



Professional socialisation (PS) of Malaysian real estate undergraduates

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ABSTRACT

In a borderless economy underlined by increased regional labour mobility, enhanced Real Estate professionals would benefit the Malaysian real estate industry. Little is known about how undergraduates undergo professionalisation during their university education. New entrants to a profession acquire the necessary values, attitudes, skills and knowledge through the process of *professional socialisation* (PS). An effective PS assists in human resource management in terms of high retention rate; conversely, an impaired PS negatively affects human resource management in terms of increased disengagement rate. This paper seeks to examine how Malaysian real estate undergraduates were initiated into their profession during their tertiary education. Using questionnaire survey as the main data collection tool, respondents comprising recent graduates from two public universities indicated the effectiveness of role models, reasoning and attitude in developing role orientation, syllabus comprehension and immersion, and soft skills enhancement. Mentorship was identified as the most important PS factor by the respondents whilst internship timing had no bearing on PS.

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Introduction

With the promulgation of the global economy and increased workforce mobility, the real estate profession is facing challenges in producing industry entrants who are highly competent and professional, already conditioned to the industry's subculture. In the Malaysian real estate research, scant literature can be found on real estate education and profession, particularly the acquisition of professionalism among real estate undergraduates. The available literature normally looked into the syllabus of real estate education (Hamzah, Mohd Aini, Sarip, & Yahya, 2007; Hamzah, Yahya, Sarip, & Mohd Adnan, 2016; Shakir, 2009). Little is known about how entrants into the real estate professions – valuer, estate agent, property manager, for instance – are exposed to and instilled with the required professional skills, values, attitudes and knowledge during their tertiary education, a process known as “professional socialisation” (PS). In the work environment, a new professional is exposed to the profession through fact finding, observing and shadowing established professionals but how real estate

undergraduates acquire professionalism in university has largely remained unexamined. An impaired PS could result in professionals who feel disengaged and little sense of belonging with the industry and ultimately contribute to low professionalism and high turnover. The broader implication is poor human resource management and resource allocation due to re-training requirements and loss of personnel. As such, there is a need to examine the process of students' acquisition of professional skills, attitude, values and norms in the university.

Whilst PS studies have increasingly permeated other professions such as nursing (Du Toit, 1995; Mooney, 2007; Waugaman & Lohrer, 2000), academia (Bess, 1978; Clark & Corcoran, 1986; Corcoran & Clark, 1984), accounting (Anderson-Gough, Grey, & Robson, 1998; Fogarty, 1992), education (Olweny, 2017; Perna & Hudgins, 1996), sociology (Kain, 1999; Kicherova, Efimova, & Khvesko, 2015) and athletics (Klossner, 2008; Mazerolle, Eason, Clines, & Pitney, 2015), less attention has been given in real estate although the adequacy of the development of professional predisposition and attributes can shape the resilience and sustainability of the entrant's career in the profession. Here, the work by Page (2004, 2005, 2007a, 2007b, 2008) on PS of valuers in Australia is invaluable in establishing how professional attributes are imparted on real estate students from the perspective of students and faculty programme directors.

Drawing from Page, this study seeks to examine PS among real estate undergraduates in Malaysia by comparing two public universities with similar syllabus content but different internship timing; University A follows the conventional model with internship just before graduation whilst University B adopts the sandwich format where internship is followed by the final year at the university before graduation. We want to see if the internship timing has any bearing on PS among Malaysian real estate undergraduates. This study adopts mixed methods approach whereby a questionnaire survey on recent graduates yield quantitative and qualitative data. The primary data were analysed and integrated to reveal the effectiveness of PS factors in imparting the essential professional values and norms during the degree programme that would condition the students for their future real estate careers. Following this Introduction section, which highlights the importance of professional socialisation among real estate professionals, Section 2 provides the literature review that guides the readers on the definition, factors, objectives and PS in real estate education before presenting the conceptual framework derived from the literature review. Section 3 discusses the context of this paper. The research methodology undertaken in this research is described in Section 4, followed by the results and discussion in Section 5. The concluding section outlines key recommendations on how to enhance PS based on the study results.

Literature review

Professional socialisation and real estate education

The definition of professional socialisation (PS) must be led by an explanation on the meaning of socialisation and professionalism. PS is deemed a subset of socialisation (Page, 2004). The classic definition of socialisation by Bragg (1976) describes "a process by which individuals acquire the values, attitudes, norms, knowledge, and skills needed to perform their roles acceptably in the group or groups in which they are, or seek to be,

members” (p.14), a definition that was also adopted in later studies (see for instance Pei & Pek, 2012; Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001). On the other hand, professionalism is “the possession and/or demonstration of structural, attitudinal and behavioural attributes of a profession and its members”, whereby professional attitude is “predisposition, feeling, emotion, or thought that upholds the ideals of a profession and serves as the basis for professional behaviour” whilst professional behaviour is “behaving in a manner to achieve optimal outcomes in professional tasks and interactions” (Hammer, 2000, p. 456). It is not wrong to conclude that socialisation is the general process of achieving professionalism.

