

CONTENTS

Building Futures Oriented Universities

Marcus Bussey

pp. 1-3

Universiti Sains Malaysia and Looking to Malaysian Tradition for Guidance

James Campbell

pp. 4-6

APEX University Research Agenda (AURA) Project (2008-2014): a USM Initiative

Ooi Keat Gin

pp. 7-8

How Polite are Malaysian Undergraduates?

Munir Shuib, Razif Mohd.,
Sarjit Kaur and Siti Hajar Che Man

pp. 9-11

Research Short Notes

pp. 12-13

News and Events

pp. 14-15

Publications

pp. 16-17

Building Futures Oriented Universities

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In 1962 the company Humble Oil ran an advertising campaign that claimed "Each day Humble supplies enough energy to melt 7 million tons of Glacier". Today this advertisement seems bizarre! It is likely that to a future generation the Lisbon Declaration, issued by the European University Association in 2000, which set a 2010 European target of becoming: "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth, with more and better jobs, and greater social cohesion"¹ will seem equally hapless. After all, there is no mention of the environment, of a relevant ethically oriented values base, of a wider human context, nor of a vision reaching beyond the narrow economy and social maintenance of the status quo. The focus is totally on market share and maintaining present practices and assumptions.

In all of this, the link between values and institutional process is left unaddressed. Institutions and the cultures they support are expressions of collective consciousness. Human culture, which is the architecture of our shared values, is the collective expression of the human drive to secure a stable future. Institutions in the current era are the main expressions of these values. Throughout history there are examples of moments in civilisations when there is no longer a clear match between a dominant value set and the context they seek to manage. At such points societies either collapse or transform (Diamond, 2005). The great historian Ibn Khaldun described such points in his cyclic theory of *asabiyyah* in which social process was built around the cohesion (or lack thereof) of groups. The central premise he had was that once

a context has been stabilised entropy sets in. This, for Khaldun, was essentially internal and centred on the decay of values and vision in a ruling group. At the same time, this situation could also be the result of values that work in one context but fail to respond effectively to new contextual factors (Khaldun, 2004).

The Indian philosopher P. R. Sarkar also suggested cycles but argued that the cycles were related to dominant psychologies or modes of consciousness which he linked to the Indian *varnas* of worker, warrior, intellectual and merchant. He contended that when one mode was dominant it became so aligned with vested economic and political interests that ultimately it failed to respond effectively to new contextual determinants (Inayatullah, 1997). Ultimately societies and their institutions would fail because of the investment in forms of expression that maintained the vested interests of the few over the many. Sarkar suggested that such cycles could only be broken by individuals, he called them *sadvipras*, who looked out for the interests of all. He suggested that the education system was well placed to foster such morally courageous, holistic and visionary people (Bussey, 2010).

To understand institutions as expressions of collective consciousness is a powerful insight. It allows those working in them to (1) access deeper resources in challenging unsustainable practices and (2) promote forms of cultural development that transform dominant modes of activity. When the latter is aligned to values that offer new ethical and cultural visions of human potentiality the stage is set for cultural renewal.

Higher education is at such a crossroads. The dominant matrix of educational modelling is still firmly committed to the interests of a worldview and culture that is rapidly losing integrity, purpose and moral authority. Entropy has set in. This concept, originally from physics, posits that every system is maintained by energy flows. All such flows both draw on and leak energy – this latter process is known as entropy. Stable systems all ultimately fall victim to entropy or they change. Today there are signs aplenty that the dominant vision is no longer sustainable. Yet the drive to leverage crude forms of energy that is exemplified in Humble Oil’s advertisement is still the dominant paradigm. Institutions of higher learning can challenge this paradigm by promoting alternative possibilities for human expression, challenging the monopoly on moral authority held by prestige universities and offering alternative models of excellence for university practice (Razak and Ramli, 2008).

Such institutions must adopt a futures-orientation that anticipates the needs of future generations and builds this mode of thought into the construction of policy and pedagogy today. Thus they become bridges to the future actively facilitating sustainable cultural and educational pathways for their staff and students. This requires the nurturing of new stories that promote values that can inform policy and

decision making and open institutional practice to creative engagement with the challenges of the present. All futures thinking is partisan in this way. It is designed to promote preferable futures over the probable (Bell, 1993).

The logic behind institutional transformation and/or failure can be captured in a series of premises that work the tension between the individual and their context, the role of institutional rationality in meaning making, the link between values and purpose and finally the centrality of new stories in transforming unsustainable contexts. The following set of premises present a logical sequence of assertions that deepen our thinking on engaging values in higher education.

Premise 1 (The Obvious)

Institutions shape people and people shape institutions.

Premise 2 (The System)

Institutions institute the rational as reality.

Premise 3 (The Paradigm)

The rational is contextual and value laden.

Premise 4 (The Story)

When the rational, i.e. the story, fails so do institutions (or they change).

“Ultimately societies and their institutions would fail because of the investment in forms of expression that maintained the vested interests of the few over the many.”

The first and obvious point to be derived from this set of premises is that our institutions are already value laden. To use Lyotard’s term, institutions are *performative* in nature (Smith, 1992); they perform the ‘real’. Here of course the real is that subset of universal possibility that currently orders our relationships across a spectrum from the interpersonal, intrapersonal to the transpersonal and also between the various ecologies that flow across and through cultural space – natural, technological, axiological, epistemological and ontological.



FIGURE 1: Humble Oil’s “Enough Energy” advertisement from 1962

“The dominant matrix of educational modelling is still firmly committed to the interests of a worldview and culture that is rapidly losing integrity, purpose and moral authority. Entropy has set in.”

To embed values and service in higher education futures requires an engagement with new stories. These are immanent to the cultural field but are suppressed by a dominant story line that determines coherence. Thus they are part of the heterotopic possibilities of context and they emerge when context produces new signals that challenge the legitimacy of the dominant story (Bussey, 2009). Those of us who work

in higher education are receiving a range of contested signals that are currently struggling for control over this story making process. Some stories are fear based and seek to lock out, control, define and legislate due process. Other stories are based on love and seek to generate possibility, hope, inclusivity and flexibility (Tolle, 2005). Whether we like it or not this is an unstable yet creative space. It is one in which violence and trust wrestle for the hearts and minds of us all.

