CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.0   <u>Introduction</u>

This chapter describes the background information of ranking issues within the context of higher education. This chapter contains nine parts. Section 1.1 contains the Background of Study. Subsection 1.1.1 involves Malaysian Government Education Plans whereas subsections 1.1.2 and 1.1.3 identify New Straits Times and World Ranking with all being located under the section 1.1 main text. Section 1.2 covers the Purpose of Study. Significance of Study forms section 1.3, followed by section 1.4 with the Research Questions. In section 1.5 covers the details of the Conclusion.

1.1   <u>Background of study</u>

1.1.1   <u>Malaysian Government Education Plans</u>

Education has been proven to be a priority of the Malaysian Government through the extensive development of the academic infrastructure in the last half century. As the development of higher learning took place, the government adjusted departmental responsibilities in order to accommodate the resultant changes. To illustrate, "The Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) was established on 27 March, 2004" in order to consolidate better the management of universities and colleges in the country (Ministry of Higher Education, 2009). The issue of rankings is included in the affairs of higher education matters, as reflected in The National Higher Education Strategic Plan of 2007.

The National Higher Education Strategic Plan identified that the past role of the Ministry of Education was to facilitate government matters with the nation's academic infrastructure. With the division of the department into the separate bodies of the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Higher Education, the responsibility of the latter now handles administrative tasks so the area of higher education within the country may have more focus for development.

The ministry's site also included information that the official distinction of the Ministry of Higher Education as a separate entity happened on 27 March, 2004. In addition to the role of administering government policy, it was also required to assure that tertiary education in Malaysia "is in line with the vision of the government to make Malaysia a centre of educational excellence and to internationalise" the higher education facilities locally.

Significant organisation has occurred to construct the path of Malaysian education in such a way that it becomes developed with the component of internationalized status as a primary part. While the ministry has clearly identified domestic interests are of foremost consideration, the inclusion of global elements into the institutional framework of academia has also been voiced.

According to the National Higher Education Action Plan of 2007–2010 made available on August 27, 2007, the former Prime Minister Yab Dato' Seri Abdullah Bin Haji Ahmad Badawi gave a message which indicated that the issue of education was a significant focus of attention and its developmental path was being directed from a nationally administrative position.

One of the primary goals listed in the mission statement of the MOHE is to ensure that Malaysian Higher Education is internationalised. The former Prime Minister Yab Dato' Seri Abdullah Bin Haji Ahmad Badawi stated in the introductory message of the National Higher Education Plan that both the National Mission and the Ninth Malaysia Plan focus on human capital development.

The former Minister of Higher Education Dato' Mustapa Mohamed elaborated on the necessity that "we must bear in mind that in this increasingly global era, Malaysia will be faced with many new challenges and our 'rakyat' must be well equipped to face and overcome them" and addressing these challenges could be aided by working on building up five key institutional pillars (National Higher Education

Action Plan 2007–2010:4). Governance, leadership, academia, teaching and learning, and research and development constitute the five areas of focus. Governance and leadership also involve the administrative role of the institutions. Three pillars deal directly with educational matters of academia, teaching and learning, and research and development. They contain critical information concerning the direction of Malaysian higher education.

The aspect of academia in the Action plan is aimed to cultivate international contacts "through exchange programmes at all levels" (p.24). This includes working with other academic institutions and international companies to achieve these exchanges. Two primary goals indicated for the academic community to achieve within this proposed plan are regular publications in international high-impact journals in addition to a developed pedagogy and research reputation in order to ultimately enable Malaysian higher education to be "respected internationally as an education hub" (p.25).

The Action plan also characterized through the teaching and learning focus that an internationalized higher education should be "benchmarked" alongside prominently recognized universities globally. The aspect of Research and Development also maintained the importance of Malaysia's projected position as an educational hub by emphasizing the importance of knowledge creation. Elaboration on this initiative has indicated that international cooperation and incorporation of foreign faculty members is a proposed method of achieving this portion.

One of the proposed results of these directives planned by the MOHE indicates an organized direction toward recognition, acceptance, and comparative status with the global academic community. This is reaffirmed through two of the desired outcomes of the Action Plan where the research universities of Malaysia are desired to become internationally-acclaimed, and five of the nation's research and development centres achieve world renowned excellence. Alongside the establishment of national

universities with research status, the Action Plan includes the establishment of one or two Apex Universities to serve as examples of academic excellence. The specialized status of "an Apex University is a conceptual construct that in due time will stand atop the pyramid of institutions. The Apex Universities will be the nation's centres of academic distinction" (p.35). As reflected in The National Higher Education Strategic Plan of 2007, institutions selected to receive recognition as an Apex university are required to include successful leaders, highly productive faculty, academically excellent students, and fully-equipped facilities. This category requires larger budgets and greater autonomy concerning the operation. Although the exclusive class for universities has been determined, criteria for classification have not been included in detail. The Star reported that "having apex universities is good for the country's branding as it will give us an international focus," ("Reaching For The Top", 2007).

Inclusion of an Apex status for the universities in Malaysia may indicate that it is being employed for both internal and external reasons. From an international perspective, it appears that this will distinguish the class of universities accorded this distinction from the other institutions and hopefully attract talent from elsewhere. Internally, it has been mentioned by the higher education minister that it might encourage other institutions to work harder.

Bajunid (2012) indicated in the New Straits Times that University of Malaya had been the only academic institution within Malaysia up until the 1960s. Since that time, in little more than 50 years, large-scale planning has been applied to expand the nation's academic infrastructure. Based on recent statistics from the Ministry of Higher Education official portal, the state of Malaysian academics has increased significantly. Currently, higher education opportunities in Malaysia include 20 public universities, 22 polytechnics, 37 public community colleges, 33 private universities and university colleges, 4 foreign university branch campuses and about 500 private colleges (Ministry

of Higher Education, 2009). The efforts to expand from only a single institution that existed 50 years ago with University of Malaya to what exists in the 21st century of Malaysia's higher education system indicates an achievement in working toward the goal of an international education hub.

1.1.2 New Straits Times

The first paper put into publication was The Prince of Wales Island Government Gazette, which was started in Pulau Pinang, known as modern day Penang, in 1806 (Othman, 1992). Malaya's first printed news source sporadically remained in print until 1830 (Wade, 2002). Numerous other publications were in circulation during that time and eventually ceased production for equally numerous reasons. Fifteen years later, in 1845, the first issue of the Straits Times was printed and distributed as a weekly publication (The New Straits Times Press, 2013). Since the initial production of the Straits Times, many changes have occurred such as ownership, physical layout, and name, but the continuous transformations of this paper led to the form recognised today. The year was 1967 for when the current name was chosen in order to maintain compliance with the new Companies Act which became effective in 1966 and that was The New Straits Times (The New Straits Times Press, 2013).

As Malaysia's oldest newspaper that has remained in publication, The New Straits Times is the second largest circulated English-language newspaper, second only to The Star (Audit Bureau of Circulations, 2013). Currently it is owned by Media Prima Berhad (Media Prima, 2013). Since Media Prima also owns other information entities in Malaysia, it has been indicated that government connections to the media influence content production (Ahmad, 2010). This direction of output could be attributed to the corporate holdings of the UMNO, which "owns 43% in NSTP through its investment arm Media Prima Bhd. The ruling party also controls all private free to air TV stations,

namely, TV3, Ntv7, 8TV and Channel 9 through Media Prima." ("No Decision On Merger Yet", 2007). The fact that ownership of The New Straits Times is largely held by the UMNO may depict a directing influence over topical publication.

1.1.3   World Ranking

The members of the ranking bodies responsible for Malaysia's global positioning have not been consistent in criteria or continuity of structure since the beginning of Malaysia's involvement in 2004. The collection of articles includes frequent mentioning of the once-paired Times Higher Education Supplement-Quacquarelli Symonds World University Rankings.

This collaboration was discontinued in 2009 which effectively left THE and QS functioning as two separate entities to produce ranking information simultaneously. The THES-QS company was not the only ranking body, although the criteria assigned by other ranking bodies were even more stringent than the parameters indicated by the World University Rankings measurements. The Graduate School of education of Shanghai Jiao Tong University and the Center for World-Class Universities (CWCU) first published The Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) in June 2003 (Academic Ranking of World Universities, 2013). This ranking process was also supposed to have incorporated so-called "methodologically sound" (Marginson, 2007:5) indicators to categorize universities. One particular indicator included the counting of staff or alumni awarded Nobel Prizes (Academic Ranking of World Universities, 2013).

According to the history of QS, available through their website, Quacquarelli Symonds Ltd. began as a student initiative in 1988 while Nunzio Quacquarelli was finishing his postgraduate studies. The bulk of the QS group's rankings background has been related to Master of Business Administration (MBA) information. From specializing in providing analysis in the area of business schools and degrees

internationally, QS Ltd. expanded to include information about universities in general. By 2001, they introduced the QS World Grad School Tour, which served as a precursor to the World University Rankings (WUR). Since the transition to the WUR to provide information on various programs from top academic institutions globally in 2004, this has been the professional direction taken by QS and utilized until 2010.

THE, a UK based publication, had begun as an information source in 1971 ("THES - The Early Years", 2001). They also provide information for their readership on higher education and issues related to the academic community. A collaborative union existed between THE and QS from 2004 until 2009 under the title of THE-QS until Quacquarelli Symonds worked independently in 2010 (Asrul, 2012).

According to the report distributed by QS on their World University Rankings 2010 top 500, they have involved countries in this placement of academic institutions since 2004. The response to this activity included, "…professors or assistant professors and the…views of more than 700 university presidents, vice-chancellors and deputy vice-chancellors." This annual ranking had continued from 2004 until 2009 under the name of THE-QS World University Ranking (QS World University Rankings 2010:3).

One of the methods included in the criteria to determine the relative placement of one university with respect to another involved the use of a survey distributed to an estimated 15,000 academics to illicit their perspective on which universities were achieving the international standards that THE-QS was attempting to codify. Various employers from around the world were added to the survey list for determining the subjective positioning of high-achieving universities according to the QS 2010 informational document.

Some of the listed members that were active in the surveys originated from the United States, India, and China. Hong Kong was specifically differentiated as an additional member that provided unspecified, but "more significant contributions" (QS

World University Rankings 2010:13). The data gathered from these academic and employer surveys provided 50% of the total score for a university's rank. The remaining criteria stated by QS included information directly related to the respective institutions such as citation, available faculty for students, and where the staff and students originate. The key aspect of this ranking depended on half of the data concerning the universities being derived from outside of the university participating in the ranking.

The primary means of data gathering for journal citations by QS is obtained from Scopus. Martin Ince, the QS Academic Advisory Board convenor stated that higher education currently is defined as a globalized business and that nations understand the importance of where academic institutions place in comparison to other recognized centres of learning in the world (QS World University Rankings, 2010). This identifies for participants in the rankings a critical issue and establishes a necessity of providing budgets for government-funded institutions to improve if they are identified as a successful place of higher learning.

