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## Issues and Challenges in Enhancing the Quality of Private Transnational Higher Education in Malaysia

An interview with Y.Bhg. Professor Tan Sri Datuk Anuwar Ali

*By Munir Shuib & Rozinah Jamaludin*



*Y.Bhg. Professor Tan Sri Datuk Dr. Anwar Ali*

The rapid growth in the demand for higher education in Malaysia and the lack of capacity of the national system to meet this demand have given rise to the emergence and expansion of private transnational higher education providers in the country. While an international linkage in educational provision is certainly a positive development, there are certain concerns which need to be addressed, one of which is quality.

In an interview with IPPTN, the President and Vice-Chancellor of Open University Malaysia (OUM), Y.Bhg. Professor Tan Sri Datuk Anuwar Ali, gave his views on the issue of quality among transnational higher education service providers in Malaysia.

Quality, in his view, is of utmost importance in private transnational higher education (TNHE). He recalled the time when private TNHE emerged in Malaysia in the late 1990s. Even then there were some concerns about the quality of its providers. One of the concerns pertained to the level of emphasis given to quality by branch campuses set up by foreign universities in Malaysia.

According to Professor Anuwar, the delivery system of a branch campus might differ from that of its parent university. Consequently, students who graduated from the branch campus might not be of the same quality as those who

graduated from the parent university. He put forth the following questions:

*“Are we sure the programmes we have here are of the same quality as those offered in the parent university? Are we sure the branch campuses offer the same amount of input as that of the parent university?”*

Private TNHE providers in Malaysia, as in many other countries, are profit-driven. They survive mainly on student enrolment. Therefore students with a very minimal qualification are given admission as long as they are able to pay their tuition fees.

**“Are we sure the programmes we have here are of the same quality as those offered in the parent university? Are we sure the branch campuses offer the same amount of input as that of the parent university?”**

According to Professor Anuwar, higher education institutions should not look at TNHE just as a source of income but must also place a high degree of emphasis on quality. They should have high-quality academics, infrastructure, human resources, and governance. In addition, they should develop high-quality curricula and encourage research and innovation.

Nevertheless, Professor Anuwar believes that TNHE providers still have a long way to go as far as quality is concerned, despite fulfilling the quality assurance requirements of the National Accreditation Board. In the near future there is the Malaysian Qualification Agency which will set the rating and ranking of each TNHE provider.

Private TNHE in Malaysia face a number of challenges. One of the main challenges, according to Professor Anuwar, is getting the right academic staff.

*“Private TNHE providers”, he said, “do not have the same amount of resources and levels of incentives for their academic staff like those enjoyed by staff in the public sector”.*

As a result, they have difficulty attracting top-level academicians such as professors and lecturers with

Ph.Ds. Another challenge plaguing many private TNHE providers concerns the teaching competency of their academic staff. In many of the institutions, the academicians may not have sufficient training in teaching. This has great implications on the quality of teaching and learning in the institutions.

Teaching and learning in private TNHE institutions in Malaysia occur in several forms, such as face-to-face instruction, blended learning and virtual learning. Currently, the most common is the conventional face-to-face instruction. Blended learning, said Professor Anuwar, is gaining popularity, especially among providers of open and distance learning such as OUM. However, virtual learning has been less successful. As a case in point, he cites a local private university which used to offer its programmes through virtual learning. It later reverted to conventional learning as the former was not well-received by Malaysian students. He believes the problem had to do with the public’s perception of virtual learning. *“People are sceptical about virtual learning; they are not ready for it”*, he reasoned.

Professor Anuwar envisages that in the future, the most common approach which will be adopted by private TNHE providers would be computer-enhanced learning or e-learning. He says that in order for the approach to be carried out effectively, the educational institutions must provide the relevant training to their teaching staff and give due recognition and incentives to those who adopt the approach in their teaching.

With the increase in the student population of Malaysia, the demand for TNHE is also expected to increase. The provision of quality services by TNHE providers is therefore critical. It is not a matter of choice but rather, a matter of obligation.

**...TNHE providers still have a long way to go as far as quality is concerned, despite fulfilling the quality assurance requirements of the National Accreditation Board. In the near future there is the Malaysian Qualification Agency which will set the rating and ranking of each TNHE provider.**

# The Governance of Public Universities: The Missing Parameters

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## Introduction

Despite the recognition of the importance of the public universities (PUs) and the increasing complexity of the university business model, the PUs governance system has not changed significantly. There have been a limited number of mostly cosmetic changes without a coherent policy or strategy at work (Bakri, 2003; Navaratnam, 2006: 136). The “undue” student and staff political activism, the rising spectre of unemployed graduates, a vibrant private tertiary education sector and the fall in the ranking of PUs in international surveys have created some disquiet about the state of PUs (Ministry of Higher Education Report (MoHE), 2006; Navaratnam, 2006). The PUs governance debate and some changes have focused mostly on the structures and powers of the university vis-à-vis the minister. In the following sections of this short paper several salient missing parameters of PUs governance and the corresponding implications for PUs performance are briefly outlined.

Firstly, for all intents and purposes the PUs are a part of the civil service. Although the University and University Colleges Act (1972) grants the PUs some autonomy to accept, modify or reject rules and regulations emanating from central agencies, it is almost perfunctory that their respective Board of Directors (BOD) will accept directives *in toto*. Being mostly ex-civil servants, the BOD’s belief in the rules-based management is still unshaken. There is great reluctance to distinguish or differentiate the role of the universities from the rest of the public sector. It is shackled tightly by the tentacles of the civil service. The universities have fought many a losing battle to seek some exception. The recent one is the raising of retirement age of the quintessential knowledge workers – the academic staff, and the *Penilaian Tahap Kecekapan* pass rates. The source of this treatment cannot be found in the legal texts. The explanation for this treatment is in the soft institutional and human aspect of the PUs. There is no sign that these parameters of governance will change in the near future as evidenced by the recent statement by the Deputy Prime Minister. “It will not be possible to separate scheme of service for public universities...” (*The Star*, p. 6, 19 August 2006). The professional values and stance of the civil servants, i.e., to implement policies and programmes “passionately” is expected of the university academics. They are not to engage in discussions of the technocratic or political merit of public policies and decisions. There is great incentive and scope for showing support for current policies and views whereas dissenting views and positions as well as scholastic works without hidden agenda are not received. The continued treatment of the PUs as part of the civil service limits the room for real

governance changes. Reification of hierarchy and rank, dominance of authority over intellectuality, intellectual meekness and a culture of conformism are some of the “soft” governance parameters that are likely to remain stubbornly a part of the PUs despite some symbolic changes in the nominal structures.

Secondly, MoHE faced with growing disaffection over the state of PUs, has quite expectedly built a larger bureaucracy to take charge of the tertiary affairs. The impending creation of an enlarged and empowered quality assurance agency will further cement the rising role of MoHE in tertiary education. A stronger MoHE is likely to be more invasive of university affairs, prone to greater centralisation and preferring standardisation – the antithesis to autonomy (Bakri, 2003: 236; Hazman, 2005). MoHE is more likely to “steer and row” the PUs. Any suggestion that MoHE should limit its role to the steering function is viewed as diminution rather than rationalisation of roles. Recognising the power and control of MoHE over the universities, the BODs and the Vice-Chancellors (VCs) speak softly, privately, politely and politically correctly on issues of great importance to the future of PUs. Any impolite reactions to MoHE’s positions and policies have and will usually receive a sharp rebuke or earn the displeasure of senior MoHE bureaucrats. In addition there is the attendant uncertainty about the tenure of the irksome VCs.

Thirdly, over the years there is a trend towards greater interest in and emphasis on managerial competence as opposed to the traditional academic accomplishment and distinction in the choice of key university administrators. Management rather than leadership appears to be the key attribute. This trend saw the appointment of senior and retired Administrative and Diplomatic Officers as VCs. These appointees trained as true blue civil servants (especially in the Administrative and Diplomatic Service Officers) found the universities to be quite disorderly, unfocused and having unhealthy levels of autonomy – all features found to be inconsistent with the demands for a modern organisational management. Despite the overt unpopularity of the old command and control style of leadership and management, it continues to thrive in the academia as it does also elsewhere. Homogeneity and standardisation are in vogue and legitimised by recent quality certifications to achieve operational discipline (often confused as operational excellence). A more collective, collegial, consultative and servant-leadership is, increasingly, not a common institutional feature in PUs (Marginson and Considine, 2000).

Recognising the power and control of MoHE over the universities, the BODs and the VCs speak soft, privately, politely and politically correctly on issues of great importance to the future of PUs. Any impolite reactions to MoHE's positions and policies has and will usually receive a sharp rebuke or earn the displeasure of the senior MoHE bureaucrats with the attendant uncertainty about the tenure of the irksome VC.

Fourthly, at a time when level five or servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1996) is promoted and heroic leadership is reviled (Mintzberg, 2004: 94), there is growing reification of the reverential VCs. Even such towering figures as Royal Professor Ungku Aziz did not become the face of the university. As the stature and profile of the more recent VCs increased and as their powers become concentrated and unchallenged, there is a growing sense of reverence, not mere respect, of the VCs. These universities cultivated a culture of reification and worshipping that is highly smothering to the intellectual tradition that the university is expected to demonstrate. Some VCs conceived of their role, not as the head of a public institution, but the head of a government institution and therefore, become politically partisan. This role concept encourages the PUs to be legitimisers rather than critical reviewers and at times, arbitrators as the Prime Minister has outlined in his recent speech at Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) launching the Tan Sri Noordin Sopiee Chair for Global Studies. This shortsighted and self-serving stance diminishes the role of the PUs. It does not become a centre of excellence but a centre of partisanship. A sort of intellectual "groupthink" develops adding credence to dominant viewpoints and expresses near hostility to alternative thinking. In the long run, the university community "loses" its ability to "think" beyond or outside the dominant or official or popular viewpoints.

Fifthly, the MoHE Report (2006) dwelled much on the legal position of the BOD vis-à-vis the Senate and the Minister. Legal autonomy and actual autonomy are not the same concepts. The BOD must be mentally prepared to exercise authority. Will the BOD members step up to the challenge? Will they be comfortable

doing it? Civil servants schooled for almost 2-3 decades in the art of active conformance to and great reverence for precedence and procedures cannot make paradigmatic changes in the twilight years of their life. Contrary to the usual and perfunctory talk about innovation, leadership and entrepreneurship, the BOD is risk averse, more of a follower than leader and more conventional than inventional. They fully understand the limits of their powers vis-à-vis the VC and especially the Minister of Higher Education. Even corporate directors succumb to the style of their more numerous public sector colleagues (Akroyd and Akroyd, 1999: 177). After all, PUs are public organisations and therefore, the BOD members from the public sector hold all the aces.

## Conclusion

The present discussion of PUs governance tends to focus on the legal and institutional aspects of PUs governance leaving aside some very fundamental parameters of PUs governance. The totality of PUs governance can only be understood when the soft governance parameters are laid bare alongside the traditional foci of PUs governance. The role of MoHE, the managerialist orientation, the reification of the VC and the bureaucrat dominated BOD define the complex and conflicting parameters of PUs governance that is often missing in the governance debate. There is as much in the culture of the universities as there is in the legal texts of the universities' constitution that constrains its performance. The basic governance premises must be deeply and critically examined to reengineer and empower the PUs to achieve world class fitness.

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# Performance Measurement System, Performance Indicators and Funding Mechanism in Malaysian Public Universities: A Conceptual Framework

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## Introduction

The funding of financial resources in higher education is one of the central issues faced by most governments in the world in this era of competition and globalisation. The public and relevant stakeholders are now closely scrutinising the public universities with what they do, how well they do it and at what cost (Shale and Gomes, 1998). What is most unnerving is that public sector organisations including universities do not always use financial resources efficiently to achieve their objectives (Yaisawarng, 1997). Thus, to improve the inefficiencies, these organisations should implement performance measurement system to efficiently allocate their financial resources based on performance indicators (Gaither, Nedvek and Neal, 1994). The general notion of performance measurement in the government sector revolves around budget performance. The more a government agency spent on the budget allocated the better it is. There are two major issues that are relevant for this paper i.e. resource allocation and performance indicators. To further explain these issues, the authors have set the objectives of the papers as follows:

- To review the theory and concepts of performance measurement and resource allocation in the context of public universities (PUs) in Malaysia.
- To highlight the types and most common performance indicators that are practised and used by the PUs in Malaysia.
- To establish the relationships between performance indicators as the predictor constructs and the funding mechanism or resource allocation as the dependent constructs.
- To indicate whether the performance measurement usage and practices are relevant in determining the budget or resource allocation decisions of Malaysian PUs.