Having presented the meaning of socialisation and professionalism, this paper adopts Page’s definition of PS i.e. “the acquisition of values, attitudes, skills and knowledge pertaining to a professional subculture” (Page, 2004, p. 2). In layman’s term and in the context of this paper, PS is the process of transformation at which students become professionals in their field. As argued by Page and other authors (see for instance Bess, 1978; Mazerolle et al., 2015; Olweny, 2017), the socialisation of undergraduates is not only about obtaining technical knowledge and skills through university studies, but also on the values and norms of their professions and how they think as a professional group. The proper implementation of PS in tertiary education would determine the professionalism of new industry entrants. Hence, it is critical that such socialisation characteristics be instilled into students undertaking professional programmes prior to their entry to practice. Apart from the knowledge and related skills, the transmission of values, norms and ways of seeing that are unique to the profession remain critical in PS (Blais, Hayes, & Kozier, 2006), with the ultimate objective of instilling professionalism of the new entrants (Hammer, 2000).

In general, the process of PS begins in the university programme itself, through orientation, syllabus delivery and mentorship (Mazerolle et al., 2015). There are currently four public universities that offer real estate degree programmes in Malaysia besides a number of private universities. Real estate education at tertiary level in Malaysia is based on the UK model of multidisciplinary study that comprises the teaching and learning of hard skills, such as valuation, management, finance and law, and soft skills such as communication, analytical, and research skills. Page (2007b) highlighted that real estate programmes also include field experience either embedded or as a standalone subject. There are obvious advantages of imparting multiple skillsets in real estate programmes compared to other built environment studies such as architecture, town planning, quantity surveying and building surveying that tend to be more narrowly defined (Yu, 2001). However, the wider range of subjects also led to issues of adequate comprehension of and immersion in the curriculum and also proper inculcation of professional qualities during a relatively short study period.

Factors and desired outcomes of professional socialisation

The PS process is shaped by a number of factors to achieve desired goals pertaining to professional behaviour. The factors can be reduced to three main factors i.e. role model, reasoning and attitude whilst the respective desired outcomes are role orientation, syllabus comprehension and immersion and soft skills enhancement.

Role model for role orientation

A newcomer would face many challenges in acquiring knowledge and skills when they first enter into any profession. Thus, the first PS factor is the *role model*, which would assist in students' orientation in the profession. In any organisation, the role orientation of a newcomer would determine his rate and extent of adjustment in the organisation, with consequences on turnover (Jones, 1986). A role model emerges when another person is chosen as a model (Fisher, 1988) and involves a complex process that incorporates action, thought and feeling (Filstad, 2004). Jones (1986) suggested that role models offer a way for new entrants' role orientation when joining an organisation. Role models demonstrate that certain achievements are possible while providing examples for emulation in achieving maintaining certain social positions (Gibson, 2004) and offer support and guidance (Nauta & Kokaly, 2001).

Although it was initially suggested that mere observation of role models is sufficient for newcomers (Bandura, 1986), later it was established that prolonged interaction between newcomers and established members is also needed in the learning process (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Therefore, observation must be followed with interaction in practice for newcomers to learn the tacit knowledge of established professionals (Nonaka, Takeuchi, & Umemoto, 1996). Newcomers can also turn to non-interpersonal sources such as written material, observations and experimentation (Kram, 1985; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1993). In this respect, the newcomers should be able to leverage on their personal traits such as self-confidence and competitiveness to their advantage.

Fisher (1988) stated that an individual's selection of a role model involves conceptualising the certain features required for that activity, particularly features that best suit their own interests. Furthermore, newcomers that succeed the most in their career used several role models in partial ways, which Filstad referred to as "multiple contingent role models" (2004, p. 5). This strategy would enable the newcomers to acquire different qualifications from different role models to their advantage. For real estate undergraduates, we contend that role models are used by the students to orientate themselves with both the degree programme and the industry. Thus, as guided by Filstad (2004) and Hammer (2000), the role models for students would include senior students, lecturers and practitioners from the industry.

