

**RESPONSE TO EXTERNAL FORCES DRIVING  
QUALITY IN MALAYSIA BY ESTABLISHED  
LOCAL PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATIONAL  
INSTITUTIONS**

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LOCAL PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATIONAL  
INSTITUTIONS**

**By**

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SHORTENED FORMS**

ACCA	Association of Certified Chartered Accountants
ADP	American Degree Programme
APICTA	Asia Pacific ICT Awards
APQN	Asia-Pacific Quality Network
AUQA	Australian Universities Quality Agency
AUSMAT	Western Australian Matriculation
CAEM	Council of Architectural Education Malaysia
CATS	Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme
CBM	Core Business Meeting
CHRIE	Council on Hotel Restaurant and Institutional Education
CIMP	Canadian International Matriculation Programme
CPU	Canadian Pre-university
DPE	Department of Private Education
EAC	Engineering Accreditation Council
GATE	Global Alliance for Transnational Education
GCE	General Certificate of Education
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
INQAAHE	International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
IT	Information Technology
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
KACST	King Abdul Aziz City of Science and Technology

KDU	Kolej Damansara Utama
KL	Kuala Lumpur
LAM	Lembaga Akitek Malaysia
LAN	Lembaga Akreditasi Negara
LCCI	London Chamber of Commerce and Industry
LCD	Liquid Crystal Display
LJM	Lembaga Jurutera Malaysia
LRT	Light Rail Transit
MAPCO	Malaysian Association for Private Colleges
MAPCU	Malaysian Association for Private Colleges and Universities
MCSA	Microsoft Certified Systems Administrator
MCSD	Microsoft Certified Systems Developer
MCSE	Microsoft Certified Systems Engineer
MIC	Malaysian Indian Congress
MICPA	Malaysian Institute of Certified Chartered Accountants
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MQA	Malaysian Qualifications Agency
MQF	Malaysian Qualifications Framework
MSC	Multimedia Super Corridor
M.Sc	Master of Science
NAPEI	National Association for Private Educational Institutions
NEAC	National Economic Action Council
NITC	National Information Technology Council

NST	New Straits Times
PHEIs	Private Higher Educational Institutions
PoA	Panel of Assessors
PKIBM	National Association for Bumiputera Higher Education Institutions
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency
QAAHE	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
QAD	Quality Assurance Division
R&D	Research and Development
RM	Ringgit Malaysia
SAM	South Australian Matriculation
SARC	Student Activities Recreation Council
SIGs	Special Interest Groups
SPM	Sijil Pelajaran Malaysian
SSABSA	Secondary School Assessment Board of South Australia
STPM	Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia
TNA	Training Needs Analysis
UCLES	University of Cambridge Local Examination Syndicate
UEC	United Examination Certificate
UK	United Kingdom
UKM	Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
UM	Universiti Malaya
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific Cultural Organisation

UNIMAS	Universiti Malaysia Sabah
UPM	Universiti Putra Malaysia
USA	United States of America
USM	Universiti Sains Malaysia
UTM	Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

# **RESPON TERHADAP DAYA LUARAN YANG MENGERAKKAN KUALITI DI MALAYSIA OLEH INSTITUSI PENDIDIKAN TINGGI SWASTA TEMPATAN YANG MANTAP**

## **ABSTRAK**

Kajian ini dikonseptualisasi berdasarkan hujahan Seymour (1993) bahawa kualiti dalam sesebuah institusi atau organisasi biasanya digerakkan oleh daya luaran iaitu akauntabiliti, persaingan, orientasi perkhidmatan dan kos. Justeru, kajian ini menerangkan bagaimana daya luaran ini menggerakkan kualiti dalam konteks pendidikan tinggi swasta di Malaysia. Tujuan utama kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji respon Institusi Pendidikan Tinggi Swasta (IPTS) yang mantap yang menganggotai Persatuan Kolej and Universiti Swasta Malaysia (MAPCU) terhadap daya luaran yang menggerakkan kualiti di Malaysia melalui input kualiti yang ditentukan dan diberi penekanan oleh badan-badan regulatori bagi pendidikan swasta di Malaysia. Input kualiti yang dimaksudkan adalah program, prasarana dan infrastruktur, perkhidmatan kepada pelajar, perkembangan staf akademik dan, kajian dan pembangunan. Dua buah IPTS tempatan MAPCU yang mantap terlibat di dalam kajian ini. Reka bentuk kajian ini adalah kajian kes kualitatif berbilang pra-berstruktur / “pre-structured qualitative multi-case study”. Teknik “pattern matching to assumptions”/ pola dipadankan dengan andaian Yin (2003) digunakan untuk menganalisa data. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa pendidikan tinggi swasta ditadbir melalui kerangka regulatori yang kuat. Maka, akauntabiliti legal adalah daya luaran yang kuat yang menggerakkan kualiti dalam IPTS. Terdapat beberapa persamaan antara respon kedua-dua IPTS yang mengambil bahagian dalam kajian ini terhadap daya luaran yang menggerakkan kualiti. Kedua-dua

