

Zaini Ujang

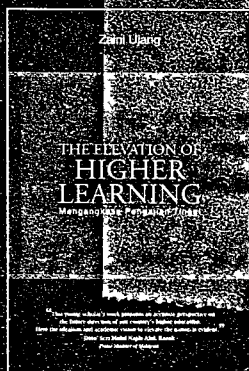
THE ELEVATION OF  
HIGHER  
LEARNING

Mengangkasa Pengajian Tinggi

“This young scholar’s work presents an accurate perspective on the future direction of our country’s higher education. Here the idealism and academic vision to elevate the nation is evident.”

- Dato’ Sri Mohd Najib -

*Prime Minister of Malaysia*



*The Elevation of Higher Learning* is a compilation of one writer's views on higher education, a sector which has swiftly become

prominent in the public eye in enhancing the appreciation of knowledge and improving its quality, especially among students and graduates. It is a frequently raised issue as universities have long been synonymous with the advancement of knowledge, its civilisation and traditions.

This book answers several relevant questions such as: does the existence of hundreds of IPTs correspond to a better understanding of knowledge among Malaysians? Does the significance of knowledge and role of intellectuals garner more exposure in the scheme of national development? With the increasing number and influence of educated citizens, are the values of knowledge nurtured by sincere, noble habits becoming more apparent in society?

This book is essential reading for policy makers, those involved in university management, administrators, researchers, academicians and intellectuals, lovers of knowledge, students and potential graduates. It is also suitable for researchers in research centres, companies and anyone who has an interest in intellectual issues and the matter of Higher Education.





“This book by Prof. Zaini is significant as it features the integration between the consolidation of knowledge and humanity that is strongly centred upon religion and history (Islam and others by comparisons), and current needs that are coloured by political, social and economical needs that he addresses in a responsible way. This work is rare in Malaysia and is something to be proud of. It is crucial that serious attention be given to it by all policy makers, academics and leaders of higher learning institutions in this country.”

**Prof. Dr. Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud**

*Former Deputy Director, International Institute of Islamic Thoughts and Civilization and  
Main Fellow Researcher, Institute of Malay World and Civilization (ATMA)*

“The Elevation of Higher Learning is a must read for all academic members at higher learning institutions as the author has put forth aspects of discussions, suggestions, opinions and criticisms with much clarity on issues surrounding higher learning and the direction to become a renowned university.”

**Prof. Dato' Ishak Ismail**

*Chairman, Majlis Profesor  
Universiti Teknologi Malaysia*

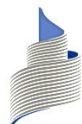
“The writing of this book has been long awaited among academics. The main issues on university, intellectualism, strengthening of knowledge, higher learning, research and development, academic freedom and human capital with a first-class mentality are critically and objectively discussed.”

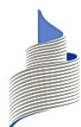
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*Director  
Penerbit Universiti Tun Hussein Malaysia*



THE ELEVATION OF  
HIGHER  
LEARNING





TUN DR. MAHATHIR MOHAMAD

# THE ELEVATION OF HIGHER LEARNING

Zaini Ujang

*Translated by*  
**Siti Aliza Alias**

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This book is dedicated to my late mother,  
Hajah Isah binti Abas (Rahimahallah), who did not understand the  
language of higher learning, did not understand the meaning of  
intellectualism but always reminded me that knowledge is light and the  
learned are the bearers of responsibility.

For my beloved mother, my prayers are for  
her for the rest of my life:

*“O Allah, shower your kindness on my mother and father  
even more than they gave to me”.*

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## Preface

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**T**he Malaysian National Institute of Translation (ITNM) wishes to express its deep-felt satisfaction at the successful completion of the English translation of “*The Elevation of Higher Learning.*”

As an organisation responsible for the coordination of matters dealing with translation, ITNM is endeavouring to its utmost to publish academics books and references of high quality in the Malay language. One of the strategies utilised towards this aim by ITNM is the forming of cooperative ties with Institutes of Higher Learning in the publishing of academic books that serve as guides of reference for students. In this context, the Technology University of Malaysia (UTM) has not been left behind in that it has become ITNM’s primary partner in the publishing of translation works in the engineering field.

Currently, ITNM is continuing this cooperative effort through the publishing of the translation *The Elevation of Higher Learning* from its original title in Malay *Mengangkasa Pengajian Tinggi*. This book represents the work of an authority on Institutes of Higher Learning (IPT), which demonstrates the seriousness of the academic community in responding to the government’s call to produce more works and academic literature that are original and of high merit. This is in parallel with the advice of the Deputy Minister of Higher Education, Dato’ Saifuddin Abdullah, who has appealed to university authorities to produce books in the national language.