To date, studies on performance measurement system in the government agencies in Malaysia have tended to concentrate on Modified Budgeting System (MBS) planning and implementation. It is unclear to what extent the MBS objectives have been met in PUs in Malaysia. The extent of the relationship or association between performance indicators and resource allocation decisions is also unknown. It is unclear to what extent the use of performance indicators as specified in the MBS are practised by the programme managers in the PUs in Malaysia. This paper attempts to close this gap and prompted the researchers to investigate how the performance measurement system works in the context of PUs in Malaysia. It will propose a model for a performance-based funding that is suitable for the

allocation of financial resources (budget) in the Malaysian PUs.

## Theoretical Overview of Performance Measurement and Resource Allocation in Malaysian PUs

Neely et al. (1995) define performance measurement as the process of quantifying the efficiency and effectiveness of action. In another aspect, a performance measure acts as a metric used to quantify the efficiency and/or effectiveness of action, while performance measurement system is the set of metric used to quantify both efficiency and effectiveness of actions. In a similarly related study, Bourne et al. (2003) define performance measurement as the use of multi-dimensional set of performance measures for the planning and management of business. Performance indicators are less precise than performance measures. Performance indicators are typically defined as factual or opinion information usually in quantitative forms (e.g. ratios, percentages, ranks, etc.). However, in qualitative forms they are about the functioning of universities for various purposes such as monitoring, evaluation, and resource allocation (Cave, Hanney, Henkel, and Kogan, 1997; Kells, 1993; Sizer, 1992). Webster and Hung (1992) state that measurement is a key management activity that provides management with information needed for decision making, monitoring performance, and effective allocation of resources.

Some common performance indicators used by scholars in education and performance measurement could be seen in the literature. For instance, Burke and Serban (1998) in a study on institutional performance to funding in the State of Tennessee, United States used indicators such as student and alumni satisfaction survey and number of baccalaureate degrees awarded. Meanwhile, a study by Cave et al. (1997) found that some of the indicators used were cost per FTE student (Full-Time-Equivalent), research income, contribution to consultation and professional training, and submission rate for research degrees.

Resource allocation is defined as the ways in which fiscal and non fiscal resources are divided between competing needs and expended for educational purposes (Richardson, 1994). Resource allocation in the context of Malaysian PUs is measured based on how much financial resources are allocated to various activities (faculties/departments/centres/branches) of

the universities (Bogue, 1998; Xavier, 2001). The budget is allocated based on five general expenditure codes/types such as salary or emolument (expenditure code 10000), academic expenditure or services and supplies (expenditure code 20000), maintenance expenditure (expenditure code 30000), student expenditure (expenditure code 40000), and other expenditure (expenditure code 50000). Salary expenditure refers to the staff and lecturers's salary and benefits; academic expenditure accounts for services and supply of academic activities such as cost for attending seminar, purchase of books, rental of building etc., maintenance expenditure is to upkeep the department and faculties as well as purchase of equipments, student expenditure involves expenditure on students activities, food and hostels and other expenditure, which is expenditure on research, publication, and others (The Treasury of Malaysia, 1997; Xavier, 2001).

According to Bujang and Xavier (1999; 2001), performance measurement in the public sector is based on the performance of the budget. The budget proposal is actually the main tool used by the government to ensure the successful implementation of its policies and strategies. Based on the budget proposal the government will monitor the achievement of its programme objectives. These programme objectives are measured based on the MBS approach which was introduced in 1990. Basically this budgeting tool is the measure of organisation's accountability proposed in the budget proposals by the programme managers. The objective of this system was to improve the Government's budgetary process especially with regard to accountability, allocation of resources/funds and the implementation of programmes/activities by the agency (Xavier, 1998, 2001). MBS stresses on the relationship between inputs, outputs, and the impacts of a particular programme or activity. Under this system, Government Agencies are required to determine their achievement targets in terms of outputs and impacts of every program or activity for which there are "programme agreements" between the agency and the Federal Treasury.

### **The Proposed Performance Measurement Framework for PUs in Malaysia**

Evidence of the use of performance indicators could be traced from the programme agreement documents which is a part of the budget document. Based on the original premise of the MBS concept, funding decision should tie with performance indicators (Xavier 1996; 1998; 2001). Based on the literature surveyed from the performance reports of the Malaysian PUs, there are twelve core areas specified by the Malaysian PUs as the main indicators used in their resource allocation decisions. The core areas are grouped into three main perspectives namely administrative, academic and student perspectives. The perspectives were developed based on the balanced scorecard approach suitable for PUs (Kaplan and Norton, 1992, 1996, 2001; Niven, 2003).

These perspectives deal with the administrative, academic, and student activities and programmes in the universities. Some of the common indicators used are shown in Table 1.

Based on the discussion of the constructs above, the researchers are proposed a conceptual framework for the study as shown in Figure 1. This study is aimed at establishing the relationships between performance indicators and resource allocation (Schick, 1990; Yaisawarng, 1997).

An exploratory study to test the reliability on the instrument of the proposed performance measurement framework in PUs was conducted. The survey was piloted to 50 programme managers in five PUs. The internal consistency was measured using the Cronbach's alpha coefficient (Cronbach, 1990) to test separately all the items of each criterion. Table 2 displays the result that consists of the reliability values termed as alpha values which range from 0.82 to 0.99 indicating that all scales are acceptable. All factors seemed to reflect values greater than 0.7 are then suggested as being adequate for testing the reliability of the criteria. The results obtained indicate that the proposed instrument has high internal consistency and therefore is reliable.

### **Conclusions**

The framework proposed is based on extensive review made from the literature regarding performance measurement in the public sector especially public universities. The framework is therefore able to elicit elements and factors relating to the use of performance indicators in the Malaysian PUs. Based on the results of the pilot tests conducted, the factors posed in the questionnaire have content validity as they have high alpha and therefore, are well received. It indicated a strong reason to believe that the variables chosen for this study are appropriate. The preliminary study found that performance indicators in the administrative, academic, and student perspectives can be used to allocate salary, academic, maintenance, student, and other expenditures in the Malaysian PUs.

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**Table 1: Perspectives, constructs and variables of Performance Indicators in PUs in Malaysia**

Perspectives	Constructs	Performance Indicator Variables
Administrative	Human Resource Management (HRM)-staff recruitment, retirement and dismissal	No. of academic staff, No. of administrative staff, No. of lecturers with Ph.D. and Masters qualifications...(17 items)
	Human Resource Development (HRD)-training and learning activities	No. of lecturers on study leave, No. of lecturers attending and presenting papers in international/national conferences, No. of conferences, seminars, workshops organised...(14 items)
	Management of Information (MOI)-reservoir of knowledge for the academicians	No. of books, journals and magazines, No. of library uses, No. of books borrowed...(7 items)
	Financial Management (FM)-rendering financial services	Level of efficiency on financial management, percentage of increase/decrease of yearly allocation, percentage of payment made on time to customers...(25 items)
	Building and Maintenance Management (BM)- maintenance services	No. of development projects planned, No. of maintenance projects planned, No. of development projects completed...(18 items)
	Corporate Affairs and Industrial Relations (CAIR)-links the universities with the stakeholders, industries, parents, potential students, alumni, suppliers, etc	No. of MOUs/cooperation with higher learning institutions/ government agencies, private sectors signed at international/national level...(8 items)
	Academic	Academic (ACA)-academic activities
Research, Consultancy, and Innovations (RCI)-research, consultancy and innovation activities		No. of long-term research registered/commenced/active, No. of short-term research registered/commenced, active...(19 items)
Publication (PUB)-publishing books, journals, etc.		No. of books published, No. of books translated, No. of academic journal published...(9 items)
Academic Development (EDUC)-academic development activities		No. of international/national level organised, No. of public lecture organised, No. of academic exhibitions organised...5 items)
Student		Student Placement (STUP)- managing student enrolment in the colleges
	Student Development (STUD)-student enrolment in colleges-student development and extracurricular activities.	No. of student seminar organised at international/national level, No. of student seminar organised at international/national level...(38 items)

**Table 2: Internal reliability of the scales and descriptive statistics of Performance Indicators in PUs**

Factor	Performance Indicators Criterion	Reliability
F1	Human resource management	0.968
F2	Human resource development	0.941
F3	Management of information	0.994
F4	Financial management	0.973
F5	Building and maintenance management	0.985
F6	Corporate affairs and industrial relations	0.960
F7	Academic	0.867
F8	Research, consultancy, and innovations	0.961
F9	Publication	0.929
F10	Academic development	0.955
F11	Student placement	0.815
F12	Student development	0.972

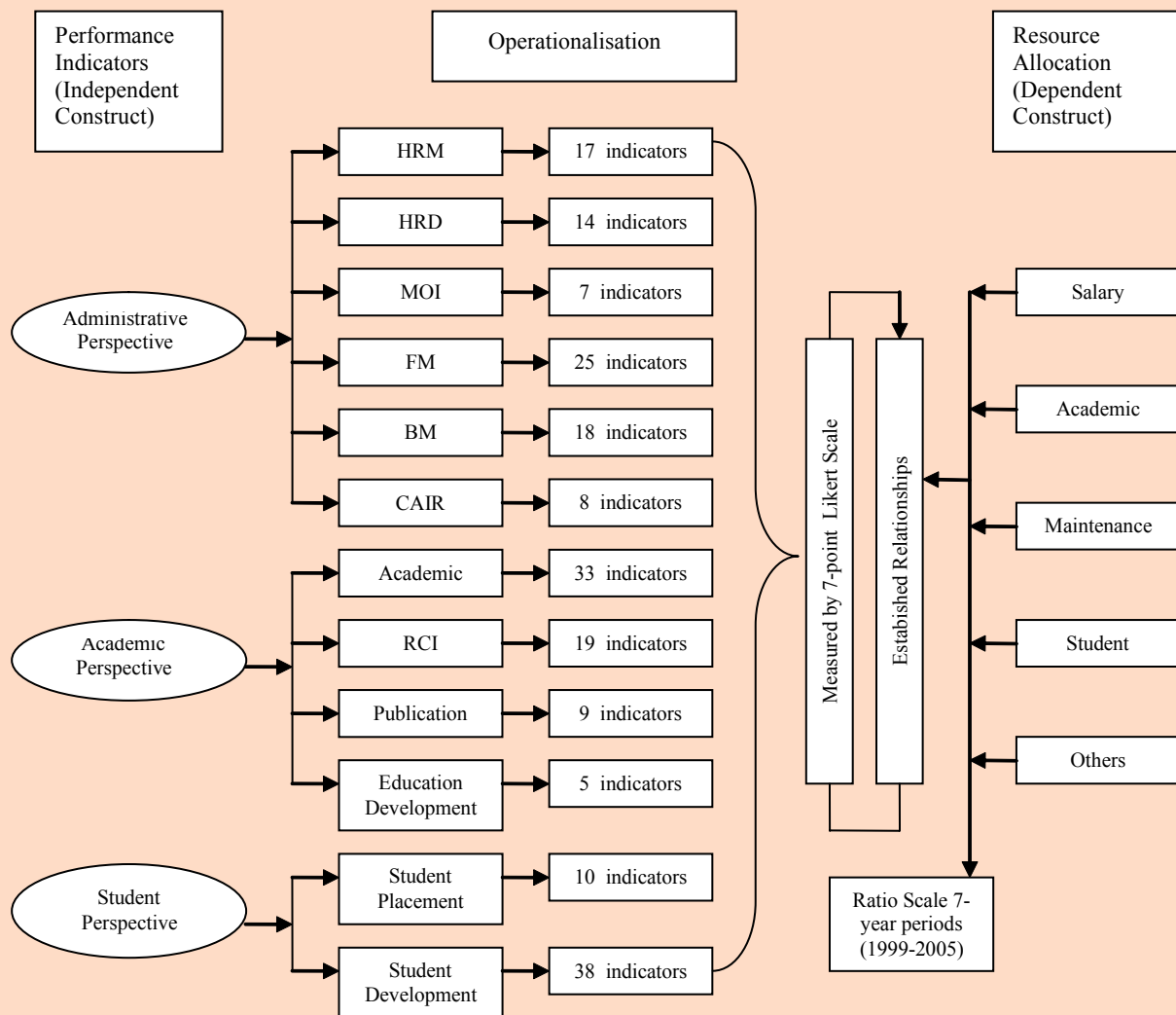


Figure 1: Conceptual framework for Performance Indicators in the Malaysian PUs

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# Promoting National Unity Through Academic and Student Activities: The Universiti Malaysia Sabah Experience

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## Introduction

Malaysia is a melting pot of people of multi-ethnicity, multi-culture, and multi-religion. As such national unity is a very important agenda in the development of the nation. This paper discusses the role of higher education in the inculcation of national unity in Malaysia. It also presents a quantitative case study of the implementation of efforts in the promotion of national unity in Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS). The study focuses on the contribution of curricular, co-curricular, extra-curricular activities as well as information interactions towards the promotion of national unity among the students.

