

The Basis of Supervisory Practice for Vocational Education and Training

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Abstract

Malaysia is developing rapidly and in a dire demand for technical and engineering manpower at the various levels especially in the technology and engineering discipline. Synchronizing with the development of K-workers, institution of Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) is providing effective supervision to develop people in the professions. This article will discuss existing literature on effective supervision in order to assist student-supervisor in enhancing the best practices for effective supervision. Developing effective supervision need to be assessed from both students' and supervisors' perspectives. Both parties have to distinguish their roles and responsibilities respectively.

Keywords: TVET, student, supervisor, effective supervision.

1. Introduction

The demand for engineers and engineering assistants keeps increasing from 153,000 in the year 1994 to 500,000 in the year 2008 [1]. In the year 2010 the country will need more than 500,000 engineering technicians and engineers (EDMAT, 2002). This figure keeps increasing by years. Currently, Malaysia has a workforce of about 12 million, of which only about 28 percent are highly-skilled, whilst 60 percent are employed in small and medium-sized enterprises (Malaysia, 2010). To meet the needs of this manpower, the government has put in place a lot of emphasis on technical and vocational education and training to produce more Knowledge workers (K-workers). Supervision can be classified as an important element in effective training.

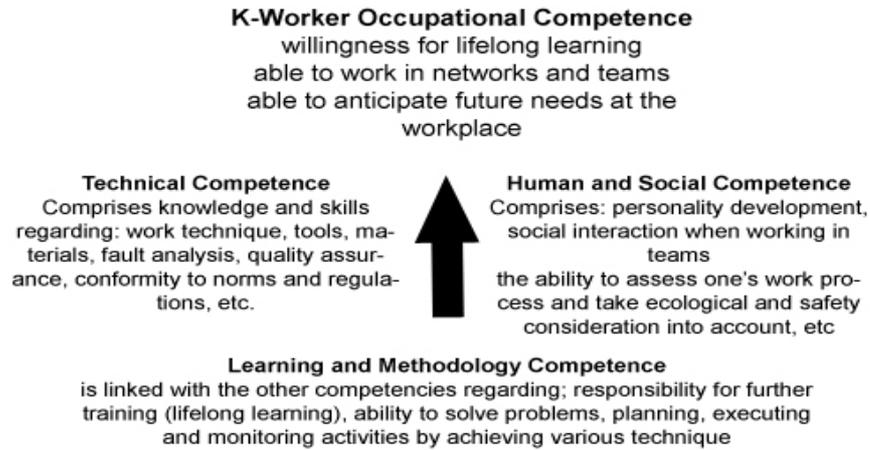


Fig. 1: K-worker occupational competence

Issue of skilled workers has become vital and widely debated across the countries. The global changes in technology and particularly in the Malaysian industries have created a major need for skilled workforce and comprehensive training. A holistic skills training and technical training program to train K-worker should encompass not only technical competences but also learning and methodology competences. This can be achieved through supervision process during their training and practical in Public Skills Training Institute (ILKA) and industries as well. The quality supervision has been described as an invaluable learning activity for beginners as well as experienced practitioners such as teachers, administrators, trainers and other professionals.

2. Literature Review and Discussion

2.1 Student-supervisor Relationship

Many scholars have mentioned the importance of the relationship between a student and a supervisor in this context [2, 3, 4] particularly where the two work closely over a number of years. The relationship between the teacher and student plays an important role in promoting the student's objectives. However, sometimes a problem of compatibility occurs between them and therefore, Hockey [5] and Wilkin [6] suggest that they both need to know their roles in order to ensure a good relationship. Learning involves two parties, the teacher (also known as supervisor, mentor, coach) and the student (known as the trainee, mentee, mentoree, coachee, protégée).

There are high numbers of research and studies highlighted the important of supervision for student development. However, most of them are focusing on postgraduate students either at master or PhD level. There are slight number of them discuss about undergraduate student. In addition, the previous studies mostly for academic stream rather than Technical and Vocational Education and Training

(TVET). It is supported by Sulaiman [7] where he mentioned that there is lack of research being done in this matter. As we know, TVET is differs from academic. Thus, an initiative should be taken to produce more research on TVET.

