

PERDANA DISCOURSE SERIES 12



**“ HIGHER EDUCATION IN MALAYSIA
Increasing Access and Quality ”**

Keynote Address by
DATO' SERI MOHAMED KHALED NORDIN
Minister of Higher Education



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“ HIGHER EDUCATION IN MALAYSIA Increasing Access and Quality ”

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PREFACE

The Perdana Discourse Series 12 was held on December 14, 2010 with the theme "Higher Education in Malaysia: Increasing Access and Quality". The keynote address was delivered by the Secretary-General of the Ministry of Higher Education, YBhg Dato' Rohani Abdullah, on behalf of the Minister. The topic of the day was deliberated in relation to the National Higher Education Strategic Plan. The plan was promulgated with the main objective of creating a large pool of quality human capital needed to propel the nation into becoming a fully industrialised one by 2020 as well as a regional and international hub for higher education par excellence. Under the National Higher Education Strategic Plan, education is identified as an engine of the nation's economic growth, hence an important commodity.

The keynote address stressed the importance of the country having sufficient human capital in order to provide quality higher education, which in turn is needed to achieve the targeted goal of Vision 2020. Apart from human capital, another success factor for higher education is the pursuit of knowledge and discoveries. The setting up of public and private universities and polytechnics is vital to the creation of quality human capital in the country. Universities, both public and private, provide students with theoretical and academically-oriented knowledge, while polytechnics equip students with technical and vocational skills. A number of technical universities were set up under the Ninth Malaysia Plan to serve as the proper conduits for graduates of polytechnics pursuing degree qualification. In this connection, these technical universities help premier polytechnics to expand their students' technical expertise and skills so that they would be ready for the next level of education, the degree programme. The

Ministry of Higher Education is providing access to higher education in a big way by setting up more universities and premier polytechnics. This has enabled more Malaysians to pursue higher qualification in the fields of their choice, enjoy quality learning experience and later enhance their livelihood.



PROLOGUE

HIGHER EDUCATION IN MALAYSIA: INCREASING ACCESS AND QUALITY

The main aims of the Education Development Plan for Malaysia (2001-2010) are “to increase access to education, increase equity in education, increase quality of education, and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of education management”. The plan focuses on the development of the education system at all levels, from preschool to tertiary through support programmes, funding, management, and integration of information and communication technology (ICT) in teaching and learning.

Tertiary education providers include community colleges, polytechnics, university colleges and universities, both public and private. At present, only 11 percent of the population aged 18-21 years have the opportunity to enrol in non-degree programmes and only 5 percent of the age cohorts are enrolled in degree programmes. These figures are low compared with other countries in the region. The Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) has been entrusted with the task to increase accessibility to tertiary education in order to meet the growing demand for higher education, and fulfil the increasing need for knowledgeable and skilled manpower, which is a necessity towards meeting the needs of the nation and the K-economy. With 27 public universities and university colleges, the number of places available is not able to meet the demand of school leavers as well as adult learners who are pursuing higher education to acquire new skills and knowledge as part of life-long learning.



Private institutions of higher learning (IHLs) provide more opportunities for tertiary education for those who are not able to get places at public IHLs. Among the more than 500 private IHLs, many also collaborate with well-established foreign universities for highly demanded programmes that attract local as well as foreign students to enrol. This in turn helps to reduce the number of students studying abroad, hence reducing government funding, as well as help promote Malaysia as a centre of academic excellence. However, for many Malaysians, especially those from the low-income group, private IHLs are beyond their means.

Other emphases of the education plan are on meeting the target of 60 per cent of graduates in science and technology and the mastery of communication skills. The plan also aims to improve post-graduate programmes that promote research and development (R&D) of international standards, hence, ones that inculcate a culture of quality in higher education. Accessibility to education should also be enhanced for the disadvantaged groups such as those in rural areas and the urban poor.

As far as quality in education is concerned, the most pressing issues are getting qualified teaching staff, the shortage of experienced teaching staff in various fields of industry and reduce the ratio of student to teaching staff. In addition, the MOE has to ensure higher education institutions have the capability to produce more R&D activities which are of quality and have the potential to be commercialised. In other words, IHLs should play a major role in transforming Malaysia into a centre of academic excellence by providing courses that are relevant to the needs of the local workforce, innovative, and internationally recognised. Other issues and problems that need to be addressed are the high fees charged by private higher institutions and the escalating development and management costs at public higher education institutions.

In summary, to ensure better accessibility and quality of high education, the following questions need to be addressed

- Is there a need to restructure the primary and secondary education system to better prepare students for tertiary education?

- What are the roles of public and private IHLs to increase access and participation in higher education?
- Who are responsible for ensuring quality in higher education in Malaysia?
- What are the characteristics of a world class university/IHL?
- What are the factors that attract foreign students to study in Malaysia?
- How do we inculcate the R&D culture among lecturers and students in order to produce research of international standards?
- How do we establish smart partnerships between IHLs and local and foreign industries?
- Where does vocational training fit in the higher education sector?



KEYNOTE SPEECH

YB. Dato' Seri Mohd Khaled bin Nordin
Minister of Higher Education

Delivered by: YBhg. Dato' Rohani Binti Abdullah
Deputy Secretary General (Development)

Yang Berbahagia Dato' Krishnan Tan, CEO and Managing Director of IJM Corporation Berhad. Yang Berusaha Associate Professor Dr. Zaini Abdullah, Deputy Vice Chancellor Research and Innovation UiTM. Yang Berbahagia Professor-professor, Datuk-datuk, Vice Chancellors of the Public Higher Education Institutions, distinguished speakers and moderator. Yang Berbahagia Datuk-datuk, Datin-datin. I hope I have not left out anyone in any way.

