

Implementation of General Education Subject (MPU) in Malaysia: an overview

*[Pelaksanaan kursus Matapelajaran Pengajian Umum (MPU) di Malaysia:
suatu sorotan kajian]*

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ABSTRACT

Human development encompasses a complete process of forming a knowledgeable, moral, skilled, competitive, and resilient human workforce. Human development has become the main focus and agenda of the country's leadership to be realized primarily through the education system undergone by citizens' children. In this regard, the Ministry of Education Malaysia has reviewed the curriculum for Compulsory Subjects (MPW) in all Higher Education Institutions in the country. Thus, the General Education Subject (MPU) has been introduced based on the branch of philosophy of knowledge, which involves humanities, pure sciences, and social sciences. However, with many students in a single lecture, the MPU course has its constraints. Some students consider this course as a subject that can be studied on their own. As a result, it is impossible to realizing future proof graduates. Therefore, this article aims to explain the current situation of implementing MPU courses in Higher Education Institutions in Malaysia. The paper is based on findings by reviewing a thorough literature review on the General Education Subject (MPU) courses. This research has applied the document analysis method by analyzing related documents for MPU courses. The data obtained are thematically analyzed via ATLAS.ti 8 software. The research finding has discovered four themes of the General Education Subject (MPU) implementation in Malaysia: its implementation, relevancy, impact, and teaching approach. Finally, the literature conclusion could be used as an initial guide for Higher Education Institutions to improve MPU courses' implementation in producing future-proof graduates.

Kata Kunci:

Matapelajaran Pengajian Umum (MPU), Institusi Pendidikan Tinggi, Analisis Tematik.

ABSTRAK

Pembangunan manusia merangkumi proses lengkap untuk membentuk tenaga kerja manusia yang berpengetahuan, bermoral, berketerampilan, berdaya saing dan berdaya tahan. Pembangunan manusia telah menjadi fokus dan agenda utama kepemimpinan negara untuk direalisasikan terutamanya melalui sistem pendidikan yang dilalui oleh anak bangsa. Sehubungan itu, Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia telah mengkaji semula kurikulum Mata Pelajaran Wajib (MPW) di semua Institusi Pengajian Tinggi di

negara ini. Oleh itu, Matapelajaran Pengajian Umum (MPU) telah diperkenalkan berdasarkan cabang falsafah pengetahuan yang melibatkan kemanusiaan, sains tulen dan sains sosial. Walau bagaimanapun, dengan jumlah pelajar yang ramai dalam satu sesi pengajaran, kursus MPU mempunyai kekangannya tersendiri. Sebilangan pelajar menganggap kursus ini sebagai subjek yang boleh dipelajari sendiri. Akibatnya, agak mustahil untuk menghasilkan bakal graduan yang cemerlang di masa hadapan. Oleh itu, artikel ini bertujuan untuk menjelaskan situasi semasa pelaksanaan kursus MPU di Institusi Pengajian Tinggi di Malaysia. Artikel ini adalah berdasarkan tinjauan literatur secara menyeluruh mengenai kursus Matapelajaran Pengajian Umum (MPU). Penyelidikan ini telah menggunakan kaedah analisis dokumen dengan menganalisis dokumen yang berkaitan untuk kursus MPU. Data yang diperoleh telah dianalisis secara tematik melalui perisian ATLAS.ti 8. Dapatan kajian ini meliputi empat tema pelaksanaan Matapelajaran Pengajian Umum (MPU) di Malaysia iaitu: pelaksanaannya, relevansi, keberkesanan dan pendekatan pengajaran. Kesimpulan dari kajian literatur ini dapat digunakan sebagai panduan awal bagi Institusi Pengajian Tinggi untuk menambahbaik pelaksanaan kursus MPU dalam menghasilkan graduan yang cemerlang di masa hadapan.

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1. Introduction

The progress of a country and a nation is closely related to build its society or better known as the process of human development (Asmawati, 2006). Human development encompasses a complete process of forming a knowledgeable, moral, skilled, competitive, and resilient human workforce (Ministry of Higher Education, 2016). Human development has become the main focus and agenda of the country's leadership to be realized mainly through the education system undergone by citizens' children. In this regard, the Ministry of Education Malaysia has reviewed the curriculum for Compulsory Subjects (MPW) in all higher education institutions in the country. Thus, the General Education Subjects (MPU) has been introduced based on the branch of philosophy of knowledge, which involves humanities, pure sciences, and social sciences (Hairul, Khairul & Faridah, 2018).

