commercialization of research activities by increasing the number of post graduate and post-doctoral candidates in Malaysian public universities. Focused Universities is established to concentrate on specific fields of study related to its establishment such as technical, education, management and defence. Comprehensive University is expected to offer a variety of courses and fields at all educational levels such as pre-undergraduate, undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. All these four classifications has their own vision, mission, objectives and annual performance indicators.

In terms of allocation of workload to academic staffs, all these four universities have their own autonomy. These allocation is based on their own vision, mission, objectives and annual performance indicators. In other words, these allocation is different not only between categories of universities but sometimes between faculties. Different annual performance indicators would also reflects different workloads for these academic staffs. Although specification of work for academic staff at public universities is different, however, all types of public universities adopt the same scheme of remuneration that is centrally managed by the Public Service Department. In simple language, although academic staff adopt the same scheme of service but work specifications are different. Indirectly, this means that the burden of the academic staff will be based on their respective annual performance indicators. What has become the issue is that although every scheme of academic staff in public university receives the same salary and remuneration regardless of the institution in which the staff is employed, their index of performance indicators is different. According to Yeon et al. (2016), inconsistencies and inequalities in the implementation of service contracts happened are not just between public but also private universities. This has been supported by Basarudin et al. (2016), who said that these issues have caused discrepancies

between workload of academic staffs and remuneration they receive. Different job specifications between institutions or between academic staff themselves in the same institution cause problems nowadays and raise the issue of injustice (Yeon et al., 2016). Here, it also arises imbalances and inequalities in the performance of service schemes between the public universities. Academic staff will move to university that has less workload with the same salary. The establishment of four types of university has also deviated the function of university from traditional teaching and learning in a four angle of classroom to a new responsibility which is the role of disseminating and sharing knowledge to the society in a form of research and publication.

Public universities have long been using academic services schemes or contracts which are binding between academic staff with the public institutions. The terms of this service scheme or contract are to take into account the level of performance indicators index set by the universities concerned and be proved through annual performance appraisal (Abdul Rahman et al., 2015). An academic staff performs their tasks based on performance indicators indices according to their respective positions. This service contract usually outlines the terms relating to job specification, remuneration scheme, employment benefits, appointment and termination. In other words, academic services scheme or contract must contain clear and comprehensive terms and must subject to the law. However the service contract of the existing academic seldom explain in detail the terms of service. This unspecified service contracts are the ones that often cause problems today (Yeon et al., 2016). Although there are various written laws regulating public universities in Malaysia, issues related to workload are not clearly stated in the statutes (Abdul Rahman et al., 2015). In addition to teaching, academic staff should carry out responsibilities related to supervision, research, publications, consultations and community services. Autonomous issues also play an important role and relate to academic staff service schemes or contracts. When autonomy is provided to public institutions of higher learning, the financial assistance from the government will be reduced. The public institutions of higher learning will work harder to generate their own income through various ways including increasing the number of programmes and students and also commercializing all research findings, consultations and publications. Indirectly, the burden of academic staff is increasing in order to ensure that their public institutions of higher learning are able to generate their own income

Workload is one of the important issues associated with the career of an academic staff (Yeon et al., 2016). Most of the academic staff in Malaysian public university shared the common workload which consist of teaching, supervision, research, consultation, publication, and professional development, participation in community service, students' consultation, and administration. However, the workload still depends on the type and missions of the respective university as they have certain target and objective to achieve. The most crucial problems with this workload is it is increasing from day to day. For example, according to Martin (2017), between 2007 and 2013, there is 3.1 times increased in publications (the highest rise in the world) in Malaysia. Seventy percent of the publications growth was contributed by our five research-status universities (Martin, 2017). The requirement of publication of research in the international impact journal has becoming part of the KPI's. This has caused a heavy burden to the academics. Research is also mandatory to academic staffs. In academic side, research and publication are the medium for them to share their knowledge and it will be evaluated to determine their achievement for

promotion and tenure (Ahmad, 2012). This is supported by Hemer (2014), which emphasized that research has become priority in universities and thus prevailing promotion of the production of research have discouraged the development of teaching and learning process.