IPTS ini bukan sahaja patuh tetapi melebihi piawai minima bagi input kualiti yang ditentukan serta menanda aras program yang ditawarkan dengan piawai antarabangsa dalam usaha mereka untuk memberi pendidikan berkualiti dalam institusi masing-masing.

# **RESPONSE TO EXTERNAL FORCES DRIVING QUALITY IN MALAYSIA BY ESTABLISHED LOCAL PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS**

## **ABSTRACT**

This study is conceptualised based on Seymour's (1993) contention that quality in any institution or organisation is usually driven by the external forces of accountability, competition, cost and service orientation. This study describes how these external forces identified by Seymour (1993) are driving quality in the context of private higher education in Malaysia. The primary purpose of this study is to examine the response by established local private higher educational institutions (PHEIs) that are members of the Malaysian Association of Private Colleges and Universities (MAPCU) to the external forces driving quality in Malaysia through the quality inputs stipulated and emphasised by the government regulatory bodies for private higher education in Malaysia. These quality inputs are programmes, facilities and infrastructure, student services, academic staff development and, research and development. Two established local PHEIs in MAPCU participated in this study. The research design for this study is a pre-structured qualitative multi-case study. Yin's (2003) technique of pattern matching to assumptions is employed to analyse the data. The findings of the study show that private higher education in Malaysia is governed through a strong regulatory framework. Hence, legal accountability is a strong external force in driving quality in PHEIs. Both the PHEIs that participated in the study share several similarities in their responses to the external forces driving quality. Both these PHEIs not only comply but surpass the minimum standard for the stipulated quality inputs as well as benchmark the programmes they

offer against international standards in their efforts to provide quality education in their institutions.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 Introduction

“Quality concerns everyone in higher education.”

(Mohamed Salleh Mohamed Yasin, 2007, p.E6)

This chapter serves as a prelude to this study on the response to external forces driving quality in Malaysia by established local private higher educational institutions (PHEIs). The aim of this chapter is to offer insights into the emergence of concern about the quality of local PHEIs operating in Malaysia. This concern has led to the research problem underlying the purpose of this study.

The research questions that were formulated serve as a guide to provide direction to achieve the purpose of this study. All studies have their boundaries hence this chapter also delineates the delimitations and limitations of this study. Finally, the specific terminologies used in this study are defined within the context of this study.

## **1.1 Background of the Study**

Private higher education as an industry is a fairly new phenomenon in Malaysia (Lee, 2003). The proliferation of PHEIs in Malaysia began with the government's educational policies favouring the growth of private higher education to meet economic changes and social demands. The private sector responded to this opportunity for access into and for the expansion of private higher education provided through these policies.

The liberalisation of government educational policies related to private higher education led to the rapid expansion of the private higher education sector in Malaysia during the mid-1990s. Among the reasons that led to the liberalisation of government policies towards private higher learning education was the lack of places in the public institutions of higher learning to meet the increasing demand for higher education, the ethnic quota system for admission into public higher educational institutions, the higher cost of overseas education and the devaluation of the Malaysian Ringgit (RM) during the Asian economic crisis (Lee, 1999). Also, in 1995, the twenty percent of Malaysian students who were studying overseas cost the Malaysian government about US\$800 million in currency outflow, constituting nearly twelve percent of the country's current account deficit (Silverman, 1996, p.26).

