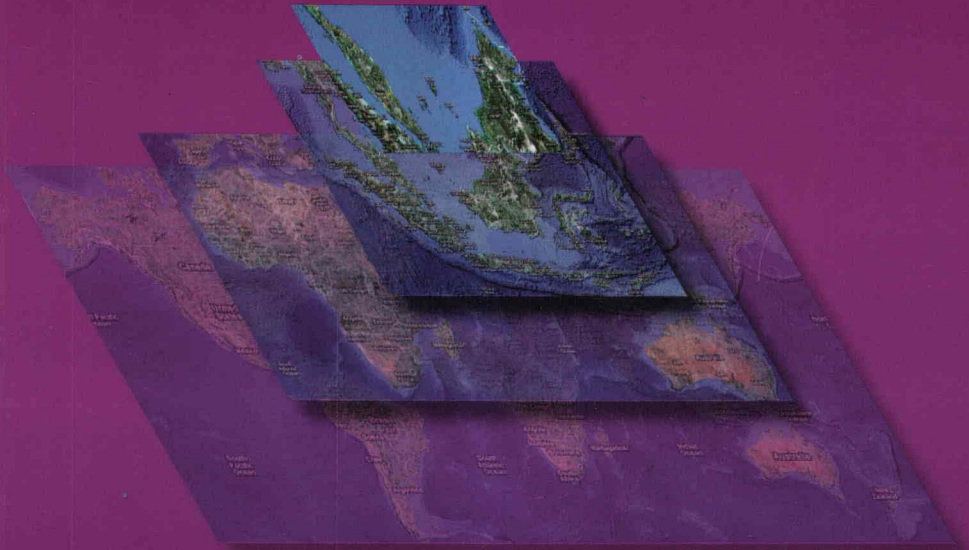


EXAMINING CONTEMPORARY MALAYSIA: Critical Knowledge From Research



Volume 2 Jilid 2

RESEARCH KNOWLEDGE & INTELLECT APPLICATION SERIES
SIRI ILMU PENYELIDIKAN & APLIKASI INTELEK

UfoRIA



UiTM

**EXAMINING CONTEMPORARY
MALAYSIA:
Critical Knowledge From Research**

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2009

**EXAMINING CONTEMPORARY MALAYSIA:
Critical Knowledge From Research**

**RESEARCH KNOWLEDGE & INTELLECT APPLICATION SERIES
VOLUME 2**

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Foreword

This UfoRIA Research Knowledge and Intellect Application series has been evaluated and edited by a panel of expert and professional reviewers from within and outside the UiTM system. Most of the articles/papers in this special series has been presented at the 'Kontemporari' seminar series both at the state and national levels. A few articles/papers have even been presented and shared at regional and international seminar and conferences.

The articles/papers selected for this second volume discusses contemporary and also critical issues that need to be carefully examined and further researched by the academic community in Malaysia. This cycle of research effort and knowledge dissemination is a never-ending journey as we strive to make knowledge and learning more that just academic culture.

It is hoped that this Research Knowledge and Intellect Application series would continue the knowledge acculturation initiative that was started in 2002 when UfoRIA was born. This is the second out of two books, one in Malay and this particular volume in English, edited and published by the Unit for Research and Intellect Application (UfoRIA) with the support of the Campus Director of UiTM Seri Iskandar, Perak, Malaysia.

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The myth of the lazy lecturer: the academic-ability, industrial expertise and international competitiveness of Malaysian academics

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ABSTRACT

As Asian institutions of higher learning prepare to scale the heights of the Times Higher Education World Top Universities' list, academics in these institutions have been asked to actively collaborate in regional knowledge sharing initiatives and to foster stronger ties to external industries. In Malaysia, beyond mainstream political rhetoric it is possible that this objective is merely a myth. This research project examined three large institutions of higher learning in Malaysia – two public and one private – to gauge faculty productivity through regional collaboration and industrial linkage by academics in these institutions. Data gathered from questionnaires and selective interviews with research participants confirms that collaborations and linkages by Malaysian academics are few and far between and the target of the Malaysian government has not been realized, and is likely to be unachievable in the near future. Some of the reasons behind this failure are also highlighted by this current research effort.