## National Unity and Higher Education in Malaysia

The importance of education for national unity in Malaysia has been underlined by national leaders, politicians, educationists and other prominent citizens. For example, Abdul Rafie Mahat (2003: 30) says that "Malaysia sees education as an indispensable asset in its attempt to foster unity, peace and prosperity". The values needed for national unity are delivered and infused through three major functions of higher education: curriculum, co-curriculum, and extra-curriculum. In a related study, Sheets (1996) found that interpersonal conflicts were more prevalent among different ethnic groups. She also found that the attitudes, beliefs, and values of students and teachers differed and were associated with ethnicity, gender, and level of academic achievement.

Curriculum involves formal participation of teaching and learning activities. In the case of UMS, the curriculum involves the teaching and learning of university core courses offered by the Centre for the Promotion of Knowledge and Language Learning such as History of the Development of Malaysia; Islamic and Asian Civilisation; Comparative Religion; the Constitution of Malaysia; the Society and the Self; Intercultural Communication; Media, Culture and Society; and Gender, Race and Class. The values for national unity are also infused by some lecturers in the teaching and learning of faculty core courses and programme courses.

To enhance the internalisation of *Rukun Negara* among students, the Department of National Unity and Integration has introduced *Rukun Negara* Club as co-curriculum in institutions of higher education in Malaysia (Ministry of Information Malaysia, 2005). The clubs aim to introduce the principles of *Rukun Negara*; to provide meaning and understanding on the five

principles: to enhance the awareness on the importance of *Rukun Negara* as the basis of daily practices; and to make the principles as daily practices for the inculcation of loyal, visionary, dignified, open and ethical members of the community. Other co-curriculum programmes related to the inculcation of national unity include Interaction of Institution with Community (INTERIM), Leadership and Motivation (*Bakti Siswa*), Folk Dance, Choir, Theatre, as well as Traditional Music (*Muzik Asli*). Sports activities such as soccer, hockey, swimming, basketball and volleyball can also contribute to the inculcation of national unity among students.

Extra-curriculum related to national unity takes the form of student outreach programmes such as student union activities, activities at residential colleges, student activities at faculty level, campaigns, and competitions. National unity is also inculcated through the interaction between students and students, students and lecturers, as well as students and other members of the university community.

## Methodology

This study surveyed the level of national unity among the students of UMS. It gauged the extent to which national unity is inculcated through curriculum, co-curriculum and extra-curriculum activities in UMS.

The main instrument consists of three divisions. The first division consists of six items on demographic characteristics of the respondents. The second division, which is adopted from Mansor and Morshidi (2005), consists of 28 positively-worded statements measuring the degree of national unity of the respondents. The third division consists of ten items measuring the degree of agreement of the respondents on university activities in which national unity is taught or infused. These activities were university core courses, faculty core courses, programme core courses, cultural activities, co-curricular activities, sports activities, activities at residential halls, student union activities, interaction with other students, and interaction with academic staff. The items in the second and third divisions were given responses based on a five-point scale.

The questionnaires were distributed to and collected from the samples by staff members of the Student Affairs Department. The samples consist of 502 randomly-sampled undergraduate students in the

university. Out of this number a total of 487 cases with complete data were used in the data analysis.

The Statistical Package for Social Science Programme was used for the data analysis. Descriptive statistics involving frequencies, means and standard deviations were used. Inferential statistics involved comparison of means using independent sample t-tests and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and linear regression.

## Findings

### Higher Education Activities

The descriptive statistics of the responses for higher education activities which contributed towards the inculcation of national unity shows that according to the perception of the students, the most contributing activities for national unity, in descending order, are: university core courses, cultural activities, interaction with other students, and sports activities. On the contrary the least contributing activities, in ascending order, are: interaction with academic staff, programme core courses, faculty core courses, and student union activities.

### Relationship between Higher Education and National Unity

To study the relationship between university activities and national unity, the correlation between activities and national unity was computed. The Pearson's  $r$  of 0.464 (sig.=0.001) shows that there is a significant moderate relationship between university activities and national unity.

A regression analysis was executed to identify university activities which are predictors for national unity among students. The result shows that the best model (Model 4) consists of four significant predictors of national unity among students. These predictors are, in descending order of strength, the contributions of university core courses, sports activities, faculty core courses, and student union activities. The coefficients of these predictors are given in Table 1.

## Conclusion and Discussion

The study shows that university core courses, cultural activities, interaction with other students, and sports activities are the main contributors for the inculcation of national unity in the campus, whereas the less contributing activities are interaction with academic staff, programme core courses, faculty core courses, and student union activities. There is a moderate correlation between university activities and national unity. Linear regression analysis shows that the predictors of national unity among students are the university core courses, sports activities, faculty core courses, and student union activities.

It can be implied from the study that efforts in inculcating national unity through university core courses, cultural activities and sports activities, as well as interaction among students should be continued.

From the finding on the predictors for national unity among students, it is recommended that the Academic Department should build on the strengths of the teaching and learning of university and faculty core courses. On the other hand, the Student Affair Department can complement them with sports and student union activities.

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Table 1: Coefficients\* of predictors for national unity

Model		Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.391	.082			
	University core courses	.185	.019	.400		
2	(Constant)	3.022	.097			
	University core courses	.155	.019	.334		
3	Sports activities	.122	.019	.265		
	(Constant)	2.933	.101			
	University core courses	.140	.020	.303		
4	Sports activities	.110	.019	.238		
	Faculty core courses	.054	.018	.129		
	(Constant)	2.875	.103			
	University core courses	.135	.020	.292		
	Sports activities	.087	.021	.190		
	Faculty core courses	.046	.018	.112		
	Student union activities	.049	.020	.114		

\* Dependent Variable: National Unity

# Relationship Between Organisational Culture and Knowledge Management: Scenario of a Malaysian Public Institution of Higher Learning

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## Introduction

The Ninth Malaysia Plan or RMK9, as it is more popularly known, signifies yet another key attempt of the Government to hasten the development of the nation into a knowledge-based economy (k-economy) in order to achieve the objectives of Vision 2020. The RMK9 provides a strategic platform defining the changes necessary to the economy, expressing a vision and mission besides prescribing 11 thrust areas that need to be addressed in moving forth the k-economy. In relation to that, one of the strategic thrusts in the RMK9 is to develop human capital. This has been supported by the K-Economy Master Plan 2002 which stresses the development of skilled and knowledge-based public sector. One of the recommendations in this plan is to develop and implement Knowledge Management System (KMS) in Malaysian Government Agencies. The public Institutions of Higher Learning (IHLs) are definitely included in this plan as they are already in the position to further realise the Government's mission.

It is widely acknowledged that one of the primary responsibilities of IHLs is to produce knowledgeable professionals (Sirajuddin, 2006). Thus, it is feasible to implement knowledge management (KM) as an advanced management practice in IHLs, looking at its ability to propel and manage the changes mentioned above. This is supported by the nature of IHLs which have long been regarded as knowledge-based organisations (Goddard, 1998) where the roles and functions of IHLs are always based on the knowledge agenda (Cronin and Davenport, 2000). In fact, research has found that an institution-wide approach to KM can lead to considerable improvements in sharing knowledge and subsequent growth benefit (Sharimllah et al., 2007).

The implementation of KM processes in IHLs, however, needs adequate and thorough planning to ensure its success. Unfortunately, there is little guidance for managers in the simplified typical literature concerning people management for KM in IHLs. Not unexpectedly, this gives rise to a growing discontentment among lecturers/academics regarding the practicalities of implementing KM (Michael, 2004). In addition to that, the growing body of literature focusing on KM inclines to emphasise the technical aspects of KM rather than the people aspects. Blackler (2000) proposes that people issues need to be moved to the centre stage of KM. The rationale is that if managers can better understand the people management issues and address them, they will be better equipped to pursue the exciting new opportunities opened up by KM.

As such, Alvesson and Kärreman (2001) and McDermott (1999) have rightly pointed out that managing knowledge partly becomes a matter of managing organisational culture. Their notions are supported by many KM researchers and practitioners who have reached a consensus that one of the most critical factors in KM implementation initiative is the presence of a knowledge-friendly culture (Chong, 2006a; Chong, 2006b; Chong and Choi, 2005; DeLong, 1997; DeLong and Fahey, 2000; Davenport and Klahr, 1998; Davenport and Prusak, 1998; Davenport et al., 1998; Greengard, 1998; Gupta et al., 2000; Jager, 1999; Maizatul Akmar and Chua, 2005; McDermott and O'Dell, 2001; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Peyman et al., 2005; Ryan and Prybutok, 2001; Schein, 1993; Serban and Luan, 2002; Sharimllah et al., 2007; Skyrme and Amidon, 1997; Von Krogh et al., 2000; Wild et al., 2002; Wind and Main, 1999; Wong, 2005). Notwithstanding the importance of organisational culture on KM success, very few studies have been carried out to investigate cultural aspects that facilitate KM implementation, especially among the IHLs (Sharimllah et al., 2007).

It is this backdrop that provides the setting for this paper exploring the relationship between KM processes and organisational culture among academics of a Malaysian public IHL. The implications of this study can be of remarkable value to IHLs, public and private, as they prepare to implement KM initiatives. The findings could help IHLs to evaluate their existing cultural practices and the possibility of success in their KM implementation. As KM requires significant investments of time, money and personnel (Chong and Lin, 2006; Parikh, 2001), a careful examination of cultural practices of the IHLs will thus determine their KM implementation success.

## Methodology

### *Sampling*

The sample comprises academics working at a public university in Malaysia. This university was established in 2000 and is recognised as a pioneer in the use of the "practice-and-application-oriented" teaching and learning method for technical education in Malaysia. The establishment of this university stemmed from the government's decision to cater for the human resource need of Malaysian industries. It aims to produce professionals who are not only highly qualified and technically competent but are also highly skilful and efficient. One of the university's primary objectives is to nurture itself into becoming a learning

and knowledge organisation. Based on this rationale of the university, it is believed that the university has been aptly selected to capture the details of the study.

**Questionnaire**

The survey questionnaire used in this study contains three sections in which the details are explained below:

- Section 1 contains two questions on the institution’s demographic information, which seek information on the faculty the academics are attached to and their knowledge of KM;
- Section 2 contains questions on the KM Assessment Instrument (KMAI) adopted from Lawson (2003) which consists of six KM process typology (Table 1) with four descriptive statements for each of the processes. A five point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree) is utilised. Lawson (2003) has performed an extensive review of literature and identified a comprehensive set of KM processes. In addition, she has tested the KMAI before and after its development. As such, her instrument is considered to be comprehensive enough to capture all the six dimensions of KM process typology; and
- Section 3 contains Organisational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI) developed and validated by Cameron and Quinn (1999) based on the theoretical model of CVF (Figure 1). There are six questions that address various components of organisation culture which consists of four descriptive statements utilising a five point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). Each question presents four alternatives that represent the same quadrant of the framework. The OCAI’s six key dimensions of organisational culture are: (1) organisation’s dominant characteristics; (2) organisational leadership; (3) management of employees; (4) organisation glue; (5) strategic emphases; and (6) organisation’s criteria of success.

