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Facilitating the Mission and Vision of the Ministry of Higher Education

Y. Bhg. Dato' Dr. Zulkefli A. Hassan was appointed as the Chief Secretary of the Ministry of Higher Education in December 2005. He is the second person to hold the post following the inception of the ministry in 2004.

In this interview with IPPTN, Zulkefli talks about his roles in facilitating the mission and vision of the Ministry of Higher Education and his views about higher education today.

**Munir Shuib &
Shukran Abd Rahman**

In the Ninth Malaysia Plan, the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) has been allocated over RM18 billion to provide better facilities and promote quality at the various universities and colleges in Malaysia. This sum is significantly higher than that was provided under the Eighth Malaysia Plan.

Higher allocation naturally means higher expectations. As the chief secretary, Zulkefli is entrusted with a huge responsibility in the ministry to help ensure that returns commensurate with the heavy investment placed by the government. His responsibility is shared by his two deputies, Y. Bhg. Dato' Dr. Mohd. Taib Hashim, who is in charge of planning and development, and Y. Bhg. Datin Rodiah Meor Sulaiman, who is in charge of governance.

An officer with many hats, Zulkefli's major roles include to oversee the implementation of all policies and decisions pertaining to higher education in the country. He also acts as a kind of 'controlling officer' for the ministry. In this role he is empowered to solve financial matters such as the spending of allocation and procurement for services and ensures that building constructions are carried out in accordance with the Treasury's instructions and government approval.

Zulkefli's roles are not restricted to governance, but also encompass capacity building in higher education. Through his Planning and Development Division, Zulkefli is entrusted to undertake studies which have strategic and national



interests. One of the studies which his team has undertaken concerns the transformation of higher education. The study examines various aspects of higher education including access, governance, research and development and linkages between tertiary education and primary and secondary education.

In addition to capacity building, he acts as the coordinator for replies and responses to questions raised by honourable members of parliament concerning higher education. To do this effectively, he requires full support from universities and all departments in MOHE. Information

requested from these parties must reach him in time to allow him to prepare the required responses.

Another equally important task is to oversee the restructuring of community colleges, which he considers to be the hub of life-long learning. According to Zulkefli, currently there are thirty four community colleges throughout the country. Another twenty five are to be built in the next five years. In line with the decision of the National Implementation Task Force, which is chaired by the Hon. Prime Minister and as part of a rebranding strategy, the ministry has decided to allow community colleges to offer courses at diploma level starting from 2007. The goal is to provide greater opportunities to school leavers, especially for those who underperformed at school levels, to enhance their knowledge and skills. Such a decision, he emphasizes, would not lead to a duplication of the roles of the polytechnics, even though the latter also offer courses at advanced diploma level for the fields of study offered by the two types of tertiary institutions differ. Furthermore, unlike community colleges, higher achievers from the polytechnics would have greater opportunities to gain admissions into universities. The proviso, needless to say, is that they meet the minimum threshold of the admission requirements. This decision, regarding community colleges, is also in line with the government's target to increase access to higher education for those aged between seventeen and twenty three years old. Currently, only 29% of those in that cohort have access to higher education. By the year 2010, however, the government expects the percentage of enrolment to increase by 40%. The increase, Zulkefli points out, is vital for Malaysia. As he puts it "for Malaysia to be a developed country in 2020, the percentage of the 17 – 23 cohort having access to higher education must be comparable to other countries in the world". However, he confesses that the percentage increase is a major challenge as it is to be undertaken against the backdrop of increasing population.

In addition to access to higher education, the ministry has devised numerous plans and strategies to transform higher education in Malaysia. One of them is to enrich the research culture and enhance its qualities among Malaysian academe through the provision of various research grants, including those offered by other ministries such as the priority research under MOSTI, the Science Fund, and the Techno Fund. MOHE itself has been allocated a sum of RM 0.2 billion for universities to conduct fundamental research and this allocation will be duly increased at the earliest opportunity.

Another strategy is to ensure the competitiveness of Malaysian higher education institutions in the world. To achieve this, Zulkefli says that "by 2020, Malaysia is expected to have two universities which are ranked in the top 200 in the world; one of which must be in the top 50".

In addition, universities are expected to increase their international postgraduate student enrolment. However, in order to attract international students to study here, the quality of teaching, research, and facilities in the institutions must be improved. Also, efforts must be made to attract the best faculties to serve the universities, both in the government as well as in the private sector. In this connection, he reports that the ministry has agreed to allow faster promotion for academics within the civil service structure. The ministry is also working on a proposal to review the starting salary for academics with PhDs as well as encouraging the more senior lecturers to continue serving beyond the current mandatory retirement age of 56 years.

To further improve the quality of higher education in Malaysia, MOHE has established an academy to train higher level managers and academic staff of higher educational institutions to efficiently and effectively handle higher education-related tasks. This training institution, the Academy for Leadership in Higher Education or Akademi Kepimpinan Pengajian Tinggi (AKEPT), will have a permanent campus at Nilai, Negeri Sembilan. The academy will provide, among others, leadership training for academics in order to prepare them for leadership and managerial roles at higher learning institutions. It will also provide training to improve academics' competencies in teaching and learning.

