CONTENTS

An Overview of Higher Education in Myanmar

*Melissa Ng Lee Yen Abdullah,
School of Educational Studies, Universiti Sains Malaysia*

Introduction

Myanmar is officially known as the Union of Myanmar. In 1962, shortly after the accession to power of the revolutionary government, there were some positive changes in Myanmar's higher education sector as the University Education Act was passed. The Act was later replaced by the Union of Myanmar Higher Education Act (1973). With the enactment of these Acts, more regional colleges were set up to meet the increasing demand for tertiary education (Do, 1994). Short-and long term development plans were also established with the aims to enhance the quality and accessibility of higher education and to promote diversity at higher education institutions (HEIs) (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2004). Since then, the number of HEIs in Myanmar has been steadily increased. There were 129 institutions in 2000, and the number has risen up to 156 in 2008. Table 1 shows the breakdown of HEIs in Myanmar.

The number of HEIs in Myanmar has totaled 158 in 2009, with 64 under the Ministry of Education and another 94 under other ministries. All the HEIs are state-funded (Naing, 2009a).

In Myanmar, higher education is provided by universities and specialised institutions (teacher training schools and colleges, technical and professional institutes and the Institute for Foreign Languages), which are all state-run and state-funded institutions. There are several universities and colleges in the seven states and seven divisions of the Union of Myanmar, except for the medical universities which are located in Yangon, Mandalay and Magway. In every state and division, there are arts and science universities, education colleges, technology colleges and computer colleges (Naing, 2009a). HEIs in Myanmar specialise in variety fields and levels of study such as undergraduate, postgraduate diploma, master's degree and doctorate programmes (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2004; Naing, 2009a).

Table 2 shows the types and number of programmes offered by HEIs, under the Ministry of Education. Most of the HEIs are under the control of the Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education. HEIs in upper and lower Myanmar are run by two separate entities: (a) The Department of Higher Education of Upper Myanmar and (b) The Department of Higher Education of Lower Myanmar. Their headquarters are based in Yangon and Mandalay respectively. National policies are established by the Universities' Central Council and the Council of University Academic Bodies and both are chaired by the Minister of Education.

TABLE 1 Number of HEIs in Myanmar (2008)

No.	Ministry	Number
1	Education	64
2	Health	14
3	Science and technology	56
4	Defence	5
5	Culture	2
6	Forestry	1
7	Agriculture and irrigation	1
8	Livestock, breeding and fisheries	1
9	Cooperatives	5
10	Civil service selection and training board	1
11	Religious affairs	2
12	Progress of border areas and national races and development affairs	1
13	Transport	3
Total		**156**

Source: Tin (2008: 122)

TABLE 2 Types and number of programmes offered by HEIs under the Ministry of Education

No.	Type of programme	No. of courses
1	First degree	50
2	Diploma	22
3	Masters	41
4	M. Research	24
5	PhD	20
6	Human Resource Development Program	169
Total		**326**

Source: Government of the Union of Myanmar (2004: 39)

Higher Education Policy and Reforms in Myanmar

Between 1997 and 2000, five seminars were conducted by the Ministry of Education to discuss the quality of higher education in Myanmar. Issues concerning higher education such as course relevance, credit system, quality of teaching, and utilisation of ICT were covered. As a result, far-reaching resolutions on postgraduate courses, doctoral programmes, doctoral research, facilities, multidisciplinary courses and computer training programmes were achieved (SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2010). In the subsequent years, under the Special Four-Year Educational Plan (2000-2004), various strategies were established and implemented for the development of higher education sector in Myanmar. These strategies focused on five core areas: (1) the promotion of quality education, (2) introduction of ICT in education, (3) advancement of research, (4) development of a lifelong learning society, and (5) enhancement of international collaboration. These reform efforts have brought about some positive changes to the higher education sector. Through a 30-Year Long-Term Education Plan (2001/02-2030/31), the government is placing additional emphasis on the development of human resource and lifelong learning while preserving the national identity and national values (The Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2004). Developing human resource is a key focus area in Myanmar's efforts to consolidate its higher education sector so as to meet the increasing demand for human capital. One of the strategies to handle the shortage of human resource is by utilising the expertise of retired academics, for instance, in the establishment of the Myanmar Academy of Arts and Science, Medical Science, Technology, Agriculture, Forestry, Livestock and Fishery Sciences. The promotion of open education system is also an attempt to meet the rapid increase in the demand for tertiary education. The distance education universities of Yangon and Mandalay have been converted into universities of open education. This more flexible and open system has provided an alternative method to teaching and learning in the country. Under the 30-year Long Term Education Development Plan, Myanmar is aiming at improving its higher education, including the development of human resource, utilisation of ICT at HEIs, expansion of research capacity, and promoting quality education (SEAMEO RIHED, 2008).

Access and Participation in Higher Education

Myanmar is aiming to achieve equitable development in all its geographical regions which are divided up into 24 development zones. According to Naing (2009b), the government is opening more and more schools and upgrading old ones so that every child has access to basic education, and opening universities of particular subjects for local young people to purse higher education in their own regions. As a result, the population of graduates of the nation is on the increase. The expansion of Myanmar's higher education is hoped to promote equitable and accessible development in all the various regions. In fact, each development zone now possesses at least one arts and science university, one degree conferring technological institute and one computer science institute (Tin, 2008; Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2004). Despite the increasing numbers of HEIs for the younger generation to further their tertiary education, Myanmar students who have opted to pursue education in foreign countries has increased significantly from the academic year 2007- 08 (Tong, 2010). The declining quality of the state education system has driven students abroad for better study and qualifications opportunities. This is an option only for the rich and upper classes, who can afford to send their children abroad (Lall, 2008). Over the past five years, there are many outstanding students in Myanmar, including those who passed the matriculation examination and are in the top-ten overall sought university education abroad on scholarship programmes (Tong, 2010).

