

## Introduction

Many countries have witnessed the rapid expansion and diversification of higher education in the last two decades. This rapid expansion has brought about not only increased student enrollments but the social class from which the students are drawn from has also expanded, and hence, the consensus concerning the nature and purpose of higher education as defined by a small elite group has also disappeared. Today higher education is a contested concept. The traditional view that the role of higher education is to conserve and transmit the high culture to an elite group no longer holds. There are different views on the roles of higher education that have emerged from different theoretical perspectives.

According to the human capital theory, there is a close relationship between economic growth and human capital; and higher education is defined in terms of the "needs" of the economy. Higher education institutions have the main responsibility for training a country's higher level professional, technical and managerial personnel. Every nation@state is geared towards economic growth, therefore, it is not surprising that each government would expand higher education. However, higher education can also be defined in terms of its cultural role.

According to the functionalist perspective, higher education plays an important role in forging the national identity of the country and providing an avenue for upward mobility. But the conflict theorists would disagree and argue that dominant groups in modern societies attempt to monopolize control of access to higher education so as to maintain their elite positions.

On the other hand, the institutional perspective maintains that there is a worldwide cultural system which includes beliefs in the economic and political efficacy of higher education. As part of the world culture, tertiary education becomes institutionalized in nearly every country throughout the world. Both the elites and the masses see higher education as legitimating their claims for privileged positions within the modern sector of the nation. Furthermore,

higher education can be defined in terms of its research function. Higher education produces and disseminates knowledge through research and teaching. Higher education is seen as being oriented towards the individual as well as towards society. It is seen as a form of consumption as well as investment. Whatever its role may be, higher education continues to be an interesting area of research, especially with respect to its reforms and the debates surrounding these reforms. The rapid expansion of higher education has brought about many

unfavourable consequences especially in the developing countries. In many of these countries, the enrollment have grown at a faster pace than resources resulting in the decline in teaching and learning quality; low internal and external efficiency (Salmi 1991). Over the years, the cost of higher education continues to increase, and there have been scarce public funds for higher education due to keen intersectoral competition. The decrease in resource availability as well as inefficiency in resource utilization have led to deteriorating infrastructure like inadequate staffing, overcrowded classrooms, poor maintenance, and scarcity of recurrent material inputs (World Bank 1993). Consequently, there is a decline in the quality of teaching and research, and rising problem of mismatch and graduate unemployment. In view of the emerging crisis in higher education, many countries have sought ways and means to improve the performance of higher education. Most of the reforms in higher education are aimed at improving the quality of teaching and research, increase external efficiency and towards achieving greater equality. Some of these reforms, among others, are directed to the university structures, innovations in the curriculum, and alternative modes of financing. The purpose of this article is to examine the higher education reforms in Malaysia as a case study which aims at highlighting the issues that have brought about these reforms and the emergent issues that may have resulted from these reforms. In general, these issues are related to questions like how many students should have access to higher education? what and

how should they learn? and how to improve effectiveness and efficiency of the higher education system? More specifically, this study focuses on the governance, access, relevance and efficiency of the higher education system in Malaysia. Issues relating to autonomy and accountability; equity and quality; general education and specialized education; and the balance between teaching and research are analysed in terms of the debates that surround these issues.

#### Higher Education in Malaysia

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The higher education system in Malaysia which started with a few elitist public institutions has expanded tremendously over the last twenty-five years through the establishment of first and second tier institutions in both the public and private sectors. Today there are nine universities and five second-tier tertiary institutions in the public sector and about 140 post-secondary private institutions in the country. The enrollment rate at the

tertiary level is about 20 percent of the age cohort in 1989 (Malaysia 1991). The rapid expansion has been fuelled by strong social demand for higher education, seen as the main avenue for social mobility and social justice, and facilitated by the universalization of secondary education. As the system expanded, new kinds of institutions were added into it resulting in a stratification within the system. At the apex are the public universities whose functions are to promote national integration and unity; to provide trained and skilled human resources; and to rectify existing imbalances in educational opportunities among racial groups (Sharom 1985). Next come the colleges, polytechnics and other technical institutions designed to meet specialized needs and the ever increasing demand for post-secondary education.

