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PUTTING INTO PERSPECTIVE THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY'S CONTRIBUTION TO NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN MALAYSIA

Dato' Dr. Zaiton Osman
University of Malaya Library

Abstract: This paper will focus on the university library's contribution towards the national education system, putting into perspective therefore its "real" role in national development. This paper will not however focus on the V2020 and the university library's role in the achievement of its objectives, which has been extensively dealt with in a previous paper. (1)

Abstrak : Artikel ini memfokuskan kepada peranan sebenar Perpustakaan akademik dalam pembangunan negara iaitu melalui sumbangannya terhadap sistem pendidikan kebangsaan. Artikel ini tidak akan menyentuh Wawasan 2020 dan peranan Perpustakaan akademik dalam mencapai objektifnya di mana ianya telah disentuh secara terperinci di dalam kertas kerja yang lepas.

1.0 THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

"National development" is a complex process, fraught with challenges. It is usually the result of many initiatives by various "expert" think-tanks from the government (e.g. ministries, universities, etc.) and private sectors, with input from political and interest groups representing the various segments of society. Providing the parameters for development are the various strategic plans – the 5-year Malaysia Plans (the 7th ends in 2000), the Outline Perspective Plan (the 2nd is for 1991-2000) and the Vision 2020 (30-year plan).

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Against this macro background, the question that begs to be asked is: How significant is the contribution by university libraries? Highly significant if we are to believe what has been written in professional literature, that:

- (i) The university is as good as the library
- (ii) The library is at the heart of learning
- (iii) Libraries are information power-houses

The issue however is whether the statements above reflect the university library's 'real' role or one that is based on perception. In order for its contribution to be placed in the right perspective, its role and functions will have to be viewed within the context of the education sector which not only provides direct input into national development plans but is also responsible, through the education system, for the achievement of certain strategic national goals such as manpower, literacy, development of the fields of science and technology, etc. In short, the university library's contribution to national development must be seen in the context of the environment within which it operates.

2.0 THE ENVIRONMENT

All public universities are almost fully funded by the Ministry of Education and are exclusively under its jurisdiction. They therefore function within the confines of national educational policies and practice, which in turn determine policies and practice at university level. In this way, the education system provides direct input towards national development. Because it serves as the determinant as well as the reflection of society, the issue of quality in the education system becomes critical. To a great extent, the success of the education system means the success of national development. An understanding therefore of what is expected of universities and accordingly their libraries in making the education system a success is crucial in ensuring success in national development.

For the library, its environment consists of 2 levels: (i) the external environment which is essentially dominated directly by the Ministry of Education and indirectly by Society and (ii) the internal environment which is made up of the university and its policies.

Developments in the external environment would effect the internal environment and ultimately the Library. This reinforces the fact that the library does not function in isolation, that it functions to support the education system and is part of the greater scheme of things, which we call national development.

The Figure 1 below would better illustrate the environment:

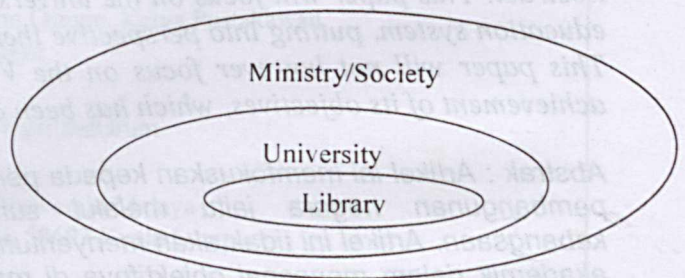


Figure 1

2.1. THE EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

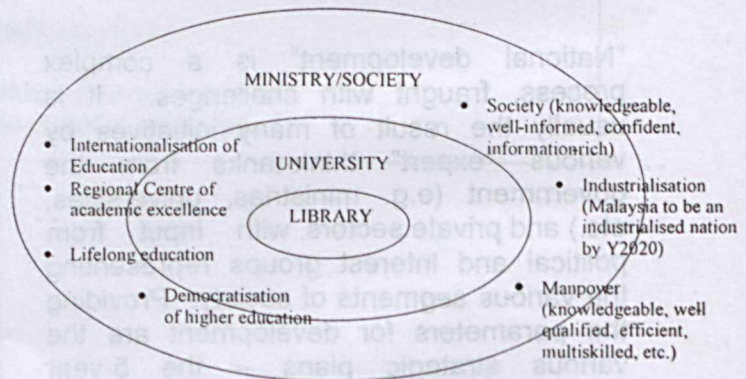


Figure 2

While there are many more areas of contribution expected of the education sector, the critical few that have a direct bearing on universities and university libraries are as shown in Figure 2.