Internationalisation of Higher Education

Internationalisation of higher education in Myanmar is still limited. All the 158 HEIs in Myanmar are state-run institutions (Naing, 2009a). The Special Four-Year Educational Plan (2000-2004) has provided impetus to HEIs to form linkages and

collaborations with international institutions and research organisations so as to harness local and foreign sources for the development of the higher education sector. The Long-Term Education Plan has further created an upsurge in the number of international and regional collaborations such as in the forms of Memorandum of Understandings (MoU), training programmes, conferences, workshops, seminars, joint research programmes and student and staff exchange. Such efforts are particularly critical to the development of human capital and intellectual capacity of the country. Cross border student mobility are usually via official channels managed and sponsored by the Ministry of Education. Under various higher education programmes, students can go abroad and access higher education in foreign countries such as Japan, Korea, Thailand, India and other neighbouring countries. Unfortunately, there is no available data on the number of international students in Myanmar, which is believed to be extremely low.

The Developing of Research Capacities

As compared to other countries in the region, research and development in Myanmar are lagging behind. It is due to inadequate research funding, shortage of facilities and human resource, as well as a lack of research culture (Tin, 2008). In fact, "the most serious factor hindering research in Myanmar is the need to further enhance a research culture, …an abiding belief in research as a necessary tool for development" (Soe & Tuu, 2000: 11). A number of education plans have been drawn to build universities' research capacities on basic and applied research. There are initiatives to upgrade research facilities and increase the funding for research by the government. Research centres at the various institutions are also being upgraded under the long-term education development plan. These centres are located within the HEIs (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2004: 53-54), for example:

1. **The Universities Research Centre (URC), Yangon University**
    It assists and fosters research activities by providing research facilities and guidance to students and faculty.

2. **Asia Research Centre, Yangon University**
    It assists and fosters scientific research activities and collaborates with the industry.

3. **Microbiology Research Centre, Myitkyina University**
    It is a microbiology laboratory focusing on the research of fauna and flora of the region.

4. **Aquaculture Research Centre, Yangon University**
    It conducts research on the breeding of various species of fish (both local and foreign).

5. **New Century Biotechnology Development Centre, Yangon University**
    It provides knowledge and awareness on biotechnology to the public, leads the way to public-private partnership ventures at HEIs for the development of research activities.

6. **Pathein University Biotechnology Laboratory**
    It focuses on the production of bio-fertilizers for community needs, the production of bio-antiseptic and the cultivation and extraction of medicines from traditional Myanmar medicinal plants.

There is an emerging trend among HEIs to provide research services to government departments and private enterprises through these research centres. Most of these centres are located in major universities. In contrast, the research capacity of other institutions is still limited. They have limited financial resources, poor research facilities, poor and limited human resources for research, development and commercialisation activities.

> **"Developing human resource is a key focus area in Myanmar's efforts to consolidate its higher education sector so as to meet the increasing demand for human capital."**

Accreditation and Quality Assurance

At present, every country in ASEAN, except Myanmar has an agency responsible for accreditation and quality assurance, either within their Ministry of Education or without (Vroeijenstijn, 2009). Nonetheless, the country's interest in quality assurance is acknowledged within the ASEAN University Network (AUN), when in 2002, the 3rd AUN-Quality Assurance Workshop entitled "QA Practices: Teaching Best, Learning Best" with the focus on the sharing of good practices in teaching and learning, was held in Yangon, Myanmar. As a result with the support from ASEAN, the AUN (which comprises of 20 leading universities from 10 ASEAN countries) is offering training programmes in various aspects to enhance the quality of higher education at the Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam (CLMV) countries, including Myanmar (Gajaseni, 2007).

The Challenges and Future Developments

Myanmar is rather behind in social-economic development, which to a certain degree underlies the slow progress of its higher education sector. In fact, the worsening socio-economic situation in the country has resulted in the inadequate development of many of the social services available to the population. Education is the most deprived sector as public expenditure on education in Myanmar is amongst the lowest in the world (European Commission, 2007). The higher education sector is confronted with issues such as shortages of equipment, teaching and learning materials, and more importantly quality teaching staff. These issues have adversely affected the standards of HEIs in the country, particularly the newly established ones.

> **"The Myanmar government hopes to achieve education reforms through a 30-year Long Term Education Development Plan (2001/02-2030/31). Successful implementation of the projects under the first phase of the plan has contributed to the multifaceted development in the higher education sector."**

Much investment and tremendous effort will have to be made in order to improve the quality of higher education and to gain recognition at the international level. The Myanmar government hopes to achieve education reforms through a 30-year Long Term Education Development Plan (2001/02-2030/31). Successful implementation of the projects under the first phase of the plan has contributed to the multifaceted development in the higher education sector. The plan to date has enormously contributed in developing qualified human resource by increasing the equity and accessibility of higher education in the country (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2004). It has also upgraded the research facilities and established new research centres. Such efforts have renewed university communities' interest towards research. Through its 'one campus-multi-system', the country hopes to promote lifelong learning in the society as the system allows convenient learning hours, flexible entry equipments and create wider access for tertiary education. Other on-going reforms include the introduction of new teaching methodologies, modernisation of curricular, improvement of faculty training and expansion of HEIs. All these aim at building a quality higher education system in Myanmar, which ultimately hope to contribute positively to the socioeconomic growth and development of the country (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2004).

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Local Social Mission of Higher Education: The Case of Eastern European Rural Faculties

Yusof Petras
School of Educational Studies, Universiti Sains Malaysia

Introduction

*I*n the past decade, a new issue has emerged in the scientific and political discourse on the mission of higher education institutions. Apart from education and research as their *traditional* functions, a further mission has been assigned to them as a consequence of national higher education policies, namely the contribution to the human and economic development of their social environment. The growing importance of this issue is reflected by the fact that in some countries such as Denmark and Sweden, a demand for social benefits is directly expressed by the latest amendments of the legal regulation of higher education (Göransson et al., 2009). Although this function of schools had always existed throughout the history of education, it has just lately gained significance in higher education policies.

This paper represents a summary of the main findings of a research project investigating the local impact of higher education faculties located in rural areas of Hungary, Eastern Europe. The primary focus of this study was the fulfilment of the social mission of rural higher education. The study seeks to answer the following question: To what extent higher education faculties promote local societies adapting to the changing socio-economic and environmental conditions?

Theoretical Background

In Eastern European rural space, the actuality of a functional analysis of higher education is provided by the profound and rapid transformation of both the global and national background of rural areas since the collapse of state socialism. As a result of this transformation, huge areas (sometimes even whole regions) have failed to join the global networks, lagging behind the more prosperous regions of their countries (Unwin et al., 2004). Due to growing spatial inequality, the social conflicts boosted by the collapse of state socialist economies and the various shock-therapies implemented for the sake of structural reform (as poverty, large scale unemployment, inequalities in the access to education, culture, health services and labour market, etc.), as well as the groups involved in these conflicts, have been over-represented in rural areas, most of which have been unable to join the global networks (Deacon, 2000; Hörschelmann, 2004).