1.0 INTRODUCTION: FACULTY PRODUCTIVITY AS AN OBJECTIVE MEASUREMENT

The ambitious National Higher Education Action Plan introduced by the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) in 2007, outlined several strategies to advance the higher education sector in this developing country. This is in response to global challenges in higher education and to coincide with the federal government's aspiration to make Malaysia a regional hub

for tertiary education. The ever sliding position of premier Malaysian public universities in international rankings is also a cause for concern given the fact that international league tables have become a necessary evil as a shortcut to measuring the 'real' standard of a university. According to Roberts and Thompson (2007), around the world in most industrialised and developing nations, more and more students have indicated that they are looking at league table positions as part of the decision making process in order for them to choose the best university to serve their educational and personal needs. Roberts and Thompson also added that in more affluent countries, at least half of the prospective student population would first refer to league tables before even thinking of studying at a university in any countries around the globe.

Therefore, a rapidly developing country like Malaysia cannot afford to be left behind in international university rankings. If Malaysian universities are not able to secure comfortable positions in yearly international league tables, it is highly likely that foreign students would not be too attracted to study in this country and even young Malaysians would lose faith in the higher education institutions of Malaysia. From a macro perspective this situations will not just translate to loss of revenue but it might also create a crisis of confidence in this country. According to Conceicao and Heitor (1999), in the post-2000 era, institutions of higher learning are not just educational establishments that cater for the educational needs of its students; universities are also at the forefront of knowledge creation, new innovation and forward thinking through vigorous research efforts and linkages with local industries. In response to these immediate challenges, one of specific targets of the National Higher Education Action Plan is that:

“All lecturers are expected to demonstrate scholarship in their fields of specialisation and to demonstrate professionalism and competence in their ability to teach” (MOHE, 2007, p. 29).

‘To demonstrate scholarship’ one the other hand, will not be an easy task for Malaysian academics given that they should aspire to greater heights in knowledge advancement and be subject to international level benchmarking standards. Malaysian public universities have in the past been strong proponents of quality assurance through initiatives like International Standard Office (ISO) certifications and the likes although initially ISO standards were only

meant for top government schools (SEAMEO, 2003), but these certificates are only useful for administrative and procedural operations. To become scholars and academics of international stature, Malaysian university educators must be more aggressive and productive in advancing knowledge through research and development initiatives and set their hearts and minds to bigger things (Azmi Anshar, 2008).

In a country where a growing number of university educators feel that academic ability is less important than personal contacts and networking, and where promotion is gained by knowing the right people than doing academic and research work (see Aminuddin, Tymms and Habsah, 2008, for a case in point), all Malaysian university teaching staff are indeed facing a real challenge, perhaps for the first time in their lives as outlined by targets within the National Higher Education Action Plan. As educators serving in public university faculties all around Malaysia, they must be ready to prove that they are productive academics and not just university-level ‘teachers’ who teach the same thing year after year and are unwilling to get involved in research efforts due to personal disinterest.

2.0 THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES, ACADEMIC ABILITY AND FACULTY PRODUCTIVITY: A REVIEW

Universities have come a long way since its conception at the proverbial ‘ivory tower’ just decades ago. In Malaysia, the traditional role of public teaching universities has also changed by embracing more research efforts and the dissemination of pure and applied knowledge to university students and beyond. Indeed, Kuhnen (1978) envisaged that in the near future research done by universities around the world will increase and become more critical for human progress by, “adding to the body of theoretical knowledge as well as its application to practical problems” (p. 78). Kuhnen also contended that university academics cannot be too concerned only with their own work (i.e. teaching), this is because such a limited view of university employment will mean that university tutors will “lose contact with society until it [the university] is completely isolated and did not understand the issues of its surroundings” (p. 79).