The number of supervision especially at post graduate level for academic staffs is also increasing. This is in line with the focus of the Ministry. According to Jusoh (2017), the Ministry is also focusing on increasing intake at postgraduate levels i.e. Master's, PhD and even Post-Doctoral. As it stands now, about 23 per cent of all international students in our universities are pursuing postgraduate degrees (Jusoh, 2017). In other words, this has also increased the burden for academic staffs especially in terms of supervision. The academic staffs will focus on other workload such as research, consultancy and publications which have more weightage of marks for yearly performance appraisal and also to ease the promotion. Scholarly publication is normally in a form of a written paper to be published in academic journal (Ahmad, 2012). According to Dhillon et al. (2013), it has to go through the process of peer review by one or more referees to ensure the quality of the paper. Reviewing the paper to be published in the journal is also one of the workload for academic staffs.

Therefore based on the above problems, it is important that this study was conducted to evaluate the perspectives of top level management at public universities particularly about academic staff's workload and its findings can be used to suit the national mission.

3. Research Questions

This study attempts to answer the following research question:

1. What is the perceptions of top management in Malaysian public university regarding academic staff's workload relating to teaching, research, consultancy, supervision and publication?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to:

1. Examine the perceptions of top management in public university in Malaysia regarding academic staff's workload relating to teaching, research, consultancy, supervision and publication.

5. Research Methods

The design for this study is socio-legal. Socio-legal study is a research method that brings together two major fields of research in the social sciences and the field of law. Both of these areas are equally important because it examines the relationship between law and society. Two types of data are used to achieve the objectives of the study, namely primary and secondary data. Primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews. In addition, reference is also made to books, journals and other legal documents. A total of 22 respondents were successfully interviewed from ten public universities in Malaysia. The respondents are the top management of public universities for example the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Development and Innovation), Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academics), or the Registrar. The sample of public universities was by state in Malaysia. Among the respondents are UUM in Kedah,

UniMAP in Perlis, USM in Penang, UM in Kuala Lumpur, IIUM and UiTM in Selangor, USIM in Negeri Sembilan, UMT in Terengganu, UTM in Johor and UNIMAS in Sarawak. For the purpose of the interview, questions were developed based on the legal provisions contained in statutes, regulations and guidelines applicable to academic staff and also based on past studies and past instruments. The interview data was analysed using thematic analysis.

6. Findings

The teaching load is a major workload for academic staff in public higher education institutions. Teaching load for academic staff is different between the university and it is quite flexible. Most universities only have general provisions regarding the teaching load. More specific teaching load is usually prepared by the dean of the faculty by looking at the needs and existing workload of the academic staff. The teaching load is usually divided into several stages such as diploma, undergraduate degrees and postgraduate levels. It is also subject to whether that particular academic staff is holding administrative position or not. For academic staff who is holding an administrative position, majority of the universities put the burden of teaching by one course per semester. For ordinary lecturer who does not hold administrative position, teaching load is between two to six courses for one semester. However, most universities put more workload for academic or contract staff involved in teaching language. According to R18:

"... teaching workload depends on the faculty. There is a faculty with high burden, and some with less burden... For professional courses, there are limitations in terms of the total number of students and academic staff. It should also be in accordance with the prescribed ratio. They look like less work but, it is more or less the same. For engineering courses, the teaching load is approximately 12 credits per semester. Teaching load for engineering course is 18 credits. It is the maximum. For language teacher, the workload is 18 credit hours per week because they only focus on teaching. "

There is also a university where the course taught not determined by the number of subjects or courses but based on credit hours. According to R21:

"... We do not decide according to the number of subjects... but we advise them to teach no more than two subjects... but we set the KPIs... if he does not hold office, 9 to 12 credit hours. If he holds academic tenure as dean, 3 credits, deputy dean, 6 credits, professor, 9 credit hours. Professor who do not hold office, 9 to 12 credits. "

Another university put the burden of teaching relatively high despite the academic staff holding administrative positions. All of the academic staffs who hold post as top management are also involved in teaching. Even the Chairman of the Board of Directors also teach. This is evidenced through R7 which states:

"As compared to other universities, teaching load for lecturer in this university is quite high. Lecturers who hold administrative positions, teaching from 6 to 8 credit hours. Deputy Vice Chancellor also teaches one course. Vice Chancellor also teach.... they teach

based on the interest and skill so that the said skill can be maintained. Our chairman also teach. "

For some higher learning institution, the teaching load for academic staffs who is pursuing a doctorate degree was also reduced into half. This is because their KPIs is based on the achievement/development of their thesis. In this situation, the teaching load is handed over to their respective faculties to be determined. This is evidenced by R12 which states that *'...staff who are doing their PhD, we reduced their teaching load. They should focus on their thesis because it is their PhD. The teaching load is flexible and determined by the faculty. "*

