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## **Fostering university-community engagement in Malaysia**

### **An Interview with YABhg. Tun Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad, former Prime Minister of Malaysia**

*By Justin Yong and Munir Shuib, IPPTN, USM*

Universities have traditionally functioned as institutions of higher learning devoted to the search and discovery of knowledge and truth. For the university, the development of knowledge is made through research, which is transmitted through the process of teaching and learning. An example is the establishment of the University of Halle in the 17th century, where this university was known as the earliest pioneer of free inquiry, scientific ways of thinking and rationalism in university education. However, such a conception of the university as a centre of research for the discovery of truth among elite intellectuals, commonly known as an ivory tower, has since evolved. The universities of today are pursuing a more active involvement in society with the objectives of community development in preparing its citizens with greater knowledge, nurturing students for the workforce, and producing skill-focused graduates with the underlying idea of developing individuals as human capital for the economy and society.

As universities evolved beyond the ivory tower, there has been a shift in focus as well as the involvement of different stakeholders. Particularly as the perceived social and economic importance of universities increases, the parties who may have a stake in university education have also increased. For example, employers are increasingly being considered a stakeholder in university education who may inform universities of the criteria and types of graduates they prefer, and in return, universities may then respond by tailoring their curriculum to meet the needs, expectations and the job market requirements of employers. To understand the scenario of university-community engagement in Malaysia, we spoke to Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, the former Prime Minister of Malaysia. Among the selected issues explored were the level of engagement of universities to their communities, respective responsibilities, the need to work together to bring about success and the contribution of Malaysian universities to their community.

**Tun, how do you see the current university-community relationship in Malaysia and what is your take on the direction of university-community relations in the future?**

*Universities have always performed their function as centres of excellence and knowledge sharing. However, I feel the university should no longer act in this capacity alone, but should instead move towards having closer relations with the community. The key, in forging this close relationship, is for the university to know the agenda set forth by the community. For instance, in line with the aspiration of Malaysia to be an industrialised state, I believe universities ought to move in the same direction and create education in line with change. This change*

**“All in all, I believe that relevance must always be maintained because the end goal of university-community engagement is for the development of the community.”**

*can then be incorporated into the experience of undergraduates who would have a part to play in the wider Malaysian industries and economy. All in all, I believe that relevance must always be maintained because the end goal of university-community engagement is for the development of the community. Thus, in their task of acquiring and enhancing knowledge, universities should never isolate themselves from the aspirations of the community.*

**In regards to the contribution of university to their community, Tun, what are your expectations from the university?**

*The university-community engagement theme requires that universities contribute back to society. Among the contributions, which I am hoping for is that universities teach industrial management. I believe this is important because each industry has its own unique management know-how. The responsibility to teach values such as integrity, punctuality, and quality in industrial management and products can be contributed by the university. In addition, there is a need for specialised universities to contribute in the training of the workforce for selected fields. For example, in the past, it was commonly understood that a person qualified in geography and history can become an administrator. But the needs of today have changed. A person must be trained in public administration if he wishes to apply for the post. I see this importance increasing as the workforce becomes more specialised and industries requiring relevant skills. Equal importance must also be placed in the involvement of universities in community activities and not merely in the thinking of their responsibility to the community.*

**In your opinion, how far have the universities in Malaysia recognised the importance of engaging the community and what areas can be improved?**

*The universities in Malaysia acknowledge the need for greater involvement with the industry as well as affecting change within the community. However, efforts by the universities to affect change must be quicker as the industry evolves quickly and continuously. With the national shift from a labour intensive industry to a knowledge-driven industry, I would consider knowledge intensity as the primary focus of the universities' contribution to the community. This emphasis on speedy change is because of a “time lag” between universities knowing the needs of society and actually acting on them.*

*I also believe that there is a need to reassess the general universities' involvement with the community. I feel that universities in Malaysia do not give attention to the culture and value systems which play a major role when the knowledge gained is applied. It is necessary for universities and other educational institutions to instil in the students and graduates the right attitude which will ensure their knowledge will be well applied in whatever work they do. Certainly the graduates should know well the “disciplines of the workplace”, without which the knowledge cannot be translated into high productivity and quality.*

**Tun, what is the role and responsibility of both the university and community towards each other?**

*For the university, I believe they ought to increase their research activities, including their understanding of society's problems and challenges. Among these would be the issues of unemployment and illiteracy. In the past,*

*universities dedicated themselves mainly as a disseminator of knowledge. However, the universities of today are also expected to focus on research and development as one of their primary activities. This shift ensures a continual production and construction of new knowledge and ideas. This is the ultimate responsibility of the university to the community. The community, on the other hand, is also responsible to contribute to the universities. However, I foresee this scenario as unlikely to happen in Malaysia. The community, at large, has yet to develop a culture of repaying universities, and continues to believe that it is the responsibility of the government to provide for them. In foreign universities such as Harvard University, successful graduates would donate millions back to their alma mater. I believe this is due to a lack of gratitude on the part of the Malaysian society as the underlying reason for this scenario. This problem can be traced to a poor system of character development, whereby the community always expects to receive but not to give. When a community does not work for its own success, it will have no sense of ownership and thus no healthy sense of pride. In turn, this would result in a lack of thankfulness and gratitude.*

