



MACRO STICKINESS IN STRATEGIC PLANNING OF MALAYSIA'S HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Stickiness is an economic phenomenon in terms of cost, imposed preferences, policy paradigm and national priorities that caused planning to be inadequate and less responsive. Purpose of study – This study investigates the influence of macro stickiness in strategic planning of Malaysia's higher education. Design/methodology/approach – It uses personal interview with academic administrators and representatives of selected academic staff associations to obtain data to accomplish research objectives. Findings – The results show that the informants argued that national unity, economic advantages to attract foreign investment, and sound economic growth influenced the strategic planning of Malaysia's higher education. Research limitations and/or implications – The results of the study are essential to assist policy makers and strategic planners in formulating Malaysia's higher education policy. Originality/value – Recent study on “macro” level stickiness confirms that policy makers and government confirmed that the government cannot exclude previous policy documents that contained three major elements, i.e., national unity, foreign direct investment and sound economic growth in designing national economic and social policies.

JEL Classification: M14, O38

Key words: Strategic planning, Higher education, Resource-based perspectives, Stickiness, Malaysia

1. INTRODUCTION

Strategic planning requires flexibility, a dynamic ability to generate new and alternative decisions that are responsive to the operations and performance (financial and non-financial) (Rudd, Greenley, Beatson, and Lings, 2008). However, strategic planning in the higher education sector might not be flexible enough due to ‘stickiness’ in its ‘self-control’ (Luhanga, 2010), diverse interest of stakeholders (Yarmohammadian, Abari, Shahtalebi, Fooladvand, Shahtalebi, and Najafi, 2011), and lack of responsiveness to markets (Ogasawara, 2002).

Theoretically, from an economic approach, “stickiness” is defined by Arrow (1962, p.155) as “learning by doing” to reflect organisational philosophy, culture, and investment in knowledge in terms of hiring people and purchasing of resources. Arrow (1969, p. 133) further improved the term as “learning by experience.” Szulanski (1995, p.437) has identified two aspects of knowledge that need attention: “knowledge characteristics” and “situation characteristics” (Szulanski, 1995, p. 437).

Szulanski’s (1995, p. 437) proposition was based on Arrow’s (1969, p. 33) contention that knowledge transfer can be understood as a communication process. Based on the above analyses of “stickiness,” this study adopts the meaning of “stickiness” to refer to costs, difficulties, prior commitment, and economic interest especially in strategic planning process of policies of Malaysian Higher Education.

Thus, in the context of national level, it can be classified as “macro stickiness,” which refers to difficulties, prior commitment and economic interest that embedded in the national level policy making and executing activities. Based on Szulanski’s (1995, pp.436-437), “micro stickiness” can be defined as the difficulties, miscommunication, and cost among firms, organisations, and individuals to be efficient and effective in attaining organisational goals.

2. ECONOMIC ORIENTATION AND POLICY MAKING PROCESS

Public policy making in Malaysia reflects a top down approach. The aim of any governments in all countries including the Malaysian government is to attain good economic growth, full employment, and

sustainable competitiveness in the global economy. It is not easy to achieve the objectives given the status of economic performance in a developing country. Malaysian economic development key scholars such as Drabble (2000, pp. 247-247, 121-147, 181-194, 235-266), Jomo (1990, pp. 101-117), Ali (1992, pp. 6-31), Rasiah (1995, pp. 48-49, 52-57), Gomez (2003, pp. 59-67) and Samad (1998, pp. 62-104) found that the Malaysian government used three approaches to promote economic and social well-being by helping firms to be more profitable.

Firstly, it sought to reduce the cost of doing business in order to attract both local and foreign investment and participation in the country's manufacturing sectors. Secondly, the government provided facilities and tax cuts to support each firm's attempts at profit maximization. Thirdly, the government formulated macro-economic policies to support the profit maximisation objectives.