In the past, the Malaysian government had very strict control over the establishment of new institutions of higher learning, but in recent years, it has been

more liberal in encouraging the "privatization" of the education sector. In the 1980s, there has been a phenomenal growth in private education especially at the post-secondary level. In 1990, there were 35 600 students enrolled in private institutions of higher learning, out of which 14 percent are studying for degree, 46 percent for diploma, and 40 percent for certificate (Malaysia 1991). The growth of private education has come about for various reasons which include the growing demand for higher education, the limited number of places in public institutions, and the greatly increased cost of overseas education. The development of higher education in Malaysia has been shaped by internal social demands as well as external forces of the international arena (Lee 1994). As discussed above, the expansion of higher education is partly a response to internal demands like income redistribution, rising social demand, and the need for skilled human resources. Like many universities in the Third world, Malaysian universities have looked to the major metropolitan institutions for leadership and often follow curricular and other practices from these institutions (Altbach 1982). In the past, the British model had permeated and dominated the higher education system in Malaysia in terms of its university structure, academic programmes, and assessment of standards; but in recent years, the trend is towards adopting many aspects of the American higher education system like the "unit/credit system", continual assessment, and multidisciplinary programmes. Despite the dominant influence of Western models in the system, efforts have also been made to link the development of higher education to the local social, political and economic context. One such efforts is to change the medium of instruction from English

to the Malay language throughout the whole education system. Today, all public institutions of higher learning use the Malay language as the medium of instruction. Efforts have also been made to offer indigenous curricular like Malay literature and Islamic studies. The International Islamic University was established to strengthen cooperation and

friendship among Islamic countries by providing facilities for Islamic studies, and training skilled human resources on the basis of Islamic principles. The stress is on the philosophical assumptions and beliefs of Islam concerning knowledge which is a radical attempt to breakaway from the dominance of Western knowledge (Selvaratnam 1989). Besides, there are also some innovative programmes found in the Malaysian higher education system. One is the Off@Campus programme in Universiti Sains Malaysia which was first established in 1971 with the aim of providing an opportunity for working adults to have a university education through distance teaching (Wong and Lee 1992). Another is the twinning programmes that are found in many of the private colleges. In Malaysia, the 1969 Higher Education Act does not allow any private institutions to confer degrees, but only restricts them to diploma and certificate courses and degrees conferred by foreign universities through the twinning programmes (Kamal 1992). As such, there is no choice but for many private colleges to twin with overseas institutions in the U.S., U.K., Australia, Canada, and other countries to offer various types of degree courses and professional qualifications. The above is a brief description of the profile of the higher education system in Malaysia. In the following sections, reforms pertaining to university governance, access to higher education, undergraduate education, and the balance between teaching and research are examined in greater details.

#### *f* Governance: Autonomy vs. Accountability

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The governance of all Malaysian universities and colleges comes under a common legislative framework known as the Universities and University Colleges Act of 1971. This Act stipulates that no university shall be established except in accordance with the provision of this Act. Under this Act, the government has full authority over student enrollments, staff appointments, curricula and financing (Malaysia 1971). For example, no faculty can be

appointed or course may be introduced without prior consultation with the Ministry of Education. This Act also forbids student or faculty to be involved in any political activities

or in affiliation to any political party or trade union. In short, the Malaysian government exercised tight control over the provision of higher education and has resorted to legislation to gag both the dons and students from being key participants in shaping public discourses and national debates.

The relationship between academic institutions and the state is largely dependent on the issue of autonomy and accountability. In many countries, the state has played the increasing role as the provider of funding for higher education; and at the same time, higher education has become the apparatus of the modern state in supplying qualified human resources and sustaining the cultural self-understanding of society (Barnett 1985). The state and academic institutions, especially the universities, are constantly engaged in the redefinition of their mutual relationship, with the former insisting for more autonomy and the latter demanding for more accountability (Albornoz 1991). Autonomy means the "power to government without outside control"; and accountability means the "requirement to demonstrate responsible actions to some external constituencies" (Berdahl 1990, p.171). The key issue here is what is the proper balance between the competing interest of state accountability and university autonomy?

