

Educators Perceptions of the Research University Status

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Abstract. Research university (RU) status is a status aimed by many universities all over the world. If a university is granted the Research University (RU) standing, the university with that rank should foster and cultivate a deeper understanding and awareness among its members on the roles and functions of the attained status. It is believed with a sound and profound perceptive of the research university function, the objectives, goals, vision and mission of the institution would be easily sustained because educators are the keys to the research university success and accomplishment. However, the main concern is, are they aware of the gravity and commitment needed in upholding this distinguished status Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the perception of educators in Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) regarding the latest class gained by the university. It tries to determine whether these educators know and comprehend the roles and functions of the RU as well as the criteria proposed in obtaining that position. The data of this study have been gathered from 302 academic staffs in UTM using a set of questionnaire that was developed by the researcher. The result showed that the perception of the academic staffs in UTM regarding RU status is at a high level. This paper will discuss further the findings of this study based on the overall perception and understanding of educators regarding the RU status.

Keywords: Educators, Academic Staff, Perception, Research University

1. Introduction

Research is exploring, investigating and examining new ideas and a key indicator for quality education in a higher learning institution. On the other hand, in a demanding, challenging and competitive world, Research University (RU) is, generally where social and economical growth takes place [1] and only a small number of universities of higher education in Malaysia are fortunate enough to be awarded that position. RU are institutions with a high concern of making a breakthrough in new research, generating new knowledge and producing Ph.D. holders in a broad range of disciplines. These institutions emerge as an example or models to other institutions so in reality their influences are bigger than their numbers would actually suggest. The recognition and acknowledgement given to Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) as Malaysia's fifth RU on 11 June, 2010 is not just an accomplishment, but it is a sign representing a new book with a new chapter to the university. This means the university is given bigger role in conducting research activities and research publications. RU title indicates that the publication and research activities is no longer the responsibility of the university alone, but the baton has now been passed to the academic staffs of the university.

For that reason, the assurance that UTM can continue and prolong with the world-class status require the educators or academic staffs in this university to double their efforts in tapping and enhancing their potential to be more in line with the improve achievements, productivity and performance of the university. In order to achieve this, UTM academic staffs need to fully understand and realize what RU means, what are the roles of the RU, and why it is essential and imperative for the institution to maintain the status. The first thing that

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they should do is, to familiarize themselves with the definition, vision and mission of the RU before great achievement and extraordinary contributions can be done. Secondly, they should also be aware of how a university could achieve that recognition and also the required criteria before the status is granted.

Based on the information given by the Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia [2], the recognition of a RU is based on the eight criteria which have been determined on the guideline drawn by the Assessment of Research Universities Committee. These criteria have been developed with the focus on the aspects that have been adopted from some leading international rating agencies. The scoring criteria for a RU are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: The Criteria of a Research University

NO	CRITERIA
1.	Quantity and quality of researcher
2.	Quantity and quality of research
3.	Post graduate quantity
4.	Post graduate quality
5.	Innovation
6.	Professional services and awards
7.	Network and Links
8.	Support facilities

Thirdly, the academic staffs should also be acquainted with the history on how the ‘RU’ term exists. Conventionally, an institute or universities are considered as the main part of the educational system and their roles traditionally are primarily based on the transfer of knowledge from lecturers to the students [3]. According to Rosenberg et al. [4] in the 19th centuries, Humboldt University in Germany which is the oldest university (now known as University of Berlin,) was the first to develop the new concept for the university. The concept does not emphasize only on teaching and learning but also give more emphasize on research activities. This notion of a research university is then shifted to other countries such as United State of the America, where it shows tremendous impact on its industrial economic progress and development. From then on, the research university concept and inspiration have been expanded to and adopted by other universities all around the world.

In terms of perception, each individual sees and perceives things differently from one another even on a simple situation or idea. According to Schermerhorn et al. [5], perception is the process where an individual would choose, categorize and also interpret the information that he gets differently from his surroundings. Sometimes, even unexpected issues or aspects which happen in an organization could affect how employees perceive things. March and Simon [6] state that, conflict occurs in an organization due to the disparity in certain aspect, concept or perception of one employee to the other. They believe that perception is the source of every actions and beliefs. When an individual objective is in contrast with the cognitive processes, where the basis of an action and behaviour is formed, the perception gap will be wider. However, if his perception of things is affirmative, then, it will inspire him to succeed and attain better accomplishment of his work in the organization. This assumption serves as the basis of this study, which focuses on the academic staffs’ perception on the notion of RU status recently granted to the institution.

This study will closely follow the Emerging Global Model (EGM) which is the representation of top level research universities worldwide [1]. It has eight characteristics as shown in Figure 1. This is the illustration model of the research university in the 21st century. Baker [7] concludes that some people call this model as a ‘super research university’ in emphasizing the importance of research universities in the eyes of the worlds.



Fig. 1: Emerging Global Model

2. Methodology

The study examines the perception of academic staffs in UTM regarding the RU status. It comprises of 302 educators from various faculties in UTM. The 12 items questionnaire on the perception on RU status has been tested using the factor analysis method and covers questions based on the 8 criteria depicted by the Ministry of Education, Malaysia. The Alpha Cronbach reliability value for the pilot study stands at 0.92. The questionnaire uses the Five Likert Scale and data are analysed using the mean and standard deviation. Mean data range in Table 2 below is used to measure the level of perception of the academic staffs in UTM.

