

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF ACADEMIC STAFF
IN SELECTED MALAYSIAN PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES

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ASIA e UNIVERSITY
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RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF ACADEMIC STAFF
IN SELECTED MALAYSIAN PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES

PRADEEP KUMAR NAIR

A Thesis Submitted to Asia e University in
Fulfilment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

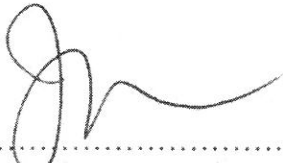
Pressed by rapid growth and an increasing cost-burden, many governments have allowed for education to be offered by private enterprises. In Malaysia, between 2000 and 2012, 70 private universities were set up to cater to approximately 401,000 new entrants into tertiary education each year, creating the need for about 12,500 qualified academic staff. The competition for academic staff has resulted in high turnover and low quality of hires. Private universities depend on their academic staffs' skills, knowledge, and abilities to maintain their competitiveness and quality, and long-term sustainability. The thesis aims to examine the structure of academic employment in private universities, assess the challenges faced in recruitment and retention of academic staff and establish important factors that help attract and retain them. A model for effective recruitment and retention was developed, supported by a set of strategies to assist the leadership of private universities to attract and retain academic talents and compete effectively. Using a multi-mix method through 27 personal interviews with senior leadership of six private universities, twelve challenges in recruitment and retention were identified. A survey of academic staff (n=455) of these universities also revealed the eleven most important factors that attract academics to join or stay in a private university. The study revealed that recruiting and retaining quality academic staff, particularly at doctoral level and in the fields of science and technology, and other specialized areas is a major challenge for private universities. Private universities are also relatively new and teaching focused, with a young academic workforce that are largely interested in pecuniary benefits, opportunities for professional development and career progression and a good work-life balance. As these universities are still transitioning from a former college into a university, they are trying hard to balance between research and teaching, growing enrolment, quality,

and financial sustainability. This study should help leadership of the universities reshape their policies and strategies to win the war for academic talent.

Keywords: Academic Staff, Recruitment and Retention Factors, Private Universities, Malaysia

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised/read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in quality and scope, as a thesis for the fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.



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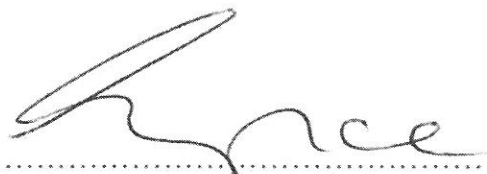
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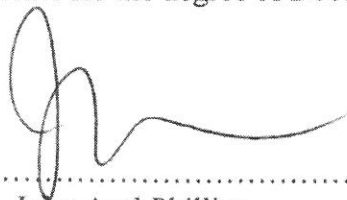


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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis is submitted in fulfillment of the PhD degree is my own work and that all contributions from any other persons or sources are properly and duly cited. I further declare that the material has not been submitted either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university. In making this declaration, I understand and acknowledge any breaches in this declaration constitute academic misconduct, which may result in my expulsion from the programme and/or exclusion from the award of the degree.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As the number of private universities grows rapidly and emerges as a key component of the Malaysian higher education system, academic staff recruitment and retention has taken on unprecedented importance. This thesis attempts to examine the issues in recruitment and retention of academic staff in Malaysian private universities arising from this growth.

Scope of the Research

We are in the midst of an educational revolution; higher education has been growing at explosive and historically unprecedented rates throughout the world. In the year 2000, more than 100 million people were enrolled in tertiary education worldwide, a staggering number that represents roughly 20% of the relevant age cohort (Varghese, 2001). Additionally, 66 million adults and more than 50% of all employed persons in the world participate in some form of continuing education. UNESCO (2009) reported that there are now 138 million students' worldwide seeking degrees, and this is expected to increase to 262 million in 2025. Today, possibly more people participate in higher education than collectively in all of history (Diamond, 2008).

Over the past decades, the monopoly of the ancient and elite universities has gradually diminished (Diamond, 2008). New universities are springing up at a rate till now unknown and access to tertiary education is becoming for many not just a far off aspiration but an achievable reality - somewhat a "birth right" of citizens across all strata of society across the globe (Bathmaker, Brooks, Parry, & Smith, 2008).

In the 1990s, Malaysia went through a phenomenal economic growth, accompanied by distinct competitive advantages in the Asia-Pacific region. In light of such favorable developments, it was only natural for Malaysia to set a target of becoming a fully developed and industrialized nation by the year 2020. This aspiration was promulgated in the country's Vision 2020, which outlined the framework of developing the nation economically, politically, spiritually, psychologically and culturally through a united Malaysian nation (Mahathir, 2009). Under the rubric of Vision 2020, there was a liberalization of educational policies leading to the democratization, privatization and decentralization of the Malaysian educational system (Chamhuri Siwar & Abdul-Mumin Abdulai, 2011). In conjunction with mass education, both the primary and secondary school curricula were revised with greater emphasis on the development of an all-round individual, the acquisition of basic skills, the inculcation of moral values, and the abolishment of early specialization. The educational administrative system was decentralized to promote school-based management and teacher empowerment. Furthermore, the private sector was encouraged to play an active role in providing higher education (Lee, 1999).

In Malaysia, higher education is largely organized under the purview of the Ministry of Education (MoE). As of 2012, the main components of the higher education ecosystem in Malaysia consisted of 20 public universities, 84 private universities (including branch campuses and university colleges), 30 polytechnics, 72 community colleges and 345 private colleges. These institutions catered to the tertiary education needs of approximately 467,970 secondary school leavers annually (Ministry of Higher Education, 2012). The total number of students enrolled in higher learning institutions in Malaysia was 1,040,549 students, 50% of which were in public universities while 25% were enrolled in private universities (Figure 1.1). A further