Higher education is closely related to the economic orientation. Jomo (1990, pp. 40-47) found some distinctive industrialisation trends depending on the economic emphasis, such as foreign direct investment, manufacturing, heavy industries, and so forth. Ali (1992, pp. 6-31) also identified discrete periods of Malaysia's industrialisation process in relation to technology transfer and foreign direct investment. Rasiah (1995, pp. 48-57) argued that he found similar outcomes when he examined Malaysia's industrialisation process with special reference to foreign capital and cheap labour. Drabble (2000, pp. 27, 121, 181, 235) identified different forms of economic planning in the colonial era, Japanese occupation, post Second World War, and under the affirmative action policy. Gomez (2003, pp. 60-64) argued that the affirmative action in economic policy limited the full potential of economic growth due to selected active economic players.

Higher education planning seems to have been influenced by the orientation of Malaysian economic development. Synthesizing the propositions by Jomo (1990), Ali (1992), Rasiah (1995), Drabble (2000), and Gomez (2003), the economic orientation can be divided into five types, namely (a) agriculture export trade (1786-1949), (b) import substitution industrialisation (1950-1960), (c) labour intensive industrialisation (1961-1980), (d) capital intensive industrialisation (1981-1995), and (e) knowledge intensive industrialisation (1996-2007). Malaysian economic development plans contained the specific discussion on education and training, particularly in the higher education. Table 1 summarizes Malaysian Plans that influenced the directions of higher education.

TABLE 1
Development Planning Documents

Plan Title	Duration	Date Tabled
First Malaysia Plan	1966 – 1970	25 Nov 1965
Second Malaysia Plan	1971 – 1975	25 Jun 1971
Third Malaysia Plan	1976 – 1980	5 Jul 1976
Fourth Malaysia Plan	1981 – 1985	16 Mar 1981
Fifth Malaysia Plan	1986 – 1990	21 Mar 1986
Sixth Malaysia Plan	1991 – 1995	7 Oct 1991
Seventh Malaysia Plan	1996 – 2000	5 Jun 1996
Eight Malaysia Plan	2001 – 2005	23 Apr 2001
Ninth Malaysia Plan	2006 – 2010	31 Mar 2006

Note: "Date Tabled" refers to the tabling at Malaysian Parliament.

2.1 MACRO STICKINESS

Macro stickiness refers to the difficulties in implementing socio-economic policies due to variables and prior commitments. In Malaysian context, the formulation of national policy follows certain economic orientations, i.e. from agriculture, import substitution, labour intensive, capital intensive and knowledge-based industrialisation (Jomo, 1990; Ali, 1992; Rasiah, 1995; Drabble, 2000; Gomez, 2003). The policy direction was pre-determined, i.e. emphasised on foreign direct investment (Jomo, 1990, pp. 40-47), technology transfer (Ali, 1992, pp. 6-31), cheap labour (Rasiah, 1995, pp. 48-57), and incorporation of affirmative action (Gomez, 2003, pp. 60-64). Indeed, the government intervened in the economic policy (Bunnell, 2002; Bunnell and Coe, 2005; Ritchie, 2005) with affirmative action (Neville, 1998). Higher education provides human capital input for the development, but its policy has been intervened (Neville, 1998). This interventionist approach in economic

development in education has reduced its role to provide input to merely producing a commodity output.

This paper attempts to extend the application of stickiness in economic to education sector. The proposition is believed to be valid as the concept of stickiness is general in nature and can be applied in any sectors of the economy. Sweeney (1996) and Mokyr (2002) argued that there are external forces which contributed to stickiness in formulating an economic policy. At firm-specific level, due to survival, firms resort to collaborating with other firms. Eventually, the collaborations involve other institutions such as universities and research organisations. Gradually, the collaborations produce a dedicated industrial area for both sectors to work on specific projects seriously. Such situations have attracted the government to upgrade the projects at national level, to get more firms and research institutions involved. The government could do better by transforming the economy at full potential, but it did not do adequately due to stickiness to economic orientation and affirmative action (Bunnell, 2002; Bunnell and Coe, 2005; Ritchie, 2005; Neville, 1998).

