Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, The national university with an international reach: Opportunities and Challenges in the 21st Century

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Abstract. Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) was formally established on 18 May 1970 after an overwhelming request and support from the population of Malaysia who would like to see the establishment of a national university with the Malay Language (Bahasa Melayu) as the medium of instruction. A university with the spirit and soul of the local culture and traditions which contributed to the advancement of knowledge of arts, religion, humanities, science and technology through Bahasa Melayu as the official medium of instruction. After 33 years of existence, about 80,000 graduates had gone through the 30 years of convocation in the fields of Medicine and Health Sciences, Social Sciences and Humanities, Religion and Language Studies, and Science, Engineering and Technology. UKM is currently one of the leading universities of choice amongst the high school leavers and matriculated students in Malaysia for undergraduate studies; and foreign students in the region as a centre of excellence in research and training for the attainment of their higher degrees. UKM not only has proven to be the champion of the Malay Language as the successful language of knowledge and advancement of culture and technologies, but it also has renowned schools of education and foreign languages in the country. At the dawn of this new millennium of ICT and globalisation, UKM is now embarking on an ambitious mission to enhance its performance as an institution of R&D in the country, through networks and linkages with institutions of higher learning outside the country, not only to promote itself as a place for the pursuit of knowledge and skills but also to expand and widen the horizons of its students and staff in line with the aspirations of the Malaysian Nation to be developed by the Year 2020. This paper will look back at what has been achieved thus far by UKM, and its aspirations in the years to come, in implementing the UKM Strategic Plan of 2000-2020.
Introduction

This short paper is mainly to illustrate the development of higher education in a post-colonial state. The higher education in state has been forced by events to come face to face with what is so often called today as the new realities that focus on expansion, the proliferation of new institutions of higher education and the knowledge revolution in a globalised world.

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM as it is popularly known) was formally established on 18 May 1970. UKM is the third university in Malaysia, but the first to use Bahasa Melayu, the national language, as the medium of instruction. UKM aims to produce graduates with skills and expertise in various fields for development of the Malaysian society, and country.

During the formation of UKM about 33 years ago, there were 192 students, with 78 academic staff. At that time UKM had three faculties namely, Faculty of Arts, Faculty of Science, and Faculty of Islamic Studies.

UKM today has expanded to 12 faculties, namely – the faculties of Economics, Engineering, Education, Islamic Studies, Business Management, Medicine, Science and Technology, Social Sciences and Humanities, Law, Information Sciences and Technology, Allied Health Sciences, and Dentistry. The university has three research institutes, the Institute of Malay World and Civilisation (ATMA), the Institute for Environment and Development (LESTARI) and the Institute for Malaysian and International Studies (IKMAS). Apart from the three research institutes UKM has two research excellence centres, the Centre for Gene Analysis and Technology (CGAT), and Centre for Advanced Engineering. In addition, UKM has founded a private limited holding company known as UKM Holdings, which handles the commercial activities of UKM.

The University is supported by several central divisions, which manages and correlates all academic activities such as - the centres for Public and International Relations (PUSPA), General Studies, Research Management, Publication and Education Technology, Academic Advancement, Students Development, and Co-curriculum. The Computer Centre maintains the University’s ICT systems. Postgraduate degrees are coordinated by the Centre for Graduate Studies and include advanced diplomas, specialist degrees, masters and PhDs, which are offered in various fields. The Centre for Educational Extension is responsible for running UKM’s academic programmes for executives in service.

During an exercise to formulate its strategic plan, UKM reworded its mission, vision and goals statements to take into account the new world of globalisation. The new vision, mission and goals are given below;

The Vision
UKM is committed to be the leading University that pioneers innovations in creating a dynamic, knowledgeable and ethical society.
**The Mission**
To be the premier University that affirms and promotes the values of the Malay Language while globalising knowledge within the framework of the national culture.

**Goals**
To become a leading and competitive centre of knowledge, enriched with technology that:

- Affirms and promotes the value of Malay as a language of learning;
- Builds a dynamic and ethical society;
- Internationalises UKM's image and contribution to the global community and
- Stimulates the development of technologies beneficial to society.

