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Correlates of Professionalism among Communication Lecturers in Malaysia

Introduction

Since Malaysia has the potential to be a world-leading nation in academic excellence, it can be realized through improving the teaching standards of the educators/lecturers. Education is mainly sharing of knowledge and transforming students into productive and responsible citizens. So, a high level of professionalism among lecturers is needed. This study tries to focus on professionalism among communication lecturers in Malaysia.

Professionalism among communication lecturers helps the students to prepare themselves for future endeavors. Professionalism studies in communication mainly concentrate on public relations (Center and Jackson, 1995), advertising agency (Mohd.Helmi and Lau, 1992) and journalists (Mc Leod and Hawley, 1964; Windahl and Rosengren, 1974; Grusin, 1987; Atkins, 1986). Yet, there is no specific study on professionalism among communication lecturers in Malaysia per se.

Lecturers are responsible to shape their students to be professional in their respective fields of study. Therefore, lecturers themselves need to maintain a high level of professionalism in their profession as well as to gain respect from the public at large. Paper qualification, together with knowledge expertise, leadership ability, communication ability, experience, work ethics, etc, is among the important factors to consider when in hiring any lecturer.

Lecturers need to be dynamic, adaptive to changing world. In fact, new mode of teaching should be learnt to

improve their style and approach. Lecturer, as a profession, should be looked at as a productive activity performed in an institution. It is a recognized work by the authority, formally compensated for the work done depending on the scale/level of achievement, and experience. Above all, they are respected for their contributions to manpower knowledge development and skill training. Therefore, they have to keep abreast with current development in their fields of specialization through research work for the betterment of mankind.

To a certain extent there exists a degree of hierarchy of specialization, stability and persistence of designation over time. Therefore, lecturers are likely to have a long-term occupational career with a distinct personality and public occupational identity.

The profession deserves the right to be evaluated, credit given to work excellence, persistent performer in the specialized field. Lecturers can devote themselves to teaching, research and scholarship. "Publish or perish" is one of the slogans that motivates lecturers to conduct research empirically or based on secondary data.

Many definitions relate to professionalism exist (Isaac and Martin, 1993; Rideout and Gurdenson, 1996; Friedson, 1996). However, for this study, professionalism is defined as the occupational work control whereby knowledge of a specialized field and skills in providing services to the clients are emphasized for a productive performance.

The essence of professionalism in this study is based on the theory of professionalism developed by Friedson (1996) who outlined six assumptions that facilitate the creation and maintenance of professionalism. Basically, the assumptions are:

- (1) A profession is considered as a specialization, which consists of a set of tasks that members of the same job perform a special work that requires abstracts theoretical knowledge but covering simple and repetitive activities;
- (2) Professional schooling is the first step towards professionalism;
- (3) Professionalism cannot exist without a viable economic foundation;
- (4) Professional associates are always necessary for establishing professionalism;

- (5) The process of maintaining professionalism requires skills to neutralize the opposing ideologies; and
- (6) The process of establishing and maintaining an institution of professionalism must be based on knowledge and skills, the sphere of its authority, and in the institutional sphere where the discipline can be practiced.

To achieve and maintain professionalism in the field, both educators and the practitioners must perform and maintain standards of the profession (Cameron, Shallot and Lavisicy, 1996).

Many variables - personal variables, job-related variables and organizational- related variables - could influence professionalism. There were a mixed results pertaining to the personal characteristics and professionalism (Helmi and Lan, 1992; Cameron, Shallot and Lavisicy, 1996).

This research tries to investigate factors influencing professionalism among communication lecturers in Malaysia.

The specific objectives of the study are to find out:

- (1) The level of professionalism among communication lecturers in Malaysia;
- (2) The dimensions of professionalism;
- (3) The relationships between selected correlates with dimensions of professionalism; and
- (4) To find out the predictors for each dimension of professionalism.

The study was conduction among public and private university lecturers in Malaysia. A mailed questionnaire was used to collect the data. A total of 47 lecturers from 11 universities participated in the study, with a response rate of 45% (Table 1).

