

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

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ABSTRACT

The export of Malaysia higher education sector can enhance the business environment locally of which we had seen a RM 1.5 billion contribution to the government 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 from the past research and studies. Thus, the study will look at the importance of research in academic colleges and the contribution towards the Malaysia's economy today and in future.

INTRODUCTION

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

In year 1991, our former Prime Minister, Tun Dr. Mahathir, had inspired and presented a development philosophy known as "Vision 2020". Vision 2020 stressed on the country's achievement in political stability, economical development, industrialization, growth in business and technology, reducing poverty and enhancing the integrity between nations' various ethnics. Tun Dr. Mahathir also highlighted on the role of education in producing ample human resources to realize our Vision 2020 (Mahathir, 1991). Nowadays, the wave of globalization in education has spread and most of the education institutions are competing with each other and actively promoting international education. A lot of the private higher educational institutions are potentially increasing their efforts to attract students from our neighbour and overseas countries such as Indonesia, Myanmar, Cambodia, Philippines, China, with the African and Arab countries (Sato, 2005). Hence, institutions of higher education are actively participating in international

education industry to provide local universities degree programmes or carrying twinning programmes with higher education institutions from western countries, for example U.K., U.S.A. and Australia. They are providing quality courses and upgrading the standard of education internationally. Besides that, with the moderate cost of living, diversity of languages and religions as advantages of studying in Malaysia, it becomes one of the major key to open Malaysian economic door to the international world (Sato, 2005).

Under the forces of globalization, there are several new challenges in the human capital market. Generic skills and professionals possessed by the graduates are needed in order for them to compete in the market of factors of production. Therefore, the generic skills such as innovative, creativity, problem solving, information and communications technology (ICT), numeracy, and analytical thinking are essential in the process of learning especially in higher educational learning (Wong and Hamali, 2006). All the institutions emphasized that research activities tend to boost up the quality of the institutions resulting in higher student enrolments. Although there are abundant advantages of doing research, but can research really polish ones teaching skills and lead to the increase in the number of students enrolment? On the other hand, are teachers ready to share out their personal or departmental research for peer review?

LITERATURE REVIEW

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 teachers must continuous enhance their educational skills and experience, and by conducting research, teacher can change the world of classroom. Carpenter had mentioned that successful researchers are also excellent teachers. Any scholars who are distinct in the research can succeed in teaching too (Carpenter, 2003). Altbach and Lewis (1995) conducted the Carnegie Foundation's international survey; more than three quarters of faculty in all 14 countries believe that successful research is important for the faculty evaluation. Besides that, the total number of publication becomes a performance indicator in higher education to determine the quality of teacher-researcher.

Although the word 'research' is refer to a study of a subject which is aim to discover new facts or information, it might not necessary be a long winded process. Many teachers are so confused in the nature of research, that they think 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, research can be less formal than that (Ross-Fisher, 2008). Research can be done through everyday teaching and learning activities. When there is an argument of concept or thoughts in the classroom between teacher and students, hereby arises problem statements and ideas for the teacher. This can help teachers to identify and conceptualize problems through the research. This kind of research is called action research. Action research can be done in personal

level and share among colleagues in the same department as well as in a private group of teachers. The finding and outcome of the research can be published in the education journals aimed to share with other researchers and teachers too. Besides that, research which is conducted as classroom activities with the participation of students will lead students to an interesting learning process. Consequently, students can be trained to think critically and 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 the professional development which includes the openness to innovations, professional growth, improving self-confidence, improvement of professional status and professional contacts. The involvement in research becomes a motivator to teacher in their career prospects. When a teacher is in a supportive environment of doing research, this can enforce the teacher to involve in continuous learning activities. Other than that, higher educational institutions as a place playing core roles in teaching and learning, research and development can make significant contribution to the economical sustainability and community responsibility. Most universities carry out research (Wallis *et. al.*, 2005).