### **What is the best solution for an effective cooperation to take place between the university and the community?**

*For effective cooperation to take place between university and the community, the Ministry of Higher Education must act as a coordinator. A lack of coordination when working together would create difficulties for both universities and the community. An example would be the increase of graduates in courses that are not in tandem with the job prospects in the economy. In this case, the Ministry of Higher Education should obtain an overall view of society's development in general. If they are able to obtain this view, they will be able to assess the relevant needs. I recalled that during my time as Prime Minister, the Ministry of Education facilitated the starting of the twinning programme of private universities as a response to the needs of the poorer but bright Malaysian Chinese students. These students were not able to self-finance their education abroad. Hence, the twinning programme was set up as an affordable alternative for these students. This example clearly illustrates the role of the Ministry of Education in coordinating the private universities and community to work effectively at addressing a prevailing need.*

**“In foreign universities such as Harvard University, successful graduates would donate millions back to their alma matter.”**

The current emphasis on universities as contributors towards economic growth has shifted the university-community engagement onto a new path. As Tun Mahathir points out, community engagement in its essence should not only see the economic role played by universities in response to the demands made by the community. Having such a perspective on engagement does not address other equally pressing needs of society such as character building. Instead, the university must know the full agenda set forth by the community. Knowing this agenda enables the university to maintain its relevance to the society in the face of many changes. The university must combine researched knowledge with society's development in mind to create a comprehensive education aligned with change.

# The Changing Gender Disparity in Malaysian Higher Education: Where are the boys?

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## Abstract

Participation in higher education has traditionally been dominated by males, but over the past decades, gender differentials in higher education have narrowed and reversed in favour of the females. In Malaysia, females now outnumber males in higher education institutions (HEIs) and in most fields of study. This paper seeks to illustrate the extent of the gender gap in Malaysian higher education across different HEIs, levels of study and fields of study. More importantly, this paper argues the need of understanding the underrepresentation of boys, the challenges that impede their transition from secondary to higher education and highlight the possible implications due to gender imbalance and a lack of an understanding of the boys.

## Introduction

Traditionally, higher education was dominated by males, and females were significantly under-represented. The oldest university in the English-speaking world, Oxford University, for more than 800 years had only admitted male students, and it was only in 1920 that female students were enrolled as full members of the university. Similarly, females were excluded by statute from colleges and universities in the United States until the 1850s when women's colleges were established (Thelin, 2004).

However, over the past two decades, female participation in higher education has increased tremendously. Females have since overtaken males in higher education, giving rise to a reversed gender gap. In the United Kingdom, females in higher education for the first time equalled males in 1992 and since then, more women than men were enrolled in British higher education institutions (HEIs) and the gender gap continues to widen (Broecke and Hamed, 2008). The dominance of females is not only a trend in developed or Western countries, but also in the Asia Pacific region. More interestingly, even in societies that are known to be dominated by males such as the Saudi Arabia, the gross enrolment ratio for females have been significantly higher than males and women have become the majority group in higher education (World Bank, 2008). Statistics revealed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2012) indicate that in most Asia Pacific countries, the gross enrolment ratio for females is significantly higher than males and females are the majority in higher education, with the exception of Cambodia, Laos and the Republic of Korea, and to a lesser degree, Indonesia (see Table 1).

In Malaysia, females made up 56 percent of total enrolment in HEIs in 2009, with gross enrolment ratios of 45 percent as compared to 35 percent for males (UNESCO, 2012). The fact that males are lagging behind females raises the question: Where are the boys and why are they not transiting into higher education?

This article attempts to highlight the reversal in gender in Malaysian higher education, which becomes much more critical as we begin to examine the participation of females and males across the types of HEIs, levels of study and fields of study.

## Types of HEIs and Levels of Study

In 2011, there were 937,229 students in Malaysian higher education, whereby 54 percent and 46 percent were enrolled in public and private HEIs respectively (see Table 2). Yet, the gender proportion within public and private HEIs differs considerably. In public HEIs, the percentages of male to female were 40 percent and 60 percent respectively. Females outnumbered males at all levels of study, except for the doctorate level. More importantly, as undergraduates pursuing a Bachelor's degree were the bulk of students in public HEIs which amounted to almost 60 percent of the student population, the gender gap at this level was the widest where the percentages of male and female were 38 percent to 62 percent.

Conversely, in private HEIs, the overall percentages of male and female were 49 percent and 51 percent, and females outnumbered the males across all levels of study, except for the 'others' category that include certificate, professional courses, advanced diploma and other qualifications. Interestingly, in the levels classified as 'others', the number of males is higher than females. It was only at the Bachelor's level that the proportions of male and female were level.

In general, the gender gap is a much more serious concern in public HEIs than private HEIs. Particularly at the Bachelor's level in public HEIs, the significantly smaller proportion of males suggests a need to understand why boys are not getting enrolled in public HEIs. The plausible explanations to such a trend: females are more likely to do better academically than males (Broecke and Hamed, 2008), and there is a higher proportion of males as compared to females who stopped schooling at the primary and secondary level (Tey, 2006). Hence, females are more likely to stay on in full time

**TABLE 1** Gross Enrolment Ratios and Percentage of Female Students in Tertiary Education across Countries in Asia Pacific

Country	Gross Enrolment Ratio (Male)	Gross Enrolment Ratio (Female)	Gross Enrolment Ratio (Total)	Percentage of Female Students
Australia (2010)	68	92	80	56
Brunei (2011)	15	25	20	62
Cambodia (2011)	18	11	14	38
China (2010)	25	27	26	50
Hong Kong (2011)	57	63	60	51
Indonesia (2010)	24	22	23	47
Laos (2011)	20	15	18	42
Malaysia (2009)	35	45	40	56
Myanmar (2011)	13	17	15	58
New Zealand (2010)	67	99	83	58
Philippines (2009)	25	31	28	54
Republic of Korea (2010)	119*	86	103*	39
Singapore (2012)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	50
Thailand (2011)	41	54	48	56
Vietnam (2010)	22	22	22	49

Source: UNESCO, 2012

\* Gross Enrolment Ratio can be greater than 100 percent as a result of grade repetition and entry at ages younger or older than the typical age of that grade level.