Up until 2009, THE worked with QS Quacquarelli Symonds company to establish the ranking system that had been employed by the Malaysian government. Since then, THE and QS separated and began submitting separate rank tables based on their own analysis. For data gathering, THE had involved Thomson Reuters to supply the information required in their specific criteria.

When the two companies separated, Phil Baty, editor of the Times Higher Education World University Rankings attempted to create a theatre of transparency concerning the methodology and operations of THE in order to clarify how the company places the participants. He proceeded to identify a distinction between the old criteria which was based on six indicators and explained how five groups broken into 13 different identifiers was the new standard followed.

The move to a larger distribution of performance indicators was to provide more categories related to university activities and matters based on comments from Thomson Reuters. Phil Baty pointed out how rankings will continue to play a significant role in economic decisions made by governments concerning academic budgets even after the transformation of THE after their separation from the QS company (Baty, 2010).

1.2   Purpose of Study

The present study is done to highlight the aspects of the selected discourse on international rankings and examine them in detail to see how, as a collection of texts, this discourse is formed. It is important to linguistically recognize what occurs to be able to accurately reference the collected data of this study. Clearly identifying which linguistic elements are present and how these serve to form communicative purposes that develop is imperative to aid in providing a more thorough report of the corpus of articles. A prominent linguistic pattern that had been exhibited in this discourse was the continual emphasis of the significance of rankings. This appeared to be maintained throughout the entirety of the texts.

1.3   Significance of Study

This issue of international rankings currently serves as a persuasive component of academia for determining policy, funding, and intake. Whether this phenomenon will become a permanent addition to the process of education remains to be seen with the evolution of academic institutions. As the influence of rankings has continued to increase, so has the drive within many countries to allocate significant portions of national attention into higher education (Hazelkorn, 2013). So to, has the Malaysian government, by drafting extensive plans to greatly develop the country's universities; the incorporation of rankings into the local tertiary education system is a primary part of that project. Just as the ranking process has been exhibited to change over the years

since being introduced into the local university spectrum, government and academe have concurrently progressed alongside this additional administrative component. Recognizing the organization and structure of this discourse will enable more effective means of understanding the involved subject matter through access to a greater comprehensive depth of the relevant issue.

1.4   Research Questions

The current research will determine how this selected collection of articles on the issue of rankings is portrayed throughout the publication time. The observation of this body of discourse will occur through identifying recurring communicative purposes that become exhibited within the texts. This will be possible by also establishing any prominent linguistic elements evidenced within the corpus. This study will be able to carry out the aforementioned objectives by investigating the research questions listed below:

(a)   How is the issue of rankings developed throughout the selection of data?

(b)   What communicative purposes arise to represent the ranking issue?

(c)   What linguistic elements are incorporated to portray the issue of ranking?

1.5   Conclusion

The above information comprised the chapter involving the background information that provides a cursory contextual positioning of the selected data within this research. In addition to an orientation of subject, three research questions designed to serve as a guide in order to provide a clear understanding of the general outcome of this study. A literature review involving relevant research relating to this study will follow in Chapter 2: Literature Review.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0   Introduction

This section provides related studies concerning the subject matter of this study. This chapter consists of four main parts. Section 2.1 illustrates the literature on discourse analysis. Subsection 2.1.1 involves studies related to modality whereas subsections 2.1.2 and 2.1.3 identify literatures on pronoun and metaphor. Thereafter, section 2.2 details the literature on rankings. Subsequently, section 2.3 describes literature on intertextuality and interdiscursivity. Sections 2.4 addresses past literature concerning the subject of news discourse.

2.1   Discourse Analysis

Making use of a language involves the selection of words which fall within functional roles that can be combined into conceptual phrases in order to convey greater meaning where it would not be possible with words alone. This is a common activity that people take part in when attempting to convey thoughts, feelings, intentions, or instructions to other people. Therefore, it cannot be limited to the "description of linguistic forms independent of the purposes or functions which those forms are designed to serve in human affairs" (Brown and Yule, 1983:1). Discourse analysis essentially means to study the what and why of people's use of language in order to understand their purpose of reasoning and decision for such language use.

According to Brown and Yule (1983) primarily transactional language is what a significant portion of discourse that is used on a daily basis is comprised of when the communication involves information exchange. Primarily transactional language is used by a speaker or writer when the motivation behind communication involves getting a message to someone that involves some kind of information. The communication between two or more people relate to a mutually referenced idea, object, or other

person. This mutual reference is what the message involves. Discourse operates as an exchange, not simply use of language or language beyond the sentence. When taking part in a discourse, people provide resources and thereby receive new resources from another participant (Yule, 2006).

A study on the use of formulaic utterances was conducted by Overstreet and Yule (2001) which focused on spoken interaction and how the social act was employed to emphasize intent. The selected discourse was analysed with a focus on the field of pragmatics in order to gain insight into the, "sociopragmatic role in interpersonal communication" (p.47) with relation to formulaic disclaimers. The results of the study indicated that speakers were compelled to perform impression management by utilizing disclaimers in conversation to provide security to their social identity. This social act was observed to be a regular method of interaction conducted among groups that share a certain degree of familiarity.

Another study conducted by George Yule which involved semantic and pragmatic use of the English phrase *and everything* (Yule, 2002). This phrase was analysed alongside a related phrase, *and all that* to observe interpersonal functions as well. Both of these phrases were studied to further understanding of formulaic language use within the discourses that were analysed. The social action observed with the use of both phrases was assumed to elicit intersubjective understanding during communication and appeared to indicate evaluative action with regard to the intended message. The phrase *and everything* was identified to be an integral component of the formulaic constructions of communication which aided in metapragmatic anticipation and influence over interpretation of communicated behaviour and events (see also Yule, 1966; Mey, 2001).

Brown (1990) devised some useful language strategies from conducting a study on understanding discourse in language learning. It was determined that implementing

explicit strategies proved to be useful for learners to gradually derive inferential knowledge of the target language. This could allow for a learner-centered pace when incorporating culturally relevant material similar to how contextual understanding is obtained in a primary language. Brown provided the position that if experiences of the teacher are shared during the course of instruction it will serve to sufficiently supplement the learning process to aid the language acquisition. The addition of supplemental context from an instructor's experiences to facilitate key language strategies was more feasible than focusing language learning on significant portions of culturally contextual material which may inhibit student learning. The provision of specific skills to direct inferential development in order to adapt to future unfamiliar situations in discourse was shown to be of primary importance alongside teacher experiences.

Brown (2008) observed habits of first and second language users when information was being processed. Selective observation of messages appeared to be a strategic means of dealing with large capacities of information in order to maintain understanding. Brown was able to show that young first language users apply different strategies when listening depending on the situation. It was observed that second language learners use similar strategies as the ability to process communication is challenged by limited vocabulary in order to achieve comprehension. The study indicated that selective processing based on the identification of nouns provided an efficient processing strategy when communicators were faced with significant informational loads (see also Brown and Yule, 1983).

Understanding of experiences, which could also be identified as information or background, to grasp a particular discourse has been shown to be of importance for involved members of a discourse. In the immediate case of the ranking issue, the involved members are identified by the Malaysian populace. Additionally, with the

recognition of the extensive body of information that was represented over time, identification of key nouns, or significant elements, again in reference to the ranking issue, allows the story to be quickly understood by readers without needing to have a complete knowledge or understanding of the rest of the story.

Some of the recent studies that have been conducted in the area of discourse analysis involve aspects of spoken discourse (Patrona, 2012; Walsh et al., 2011; Diani, 2008), ethnographies (Korstanje, 2011; Hewitt, 2009; Rampton, 2002), and interviews (Gaines, 2011; Lauerbach, 2006).

The initial aspect of discourse analysis that is addressed involves the study of Greek commercial prime-time news conducted by Patrona (2012). Patrona examines a new type of broadcast interactive medium named the structured panel discussion. It has been studied to provide insight on transitional developments of the perceived neutrality of reporting shifting into a style of opinion designed with an "aim at enlisting audience alignment with the views expressed" (p.159). According to Patrona, this approach of adopting a personal position on the topics appears to construct a model where participation among the reporters results in discussions on political, social, and financial issues that construct a prescriptive platform with personal viewpoints portrayed to be expressed. The audience takes this as an interactive delivery of news instead of the traditional one-way reporting which "positions the journalist as superior to the general public" (p.159) where the standpoint of the experts is gathered to discuss matters for participants to receive the message.

Participatory news casts have been shown by Patrona (2012) to deliver a conversational style with embedded argumentative approaches to the addressed issues. The indications on behalf of the reporters reveal to the audience that "journalists are shown to possess insider knowledge of political reality" (p.159). The New Straits Times attempted to present a similar format by employing the appearance of a facilitated arena

of discussion on the issue of ranking in the collected articles. This type of newspaper writing style has not been addressed within Malaysian mass media and it is important to identify transformative stages of how news is formed and presented to the public. This application of analysis in spoken discourse involves the use of discourse analysis from the standpoint of socializing verbally.

Ethnographies have also been used to observe spoken discourse as well as perform analyses on communities and retrieve valuable resources from newspapers for further content analysis, as with the study done by Korstanje (2011) in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Korstanje's research focused on the H1N1 outbreak in 2009 and how the reports created resultant fear within the Argentinian public. The connection to readership is an important element of this analysis as it relates to how journalists "react in context of emergencies but also the diversity of fears it enhances" (p.70). Through a passive role as observer to the events that developed in Buenos Aires, Korstanje performed an ethnography to analyse the coverage of H1N1 in Argentina which involved formal and informal interviews alongside the content analysis of the articles from a period of time in 2009 from April until June. Korstanje relates how disasters are reported within a mediated context to mitigate potentially extreme reactions. The concept of a disaster could be applied to how the results of ranking turned out when the process had gone through the first year and University of Malaya had an initial drop in scoring.

When the issue of ranking became contentious it was mediated by the authors of the news articles and the discourse that was built around rankings had begun to "affect communities and change their perspective" (p.63). Although the general issue of rankings was not a new topic internationally, for the Malaysian context, it was a new addition to local matters of higher education. Since this was the case, authors of the news articles exemplified national plans, regardless of the negative aspects to the issue

since "lay persons need to know further, reporters play a crucial role in shaping the understanding" (p.62) as Ahmad (2010) suggests, "the press has tremendous power to determine the focus and tone of public discourse" (p.120).

Aspects of discourse analysis such as observation of metaphor, stories, and statements with the addition of conversation analysis were utilised by Akturan (2011) to analyze the issue involving Tiger Wood's infidelity incident and Nike's response to the event. A collection of 451 posts from a database of weblogs were compiled and examined to determine how consumers reacted when an endorsement deal was made after the negative publicity of the celebrity had been disseminated. In the case of universities rankings, it also portrays how the authors of the news articles effectively navigated the incorporation of negative reports on how ranking was fallible and contentious. It is important to highlight how similar events of the audience perception of rankings development had been included and utilized to concurrently develop the facilitation of the event with the addition of the government, academic, and public communities into the articles.