The huge investment made by the government on higher education should bring about desirable returns in the form of competent human capital not just in terms of competent academics but also competent graduates. For Zulkefli, it is vital for universities to edify university students with desired competencies, so as to make them highly employable graduates. He underlines, "Only with vast knowledge, up-to-date skills, proficient abilities, and positive characteristics, could graduates competently fare in the world of work".

MOHE and the private sector, in particular the industry, always maintain close ties in order to produce employable graduates whose competencies commensurate with job demands. Such close ties, according to Zulkefli, have paved ways to "a judicious formation of university curriculum which prepare students for the job market, making them more relevant in the increasingly changing world of work".

There is no denying that numerous efforts have been made and will still have to be made by MOHE to enhance the quality and the image of higher learning institutions in Malaysia. But with the forward looking and vastly experience chief secretary and his team supporting and facilitating MOHE's mission and vision, there is little doubt that Malaysia will soon be transformed into a world class regional higher education hub.

Potential Marketability of Graduates From Bachelor of Production Operations Management (Hons), Universiti Utara Malaysia

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Introduction

The Second Malaysian Industrial Master Plan (IMP): (1995-2005) had identified the manufacturing sector as a contributor to Malaysia's economic development. Therefore, to materialize the objective of IMP2, Malaysia needs to depend on the effectiveness and efficiency of its technocrats and operations managers.

The establishment of the Production Operations Management Programme under the Faculty of Technology Management, Universiti Utara Malaysia will enable its graduates to function effectively in a wide range of social and professional contexts. However, in responding to present and future needs of the industry, the programme structure needs to be relevant to the needs of the industry. Measures to ensure quality of the Production Operations Management education must be considered early in the course design stage.

Studies on academic programmes offered are crucial in obtaining vital information regarding the suitability of such programmes in fulfilling current and future

workforce demands. Data from such studies would provide an understanding of graduate unemployment. The main objective of this study is to obtain data from local industries in Kedah with the aim of developing an appropriate academic programme. It also aims to identify the actual needs and demands of local industries with regard to future graduates of the Bachelor of Production Operations Management, Universiti Utara Malaysia. An empirical study involving 30 of the 48 FMM (Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers)-listed manufacturing companies in Kedah was undertaken. These are companies from various industrial zones/locations throughout Kedah. The study found that there is relevance between the courses offered by the programme and the components practised in the field of production management. In addition towards developing a strong and structured academic programme, this study aims to explore career opportunities and industrial placements of graduates.

Literature Review

Production Operations Management is a mainstream functional area in business and management programme. It is also inter-disciplined with Information System, Human Resource, and Marketing and Finance (Chase, 1998). Goffin (2003) states that the Production and Operations

Management [POM] field is a key factor for the competitiveness of any business. Therefore university training in POM is a critical element in preparing future managers for various organizations.

Operations Management Curricula

Traditionally, POM courses have been based around a number of tools and techniques (Adler, 1989; Hill, 1996) and this means that POM has been taught differently to the way in which it is practiced in successful organizations (Davies, 1996). However, many researchers recommend that POM programmes put more emphasis on strategic aspects (Wood and Britney, 1989; Bregman and Flores, 1991; Hill, 1996; Levenburg, 1996; Goffin, 2003). Thus, Hill (1996) recommends that 40 per cent of postgraduate sessions should be allocated to strategy.

Marketability Survey and Job Opportunity

Job opportunities in the field of POM can be classified into three sectors:

- Manufacturing Sector
According to the 2002 Economic Report, from 1998 to the mid 2002, the manufacturing sector consistently contributed 26% of the total overall employment rate (2,670,200 people) which was just less 1% from the service sector. Furthermore, career opportunities

in the manufacturing sector provided 46% or at least 60,000 job opportunities of various levels and positions compared to other sectors. Hence it was not surprising that Malaysian Economic Report Statistics showed that job opportunities offered by the manufacturing sector increased from year to year (Bank Negara Malaysia Annual Report, 2002)

• Service Sector

The prospects of the graduates in this sector centred more in the areas of logistics, distribution and transportation, and procurement. In addition, the POM knowledge itself stresses on the aspect of service operations management.

• Government Sector

There are various career opportunities relevant to POM graduates in the public sector such as in government agencies. The public sector includes government-linked companies such as port managements, state development authorities, SIRIM, as well as ministries such as the Ministry of Trade and Industries, the Ministry of Primary Industry and the Ministry of Transportation.

Research Objectives

The research objectives of this study are:

- i. To determine the opinion and feedback from organizations about the suitability of the structure and program content of the POM degree course.
- ii. To identify Bachelor of Production Operations Management (BPOM) students' job opportunities.

Research Method

Sampling procedure

The number of manufacturing companies in Kedah, based on FMM directory is 48. Since the number of companies is small, we have included all of them as our respondents. Of the 48 respondents, 30 companies replied to the survey. Questionnaires were sent to them by mail. A high response rate of 61% is attained after follow-up letters were sent to those who did not respond to our initial questionnaire.

Instrument

The major data collection instrument was a questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of three parts:

- I: Background information
- II: Contents of programme and its relevance to the needs of organizations
- III: Career opportunities

Data Analysis

Most of the data were analysed by using frequency and percentages due to the nature of our data. SPSS version 12 was used to analyse the data.

Sample Characteristics

Table 1 and Table 2 show the profile of the sample. Most of the companies that participated were large sized with employees numbering more than 250 people.

