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PROBLEMS IN MALAYSIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES THAT HURDLE THE ADVANCEMENT TOWARDS INTERNATIONAL COMPETITIVENESS

*“Masalah-masalah universiti awam di Malaysia yang menghalang kemajuan ke arah
kebersaingan antarabangsa” – Malay Language*

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PROBLEMS IN MALAYSIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES THAT HURDLE THE
ADVANCEMENT TOWARDS INTERNATIONAL COMPETITIVENESS IN
COMPARISON TO TOP UNIVERSITIES IN THE WORLD

Malaysian public universities have produced a lot of quality graduates that serviced for various professions since the establishment of the first University Malaya in 1949. Diversity and scale of Malaysian public universities have increased multiple folds with large volume of academics and research activities serving for various sectors in Malaysia. However, the efficiency and reputation of current Malaysian Higher Education particularly conducted by public sectors are questionable, whether Malaysian universities are competitive enough to meet global demand where many existing problems are still lying behind the university administration :

(a) Insufficient university placement : Malaysian government failed to provide enough places particularly for local Malaysian students where many students excellent in academics would prefer to spend extra money in the more expensive private universities and overseas advanced institution of higher learning, due to lack of ability to manage higher education funds for the development of various facilities and personnel. Many are not upgraded or facing shortage, although Coalition government has given mandate since independence to run governmental universities with global ranking continually falling in the last 20 years. Potential corruption of research funding in Malaysian universities in fact should require proper investigation especially the issues of excessive funding for the poorly-performed university scientists in Malaysian universities that wasted the money to conduct useless research studies, producing nothing good for the people, whereas some excellent scientists were threatened unfairly in the promotional hierarchy and research funding, that latter prefer to service to overseas advanced countries with a series of brain drain, because the salary provided is too low due to mismanagement of finance and economy at the national level, unable to attract those excellent to service in public universities.

(b) Poor scientific research culture : Public universities in Malaysia did not encourage proper research environment for most numbers of students and staffs at large quantity with limited research programs that were not able to cater the current requirement of postgraduates and postdoctorates due to shortage of quality staffs serving as mentors for future Malaysian scientists. Due to excessive increase of human population in Malaysia in comparison to placement of institution of higher learning, many secondary school leavers were facing difficulties in the continuation of studies at tertiary level due to lack of encouragement by peers and teachers in the unwholesome schools that generated higher percentage of drop-outs rather than those who could succeed at the tertiary learning. The scientific discussions were not encouraged in groups and assemblies due to Malaysian Universities and Colleges Act that prevented the open learning and freedom of thinking of Malaysian university students, that is available more for political reasons to suppress the dissidents or opponents of Malaysian government rather than assisting the intellectual exploration of creative student to undertake higher level of challenges in new invention and design programs starting from the undergraduate levels.

(c) Non-representative university environment : Malaysian university administration had not been able to create a truly multicultural, multireligious and multiracial environment that reflected the special identity of Malaysia. Malaysia is a democratic and constitutional nation that stress on human rights and equality, unfortunately there is not even small Christian church nor Buddhist, Hindu or Sikh temple to be allowed to be constructed inside the university where spaces of activities provided are far more less than big mosques based on the proportion of religious centre usage. This is similar to the staff recruitment with approximately 85% of the staffs were native *Bumiputra*, especially in the university higher position like vice-chancellor and administrative positions like research centre manager that prevented non-native *Bumiputra* like Chinese and Indian and also Western professional to retain in the top position. This trend also signified insincere effort of Malaysian university administration to participate in high value linkage international research projects that could bring higher profit to the country but many corruptive public university administration officers preferred to execute discriminative policy that hurdled the progress of Malay ethnic by preventing the ethnic to learn more foreign languages or non-Islamic religions, in order to maintain the high paid job by foolishing the university intellect.

(d) Wasting governmental fund in staff training : Malaysian public university would be willing to spend million of dollars for research staffs training particularly to overseas of very high cost of living, although there were huge ground and opportunity to develop advanced facilities for various types of research and developmental projects. Many field of scientific research cold be conducted inside Malaysia in partnerships with industries, where such linkage of Malaysian public universities with local industries and overseas research institutes were not yet fully developed with far more smaller volume of investment in the areas showing the poor economic performances of the country so far and not competitive in the world scientific arena in term of profit per volume of investment or population in Malaysia. This was similar to the quality of student population that spent most money in political training camp rather than scientific relevant programs to enable the existing university students to participate in various industrial programs and research projects especially during holidays where the opportunities towards such exposure were very limited to just a few proportion of students, remained mostly untrained that could face difficulties to find the jobs that suit the skills of workforce.