Another study was done by Koeberlé (2012) to increase the use of discourse analysis within strategy-related situations. Beerbourg was observed to examine how issues of strategic management were conducted during an urban planning event using strategy-as-practice. The materials that provided source data in Koeberlé's investigation included 40 texts produced during planning meetings, 40 local newspaper articles, and seven official documents. This addition of someone becoming involved that was outside of the original discourse functioned "as a rhetorical artifice to increase the power of their discourse" (p.400). This same application of authoritative figures was applied in a continuous manner within the ranking discourse to indicate the importance of incorporation of ranking into public university functions. The involvement of the ranking companies in the field of academia has begun to produce a new arena that the

university systems are now expected to function within and adjust based on these new perceptions and expectations.

Jorgensen (2012) points out that the public perceives events such as new national plans, business directions, or large scale policies based on the discourses that form the situation. As the New Straits Times functions along a similar connection with the government, it also works from the standpoint of providing an interpretive event to the public what the actions of the government and public universities are by describing rankings over a long period of time. As suggested by Yule (2006), "to arrive at an interpretation, and to make our messages interpretable, we certainly rely on what we know about linguistic form and structure" (p.125). Forming a detailed picture for readers of the ranking issue develops ranking as a symbol through repetition and the use of metaphor to explain the event in multiple ways. All participants in the ranking process reach a point over the seven years of publication where "they are informed by commonly shared connotations" (Jorgensen, 2012:113).

The important point to maintain when conducting a discourse analysis is that no single aspect of discourse can be focused on to reach a conclusion. It is important to conduct a multi-methodological and detailed investigation of a subject through multiple tools derived from more than one source.

2.1.1   Modality

Language use can often be more varied than simply through the use of statements or the posing of questions. Feelings can be described or uncomfortable situations can be tactfully addressed without causing unnecessary stress. Requests are routinely made in everyday language senarios, as well as offers and suggestions in order to express desire or intent. Most of these instances involve the use of modals which aid with indicating attitude or the effect of what message is conveyed. Modals are

demonstrated through modal verbs and modal auxiliaries (Sinclair, 1997). To support the topic they are used in, "English modal verbs reflects the complexity of their grammatical, pragmatic, and contextual functions" (Hinkel, 2009: 670). Central modal verbs, also referenced as core, principal, nuclear modal verbs, modal auxiliaries, verbal modality markers, or commonly classified as modals (Hinkel, 2009) which often include can, could, may, might, shall, should, will, would, and must, are employed to express modality. Classification of modals can also include marginal modals like need (to), have (got) to, or ought to which may be referred to by terms such as "semi-modals, semi-auxiliaries, quasi-modals, periphrastic modals, modal idioms, or fixed idiomatic modals" (Hinkel, 2009: 670). Modal verbs are typically classified into three groups; (i) the expression of certainty such as shall, and will; (ii) the expression of possibility and ability such as can, may, might, could, and to be able to; (iii) the expression of obligation and necessity such as must, should, ought to, need (to), and have to (Hinkel, 2009; Sinclair, 1997; Longacre, 1996).

Cuenca and Marin (2012) presents the fluid status of words that typically function as modals but can also occur as structural elements of text in the form of discourse markers such as conjunctions. The focus of the study scrutinized the word 'clar' from the Catalan language which means 'clear' in English. This was done through analysing a corpus of 10 conversations collected through semi-structured interviews. Tasks were provided to generate five different types of text. Each interview was video recorded and transcribed. The results from the varied responses identified that 'clar' functioned strictly as a modal, such as an interjection, a modal marker in conversation, combined modal and structural attributes, or served to mitigate when it was a discourse marker.

Rubin (2007) indicated definite certainty and doubt markers in news discourse to represent subjectivity in classification of the existent modals. This was done in order to

justify further development for training coders to improve agreement results regarding modals. This study involved 80 randomly selected New York Times articles from the year 2000. The data was analysed by four annotators using the Explicit Certainty Categorization Model, which groups certainty markers into five classes ranging from complete certainty to uncertain. The most significant instances of modals were identified due to the repetitive patterns of occurrence. It was concluded that high subjectivity in manual annotation existed when determining certainty in modals, thus indicating a possible need for streamlining levels of certainty in order to aid future research.

2.1.2   Pronoun

Pronouns provide a means of identification of a person, place, thing, or idea. This readdressing of content can be done in order to provide a means of efficiency in language use. "We can do this by representing the noun group, but unless there is a special reason to do so we are more likely to use a pronoun instead" (Sinclair, 1997:28). Contextual understanding for the topic that is replaced by a pronoun is important for understanding to be retained. "Pronouns are used to make reference to an object (or objects) present in the shared perceptual environment, or rendered salient in some other way" (Evans, 1980:337). Three classes of pronouns commonly utilised in various forms of communication such as verbal, written, electronic, and academic contexts include first-person pronouns (e.g. I, me, we); second-person pronouns (e.g. you) and third-person pronouns (e.g. he, she, it, they).

The study conducted by Yeo and Ting (2014) highlighted a connection between the use of pronouns and interactivity. The use of pronouns during lectures was monitored to determine how it promoted the interaction of students. This was accomplished through the classification of pronouns into the number used, comparison

of use across various kinds of lectures and specific areas of use in the discourses. Tracking pronouns in these instances aided the investigation of how their use affected engagement of the people involved. Use of pronouns was observed to determine the construction of relationships between participant parties during a series of academic engagements. The method of this study incorporated a frequency analysis. Color-coded pronoun compilation within the data was comparatively analysed for frequency of use to determine variance. Contextual use of pronouns and collocating verbs was determined based on multiple readings of the collected lecture data to aid in the analysis classification. This was done to indicate appropriate manner of pronoun use within the data. The outcome of the research indicated some correlation between pronoun use and interactivity. This was especially evident in the use of the 'you' pronoun as a highly effective word for engaging interactivity.

Use of pronouns was exhibited to illustrate how communicative purposes can be structured based on intonation of Mandarin. This study by Hsiao (2011) set out to identify speaker interaction with listener by monitoring pronoun use and manipulation. This was conducted in order to highlight how dialogues are formed as the conversationalists proceed to understand the discussion. Both discourse analysis and conversation analysis were incorporated into this research to monitor micro-level interactions. This research showed that when 'wo', or 'I', was used as a second person pronoun, it conveyed the position of the listeners' perspective when uttered by the speaker. Use of 'ni' for 'you' as a first person pronoun helped to draw the audience into a subjective experience and provide information.

2.1.3   Metaphor

Metaphor, as Lakoff and Johnson (2003) indicate, begins conceptually. Metaphor employs substitution of words, concepts, or phrases that typically reside in a

reader's collective understanding to symbolize a complex or abstract subject. Providing a simple example with similar traits to elicit understanding of a more complex system is essentially the function of metaphor. Along with this description, it should be added that Reddy (1979) suggests the English language carries with it a unique approach to understanding how the communication that occurs within the language is mentally processed. This particular means of processing ideas can be exploited in order to direct how topics are understood and viewed. Within this research, metaphors will be understood to function in both a comparative and selectively interpretive capacity.

The work done by Woodhams (2014) investigated how metaphor was used to aid in the socialization adjustments of new employees in order to acclimatize to standard practices of the workplace. This was done through the analysis of conversations between a new hire in an internship position and an experienced mentor. The objective of this study was to determine if metaphor was effectively used to provide simple descriptions for how the process of daily responsibilities at that particular job was conducted. The conversations of five volunteer migrants were recorded which provided fourteen and one-half recorded hours of data. The MIPVU (Metaphor Identification Procedure Vrije Universiteit) provided the research guidelines to systematically identify metaphors within data transcripts. The identified portions were then analysed at the lexical level to determine the systematic metaphors that were present. The findings indicated that use of metaphors provided an educational means of understanding new and complex procedures in workplace contexts. It was shown that application of metaphors was significantly useful in conveying new understanding of abstract concepts.

Implied ideological values were analysed in relation to the application of metaphor within media discourse in Arcimaviciene's (2013) study. It was done to represent if the subject of spy-swapping between Russia and the United States was

treated in a positive context. This analysis would serve to portray possible ideology through metaphor in the news discourse. Articles were selected from nine online media sources that involved both standard reports and commentary. A time period of five days limited the quantity of data collected from the various publications. Media perception was highlighted through the identification of lexical patterns that showed repeated metaphor use. The incorporation of metaphors in this work helped to build a general concept of the relationship between Russia and the United States. The topic of spies was frequently reinforced through metaphor use and indicated the role of spies in national policy as commodity serving a utilitarian function of diplomacy. Metaphors served to represent a negative but useful treatment of spy-swapping between the two nations. This identification of media perception is alluded to through the metaphors that were applied which helped to deliver a presentation of the US-Russian relations.

2.2   Rankings

When the ranking issue became significant due to the world placement of UM in 2004, rankings have been increasingly recognized in Malaysia. Regional assessment of Malaysia's interface with the international community and the volatility of local universities' positioning was presented by Ratnavelu (2010) through a report on ranking criteria and its unstable subjectivity.

Holmes (2006) examined the ranking criteria used by the THES Rankings which was compiled by QS. The findings reveal that rankings were not compiled by THES but the QS Quacquarelli Symonds institution which specializes in promoting international MBA education but lacked in specialized research and teaching knowledge in the area of natural and social sciences or the humanities. With the oversights of omission of native language journal publications and exclusion of social sciences and humanities in

the calculation of categories, the QS consulting firm and THES were put in a position of explanation for a number of inconsistencies.

A number of investigations revolve around the inconsistencies of the ranking methodologies and its global impact on higher education (Ishikawa, 2009; Bookstein et al., 2010; Liu and Cheng, 2005; Hazelkorn, 2009; Marginson, 2007, Marginson and van der Wende, 2007). Ishikawa's (2009) qualitative analysis of rankings between Osaka University and THES-QS displayed emergent patterns of active parties through a critical ethnographic approach. Her study exemplifies the challenges and dilemmas experienced by non-western and non-English language medium universities and how continuous pressure to stay competitive in rankings is influencing the university's values. In contrast, an analysis of news articles that catalogue the development of the rankings issue approaches the subject from a different perspective. The context of rankings in Japan is focused on the issue within the university and how the ranking issue had begun to affect the university's policy whereas within the Malaysian context the ranking issue relates to the greater context of multiple national universities being affected and the resultant reactions of the Malaysian Government. The development of the rankings discourse in a national media publication aids in constructing this subject in a public context, whereas Ishikawa's study confined the ethnographic analysis to the interaction of a national university with the rankings institutions THES and QS Limited.

Marginson's (2007) conference paper presented a view of the rankings phenomenon from the context of New Zealand. The aim was to look at the effects that would occur with academies nationally. It approached the matter from a broad perspective in terms of how the Jiao Tong rankings rated universities as well as how the Times Higher global ranking approach was constructed. In Marginson and van der Wende's (2007) study, they emphasize how both the research rankings by Shanghai Jiao Tong University and composite rankings by the Times Higher Education Supplement

have been globally publicized and widely received by elite researchers despite the methodological problems and policy limitations. The current study takes into account the background information of the subject and incorporates all of the contextual matters to aid in the discourse analysis of The New Straits Times rankings articles.

