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'Studies will yield clues on varsity gender gap'

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and Roy See Wei Zhi**

KUALA LUMPUR: Many quarters lauded the government's initiative to implement a vocational-technical based curriculum for secondary schools, but suggested more studies be conducted to determine the real cause for the gender disparity in universities.

It was reported yesterday that the Higher Education and Education Ministries are considering introducing a vocational curriculum in secondary schools to address gender imbalance in universities.

The university gender ratio stood at 65:35 in favour of female students.

Universiti Utara Malaysia's vice-chancellor Prof Dr Mohd Salleh Abu said the examination-based system tends to reward studious and diligent students but ignored those with talents outside of standard academia.

"There is a perception that those who go to vocational schools are less successful. Skills-based occupations are not seen as glamorous and the

people aren't paid as well. This can become an obstacle.

"This perception must be changed, if not, boys graduating from vocational studies would be looked down upon," he added.

Universiti Sains Malaysia's Education Studies dean Prof Dr Abdul Rashid Mohamed urged to government to look deeper into the causes of the gender imbalance.

He said there must be a thorough study to prove whether the notion that boys were less academically inclined than girls holds true across all ethnicities and social backgrounds.

He said there were more females than males in science courses such as medicine and pharmacy, and in education in USM, but felt that it was due to the shift in the social expectations for women.

Nexus International School principal Dr Stuart Martin disagreed with the perception that girls were better

than boys at studies.

"This is a simplistic view of human beings and is inaccurate and misleading. Most novelists, philosophers, economists, doctors and lawyers are men who did well in school."

Dr Martin said the authorities shouldn't be harping about the gender gap in schools when women were still getting less opportunities than men in the corporate world.

For example, women were still not getting paid more than men in the workplace, nor have they come to make up the majority of directors in big corporations.

Psychologist R. Kogilavani welcomed the initiative from the government but felt that there were less men in universities today due to pressure from society.

"Younger boys feel inclined to stop studying and start working, as societal views today seem to favour people who have financial income."