TABLE 1
Distribution of
Respondents
According to
University

University	Frequency	Percentage	Population	Response Rate (%)
UiTM	9	19.1	20	45
UMS/MAS	8	17.0	8	100
UPM	7	14.9	13	54
UUM	6	12.8	6	100
IIUM	4	8.5	7	57
UKM	4	8.5	14	29
USM	3	6.4	20	15
UM	3	6.4	13	23
UNITEP	2	4.3	2	100
UTM	1	2.1	2	50
Total	47	100	105	45

Findings of the Study

The findings of the study are first presented according to the respondents' demographic characteristics.

(1) The Personal Characteristics of the Respondents

The proportion of male to female lecturers is about the same (Table 2). The respondents are mostly Malaysians (96%), married (89%), Malays (83%), and with an average age of 41 years old.

Demographic Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender:		
Male	26	55.3
Female	21	44.7
Total	47	100.0
Race:		
Malay	39	83.0
Chinese	5	10.6
Indian	2	4.3
Others	1	2.1
Total	47	100.0
Marital Status:		
Married	42	89.4
Single	5	10.6
Total	47	100.0
Citizenship:		
Malaysian	45	95.7
International	2	4.3
Total	47	100.0
Age (years): Mean=40.84, SD=7.69		
Young (27 - 35)	13	28.9
Middle Age (36 - 45)	20	44.4
Old (46 - 55)	9	20.0
Veteran (56 - 58)	3	6.7
Total	45	100.0

TABLE 2
Distribution of
Respondents
According to
Demographic
Variables

(2) The Job-Related Characteristics of the Respondents

Table 3 shows that more respondents hold a masters degree (62%) than with a Ph. D. degree (38%). Hence, their position is concentrated as lecturers/assistant professors (72%). Their specializations vary widely but the three major specializations are mass communication (28%), broadcasting (17%) and public relations (11%). In line with the qualification and position, the mean income is about RM3600.00 with the mean work experience with the present university of 8 years and with previous university for an average of 5 years, although some did not work elsewhere.

TABLE 3
Distribution of
Respondents
According to
Job-Related
Characteristics

Job Related Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Academic Achievement (N=47):		
Masters Degree	29	61.7
Ph.D.	18	38.3
Present Designation (N=47):		
Assistant Lecturer/Tutor	3	6.4
Lecturer	34	72.3
Associate Professor	7	14.9
Professor	3	6.4
Specialization (N=47):		
Mass Comm.	13	27.7
Broadcasting	8	17.0
Public Relations	5	10.6
Journalism	4	8.5
Comm. Technology	4	8.5
Organ Comm.	3	6.4
Telecomm. Mgt.	2	4.3
Dev. Comm.	1	2.1
Others	7	14.9
Salary in Ringgit (N=43): Mean=3592.20, SD=1658.20		
1500 - 2500	13	30.2
2501 - 3500	7	16.3
3501 - 4500	13	30.2
4501 - 7000	10	23.3
Service in present university in years (N=47): Mean=8.02, SD=6.24		
Not very experienced (1-5)	23	48.9
Not experienced (6 - 10)	7	14.9
Experience (11- 15)	10	21.3
Very experience (16+)	7	15.0
Service in previous organization in years (N=47): Mean=5.45, SD=8.25		
No experience (0)	24	51.0
Less experienced (1 - 5)	7	14.9
Experienced (6 - 10)	6	12.8
Very experienced (11 - 33)	10	21.3

The respondents were also asked about their (a) teaching load, (b) level of courses taught and part-time lecturing, (c) research and publications, (d) number of professional courses

attended, (e) communication association membership, and (f) language proficiency. In brief the following findings are summarized accordingly (detailed report in Saodah Wok, 2000). The variables (correlates) mentioned above are used to predict professionalism besides some selected demographic characteristics, such as, age, salary per month, present work service, and previous work service.

