

Historical Development of Public Institutions of Higher Learning in Malaysia

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Abstract: In Malaysia, institutions of higher learning are divided into public and private. Public higher institutions of learning (IPTA) such as teacher training college, technical college, agricultural college, polytechnic, language institute and 20 other universities are listed by the Ministry of Higher Education. All IPTAs are mostly funded by government financial provisions through the Ministry of Higher Education whereas private institutions of higher learning (IPTS) are more like businesses with profits, with much less government funding than for IPTAs. This article discusses the early development of institutions of higher learning through the Universities and Colleges Act from the year 1960 to the year 2012 and their contribution to the community, society and nation. The outcome of this article is based on a qualitative method by analysis of library literature. Reference is also made to related websites such as the official portal site of the Ministry of Higher Education.

Key words: History • Education • Public Institutions of Higher Learning • University • Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

Institutions of higher learning are better known as universities with teaching and research facilities offering bachelor, master and doctoral degrees in various fields. A university also functions as an institution of higher learning made up of the intellectual community with moral, cultural and civilizing responsibilities. This responsibility is shouldered through exploring and generating knowledge as well as teaching. An intellectual community is formed when scholars explore and generate knowledge through a developed propriety and moral order. Critical thinking also enables creation of a variety of knowledge for the sake of giving meaning to life and civilization [1].

Higher education offered by the university focuses on two dimensions, namely academic and professional. These dimensions complement each other to enable graduates to function as high-minded individuals skilled and efficient in carrying out work, especially in scientific

fields, medicine, engineering, arts, education, agriculture, finance, laws and administration. High-minded graduates are able to solve problems in life and work using various thinking techniques and skills, not by methods static and irrelevant to the context of time and place. In addition, professional graduates are dynamic and progressive, that is, constantly adding to work knowledge and skills, to improve the quality of service [2].

Admission to institutions of higher learning requires certain qualifications, particularly excellent secondary school qualifications. In Malaysia, admission to university, college and training college require excellent results in the Malaysian Certificate of Education (SPM), or Malaysian Vocational Certificate of Education (SKVM) or High School Certificate of Education (STPM). In the years 2010 and 2009, student enrolment at the level of higher education rose to 438,566 and 414,964 respectively compared to ten years before when there were only 292,575 students in institutions of higher learning reading diplomas and degree programs [3]. This amounts to an

increase of 49%. This means that the number of universities, colleges and training colleges has sufficiently increased to accommodate the high social demand for national higher education. This also means that higher education is still based on openness and meritocracy, limiting admission to selected students. Hence, this gives rise to intense academic competition among students at the secondary school level to enable them to further study at first degree or diploma level. In meeting social demand, the Ministry of Higher Education constantly builds universities and other institutions from time to time and also encourages the private sector to do the same or provide various twinning programs and joint-ventures with foreign universities.

Based on the above, it can be said that higher education in Malaysia has developed and achieved a certain standard with dimensions in research, education and training. The research dimension has the purpose of generating new knowledge and technology for the benefit of advancing human civilization and to improve the quality of human life. The education dimension seeks to develop to the maximum individual intellectual, spiritual, emotional, character, aesthetic, cultural and physical aspects so that individuals become not only balanced humans, but are also able to make appropriate adaptations towards the influence of current global developments. And the training dimension touches on the role of higher education in the socio-economic development of society, which institutions of higher learning form part of [4].

Early Development of Higher Education: Institutions of higher learning generally include training colleges, community colleges, polytechnics, technology institutes and all public and private universities. In this country, most of them were established by the government in early development and by the year 2012, 20 public universities have been established. As for the private institutions built by the private sector, most of the courses offered are at certificate and diploma levels. However, the growth of more private institutions currently has enabled offering courses at first degree to doctoral levels because of pressing social demand in view of government financial constraints to provide this facility. In fact, in major urban centres such as Petaling Jaya and Kuala Lumpur, there are currently established several universities which twin with foreign universities [5].

The development of higher education in this country was rapid between the years 1960 to 1975. During this period, the institutions established were Universiti Malaya, Institut Teknologi MARA (1967), Kolej Tunku Abdul Rahman (1969), Politeknik Ungku Omar (1969), Universiti Sains Malaysia (1969), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (1970), Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (1971) and Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (1972). The rapid formation of such institutions within such a short period was for the main purpose of meeting the country's manpower needs, to replace foreign manpower with local manpower in various professional and semi-professional positions, whether in the government or private sector. This was caused by a severe shortage of manpower in the 1960s and 1970s.

The government made serious efforts to increase the workforce of professionals, semi-professionals, skilled and semi-skilled in the period from 1970 to 1980 parallel with economic development. In the year 1978, there were 19,572 students attending various courses at first degree and diploma levels in the five universities mentioned. In addition, there were 17,714 students in training colleges and polytechnics attending various courses at diploma and certificate levels [6].

The output of graduates from local universities in the 1970s was more inclined to be from the arts field. During the period 1976-1978, out of 11,159 new graduates, 61 percent read in arts courses, 39 percent in sciences and 7 percent in the technical field. The increase of student intake in Universiti Sains Malaysia, Universiti Pertanian Malaysia and Universiti Teknologi Malaysia had reduced the gap between the number of arts graduates and the number of science and technical graduates. By the year 1980 there were 53 percent of graduates from the arts stream (2,326 persons), 37 percent in science stream (1,618 persons) and 9.7 percent in the technical stream (423 persons).

Two more universities were built in the early 1980s, namely International Islamic University (1983) and Universiti Utara Malaysia (1984). The establishment of International Islamic University with its temporary campus in Petaling Jaya was driven by the spirit of unity among the international Islamic community led by the Malaysian government. And Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) was set up to meet the high demand for university education, not merely to fulfill manpower needs.