UKM’s dynamism is based on its readiness to face future challenges as is clear from its efforts to redefine its role. UKM aims to be pioneer and explorer, one that ventures into the future in pursuit of academic excellence. To achieve its mission, the University is restructuring and redefining its objectives and aims. Of utmost concern are the need for nation building, the need to heighten national awareness, the need to provide a support system utilising high technology and the need for co-operation between the private and public sectors. As such, issues relating to the management of UKM such as corporatisation, total quality management, restructuring and consolidation of academic roles, as well as human resource management, have become priorities in the University’s strategies for excellence. UKM, though a brainchild of nationalistic fervour and aspirations, is very international in outlook without sacrificing its cherished culture and values.

In this era of globalisation UKM is ready to push its boundaries further to remain competitive. UKM has played host to more than 80 institutions and organisations from countries all over the world including those from ASEAN, Asia, Europe and Americas. Such visits have paved the way for forging closer international ties in the areas of academic research and administration. Specific collaborative efforts in the form of Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) were signed with 50 various international institutions. In an effort to consolidate its internationalisation programme, a Centre for Public and International Relations (PUSPA) was established on the 1st of January 2002. The new centre works in tandem with the Centre for Graduate Studies to promote UKM's academic programmes internationally. The main theme of UKM's new image is “The national university with an international reach”.

At the undergraduate level, the University offers a wide range of courses with a total of 98 disciplines, leading to Bachelor of Science, Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Business Administration, Bachelor of Economics, Bachelor of Accounting, Bachelor of Science Education, Bachelor of Engineering, Bachelor of Law, Doctor of Medicine, Bachelor of Dental Surgery, and Bachelor of Islamic Studies degrees.

At the postgraduate level, 51 higher degree programmes are offered including Masters of Science, Masters of Arts, Masters of Business Administration, Masters of Economics, Masters of Accounting, Masters of Education, Masters of Islamic Studies, Masters of
Letters, Masters of Law, Masters of Philosophy, Masters of Medicine, Masters of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Masters of Surgery, Masters of Medical Pathology, Masters of Community Health, Masters of Family Medicine, Masters of Medical Science, Advanced Masters of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Advanced Masters of Dermatology, Diploma of Cardiology, Masters of Environmental Management, Masters of Engineering, Masters of Information Technology, Masters In Industrial Safety Management, Doctorate of Medicine, Doctorate of Business Administration, and Doctor of Philosophy in various disciplines. UKM is now well known as the main centre for training in various areas of specialisation. Diploma programmes in Islamic Administration and Legal Profession, Strategic and Security Studies, and Counselling are also offered. Masters and Doctorate theses may be written in Malay, English or Arabic.

Today, UKM has about 16,600 undergraduate students, and 4,600 postgraduate students. There are 530 foreign students registered mainly in the postgraduate programmes. The number of academic staff in UKM now is 1,582 comprising 156 professors, 356 associate professors, 993 lecturers and 77 teachers. A further 4,157 supporting staff that comprised of the professional, management, and administration personnel lend support to the smooth running of the university. Since its establishment in 1970 up till now, the University has produced 80,379 graduates; 77,321 Bachelors, 5,812 Masters and 426 Doctorates.

How Can UKM Face the Challenges?

The advances made in information technology coupled with the mass transportation of people have turned the world into a global village. The mobility of ordinary people and the ease plus speed with which we communicate with each other has meant that we now live in a smaller world. Globalisation has arrived at our doorstep affecting the way we live and work. In higher education, the term globalisation may generally be described as trends in higher education that is connected to cross-national implications. These will include the democratisation of education, global choice for tertiary education, international growing scope for employers, the Internet and communication technology. Those in the business of higher education will have to respond to these new challenges brought on by globalisation in order to remain competitive. Internationalisation is the term widely used for the response of higher education systems and institutions to trends of globalisation. One of the challenges that would be common for the new borderless world is the introduction of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) that is an offshoot of the World Trade Organisation. Under GATS, there should be progressive liberalisation in services that will include education.