Bearing in mind that Kuhnen's position paper was written more than 30 years ago, it might be safe for us to assume that Malaysian academics have a fair bit of catching up to do compared to their counterparts in more developed countries. This is because, according to the large scale survey by Aminuddin, Tymms and Habsah (2008) on the teaching staff of six Malaysian public universities, "the most productive role in the eyes of the academics was found to be teaching with research and administration coming second and third, respectively" (p. 283). The researchers also found out that the administrative divisions of all the universities they surveyed have differing opinions on the centrality of research work for their teaching staff. Due partly to this, the respondents of the survey largely lamented that their lower-than-average research productivity and knowledge development initiatives (as compared to more established universities in the world) was due mainly to the limited amount of time available to do research compared to the hours given for teaching.

It goes without saying that in today's challenging economical, political and social climate; the full benefits from a university can only be reaped if the university and the society it is in are organically linked together. In other words, the needs of a society have to be at the centre of a university's core activities. In Malaysia today, research work and knowledge creation initiatives must be accepted as core university activities that must be balanced and not placed behind the teaching load of university academics. According to Arimoto (2005), this change in mindset and shift in educational policy has indeed been slow to take place in the Asian context due to multiple constraints like reluctance to take part in research due to little or no incentives, too much focus on teaching at the expense of knowledge creation initiatives and also far too many red tapes in conservative Asian universities that see research work as mainly a distraction for academic staff from their main (and in many cases, only) responsibility – teaching.

Nevertheless, does focusing only on teaching actually help to raise the academic ability of university tutors? The answer to this question is unclear, but research efforts seem to show that university academics become more *academic* when they are actively involved in research efforts with other academic staff and when they are involved in consulting projects with external organisations based on their areas of specialty. Bailey's (1999) research in Australia for example, found out that motivation to do research is directly research to academic

efficacy in that academics who active do research are also better educators compared to colleagues with low research productivity. Bailey also reported that academic staff, “with higher degrees and greater research productivity were more motivated to teach and self-efficacious about research” (p. 343).

In line with the arguments forwarded by Bailey is concept forwarded by Schapper and Mayson (2008) that they refer to as ‘research-led teaching’. Teaching and research is thus viewed as a mutually empowering relationship that must be embraced by members of academia. If we subscribe to this model, not only will we be able to raise faculty productivity but at the same time we can be sure of substance in our teaching. According to Schapper and Mayson, although as it stands the concept of research-led teaching needs more empirical grounding, it should pave the way for university academics to “reconsider scholarship, to focus of learning, to establish a culture of inquiry and to reshape teaching and research from a product-based process to a process-based approach” (2008, p. 8). Perhaps in the Malaysian context, research-led teaching should be widely promoted to push Malaysian academics to develop a wider world view and accept the virtues of doing serious research as part and parcel of their academic existence. As Brew and Prosser (2003), two leading researchers in this field wrote:

“Research-led teaching [...] is teaching carried out in the atmosphere of imaginative enquiry that arises from leading-edge scholarship; teaching that stimulates reflective learning and critical, creative thinking, at all levels” (p. 3).

Now that we have discussed the role of universities and the importance of research initiatives as a catalyst for raising academic and teaching abilities, we would like to close this section with a short discussion on the concept of faculty productivity. According to Bland and Bergquist (1997) in the American tradition, faculty productivity is a term that generally means the all work done by a faculty member, which is not just about teaching. Faculty productivity involves things like research projects, industrial linkage, publication activities, visiting scholarships, invited talks, consulting the government and other organisations, voluntary and community based work and others (see Fairweather, 1996; Tierney, 1999). The notion of faculty productivity is also useful because of several reasons.