MPU courses are seen in line with the government's aspirations in the National Philosophy of Education. In general, the Philosophy of National Education aims to produce good citizens and have the following characteristics (Ministry of Higher Education, 2016):

- i. Trust and obey God
- ii. Knowledgeable
- iii. Skilled
- iv. Highly morale
- v. Willing to contribute to society, religion, race and country.
- vi. Responsible to self, religion, race, society and country.

Therefore, MPU has been introduced by improving the Compulsory Subjects' structure to be more structured to improve human quality in line with the National Strategic Plan for Higher Education (PSPTN) goals. The new design of the MPU is seen to produce holistic graduates, appreciate the values of patriotism and Malaysian-shaped identity and master soft skills towards fulfilling job marketability.

In 2016, the Ministry of Education Malaysia has issued a 2nd edition of General Guidelines Book for the Implementation of MPU courses, as the main reference in implementing MPU courses in Public and Private Universities. Starting from 2019, a High Impact Education Practice Guidebook-HIEPS has been



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published to provide a reference in line with the aspirations of the Malaysia Education Development Plan 2015-2025 (Jabatan Pendidikan Tinggi, 2019). However, according to Noor Aziera, Siti Nurul, Mohd Faizal, Norafifah, dan Norizah (2018), the study on the implementation of the revised MPU course teaching methods starting from 2018 require more in -depth study on its effectiveness. There are several elements in TITAS learning that have been identified to contribute to the formation of personality and behavior among students namely religion and belief, family institutions, jihad and science and technology (Azrul Jaafar, Tahir, Firdaus Mohd Noor, Kunci, & Murni, 2017; Faridah & Fakhrol, 2011).

Since MPU courses is a compulsory course for every university, with the large number of students for each teaching session has limited the delivery of lecturers to students. Some students consider this course as a subject that can be studied on their own. *"This MPU subject is for me, in the available slides he has told a brief story about each topic. And even if the lecturer doesn't explain, we can read on our own and learn on our own."* (Anis, personal interview, March 25, 2021). As a result, it is impossible to realizing future proof graduates. Thus, this concept paper will review the current implementation of the General Education Subject in Malaysia.

2. Research Methodology

This research applied a descriptive qualitative method because it is done to study the implementation of General Education Subject (MPU) courses in Malaysia. This course is aimed to cultivate an appreciation of philosophy, values and history. The research method is entirely qualitative which applied the document analysis method using ATLAS.ti 8 software to produce specific codes based on the previous studies' observation (Zairul, 2020). The selection of literature was performed according to several selection criteria, which are:

- i. Publications from 2016 to 2020.
- ii. Has at least keyword(s) of "General Education Subject (MPU)"

The visual form theme will help the researchers interpret qualitative data easily (Othman, 2019). This method is used to visualize and analyze the themes of the current practices for implementing General Education Subject (MPU) courses in Malaysia and provide some views and recommendations to improve teaching methods further.

3. History of General Education Subjects (MPU)

General Education Subjects (MPU) formerly known as Compulsory Subject (MPW) is compulsory for students in all Malaysian higher education institutions with a set credit value. The Malaysian Ministry of Education has officially announced the new MPU modular system from 1 September 2013 on a new cohort of students in higher education institutions. The current MPU courses using the Second Edition MPU guidelines came into effect in September 2017 (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2016). MPU is a general education subject prescribed and administered by the Malaysian Examinations Council examined by the Malaysian Examinations body and both are under the Ministry of Education Malaysia. MPU is not only a compulsory subject for students in public higher education institutions, but it is also a compulsory subject for all private higher education institutions (Ng & Iswandi, 2017). The Private Higher Education Institutions Act 1996 (Act 555) provides that every private institution of higher education shall teach MPU as a compulsory subject. The Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) requires all higher education students in Malaysia, whether local or international students must complete MPU courses as a prerequisite for awarding a certificate, diploma or bachelor's degree.