Liu and Cheng's (2005) study on the academic ranking of world universities presents the details of the methodological problems and solutions from qualitative and quantitative perspectives. Similar to Marginson's (2007) and Marginson and van der Wende's (2007) study, the ranking system has received positive encouragement and suggestions despite the obvious shortcomings. The findings revealed that only five percent of the feedback contains negative comments while the remaining feedback comprise of a mixture of appraisal for the initiative taken and offering of positive recommendations.

A study conducted by Delgado-Márquez et al. (2012) examined the relationship between university cultural practices and the internationalization behaviour of higher education institutions. An empirical investigation was carried out to analyse the national culture influence on the internationalization patterns of the THES 200 top-ranked universities globally. Having internationalization in mind, Coelen (2009) investigated the relationship between rankings and measurement of success in internationalization. The international perspective of a university can be measured from various aspects including administration, governance, staff and student support. In terms of international enrolments, processes of ranking and internationalization seemingly exert an influence on each other. As he explains, the increase of international acquisition of talent, an aspect of measuring internationalization, will improve university's status in ranking which will in turn increase the recruitment of talented international staff and students. Therefore, he concluded that both rankings and the measurement of success in internationalization are complimentary for each other. Similar to the present research,

incorporating internationalization is a primary goal through benchmarking against leading institutions worldwide.

According to Horn et al.'s (2007) analysis, the American Council on Education's (1995) 10 "ground rules" for internationalization include a non-English language proficiency requirement for all students and establishing cooperative relationships with institutions in other countries (p.337). This is the requirement of academic establishments within the context of the United States but when an institute is evaluated according to criteria determined by a ranking body, a similar approach is constructed as to the amount of publications that are accomplished in English. In Horn et al. (2007), rankings present a hegemonic structure that is introduced into American institutions through the faculty and administration. These particular internationalized elements are observed and calculated based on criteria defined by the study that are accessible by members of the general public. The analysis described above serves to provide an example of the extensive effort placed on incorporating internationalized practices into North American academia. Therefore, this provides additional contextual evidence on structural similarities of how ranking criteria within THES and QS is approached.

Since the goal of the Malaysian government is to reach a nationally developed status by 2020, the incorporation of an internationally recognized educational system is an important part of that plan. In addition to this objective, the increasing development of the internationalization of higher education by the European Union and other partnering nations adds developmental pressure to the push to have internationally recognized institutions within Malaysia. Since this is a fact of the current state of education globally, Malaysian academic institutions have taken part in the process of rankings. This is a sensitive subject and still in a formative stage since the initial organization of how the local universities were evaluated was not clearly defined or

concretely organized. It is still a prominent issue since the shift from the THES and QS system to the now THE rankings. International ranking is important to identify where local universities place globally, but the inclusion of language and clear understanding of regional issues are also factors to consider when making these comparisons.

The focus of research in European higher education ranking systems (HERs) is beneficial for the study of institutions within the European Union although it does not seem to directly address the issue that was mentioned earlier within the same study that linguistic bias seems to be a prominent issue within the rankings community (Stolz et al., 2010). The study focused on quality of ranking practices instead of the ranking institutions themselves. Ranking standards are not universal and have varying degrees of accuracy depending on the particular criteria that is applied to measure respective universities. The immediate issue concerning the discourse analysis over rankings in Malaysia is due in part to the subjectivity of the ranking bodies involved.

Rankings in the European Union and the monitoring of rankings are shown to be important issues when descriptions in the study identify certain relationships between the organization of the rankings systems, country of origin, and the relative positioning of the rankings system. This helped to indicate how an external ranking body may experience challenges in accurately portraying universities locally.

With respect to the issue of rankings in the Malaysian context, little was detailed within the realm of discourse analysis concerning how the issue was presented and how the academic bodies that were involved in the rankings exercises responded to the systems in place. This also gave the current research a place to supplement the existing body of literature on rankings and how the ongoing stress of the importance of ranking occurred to be maintained throughout a period of time.

2.3   Intertextuality and Interdiscursivity

Bhatia (2010) makes the point that interdiscursivity has not received as much attention in research as intertextuality, and that it is an "appropriation of generic resources, primarily contextual in nature" (p.33) while also sharing concepts within and across "discursive and professional practices as well as professional cultures" (p.33). This works within the current research from the standpoint of the promotional discourses that were added to the news discourse within the ranking articles. The application of promotion of ranking from the ranking companies and the government action plan involved conversations between news editors and key figures from within the ranking companies as well as leading government officials providing updates on national education plans. These verbal exchanges within initially different contextual situations were then appropriated to be used as supportive texts for providing the general public with the necessary information on ranking.

In emphasizing the importance of interdiscursivity, Bhatia claims "that it is central to the understanding of professional genres and practices" (Bhatia, 2008a; 2008b cited in Bhatia, 2010:48) in order to encourage broadening areas of interdiscursive research. Dunn's (2006) suggests that "interdiscursivity allows speakers to use existing cultural resources to create new texts that are simultaneously appropriate, authoritative, and creative" (p.153). The research Bhatia (2010) conducted with annual reports, commercial arbitration, and fundraising using his three space multidimensional and multi-perspective model for analysing written discourse has been outlined in Bhatia (2004). This identifies that multiple interdiscursive exchanges occurred within the discursive and professional practices of these genres.

Using similar analytical framework, Bhatia (2008) made the point that two different discourses, "through the expert use of specific lexico-syntactic as well as socio-pragmatic resources, are cleverly exploited to 'bend' the norms and conventions

of 'reporting' to promote a positive image" (p.167), which in this case included accounting and public relation discourses. As the analysis of a seven year collection of articles has not been conducted from the approach of discourse analysis to identify features in and above the text, the incorporation of showing how intertextuality plays a role in the development of these elements is an important component of this research. This current study will provide information from related research to indicate where external texts may have been derived from and supplemented by the authors of the news articles to put together the discourse printed in the newspaper.

A number of studies have drawn attention to the investigation of intertextuality. Fairclough (1992) suggests that the extremely fast moving pace of "transformation and restructuring of textual traditions and orders of discourse" (p.102) puts intertextuality as an important focus of study in the area of discourse analysis. According to Solin (2004), "intertextual chains are not a neutral form of mediation, in the sense of acting simply as channels of transmission" (p.267). Focusing on financial discourses, Camiciottoli (2010) used a qualitative discourse analysis of a corpus of 20 earnings call transcripts. This analysis primarily "focuses on global textual features" (p.347). The analysis provided evidence of a regular pattern of structure, intertextual features, and contributed understanding on how the earnings call categorizes as an independent spoken genre. Intertextuality was indicated to be present as the financial community used the earnings call as a means of building communicative practices that were unique. The use of an interview with a confidential informant was also involved in gathering contextual information. Since the presence of intertextuality showed "a well-defined community of practice that regularly produces and consumes specific genres" (p.353), its existence helped in the identification of this financial genre. Instances where "executives also made some explicit references to texts produced by other entities" (p.352) parallels what the authors of the news articles were doing in the ranking articles. Since the national

plan to improve the public universities needed to be implemented and have a general acceptance, the insertion of texts that referenced government plans were identified as being spoken of in a necessary manner by high ranking members of academia and the government. These instances of intertextuality added to the developed discourse on the ranking issue.

In the context of academic discourse, intertextuality was studied from the standpoint of how student writers incorporated knowledge of texts across different subjects (Jesson et al., 2011). The study involved four teachers from six schools in writing classes from a single term. The observations provided an understanding of how the addition of intertextual resources affected the student writing skills. It was determined that the inclusion of intertextuality into the writing programme "offered students a greater degree of authority over their situated textual knowledge" (p.65). Jesson et al.'s study included analysis of contextual knowledge and how the students were able to apply knowledge and transfer the understanding to separate contexts. It was indicated that "intertextual understandings have the potential for providing a discourse …that may afford transfer of literacy learning" (p.68). This observation may provide understanding into the way intertextuality is applied by the authors of the news articles in the ranking issue as "intertextuality not only accounts for the links between texts, but it also an important factor influencing the way in which texts are constructed" (Bremner, 2008:306). When repetition of information is continually incorporated it appears to aid in the development of comprehension for readers. Since there is a gradual incorporation of links to the prior knowledge of the past events that were recontextualized back into the ranking articles, readers are more likely to be able to engage and react in a positive or at least an accepting manner with regard to ranking.

Kong (2006) conducted a study involving 83 transaction reports obtained from two Hong Kong property magazines from a single day in order to compare how selected

events that were covered by the two reports were formed. The purpose of Kong's study is twofold. One is to observe how the components of news report and advertisement structures are used to provide aid to transaction reports in meeting objectives of construction. The other involves a determination of how useful "prototypical categories established in discourse analysis to identify genres" (p.773) prove to be in this analysis. Transaction reports were shown in Kong's study to contain characteristics of news reports and advertisements. These reports might point to similar activity that may not be intentionally developed through the inclusion of promotional discourses into the New Straits Time's publications on the ranking issue. As rankings are a relatively new subject within the Malaysian context, little work has been accomplished to see how this commercial endeavour has developed within a mass media context. With the involvement of at least three primary communities in the overall development of the ranking articles, intertextuality becomes a significant feature exhibited within the corpus. This may identify activity of other generic developments that occur during the reporting of news which may consequently produce the hybridization of those reports into new discourses made up from government, commercial, and academic genres.

Related to political events, intertextuality was focused on to determine how the text writers brought in elements of news reports outside of China and incorporated them into the news discourse of the Chinese publications concerning the 11 September 2001 international incident (Wang, 2008). Current genre theories were also applied "to explore newspaper commentaries in China with the focus of investigating intertextual practices of the genre in question" (p.362) in order to determine how Chinese news editors fulfil nationally contextual expectations of news content. All of these elements were brought in to study the intertextual practices, outside sources, and the multiple roles that a writer would adopt regarding text so culturally contextual development of

the analysed articles could be thoroughly understood given "intertextual relations as social practice" (Bazerman, 1993, 2004; Devitt, 1991 cited in Wang, 2008).

This study of Chinese newspapers reflects aspects of the current research in that both the Chinese news media and Malaysian publications involve government influence. Wang (2008) corroborates the findings in this study that the use of direct and indirect quotations consists largely of members of the government and academic leaders and "direct quotations…contains the potential to make the substantive reference in the reported clause even more prominent" (Matoesian, 1999:94). The discourse of mass media in China symbolizes a platform to provide understanding to "the public...on what constitutes acceptable beliefs and behaviour from the people" (Kluver, 1996 cited in Wang, 2008:375). This supports what has been found in the local media with the portrayal of ranking as a necessary component of university progress. Incorporating the observation of intertextual features from government plans into news articles with a discourse analysis of textual aspects of those articles is necessary for providing insight into development and forming of local news.