Majority of the respondent agreed that teaching load of the academic staff will not exceed 18 hours. It is based on the statement of by R1, R2, and R3 which states that the maximum credit hour would be 18 credits equivalent to 2 or 3 subjects per semester. However, R4 has extended the discussion by mentioning that *"we had made the teaching work to be flexible as required by academic staff. Academic staffs may request either to fully focus on the teaching or research".*

It is supported by the statement made by the R3, who mentioned that:

"Why bother about research track, we've been teaching for 4 years, we will not produce papers because we are concentrating on producing high calibre graduate and talented students for the market, and teaching professional programmes to produce high employability graduate such as architects, lawyers, accountant. We have introduced semi-professionals and professionals, but as we became the university, and they tried to implement research, entrepreneurship, we lost focus. Everyone started to aim to get the status of Research University that require them to follow guideline provided by the Ministry of Higher Education. We have to produce papers, research, postgraduate, supervised PhD, but we forgot about this group of people that have been working so hard to ensure 100% of the student will be employed after graduate".

Supervision can be divided into two levels namely undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The postgraduate level can be sub divided into two namely master's degree and doctor of philosophy. Total number of supervision for each public university is different. There are three universities that have a total average number of supervision of more than 10 students. There was also one university with a maximum number of supervisees up to 40 supervisees. This is supported by R1 *"... the number of supervision is between 10 to 40 students"* and R2 which states:

"Total number of supervision is 10 and above. Indeed, majority of academic staff has more than 10 supervisees. There are also supervisors with 30 supervisees. Because they are professors in specific area of expertise. The Deputy Vice Chancellor of Academic also has 31 supervisees. We have single supervision and co supervision."

There is also a university that puts the burden of supervision according to the type of supervision i.e. undergraduate or postgraduate. This can be seen through R13 statement which provides that *"... I think 5 supervisees for PhD, masters level 10 students each supervisor and the thesis for undergraduate is 20 students per supervisor."*

In terms of supervision, there is also a problem in which the academic staff do not get the opportunity to supervise as they have yet to receive a doctorate. If they've got a doctorate, they can have up to 20 students. That is why, in terms of supervision, it becomes a subjective matter. This was agreed by R5 who said that "*...not many lecturer have PhD, so there is lecturer with PhD who supervise more than 20 students... it becomes subjective.*" The average amount of supervision for most public university is between 4-6 supervisees.

Types of supervision can be divided into single supervision, co supervision, group supervision or supervision by committee. But single and co supervision are the most widely practiced among all institutions of higher learning. There are two institutions that exercise group supervision or supervision through committee. There are also universities that have lots of individual supervision. This is supported by R14 "*we have single supervision, co supervision and group supervision. Mostly (70% -80%) involves single supervision.*"

Research is also one of the academic workload. The workload varies between universities and also between the faculties itself. This is supported by R12 which states:

"Yes. It varies. Faculty has the power to determine the research workload for academic staff. It is difficult to use the same KPIs for all faculties. The problem is when faculty does not implement it flexibly, lecturers will complain. We have been given permission to faculty and faculty can make modifications to the KPIs."

Total number of research also cannot be determined since there is a relatively easy field to get a grant or allocation for research. There are also areas that are difficult to get sponsorship or grants from any party. This was supported by R12 which states:

"In respect of grants, yes, the same reason why a lot of engineering and science academic staffs can get grant at international and national levels. Regarding, how much grant they should get, this has been discussed from the beginning. This year, the engineering department has made plans to acquire 10 million. After that, the faculty must know how it would be distributed."

Most faculties have put one to two grants of research for each academic staff as their KPIs. However, the total values of the grant were not disclosed in most higher learning institutions. There are a number of institutions that allocate grants between 20 thousand to 50 thousand ringgit per academic staff. There is also an institution that puts the grant or amount of grants by the position held by the academic staff. The higher the rank he held, the higher the value of the grant to be met. This is supported by the R4 stating "*... follow the position, number and amount.*" The category of grants can be divided into five namely university grants, national grants, private grants, international grants and self-funding grant . Most universities have all categories of grants.

Consultation is also one of the workload of academic staff in most public universities. Sometimes, it is not part of the KPIs for some institutions. As a result, the findings of these interviews shows some of the public universities does not make it as part of their KPIs. It is recommended only and just as means of encouragement. This has been supported by R19 who states that "*... we also have consultation, but it is not as part of our KPs. Grants for consultation involved university grant, national grant and others.*"

There are also universities that require academic staff to have consultation project at all time. This is evidenced by R14 which states:

"... Sources of financing consultation....we have various kind of sources... government, private, international... but for international, of course, a little. Total number of consultation per year for every academic staff...we put it as one for each academic staff as their KPIs. "

There are three types of grants that are usually available for consultation purposes such as government grants, private grants and international grants. Most universities have all three types of grants, while only a few have only one type of grant.