Institutions are having to find their way in this environment by engaging what Ananta Kumar Giri calls a ‘labour of learning’ (2005: 27). Universities working with the present for the future are bridging institutions. They are working on understanding how stories can be used to generate new possibilities while retaining legibility within the current higher education narrative. Such institutions have done this by bridging between an emergent context for the university and the need to be seen as responsible. This is a delicate balancing act which requires openness to the future and a deeper understanding of control, not as based on managerialist fear, but as based on trust and a delicious anticipation of the creative possibilities that lie before them.

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Footnote:

1. The Lisbon Declaration can be found at http://www.bmwf.gv.at/fileadmin/user_upload/europa/bologna/EUA_lisbon_declaration__07.pdf

Universiti Sains Malaysia and Looking to Malaysian Tradition for Guidance

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Higher educational reform in Malaysia is ultimately engaged with the question of developing creativity in learning and maintaining values in a changing and dynamic world. The approach of Universiti Sains Malaysia to its APEX agenda is an approach that tries to couple and develop these two important aims. The argument which is set out in the following discussion is that two seminal Malaysian thinkers provide us with a balanced path and interesting insights into how we can think through advancing these aims. These thinkers are: Syed Hussein Alatas and his brother Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas. The argument in this brief discussion is not that USM's articulation of the APEX agenda through the 'University in a Garden' philosophy is necessarily a *conscious* elaboration of these thinkers' complex philosophical and social theoretical arguments. Rather these thinkers provide important and explicit indigenous theoretical contributions that can be made to the *unfolding* APEX agenda adding depth, nuance and philosophical richness to the discourse of higher educational reform which is lost should we ignore their insights and important arguments.

“Sustainable development and growth in higher education requires a commitment to an ethical imperative. In the case of USM this imperative is found in the twin doctrines of sustainability and commitment to the bottom billions.”

Firstly, Syed Hussein Alatas provides us with a classical way to engage the problem of pedagogy, social development and cultural self respect. Syed Hussein Alatas' approach to these issues provides us with a language and philosophical insight that can help us to deeply and sagaciously understand the choices USM faces in advancing a transformative agenda. The core binary that Alatas presents is between the 'captive' mind and the 'creative' mind (Alatas, 1974). This binary is representative of a very deep and profound distinction, and it is of central importance to understanding the distinctions and issues we face in analysing USM's education reform. Syed Hussein Alatas in some of his seminal essays on this topic argues that a profound problem that manifests

in Malaysian education and indeed in Malaysian higher education is the problem of 'intellectual imperialism'. Intellectual imperialism is a manifestation of what Alatas refers to as 'Erring Modernisation' (Alatas, 1975).

Erring Modernisation is a form of modernisation that is reducible to westernisation and imperialism, and should be distinguished from modernisation that respects and engaged local culture. Erring modernisation entails cultural and intellectual imperialism and captivity of the mind. The aim of USM in its pedagogical agenda is to not repeat the mistakes of erring modernisation. For example the commitment by USM to advancing knowledge and 'creativity' and 'out-of-the-box thinking' needs some reference to a philosophy which is rooted in a concern not to simply mimic westernization (USM, 2008: 62). The commitment to 'writing our own rules and excelling and executing them without compromising our values' is a very good example of the sentiment which finds deeper philosophical support in Alatas' commitment to creativity rooted in self respect (Razak, 2009: 6). The key observation with respect to Malaysian public policy in regards to higher education is its effort at both engaging economic development while also recognising the centrality of sustainable values and culture (this approach is also reinforced in the New Economic Model's commitment to sustainability, inclusiveness and high income).

Sustainable development and growth in higher education requires a commitment to an ethical imperative. In the case of USM this imperative is found in the twin doctrines of sustainability and commitment to the bottom billions. How does USM embed its ethical vision? It does so by being 'more concerned with how to build a whole personality rather than just building people for the markets' (Chow, 2008). This concept of building the 'whole personality' which is the way in which the ethical aims of USM's philosophy can be driven can only be achieved if we do not fall into the habits of the captive mind as articulated by Alatas. At the same time this desire to engage and develop the whole personality reinforces the need for us to take seriously the spiritual and ethical dimension of higher educational reform.

This brings us to the second thinker whose ideas can help us to engage the APEX project of USM in a more nuanced and deeper fashion: Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas. The idea that ultimately education is about seeking to instil a 'harmonious and rightly-balanced relationship between the man and his self' (Al-Attas, 1985: 72) is of critical importance for how we understand the relationship between values and knowledge. Given this, and given the way USM through its 'University in a Garden' approach seeks to take seriously indigenous civilisation and values it follows that thinkers such as Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas whose life work

is a profound effort to engage the problems of values and civilisation should at least be considered as having some important contribution to our debate over the meaning and direction of higher educational reform and USM's APEX agenda in particular.

“Educational growth, change and development if not bounded by a deeper commitment to normative principles and the social good is a pedagogy stripped of its central essence.”

The right balance referred to by Syed Muhammed Naquib Al-Attas is a critically central issue in any discussion of what it is to be educated. In the USM example the centrality of the concept of *sejahtera*, which suggests spiritual as well as physical well being in unison may be one way of formulating and seeking to address the issue of balancing physical well being with a deeper ethical and spiritual sense (Ibrahim, 2005). The critical point in respect of APEX and USM is that the economic argument to change Malaysian pedagogical practice must be tempered by a values framework that is not reducible to individualism or unsustainable consumerism (Mohamed, 2008).

Educational Problems

The USM project seeks to balance the economic needs of the nation with a deeper ethical framework by seeking to address a fundamental problem that characterises Malaysian education: the problem of lack of creativity within educational institutions with the emphasis on rote learning and a lack of engagement with issues of substantive moral personality. Ethics is largely taught with an emphasis on rote recitation of rules lacking substantive content and cultivation of moral personality. There is also a fundamental lack of engagement with critical thinking within educational institutions. This manifests in the discourse of human capital which accentuates the utilitarian aspect of knowledge at the expense of its deeper values orientation. The competencies, practices, and identities that are necessary for students to compete and succeed in contemporary Malaysian society cannot be simply reduced to technical arguments over improvements in human capital (Wong, 2009a). As Steven Wong argues, that creativity and innovation ‘starts and ends with a living, breathing person. That person has a family, a circle of friends and a community’ (Wong, 2009b).

