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Advancing Project Management Education Through A Tailored Module At Uitm

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Abstract– *Project management (PM) is a vital skill across various industries, and its integration into higher education has become increasingly important. However, in academic programs like administrative science, there is a notable gap in structured, contextually relevant PM education. This study aims to explore the challenges faced by students in preparing project proposals and the strategies that can be employed to improve their understanding and application of project management concepts. Through in-depth interviews with two experts in the field, the research identifies key issues students encounter, including difficulty in scoping projects, ineffective use of PM tools (such as work breakdown structures and risk assessments), and challenges with time management and budgeting. The findings emphasize the need for a comprehensive PM module that blends academic writing skills with practical project planning techniques. Key strategies for overcoming the challenges include providing structured templates, early topic refinement sessions, regular consultation opportunities, and hands-on experience with PM tools. Additionally, the experts highlight the importance of addressing common student misconceptions about PM processes and the rationale behind them. The study concludes that developing a tailored PM module for administrative science students is essential to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Such a module should not only equip students with the necessary technical skills but also provide them with the academic and practical tools to create industry-relevant project proposals. The research highlights the potential for curriculum innovation in higher education to better prepare students for the complexities of project management in the real world.*

Index Terms– *Project management, Education, Module.*

I. LITERATURE REVIEW

Project Management (PM) has emerged as a core competency across both public and private sectors, underpinned by the increasing complexity, scale, and interdependence of organizational operations in a rapidly evolving global environment (Kerzner, 2021). As industries face the pressure to deliver outcomes within limited timeframes and budgets, the demand for professionals skilled in planning, executing, and overseeing projects has intensified. Whether in infrastructure development, technology deployment, public sector reforms, or service innovation, project management serves as a structured approach to achieving objectives efficiently and effectively (Sturup, 2019). This growing importance is reflected in the expanding role of PM skills in workforce development. Employers are increasingly seeking graduates who not only possess theoretical knowledge but also demonstrate the ability to lead and manage tasks in real-world, team-based environments. Project management offers a comprehensive framework that encompasses essential soft and technical skills such as communication, time management, budgeting, risk analysis, and stakeholder engagement—skills that are universally applicable across roles and sectors (Pinto & Slevin, 2018).

In response, higher education institutions around the world are progressively integrating project management into their academic offerings. However, while business, engineering, and technology programs have widely adopted PM curricula, other disciplines—such as administrative science, public policy, and the social sciences—have not kept pace. This disparity creates a gap between what students learn and what is required in practice, particularly in fields where project-based work is becoming increasingly common, such as government administration, NGO program management, and organizational development (Papke-Shields & Boyer-Wright, 2017). Administrative science, as an academic discipline, is especially affected by this gap. It prepares students for careers in public

administration, institutional governance, and policy implementation—domains where projects are a primary vehicle for enacting change and delivering services (Ikpebe, 2024). Yet, many administrative science programs still focus heavily on theory, policy analysis, and bureaucratic models, with limited practical application. As a result, students often graduate without the ability to design, plan, or execute projects effectively, which hampers their readiness for professional roles that demand these competencies (Crawford & Nahmias, 2010).

The case for developing structured, contextually relevant project management modules in such disciplines is both timely and compelling. First, it aligns with the broader educational goal of producing graduates who are job-ready and capable of contributing meaningfully from the outset of their careers (Turner & Baker, 2019). Second, it addresses the real-world challenges faced by public institutions, which increasingly rely on project-based approaches to implement reforms, manage resources, and innovate services (Patanakul & Shenhar, 2020). Furthermore, the inclusion of a PM module tailored to administrative science would serve multiple pedagogical and strategic purposes (Kolb & Kolb, 2018). From a pedagogical perspective, it would foster experiential learning by enabling students to apply theoretical concepts to real-world scenarios through simulations, case studies, and group projects. Research has shown that such learning methods significantly enhance students' critical thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving skills—attributes that are vital in administrative and leadership roles.

From a strategic perspective, the integration of PM into the curriculum can help position academic faculties as leaders in curriculum innovation and responsiveness to market needs. For institutions like Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), whose mission includes fostering excellence in public administration and policy studies, the development of a project management module is an opportunity to strengthen their academic programs and increase the employability of their graduates. Moreover, the introduction of such a module supports national and international educational objectives, including Malaysia's push toward IR4.0 (Industrial Revolution 4.0), which emphasizes agility, innovation, and efficiency in both public and private sectors. Project management, with its focus on structured planning and agile execution, is directly aligned with these priorities.