**Findings**

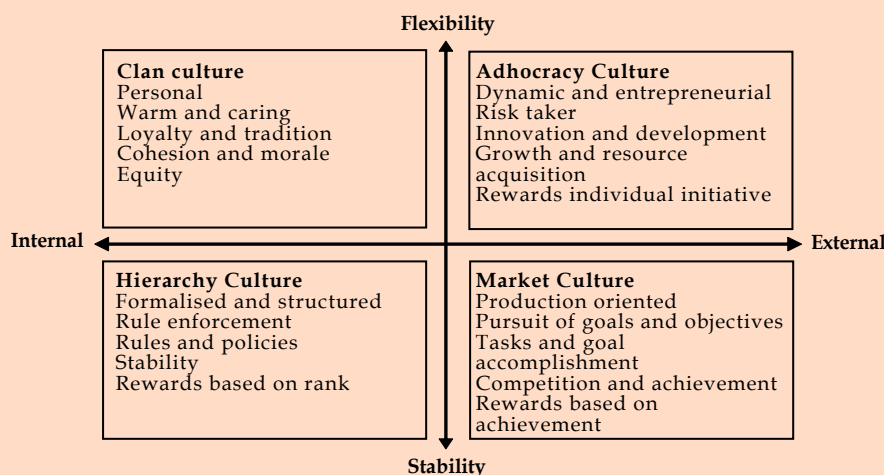
The profile of the respondents is shown in Table 2. Most of them are attached to the Faculty of Information and Communication Technology,

**Table 1: Definition of KM processes**

KM processes	Definition
Knowledge Creation	Organisations make conscious effort to search and define relevant knowledge and its sources form both within and outside. Knowledge is created through discovery, that is, employees developing new ways of doing things or it is brought in through external sources.
Knowledge Capture	New knowledge is identified as relevant and valuable to current and future needs. It is represented in a reasonable way where it is easily accessed, extracted and shared.
Knowledge Organisation	New knowledge is refined and organised. This is done through filtering to identify and cross list the useful dimensions of the knowledge for different products and services. The knowledge is placed in context so that it is actionable and it can be reviewed and kept current and relevant.
Knowledge Storage	Codified knowledge is stored in a reasonable format so that others in the organisation can access it. Database management and data warehousing technologies can help in this process.
Knowledge Dissemination	Knowledge is personalised and distributed in a useful format to meet the specific needs of users. The knowledge is articulated in a common language using tools that are understood by all users.
Knowledge Application	Knowledge is applied to new situations where users can learn and generate new knowledge. In the learning process, there should be analysis and critical evaluation to generate new patterns for future use.

(Source: Earl and Scott, 1999; Lawson, 2003)

followed by the Faculty of Electronic and Computer Engineering and the Centre for Academic Services. The Institute of Technology and Entrepreneurship Management constitutes the least number of respondents. Most of the respondents state that they have average knowledge of KM (40 per cent). Out of the rest, 35.7 per cent of them have some knowledge and 16.2 per cent have no knowledge at all. Only 8.1 per cent of the respondents have more than average knowledge of KM. This implies that the majority of academic members have some knowledge of KM. This justifies



Source: Cameron and Quinn (1999: 32) and Zammuto et al. (1999: 128).

**Figure1: Competing values framework**

**Table 2: Demographic characteristics of respondents**

Items	Descriptions	%
Faculty	Faculty of Electronic and Computer Engineering	20.5
	Faculty of Electrical Engineering	10.8
	Faculty of Mechanical Engineering	15.1
	Faculty of Manufacturing Engineering	15.1
	Faculty of Information and Communication Technology	21.1
	Centre for Academic Services	16.2
	Institute of Technology Management and Entrepreneurship	1.1
Knowledge on KM	1 = Nothing	16.2
	2 = Some knowledge	35.7
	3 = Average	40.0
	4 = More than average	8.1

**Table 3: Correlation between KM Processes and OC**

	Clan	Adhocracy	Market	Hierarchy	KM Processes
Clan					
Adhocracy	.587**				
Market	.638**	.663**			
Hierarchy	.666**	.407**	.551**		
KM Processes	.506**	.563**	.573**	.435**	

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

their inclusion in the current study as academics are actively involved in issues pertaining to KM processes (Chaudhry and Higgins, 2003; Jones, 2003; Luby, 1999; Sharimllah et al., 2007).

The Pearson Correlation analysis presented in Table 3 shows that all the four types of OC have significant positive correlation with KM processes. Greater correlation coefficients were recorded for adhocracy and market culture types. Hierarchical culture has the lowest positive correlation with KM processes.

## Discussion

This research has advanced knowledge by filling the gaps mentioned in the introduction above. This is probably one of the first studies that attempted to comprehensively examine the relationship between KM processes and organisational culture in the IHL setting, particularly in Malaysia. Based on the results of the statistical analysis, many of the academics have some knowledge of KM. The findings on the extent of academics' knowledge on KM provide empirical evidence that IHLs are in fact knowledge-based organisations (Cronin and Davenport, 2000; Goddard, 1998; Rowley, 2000). Studies show that the IHLs do not solely provide knowledge to students, but are also engaged in managing and collaborating the existing knowledge for future reference (Maizatul and Chua 2006; Goud et al., 2006; Yusof and Suhaimi, 2006). Although the IHL surveyed does not have a formal KM programme institutionalised to date, it aims to become

a learning and knowledge-based institution. This could be the reason why the academics are able to understand the meaning of KM and are able to give positive ratings to all the KM processes.

The Pearson correlation analysis provides further evidence that all the OC types work best in order for KM implementation to be successful. This indicates that an optimum culture that comprises all of the four OC types is needed for all the KM processes to be effectively carried out. This finding has also rejected Mintzberg's (1993) idea that public IHLs are operated solely as bureaucratic institutions, thus allowing the bureaucratic culture to dominate the institution. A review of the IHL's activities indicates that it has responded to the environmental needs at the point of its establishment (to cater for to the human resource needs of Malaysian industries). In addition, the IHL has been positioning itself as a centre for continuing professional education and it has strived in its quest to collaborate with industry partners as part of its scholarly activities (represent the adhocracy and market type cultural types). The finding on clan cultural type explains that some of the academics collaborated with each other in terms of research and other scholarly activities. The presence of all the OC types in the IHL surveyed might explain why a balanced culture has been instilled within the academics of the university. The Pearson correlation analysis provides further evidence that all the OC types work best in order for KM implementation to be successful. This indicates that an optimum culture that comprises all of the four OC types is needed for all the KM processes to be effectively carried out.

## Recommendation

First of all, KM has been proven as a viable management practice in many academic and trade literature across different organisational types (Sallis and Jones, 2002). The benefits of KM implementation have also been widely documented. As such, it is timely for the Malaysian IHLs to consider institutionalising a KM programme. With a proper implementation of KM, IHLs would be in a better position to manage their KM processes effectively. This would allow IHLs to respond to the frequent unexpected changes in the environment and meet the expectation of their stakeholders.

To achieve this, the top management of IHLs and even government leaders play critical roles in shaping the culture of IHLs. In promoting a balanced culture, the leaders must take the role of cultural change agents in enabling KM. A revolutionary practice such as KM requires radical changes to the organisation and its members, and therefore, invites resistance to the organisation by its members. Thus, only through proper change management initiated by the leaders through systematic promotion of desired subcultures, used planned organisational development projects, created parallel learning structure or change through technical influences (Schein, 1992) would enable KM initiatives to be successful.

Communication is another important aspect in which organisational leaders must provide justifications to its members on why KM is needed and why a culture of knowledge sharing has to be mandated for organisational success.

## Conclusion

The results of this study allow for two contrasting conclusions. On one hand, IHLs by nature are considered knowledge-based organisations. On the other, although IHLs by nature are knowledge-based, it does not mean that the KM processes are formally institutionalised. In order to successfully deal with the challenges of environmental uncertainties, IHLs are compelled to place more emphasis in managing their knowledge processes in order to remain successful and at the forefront. Culture, in this respect, plays an important role in shaping KM implementation success in IHLs. It is hoped that the findings and recommendations made in this study would help IHLs to properly manage their KM processes through the development of a knowledge-friendly culture across the institution. This would ensure that knowledge is effectively transferred not only between academics, students out also, indirectly, to the society as well as allowing the IHLs to respond proactively to the changes in the environment.

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# The English Language Curriculum for Petroleum Students at Hadramout University of Science and Technology (HUST)

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## Introduction

Like all engineers, petroleum students need the English language to meet their academic and professional needs. However, it has been found that petroleum students at Hadramout University of Science and Technology (HUST) faced a lot of difficulties in using the language. There may be many reasons for the difficulties. One of the reasons might be the English language curriculum which is offered to the petroleum students. Given this, the present paper discusses issues related to the English language curriculum for petroleum students at HUST in its past and current situation and what should be done in the future.

## English Language Curriculum for the Petroleum Students at HUST

Like all the faculties in HUST, English is taught to first year petroleum students as a faculty requirement for one year. It aims to qualify these students with the required proficiency level they need on their professional lives. Another important aim of the English course is to “develop and improve students’ communicative competence in the four language skills” (Al-Fadly, 2004: 18). Despite taking the course, they might face a lot of difficulties in using English as most of the graduates were rejected when applying to work at the oil companies. In fact, they have been advised to take intensive courses in English to improve their language.

Obviously, there are many factors that might cause the students’ low proficiency in English. Yet, much more insight and beneficial data may be obtained by concentrating on the appropriateness of the English language syllabus.

Generally speaking, before 2004, the English language syllabus in almost all the faculties in HUST was designed by English for Specific Purposes (ESP) teachers based on their own perceptions and views of the students’ needs (Al-Fadly, 2004). Designing the English language course to the engineering students and other majors presented a lot of difficulties to the teachers. This is because their background knowledge, which is education, is different from the students’. This problem has been highlighted by many researchers. For example, Pritchard and Nasr (2004) comment that as these teachers do not have as much technical background as their students do, they “lack confidence in their own knowledge and expertise” (ibid: 426). Moreover, English courses designed by these teachers

might neglect the students’ needs and interests (ibid). The importance of having relevant background knowledge and expertise is clearly pointed out by Nunan (1987: 7).

If teachers are to be the ones responsible for developing the curriculum, they need the time, the skills and the support to do so. Support may include curriculum models and guidelines and may include support from individuals acting in a curriculum advisory position. The provision of such support cannot be removed and must not be seen in isolation from the curriculum.

From the above, it is now clear that the problem is not just for these teachers as syllabus designers but also as ESP teachers. The latter issue needs to be further researched so as to know whether these teachers are competent enough to teach the ESP students in all the faculties at HUST in general and in the Faculty of Petroleum and Engineering (FPE) in particular or whether they need some orientation and/or training to be effective teachers.

However, since 2004, the English language department at the Faculty of Education has revamped the syllabus by replacing the materials designed by the ESP teachers with materials more related to General English (GE). This syllabus is offered to all first year students in HUST regardless of their different majors. As such, instead of developing new English courses to meet the needs of the students, GE course has been taught to all the students including petroleum students.

The new syllabus was written by Al-Khuali (2003) for Jordanian post-secondary school students and published by Dar Al-Falah. It consists of two books entitled “English Skills One and English Skills Two”. Each book consists of fourteen units. Each unit contains one passage divided into three parts. Two of these parts are for reading comprehension while the third for listening comprehension. Each passage is followed by exercises on reading, listening, vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, spelling, pronunciation and writing.

It seems plausible at this juncture to mention some of the titles of the passages to show how far these topics are from the petroleum specialisation. In English Skills One, for example, one can find: *The Migration of the Birds, Language and Community, What is Linguistics* and so forth. In the English Skills Two, one can read: *What is Language, Moonlight, and Bees and Colour*. Implementing such topics, instead of ESP ones, to the petroleum

students may be a learning obstacle. Teaching the petroleum students such a course would mismatch the awareness of what these students exactly need. This stems from Hutchinson and Waters's (1987: 53) argumentation that differentiates the ESP course and the GE course by stating that: "What distinguishes ESP from General English is not the existence of a need as such but rather an awareness of the need". They go on to state that, "if learners, sponsors and teachers know why the learners need English, that awareness will have an influence on what will be acceptable as reasonable content in the language course and, on the positive side, what potential can be exploited" (ibid).

In a detailed description of how to design an ESP course, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) come up with a thorough approach which they called the learning-centred approach. They focused on the needs analysis of the ESP learners to be the first step on designing an ESP syllabus. On this account, Hutchinson and Waters (1987: 12) state that

"The purpose of an ESP course is to enable learners to function adequately in a target situation, that is, the situation in which the learners will use the language they are learning, then the ESP course design process should proceed by first identifying the target situation and then carrying out a rigorous analysis of the linguistics features of that situation. The identified features will form the syllabus of the ESP course."