As a result of the neoliberal transition of post-socialist societies, both the demand for higher education degrees and the costs of attaining them have increased significantly (Kozma, 2004). Due to the simultaneous trends of expansion and social polarisation, a huge group of lower-class and lower-middle-class rural population will be seeking higher education, thus demanding the availability of low-cost studies within a short commuting distance.

In this study, I examined the realisation of the social mission of higher education within the framework of functional analysis of institutions, focusing on the impacts of institutions on their social environment as organisational responses to the demands of the society. There are two types of ties between schools and their social environment: vertical ties binding them to state authorities and macro-society, and horizontal ones converting local needs and demands to the aims and vision of education institutions (Halász, 1990). In a functionalist approach, social contribution of schools is partly a manifest function declared by their authorised profile and mission statement, partly latent however, created by the needs of their local social environment (Kozma, 2004).

In most cases, horizontal ties account for the latent functions of higher education faculties, due to the informal lobbying and community-building activities of such agents as their local students (and their families), their local employees as well as those actors of local economy capitalising the human resource created by them (Brudney, 2001; Maurrasse, 2001). The contribution of faculties to their local environment can be present at each sphere of social existence, including community issues, economic, cultural and political life, and even the mental patterns of residents.

The technical framework of the present study is based on analysis input-output model, designed for the examination of short-term and long-term economic impacts of institutions by Leontief (1936). It was applied in higher education research pertaining to a peripheral-located college faculty in Scotland (Blake & McDowell, 1967), then adopted by numerous British and American impact studies throughout in the past half century (Lillis & Tonkowich, 1976; Goldstein, 1990; Batterbury & Hill, 2004; Hermansson et al., 2008). In this model, inputs involve all immediate benefits derived from the existence of a faculty as a local consumer, employer and an agent attracting young people to the locality from outside, while outputs are produced by the long-term benefits capitalised from the direct research and development activities, as well as the knowledge and human resource created by higher education (Figure 1).

In the past two decades, a number of impact studies applying the input-output model have provided empirical evidence that higher education can take a significant contribution to its socio-economic environment (Florax & Folmer, 1992; Huffman & Kigley, 2002). An important finding of these studies is that the proportion of inputs and outputs are determined by the local human and material environment.

While big regional centres benefit from the output impacts of their higher education institutions principally, small town faculties located in rural areas rather contribute by their inputs to the surrounding locality (Stokes & Coomes, 1996).
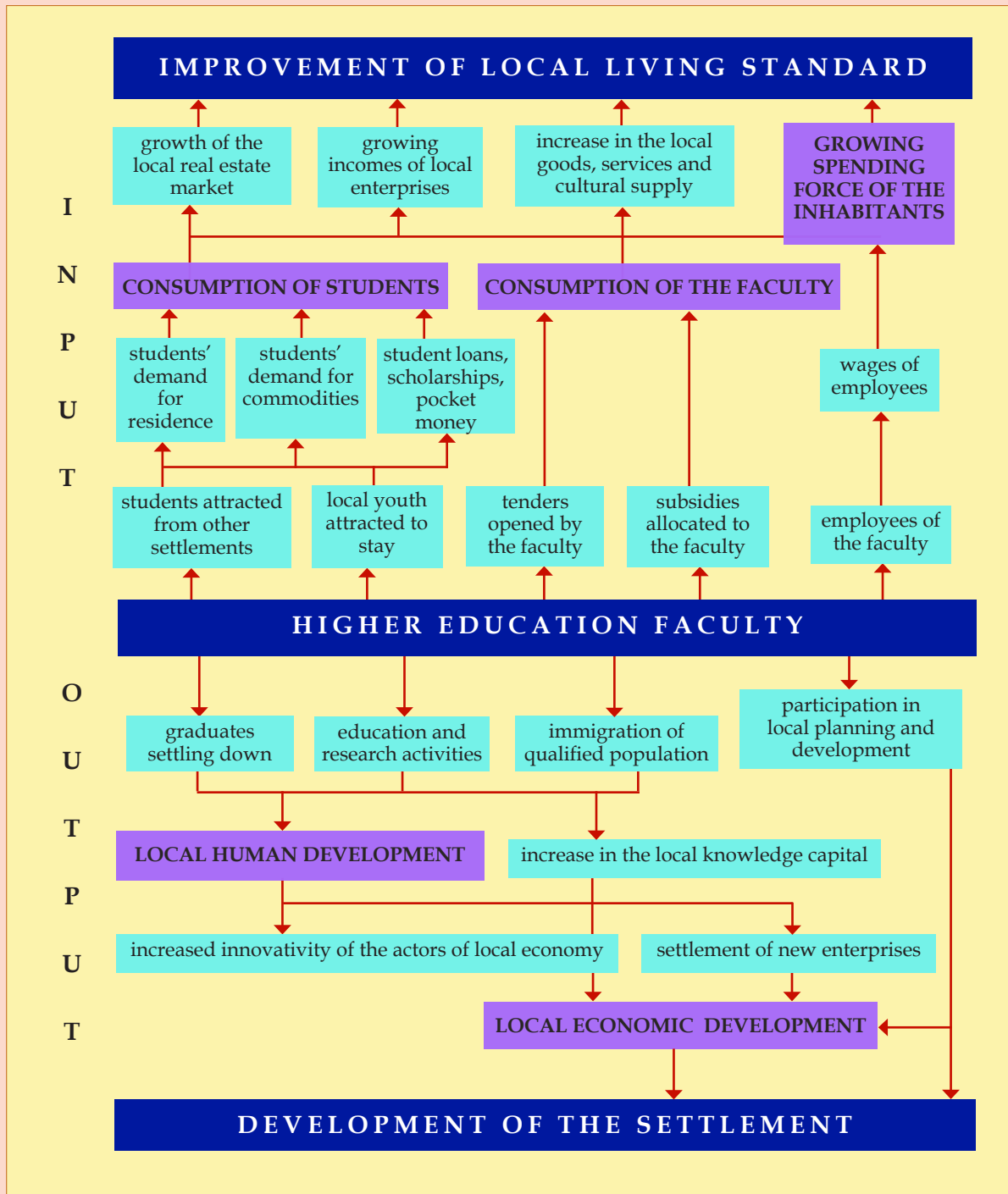

FIGURE 1 Input and output impacts of higher education
Source: The author's compilation.