Li (2009) conducted a study on the effects of intertextuality on the discursive construction of national identities involving daily newspapers from China and the United States and followed to political stories that were written differently by each publication. The research was confined to front-page articles of the New York Times and the China Daily. This was done because of the rich data present and "the general importance of front-page articles in indicating a newspaper's interests, concerns, and positions" (p.93). In Li's (2009) study, it is indicated that a completely objective approach is not administered with direct reporting of facts. Questions are interjected at the beginning of a paragraph that could be used to imitate what the reader may be thinking about the particular news story. Setting the questions for the audience to

consider "creates a rhetorical situation in which both the author and the reader are engaged in a dialogue" (p.108).

The study conducted by Gadavanij (2002) concerning no-confidence debates in Thailand involves the use of comments made by other people during parliamentary proceedings. The incorporation of intertextuality on the basis of a speaker utilizing the words of another person offers an opportunity to study "the concept of voice as an indication of who the participants of the discourse are and what identity they assume" (p.35). Adopting Chouliaraki and Fairclough's 2-level definition of intertextuality; the combination of genre and the combination of voices within the discourse (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999 cited in Gadavanij, 2002), discourse production within particular contexts has been suggested by Gadavanij (2002) to function well through the use of both genre and voice. The use of reported speech within the debates allow the participants to comment negatively on government activities and stay within a technical position of security. These activities presented in Gadavanij's study substantiate how the text authors are able to include points made about the faults of ranking and comments on government policy with connections to indirect speech as "texts are studied as combinations or blends of multiple voices, some explicitly marked, others more subtle" (Solin, 2004:268). Presenting negative aspects of the ranking process through reported speech of members of the public alongside academic and government figures distances the newspaper from the issue. This prevents negative commenting from being performed by the New Straits Times concerning ranking. This provides a buffer against creating potentially damaging issues if the newspaper were to be accused of printing commentary against government policies. This mixing of referenced comments made by other people is an example of use of intertextuality.

With the development of ranking as a significant aspect of university activities, it is necessary to provide research on the presentation of the ranking phenomenon

within Malaysia. The use of discourse analysis studies to provide detailed explanations within the focus of text and directly above the text with a cursory contextual addition is important to supplement knowledge on how discourses are presented in newspaper publications.

2.4   News Discourse

In the domain of news discourse, there has been a significant amount of past studies conducted from various disciplines. Some recent studies include news discourse in the area of healthcare (Lawrence et al., 2008; Wakefield et al., 2003; Benelli, 2003; Hilton, 2010; Washer, 2004; Collins et al., 2006; Schwartz and Andsager, 2008), natural disaster (Miles and Morse, 2007), gender (Lee, 2004; Jowett and Peel, 2010; Wang, 2009), political (Erjavec and Volcic, 2006; de Wet, 2001) and business and marketing (Vivanco, 2005; McLaren-Hankin, 2007; Li and Tang, 2009). The present study supplements the past works as relatively limited attention has been paid to analysing local news media within the area of higher education institution rankings.

Utilizing data of over 200 news articles, editorials, cartoons and letters to the editor located through Newztext newspapers, Frewin et al. (2009) conducted a critical discursive analysis of contemporary media accounts of controversial New Zealand legislation designed to provide counselling and monetary compensation to sexual abuse victims or survivors. They argued that media often portrays a story through the dominant perspective of how the topic is formed as they are 'concerned with and constrained by attracting and retaining a large audience, and the financial objectives of the corporations that own them" (p.30).

Through the use of specific language, media can present a topic in a controlled and constructed fashion in order to direct an audience. This statement supports the previous studies which claim that linguistic construction of topic produces calculable

responses and perceptions. This current study's approach is important in adding to the academic sphere of news discourse for addressing how the rankings topic is linguistically presented in the eyes of the public. With regard to the ranking issue, rationale for the continued importance that it appeared to hold may have been related to the presentation and repetition of publication which impacted audience influence.

Adopting Fairclough's (1992,1995) multidimensional approach, Kuo (2007) conducted an analysis based on data from four newspapers in Taiwan namely, the United Daily News (UDN), the China Times (CT), the Liberty Times (LT), and the Apple Daily (AD) sampled from three different time periods, 1985, 1995, and 2005. Her study emphasized the conversationalization in printed media within Taiwan society.

As Kuo's study deals with the change of language use over a selected portion of texts from newspapers, it does apply an analysis of structural change of discourse over time and show how conversational qualities are gradually incorporated in order to involve a wider readership. Fairclough's (1992) identification of linguistic features such as direct quotations and pronouns which are associated with conversationalization is also present in the current analysis as part of the investigation of intertextuality which occurs within the news media texts. This research also focuses on news media over an extended time period. In contrast to Kuo's work, the researcher involves articles from 2004 until 2010 instead of focusing on a sampling from once every five years. This is performed in order to analyse not simply a conversation on the rankings topic, but obtain a detailed progression of an elaborated discourse with the rich sampling. The issue of how the discourse on rankings issue is presented by the authors of the news articles with respect to Malaysian higher education institutions and possible motivation for the particular linguistic devices used are presented.

Adopting the CDA approach, Kuo and Nakamura (2005) explored the relationship between language and ideology in Taiwanese news discourse, emphasizing

on a particular issue in relation to Taiwan's first lady Wu Shu-chen's interview with the media which appeared in two ideologically opposed newspapers. The findings showed the two Chinese versions deviate from the English original in that they both add and omit information.

Media presents a form of reality on the basis of the body that provides the information of that reality. Besides, the article successfully identified the differences in the portrayal of a news report from the standpoint of two separate ideological constructs. The analysis of two different newspapers focused on how ideology was expressed through editorial deletion and addition, syntactic and lexical variations, as well as stylistic differences in paragraph combination, whereas the current research directs the area of focus on how constant attention on a single topic of the ranking issue seemed to be maintained throughout the entirety of the texts with the incorporation of other texts and social practices from within and across disciplines. The primary groups that are involved in the rankings issue include THES and QS, Malaysian universities authorities, and the general public which are all depicted by the news media.

Another study conducted by Miles and Morse (2007) through quantitative and qualitative content analysis explored the news media's role in constructing public perceptions of risk associated with events of Hurricane Katrina and Rita of 2005. Miles and Morse addressed the inclusion of risk within narratives and how that inclusion has potential to increase the perceived reality of the contextual risk in relation to how a target audience may receive the content. The opposite is also mentioned that the omission of risk as a related element of a topic may have the effect of minimizing possibility for any associated risk. This subject relates to the element of foregrounding and backgrounding with relation to Fairclough's construction of context. When a topic is explicitly introduced there is reason on the part of the text producer, the same is true when a topic is not discussed, and there is a reason for omitting information.

As findings illustrated that media, which included print news media, is considered to be a source of reliable information concerning disasters. This relates to the spectacle of the rankings and how involved parties would respond to the erratic positioning of Malaysian universities in international ranking as a form of disaster or crises. Since media within Malaysia is a component of the structural framework of the government, this supplies evidence for reasoning behind analysis of how the news publication itself plays a role as a prominent figure in maintaining the importance of rankings issue amongst the general public.

News media plays a significant role in shaping and influencing readers' opinions and viewpoints. Wakefield et al.'s (2003) study concerning media influences on youth smoking concludes that in addition to providing information about smoking directly to the audiences, it strongly shapes and reflects social values about smoking. According to Wakefield et al., not only continuous reinforcement may have an influence on readers, the way the story in the news media is reported also plays a vital role in changing audiences' judgments as Ahmad (2010) puts it, "management of information also means the organization empowers the control over the messages structure, processing and delivery" (p.108). Similarly, Benelli's (2003) investigation on publicity for a new unproven treatment for a wide range of cancers in Italy also suggests how media can have dual functionality of informing and orienting public's standpoints at the same time.

As the newspaper industry takes a major part of responsibilities in public's daily lives, it is crucial for the authors of the news articles to be providing correct and accurate information. As Lawrence et al. (2008) commented in their study with regard to health issues, although the public health practitioners are highly dependent on the media to create awareness amongst the public, the messages conveyed are sometimes inaccurate and providing no assistance to alert the public concerning threats of disease and opportunities for prevention as well as protection. The current study does not only

take into account the textual analysis like in Lawrence et al.'s, but also the investigation of the intertextuality aspects of the printed texts in relation to the issue of rankings.

2.5   Conclusion

The subjects in this chapter covered discourse analysis, issues of modality, pronoun, and metaphor, work related to ranking, intertextuality and interdiscursivity, as well as literature concerning news discourse. Observation of phrases, utterances, and interpretations of events were representative of what was covered in research conducted on discourse analysis. Modality represented the portrayal of certainty, possibility and ability, or obligation and necessity in relation to various degrees of understanding, involvement, or participation within situational contexts. Pronouns were analysed to provide an understanding of how important context and construction of relationships is dependent on the employment of pronouns in texts. Metaphor requires a certain amount of familiarity of reference to be effective in developing collective understanding in a media group readership. The dichotomous nature of rankings was approached by detailing both the related contentious issues and the continued acceptance of this process. Intertextuality and interdiscursivity exhibited new methods of forming communicative practices while maintaining necessary links to past texts. Media discourse was indicated to have influential control over content that the public accessed. Chapter 3: Methodology, will detail the analytical framework and research method.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.0   Introduction

An overview of this chapter is presented to orient the overall structure. Section 3.1 details the collection of data. Subsection of this category namely, sections 3.1.1, 3.1.2 and 3.1.3 list the selection of text type, specialist informant and rationale and limitation for data collection. Section 3.2 follows afterward detailing the discourse members. The section on analytical framework is separated into two subsections 3.3.1 and 3.3.2 namely data analysis and six structural stages of analysis.

3.1   Collection of data

The source of articles used as data is the New Straits Times, a local English Malaysian mass produced and distributed newspaper. Since government entities maintain a significant portion of ownership of the NSTP, selection of the New Straits Times as a source for compiling data was deemed suitable because the issue of the incorporation of ranking naturally dealt with national goals and interests. As the New Straits Times is only one source of mediation of the issue of rankings, this research was intended to focus on that particular source in an attempt to identify how the issue of rankings is presented throughout the selection of data.

3.1.1   Selection of text type

Bhatia (2004), has indicated that "news reports are considered objective, detached and factual, though it is oftentimes true that news reporters favour a particular interpretation, slant or perspective on specific events of the day" (p.82). As the subject of news involves reporting world events, this may include additional interpretation based on which news agency distributes the finished articles, who is conducting the reporting, and which audience is intended to receive the report. Even though newspaper

articles are often placed within the reporting genre, Bhatia maintains that these texts may display "overlaps within and across a number of disciplinary domains" (p.82). "However, they can usually be categorized and identified within a specific set of communicative purposes which are mutually understood by members of the professional or academic community in which they regularly occur" (Bhatia, 1993:13). Brown and Yule (1983) add that "discourse analysis is always [involving] a fragment of discourse and the discourse analyst always has to decide where the fragment begins and ends" (p.69). This deployment of the decision process develops out of an understanding of the topic in order to make assessments of where a discourse begins and ends (Brown and Yule, 1983).

This research followed the method of identifying the communicative purposes within the selected corpus from 2004 to 2010 in predetermined stages. Publication of the THES-QS rankings began including the placement of Malaysia's public universities in 2004, which was the reasoning for the starting point with collection of data to begin in that year. Ranking-related articles that occurred beyond 2010 provided straightforward announcements of ranking statistics without additional commentary. The few stories that included content other than statistics exhibited mainly recycled information, so it was evident that the issue of rankings no longer held the same significance.

