

## To overhaul or revolutionise IPT?

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Comment

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MALAYSIA is said to be trapped within a moderate economic level. This resulted from the failure of our public and private universities or the institutions of higher learning (IPT) to churn out graduates for a higher level economy as they are entangled in meeting the outdated job market.

Much to our dismay, the market is not capable of or interested in making forays into the future. As a result, our job market is lagging far behind our competitors and that of the developed countries.

For example, in biotechnology, the employability of graduates in the field is restricted – there was hardly any growth in the past few years.

So what types of jobs can be matched if there is no market demand in the field or it is too small to accommodate them. As a result, we will continue to lag behind in biotechnology for our universities are only required to fill up the current job market and not any taking risks in creating future jobs.

It is not surprising that our economy is locked in and having difficulty to venture into new fields for there is no market demand! This also happened when we delve on nanotechnology while our competitors had made a head start by investing in new fields through their universities.

In developed countries, the universities set the pace by opening new markets and create wealth in charting the economic growth. Ironically, in Malaysia it is the other way round. The universities have to kowtow to the needs of the industries – it does not matter if we continue to be in the backwaters or cater for the sunset industries as long as the graduates are gainfully employed.

This bring into focus comments made by Datuk Radin Omar on Datuk Salleh Majid's article on "overhauling" the IPT (Utusan Malaysia, Oct 23 2009). The issue can be turned into a positive platform to dabble on changes on IPT courses for common good.

What is interesting the word "overhaul" is used by the two writers. On the one hand, it is accurate to describe a "transformation" via a thorough cleaning up process, including replacing faulty parts, akin to overhauling vehicle engine components.

The basic question is to what extent the performance can be upgraded as the "components" are basically old. The "transformation" carried out is relative.

What are more pertinent are the basics from where the components originated. The "basics" must be appropriate in time and space to enable the performance can be fully benefitted. And it will be cost-effective.

For example, after the "overhaul" is completed, the results must be better many times over as the "engine" had been souped up. Anyway, if it is not suitable or does not match the job demand as pointed out by Salleh, it will haunt us.

Radin offers a solution by introducing a graduate profile process – if the graduate profile minted is suitable, the question of matching does not arise.

This raise another question: who decides whether what is produced matches the job market or not? Definitely the employers have the final say for our consideration is to cater for the job market. This can be likened to the Key Performance Indicators (KPI) of a university. If all graduates from an IPT are employed in the chosen fields quickly, it is deemed as "successful". Otherwise, it has failed.

Suffice to say, what is needed is not an "overhaul" but more pertinent than that. Former prime minister Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi had proposed an "education revolution" to address Malaysia's future needs. This includes evaluating the "basics" by involving all quarters, stages and policies.

Superficial changes such as overhauling "old and faulty parts" is not enough; and it will be a sheer waste of time and energy for many changes had since taken place or the "parts" are no longer suitable.

This include forsaking the perception that universities are "factories" to mint graduates.

This is the basic issue that needed to be tackled quickly. The question is the timeframe for it called for courage to tear down the walls and make changes at all political, economic and social levels.

*This article is translated from the original in Bahasa Malaysia (Utusan Sept 26), courtesy of Utusan Malaysia.*

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