Firstly, it is a totally objective measure of the work done by a university educator. The more a university educator does, the more this is reflected in his or her measure of productivity and vice versa. Take as a case in point, voluntary and community based activities. If an academic is good in teaching but has never been involved in voluntary and community based activities, this fact will be clear in his or her faculty productivity record. The same goes for all the other activities as mentioned in the preceding paragraph. Secondly, because it is a truly objective way to measure the work done by an academic, the faculty productivity records of academics should be the only data used to gain promotion or special awards for academic ability. This is totally opposite the measure used in the Malaysian situation which is at best totally subjective and at worse, repressive in nature particularly to those academics who do not conform to the status quo. Finally, faculty productivity as a concept, embodies the true essence as being an academic because it promotes healthy competition between academically able peers, it compels university educators to strive in several areas and to raise their professionalism as lecturer and tutors, plus it also helps to create true 'world class' university educators who are true academics in the fullest sense of the word, as Fairweather (1996) wrote:

“From this perspective, the best scholars are the best teachers; the best teacher is a scholar who keep abreast of the content and methods of a field through continuing involvement in research and who communicates knowledge and enthusiasm for a subject to students” (p. 100).

3.0 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM AND KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As Asian institutions of higher learning prepare to move up the list in international league tables, academics in these institutions have been asked to collaborate in regional knowledge sharing initiatives and to foster stronger ties to external industries. To directly face this challenge, the Malaysian government through its Ministry of Higher Education has instituted a landmark policy in 2007 called the National Higher Education Action Plan. One of the main objectives of this national plan is to expedite the process of turning Malaysia into a regional hub of education excellence by enhancing the ability of Malaysian university educators by turning them into truly productive faculty

members. There is much literature on the role of universities, academic ability and faculty productivity but most research initiatives have focused on more developed nations. To operationalise the concept of faculty productivity into manageable chunks for useful empirical research, two areas have been chosen namely research collaboration and industrial linkage. In Malaysia, there is a gap in knowledge particularly in the productivity of Malaysian academics with reference to research collaboration and industrial linkage. This is the focus of this current research effort by trying to answer two major research questions:

One: What is the actual count on research collaboration and industrial linkage by a section of Malaysian academics as reported by them, based on the actual academic work that they have done, which is not directly related to teaching?

Two: What are the perceptions and feelings of a section of Malaysian academics with reference to the government's and Ministry of Higher Education's current policies on internationalisation and special focus on regional research partnerships and local industrial linkages?

4.0 METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

A broad survey was chosen for this research to quantitatively study the academic productivity of the respondents based on the number of academic work, not directly related to teaching, which they have done. This was then supplemented with qualitative data from random open ended interviews administered to a few respondents across the research sites to qualify the responses that they had provided in the survey forms.

4.1. The surveys

The original survey was developed by the University System of Maryland, USA and it was adopted and edited with permission. The survey instrument was piloted twice to correct and refine the questions, once at a public university and the second time at a private college. The pilot stage also made sure that all possibilities of bias were reduced and that the survey instrument was as objective as it possibly can be. All of questions in the survey sought

numerical figures with '0' or 'zero/none' being the lowest possible answer. Questions number 25 and 26, being the two last questions are open answer questions where the respondents could provide additional comments to justify their responses for the whole survey. Table One below provides some related information about all the research sites:

Table One: Information about the sites of research

Brief background of institution	Total number of teaching staff	Number of faculties	Number of respondents based on faculties/ centres *
- Site One - Public university in north Malaysia with focus on science and technology subjects.	Currently 343 academic staff. 75 respondents representing 21.9% of total population.	Seven	Business and Management = 26 Information Technologies = 28 Languages Studies = 21
- Site Two - Branch campus of a public university in central Malaysia with focus on the arts and social sciences.	Currently 276 academic staff. 68 respondents representing 24.6% of total population.	Six	Business and Management = 25 Information Technologies = 25 Languages Studies = 18
- Site Three - A private university college in central Malaysia focusing on a wide range of areas including arts and science subjects.	Currently 208 academic staff. 70 respondents representing 33.7% of total population.	Six	Business and Management = 26 Information Technologies = 22 Languages Studies = 22

* For the purposes of this research, it was decided that only three academic centres and/or faculties would be grouped together and surveyed because not all the same faculties were present at all three research sites except for business and management, information technologies and language studies.