TVET provider in Malaysia is conducted by many different ministries, agencies and organizations, both public and private. The various TVET providers often operate as silos and do not taking into account program offerings in the broader context, resulting in overlapping courses and institutions as well as creating confusion for students and employers. This situation has implications for the standardization of training and qualification, cost-effectiveness, quality assurance, recognition of prior learning, and the further education of TVET graduates. The current governance structure still lacks effective coordination, sharing of resources, and articulation within the overall system. There is also no single oversight body to provide overview of TVET landscape. The diverse TVET management structures and the sharing of supervisory responsibilities by various government bodies and ministries account for some of the inefficiencies in the system like duplication and segmentation of training, and the absence of a common platform for developing coherent policies and joint initiatives.

The main issue reported from the industries are the lacking of product quality and skills possessed by the students. Although the system fundamentally designed to meet observed or projected labor market demands, the current TVET programs in Malaysia are largely supply-driven and still lack giving emphasis to match training to available jobs. Training institutions also seldom track the employment destination of their graduates. Consequently, the institutions have not taken advantage feedback from past trainees on the quality of the training they have received to improve their curricula and training packages. In short, the implementation of outcome evaluation and tracer studies that can improve the market responsiveness of training programs is still lacking. The overall funding structure also does not fully support quality and performance of TVET providers [8].

One of the main factors contributes to the lacking of graduates quality is the kind of supervision they obtain during their study. Students sometimes get confused and did not get clear picture of their responsibilities to manage their industrial based project. At the end of their semester before attending on job training (OJT), they need to complete their final year project based on the industry. At this stage, student often encounter many difficulties and need support from their supervisor. The roles of student-supervisor responsibilities will take place from this point.

2.2 Needs on Effective Supervisor

For students that are doing certain projects, there is a crucial need for an effective supervisory system. Students experienced lots of difficulties during their projects' process. Some of them are not familiar with the research topic and some of them are lack of knowledge about research methodology. In the other side, supervision is one of the main elements that should be taken into account when discussing about graduate students. Observation from this subject must be seriously administered in order to guide graduate students to complete their studies. Many researchers have operationalized supervision in so many ways. But the nature of the exact function is still shrouded with uncertainty. In recent years, research supervision has become very critical for graduate students to achieve higher degree certification. It is out of the realization that supervision is now a central process for the successful completion of graduate programs. Supervision also can be interpreted as a two ways interactional process that requires both the student and the supervisor to consciously engage each other within the spirit of professionalism, respect, collegiality and open-mindedness. Supervision is a complex social encounter which involves two parties with both converging and diverging interests. Therefore, balancing these interests is very crucial to the successful supervision of student projects.

Various studies have reported on the importance of interpersonal relationships between students and their supervisors as a determinant of student success [9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14]. The supervisor often becomes the face of the faculty for graduate students, which Lee & Green [15] refer to as "an essentially privatized and personalized" relationship, which is "traditionally conducted behind closed doors" [16]. Malfroy [17] reports that graduate students often experience frustration as a result of a perceived lack of support or what is referred to as "a disjunction in expectations" between the student and the supervisor.

Lessing & Schulze [13] describe the supervisory role as a balancing act between various factors: expertise in the area of research, support for the student, critique, and creativity. Ives and Rowley [14] emphasize the importance of matching supervisors to graduate students in terms of both topic expertise and working relationships. These authors also note the changing needs of graduate students, which may necessitate a change in supervisory practices as students' progress through a graduate program. Malfroy [17] adds that an open approach to supervision and a collaborative approach to learning may achieve more in terms of developing a community of scholars than more traditional approaches to supervision. Lessing & Schulze [13] furthermore recommend that supervisors receive training in order to meet their graduate students' needs effectively. They determined that a varied pattern of supervisory involvement in the research process produces the best results. This pattern involves a significant initial investment in time and effort in formulating the research question, followed by less interaction and more monitoring during the implementation phase, and finally increased input during the eventual writing of the research report. These findings

indicate that a differentiated approach to providing information and support to graduate students may be necessary. Lessing and Lessing [18] adds that there needs to be a balance between supervisor input and student independence.

