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Research Paper

Generic Skills of The Undergraduates: A Case Study of Faculty of Built Environment in Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

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Abstract

Higher Learning Institution in Malaysia has emphasised on the acquisition of generic skills of graduates' prior employment. The growing number of unemployed graduates is partly due to their poor generic skills. Thus, the purpose of this research is to identify the level of generic skills among undergraduates of Faculty of Built Environment in Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM), Skudai, Johor, Malaysia. Questionnaires were distributed to undergraduates from 4 programmes which are Quantity Surveying; Landscape Architecture; Urban and Regional Planning and Construction. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics. The findings revealed that students' level of generic skills are relatively high among the four programmes with an exception to Quantity Surveying undergraduates whom scored moderately. It is recommended that future research should focus on investigating generic skills of undergraduates from different faculties in UTM as to provide a comprehensive generalisation of UTM's undergraduates'performances.

Keywords: *Generic Skills, Undergraduates, Survey, Descriptive Statistics*

1. Introduction

Malaysia has several Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) both public and private universities, polytechnics and colleges. According to Malaysian Education Blueprint 2015-2025, there is a significant increase of graduates from 106,906 graduates in 2014 to 122,764 in 2015 [1].It is projected that the numbers are expected to increase steadily every year. A study conducted by Noor Azina Ismail [2] claimed that having good grades do not warrant employment for Malaysian graduates. In a survey by JobStreet.com in 2013 revealed that employers are increasingly looking for skills beyond academic achievement when it comes to hiring graduates. The employers are looking for good interpersonal skills and communication. Crawford *et al.*[3] claimed that employers are looking for applicants who possess good communication skills, decision-making skills, problem-solving skills, self-management and teamwork skills. The focus on problem solving skills is anticipated when students engage in lifelong learning environment [4, 5].
Unemployment among graduates has become an issue, not only in Malaysia but also around the world. Unemployed individuals are persons who are available for work but not working during a certain period. They could be either actively or not actively for work during that particular period [6]. Datuk Seri Abdul Wahid Omarstated that 161,000 graduates or 8.8 per cent of youths, aged between 20 and 24 years are still looking for job. According to him, the main reason of unemployed graduates in the country is due to the lack of self-initiative and generic skills [7].

In 2006, Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) has launched Modules of Soft Skills Development for Malaysian Higher Education Institutions which aims at producing quality human capital in term of skills and competitiveness at international level [8].The Module of Soft Skills introduced by MOHE has been implemented by many HEIs, especially in Malaysian public universities. Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) is committed in implementing the module which has been embedded in various in-class learning activities, out-of-class activities as well as curriculum activities. Thus, this paper aims at presenting findings of a study which focused on measuring the level of generic skills of undergraduates particularly in identifying differences of generic skills' among different cohort sand programmes as well as variances of undergraduates' perceptions over the seven types of generic skills.

2. Graduates and Generic Skills Requirement

According to National Graduate Employability Blueprint 2012-2017, Malaysian industries should emphasise on specific skills of graduates when applying for job [1]. These skills are divided into two categories which are hard skills and generic skills.Babić & Slacković [10] named hard skills as "what you know" relating to specific technical knowledge and abilities while doing a job. Hard skills are normally easy to observe and measure due to its relevance to particular job position of a worker [11].However, generic skills have been claimed to be difficult to develop and measure by many authors and researchers.

Many authors have identified eight generic skills for employment which is eight generic skills listed by which are teamwork skills, communication skills, self-initiative and leadership skills, coaching skills, and presentation skills [12]. Babić & Slacković [10] developed list of generic skills among others include teamwork, flexibility, communication skill, time management skills, coordination and organization, creativity, analytical, leadership and negotiation. Sulaiman Md Yassin *et al.* [13] provided seven types of generic skills which are communication, language proficiency, ICT, analytical, learning to learn, numeracy and entrepreneurship. In similar dues, Latisha and Nayan [14] dentified personal attributes are the most important generic skills, followed by team working, self-management, communication, learning, self-initiative, entrepreneurship, planning and organizing and problem solving.

Authors from different countries have listed different set of generic skills which have similarities and consistencies among each other. The New Zealand Curriculum Framework proposed eight essential generic skills namely communication, information, self-management and competitiveness, physical, numeracy, problem solving, cooperative, work and study. Whereas in United Kingdom, Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) developed a set of six generic skills namely information technology, application of numbers, skills in working with others, improve learning and performance and problem solving skills [15]. Meanwhile the Module of Soft Skills for HEIs is Communication Skills (CS), Critical Thinking and Problem Solving Skills (CTPS), Teamwork Skills (TS), Lifelong Learning and Information Management Skills (LL), Entrepreneurial Skills (ES), Professional Ethics and Moralism (EM) and Leadership Skills (LS).Eventhough the module has been developed in 2006, little effort is done in measuring the level of general skills attributes of undergraduate students in Malaysia. Due to the dearth of research in this area, this study is warrant for.

