Transformation of Higher Education Status: Issues on Faculty Workload

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Abstract

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The Malaysian Public Universities are undergoing the process of transformation which requires efforts from every components of the universities, especially the academic staffs, in order to achieve high rankings internationally and to fulfil their Key Performance Indicator (KPI) for the purpose of promotion and appraisal. These ambitions have increased the workload of academic staffs and extend their workloads from teaching to other myriad of responsibilities such as; research, consultation, administrative and community services. This paper examines the impact of transformation of university status and the workload of academic staff. Data was collected through interview with the top level management from four different categories of universities such as APEX, Research, Focus and Comprehensive University. Thematic content data analysis technique was used in analysing the data collected. This paper finds that the transformation of higher education status has intricated the workloads of academic staffs with less benefits. The workloads and job specifications of the academic staffs are different in accordance to the categories of the universities. Meanwhile, all public universities are bound to follow the dictated scheme provided by the Public Service Department of Malaysia. This study suggests that the contract of service of academic staffs to be revised and to include clear terms on the improvement of scheme and benefits for academic staffs in public universities.

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Keywords: Transformation of Higher Education Status; Malaysian Public University; Workload of Academic Staffs; Key Performance Indicator; Employment Benefits.

1. Introduction

Higher education institutions exist to educate students as a constructive way of contributing to national developments. However, due to globalization, the establishment of university does not play a unitary role of producing human capital but also involve in training and focusing on infusing values that are beneficial industrially and to the society at large. This global trends have led to the changes of national educational policy and institutional development in Malaysia (Lee, 2004). New approaches and strategies are designed to reorientate and transform the way in which universities are managed as well as the delivery of educational services (Hee, 2007). This changes motivated the need to train human capitals that are knowledgeable, skillful and innovative to meet the future national challenges.

Consistent with the national objective to ensure Malaysian universities stand in rank with the world universities, the transformation of higher education status was invented which brought about classifying Malaysian public universities into different categories namely; APEX University, Research University (RU), Comprehensive University (CU), and Focus University (FU). The universities under each categories set distinctive visions, missions, objectives and key performance indicators in order to facilitate the attainment of the university's status. However, all public universities are bound to follow the standard scheme provided by the Public Service Department of Malaysia even though the work specifications are different compared to one another. These issues have caused discrepancies between the teaching workload of academic staffs and the remuneration they receive. Hence, this paper seeks to answer the following research questions; *Does the transformation of higher education status affects the workload of academic staff?*

2. Transformation of Higher Education Status in Malaysia

The Malaysian government have been interested in restructuring the higher education institutions in Malaysia, by revamping the relationship between the universities, state government, and the industries, increasing the institutional autonomy of higher instutions in Malaysia through transformation of the higher educational institutions status. In line with the educational and institutional transformation objectives, a significant pedagogical shift that allows learners to be independent, creative, innovative and critically reflective was introduced. Additionally, higher institutions were encouraged to be knowledge-based economy where knowledgeable, skillful and innovative human capital are produced to meet the future national challenges. In order to achieve these transformational targets, the learning curriculum was revised with the invention of a National Higher Education Strategic Plan which includes the improvement of quality teaching and learning approach. For that purpose, public universities were categorized into four different categories –namely; APEX University, RU, FU, and CU and were entrusted with different responsibilities.

2.1. Universities Category

APEX University: APEX is an acronym that stands for Accelerated Program for Excellence. Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) was selected to be recognized as APEX university with the aim of enabling the university to be highly ranked among international universities. National Higher Education Action Plan 2007 defines APEX University to be the centre for academic distinctions, led by

visionary, motivated and committed leaders, encompassing of talented and renowned academic staffs, filled with local and international students who possess a high standard of academic excellence, and equipped with state-of-the-art facilities (Morni et al., 2009)

Research University: RU is to enhance the development and commercialization of research activities in the academia. This is done by increasing the number of post-graduate and post-doctoral candidates in Malaysia public universities. Research University are expected to be centres of excellence focused on improving university ranking in THE-QS (Razak, 2009). The aim of establishing RU was to actively engage in new explorations of ideas, proffer innovations, and take intellectual opportunities to further discover and expand the boundaries of knowledge.