Agreeing to supervise a project means undertaking to work in close collaboration with someone who is embarking on a journey within themselves: a journey which may at times profoundly exciting, but which will also certainly be difficult, risky and painful [19]. A research degree is about research training as well as contributing to knowledge and although it is not impossible to find ways of training oneself, the whole process is designed to be guided by a supervisor [2]. Both student and supervisor must wish the relationship to succeed. Otherwise, the problems in the relationship can affect the student's progress. Cryer [2] showed that only highly committed students will successfully complete their research degrees if the relationship with their supervisors is poor. Therefore, a supervisor and student must have a very good relationship and be very close to each other. Furthermore, the learning system for skills programs by project is not examination oriented, but thinking oriented. At the end of the program, the students are required to submit these theses. Various studies have reported on the importance of interpersonal relationships between graduate students and their supervisors as a determinant of student success [9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14]. The supervisor often becomes the face of the faculty for graduate students, which Lee & Green [15] refer to as an essentially privatized and personalized relationship, which is traditionally conducted behind closed doors [16]. Malfroy [17] reports that graduate students often experience frustration as a result of a perceived lack of support or what is referred to as a disjunction in expectations between the student and the supervisor.

Moses [20] argues that at each stage of the research progress, students are likely to need different forms of guidance. They need particular guidance on when to stop data collection and analysis, when to start drafting the thesis and how to structure it [20]. Thus, the supervisors are expected and assumed to be guides [21, 2, 22, 23, 24, 25] and critical friends [25, 26]. On the other hand, they should also be able to adopt flexible supervision strategies depending on the individual requirements, which are influenced by the attributes of the particular student [21, 25, 26, 27]. This is due to the fact that Ph.D students are not homogenous, but highly diverse in terms of academic ability, personality attributes, motivation and attitude. Hence, how supervisors respond to students will, in part, be conditioned by these different factors and applying the same rigid strategy for each student may not always work effectively [27]. Burgess, Pole, & Hockey [28] also pick up the theme of changing research stages and the need for a supervisor to be flexible in an attempt to meet the needs of individual students. Supervisors who have this flexibility can be more helpful to their research students [29]. Hockey [25] agrees with this statement and suggests that supervisors initiate a tight structure of control solely with the students whom they consider to be weak. However, research has found that strong and highly

motivated students also demand such a structure. Conversely, with this kind of student, supervisors might need considerable latitude in order to express themselves intellectually. In this case, a relatively unstructured strategy might develop with supervisors being primarily reactive to students' demands.

2.3 Roles and Responsibilities Behind The Relationship

The roles and responsibilities of the supervisor and supervisee should be clear to all participants in supervision [30]. Besides, supervisors and supervisee should be aware of the ethical codes for supervision [31]. As Carroll [32] mentions, good supervisors are able to adopt a multiplicity of roles in relation to the supervisee. Carroll [32] emphasizes the meaning of the task and role of the supervisor and states that tasks are the behavioral side of functions and roles. The role is person-centered (teacher/pupil), the task is action-centered (to teach/to learn), and the function is a combination of both roles and tasks. Van Ooijen [33] argues that, even though a strong notional distinction is made between roles and tasks, in reality they combine.

Traditionally, part of the supervisor's job was to ensure that work was done well and to standard [34,35]. Hawkins & Shohet [35] and Proctor [36] argue that a supervisor can be seen as having three tasks. The administration or normative task examines the management part of practitioners' roles and is concerned with on-going monitoring and quality [37, 32, 38]. The education or formative task involves the process of skill development and the ability to reflect on experiences. Lastly, the support or restorative task involves the supportive and helping function. Goldhammer, Anderson, & Krajewski [38] additionally suggest curricular and instructional components as supervisor's job.