Within a span about a month, all the survey forms were sent by surface mail to contact persons at the research sites who later distributed them to all respondents in their respective sites. These forms were later collected and posted back by the contact persons. A total of 213 survey forms were collected (n=213) from respondents with a return rate of 78.9% where 90 forms were equally distributed at each research site to three faculties/academic centres. The rate of return was quite high and deemed acceptable for the purposes of

this study, largely through the assistance of the contact persons. Table Two provides some general information about the gender, age, working experience and educational background of the respondents. For the purpose of data analysis, all other demographic factors have been ignored in this report.

Table Two: Demographics of respondents based on research sites **

Research site	Gender of respondents	Age group of respondent	Number of years working	Educational background
- Site One - 75 respondents 35.2% of total research population (n=213)	Male	21-30 years = 14 or 18.7%	0 to 9 years = 12 or 16.0%	First degree = 21 or 28.0%
	Female	31-40 years = 35 or 46.7%	10 to 19 years = 35 or 46.7%	Master's = 35 or 46.7%
		41-50 years = 18 or 24.0%	20 to 29 years = 26 or 34.7%	Doctorate = 19 or 25.3%
		51 and above = 8 or 10.7%	30 and above = 2 or 2.7%	
- Site Two - 68 respondents 32.0% of total research population (n=213)	Male	21-30 years = 18 or 26.5%	0 to 9 years = 19 or 28.0%	First degree = 21 or 28.0%
	Female	31-40 years = 30 or 44.1%	10 to 19 years = 22 or 32.4%	Master's = 47 or 62.7%
		41-50 years = 17 or 25.0%	20 to 29 years = 23 or 33.8%	Doctorate = 7 or 9.3%
		51 and above = 3 or 4.4%	30 and above = 4 or 5.9%	
- Site Three - 70 respondents 32.9% of total research population (n=213)	Male	21-30 years = 23 or 32.9%	0 to 9 years = 37 or 52.9%	Diploma = 15 or 21.4%
	Female	31-40 years = 33 or 47.1%	10 to 19 years = 26 or 37.1%	First degree = 29 or 41.4%
		41-50 years = 12 or 17.1%	20 to 29 years = 7 or 10.0%	Master's = 17 or 24.3%
		51 and above = 2 or 2.9%		Doctorate = 9 or 12.9%

** Demographic variables that returned zero values have been removed from this table for clarity of presentation.

As for the general academic specialisation of all the respondents, some information technologies lecturers were from the quantitative and mathematical sciences department whilst business and management respondents were made up of both business studies and management studies teaching staff. As for language studies, the respondents were made up of Malay, English, Arabic and Mandarin language lecturers with English language lecturers making up the biggest group in all three research sites.

4.2 The interviews

As for the eight interview questions, they were open ended and sought the feelings and opinions of a few selected respondents. Eleven short interview sessions were completed successfully representing more than 5% of the population under research, although the original plan was to interview about 27 respondents. This was later reduced to twelve with four interview proposed for each site due to time constraints to complete this final report. Four interviews were completed with respondents in site one and three, whilst only three were done in site two as one of the interviewee pulled out at the last minute due to illness. It was decided that no time could be spared to find a replacement. The open-ended interviews were devised using trigger and lead-off questions to supplement the 26 point surveys that were distributed to all the respondents in Research Sites One to Three. Generally, although all the interviews never took more than 40 minutes to complete, they provided useful narrative data with reference to the feelings and opinions of the research participants in all three sites of study.

5.0. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

5.1. The surveys (excerpts from the survey are provided as Appendix A)

It was quite surprising to find that most of the survey forms collected from all three research sites returned the value of ‘zero’ or ‘none’ for all five datasets, namely:

1. Sponsored research and scholarly productivity in Malaysia.
2. Public service to external bodies and organisations in Malaysia.

3. Service to institution and Malaysia in current higher education institution.
4. Industrial linkage with external industry/organisation in Malaysia and abroad.
5. Involvement in inter-institutional cooperation and international academic efforts.