The traditional idea of academic governance stresses the importance of autonomy and academic institutions have tried to insulate themselves from direct control by external agencies. However, with the increase in size, scope, importance and cost of higher education, there have been immense pressure by those funding higher education, mostly the state, to expect accountability from institutions of higher learning (Altbach 1991). On the one hand, too much autonomy might lead to higher education unresponsive to society; and on the other hand, too much accountability might destroy the necessary academic ethos. Academic

freedom and university autonomy, though related, are not synonymous. According to Berdahl (1990),

"Academic freedom is that freedom of the individual scholar in his/her teaching and research to pursue truth wherever it seems to lead without fear of punishment or termination of employment for having offended some political, religious or social orthodoxy" (p. 171 ).

Academic freedom is directed more at the individual level whereas campus autonomy operates at the institutional level. Institutional autonomy can be further differentiated into substantive autonomy and procedural autonomy (Berdahl 1990). Substantive autonomy is

the power of the academic institution in its corporate form to determine its own goals and programmes, whereas procedural autonomy is the power to determine the means by which these goals and programmes will be pursued. In exploring autonomy issues, Berdahl (1990) argues that it is helpful to know whether the state is intervening in procedural or substantive matters. He maintains that the state ought to stay out of any issues which threaten to lessen the academic freedom of persons undertaking teaching and research at institutions of higher learning. The crucial domain is substantive autonomy and government should not interfere with the "heart of academe". However, neither academic freedom nor institutional autonomy can ever be absolute. What is needed is a constructive partnership between the state and academic institutions with sensitive mechanisms for bringing together the state's concern with accountability and academic concern with autonomy. In the context of Malaysia, all public institutions of higher learning are totally funded by the government. The universities have emerged as major national institutions and, therefore, the government exerts its authority not only over broad policies but also presides over the detailed operations of the universities. Furthermore, the government demands accountability not only for how public funds are spent but also seeks

to ensure that public institutions of higher learning provide the kinds of training and research programmes which contribute to human resource development in line with national priorities. As discussed above, the political and administrative control of the universities by the state was legally enshrined in the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 (and its amendments in 1975). This act was conceived within a broader national framework of constitutional and policy reforms which was considered to be more appropriate for a "fragile" multiracial society in which disparate aspirations of the population, particularly of the majority Malay community had to be met (Selvaratnam 1989). Academic freedom in terms of freedom to teach, research, and publish are subjected to governmental approval, and this is deemed necessary because Malaysia has not yet developed sufficient sophistication to permit total freedom in this respect. In the interest of the public as a whole it is necessary that the academics should conform to the Universities and University Colleges Act that has been laid down by parliament to play down racial and religious animosities (Amir 1981). The higher education system in Malaysia is very much a state controlled system. All the public institutions of higher learning are funded and regulated by the state and, similarly, all private institutions are required to be registered with the

Ministry of Education. The Minister of Education holds both administrative and political authority over all institutions. Vice-chancellors of universities are appointed by the King and all academic appointments must be sanctioned by the government. All public institutions do not choose their students, instead all admissions to universities come under the responsibility of the Central University Admission Unit. The 1975 Amendments of the Universities and University Colleges Act further restricts campus autonomy by curbing faculty members' and students' involvement in political activities. In sum, higher education institutions are required to be accountable for their academic and

management performances.