Likewise, governments also play an important role in contributing to "macro" level stickiness through economic policies designed to achieve the desired level or rate of economic development. Governments believe that economic development requires the development of technology. While this knowledge can be generated within the country concerned, Sweeney (1996, p. 6) has pointed out that the development of technology can be achieved through "learning." Accordingly, Sweeney (1996, p. 6) contended that learning can contribute to the development of technology in two ways, namely (a) by improving the existing ways of doing things in organisations, and (b) by introducing new ways of doing things in organisations. Both of these contributions can be achieved by investing in "learning" activities; in short, education.

2.2 MACRO STICKINESS IN EDUCATION

Macro stickiness could occur in learning activities within organizations as well as with other organizations, including states. While knowledge can be generated within the country concerned, Sweeney (1996, p. 6) has pointed out that the development of technology can be achieved through "learning." Accordingly, Sweeney (1996, p. 6) contended that learning can contribute to the development of technology in two ways, namely (a) by improving

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Sweeney’s (1996, pp. 6-7) refers to the role of governments in promoting human capital development to generate economic growth and capacity building through the intensity of technology development. There are two factors involved when change occurs, namely (a) the change resulting from pressure on firms to adopt new technologies (“technology push”) and (b) the pressure from the market to produce new technologies (“market pull”) (Macdonald, 1998, p.45). These forces are beyond the firms’ control (Macdonald, 1998, p.45). However, these forces serve to make firms proactive. In higher education, it should not have illiberal element because when higher education needs large room of flexibility (Neville, 1998) to respond to the dynamic changes (Bunnell and Coe, 2005; Ritchie, 2005).

Macdonald (1998, pp. 46-47) argued that innovation is important to economic growth and for that reason governments are motivated to encourage innovation. However, the governments’ initiative may not purely be in line with those of business owners because governments seek to gain political advantage by achieving good economic growth and prosperity (Joseph, 1997, pp. 289-290). For instance, to address the slowing economic growth, some governments seek to activate the economy by increasing spending on research and development in high technology in order to encourage (at least) domestic economic growth and also to provide more employment opportunities that are associated with jobs in the high technology sector. In doing so, governments attempt to establish essential facilities, such as science or technology parks in order to encourage innovation. In higher education, besides physical facilities, flexibility and autonomy are needed (Neville, 1998) to encourage innovation and be responsive to dynamic changes (Bunnell and Coe, 2005; Ritchie, 2005).

Sweeney identified a number of factors that will affect the extent to which human capital development via knowledge transfer between firms in technology parks can take place. Firms had to consider a variety of factors to ensure that “learning” (i.e. knowledge acquisition) takes place between firms. These included (a) “information behaviour” (Sweeney, 1996, p. 8), (b) “socio-cultural” effects (Sweeney, 1996, p. 9), (c) “distinctiveness” (Sweeney, 1996, p. 11), (d) the “technology culture” within the firms (Sweeney, 1996,

p. 13), (e) their “technological progressiveness” (Sweeney, 1996, p. 14), (f) “entrepreneurial vitality” (Sweeney, 1996, pp. 15-16), (g) the “interactive creation of innovation” (Sweeney, 1996, p. 17), and (h) the evaluation of “future and past structure” (Sweeney, 1996, pp. 18-19). Sweeney’s (Sweeney, 1996, pp. 6-19) discussion of “learning,” “technological progress,”

2.3 MACRO STICKINESS IN NATION’S ECONOMIC POLICY

Stickiness can be traced throughout Malaysia Plans. The First Malaysia Plan (Malaysia, 1965, p.166) attempted to consolidate the national education system to be the catalyst and enabler for social, cultural and political unity. Besides that, the improvement of quality of skill was aimed to accommodate the economy at that time.

The Second Malaysia Plan (Malaysia, 1971, pp. 231-33) extended the previous plan to integrate national unity with economic interest, thus more training colleges, universities, and technology institutes were created to prepare manpower for increasing need in the manufacturing.

Third Malaysia Plan (Malaysia, 1976, p. 327) focused on two levels of higher education, college level (through the establishment of Ungku Omar Polytechnic, MARA Institute of Technology, and Tunku Abdul Rahman College), and university level (through the establishment of University of Malaya, Science University of Malaysia, National University of Malaysia, Agricultural University of Malaysia, and Technological University of Malaysia).