The task of ITNM in translating this book into English was with the aim of delivering it to the international stage in order to demonstrate the pattern and development of IPT in Malaysia. Through this book, the international community will see for itself the swift progress of the system of higher learning in Malaysia, which is capable of generating model human beings who are knowledgeable and possess leadership qualities and high calibre. Moreover, this book may indirectly attract the interest of foreign citizens in making Malaysia a hub of international higher learning.

It is hoped that this cooperative relationship between ITNM and UTM will continue to grow in the production of many more reference books of higher education, either in English or Malay, in line with the Ministry of Education's strategy in raising the status of the Malay language and strengthening the English language (MBMMBI).

**Dato' Dr Wan Hashim Wan Teh**  
Chairman  
The Malaysian National Translation Institute

## A Word from the Author

---

**T**his book is the author's personal points of view of higher learning. At times, the author will take an idealistic approach especially when the author has yet to be directly involved with university administration, but become more practical and realistic when discussing current issues such as ratings, internationalisation and performance indicators.

Initially, this book was merely the author's weekly notes in his computer after reading about or discussing higher learning. The written opinions were elaborated further and developed into separate chapters. Part of the writings was published in a few local newspapers and some other parts were included in seminar proceedings or simply personal notes.

---

The history of higher learning in Malaysia goes back to before the time of independence with the establishment of various learning institutions such as colleges, institutes, modern schools and hut schools. Some of the colleges were upgraded to become universities, such as Malaya University in 1949 (starting with *Straits and Federated Malay States Government Medical School* in 1905 and later changed to *King Edward VII College of Medicine* in Singapore in 1912) and Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (starting with *Maktab Perguruan Sultan Idris Tanjung Malim* in 1922). There were also

schools that were upgraded to become colleges and later universities, such as Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) (Technical School in 1904, Technical College in 1942, National Technology Institute in 1972 and finally UTM in 1975) and Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) (School of Agriculture in 1931, Malaya Agricultural College in 1947, and UPM in 1971).

This development shows that higher learning is a consolidation process of national education that is continuously experiencing improvement in terms of entity, role and focus. This is even more apparent with the existence of various needs and demands, such as Islamic teachings that stress the very importance of education from the “cradle to the grave” in the Malay context. These were among the main motivating factors that led students to further their studies as far as the Middle East, especially to the Sacred Land of Makkah and Madinah, or Al-Azhar University in Egypt.

In addition, quite a number of students also pursued their higher studies in England, Taiwan, India and Indonesia in various fields. Students who furthered their studies in England before or after independence were mainly taking up courses in Law, engineering, accounting and education. On the other hand, most of the students who studied in Taiwan or India were in the field of medicine, while those in Indonesia were in the fields of engineering, agriculture and medicine.

In terms of roles, higher learning institutions in the post-independence era can be divided into four stages, which are:

- (a) Preparing the institutions and facilities for the purpose of intellectual development and to support the needs of human capital in certain fields,
- (b) Fulfilling the National Development Policy objectives such as in terms of the participation of the Bumiputera in various sectors,
- (c) Preparing human capital at the graduate study level, and
- (d) Strengthening quality and image in terms of intellectual development.

All four stages were implemented in line with the National Development Policy specific to the development of the era. The most apparent was stage (b), which was the implementation of the New Economy Policy and supervised via the University and College University Act (AUKU) 1974. On the other hand, stage (d) was supported by the National Higher Learning Strategic Plan 2007 and AUKU Amendments 2008.

All of these developments, however, are not elaborately discussed in this book except for stages (c) and (d) alone.



The author has his own reasons for choosing the phrase “the elevation of” Higher Learning which became the title of this book. “Elevating” means placing something in a high position. The term also illustrates the need to place higher learning at the highest possible position, so that its roles and importance are appreciated and valued by all, not just by students and the academic community, but at all levels of society.

The term “elevating” was also used by YAB Dato’ Sri Mohd Najib Abdul Razak as the Deputy President of UMNO in his speech entitled “Elevating the Nation’s Civilisation” during the Pemuda, Wanita and Puteri UMNO assembly on 6 November 2007. The author does not intend to show any association to a particular notion or political thought but – according to the author – the term is unique and appropriate to be used at a time where we are hoping for an ideal that requires a massive transformation.