The MPW system changes to the new MPU modular system are due to several factors, such as the decline of patriotism and values among IPT students. This situation is often discussed in newspaper writings (Nasir, Ghani, Salamat, & Husain, 2018). Furthermore, the MPW system that has been offered for a long time needs to be reviewed so that its implementation can be coordinated at the level of public and private higher education institutions (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2016). Among the implementation missions of MPU courses that have been set by the Ministry of Education Malaysia are (Ministry of Higher Education, 2016):

- i. Coordination of Compulsory Subjects to MPU in IPT
- ii. Nation Building
- iii. Mastery and Expansion of Soft Skills
- iv. Strengthening and Expanding Knowledge in Malaysia

v. Application of Soft Skills

Based on the above purpose, the General Education Subjects (MPU) courses are divided into four categories that all students must complete (Malaysian and international students) who pursue higher education institutions in Malaysia, namely: U1 U2, U3 and U4. The division of each cluster can be seen in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Division of MPU Courses

MPU	Aims
U1	Appreciation of Philosophy, Values and History
U2	Mastery of soft skills
U3	Expansion of knowledge about Malaysia
U4	Community practical management skills such as community service and co-curriculum

Source: Ministry of Higher Education, 2016

Table 2 below explains the implementation structure of MPU subjects under clusters U1, U2, U3 and U4. The determination of implementation and selection of subjects is under the jurisdiction of Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) and the respective higher education institutions.

Table 2: Implementation of MPU Clusters U1, U2, U3 and U4

U1 (2 to 6 credit)	U2 (2 or 3 credit)	U3 (2 or 3 credit)	U4 (2 credit)
Ethnic Relation	Leadership and Human Relation Skills	Malaysian Economy	Community Service
Islamic Civilization Asian Civilization (TITAS) Malaysian Studies	Design and Innovation Skills Writing Skills	Government and Public Policy of Malaysia Organizational Behaviour in Malaysia's Multi-Ethnic Society	Co-Curriculum Or any other courses proposed by MOHE or HEI
Malay Language for Communication	Thinking Skills Entrepreneurial Skills Or any other courses proposed by MOHE or HEI	Comparative Religion Comparative Ethics Or any other courses proposed by MOHE or HEI	

Source: Ministry of Higher Education, 2016

The restructuring of MPW courses to more holistic MPU courses has positively impacted students' identity (Hairol et al., 2018). According to Hairol and Zawiah (2017), the TITAS course's aims to realize the aspirations of building identity and nation-state among the younger generation. The TITAS course plays a vital role in producing students who can understand the country's historical heritage, cultivate noble values, have a national identity, and appreciate the cultural diversity in Malaysian society (Hairol & Zawiah, 2017).

4. Implementation of General Education Subject (MPU)

Analysis of the literature found that previous researchers have done studies on General Education Subject (MPU). However, the results of thorough literature of previous studies with a search based on the keyword "General Education Courses (MPU)" between 2016 to 2020 found that there are still inadequate research numbers in current literature. Next, the researchers presented some research findings related to the MPU course. The analysis that was done through ATLAS.ti 8 software has identified four themes that will be elaborated from in Figure 1 below:

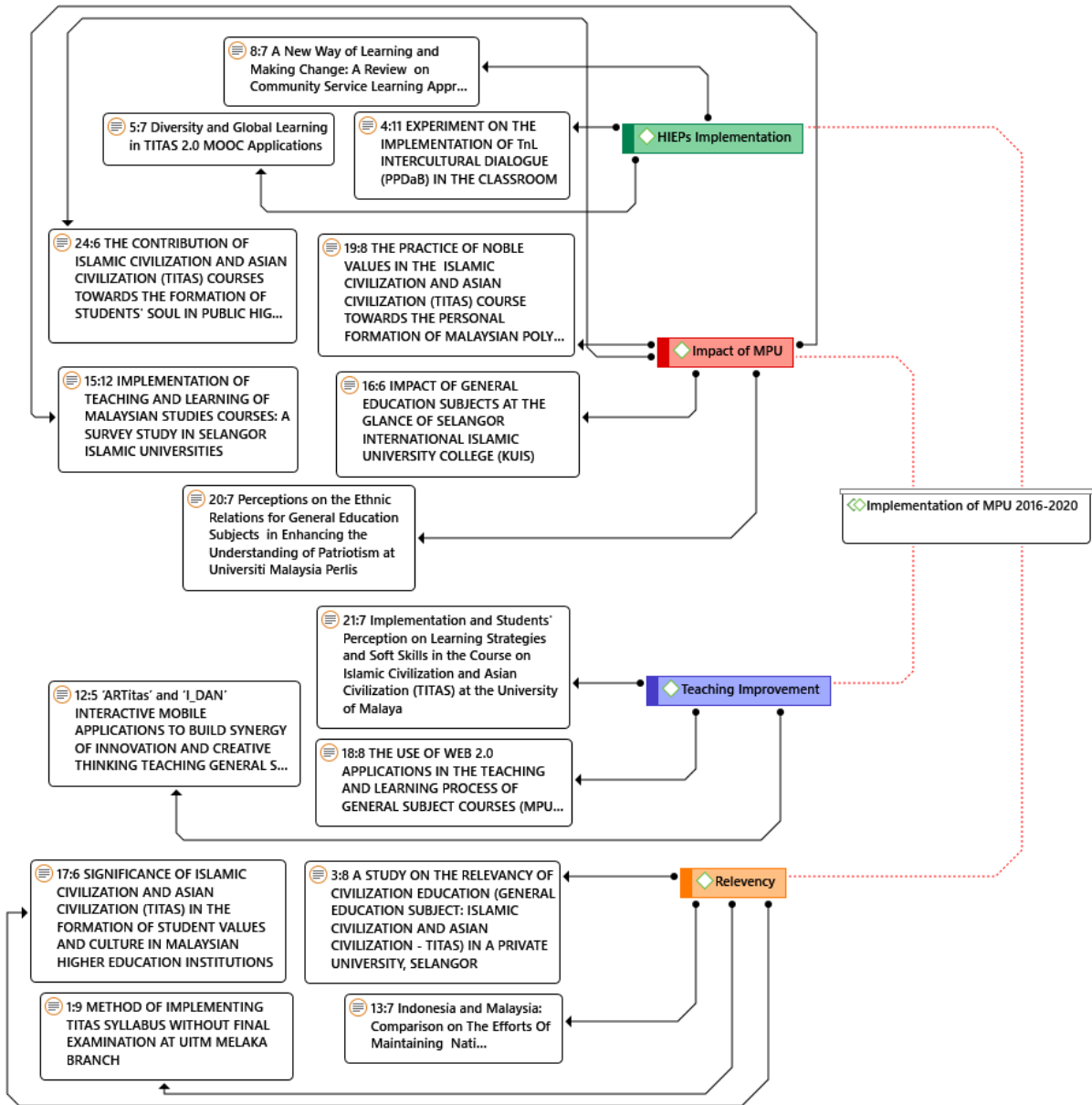
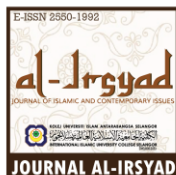


Figure 1: Implementation of General Education Subject (MPU) from 2016 to 2020

From the aspect of the implementation of High Impact Educational Practices (HIEPs), Fen, Siraj, and Naimie (2017) have made a preliminary study on the use of community service methods that have been outlined in the High Impact Educational Practices (HIEPs) handbook. The study's findings show that this method effectively develops communication talents and relationships between students and the outside community. It is supported by Azarudin and Azman (2019), where a study on the implementation of intercultural dialogue methods has been tested to implement social integration among students. A study conducted through a questionnaire on students found that it effectively fosters the value of inter-ethnic unity. This study proved to support the study made by Suzy Aziziyana, Rosila Bee and Khairulnizam (2018) on inter-ethnic methods dialogue as a platform to improve social relations among IPT students. According to Azri, Halim and Othman (2020), global learning for MPU courses effectively makes the learning environment more interactive. The findings of the study obtained through an online questionnaire (google form) have found that students' involvement becomes more active and interactive through the use of MOOC applications for learning TITAS subject. This global learning is one of the methods that has been introduced in HIEPs. However, these studies only look at its effectiveness from students' aspect without in-depth research from the lecturers' implementation.



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Therefore, research on the use of HIEPs-based teaching approaches and their effectiveness according to the lecturer's perspective needs to be done.

Studies within the relevancy of MPU course offerings show that these courses are highly significantly offered at the tertiary level (Faridah & Fakhrol, 2018; Irawaty & Tjipto, 2018; Noor Aziera et al., 2018). Studies made by observing small groups of students and authoritative documents for MPU subjects are seen as important in forming a nation-state to drive a quality education (Noor Aziera et al., 2018). A study conducted by Nasir et al. (2018) in two Private Higher Education Institutions found that the majority of respondents agreed that the TITAS subject is relevant to be taught and it can be beneficial to educate morals, manners and provide history knowledge to students. It supports a study made by Hairol and Zawiah (2017), where TITAS courses can play a vital role in producing students who understand; the country's historical heritage and cultivate noble values, have a national identity and appreciates cultural diversity in Malaysian society. Moreover, Irawaty and Tjipto (2018) have conducted a comparative study on courses that aim to maintain students' identity for Indonesia and Malaysia. The study found that Malaysia's general education courses are more interactive than in Indonesia which uses a constructivist approach. However, previous studies on the relevance of these MPU subjects have been studied conceptually. Therefore, a field study needs to be done to see the significance of this MPU offer to students in higher education institutions.