3. Research Methodology

The research approach is quantitative using descriptive survey of Year 1 until Year 4 undergraduates at Faculty of Built Environment, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM). The survey has been distributed to respondents through stratified random sampling methods. The population of students at Faculty of Built Environment, UTM is 650 students (excluding Architecture), which consists of 240 students in Quantity Surveying, 136 students in Landscape Architect, 156 students in Urban and Regional Planning, and 118 students in Construction. Based on Krejcie and Morgan [16], the sample size of the study is 242 students. The distribution of sample size of different programme can be referred to the following **Table 1**. A total of 260 questionnaires were distributed and 210 questionnaires were successfully returned for analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to analysed the survey data.

Table 1: Undergraduates sampling size

Course/ Year	Y1		Y2		Y3		Y4		Total
	(N)	(S)	(N)	(S)	(N)	(S)	(N)	(S)	
Quantity Surveying	45	**15**	65	**21**	68	**22**	62	**20**	**78**
Landscape Architecture	40	**13**	35	**11**	24	**8**	37	**12**	**44**
Urban & Regional Planning	30	**10**	35	**11**	46	**15**	45	**14**	**50**
Construction	24	**8**	32	**10**	19	**6**	43	**14**	**38**
Total		**46**		**53**		**51**		**60**	**210**

4. Results

Undergraduates were asked regarding CS questions which are categorised into three categories. In each category, undergraduates were asked three questions. The descriptions of the categories are as follow:

CS1: The ability to communicate ideas clearly, effectively and confidently, verbally and in writing

CS2: The ability to practice active listening skills and provide feedback

CS3: The ability to make presentations clearly with full of confidence and is compatible with the level of listener

Analyses were conducted on measuring each of the CS categories against Year 1, Year 2, Year 3 and Year 4 undergraduates of all programmes. The comparisons of findings were summarised in **Table 2** (below). It is discovered that Year 1 Urban and Regional Planning undergraduates scored the highest in CS1 and CS2, with a mean score of 4.08, 4.07 and 3.70 respectively. In addition, Year 2 Quantity Surveying undergraduates scored the highest in CS3. It is found that Year 2 Landscape Architecture undergraduates scored the highest in CS2 while Year 2 Urban and Regional Planning obtained the highest in CS2 and CS3 respectively at 3.91. Year 3 Landscape Architecture reflected the highest mean score of 3.94 in CS1 while Year 3 Urban and Regional Planning undergraduates obtained 3.82 and 4.07 in both CS2 and CS3. Interestingly, it is found that Year 4 Urban and Regional Planning undergraduates obtained the highest mean score in all CS categories.

Table 2. Communication Skills by Year

COMMUNICATION SKILLS	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
CS1				
Quantity Surveying	4.05	3.85	3.72	3.66
Landscape Architecture	3.63	3.86	3.94	3.60
Urban & Regional Planning	4.08	3.82	3.77	3.70
Construction	3.41	3.75	3.63	3.64
CS2				
Quantity Surveying	3.84	3.73	3.67	3.77
Landscape Architecture	3.80	3.73	3.58	3.64
Urban & Regional Planning	4.07	3.91	3.82	3.95
Construction	3.59	3.87	3.44	3.83
CS3				
Quantity Surveying	3.70	3.74	3.45	3.73
Landscape Architecture	3.58	3.82	3.63	3.67
Urban & Regional Planning	3.70	3.91	4.07	3.86
Construction	3.44	3.65	3.75	3.75

The survey questionson CTPS are divided into three categories where each category consists of two questions. The descriptions of the categories are as follow:

CTPS1: The ability to identify and analyse problems in complex and ambiguous situation, and make justified evaluations

CTPS2: The ability to develop and improve thinking skills such as explaining, analyzing and evaluating the discussion