Fourth Malaysia Plan (Malaysia, 1981, p. 358) showed increment in enrolment at higher education level despite the slow economy. In Fifth Malaysia Plan (Malaysia, 1986, pp. 501-502), higher education included technical, science, and vocational, with marked inclination to Japanese way. Sixth Malaysia Plan (Malaysia, 1993, p. 157) emphasized on human resource development to eradicate poverty and increase competitiveness.

The government continues its initiatives to eradicate poverty and to generate good economic growth. In Seventh Malaysia Plan (Malaysia, 1996), the Government identified ICT industry as the catalyst to generate economic growth under the knowledge-based economy concept. The emphasis on knowledge-based is intensified in Eight Malaysia Plan (Malaysia, 2001). The Ninth Malaysia Plan (Malaysia, 2006) has targeted at human capital development, talent management, and comprehensive excellence in the economic activities of the knowledge-based economy.

Strategic planning at higher learning institutions in Malaysia must include a number of appropriate policies and blueprints. Firstly, the purpose of higher education should be compatible with the “National Education Philosophy.” The guiding philosophy for Malaysian education is to ensure that all levels of education sectors develop human capital. According to the National Philosophy of Education (NPE) (Ministry of Higher Education, 2011):

“Education in Malaysia is a continuous effort towards enhancing potentials of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner in order to create individuals who are well-equipped intellectually, spiritually and emotionally. This effort aims to produce knowledgeable, ethical and responsible Malaysian citizens who are can contribute towards the harmony and prosperity of the community and nation”.

In other words, any academic programs must include intellectual, emotional, and physical aspects of human development. In addition, the individuals produced by Malaysia’s higher education institutions must ensure that they are not only knowledgeable in respective fields, but also possess full integrity who will contribute as responsible citizens. Education moulds individuals to be better citizens who contribute significantly in achieving the country’s aims and aspirations. With the NPE, the national education system has propelled to the forefront of education in the region.

2.4 OBJECTIVES OF HIGHER EDUCATION

According to Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia (2011), there are five main objectives of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Malaysia, namely (a) to have a pool of qualified manpower, (b) develop critical knowledge area, (c) to meet Malaysian diverse socio-economic profile, (d) to have marketable tertiary education, and (e) to offer Malaysia’s higher education to the rest of the world.

Higher education remains essential for Malaysia to prepare itself with sound capacity and competitiveness. Education and training has been an important topic in the Malaysia Plans from first until tenth. A revolutionary approach to higher education began when the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia produced Strategic Planning for National Higher Education and Action Plan for

Implementation (2007-2010). This plan prepares Malaysia to be competitive globally by year 2020. The Strategic Planning for Higher Education aims to transform Malaysia to be a centre of excellence for higher education. Before it can achieve the target, it needs to develop and prepare a higher education environment that encourages knowledge sharing among individuals and with institutions so as to be competent, innovative and globally marketable. The expected results from the strategic plan are at least three Malaysian universities to be listed as the best 100 universities in the world and a world's top 50 universities, and to develop at least 20 centres of excellence.

3. METHODOLOGY

The research question for the paper is "why could strategic planning for higher education be difficult?" The research question aspires to ascertain whether the government contributed to "macro" level stickiness through its economic and education policies.

There are many 'actors' involved in policy formulation, namely policy makers, government officers as policy implementers, and the government servants. To answer the question, this study asked academic administrators and representatives of academic staff associations who used to be involved in policy making level with the ministers to explain the nature of education and economic policy making.

The research methodologies used in the previous studies were primarily quantitative on knowledge transfer among firms. In Arrow's (1962, p. 155) examination on the impact of costs as proxy to "stickiness," he used a quantitative method using secondary data to investigate the difficulties in exchange and interactions between companies in the form of "learning." Later, Teece (1977, p. 247) and Galbraith (1990, p. 61) also undertook quantitative investigations. von Hippel (1994, p. 434) also used a quantitative method. Following the quantitative method by von Hippel (1994, p. 434) and the earlier authors, Szulanski (1996, p. 28) examined quantitatively the transfer of best practices in multinational enterprises.