Comprehensive University and Focus University: CU is expected to offer courses in several fields of studies at all educational levels such as; pre-undergraduate, undergraduate, and postgraduate degrees. Four public universities are entrusted with these responsibilities namely; Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) and Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) (Ministry of Higher Education). Meanwhile, FU is established to concentrate on specific fields of study such as technical, education, management and defence. Twelve universities are listed under the FU category namely; Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) focuses on management, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI) focuses on education, Universiti Malaysia Pahang (UMP) focuses on technology, Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM) focuses on engineering, science and technology, Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka (UTeM) focuses on technical, Universiti Malaysia Perlis (UniMAP) focuses on electronic engineering, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM) focuses on Islamic studies, Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT) focuses on science marine, Universiti Sulatan Zainal Abidin (UNISZA) focuses on technology management, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (UMK) focuses on entrepreneurship, and   Universiti Pertahanan Nasional Malaysia (UPNM) focuses on defence. Both CU and FU have similar criteria in terms of student intakes.

2.2. Faculty Workload

According to Eubene, workloads of faculty members are different according to their disciplines and the university they work. Normally, workloads of academic staffs go beyond the time they spend in classrooms teaching or the time they spend on research activities. Tural mentions that the globalization process has affected the academia administratively and financially and academic staffs are thrusted with magnanimous responsibilities that rob them of their academic freedom, implicated with more challenges in teaching and writing and faced with accountability challenges. Since the inception of the transformation of educational status in Malaysia, the workloads of the academic staffs have increased exponentially while their participation in decision making processes is inversely reducing. Additionally, the requirements for their KPI appraisal have been challenging than ever before (Tural, 2007).

Peter in his study on academic staff workloads mentioned that teaching and research are the core academic responsibilities of academic staffs and any other tasks relating to course coordination or management and leadership activities are somewhat a distraction to academic staffs. However,

academic staffs are commonly distracted with assignments outside academic core responsibilities. Recently, it has been a commonplace scenario in public universities for academic staffs to face excessive demands to do too many disconnected tasks outside the academic responsibilities that are primarily expected of them (Austin & Gamson, 1983). The Faculty Workload Report of the University of Nevada presents that academic staff workloads are dual-facated that is, the instructional workload (i.e. in-class workload) and out-of-classroom activities. This indicates that the role of academic staffs in higher education institutions extends beyond classroom. The degree of the increase in the faculty workload varies from one university to another as according to their institutional type of mission. In general, the basic workload of academic staffs entails research, supervision, teaching and myriad of other responsibilities outside the academic activities (Report, 2010).

3. Research Methodology

This paper adopts a qualitative research method by conducting interviews with the top level management such as the registrars and deputy vice chancellors from four different categories of public universities namely; APEX University, RU, FU and CU. In analysing the data, thematic data analysis was employed to deduce findings from the respondents' views. The thematic analysis sort out the rules and principles and law of the university's policy that govern academic staff in terms of their workload and the allocated benefit. While, an analytical analysis concept is adopted to evaluate the factual data in the study. The respondents are classified as R1: APEX University, R2: Focused University, R3: Comprehensive University, and R4: Research University. Discussion on the analysis of the workload and the benefits received by the academic staffs are presented below.

4. Findings on Workload of Academic Staff

Workload of academic staff is grouped as TS: Teaching & Supervision, RC: Research & Consultation, AW: Administrative Work, P: Publication and CS: Community Service.