CTPS3: The ability to seek ideas and find alternative solutions

Results of CTPS section are presented in **Table 3** below. Findings from CTPS section revealed that Year 1 Landscape Architecture undergraduates scored the highest in CTPS1 (3.50) and Year 1 Construction undergraduates in CTP2 (3.56). In similar category, Year 1 Quantity Surveying undergraduates scored the highest in CTPS3. It is found that Year 2 Landscape Architecture undergraduates and Construction undergraduates scored the highest in CTPS1 with a mean score of 3.55. While Year 2 Construction obtained the highest in CTPS2 and CTPS3 respectively at 3.60. It is worth to highlight that Year 3 Urban and Regional Planning undergraduates achieved the highest mean score in all CTPS categories. Whereas Year 4Urban and Regional Planning undergraduates attained the highest mean score of 3.93 in CTPS1 and 4.00 in CTPS2. In addition, Year 4 Construction undergraduates scored the highest for CTPS3 with a mean score of 3.89.

Table 3. Critical Thinking and Problem Solving Skills by Year

CRITICAL THINKING AND PROBLEM SOLVING SKILLS	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
CTPS1				
Quantity Surveying	3.27	3.46	3.45	3.55
Landscape Architecture	3.50	3.55	3.50	3.88
Urban & Regional Planning	3.35	3.23	3.53	3.93
Construction	3.25	3.55	3.50	3.46
CTPS2				
Quantity Surveying	3.53	3.52	3.70	3.68
Landscape Architecture	3.42	3.55	3.63	3.75
Urban & Regional Planning	3.55	3.45	3.70	4.00
Construction	3.56	3.60	3.67	3.82
CTPS3				
Quantity Surveying	3.70	3.33	3.45	3.38
Landscape Architecture	3.46	3.36	3.81	3.71
Urban & Regional Planning	3.45	3.36	3.90	3.79
Construction	3.44	3.60	3.58	3.89

The survey questions on TS consist of six questions which are categorised in three categories. In each category, undergraduates were asked based on two questions. The descriptions of the categories are as follows:

TS1: The ability to build good relationships, interact with others and work effectively with them to achieve common objectives

TS2: The ability to understand and undertake the roles between the group leader and group members interchangeably

TS3: The ability to recognize and respect towards others attitude

The comparisons between TS of undergraduates and programmes were presented in **Table 4** (below). It is discovered that Year 1 Construction undergraduates scored the highest in TS1, TS2 and TS3witha mean score of 3.81, 3.75 and 4.38 respectively. In similar category, Year 2 Construction undergraduates scored the highest in TS1 and TS2 with a mean score of 4.10 and 4.15 accordingly. Whereas Year 2 Urban and Regional Planning undergraduates scored the highest mean score of 4.05 for TS3. It is found that Year 3Construction undergraduates scored the highest mean score of 4.08, 4.08 and 4.42 in TS1, TS2 and TS3; while Year 4 Urban and Regional Planning obtained the highest in TS1, TS2 and TS3 with a mean score of4.21, 4.43 and 4.39 correspondingly.

Table 4. Teamwork Skills by Year

TEAMWORK SKILLS	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
TS1				
Quantity Surveying	3.57	3.43	3.61	3.83
Landscape Architecture	3.69	3.77	3.50	3.54
Urban & Regional Planning	3.60	3.77	3.47	4.21
Construction	3.81	4.10	4.08	4.07
TS2				
Quantity Surveying	3.73	3.29	3.84	3.85
Landscape Architecture	3.69	3.68	3.80	3.88
Urban & Regional Planning	3.60	3.73	3.53	4.43
Construction	3.75	4.15	4.08	3.93
TS3				
Quantity Surveying	3.53	3.95	3.95	3.98
Landscape Architecture	3.88	4.00	3.94	4.00
Urban & Regional Planning	3.95	4.05	3.93	4.39
Construction	4.38	4.00	4.42	4.14

The survey questions on LL are divided into two categories where each category consists of two questions. The descriptions of the categories are as follows:

LL1: The ability to find and manage relevant information from various sources

LL2: The ability to accept new ideas and capable of autonomous learning

Results from LL category are presented in **Table 5** below. Finding from LL revealed that Year 1 Landscape Architecture undergraduates scored the highest in LL1 and LL2 with a mean score of 3.62 and 4.08. In similar category, Year 2Landscape Architecture undergraduates scored the highest in LL2 (4.00) while Year 2 Construction undergraduates obtained the highest in LL1 (3.90). It is found that Year 3 Construction undergraduates attained the highest in LL1 with a mean score of 3.92. Meanwhile Year 3 Urban and Regional Planning obtained the highest in LL2 respectively at 3.87. It is also found that Year 4Landscape Architecture undergraduates obtained the highest mean score in LL1. Outstandingly, Year 4 Urban and Regional Planning undergraduates' perceptions are the highest for LL2 with a mean score of 4.21.