According to Najib, an “Elevated Nation” is a nation that always has the highest dreams and great civilisation. For that, we must conquer various disciplines of Science and Technology, possess knowledge and skills, be fluent in different languages, generate knowledge, strengthen religious beliefs, possess excellent culture and ambition that is high as the heavens. To Najib, “elevation” is one of the highest achievements that becomes a vision, dream and ambition, which also means bringing glory or upholding something that has existed at a higher level. In the author’s opinion, the Institutions of Higher Learning (IPT) in Malaysia has been growing rapidly since almost a decade, that is after the higher learning reformation when Dato’ Sri Mohd Najib Abdul Razak was the Minister of Education responsible for various changes in terms of policy and initiative. These changes were drafted in line with the need of development of intellect, humanity and human resource, not only for local needs but also encouraged by the policy of providing quality higher learning to fulfill the demands of the region.

It is reasonable to say that relatively, when compared to the previous decades, the rapid growth that has taken place in the last ten years has surpassed the whole forty years of growth that had occurred before, especially in terms of the increase in the number of IPT, the increase in the number of students and new courses, as well as the establishment of Private Institutions of Higher Learning (IPTS). This trend started during the financial crisis of 1997 when thousands of Malaysian students abroad had to be placed at local IPT. The government increased the number of students in IPTA and gave more room for IPTS to provide courses at degree level.

From one angle, the rapid growth of the higher learning sector brought many challenges and new opportunities, such as the increase in quality and new financial models that were not merely bounded by funds provided by the government. These challenges made the higher learning sector more competitive and dynamic, relevant and progressive.

In the era of the internet and globalisation, higher learning has become the centre of the public's attention in terms of quality, especially amongst parents, students and graduates. This is highly relevant due to the fact that the university has become synonymous with the development of knowledge, civilisation and knowledge tradition. The question now is: has the existence of numerous new IPTA and hundreds of IPTS increased the appreciation of the knowledge culture among Malaysians? Has the importance of knowledge and the role of scholars become more apparent in the national development schema? Have the values of knowledge that have been digested in the form of virtuous practices become more inherent in the life of society with the increase in the influence of learned groups?

These are the important questions the author has posed in this book. In the author's opinion, knowledge advancement and the quality of higher learning are cultural in nature and should not be measured by solely comparing figures.

Through this book, the author has put forth the point of view that real knowledge advancement does not only depend on aspects of achievement that revolve around certificates, quantitative and physical aspects only. More importantly is knowledge advancement that is written through the qualitative aspect in the personality of scholars that manifests in the form of quality of soul, strength of mind, fresh aspiration, smoothness of discourse either verbally or written, effectiveness of intellectual activities, everyday way of life and skills that are continuously strengthened in the being of each member of the knowledge community, including academics and students, as well as graduates.<sup>1</sup> The aspects of behaviour and value of knowledge, source of knowledge, knowledge materials, intellectual activism, status of scholars and the process of knowledge growth are also important

<sup>1</sup> The writer would like to express his gratitude to Prof. Dr. Wan Mohd. Nor Wan Daud for his tireless effort in terms of time and friendship in helping the author to understand concepts, idealism, commitment, tradition and knowledge culture, especially from the Islamic perspective. His works became the reference and reading materials everytime he needed motivation and to increase his 'passion' in surfing the course of knowledge, especially his two earlier titles, *Penjelasan Budaya Ilmu*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (1991) and *The Growth of Knowledge in Islam*. London: Mansel (1989).

and must be considered as root issues, which must be continuously and widely discussed.

In other words, important questions are not only limited to the showcase of PhD-holders statistics, the number of students pursuing extended degrees and the list of achievements, as well as Research and Development (R&D) activities only. More importantly is the question of how far is the level of appreciation towards knowledge culture, the capability to create a knowledge-friendly environment and the readiness of organisations to become intellectual-friendly? Have intellectual activities such as reading and writing become the practice of all members of the academic community – the university campus for example – either specific to a particular knowledge discipline or across the general knowledge disciplines such as human civilisation, as well as the history of knowledge tradition of a particular nation? Moreover, does the mentality and pure idealism based on *tauhid* continue to be nurtured, so as to become life's foundation that upholds truth, peace and sincerity?