Hawkins & Shohet [35] mention that supervision can be an important part of taking care of oneself and facilitating reflection. Berger and Bushholz [37], Carroll [32], Cogan [39], Health [40], Fowler [41], Kohner [30] and Rodenhauser, Rudisill, & Painter [41], point out that it is important in staying open and committed to learning. However, Ekstein & Wallenstein [42] and Rogers [35] suggest that it is important in maintaining self-awareness. Therefore, supervisors have to be teachers and innovators [38, 43, 33]. On the other hand, Ekstein and Wallenstein [42] also identify different styles of approach within the supervisor's role, including: openness to feelings, anxieties and experiences and reward, which give encouragement and recognition. With experience, the supervisor's role should develop and they should become more skilled at helping and supporting other practitioners [37, 31, 44]. Carroll [32] states that the generic tasks of counselling supervision should include consulting, evaluating [25,33] and monitoring professional or ethical issues and highlights the fact that emotional awareness and self-evaluation are also among the tasks that are necessary for all counselors as they work with clients. Holloway [45] agrees with Carroll [32], but suggests other tasks such as instructing, advising and

sharing while Van Ooijen [33] refers to modelling. However, Holloway [45] mentions that a supervisor should understand the client's psychosocial history and present problems. A supervisor should also learn the tasks of record-keeping [30, 46], procedures and appropriate inter-professional relationships and participate fully in the supervisory relationship [32].

Information will now be given regarding the qualities and skills that it is necessary to acquire in order to be an effective supervisor. As Butterworth, Faugier, & Burnard [31] mention, supervisors require training in supervision as an integral part of their professional development. Many authors have advocated more structured training for supervisors [47, 48, 49, 50, 51]. Meanwhile, Rogers [35] proposes that clinical supervisor should: (1) be a role model; (2) establish a safe confidential environment [44]; (3) give clear feedback [47, 41, 52, 49, 53, 54]; and (4) be aware of organizational and personal constraints.

Wilkin, Bowers, & Monk [6] identify the following skills as required by the supervisor: (1) communication skills [31], which involve being attentive and actively listening [35] and being able to comment openly, objectively and constructively; (2) supportive skills which involve being able to identify when support is needed and offer supportive responses [41,45,35]; (3) general skills; and (4) specialist skills which means that those who specialize in particular fields of work should have access to supervision by someone who is similarly orientated. Effective supervisors are also characterized by respect [37,31,32,30,44], empathy [37, 32,45], genuineness [32,44], honesty [31,32], non-sexist and non-authoritarian attitudes [31, 32, 45]. An effective supervisor should also pay attention to client welfare [41, 44].

Carroll [32] identifies a good supervisor as being a good teacher, who has access to a range of teaching and learning methods and can adapt to individual supervisees. In a similar vein, Berger and Bushholz [37] mention that, teachers should be flexible in their relationship with supervisees, moving easily between the roles of teacher, monitor, evaluator, model, mentor and counsellor. Good teachers understand individual differences and adapt accordingly. They maintain flexible roles and are capable of moving, when needed, between roles. They are able to share their own work in a facilitative manner, are open to negotiation and flexible in working and create clear boundaries [54].

3. Summary and Conclusion

Supervision is related to self-development, professional growth and career development of the supervisees. The supervisor's role is to help learners to achieve their goals by acting as counselor, facilitator and advisor. Counseling is an important function in relation to the supervising because it can lead to an improved relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee. It consists of support, feedback, providing counsel, consultation, teaching, evaluation, motivation and the monitoring of professional issues. One of the important functions of a supervisor is to be role model for the supervisee. This view is supported by many authors who have mentioned that the supervisor is someone who has greater experience and helps less skilled or less experienced practitioners to achieve professional abilities. In order to react effectively, a supervisor must: (1) have certain goals and plans; (2) be a good communication; (3) have the knowledge and relevant skills about the candidate's area of interest; (4) be able to establish a good and professional relationship; and (5) be flexible in supervision strategies depending on the individual requirements. A good relationship can make both parties comfortable with meeting regularly and sharing ideas or knowledge with a view to supervise development. As a student, one must be eager to learn, enhance one's self-awareness, learn from mistakes and success, develop and apply new skills and design action plans or timetables. In addition, he/she must be diligent, conscientious and hardworking, open to critics, willing to listen to others and to talk openly.

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