The challenge, however, lies in designing a PM module that is not only academically rigorous but also contextually relevant to the needs of administrative science students. A generic, one-size-fits-all approach borrowed from engineering or business schools may not effectively address the specific challenges and environments encountered in public administration. Instead, the module must be grounded in public-sector realities, using examples, case studies, and project frameworks that reflect the constraints and complexities of governance, community engagement, and policy implementation (Edelenbos & Meerkerk, 2021). For instance, unlike corporate projects driven by profitability and competition, public sector projects are often shaped by political mandates, regulatory frameworks, and social accountability. As such, a PM module for administrative science should include components on managing public funds, dealing with bureaucratic processes, ensuring transparency, and engaging stakeholders with diverse—and sometimes conflicting—interests. Incorporating such topics will ensure that the module is not only relevant but also enriching, preparing students for the actual dynamics of public service work.

Another consideration is the assessment methodology. To truly build PM competencies, the module should move beyond traditional exams and incorporate authentic assessment methods, such as team projects, project charters, Gantt charts, risk management plans, and final project reports or presentations. These practical tasks will give students firsthand experience in managing timelines, resources, and expectations—skills that are essential in any career path involving project oversight. Additionally, the implementation of a project management module should consider the integration of digital tools and software commonly used in the industry, such as Microsoft Project (Almeida et al., 2023). Exposure to such tools will not only enhance students' digital literacy but also make them more competitive in the job market. There is also a broader institutional benefit. Embedding project management education across disciplines promotes a culture of efficiency and innovation within the university itself. Students who are well-versed in project management can contribute to university-led initiatives, research projects, and community engagement programs more effectively, often serving as catalysts for multidisciplinary collaboration and creative problem-solving.

Despite this growing consensus, the actual implementation of PM education in non-traditional disciplines remains inconsistent and underdeveloped. In many universities, including those in Malaysia, project management modules outside of business or engineering faculties are often optional, superficial, or treated as elective coursework rather than as integral components of the core curriculum (Abbasi &

Jaafari, 2018). Where PM content is introduced, it is frequently adapted from business templates, often without sufficient contextualization for the unique challenges and objectives of other fields. Consequently, students in disciplines such as administrative science, policy studies, and the humanities often graduate with limited exposure to structured project work, missing a vital opportunity to develop transferable and in-demand skills. In the Malaysian higher education context, this gap is particularly notable (Palaniappan & Shavarebi, 2021). While Malaysia has made significant strides in enhancing its tertiary education system under frameworks such as the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015–2025 (Higher Education), there remains a pronounced gap in interdisciplinary curriculum integration. Project management is increasingly recognized as a key competency supporting employability, innovation, and national development goals. Yet, tailored PM education for administrative science remains sparse. A review of academic program offerings across Malaysian public universities reveals that while business and engineering students often have access to full PM modules or specializations, students in public administration, political science, and related fields rarely receive equivalent training.

The lack of structured PM education within administrative science is a missed opportunity (Da Assunção Moutinho & Rabechini, 2020). This discipline, which prepares graduates for roles in public service, policy implementation, institutional governance, and social program delivery, is inherently project oriented. Governments and public institutions are increasingly operating through time-bound initiatives aimed at social development, infrastructure improvement, digital transformation, and community engagement. These initiatives require robust planning, stakeholder coordination, resource allocation, and risk management—all of which are core competencies of project management (Da Assunção Moutinho & Rabechini, 2020). Therefore, excluding or underemphasizing PM in administrative science curricula contributes to a readiness gap that can affect the performance and impact of future public sector professionals. One of the major challenges is the lack of Malaysia-based literature and case studies that examine or model the integration of PM education into administrative science (Razak et al., 2019). Most of the available academic work focuses on PM in engineering and business, or on international case studies that may not be directly transferable to the Malaysian context due to differences in governance systems, educational structures, and institutional objectives (Tham, 2013). This literature gap limits educators' ability to benchmark best practices, design localized curricula or build evidence-based teaching methods. Furthermore, it hinders academic discourse and innovation in PM education tailored to the needs of public sector disciplines. To address this, there is a pressing need for curriculum innovation driven by research and local contextual understanding. Such innovation should begin with a comprehensive needs assessment to identify the competencies required by administrative science graduates entering Malaysia's public service and governance sectors. Based on this assessment, a PM module can be designed that incorporates relevant content areas such as public project planning, budgeting and procurement, regulatory compliance, stakeholder engagement in diverse communities, monitoring and evaluation, and ethical governance (Irfan et al., 2021). These elements reflect the project realities in public administration, distinguishing the module from business- or engineering-based counterparts.