Effects of Research on Teaching and Learning

In view of the teacher development system, teachers' knowledge and skills in preparation, accomplishment in teaching and supervision being served as the major components in the effort to improve student performance. A recognize definition of high quality teaching has to be defined to promote continuous advancement in teaching and learning sphere. By the way, all teachers must understand the importance to keep a watching eye with the developments of their field and keeping up-to-date findings in the subject they teach (Baldwin, 2005). Thus, carrying research can be a good approach in updating knowledge of fundamentals of the teaching subject.

Middlewood's research in 1999 shows 94% of the respondents feel that they had learned new skills by doing research and the advancement is the value added in their professional (Middlewood, 1999). Besides that, teachers can identify the concept of a theory using evidence and argument found in their research. Logical argument, critical thinking and problem solving skills will be developed from the process of conducting research. Consequently, pedagogical skills will be developed too. This has improved the teachers' preparation in teaching and enlightens students in their learning environment. Hence, the research held can enhance the teacher quality and teacher can explore their knowledge of the subject in depth. This may become the key of how students evaluate their teacher. So, in academic viewpoint, research always improves the teaching and learning process. High qualified teachers will be able to create effective teaching plan and assessment 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 research. Moreover, he has stated that students can learn more research skills during their studies and it is helpful in their Master Thesis level (Zeichner, 1983). Research done in degree level is a bit different compare to the master degree. With a basic knowledge in analysis and problem solving skills, students can discover an inspiration or a gap in their principles. This will lead students to participate in Master Thesis by designing proposal and important research question.

There is an opposite opinion on the discussion of the link between research and teaching. A study carried by Brew and Boud (1995) had 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 another word; 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. Whilst there is a negative relationship between teaching and research, another survey been done by Dr Sylvia Hogarth in year 2004 for the Forum for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching to determine how teaching informed by research. He tried to collect as more examples from teachers and researches towards the inter-relationship of their teaching and research. Responds from the survey been concluded and the benefits towards students can be seen as below:

- 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 and learn the research approaches

Hogarth (2004) had drawn a conclusion from his survey; it is common practice for teaching staff across the university to include aspects of their teaching in their research.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Marshall (2003) had pointed out that Harvard and seven other Greater Boston research universities had successfully infuse 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 regions economic.

In Malaysia, the overall numbers of international students in Malaysian international school and higher education institutions has increase 30% between 2006 and 2008 to 65,000. According to

the former Minister of Education, Tan Sri Musa Mohamad, 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 is attributing to the effort of promoting Malaysian Education into international market. The “Malaysian Education” brand emphasizes on several attributes, therefore quality of education is one of the attributes (Tan, 2008).

In the 2008 Budget Speech by YAB Dato’ Seri Abdullah Badawi, Prime Minister and Minister of Finance had announced that government is going to provide a sum of RM12 billion for the higher education projects and programmes. Government would like to utilize the sum of money in enhancing 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, government will proceed to the project of re-branding of our community colleges.

From the literature review, there were several advantages of the teacher as researcher been figured out which can be the selling points to achieve Malaysia education prospects and encourage teacher to actively participate in research activities. Teacher researchers learn new skills through conducting research. Other than that, research help to provide data which can describe or monitor important economical and educational concerns. So, any changes in demographic, academic achievement and dropout rates can also be found from the research. In view of improving student learning outcome and encourage more international students to study in Malaysia, the teachers who are involved in the research can be more well prepared and raise the instinct of students in search for new knowledge. Therefore, indirectly there will be an increment in the total number of students enrol in the higher educational institutions. The attachment in research can build the teachers as well as students self-confidence and hence make advancement in the teaching-learning development. Expansion in the professional careers, professional contacts and status is can be achieved when teachers take part in research activities and bring up recognition in the international conference, publication, seminar, workshops and so on and so forth.

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 government to promote and accomplish branding on Malaysian education is no longer a far-fetched vision but a small step away towards tomorrow reality. Exporting of Malaysian education will be one of the fundamentals in provoking a strong economic foundation if and only if Malaysian teacher is also a researcher!

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