(e) Narrow-minded among university population : Although Malaysian public universities produced many professional graduates per year, tolerance towards the cultural differences of each other was comparatively low especially in non-Malay language usage in the university particularly in formal affairs where English, Mandarin Chinese, Tamil Indian etc were not allowed to be applied freely in some public occasions. Due to high density of Malaysian populations with comparatively congested environment that sometimes could prevent the freedom of speech and intellect for safety and security reasons. Many creativities and independence of thinking had been undetermined too, that always hurdled the competitiveness of Malaysian students from public university in term of invention and design with only a small proportion that could really excel in the research work in comparison to other advanced countries that provided huge rages of exposure and quality

training with incentives to retain committed staffs in wide range of research training to students with multiple aspects of potential. Language limitation without intense scientific research culture in the university environment would generate more *Pak Turuts* or followers of workers rather than quality leaders.

(f) Malaysian public administration was questionable: Many works of Malaysian public university were till rely on manual work with limited computerization. In the era of information technology the university did not provide sufficient computers for every student with many damaged computers in the closed laboratories and workshops without proper maintenance. That was similar to research laboratories in Malaysian public universities that were full of dust with abandoned instruments scattered everywhere with many malfunction equipment ready to be serviced where the readings produced in some laboratory class were questionable. Certain existing services were unattended even during working hours with poor internet communication reception that many questions sent online were unanswered or could not reach the recipients of the same department. The significant work activities were reduced especially in fasting month without much work follow-up afterwards; causing much delay with many corporate works could not be completed on time.

(g) Inherent danger of non-harmonious working environment : Due to local political culture there existed many groups of Islamic religious fanatics and cultural racists among student and staff populations that could not tolerate differences in political opinions, normally influenced by political organizations that conducted the training informally. Such extremists were similar to time bomb that could explode once the instability of the country might happen anytime. These were caused by poor Emotional Quotient (EQ) among the selected university students where the psychological aspects were neglected in the religious education and civic ethics, with inflexible public university education that presented critical thinking among interest group followers, especially among Malaysian public university students that lost the direction, due to lack of sufficient social knowledge, limited themselves in the single source of idea, at the same time, neglected the study in the preparation of university exams. Spirituality was more overemphasized than the worldly skills for professional living, leading to poor judgement of physical aspects that deemed required to increase the standard of living especially in scientific studies. Many preferred not to spend time to understand every detail but more inclined towards discriminative and hatred on those non-familiar and disliked.

(h) Lack of good professional administration example : The faulty Malaysian public administration would still influence the public university management in Malaysia with many unfair cases of nepotism in term of promotion in higher posts that favoured those with political influence rather than truly academic and research backgrounds. Investment in university library was far less than that should be with many important journals and online databases unavailable, sometimes preventing professional public uses with excuses of lack of security device, reference books and spaces for external professional although

fees were affordable, due to astonishingly poor public university library management in certain places. Corruption in funding for student activities especially in academics were usual, with many general interest clubs could not be successfully registered or approved by the Student Affairs Office (*Pejabat Hal Ehwal Pelajar HEP*) that had limited the potential of many students in various fields of studies with wide ranges of interest. College and University Act (AUKU) would be imposed on those who criticized the mistakes made by Malaysian government and public university administration, with multiple threatening in the removal of study candidature, reflecting the recalcitrant and revengeful of Malaysian public administration in making corrective changes on time, behave arrogantly even to critical-minded university student and staff intellects of small population that could lead the inherited faulty university administration in future.

(i) Low hygienic standard and nutritional values in university canteen : Food and beverages were among factors that would influence the intellectual development of university population. Although Malaysian universities had food research institutes that were believed to produce many cheap but nutritive menu for internal uses, there were still limited ranges of foods available with mostly below acceptable nutritional content that would not be able to produce quality graduates if no specific formulation found to optimize the potential of students and staffs in digestion. Non-*halal* corners were not provided for non-Muslims, nor vegetarian sections prepared suitable for all with health conscious rather than religious reasons. Besides inconsideration of the nutritive aspects of scientific and cultural basis, civic education in environmental protection was neglected with rubbish like cigarette buds and food packets thrown randomly even by professors in public places, providing bad examples for subordinated and students.

(j) Human rights of university students neglected : Discrimination among Muslim women were very significant with only very low proportion serviced at the top of administration like vice chancellors, professors and research managers etc although many Muslim females succeeded in university academia and research studies. Some of the unfortunate groups would be warned spiritually by burning with hell fire, or threatened to be punished with university disciplinary action or justified to be disturbed sexually if not wearing headscarfs. This was similar to certain amoral university academia inclined towards copying the ideas of the students without giving merits, sometimes cheating the students to complete research work but not paying wages according to the standard professional values if not aware. Traps would be set to remove those discovered the unethical practises of the monsters in the university offices that were greedy co-operatively in public university fund usage for personal interests mainly, that always prevented the branch campus to be developed outside Malaysia as a part of long term investment, where the existing corporate systems were too self-centred without considering the global professional climate.

Brief Conclusion

The contaminated ivory towel of Malaysian public universities so far should be exposed to the Malaysian public not only in Malaysia but throughout the world for further investigation on inherent problems that prevented Malaysian public tertiary education to excel towards a truly competitive world standard in comparison to other advanced nation. While stressing towards Vision 2020 that required high ranked and top universities in Malaysia that could produce many worldly recognized graduates not only able to meet the domestic demands but also able to succeed in the world arena, typically in science and technology. Reformation will be required in fostering partnerships with local private universities and top institution of higher learning in the world to introduce programs of many aspects either in academic or research studies, at the same time, correct the existing weaknesses as mentioned that would never be accepted in any truly competitive global university with necessary intellectual elements required in top professional works.