The issue here is how close does the state intervene into the core elements of the academic institutions such as the authority to appoint and promote academic staff, the content and modes of instruction and research, and the setting of academic standards and assessment of performance. Based on the above analysis, the Malaysian government, for political expediency, intervenes directly into these core areas, imposing considerable containment on the autonomy of the public institutions. This has led to a call for a more independent form of university governance and more campus autonomy. Interested parties, like the academicians, have been calling for the setting up of a higher education council that is directly answerable to Parliament, instead of the Ministry of Education. The government can grant charters to universities, specifying their freedoms and autonomies; and set up buffer agencies or mechanisms to distribute public funds to public institutions. It is hope that the state would change its dominant role in the provision and the financing of institutions to a less interventionist role whereby it supervises and monitors the development of higher education. Its main responsibilities would be to provide a conducive environment establishing broad policies to guide public and private higher education and to offer incentives to meet national training and research needs. For example, there has been pressure to modify the 1971 Act so as to allow foreign universities to set up branch campuses in the country and to make Malaysia the higher education centre in the ASEAN region. If the government needs the active participation of the private sector to provide higher education then it has to formulate clear cut policies concerning private education like the establishment of a national accreditation board and provide financial incentives to private institutions for offering technical programmes (Lee 1994).

There should be more institutional autonomy whereby universities can determine both the

content of instruction and research and the selection of academic personnels should be left to the

academics, especially at the department or faculty level. Undergraduate studies and courses should be designed and approved solely by academics and departments or faculties rather than as directed by the senate of the university or ministry of education. There should be a shift from a "state control" model to a "state supervisory model" of higher education system which involves decentralizing for increased autonomy and accountability (World Bank 1993).

√Access: Equity vs. Quality

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This section examines the issues relating to the distribution of higher education among competing social groups. The key question is who determine who gets access to higher education? According to Reid (1991), there is a distinction between "increased access" and "wider access". Increased access refers to the quantitative expansion of higher education in the sense of making more higher education available to a greater number of students; whereas wider access refers to the creation of a less homogenous student population drawn from all social groups. So the issue here is wider access for whom in terms of gender, class, race, and regions? Access to higher education is a salient issue relating to equity and quality. A prevailing educational dilemma facing most countries' systems of higher education is how to design a selective process which increases representations of traditionally underrepresented groups without sacrificing the academic quality of the entering class (World Bank 1993). In many countries, limited resources come into direct conflict with increasing demands for access to higher education, especially from minority groups. According to Miller (1990), decision-making concerning higher education involves three key factors @@ resources (human and material), access, and quality.

If greater access is desired, then to maintain quality, greater human and fiscal resources are required; if greater quality is the

target, then either decreased access or increased resource will be needed; and if fiscal resources are diminished, either decreases in personnel, access, and/or quality will be needed (p. 46).

There is always tension between access and quality, and the issue may be interpreted as "more means worse?"; "more means different?"; or "more means better?" (Ball and Enggins 1989). Very often in the pursuit of excellence, students are selected and admitted to

institutions of higher learning through a merit system, and in doing so it excludes a sizeable number of students from the disadvantaged groups. To overcome this problem, many countries have implemented "affirmative action policies" whereby a specified number of admission places for minority students who do not meet the regular academic admission standards are set aside for the disadvantaged groups. To fill these quotas for minority students, applicants are usually judged by less vigorous admission standards. While some quota-admitted students may have done well in their studies, many have also dropped out. Thus affirmative action policies often involve important trade-offs between equity and efficiency. However, preferential admission policies aimed at increasing the participation of previously excluded groups will not adversely affect the quality of higher education only if the overall selectivity is high and the quality of academic secondary education is reasonably uniform (World Bank 1993). Otherwise, manipulation of meritocratic admission criteria is often fraught with difficulties. In the case of Malaysia, the government views access to higher education as a means of restructuring the Malaysian society and to eliminate the identification of ethnic community with economic functions. For the past twenty-five years, there have been concerted efforts to provide more educational opportunities to the Bumiputras. Bumiputra means "native of the soil". This term is used to mean the Malays and other indigenous tribes such as the Kadazans and Dayaks. The Bumiputras

enjoy "special privileges" as enshrined in the Malaysian Constitution (see Article 152 of the 1957 Malaysian Constitution). and to increase Bumiputra representation in the various professions and occupations in the modern sector. To achieve this objective, the Malaysian government implemented the "racial quota" policy whereby student admission to public institutions of higher learning and the appointment of academic staffing in these institutions are based on racial quotas in favour of the Bumiputras. Bumiputra students have a different access route to university education, for most of them sit for the Matriculation examinations which are set by each of the universities for their own pre<sup>™</sup>university classes; while the non-Bumiputra students sit for the Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Menengah (Higher Secondary Education Certificate) which is set by the Malaysian Examination Syndicate. Needless to say, there is a great discrepancy in the academic quality of the students that are admitted to the universities based on these two kinds of examinations.