Apart from the general challenges brought on by globalisation there are specific issues that must be tackled by universities in order to stay being relevant. One of the main challenges that UKM must face is the corporatisation of public universities by the government of Malaysia. Once fully corporatised the university is expected to generate its own income with the government financing only a fraction of the total expenditure. Since the 15 March 1999, UKM has undergone the initial corporatisation exercise by which UKM is now governed by a Board. The process of decentralisation will be carried out in stages rather than abruptly, as the government has not set a concrete dateline as to when full corporatisation will take place. UKM must now look into ways to raise its own
income. UKM's initial response is to set up a private limited holding company known as UKM Holdings. In future it is anticipated that each faculty will be required to generate its own income. Students will expect better facilities and quality services. A fully corporatised UKM will also mean greater accountability, which will translate into an efficiently managed entity. As such, departments and faculties will have to be restructured to be academically sound as well as cost effective. Currently, UKM has embarked on its restructuring programme by successfully establishing the new streamlined Faculty of Science and Technology and Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities. These two newly restructured faculties offer programmes that are multidisciplinary, transcending previously different departments. For the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, innovative programmes, which are advanced for the region, will be offered, for example, Language and ICT. The Faculties of Economics and Business Administration views the restructuring exercise as the opportunity to position themselves as the leader in business related courses with the setting up of their Bangi Business Graduate School. It is anticipated that the future students will have a wider choice of courses to choose from thus enhancing UKM's academic programmes.

The process of globalisation makes the market place stronger. The higher education industry will move towards the direction of what the students demand and expect from tertiary education. The students' expectations will be greatly influenced by the requirements of potential employers. Increasingly, employers now look for a graduate with an international outlook. Employees are expected to adapt to changes quickly, possess good communication skills, are exposed to multicultural experiences, reliable, open minded, tolerant and ever ready to face the challenges of globalisation. As such students will seek for academic excellence, which entails a strong research culture, quality education and publications of international standing.

With respect to research, UKM has shown tremendous progress. The Government of Malaysia has identified UKM as a research university. UKM is receiving an increasing amount of research grants. The academic staffs of UKM are publishing their work and findings in reputable journals of international, regional and national standings. They have attended and are attending international conferences all over the world. Some of their innovations and findings had been exhibited and recognized with citations and medals at international exhibitions of innovation and inventions such as the annual ITEX event in Geneva.

UKM had made significant achievements in human resource development, especially its academic staff. Almost all of the 1,500 academic staff had been trained at either Master or PhD degree level at renowned universities, overseas. Human resource development will continue to remain a key strategy in ensuring that all academic staff contributes to the excellence of UKM via research and training, which will lead to nation's development and prosperity, and making the graduates globally competitive. The development of a knowledge-based economy through excellent capacity development programmes is an important agenda at UKM, in line with the aspiration of the country. Development of a knowledge-based economy coupled with the emerging technologies and globalisation will influence future growth trends in the demand for skills and expertise, also in creating economic opportunities that can lead to improvements of income for all Malaysians. This strategy of UKM augers well with the need of the nation to have better accessibility to
quality education and training and strengthening the human resource base to support the development of a knowledge-based economy towards realizing the Vision 2020.

UKM is continuously upgrading and developing the infrastructure facilities within its campuses, and the softwares to help facilitate the learning and training processes. This is to ensure its sustainability as one of the leading universities in the country, especially with the presence of private universities offering twinning programmes with universities from developed countries, and a number of universities, which are opening off shore campuses in Malaysia, plus the mushrooming of private colleges for skills and professional training. UKM is facing the challenge of making Malaysia the education hub of this region. Students from several countries are now flocking into Malaysia for their degrees. Students from about 30 countries from all over the world, pursuing their Master and Doctorate degrees, are currently seeking UKM. Ministers, and senior education officials from the middle-eastern countries are now seriously exploring the potential of sending students from their countries to Malaysia for higher education. The healthy political and socio-economical climate of Malaysia is a strong pulling point for them and UKM is very much considered in their plan, especially so after the September 11 incident. The Government of Malaysia is supporting efforts by UKM and other universities in the country in the drive to promote Malaysia as the education centre of excellence in this region.