Educational growth, change and development if not bounded by a deeper commitment to normative principles and the social good is a pedagogy stripped of its central essence. It is like ‘a circle with no centre’ (Al-Attas, 1985: 148). The key to USM's approach is that it recognises the educational importance of having a vital and central rationale. USM is seeking to avoid the problem which characterises the contemporary university of having no ‘vital *centre*’. Syed Muhammed Naquib Al-Attas captures the problem to be avoided clearly:

‘Like a man with no personality, the modern university has no vital *centre*, no permanent underlying principle establishing its final purpose. It still pretends to contemplate the universal and even claims to possess faculties and departments as if it were the body of an organ – but it has no brain, let alone intellect and soul, except only in terms of a purely administrative function of maintenance and physical development. Its development is not guided by a *final* principle and definite purpose, except by the relative principle urging on the pursuit of knowledge incessantly, with no absolute end in view’ (Al-Attas, 1985: 147).

Syed Muhammed Naquib Al-Attas points out that an uncritical swallowing of western knowledge forms can undermine and dissipate the values and normative commitments of Malaysian society (Al-Attas, 1985). The problem of how USM ensures that its uptake of educational reform does not result in a radically westernised *disenchanted* education made utterly *profane* in the context of an uncritical following of so-called ‘best practice’ or ‘world class’ pedagogy is a central existential dilemma for the USM project. USM's educational strategy seeks to engage with and overcome these problems. Pedagogical reform, ‘needs to encourage more critical inquiry and open deliberation’ (Hashim and Tan 2009: 55) however it also needs to be imbued with a sense of ‘mans purpose for knowing’ (Al-Attas, 1985: 132).

Practical ways in which USM can engage this agenda include shifting learning to a student centered approach which focuses on ensuring that students learning are deep and embedded in understandings that are far more engaged than the type of knowledge realised through rote instruction and the recitation of formula or facts. Problem Based Learning which is currently practiced in the Health Sciences is an example of this approach (USM, 2008: 27). Another reform which can embed the ethical programme into the way knowledge is taught is the Sustainability Development Criteria which entails courses being, ‘required by their professional institutes to incorporate sustainable development into their curriculum’ (USM, 2008: 28). This is currently exercised in Engineering at USM. Finally reform to assessment strategies away from examinations and summative assessment towards formative assessment can help drive changes to teaching and learning which in turn will positively affect the development of the ‘whole personality’ and develop deeper more embedded knowledge as well as normative commitments. In short,

changes to pedagogy, curriculum and assessment which are currently underway at USM give practical support to the philosophical arguments made here.

“USM’s agenda is an effort inspired by an approach rooted in cultural self respect and recognition of the importance and value that Malaysian ideas and culture can bring to higher educational reform.”

USM’s pedagogical agenda seeks to avoid the intellectual imperialism and values degradation that characterises the way neo-liberalism is assaulting Malaysian culture. USM’s agenda is an attempt to avoid captivity of the mind, moral confusion and ultimately second rate status that characterises an educational agenda dogged by rote learning, summative exam oriented pedagogy and a failure to take seriously the ethical responsibility of higher education. USM’s agenda is an effort inspired by an approach rooted in cultural self respect and recognition of the importance and value that Malaysian ideas and culture can bring to higher educational reform. Both Syed Hussein Alatas and Syed Muhammed Naquib Al-Attas provide significant intellectual support for this project of cultural self respect and dignity. The questions they raise and the philosophical depth they provide to trying to answer them provides useful food for thought for those interested in higher educational reform. We do not need to accept uncritically everything these authors argue, to recognise the profundity of the questions they raise and the salient importance of their insights to the problems of higher education. A higher educational discourse which fails to recognise their contribution to the debate over reform is all the poorer for it. USM’s APEX strategy of the University in a Garden is made all the richer by drawing these thinkers into the fold.

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APEX University Research Agenda (AURA) Project (2008-2014): a USM Initiative

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I have but one lamp by which my feet are guided, and that is the lamp of experience. I know no way of judging of the future but by the past.

Edward Gibbon (1737-1794)

Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) became the first institution of higher learning to be inducted in Malaysia's Accelerated Programme for Excellence (APEX) in early September 2008 (Simrit and Chapman, 2008). With APEX the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) is expecting USM to be in the world's top 100 universities by 2013, and among the elite 50 by 2020.

It is imperative that USM's metamorphosis is documented, analysed, and evaluated. To this end the APEX University Research Agenda (AURA) Project (2008-2014) is entrusted with this task to offer an impartial and scholarly record, analysis and evaluation. This paper outlines the activities undertaken since the later part of 2008 and early 2009.

A "Model Experience"

AURA was initiated in the last quarter of 2008. This project seeks to offer a "model experience" of the transformation process that USM undertakes in its evolution propelled by APEX towards attaining world class status within the stipulated time frame. AURA is in line with the APEX programme in that lessons learnt from USM's experiences could then be utilised to accelerate the transformation exercise of other Malaysian universities. It is therefore imperative that AURA offers a holistic picture of USM's transformation journey and experiences therein, and more importantly, an impartial and objective scenario thereby allowing MoHE and other vested quarters to draw benefits, to be conscious of pitfalls, and to overcome shortcomings.

The AURA Team

AURA's transdisciplinary team comprised more than 30 researchers from various disciplines from the School of Educational Studies, the School of Social Sciences, the School of Management, the Graduate School of Business (GSB), and the School of Humanities, USM. AURA focuses on four key areas of concern each with its respective particular aims. All its four research groups working in tandem follow the timeline development and transformation of USM through the pre-APEX period (last quarter of 2008), APEX transformation phase (2009-2013), and the post-APEX stage (2014 and thereafter).

The *AURA-Historical Group* undertakes the documentation task of recording the chronological development of USM's APEX experiences covering significant milestones at the various stages. Working alongside is the *AURA-Governance Group* that ascertains and evaluates the changes and

developments in relation to human resources, governance, service quality, as well as performance that encapsulates the readiness and capabilities of the campus community through the entire transformation process. The third group, the *AURA-Understand, Expect, Aspire (UEA) Group* seeks to identify the changes in the understanding, expectation and aspiration of the USM community as they go through the transformation experience. Meanwhile the *Bio-Psychosocial Group* monitors the bio-psychosocial changes of individuals in the campus community aimed at ascertaining the short- and long-term impact of the transformation process on the individual. Outcomes in bio-psychosocial changes are assessed and analysed in order that timely and strategic interventions are proposed and subsequent actions be taken to arrest unfavourable or even harmful consequences on the individual.