Under the racial quota policy, not only the appointment of academic staff needs to reflect the ethnic composition of the country's population, but also greater Bumiputra's representation in key administrative positions in the universities (Jaspir 1989). The implementation of this policy has eroded one of the deeply entrenched academic traditions which is to admit students and to appoint faculty members based on merits. This preferential treatment policy may have been extremely successful in increasing the Bumiputra's participation in tertiary education, but it has also brought about many other unforeseen consequences. This policy has led to the emergence of an even more polarized society instead of promoting national integration. Because of the quota system and the limited number of places in the public institutions of higher learning, many non-Bumiputra students who are just as qualified are denied places locally and are forced to go overseas at very high expenses or to seek further education in the private colleges. Consequently, this positive discrimination policy has generated interethnic conflict and

increased communal tension ( Lee 1994). Furthermore, there is also a definite decline in the quality and efficiency of public higher education. A study by Karthigesu (1986) shows that the percentage of Bumiputra students obtaining the higher classes of degrees is comparatively less than non™Bumiputra students, no matter if it is an Arts degree, Science degree or professional degree. This goes to show that in giving greater attention to equity issues in educational and occupational opportunities, less demands have been made on the quality of student outputs (Jaspir 1989). Moreover, the external efficiency of the Malaysian higher education system is problematic as reflected by a certain amount of mismatch between graduates and occupations. A study on higher education and the employment recorded a fair degree of mismatch between high@level scientific personnels and the needs of the labour market (Fatimah et al. 1985). According to Mehmet and Yip (1985), the Malaysian government scholarships for higher education are not geared to the development of the professional type of manpower, but rather to the production of generalists. Graduates in the professional fields represented only 23.3 percent of the total. As a result, there is a surplus of generalist graduates and at the same time an acute shortage of scientific and professional graduates. This problem is further exacerbated by an imbalance in the higher education system where graduates at the degree level far exceeded the number of graduates in both the diploma and certificate level (Lee 1994). In attempting to redress social inequity by implementing a quota system in both admission practies and appointments of faculty and administrators, the

higher education system becomes inefficient and graduates are produced at a significantly higher cost due to poorer academic performance and greater likelihood of repetition. Equity issues in higher education will not be effectively addressed in the long run unless determined efforts are also made to increase educational opportunities for disadvantaged groups at all levels of education (World Bank 1993). One way to ensure good quality higher education is

to take measures to reduce the variability in the performance of secondary school graduates and enlarge the pool of eligible candidates for admission to higher education. In the context of Malaysia, the government set up special residential science schools and junior science colleges so as to provide special secondary science education to Bumiputra students. In addition, each of the universities runs pre@university, matriculation, pre@medical, pre@science, and pre@engineering programmes for Bumiputra students (Selvaratnam 1988). These moves were aimed at improving the supply of suitable Bumiputra candidates to be admitted to science@based courses at the tertiary level. However, most of the Bumiputra students with good academic results are sent overseas on government scholarships leaving those with lesser qualifications to enter local universities. In assessing the quality of higher education, one does not only examine the entry standards and alternative access routes but one also needs to look at the exit points and the purposes of higher education. If one of the purposes of higher education is the production of qualified human resources for the economy, then it is essential that we examine the employers' perception of the graduates, that is, we need to listen to the voice of the labour market in accepting the products of the system (Barnett 1992). Unfortunately, many of the local graduates in Malaysia cannot obtain employment in the private sector, especially in the multinational companies, because they are not fluent in English. Peer review is another method of assessing quality and in this case we have to listen to the voices of the professional bodies. Although many of the professional degrees conferred by the Malaysian universities are recognized world@wide, the locally produced medical degree is problematic because it is not recognized by the British Medical Association. Yet another way of interpreting the quality of higher education is to examine the quality of the student's educational experience, that is, the "value@added" during the process of higher education (Ball and Enggins 1989). The value@added approach in viewing educational excellence focuses on what is taught and how it is being taught and

evaluates the scope and rigour of the curriculum. It also takes into consideration the

contextual constraints, opportunities, and improvement in performances (Morgan and Mitchell 1985). The following section examines issues relating to the undergraduate curriculum and reforms pertaining to it.