Table 1: Size of Manufacturing Companies (N=30)

Size	Frequency	Percent (%)
Large	21	70
Medium	6	20
Small	3	10

Table 2: Characteristics of the respondents (N=30)

Item	Frequency	Percent (%)
Location		
Kedah	30	100
Non-Kedah	-	
Type		
Manufacturing	30	100
Non-manufacturing	-	
Size		
Large	21	70
Medium	6	20
Small	3	10
No. of Employees		
Less than 50	3	10
51 - 150	4	13.3
151 - 250	2	6.7
Over 250	21	70

Results And Discussion

The results were summarized based on our research objectives previously specified:

- (1) Suitability of the structure programme content,
- (2) Job opportunities for BPOM students.

Structure and Program Content

- Courses offered

Table 3: Importance rating of POM courses

Courses	Frequency	Importance (%)
Production & Operations Management	30	100.00
Management of Quality	30	100.00
Management of Quality System	29	96.66
Industrial Engineering	28	90.00
Manufacturing Technology	26	86.67
Inventory Management	25	83.33
Purchasing & Supply Chain Mgt.	24	80.00
Operations Strategy	24	80.00
Project Management	23	76.67
Operation Management Information System	23	76.67
Occupational Safety and Health	23	76.67
Design of Operations System	22	73.33
Electrical & Electronic Technology	20	66.66
Mathematics for Technology	18	60.00
Management Science	18	60.00

Most courses that are offered are considered relevant to practitioners' needs. This could be seen from the ratings provided by practitioners on each POM course. Table 3 above indicates in percentages the important courses from the practitioners' viewpoint. Among the given courses with the highest rating are Production & Operations Management, and Management of Quality (100%), Management of Quality System (96.66%), and Industrial Engineering (90%). Today, most firms express their goals in terms of customer satisfaction or level of quality to beat the competition. According to Russell (2006), the way to achieve the

competitive edge is by deploying basic functions of operations management such as quality. Based on Table 3, it can be said that POM is a very important and relevant subject to offer on this programme and fulfils industry's needs.

Career Opportunity

• Job Opportunities

All the respondents agree that graduates of the POM programme are suitable to work in their organization and agree to recruit graduates from this programme.

• Relevant posts

The top ten relevant posts considered by the respondents are Production Planner, Operations and Planning Executive, Production Executive, Production Control Executive, Production Manager, QA/QC Executive, Quality System, Inventory Planner/ Controller, Logistics Executive and Buyer/ Purchaser/ Purchasing Officer/ Executive.

• Appropriate income

Overall, respondents have positive perceptions of the appropriate income for fresh graduates of this programme. As shown in *Figure 1* on page 6, 50% of respondents agree to pay the graduates a starting salary of RM 1501-RM 2000, compared to 43% of respondents who are willing to pay RM 1001-RM 1500. This result indicates that production operation management graduates can expect to receive relatively high starting salaries.

Conclusion

The majority of organizations stated that the offering of this POM programme and its course content is definitely suitable and in line with the organizations' workplace needs. Every single component of the course offered is rated important. Majority of them stress that this programme is able to fulfil the needs of the workforce market through various executive positions. Furthermore, a majority of the respondents agree to accept POM students to undertake their practical training at their organization.

Based on the feedback received from the various industries, the programme can be implemented and fulfil the justification in order to produce skilled and expert graduates required by organizations.