As far as the English language curriculum for the petroleum students at HUST is concerned, these students should study English for specific purposes. That is, they need to study English to meet their academic and professional needs. As discussed before, the current English syllabus is not so appropriate to these ESP students. In other words, such a syllabus is not designed to provide the petroleum students with the English language and learning needs that they require. From bad to worse, the history of the English language syllabus at HUST was just like a patient who wished to get a recovery from fever but was infected with flu. Instead of diagnosing the symptoms and come up with a good treatment, the English department at the Faculty of Education in HUST implemented GE course to all the ESP students. These materials are much more far away from the students' needs if compared with the previous ones. Even though the previous materials were designed by teachers who have no relevant background to what should be taught, one can find some related topics to each specialisation.

The background knowledge of ESP teachers at HUST was another important issue. Ideally, in order to teach English for specific purposes, teachers need sufficient background knowledge of the students' specific field of study. On this account, it is argued that as these teachers were graduates of the Education Faculty, they

might face some difficulties to teach petroleum students and/or to design their English syllabus for these students. Another important issue related to the English language curriculum was the socio-cultural background of the students. Like all Yemeni EFL learners, petroleum students have different socio-cultural backgrounds such as the type of school, parents' education, the area of residence, the family size and so forth. Given this, it is contended that taking such factors into consideration prior to course design is indispensable.

To sum up, the main objective of the current paper is to discuss issues related to the English language curriculum for the petroleum students at HUST. The review and discussion presented so far make it clear that the present syllabus might not suit the petroleum students' language and learning needs. It is more related to GE than to ESP as described by the English language teachers. Some recommendations that may be taken into consideration by the ESP syllabus designers, teachers, students and researchers at HUST are as follows:

- Identify the petroleum students' language and learning needs of English as perceived by five different stakeholders, i.e. students, ESP teachers, faculty teachers, graduates and experts in the field. These needs can be used as a basis to design an ESP course for these learners.
- Relate the petroleum students' needs to their socio-cultural backgrounds and try to find out what these Yemeni EFL learners need English language for and how their needs might differ from other engineers' needs elsewhere.
- Identify the job-related language needs for the petroleum graduates at their workplace.
- Conduct empirical research to testify all the possible factors that might cause the ESP students' low proficiency in English in all the faculties at HUST in general and in the faculty of petroleum and engineering in particular.

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# Multimodality of Learning in Higher Education: Issues and Challenges

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## Introduction

In today's borderless and globalised world, educators are often faced with the arduous challenge of preparing undergraduates with appropriate competencies and practices so that they can cope in workplaces which are increasingly technologically-driven. Globalisation is placing new demands on the kinds of 'literacies' we need in the workplace as much as in the communicational demands of everyday life. Universities, through their educational activities of discovery, shaping, achieving, transmitting, and applying knowledge are expected to take the lead in promoting the transition by challenging present and stimulating future scenarios. Kellner (2000: 245) stresses the importance that 'if education is to be relevant to the problems and challenges of contemporary life, it must expand the concept of literacy and develop new curricula and pedagogies'. In the global marketplace, the higher education sector must provide an essential infrastructure with which a country can harness from the perspective of creative technological expertise. Thus, with greater emphasis on a 'knowledge industry', institutions higher education learning will be expected to give relevant importance in the area of teaching, in order to cater for new developments of the broader community.

Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996; 2001) have challenged the notions of traditional literacy's importance on print as a result of the tremendous growth in the role of multimodal texts and digital technology. They highlight that a print-based pedagogy solely is inappropriate to cater for the demands of the existing information age. This is viewed in the light of 'the screen' and multimodal texts that are developing new ways of analysing, critiquing and engaging in texts. This phenomenon rules out the traditional notion of sole dependence of the meaning-making process based on written texts as the main source of interpreting information. However, this view does not overlook the skills of reading and writing of print-based texts but supplements the idea of literacy in line with a new era of digitalisation. Education in higher education is responsible in addressing the fact that undergraduates engage in the multiple modes of communication which must be taken into account as relevant steps towards equipping them with appropriate competencies that are vital to go beyond academia in order to prepare graduates for the world of work.

## Multimodality: Context, Background and Focus

The screen is now the culturally dominant medium in many parts of the world, and for many members of numerous societies around the globe (Johnson and Kress, 2003). Similarly, when learners conceptualise,

experience, apply, and analyse multimodal texts, the learners are required to use linguistic, visual, auditory, gestural and spatial design elements (Cope and Kalantzis, 2001).

Technology enhances literary practices through multimodality where the visual design element extends, enhances and communicates meaning with new modes like Power Point presentations, Video Papers, hypertext, blogging and other website-related activities that promote and develop literacy skills of undergraduates. The multimodality framework that encourages the usage of on-line technologies as a tool for autonomous learning promotes the skills of reading for comprehension, asking a question, sharing an opinion in public forums, giving advice, sharing knowledge, conducting surveys, post summaries and original research. Besides that, participation of undergraduates in collaborative projects will involve them working with people in different places, creating webpages and websites individually and collaboratively, through effective combination of texts, graphics, audio, video and other media in hypertext format.

In this context, Pandian (2003) perceptively points out that literacy and new media technology complement each other in a multi-channelled learning environment where literacy practices extend beyond community and country borders in new and exciting ways. He further stresses that:

"educators are responsible in thinking, planning and managing new persons for new communities... In addressing the new times, we have to ensure that the term literacy goes beyond technological advances that are linking the world ever more closely, to focus on knowledge and its creation - as dimensions linked to economics, politics, culture, religion, environment, social justice and peace to ensure the well being of each nation and the wider world" (p.66).

Pandian (2003) highlights the evident fact that literacy practices should be challenging, and that educators play a significant role in creating avenues for confronting new times and preparing undergraduates to face challenges for employment in the present digital age. According to Pandian (2003), a study which investigated undergraduates' engagement with computers among 675 Universiti Sains Malaysia students unveiled some interesting patterns which indicate that computer literacy among the respondents in the study was high. This suggests that undergraduates do favour the use of literacy practices

that are multimodal in nature, where screen is a preferred mode of reading than page.

## Issues and Challenges Faced by University Teachers

### *Making Learning Learner-centred*

One of the key challenges in a higher education setting is undergraduates' learning has been encapsulated as to be focused on content and learner-centred. Kaur (2001) adds that the contemporary revolution, confronted with the mushrooming of technological advancement, has opened up avenues for network information retrieval by students and educators through channels of multimedia like the internet, computer conferences, listservs, relational databases and other innovations.

### *Using a Multimodal Pedagogy in the Classroom*

In preparing the nation's future competent workforce, it makes good sense then to equip undergraduates with diverse competencies that are vital in response to negotiating with the rapid and expanding changes in information and communication technology. In this light, technological tools must be viewed as an essential and important element in today's classroom pedagogy where a multimodal pedagogy can be significant in promoting effective and real-life learning. Creative tasks can be structured and scaffolded to provide more opportunities for students to communicate their ideas.

In spite of several potentially limiting conditions currently prevalent in many university contexts (with regard to ICT implementation as a policy, availability of resources to fund the incorporation of technology in lecture theatres, etc.), the benefits of using multimodal texts in upgrading students' learning repertoires are here to stay.

### *Using Resources Effectively*

In adopting the Multiliteracies approach, university teachers and students must possess the ability to be able to critically assess and evaluate texts using technology as a means to engage in literacy. They need the ability to use such resources effectively and creatively in their associated cultures by reading and to critique them in the process, to appropriate and redesign them as well as to be able to actively envisage and contribute to transforming social practices as they judge the text.

### *Academic Dishonesty*

This could be the result of a new learning culture or university culture; other factors include undergraduates' poor mastery in English, their misunderstanding about the concept or academic

conventions of referencing and their ignorance of the unit's requirements. Therefore, educators have to emphasise and create a sense of awareness of the seriousness of plagiarism and its implications in academic writing.

### *Pressures and Constraints Affecting Academic Staff*

University teachers are constantly challenged with limited time factor as they have to meet the traditional demands of academic research, teaching, supervision and administrative activities. As a result, academic staff are pressured with little time left for developing and using ICT in teaching. This problem needs to be overcome, in order to promote better literacy practices, promote creative thinking skills and problem solving skills among our students. Undergraduates must be encouraged to engage in multimodal texts during lectures and course assignments as this will motivate them to be active receptors of knowledge who can chart their goal towards more independent thinking.

## Conclusion

Higher education institutions should be able to provide the context for change that reflect the values, needs, and structure to affect a transformational change. Improving the quality of teaching and learning practices is significant in upgrading the standard of graduates in preparation for future workplaces in the present scenarios of the new knowledge and innovation economies. In spite of several potentially limiting conditions currently prevalent in many university contexts (with regard to ICT implementation as a policy, availability of resources to fund the incorporation of technology in lecture theatres, etc.), the benefits of using multimodal texts in upgrading students' learning repertoires are here to stay. There are important lessons for university teachers who have intentions to make student learning more situated in the real world and in doing so, helping students to deal with multimodal texts that will "challenge students intellectually and emotionally" (Hamston, 2006: 48).

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# Can Teacher Education in Australia Meet the Challenges of the New Millennium?

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## Introduction

This paper provides a brief discussion of teacher education in Australia, as it faces significant challenges in preparing teachers to take on the academic, technological and emotional demands of teaching as a career.

## Attitudes to Teaching as a Career

The Australian Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST, 2006) synthesised recent research on attitudes to teaching as a career. The report found that the following factors led to many students not wanting to enter teaching:

- teaching is viewed as a low status job;
- teaching offers poor career opportunities in terms of promotion pathways and little reward for outstanding performance;
- teaching is difficult and poorly rewarded;
- teacher training is difficult for mature-aged students – especially financially;
- teaching is seen by some to be boring and repetitive;
- teaching is less attractive to high-achievers and to males.

Clearly, teaching is suffering to some extent from poor publicity, and one of the major challenges is to change this perception if we are to attract the best young people into the profession.

## Funding

There has been a steady reduction in government support for universities over the last decade and more (Fasano and Winder, 1999; Willmott, 2002) that has particularly affected teacher education. In this general shift, school and tertiary education are considered to be part of broader social and economic policy parameters, with increased concerns with efficiency, accountability and measurable outcomes. The particular impact on teacher education includes constraints on funding for practicum, and the adverse effect of increasing workloads on the ability of university staff to collaborate and liaise effectively with teachers in schools. This development is occurring at a time when reviews of teacher education (Ramsey, 2000; Vinson, 2003) are consistently calling for greater time in schools for pre-service teachers, and greater collaboration between universities and schools.

## Attracting Outstanding Teachers

Reduced funding of the tertiary sector also limits the ability to attract outstanding teaching practitioners into

universities (Houston, Meyer and Paewei, 2004). Teaching and academic salaries compare unfavourably. A teacher of demonstrated excellence will have a strong track record in schools. A temporary university placement will not necessarily enhance that track record in the view of school systems, evidenced by the refusal of some school principals to release their excellent teachers to work in the university. A permanent university appointment will mean that some degree of starting afresh on a career track will be necessary.

## Poor Retention Rates

Many teachers are lost at the pre-service and early career points (Keefe and O'Brien, 2006). Thirty per cent of beginning teachers in Australia express a desire to leave within the first two years of service (Abbott-Chapman, 2006; Christie, 2006; Goddard and O'Brien, 2004). A survey by the Australian Education Union reported in DEST (2006) noted that 45 per cent of beginning teachers intended to leave teaching in the next ten years and their major issues were workload, behaviour management, pay and class sizes. Historically, work overload and a lack of professional support were contributing factors to increased levels of stress and burnout, but recent research (Goddard and O'Brien, 2004; O'Brien and Goddard, 2006) has found that the conservative nature of more experienced teachers, and some cynicism towards young teachers wanting to try new ideas, have reduced the enthusiasm and energy of new teachers.

Significant losses also occur mid career and through early retirement. Mobility across professions is now a feature of the contemporary labour market. One third of qualified teachers are employed elsewhere rather than in schools (Lovat, 2006; Skilbeck and Connell, 2004). Teaching is competing with other knowledge-intensive fields for highly qualified personnel. Attrition is higher in certain disciplines (e.g. science) and for teachers with higher academic credentials.

When one examines the reasons teachers give for remaining in and enjoying a career in teaching, personal satisfaction and making a difference in children's lives are regularly cited. It is reported that intrinsic rather than extrinsic factors motivate people to choose teaching as a career (Reid and Caldwell, 1997). Many reported being positively influenced by their own teachers, which highlights the importance of having positive role models in place to inspire a new generation of teachers.