√Relevance : General Education and Specialized Education *f*

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An ongoing concern in any educational system is deciding on what and how should students learn. Two competing school of thoughts prevail in guiding the development of undergraduate education in universities. One is learning for its own sake, and the other is the instrumental theory of "utilitarianism", that is, learning what is applicable and useful (Ball and Enggins 1989). The debate on undergraduate curriculum revolves around the issue of relevance @@ should the student "learn more and more of very little" or "know less and less of more and more"? In the literature, the former is usually referred to as specialized education and the latter is general education. General education is that part of a student's whole education which looks first of all to his life as a responsible human being and citizen, whereas specialized education is that part which looks to the student's competence in some occupation (Report of Havard Committee 1945). In recent years, the trend in higher education is towards specialized education. Throughout the world, there has been a conviction that the university curriculum should provide relevant training for a variety of increasingly complex jobs (Altbach 1991). It has been argued that in view of the knowledge explosion, it is quite impossible for one person to learn all that there is to know. The pragmatic view of undergraduate education is for students to immerse themselves in a particular branch of study and prepared themselves for some specialized career. Therefore, the function of a university is to train students for highly scientific and technical skilled jobs. The Malaysian education system has been, for a long time, geared

towards early specialization. Students had to make a choice of studying either in the Arts or Science stream at the upper secondary level, and this specialization continued at the pre-university level. At the undergraduate level, students enrolled themselves in specific professional programmes like engineering, medicine, teaching, and others, right at the freshman year itself. This approach towards university education may be more economical as compared to the American system where professional studies do not start until at the postgraduate level. However, it also has its limitations in that early specialization often leads to "narrowness" and "inflexibility" on the part of the individual (Report of the Havard Committee 1945). The

recent reforms in both the secondary school curriculum and undergraduate curriculum in Malaysia reflect the importance of providing a broad-based general type of education which aims at developing an all-rounded individual. As from the early 1990s onwards, the Arts and Science streams were abolished and under the new secondary school curriculum students can choose both Arts and Science subjects at the upper secondary level. The undergraduate curriculum has also become more broad-based. For example, at the Universiti Sains Malaysia in Penang, there are more and more core courses like Malaysian Society, Islamic Civilization, Critical Thinking, Philosophy of Science, which are compulsory to all undergraduates. Furthermore, science students can take a minor package from any of the Arts areas and vice versa. This is very much in line with the Malaysian educational philosophy which stresses the importance of developing the intellectual, moral, spiritual, and physical aspects of the individual. As mentioned above, the argument against specialized education is its narrowness because in a rapidly changing society, specific knowledge can easily become outdated. Given the pace of economic progress and technological advancement, the specific training that the students obtained in universities may no longer be applicable when they enter the labour market or soon after. In criticizing the vocationalization of higher

education, Husen (1991)

maintains that

Evidently in-depth study in a given field generates solid competence in that particular field but easily leads to a narrow perspective and weakens the ability to acquire new knowledge when the subject matter learned becomes obsolete (p. 182).

He recommends a core curriculum that provides a common frame of reference for all

undergraduate students. To him, undergraduate education should emphasize underlying

intellectual, scientific and technological principles rather than provide too narrow specialized

knowledge. In general, employers would prefer a little less specialist subject knowledge and

a little more on what has become known as "transferable personal skills" (Wagner 1989).

Employers expect graduates to possess skills like numeracy, literacy, communication,

teamwork and leadership skills as well as attitudes like loyalty, courage, optimism and the

sheer ability to work hard as a member of a team.