Based on Szulanski's (1996, p. 28) work, Kostova (1999, p. 309) also used quantitative methods to examine stickiness of knowledge transfer in multinational firms in which the transfers took place in multiple contexts. The same quantitative method was used in the examination of stages in knowledge transfer processes that caused stickiness (Szulanski, 2000, pp. 12-13), and 122 internal

transfers of cross-border transfers (Jensen & Szulanski, 2004, pp. 508-509). Szulanski and Jensen (2004, p. 350) and Szulanski and Jensen (2006, p. 938) also used quantitative methods when they examined the role of the “template” or “working example.” According Szulanski and Jensen (2006, p.938), a template or a working example is prepared based on the previous experience and can be used in the subsequent year of operations provided that the substance of the work remains unchanged. The empirical findings on stickiness were done at individual firm level by a few authors as listed in Table 2. Thus, the sample is based on ‘micro stickiness.’ Table 2 summarises the research methods used in the previous studies.

TABLE 2
Summary of Methods Used in Previous Studies on “Micro”
Stickiness

Authors	Unit of analysis	Method	Methodology
Arrow’s (1962, p. 155)	firms	Case study	Quantitative
Nelson and Winter’s (1982, pp. 9-11,99)	firms	Case study	Quantitative
Winter and Szulanski (2001, p. 731)	firms	Case study	Quantitative
Szulanski and Jensen (2004, p. 348)	firms	Case study	Quantitative
Szulanski & Jensen (2006, pp. 937-939)	firms	Experiment	Quantitative
Arrow (1969, pp. 29-35)	firms	Case study	Quantitative
Teece (1977, p. 245)	firms	Case study	Quantitative
Szulanski (1996, p. 28)	firms	Case study	Quantitative
Szulanski & Jensen (2004, p. 348)	firms	Experiment	Quantitative
Szulanski (1995, pp. 438-439)	firms	Case study	Quantitative

Kostova (1999, p.309)	firms	Case study	Quantitative
Simonin (1999, pp. 464-465)	firms	Case study	Quantitative
Arrow (1969, pp. 29-35)	firms	Case study	Quantitative
Szulanski and Jensen (2004, p. 350)	firms	Experiment	Quantitative
Szulanski and Jensen (2006, p. 938)	firms	Experiment	Quantitative and Qualitative
Teece (1977, p. 247)	factories	Case study	Quantitative
Galbraith (1990, p. 61)	factories	Case study	Quantitative
von Hippel (1994, p. 434)	firms	Case study	Quantitative
Szulanski (1996, p. 28)	firms	Case study	Quantitative and Qualitative
Szulanski (2000, pp. 12-13)	firms	Case study	Quantitative and Qualitative
Jensen and Szulanski (2004, pp. 508-509)	firms	Case study	Quantitative and Qualitative

Unlike the previous studies, this study used personal interview because it wanted to obtain in-depth explanation of the phenomenon of feasible 'stickiness'. The study interviewed three academic administrators and five representatives of academic staff associations of higher learning institutes. Since the strategic planning situation is very complex, the use of qualitative method through personal interviews was considered appropriate. Miles and Huberman (1994) argued that qualitative method is appropriate to examine complex and difficult contexts of study because it can put the situation/s in question into the right perspective. In addition, Marshall and Rossman (1989) recommended the use of qualitative

methods to enable researchers to ask more questions in order to explore the context of the study in greater detail.

The nature of strategic planning is dynamic because it involves different perspectives and understanding of different individuals. Such situations are best understood utilising qualitative method (Ezzy, 2002; Lee, 1999). Further, qualitative method also enables the researcher to identify and understand complex relationships (Lee, 1999; Rist, 1994). By asking questions in personal interviews, the researcher will obtain varieties of answers that are relevant to the interview questions (Patton, 2002; Silverman, 1993).

There are many techniques available to obtain data using qualitative method, such as active or passive participation and observation, personal interviews, content analysis on various documents, and case study (Patton, 2002; Lee, 1999; Creswell, 1998). Using personal interview, the research was aware that the qualitative method used in this study was not easy to be conducted, time consuming, and required alert and objective content analysis of the texts.