Table 1. Workload of Academic Staff

Respondents/ Workload	TS	RC	AW	P	CS
R1	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
R2	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
R3	Yes	R-Not compulsory (Required to be Principal Investigator) C- No, it is encouraged	Yes	Yes	Yes
R4	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Table 1 explains the workload of academic staff in four different categories of public universities in Malaysia. The table shows that majority of the respondents agreed to the fact that academic staff in each university have the same workload which consists of teaching and supervision, research and consultation, administrative work, publication and community service. However, R3's response state that it is not compulsory for academic staff to participate in research activities. The only requirement

for academic staff is to be Principal Investigator which is considered as part of their KPI. While, consultation is also not part the workload and KPI's assessment. It is just a means of encouragement.

4.1 Teaching and Supervision

The triad core of the academic work which involved teaching, learning, and research has caused complexity as it demands a deeper understanding of the nature of student learning, pressures to the relocation of the teaching and learning environment around learning outcomes, and due to demand of certain course that require a professional approach in university teaching (Coaldrake & Stedman, 1999). Therefore, in ensuring compliance of the standards and to produce the eminence graduates, academician has to work hard to achieve such requirements.

In another aspect, teaching load of academic staff in public university is increasing due to surplus number of undergraduate student enrolled in every semester. The average number of hours of an academic staff is measured and the data collected during the interview shows that even though they have other supplemented work, but the teaching load is still the same. Majority of the respondent agreed that teaching load of the academic staff will not exceed 18 hours. It is based on the statement of R1, R2, and R3 (TS) that "*the maximum credit hour would be 18 credits equivalent to 2 or 3 subjects per semester*". However, R4 (TS) has extended the discussion by mentioning that "*we had made the teaching work to be flexible as required by academic staff. Academician may request either to fully focus on the teaching or research*".

The most crucial part is, part of their teaching KPIs will be evaluated by the student. It would reflect their credibility and competency in carrying out their task as it will show the qualities associated with the good teaching such as lecturers' knowledge, clarity, classroom management and course organization (Chuan & Heng, 2013). It is for the purpose of improving teaching ability of the lecturers (Comm & Mathaisel, 2003). The outcome of this evaluation is often used to formulate key performance index of lecturers in staff appraisal for both promotion and tenure decisions (Chuan & Heng, 2013). Therefore, the academician would feel impossible to maintain the quality of teaching and learning if they have to face other works in one time. It is supported by the statement made by the R3, who mentioned that "*Why bother about research track, we've been teaching for 4 years, we will not produce papers because we are concentrating on producing high caliber graduate and talented students for the market, and teaching professional programs to produce high employability graduate such as architects, lawyers, accountant. We have introduced semi-professionals and professionals, but as we became the university, and they tried to implement research, entrepreneurship, we lost focus. Everyone started to aim to get the status of Research University that require them to follow guideline provided by the Ministry of Higher Education. We have to produce papers, research, postgraduate, supervised PhD, but we forgot about this group of people that have been working so hard to ensure 100% of the student will be employed after graduate*".

Thus, it can be said, in the process of teaching itself, it needs a lot effort of academician to maintain the quality of knowledge disseminated to the student. It is no longer based on the textbook itself, but it goes beyond that in which students will be expecting the lecturers to equip them with practical knowledge.

4.2 Research, Consultation and Publication

Research and scholarly publication are important for the purpose of disseminating knowledge, especially for the country's development. New findings, theories and solution to the issues are useful to the public. In academic side, research and publication are the medium for them to share their knowledge and it will be evaluated to determine their achievement for promotion and tenure (Ahmad, 2012).

It is also important as the excellent performance of university will be measured by the quantity and quality of research produced other than the quality teaching and learning. It does not only contribute to the university's performance, however, most importantly, it will be valued as the contribution to global economic development and to nation's gross domestic product (GDP) (Ahmad, 2012). In achieving the performance indicators, lecturers are encouraged to produce two to three academic article journals per year and publish in the high impact publications and citations such as the first quartile (Q1), Scopus, ISI and others because it reflects the international recognition (Ahmad, 2012).