**TABLE 2** Enrolment in Public and Private HEIs by Levels of Study and Gender, 2011

Level	Public			Private		
	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total
Doctorates	12,846 (57)	9,748 (43)	22,594	2,879 (48)	3,071 (52)	5,950
Masters	22,226 (42)	31,041 (58)	53,267	8,124 (57)	6,193 (43)	14,317
Bachelors	112,273 (38)	186,906 (62)	299,179	90,263 (50)	89,802 (50)	180,065
Diploma	43,667 (41)	62,069 (59)	105,736	76,962 (45)	94,235 (55)	171,197
Others	10,721 (39)	16,759 (61)	27,480	31,589 (55)	25,855 (45)	57,444
<b>Total</b>	<b>201,733 (40)</b>	<b>306,523 (60)</b>	<b>508,256</b>	<b>209,817 (49)</b>	<b>219,156 (51)</b>	<b>428,973</b>

Source: MOHE, 2012

education, take up pre-university programmes and pursue higher education. Specifically in the context of Malaysia, given that access to public HEIs is much more competitive with a strong emphasis on academic performance in secondary schools and pre-university programmes, the selection criterion results in more females being enrolled in public HEIs. Moreover, it may be also for the same reason that there are relatively more males in private HEIs than public HEIs, where access to private HEIs is less competitive and is more flexible to accommodate different routes into the Bachelor's programme.

### Fields of Study

There is a clear gender pattern across the fields of study and the gender gap in some fields of study is even wider (see Table 3). In technical disciplines such as engineering, manufacturing and construction, the number of males significantly outnumbered females. Yet, the gender gap in

technical disciplines has reduced between 2008 and 2011 and the reduction has been much more significant in public HEIs than private HEIs.

Apart from the technical disciplines and non-disciplinary basic programmes in private HEIs, the gender gaps in education, humanities and social sciences, and sciences are skewed heavily towards females. Between 2008 and 2011, the percentages of male and female across these disciplines were relatively constant, except for sciences in private HEIs where the gap has reduced from 38 and 62 percent to 44 and 56 percent respectively.

The fields of study also reflect the gender gap from a different perspective. Among the twenty public HEIs in Malaysia, there are six HEIs where the number of male students is higher than female students. Interestingly, five of the six HEIs specialise in engineering and technology, while the other HEI specialises in defence studies. In these

six specialised HEIs, the percentages of male and female were 56 percent and 44 percent (see Table 4). However, the gender gap in the remaining 14 public HEIs pictured a contrasting scenario that underline an alarming trend in Malaysian higher education. The percentages of male and female across these 14 public HEIs were 25 percent and 75 percent, or simply a ratio of one boy to three girls.

**TABLE 3** Enrolment in Public and Private HEIs by Field of Study and Gender, 2008 and 2011

HEI	Field	2008			2011		
		Male (%)	Female (%)	Total	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total
Public HEIs	Education	12,682 (31)	28,828 (69)	41,510	12,867 (30)	29,957 (70)	42,824
	Humanities & Social Sciences	61,033 (33)	126,350 (67)	187,383	81,890 (34)	157,986 (66)	239,876
	Science	36,105 (37)	61,090 (63)	97,195	40,293 (36)	70,215 (64)	110,508
	Technical	57,130 (62)	35,375 (38)	92,505	66,683 (58)	48,365 (42)	115,048
	Others	341 (45)	421 (55)	762	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
	<b>Total</b>	<b>167,291 (40)</b>	<b>252,064 (60)</b>	<b>419,355</b>	<b>201,733 (40)</b>	<b>306,523 (60)</b>	<b>508,256</b>
Private HEIs	Basic Programme	5,393 (48)	5,894 (52)	11,287	9,889 (51)	9,427 (49)	19,316
	Education	8,190 (31)	18,469 (69)	26,659	10,694 (31)	23,715 (69)	34,409
	Humanities & Social Sciences	72,348 (40)	108,183 (60)	180,531	100,143 (47)	112,948 (53)	213,091
	Science	46,041 (38)	75,358 (62)	121,399	45,710 (44)	59,212 (56)	104,922
	Technical	46,391 (77)	13,585 (23)	59,976	43,381 (76)	13,854 (24)	57,235
	<b>Total</b>	<b>181,547 (46)</b>	<b>214,439 (54)</b>	<b>399,852</b>	<b>209,817 (49)</b>	<b>219,156 (51)</b>	<b>428,973</b>