In addition to content customization, pedagogical strategies must also be reconsidered. Traditional lecture-based delivery may not be sufficient to instil the dynamic and applied nature of project management. Instead, interactive methods such as case-based learning, project simulations, team-based exercises, and real-world project assignments should be incorporated. Guest lectures from experienced public administrators or project managers in the civil service could also enhance relevance and provide valuable professional insights. Assessment methods should align with real-world expectations by including project proposals, Gantt charts, budgeting exercises, risk matrices, and post-project evaluation reports, rather than relying solely on written examinations. Moreover, there is an opportunity to embed digital literacy into the module by introducing project management software such as Microsoft Project, Trello, or Asana. These tools are widely used in both private and public sectors and would enhance students' technological competencies. As Malaysia continues its push toward digital government and IR4.0 readiness, such digital skills are no longer optional but essential. In the long term, embedding project management into administrative science curricula can yield broader institutional and societal benefits. Universities will be able to produce graduates who are not only theoretically grounded but also practically equipped to contribute effectively in their professional roles.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore expert insights into the development of a project management (PM) module specifically designed for administrative science students. Given the exploratory nature of the study, a qualitative approach was selected to capture in-depth perspectives, contextual understandings, and experiential knowledge that could inform curriculum innovation within higher education. The qualitative design was chosen to allow for a detailed and interpretive understanding of the phenomena under investigation—namely, the development of a PM module tailored to the unique context of administrative science. This design is well-suited for studies that aim to explore complex issues from the perspective of those with deep knowledge and practical experience. Two experts were purposefully selected based on their recognized academic and professional expertise in project management and administrative science. Both individuals hold senior academic positions in Malaysian public universities and have direct experience in curriculum design, program development, and the application of project management principles within the public sector or academic settings. Their expertise ensured that the data collected would be both relevant and reflective of real-world considerations in higher education and project implementation. Data were collected through written interviews, which involved a series of open-ended questions provided to the participants via email. This method was selected to accommodate the participants' schedules and to allow them time to reflect and provide thoughtful, comprehensive responses. Written interviews are a recognized qualitative technique that can yield rich, detailed narratives, particularly when participants are subject-matter experts with a high degree of self-reflection and articulation. Once responses were received, the written data were compiled and subjected to a thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is an established method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within qualitative data. Ethical protocols were observed throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from both participants prior to data collection. They were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and their written responses were stored securely. Any identifying information was removed during analysis to maintain participant privacy.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Challenges in teaching project management

Both experts identified several recurring challenges students face when developing project proposals in the context of project management education. These challenges broadly fall into areas of conceptual understanding, practical application, scope definition, and time and resource management. Expert 1, who has several years of experience teaching project management at the university level, provided a detailed account of the common difficulties encountered by students. According to the expert:

"As a lecturer who taught for the Project Management subject at the university level for the past few years, I have observed several recurring issues faced by students during the preparation of their project proposal papers."

A key issue highlighted involves students' difficulty in defining the scope of their projects appropriately:

"Students often struggle to clearly define the goals and boundaries of their proposed projects. They tend to either aim too broadly, making the project unmanageable, or too narrowly, limiting the relevance and impact."

This observation aligns with broader literature in project management education, where early-stage project scoping is often cited as a crucial yet challenging skill for students (Turner, 2016). Defining a project that is both feasible and meaningful requires both technical understanding and critical thinking, which may not be sufficiently developed in early learners. A second, related challenge involves the application of core project management tools and techniques. Expert 1 notes that:

"A common issue is the failure to integrate key project management concepts such as work breakdown structure (WBS), risk assessment, stakeholder analysis, or project scheduling techniques (e.g., Gantt chart, critical path method). Theoretical knowledge is often not effectively applied to the proposal."

This indicates a significant theory-practice gap, where students may be able to recall concepts but struggle to apply them in context. Risk management is another critical area of concern. Expert 1 emphasized that:

"Risk management is a core aspect of project management, yet students frequently overlook this or provide generic risks without thoughtful mitigation strategies."