The requirement in consistency writing journal and produce research publication somehow contributes to the workload of academic staff, especially those universities which hold the status of APEX and Research Universities because the main criteria for an establishment of a Research University (RU) are publications with impact factor (IF) journals followed by external research funding (Ahmad, 2012). On top of that, all the universities' research achievement will be evaluated every five years through the Malaysian Research Assessment tool (MyRA). It requires all the criteria listed in evaluating the Research Universities' achievement which include the quality and quantity of researchers and research, quality and quantity of postgraduate, innovation, professional services, and networking and linkages to be fulfilled

Research has been made compulsory to all universities regardless of the status either Comprehensive or Focused University as mentioned by the R3 (RC) "*we always aim for RU status, but without being RU, it's very important to have research activities because we need to have research profile*". Therefore, it shows that all academicians cannot escape from conducting any research as the current situation demands more research papers to be produced, to gain more external money, to conform with criteria for performance appraisal, and also to supervise more graduate students (Mat et al., 2007). Thus, in addressing their effort, they should be rewarded with a publication incentive to increase their motivation and encouragement (Ahmad, 2012). Based on the interview, majority of Respondent agreed that they are required to publish average one to three publications per year. R4 (P) mentioned that, "*to achieve their KPIs, they have to publish 1-3 publications*".

Besides that, consultation is important in academic work as it helps the institution to generate money through service provided to the client. The new transformation of governing councils into corporate boards has directed the executive system to emerge to new corporate structures in areas such as international education, intellectual property, relations with industry, and work based training (Marginson, 2000).

4.3 Administrative Works

Recently, there is portion in the key performance indicators (KPIs) that evaluate the participation of academician in administrative post. Since it is part of their KPIs, it will link to their promotion and tenure (Makhbul & Khairuddin, 2014). Administrative post is considered periodically as the appointment is rotary in nature. It is important to ensure the execution of faculty and management department will be in the right track such as the academic programme, human resource management, and management of academic process such as teaching, learning, examination and several others. Besides, it is the duty of administrator to lead the department or institution to achieve the vision, mission and objective of university by guiding the academician to understand the direction of the faculty and department.

To appreciate their hard work in ensuring the performance university, for major roles, such as Deputy Vice Chancellor, heads of school and deans, weightings are often set centrally with allowances depending on the size and complexity of the task. Majority of respondents agreed that administrative work is part of their KPIs for the purpose of promotion to the next level. However, certain university reluctant to provide incentive to administrators that hold the administrative post such as vice chancellor and deputy vice chancellor. R1 mentioned that "*Vice chancellor will not be provided with any incentive as he holds the position of chairman in APEX university. But, the rest of the administrative holder may receive allowance according to the rate fixed by the university. For example dean may be given RM 800, deputy dean is RM 700, programme coordinator is RM 600*".

4.4 Community Service

Community service refers to the activities of academics involving participation in external committees or organizations outside the university. These activities include services extended to the government; professional associations, public and community organizations, other universities, and activities such as the external examination of theses, consultancy work and appearances as an invited expert in media event (Makhbul & Khairuddin, 2014). Lecturers owed responsibilities to the society in the aspect of contribution of knowledge and social welfare. Lecturers have to contribute their knowledge and expertise to the society either locally or at the international level.

5. Discussion and Suggestion

Higher education institution in Malaysia is targeting on the achievement to be levelled in the world rank university. To reach the main goal, it needs a lot of effort, especially from the component of university itself, which includes management of university, academic staffs, and students. In fulfilling aspiration of the government and also the individual target on the KPIs of institution, academic staffs especially has to face with the burden of workload which is disproportionate with their effort spent and benefit received in achieving every components of the required achievement such as the number of research and publication, doing administrative work, teaching and learning, handling programme for students and several others. This kind of issues had lowered the motivation of academic staffs to struggle to steer the university to the next level of achievement.