Source: MOHE, 2012

**TABLE 4** Enrolment in Public HEIs by Gender, 2011

Public HEIs	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total
Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris	6,259 (28)	15,955 (72)	22,214
Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin	1,855 (29)	4,456 (71)	6,311
Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia	2,711 (29)	6,679 (71)	9,390
Universiti Malaysia Terengganu	2,248 (31)	5,015 (69)	7,263
Universiti Malaysia Kelantan	904 (33)	1,866 (67)	2,770
Universiti Malaysia Sarawak	3,631 (33)	7,296 (67)	10,927
Universiti Malaysia Sabah	6,396 (35)	11,621 (65)	18,017
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia	9,346 (37)	15,647 (63)	24,993
Universiti Putra Malaysia	11,462 (37)	19,718 (63)	31,180
Universiti Utara Malaysia	11,629 (37)	19,988 (63)	31,617
Universiti Teknologi MARA	68,673 (37)	116,349 (63)	185,022
Universiti Sains Malaysia	11,648 (41)	16,629 (59)	28,277
Universiti Malaya	10,957 (42)	15,384 (58)	26,341
Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia	12,709 (43)	17,093 (57)	29,802
<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>160,428 (25)</b>	<b>273,696 (75)</b>	<b>434,124</b>
Universiti Malaysia Pahang	4,068 (51)	3,935 (49)	8,003
Universiti Tun Hussein Oon Malaysia	6,773 (54)	5,761 (46)	12,534
Universiti Malaysia Perlis	4,121 (55)	3,317 (45)	7,438
Universiti Teknologi Malaysia	19,153 (55)	15,465 (45)	34,618
Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka	5,321 (59)	3,685 (41)	9,006
Universiti Pertahanan Nasional Malaysia	1,869 (74)	664 (26)	2,533
<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>41,305 (56)</b>	<b>32,827 (44)</b>	<b>74,132</b>

Source: MOHE, 2012

## Discussion and Conclusion

This article has highlighted two significant gender gaps in Malaysian higher education. One, which concerns the overall gap in Malaysian public HEIs, and two, the fields of studies specifically in public HEIs. These gender gaps reaffirmed the need to address an important and critical question of: Where are the boys and why are they not transiting to public HEIs? This article does not attempt to answer this question, but instead, aims to argue the need to focus on understanding boys and how they transit from secondary education into higher education. More importantly, there is also a need to understand the barriers that discourage or hinder boys from progressing into higher education and public HEIs across different fields of study. Without a thorough understanding of boys, their participation and the underlying reasons of their underrepresentation in higher education in public HEIs and in non-technical disciplines, policy interventions may not be effective, or worse, may be detrimental to the Malaysian higher education.

A common proposal to address gaps and disproportions is the use of a quota system. Historically, ethnic quota was introduced in Malaysian higher education in 1971 to address the ethnic imbalance. While the quota system has successfully redistributed the ethnic balance in public HEIs, the same quota has contributed to a different form of imbalance in the form of ethnic imbalance between public and private HEIs (Ahmad and Noran, 1999; Wan, 2007). In the context of gender gap, the use of a quota system without understanding the boys, their participation, the barriers and their underrepresentation, can be detrimental. First, assuming *ceteris paribus*, the introduction of a quota for males in public HEIs or in a particular field of study, would be at the cost of the females. In other words, without increasing the number of students, a gender quota will increase the number of males at the expense of females. Second, the introduction of a quota and to ensure the reserved allocations are filled up will create a vicious circle that is detrimental to the quality of higher education. To ensure males are enrolled in public HEIs, the requirements for entry may have to be lowered. This, in turn, may create a perception that students and graduates produced by the public HEIs through a quota system are poor in quality.

**“...there is also a need to understand the barriers that discourage or hinder boys from progressing into higher education and public HEIs across different field of studies.”**

Conversely, this article argues the need to understand boys and their transition into higher education, because such understanding has vast policy implications in addressing the gender imbalance. By identifying the barriers and factors

resulting in the imbalance, policy interventions can focus on addressing specifically these barriers and factors. Broecke and Hamed (2008) claimed that girls tend to outperform boys in school and therefore a rigid and examination-oriented entry may favour girls rather than boys. Hence, effective intervention in this respect may focus on, for example, diversifying the entrance requirements, reducing the emphasis placed upon academic performance and taking into account work experiences for entry into higher education. At this point in time, Malaysian public HEIs, and to a large extent private HEIs, are predominantly focused on students transiting directly from secondary schools into higher education, and the entry requirements tend to put mature students with relevant working experiences and without necessary academic credentials at a disadvantaged position.

**“The widening gender gap, and specifically the disproportion of males to females, is not only about access and equity to higher education, but more critically if left unattended, have vast social and economic implications.”**

In addition, the gender gap in Malaysian higher education may imply inequitable access in terms of monetary and financial considerations. The relatively different size of gender gaps between public and private HEIs may suggest that families prioritise the education of sons over daughters. This proposition is further reaffirmed using the Malaysian census data that focused on the cohorts of graduates between 1946 and 1980, whereby it was found that a higher proportion of male graduates were trained overseas or in private HEIs, as compared to female graduates who are more likely trained at local public HEIs (Tey, 2006). As it is significantly more expensive to pursue higher education overseas or in private HEIs as compared to public HEIs, the wider gender gap in public HEIs may therefore imply some degree of inequitable access to higher education at the individual household level. Hypothetically, if gender gap is related to inequitable access, policy intervention may instead divert the attention to address the funding mechanism that could have indirectly led to this gender imbalance. The National Higher Education Fund Corporation (PTPTN) was created in 1997 to provide financial support for students into higher education. Since its establishment, RM 44.62 billion has been disbursed to 1.99 million students. Proportionately, 53 percent of the fund was disbursed to 1.37 million students in public HEIs (The Star, 2012), but interestingly, the proportion of students from private HEIs have been increasing. In 2000, there were 8,956 students from private HEIs funded by PTPTN, and in 2009, the number has increased to 76,454 (Tham, 2011). Hence, if the gender gap in public HEIs has been a result of inequitable access due to families' monetary and financial prioritisation,

policy intervention that is better-informed of the underlying reasons of this phenomenon is important to address the issue of inequitable access in higher education and gender gap in public HEIs.