The liberalisation of government educational policies expanded the opportunities for Malaysians to pursue higher education and obtain foreign degrees within the country. With the downside of the Malaysian currency against major foreign currencies, the Malaysian government made a policy objective of reducing the number of students sent overseas for undergraduate study during this period (Malaysia, 1996). In order to realise this policy objective, “the government sought to develop its indigenous provision through both local private and public institutions, and through partnerships with foreign higher educational institutions” (Morshidi, 2006, p.113). The government saw the local private education sector as the key means of reducing the currency outflow and in the long term, transforming Malaysia into a net exporter of tertiary education (Ismail, 1997).

The government’s liberalisation of the educational policies resulted in the large increase in the number of PHEIs operating in Malaysia. Ahmad Mahdzan Ayob and Noran Fauziah Yaakub (1999) explain that the liberalisation of government policies towards private higher education stemming from economic necessities opened the floodgates for private education providers to set up tertiary programmes. Between the year 1996 and the year 2001, the number of PHEIs operating in Malaysia increased by one hundred and four percent; from three hundred and fifty four institutions in 1996 to seven hundred and six institutions in 2001 (Education Guide Malaysia, 2001). The Malaysian government placed no restrictions on the number of private colleges and let free market forces play out in the arena of private education (Lee, 1999). The Malaysian government’s

liberalisation of policies necessitated by the economic crisis in the late 1990's was the impetus for the rapid growth of private higher education in Malaysia (Ahmad Mahdzan Ayob & Noran Fauziah Yaakub, 1999; Cohen, 2001; Lee, 2004; Morshidi, 2006).

This rapid and uncontrolled expansion of private higher education in Malaysia saw the emergence of some PHEI operators establishing institutions with the sole intention of making a fast buck. These PHEI operators exploited the opportunity for easier access into the private higher education sector provided by the government under the liberalisation policies towards private higher education. According to Chin (2005) there is no doubt that education, especially at tertiary level, is big business and a growing one. That is why it has attracted so many new players, though some of them may have joined for the wrong reason. Faucher (2002) provides an insight into the scenario of this sector during the uncontrolled expansion of private higher education in Malaysia provided under the liberalisation policies towards private higher education: Malaysia was struggling with the market place it had created; also quality education does not necessarily go hand in hand with making a quick buck. A spokesman from Metropolitan College, which is a local PHEI in MAPCU, also contends that "there has been a proliferation of sub-standard institutions of dubious quality" (Disney & Adlan, 2003, p.8).

Explaining the emergence of these unscrupulous PHEI operators that had established institutions merely to cash in on this opportunity, the Director-General of the Department of Private Education (DPE), Hassan Hashim, admits, “the problem arose because the department had to approve many colleges during the 1997 economic crisis, as many students abroad were asked to return” (“Eye on private education industry”, 2003).

In order to address the concerns about the quality of education provided by PHEI operators and to assure the quality of education provided in these institutions, the Malaysian government passed three educational acts to regulate the private higher education sector as well as to monitor the quality and standard of the educational programmes offered in PHEIs.

The first act was the National Council on Higher Education Act, 1996. A national council was established to steer the direction of both public and private higher education. Its function is to plan, to formulate and to determine national policies and strategies to ensure better coordination of the higher education system in Malaysia. The second act was the Private Higher Education Institutions Act, 1996. This act defines the government’s regulatory control over PHEIs. The third act was the National Accreditation Board Act, 1996. The enactment of this legislation led to the establishment of two government agencies in 1997. These agencies were the Department of Private Education (DPE) and the National Accreditation Board. The National Accreditation Board also known as LAN (“Lembaga

Akreditasi Negara”) serves to act as the government’s regulatory mechanism to safeguard the quality in PHEIs in Malaysia. It also serves as a point of reference in determining quality and standards in PHEIs, as laid down by the government. LAN is authorised to put quality in place, to set policies on the standard and quality control of courses of study, and certification awarded by PHEIs.

Ahmad Mahzdan Ayob and Noran Fauziah Yaakub (1999) contend these acts paved the way for the private sector to enter the higher education market in a big and regulated way. Lee (1999) however pointed out that though there were rules and regulations in place to safeguard quality through these acts, due to the lack of human resources, the implementation of these acts faced shortcomings such as in the areas of monitoring and enforcement.