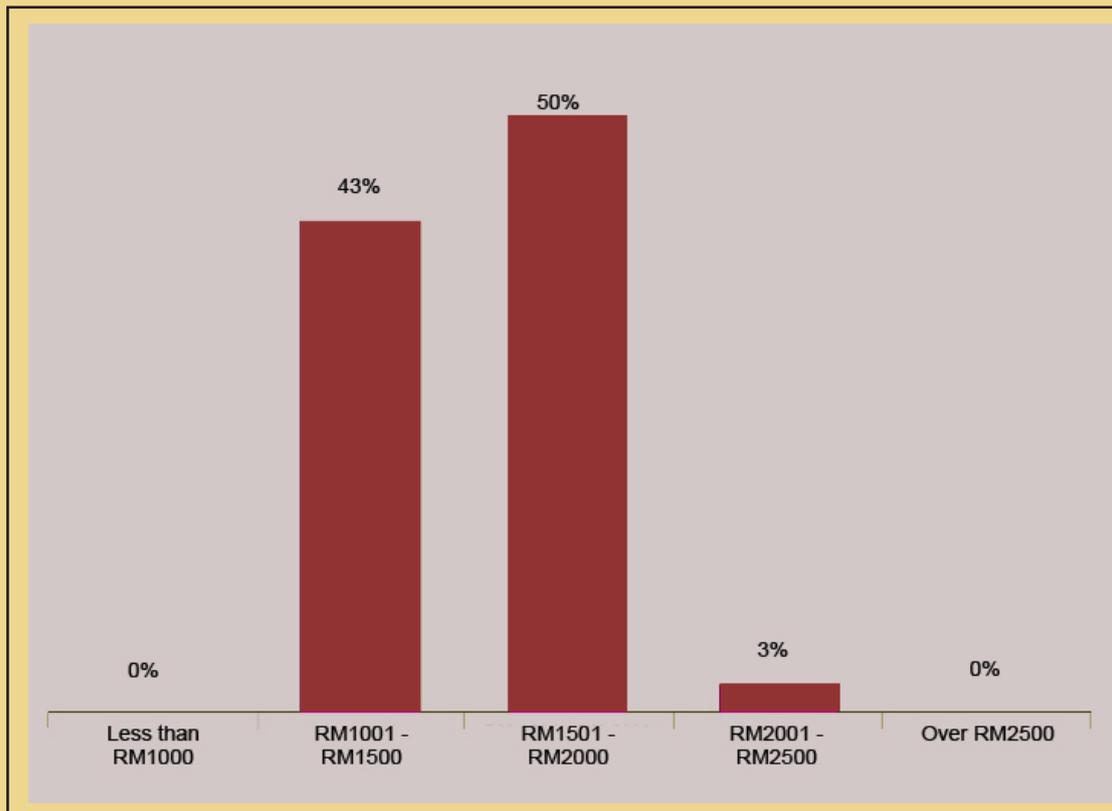


Figure 1: Appropriate Income

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The Cultivation of Skills through the Study of Philosophy

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Philosophy, the mother of all sciences and knowledge, is often viewed as an extremely challenging discipline in the Arts or Humanities. The kinds of questions and issues it deals with, the abstract nature of its discourse, and its technical vocabulary have all made philosophy to be regarded not only as too difficult a subject to engage in but also as not leading to any particular skills which are sought after at the workplace. Consequently, many students shy away from making philosophy a discipline of their choice. In this paper, I would like to dispel some of the inaccuracies and misconceptions concerning philosophy by identifying certain intellectual skills that can be attained from the study of philosophy which will prove useful at the workplace and will be appreciated by employers as assets.

Philosophy

Philosophy begins from 'man's sense of wonder' (Stumpf, 1983: 3) and of wanting to know the true nature of things. The fact that things may not what they seem to be, such as a straight piece of stick in a glass of water appears crooked to the observing eye, and the ground under our feet is still when in fact, the earth is rotating on its axis and simultaneously revolving around

the sun, have made philosophers from the very beginning of time not only to be sceptical of knowledge based on sense perception alone but also to be cognisant of the difference between 'appearance' and 'reality'.

The experience of being in this world of change and becoming, of witnessing the processes of 'birth, growth, decay and death, raises not only the fundamental existential questions of personal identity' (Who am I?) and the meaning of life (Why are we here?) but also questions concerning the world around us (ibid) such as: How do things and persons come into existence? What are things made of? And what happens to things when they pass away? The history of science and philosophy are the same in the beginning, hence the appellation, 'philosophy is the mother of all knowledge'. Only later, did the various disciplines separate themselves from the all-embracing field of philosophy (ibid: 4)

Philosophy is an intellectual activity, of thinking, pondering, reflecting, analysing and evaluating. It is 'thinking about basic questions' concerning ourselves and the world we live in, 'in a mood of genuine and free enquiry' (ibid.) In this basic sense, every thinking individual has a philosophy, even though he may not write or express it in a clear, logical, structured or organised way. But as an intellectual discipline or a field of

study, philosophy has to be defined in more specific terms.

Etymologically, the term 'philosophy' is derived from the Greek words 'philo', meaning 'love or loving', and 'sophia', which means 'wisdom'. Philosophy, therefore, means the 'love of wisdom' or 'the love of knowledge and wisdom' (Titus, 1970: 7) since there can be no wisdom without knowledge, whether it be theoretical or practical. Several characteristics distinguish philosophy from other intellectual activities or disciplines. The following are five characterisations of what philosophers generally consider to be the approach, nature and function of philosophy (ibid: 7-10).

1. Philosophy is a personal attitude toward life and the universe.

Oftentimes, we hear the phrase that someone is being philosophical about the problem that he or she is facing. 'Being philosophical' here means that the individual is seeing 'the problem in its broad perspective, in the larger picture of things' (ibid : 7) or seeing it from other angles apart from his or her own. To see things in perspectives other than one's own or to see things from as many possible aspects there are to a question or an issue, requires not only open mindedness, tolerance and courage (ibid) but more importantly, a willingness to put aside one's subjective thoughts and feelings which is a necessary

first step towards being objective. ‘To be objective is to die a little’, states Frithjof Schuon, an eminent authority on philosophia perennis or perennial philosophy (Schuon, 1992: 58).

2. Philosophy is a method of reflective thinking and reasoned inquiry.

Although reflective thinking and reasoned inquiry ‘is not the exclusive property of philosophy and philosophers’ since every intellectual discipline makes use of it (ibid), however what sets philosophy and philosophers apart is the degree of rigour they apply to it and the extent they are willing to pursue it. Philosophers throughout the ages are known for being extremely critical and relentless in their pursuit to know and understand something. To inquire to the logical end of things or to the root of a matter so as ‘to leave no stones untouched’ is a characteristic of a philosophical inquiry into a particular question or subject matter.