Reasoning for syllabus comprehension and immersion

The second factor that could influence PS is *reasoning*. Here, reasoning is defined as the thinking and decision-making processes associated with professional practice (Jones & Higgs, 2000). Learning to reason is also a contextualised, participation-focused activity that develops through a journey of PS (Ajjawi, 2006). There have been a number of studies on how professionals perform reasoning and the relationship between reasoning, knowledge and expertise, the bulk of which in the medical field (see for instance Ajjawi & Higgs, 2012; Boshuizen & Schmidt, 2008; Charles, Gafni, & Whelan, 1999) with some examinations on ethical or moral reasoning in other fields such as accounting (Cohen, Pant, & Sharp, 2001; Ho, 2009), which indicates that reasoning is a mandatory skill in all professions. These studies demonstrated how basic technical skills and knowledge as well as the capacity to reason and make decisions are implicitly gained as a part of PS at both formal professional-entry education and workplace

learning. However, Ajjawi and Higgs (2008) suggested that there is a need for explicit teaching and learning of the advanced reasoning skills for professional programmes for effective socialisation in the workplace.

For undergraduates, reasoning allows them to select what is perceived as meaningful to their learning (Brown & Duguid, 1996). Undergraduates should be trained so that their cognitive processing of information would be sound upon industry entrance to ensure moral and/or viable outcomes in their subsequent professional activities. Whilst the workplace development of reasoning is explicit through interactions with role models, mentors and colleagues (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2008), the higher education setting often entails the non-explicit instruction of reasoning, often embedded in the conveyance of syllabus (Ajjawi, 2006). In the case of real estate education, field experience gained from assignments and practicum can assist in understanding of material presented (Page, 2007b). From Ajjawi and Page, it is inferred that undergraduates obtain their reasoning skills from the syllabus and, broadening the argument, use the reasoning skills obtained during their study to facilitate their comprehension and immersion of the syllabus. This situation poses a challenge in countries that follow the traditional UK model of real estate education where its multidisciplinary nature involves a wide range of modules that need to be absorbed by students within the short semester system (Yu, 2001), what Page termed as “curriculum overload” (2007b, p. 4). However, we support Ajjawi and Higgs (2008) that the real estate syllabus would trigger and sharpen the reasoning skills of undergraduates, albeit tacitly.

Attitude for soft skills enhancement

Professional *attitude* is a key PS factor. In the Theory of Planned Behaviour, a more favourable attitude towards a behaviour would indicate a stronger intention to perform the behaviour (Ajzen, 1985, 1991, 2011). Attitude towards the behaviour is seen as “the degree to which a person has a favourable or unfavourable evaluation or appraisal of the behaviour in question” (Ajzen, 1991, p. 188). The specific attitude and behaviour of a profession should have been instilled and developed during the undergraduate programme. The professional attitudes are specific to the field; for instance, medical and pharmaceutical professionals should have a caring attitude which may not be important for valuers. On the other hand, soft skills are “skills that place emphasis on personal behaviour and managing relationships between people as well as interpersonal, human, people or behavioural skills” (Adnan, Daud, Alias, & Razali, 2012, p. 3). For PS, the professional behaviour will depend on the professional attitude that has been moderated by soft skills. The real estate industry opined that graduates lacked leadership skills, skills to carry out tasks and ability to work with minimum supervision (Blake & Susilawati, 2009), and more recently highlighted the importance of oral and written communication skills, presentation skills, numeracy, ethics and professionalism and critical thinking and problem solving (Adnan et al., 2012; Poon, 2014).

Studies on soft skills in real estate education in various contexts including Australia (Poon, 2012, 2014), Malaysia (Adnan et al., 2012; Shakir, 2009) and Nigeria (Oladokun & Gbadegesin, 2017) confirm that soft skills indeed are central for PS. Considering the importance of soft skills in increasing graduate employability, most university programmes including real estate have embedded these skills in their curriculum. In Malaysia, the enhancement of soft skills among undergraduates, including in real estate

programmes, has been institutionalised as part of the government's programme to increase graduate employability (Adnan et al., 2012). The inculcation of seven key soft skills (ethics & professionalism, critical thinking & problem solving, teamwork, leadership, communications, information management & lifelong learning and entrepreneurship) is seen as contributing towards the positive attitude among graduates. For PS to occur among Real Estate undergraduates, the students themselves should have positive attitude during the process.

Professional socialisation in real estate education

Although PS is a process that can occur throughout the study period, we adapted the PS model by Mazerolle et al. (2015) to divide PS into three stages: the introductory stage in the process of new student assimilation (orientation), the study stage whereby the curriculum is imparted on the students (programme delivery) and the various points during the study stage at which guidance is delivered by a more experienced or knowledgeable person (mentoring).

Orientation

Orientation is crucial at the point of any organisational entry. Just as newcomers into any organisation need to align themselves with important domains of the organisation (Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1993) and new professionals the norms and values of the profession (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2008), new students also need to adapt to university setting. According to Mazerolle et al. (2015), the orientation stage can be grouped into formal and informal orientation. Formal orientation can be either required orientations or instructional sessions arranged by the university to help students better understand their direction of study and what is expected of them. This usually involves lecturers and existing students sharing their opinion, thoughts and experience with new students during the orientation week. Conversely, informal orientation is not structured and uses informal approach, where new students learn and familiarise with the programme based on the work or assignment that they will do subsequently. Newcomers will become part of the assignment groups where learning takes place informally.