Several studies have discussed the effect or impact of offering this MPU courses on Higher Education Institutions students. Azrul Jaafar et al. (2017) found that the teaching of TITAS subjects in polytechnics throughout Malaysia has shown a positive effect on understanding moral values among students. The study conducted on 100 students in four Malaysian polytechnics aims to identify the level of understanding and practice of noble values through TITAS subject. A survey conducted on students of the Selangor International Islamic University College (KUIS) found that MPU courses can positively impact them (Endut et al., 2019; Hairol et al., 2018). Hairol et al. (2018) conducted a quantitative study to obtain student responses to the implementation of teaching and learning for Malaysian Studies subject. Meanwhile, Endut et al. (2019) conducted a further research on the teaching of Malaysian Studies subjects in KUIS by conducting a survey of students to obtain their feedback regarding the impact of offering MPU courses in Private Higher Education Institutions. Besides, the TITAS subject can create awareness among students about the universal values that successfully unite students from different cultural backgrounds. A deep awareness of universal values fosters understanding in a society (Faridah & Fakhrol, 2018). This study is supported by a research made by Norayu, Basir, Zaini, Bakar, and Hassan (2018) who found that the subject offering of Ethnic Relations can increase the understanding of patriotism among students. However, their level of understanding varies according to ethnicity. Based on the researcher's evaluation, the study on this MPU course's effectiveness is more focused on the student aspect. The significance of MPU subjects can also be studied from the aspect of lecturers to form a more holistic assessment framework.

Previous researchers have made several efforts to improve the implementation of MPU courses in terms of its teaching methods. Ahmad (2019) has developed the 'ARTitas' and 'I_DAN' Interactive mobile applications that allow lecturers and students to gain access to the teaching and learning of MPU courses through mobile devices and mobile interfaces (Android, iPhone, Windows Mobile). Ahmad, Yusoff, Wan Norina, and Nor Khayati (2019) have also developed an e-learning portal for MPU courses at Polytechnics. The study conducted using a quantitative approach involving 54 students showed the four aspects assessed namely; the form of interface, content organization, multimedia and usability of the portal has been successfully implemented in the portal's development. The effect of these learning applications is seen to make teaching more interactive. However, the study of the application of noble values of these applications' usage is still vague. Thus, a framework for applying noble values to the use of interactive applications for the teaching of MPU courses needs an attention.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this review paper highlights the current situation of the General Education Subject (MPU) courses implementation in Malaysian higher education institutions. Previous studies have helped researchers understand the General Education Subject courses from the highlights and literature review. However, most studies only describe the implementation of MPU courses in Higher Education Institutions conceptually. Researchers look at the need to analyze the current implementation of the MPU course for a holistic framework as a guide for future improvement. The research finding has discovered four themes of the General Education Subject (MPU) implementation in Malaysia namely; implementation, relevancy, impact, and teaching approach. However, there are several issues raised despite the implementation of MPU courses in higher education

institutions. Studies on the implementation of MPU only look at its effectiveness from students' aspect without in-depth research from the lecturers' implementation. Therefore, research on the use of HIEPs-based teaching approaches and their effectiveness according to the lecturer's perspective needs to be done. Secondly, previous studies on the relevance of these MPU subjects have been studied conceptually. Therefore, a field study needs to be done to see the significance of this MPU offer to students in higher education institutions. Moreover, the study on this MPU course's effectiveness is more focused on the student aspect. The significance of MPU subjects can also be studied from the aspect of lecturers to form a more holistic assessment framework. Besides, the study of the application of noble values of these applications' usage is still vague. Thus, a framework for applying noble values to the use of interactive applications for the teaching of MPU courses needs an attention. Finally, the literature conclusion could be used as an initial guide for Higher Education Institutions to improve MPU courses' implementation in producing future-proof graduates.

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