During this period of the rapid expansion of private higher education in Malaysia, in 1997, MAPCU (formerly known as MAPCO), consisting of the bigger PHEIs, with a minimum paid up capital of RM 500, 000 owned by large corporations and managed by academic professionals, wanted to be differentiated from other PHEIs as they considered themselves to be reputable high quality education providers. The former Deputy President of MAPCO, Ramon Navaratnam explains why the association was formed in 1997,

“The private sector has a lot of unscrupulous operators who should be screened before they are given licenses to educate. The ministry has been too liberal earlier and, as such, we have about seven hundred colleges with varying standards of quality and scope. Some are in shop houses. They are vocational schools teaching hair dressing, tailoring and secretarial courses. That is why MAPCO was formed, to separate the wheat from the chaff.”

(“Golden rules to follow to avoid being fleeced”, 2002)

In the highly competitive environment, with over seven hundred private colleges operating with various scope and quality, some questionable, the establishment of MAPCU served to safeguard the reputation of its member institutions.

In 1997, necessitated by the economic crisis, for the first time the Malaysian government allowed non-university PHEIs to conduct foreign undergraduate degree programmes in Malaysia. These programmes were conducted through partnerships with foreign universities in the United Kingdom (UK), Australia, New Zealand and France through the 3+ 0 programme (Jabatan Pendidikan Swasta, 2001). Only ten non-university PHEIs operating during that period were approved to conduct this innovative model of the twinning programme called the 3 + 0. All but one of these local PHEIs is in MAPCU (Lee, 1999).

These local PHEIs in MAPCU spearheaded renegotiations with their foreign partner universities to allow Malaysian students enrolled in the twinning degree programmes in their institutions to be able to complete these programmes entirely in Malaysia. Through these renegotiations the students enrolled in twinning programmes would be awarded a degree without having to fulfill the

requirement of completing the final year in the foreign partner university before a degree could be awarded. During the currency downturn, as a result of the economic crisis, the local PHEIs in MAPCU played a crucial role in helping the government provide quality education for many students who had to stay back in Malaysia to pursue their higher education (Tan, 2002). During this financial whirlwind period in the Malaysian economy, the local PHEIs in MAPCU, apart from expanding the accessibility for Malaysian students into the limited places for higher education in Malaysia, also helped to reduce the out flow of currency from the country for the government.

## **1.2 Research Problem**

When enrollment in higher education institutions was small and was the domain of the elitist, only the best were admitted as students and only the most able were allowed to teach. Its small numbers and exclusivity preserved excellence in higher education (Brennan & Shah, 2000). However, with the massification of higher education through expansion, distance education, privatisation, transnational education and diversification, the concern about the quality of higher education began to surface. "All these trends seen in higher education, like expansion, privatisation, diversification, the emergence of non-traditional and non-university type educational provisions and the growing relevance of transnational education bring in the concern for quality and standards of the education offered for both international and local consumption" (Gnanam, 2003,

p.4). He further adds that the concern for quality education and quality assurance is also evidenced by the establishing of over one hundred and thirty national quality assurance agencies in over one hundred countries within the past decade. More countries are in stages of establishing quality assurance agencies for higher educational institutions within their countries.

Another concern arising from mass higher education is the commoditisation of higher education. Green (1994) expresses some of the fears concerning the quality of higher education resulting from the commoditisation of higher education. They are that quality would be sacrificed in the increasingly competitive educational market for student numbers; that quality would be traded for greater efficiency to cater for a larger number of students, and also that there would be a “dilution” of the quality of student intake into higher education institutions. These fears expressed by Green (1994) have also been described as the “ugly side effects” of the private higher education industry in Malaysia (“Weeding out shady colleges”, 2005)

According to LAN, “The quality of education offered by PHEIs is questionable; even though it cannot be denied that there may be quality control mechanisms at the institutional level” (LAN Annual Report, 1999, p.5). Lee (1999) also contends that although there are some very reputable private colleges and universities in the country, the quality of education provided by many of the PHEIs is questionable. The quality of PHEIs operating in Malaysia is of great concern to

the government, to parents and students, to employers and to the major players in the private higher education industry. Private higher education in Malaysia has gained local acceptance from the public as well as from the government as another option for higher education besides public higher education. Malaysia is also gaining recognition internationally as an education exporting country in which foreign students can pursue higher education (Education Guide Malaysia, 2004). However, the perceived lack of overall quality of PHEIs in Malaysia as a result of the black sheep among the private higher education providers operating in the industry may undermine the confidence of local and foreign students in PHEIs in Malaysia and could adversely affect the reputation of this industry.