This suggests that students may not fully appreciate the strategic importance of risk identification and mitigation in project planning, potentially due to insufficient emphasis on real-world case applications during instruction. Resource allocation and budgeting are also recurring weak points:

"Many students face difficulties in estimating project costs, allocating resources realistically, and justifying the financial needs of their proposals. This is often due to limited understanding of cost estimation techniques."

This insight reveals a gap in financial literacy and practical cost assessment skills among students, reinforcing the argument for a more applied, practice-oriented curriculum that includes exercises in realistic budgeting. Lastly, the irony of students struggling with time management within a project management course was highlighted:

"Despite studying project management, students ironically face time management issues themselves—leaving proposal writing to the last minute and not allocating sufficient time for revisions and feedback."

This problem is not uncommon in higher education, but in the context of a PM course, it reflects a deeper issue of students not internalizing or translating learned principles into their own academic work.

Expert 2 provided a more general but equally telling perspective:

"Students fail to apply the concepts learned in class, particularly fundamental concepts, when developing their project proposals. Consequently, their drafts and proposals frequently lack adequate planning and effectiveness."

This statement supports the earlier observations and underlines the importance of strengthening instructional design to reinforce the relevance and application of PM tools and concepts. It also suggests a need for scaffolding exercises and formative assessments to help students progressively build competence in planning and proposal writing. Hence, both experts point to a convergence of challenges centered on conceptual disconnects, weak application of techniques, and issues with scoping, budgeting, and time management. These findings underscore the importance of a project management module that is not only theoretically robust but also deeply practical, with opportunities for iterative learning, real-life case study analysis, and hands-on project planning tasks.

B. Strategies to Overcome the Challenges

To address the challenges that students face in developing project proposals, both experts highlighted a range of instructional strategies aimed at improving understanding, enhancing application, and supporting student progress throughout the project development process. These strategies reflect a strong emphasis on structured guidance, practical examples, and continuous feedback. Expert 1 outlined several well-established interventions drawn from their teaching practice:

"I have implemented several strategies over the course of my teaching experience:"

One foundational strategy involves providing students with detailed templates to guide the structure and content of their proposals:

"To reduce confusion, I provide structured templates tailored to project management proposals. These templates include detailed instructions and examples for each section (e.g., objectives, scope, WBS, budget)."

Templates serve as scaffolding tools that support students in organizing their ideas and applying project management concepts with greater clarity. In addition, Expert 1 emphasized the importance of early intervention during the ideation stage:

"I organize sessions at the beginning of the semester to help students brainstorm and refine their project topics. This includes guided exercises to narrow down their scope and align their proposals with realistic and relevant project goals."

These early brainstorming sessions provide a proactive approach to one of the most common student pitfalls—overly broad or poorly defined project scopes. By guiding students through topic refinement at the outset, the lecturer reduces downstream issues in proposal coherence and feasibility. Ongoing, personalized support was also highlighted as a critical part of the instructional strategy:

"I dedicate consultation time each week specifically for project proposal discussions. Students are encouraged to seek feedback on their problem statements, methodology, and other components."

This strategy reinforces the role of regular feedback in enhancing academic outcomes and aligns with the formative assessment approach, where learning is continuously supported through low-stakes, constructive input. Expert 1 also described the integration of real-world content and practical tools into the learning process:

"I incorporate case studies and industry-based examples to show how real-world projects are planned and proposed. I also conduct hands-on sessions where students practice using project management tools such as Gantt charts, WBS software."This experiential learning approach allows students to move beyond theoretical abstraction and engage with the practicalities of managing actual projects. The inclusion of

industry-based examples enhances relevance and helps students envision how project management functions in the field, particularly within the public sector context relevant to administrative science.

Expert 2, while offering a more general approach, highlighted the importance of using analogies and context-driven explanation as part of their teaching technique:

"As a tutor, I provide guidance by offering analogies and explaining the rationale behind the need for well-planned and properly executed actions and processes in project management. I also present relevant examples to deepen students' understanding."

This narrative-based approach taps into students' intuitive learning processes, making abstract concepts more relatable and easier to internalize. Analogies can be especially powerful in disciplines where students may not immediately see the connection between theory and practice, such as administrative science. By breaking down complex ideas into familiar terms and situations, tutors can significantly enhance comprehension and retention.