Table 5. Life Long Learning & Information Management Skills by Year

LIFE LONG LEARNING & INFORMATION MANAGEMENT SKILLS	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
LL1				
Quantity Surveying	3.50	3.67	3.68	3.88
Landscape Architecture	3.62	3.68	3.56	3.96
Urban & Regional Planning	3.20	3.41	3.60	3.93
Construction	3.25	3.90	3.92	3.93
LL2				
Quantity Surveying	3.70	3.90	3.80	3.73
Landscape Architecture	4.08	4.00	3.75	3.92
Urban & Regional Planning	4.00	3.82	3.87	4.21
Construction	3.63	3.90	3.83	4.07

The undergraduates were surveyed regarding ES which related to their abilities to identify business opportunities that are divided into six questions. The comparisons between different programmes arepresented in **Table 6** (below). It is discovered that all cohorts of undergraduates in Construction attained the highest in ES with a mean score of 3.25, 3.60, 3.69 and 3.83 accordingly.

Table 6. Entrepreneurial Skills and Entrepreneurial Skills by Year

ENTREPRENEURIAL SKILLS	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
ES1				
Quantity Surveying	3.00	3.14	3.33	3.27
Landscape Architecture	2.81	3.23	3.21	3.50
Urban & Regional Planning	3.00	2.99	3.49	3.37
Construction	3.25	3.60	3.69	3.83

The survey questions related to EM consist of four questions which are categorised in two categories. In each category undergraduates were asked two questions. The descriptions of the categories are as follows:

EM1: The ability to understand the impact of economics, environmental and sociocultural in professional practice

EM2: The ability to analyse and make decisions in solving problems related to ethics

Results from EM category are presented in **Table 7** below. Findings revealed that Year 1 Landscape Architecture undergraduates obtained the highest in EM1 while Year 1 Urban and Regional Planning undergraduates attained the highest in EM2 with a mean score of 4.35 and 3.80 respectively. In similar category, Year 2 Landscape Architecture undergraduates and Urban and Regional Planning undergraduates achieved the highest score for EM1 and EM2with a mean score of 4.32. Overall, Year 3 Construction undergraduates scored the highest in EM1 (4.42) while Quantity Surveying undergraduates scored the highest in EM2 (3.84). It is found that Year 4 Quantity Surveying undergraduates obtained the highest in EM1 with a mean score of 4.35 while Year 4 Landscape Architecture undergraduates achieved the highest in EM2 (4.08).

Table 7. Professional Ethics and Moralism by Year

PROFESSIONAL ETHICS AND MORALISM	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
EM1				
Quantity Surveying	4.17	4.26	4.18	4.35
Landscape Architecture	4.35	4.32	4.38	4.13
Urban & Regional Planning	4.00	4.09	4.30	4.32
Construction	4.00	4.05	4.42	4.11
EM2				
Quantity Surveying	3.70	3.48	3.84	3.75
Landscape Architecture	3.62	3.77	3.25	4.08
Urban & Regional Planning	3.80	4.32	3.40	3.57
Construction	3.38	3.90	3.33	3.68

The survey questions on LS are divided into two categories where each category consists of three questions. The descriptions of the categories are as follows:

LS1: Basic knowledge of leadership
LS2: The ability to lead projects

The comparison between cohorts of undergraduates and programmes for LS were presented in **Table 8** (below). It is discovered that Year 1 Urban and Regional Planning undergraduates scored the highest in LS1 while Year 1 Architect Landscape obtained the highest in LS2with a mean score of 3.90 and 4.08 respectively. In addition, Year 2 Construction undergraduates scored the highest in LS1 and LS2 with a mean score of 3.85 and 4.15 respectively. It is found that Year 3 Urban and Regional Planning undergraduates achieved the highest in LS1 at 3.68 while Year 3 Quantity Surveying undergraduates obtained the highest in LS2 at 4.00. In similar category, the highest score for LS1 and LS2 of Year 4 Urban and Regional Planning undergraduates are 4.05 and 4.29 accordingly.