(i) Industrialisation

One of the strategic objectives of the V2020 is to make Malaysia an industrialised nation by the year 2020. Although the V2020 covers a period of 30 years, achieving an industrialised nation status within that time span is no easy task. And how does the education sector expected to accomplish this? Mainly by ensuring that:

- priority is given to science and technology programmes/courses in schools and universities.
- research in science and technology be given priority through sufficient funding especially in areas that are not only commercially viable but also ensuring that research findings are capable of being applied for the development of the nation.
- increasing manpower through the education system via increased enrollment at schools and universities.
- providing society with opportunities of higher education via non-conventional educational programmes (long distance/part-time certificate and diploma courses) in science and technology.

The policy initiated to accelerate the development of science and technology at the national level will have repercussions at the university level on their core business – teaching, learning and research.

Through its core business activities, the university is in the position to make industrialisation a reality, because underlying industrialisation is knowledge in the fields of science and technology. Knowledge is the 'fuel' that can propel the country towards industrialisation.

(ii) Manpower

For the nation to achieve the status of industrialised nation by 2020, V2020 has specified that manpower should be knowledgeable, efficient, well-qualified, multiskilled and pragmatic.

Although manpower planning per se for the nation is not under the purview of the Ministry of Education, the education system is responsible for *producing* manpower via schools, colleges and universities.

To date, the manpower produced by the universities total 375,000 graduates in all areas of profession. They are therefore elitist, highly-qualified, trained for leadership and have expertise in several areas of proficiency.

To increase and broaden the manpower base from universities, the Ministry had specified a minimum recruitment of 20,000 undergraduates at each university by the year 2020. In the case of older universities, the recruitment figure has already been surpassed, such as the University of Malaya, which has a student recruitment of about 30,000 by year 2000.

Recruitment aside, of more importance issue is the quality of manpower. The need for quality manpower will have implications for teaching-learning strategies, curricula for university courses, qualifications at entry point, student activities, student welfare, student politics, etc.

In discussing the quality of manpower, what is important is the need for a different type of manpower for an industrialised nation. The current buzzword is "knowledge workers". There are numerous definitions of "knowledge workers", but underlying all arguments is the acknowledgement that manpower of the future must be capable of using and processing information independently. Universities should take cognizance of this in order to ensure that the manpower they produce are relevant for the industrialised Malaysia.

(iii) Malaysian Society

A well-informed, balanced yet robust society hopes to emerge by the Y2020. The stress on literacy and knowledge and particularly the importance of the need to

use and process information was singled out by the Prime Minister when he addressed issues of V2020, stating thus:

"in the information age that we are living in, the Malaysian society must be information-rich. It can be no accident that there is today no wealthy, developed country that is information-poor and no information-rich country that is poor and undeveloped". (2)

What role does the Ministry play in the formation of such a society? At the school level, probably by making sure that the national curriculum, teaching/learning strategies, co-curricular programmes, parent-teacher organisations and student welfare plans have incorporated the need to produce responsible citizens from the school system. At the university level, because of the 'elitist' nature of the population -- the impact is greater.

As graduates occupy the higher levels of society and usually provide economic, social and political leadership in society, it is more important that they understand what is expected of them as members of society.

As such, the responsibility of universities is greater if seen in the context of the above, and like at schools, will have implications for the university's academic and political role.

(iv) Democratisation of higher education

This issue has been extensively discussed in the 1994⁽³⁾ paper. In the same paper, mention was made of 9 public universities. To date, there are now 15 ⁽⁴⁾ public universities. A total number of 18, as mentioned in the same paper, was projected for Y2020.

What has not changed however is the intended shift "from elite to mass higher

education". ⁽⁵⁾ The V2020 hopes to see 40% of the population (40% of a projected 32 million ⁽⁶⁾) receiving university education

In discussing the democratisation of higher education, it must be mentioned that although education is not compulsory in Malaysia, a high percentage of the population takes advantage of free education (up to Form 6). Using 1998 statistics, there was a 95.66% of enrollment in primary schools (2,861,944 out of 3,010,678) ⁽⁷⁾ Considering that the rest could have enrolled in private schools, it would be safe to assume that 100% of the population between ages 6-11 would have enrolled in schools. The low percentage of those receiving university education (1.9%) gives the impression that its contribution to national development is negligible but in the final analysis it is quality not quantity that is important.