Preliminary Findings

During its initial year of research, AURA focused on the pre-APEX (last quarter of 2008) and the first year of APEX (2009). Altogether 15 papers were produced across the four research groups, two of the papers pertained to the research instruments utilised by the *AURA-Bio-Psychosocial Group*. On the whole, the research findings are encouraging.

The genesis and the subsequent announcement of USM in APEX, and the basis of USM's sustainable development agenda are covered by the *Historical Group* (Nik Haslinda et al. 2010; Ratna and Zainal, 2010). The group also detailed and evaluated the MyCSD (Continuous Student Development) programme, an initiative by USM to recognise and acknowledge the achievements of undergraduates. This is also incorporated under the *PIMPIN SISWA* module, a students' character development programme, which offers an insightful perspective into the happenings among the student community on the ground (Nazarudin et al. 2010; Rahimah et al. 2010).

The *Bio-Psychosocial Group* employs two instruments in their study. The Behavioural Management System (BeMIS) is used to assess the degree of personality change of individuals going through the transformation process of APEX (Ng et al. 2010), whilst the New Mind Maps Instrument "allows the individuals to self explore their mental health status with regards to changing work culture and expectations of the university (Rahimi et al. 2010: 1). It is hoped that untoward behaviour and/or adverse changes in mental well-being could be detected and promptly addressed.

According to a pilot study conducted by the AURA-Understand, Expect, Aspire (UEA) Group (Premalatha et al. 2010) the USM student community possessed high expectations and aspirations. Furthermore it was noted that both undergraduates and postgraduates have a high understanding of what APEX entails.

In examining the level of governance and internal control from the perspective of USM's management, Hasnah and Effiezal (2010: 2) from the AURA-Governance Group found that both governance and internal control are in place but "much improvements are needed." Noor Hazlina and Siti Rohaida (2010) found that USM academics see themselves as capable supervisors (of students), consultants (projects), and teachers (lecturing) but modest in their research and publication as well as networking. On the other hand, the university's administrative personnel in their own perception reportedly appeared to be ready and able to "fulfil the expectation as the human capital of an APEX university" (Siti Rohaida and Noor Hazlina, 2010: 13). USM students are satisfied with the quality of services by both the university's academic and administrative staff (Malliga and Ishak, 2010). Most USM academics are generally satisfied with the service quality offered by their administrative colleagues (Ishak and Malliga, 2010).

Zamri and Tajul (2010) found that USM academics performed well in publication and teaching, competitively successful as recipients of local funding, and enjoy peer recognition. They, however, are less successful in foreign grants applications, graduating postgraduates, and are not readily involved within the local community (ibid 12-13). Furthermore, faculty members possess "a strong perception that they are ready to take up the [APEX] challenge" (Tajul and Zamri, 2010a: 23). However they are only moderately satisfied with the performance of their administrative colleagues (Tajul and Zamri, 2010b: 13).

Concluding Remarks

The years 2010-2013 encapsulate the transformation process per se and the AURA Team is poised to bear witness to history in the making. AURA's documentation, objective analysis and scholarly evaluation will contribute as markers of encouragement as well as of caution in USM's journey on the APEX highway to greater achievements. As the AURA Team continues with its work, the APEX experience of USM will gradually emerge allowing the relevant quarters to take cognizance of the outcome warts and all.

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How Polite are Malaysian Undergraduates?

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Introduction

A growing number of universities and colleges in Japan have started providing information on good manners to their students, especially freshmen (*The Sunday Star*, 7 March 2010). Many university officials, the report adds, say they have had to train their students in good manners because many do not seem to have much awareness of what behaviour is considered socially acceptable. One of the reasons motivating such efforts is the tight employment situation in the country in recent years.

The scenario regarding the employment situation in Japan is more or less the same as in Malaysia. Many undergraduates' failure to find suitable jobs is not so much due to their lack of academic knowledge but it is very much due to their lack of soft skills. Many studies (e.g. Kong, 1998; Aniswal, Munir and Haslina, 2005) have reported that the ability to behave and communicate politely is one of the soft skills required by employers. Thus, it is imperative that higher education institutions equip their students with such skills to help them prepare for the job market. However, despite the multitude of studies on the employability and marketability of graduates, not many studies have been carried out on how Malaysian undergraduates perceive the importance of politeness and how they use this pragmatic feature when communicating.

The aim of this paper is to briefly report some findings from a study on the awareness and use of politeness among undergraduates in a local university in Malaysia. The study employs Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness features as its theoretical framework. They argue that there are two forms of politeness: positive politeness (attempts by a speaker to treat the listener as a friend or as someone to be included in discourse) and negative politeness (attempts by the speaker to save the listener's face by engaging in some formality or restraint). The objectives of the study are to determine the undergraduates' awareness and practices of politeness.

This paper, however, will focus only on the respondents' perceptions of the importance of politeness, their use of politeness when communicating with individuals and their perception of their level of politeness.

The sample comprises 123 undergraduates from both the Arts and Sciences ranging from first year to third year students. 21.9 per cent are males whereas 78.1 per cent are females. Questionnaires and focus group interviews were employed in order to obtain data.

Findings and Discussion

To determine the respondents' perception of the importance of politeness in communication, respondents were asked to choose a range of options from 'very important' to 'not important at all'. The study found that the majority of the respondents felt that politeness was important in communication, as indicated in Figure 1 below.

As can be seen, of the 123 respondents, 55.3 per cent ranked politeness as very important and 20.3 per cent ranked it as important. What is interesting, however, is that there were also respondents (13.8 per cent) who felt that politeness was either of little importance or not important at all. Although the number was relatively small, it is still a cause for concern.

As for the respondents' use of politeness when communicating with different individuals, the results are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2 shows that the majority of the respondents claimed that they were always polite when communicating with their dean, lecturers, office clerks and strangers. However, when it comes to communicating with their friends, a majority (59.3 per cent) of respondents claimed that they sometimes practiced politeness. In fact, there were some (16.3 per cent) who stated that they rarely did so.