In synthesis, the strategies identified by both experts reflect a multi-faceted, student-centered approach to teaching project management. Key themes include structure (through templates and clear guidelines), early and ongoing support (through consultations and guided planning sessions), experiential learning (via case studies and hands-on tool use), and conceptual reinforcement (using analogies and practical examples). These findings suggest that a well-designed project management module for administrative science should incorporate not only technical instruction but also pedagogical practices that actively guide students through the process of transforming theory into actionable, realistic project proposals. Importantly, the emphasis on contextual examples and application aligns the learning experience more closely with the real-world environments students are being prepared to enter.

C. Criteria of the Comprehensive Project Management Module

Both experts expressed strong support for the development of a dedicated Project Management (PM) module designed to assist students in preparing comprehensive and academically sound project proposal papers. Their insights emphasize the importance of contextualized, structured content that bridges theoretical knowledge with practical application. Expert 1 explicitly endorsed the need for a tailored module:

"Yes, absolutely — providing a Project Management module specifically tailored to the preparation of project proposal papers is not only beneficial, but in many cases essential, especially for students studying the Project Management subject."

This endorsement highlights that students often require more than general project management knowledge—they need targeted instruction aligned with academic expectations and professional standards of proposal writing. A well-designed module can fill this critical gap. Expert 1 further elaborated on the type of content and learning outcomes such a module should aim to deliver:

"The content should be carefully structured to balance academic writing skills and professional project planning practices [...]"

"Equip students with the knowledge and skills required to prepare a comprehensive, industry-relevant, and academically sound project proposal using project management principles and tools."

This perspective reinforces the idea that the module must integrate academic competencies—such as clear writing, logical structuring of proposals—with practical project planning tools—such as work breakdown structures, budgeting, stakeholder analysis. The dual emphasis ensures that students are not only capable of formulating an idea but also able to plan, justify, and present it in a format accepted in both academic and industry settings. Expert 2 also agreed with the necessity of introducing a dedicated PM module:

"Yes, I agree that project management module to be provided."

Their focus was on instructional depth and addressing student misconceptions, which are crucial for improving comprehension and long-term application:

"I believe that emphasizing the rationale for each process in project management, supported by examples from previous projects, is essential for effective learning. In addition, highlighting the common misunderstanding that students have on certain concept."

This suggests that the module should not only teach students how to do something but also why it is done in a certain way. By clarifying the purpose behind project management processes—such as why risk assessment is critical, or how scope creep undermines project goals—students are more likely to internalize and apply these concepts effectively.

The call to address common misunderstandings is especially important in foundational education. Misconceptions—such as confusing project objectives with deliverables or assuming timelines are flexible—

can derail entire proposals. Therefore, a strong module should incorporate diagnostic tools, such as quizzes, reflective exercises, to uncover and correct these gaps early in the learning process.

CONCLUSION

The development of a dedicated Project Management (PM) module, particularly tailored for students in administrative science programs, is both timely and essential. This research highlights the critical gap in existing academic offerings and emphasizes the need for curriculum innovation to better equip students with the skills necessary for successful project planning and execution in real-world environments. The findings from the expert interviews indicate that students face significant challenges in developing project proposals, primarily due to a lack of clarity in project scoping, limited application of core PM tools, and difficulties with time and resource management. These challenges underscore the importance of designing a module that not only imparts theoretical knowledge but also fosters practical application (Kerzner, 2021). The experts emphasized the value of structured guidance, case-based learning, and personalized feedback to support students throughout the proposal-writing process. Furthermore, the research highlights key strategies that can be employed to overcome these challenges (Kerzner, 2021). These include the use of structured templates, early intervention in the topic selection process, regular consultation sessions, and hands-on practice with PM tools. These strategies ensure that students are not only exposed to project management concepts but also have the opportunity to apply these concepts in a structured and supportive learning environment.

The criteria for a comprehensive PM module, as identified by the experts, revolve around balancing academic rigor with professional practice. A well-rounded module should equip students with the knowledge and skills to develop academically sound and industry-relevant project proposals (Ramamonjisoa, 2024). This requires an integration of clear learning objectives, practical applications, conceptual clarity, and the provision of adequate support systems such as templates, examples, and feedback loops. In conclusion, the implementation of a comprehensive Project Management module for administrative science students is not only beneficial but also necessary. It will bridge the gap between theory and practice, enhance students' understanding of project management principles, and prepare them for the challenges of managing projects in the real world. By addressing the common challenges faced by students and incorporating strategies to overcome these obstacles, educational institutions can provide students with the tools they need to succeed in both academic and professional project environments (Ramamonjisoa, 2024).

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