Due to this, it was decided that the survey forms would be grouped into ‘not useful’ (those that returned all zero or none for the data sets above) and ‘useful’ ones (those with at least one response, which is not zero or none) for data analysis, as elaborated in Table Three below:

Table Three: ‘Not useful’ and ‘useful’ survey forms for data analysis by site

Brief background of institution	Total number of surveys collected	Not useful surveys (all ‘zero’ values’)	Useful surveys (all the rest)
- Site One - Public university.	75 respondents representing 21.9% of total population.	36 or 48.0%	39 or 52.0%
- Site Two - Branch campus of a public university.	68 respondents representing 24.6% of total population.	45 or 66.2%	23 or 33.8%
- Site Three - A private university college.	70 respondents representing 33.7% of total population.	48 or 68.6%	22 or 31.4%

1st key finding: Some Malaysian academics score very low or even *nothing* at all for their academic productivity.

In total 129 or 60.6% respondents across the three research sites admitted that they have *never* been involved in any of the five measures of academic productivity above. Only Site One seem to be better than average with nearly 50% of its academic staff showing productivity in academic work involving research collaboration and industrial linkages in Malaysia and abroad. For the other two research sites the numbers recorded were very low for academic quite large academic institutions (based on the number of teaching staff).

Table Four below shows the number of useful and not useful survey forms based on the faculties/academic centres across the three research sites:

Table Four: Breakdown of ‘not useful’ survey forms by faculties/centres

Brief background of institution	Total number of surveys collected	Not useful surveys (all with ‘zero’ values) ^
- Site One - Public university.	75 respondents representing 21.9% of total population.	B&M = 6 IT = 9 LS = 21 36 or 48.0%
- Site Two - Branch campus of a public university.	68 respondents representing 24.6% of total population.	B&M = 8 IT = 10 LS = 27 45 or 66.2%
- Site Three - A private university college.	70 respondents representing 33.7% of total population.	B&M = 20 IT = 14 LS = 14 48 or 68.6%

^ The acronyms used are as follows: B&M for Business and Management, IT for Information Technologies and LS for Language Studies.

2nd key finding: Low productivity could be attributed to the nature of academic specialisation and also institutional factors.

At first glance, it is quite glaring that the highest number of academics with no academic work recorded are those who specialise in Language Studies. This could be due to the nature of language teaching and learning, although this is highly suspect given that many other academics in the same line in Malaysia and abroad have produced an immense body of research literature Business and Management and Information Technologies teaching staff seems to be more active particularly in public universities. On the other hand, the spread seems to be nearly equal in the private institution perhaps because there is less focus on research and other academic work by its administration, compared to purely teaching activities.

Table Five below breaks down the number of survey forms deemed to return useful values based on demographics. The values for gender have been removed as they are thought to be not significant.

Table Five: Breakdown of ‘useful’ survey forms by demographics **

Research site	Age group of respondent	Number of years working	Educational background
- Site One - 39 respondents returned ‘useful’ responses in their survey forms	21-30 years = 3 or 7.7%	0 to 9 years = 8 or 20.5%	First degree = 5 or 12.8%
	31-40 years = 18 or 46.2%	10 to 19 years = 24 or 61.5%	Master’s = 15 or 38.5%
	41-50 years = 16 or 41.0%	20 to 29 years = 7 or 17.9%	Doctorate = 19 or 48.7%
	51 and above = 2 or 5.1%		
- Site Two - 23 respondents returned ‘useful’ responses in their survey forms	21-30 years = 6 or 26.1%	0 to 9 years = 9 or 39.1%	First degree = 4 or 17.4%
	31-40 years = 13 or 56.5%	10 to 19 years = 11 or 47.8%	Master’s = 12 or 52.2%
	41-50 years = 4 or 17.4%	20 to 29 years = 1 or 4.3%	Doctorate = 7 or 30.4%
		30 and above = 2 or 8.7%	
- Site Three - 22 respondents returned ‘useful’ responses in their survey forms	21-30 years = 3 or 13.6%	0 to 9 years = 12 or 54.5%	Diploma = 1 or 4.5%
	31-40 years = 16 or 72.7%	10 to 19 years = 9 or 40.9%	First degree = 5 or 22.7%
	41-50 years = 3 or 13.6%	20 to 29 years = 1 or 4.5%	Master’s = 8 or 36.4%
			Doctorate = 8 or 36.4%

** Demographic variables that returned zero values have been removed from this table for clarity of presentation.

3rd key finding: Demographic factors could also be related to academic productivity especially age group, working experience and educational qualification.