Empirical Background

The empirical data presented in this study is supported by a field research on the local socio-economic impacts of higher education, realised from September 2006 to April 2007, in a sample involving four higher education faculties, namely Faculty of Agriculture of Szeged University in the town of Hódmezővásárhely, College Faculty of Teacher Training of Károli Gáspár University in Nagykőrös town, as well as Faculty of Education and Faculty of Agriculture, Water and Environmental Management of Tessedik Sámuel College, both located in the town of Szarvas.

In designing the empirical analysis for this study, the research endeavoured to adjust the methods to the character of the research topic, following Gadamer's principles (Gadamer, 2005 [1960]). The relatively low number and homogenous nature of lecturers called for qualitative research, while quantitative methods were needed by the more populous group of students as well as the demand for a comparative analysis of the different faculties. Having considered the above demands and the theories of the last two decades on methodology – especially the theses of Denzin and Lincoln (1998) and Ercikan and Roth (2006) – the decision was to use qualitative and quantitative methods simultaneously.

In this research, local impacts of faculties were investigated primarily by in-faculty data collection, such as document analysis, prominence interviews of leaders and lecturers, complemented by a survey among full-time students on their embeddedness into the society and economy of their town of studies (Table 1).

TABLE 1 Methods and database of the study

Method	Date of collecting data	Planned database	Database realised (total and by faculties)
Student survey	Fall 2006	200 to 240 (50 to 60 per faculty)	227 (55+46+76+50)
Prominence interviews	Winter 2006	28 to 36 (7 to 9 per faculty)	32 (7+8+10+8)
Document analysis	Spring 2007	4 (1 per faculty)	4 (1+1+1+1)

Main Findings

This current study provides empirical evidence on numerous local impacts by each observed faculty. An overall experience of this empirical research was the lack of small town institutions having significant input and output impacts on the local economy at the same time. While inputs are determined by the number of students and the range of programmes, outputs are relatively irrespective to the size of institutions, being influenced rather by their cooperation potential with local economical and political actors.

The favourable economic, touristic and demographic impacts of the presence of students was restricted to a few areas, such as off-campus retail and entertainment units and some local recreational facilities at the opening and closing weeks of semesters. Contrary to the researcher's assumption, students play minimal role as a source of immigration, due to the low level of local demand for the qualifications provided by the faculties. Nevertheless, the Szarvas case confirmed that a number of local ventures is capable in capturing a considerable share in students' consumption, even against the concurrency of great supply chains from outside the local economy.

Agriculture faculties have obviously greater impact on local economies than teacher training institutions. An explanation for this difference is that the profile of agriculture faculties is closer to the manufacturing sector, boosted by the long tradition of cooperation between faculties and production plants, rooted in the agriculture system of the past socialist regime.

It was found an extensive partnership exists between the faculties and other local institutions. The premises of the faculties often served as scenes of community events, by hosting local cultural programmes such as festivals, and providing venue for the regular meetings of local NGOs. Moreover, some leaders and senior lecturers of the faculties were found to use the prestige of their employer as a supporting factor to enforce their economical, cultural and political roles in the local society. Examples of partnership with social and cultural institutions were observed particularly in the case of the education faculties. The Hódmezővásárhely case in particular, indicated an intensive cooperation with the local authority in the field of urban development.

In general, this empirical research indicates the lack of rurally located institutions having sizeable input and output impacts on the local economy at the same time. While inputs are determined by the number of students and the range of programmes, outputs are relatively independent from the size of institutions, and are not influenced by their cooperation potential with local economical and political actors.

Based on the research data, a reason for the above negative experience is that the Soviet-style model of specialised colleges, still prevalent in the higher education of small

towns in the Great Plain, is less suitable for fulfilling a social mission. This issue is addressed by the current development strategies of the observed faculties, envisioning a gradual upgrade to university status.

> **"...students play minimal role as a source of immigration, due to the low level of local demand for the qualifications educated at the faculties."**

On the grounds of the British higher education reforms of the 1990s, evaluated by Ianelli (2007), realisation of the above ambitions can be expected to result in a long-term development of both the affected institutions and the Hungarian higher education network as a whole.

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Dimensions to Measure Service Quality in Private Higher Education Institutions

Arivalan Ramaiyah & Ahmad Nurulazam Md. Zain
School of Educational Studies, Universiti Sains Malaysia

Introduction

Service quality has become an important component of businesses in the service industries across the world. The educational services sector has gone through drastic changes over the decades in realising the vision and mission towards achieving the highest service quality standards to meet its growing customer needs. The modern education has to look to its future survival, beyond its current disciplinary organisation and quality of standards. This involves identifying new modes of providing service quality to enhance the institutions' competitive advantage and performance.

Private higher education institutions in Malaysia have to develop the confidence of a number of stakeholders to ensure successful operations. Among them, students perhaps are the key stakeholder because all other stakeholders are geared to serve the students as customers (Schmidt, 2002). These institutions would not be able to serve the students well if they do not take the initiative to measure the students' expectations and perceptions of services provided (Shanahan & Gerber, 2004). The process of measurement should involve how the customers are treated during the period of service interaction (Altman & Hernon, 1998) and the outcome is the actual end result as experienced by the customer (Arambewela & Hall, 2006).

However, students' perceptions of service quality depend highly on what they receive rather than on what was given. Under these circumstances, there is an urgent need for the private higher education institutions to measure the perceptions and expectations of students on the quality of services received. Educators will benefit to a great extent by understanding students' perceptions on the quality and delivery of educational services by creating better opportunities and outcomes beyond the traditional boundaries. Policy makers in the private higher education institutions will be able to modify their existing policies and procedures to suit students' expectations.

According to Mathew, Mehenna and George (2005), service quality is directly related to student satisfaction. Furthermore, high satisfaction level will also lead to high customer loyalty (Roediger, Thornsten & Isabelle, 2007). Taylor and Baker (1994) in their study on the relationship between service quality and satisfaction have noted that there is a strong correlation between the two. In this respect, it can be postulated that high service quality will eventually lead to high student satisfactions.