3. Philosophy is an attempt to gain a view of the whole.

‘Philosophy seeks to combine the conclusions of the various disciplines and long human experience into some kind of consistent worldview’ (ibid: 8). The philosopher aspires to see things or life, ‘not with the specialised slant of the scientist or the businessman or the artist but with the over-all view’ which takes into account of the totality of things (ibid). By making use of and reflecting on the results or data from the various disciplines or fields of knowledge, philosophers attempt to reach general conclusions about the questions we have. In this respect, ‘philosophy is not a special

subject matter’ since ‘the field of philosophy is as broad as human life itself’ (ibid).

“To inquire to the logical end of things or to the root of a matter so as ‘to leave no stones untouched’ is a characteristic of a philosophical inquiry into a particular question or subject matter”

4. Philosophy is the logical analysis of language and the clarification of the meaning of words and concepts.

Almost all philosophers, ancient or modern, East or West, are involved in clarifying and analysing the meaning of terms, and the use of language. Language is the tool or medium of expression of man’s thoughts. There are philosophers who consider this as the main task of philosophy, and there are a few such as the analytic philosophers who view it as the only legitimate function of philosophy (ibid: 9).

5. Philosophy is a group of problems as well as theories about the solution of these problems.

There are certain fundamental problems that interest humanity as a whole since time immemorial and for which philosophers have taken upon themselves to seek answers to (ibid). For example: What is truth? What is good? What is being? Are human beings free? Where does knowledge come from? How can we know that which we know is true? Is language the result of human experience or does language order our experience? These are

all philosophical questions. ‘The attempt to seek answers or solutions to them has given rise to theories and systems of thought’ (ibid: 10). In this sense, ‘philosophy means the various theories or systems of thought developed by the great philosophers’ (ibid) throughout the ages from all over the world in different languages. And we have indeed a great and varied legacy of philosophical thought which addresses and deals with the perennial questions that interest humanity, such as those mentioned above.

Skills

From the above discussion on philosophy, what skills can an individual acquire from engaging in its study? Essentially, philosophy is a discipline which cultivates an inquiring and a critical mind.

First, philosophy requires the individual who studies it to use his or her mind or intelligence to comprehend, analyse, and reflect on what is said or written concerning a particular question or issue. In order to comprehend and analyse a philosophical discourse, a student is required to study the particular philosopher’s choice of words, use of language, arguments to support his view or claim, the assumptions that underlie his arguments and the conclusions he draws from them. In the process, a student cultivates a sensitivity for the careful and clearly defined use of words, the rules of valid and sound reasoning, and the importance of consistency and coherence.

Second, philosophy trains the individual to ask questions, i.e. the necessary questions, the logical questions that follow as a consequence of stating or asserting

something. It trains the student's mind to move in an organised and systematic manner based on the principles of logical thought, and of valid and sound argumentation.

Third, philosophy requires the individual to distinguish between the important from the unimportant, the primary from the secondary, and the essential from the non-essential. In other words, it requires the student to go to the root of the matter, to the crux of the problem, and to the thrust of the issue. This exercise cultivates in the student the ability to grasp the fundamental issue and line of reasoning or arguments, regardless of the complexity of the discussion at hand. Finally, all of the mental or intellectual activities mentioned above are to be done in an open and objective manner. Thus, the study of philosophy impresses on the student the importance and value of free and independent enquiry into a particular issue or subject matter. The natural human impulse or desire to know is best served by an intellectual ambience that is free and open, unencumbered by human emotions, prejudice and preconceptions or presumptions.

“the study of philosophy impresses on the student the importance and value of free and independent enquiry into a particular issue or subject matter”

Our thoughts are the foundation of our actions. We do something as a result of how we think about it or view it or evaluate it. The more clear and correct we are in our thinking, the better are our decisions and actions arising from

it. In order for us to decide wisely and to act accordingly, ‘we need to discover values and the meaning of things’ (Titus, 1970: 15). In other words, we need ‘to make choices and to act on the basis of some scale of values’ which distinguish truth from falsehood, good from evil, right from wrong, beauty from ugliness (ibid). ‘Philosophy which is interested in the qualitative aspects of things’ deals precisely with the fundamental categories of values mentioned earlier, not as means but as ends in themselves (ibid). Thus, the study of philosophy nurtures in the individual a keen and discerning sense of values that will both inform and aid him in his judgment, decisions and actions.

In the human person, knowledge, actions and being are closely inter-related. ‘To know is to be’ states an ancient adage (Schuon, 1991: 96). What we know not only determines who we are, but who we are also determines what we know (Nasr, 1981: 310-11). Philosophy helps us to know in order to be that which we know.

Conclusion

The study of philosophy which cultivates an inquiring mind by engaging with the big questions dealt with by philosophers, trains students to ask the necessary and crucial questions which is an important step in problem solving. The intellectual habit of going to the root of the matter develops a diagnostic and incisive approach, and the demand to distinguish between the essential from the accidental or superfluous, cultivates discernment.

In addition, the emphasis on reason and rationality, nurtures a keen sense of objectivity that is necessary for sound judgement.

All of these qualities make the student of philosophy to be particularly skillful, for example, at problem solving, analysing texts or arguments, providing a comprehensive report of a complex issue or subject matter, mediating between different or conflicting parties, identifying and highlighting issues that are related to values such as ethics and morality. Thus, a graduate who has studied philosophy will not only prove to be an intellectual asset but also a principled individual at the workplace.

“The intellectual habit of going to the root of the matter develops a diagnostic and incisive approach, and the demand to distinguish between the essential from the accidental or superfluous, cultivates discernment.”