Through the statistics presented, this article argues the need and importance to focus on boys and their participation in higher education. The widening gender gap, and specifically the disproportion of males to females, is not only about access and equity to higher education, but more critically if left unattended, have vast social and economic implications. Among the social implications include delayed marriage, increased non-marriage and women marrying 'downward' (Tey, 2006), while economic implications are disproportion of the graduate labour market and widening wage disparity between males and females that favour the males due to a perceived oversupply of female graduates. However, without adequate understanding of boys and their underrepresentation, effective policy intervention to address such a gap may be found wanting.

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# Sociocultural Adjustment of International Students in Higher Education: A Case Study of Yemeni Postgraduate Students

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## Abstract

*This article presents the findings of a study that examined the sociocultural adjustment of Yemeni postgraduate students in a public university in Malaysia. Data collection included a questionnaire, journal writings and focus group interviews. The analysis of data revealed that the sociocultural adjustment difficulties faced by Yemeni postgraduate students in the public university include among others, making friends, getting used to the local food, understanding cultural differences, understanding the local accent/language and dealing with people in authority. To overcome such sociocultural difficulties, the Yemeni postgraduate students either remained passive or adapted themselves to the norms of the new environment. The findings reveal that these specific sociocultural difficulties faced by the Yemeni postgraduate students should be handled carefully by university administrators to allow the postgraduates to experience a more positive academic student experience. The findings reported contribute to the ongoing interest of research into the experience of international students in the Malaysian landscape of higher education as well as in other higher education contexts.*

## Introduction

Due to the importance of higher education as an essential tool for developing a knowledge-based society, there has been a rapid increase in the number of international students pursuing higher education worldwide. Malaysia is one country that has embarked on various active and strategic promotions in order to attract more international students (Abiddin & Ismail, 2009). As a result of these successful efforts, Malaysian universities have witnessed an increase in the number of international students from different countries in the Middle East, Africa and some Asian counties (Ooi, Kaur & Sirat, 2009; Yusliza & Chelliah, 2010). Among Arab counties, the government of Yemen has been granting scholarships to Yemeni students to pursue their higher education in some Malaysian universities and colleges.

International students in Malaysian universities come from various diverse academic backgrounds. Undoubtedly, this poses different academic and sociocultural difficulties for these students while they attempt to negotiate the dominant literacies of the academic communities in Malaysian higher education institutions. Furthermore, international students' cultural backgrounds may also affect their sociocultural adjustment. Similarly, the domestic higher education institution can play an important part in helping the international students adjust to their new cultural context in terms of institutional policies and practices.

International students pursuing their higher education studies in higher education institutions in Malaysia face many challenges. This is because international students are a heterogeneous group of students who face many barriers and challenges that hamper their learning experiences (Pandian, 2008). As a result of this, the diversity of international students should be taken into account because they do encounter various dilemmas in their educational and social contexts. One such aspect that is related to the experience of international students in Malaysia is sociocultural adjustment. This refers to the level of acquisition of culturally

appropriate skills and the ability to interact with others in the culture of the host country (Ward & Kennedy, 1999). The theory of adjustment, which is referred to as acculturation, focuses on understanding the adaptation processes and cultural changes of minority groups as they experience first-hand contact with a dominant culture (Sodowsky & Plake, 1992). This study reports on Yemeni postgraduate students' perceptions of their sociocultural adjustment difficulties and the coping strategies they employ while studying in a public university in Malaysia.

Although there is recent attention on analysing and exploring international students' academic experiences (Sugimura, 2008; Phakiti & Li, 2011), few studies have explored the sociocultural adjustment of international students in Malaysia. In view of this fact, Yusliza (2011:3) argues that "although the number of international students on campuses continues to increase; only a limited number of recently published studies have examined this topic in Malaysia". Furthermore, Yusliza (2010:36) has concluded that "as the number of international students entering Malaysian universities increase, the need to understand and address their cross-cultural adjustment to this country becomes more important". Accordingly, this study presents findings on the following two issues: the perceptions of Yemeni postgraduate students of their sociocultural adjustment problems and the strategies they use to overcome these difficulties. The findings and recommendations of this study can help educational leaders and their higher education institutions to work on facilitating these students' journey through the educational system. Such studies can shed further light on how international students perceive the sociocultural adjustment problems they face because the factors that affect international students' psychological and sociocultural adjustment problems (such as English language proficiency, social support and some personality variables) can impact their academic achievement (Yuzliza, 2010).

This study is a mixed methods research in which data were collected using both quantitative and qualitative methods.

**“...sociocultural adjustment of international students is associated with psychological and sociocultural factors such as abilities of both international and local students to mix with each other and handle cultural differences.”**

The quantitative data were collected using a questionnaire that adopted items on students' academic difficulties from Hyland (1997) and Evans and Green (2007). Meanwhile, items on international students' sociocultural adjustment were adapted from Ward and Kennedy (1999). The qualitative data were collected employing two methods of data collection: focus group interviews with 30 respondents and journal writing by 21 respondents. While quantitative data from the 92 completed student questionnaires were analysed using Statistical Package for the Social (SPSS), qualitative data were analysed through content analysis in which data were transcribed and coded thematically.