The Definition of Service Quality

The characteristics of service quality, which is intangible, heterogeneity, inseparability and perishability (Parasuraman, 1985), cannot be measured objectively (Patterson & Johnson, 1993). However, many researchers stated that service quality can be measured by making the comparisons between customers' expectations and perceptions (Zeithaml, Parasuraman & Berry, 1990). The authors have distinguished the service quality into four types namely expected service; desired service; adequate service; and predicted service.

> **"The modern education has to look to its future survival, beyond its current disciplinary organisation and quality of standards. This involves identifying new modes of providing service quality to enhance the institutions' competitive advantage and performance."**

Expected services refer to the services customers intend to obtain from the service provider. Desired services are the level of services which the customer wishes to obtain. Adequate service refers to the minimum level of services expected from the service provider and finally, predicted services are what the customers believe the company will perform. O'Neil and Palmer (2004) also define service quality as the difference between what a student expects to receive and his/her perceptions of actual delivery. This definition is similar to the one advocated by Zeithaml et al. (1990).

In the context of higher education, students' perceived quality is an antecedent to student satisfaction (Browne et al., 1998). It is noted that positive perceptions of service quality can eventually lead to student satisfaction, and therefore, satisfied student would attract potential students through word-of-mouth communications.

Dimensions of Service Quality

The main concern in developing the dimensions of service quality is the range of areas that should be included in the survey of the research. Different dimensions of service

quality are used in different industries to fulfil various objectives. However, there are some similarities on the chosen dimensions (Lagrosen, Roxana & Markus, 2004). Many authors have developed service quality dimensions according to their customers' preferences. Researchers agree that there is no single dimension which can be applicable to all the service sectors (Carman, 1990; Brown, Churchill & Peter, 1993; Cronin & Taylor, 1994). They also agree that customers must be the determinant of the service quality dimensions rather than the management or the academic staff of the respective university (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1988; Cronin & Taylor, 1994; Carman, 1990; Lagrosen et al., 2004; Madsen & Carlsson, 1995; Lee, Lee & Yoo, 2000).

The initial ten dimensions of service quality developed by Parasuraman et al. 1988 are reliability, responsiveness, competence, access, courtesy, communication, credibility, security, understanding the customer and tangibles. Through an empirical test, the authors later condensed the ten dimensions into five (Parasuraman & Berry, 1992; Zeithaml et al., 1990). These dimensions are tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy.

> **"Due to the intensity of the competition among the private universities, it is high time that these universities invest their resources, energy and effort to identify the factors that contribute to the quality of services provided to their students."**

Quality dimensions, according to Gronroos (1990), can be classified into three groups: technical quality, functional quality and corporate image. This is similar to those proposed by Lehtinen and Lehtinen (1991), i.e. physical quality, interactive quality and corporate quality. The dimensions associated with technical quality are those that can be measured objectively regardless of customers' opinion. Those concerned with functional quality are related to the interaction between the provider and recipient of the service and are often perceived in a subjective manner.

Carney (1994) proposed a comprehensive list of twenty variables/attributes in studying a college's image i.e. student qualification (academic), student qualities (personal), faculty-student interaction, quality instruction (faculty), variety of courses, academic reputation, class size, career preparation, athletic programmes, student activities (social life), community service, facilities and equipment, location,

physical appearance (campus), on-campus residence, friendly, caring atmosphere, religious atmosphere, safe campus, and cost/financial aid. Although the variables were developed under the context of college image, most of the variables noted are highly relevant to the measurement of service quality.

Athiyaman (1997) used eight characteristics to examine university education services namely, teaching students well, availability of staff for student consultation, library services, computing facilities, recreational facilities, class sizes, level and difficulty of subject content and student workload. Athiyaman (1997: 532) further noted that "consumer satisfaction is similar to attitude, but it is short-term and results from an evaluation of a specific consumption experience". Lee et al. (2000) explained that the two of the total quality experience variables 'overall impression of the school' and 'overall impression of the education quality' are the determinant variables in predicting overall satisfaction.

Sangeeta et al. (2004) noted that it is necessary to identify customers' requirements and the design characteristics that make up an educational system. The authors have highlighted the importance of comparing the perceptions of the customers relating to those requirements and characteristics with their expectations and thus, determine service quality. As far as customer requirements were concerned, the tests for validity and reliability identified a total of 26 items, which were grouped under five factors/constructs: competence, attitude, content, delivery and reliability.

Hadikoemoro (2002) identified 35 items of service quality after two focus group interviews conducted in private and public universities. A total of 28 items were identified through factor analysis using varimax rotation. Based on a second factor analysis, these items were categorised into five dimensions: academic services, readiness and attentiveness, fair and impartial, tangible and general attitudes.

Owlia and Aspinwall (1996), developed 30 attributes called "quality characteristics" after conducting thorough literature reviews on service quality research papers. Based on the similarities, the service quality attributes were grouped into six dimensions that include tangibles, competence, attitude, content, delivery and reliability.

Service Quality Dimensions in the Private Higher Educations

Developing a service quality model to measure the student's perception on quality is a very complex and tedious task because the service quality dimensions at the higher education institutions cover many areas and therefore, only important elements of dimensions included in the survey (Hadikoemoro, 2002). The dimension of service quality in the private higher education in general varies according to researchers. Following are the dimensions used by different academic researchers (Table 1).

TABLE 1 Dimensions used by academic researchers

No.	Athiyaman, 1997	Brooks, 2005	Sangeeta, 2004	Hadikoemoro, 2002	Owlia & Aspinwall (1996)
1	Level and difficulty of subject content and student work-load	Reputation; program features; career outcome	Reliability, orientation towards achievement	Readiness and attentiveness	Content, reliability
2	Library services, computing and recreational facilities, class size	Financial support	Physical facilities; adequate and appropriate classroom	Tangibles	Tangibles
3	Teaching quality, consultation	Faculty research; teaching assistantship; fellowship grant; instructions;	Sufficient staff, access to staff and teachers	Readiness and attentiveness	Delivery
4	-	Interaction with faculties	Faculty expertise and sufficient staff	Fair and impartial	Competence
5	-	-	Effective problem solving	General attitude	Attitude

The following summarises the comparisons between different dimensions of service quality discussed above:

- There are significant differences in the dimensions of service quality developed and used by various researchers.