From Table Five (that should be compared to Table Two), some clear patterns have emerged. Firstly, senior academics and junior academics could be considered not too active in academic work. The most active age group seems to be the 31-40 year olds. Secondly, the working experience of academic staff could also be related to their academic productivity with the most senior staff returning the lowest values. And finally, nearly all academics in the survey that are productive in areas other than teaching have a master's degree and/or a doctorate. In addition, it could be said that all of the doctorate holders are productive academics although this should be subject to further inquiry as to ascertain the true nature of their academic work.

4th key finding: For respondents who did return 'useful' survey forms, involvement in the fourth (industrial linkage) and fifth (international academic projects) areas could still be seen as low in general.

The surveys show that external links with relevant industries and also private and public organisations are still low. Furthermore for international level academic projects, less than a quarter of the useful surveys returned a value other than zero. This is in direct opposition with the Malaysian government's target through the National Higher Education Action Plan, although we must also understand that to become a true international level academic is not as easy task to accomplish as the person in question must be of very high academic ability and exceptional in his or her research related work.

5th key finding: Although far too many Malaysian academics are still not showing academic productivity, there are a few at the opposite end with extremely high levels of academic productivity as reported in their survey forms.

If we take all the survey forms at face value, it is clear that a small number of Malaysian academics could be seen as highly productive in regional research collaboration and able to advise industries and organisations not just at the national level but also the international level. One academic for example wrote 'more than 400 so far' for his non-refereed professional writings in commercial

and non-commercial publications. A few even wrote ‘more than RM200K’ for the amount of external grants that they have received so far. The highest numbers for international level industrial linkage and internationally funded research grants are 19 and 11 respectively by a teaching staff in the Business and Management line from the first research site.

5.2 The interviews (some of the actual questions are provided as Appendix B)

After analysing the interview data, the responses from the eleven research participants could be grouped generally into three broad themes, and they are: Institutional constraints and limitations; Support structure for academic work, Personal interest and inclinations. Some interesting actual comments made by the research participants are presented next (using these three broad themes to categorise and organise them).

First theme derived from the interview: Institutional constraints and limitations.

All the academics interviewed believe that currently their institutions are limiting the research work and industrial links that they could participate in. This according to them severely limits their academic productivity. Most of them put the blame on the teaching load although a few believe that the administration staff of their institution are not supportive and sympathetic towards the cause. Two of the academics actually mentioned that they were not supposed to go to academic conferences and were forced to take leave to attend.

Second theme derived from the interview: Support structure for academic work.

Most of the academic interviewed argue that there is no support structure for doing academically related work. They want to see a clearer structure and direction for doing academic work in the first place. Without this structure in place, they believe that Malaysian academics will never be able to compete with international level academics from more renowned universities. They want the government to outline the importance of academic work in black and

white and send this to all universities and colleges so that “we can all work towards the same goals, not like now”.

Third theme derived from the interview: Personal interest and inclinations.

More than two third of the interview sample believe that at this moment in time, “lecturers do research because they like research”. According to them, again there is no actual need to become international level academics as “we just need to teach and teach, like school teachers”. This is indeed a real problem for the Malaysian government to face, which is to change the mindsets of local university educators to see the true importance of regional research activities and linking with industries and organisations in this region and beyond. That said, without the whole reform of the system and strong and positive support structure in place for academic or faculty productivity – this sacred dream will just remain a dream, for many years to come in the Malaysian higher education sector.

6.0 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

To conclude, the data collected by this current study although quite limited in depth and coverage, is useful in providing a snapshot of the actual productivity of Malaysian academics in areas other than teaching and administrative duties. On the contrary, the less than flattering numerical count in regional collaboration and industrial linkage might also be an indication that as it is, Malaysian university educators are still not able to meet the challenges set for them by the Malaysian government. The fact that a large number of the research respondents admit that they have not been involved in regional research initiatives to date and that they have not been invited by local industries and organisations to share their knowledge – points directly to the fact that at this moment in time, a number of Malaysian academics might not be able to “demonstrate scholarship in their fields of specialisation and to demonstrate professionalism and competence in their ability” (MOHE, 2007, p. 29), as university educators and researchers.