### **Sociocultural Adjustment of Yemeni Postgraduate Students**

The analysis of the data collected showed that the behavioural adjustment faced by Yemeni postgraduate students include understanding cultural differences, making friends, seeing things from the locals' point of view, taking a local perspective on the culture, dealing with someone unpleasant or aggressive people, talking about themselves with others, taking a local perspective on the culture, getting used to the local food or finding the food they enjoy, making themselves understood, going to social events, understanding the local value system, communicating with people of a different ethnic group, relating to members of the opposite sex and being able to see two sides of an intercultural issue.

With reference to the cognitive adjustment, dealing with people of higher status, dealing with people in authority and understanding the local accent/language were perceived as great difficulties by Yemeni postgraduate students. Similar to the findings of Baker and Luke (1991) and Myles and Cheng (2003), sociocultural adjustment of international students is associated with psychological and sociocultural factors such as abilities of both international and local students to mix with each other and handle cultural differences. This study has revealed that Yemeni postgraduate students' sociocultural adjustment problems can be traced to the cultural differences and the norms and beliefs these students bring to the Malaysian context.

Unlike the findings of studies conducted by Myles and Cheng (2003) who found that international students have

no adjustment problems related to their sociocultural life in the host countries, the current study shows that Yemeni postgraduate students faced several adjustment difficulties due to the cultural and social differences between their culture and the multi-cultures of the host country, Malaysia.

Also, similar to the findings of studies conducted by Novera (2004), Li and Gasser (2005) and Brown and Holloway (2008), the current study reveals that Yemeni postgraduate students face sociocultural adjustment difficulties due to their unfamiliarity with the host nation's cultural norms. This study reveals that the top sociocultural adjustment for Yemeni students include understanding cultural differences, making friends, seeing things from the locals' point of view and taking a local perspective on the Malaysian culture.

### **Overcoming Sociocultural Adjustment Problems**

With reference to the cognitive adjustment difficulties faced by Yemeni postgraduate students, the analysis of quantitative and qualitative data indicates that the students depend on three strategies to overcome their cognitive adjustment: having friendships with other international students and students from their countries, trying to find suitable food for themselves on campus and outside campus and accommodating themselves to the difficulties they may face. The strategy of adaptation to the sociocultural difficulties of the host country is known as acculturation one in which international students may accept some changes as being influenced by the culture, customs and social institutions of the host country.

**“...the top sociocultural adjustment for Yemeni students include understanding cultural differences, making friends, seeing things from the locals' point of view and taking a local perspective on the Malaysian culture.”**

The quantitative findings (relating to students' academic difficulties in the language skills of speaking, reading, writing and listening) show that the strategies Yemeni postgraduate students employ to adjust themselves may be more effective when the society in the host country show positive attitudes towards them. In other words, the individual's acculturation is not only impacted by his/her own strategies and attitudes, but is also inevitably affected by the context of the host country. The Yemeni postgraduate students perceive that their adaptability can be defined as the capacity for an individual to suspend or change behaviour common to his or her native culture, to learn and accommodate to some of the new cultural ways of doing and ultimately “find ways to manage the dynamics of cultural difference/unfamiliarity,

intergroup posture and the accompanying stress" (Kim, 1991: 268).

## Conclusion

The experiences of all international students can be more beneficial and less stressful if higher education institutions in Malaysia take into account the various adjustment difficulties faced by these students, including the sociocultural ones. Host higher education institutions in Malaysia cannot consider their own conceptions of teaching and learning as the standard norms but instead they need to show awareness that international students bring with them slightly different conceptions of learning and these need to be accommodated by the institutions in some way. The differences that international students bring with them are of great value because they can inform authorities on how to best provide suitable support and assistance to future students. Thus, understanding and acknowledging the similarities and differences and taking the necessary steps to address them can ensure a more positive learning environment for international students.

To inculcate positive learning experiences among international students, higher education institutions in Malaysia should invest resources to address these students' unique needs and they should be aware of cultural common grounds as well as barriers, differences in the educational systems and other frustrations these students may come across in adjusting to the academic and sociocultural environment. University administrators and authorities should not only be aware of the problems many international students face in adjusting to the academic environment but they should strive to provide ways that can help these students adjust more successfully into the academic and cultural life of the institution. In addition to these procedures, social support and programmes on stress management can be suggestions that can be useful to universities in Malaysia in order to facilitate the academic and sociocultural life of international students. Future research can investigate, using experimental designs or correlational studies, the impact of such sociocultural factors on the achievement and the development of international students in Malaysian universities.

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## Translating the Islamic Education Philosophy into Actions; Muslim Universities Vice-Chancellors'/Presidents' Forum

Reported by Noor Anisa Abdul Kader, IPPTN

Universiti Sains Malaysia, in collaboration with Higher Education Leadership Academy (AKEPT), organised the second Muslim Universities Vice-Chancellors' Forum (MUVCF) with National Higher Education Research Institute (IPPTN) as the MUVCF Secretariat on 3–4 December 2012 at The Royale Chulan Kuala Lumpur.



Prof. Dato' Omar accompanied by Dato' Roziah presenting souvenir to the keynote speaker.