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Tun Dr. Mahathir's Vision 2020 Universities: Views from the Humanities

Morshidi Sirat & Munir Shuib

Vision 2020, the most influential policy statement in Malaysia since independence, has generated intense national discussions and attracted widespread public support as well as criticisms. The concept of Vision 2020 was introduced by the former Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad during the tabling of the Sixth Malaysia Plan in 1991. Vision 2020 acts as a way for providing a road map for transforming Malaysia into a fully developed self-sufficient economy by the year 2020. This national development plan places great emphasis on strengthening and reforming the country's higher education system through various means.

The Universities of Vision 2020

On 22 September 2006, Tun Dr. Mahathir shared his thoughts on universities of Vision 2020 during a public talk in Multimedia University. In his speech he stated four characteristics of such universities. Universities of Vision 2020, he said, would be:

1. Quality universities where knowledge is studied in great depth.
2. Known for their research findings and recognized as world class.
3. Characterized by an expansion of science fields.
4. More specialized and focusing on science.

“Will fields such as literature, history and philosophy still be offered in Malaysian universities in 2020 or will they have to succumb to market demands?”

It is clear from Tun's speech that by the year 2020, Malaysian universities of the future are expected to be universities with outstanding quality. They are also expected to be highly specialized and place significantly high emphasis on science. But what is also clear from his speech is a reduction of emphasis on the humanities. Given the fast-changing pace and growth of scientific knowledge and innovations, Tun's vision of scientific universities in 2020 is unsurprising. Even today, there are already several private higher education institutions offering science-oriented specialized education. Such a vision, however, imposes an enormous challenge to the humanities.

Given the huge emphasis on the sciences, how relevant will the humanities be in 2020? Will fields such as literature, history and philosophy still be offered in Malaysian universities in 2020 or will they have to succumb to market demands? Ultimately, will Tun's Vision 2020 universities mark the slow death of the humanities?

To help answer these questions, IPPTN organized an intellectual discourse involving professors from the School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia on 13 October 2006. The discourse was aimed at obtaining their reactions towards the former Prime Minister's Vision 2020 universities. The group comprised Professor Md Salleh Yaapar, Professor Ruslan Rainis, Professor Ambigapathy Pandian, Professor Abu Talib, Professor Harun Daud, and Associate Professor Abdul Rahman. It was chaired by the dean of the School of Humanities, Associate Professor Norizan Md Nor.

All the scholars agree with Tun Mahathir that the universities of the future will be quality universities and well known for their research results. However, Tun's idea of specialized universities drew flak from many of the professors. Professor Md Salleh Yaapar, a professor of literature, argues that an extreme specialization would lead to fragmentation of knowledge which could be detrimental to mankind. He adds that great Islamic scholars of the past such as Ibn Sina, Ibn Tufayl and Ibn Bajja never practiced specialization. In fact their knowledge was not just in-depth but also diverse. Professor Ruslan Rainis, a professor of geography, also does not believe in having specialized universities. He argues that universities must have niche areas but should not be too specialized.



“Whether or not Tun’s idea of the dominance of science-oriented specialized universities in 2020 will materialize remains to be seen. His vision, however, should definitely be regarded as a wake-up call for those in the humanities.”

Tun’s idea of placing greater emphasis on science fields in the universities of the future received even more negative criticisms from the humanities professors. For Associate Professor Abd Rahman, Tun’s idea reflected an unbalanced education in which the humanities were ignored or disregarded. For Professor Md Salleh Yaapar, it would be wrong to disregard the humanities in the quest for scientific advancement. Sciences, he says, need the humanities especially in aspects of philosophy and religion. In the same vein, Professor Ambigapathy, a professor of English, believes that the sciences

and the humanities should work hand-in-hand. They should not be considered as opposites.

All the professors, regardless of their areas of expertise, strongly agree that the humanities are still important and relevant today and would still be important and relevant in the future. However, efforts must be made and strategies must be identified to ensure their sustainability. One possibility would be the introduction of a program called “Malaysian Studies” in higher education, as suggested by Professor Abu Talib, a professor of history. He says that this program, which could be comprised of disciplines from the humanities and social science, would allow the humanities scholars to develop and promote their expertise and excellence vis-vis research and academic activities pertaining to various important social aspects of Malaysia such as language and culture change, historical development and religious issues.

Whether or not Tun’s idea of the dominance of science-oriented specialized universities in 2020 will materialize remains to be seen. His vision, however, should definitely be regarded as a wake-up call for those in the humanities.

From the rhetorics of the professors, it may be said that the humanities will still have a place in the universities of the future despite them becoming more and more specialized as envisioned by the former Prime Minister. For the humanities to remain important and relevant, mere rhetorics would not be sufficient. There must be efforts by all parties in academia to identify and implement strategies and policies that ensure the relevance and significance of the

“There must be efforts to influence policy directions, to advance excellence, to promote the worth of the humanities in all areas and to seek and challenge new ways to make the humanistic disciplines relevant in our quest for scientific innovations.”

humanistic disciplines. There must be efforts to change and respond to changes. More crucially, there must be efforts to influence policy directions, to advance excellence, to promote the worth of the humanities in all areas and to seek and challenge new ways to make the humanistic disciplines relevant in our quest for scientific innovations.