Since the span of time from 2004-2010 involved the greatest amount of coverage concerning ranking, the data was analysed manually so a consistency of a contextual flow of topic was maintained. This was ensured by screening articles containing 'education' as a key word. The topic was then narrowed to involve only the key word 'Malaysian' in order to specify the issue. The last key words looked for to help define the parameters of this study included 'university' and 'ranking' so that the criteria of only analysing articles dealing with the ranking issue in Malaysia would be included in the

required corpus. By following this detailed method of word screening, it allowed for a thorough investigation of a seven year span of data to determine how the Malaysian university ranking issue was gradually presented.

3.1.2   Specialist informant

The triangulation of data followed at the methodological level which included a discussion conducted with a specialist informant. This particular person was chosen to be interviewed based on specific experience related to central issue of this research on rankings. The individual was a journalist in the department of a prominent Malaysian news agency. The decision to include input from this informant was also made because the expert had experienced consistent contact with ranking bodies and had involvement in subjects directly relating to higher education in Malaysia. This member from the arena of the news media was consulted in order to supplement understanding of the manner a newspaper obtains and mediates information. The discussion was organized into two portions. The initial section involved issues that directly related to the specialist informant. The portion that followed entered into the ranking issue and how the issue was deemed as newsworthy material. Matters concerning the general process of news gathering, editing of the selected topics, and procedure of article acceptance and how this entire process related to the evolution of the ranking subject were addressed during the concluding portion of the discussion. Meeting with this specialist informant provided contextual structuring to the research approach.

3.1.3   Rationale and limitation for data collection

The issue of international rankings has developed into a mark of status among the higher education academic community. The Malaysian Government's National Higher Education Action Plan 2007-2010 incorporated ranking as an important part of

the main goal of developing the tertiary education system to compete in internationalized higher education. Malaysia's intention to take part in ranking is clearly identified as a "means [of] ensuring we maintain benchmarks with leading institutions the world over" (p.27) and is detailed within the Education plan in order to attain a position globally as an internationally recognized education centre. In order to make sure this adoption of ranking is incorporated into the local academic system, the first objective the Ministry of Higher Education has set as the top goal of the strategic plan is "To ensure at least two national universities are listed among the top 100 universities in the world, and one of the universities is listed among the top 50 universities in the world." With the adoption of rankings being placed as the first priority of the nation's strategic plan, it is important to highlight the equally important emphasis placed on the subject of rankings within national media.

The subject of ranking on an international level within the context of the Malaysian tertiary education system became a matter of public awareness with the announcement of University of Malaya's ranking and academia's involvement with QS Quacquarelli Symonds in 2004. This period of time marked a starting point when significant publications were being produced concerning an increase in placement of Malaysian universities that were beginning to become ranked among the top 100 group of institutions internationally. Articles that have been selected for analysis in this research begin during this starting year in 2004. The full range of collected articles chronicle the development of this ranking issue and continue from the initial 2004 introductory year to conclude within 2010. This is a seven year span of time in which 40 selected articles are involved. A breakdown of instances from year to year include: three articles from 2004, seven in 2005, six articles from 2006, with another six again from 2007, and eight in 2008, while 2009 provided three news reports. Although seven articles were obtained from 2010 for use in this study, the coverage of the ranking issue

began to diminish from 2010 onward in terms of content beyond reporting of placement statistics, thus providing a stopping point for discontinuing further collection of data.

How the issue of rankings is presented throughout the corpus of texts is the focus of this study. As a result, linguistic elements that exhibit recurring patterns over the development of the ranking issue and communicative purposes that form out of the authors of the news articles' construction of this discourse will be examined. The selected articles contained discourse on the ranking issue which involved the Malaysian government, tertiary institution professors and lecturers within the local academic community, and key figures connected to the companies that directed the rankings. The investigation performed in this research will be constrained to principles of discourse analysis based on approaches proposed by Brown and Yule (1983) and Yule (2006). A semiotic analysis of accompanying photographs will not be conducted as that extends beyond the scope of this research.

3.2   Discourse members

The Malaysian Ministry of Education branched into two separate divisions in March of 2004 and the department responsible for tertiary education matters was the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE). Voices from the Malaysian government which included the prime minister and other senior administrative members presented the official position concerning the issue of rankings. Members of the academic community were dispersed over a variety of professors, lecturers, and professionals connected to aspects of Malaysian universities. One of the companies that the Malaysian government has been conducting the practice of academic placement on an international basis with starting from early in 2004 was the QS Quacquarelli Symonds group. In 2010, QS and The Times Higher Education (THE) separated and THE company was identified later in the conversation as a separate entity that also began to supply ranking scores for

Malaysian universities (see section 1.1.3). The two primary voices indicated in the conversation related to the organizations that coordinate rankings are the QS managing director Nunzio Quacquarelli and THE World University Rankings editor Phil Baty.

3.3   Analytical Framework

Approaches to discourse analysis vary. The 'content' of the language used can be viewed, or the issues discussed and topics contained within the issues of a conversation or news article might be observed. Language structure, or the 'grammar' and function of the structure in how meaning is conveyed in particular contexts can also be focused on with selected approaches. Gee (2011) adds that "Different linguistic approaches to discourse analysis use different theories of grammar and take different views about how to talk about meaning…" (p.8). It is also important to note that "…different approaches sometimes reach similar conclusions though they use different tools and terminologies connected to different 'micro-communities' of researches." (p.10). Choice of what relates to targeted objectives is key, not the inclusion of every aspect of what comprises a text. These selections of observed criteria reside with the researcher and the "judgments of relevance are ultimately theoretical judgments, that is, they are based on the analyst's theories of how language, contexts, and interactions work in general and in the specific context being analyzed" (p.117).

A detailed view of language yields surprising results in how language can be applied (Yule, 2006) which can interestingly influence language beyond the sentence level. The importance of accounting for multiple aspects of language should be recognized and should not be ""restricted to the description of linguistic forms independent of the purpose or functions which those forms are designed to serve the human affairs" (Yule, 2006:124). The function of language is an integral component of research (Yule, 2006). Understanding these functions serve to support discourse

analysis, leading to greater understanding, as "the discourse analyst is committed to an investigation of what that language is used for" (Brown and Yule, 1983:1). An analyst might inquire how it occurs that "language-users successfully interpret what other language-users intend to convey" (Yule, 2006:124). Discourse analysis allows for deeper investigation in order to "make sense of what is read, reorganize well-constructed texts as opposed to those that are jumbled or incoherent, and understand how speakers who communicate more than they say" (Yule, 2006:124).

This research utilizes an approach suggested by Brown and Yule (1983) and Yule (2006). Aspects of features within and above sentence boundaries will be addressed. A discourse analysis will be conducted of 40 newspaper articles dealing with the issue of rankings over the selected period of seven years and be separated into three distinct phases (for more details refer to section 4.1). To provide a level of contextual reference to the analysis of linguistic elements identified within the texts, rationale for the events within the articles across all three phases will also be discussed through the identification of communicative purposes. The communicative purposes will be investigated based on the Persuasion Process Model which Newsom and Carrell (2001) had included as an expansion to, and prompted by McGuire's Communication-Persuasion Matrix (1973, 1999, 2001). Newsom and Carell (2001) provided the reference of the six structural stages existent in persuasive techniques namely; Presenting, Attending, Comprehending, Yielding, Retaining the new position and Acting (refer section 3.3.2).

Intertextuality involves the concept of "relationality, interconnectedness and interdependence" between texts as Tannen (2007) asserts. Intertextuality refers to what Tannen maintains as "meaning in language [which] results from a complex relationship of linking items within a discourse and linking current to prior instances of language" (p.8-9). Cameron (2001) includes that intertextuality is regarded as a form of artistic

production. According to Cameron (2001), most art is produced through referencing previous work as artists transfer elements, qualities, or texts with similar cultural practices from one source into current works to create new meaning. The notion of intertextuality is provided by Bhatia (2004, 2010) and adapted to the current research. The selection of news articles involves the examination of intertextuality to determine the presence of various texts or discourses that may develop within and across disciplines.

3.3.1   Data Analysis

The researcher conducted a manual data processing method to select and analyse articles (refer section 3.1.1). The approach was chosen to assure the researcher maintained a continuity and consistency of topic so analysis results would be maintained within the directive of the study. The body of texts obtained from the New Straits Times serves as a readily available source of rich data. This research will not follow a regiment of 'rules', but instead identify frequent regularities of linguistic elements (Brown and Yule, 1983:22). If the occurrence of these regularities can be observed in numerous instances within the data, explanations can be readily employed that provide an analysis of the observed features. This is emphasized to stress that "frequency of occurrence need not be as high as 90% to qualify as a regularity", yet analysis relays explanation based on "the level of frequency which reaches significance in perceptual terms" (p.22). This study of language is better "regarded as a set of techniques, rather than a theoretically predetermined system for the writing of linguistic 'rules' [with which a] discourse analyst attempts to discover regularities...and to describe them" (p.23). The direction of analysis follows the layout of the research questions in how the ranking issue is presented within the selected data, what communicative purposes are involved to portray the issue, and the recognized linguistic elements that

surface will all preside as the means by which all data is scrutinized. This approach enables the research to follow the main recurring phenomenon that will be detailed below and which is observed to exist within the corpus of selected texts. The data analysis will be divided into three phases, which will be then presented by topics. Here the use of the designation of topic is defined as a separation of prominent issues relevant and unique to each distinct phase which are present as overarching points.

The analysis of modals in the current research is qualitative and explanatory in nature. A manual analysis was employed in the process of determining modals. When the occurrence of samples such as 'will', 'could', 'should', 'must', 'would', 'maybe', and 'can' appeared, relevance to the issue in relation to the use was scrutinized. Monitoring of the modal use was not conducted to evaluate complete confirmation or an absolute lack of certainty with regard to the implementation of ranking. Since ranking became a part of the university process as it was a government mandate, the tracking of modal existence was done to see how the explanations of issues developed. Whether the explanation was positive or negative, the modals served as contributing elements within the particular story. An observation of modals was conducted during the corpus analysis in order to determine how the description of ranking issue developed. An individually contextual approach to article content was maintained while screening for modals in order to identify the modal use related to ranking. This same routine was applied to the entire collection so that a determination of the general direction of the issue of ranking in relation to the identified modals could be made.

Pronouns were addressed from a position of inclusivity and exclusivity. During the detailed analytic stages of this research, the selected texts were looked at with relation to how pronouns were involved. Pronouns such as 'we', 'I', 'us', 'our', 'he', 'they', and 'she' were observed throughout the texts. The associated context of each article that was involved with each pronoun analysed was evaluated to aid in the manner the

pronouns were used. For example, when 'we' begins the sentence of the first excerpt of phase 1, it can apply as a reference to the government, members of the academic community, or the Malaysian community. Repeated readings of the data were conducted in order to exhaustively analyse each instance of pronoun application.