4. FINDINGS

This section presents the opinions of three academic administrators (AAs) and five representatives of academic staff associations (PKAs). Each interview was conducted within 20-30 minutes. Note taking, rather than audio tape recording, was used due to the request of the informants. Nevertheless, the transcribed notes were verified with the informants prior to analysis.

Each informant was assigned a code for easy reference. The academic administrators consist of a deputy dean and two directors of centres. In terms of location, all of the academic administrators represent three different public universities. As for representatives of academic staff association, there were three chairmen, one secretary and a committee member.

In terms of their locality, two were from Klang Valley and the remaining represented three areas of Peninsular Malaysia, namely Northern, Southern and East Coast. Table 3 summarizes the profile of informants.

TABLE 3
Summary of Responses from the Informants

Code	Position	Institution
AA1	Deputy Dean	An academic centre from a university of Northern Peninsular
AA2	Director	An industrial linkage unit from a university of East Coast Peninsular
AA3	Director	A student development centre of a university from Southern Peninsular
PKA1	Committee	A public university in Klang Valley
PKA 2	Secretary	A public university from Northern Peninsular
PKA 3	Chairman	A public university from East Coast Peninsular
PKA 4	Committee	A public university from Southern Peninsular
PKA 5	Chairman	A public university in Klang Valley

The informants argued that higher education is part of the thrusts of national agenda and they insisted that a proper strategic planning should involve all key stakeholders. According to them, the current strategic planning process reflects a combination of political, social and economic objectives.

AA1, a Deputy Dean, said that the 'top-down' approach has always incorporated the national bigger agenda. This approach needs a revisit to fit into contemporary context, as AA1 said:

Our business is higher education, but we have to follow the Master Plan of the country. We have to be creative, how we can fit in into the big plan. This is the way we are doing our business, always top-down – the top give all kinds of directives based on their imagination, but in the end they are always for national unity, to address poverty, to strengthen the racial relationships, and to make sure that politics is stable so that it is always attractive for business and investment. If you look at all policies, you will observe these elements. How can that be when we are already in the new millennium?

An important fact that AA1 pointed out was that the policy "...is always for national unity, to address the poverty...." The

informant was not comfortable with the process with a remark: “How can that be when we already in the new millennium?”

As for AA2, a Director of industrial linkage unit from a university of East Coast Peninsular, strategic planning for higher education is important to be linked with the economic and development efforts so that the people and the country will get the benefits. He said:

Strategic planning in higher education is part of the Master Plan of the country because higher education is just another economic sector. It is the sector that drives the economy and also is an outcome of the economy. For that reason, it has to adopt the spirit of the blueprint to prepare Malaysia to be an attractive country for foreign investment. Thus, we need to ensure the politics is stable. Again, political stability is maintained through good relationships among various races.

A Director of student development centre of a university from Southern Peninsular, AA3 argued that higher education has vast potential as a new source of national income when combined with commercialization of some of the universities’ R&D’s. This is done by promoting Malaysia as a destination of friendly atmosphere and warmth hospitality. AA3 mentioned:

Higher Education [in the public] sector is no longer a slow pace government office of the past 20 years. It is now being ranked by the world. For us, Higher Education Malaysia is a new service for Malaysia, or new way to generate income. In fact, our overseas Malaysia Student Department (MSD) is now called “Education Malaysia” (EM). This sector is very competitive. With new branding, like EM overseas, we could attract many foreign students to come to Malaysia to enrol into our public and private universities. Can you imagine that? For the past 30 years, Malaysia was a destination of manufacturing, factories, and all the cheap production facilities. Now, we are offering human capital development not only for our own people but the rest of the world. It is a new source of national income. Therefore, we must make Malaysia attractive.

In short, academic administrators argued that strategic planning lacks dynamism due to its top-down approach and lack of mutual discussion. Even though the main aim of strategic planning is for higher education, other objectives are also blended with it, i.e. political stability, national unity, poverty eradication, and building competitiveness.