(v) Lifelong Education

This issue was discussed in the previous paper but from a different angle. The purpose of the discussion here is to determine how by propagating lifelong education, the education system could contribute towards national development. Basically, in the following ways:

- increasing the number of students by allowing those not recruited via the normal process to follow university courses using non-conventional methods
- developing well-rounded individuals by providing learning skills that could be used on a lifelong basis and allowing for independent self-paced learning
- Promote independent learning by empowering the learner such that he is responsible for his own learning
- Enable the mastery of learning skills including information – handling skills. Such skills would enable students to deal with information through various processes-

gathering information, analysing information, evaluating information, synthesizing information, disseminating and presenting information, etc.)

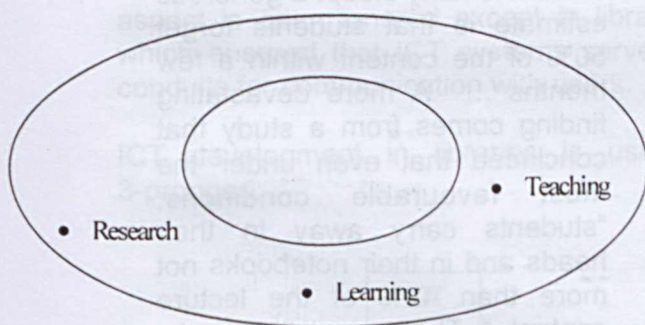
(vi) Internationalisation of Education

In answer to globalisation, the Ministry is taking steps to internationalise university courses, attract postgraduate students from overseas to study at local universities and to make Malaysia the Regional Centre for academic excellence.

In this context the quality of the courses to be marketed to international venues is important. This will have great implications for the marketability of the curricula, progressive teaching-learning strategies, availability of ICT network, excellent library and other support facilities, and the quality of lecturers. In short, the education system to be marketed should be nothing less than world class.

2.2. INTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

How do universities respond to the challenges posed by the external environment? What implications are there for the university's 'core business' - teaching, learning and research?



There are essentially 3 main issues that universities have to contend with:

- (i) Emphasis on science and technology
- (ii) Promote lifelong learning
- (iii) Institute and promote quality measures.

- (i) Emphasis on Science and Technology
 - Instituting the 60% vs 40% formula in favour of science and technology for courses offered by universities. This would have direct impact on libraries and other support facilities.
 - Reinforcing the learning of science and technology subjects for students weak in science and technology.
 - Giving priority to research in sciences and technology (especially those that use empirical methods) by providing adequate funding, proper monitoring and incentive schemes.

(ii) Promoting lifelong education

Lifelong learning has implications for teaching-learning strategies because it gives importance to the learner in the teaching-learning process. Learners learn at their own pace and are responsible for their own learning. Talk-chalk methods and rote-learning are incongruous with the concept of lifelong education. Project-work and problem-solving methods of learning are vehicles used to promote lifelong learning. The overall development of the learner is the fundamental aim of lifelong learning and the lecturer serves only as a guide. The potential for independent resource-based learning is tremendous.

(iii) Quality Measures

Underlying the V2020 objectives is the quest for Quality—whether it is for the development of manpower, restructuring of society, upgrading the education system, etc.

Underpinning these issues is the importance of knowledge and information.

Knowledge and information form the basis of university education and this importance should be reflected in the teaching, learning and research activities at universities

3.0 CONTRIBUTION OF UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES TO NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

It is against this macro background detailed above that the University library's contribution can be assessed.

Broadly categorized, there are 4 main areas of contribution that can be immediately identified:

- (i) Collection Development
- (ii) Knowledge Database Development
- (iii) Information Literacy Development
- (ii) Librarians as Information Managers

(i) Collection Development

University libraries have a total collection of 5 million volumes but what is important is not so much the number but the quality of the collections. In terms of monetary value, they may cost millions (8) of ringgits but their academic value is priceless. Also, just as important, the collections at university libraries comprise all forms and formats; encompass every conceivable subject area and contain precious indigenous titles that together constitute the nation's heritage. Committed to the policy of giving priority to science and technology (60% vs. 40%) library collections have had to adhere to the same formula. *But* while libraries are expected to develop their collections in accordance with the courses offered, other policies such as ensuring the complete coverage of Malaysiana titles published and providing alternative co-curricular reading materials such as novels, biographies, hobby books, folklore, etc. are actively pursued.