In this regard, many questions on the philosophy of knowledge and policy must be tackled. The dimension of higher learning quality must be looked at in a comprehensive, holistic and structured manner. Moreover, the value of knowledge must be placed at a far higher position compared to social status, hedonism, position and ideology that lean upon materialism. This means that appreciation of knowledge in the real sense must be free and not shadowed or confined solely to utilitarianism ideology. The demands of the job market are indeed important, but should not be made the main agenda until it 'blinds' us to the main objective of education as written in the National Education Philosophy, which is:

*“Education in Malaysia is a continuous effort towards the growth of individual potential in a comprehensive and integrated way so as to create a balanced and harmonious person in terms of intellectual, spiritual, emotional and physical aspects, based on trust and obedience to God. This effort is for the purpose of creating Malaysians who are knowledgeable, responsible and capable of attaining well-being, as well as contributing to the harmony and peace of society and nation.”<sup>2</sup>*

An ideal graduate, in the author's opinion, is someone who possesses thinking skills, capability to argue, ease of communication according to

<sup>2</sup> See [http://www.moe.gov.my/tayang.php?laman=falsafah\\_pendidikan&unit=kementerian&bhs=my](http://www.moe.gov.my/tayang.php?laman=falsafah_pendidikan&unit=kementerian&bhs=my)

different dimensions and perspectives, has a passion for knowledge and is a seeker of truth, righteous and an expert in seeking knowledge. With these skills, a graduate is capable of facing any situation and ready to enter the job market with more ease as compared to a 'ready-made' graduate who focuses more on technical skills and certain professional practices, but is sometimes lacking in terms of thinking skills, communication skills and being knowledge-friendly.

Through this book, the author suggests that all concerned parties, especially the government, should give more focus on knowledge culture including among the academic community. The author is also very critical towards the definition of an intellectual. Are all academics intellectual or merely intelligent and holders of higher learning degrees? This knowledge culture is essential as a university is not only respected for the academic programmes it offers or academic and professional qualifications that the lecturers possess, but more importantly the academic culture and environment that stimulate the mind, test the intelligence and test the creativity and knowledge-friendly attitude.

---

In this context, the author would like to express his gratitude to Dato' Sri Mohd Najib Abdul Razak, who had appointed him as his Special Official (1997–1998) at the Ministry of Education to help him in matters and issues pertaining to higher learning.

Although the experience was only for two years, it gave the author the opportunity to more or less gain an understanding of higher learning from the perspective of national policy, political demands, administrative custom and job market. It was a 'long' two-year term (with various tasks and a hectic work schedule), which was full of experience that succeeded in strengthening the idealism, enriching the thoughts and fulfilling the author's ideas towards higher learning.

Thanks is also due to Dato' Mustapa Mohamed, former Minister of Higher Learning (2006–2008), and Dato' Seri Mohamed Khaled Nordin, Minister of Higher Learning, who had given the author the opportunity to be part of the effort in colouring the national academic climate, at least at UTM level.

To friends and acquaintances in academia, non-governmental organisations and the media, the author would like to thank everyone, especially Mustapha Omar, Zainudin Ayip and Kadir Dikoh (*Berita Harian*). Melati Arif (*Bernama*), Elizabeth John (NST) and to the whole of

UTM community, who although did not directly extend their assistance, had prayed for the author in his journey of knowledge in finding the real meaning of life and in his effort to contribute to the religion, community and nation. The author would also like to thank Tan Sri Abdul Halim Ali, Tan Sri Dr. Johari Mat, Tan Sri Datuk Prof. Dr. Anwar Ali, Tan Sri Ainuddin Wahid, Tan Sri Dr. Ahmad Zaharudin Idrus, Tan Sri Datuk Prof. Ir. Dr. Mohd. Zulkifli Tan Sri Mohd. Ghazali, Tan Sri Dato' Ir. Zaini Omar, Tan Sri Abu Zahar Ujang, Tan Sri Omar Ibrahim, Profesor Dato' Wira Ir. Dr. Mohammad Noor Hj. Salleh, Dato' Syed Muhamad Shahabudin, Prof. Dato' Dr. Hasan Said, Prof. Ir. Dr. Zainai Mohamed, Dr. Azman Awang, Prof. Dr. Sidek Baba, Prof. Mark van Loosdrecht, Prof. Mogens Henze, Prof. Gustaf Ollson, Prof. Dr. Zulkipli Yusop, Prof. Dr. Mohd. Azraai Kassim, Prof. Madya Dr. Maketab Mohamed, Dr. Uthman el-Muhammady, Cikgu Rosiapah Dollah, Cikgu Baharudin Borhan, Ustaz Abd. Razak Saad, and Ustaz Ahmad Sidin for their encouragement, support, advice, teaching and guidance throughout the author's career.

To my family especially my beloved wife, Zainah Moktar and my dearest children: Siti Fatimah, Aishah, Muhammad Arif and Maryam, the author would like to express his deep gratitude for their undivided consent in allowing the author to give his utmost attention to the task of understanding, appreciating and elevating knowledge, even if not to the highest level, at least for his family. The date the author completed the review of this book was on 15th November, which was the sixth birthday of Maryam, the author's youngest daughter who can already read, although probably not yet able to understand the title, let alone the material in this book.

