

## TEACHER-AS-RESEARCHER AND THE IMPORTANCE TOWARDS MALAYSIA'S EDUCATION PROSPECT

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The export of Malaysian higher education sector had seen a RM 1.5 billion contribution to Government revenue in 2007. World-class higher education requires a wide array of quality area among others – research activities. The main concern of this study is to review the readiness and willingness of the educators to participate in research activities through a study of past research activities in academic colleges and their contribution towards Malaysia's economy today and in the future.*

### **1.0 Introduction**

In 2007, the higher education sector contributed RM1.5 billion to Government revenue and this source of income continues. This income is generated from foreign students currently enrolled at the local higher learning institutions. Education has become one of the sectors which can enhance the business environment in Malaysia. Consequently, the Government is promoting the export of Malaysian education. Public and private institutes of higher learning are required to offer a world-class quality higher education along with the mission; becoming the centre of excellence in education in the Asian region.

In 1991, former Malaysian Prime Minister, Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamed, presented a development philosophy known as "Vision 2020". Vision 2020 stressed on the country's achievement in political stability, economical development, industrialisation, growth in business and technology, reducing poverty and ensuring good relationships between various ethnic groups. He also highlighted the role of education in producing ample human resource to realise Vision 2020 (Mahathir, 1991). Nowadays, the wave of globalisation in education has spread and most of the education institutions are competing with each other and actively promoting international education. Many private higher educational institutions are increasing their efforts to attract students from countries such as Indonesia, Myanmar, Cambodia, Philippines, China, and the African and Arab countries (Sato, 2005). Local institutions of higher education are offering local degree programmes or twinning programmes offered in partnership with higher education institutions from western countries, for example, United Kingdom, United States of America and Australia. With the moderate cost of living, diversity of languages and religions, Malaysia has become an attractive place to study (Sato, 2005).

Under the forces of globalisation, there are several new challenges in the human capital market. Generic skills and professionalism are needed by the graduates in order for them to compete in the market which stresses productivity. Therefore, generic skills such as innovativeness, creativity, problem solving, information and communication technology (ICT), numeracy and analytical thinking are essential in the process of learning especially in the higher educational learning (Wong and Hamali, 2006). All the institutions of higher learning emphasise that research activities tend to boost the academic quality of the

institutions resulting in a higher students' enrollment. Although there are abundant advantages of doing research, but can research really polish one's teaching skills and lead to an increase in the number of student enrollment? On the other hand, are the lecturers ready to share their personal or departmental research with their peers?

## **2.0 Literature Review**

### **2.1 The Nature of Educational Research**

In the past 30 years, there were several scholars trying to link research as part of the duty of teachers. Stenhouse (1975) had advised that the teachers must enhance their educational skills and experience continuously, and by conducting research, they can change the world of the classroom. Carpenter had mentioned that successful researchers are also excellent teachers. Scholars who are good in research are likely to succeed in teaching (Carpenter, 2003). Altbach and Lewis (1995) conducted the Carnegie Foundation's international survey and found that more than three quarters of faculty in 14 countries believe that successful research is important for the faculty evaluation. Besides that, the total number of publications becomes a performance indicator to determine the quality of teacher-researcher.

Although the word 'research' refers to a study of a subject which aims to discover new facts or information, it is not necessary be a long process. Many teachers think that conducting a research needs either qualitative or quantitative data analyses of which the sample size must be large enough to produce significant results. In fact, the research can be less formal than that (Ross-Fisher, 2008). The research can be done through everyday teaching and learning activities. When there is an argument concerning a concept in the classroom between the teacher and students, hereby arises an opportunity for the teacher to identify and conceptualise problems through the research. This kind of research is called action research. The action research can be done on the personal level and shared among colleagues in the same department as well as in a private group. The finding and outcome of the research can be published in education journals. Besides that, the research which is conducted as a classroom activity with the participation of students will lead students to an interesting learning process. Consequently, the students can be trained to think critically and themselves become able to solve problems in an efficient manner. The main purpose of a research is to improve teaching and learning (Slavin, 2006).

Katz and Coleman had conducted a survey to derive the importance of research at academic colleges in Israel (Katz and Coleman, 2001). From the survey, there are five responses on the contribution of research to professional development which include the openness to innovations, professional growth, improving self-confidence, improvement of professional status and professional contacts. Involvement in a research usually enhances a teacher's career prospects. When a teacher is doing research, it will enforce the teacher's learning ability. Research and development activities in higher education institutions can make significant contribution to the economical sustainability of a country. Most universities carry out research (Wallis *et. al.*, 2005).