The effective usage of the valuable collections is dependent on how teaching, learning and research are conducted at Universities. The guidelines set by national policies are quite clear – graduates should be well-rounded, analytical, critical, independent, confident, etc. There is little chance of graduates turning out well-rounded if teaching strategies are archaic, if students become clones of lecturers as a result of depending solely on their lectures and notes.

While the talk-chalk may have its place in pedagogy, a variety of teaching strategies are required to inculcate lifelong learning skills. The weaknesses of the talk-chalk method of teaching are well-documented.

As illustrated by the report of the American Library Association,

"Students, for example, receive predigested information from lectures and textbooks, and little in their environment fosters active thinking or problem solving. What problem solving does occur is within artificially constructed and limited information environments that allow for single "correct" answers. Such exercises bear little resemblance to problem solving in the real world where multiple solutions of varying degrees of usefulness must be pieced together – often from many disciplines and from multiple information sources such as online databases, videotapes, government documents, and journals." (9)

The disadvantage of the didactic method is the great tendency to forget the contents of what is learnt. An interesting account is given below:

"The curve for forgetting course content is fairly steep: a generous estimate is that students forget 50% of the content within a few months ... A more devastating finding comes from a study that concluded that even under the most favourable conditions, "students carry away in their heads and in their notebooks not more than 42% of the lecture content." Those were the results when students were told that they would be tested immediately following the lecture; they were permitted to use their notes; and they were given a prepared summary of the lecture. These results were bad enough, but when students were tested a

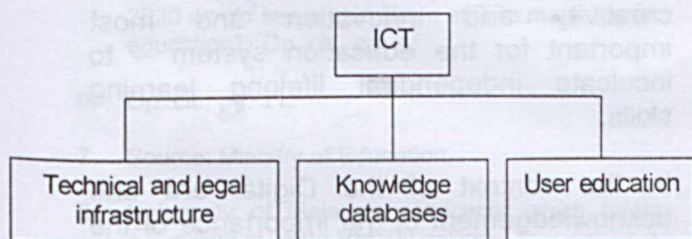
week later, without the use of their notes, they could recall only 17% of the lecture material. (Cross, Patricia)". (10)

Library collections and retrieval systems are ideal for developing lifelong learning skills. The variety as well as the comprehensiveness of their scope and range would expose students to different ways of thinking and undergo (albeit vicariously) varied experiences. Using library collections and systems would help students be independent and responsible for their own learning. The fact that university libraries have in their collections non-curricular materials, such as novels, biographies, and books on hobby and self-development, would also help students develop their creativity and innovation – a step that would help to balance the 'narrowness' of curricular materials.

(ii) Knowledge Database Development

Not many realise that libraries develop knowledge databases. Among librarians, the fact that IT development has resulted in the greater development of the "T" (technology) rather than the "I" (information) is a cause for concern and reflects society's ignorance of the library's academic role. The "C" (communication) aspect is open ignored except in libraries which ensured that ICT systems serve as conduits for communication with users.

ICT development in libraries is usually 3-pronged:



(a) Development of the technical infrastructure is to ensure the hardware issues – the computer

systems, the cabling, the maintenance structures and issues of copyright - are addressed.

- (b) Knowledge databases contain indexed records and abstracts; and since the databases are usually records of local titles, serve not only as an invaluable database of indigenous collections but also as a critical research tool. The move to provide full-text databases has begun this year.
- (c) User education enables the user to use (a) and (b) above with efficiency and effectiveness and as a result will not render both (a) and (b) to waste.

There are a variety of knowledge databases developed at university libraries that can be termed as "national assets" -- an invaluable contribution to national development in different ways:

- as a depository of 'Malaysiana' materials and therefore of Malaysian heritage
- as a database for research on Malaysia and therefore contributing towards various aspects of its development
- as a means of projecting Malaysia to the rest of the world via the National Digital Library Initiative (PERDANA)

(iii) Information Skills

A university may have the best of collections, offer the most excellent of services and install the most sophisticated ICT systems but all will come to nought if their users (students, lecturers, researchers) cannot exploit them for teaching, learning and research purposes. Hence, the move towards user education – not the 'orientation' or the 'induction' models that had been practised all these years – but a systematic course that incorporates the need to develop independent lifelong learning skills. In most universities, students are given Information

Skill courses to enable them to not only access the ICT retrieval systems but to also recognise different types of sources available, as well as how to use and cite them. Information skills are important in lifelong education because these skills would ensure that students would not only be able to access information systems anywhere anytime but also enable them to process information effectively throughout life. The first start to being a knowledge worker is probably at the primary school library.