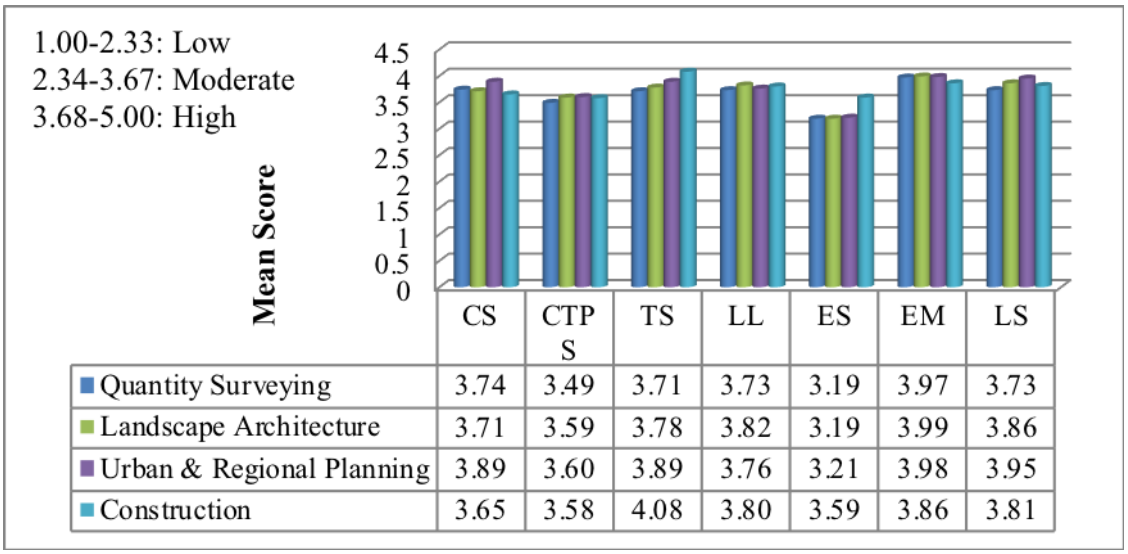
Table 8. Leadership Skills by Year

Leadership Skills	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
LS1				
Quantity Surveying	3.53	3.67	3.42	3.58
Landscape Architecture	3.87	3.82	3.59	3.79
Urban & Regional Planning	3.90	3.80	3.68	4.05
Construction	3.66	3.85	3.63	3.61
LS2				
Quantity Surveying	3.87	3.93	4.00	3.80
Landscape Architecture	4.08	4.05	3.75	3.96
Urban & Regional Planning	4.00	3.95	3.93	4.29
Construction	3.81	4.15	3.83	3.93

Findings from the survey indicated that undergraduates of Faculty of Built Environment have relatively high generic skills acquisition. The summary of the undergraduates' generic skills acquisition is presented in **Figure 1**.

Result from the survey related to communication skills (CS) highlighted that undergraduates in all programmes obtained relatively high scores with an exception of the Construction undergraduates who attained 3.65 mean score. As for critical thinking and problem solving skills (CTPS), all undergraduates scored moderately. Interestingly, all undergraduates in all programmes perceived highly on teamwork skills (TS). In the lifelong learning (LL) category, all undergraduates claimed high level of lifelong learning skills. All undergraduates claimed to have moderate entrepreneurial skills but high professional ethics and moralism (EM) and leadership skills (LS).

Further analyses were conducted in order to identify the differences between programmes with seven types of generic skills. **Table 9** (below) showed the frequencies of undergraduates' high perceptions over seven types of generic skills. Therefore, it is concluded that Urban and Regional Planning undergraduates scored the highest in CS, CTPS and LS categories. However, in terms of TS and ES, the Construction undergraduates obtained the highest score compared to other programmes. In addition, Quantity Surveying undergraduates attained the highest score in LL. Interestingly, results showed that all programmes obtained relatively high in the EM category.



	CS	CTPS	TS	LL	ES	EM	LS
Quantity Surveying	3.74	3.49	3.71	3.73	3.19	3.97	3.73
Landscape Architecture	3.71	3.59	3.78	3.82	3.19	3.99	3.86
Urban & Regional Planning	3.89	3.60	3.89	3.76	3.21	3.98	3.95
Construction	3.65	3.58	4.08	3.80	3.59	3.86	3.81

Fig. 1. Overall Finding on Different Type of Generic Skills of Undergraduates by Different Programmes

Table 9. Frequencies of undergraduates' high perceptions over seven types of generic skills