## Continuing Education for Teachers

Schools and teachers are being affected by profound changes across all domains – technological, scientific and commercial. The changing nature of society, including challenges to the authority of established figures and institutions, demands teachers who have highly developed interpersonal skills, an ability to manage an ever-increasing knowledge base, who are innovative thinkers and problem solvers, and who are constant learners (Ryan, 2006; Skilbeck and Connell, 2004). A four-year preparation degree can be seen as no more than a foundation for professional practice, but teachers, perhaps because of their high-pressured and often stressful lives, do not tend to take up further retraining opportunities unless it is mandated (which may come quite soon in Australia).

Teaching is competing with other knowledge-intensive fields for highly qualified personnel. Attrition is higher in certain disciplines (e.g. science) and for teachers with higher academic credentials.

## Conclusion

Over the next decade, as the so-called “baby-boomers” reach retirement age, there will be an enormous turnover within the teaching profession in Australia, with many experienced teachers being replaced by neophytes to the field who will require appropriate training. Ferguson (2005) and Dinham (2005) point out, demands to be innovative, responsive and creative are coming at the same time as increasing bureaucratic restrictions act to construct a culture that is, at least sometimes, counter to the innovation’s push. Too many government initiatives and external demands can be counter-productive, motivating teachers to leave the profession because of the heavy administrative load, over-crowded curriculum and lack of autonomy (Rossmanith, 2006). This shift away from the teaching profession is coming at a time when more rather than fewer teachers are needed to meet the shortfall.

At the University of Wollongong, we are endeavouring to attract talented young people who see teaching as a long-term career, who have a valued qualification and who have the aptitude to teach students with learning and behavioural difficulties. We present teaching as a

valued profession that has both extrinsic and intrinsic rewards and we continually promote the value of education. We take every opportunity to communicate a positive and convincing professional image and to publicise the link between a knowledgeable and innovative society and high quality teaching. Of course, these initiatives must be matched by systemic support and by policies that address the issues that many recent reports have identified. These could include the following policies: promotion of teaching as a career option to more receptive target groups such as rural and remote residents; financial incentives to teach in hard-to-staff-areas; increased administrative support for teachers; more effective whole-school/systemic strategies to manage disruptive behaviour and better career progression opportunities.

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# Negotiating Learning: Are Shortcuts Good or Bad for Our Students?

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oday's increasingly globalised world places specific demands on young people pursuing tertiary education. There is a growing contention that students are increasingly "engaging in shortcut behaviour" due to the competitive nature of studies at Malaysian universities. Although the phrase has not been widely established in related academic areas as describing particular learning behaviour, "engaging in shortcut behaviour" may be operationally defined as a situation whereby, in order to achieve a particular learning result, a student undertakes courses of actions that are perceived to require lesser time and effort than are conventionally prescribed.

In the light of remarks and discussions on the quality of Malaysian university graduates, there is a need to investigate how students live through their university lives. If students do engage in the so-called shortcut behaviour, does this potentially have a bearing on the quality of graduates we are producing as human resource or as citizens? Do courses of action that reduce time and effort necessarily have negative impact on students' performance in the university when they enter employment or face life challenges in general?

A research carried out amongst students of Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) in 2005<sup>1</sup> has led to a few conclusions about the way Malaysian students negotiate their academic lives on campus. This study used a quantitative method of assessing students' behaviour that may be described as an attempt to use shortcuts. In the study, questionnaires were administered to 809 students, the majority (69 per cent) of which were female. The students interviewed were fairly representative of the multiple ethnic, economic and academic backgrounds of students of institutions of higher learning in Malaysia.

Where the landscape of students' academic life is concerned, the research focused on students' actions and decisions in classes, while completing academic assignments and in gathering information about academic and administrative matters. Students were asked questions relating to their thinking processes in class, their efforts in completing assignments given by lecturers and the degree that they would go to, to obtain information related to academic and administrative matters.

The results of the study indicate that the variables of age, gender, year of studies, accumulated academic grades, academic programmes, area of origin and birth order do not have significant relationships with students' decisions to engage in shortcut behaviour.

The study also concludes that if students are given choices they prefer group work to individual work for assignments stipulated in their academic courses. Students' decisions may be based on a few factors. Students may feel more confident doing group work because this provides them with an opportunity to confer and double-check facts and content with the designated course mates. Individual work may be isolating and lonely and students may choose to do group work to avoid this and to make completing assignments more psychologically bearable. On the other hand, students may also choose group work as a means to cope with the burden of multiple assignments given throughout a semester.

The USM study finds that when students are given group assignments, they tend to minimise efforts and thought processes in contributing collaboratively towards completing the project.

Group work is not necessarily a bad thing for students to choose even though it signifies a decision to engage in "shortcuts". In many employment situations, team-work is an encouraged method of working. Group work may also teach students to be tolerant, receptive of differing ideas and willing to share resources. All are admirable qualities of a citizen.

On the other hand, some findings of the study may negate the values of group work. The USM study finds that when students are given group assignments, they tend to minimise efforts and thought processes in contributing collaboratively towards completing

the project. They shy away from making independent judgements about the direction of the assignments and prefer to follow the decisions of the majority in the group. Thus, in order for group work to benefit students, the university authority may want to inculcate in the students the feeling of ownership and responsibility over their team project and thus, compel them to contribute equally towards decision making processing in the course of completing the assignment. In such situations, “shortcuts” can actually have positive results.

They shy away from making independent judgements about the direction of the assignments and prefer to follow the decisions of the majority in the group.

Students also engage in shortcut behaviour during lectures by being passive. This may indicate their preferences for the “wait-and-see” strategy. This can be associated with the teaching and learning culture during their pre-university education whereby active learning is not encouraged and spoon-feeding prevails. In this kind of environment, students usually wait passively for teachers to give out information. Another possible explanation is students’ lackadaisical attitudes towards the learning process. Students may feel that it is not necessary to commit to the extra work by participating when their peers are not doing the same. This may indicate that which in psychology may be termed as a “social loafing” pattern among students.

The USM study discovers that the highest “shortcut” behaviour incidents relate to the aspect of making decisions. Students are more likely to take shortcuts when making decisions regarding courses to take as well as the major and minor programmes to choose. This is worrying since students are making these important decisions not by carefully considering their choices but following suggestions from their seniors and friends. Again, this may reflect a lack of independence in judgment and actions on the part of the students.

As a means of negotiating academic life, shortcut behaviour has both merits and demerits towards development of students into potential human capital and citizens. If the goal of education in Malaysia is to produce graduates with the best academic performance, then shortcuts may be seen as feasible strategies for students to achieve this. However, lines may have to be drawn at actions and decisions that are ethical and legal. On the other hand, if the aim of university education is the process of learning, which is to say, the engagement of students’ minds in deliberate thought processes and the acquisition by students of skills of independent judgement and action, then shortcut behaviour as defined in this article, if pervasive amongst our students, is a cause for due concern.

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<sup>1</sup>The research, “Shortcut Behaviour Amongst Students of Higher Learning Institutions” was funded by IPPTN.

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# Australian Englishes and the Experiences of International Students

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## Introduction

There is one salient feature that differentiates English from other Asian and European global languages. It is the way in which English has been subject to commodification and characterised as a marketable product (Habermas, 1990). In the context of a post-industrial society, English has assumed an important status as providing access to economic, educational and immigration opportunities (Singh, Kell and Pandian, 2002).

In his work on the uses of languages, Bourdieu (Jenkins, 1992: 152) claimed that language could not be understood without close attention to the cultural context in which it was situated. Language and culture are interwoven. Language is firmly embedded in social relationships and language is a part of the struggle over the production of culture with cultural reproduction confirming and legitimising the existing social order. Belying the unity of standard languages is a symbolic domination in which non-standard languages are given less dominance (Hanks 2005: 75).

The internationalisation of the university had included the increased use and reliance on English as the lingua franca of higher education. However, in the current climate while there has been an increased policy focus on English proficiency, this focus has tended to see English as disconnected from culture and has also failed to recognise the hybridity of Englishes that exist in Australia and the connection between international students successful negotiation of these Englishes and their well-being. This paper focuses on the issues confronting international students in academic and social life in Australia.

A crucial element in the achievement of success for international students is not only their academic adjustment but also their adjustment to the social and cultural environment. While academic success may heighten a student's confidence, social and cultural adjustment can be important factors that lead to this academic success (Novera, 2004: 475). According to Cameron and Meade (2002), there is a tendency to view international students, particularly Asian students as a homogenous group. Thus, while it is important to be aware of the heterogeneity of the international student population, recent research suggests that there are a number of common difficulties which many international students face in terms of their adjustment and well being. These include, homesickness, financial difficulties, language difficulties, problems dealing with university staff and other authorities, loneliness, isolation from other classmates and anxiousness about

speaking in the classroom in front of classmates and lecturers (Leder and Forgasz, 2004: 195; Novera, 2004: 476; Roberstson et al., 2000: 94; Scheyvens et al., 2003).

## Global English in the Global University

The research that will be described below was part of a much larger trans-national project funded by the Global Development Network of the World Bank. The research project explored the question of how to enhance the usage and proficiency of English in universities in the Asia Pacific and Australia. There were two nodes of research, one in Malaysia conducted by Ambigapathy Pandian of the University of Sains Malaysia and one in Australia. The research from which this data emerged was part of this study and was conducted by Peter Kell and Gillian Vogl as part of the Australian node. This node was conducted in a highly regarded public university in a regional centre in Eastern Australia and for the purposes of this study is called Beachways University.

The data in this study was obtained through a combination of in-depth interviews and focus groups, with support staff, university management, and international students. This paper concentrates essentially on the students' accounts of their own experiences in settling into the Australian university setting and the broader community.

## Global English in the Global University-Issues about Living as a Student in Australia

### Written Academic English

The majority of the students who participated in this research had been studying English since junior high school. This, however, largely involved reading and writing of an academic nature. Students from a number of different countries made comments, such as: *They teach in Japan to focus on grammar, especially writing and reading and they seldom teach us communication, English is mostly concentrated on grammar and vocabulary (Iran) and In my country most people learn to read and write in English but spoken English is not important (China).*

Largely, students in this study stated that they felt the most anxious about listening and speaking in English. One of the major factors that led to many of the students' difficulties in understanding English was the Australian accent. Students mentioned that it was particularly difficult to understand the Australian accent out in the community.

One of the students from Indonesia stated that the American and the Australian accent were different and in Indonesia they were used to hearing English spoken with an American accent. To this group Australians tended to mumble and slur words. Others were embarrassed when they spoke to 'Australians' and the Australians did not understand what they were saying because of their accents. They felt that this was not only embarrassing for them when they were asked to repeat themselves but also embarrassing for the person who did not understand them. Other students stated that it did not really matter about a person's accent as long as they spoke slowly and clearly.

They also found 'Australians' hard to understand because they shortened words. Australians even shortened University to 'uni' which tended to confuse students who were used to a more formal type of English (Angelo et al., 1994).

An issue that arose from the focus group discussion was what the participants viewed as 'English' in the first place. They differentiated between American and British English and then again between 'proper English' and the English they heard in Australia. As one student explained, *When I came to Australia, I'm thinking what is going on and they put every word together and it's very different, it's not like English but it's English.*

Some of the support staff who were interviewed said that they explained to students that *English is an evolving language and that there are many different versions of it around the world and that Australia is a multicultural country and so there is no correct or incorrect way to speak English as long as you make yourself understood. That is all that matters.*

Students lacked confidence in speaking to local students and found it difficult to understand what locals were saying but really wanted the experience of speaking conversational English and getting to know what they saw as Anglo-Australians.

In the focus groups, students who had been more successful in starting and sustaining conversations with 'Australians' spoke about the importance of establishing common ground. One of the students talked about the importance of watching popular television shows like 'Home and Away' so that she could join in on discussions about these shows that took place at her workplace and in her seminars. Another participant talked about learning some Australian colloquialisms. He said that going up to people and saying "how is it going mate?" was a good conversation starter.