In the decade of the 1990s, four more public universities were established by the government to strengthen the process of national integration, to cater for the increased number of school-leavers and to train skilled labour in certain fields. These four universities are Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (1992), Universiti Malaysia Sabah (1994), Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (1997) and Universiti Teknologi MARA (1999). Universiti Malaysia Sarawak and Universiti Malaysia Sabah are public universities which adopt their own state names, to reduce the gap or imbalance of higher education opportunities between East and West Malaysia, in line with the vision of national integrity and extension of the democracy concept in higher education [7].

Besides new universities, the government built two more new colleges, namely, Kolej Universiti Sains dan Teknologi Malaysia (KUSTEM) at Mengabang Telipot and Kolej Universiti Teknologi Tun Hussein Onn (KUiTTHO) at Batu Pahat. These colleges were later upgraded to full universities in the year 1999 and are known as Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT) and Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM). Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) has a vision to be a higher education centre in education and training in the fields of science, technology and natural resource management, while Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM) started as a Polytechnic Staff Training Centre on the 16th September 1993, through a memorandum of understanding between the Ministry of Education and Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. UTHM currently offers courses in mechanical, civil, electrical and electronic engineering at undergraduate and graduate levels [8].

In addition to universities, the government also built several polytechnics and institutes to train semi-skilled professionals in engineering. There are currently 12 polytechnics which conduct diploma and certificate courses in the fields of mechanical, electrical, electronic engineering and nutrition. In addition, certain state governments through their state agencies have established institutes which offer diploma and certificate courses, of which the premier ones are Institut Ikhtisas Pahang (1991), Institut Teknik Tinggi Terengganu (1994) and Kolej Universiti Terengganu (1999). The Ministry of Human Resource is also involved in establishing the Industrial Training Institute in many towns and cities such as Kuantan, Labuan, Jitra, Perai, Ipoh, Kuala Lumpur, Malacca, Pasir Gudang, Kuala Terengganu and Kota Bharu. These institutes offer courses in printing, electrochemical, manufacturing, instrumentation, electronics and heavy machinery.

The decade of the 1990s is also significant whereby the government opened the opportunity for the private sector with large capital to form private universities. The main reasons which encouraged this are globalization, liberalization, industry and cooperation. The Education Act 1996 concerning higher education is the landmark legislation which encouraged the private sector to join the government in expanding higher education in Malaysia. Nevertheless, as a measure of quality control to avoid low quality programs and unaccredited degrees, the Education Act 1966 lays down the condition of the establishment of the National Accreditation Board (LAN) to monitor the quality of programs and courses in private colleges and universities.

The concept of an education industry presumes that education is not a social service or the sole responsibility of the government. This means that, as with other services in the economic sector, people who desire higher education should pay for their own cost. The purpose is to save government monies for other more urgent or important development projects. Hence, the concept of scholarships and bursaries was gradually ended. The concept of education industry instrumentally engenders the concept of loans for higher education to assist students from lower income and lower middle classes to borrow funds in pursuit of higher education. The outcome of this is the establishment of the National Higher Education Fund Corporation (PTPTN) beginning from the year 1997/98 for which was allocated RM2.3 billion in the year 1999/2000. An estimated half of the 321,729 - strong student population in public and private higher education institutions receive the services of PTPTN [9].

With extended application of the above concepts, the private sector has drastically developed higher education in the 1990s. Many universities and colleges were established in that decade. Among these private universities are Universiti Telekom Malaysia, Universiti Tenaga Nasional, Universiti Teknologi Petronas, Universiti Multimedia, Universiti Perubatan Antarabangsa, Universiti Tun Abdul Razak, Universiti Industri Selangor and Universiti Terbuka Malaysia (Open University). Further, foreign universities also contribute to expanding opportunities for higher education to local students. Among foreign universities with branches in Malaysia are Middlesex University, Northwood University, Monash University, Curtin University, University of Nottingham, University of East London, University of Swansea and Western Michigan University. Similar to local universities, these foreign

universities conduct programs at diploma, degree and postgraduate in the academic and professional streams through colleges or institutions in Malaysia [10].

Private universities and colleges focus on programs and courses in high demand by industrial, commercial, electronic and electrical engineering, medicine, computer and information technology sectors. These institutes are international in terms of admission of foreign students from countries such as India, Taiwan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Singapore and Indonesia. The medium of instruction is English. The facilities of reputable private universities and colleges are good. Examples of such private colleges are Sunway College, Stamford College, Raffles College, KDU College, Informatics College, HELP Institute, Asia Pacific of Information Technology, Taylor's College, INTI College and Institut Teknologi Tun Abdul Razak (ITTAR). Private colleges have their own union, MAPCO (Malaysia Association of Private Colleges) whose agenda is to improve the quality of programs and courses, in cooperation with the Ministry of Higher Education of Malaysia and to give scholarship assistance to excellent students [11].

CONCLUSION

From 1960 to 2012, Malaysian public and private institutions of higher learning have developed and achieved a certain standard with dimensions in research, education and training. This is to meet the human resource needs of the nation in various fields to achieve the status of developed nation by the year 2020. A university or institution of higher learning is not a system closed to the influence and aspirations of the society and nation. An institution of higher learning does not only play the role of a professional institute but also functions actively to develop social culture, science, arts, economics, politics and scholarship. Thus, institutions of higher learning work in close collaboration with the community or society.

This is in accordance with the Philosophy of National Education and higher education which gives priority to development of the maximum potential of individuals in all aspects, namely intellectual, aesthetics, spiritual and physical. Education encompasses various branches of knowledge to build a rational and efficient mind so as to be able to think holistically on the reality of man's and nature's existence. In addition, emphasis on the growth of aesthetics, spiritual and physical aspects through various activities aims to build individuals who are better balanced.

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