Table 2: Mean Value

Mean Value	Satisfaction Level
1.00 – 2.33	Low
2.34 – 3.66	Moderate
3.67 – 5.00	High

3. Result

Table 3: Perception Level

Item	Mean	SD	Perception level (n=302)					
			LOW		MODERATE		HIGH	
			f	%	f	%	f	%
1. RU status is very significant to UTM	4.29	.841	10	3	39	13	253	84
2. I fully understand why RU status is essential to UTM.	4.16	.821	9	3	51	17	242	80
3. UTM really meets the criteria to be awarded the RU status.	3.76	.948	25	8	71	24	206	68
4. UTM lecturer plays a major role in establishing its RU status.	4.43	.662	6	2	11	4	285	94
5. The quantity and quality of UTM graduates should be enhanced in achieving its RU status.	4.46	.613	1	0.3	13	4.3	288	95
6. The quantity and quality of UTM research should be multiplied in sustaining its RU status.	4.41	.659	3	1	20	7	279	92
7. The quantity and quality of UTM researcher should be increased in reaching its RU status.	4.45	.578	0	0	13	4	289	96
8. The monitoring of the RU should not be done every year because the status is considered permanent.	3.15	1.134	84	28	88	29	130	43
9. I am absolutely satisfied and proud with UTM as a RU.	4.12	.860	11	4	56	18	235	78

10. UTM is fully qualified to compete at international level as a RU.	3.62	.997	40	13	84	28	178	59
11. I do not think that anything has changed since UTM obtained its RU status.	3.50	.997	50	17	75	24	177	59
12. RU status is not imperative and does not give that much benefit to me.	3.59	1.020	44	15	84	27	174	58
Overall	3.99	.488	24	8	50	17	228	75

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The result in table 3 above shows that the overall perception of academic staffs in UTM regarding its RU status is at a high level (Mean = 3.99). This indicates that the academic staffs in UTM are highly and fully aware of the definition, importance and roles of the RU status to the university. They are also conscious of their functions to the university and the significance of their contributions to the RU status as reflected in items 4, 5, 6 and 7 (refer to Table 2). The results also demonstrate that UTM academic staffs fully realize that the quantity and quality of the UTM graduates and researcher are important in enhancing the RU status. This result indicates that the academic staffs are aware that they have to enhance their research activities due to the newly awarded RU status. At the same time, they are capable of distinguishing the critical factor of having academic staffs with higher degree of education at either PhD or post doctoral level which can contribute significantly to further strengthen the university status. They also give the impression that they understand the relationship between teaching and conducting research in UTM. Consistent with this understanding, there are lots of research beliefs that found a strong positive perception between teaching and learning [8] [9].

Based on this finding, in the world and environment where knowledge is expanding, UTM should come up with some creative ways to help strengthen the institution position while sustaining its prominent place either locally or internationally. In Malaysia, research universities other than UTM have for many years played a major role in furthering the country economic development. Research has become the focus of attention for these research universities and considerable development has been made in the quality of research that they carried out. Therefore, with the RU position awarded to UTM, it is high time that the university acclimatize to this new transformation. Indirectly, with this status, the role and functions of UTM academic staffs would grow bigger. Since they have already comprehended the functions of RU status, what they have to understand now is how important their move means in the next few years to the university. Literally, they have to quickly adapt to the research challenge portrays through the RU status. The university needs to take a more proactive role with the changing needs of the society [10]. According to Yuhao and Jie [11], the core competitiveness becomes the major concern for universities to develop and compete with their world peers in both globalization of world economy and internalization of higher education. In this context, UTM's academic staff should grasp the spirit to be aspired and become more competitive with other academic staffs within the university or other universities. This is to assure considerable success and to be recognized by other universities in the future especially in conducting high quality research and transferring new knowledge.

What are the responsibilities of the academic staffs? First, they have to start by competing for knowledge which means that they have to adhere to research culture environment. They have to be culturally prepared to engage in competition related to research. This can be done by having a healthy competition among faculty members for research grants. No matter how small a grant is, it is an important factor in fostering the quantity and quality of research in UTM. Secondly, they have to conduct research that move forward in knowledge covering all disciplines ranging from education, social science, technology, pure science and engineering which can contribute to the economy of the university or the government. The ability to attract research grant that gives big financial contribution is essential to the university progress and RU status. Thirdly, academic staffs are also encouraged to build relationship with other organizations, company or industry in order to expand their research activities. If possible, a three-way-partnership among university, government and industry should be explored in carrying out research. This undertaking can guarantee the expansion of research and knowledge in a bigger environment and indirectly cultivating cultural progress.

Fourthly, with all these demands and requirements, strain, anxiety and stress would become the side effect as workload escalates quickly. Therefore, academic staffs in UTM would have to adapt to these heavy pressures mounting on their shoulders. They have to become accustomed to these situations because research culture is also a part of decision making process. Similarly, organizing and managing research successfully requires experience and skills and time would tell how academic staffs in UTM would cope with all these pressures.

As a conclusion, the finding of this study shows that the perception of academic staffs in UTM regarding RU status is at a high level. This indicates that they understand what RU is. However, to achieve considerable success in a RU, academic staffs are expected to make certain sacrifices. They have to understand and appreciate their roles are essential in achieving the RU's goal and they have willingly continue to compete with other research universities throughout the world. Besides, they also have to adjust to the increasing challenge and prepare to work harder in producing quality research. Lastly the most significant factor is, they have to realize that the product of a research is an important contribution to higher education.

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6. References

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