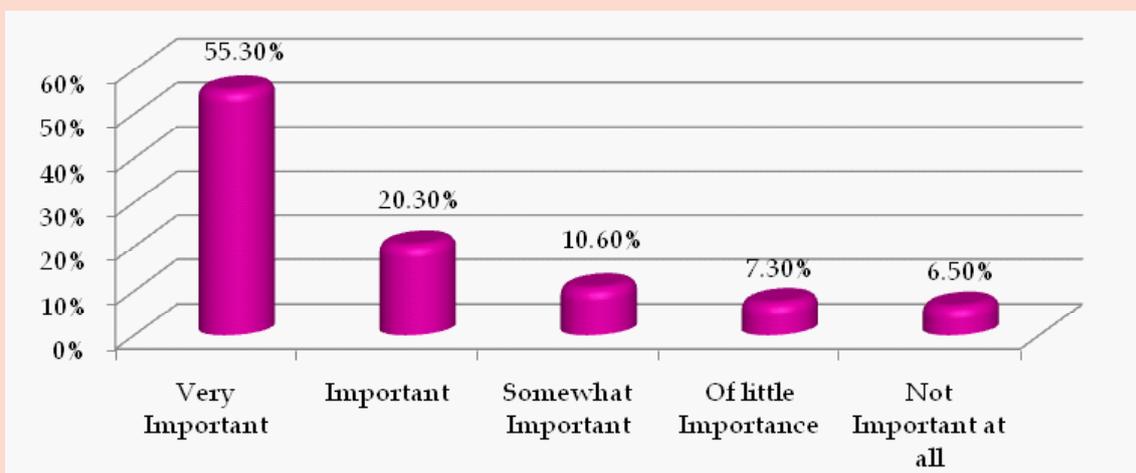


FIGURE 1: The importance of politeness in communication

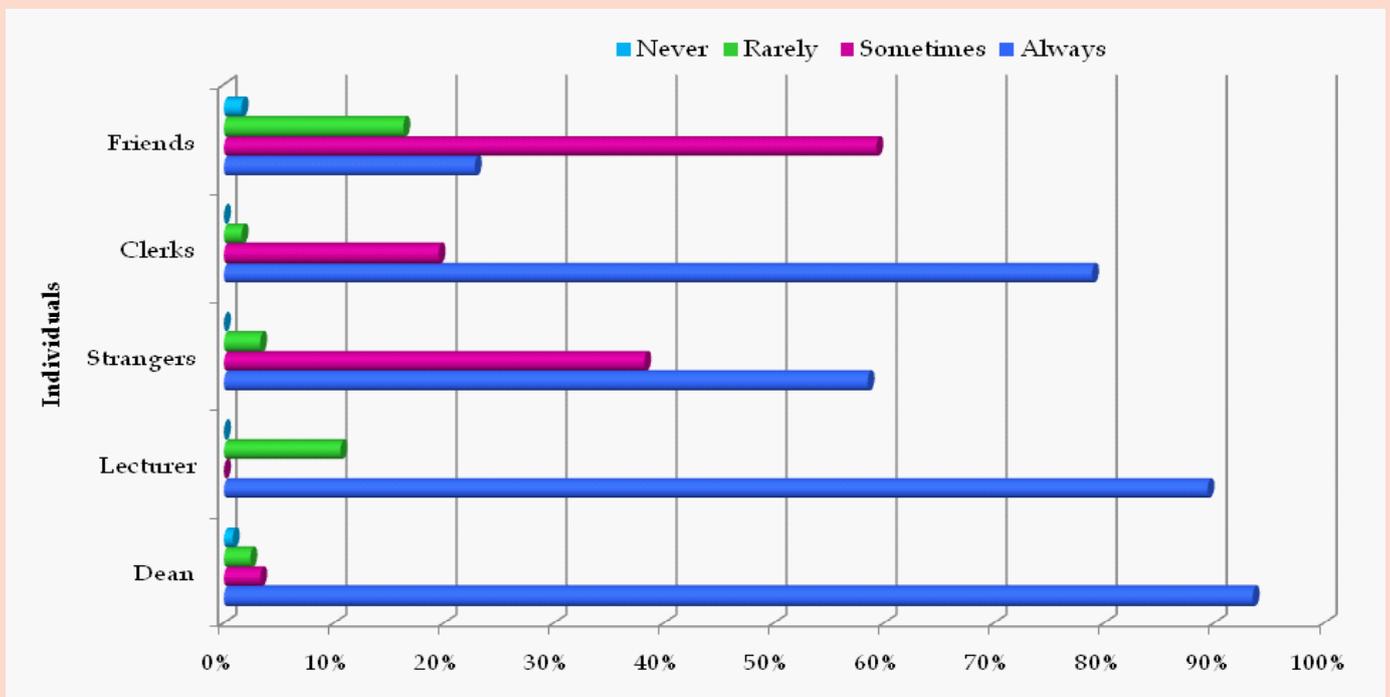


FIGURE 2: The use of politeness with various individuals

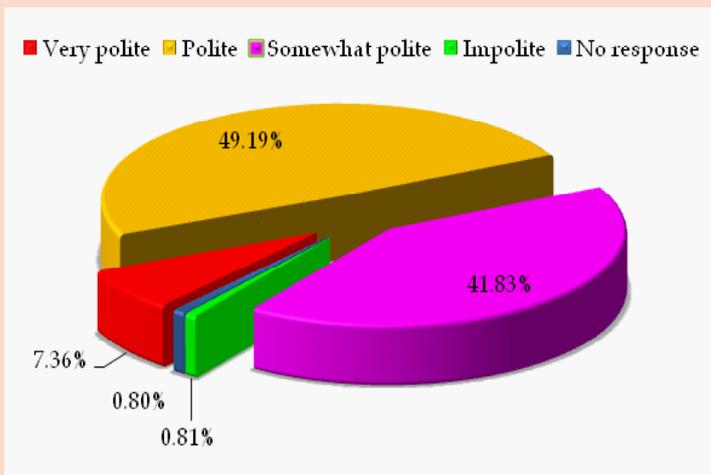


FIGURE 3: Politeness level among undergraduates

As for the level of politeness, the majority (48.8 per cent) believed that their politeness level was high. Some (7.3 per cent) even claimed that they had very high politeness level. However, quite a number of the respondents (41.5 per cent) claimed that their politeness level was only average. The results are shown in Figure 3 above.