This lack of confidence in private higher education stemming from the questionable quality of a number of PHEIs would then in turn result in the loss of revenue generated by the private higher education industry for the country. It would also thwart the healthy growth of this competitive private education industry and would certainly retard the government's plans to establish Malaysia as a centre for excellence in education.

The quality of private higher education in Malaysia is a critical issue as it affects not only the well-being of this sector but also the external constituents in this sector; namely, the students who enroll in these institutions, their parents who pay the fees, employers who receive the manpower produced by these PHEIs,

the government's responsibility in the provision of higher education and the private higher education industry itself.

The issue of the questionable quality of PHEIs needs to be addressed by all private higher education providers operating in Malaysia. Seymour (1993) contends that with the large numbers of higher education institutions operating, quality has become the universal criterion in the higher competitive environment of higher education. Seymour (1993) warns, "Either respond to the call for quality or step aside because others will be more than happy to move to the front of the line" (p.8). However, despite being a critical issue, whilst there are some PHEIs that are responding to the call for quality by these external constituents and are initiating efforts to enhance the quality of education within their institutions, the problem remains. A fairly large number of local PHEIs are still not responding to the issue of quality.

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

Despite the perceived lack of overall quality and lack of confidence in local PHEIs by the public and the government regulatory bodies, there are several local PHEIs that have been acknowledged as reputable education providers and have been recognised by the regulatory bodies for providing quality education. In this category of PHEIs are the local PHEIs in MAPCU consisting of the bigger and established local PHEIs. These major players in the industry are responding to the call for quality and are continuously initiating efforts to enhance the quality of

education provided in their institutions. However, little is known about the efforts of these PHEIs in responding to the call for quality.

Seymour (1993) contends that quality in any organisation or institution is usually driven by external forces. He argues that there need to be forces, usually external that demand a new approach or different strategies to enhance quality. He believes that without these forces that drive quality, changes in operating philosophy and procedures will not be carried out willfully by organisations and institutions. The external forces identified by Seymour (1993) are accountability, competition, service orientation and cost.

PHEIs in Malaysia operate in a highly regulated environment (Lee, 1999; Tan, 2002). Hence, PHEIs in Malaysia must respond to the external forces driving quality within the boundaries of the legislated regulatory framework governing this sector. Hence, PHEIs in Malaysia need to respond to the external forces driving quality through the quality inputs stipulated by LAN (Lembaga Akreditasi Negara, 2003) and emphasised in the Strategic Plan for the Quality Enhancement of PHEIs from 2001 to 2010 ( Refer to Table 2.2) to assure and to enhance the quality of programmes offered by PHEIs. For the purpose of this study, five quality inputs among the quality inputs from these quality inputs were selected. They were programme, facilities and infrastructure, student services, academic staff development and research and development (Lembaga Akreditasi Negara, 2003; Jabatan Pendidikan Swasta, 2001).

Based on Seymour's (1993) contention and the conditions in which PHEIs are legally permitted to operate in Malaysia, the purpose of this study primarily was to examine the response by established local PHEIs in MAPCU to the external forces driving quality through the quality inputs stipulated and emphasised by the government regulatory bodies.

Therefore, this study had two objectives:

- (a) To describe how the external forces of accountability, competition, service orientation and cost identified by Seymour (1993), are driving quality in the context of private higher education in Malaysia.
- (b) To examine the response by established local PHEIs in MAPCU to the external forces driving quality in Malaysia through their programmes, facilities and infrastructure, student services, academic staff development and research and development.