Another issue that led to the higher burden workload of academic staff is the non-standardize system of public universities in Malaysia. We had acknowledged that public university in Malaysia has been categorized in different types of university, namely APEX University, RU, FU and CU. However, every university aims to get the status of RU which makes core duty of academic staffs on teaching and learning is no longer a priority, even though the student enrolled for diploma, undergraduate and postgraduate is large in number. Academic staff in such university are burdened with number of credit hours, which sometimes become excessive. They even need to produce research products as part of their KPI and contribution to the university.

There are few suggestions presented by the researchers in terms of amendment of the existence law to include or abolish certain provisions which prohibit the exercise of power of academic staffs, providing fund for the research project, and improvement on the salary scheme and system of work which may help academic staffs to focus on their real work.

5.1. Improvement on Remuneration and Appraisal

Remuneration is considered important not only as a salary, but more on the motivation aspect to improve their performance as well as some sort of appreciation. It is even important to those expertise and outstanding lecturers to be paid with higher amount to appreciate their knowledge in certain fields. Even though the basic salary scheme of academic staff has been determined by the Public Service Department, as an appreciation, university may set an increment that reflects the market, job preparation and any achievement they acquired. Furthermore, the remuneration provided must be very competitive as what has been offered by private universities. Another strategy to attract and retain the academic staffs in public university, a competitive level of compensation must be offered, and they must recognize their achievements which can be acknowledged in terms of appraisal scheme (Smith, 1995). A systematic appraisal scheme is significant for individual staff development. The establishment of these criteria is essential to ensure the successful of faculty performance assessment and it must be closely studied and evaluated (Comm & Mathaisel, 2003).

5.2. Providing Fund and Facilities

Universities in Malaysia are facing the decline of funding from Government and such reduction has caused public universities to work harder to generate their own income (Ahmad & Farley, 2014). Moving towards a greater future as a hub place for research and development, universities in Malaysia needs to integrate its research with the global research community which requires the university to collaborate with foreign research institutions, universities and companies. It may cultivate the funding research culture and provide special incentives and R&D funding allocation to promote the development of centers of excellence by concentrating on top level researchers and financing in particular institutions specializing in certain fields (Vestergaard, 2007). Thus, the government and university's management should continue their reward system to ensure the continuing process of future research project by allocating funds to public higher learning institution. Fund allocated may be done through evaluating the performance of universities and its capability of upholding the name of Malaysia to the international level.

5.3. Professional Track

Career in academics nowadays focuses on a few main areas that requires achievement of faculty members in research, teaching and professional service. However, in reality, many academic staffs are still incapable of reaching these expectations as it needs hundred percent commitment for every category of work (Jusoff & Samah, 2009). Therefore, in preparing them for a better future to meet the achievement and excellence, a clear and high standard of academic strategic have to be planned by the top level management of university to ensure the objective of university as well as the academic staffs's aim is on the right track. It is suggested for local university to have a promotion tracks to fit the different career path because it allows them to focus on their specialization either teaching, research or professional service. Researchers acknowledge that some of the public universities in Malaysia have started with the implementation of professional track. However, researchers of the opinion that, it is better if all public universities would take into consideration to practice the same concept for the purpose of bringing up the value of public universities and to lead the university towards achievement. However, for the assessment matters, they are still being evaluated on the criteria provided by the university but according to different portions of weightage. This kind of track may serve as substance for greater steps in the development of the universities as it may lead the university to reach their target.

6. Conclusion

Transformation of higher education in Malaysia directly leads to the increasing number of academic staff. However, issues arose due to dissatisfaction of academic staffs because all public universities are still bound to follow the dictated scheme provided by the Public Service Department of Malaysia and the benefits received lesser than they supposed to obtain despite the burden of workload of academic staff and job specifications are different compared to one another regardless of the status of universities either APEX, Research, Focused, or Comprehensive University. Therefore, researchers suggested for the revision of contract of service of academic staff to include clear terms in the contract for the purpose of better scheme and improvement of benefits to academic staffs.

Acknowledgment

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