Publication is one of the main KPIs for all higher learning institutions. Most universities put publications between 1-3 per year for each academic staff. Majority of the respondent also agreed that they are required to publish average one to three publications per year. R4 mentioned that, *'...to achieve their KPIs, they have to publish 1-3 publications'*. This is also supported by R2 which state that *"...number of publication per year is from 1 to 3... We have all kind of publication like journals, books, chapters in books and others."*

There are also universities that put the burden of publication for academic staff by category. This means that the workload for publication varies according to their position. This was disclosed by R21:

"The publication workload is different. 3 for professor, 2 for associate professors, senior lecturers and below 1 minimum. If they are writing together, we have to divide following the percentage written. We still not yet decide or impose anything on this... "

Fields also play a role in determining this burden. For example, if the field is science, they must published in ISI category. This is evidenced by R12:

"For science-based field, publications must be in the ISI journals, not less than that. If it was not science, there is a choice of SCOPUS, ISI journals or journals that are classified as A, B journal, based on the faculty. But he has to get the approval of this journal to be recognized as category A. It's not the ISI and SCOPUS but very high in these areas. "

As a discussion, the overall finding shows that majority of the respondents agreed that academic staff in each university have the same type of workload which consists of teaching, supervision, research, consultation, administrative work, publication and community service. However, the overall burden for the said workload for academic staff is different between universities, vary according to rank and only been provided in general. In terms of teaching, more specific teaching load is usually allocated by the dean of the faculty by looking at the needs and existing workload of the academic staff. The minimum is one course and the maximum is six course per semester. In another aspect, teaching load of academic staff in public university is increasing due to surplus number of undergraduate student enrolled every semester. The average number of teaching hours of an academic staff is measured and the finding shows that even though they have other supplemented work, but the teaching load is still the same.

In terms of supervision, the number of supervisee will depend on the intake of students into the programmes by the range of 1-3 or 4-6 students per supervisor. The maximum number is 40 students per supervisor which actually happened in one university only. The reason behind this is because of the expertise that the supervisor has. In order to make the supervision successful, the supervisor will meet the

supervisees in group according to the fixed scheduled. For research, academic staffs are required to carry out research based on certain amount of research grant that they must bid. The amount of research grants are depending on the position held by the academic staff. The higher the rank he held, the higher the value of the grant to be met. There is a difference between the universities in terms of consultation because for some universities, consultation is not considered as their KPIs. May be because it is hard to get the grant for consultation, some universities make consultation as an alternative of research. There are some universities that make it a choice between research and consultation. The number of publications on average is between 1-3 year and most of the academic staff involved in all types of publications.

Workload of academic staff at this time somewhat deviated from the teaching and learning where the weights allocated to teaching are relatively low. Therefore, most of the academic staff are more likely to focus on other workload such as research, consultancy and publications which have more weightage of marks for yearly performance appraisal and also to ease the promotion. Less focus on teaching can interfere the quality of teaching and produces graduates who are less capable. KPIs set by the university is also very high and is difficult to achieve. This resulted in the possibility of neglecting the quality of work. Worse likely it may also involves the issue of 'free rider' in academic world.

7. Conclusion

In order to improve this, a reasonable KPIs must be provided by the university and it should be quite similar among all universities. It must match the quality of work done so it can produce excellent academic staff and quality graduates. Reasonable workload for academic staff is important to ensure the physical and spiritual welfare of the staff involved. The issue of equality in workload between universities are also important. Although it cannot be similar to each other as there are various constraints, but the difference should not be too noticeable. It also can curb academic staff moved to other universities.

Good facilities and enough funds to carry out the tasks involved must be provided by the university or the government in general. In investigating the issue for example, funds must be provided by the Ministry, university and also from the industry. If all these things are available, academic staffs have no excuse not to achieve this KPIs. In terms of teaching, the 'track' that has been and will be implemented should be streamlined so that it will be more effective. The 'track' system will make the academic staff focuses on its workload, but its effectiveness remains to be seen since there are some constraints in its implementation. Finally, with this tremendous workload, academic staff salaries should be increased in order to balance with the average salary received by the academic staff worldwide. It can also be a catalyst for academic staff to become more brilliant.

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