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

The research questions were meant both to guide this study as well as to be answered. The research questions for this study were generated from the conceptual framework for this study. To use Miles and Huberman's (1994) phrase, formulating the research questions was "an iterative process" (p.25). The research questions were reformulated several times until the researcher was

satisfied that the questions reflected the purposes of this study and were characteristic of research questions in a qualitative approach to a case study suggested by Marshall and Rossman (1995). They contend that “research questions should be general enough to permit exploration but focused enough to delimit the study.

The research questions were:

1. How are the external forces driving quality in the context of private higher education in Malaysia?
2. How are the established local PHEIs in MAPCU responding to the external forces driving quality in Malaysia through the quality inputs stipulated by LAN and emphasised in the Strategic Plan for Quality Enhancement of PHEIs from 2001 to 2010?
  - (a) How are the established local PHEIs in MAPCU responding to the external forces driving quality in Malaysia through their programmes?
  - (b) How are the established local PHEIs in MAPCU responding to the external forces driving quality in Malaysia through their facilities and infrastructure?
  - (c) How are the established local PHEIs in MAPCU responding to the external forces driving quality in Malaysia through their student services?
  - (d) How are the established local PHEIs in MAPCU responding to the external forces driving quality in Malaysia through their academic staff development?

(e) How are the established local PHEIs in MAPCU responding to the external forces driving quality in Malaysia through their research and development?

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

This study is significant because it should contribute to knowledge on private higher education in Malaysia in the following ways. Private higher education is considered one of the most dynamic and fastest growing segments of post secondary education at the turn of the twenty first century (Altbach, 1999). Private higher education as an industry is a relatively new phenomenon in Malaysia, yet it has grown so rapidly that it accounts for more than half of all enrollment in higher education within the country and the number of PHEIs has surpassed the number of public higher educational institutions (Fu, 2004; Sharifah Hapsah Shahabudin, 2005). However, the literature on private higher education in Malaysia is considerably limited. Academic research carried out on this crucial industry is little, especially research looking into the efforts made by the players within the industry itself in addressing issues related to quality. In examining the response by the established local PHEIs in MAPCU to the external forces driving quality, this study makes a contribution to the literature on private higher education in Malaysia by providing insightful details on the efforts of these PHEIs in responding to the external forces driving quality in Malaysia. The experiences in responding to the external forces driving quality shared by these PHEIs that participated in this study serve as a valuable learning opportunity for

all PHEIs that are concerned with providing quality education and in responding to the external forces driving quality in Malaysia.

As far as is known to the researcher, no other study has been carried out on how the external forces driving quality identified by Seymour (1993) are driving quality in the context of private higher education in Malaysia. Freed and Klugman's (1997) study on external forces driving quality along similar lines was carried out in higher educational institutions across the United States (USA). Hence, this study adds to the body of literature on the forces driving quality in higher education.

As the legislative framework for private higher education is still evolving, this study provides feedback to the authorities concerned with assuring and enhancing the quality of private higher education in Malaysia. This study also provides data for consideration by the authorities concerned, to review, to formulate policies and to develop strategies that will stimulate the provision of the quality of private higher education in Malaysia as well as to support the established local PHEIs in MAPCU in their efforts towards providing quality education in line with the government's mission of establishing Malaysia as a centre of excellence in education.

Finally, this study makes a contribution to knowledge on private higher education in Malaysia by responding to the suggestion made by the Executive Director for

the Centre for Quality Assurance in International Education; to highlight the positive contributions of private higher education.

“Regardless of the extent of a country’s wealth, no country exists at present which can sustain expanding its state funded higher education system, especially those which are tuition free. Examples of improved access through allowing educational systems other than government educational systems are found in Japan, China and Malaysia. However, because higher education has been traditionally the responsibility of national governments, private education is viewed often without cause, as second rate and not trustworthy. A global campaign concerning the positive contributions of the private higher education sector would be an interesting, and probably fruitful exercise.”

(Lenn,n.d.)