On the whole the job-related characteristics of the communication lecturers are:

- (a) Teaching load – semester 1 is about 10 credit hours, semester 2 is about 7 while majority of the lecturers do not teach in semester 3.
- (b) Level of courses taught – many do not teach post-graduate programme (64%) but instead teach undergraduate programme (87%), majority do not teach diploma programme (87%), and many without any-part-time teaching (66%).
- (c) Research and publications – many have done research (60%), more without book being published (57%), not even a chapter of a book (62%), but many have written in journals (62%), many are without any monograph written (72%), but many have prepared seminar papers (70%), more with unpublished notes (55%), many without project paper (66%), more with masters thesis (60%), and many without Ph. D. dissertation (66%).
- (d) Number of in-service courses attended – more with computer course (62%) but many without additional on-the-job communication course training (60%), no motivation course (57%), no organizational course (57%), no leadership course (57%), no management course (60%) and majority (81%) do not go for statistics course.
- (e) Communication association membership – more are members of international associations (54%) compared to local communication association membership (46%).
- (f) Language proficiency – majority are proficient in Bahasa Melayu than in English and in the Arabic Language, in that sequence, while many are better at using Microsoft Words than with Power point and the least is SPSS.

(3) The Level of Overall Professionalism

The 30-item professionalism scale was factor analyzed and 7 factors (dimensions) emerged and labeled as:

- F1 – Leadership ability with 9 items and median of 27;
- F2 – Working experience with 8 items and median of 24;
- F3 – Communication capability with 4 items and median of 12;
- F4 – Knowledge acquired with 3 items and median of 9;
- F5 – Teaching capability with 3 items and median of 9;
- F6 – Power/Autonomy with 1 item and median of 3;
and
- F7 – Ethical consideration with 2 items and median of 6.

The levels of professionalism for all the dimensions were based on the median in order to classify whether the lecturers are professional or more professional than the others (Table 4). On the whole the communication lecturers are considered very professional since the means for all the dimensions are bigger than the median.

(4) Relationships between Degree of Professionalism and its Dimensions with Selected Variables.

A correlation (Table 5) was done between degree of professionalism and its dimensions with (a) demographic characteristics — age, salary per month, present work service, and previous work service; (b) semester workload (credit hours) for three semesters; (c) number of research conducted; (d) number of publications — major publications (F1) and supportive publications (F2); (e) number of training courses attended — professional courses (F1) and other courses (F2); (f) number of working/unpublished papers — supplementary papers (F1) and major papers (F2); (g) courses taught —all course at post-graduate, undergraduate and/or diploma program; (h) number of part-time lecturing ; and (i) language proficiency in- Arabic (F1), Bahasa Melayu (F2), English Language (F3), and computer language (F4).

Level of Professionalism	Frequency	Percentage
Leadership Ability: Mean=35.55, SD=6.40		
Professional (9 - 27)	7	14.9
More Professional (28 - more)	40	85.1
Work Expectation: Mean=32.47, SD=5.29		
Professional (8 - 24)	4	8.5
More Professional (24 and more)	43	91.5
Communication Ability: Mean=16.66, SD=2.79		
Professional (4 - 12)	4	8.5
More Professional (13 and more)	43	91.5
Knowledge Expertise: Mean=12.02, SD=2.04		
Professional (3 - 9)	7	14.9
More Professional (10 and more)	40	85.1
Teaching Capability: Mean=11.32, SD=1.91		
Professional (3 - 9)	8	17.0
More Professional (10 and more)	39	83.0
Autonomy/Power: Mean=4.02, SD=0.77		
Professional (1 - 3)	11	23.4
More Professional (4 and above)	36	76.6
Ethical Consideration: Mean=7.68, SD=1.66		
Professional (2 - 6)	8	17.0
More Professional (7 and more)	39	83.0
Overall Professionalism: Mean=119.75, SD=18.27		
Professional (30 - 90)	4	8.5
More Professional (91 and above)	43	91.5