On the whole, the findings indicate that generally Malaysian undergraduates in the study were aware of the importance of politeness and did practice politeness in communicative situations with various individuals. The focus group interviews involving eleven undergraduate respondents confirmed these quantitative findings. All the respondents agreed that politeness is important in communication. They also agreed that undergraduates were generally polite when they communicate with others but there were many who they claimed lacked politeness due to “attitude problems”. It

is interesting to note that they also agreed that there was no need to be polite when communicating among friends.

While no firm conclusion may be made from this study due to its limitation in sample size, there are nevertheless two interesting issues which have emerged from the findings. To begin with, even though the majority considered politeness as important, quite a number of the respondents considered it as either only somewhat important, of little importance or even not important at all. In total these respondents made up almost 25 per cent of the total sample. In addition, almost half of the sample considered themselves as only somewhat polite or even impolite. In other words, although many knew that politeness was important, many too did not consider themselves sufficiently polite and some did not even think that politeness was important in communication, especially among friends.

“...many undergraduates may enter the workforce with a lack of appropriate level of politeness and with a relatively low awareness of its importance in communication.”

These two issues may have serious implications so far as their preparedness for the workplace is concerned. As mentioned earlier, politeness is considered one of the most important requirements by employers. However, this study seems to indicate that many undergraduates may enter the workforce with a lack of appropriate level of politeness and with a relatively low awareness of its importance in communication. It may even be possible that the low level of importance to be polite among friends which they appear to practice at their university be carried over to the workplace later on. This is certainly a cause for concern as it may negatively impact the organisations which employ them. At the same time this low level of politeness may reflect poorly on the higher education institution that graduated them. According to Porath and Pearson (2009) who carried out a study on the cost of bad behaviour at work, rudeness in the workplace could be costing companies billions in lost productivity due to various factors including performance decline as well as lost of loyalty and commitment.

“...rudeness in the workplace could be costing companies billions in lost productivity due to various factors including performance decline as well as lost of loyalty and commitment.”

Although such problems may not be encountered by majority of the undergraduates, it may still be important for universities to take appropriate proactive measures in order to ensure as many students as possible graduate with appropriate awareness and use of politeness as expected in today's increasingly globalised workplace environments. The measures may be direct or indirect. A direct approach involves including elements of politeness as part of the course content. A popular practice by universities is to incorporate the teaching of politeness forms and strategies in language proficiency courses (Wen Chia, 2003). However, politeness may also be instilled in or exposed indirectly to students. This can be done through non-academic activities such as by politeness campaigns, for example the recent local university's *Karnival Budi Bahasa*. Another avenue could be via internship programmes. In addition to technical knowledge, interns can have hands-on exposure about workplace communication skills including the use of politeness during their internship at their chosen organisation. According to Porath and Pearson (2009) “civility is best learned experientially”.

Conclusion

Whatever the approach may be, there is no denying that politeness is an important communicative competence that university students should possess and, as the present study seems to indicate, many university students may still need exposure and practice in appropriate use of politeness in appreciation of the rich diversity of the cultures in today's workplaces. Further larger scale studies, however, are needed to support the findings especially involving other categories of respondents.

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The Changing Academic Profession: towards Empowering Leadership in Teaching

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Overview of Findings

Being part of a 22-country study on the changing academic profession (CAP project) which began in 2006, the research instrument (a questionnaire on the changing academic profession) was designed by the Method Group based at Kessel University, Germany which laid out sampling and data collection procedures. The Malaysia study used mailed or/and online questionnaires which were sent out to academics in both public and private higher education institutions. Data collection was completed in June 2007. A total of 1,176 completed questionnaires were analysed. In an effort to cross check the information provided in the questionnaire, the researchers interviewed 10 lecturers in Universiti Sains Malaysia for their views on teaching which encompassed current challenges in their profession, teaching workloads, work situation and leadership activities. This article discusses the findings from the qualitative data.

The individual semi-structured interviews with the lecturers broadly reflected the analysis of the quantitative data collected from the questionnaire (especially with regard to instruction time spent and number of students taught, involvement in teaching activities, quantitative load targets or regulatory expectations, views on various aspects of teaching and teaching abroad and official language of instruction).

Other findings relating to the emergent theme of leadership in teaching include:

- the pressing need “to introduce and apply innovative teaching methods” (Respondent 3=R3), “to engage in collaborative research as opposed to individual research” (R2), “to constantly enhance the learning experience of students” (R1), “to keep up with technology, especially in teaching” (R8), and “to meet increasing demands in terms of assessment” (R5).
- the need to ensure that students acquire the necessary soft skills such as “good communication skills, thinking skills, analytical skills, the ability to work independently and the ability to take initiative” (R2, 3, 5, 7, 9)
- the increasing importance attached to research activities

“...another respondent (R3) views leadership in the academic profession as an avenue that “involves giving intellectual input in a variety of channels – through one’s community activities, research responsibilities, administrative tasks and requires one to share material among colleague to generate collegiality to enhance capacity building” ...

- administrative work is seen as a necessary extension of teaching activities besides supervision of postgraduate students
- the need to assume the position of leader to their own students (including the ability to initiate and foster relationship with others, first with those in the same department/section and to build a strong team, and later with other colleagues within the same school and to work closely with them in teaching and non-teaching activities)
- leadership is also viewed as the ability to support one’s colleagues and to provide encouragement to them. One respondent (R2) also mentioned that being a leader means “taking responsibility and initiative even when you are not in a position of authority”. Additionally, another respondent (R3) views leadership in the academic profession as an avenue that “involves giving intellectual input in a variety of channels – through one’s community activities, research responsibilities, administrative tasks and requires one to share material among colleague to generate collegiality to enhance capacity building”

- the importance of group work where everyone is given the chance to be leaders, for instance to set a goal as a team, to work together as a team by drawing on their individual strengths, to delegate tasks to members of the group, to voice out their own opinion, to encourage others to work/join in group discussions, and to manage conflicts within their own group
- leadership is also cultivated by giving students the freedom to complete a certain task (R5, R7, R9). According to one respondent (R8), rather than telling students how something should be done, students are free to make their own choices. Besides cultivating leadership, these activities also go some way in developing their soft skills. To another respondent (R6), academic leadership can take on various forms but this respondent stresses the fact that “the first step is always for lecturers to instil discipline in structuring course content that will meet the students’ needs and abilities”
- the importance of being good role models to their own students
- leadership also involves giving intellectual input in a variety of channels including through community activities, research responsibilities and administrative tasks. Another respondent (R2) mentioned the importance of collaborative research in which each member of the team is expected to work with others, negotiate differences among themselves, manage conflict among themselves, complete the tasks given to them, and support other team members. Another respondent (R8) mentioned that although the increasing importance attached to collaborative research at the university means that faculty members have no choice but to engage in research instead of focusing merely on teaching, it forces them “to learn how to work with people that they otherwise do not normally work with”.

