

Is the Higher Education Sector Contributing Towards The Sustainable Competitive Advantage of Malaysia? If Not, Why Not?

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There is now mainstream acceptance that the core catalyst for the development of a nation is its 'intellectual capital'. It is a key driver of a country's transformation towards a 'knowledge economy'. How effectively a nation harnesses this vital intangible asset will often determine the difference between success and failure. Singapore is the best success story in Southeast Asia. Dr Suresh Marcandan's presentation emphasises that education in general, and tertiary education in particular, are great equalisers in societies, and are the most potent weapons for the alleviation of poverty, and the reduction of crime and other social ills. It follows therefore that higher education plays a crucial role in sustaining the competitive advantage of a nation.

The vision of MOHE is "To make Malaysia a centre for higher education excellence by 2020". However, a comparative analysis conducted by USM (2016) found that when the three top public universities (UM, UTM & UUM) were compared with the private and foreign branch universities in Malaysia, they were "inefficient in income generation and in managing inputs, which included the government operating grants". They have become complacent. It is paradoxical that Malaysia spends almost 5% of GDP on education but has been ranked the 5th most expensive place to get a university education, relative to its household income.

These statistics are worrying, and begs the question whether or not the Malaysian higher education sector is well positioned to contribute towards the lofty vision of the MOHE, *by identifying, nurturing, developing and retaining talent*, in order to meet the demands of a changing workplace landscape created by the 'digital age' driven by disruptive innovations. The main challenges faced are discussed, and some innovative transformational strategies for survival beyond 2020 are suggested.

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Lecture Theatre 5

Level 1

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