Programme delivery

The delivery of real estate programme contents through lectures, seminar, coursework and increasingly interactive style of teaching and learning such as virtual classroom and online teaching can directly help graduates develop their PS (Blake & Susilawati, 2009). New pedagogical methods are also being used in real estate education, including active learning and problem-based learning, together with assessment methods that dissuaded rote learning and encouraged deep learning (Yu, 2001). Additionally, invited lectures and field visits are adopted not only to impart knowledge but also to inspire students to be successful in their chosen career path. Another feature is elective modules to develop students' interests outside their specialisation, chosen for purely personal interest and self-development or for future career requirement e.g. foreign languages. Student mobility programmes such as student exchange between universities may also promote

PS among students in addition to the credits transfer. The international exposure could benefit students particularly in view of the increasing trend towards globalisation.

Mentoring

Mentoring is a relationship between less experienced individual (protégé) and a more experienced individual (mentor) where the mentor provides support, guidance and counselling to the protégé (Kram, 1983). Mentoring has been shown to result in more adjusted new entrants to organisations as they gained information from not only by observing the setting but also by inputs from their mentors (Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1993), especially in a “hierarchical relationship” (Mazerolle et al., 2015, p. 536). According to Jacobi (1991), academic mentoring involves formal mentoring, comprising a faculty-assigned lecturer or faculty member providing support and guidance to students on academic as well as non-academic issues including career guidance and informal mentoring, comprising a mentorship initiated by the protégé. This purposeful engagement with the mentor, both formally or informally, may facilitate psychological adjustment and foster a sense of professional identity among mentees (Austin, 2002). One-to-one mentoring, in particular, provides opportunities for students to discuss their career prospects and skills gap that they have to address in order to secure employment.

Conceptual framework of this paper

The above literature review produced the conceptual framework that guided the questionnaire survey formulation. Figure 1 presents the PS in real estate programme that occurred in three temporal delineations (orientation, programme delivery and mentoring sessions) involving the PS factors (role model, reasoning and attitude) shaping the PS outcomes (role orientation, syllabus comprehension and immersion, and soft skills enhancement). Here we

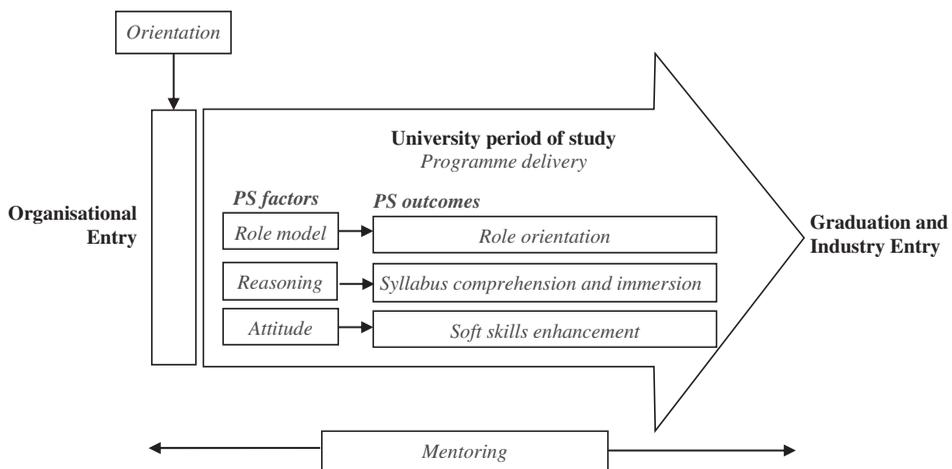


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of Professional Socialisation in real estate programmes.

Source: Authors

juxtapose the framework with the work by Page (2004, 2005, 2007a, 2007b, 2008)), considered the foremost study on PS of real estate undergraduates in this region.

Context

Real estate profession in Malaysia

The real estate profession in Malaysia was formalised by the establishment of the valuation division of Ministry of Finance, now the Valuation and Property Services Department (VPSD), in the 1960s. The real estate education was initiated to train VPSD officers but has evolved to reflect increasing corporate participation in the real estate industry (Ali & Alias, 2006). The industry is regulated by the Board of Valuers, Appraisers, Estate Agents and Property Managers Malaysia (BOVAEAPM), the Royal Institution of Surveyors Malaysia (RISM) and the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS). BOVAEAPM and RICS are the accreditation bodies in most of the tertiary real estate programmes. Whilst there are many real estate professions, the statutorily regulated professions are valuer and appraiser, estate agent and property manager, being eligible for registration with BOVAEAPM to practice. Other professions such as real estate marketing and research are unregulated.