In addition, the author would also like to extend his gratitude to Tuan Haji Kassim Thukiman, Khalid Mazlan and Mohd Zubil Bahak, who also contributed their energy and expertise in helping to arrange, edit and proofread from the early stage of writing up until the book was published. Thanks is also due to all individuals who had given their criticisms, comments and opinions so as to enhance the quality of publication of this book. Without the support and trust of all parties, it would have been impossible for this book to be successfully published.

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Although very simple and not too excessive in knowledge value, the author hopes that this book may become the material for discourse so that the least it will do is to invigorate the academic atmosphere amongst scholars

and students, especially at local universities. The background issues and current environment included in each of the chapters in this book were written to answer current questions in a topical manner from the point of view of the author, who has tried his best to place the notion of knowledge, academic tradition and thinking culture as the main issue. At times, there will be repetition of facts and arguments. This is also apparent in terms of similarity in ideas and emphasis, especially when discussing the National Higher Learning Strategic Plan and the notion of university.

Nevertheless, the author hopes and prays that this simple book will serve as one of the contributions and commitment of the author's efforts to enliven the intellectual climate amongst the academic community. And more importantly, as deeds which are a part of the author's effort to contribute good deeds as provision for the Hereafter.

If there are any weaknesses and errors in this book, the author hopes for nothing more than constructive criticism from all readers. From Allah, Most High, the author seeks repentance and mercy:

*“... Our Lord! Condemn us not if we forget or fall into error; Our Lord! Lay not on us a burden like that which Thou didst lay on those before us; Our Lord! Lay not on us a burden greater than we have strength to bear. Blot out our sins, and grant us forgiveness. Have mercy on us. Thou art our Protector; Help us against those who stand against faith.”*

(Surah *al-Baqarah*, 2:286)

ZAINI UJANG

Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

## Foreword by the Minister of Higher Learning

---

**P**rofessor Dato' Ir. Dr. Zaini Ujang is an academic figure who believes and is absolutely confident that the concept of the Institution of Higher Learning can shine and be on a par with any renowned universities in the world, if the government's commitment in terms of funding and proactive policy are able to drive and shape the element of academic freedom, the strengthening of human capital, research and development, the academia-industry relationship and internationalisation properly and effectively. These possibilities are based on his observation of the serious effort by the Ministry of Higher Learning in implementing the National Higher Educational Strategic Plan (PSPTN), which is strengthened by the Higher Learning Transformation Plan, branding of the Research University, and the establishment of the Malaysian Qualification Agency (MQA). The PSPTN is a huge aspiration that requires cooperation and support by the implementation body at the university level in order for it to be realised. This process requires those who are really capable, such as Zaini Ujang, in driving the agenda of elevation, so that the effects are really felt and will bring improvement to the national higher learning sector itself.

A brief look at Zaini's background in his writings, which have served as the basis for his thoughts on "higher learning" since the early 1990s, included in this book show that this young academic has a deep interest, plus wide reading combined with priceless experience that he has gained

# THE ELEVATION OF HIGHER LEARNING

“This book comprehensively tackles questions on perspectives concerning higher education in a critical, synthesised and rational manner.”

- **Dato' Seri Mohamed Khaled Nordin** -  
*Minister of Higher Education, Malaysia*

“This book offers a comprehensive picture of the successes and challenges in national higher education. It should be read by all Malaysian scholars and citizens who wish to see our country's higher education elevated to world status.”

- **Dato' Mustapa Mohamed** -  
*Minister of International Trade and Industry/  
Former Minister of Higher Education in Malaysia (2006–2008)*

“This critical escamination is the sole national treasure which mirrors the far-sighted and in-depth perspective of an academic scholar regarding the development and future direction of higher education in Malaysia towards success.”

- **Dato' Ir. Dr. A. Bakar Jaafar** -  
*Member, Board of Directors  
University of Malaysia, Terengganu*

“A work which presents questions and an outpouring of views, ideas and comments critically, expertly and holistically towards elevating the higher education sector in the country. As explained in the book, higher education should not just provide the means of obtaining a degree; it should also prepare model human beings with a holistic perspective or humane skills, intellectual and spiritual development and also the groundwork to face the reality at the working environment. Thus, this work should be read by every academic group in national higher learning institutes, and even researchers at research institutes and in the private sector.”

- **Prof. Dato' Ir. Dr. Zainai Mohamed** -  
*Vice-Chancellor  
University of Malaysia, Kelantan*

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