## **1.6 Scope and Delimitation of the Study**

Merriam (1998) contends that “the single most defining characteristic of case study research lies in delimiting the object of study, the case (p. 27). Delimitation explains how the scope of a study is focused on one particular area (Hussey & Hussey, 1997). The focus of this study was on examining the response to the external forces driving quality by established local PHEIs in MAPCU within the context of private higher education in Malaysia. This study was based on Seymour’s (1993) contention and supported by Freed and Klugman (1997) that it is usually external forces that drive quality. The external forces are not the only forces driving quality. There are also internal forces driving quality. These internal forces have been identified by Freed and Klugman (1997) as forces driving quality improvement within higher education institutions across the USA. The internal forces in order of strength are the top mid-level managers, individuals with personal commitment, faculty members and sceptics of quality enhancement

efforts within the institution. Freed and Klugman (1997) believe that a combination of internal and external forces drive quality but they explain that it is the external forces that serve as a means for internal forces to initiate quality improvement within higher education institutions. Therefore, it was based on this argument that this study focused on the external forces driving quality in Malaysia to examine the response by the established local PHEIs in MAPCU.

In the context of private higher education in Malaysia, all PHEIs must operate within the legislated regulatory parameters. Thus, the response by the established local PHEIs in MAPCU that participated in the study to the external forces driving quality in Malaysia was examined through the quality inputs stipulated by LAN (Lembaga Akreditasi Negara, 2003) and emphasised in the Strategic Plan for the Quality Enhancement of PHEIs from 2001 to 2010 (Refer to Table 2.2) to assure and to enhance the quality of programmes offered by PHEIs. In order to delimit the scope to examine the response by the established local PHEIs in MAPCU in response to the external forces driving quality of this study, five quality inputs among the quality inputs stipulated and emphasised were selected. They were programme, facilities and infrastructure, student services, academic staff development and research and development (Lembaga Akreditasi Negara, 2003; Jabatan Pendidikan Swasta, 2001).

This study was not carried out to evaluate the response by the established local PHEIs in MAPCU that participated in the study. This was specified explicitly and clearly to the participants in this study. The researcher did not impose any

external yardstick to assess the quality practices of these institutions as quality is a relative concept (Ball, 1991; Singh & Sudharshan, 1996; Vroeijenstijn, 1991). Furthermore Goedegebuure et. al., (1994) contend that quality is multidimensional, interpretive and contextually determined. Therefore, the comparisons of the quality of the established local PHEIs that participated in the study were not hierarchical but descriptive and interpretive.

### **1.7 Limitations of the Study**

The data obtained from this study, was based on the environment in private higher education in which these local PHEIs were operating during the period the study was conducted, which was from 2003 to mid-2007.

Some of the information provided by the regulatory bodies on changes in policies and approaches to assuring quality were tentative as the data collection was carried out a few months after the Higher Education Ministry was established and during the restructuring of the quality assurance framework for higher education in Malaysia. As this study is a pre-structured qualitative multi-case study which is “bounded in context” (Miles & Huberman, 1994) the findings and conclusions of the responses by the established local PHEIs in MAPCU to the external forces driving quality were relevant to the point in time when this study was carried out. Hence, based on the changes in the expectations and demands of the external

forces driving quality in the future, the response of the established local PHEIs in MAPCU may change accordingly.

This study does not purport to make precise generalisations. Only two established local PHEIs in MAPCU were involved in this study. Furthermore, the researcher was only allowed limited access into the PHEIs that were involved in the study. Therefore, the findings on the response of these two established local PHEIs in MAPCU are not representative of all established local PHEIs in MAPCU, though their response may be reflected in the response of other established local PHEIs in MAPCU.

### **1.8 Working Definitions**

The following are the working definitions used in this study:

**Clients** refer to students as customers of PHEIs receiving education services for a fee.

**Established local PHEIs in MAPCU** refers to privately funded for-profit higher education providers that are members of the Malaysian Association for Private Colleges and Universities (MAPCU). They are usually referred to as the bigger and major players in the private higher education industry with a minimum paid up capital of RM 500, 000 and are mostly owned by corporations. They consist of both non-university and university status PHEIs. They have also received recognition from the government regulatory authorities in Malaysia as PHEIs that

provide quality education. The established local PHEIs in MAPCU commonly referred to as private colleges that participated in this study were all of non-university status during the period the fieldwork for this study was carried out.

**External forces** refer to forces outside the institution driving quality in any organisation or institution. Seymour (1993) identified four external forces. They are accountability, competition, cost and service orientation.