UKM Strategic Plan

The strategic plan was built through consensus involving all levels of UKM population inclusive of academics, administrative staffs and students. The document belongs to UKM as a whole and not just for top management.

The UKM Strategic Plan was formulated in view of the challenges that are anticipated for the university. The rationale of the plan revolves around four aspects

- Environmental issues
- The promulgation of the Mission, Vision and Goals
- The identification of Strategies, Objectives as well as the Activities to achieve objectives
- The monitoring of the impact based on Performance Indicators as well as the Assumptions and Implementers for each strategy and Implementers for each strategy envisaged, in a particular time frame.

The essence of the UKM Strategic Plan has in its Mission to be a premier university. The Overall Strategy to achieve the mission lists 10 ensuing strategies in several areas deemed to be contributing components:

- To advance and nurture Bahasa Melayu
- To emphasise and intensify research
- To uplift the quality of academic programmes
- To lead UKM to the international level
- To realise students excellence and potential
• To equip UKM as a leading agency of the ICT era
• To develop and maintain human resources
• To implement budgeting according to planning
• To provide the required physical infrastructure and environment
• To emplace a quality work culture based on indigenous values

Each Strategy mentioned is supported by a list of activities and the internal implementers who are responsible for these activities. Each Activity supporting the Objective is placed in a particular time frame, short term (2000-2005), intermediate (2006-2010) and long term (2011-2020).

As globalisation looms in the background UKM has included Strategy 4 in its Strategic Plan. Activities that will be implemented by UKM to internationalise the university are given in this strategy. Of utmost importance is the formation of strategic alliances with universities outside the country. It is hoped that the alliances will lead to a greater network of partnerships in academic activities such as research, joint publications, joint supervision, exchange of students, staff exchange, joint seminars and others. Such activities besides giving added knowledge to the people of UKM, will also expose them to new cultures and experiences. Such experiences will enhance the performance of the university as a whole truly reflecting UKM's image as “The national university with an international reach”.

Conclusions

UKM has fulfilled and proven the aspirations of the people of Malaysia. UKM has proven beyond doubt that Bahasa Melayu can be utilised as a language of instruction at the tertiary level. UKM is at a juncture of the millennium, to redefine its role as a national university with an international reach. UKM has the Strategic Plan as its guidance. Special emphasis is given to international strategic alliance as in this era of globalisation smart partnerships must be forged at the international level. There will be great challenges ahead but UKM has the will to overcome all these challenges to realise the theme “The National University with an International Reach”.

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Bibliography

APPENDIX 1

History of UKM

The idea of establishing a national university was first mooted as far back as the early 1920's. The initial notion by Abdul Kadir Adabi, sought for the establishment of a university that could meet the educational needs of the Malays and the development of their language.

Through the 30's, the idea grew, but secretly cherished in the hearts of the Malays, especially during the time of strong colonial domination. However, it was again openly and actively pursued during the 40's and the 50's when the Federation of the Union of Malay Teachers of the Peninsula agitated for the placement of the Malay Language in the active live of the country, and raise the standard of the Malay schools so that their students could further their studies at tertiary level.

In the 60's, the demands were repeated and discussions were reopened. A group of Malay intellectuals gathered to discuss ideas of a national university, not only in the context of the Malay needs, but also of a Malaysian nation. Their ideas were well received by all. Thus, from then on, no force could stop the advancement of the people's demands.

In 1969, a Sponsoring Committee was set up to prepare and publish a report recommending the establishment of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. The report formed the basis of the University. Much of its recommendations were adopted as guidelines in the official establishment of the University on May 18, 1970.

Thus, the establishment of the University was indeed an historical event. It was erected on the hard stone and bricks of people's thoughts, sweat and vision. The progress achieved since its formation has proved beyond any doubt the success of Bahasa Melayu (Malay language) as a medium of instruction at the university level.