TABLE 4
Level of
Overall
Professionalism
and its
Dimensions

TABLE 5. Correlation between Professionalism and Selected Variables

Correlation	Degree of Leadership Ability	Degree of Work Expectation	Degree of Comm. Ability	Degree of Knowledge Expertise	Degree of Teaching Capability	Degree of Autonomy/ Power	Degree of Ethical Practices	Overall Professionalism
Variables	F1(r)	F2 (r)	F3 (r)	F4 (r)	F5 (r)	F6 (r)	F7 (r)	(r)
(a) Age	0.120	-0.087	-0.199	0.009	-0.225	0.238	-0.309*	-0.086
(b) Salary per month	0.313*	0.360*	0.184	0.207	-0.022	0.352*	0.058	0.310*
(c) Present service (yrs)	0.322*	0.251*	0.123	0.162	0.090	0.208	-0.114	0.241
(d) Previous service (yrs)	-0.077	-0.140	-0.112	-0.038	-0.112	0.029	-0.090	-0.130
(e) Semester Workload	0.166	0.157	0.153	-0.037	0.404*	0.071	-0.210	0.180
(f) No. of Research	0.427*	0.370*	0.218	0.367*	0.112	0.451*	-0.108	0.401*
(g) Major Publication	0.465*	0.342*	0.178	0.394*	0.181	0.256*	-0.073	-0.410*
(h) Supportive Publication	0.363*	0.313*	0.204	0.286*	-0.048	0.240	-0.003	0.286*
(i) Professional Courses	0.196	0.081	0.106	0.254*	0.114	0.155	-0.114	0.186
(j) Other Courses	0.245*	0.238	0.238	0.112	0.885*	0.034	-0.015	0.248*
(k) Supplementary papers	0.400*	0.287*	0.348*	0.302*	0.490*	0.243*	-0.039	0.387*
(l) Major papers	0.352*	0.349*	0.133	0.404*	0.084	0.405*	-0.005	0.352*
(m) Courses Taught	0.196	0.206	0.107	0.104	0.190	0.187	-0.131	0.195
(n) No. of part-time lecturing	0.147	0.112	0.017	0.085	0.243*	0.071	-0.135	0.091
(o) Arabic	0.204	0.262*	0.214	0.070	0.381*	0.066	-0.032	0.258*
(p) Bahasa Melayu	0.462*	0.506*	0.430*	0.518*	0.181	0.277*	0.042	0.514*
(q) English	0.579*	0.565*	0.544*	0.528*	0.225	0.643*	0.230	0.619*
(r) Computer	0.328*	0.280*	0.370*	0.327*	0.309*	-0.033	-0.005	0.360*

*r =0.243, df=45, p=0.05

TABLE 6. Beta Weight of Simple regression between Professionalism and Selected Variables