COMPLAINT OUTCOME : SOLUTIONS RECOMMENDED FOR THE PROBLEMS IN MALAYSIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

Recommendations of solutions were provided for attention and rectification of the long existing mismanagement problems in Malaysian public universities in the process of moving towards truly internationally competitive institution of higher learning :

(a) Privatisation of university with many branch campuses : Malaysian public universities should consider the investment in private campuses with higher fees, either under the name of the main campus or joint-venture with foreign institution of higher learning that specially catered the education for international students with world-class facilities and fees. Existing campus could consider to widen the research partnerships volume with advanced top class research institutes, that portion of the research projects could be distributed for the branch privately operated international campus that had better university-industrial linkage. Additional local branch campuses could be added up to 6 per public university with close alumni association link in every Malaysian state throughout the world, where such network could be expanded to overseas as a part of quality educational investment projects via international campuses.

(b) Variegation of university multiracial, multicultural and multireligious environment : Enrolled students should be exposed to balanced international culture not only limited to local Malay and Muslim traditions mainly as observed in current Malaysian public universities but allowed more open learning and practise environment in additional languages like English, Japanese, Spanish, Chinese, French etc in local universities formal affairs. Staffs and students of universities should be more open-minded in learning and practising religions different from parents without being converted. Multilingual direction and notice boards should be placed with officers well-versed in different cultural practises were employed in the verification of activity notices. This was similar to the proposed

well-linked university libraries that should include professional references with wider range of choices, enabled ideas to flourish among academicians. Multifaith centre facilities should be improved on non-Muslim units with more conducive international student exchange environment.

(c) Punishment for corrupted university administrators : Issues faced in Malaysian public universities should be exposed to press in order to prosecute the corrupted and inefficient staffs under the law particularly in research facility funding and university administration costing with significantly less benefits gained from high volume of investment. Racially and religiously discriminated rules set by crooked staff members that were bias in decision making related to language, cultural and religious affairs should be removed immediately that the names of the blacklisted officers could be submitted anytime to the requested parties and presses. This was similar to poorly-performed student leaders that should be condemned and sacked in front of the public with shame. Fairness should also be stressed particularly in university higher position where approximately 30% of the top jobs in the Malaysian public universities should be reserved to non-native *Bumiputra* included in the current Coalition government policy with reference to the similar proportion of share given to *Bumiputra*-natives in Malaysian public listed companies, where the drafters of various racially discriminated public policy makers against the Constitution should be questioned in local and international court on the logic of defected governmental rules that were designed in favour of corrupted officers and businessmen.

(d) Improvement of facilities for student activities : All professional relevant academic clubs and societies should form very close ties with fellow counterparts from other Malaysian and overseas universities for experience sharing, serving as fundamental opportunities for future student exchange and scientific research partnerships. Various student groups should be allowed to register with Malaysian public university student affair offices at higher cost, whether the club is single-raced with independent observers outside the group, alumni of high school, specific anonymous groups as long as the organizers were well-behaved in the organization of activities with more open learning environment, where the collected fees could serve as facility improvement funds for additional leaderships training in professional club management, electronic facilities like e-voting and club registration databases, enriched festive functions and scientific forums etc.

(e) More efficient training and professional development program for cost efficient wise local Malaysian university should reduce the overseas training sponsorships for academic and research staffs that in fact many similar skills could be gained with existing reserved facilities in Malaysia with lower cost. However, facility investment should be increased in the improvement of scientific research instrumentation where many were underutilized and not well-maintained. Sharing of scientific research database among Malaysian public and private university libraries with co-investment should be considered to enable many resources of references to be optimized among required staff and student members open to

public professional application. Close linkage with local industries and international entrepreneurs should always be promoted to reduce the dependence on government supports, enabled graduates obtained necessary skill training in relevant professional field of study for employment. Similar to water, electricity and telecommunication suppliers, well-improved technology could be developed with higher standard to cater the need of scientific research institutes that required better quality facility of energy and telecommunication suppliers for more accurately reliable research and development (R&D) outputs, as in many international industries, with higher quality outputs sold at international markets with higher volume of investment.

Final Recommendation : Existing culture, tradition and belief of Malaysian society that stucked to ritual would always prevent the advancement in science and technology with many unquestionable doctrine and direction. The increase of human population with greater rate than the necessary spending in education would never made Malaysia a worldly competitive nation of quality export where the existing prosperity in fact was just a mirage unless Malaysian Coalition government was truly proactive enough to supply necessary skills for the people required in various professions with threefold rates. Human factors in fact should be catered with care that many problems in Malaysian public universities were originated from the attitude of staff members that in fact should be given more opportunities to voice opinions, unlike the current politically-controlled academic environment with restriction of professional ideas presentation that could be bias against the interest of dominant rulers.