Real estate programmes in Malaysia

The four public universities that offer real estate programmes (according to chronological order) are the Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM), Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM), University of Malaya (UM) and Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM) (Hamzah et al., 2007). All of these programmes are accredited by BOVAEAPM. At present, BOVAEAPM recognises programmes from 10 local universities and also several universities from Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Singapore and the UK (BOVAEAPM, 2018). We reviewed the websites of these public universities to compare the programme structures (Table 1). The selection of these universities was based on their established status and as leaders of real estate education in Malaysia. It can be seen that valuation, property management, property development, investment, property law, finance and agency were offered in all four universities.

Table 1. Summary of structure of Real Estate Programmes in Malaysia.

Courses	UM	UTM	UiTM	UTHM
Valuation	✓	✓	✓	✓
Property Management	✓	✓	✓	✓
Property Development	✓	✓	✓	✓
Property Investment	✓	✓	✓	✓
Property Law	✓	✓	✓	✓
Property Finance	✓	✓	✓	✓
Property Agency	✓	✓	✓	✓
Research Project	✓	✓	✓	✓
Practicum timing	Final semester followed by graduation	Second semester of the third year, followed by two more semesters at university before graduation	Final semester followed by graduation	Final semester followed by graduation

Source: This study

In addition to BOVAEAPM's accreditation requirements, academic programmes offered by educational institutions in Malaysia also need to go through a stringent accreditation process by the Malaysian Qualification Agency (MQA). MQA is responsible for the monitoring of the quality assurance practice and accreditation of academic programmes. Apart from benchmarking their programmes against reputable institutions in the UK and Australia, dialogues and seminars with industry stakeholders are the typical means used to improve the overall quality of real estate programmes in Malaysia. Finally, practicum is also a syllabus component to expose students to real life setting of the profession. During practicum, a supervisor is assigned to guide and instruct the student on work matters and also assess the student's practice-readiness.

Methodology

The research design is based on the convergent parallel mixed methods that would enable us to merge the quantitative and qualitative data to give a more comprehensive understanding of PS within the Malaysian real estate programmes (Creswell, 2014). The study adopted a comparative approach of real estate graduates between two public universities; University A with practicum immediately followed by graduation and University B with practicum followed by two more semesters at the university. The reason to select programmes with different practicum timing is to see if temporal distance between practicum (learning) and practice (working) has any bearing on PS.

Data collection instrument

Figure 1 was used to guide the formulation of the questionnaire survey. The majority of the questions were close-ended and five-point Likert scale, with an open-ended question asking the respondents to elaborate on the PS factor that had the most bearing during their study. The questionnaire survey comprised five sections; 1) Background of respondents, 2) Organisational entry and orientation, 3) The real estate programme; 4) Mentorship, and 5) Soft skills. PS factors were covered in Sections 3, 4 and 5 whilst the PS process was covered in Sections 2, 3 and 4. PS outcomes were inferred in all sections except for Section 1.

Data collection procedure

The questionnaire survey was administered among recent graduates of real estate undergraduate programme of two public universities in Malaysia, University A in Kuala Lumpur and University B in the southern state of Johor. The survey took place from January to March 2018. Both universities are categorised as research universities, meaning that lecturers have to teach and are also mandated to undertake research and publication. The teaching staffs of both universities generally have industry experience before joining academia although details of the experience vary individually and both departments have similar ratio of PhD holders. Whilst teaching quality and syllabus of both universities were comparable, there was a distinct dissimilarity in terms of the timing of internship. Students from University A enter practice immediately after practicum whilst students from University B return to university to receive further

education whilst having the benefit of practicum as reference point for the remainder of their studies.

Purposive sampling was used as this study aimed at gaining the information from a specific target group (Sekaran, 2006). In this case, respondents were recent real estate graduates who had undergone the full term of study at their respective universities and had just joined the workforce. Respondents were personally approached and invited to participate in the survey. 30 students from University A and 44 students from University B agreed to take part. An electronic form of the questionnaire was sent out via email. Whilst most of the respondents were prompt in returning the completed questionnaire, a number of reminder emails had to be sent out to coax a few neglectful respondents. The survey was returned through email.

Data analysis

The quantitative data from the questionnaire was analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) to generate descriptive and non-parametric statistics. We used frequency and mean score to establish patterns in the responses. As the data was assumed not to be normally distributed, the Mann–Whitney U non-parametric test was chosen to identify the correlation and differences between the examined criteria. Frequency analysis was used to identify the number of each categories of the phenomenon occurs for easy understanding and interpretation (Sekaran, 2006). Mean scores were calculated to compare the results between both universities to show the extent that knowledge and interest in the profession as indicators of role orientation had developed during the university study. Mann–Whitney U tests were done to establish the significance of differences between the two universities. The results were presented in the form of table and chart of frequency. Results will be described for overall respondents (R_{UO}), respondents from University A (R_{UA}) and respondents from University B (R_{UB}). We undertook a thematic analysis of the qualitative data to derive perceptions and proclivities that could be used to support or contradict the explanation of the quantitative results for a more meaningful discussion of the results.