Academic staff associations (*Persatuan Kakitangan Akademik*, PKAs) identified lack of attention of the authorities on the welfare of the academics in the planning process. The leadership of a staff association, PKA1, argued that the planning for opportunities in future should include the welfare of staff of higher education institutes. PKA1 said:

Strategic planning for higher education, even at a public university level requires the participation from various units. Normally, the main concern is not so much about the well being of the academic staff. In fact, we [academic staff] are always being manipulated to participate in the so-called planning for the sake of the people and the country. At the end of the day, our salaries and other benefits are not as attractive as those of federal government officers or teachers. Yet, we have been sacrificing to produce the best human capital for the various sectors of the economy. Our PKA (staff association) always mention this matter during the meeting with our top management.

According to the secretary of an institute, PKA2, higher education in Malaysia lacks a unifying force to turn it into excellent education hub; it has numerous directions, emphasises, and targets. This situation drags higher education into uncertainty. PKA2 said:

When there is a change in leadership in higher education, the goals also change. What happened to all the previous efforts? What a waste of effort and time to come out with so many proposals for improvement? At one time, we wanted to train our students so that they would be marketable to multinational corporations and so many countries. So many technical and vocational based colleges were established to cater the overseas manpower demand. After a change in leadership, now we want foreign students to enroll into our universities and colleges. So what happened to the planning to export skilled workers worldwide?

Chairman of a staff association of another public university, PKA3 said:

Higher education is very important to supply skilled human capital for the market. Without human capital development, sustainability in the economy will disappear quickly. We can see now so many graduates unemployed due to shortage of work in the market. These people are brilliant, young, vibrant and energetic; but they do not know how to take advantage of the opportunities.

According to a committee member and chairman (President) of associations of two different universities, PKA4 and 5 respectively, some of the PKAs are not welcome at all in the strategic planning process of their respective universities. Most PKAs were not invited in the strategic planning process of their own higher education institutions as well as at the federal levels. When the directives were issued to staff, they protested the directives and sent petitions to the highest authority of the country. Table 4 presents the summary of responses from the informants.

5. DISCUSSION

Overall, the informants argued that strategic planning for higher education in Malaysia is 'sticky' due to the top down approach and over emphasis on achievement of economic advantages. In addition, key stakeholders were not fully represented in the strategic planning process of the nation's higher education system. This phenomenon is inevitable especially when the policies and planning are embedded with the government multiple agenda.

Despite this scenario, the pressure from external forces might be able to modify the government strategic planning approach to be more inclusive and conclusive by incorporating the concerns or experience of key stakeholders. In fact, Macdonald (1998, p. 45) argued that the influence of external forces can motivate a government to make changes in its economic policies. In an open system, even the government will be subjected to externally driven change (Macdonald, 1998, p. 45).

Informants observed that the objective of higher education has been combined with many other national agenda whilst the policy making process lacks the involvement of key stakeholders. In fact, policy direction works together with the national agenda of affirmative action (Lim, 2011). Besides, various stakeholders were

TABLE 4
Summary of Responses from the Informants

Code	Summary of responses
AA1	Top-down oriented, anticipate for political stability, racial unity, eradication of poverty
AA2	Higher education as a sector to build national economic advantages, political stability, unity, foreign investment friendly
AA3	Higher education as marketing tool for economic growth, wealth creation, skill enhancement, foreign investment friendly
PKA1	Result oriented, top-down approach, no resistance, not sensitive to well-being and welfare of academic staff, so much for capacity building, non-responsive to external threats
PKA2	Higher education divided into sub clusters with autonomous decisions, always neglect staff welfare but very much concern with political stability
PKA3	Economic directions, national unity, employment, skill enhancement
PKA4	Economic vast opportunities, employment in skill, best brain development
PKA5	Indirect variables attached with strategic planning for higher education such as economic advantages, competitiveness and politically stable for foreign direct investment.

not convinced of the contents of the national agenda that did not address the expectations of various stakeholders (Chen, Chien, We and Tsai, 2010). In fact, some stakeholders found major flaws in the policy directions (Neville, 1998; Marathamuthu, Muthaiyah, Raman and Benjamin, 2011).