The objectives of the forum were to bring together erudite Muslims who are committed to sketch the future of their Muslim counterparts based on new ideas and approaches which are free from the negative influences of Western education; to deliberate, elaborate, and seek strong commitments in executing the resolutions of the first MUVCF; and to enhance cooperation among universities that are aware of the need for the Muslim to determine the developmental path of higher education which is different from the usual or conventional model (pro-Western). Muslim universities have debated on the philosophical and conceptual framework of higher education in Islam long enough, to be more precise, since 1977 in Makkah. Till 2012, however, there is still no proper model for Islamic higher education based on *tawhid*. Thus, the theme *Translating the Islamic Education Philosophy into Actions* was chosen for the second MUVCF to deliberate on how to translate the philosophy of Islamic education instead of merely having discussions and ideas.

The second MUVCF was officiated by Y.Bhg. Profesor Dato' Omar Osman, Vice-Chancellor of Universiti Sains Malaysia and Y.Bhg. Professor Datuk Dr. Roziah Omar, Director of AKEPT.

The forum was attended by 52 participants (hailing from 17 countries) including speakers and rapporteurs, and assisted by secretariats from IPPTN, Universiti Sains Malaysia, and AKEPT. The keynote speech entitled "Philosophy of Higher Education in Islam" was given by Professor Osama El Sayed Mahmoud Al- Azhari from Al-Azhar University. The other invited guest speakers were Professor Glen Hardaker, University of Huddersfield; Professor Mohamed Aslam Haneef, International Islamic University Malaysia; Professor Dr Abdeljalil Salem, Ez-Zitouna University; Professor Dr Abdullah Çavuşoğlu, Yildirim Beyazit University; Mr Ahmad T. Ahdad, Razi Group; Professor Dr Anis Ahmad, Riphah International University; and Professor Muammer Koc, Sehir University.



MUVCF participants.

Case presentations were divided into two categories: curriculum and pedagogy. On the second day of the forum, participants were divided into two groups to identify and share good practices on Islamic curriculum and pedagogy. The two-day deliberations resulted in 10 resolutions agreed upon by all country participant representatives.



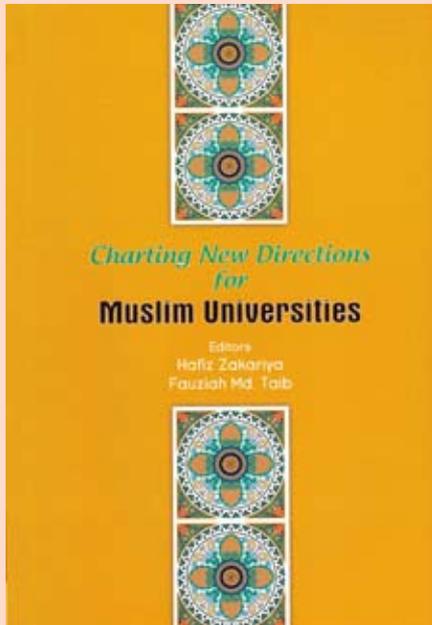
Participants of the MUVCF in a group photograph.

The participating countries acknowledged that there had been little efforts put into collaborations, comprehensive academic programmes, teacher training, and informal education such as cocurricular activities based on Islamic philosophy. Discussions throughout the forum mainly addressed these issues, recommending ways to overcome them. It is hoped that by the resolutions and consensus made, Islamic philosophy could gradually be incorporated into the higher education systems worldwide.

# Charting New Directions for Muslim Universities

*Editors*

Hafiz Zakariya & Fauziah Md Taib



With the advent of the new imperialism in the late 19th century, one after another Muslim country was officially either colonised or came under the influence of the major Western powers. This had a far-reaching impact on the Muslim world. It altered the political geography and replaced or transformed the indigenous politics, social, education and economic systems of the colonised countries. Unfortunately, even after the Muslim countries achieved independence, they continued to be influenced by the Western systems legally, socially and educationally. In the sphere of education, liberation from imperialism often did not entail the creation of higher education based on indigenous tradition and values. To make matters worse, most of the secular leaders in the Muslim countries continued to borrow the Western models of higher education uncritically. This book brings together a collection of articles on higher education in Muslim countries. Topics range from the philosophical, structural dimension and reform of Islamic higher education to the present achievements and gaps in the level of scientific research in Muslim countries, and the ranking of Islamic higher education institutions. All seven chapters present useful insights on various issues of higher education in Muslim countries. Discussions from the chapters examine the current trends adopted by most Muslim countries and challenge readers to critically consider the coexistence of material and spiritual values in higher education, particularly from the Islamic perspective. Equipped

with such information, policymakers, researchers, university leaders and students can be better prepared to comprehend the major trends in higher education in Muslim countries.

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# ANNOUNCEMENT



## Invitation to Participate and Call for Papers

### SUSTAINING DIVERSE ECOSYSTEMS IN HIGHER EDUCATION TOWARDS INCLUSIVE FUTURES

Jointly Organised by:



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**GHEF2013** seeks to create a dialogic space for widening the representation of diverse voices, strengthening cultural connectivity, intercivilisational and cultural dialogues, and indigenous knowledge systems. We would like to hear from the less represented and unheard voices alongside the experts and key players in fora on higher education. We believe that sustainable higher education futures engage with multiple actors and stakeholders locally, regionally and transnationally. This commitment stretches beyond dialogues, towards establishing firm plans and actions to empower the majority for the greater public good of all. Through conversations and partnerships between the various stakeholders and actors whose worldviews, voices and narratives matters, transformation unfolds. We aspire for an organically linked higher education ecosystem which is responsive to the needs of the communities. We would contest the hegemony of higher education which at times, seen to be separate, even alienated from its immediate socio-cultural communities and contexts; and taken a life of its own, at times, more connected to the elitist and privileged world outside, visible by the global order of internationalisation, the pursuit of global ranking at any costs and the commodification of higher education in an ascending higher education marketplace. It matters to us at GHEF2013 that the intercultural conversations and the multiple partnerships to build and sustain a symbiotic higher education ecosystem are vitally linked to the local and global community.