Results

The Cronbach's Alpha reliability test yielded a value of 0.828 that can be interpreted as having high reliability based on Chua (2013). Students' background can influence the extent of PS during study (Table 2). The gender ratio of respondents was balanced for R_{UA} but a higher female ratio was observed for R_{UB} . The membership of professional bodies among respondents was more encouraging among R_{UB} compared to R_{UA} . Rather than merely encouraging and then leaving it to students to pursue membership as the practice at University A, students at University B were involved in mandatory membership drives. It can be seen that the local professional body RISM was the most popular among R_{UO} . As for the knowledge about the real estate profession prior to joining the programme, overall there was a slightly higher proportion of positive responses, a trend similarly observed with R_{UB} , but not with R_{UA} . As R_{UB} is a sandwich programme, i.e. practicum followed by classroom learning before graduating, knowledge on the profession could be more enhanced due to exposure during practicum followed by

Table 2. Respondents' profile.

Profile factor	Variables	R _{UO}		R _{UA}		R _{UB}	
		f	%	f	%	f	%
Gender	Male	26	35	16	53	10	23
	Female	48	65	14	47	34	77
Professional body membership	RICS	10	18	4	33	6	14
	RISM	42	75	6	50	36	82
	Others	4	7	2	17	2	4
Pre-degree knowledge	Yes	43	58	13	43	30	68
	No	31	42	17	57	14	32
Source of influence	Nobody	38	51	14	47	24	54
	Family	26	35	11	37	15	34
	Friends	4	6	2	7	2	5
	Teacher	4	6	2	7	2	5
	Others	1	2	0	0	1	2

Table 3. Mann–Whitney U Test results on knowledge and interest levels for real estate professions.

Variables	Entry	Exit
KnowV	.230	.807
KnowPM	.465	.564
KnowEA	.166	.498
IntV	.900	.774
IntPM	.533	.010
IntEA	.504	.319

*Significance level is .05

V = Valuation, PM = Property Management,
EA = Estate Agency

reinforcement in classroom. The highest source of influence for joining the real estate programme was indicated to be 'nobody' or "own self" for both universities.

Role orientation

The respondents were asked to indicate the levels of their knowledge (*Know*) and interest (*Int*) on the three main real estate professions at the entry and exit points of the real estate programme. Table 3 displays the results for valuation (V), property management (PM) and estate agency (EA) as the main real estate professions in Malaysia. Mann-Whitney tests were conducted to determine whether there are significant differences between the two universities on PS factors and indicators. The Mann–Whitney U test data analysis results show that there were generally no significant differences between both universities on the transformation of knowledge and interest levels during study [$U (n_1 = 30, n_2 = 44) = 74, p > 0.05$] except for the interest level in Property Management.

The mean scores of levels of knowledge of and interest in the real estate professions at entry and exit levels were calculated for R_{UO}, R_{UA} and R_{UB} (Table 4). Results showed that the knowledge and interest levels in all three professions improved among R_{UO}. For both R_{UA} and R_{UB}, improvements in knowledge of the professions were indicated to be higher than levels of interest. However, whilst R_{UA} indicated higher increase in

Table 4. Comparison of mean scores of Knowledge and Interest levels.

	Knowledge						Interest										
	R _{UO}		R _{UA}		R _{UB}		R _{UO}		R _{UA}		R _{UB}						
	Entry	Exit															
V	1.58	4.18	2.60	1.47	4.20	2.73	1.66	4.16	2.34	3.93	1.59	2.37	3.93	1.56	2.32	3.93	1.61
PM	1.91	4.08	2.17	1.80	4.13	2.33	1.98	4.05	2.32	4.07	1.75	2.27	3.73	1.46	2.36	4.3	1.94
EA	2.61	4.12	1.51	2.40	4.03	1.63	2.75	4.18	2.70	3.74	1.04	2.60	3.62	1.02	2.77	3.82	1.05
Avg	2.03	4.13	2.10	1.89	4.12	2.23	2.13	4.13	2.45	3.91	1.46	2.41	3.76	1.35	2.48	4.02	1.54

V = Valuation, PM = Property Management, EA = Estate Agency

knowledge of the professions compared to R_{UB} , the increase in interest in the professions for R_{UA} is lower than R_{UB} .

Valuation seemed to be the profession that both R_{UA} and R_{UB} showed the highest improvement in knowledge. This may be explained by the particularly strong focus by BOVAEAPM on valuation as a condition for accreditation. However, whilst R_{UA} indicated the highest improvement in interest in valuation, R_{UB} showed property management as the profession with the highest improvement in interest. The marked improvement in interest on property management of R_{UB} generally corresponds well to the urgency and effort initiated by BOVAEAPM to increase the number of registered property managers in the country. Furthermore, one of the much debated property management issues at the time of this survey was the implementation of a parliamentary law on strata management which came into effect less than two years ago.