In the University of Malaya Library, user education had advanced to the level of offering a compulsory, one-credit course for all first year students (GXEX1401: Information Skills). Since 1998, it has offered the course for about 6,000 students each year from 17 faculties, and by Feb. 2003, 29,422 students would have benefitted from this course. Apart from this course, UM also offers the ad hoc courses aimed at improving ICT literacy and develop information handling skills among postgraduate students and academic staff.

In all other universities, IS is offered as elective courses although at this moment, there is an effort to try and make IS compulsory if not for all students, at least to groups or certain faculties. It will not be long before all university libraries will be offering IS courses as part of library function.

What is important is that through IS courses, libraries are contributing to national development by developing manpower who are proficient in information retrieval, via local or global information databases.

Through courses such as this, the manpower produced by universities would be ICT-literate, information using, information-rich and independent as learners for life.

A more comprehensive account of the Information Skills course is given in a previous paper. (11)

(iv) Librarians as Information Managers

As a group, librarians are better exposed to information work than any other groups of professionals.

They are knowledgeable in all aspects of ICT development – the 'I', the 'C' and 'T' – and as a group are directly contributing towards the National IT Agenda via the National Digital Library System (PERDANA).

4.0 CONCLUSION

To put into perspective the university libraries' contribution to national development, it is important to first put into perspective the importance of information in national development.

The importance of information in this Digital era has been acknowledged. Instead of the 'gold rush' of yesteryears, it is now the age of 'information rush'. The Prime Minister (12) in his address had alluded to this when he said, "it can be no accident that there is today no wealthy, developed country that is information-poor and no information-rich country that is poor and undeveloped".

Information is important in national development because of its role in decision-making (e.g. in civil service); in upgrading standards in education; upgrading the quality of research; developing personal qualities; develop a society that is knowledgeable, well-informed, competent, confident, morally upright; develop intellectualism, creativity and innovation and most important for the education system -- to inculcate independent lifelong learning skills.

In the context of the Digital era and acknowledgement of the importance of the Knowledge Worker, the importance of libraries in national development is in producing graduates who are

information-using and information savvy because librarians have the capability to improve the quality of teaching, learning and research at universities.

The core business in universities cannot do without libraries because in this Information Age and Digital Era – libraries provide the most comprehensive range of information resources services as well as the most sophisticated information retrieval systems of a scope and range unparalleled.

If it is accepted that information is critical in this age and era – then the university libraries' contribution to national development is extremely significant.

1. Please refer to Zaiton Osman, "Vision 2020 : Defining objectives for high performance in academic and special libraries in Malaysia"; paper presented at the Joint PPM/LAS Congress, 19-21 September 1994, Penang, Malaysia.
2. Mahathir bin Mohamed, (1991) Malaysia: the way forward; working paper presented at the Inaugural Meeting of the Malaysian Business Council, Kuala Lumpur, 28 February 1991, para 79, pg. 19 (Mimeographed).
3. Zaiton Osman, "Vision 2020 : Defining objectives for high performance in academic and special libraries in Malaysia"; paper presented at the Joint PPM/LAS Congress, 19-21 September 1994, Penang, Malaysia.pg. 11.
4. Of the 15, 4 are regarded as 'private universities although receiving government funds. This number does not take into account the few in the private sector.
5. Minister of Education (then) had remarked that 2020 would see a shift "from elite to mass higher education". Op. cit., pg. 11.
6. Op. cit., pg. 11.
7. Source: Ministry of Education.
8. University of Malaya's collection, which totals 1.2 million is worth RM109 million.

9. Report by the Presidential Committee on Information Literacy, American Library Association, pg. 2 (2000). Released January 10, 1989. Last modified 14 June 1999. (Internet)
10. *ibid*, pg. 6.
11. Zaiton Osman et. al., Developing IT skills through Information Skills (IS) programmes: paper presented at the PPM-LAS Seminar, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, 22-24 June, 1998.
12. Mahathir bin Mohamed, (1991) Malaysia: the way forward; working paper presented at the Inaugural Meeting of the Malaysian Business Council, Kuala Lumpur, 28 February 1991, para 29, p. 19 (Mimeographed).

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