### **2.2 Effects of Research on Teaching and Learning**

A teacher's knowledge of content and skills in preparation of lectures contributes to improved student performance. All teachers must understand the importance of keeping

abreast of the developments of their field so that their teaching materials are up-to-date (Baldwin, 2005).

Middlewood's (1999) research shows 94% of the respondents feel that they had learned new skills by doing research. Logical argument, critical thinking and problem solving skills will be developed in the process of conducting research. Consequently, the pedagogical skills will be developed too. This will improve the teacher's teaching skills and the students will benefit. Hence, research can enhance teacher quality. So, from an academic viewpoint, research always improves the teaching and learning processes. Highly qualified teachers will be able to create an effective teaching plan to influence students' learning process. Zeichner had defined four determinants for the research-based teacher education. One of the determinants has outlined that all teaching is based on the research. Moreover, he has stated that students can learn more research skills during their studies and it is helpful in their Master level (Zeichner, 1983). The research done in the Degree level is a bit different compared to the Master level. With a basic knowledge in analysis and problem solving skills, the students can participate in Master level discussions and ask important research questions.

There is an opposite opinion in the discussion of the link between research and teaching. A study carried by Brew and Boud (1995) stated the assumption that research productivity enhances teaching effectiveness and not the other way round. Hattie and Marsh (1996) provide a survey which concludes that there is no connection between teaching and research. Ramsden and Moses argued that research performance cannot work in parallel with teaching performance. In other words, teaching and research can affect teaching quality separately (Ramsden & Moses, 1992). Moreover, from the review of literature, quite a numbers of the scholar suggested that only research may enhance teaching, and there is no possible relation in the other direction. While there is a negative relationship between teaching and research, another survey been done by Hogarth in 2004 to determine how teaching is influenced by research. The survey concluded that the benefits to students are:

- i) Motivate students' interest in the subject
- ii) Improve understanding
- iii) Encourage critical reflection / analysis
- iv) Provide up-to-date information
- v) Students can be part of the research

Hogarth (2004) drew the conclusion from his survey that teaching staff across the university include aspects of their teaching in their research.

### **3.0 Discussion and Conclusion**

Marshall (2003) had pointed out that Harvard and seven other Greater Boston research universities had successfully infused more than \$7 billion into the regional economy each year. Other than providing direct financial impact, they are producing human capital and new technologies that evoke economic growth. Take the Greater Boston research universities as example, the universities' mission is to develop new knowledge and make great contributions to the region's economic well-being.

In Malaysia, the overall number of international students in Malaysian international school and higher education institutions had increased 30% between 2006 and 2008 to 65,000. According to the former Minister of Education, Tan Sri Musa Mohamad, the Malaysian government is set on target to achieve 50,000 international students in year 2010. Currently, there are about 28, 000 international students acquiring higher education in Malaysia (Sato, 2005). Dr. Mohamed Nasser Mohamed Noor, Director of the Higher Education Ministry Marketing and International Education Division said that the increased number of international students can be attributed to the effort of promoting Malaysian Education into the international market. The “Malaysian Education” brand emphasises quality of education as one of the attributes (Tan, 2008).

In the 2008 Budget Speech by Dato’ Seri Abdullah Badawi, Prime Minister and Minister of Finance announced that the Government was going to provide a sum of RM 12 billion for the higher education projects and programmes. The Government would like to utilise the sum of money to enhance research, development and commercialization activities in our four Research Universities; University of Malaya (UM), Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) (Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, 2007). Besides that, the Government will proceed with the project of re-branding our community colleges.

Teacher researchers learn new skills through conducting research. Other than that, research helps to provide data which can describe or monitor important economical and educational concerns. So, any changes in demography, academic achievement and dropout rates can also be found from the research. Research can build the teachers’ as well as students self-confidence and hence make advancement in the teaching-learning development. Professional contacts can be achieved when teachers take part in research activities such as international conferences, publications, seminars, workshops and so on.

Looking back, there are ample advantages and methods that can be implemented to attract international students to study in Malaysian higher education institutions. The aim of the Government is to promote and accomplish branding of Malaysian education is no longer a far-fetched vision but a small step away towards tomorrow reality.

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