Correlation	Degree of Leadership Ability	Degree of Work Expectation	Degree of Comm. Ability	Degree of Knowledge Expertise	Degree of Teaching Capability	Degree of Autonomy/ Power	Degree of Ethical Practices	Overall Professionalism
Variables Demographic:	F1(β)	F2 (β)	F3 (β)	F4 (β)	F5 (β)	F6 (β)	F7 (β)	(β)
(a) Age	-0.167	-0.727*	-0.695*	-0.515*	-0.567*	-0.022	-0.522*	-0.656*
(b) Salary per month	0.256	0.570*	0.424*	0.288	0.141	0.312	0.251	0.470*
(c) Present service (yrs)	0.284	0.283	0.236	0.189	0.296	0.135	-0.021	0.298
(d) Previous service (yrs)	-0.115	-0.312	-0.339	-0.189	0.325	0.033	-0.196	0.297
Semester Workload:								
(e) Semester Workload	0.166	0.157	0.153	-0.037	0.404*	0.071	-0.210	0.180
Research:								
(f) No. of Research	0.427*	0.370*	0.218	0.367*	0.112	0.451*	-0.108	0.401*
Publication:								
(g) Major Publication	0.406*	0.289*	0.141	0.350*	0.200	0.215	-0.076	-0.366*
(h) Supportive Publication	0.278*	0.252*	0.174	0.212	-0.090	0.194	0.014	0.209
Training Courses:								
(i) Professional Courses	0.186	0.235	0.234	0.250*	0.075	0.154	-0.114	0.155
(j) Other Courses	0.237	0.070	0.096	0.101	0.882*	0.027	-0.010	0.241
Working/ Unpublished Papers:								
(k) Supplementary papers	0.300*	0.156	0.369*	0.142	0.583*	0.064	-0.017	0.283*
(l) Major papers	0.209	0.274*	-0.043	0.336*	-0.195	0.374*	-0.047	0.217
Courses taught:								
(m) Courses Taught	0.196	0.206	0.107	0.104	0.190	0.187	-0.131	0.195
Part-Time:								
(n) No. of part-time lecturing	0.147	0.112	0.017	0.085	0.243	0.071	-0.135	0.091
Language Proficiency:								
(o) Arabic	0.117	0.218*	0.107	-0.022	0.316*	0.078	-0.052	0.172
(p) Bahasa	0.295*	0.390*	0.247	0.355*	0.090	0.188	0.020	0.344*
(q) English	0.462*	0.430*	0.428*	0.403*	0.133	0.630*	0.247	0.482*
(r) Computer	0.087	-0.025	0.157	0.124	0.140	-0.454	-0.029	0.078

*p0.05

(5) The Correlates of Professionalism and its Dimensions

The correlates are the variables that are significantly correlated with the dimensions of professionalism. The significant value (with alpha of 0.05 and the degree of freedom of 45) is 2.43. So, if the correlation between the dimensions of professionalism and the selected variables are bigger than 2.43, then a significant relationship between the two variables exist.

Results show that the correlates for the professionalism dimensions in terms of:

- (a) **Degree of leadership ability** – salary per month ($r=0.313$), present work service ($r=0.322$), number of research conducted ($r=0.427$), number major publication ($r=0.465$), number of supportive publication ($r=0.363$), other courses ($r=0.245$), number of supplementary papers ($r=0.400$), number of major papers ($r=0.352$), Bahasa Melayu ($r=0.462$), English Language ($r=0.579$) and computer language skill ($r=0.328$).
- (b) **Degree of work expectation** – salary per month ($r=0.360$), present service ($r=0.251$), number of research conducted ($r=0.370$), major publication ($r=0.342$), supportive publication ($r=0.313$), supplementary papers ($r=0.287$), major papers ($r=0.349$), Arabic Language ($r=0.262$), Bahasa Melayu ($r=0.506$), English Language ($r=0.565$), and computer language skill ($r=0.280$).
- (c) **Degree of communication ability** – supplementary papers ($r=0.348$), Bahasa Melayu ($r=0.430$), English Language ($r=0.544$), and computer language skill ($r=0.370$).
- (d) **Degree of knowledge expertise** – number of research conducted ($r=0.367$), major publication ($r=0.394$), supportive publication ($r=0.286$), professional courses ($r=0.254$), supplementary papers ($r=0.302$), major papers ($r=0.404$), Bahasa Melayu ($r=0.518$), English Language ($r=0.528$), and computer language skill ($r=0.327$).
- (e) **Degree of teaching capability** – semester workload ($r=0.404$), other courses ($r=0.885$), supplementary papers ($r=0.490$), number of part-time lecturing ($r=0.243$), Arabic Language ($r=0.381$), and computer

- language skill ($r=0.309$).
- (f) **Degree of power/autonomy** – salary per month ($r=0.352$), number of research conducted ($r=0.451$), major publication (256), supplementary papers ($r=0.243$), major papers ($r=0.405$), Bahasa Melayu (0.277), and English Language ($r=0.643$).
 - (g) **Degree of ethical practices** – age ($r=-0.309$).
 - (h) **Overall professionalism** – salary per month ($r=0.310$), number of research conducted ($r=0.401$), major publication ($r=0.410$), supportive publication ($r=0.286$), other courses ($r=0.248$), supplementary papers ($r=0.387$), major papers ($r=0.352$), Arabic Language ($r=0.258$), Bahasa Melayu ($r=0.514$), English Language ($r=0.619$), and computer language skill ($r=0.360$).