Ladies and gentlemen, Assalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh and good morning.

First, allow me to present my apologies on behalf of Yang Berhormat Dato' Seri Mohd Khaled bin Nordin, Minister of Higher Education, who has to be in a meeting with the Prime Minister on matter of some urgencies. However he does express his sincere hope that at some point in the future he can join you here, if not as a speaker, perhaps as a participant in this very distinguished Discourse Series. I have been tasked to present the keynote address on his behalf and I shall do so as best as I can.

It gives me great pleasure to be here this morning and I would like to thank the organisers of the 12th Perdana Discourse Series, the Perdana Leadership Foundation and Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) for giving me the opportunity to speak in this prominent Perdana Discourse Series. It is indeed an honour for me to be here representing the Ministry of Higher Education. We are now at the period when the role of higher education is more important

than ever. In light of the country's vision, we wish to place our higher education and its contribution to the country's economy in its proper context.

However, we are also aware that the higher education scenario is also developing rapidly worldwide, and it is imperative that we in Malaysia strive to stay abreast if not ahead of these developments for both social and economic reasons. Thus, education and in particular, higher education has been earmarked as one of the twelve engines of growth for the nation's new economic transformation programme. Now, education as an exportable commodity is increasingly gaining value and we want to be the best provider of higher education, both regionally and globally. This intention was explicitly stated way back in 2007, three years after the Ministry of Higher Education was created. The then Prime Minister launched a New National Higher Education Strategic Plan, the central objective of which was to create a critical mass of quality human capital for the nation's growth towards achieving Vision 2020 and to make Malaysia a regional and an international hub of high quality higher education.

That was the primary goal. It has not changed, and this is what we will be venturing in the next decade. The challenge is in its implementation. Coming up with a very lofty plan is one thing, attaining it is quite another thing, getting a buy-in from the various stakeholders and the clients are yet another thing.

In the borderless world that we find ourselves today, having sufficient human capital is paramount. Even more critical is the possession and utilisation of human capital. Sufficient human capital refers to accessibility to human capital and the right human capital depends on how best we provide quality higher education. Not only are our industries demanding very different types of human capital on an ever changing basis compared with decades ago, but the industries themselves are changing, while the industry players themselves are grappling to determine their human capital needs. So, our institutions of higher learning need to keep up with these developments.

We concur that adapting to change is very important for the success of the higher education sector, which traditionally has always been purely focused on the pursuit of knowledge and discovery. Within these changing circumstances, the attainment of knowledge per se would be very much like the proverbial “ostrich burying its head in the sand”. The world will pass us by. We have to work with what we have and with what we expect the world to demand of us.

Also, while we concur that there are disciplines that need to be continuously developed and enriched for the sake of humanity and civilisation, we are also sensitive to the fact that these alone would no longer be sufficient. The role of higher education therefore, is becoming more important than ever, especially when Malaysia is seeking to become an important global player.

With this in mind, the Ministry of Higher Education is taking several measures and coming up with strategic plans to improve the efficiency and accessibility of higher education in meeting the demand for the right human capital. I would like to just touch on our National Higher Education Strategic Plan - to recap what have and have not been done. For the information of especially our foreign guests, the Higher Education Strategic Plan or PSPTN, as it is commonly referred to, is a four-phase strategic plan. It commenced towards the end of 2007, with the first part of the foundation phase about to be completed this month. During this phase, two provisions of higher education were given special attention.

In light of the nation’s focus on its human capital development, PSPTN has been made explicit in the Ninth Malaysia Plan, Vision 2020 and in the projection of High Income Nation for the year 2020. The two aspects that emerge very prominently in the strategic plan are related to the input and process levels. The impact of these on the outcome of higher education, and specifically, on the products of higher education are not limited to the graduates, but also to all those who pass through other educational institutions, such as polytechnics and community colleges.

As the government revamps and transforms the nation's higher education scenario, one recurring issue is that of accessibility. This is probably one of the most popular topics every year, particularly after the results of applications into universities or other academic institutions are known. Access and equity are the thrusts of PSPTN, the strategic plan, and the transformation plan. Ensuring opportunities for higher education with regard to space and financing mechanisms is vital in this case. The issue of access is very much different today compared to ten or twenty years ago, not only in terms of demography, but also in terms of spread.

Present complexities are triggered by changing global higher education and economic patterns. We find that with time, demands for access to higher education surge and the pressure to increase intake mounts. We would be hard-pressed to find even a single family in Malaysia whose aspiration is not to have at least one child graduate from university or any post secondary higher education institution. Such is the huge demand for higher education.

What steps are taken to ensure that everyone eligible for higher education is accorded the opportunity to do so? The pressure in fulfilling the above always stems from financial considerations. This is not an issue peculiar to Malaysia alone, as it is also faced by almost every developing country. Numerous means and ways have been found to address these issues, but the demand always surpasses the available places.

In terms of quality, however, the execution of the various Critical Agenda Programmes (CAPS) is a bane to the academicians. The pressure on the academicians and the institutions to perform and face up to the reality under the strategic plan is tremendous. The task of maintaining and ensuring quality at the tertiary institutions involves many levels of execution and numerous aspects of teaching and learning, which are the core business of the institutions. Research and continuous innovations are the reality with which academic institutions have to live, and this has been felt even by polytechnics.



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