**Government regulatory bodies** refers to the “Lembaga Akreditasi Negara” (National Accreditation Board) known as LAN and the Department of Private Education (DPE) legislated to assert control measures to safeguard and assure quality in PHEIs in Malaysia.

**Interpersonal quality** refers to how well needs and services are provided to the satisfaction of the clients.

**Quality standards** refer to the pre-determined standards based on criteria stipulated by the government regulatory bodies that must be complied with by all PHEIs in order to legally conduct courses of study.

**Quality inputs** refer to programmes (courses of study and curriculum), facilities and infrastructure, academic staff development (teachers and staff development), student services (management of student affairs) and, research and development. These are among the areas stipulated and emphasised by the

government regulatory bodies to assure and to enhance the quality of programmes offered by PHEIs. As private higher education in Malaysia is highly regulated, PHEIs need to respond to the external forces driving quality in Malaysia through these quality inputs.

**Quasi-market** refers to markets in education that are different from the pure market mainly due to government intervention manifested through policies and regulations.

**Research paradigm** refers to fundamental assumptions scholars make about the world that they are studying. The fundamental assumptions form a picture of the world the scholar is studying and tells the scholar what is known about the world, what is unknown about it, and how one should view the world if one wants to know the unknown and finally what is worth knowing.

**Technical quality** is the principal dimension of quality. It consists of inputs and resources.

**Transnational education** refers to education in which the students are located in a country different from where the awarding institution is based.

## **1.9 Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented the background and the context of the study. It also outlined the research purpose, objectives, research questions, significance, delimitation and limitations of this study. For a sector that is playing a crucial role in the provision of higher education in this country, very few studies have been carried out; hence the need for this study. This study serves to provide a better understanding of how the external forces of accountability, competition cost and service orientation identified by Seymour (1993) are driving quality in the context of the highly regulated private higher education sector in Malaysia. The major players in the private education industry are acknowledged by the government for their role in the provision of quality higher education but very little is known about their efforts. Therefore, this study serves to provide insights into the response by the established local PHEIs in MAPCU to the external forces driving quality in Malaysia through the quality inputs stipulated by LAN and emphasised in the Strategic Plan for Quality Enhancement of PHEIs from 2001 to 2010 to assure and enhance the quality of programmes offered by PHEIs. In the next chapter, the literature review and the conceptual framework for the study will be presented.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

“No problem in education exists in isolation from other areas of human behaviour. Consequently, there is always some research study, some theory, some thinking related to the problem that can be reviewed to inform the study at hand”.

(Merriam, 1998)

The literature review provided the knowledge base that the researcher could draw upon in making decisions for the journey into the world of private higher education in Malaysia for the purpose of this research. The literature review helped the researcher decide on the focus of the study, formulate the research questions, form assumptions, develop the conceptual framework and later find support to substantiate the findings in this study.

The literature review begins with a discussion on the concepts central to this study. Next, the review of literature relevant to governance of higher education, quality assurance, approaches to assuring quality in higher education and private higher education provides an insight into the context in which PHEIs in Malaysia operate. Finally the concepts central to this study are framed within the context of private higher education in Malaysia to develop the conceptual framework and form the assumptions for this study.

## **2.1 Concepts**

The concepts central to this study are discussed in this section of the literature review. These concepts are quality in higher education, monitoring quality, dimensions of quality, and forces driving quality.

### **2.1.1 Quality in Higher Education**

The traditional view of quality is that quality is absolute. It is an ideal in which there is no compromise. Used in the educational context, quality is elitist and pursuing quality is all about pursuing the highest standards in which there is no compromise. Hence, the notion of exclusivity is implied (Singh & Sudharshan, 1996). Traditionally, higher education was only the concern of academics working within the same framework and sharing similar values. The academic community had no need to define quality or discuss its meaning for they knew quality when they saw it. Garvin (1988) defines this notion of quality as transcendent quality.

According to Mayhew et. al., (1990) the transcendent perspective to quality reflects the historic view of quality. Resulting from the extension and diversification of purposes and types of institutions in higher education, quality in higher education has become the concern of the different stakeholders who have varying interests and give priority to different aspects in deciding what quality in