The following comments indicated lecturers' function in providing a positive role model for emulation during study as stated by Nauta and Kokaly (2001).

"During lecture, lecturers also are very supportive and help students like share their experience during they in real estate industry." Student A10

"We got many experienced lecturers. . . most of them like to share their experience. So from that actually they encouraged us. . . From our lecturer, we become enthusiastic or motivated." Student B11

Conversely, this comment was illuminating on the high expectations on lecturers before they can be made role models.

"... a small portion of lecturers couldn't answer students' questions about real estate. For example, regarding valuation aspects, how much or why does x% of adjustment is made..." Student A11

The above results suggest how real estate programmes should be run by lecturers with industry experience and preferably with professional qualifications. As argued by Filstad (2004), role models need to be established members who represent an important knowledge source for newcomers. Additionally, the "multiple contingent role models" advocated by Filstad should be taken into consideration as career interest was indicated to veer towards non-valuation profession i.e. property management.

Programme delivery

Due to the BOVAEAPM and MQA requirements, the programme delivery for both universities is quite similar in terms of syllabus content. Therefore, we did not differentiate between the universities and report only R_{UO} results. The most effective teaching mode to add real estate knowledge was indicated to be through lectures ($f = 42$, 56.8%), followed by talks and seminars ($f = 18$, 24.3%) and tutorials ($f = 7$, 9.5%). On the other hand, the two most effective learning modes were group assignment ($f = 24$, 32.4%) and own study ($f = 23$, 31.1%), followed by project paper/thesis ($f = 10$, 13.5%). The syllabus, non-classroom lectures (seminars, talks, conferences, etc.) and elective courses were generally regarded as useful in developing professionalism, with frequencies of 93.2, 90.5 and 73.0% respectively. This affirms Page (2007b) in that hands-on

experience would facilitate the comprehension and immersion of syllabus content for real estate students.

Students' explanations on the ranking of elements that influenced their professionalism provided further support for programme delivery, for example:

"I chose the syllabus program as the highest element because all the subject courses that I take in university really introduced to me about property management and estate management. It also helped me discover the world of real estate." Student B15

"Programme syllabus is the fundamental element towards my real estate professionalism due to the fact that the syllabus provided the essential knowledge with the regard (sic) the real estate field" Student B17

"The programme syllabus had provided a really strong foundation that is essential in the industry" Student A15

The comments also indicated the importance of lectures and assignments in imparting theoretical knowledge as well as industry experience for PS among respondents. This further supports industry experience and professional qualification among lecturers as they were instrumental in effective programme delivery where examples from real-life cases could facilitate teaching and learning. Although this seemed obvious, the current Malaysian education policy favours academic over professional qualification in lecturer appointment. However, we argue that this gap does not impair the overall quality of real estate programmes in Malaysian public universities as there are policies and requirements for lecturers to undergo industrial attachment as well as employment of part-time lecturers from industry. Another deficiency is how the teaching of reasoning is embedded within the syllabus and not made explicit. Although Malaysian universities use up-to-date teaching methods such as blended learning and virtual learning, the acquisition of reasoning skills is still tacit. A review of current lecturer recruitment policy and teaching methods should be considered.

Soft skills enhancement

Respondents were asked about their opinion on the importance of the ministry-endorsed soft skills for their future career and the improvement of each soft skill during their study. Table 5 presents the mean scores and ranks of the soft skills for R_{UO} , R_{UA} and R_{UB} in terms of their importance and improvement. Entrepreneurship was selected as the most important and most improved soft skill, which can be

Table 5. Mean scores and ranks of soft skills.

	Importance			Improvement		
	R_{UO}	R_{UA}	R_{UB}	R_{UO}	R_{UA}	R_{UB}
Entrepreneurship	6.08 (1)	5.57 (1)	6.43 (1)	6.05 (1)	5.87 (1)	6.18 (1)
Leadership	4.28 (2)	4.37 (2)	4.23 (2)	4.51 (2)	4.20 (3)	4.73 (2)
Lifelong learning and information management	3.99 (3)	3.67 (4)	4.20 (3)	3.80 (4)	4.67 (2)	3.61 (4)
Ethics and moral	3.89 (4)	4.10 (3)	3.75 (5)	4.04 (3)	3.17 (5)	4.23 (3)
Teamwork	3.57 (5)	2.93 (5)	4.00 (4)	3.30 (5)	2.97 (6)	3.52 (5)
Communication	2.64 (6)	2.53 (6)	2.70 (6)	2.92 (6)	3.20 (4)	2.73 (7)
Critical thinking	2.53 (7)	2.30 (7)	2.68 (7)	2.91 (7)	2.77 (7)	3.00 (6)

attributed to the compulsory Basic Entrepreneurship Skill subject that is mandated by the Ministry of Education on all undergraduate programmes whereas all other soft skills are embedded in other subjects. This can lead to a greater awareness of entrepreneurship among undergraduates compared to other soft skills. Overall, communication and critical thinking were placed at the bottom in terms of importance and improvement. Besides the formal classification as mandatory soft skills, communication and critical thinking are also components of reasoning. The negative perception and assessment on their communication and critical thinking skills at the end of the study may present a barrier to further socialisation at industry entry.