(6) Regression Analysis

Since professionalism has seven dimensions, each dimension was regressed with the selected demographic variables and selected job-related variables (Table 6). The results of the predictors can be summarized as follows:

- (a) **Degree of leadership ability** – predicted by, number of research conducted, number of publication (major and supportive), number of supplementary working papers, Bahasa Melayu proficiency, and English Language proficiency.
- (b) **Degree of work expectation** – age (young more), salary per month, number of research conducted, number of major publication, Bahasa Melayu proficiency, and English Language proficiency.
- (c) **Degree of communication ability** – age (young better), and salary per month, number of supportive papers, and English Language proficiency.
- (d) **Degree of knowledge expertise** – number of research conducted, number of major publication, number of major papers, Bahasa Melayu proficiency, and English Language proficiency.
- (e) **Degree of teaching capability** – semester workload, number of other courses, number of supportive papers, and Arabic Language proficiency.

- (f) **Degree of power/autonomy** – number of research conducted, number of major papers, and English Language proficiency.
- (g) **Degree of ethical consideration** – age (young more) only.
- (h) **Degree of overall professionalism** –age (young more), salary per month, number of research conducted, number of major publication, number of supportive papers, Bahasa Melayu proficiency, and English Language proficiency.

Conclusions

Based on the findings, the following conclusions can be made:

- 1) Majority of the communication lecturers is highly professional, regardless of gender, marital status, nationality, race, and association membership. Hence, some personal characteristics are not good predictors for professionalism among communication lecturers. However, age was able to predict for Work Expectation and Communication Ability. It seems that the young lecturers tend to have high work expectation and able to communicate well.
- 2) Professionalism for communication lecturers has even dimensions, namely, (a) leadership ability, (b) work expectation, (c) communication ability, (d) knowledge expertise, (e) teaching ability, (f) autonomy/power, and (g) ethical considerations. Each dimension has its own predictors. Job-related variables help in determining professionalism among communication lecturers.

Practical Suggestions

(A) Communication Lecturers

Based on the findings of the study, communication lecturers are recommended:

- 1) To first conduct research either individually or jointly, as a team within own university or across universities; second, to present the findings at

seminars or conferences at the national and/or international level; and finally to publish the articles in journals, in monographs, and/or in chapters of books.

- 2) To attend courses that help improve knowledge expertise and to learn Arabic Language for ethical considerations of the lecturing profession.
- 3) To be loyal to own university for attaining leadership ability professionally.

(B) University/Institution/Employer

University as a whole is asked to look into the following:

- (1) To differentiate the criteria for annual increment and for promotional purpose. Therefore it is suggested that:
 - (a) Criteria for annual increment be based on teaching load, teaching capability, knowledge expertise, and work expectation;
 - (b) Criteria for promotional purpose be based on research conducted, communication ability, publication published, and language proficiency; and
 - (c) Criteria for leadership appointment should be based on leadership ability, communication ability, autonomy ability, ethical considerations, academic achievement, and designation of at least an associate professor position.
- (2) Groom and nurture communication lecturers professionally through teamwork, that is, through formation of research team, team for writing publication, and rotation of leadership appointment.

Suggestions for Future Research

Based on the results of the study, it is suggested that future research:

- 1) Use the same professionalism theory to be applied other fields and for other professions.

- 2) Conduct qualitative research among successful local professors in communication to share their experience and to highlight their working habits pertaining to their achievements. A trend analysis study could be employed.
- 3) Include other job-related variables, such as, (a) number of in-service training courses given to the public, (b) job satisfaction, (c) learning motivation, and (d) information sharing.

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