Albert Einstein’s quote below may be pertinent in the light of the discussion above. “I do not think it is necessarily the case that science and religion are natural opposites. In fact, there is a very close connection between the two. Further, I think that science without religion is lame, and conversely, that religion without science is blind. Both are important and should work hand-in-hand”. The renowned revolutionary thinker and scientist has long noted the interdependence between the secular and the non-secular. Similar arguments could be extended to this discourse between the pure sciences and the humanities.

International Higher Education Policy Research and Management Forum 2006

8 - 11 November 2006, Universiti Sains Malaysia



Participants of International Higher Education Policy Research and Management Forum 2006 in a group photograph. The forum attracted a diverse pool of international academics in discussing regional higher education issues.

Reported by: Ng Eng Kiat

The “International Higher Education Policy Research and Management Forum 2006” was successfully organised by the National Higher Education Research Institute (IPPTN) and Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), with the cooperation of the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia and the Centre for Asia Pacific Social Transformation Studies (CAPSTRANS), University of Wollongong, Australia.

The forum, also known as “The USM Penang HE Forum”, was held on 8th – 11th November 2006 at Lecture Halls A, B, and C in Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang.

The forum provided an opportunity for higher education policy researchers and administrators to discuss issues pertaining to higher education in the Asia Pacific region. There were a total of 54 academic papers presented in three days. The forum attracted

120 participants from 13 countries. IPPTN was gratified with such a response and is extremely pleased that the forum was highly rated by participants in terms of organization, academic substance and contents.

The International Higher Education Policy and Research Management Forum in Penang was a follow-up to the successful two-day Malaysia-Australia higher education forum held one year ago at the University of Wollongong, Australia. The higher education researchers and experts from the Asia Pacific region who gathered deliberated on higher education issues, and networked towards establishing collaborative research between the various countries in this region.

The forum was divided into ten sessions covering themes such as “Governance and Leadership in Higher Education”, “Gender and Inclusion in Higher Education Research in the Asia Pacific”, “Interconnections and Global Diversity: Intercultural Implications Emerging from Internationalisation for

Teaching/Research”, “Interconnected Knowledge and Research: Research Policy and Directions and the dilemmas for Australia, Malaysia, and other Partners in the Asia Pacific”, “Maintaining the Standards of Higher Education in the Asia Pacific: Quality Assurance of Transnational Education”, etc.

The forum had three esteemed keynote speakers. Professor William G. Tierney from the Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis in the University of Southern California (CHEPA), USA, spoke on “Academic Freedom and the Changing Nature of Faculty Work in an Age of Globalization”. The second keynote was delivered by Professor Futao Huang of the Research Institute of Higher Education (RIHE),

Hiroshima University. He spoke on “New Challenges for Undergraduate Curriculum Development in a New Era”. The third keynote address, on “Internationalization, National Development and Markets: Key Dilemmas in Leadership in Higher Education”, was delivered by Associate Professor Peter Kell of University of Wollongong, Australia.

On a lighter note, the forum ended with the participants taken on a tour of Georgetown. The capital city of Penang is renowned for its pre-war and colonial heritage. Penang island was the Pearl of the Orient in the former British Empire.



The International Higher Education Policy Research and Management Forum 2006 brought together 120 participants from 13 countries and saw 54 papers presented over a course of three days.



The forum also provided a platform for discussion, debate, and exchange of ideas on Higher Education issues in the region.

Futures of Higher Education in Malaysia Workshop

18 September 2006, Pan Pacific Hotel KLIA

**Reported by: Ng Eng Kiat &
Noraini Mohamad Yusof**

The National Higher Education Research Institute (IPPTN), in partnership with the Ministry of Higher Education, organised a workshop discussing the “Futures of Higher Education in Malaysia” on 18 September 2006.

Held at the Pan Pacific Hotel of Kuala Lumpur International Airport, Sepang, the workshop pulled together 25 academics from both public and private institutions of higher learning in Malaysia to scan and analyse developments of the local higher education landscape.

Also part of a task force to chart the “Futures of Higher Education in Malaysia” (FOHEM), the 25 participants were introduced to the Scenario Planning method which can be used in scanning developments and changes in the global higher education arena.

This workshop also acted as an informal meeting in determining the responsibilities and organisation of the FOHEM task force.

In the first morning session, Associate Professor Lee Lik Ming from Universiti Sains Malaysia presented a paper on Understanding Scenario Planning. Taking a case study on how petroleum giants Shell “successfully predicted events”, Lee discussed the need for scenario

planning and key issues in scenario planning (research on the fringe, focus on uncertainties, and asking the right questions).

After a short break, the workshop continued with Associate Professor Mohd. Azhari Abdul Karim talking on Methods for Scenario Planning. Looking at scenario planning from two angles, Azhari discussed notions of “Futures Narration” and then proposed methods putting scenario planning into practice.

In the afternoon, the workshop continued with a session themed Scenarios for Higher Education. This session saw both paper presenters in the morning teaming up to lead participants in discussing recurring themes in scenarios for higher education, trends, emerging issues, and their relevance to the future of higher education in Malaysia.

In the discussion of the setting up of a task force for FOHEM, it was suggested that the task force be formalised as a permanent body that can move ahead in operationalising futures of higher education in Malaysia.