One of the students was very relieved when she discovered the importance of discussing the weather in Australia. She stated that: *That is another thing that I have picked up here, the conversation about how the day is and whether is it*

*going to rain, that nice things to talk about. In India there is so much like electricity is off so you are trying to catch hold of the electrician or water has stopped coming so you are running around for the plumber. There is so many things going on, and the traffic jams, nobody really has time to stop and talk about the weather. Someone will start talking about, how is your son, how is your daughter and I have this problem, the fridge isn't working and my daughter is seeing a guy that I don't approve of. So that is another reason that sometimes I used to be very quiet. I am on the fifth floor and I am going down and on the fourth floor somebody else comes and it is just a nod and a smile as then I did not know that I could talk about the weather.*

Some of the international students believed that it was not that local students were unfriendly but rather that they also did not know how to initiate conversations with International students. A student mentioned that once the "ice was broken" then it had more to do with a student's personality than their culture as to whether or not a relationship developed. Other students found it hard as they felt that Australian students knew very little about their culture and countries of origin. As one of the students from our focus group stated:

*I recognised one lady, myself-I come from Indonesia and I asked her if she knew about Indonesia and she said: I don't know Indonesia. And I asked her again about Bali and she said: I have been there six times. But she did not know about Indonesia.*

Another student commented that 'Australians' who had been out of the country were much easier to approach and were 'a lot more friendly' than those who had never left the country.

### **Learning the Culture**

Some of the students took a while to get used to what they referred to as the 'informalness' or informality of Australians in terms of both the way they dressed and behaved. One student stated that;

*And nobody even dreams of wearing thongs to university (laughs) that is unimaginable, I mean if my mum got to know that I wear slippers and come to the college, she would freak out.*

Some students stated that it was hard to meet Australians because of the pub and club culture of many Australians. One of the students explained that there are two groups of international students, those who cannot go to pubs and drink because they cannot afford to and those who cannot drink alcohol for cultural and religious reasons.

Many of the students found it difficult to follow what both their lecturers and classmates were saying due to both the speed with which they spoke and because of their use of Australian colloquialisms. One of the students said that she was once the only "Asian" in a group and that she did not understand a word of what was being said because everyone in her group talked in slang. Some of the students perceived only their



'Anglo' lecturers to be real Australians. However others recognised that Australia was a multi-cultural country and that the notion of being an Australian was more complex than a simple connection with being a white Anglo Celtic. A few students felt that their lecturers from non-English speaking backgrounds were less helpful, while others perceived them to be more helpful as they felt like these lecturers were more empathetic with their language issues. According to one of the support staff, most of the students were very happy with non-Anglo lecturers if they were good teachers. If they were not, however, this was then attributed to their ethnicity.

### *Getting on with 'Aussies'; Parallel Worlds?*

When students from the focus group were asked if 'Australians' wanted to get to know them most of the students felt that 'Australians' did not want to know them. Yet these participants were interested in getting to know 'Australians' and curious about their lives. Some of the reasons which students provided for their difficulties in forming relationships with 'Australians' were; they did not feel confident talking to 'Australians' or they felt that 'Australians' may not want to form relationships with them because of their own temporariness. Some felt that Australian students couldn't be bothered and that Australians were too busy due to work, family and study commitments.

On the surface it appeared that international students associated and socialised with students from their own backgrounds or exclusively with international students. However, when questioned in greater depth to review associations and connections in their day-to-day experiences, the picture was slightly different. It was not as though the students did not spend a lot of time with others from their own background but further interviews suggested that they seemed to interact more with domestic students than they themselves initially recognised and recalled.

Some of the examples that students provided were attending barbecues with Australians and going out to the pub with work friends. One of the students who had hurt his back spoke about the very friendly interactions he had with his physiotherapist and also other hospital staff. His wife had also made friends with some Australians at the 'mothers group' that she attended. Indeed some recognised their associations through participation in work, sports and house sharing, all of which were not mentioned initially. This

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was partly due to the perception among international student that only Anglo students were real Australians.

## Conclusion

A theme emerging from this research suggests that there is an interconnection between English language proficiency and social interaction. The current policy settings interpret language as a disconnected 'requirement to be met' but in reality the attainment of competence and proficiency is, from the perspective of those interviewed, dependent and related to the capacities of students to display social and cultural adaptation and interaction. This interaction is very often outside the academy and is often in language contexts that are very different from that which features in the academy. The possession of an understanding and ability to use colloquial and non-formal English is a key to initiating and maintaining social interactions within and outside the academy. It needs to be recognised in policy terms that the needs of students are often as much to do with developing social, cultural and lifestyle connections and networks that enable access to this colloquial Australian English as they are to do with academic preparation. While within the academy, a more formal type of English may have symbolic dominance, clearly the possession of a basic working knowledge of informal Australian English is important in reducing alienation, loneliness and homesickness and from the experience of informants is linked to the connection they make with the broader Australian community.

The research suggested that there are some complexities about the presence of international students and more particularly Asian students that need to be unpacked for policies to respond to some of the issues described in this research. The neo-liberal market-based approach welcomes an influx of international students to be involved in an Australian experience. This exposure to the Australian experience is something that international students find difficult to negotiate with limited Australian English and knowledge of social norms.

From the data that we gathered in this project, there is a complex pattern of intercultural negotiation through the medium of English inside and outside the academy that influences the life of international students. Simply addressing issues of standard and English proficiency in the academy disconnected from social and cultural aspects of student life will not adequately address the needs of an increasingly diverse student population.

# The Learning Experience of Postgraduate Students: Emergent Themes

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## Introduction

In recent years, postgraduate education in Malaysian public universities has undergone tremendous changes. A variety of trends and factors continue to affect higher education institutions that offer postgraduate programmes to a large number of local and foreign postgraduate students. The transformation of higher education from a selected elite clientele to a wider deserving target is not only restricted to the undergraduate level but also applies to postgraduate education. In Universiti Sains Malaysia, the number of postgraduate student enrolments has increased three folds. The present enrolment of 5,289 students is distributed in 39 schools and four Centres of Excellence in the fields of Medicine, Science and Technology, Engineering and Arts. Currently there are 892 foreign postgraduate students, mainly from the Middle East (Handbook, Institute of Graduate Studies, USM, 2005).

The “performance chasm” in academic success among postgraduate students is a topic which concerns numerous interested parties involved in offering graduate studies programmes either by mixed mode or research modes. University educators have engaged in important discussions and dialogue about the need for postgraduate education to develop broad repertoires of literacy practice that will build on students’ specific academic disciplines, cultural and linguistic diversity and expand their knowledge base and skills in an effective manner so that they can be assured of a high quality education at their respective higher education institutions. However, for teachers facing issues of student diversity among current postgraduate enrolments in public universities in Malaysia, the realities can pose other complexities particularly pertaining to current pedagogic realities. The diversity in students’ prior learning is more complex now than in the past. Then university teachers only had to deal with fairly homogenous graduate student populations. Our students now represent “multifarious histories, expectations and responses and these are continually being shaped and reshaped in an interaction of student agency with socioculturally and politically formed pedagogic imperatives” (Scott, 2005: 298).

Notwithstanding these global forces and intentions affecting the offering of postgraduate education, some educators point to a potential dissonance between the kinds of actual student learning experience and the expected learning outcomes that employers want exhibited at the workplace. Consequently, the task of evaluating student learning experience in postgraduate education is a research activity worth carrying out as the outcomes of such an evaluative endeavour can point out to researchers and university educators the

various mismatches that would not be immediately known otherwise. This is especially so in a rapidly developing country such as Malaysia, which is experiencing waves of globalisation and internationalisation in her effort to steer healthy economic growth in all sectors. Arguably, adopting a realistic stance in evaluating learner experience is crucial in any academic setting. Students and university teachers continue to display the tendency to define postgraduate experience in terms of only ‘transmitting and accumulating knowledge’ during the course of their postgraduate teaching and learning.

## The Context of Previous Research

Student perceptions about their learning experience have a long history in educational research in terms of its legitimacy and importance. In these spheres of inquiry, most researchers employ quantitative methodology to gather large volumes of data on students’ perceptions of education quality. Although quantitative research is still highly valued, qualitative enquiry, which gives a deeper impression of the experience of an educational programme has enabled researchers to have greater appreciation of the unintended outcomes as well as the achievement of specific objectives (Light and Cox, 2001).

Postgraduate students and postgraduate courses are a rapidly growing element of many higher education systems worldwide. Master’s students frequently seek taught courses that meet specialised professional and personal concerns, and they are “discerning and frequently demanding students” (Knight, 1997; cited in Lindsay, Breen and Jenkins, 2002: 324). Postgraduate students often pay for their education themselves, and arguably as a result, their perceptions of what they receive have added force, both for themselves, and for departments and institutions seeking to attract them and meet their needs. Jenkins et al. (2002) note that one clear policy implication for researching postgraduate students is that it introduces a new element into the equation of student evaluation research – that of the ‘salience’ factor, which individual staff, course teams and departments should take into account. This, to some extent, necessitates that higher education providers devise formal and informational strategies to show that such course structures are ‘salient’ to student concerns, including in part the induction of a belief that choosing the course was an economically sound decision (Lindsay, Breen and Jenkins, 2002). Although most of these strategies may necessarily be course-specific, it may also be useful for departments to continuously promote research activities on the

ongoing evaluation of the postgraduate courses it offers so that the needs of the students are always given central importance.

## Method

In semester II of the 2005/06 academic session, a qualitative study of 30 postgraduate students studying for their MA in English Language and Linguistics at the School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) was carried out. The researchers team taught the MA course together. The overall aim of the project was to identify what the postgraduate students consider to be important issues related to their student experience in the MA course. By adopting a qualitative approach, the researchers used both student narratives and a combination of individual and select focus group interviews in their data collection stage. Focus group interviews (in groups of 4 students at a time) were held with a significant number of the postgraduate students. As the researchers were keen to explore various kinds of concerns experienced by the postgraduate students, they also asked students to hand in written narratives (2-3 pages) at the end of the semester. The researchers provided input (by means of a guided worksheet) on the types of information they wanted the students to discuss or write about in their narrative writing. The information sought included students' personal details (age, gender, marital status, country of origin and work experience), the knowledge, values and skills they have learned from the MA course, professional and personal values to which they put their knowledge to use and specific learning problems they encountered in the MA course as well as any other issues or suggestions deemed relevant by the respondents.

## Results

### *Profile of Postgraduate Students*

In this MA in Linguistics and English Studies (mixed mode) course, the respondents comprised 7 foreign postgraduate students (1 Iranian, 2 Jordanians, 2 Yemenis, 1 Egyptian and 1 Japanese) and 23 Malaysian postgraduate students. The Malaysian postgraduates are from the following ethnic groups: Malay (9), Chinese (4), Indian (9) and one Eurasian student. Almost three quarters of the postgraduate students are married (73.3 per cent) and are teachers (86.7 per cent). Only 2 Malaysian postgraduate students were currently not working. All the foreign postgraduate students were following the MA course on a full-time basis and were not in employment in Malaysia. However, 5 of them worked as teachers in their countries of origin before coming to Malaysia. In contrast, most of the Malaysian postgraduates were part-timers and most of them were currently teaching English in secondary schools (70.0 per cent).

### *Reasons for Embarking on MA Studies*

Among the main reasons cited were: achieving personal fulfilment and advancement, continuing education after first degree, pursuing further knowledge, learning to do research in the field, inspiring their children and having

the chance to pursue high quality postgraduate education with affordable tuition fees. Additionally, most of the foreign postgraduate Muslim students said they felt safer studying in Malaysia than in other English-speaking countries because of the negative effects of the 9-11 terrorist attacks in 2001 worldwide.

### *Knowledge, Values and Contacts Acquired by Students*

In most student narratives, the foreign postgraduate students wrote extensively about the knowledge, values and contacts they acquired in the process of their studies in USM. During the focus-group interview sessions, most Malaysian students discussed with the researchers that they have learned valuable research skills and honed their academic writing ability. Some of the students candidly spoke about key values that the course helped bring out in them. These values included being more hardworking, managing their time well and being accountable for what they say and do. Some spoke at length about the value of teamwork for group assignments and most of the postgraduate students enjoyed the related learning experience.

### *Professional and Personal Values Acquired by Students*

With regard to learning experiences, some of the postgraduates expressed positive benefits that they gained from the various presentations and seminars they participated in their MA programme. This seemed to provide an opportunity for a broader outlook and greater maturity, which outweighed the academic course itself. In general, the focus group interviews revealed that many students were conscious of a new 'experience curve' and despite some frustrations along the way (for both the Malaysian and foreign students), most of them were beginning to experience feelings of confidence. In highlighting how the MA course affected their personal values, almost all the postgraduate students mentioned the following traits: hardworking, disciplined to read more journal articles, learned to set realistic goals, more focused and improved time management skills.