The importance of soft skills in developing professionalism was a recurring theme in students' explanation of their ranking of the socialisation elements. The following are some of the examples:

“In the field, soft skills are the most important skill one must possess to actually communicate or influence others” Student A24

“I find that soft skills including communication, the way we treat others, being street smart are among the determinants on whether a real estate professional can succeed further” Student A3

“Although knowledge is important, I’ve come to understand that soft skills is (sic) the most important factor in the workplace. Effective communication is key!” Student A18

“Dealing with client needs good soft skills especially in communication (good in English and Malay, good in Chinese will be added value) to deliver good messages and avoid miss communications (sic). When we are working, we are running the company’s business, thus soft skills is very important to handle any kind of situations.” Student B22

“Because in real working life, soft skills are more important and big influence to (sic) your future career.” Student B31

Noticeably, students are aware that knowledge alone would not make them ready for challenges in the real world and emphasised, in particular, communication as a critical soft skill. As such, some students expressed their satisfaction on the syllabus of the programme which provided opportunities for them to develop their soft skills. The degree of soft skill acquisition would have a bearing on the professional attitude (Blake & Susilawati, 2009) and subsequently PS. It was somewhat worrying that respondents from both universities indicated their critical thinking skill as least important and least improved of all the soft skills.

Mentorship

Mentorship can be considered as the extra reinforcement of PS throughout the real estate programme. The majority of respondents indicated that they did not join any mentorship programme at the university (67.6%). Nonetheless, more than half stated that they had informal mentorship with respected figures. More than two-thirds of respondents cited having lecturer or academic advisor as their mentor, whilst 23.0% indicated having mentors among seniors or alumni. As the closest authoritative figures, lecturer and academic advisor presented trusted figures to the respondents as observed by Jacobi (1991). Clearly, students' expectations on their lecturer or academic advisor

must be fulfilled or the trust capital will deplete. Therefore, lecturers should equip themselves not only with professional but also counselling knowledge and skills to facilitate their guidance and advisory roles. This includes having industry experience and linkages so as to impart current and relevant professional knowledge and skills.

Students' explanations on the role of mentorship, however, varied such as;

"From my opinion (sic), mentorship influenced me to enhance my soft skills in order to meet the market demand towards the industry. With the guidance from lecturers and industrial training supervisor, it helps me more to understand and apply the theory from programme syllabus." Student B6

"I don't find mentorship useful." Student A14

"Mentorship has the least influence for my real estate professionalism because there were not much interaction between mentor and mentees" Student A7

"Mentor's advice gives an expectation of what will we expect in the real estate professionalism (sic)" Student A5

In essence, these comments indicate the lack of formal mentoring activities at both universities and the potential to broaden the role of academic advisor to encompass mentorship. By changing the role of academic advisor to mentor, more career guidance could be given to real estate students, with a positive influence on PS. Interestingly, respondents from University B also mentioned his industrial training supervisor as a mentor besides his lecturers. This suggests the added value of the sandwich format of the real estate programme, but caution should be practised about advocating such a format without further studies.

Conclusion and recommendations

This paper has highlighted the value and process of PS in preparing students for their future employment in the real estate industry. Although the above results indicated that PS had indeed taken place among real estate undergraduates at both universities, attention is directed to the weakness in developing reasoning and critical thinking skills. These skills had been promoted as mandatory in other fields and real estate should not have been an exception. It is also concluded that lecturers are the gatekeepers of PS among real estate students. Therefore, academic staff as encouraged by universities should equip themselves with rich industry knowledge and experience. In fact, such quality has long been recognised as critical for the progress of research universities in Malaysia.

As with other studies, this study acknowledges some limitations, including the small sample number and limiting the sample from two out of four public universities. With a limited sampling, the validity of generalising the results for the whole of the real estate graduates population is undoubtedly low. Additionally, the effects of social factors such as gender and ethnicity on PS were not examined, and can be further explored in future endeavour. More research is needed in order to further explore other perspectives on PS in real estate education, including employers and professional bodies. Finally, as PS also occurs during the graduate's entry into the industry, research on PS during early employment period should also be considered.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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