To many, the best kind of initial higher education is general education which aims at

the "cultivation of the intellect" as well as "practical wisdom" (Brubacher 1965). This is

usually carried out in an elective system where students are allowed to choose, within certain

limits, among a great variety of courses and thus compose their own curriculum for the first

degree. But this system does have an inherent flaw because if we leave

general education to

self-interest then, sometimes, its standard may fall prey to the students' "get by" attitude. In

other words, the students apply themselves to satisfy the minimum requirements of social

conventions but little or no

more. Such attitude and practice would jeopardize the "pursuit of excellence" as the enshrined goal of university education. To overcome

this shortcoming, it

is imperative that there should be some prescription whereby the students are not given total

freedom of choice so that the kind of general education offered is not something that is

formless, that is, the taking of one course after another, but rather it is an organic whole

whose parts are integrated in serving a common aim (Report of Havard Committee 1945). In

short, undergraduate education should avoid early career choice and

should allow students to explore their own inclinations by exposing them to a wide variety of courses.

√Efficiency: Balance between Teaching and Research

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Knowledge is at the heart of higher education. The dual role of higher education is to produce and disseminate knowledge. The dilemma faced by many universities is how to perform the dual tasks of generating new knowledge through research and to impart already existing knowledge through teaching. A long established view is that research and teaching should go hand in hand in universities. "Scholarship" should be common to both research and teaching which makes the two conceptually indivisible (Westergaard 1991). It has been argued that faculty members should engage in both teaching and research for not only would they impart the most updated knowledge to their students but also they are unlikely to mislead their students through ignorance (Ben-David 1972). However, the principle of the unity of teaching and research has been in contention, especially in Great Britain. In recent years, the debate is whether research should be decoupled from teaching.

The common argument in Britain is that teaching in higher education can be sound without the backup from staff engagement in research (Westergaard 1991). If the country is moving towards mass higher education, then one should re-examine the relationship between research and teaching. If more students mean more teaching, it should not necessarily mean more research for research can be uncoupled from teaching and limited to a small number of selected institutions. The split between teaching and research would result in a stratified system of higher education which is emerging in Britain where there are

universities, some institutions that combine research and teaching, and others that teach only.

In Malaysia, universities do expect their academic staff to teach and be involved in

research. However, the Malaysian universities have relatively low rate of research productivity (Jaspir 1989, Haris 1985). The seeming reluctance of local academics to get involved in research is basically due to weak research environment that prevails in Malaysia. The lack of motive to do research can be contributed to several factors such as lack of time due to heavy teaching load, lack of finance and equipments, and lack of academic leadership from senior faculty members. The inability of Malaysian universities to produce research has led the government to establish specialized research institutes like Rubber Research Institute (RRI), Malaysian Agriculture Research and Development Institute (MARDI), Palm Oil Research Institute of Malaysia (PORIM), Malaysian Institute of Economic Research (MIER), and others. These research institutes were set up to study specific problems relating to national development and to do the bulk of R&D work. The separation of research from teaching at the institutional level can deprive the institutions of higher learning of important infusion of funds and talents. But that does not mean that there cannot be a division of labour among the academic staff within the institutions or departments. Not all academics are competent researchers nor are they all good teachers. It is quite unrealistic to expect that every teacher to be capable and motivated to become a competent researcher who would make original contributions to their fields of expertise. Therefore, it may be necessary to acknowledge the natural division of labour among the academic staff so that each would have the time and resources to perform well in their chosen specialties.

#### √Conclusionsf

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The issues that have emerged from the higher education reforms in Malaysia are not at all unique to this particular country, but rather they are comparable to other countries. Many higher education systems are engaged in reforms which aim at improving academic quality; increasing both internal and external efficiency; and

achieving greater social equality.

How should higher education institutions be governed and financed? Who should get access to higher education? What and how should students learn? How can higher education be made more cost-effective? These are some of the common concerns of all nations in their efforts to expand and diversify higher education. This is a Malaysian

case study which analyses the issues relating to autonomy and accountability; equity and quality; general and specialized education; and the balance between research and teaching in institutions of higher learning.

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