#### SUB-THEMES

1. Cultural connectivity
  - Language, community representation
  - Intercultural dialogues
  - Indigenous/vernacular knowledge
2. Engaging networks
  - Industry/community links
  - Social/industrial/political innovation
  - Philanthropy & volunteerism
3. Values and ethics: Humanising higher education
  - Human governance
  - Shared and contested values
4. Voices and actors in higher education
  - The underrepresented group
  - Widening access and promoting equity
  - Education for all
  - Beyond listening to charting pathways

## APPROACH

The GHEF2013 will deliberate on several sub-themes with the objective to provide channels for all voices to be included. Thus, sessions are planned in a way that provides opportunity for participants to network, communicate, express their ideas and seek understanding among the many stakeholders who participate in the forum.

## PARTICIPATION

The Global Higher Education Forum 2013 (GHEF2013) brings together scholars, policy makers, researchers, academics, administrators, parents, students, NGOs and industries to reflect, analyse, discuss and debate on the need to pursue the future through inclusive higher education systems.

## FORMAT

The GHEF 2013 offers a varied programme of keynote address, plenary sessions including panel discussions by invited speakers with ample time for Q&A. The programme also includes a roundtable discussion subsequent to each plenary session to promote participation.

## PARTICIPANT PAPER PRESENTERS

For participants who submit their abstracts and full papers, there is a special session for selected paper presenters.

### Important Deadlines

Submission of abstract	15 June 2013
Notification of acceptance of abstract	1 July 2013
Submission of full paper	30 September 2013
Closing date for registration	15 November 2013

Note:

- i. Abstracts will be uploaded onto the website by **15 JULY 2013**.

## REGISTRATION FEE

Category	Local	International
Early registration	RM 1,000.00	USD 800.00
Normal registration	RM 1,100.00	USD 900.00
Group registration (3 & above from same organisation)	RM 900.00 each	USD 700.00 each
GHEN membership	RM 950.00	USD 750.00

Note:

- i. Registration fee covers conference materials, five tea-breaks and three lunches.
- ii. Payment for early registration should be made before **31 AUGUST 2013**.
- iii. Full payment must be made on or before **15 NOVEMBER 2013**.

## MODE OF PAYMENT

- i. By Bank Transfer in RM/USD in favour of "Bursar Universiti Sains Malaysia"

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Please send cheque with a cover note indicating participant's name, institution and payment for GHEF2013.

## REGISTRATION AND FURTHER INFORMATION

Detailed programme on the GHEF2013, online registration, hotel information, etc is available on the GHEF2013 website, <http://gheforum.usm.my>. If you wish to be in the mailing list for updates information, please email to [gheforum.usm@gmail.com](mailto:gheforum.usm@gmail.com); [gheforum@usm.my](mailto:gheforum@usm.my)

# Calling for Articles and News Briefs

## Guidelines on Submission of Manuscripts

1. Manuscripts should be written in English, typed using Times New Roman 12 point font, and double spaced on only one side of A4 size paper with ample left and right margins on Microsoft Word.
2. The length of the manuscripts should not exceed 1,500 words. An abstract of about 150 words should be included.
3. Authors are responsible for obtaining permission to use any published material. The publisher shall not be held responsible for the use of such material.
4. Citations in the text should include the author's last name and date of publication, e.g. (Ashton, 2001). If quotations are used, page numbers should be indicated, eg. (Ashton, 2001: 30).
5. Endnotes may be used.
6. Include tables and figures within the text. Number tables and figures consecutively.
7. The reference list should be arranged in alphabetical order and should include only works cited in the text.

### Examples:

Altbach, P. G. (2004). *The costs and benefits of world-class universities*. Retrieved 23 October 2005 from <http://www.aaup.org/publications/Academe/2004/04jf/04jfalbtb.htm>

Mahadhir, M., Ting, S. H. and Carol, D. (2006). *Learning materials and human factors: Looking at the chemistry in the genre-based approach classroom*. Proceedings of 2<sup>nd</sup> Science and Art of Language in Teaching International Conference, 'Change: Bridging Theory and Practice', 20 - 22 November, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Pulau Pinang.

Watkins, D. (1998). A cross-cultural look at perceptions of good teaching: Asia and the West. In J. J. F. Forest (Ed.), *University teaching: International perspectives*. New York: Garland.

Wolfe, R. N. and Johnson, S. D. (1995). Personality as a predictor of college performance. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, Vol. 2, 177-185.

Yule, G. (1996). *Pragmatics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

8. All submissions should include a cover page containing the title, name of author(s), designation, affiliation, mailing/ e-mail address and telephone/fax number. A brief biographical note of the author(s) should also be included.
9. Manuscripts submitted must not be those already published or those which have been offered for publication elsewhere.
10. Manuscripts received will be acknowledged but not returned.
11. Submission of a manuscript will mean that the author agrees to transfer copyright of his/her article to the publisher if and when the article is published. Authors who wish to send their articles to be published elsewhere should seek the written agreement of the publisher.
12. Manuscripts may be sent via e-mail attachment ([ipptn@usm.my](mailto:ipptn@usm.my) or [munir@usm.my](mailto:munir@usm.my)) or via post together with the compact disk.

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