Conclusion

While academics might lament that their profession is often compounded by pressing challenges, they must acknowledge that the efficacy of leadership qualities in their profession does to a large extent rest on their ability to cope with existing reforms and challenges in their organisational structures. While a supportive work environment can help empower university teachers to adopt leadership qualities, academics who accept the constraints of limited time and heavy responsibilities can achieve more success if they focus their energy on improving their teaching and learning activities.

“...academics who accept the constraints of limited time and heavy responsibilities can achieve more success if they focus their energy on improving their teaching and learning activities.”

GLOBAL HIGHER EDUCATION FORUM (GHEF2009) Global Higher Education: Current Trends, Future Perspectives

The 2009 Global Higher Education Forum (GHEF2009) was held from 14 to 16 December 2009 at Parkroyal Hotel, Penang. GHEF2009 was jointly organised by the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia and Universiti Sains Malaysia with the Centre for Higher Education Research and Studies (CHERS), Ministry of Higher Education Saudi Arabia as co-sponsor. The Association of African Universities (AAU) and Consortium for North American Higher Education Collaboration (CONAHEC) contributed intellectual support, whereas the National Higher Education Research Institute (IPPTN), Universiti Sains Malaysia served as the GHEF2009 Secretariat.

GHEF2009 brought together scholars, policymakers, researchers, academics and administrators to review, analyse, discuss and debate on various universal higher education issues in the south-south context. Specifically, GHEF2009 focused on the theme, Universal Higher Education, surveying and studying the benefits and challenges related to such a theme. At the same time, this forum also outlined the direction in developing and enhancing the higher education system.



GHEF2009 participants listening attentively in one of the sessions.

This forum was attended by 133 participants and 48 panel members from across 32 countries including Mexico, Ghana, Saudi Arabia, America, Hong Kong, Thailand, Japan, Canada, the United Kingdom, France, Jordan, Papua New Guinea and Finland.

GHEF2009 was initiated by the Minister of Higher Education, Y.Bhg. Dato' Seri Mohamed Khalid Nordin and was officially closed by the Deputy Minister of Higher Education, Y.Bhg. Dato' Saifuddin Abdullah on 16 December 2009. In addition, GHEF2009 launched the Global Centre for Sustainability Studies (CGSS) and three books jointly published by IPPTN and the Universiti Sains Malaysia Press: 1) Student Loan Schemes:



The launch of new USM published books during GHEF2009.

Experiences of New Zealand, Australia, India and Thailand and Way Forward for Malaysia; 2) Quality Assurance and University Rankings in Higher Education in the Asia Pacific: Challenges for Universities and Nations; and 3) 50 Years of Higher Education Development in Malaysia (1957-2007).

GHEF2009 included four plenary sessions and seven parallel sessions, all held at Parkroyal Hotel. The GHEF2009 dinner banquet on the other hand, was held at Traders Hotel with cultural performances by dancers from the School of Arts, Universiti Sains Malaysia.

In a joint statement released by Universiti Sains Malaysia, CHERS, AAU (Ghana), AAU (Jordan) and CONAHEC, the said organisations have agreed that a specific working structure will be built immediately to enable members of the academic world to work and collaborate in reaching a collective common rating standard. In line with such intent, the leadership and governance aspects have to be enhanced as the basis of carrying out actions that will fulfil the aspirations of all parties, specifically in achieving education for sustainable development (ESD).

Overall, this forum successfully achieved its objective in concluding that academic leadership and scholarship play equally important roles in enhancing activities in sustainability.



The signing of the MoU between leaders of university/association.

CELEBRATING AND PRESERVING PENANG FOLKLORE: An inter-varsity collaborative project with the community

Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) in collaboration with Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) and Wawasan Open University (WOU) organised a one-day workshop on Penang Folklore: Celebrating and Preserving the Penang folklore on 12 May 2010. The workshop was part of a larger scale joint effort by the three universities, led by Associate Professor Munir Shuib from the School of Humanities, USM, to link and work together with the community in order to preserve Penang cultural heritage.

The objectives of this workshop were to create awareness among the Penang community about the importance of appreciating and preserving their folklore and to discuss possible strategies for the purpose of preserving and promoting Penang folklore. A blog (<http://penangfolklore2010.blogspot.com>) documenting various forms of Penang folklore was also launched during the workshop.

This event also involved Sekolah Kebangsaan Alma, Bukit Mertajam and the Kumpulan Boria Budayasari Pulau Pinang which performed traditional dances and boria, respectively. Traditional games, crafts, local products and food were on

exhibition and they were part of the event's attraction as they provided an enriching experience for participants as well as better appreciation of the Penang tradition.

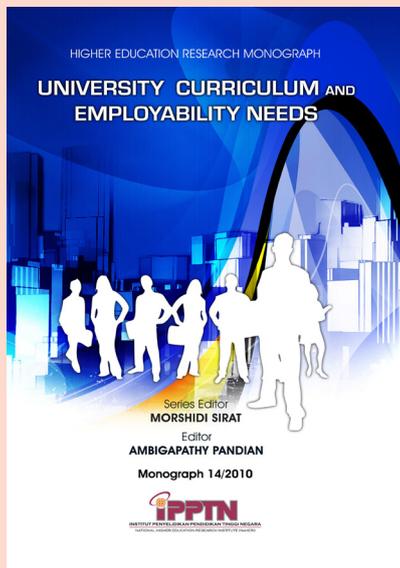
The workshop was officiated by the Governor of Penang, Tun Dato' Seri Utama (Dr.) Haji Abdul Rahman Haji Abbas after a welcoming speech by Professor Lim Koon Ong, Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Industry and Community Network Division, USM and followed by boria performance before the morning tea break. A forum on Empowering Penang Folklore was the following highlight with four panelists from USM, UiTM, WOU and Kumpulan Boria Budayasari. Penang heritage and folklores were featured prominently in the forum to give an overview of the wonderful tradition and practices of Penang community. A discussion session succeeded with questions, comments and suggestions from participants. A colourful performance by students from Sekolah Kebangsaan Alma was the final highlight which was then followed by a closing speech by Professor Dato' Abu Talib Ahmad, Dean of School of Humanities, USM. Everyone was then invited to lunch and traditional carnival where the exhibition was held.