- Each of the developed dimensions is unique, therefore it supports the hypothesis that there is no single set of dimension of service quality that is applicable and suitable for all types of service quality research.

- Service quality dimension varies according to customers, research objectives, institution, situation, environment and time.

Conclusion

In Malaysia, private universities spend millions of ringgits annually on marketing activities in attracting students to their respective institutions. Fulfilment of the service quality criteria set by the students would enable the respective private institutions to gain competitive advantage over the other institutions. By achieving high standards in service quality, the universities will have more opportunity to select better qualified students into their institutions. Dimensions of service quality may vary according to different university settings so it is necessary to select the most appropriate dimensions for further service improvements. Due to the intensity of the competition among private universities, it is high time these universities invest their resources and energy in identifying the factors that would contribute towards providing quality services to their current and potential students.

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Learning Statistics: Experiences of Senior Citizen Students in the Social Sciences at Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, Malaysia

Premalatha Karupiah
School of Social Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia

Introduction

Learning statistics is difficult for many students especially those with little or no prior statistical or mathematical training (Onwuegbuzie & Wilson, 2003). Studies have shown that students in the social sciences often experience very high level of statistics anxiety and this negatively affects their learning process (Pan & Tang, 2004; 2005).

Onwuegbuzie, DaRos and Ryan (1997, as cited by Onwuegbuzie and Wilson, 2003) defined statistics anxiety as anxiety that happens when students encounter any form of statistics at any level and identified four components of statistics anxiety, i.e. instrument anxiety, content anxiety, interpersonal anxiety and failure anxiety.

Three major causes of statistics anxiety are dispositional, situational and environmental factors (Baloglu, 2003; Onwuegbuzie & Wilson, 2003). Environmental factors include factors such as gender, age, ethnicity, academic major and previous mathematics experience. Situational factors are factors related to the nature of a statistics course, e.g. instructor and instruction. Dispositional factors include factors such as attitudes towards statistics, perception and self-concept (Baloglu, 2003).

This paper is based on a study on statistics anxiety among social science undergraduate students in Universiti Sains Malaysia. This paper describes senior citizen students' learning experiences of statistics in the social sciences. In recent years, much research has been done in the area of statistics anxiety but none focused specifically on understanding this phenomenon among senior citizens students. Some studies have shown that older students experience higher level of statistics anxiety than younger students (Royse & Rompf, 1992). The findings of this study may help teachers understand statistics learning experiences among senior citizen students.

Data and Methods

The data for this study were collected from 12 senior citizen students at Universiti Sains Malaysia. These students were enrolled in a social science degree programme as part of life long education programme by the university. An introductory social statistics course is a compulsory course and it enables the students to identify various types of data, and various types of statistical analysis relevant to the data and, and interpret results from the analysis. These students were requested to submit written narratives regarding their experiences of learning statistics. In addition, the researcher requested the students to provide some demographic information. These narratives were written mainly in Malay. Data was later analysed using qualitative data analysis software, NVivo. In analysing these narratives, the researcher paid attention to both the manifest content as well as the latent content of the texts.

Results

The students who participated in this study were between 52 and 66 years old. Only three students have some knowledge of statistics prior to enrolling in the programme. These students did not feel high level anxiety prior to taking the course. One student expressed mixed feelings regarding taking the course. The other eight students in this study expressed that they were worried about taking a statistics course.

Students gave various reasons as to why they were worried about taking the course. The two main reasons expressed by students are fear of mathematics and lack of prior knowledge in statistics. Some students express "fear" towards mathematics, numbers and formulas. Other students were worried because they do not have prior knowledge of the course. All the students identified that matching formulas and analysis as a very difficult task for them. Another problem faced by the students is "stress" related to examination and the semester system being used in the university. Other than describing their experiences in learning statistics, students also made some suggestions on ways that may help them learn statistics effectively. Some students suggested that they were given a basic mathematics skills course prior to the statistics course. Senior citizen student also felt that they should be given more hours of lectures to learn statistics effectively.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that senior citizen students in the social sciences experience statistics anxiety when taking a statistics course. The study echoes other studies that show older students and students with minimal or no statistics training have high level of statistics anxiety (Baloglu, 2003; Pan & Tang, 2004). It is important to note that these studies however did not focus on senior citizen students.

Students in this study display various components or elements of statistics anxiety as discussed by Onwuegbuzie and Wilson (2003), which includes elements of instrument, content and failure anxiety. For example, students fear of mathematics (numbers and calculation) and their perception

regarding their inability to do well in a statistics course shows elements of instrument anxiety. Students demonstrate elements of content anxiety when discussing the difficulty in recalling formulas and various statistical terms. Students also reveal elements of failure anxiety when discussing the high level of stress they experience when taking their test or examinations. The anxiety level may also be high because the course is compulsory and students are required to obtain a pass grade.

> **"Studies have shown that students' perception regarding their ability is an important factor in determining level of statistic anxiety."**

Students identified two main causes of their anxiety: fear of mathematics, numbers and formulas, and lack of knowledge regarding statistics. Pan and Tang (2005) in a study among graduate in the social sciences identified "fear of math" as a factor contributing to statistics anxiety. Other than that, students also perceive themselves to be very weak in anything related to mathematics or calculation. Studies have shown that students' perception regarding their ability is an important factor in determining level of statistic anxiety. Students who have very low perceived intellectual ability have high level of statistics anxiety (Onwuegbuzie, 2000). Another cause of their anxiety is their lack of knowledge regarding statistics. For many students this was their first experience of learning statistics. Students with limited previous mathematics experience have high level of statistics anxiety (Baloglu, 2003). In addition to this, these students have left school for at least 30 years prior to enrolling in this undergraduate degree programme. Therefore, many of them lack basic mathematical skills and this contributes to the high level of statistics anxiety among them.

The findings of this study can help provide some useful strategies to reduce statistics anxiety among senior citizen students. Senior citizens in this study have left school for many years, therefore, it will be useful if they are able to attend a workshop or short course on basic mathematical skills (calculation, substitution, using calculator, etc.) prior to taking a statistics course. This suggestion was mentioned by four students in their narratives. They felt this will reduce their anxiety and help them in learning statistics. In addition, the use of innovative, interactive and application-oriented instructional methods are effective in reducing statistics anxiety (Mvududu, 2005; Pan & Tang, 2004). Interactive environment will enable the students to get attention and guidance from their course instructor. This is very importance because the needs of younger and older students are different

(Baloglu, 2003). Application-oriented instructional methods will be very useful for teaching senior citizen students as these students have many years of working experience. Instructors' ability to relate statistical techniques to real life example will help students appreciate the importance of statistics and enable the students to learn statistics more effectively.