### *Specific Learning Problems Encountered*

Language difficulties were cited by most of the students as being the main obstacle to academic adjustment to their programme. Most of the foreign postgraduate students spoke at length on this aspect. However, many of the Malay Malaysian students aired their concerns of their inability to write research papers effectively in English. Writing was an extremely frustrating experience for postgraduate students who although have a good knowledge of the subject matter struggled to express their points eloquently. For some of the postgraduate students, their limited English proficiency and poor argumentation skills were inextricably linked. It has been argued that 'study shock' (Burns, 1991: 61) can be experienced by students shifting between different cultures of learning. One of the biggest differences that foreign postgraduate students encounter is the emphasis on independent, critical thought that is often encouraged by the course lecturers in this MA course.

## Implications and Recommendations

The emergent themes suggest that postgraduates who have enrolled in this MA programme have benefited greatly from the course as it has equipped them with the right knowledge, values and contacts to enable them to become competent researchers and effective teachers. However, it needs to be noted that language difficulties and socio-cultural adjustments were cited as the main obstacles to their learning process. The latter certainly has wider implications for USM as this means providing a range of facilities to postgraduates that can help to promote and support good practices in all aspects of learning and managing learning at this level. Since enrolment of postgraduate students have multiplied over the years, particularly among the international student cohorts who may have problems reading and writing in English Language, it is highly recommended that the university sets up a Reading and Writing Centre for Postgraduates. This centre should offer on-going workshops and seminars that could help develop the four basic skills of writing, reading, listening and speaking. At the school level, it is also recommended that reading groups be established with the aim of helping postgraduate students to read and understand the content or subject matter of the various courses. During these sessions, postgraduate students and lecturers meet on a regular basis to discuss issues raised in the articles from a critical perspective.

Since enrolment of postgraduate students have multiplied over the years, particularly among the international student cohorts who may have problems reading and writing in English Language, it is highly recommended that the university sets up a Reading and Writing Centre for Postgraduates.

## Conclusion

In general, it is found that there are a number of common themes that run parallel in the personal narratives and the interview sessions. Essentially, these include the pressures of undertaking and coping with the requirements of postgraduate work, the initial difficulties encountered when adjusting to a new environment and academic culture, the problems of reading academic texts in a critical manner and writing using appropriate academic language, the lack of knowledge in research skills, and different cultural expectations, particularly when it involves the relationship between lecturers and students. It is crucial that the university take steps to provide the much-needed support and facilities to these postgraduates especially since the number of postgraduate enrolments have multiplied over time. The suggestions to set up a Reading and Writing Centre for Postgraduates, the creation of reading groups and the introduction of a properly structured "Orientation" programme are timely as these will certainly help to enhance the quality of our postgraduates and their research output. In addition, the university should also upgrade its facilities by improving the facilities offered by the library and to house more books and journals that are current and much-needed in the disciplines of Linguistics and Literature. The steps mentioned here are necessary and ought to be taken if the university aims to establish itself as a centre of academic excellence on par with universities of international repute.

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# “Workshop on Funding for Higher Education: A Comparative Analysis of Australia, India, Thailand, New Zealand and Way Forward for Malaysia”

*Reported by Ahmad Faiz Abdul Latip*

The National Higher Education Research Institute (IPPTN) in collaboration with the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) Malaysia coordinated a workshop on “Funding for Higher Education: A Comparative Analysis of Australia, India, Thailand, New Zealand and Way Forward for Malaysia” on 29th - 30th of May 2007 which took place at Parkroyal Hotel, Kuala Lumpur. The programme attracted more than 20 participants from academics and researchers from local public and private universities, as well as policy makers from the Malaysian government’s fund arms for higher education students, National Higher Education Fund Corporation (PTPTN).

The programme was aimed at gathering input on the financing systems for higher education students in four different countries, namely Australia, India, Thailand and New Zealand through comparison with the system currently applied in Malaysia. There were five speakers from each country; Professor Bruce Chapman of the Australian National University (ANU), Professor Jandhyala B. G. Tilak of the National University of Educational Planning and Administration (NUEPA), India, Dr. Suchittra Chamnivickron of the National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA), Thailand, Mr. Norman LaRocque, a public policy accountant and an advisor to the Education Forum (EFNZ), New Zealand and Dr. Shuki Osman, a lecturer at the School of Educational Studies, Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM).

The Programme on day one was kicked off by Professor Bruce Chapman, professor of Economics at the Research School of Social Sciences, ANU, who offered an analysis of the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) in Australia. It is worth noting that HECS has been operationally successful and has not been associated with any deleterious outcomes with respect to the socio-economic composition of higher education students. The programme continued with Professor Jandhyala B. G. Tilak, professor of Educational Finance at the NUEPA, who presented an overview of the financing higher education problems in India wherein the Indian government cut short public budgets for education. Professor Tilak later touched on the strengths and weaknesses of the present student loan scheme as a method of financing higher education and drew lessons for India and other countries in this regard.

A case study of higher education financing system in Thailand was elaborated by Dr. Suchittra Chamnivickron,

Director at the School of Development Economics, NIDA. Dr. Suchittra recalled why the old system did not work out which had prompted the Thai Government to shift to the modified ICL-based scheme. Moving on, Mr. Norman LaRocque’s described the evolution of tertiary education policy in New Zealand over the last two decades and drew some lessons from the country’s experience. Mr. LaRocque also concentrated on the evolution of the policy framework for the student loan scheme. Finally, Dr. Shuki Osman presented his research group’s work on profiling borrowers of PTPTN. The group utilised PTPTN borrower’s database to construct, through a detailed analysis, a model which can be used to predict the probability of future borrowers to default on student loan repayment with certain socio-economic backgrounds and status.

On day two, a briefing on PTPTN was delivered by Mr. Md. Yunus Abd. Ghani, the CEO of the corporation. He set out the challenges that PTPTN is likely to be facing in the coming years especially with regard to the performance in the loan repayment collection as well as the issue of delivery system. Some future plans were also outlined. Before the session was wrapped up, a roundtable discussion chaired by Associate Professor Dr. Mohd. Ridzuan Nordin came to a number of suggestions to be forwarded to the MoHE. Two interesting points made are the suggestion to apply the Islamic finance systems into financing student loan scheme in Malaysia and the critical role of government in securing the success of the scheme.



*Participants paying attention to the speaker (top).  
Some of the participants & presenters at the workshop (bottom)*



# Seminar on “Globalisation and Internationalisation of Higher Education in Malaysia: The Book Project”

Reported by Ahmad Faiz Abdul Latip

Concerned about the interchangeably improper use of the terms ‘globalisation’ and ‘internationalisation’ within the realm of Malaysian higher education, the National Higher Education Research Institute (IPPTN) together with the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia organised a one-day seminar on “Globalisation and Internationalisation of Higher Education in Malaysia (GIHE): The Book Project”. The seminar was held on 28 May 2007 at Parkroyal Hotel, Kuala Lumpur. The programme served as a platform for academics and researchers from local public and private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to share views on how these two terms would impact the provision of higher education in Malaysia. Emphases on the process of teaching and learning were noticeably brought up during the seminar, as well as the call for sound internationalisation

strategies to equip both students and HEIs to brave the waves and forces of global higher education.

There were two sessions of discourse; “Issues in Teaching and Learning and Outcomes in Higher Education” and “Internationalisation Issues in Higher Education” which saw 14 papers presented. Each presentation was followed by a commentary slot chaired by two esteemed reviewers; Dato’ Professor Dr. Zalizan Mohd Jelas of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia oversaw the “Issues in Teaching and Learning and Outcomes in Higher Education” while Professor Dr. Noraini Idris of Universiti Malaya took on the “Internationalisation Issues in Higher Education”. All papers presented will be included in the GIHE book which is expected to be launched in November 2007.



Presenters delivering their papers during the seminar. From left Ms. Banumathy Devi, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Vincent Pang & Assoc. Prof. Dr. Aida Suraya Md. Yunus.

## Publications

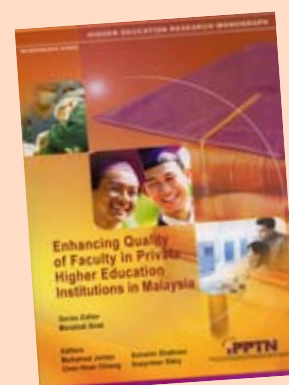
### ‘Shortcut Behaviour’ Among Students at Malaysian Higher Education Institutions

This monograph outlines the result of a study conducted to identify ‘shortcut behaviour’ among students at Malaysian higher education institutions. Generally, shortcut behaviour is defined as an action taken to attain a specific aim but involving the least expenditure of energy and effort. The objectives of this research are to investigate whether or not students engage in shortcut behaviour and what aspects of their lives are significant. Discussions pertaining to the study findings were conducted within the context of the Malaysian education system and policy recommendations were proposed to improve current educational approaches in efforts to minimise ‘shortcut behaviour’ among students of Malaysian higher education institutions.



### Enhancing the Quality of Faculty in Private Higher Education Institutions in Malaysia

This monograph outlines the findings of a research designed to determine the quality of faculty in private higher education institutions in Malaysia in terms of the number of academics possessing a doctorate in philosophy, recruitment, training, and turnover issues and to suggest ways to consolidate their strength. The research utilised survey technique and focus group interviews conducted at institutional and individual levels in order to compile the required data.



# ANNOUNCEMENT

## GLOBAL HIGHER EDUCATION FORUM (GHEF) MALAYSIA 2007



### GLOBAL HIGHER EDUCATION FORUM (GHEF) MALAYSIA 2007

6 & 7 November 2007, Hotel Nikko Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

“*Knowledge and Relevant Human Resource Development*”

#### KEYNOTE ADDRESS AND OFFICIAL OPENING

Y.A.B. Dato' Seri Abdullah bin Haji Ahmad Badawi

#### KEYNOTE PRESENTATION

**Dr. Juan Ramon De la Fuente**  
*National Autonomous University of México, Mexico*

#### PLENARY SESSION SPEAKERS

**Dr. Jose Ferreira Gomes**  
*University of Porto, Portugal*

**Prof. Shih Choon Fong**  
*National University of Singapore*

**Prof. John C. Cavanaugh**  
*University of West Florida, USA*

**Prof. Dato' Dzul kifli Abdul Razak**  
*Universiti Sains Malaysia*

**Dato' Prof. Ansary Ahmed**  
*Open University Malaysia*

#### DECLARATION OF THE FORUM

**Y.B Dato Seri Najib Tun Abdul Razak**  
*Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia*

#### THEMES OF THE FORUM

- Global Mobility, Access and Equity in Higher Education
- Governance, Leadership and Quality of Higher Education
- Transnational, Cross border Education and Lifelong Learning

#### OBJECTIVES

The GHEF 2007 will gather policy-makers, higher education researchers and experts from all over the world to deliberate on higher education issues with a view to sharing of experiences and visions. The main objectives are to:

- encourage dialogue and debate on the variety of trends and internal and external factors currently affecting higher education institutions
- compare and contrast institutional, national, regional, and international perspectives in relation to all issues, including questions of access and success, and quality of higher education
- facilitate national, global and international collaboration in the provision of higher education
- map the way forward in sustaining developments in higher education

#### OUTCOMES

The intended outcomes of the GHEF 2007 are to:

- develop an informed understanding of the emerging and future directions of higher education in developed and developing countries
- develop and promote repertoires of good practices in higher education for developing countries
- initiate, develop and sustain regional, global and international networking and engagement on higher education issues

#### REGISTRATION AND MORE DETAILED INFORMATION

Detailed programme for the GHEF 2007, as well as registration forms, fee schedule and hotel information will be available on the GHEF 2007 website <http://www.gheforum.org>. To be added to the mailing list for up-dated information, please send your request by e-mail to: [malaysiaforum2007@yahoo.com](mailto:malaysiaforum2007@yahoo.com) or to [iau@unesco.org](mailto:iau@unesco.org) and signal your interest in [Global Higher Education Forum, Malaysia 2007](#).

# Calling for Articles & 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 1000 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, e.g. (Ashton, 2001:30).
5. Endnotes may be used.
6. Include tables and figures within the text. Number tables and figures consecutively.
7. The reference list should be arranged in alphabetical order and should include only works cited in the text.

### Examples:

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

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

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

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

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ISSN: 1675-6428



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