The officiating ceremony of Penang Folklore Workshop.

University Curriculum and Employability Needs

University curriculum that meets employability needs is deemed as an important factor in enhancing human capital development. Unemployment among public higher education institution graduates has dominated much public discussion in Malaysia and the university curricula in preparing students for the workplace has been questioned. This book reports the findings of a study that has aimed to examine the skills and competencies as required by employers in the workplace in the fields of Science, Information and Communications Technology so that current development trends can inform the designing of the university curriculum. The discussion engages quantitative and qualitative methods to elicit views from the industry managers, academics and graduates on four areas: digital age literacy skills, effective communication skills, inventive thinking skills and high productivity skills. The command of English language, technological and computer skills; the ability to communicate, to take risks and to be able to confront challenges; as well as the capacity to work hard and productively were noted as important factors that contribute to gainful employability. This comprehensive report provides several outlooks that will enable the Ministry of Higher Education, University authorities and the industry to make choices about designing learning environments that can enable university students to seek successful employability.

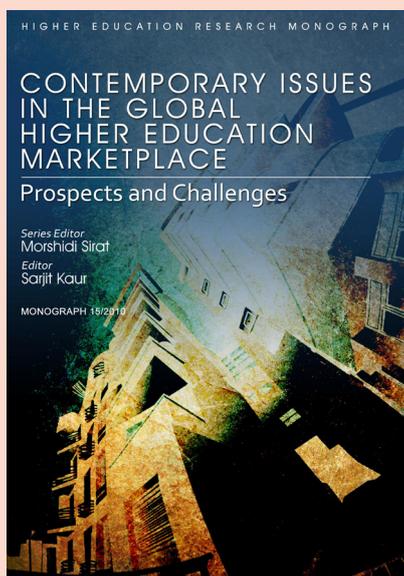


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Contemporary Issues in the Global Higher Education Marketplace: Prospects and Challenges

For the past decade, global higher education has been transforming rapidly and nations are competing to be recognised as hubs offering excellent higher education. To be able to analyse contemporary dynamics efficiently, one must first examine current trends and issues affecting contemporary higher education. This monograph brings together a collection of well researched articles on issues and trends in today's higher education marketplace. Topics range from understanding the international student experience, and implications of globalisation and international student mobility to the introduction of cyberpreneurship, and the fundamentals of terms such as signalling and graduate taxes. All six chapters present in-depth insights on current conditions and patterns in selected higher education settings. Equipped with such information, policy makers, researchers, university leaders and students can be better prepared for future challenges as market forces continue to feature prominently in higher education.



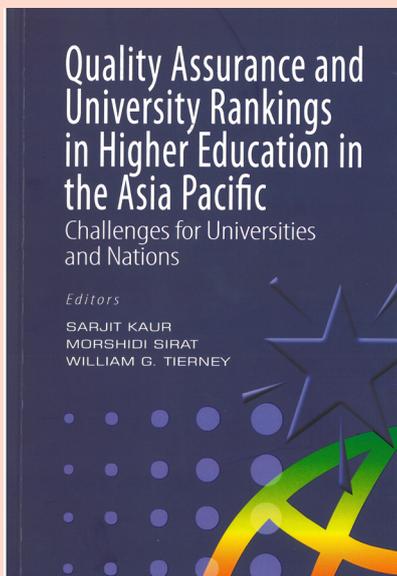
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Quality Assurance and University Rankings in Higher Education in the Asia Pacific: Challenges for Universities and Nations

For higher education researchers, this timely and engaging book offers long-awaited critical analyses of quality assurance and university rankings facing selected countries and the Asia Pacific region. This edited volume has world renowned authors discussing and getting to the heart of the debate on measuring 'quality' in various dimensions of university environments to foster sustainable growth in policy making, governance, teaching, learning and related functions of university systems. Readers will come to know the impact and pervasive influence of university rankings as well as the restrictive functions global comparisons have on higher education systems. There is in depth discussion of the measurement and criteria indices of the current ranking systems and the downfalls of those systems. The book contributors

also highlight current challenges and complexities of quality assurance for higher education institutions and offer practical recommendations that aim to bring about significant changes in higher education policies to help improve the standard of higher education in the Asia Pacific region.



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50 Years of Higher Education Development in Malaysia (1957 - 2007)

Taking into account that to date, there is not a single book that deals specifically on the subject of higher education in Malaysia, this book aims at discussing the subject in a comprehensive manner. As such, it covers several important aspects concerning it. The selected aspects are the history, philosophy, prominent figures, current issues and challenges, future direction, and planning of higher education in Malaysia. Each of these aspects constitutes the main focus of discussion of the six chapters of this book. In conjunction with the 50 years celebration of the nation's independence from British colonial rule, the writers have paid special emphasis on the period from 1957 to 2007. However, the discussion goes beyond this period as demonstrated by the first chapter that deals with the development of higher education which predates independence, and

the final chapter which explores the issue of planning for the future. By examining the specific aspects involved in the development of higher education in the country, it is hoped that this book will provide the important and relevant discussion of the subject and thereby, lends itself to be a useful reference for those who wish to read and learn more about higher education in Malaysia.

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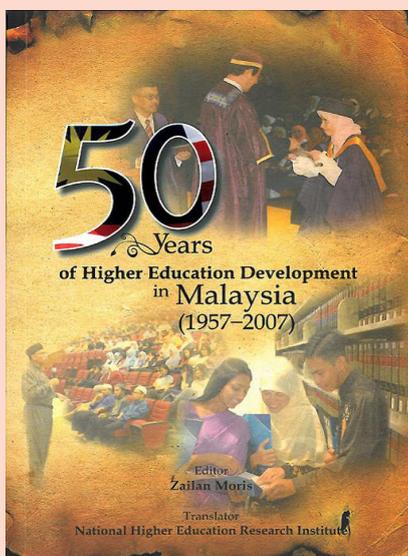
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