Conclusion

Senior citizen students in the social sciences experience statistic anxiety when taking a statistics course. They display elements of instrument, content and failure anxiety. Their anxiety is mainly caused by fear of mathematics and lack of prior knowledge in statistics. The understanding on statistics anxiety among senior citizen student is important in order to help them cope with their statistics anxiety. Introductory courses to mathematics and calculation may help reduce statistics anxiety among senior citizen students. Other than that, interactive, innovative and application-oriented instructional methods will make their statistics learning experience more enjoyable and meaningful.

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Re-Igniting Awareness of Local Folklore through Community Engagement: A Collaborative Effort of USM, UiTM and WOU

Azlena Zainal, Norhaniza Md. Ismail, Nur Darina Ibrahim, Noor Laili Mohd. Yusof and Er Ann Nah
Universiti Teknologi MARA, Pulau Pinang

Munir Shuib
School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia

*T*raditionally, institutions of higher learning have always been seen as the source of new knowledge where solutions to complex problems are debated and unravelled. In response to the global trend where knowledge has become a commodity, higher education institutions are also evolving into a pre-eminent catalyst of societal change. In the race to expand and restructure higher education systems to be of world-class quality, it is important that the role of the university as the conscience of society is not forsaken. It has been argued that no institution can rival the universities' potential to transform society because universities alone exist solely to produce and disseminate knowledge (Crow, 2005).

> "... the obligation to attend to society needs and developing a community engaged university is part and parcel of the social contract of any higher education. In making time for civic responsibility, universities acknowledge the importance of fostering positive relationships with their local communities."

Community engagement is now the main agenda of many socially responsive and engaged universities because public service is now viewed as one of the fundamental objectives of a university (Zipsane, 2011). Local and regional community engagement is a rapidly expanding activity in Malaysian universities. Globally, it is increasingly seen as part of the universal quality assurance assessment process of any institution of higher learning (Garlick & Langworthy, 2008). Admittedly, the obligation to attend to society needs and developing a community engaged university is part and parcel of the social contract of a higher education. In making time for civic responsibility, universities acknowledge the importance of fostering positive relationships with their local communities. Societal commitment should take precedence and the relevance of any knowledge should be in tandem with societal needs and rooted in ethics and values.

It is with this aspiration in mind that three local universities embarked on a collaborative effort to increase the cultural link and inter-relationships between universities and the local community. Universiti Sains Malaysia, Universiti Teknologi MARA and Wawasan Open University joined forces to work together bridging ethnicities, cultures and traditions through an effort to re-ignite awareness of the local cultural tradition. This project was funded by the Division of Industry and Community Networking, Universiti Sains Malaysia. As part of the initiative, a workshop on local folklore entitled *Bengkel Tradisi Rakyat: Merai dan Memulihara Tradisi Rakyat Pulau Pinang* was held. It coincided with the launching of a blog: http://www.tradisirakyat.com/ that acts as a platform for Penangites to contribute towards the documentation of their local tradition.

This endeavour has brought together communities and denizens of higher institutions in an effort to impart the importance of conserving and preserving local culture for future generations. In addition, to facilitate meaningful connections between the task group and the local communities, the project managed to encourage active participations of many local cultural organisations in Penang. This was attained by providing them a platform to exhibit their cultural heritage during the workshop and take into account their views and experiences through a participatory dialogues between them and the universities.

A small scale study had been conducted during the workshop to measure the impact of the cultural awareness efforts on the participants. A set of questionnaire was administered during the workshop to enquire the participants' level of awareness on the tradition the Penang's multiracial community before and after the workshop. The questionnaire consists of three sections: the participants' demographic background, the participants' awareness level before attending the workshop and the participants' level of awareness post-workshop.

35 participants from various ethnic backgrounds and professions participated in the study. Out of the 35 respondents, 25 (71.4 per cent) of them were female. Majority of them were within the age range of between 30 to 39 years old and one respondent was 70 years old. Fourty per cent of the respondents came from the education field while 31.5 per cent of them were from the servicing sectors. The

respondents also included 11.5 per cent students and six per cent cultural activists while the remainder was made up of local business owners and members of NGOs. The ethnic make up of the respondents were 86 per cent Malay, 11.5 per cent Chinese and 2.5 per cent Indian Hindus. Fourty per cent of the respondents originated from Penang, while the rest migrated to Penang due to work and studies.

> **"The potential of synergy between the universities' efforts and the expressed needs of the respondents for a concerted effort by the universities, cultural activists, cultural organisations and the local community to preserve their cultural tradition may effectively be a central part of nation building embodied in the concept of 1Malaysia social cohesion."**

Based on the empirical data, 58 per cent of the respondents agreed that before attending the workshop, their knowledge and understanding about the Penang culture was quite limited. About 60 per cent of the respondents claimed that they were previously less interested to know about Penang culture besides never ever attending any cultural workshop. Nevertheless, 94 per cent of them felt that there was a need to learn and educate themselves about the extensive and distinctive culture of a myriad of ethnic and religious groups in Penang. Most significantly, a majority of them (94 per cent) agreed that it was vital to preserve and sustain the cultural heritage of the Penangites, hasten by what they perceived as threats of a globalised culture. It was strongly put across that they felt that their culture was essentially their identity, therefore the preservation of that identity was crucial.

Feedbacks obtained from the same set of respondents indicate that 97 per cent of them expressed agreement that their knowledge and understanding about the Penang culture had reached a new depth after attending the workshop. All of them claimed that their interest to be acquainted with various facets of Penang tradition increased notably and they were looking forward to participate in more cultural seminars and workshops. The respondents believed that more rigorous and sustainable efforts by higher educational institutions should be put in action to preserve the tradition of the Penangites. The respondents also expressed an urgent need for more workshops that engage the community to actively participate in cultural preservation.