The late Tun Abdul Razak bin Dato’ Hussein, Malaysia’s second Prime Minister, was appointed as UKM's Inaugural Chancellor from 7 July 1970 until his demise on 14 January 1976. Since 15 January 1976, His Royal Highness Tuanku Ja’afar Ibni Almarhum Tuanku Abdul Rahman, the Sultan and Head of State of Negeri Sembilan Darul Khusus, is the second and present Chancellor of the UKM.

Tun Tan Siew Sin and Tan Sri Dato’ Nik Ahmed Kamil bin Nik Mahmood were appointed as UKM’s inaugural Pro Chancellors. The former held the position from November 1971 to January 1987, and the latter from November 1971 to December 1977. Tan Sri Dato’ Syed Nasir bin Ismail was Pro Chancellor of UKM from 1977 to 1982; and Tun Dato’ Ismail Mohd Ali from 1982 to 1991. Tun Dato’ Haji Omar Yoke Lin Ong was Pro Chancellor of UKM from 1987 to 1990. The present Pro Chancellors of UKM are Tan Sri Datuk (Dr.) Abdullah bin Haji Mohd Salleh (since August 1987) and Tengku Tan Sri Dato’ Seri (Dr.) Ahmad Rithaudeen Al-Haj bin Tengku Ismail (since August 1990).
Tan Sri Sheikh Hussein bin Sheikh Mohamed was appointed as Chairman of the UKM Council from May 1970 to April 1974. The Honourable Dato’ Seri Dr Mahathir bin Mohamad was the second Chairman of the UKM Council from April to October 1974. Dr Mahathir was replaced by Tan Sri Datuk (Dr.) Abdullah bin Haji Mohd Salleh until May 1987. Emeritus Professor Tan Sri Dato’ Dr Mohd Rashdan bin Haji Baba was appointed Chairman of the UKM Council since 1987, and presently he is the Chairman of the Board of UKM, after the corporatisation of governance of UKM on 15 March 1999.

Emeritus Professor Tan Sri Dato’ Dr Mohd Rashdan bin Haji Baba was appointed as the Inaugural Vice-Chancellor of UKM from September 1969 to March 1971. Dato’ Dr Ariffin bin Ngah Marzuki was the second UKM Vice Chancellor from 1971 to 1974. Professor Datuk Dr Mohd Ghazali bin Haji Abdul Rahman was the acting Vice Chancellor until July 1975 when Tan Sri Datuk Dr Anuwar bin Mahmud took up the post of UKM Vice Chancellor until 1980. Professor Datuk Dr Mohd Ghazali bin Haji Abdul Rahman was again the acting Vice Chancellor for a few months before the post was resumed by Professor Tan Sri Dato’ Dr Awang Had Salleh until 1984. From 1984 to 1990, the Vice Chancellor of UKM was Professor Tan Sri Dato’ Dr Haji Abdul Hamid bin Haji Abdul Rahman, and Professor Dato’ Dr Mohd Sham Sani took over from 1983 to 1998. Professor Datuk Dr Anuwar Ali is the present Vice Chancellor, since May 1998.

The first campus of UKM was located at Jalan Pantai Baru, Kuala Lumpur. This campus was in operation until 1977 when the then new campus in Bangi was developed. The main present campus in Bangi was officially inaugurated on 2 September 1980 by His Royal Highness Tuanku Haji Ahmad Shah Al-Musta’in Billah Ibni Al-Marhum Sultan Abu Bakar Ri’Ayatullah Al-Mu’adzam Shah (The Sultan of the State of Pahang), the Seventh Yang di-Pertuan Agong (King of all Kings) of Malaysia, accompanied by UKM’s Chancellor His Royal Highness Tuanku Ja’afar Ibni Almarhum Tuanku Abdul Rahman. This auspicious occasion was also graced by the attendance of the Sultans and Governors of other states in Malaysia, and top dignitaries of the country.