Each article was manually screened to determine whether words and phrases carried a basic match to any relational understanding of the content. If outstanding mismatches were noticed, these instances were identified as metaphors and reassessed during successive readings. Texts containing these suspect elements that did not directly contextualize with the immediate issue were then analysed with greater scrutiny. The example of excerpt 73 in section 4.1.2.4 represents an instance where word use does not coherently match the issue at first glance because 'magnitude' is commonly used for the measurement of earthquakes, not universities. When the different contexts are addressed in parallel, the comparative representation of a disaster could be linked.

3.3.2 Six structural stages

The Persuasion Process Model that Newsom and Carell (2001) had expanded upon from the initial Communication-Persuasion Matrix (McGuire 1973, 1999, 2001) supplies content for the definition of these stages. Persuasive techniques currently utilized in various fields of discourse have also adopted the following six structural stages which were provided as a reference by Newsom and Carell (2001).

Step 1: Presenting

This critical stage initiates the process. It involves placement of a message. Reaching an audience begins with knowing where your message will be obtained by the targeted group. By understanding what the most potential outlet for a message to be distributed from might help in better understanding an audience. With this knowledge, it might be possible to improve the frequency of the content presentation.

Step 2: Attending

The next step requires an audience to have an interest in the message being delivered. This is where the people must provide a portion of time to see what has been presented. Additional information about who is intended to be reached would aid in tailoring a message. There must be something that connects the group that this message is meant for so that it will be of interest. The message itself may not be of direct interest though so it may need additional elements included to produce a measure of focus on the primary content.

Step 3: Comprehending

After gaining attention that the intended message needs, comprehension must immediately take place. This needs to accomplish quickly in order to enable an audience

to be able to understand what the message contains. The way this should be done is as simply as possible both in message and in delivery so that minimal confusion might occur with relation to the message. This way the desired audience might have the highest possible chance of easily grasping any content. The more time a recipient needs to take to know what a message contains, the less likely it is the message will be understood.

Step 4: Yielding

The need for the audience to provide interest is important again at this stage. At this point the message should be noticed and understood. This is where the message should now appeal to the audience on some personal level. The content of the message should in some way be desirable to the audience. If there is not some form of agreement or acceptance of the message, the audience will not be held any further.

Step 5: Retaining the New Position

At this stage of the process, repetition is vital to ensure that an audience maintains interest in a message. If the topic interest a group, it may be forgotten if reinforcement of the content is accomplished. This is where the intended message must reach a point of saturation with the targeted segment in order to maintain all of the previous stages. If the message is not reintroduced numerous times in engaging forms that still retain the core concept, the audience may still be lost. As long as a group is continually provided information that stimulates interest in relation to the message, that group will remain interested.

Step 6: Acting

This final stage requires commitment from both the audience and the person or group delivering the message. In order for an audience to move from a stage of continued interest to that of commitment, it is necessary to deliver a message that cannot be forgotten. This means the message must involve some element that encourages the audience to take the last step of accepting the proposed idea. Repetition of content does not always reach this ending step, but it does increase the possibility of group follow through on accepting an idea as their own. Acceptance of content must be shown by the audience through action by agreement or participation in the proposed idea.

3.4 Conclusion

This methodological outline has been provided as a guide to determine the course of action taken for how the following analysis and results were obtained. The theoretical framework mapped out the particular application of Discourse Analysis in this study. An explanation of the sampling of data and where it was obtained was also indicated. In the last portion of this chapter, a detailed description of the analytical method was provided and followed by the plan for analysis.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

4.0   Introduction

The data for this research is analysed in this chapter. A determination of how the ranking issue is reported within the entirety of the selected data will be based on observation of the linguistic features that continually surface as well as the formation of communicative purposes that drive the ranking issue throughout the newspaper articles. Examination of the use of intertextuality is also performed to provide a thorough analysis of the study. The existence of three distinct phases has been recognized within the data. Section 4.1 will address the details of Phase 1, Phase 2, and Phase 3, thereby including explanations of the existing linguistic elements within the data. In section 4.2, an examination that exhibits how the communicative purposes are produced across all three phases within the collection of articles is accomplished. Developmental details of intertextuality within the corpus are explored in section 4.3 to provide some intertextual reference for how the reporting of the ranking issue progressed.

4.1   Phases in reporting of the ranking issue

The approach utilized for this study has been outlined by Brown and Yule (1983) and Yule (2006). The structure of data explanation is organised in a chronological manner, following the collected data. This is done in order to retain a contextual continuity of the descriptions of what is contained within the articles as each phase forms. Selected extracts of text have been organized into tables that show notable phrases relating to the topic of ranking and exhibiting traits which lend to the first part of this research. Three significant phases are exhibited that indicate an observable development related to the issue of ranking within the collected texts.

Phase 1

The structure of the rankings issue is presented in a manner of celebration and benefit. The descriptions included in this stage place the concept of ranking in a manner that would appear to be of benefit to the academic community. An approach of optimism is detailed within the first year of data involving the rankings. The significant elements of this category identify a moment of excitement and the positive reference to future development based on involvement with the rankings. Although this stage is the smallest portion of the entire collection of articles, it develops an introductory setting for the following phases.

Phase 2

Following the results that were announced in 2005, the presentation of the rankings issue shifts. Phase 1 involved the promotion of possibility in a beneficial future whereas phase 2 begins the long process of evaluation. This phase of the ranking issue spans from the data collected between 2005 and begins to indicate signs of transition in 2007. The primary indicators within this portion of data emphasize involving tact with respect to participation in the ranking process. Another significant point is that while the issue of exhibiting discretion concerning involvement is highlighted, the requirement of the continued use of ranking as mandated by the MOHE is still simultaneously maintained.

Phase 3

As issues concerning the reliability and applicability of the rankings reach a point of repetition, a stage of resignation begins to appear in phase 3 before no further significant data was discovered. This phase shows evidence from the years of collected data between 2008 and 2010. It appears that the primary topics involve a questioning of the importance of the issue of rankings in general. As the issues of validity and reliability have been addressed in phase 2, this final stage presents the rankings issue in

a concluding manner. The issue of continued use of rankings is still present at this stage but from a standpoint of resignation that the process is flawed but necessary.

Prominent topics that are recognized within each phase are explained in detail. The adaptation of Brown and Yule (1983) and Yule (2006) provide means to examine the features that within the sentence boundaries. Brown and Yule (1983) and Yule's (2006) methods for observation of linguistic features which exhibit frequent regularities have been chosen to serve as guidelines for analysis. These were adapted in this study because of the emphasis on a perceived recurrence of features that was suited for the analysis, rather than any measurement in a statistical fashion that indicated instances in percentages (Brown and Yule, 1983).

Table 1: Overview of the phases in reporting of the ranking issue

Phase 1
Topics:
- Emphasis on the need for ranking   - Detailing of incentives related to positive performance in ranking   - Highlights concerning competition among local public universities   - Optimistic expressions in connection with ranking
Phase 2
Topics:
- Questioning the validity and reliability of rankings   - Limitations in the ranking process   - Cautionary approaches concerning participation in rankings   - Dissatisfaction with rankings
Phase 3
Topics:
- Ranking is a good measurement despite its flaws   - Continued support for the ranking system   - Descriptions of university plans for incorporating rankings   - Disaffection or disregard for rankings   - Emphasizing continual evaluation of rankings

4.1.1 Phase 1

It is found that in Phase 1, a general sense of agreement, excitement, or optimism is the primary topic noticed in 2004. Here, the rankings issue involves mainly positive references accompanied by indications of optimism. Most excerpts in Phase 1 approach ranking as beneficial for tertiary education. Focus on cultivating a proactive approach to participating in ranking appears to be established and involvement is presented optimistically. The initial topic that appears to surface relates to *Emphasis on the need for ranking*. Excerpts 1 through 11 indicate development of Phase 1.

4.1.1.1 Emphasis on the need for ranking

Phase 1 introduces emphasis on the need for ranking. The necessity of a ranking system of public universities is highlighted in this section. The following excerpts supply details of essential reasons for the ranking system and suggestions for its incorporation into the local education system. Excerpts 1 to 11 illustrate this topic.

(i)   Table 2: <u>Emphasis on the need for ranking</u>

NST article	Excerpt
Excerpt 1 28 Apr 2004	"We <u>need to consistently measure and benchmark</u> the quality of our tertiary institutions, starting with public universities."
Excerpt 2 28 Apr 2004	"…that <u>a league table that ranks public universities</u> based on criteria such as quality of teaching, research, infrastructure, student satisfaction and employability is <u>long overdue</u>."
Excerpt 3 28 Apr 2004	"…<u>the ultimate goal of a credible system could only be achieved with the full participation of all Malaysians</u>."
Excerpt 4 02 May 2004	<u>Ranking system</u> for universities <u>will help promote excellence</u>

NST article	Excerpt
Excerpt 5 02 May 2004	"the need to consistently measure and benchmark the quality of local tertiary institutions, beginning with public universities."
Excerpt 6 02 May 2004	"…that a league table that ranks public universities based on criteria such as quality of teaching, research infrastructure, student satisfaction and employability is long overdue."
Excerpt 7 02 May 2004	A ranking system is among the many measures that local universities would like to see in Malaysian Higher Education.
Excerpt 8 02 May 2004	Ensuring a notable quality of education calls for a standard process of monitoring, reviewing and benchmarking.
Excerpt 9 02 May 2004	"… public universities should set the benchmark for quality."
Excerpt 10 02 May 2004	"We must ensure that public universities are of the highest standard…"
Excerpt 11 02 May 2004	"Universities must intensify their efforts in continually upgrading and promoting themselves…"

The former Prime Minister Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi is depicted as calling for involvement with public universities to bring in a ranking system through the modal 'need', which in this sample expresses the serious necessity for this to occur in excerpt 1. The words 'consistently', 'measure', and 'benchmark' serve as keywords supporting this point. Both words 'measure', and 'benchmark' incorporate metaphor by relating to a standard of comparison where rankings is to serve as a point of reference public universities could be directed toward in improving efforts. Maintaining the application of ranking is emphasized with the word 'consistently'. An inclusive approach is taken to include all citizens of the nation when the pronouns 'we' and 'our' are incorporated in this work toward meeting a higher standard of performance. This provides a means of generating the sense that this can only be achieved if all members of the country work toward a common goal and the result will be consequently enjoyed by everyone that took part.

In excerpt 2, the phrase 'long overdue' references the necessity for a system of ranking has been present and there is as of yet some standard to be utilized. This phrase also supports a concept of how important the ranking system is and how it should be taken as a permanent component of the quality oversight of public universities. Both excerpts 1 and 2 are indicated as being delivered by the former Prime Minister in the article published on 28 April 2004 and are intertextually reapplied in excerpts 5 and 6 on 2 May 2004 which add to the reinforcement of these points. These statements are portrayed as comments made on behalf of the government which emphasize the voice of authority making this a task worthy of accomplishing. All of these elements combine to set forth a strong base of defense for the importance of incorporating ranking into local academia.

