


Framing Responsive and Responsible Learning in Project-Based Assessment: A Study on the Malaysian General Studies Subject

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This chapter aims to reimagine learning and teaching general studies by embedding responsive and responsible learning elements in the project-based assessment. The author unfolds the educator's reflective experiences in carrying out the assessment and the student's experiences in completing the project. Data are collected through the educators' reflective journals and students' evaluations, including students' evaluation reports and qualitative feedback. The findings include a discussion on strategies and challenges in curating responsive and responsible learning in a project-based assessment, and how the project-based assessment creates an affective and effective learning environment. This study aspires to serve as evidence-based practice and reflections to develop responsive and responsible learning in the project-based assessment.

INTRODUCTION

General Studies in Malaysian Higher Education System

The Malaysian General Studies subjects aspire to contribute to nation-building by improving graduates' knowledge and soft skill in developing holistic human capital. In 1996, the Malaysian government implemented government-mandated subjects known as General Studies (previously known as Com-

pulsory Subjects), intending to improve students' soft skills and employability. Local and international undergraduate students who are enrolled in Malaysian higher education institutions are required to pass these subjects as a requirement for their graduation. The intention of offering these subjects aligned with the National Education Philosophy, which is to produce good citizens with balanced personality and identity that embrace the following characteristics:

- i. Trusting and obeying God
- ii. Knowledgeable
- iii. Skilled
- iv. Willing to contribute to society, religion, race, and country
- v. Responsible to oneself, religion, race, society, and country.

The General Studies aim to curate general education that embeds aspects of knowledge that enhance communication skills and develop an appreciation of noble values, as well as general knowledge that transcends the boundaries of traditional disciplines such as philosophy, arts, and national language. The bigger vision of these subjects is to produce graduates with broad-minded, balanced, and holistic skills who can be competitive in modern society.

At the beginning of the implementation, there were five subjects introduced namely; Malaysian Studies, Islamic Studies, Moral Education, National Language A, and National Language B (for international students). In 2012, these subjects were replaced with the new General Studies subjects which are Malaysian Studies and Communicative Malay 2 for international students. Malaysian students are offered subjects namely Ethnic Relations, Islamic and Asian Civilization, and National Language A. The new subjects intend to align with the Ministry's National Higher Education Strategic Plan (NHESP) which seeks to strengthen nation-building by equipping graduates with both hard and soft skills, resulting in comprehensive human capital. (Yip & Burhanuddin, 2017).

The new subjects were embedded in a new General Studies structure which divides the General Studies subjects into four components (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2016);

- U1: Appreciation of philosophy, values, and history
- U2: Mastery of soft skills
- U3: Expansion of knowledge about Malaysia, and
- U4: Community service and co-curriculum.

In this new structure, students have to complete several credit hours in each component as a requirement for completing their degree. This regulation applies to all higher learning institutions regardless of homegrown institutions or foreign universities located in Malaysia.

Strategically, General Studies subjects were designed based on Malaysia's National Education Philosophy, Malaysia's Education Blueprint 2012–2025 (Higher Education), and High-Impact Educational Practices. These three strategies aspire to develop values, knowledge, as well as cognitive and social skills. The subjects emphasize nation-building, soft skills mastery and development, strengthening and increasing understanding of Malaysia, and utilizing soft skills in preparing students to meet problems in a real and competitive world in the future. (Yip and Burhanuddin, 2017). However, not all aspects are ideal when it comes to the implementation of the subjects at the ground level. There were some challenges that required improvement efforts to address the setback.

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