Conclusion

Based on this small scale study, one can deduce that the three universities' efforts to increase cultural awareness through community engagement efforts and institutional collaboration has resulted in meaningful and purposeful impact on matters close to the heart of the community. The potential of synergy between the universities' efforts and the expressed needs of the respondents for a concerted effort by the universities, cultural activists, cultural organisations and the local community to preserve their cultural tradition may effectively be a central part of nation building embodied in the concept of 1Malaysia social cohesion.

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Seminar on the Integration of the Madrasah Institution into the Cambodian National Education System: Sharing Malaysian Experience

Reported by Bahrulmazi Edrak, UCTI

The seminar on the "Integration of the Madrasah Institution into the Cambodian National Education System: Sharing Malaysian Experience" was jointly organised by the Asia Pacific University College of Technology and Innovation (UCTI) and the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE). The National Higher Education Research Institute (IPPTN) acted as the secretariat for the series of strategic dialogue between the countries of Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR), Myanmar and Vietnam, i.e. CLMV. The seminar was the outcome of a research project headed by Y.Bhg. Datuk Mohd. Yusof Kasim (UCTI) and involved a group of researchers made up of lecturers from Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Universiti Sultan zainal Abidin (UniSZA), UCTI and the Cambodian Islamic Welfare Association. A total of 20 mudirs from Cambodia were invited to be participants of the seminar. The seminar was also attended by HE Ou Eng, the Head Director of the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth of Cambodia. Two officers and two cameramen from Apsara television, the Cambodian government owned television station covered the seminar. The seminar was officiated by the Deputy Chief of Mission of the Malaysian Embassy, Y.M. Raja Saifful Ridwan.

Cambodia was chosen as the initial starting point of the project. Similar subsequent projects will be carried out in other selected countries such as Lao PDR, Myanmar, Vietnam, Timor Leste, Sri Lanka, Papua New Guinea and Southern Philippines. The project, at a later phase, will also include less developed countries in Africa.

The main objective of this seminar was to share Malaysia's experience with the participants and representatives from the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth of Cambodia in modernising its Islamic school system, and strengthening and increasing networking between ministries, universities, non government organisations (NGOs), Islamic schools and the communities of Malaysia and Cambodia. The seminar also aims at dentifying possible integration programmes to be implemented at the Islamic schools, suggesting suitable community approaches between Malaysian universities and the Islamic schools in Cambodia, and drafting the CLMV Master Plan for Community Engagement and Student Exchange 2011 for the Department of Higher Education.

The seminar started off with a paper presentation by the Malaysian researchers and roundtable discussion between the researchers and Cambodian participants from the Islamic schools. Deliberation of the seminar was aired in the news broadcast of Apsara Television, Cambodia. As a result of the roundtable discussion, the secretariat concluded a few items that could be implemented by the MoHE and Malaysian government. Among those items were the need to regularise and standardise the syllabus of Islamic schools, identify sample reference books and book aids for modernising programmes, identify the university fields in which the students of Islamic schools may further their studies, and implement training programmes for teachers in Cambodia with a focus on effective learning and teaching techniques through short courses. The commitment in assisting the Islamic schools in Cambodia by Malaysia was underlined by the Malaysian embassy in Cambodia initiative to include the activities in modernising the Islamics schools as part of their key performance indicators (KPIs).

The Malaysian delegation also visited a few Islamic schools and villages in the area of Phnom Penh to observe current practices particularly with regard to learning methods. An interview with imams, heads of village, residents and students was conducted to gather further information on the Islamic school system in Cambodia. The visit was very helpful in drafting a suitable action plan based on the social background of the Islamic society in Cambodia. The researchers have prepared a comprehensive report for the Ministry of Higher Education consisting of recommendations and proposals on developing and modernising the Islamic schools in Cambodia.
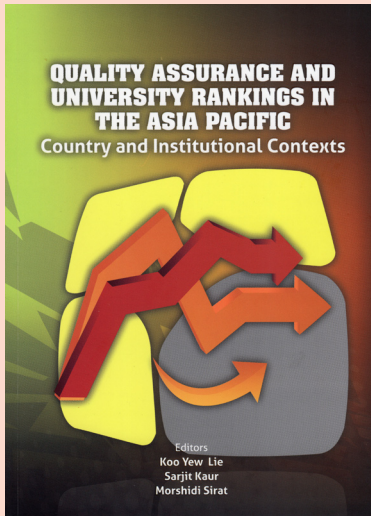
This initial phase is anticipated to be a reference in developing future undertakings of similar projects. In the long run, it is envisioned that minority groups in the CLMV countries would be able to further their studies in either the universities in Cambodia or Malaysia.

Participants of the seminar.

Quality Assurance and University Rankings in the Asia Pacific Country and Institutional Contexts

University league tables at national, regional, international levels are increasingly complex, influential and controversial. In spite of criticisms on robustness of methodology and bias of indicators, higher education institutions continue to have an appetite for them and use or misuse them in their planning, policymaking and promotion activities. This publication will contribute to the much needed analysis of the implications, benefits and unintended consequences related to rankings and the broader issues of quality assurance in the Asia Pacific region.

Editors
Koo Yew Lie, Sarjit Kaur and Morshidi Sirat

Calling for Articles and News Briefs

Guidelines on Submission of Manuscripts

1. Manuscripts should be written in English, typed using Times New Roman 12 point font, and double spaced on only one side of A4 size paper with ample left and right margins on Microsoft Word.

2. The length of the manuscripts should not exceed 1,500 words. An abstract of about 150 words should be included.

3. Authors are responsible for obtaining permission to use any published material. The publisher shall not be held responsible for the use of such material.

4. Citations in the text should include the author's last name and date of publication, e.g. (Ashton, 2001). If quotations are used, page numbers should be indicated, eg. (Ashton, 2001: 30).

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6. Include tables and figures within the text. Number tables and figures consecutively.

7. The reference list should be arranged in alphabetical order and should include only works cited in the text.

Examples:

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

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

8. All submissions should include a cover page containing the title, name of author(s), designation, affiliation, mailing/e-mail address and telephone/fax number. A brief biographical note of the author(s) should also be included.

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Block C, Level 2, sains@usm
No. 10, Persiaran Bukit Jambul
11900 Bayan Lepas, Penang
MALAYSIA

Tel: 604-653 5758 (Administration);
        653 5760 (Research)
Fax: 604-653 5771
Web: http://www.ipptn.usm.my
E-mail: ipptn@usm.my

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