Programme/Generic Skills	**Y1**	**Y2**	**Y3**	**Y4**	**Y1**	**Y2**	**Y3**	**Y4**	**Y1**	**Y2**	**Y3**	**Y4**	∑
COMMUNICATION SKILLS													
	CS1				CS2				CS3				
Quantity Surveying	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●		●	10
Landscape Architecture		●		●	●	●				●		●	6
Urban & Regional Planning	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	12
Construction		●				●		●			●	●	5
CRITICAL THINKING AND PROBLEM SOLVING SKILLS													
	CTPS1				CTPS2				CTPS3				
Quantity Surveying							●	●	●				3
Landscape Architecture				●				●			●	●	4
Urban & Regional Planning				●			●	●			●	●	5
Construction							●	●				●	3
TEAMWORK SKILLS													
	TS1				TS2				TS3				
Quantity Surveying				●	●		●	●		●	●	●	7
Landscape Architecture	●	●			●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	10
Urban & Regional Planning		●		●		●		●	●	●	●	●	8
Construction	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	12
LIFELONG LEARNING SKILLS													
	LS1				LS2								
Quantity Surveying		●	●	●	●	●	●	●					7
Landscape Architecture		●		●	●	●	●	●					6
Urban & Regional Planning				●	●	●	●	●					5
Construction		●	●	●		●	●	●					6
ENTREPRENEURIAL SKILLS													
	ES1												
Quantity Surveying													0
Landscape Architecture													0
Urban & Regional Planning													0
Construction			●	●									2
PROFESSIONAL ETHICS AND MORALISM													
	EM1				EM2								
Quantity Surveying	●	●	●	●	●		●	●					7
Landscape Architecture	●	●	●	●		●		●					7
Urban & Regional Planning	●	●	●	●	●	●							7
Construction	●	●	●	●		●		●					7
LEADERSHIP SKILLS													
	LS1				LS2								
Quantity Surveying		●			●	●	●	●					5
Landscape Architecture	●	●		●	●	●	●	●					7
Urban & Regional Planning	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●					8
Construction		●			●	●	●	●					5

Figure 2 represents the mapping of the overall generic skills acquisition of undergraduates from Faculty of Built Environment, UTM. It is indicated that Landscape Architecture, Urban and Regional Planning and Construction undergraduates claimed high level generic skills acquisition whereas Quantity Surveying undergraduates only attained at a moderate level. The highest mean score of generic skills perceived by Construction undergraduates is 3.77 while the lowest mean score professed by Quantity Surveying undergraduates is 3.65. The second highest mean score is obtained by Urban and Regional Planning undergraduates(3.75) followed by the Landscape Architecture undergraduates (3.71).

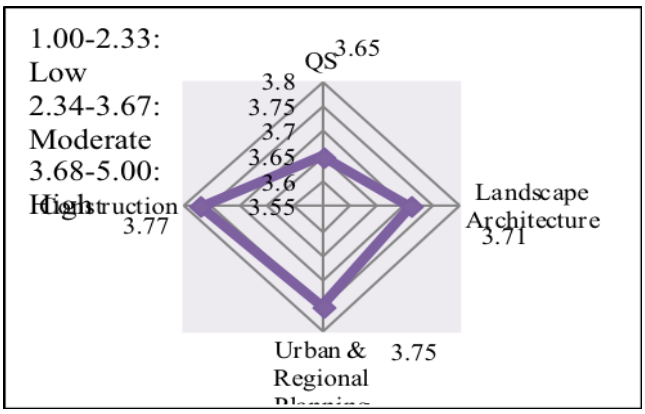


Fig. 2. Mapping of the Overall Level of Generic Skills by Students of Faculty of Built Environment in UTM

5. Discussions

The overall result shows a good level of generic skills by students of Built Environment in UTM and most of the mean scores are between 3.50 and 4.00.In brief, findings from the study are paralleled to previous work of other authors in the field. CS which is highly regarded by Zanaton Haji Iksan *et al.* [17] is also found as significant in this study. In particular the undergraduates of Urban and Regional Planning. CTPS which is emphasized by Roselina Shakir [18] is only important as perceived by the final year of undergraduates.However, TS which is emphasized by Tarricone & Luca [19], is important as perceived by all undergraduates explicitly Construction undergraduates. While profess there was not much differences among undergraduates' perception over ethics. This may be due to lack of understanding of the expectation of professional ethics and guidelines due to the fact they have not graduated and work in the industry. In addition, Shaizatul Azreen Rodzalan and Maisarah Mohamed Saat found that [20]. that have high level of ethics, however it differs when the situation is beyond their control and when the situation involved their friends. The study also has indicated that students tend not to behave unethically such as plagiarism and stealing. The findings for the study can be generalized to the graduates of FAB UTM Therefore it is suggested for future research to conduct on a bigger sample size so that a conclusive level of generic skills of utm undergraduates can be obtained.

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