Informants also contended that three matters interact to aggravate the planning outcome - the affirmative action, top-down approach and lack of mutual discussion with key stakeholders. Moreover, the strategic planning for higher education has been used as policy instrument to attract foreign direct investment although it should primarily be geared towards national capacity building. In fact, the government has made education as a hub to attract more students from abroad to study at local universities (Mok, 2011).

Education has, therefore, become part of trade initiatives (Chen et al., 2010; Tham, 2010). All of the above factors caused difficulties or stickiness when the government together with the private sector was unable to provide integrative and synchronous

support for transformation process (Fleming and SØborg, 2010) and also affirmative action (Haque, 2003; Yang et al., 2006; Cheong, Nagaraj and Lee, 2009).

For these reasons, the informants insisted the government to be receptive to participation of key stakeholders in the strategic planning process of the country's higher education. With a clear focus and concerted effort, the strategic planning for higher education can potentially transform Malaysia to be an excellent education hub (Chen et al., 2010; Tham, 2010).

5.1 IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY

Macro stickiness in the context of the study may be attributed to the need to acquire foreign direct investment (Jomo, 1990), to enhance national capacity building (Ali, 1992; Rasiah, 1995), and to liberalise the protected and illiberal economic policies (Neville, 1998; Gomez, 2003; Bunnell and Coe, 2005; Ritchie, 2005).

This interventionist approach in the economic policies has been extended to the national social and education development agenda, which may be interpreted as transforming every social outcome – including education - into a commodity.

As a result, obsession with outcome or commodity prevails in the strategic planning for higher education when higher education authorities accord themselves autonomous decision making prerogative (Neville, 1998).

5.2 IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Policy makers in the higher education should incorporate the more relevant stakeholders, especially representatives from academic staff associations in order to create a comprehensive and supported strategic plan. By including some stakeholders and excluding others in the formal strategic planning, the planning process suffers from severe flaws in terms of contents and integrity (Neville, 1998; Ritchie, 2005). The 'sticky' practice is not feasible and defensible especially in the competitive nature of higher education sector globally (Neville, 1998; Gomez, 2003; Bunnell and Coe, 2005; Ritchie, 2005).

Knowledge based economy requires more preparation and strategies to make human resource (Fleming and SØborg, 2010) that it develops become more competitive. The current approach to strategic planning for higher education lacks ownership (of the other

stakeholders), competitiveness and clear directions (Neville, 1998; Ritchie, 2005; Lim, 2011). In fact, Morshidi, Razak and Koo (2011) argued that based on the analysis of higher education from the views of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), Malaysia's higher education is also not competitive due to its limited packages.

5.3 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

There are clearly a few limitations inherent in the study. Firstly, it relies on limited number of informants comprising a few academic administrators and representatives of academic staff associations. Future research should also attempt to obtain the opinions of other members of the same cohort, i.e. academic administrators and academic staff associations. Integrating and harmonizing the opinions of more relevant others will ensure that there is some consistency in consensus.

Secondly, the study obtained its data from two groups of stakeholders only. Future research needs to also incorporate the opinions of another stakeholder, i.e. the employers. By ignoring the interest of employers, the higher learning will be producing graduates that fail to meet the expectations of the workplace.

Thirdly, personal interviews do provide depth, but they lack breath of the subject matter being studied. Future research may want to consider using cross-sectional data collection method, i.e. closed-ended, scaled-type questionnaires to complement the interview results.

6. CONCLUSION

Overall, macro stickiness influences strategic planning of higher education in Malaysia by reducing the latter's flexibility and dynamism to be responsive to the stakeholders and competition. The current approach to strategic planning in higher education has apparently been inflexible and less accommodative. One of the criticisms of the informants is that strategic planning over-emphasizes on achievement of economic advantages. In addition, the planning process is further reinforced by affirmative action indiscriminately.

This narrow pursuit of national socio-economic agenda via education weakens the tempo of the nation to gain competitiveness in the higher education market. The higher education strategic planning

needs to be more consultative in order to be more relevant to national and global market needs and expectations.

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