On matters regarding the task force, IPPTN has been identified to act as a secretariat to the Ministry of Higher Education. As such, IPPTN will list out an inventory of all studies that have been done on higher education and draw up future scenarios of higher education in Malaysia in the next 15 years.



Participants of the FOHEM Workshop were introduced to various scenario planning methods.

Higher Education Research Monograph Series: Industrial Training Practices in Malaysian Undergraduate Engineering Programme

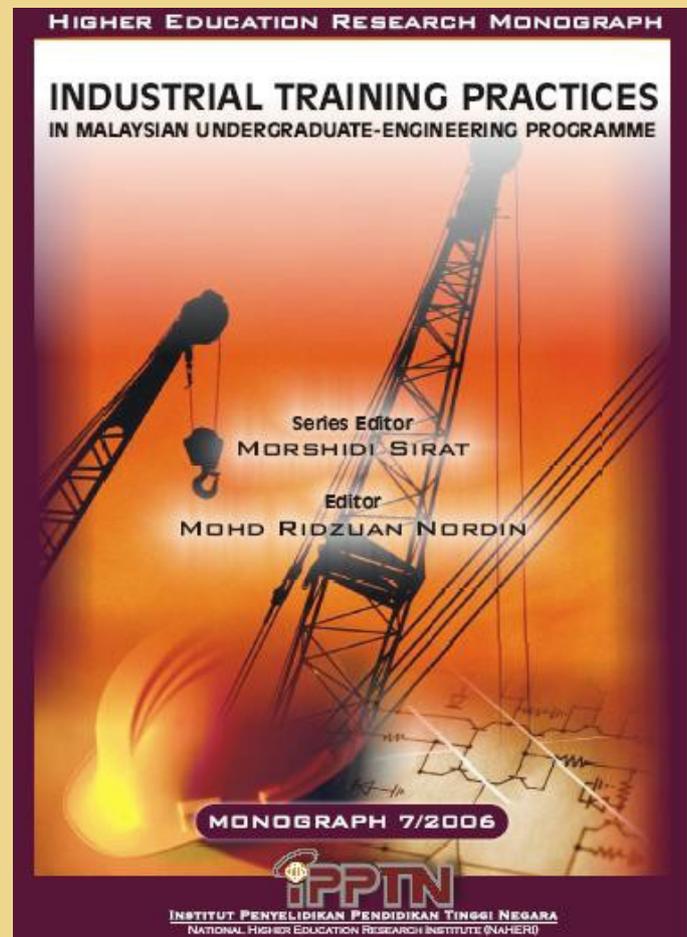
The primary objective of this project is to explore approaches to enhance the effectiveness of industrial training conducted by institutions of higher education in Malaysia. Industrial training is viewed as an important strategy to expose students to real work life and to equip them with the necessary skills so that they would be job ready when they graduate.

Malaysian institutions of higher education adopt diverse approaches for industrial training programme. This is reflected in the way of which the programme is conducted, academically and administratively. In the case of the engineering programme there is a university that makes industrial training an elective component of the programme. On the other hand there is also a university that makes it a compulsory component with industrial training carrying 16 credit hours and students' performance in the training contributing towards CGPA computation.

Overall, the organisations surveyed are willing to continue accepting students on industrial training because of the benefit of such programme to students and to organisations. Organisations provide allowance to the majority of respondents in this study indicating their support to the industrial training programme. However several areas needing improvement have been identified. These include clearer industrial training guidelines, improved coordination between institutions and organizations and better preparation of students for industrial training.

Eventhough the institutional respondents indicated that their institutions have done their best in managing the industrial training programme, two observations pointed that the efforts may have been within the constraints faced by the administrations of industrial training. These constraints are the financial allocations and attentions given by the management of the university to industrial training programme.

Based on the findings of this study, recommendations are made for the various parties including government, organisations, institutions of higher education and students. The government is recommended to view industrial training as a strategic agenda in the development of human resource of the nation, to further formulate policy and create incentive that would encourage organizations to provide industrial



training opportunities for students.

The organizations are recommended to enhance their commitment to train the country's human resource through active involvement in industrial training and to provide systematic and relevant training to students inclusive of assigning suitable officers to supervise students on industrial training.

The institutions of higher education are recommended to coordinate each other's efforts pertaining to industrial training and adopt the best practice, to develop databases and web-based services that facilitate smooth management of industrial training by the institution. The institutions are also recommended to provide appropriate allocations to finance industrial training related activities especially the assessment related activities and to signify the strategic importance of industrial training in relation to the institution's overall mission and finally to continuously solicit feedback and input from the industry to enhance the effectiveness of industrial training and the quality of students and academic programmes.

Sharing of information and adopting synergistic approaches towards managing industrial training are required for the benefit of the nation. Best practices should be found and adopted system wide. Novel and brave measures should be introduced to reflect the strategic significance of industrial training.

Forthcoming in this series:

Monograph 8: Shortcut Behaviour among Students at Malaysian Higher Education Institutions.

Monograph 9: Enhancing Quality of Faculty in Private Higher Education Institutions in Malaysia.

Calling for Articles & News Briefs

The *Bulletin of Higher Education Research* welcomes short articles, opinions, comments, and information about people and events related to higher education in public and private institutions in Malaysia and abroad. Please address your correspondence to:

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