Although shocking to some, to those in the higher education sector in Malaysia perhaps this finding is not that surprising. This is due to the fact that all

Malaysian universities and colleges seem to have their own 'standards' with regards to research work with some institutions not even giving the leeway to its academic staff to get actively involved in doing research. The lack of a standard practice and response to academic/faculty productivity means that it will not be easy for the Malaysian government to put the National Higher Education Action Plan into action smoothly. This is another case where positive educational policies could not be fully implemented because of the resistance of social systems, in this case the Malaysian higher education system, to change (Airil Haimi and Smith, 2001).

Looking back at the qualitative data, it is clear that there is a mix of feelings in Malaysian academics with regards to knowledge development initiatives and the sharing of expertise with local industries and organisations. On the one hand, for the few Malaysian university educators in this research who are highly productive, we could safely argue that their high productivity is positively related to their deep satisfaction in their work as academics. But on the other hand, the majority seem to feel jaded, bored or otherwise disengaged from what initially drew them to make an academic life for themselves. It is actually quite easy to spot the one strategy they have adopted to emotionally compensate for their loss of interest and excitement – they seem to focus on teaching and *only* teaching without having to do research and to engage in knowledge sharing projects outside the four walls of the university. Some even choose to spend a large amount of time on tedious administrative work, as in some Malaysian institutions of higher learning, being a good administrator provides a better payoff compared to becoming a productive academic. Again, we might blame the system and the limited worldview of university leaders for their inability to enact a strong framework for faculty productivity in other critical areas, not just juggling between teaching and doing administrative duties.

All of these negative findings area present an actual loss to the Malaysian higher education sector and to all Malaysians generally. We have established that research and teaching are mutually reinforcing and that a true academic is someone who is able to teach based on his or her research efforts. There is much to be done at all levels under the guidance of the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education, but at the same time we would still fail to become a regional higher education hub and climb up the ladder of global university rankings

if local stakeholders – university educators, university leaders, and even university students – fail to reconceptualise and broaden their worldviews with reference to the life and the work of true academics. As Malaysian academics, not only must we work together to face all the shortcomings of a system in transition, but we must also be ready to face new and even bigger challenges to ensure that Malaysian public and private, universities and colleges make the cut as global higher education institutions – even if it means Malaysian academics have to relearn the skills of the trade and embrace new duties and responsibilities.

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APPENDIX A – Excerpts from the survey instrument

The Malaysian government have adopted productivity goals in the areas of inter-institutional cooperation and distance/international education. The following questions will provide data to measure progress towards some of these goals:

19. Have you collaborated with someone affiliated with another tertiary institution outside of Malaysia, in team teaching, or preparing course material or curriculum that directly affect what is taught in that institution?	Yes	No
20. Have you collaborated with someone from an international tertiary education institution other than your own, in scholarly effort that could lead to international presentation, publication, performance or dissemination of data?	Yes	No
21. How many times have your work as an academic taken you outside of the country (for seminars, conferences, expositions, public talk, professional training, etc.)?	_____	
22. How many times have you consulted an international level organization or industry based on your expertise either in a paid or unpaid manner, formally or informally?	_____	
23. For how many externally funded academic (research based) and non-academic (industry based) projects overseas were you part of?	_____	
24. What was the total whole Malaysian Ringgit amount of grants that you have received so far (including paid work grants)? (Please use whole numbers)	_____	

APPENDIX B – Sample of the interview questions

Trigger: Have you ever been involved in international level projects related to your work as an academic?

Possible lead offs:

Q lead 1. Would you kindly state factors that have helped you to get involved/ stopped you from getting involved in such projects?

Q lead 2. What would your response be if people say that you are not an international level academic? Why?

Q lead 3. What are your actual plans to get involved in such projects in the near future please?