The word 'goal' used in conjunction with the phrase 'could only be achieved with the full participation of all Malaysians' indicates the importance of this suggestion as the only way it will develop with the addition of the modal 'could' in connection to 'only' to illustrate the necessity that everyone becomes involved by supporting the use of ranking in excerpt 3. Malaysia, as a collection of all the people living in the country, is directly addressed by stating the 'goal', being rankings, is possible through a reinforced understanding of working as a single force to succeed. This proposition continues to support the previous two excerpts. The importance of working collectively to incorporate rankings will provide help for the system to work.

Excerpt 4 sets the tone of the article by utilizing the phrase 'ranking system' and the word 'excellence'. A concept is established here that in order for the public universities to become competitively functional from the position of capability, the involvement of rankings is necessary. Linking the issue of the ranking system with the idea of excellence by use of the modal 'will' serves to show certainty that this quality will be achieved. This sets in the mind of the reader that rankings are a requirement and

of particular use. The introduction of the rest of the article is already preparing the audience to associate rankings with the primary means of public universities improving over time.

The phrase 'would like' is connected with Malaysian universities in excerpt 7 with regard to ranking. The modal 'would' is used to suggest that as work is being done toward the involvement of public universities in rankings, desire for a system that sets standards also exists. This connection would indicate to an audience that if the academic community is being reported as supportive and desiring the system of ranking that it must be important. This also connects previous excerpts together cohesively to show solidarity across government, academic, and public communities within Malaysia.

The 'standard process' referred to in excerpt 8 maintains the concept of benchmarking with continuing the concept of ranking as a necessity. The other terms such as 'notable', 'monitoring', and 'reviewing' also support this direction. The imperative of the ranking system is continually reinforced through the metaphors of setting a goal in a benchmark and the reach for a notable, or above a common quality. All of this works toward building a strong support within the articles for the importance of rankings.

Once again the word 'benchmark' as a metaphor of a goal is used in excerpt 9. This goal as a measurement of the public university performance is emphasized with the modal 'should', which continues to suggest the responsibilities public universities have in improving knowledge production. This also applies the concept that the universities will be expected in the future to embody the measurement by which other universities will seek to match. This is the essence of the reasoning for incorporating rankings with the public institutions in order to generate competition towards a forming goal.

Excerpt 10 involves the phrase 'we must ensure' (we as pronoun/must as modality) indicates with the pronoun 'we' and the modal 'must' the need for everyone

involved with the ranking issue to take responsibility in working toward adopting rankings. This phrase involves the general community as well as members of the academic communities it relates with the outcome of public institutions. The repetitive reference of 'public universities' again incorporates the intertextual aspect of the MOHE Action Plan with putting the priority of ranking alongside improvement of the nation's public universities. The phrase 'highest standard' alludes to involvement with ranking where the competition will not be simply localized but will involve universities worldwide.

Maintaining the importance of ranking is exhibited in excerpt 11. The term 'continually' is synonymous with the earlier word 'consistently' to reinforce the point that the process of rankings must be ongoing. This works in conjunction with the terms 'upgrading' and 'promoting' by emphasizing there will be direct improvements from involvement in ranking. The culture of life-long learning will be adopted in order to maintain a current level of ability with other competing institutions. A metaphor of marketing is involved with the word 'promoting' where the academic community takes on the likeness of a business model where it is important to advertise and identify to an interested community what marketable products are available through particular institutions. This phrase identifies that Malaysian public universities will need to adopt self-marketing strategies and increase skill-improvement practices in order to take part in rankings.

Use of the modal 'need' in excerpts 1 and 5 in conjunction with the modal 'must' in excerpts 10 and 11 are both used to express the necessity of building up institutional positions. These modals also indicate the emphasis of government requiring rankings to become part of the tertiary infrastructure. The ongoing assessment that rankings would provide applies the first directive of the MOHE Action Plan intertextually by identifying the government's pressure to begin incorporating these plans. The involvement of the

Action Plan throughout the introduction of the ranking issue is continually reinforced in the 2004 articles.

4.1.1.2 Incentives related to positive performance

The second topic that appears in Phase 1 involves *Detailing of incentives related to positive performance in ranking.* These highlight certain benefits in the area of administrative promotion or salary increments due to future improvements with regard to ranking. The below excerpts point out how the academic structure may later be built on results of the ranking process which could provide other developments such as research funding. Excerpts 12, 13, and 14 relate to this topic.

(ii)   Table 3: Detailing of incentives related to positive performance in ranking

NST article	Excerpt
Excerpt 12 28 Apr 2004	Eventually, the rankings could form the basis for the amount of government funding received by these universities, thus adding a further incentive for quality improvements.
Excerpt 13 02 May 2004	…would help if there is some sort of ranking. Maybe incentives should be given for universities which can show progress, for instance, in research and development.
Excerpt 14 05 Dec 2004	…research and publications were certainly the top criteria for the promotion of UM faculty members.

In excerpt 12, the phrase 'rankings could form the basis for the amount of government funding received' is an indicator of future approaches to government spending concerning public universities. It indicates responsibility is still heavily placed on the institutions to adhere to the ranking system and if acceptance is readily performed, benefits will follow. As academic funding is a significant portion of the means by which public universities operate, then the direct connection between performance and income is clearly stated in this phrase. Even though this statement is

presented with the modal 'could' to suggest a possibility of this happening, it still suggests to the reader that this will actually occur based on evidence from other included excerpts that involve information on the need for acceptance of rankings by the universities.

Excerpt 13 provides the phrase 'incentives should be given for universities which can show progress'. The conjoining of the modals 'should' and 'maybe' make up a slightly reduced suggestion for encouragement through incentives. The combination of these modals softens the expression of this idea as a directive. When this phrase is set against the suggestion of having a ranking system that would help universities show progress, it provides ideas of how to establish the system. This is done to attempt to indicate possible ways to develop a program with aspects that would encourage academic members.

In excerpt 14, a similar encouragement and directive can be seen in 'research and publications were certainly the top criteria for the promotion of UM faculty members'. Two important aspects of career advancement in academia are directly linked to the criteria of ranking with research and publication. This also shows how the process of ranking is promoted and how the members involved in the academic community are encouraged to increase performance. The use of the word 'certainly' strengthens the emphasis on how serious the mentioned features for faculty and staff to develop. Through the improvement of academic practices the lecturers will benefit from promotions and the universities will benefit from increased publications.

These findings are in accordance with Bhatia's (1993) view concerning the function of offering an incentive. Through exploring possibilities of what could be done to encourage academic members to actively participate due to direct benefits, it attempts to "persuade the prospective customer to consider seriously the service being offered" (p.52-53). The excerpts that indicate direct connections between government funding

and job promotions are a clear indicator of promotional tactics. If public universities take part then everyone may possibly benefit from increment or academic recognition.

4.1.1.3 Competition among local public universities

The third topic involves *Highlights concerning competition among local public universities.* This identifies how the issue of rankings is causing involved participants to strive for positions within the developing process of ranking. This topic ties in with the previous two from the standpoint of how ranking is embraced and incentives are being defined. Excerpts 15 through 18 include details on this topic.

(iii)   Table 4: Highlights concerning competition among local public universities

NST article	Excerpt
Excerpt 15 28 Apr 2004	The healthy competition fostered between universities can help motivate the pursuit of better teaching, better courses and better research.
Excerpt 16 02 May 2004	As local universities compete to obtain world-class standard…
Excerpt 17 05Dec 2004	Malaysia's oldest university bested its 16 local rivals, with Universiti Sains Malaysia being its closest contender, in 111th position.
Excerpt 18 05Dec 2004	In the Asia Pacific region, UM ranked number 24, tailed by USM in 29th position.

The word 'competition' in excerpt 15 connected by the modal 'can' to the phrase 'motivate the pursuit of better teaching' continues to identify the significance the ranking issue is exerting on the academic community. Encouraging universities to compete and linking this concept with the modal 'can' expresses the potential for this action to develop the ability to enable better teaching. This maintains the goal metaphor by conceptualizing how public universities are portrayed as rivals to attain the prize after completing the goal. The word 'healthy' places a positive emphasis on the activity and

gives it a beneficial quality. This activity has "universities at different stages of development compete among themselves." (Bajunid, 2012).

Excerpt 16 follows along behind excerpt 15 with an alteration of word structure to elicit a similar meaning. The use of the word 'compete' with the root form emphasizes the previous excerpt. The action of compete connected to obtain revitalizes the goal metaphor. The phrase 'world-class standard' serves to symbolize the goal of the metaphor. This reinforcement of the importance to achieve international recognition is repeated to produce a maximum impact.

The sense of competition is maintained in excerpt 17. The word 'oldest' is connected the University of Malaya to indicate the body of experience and history within the institution. This is placed alongside the term 'bested' which continues the goal metaphor that all the public universities are working to achieve. This also involves the words 'rivals' and 'contender' which support the goal metaphor and also exemplify metaphor related to war. This pursuit of the goal becomes more intensified to reach a level of combat where the rewards are even more precious.

The competitive nature of the rankings is continually highlighted and continued with excerpt 18. The phrase 'tailed by' sustains the goal metaphor and presents the idea of the competition is becoming more exciting. When a horserace is being announced, the manner of description of how the horses are fairing is announced in a passionate manner and uses language similar to the phrase utilized in this excerpt. The metaphor of a race is layered onto the original goal metaphor in this fashion.

4.1.1.4 Optimistic expressions

Phase 1 continues to be developed with the fourth topic. Within *Optimistic expressions in connection with ranking* are examples that display extreme emotion concerning the ranking issue. Excerpts 19 and 20 include descriptive aspects to indicate this topic.

(iv)   Table 5: <u>Optimistic expressions in connection with ranking</u>

NST article	Excerpt
Excerpt 19 05 Dec 2004	<u>UM is No. 89!</u>
Excerpt 20 05 Dec 2004	UNIVERSITY of Malaya's nearly 2,000 <u>academics have been beaming</u> for the past few weeks since the institution was <u>ranked 89th</u> out of the world's top 200 universities…

The use of an exclamation mark in the article title exhibits extreme emphasis of the topic in excerpt 19. Beginning an article with the headline ending in an exclamation point is done to illicit additional interest as the expression of excitement is to draw the attention of the reader. This also adds a level of sensationalism as the statement alone is noteworthy without additional emphasis. The use of the exclamation in the title also helps to draw the reader to find out why the score was obtained.

A metaphor relating to brightness or warmth is provided with the term 'beaming' being used in excerpt 20. This indicates the joy experienced by the academic members included in the position of the world's top 200 universities. As the issue of ranking is popular during the time the ranking position is posted, academic members at University of Malaya were indicated to be showing a great amount of pleasure. The ranking score created a significant impact on how the academic community began addressing the ranking issue.

The preceding extracts from the articles in 2004 characterize the first set of observed topics from Phase 1. These topics form the basis of the concepts of optimism in the ranking process. As the corpus of articles unfold in the following phases, the transition from a celebratory and receptiveness of rankings to a critical discussion develops.

4.1.2 Phase 2

After the introductory approach of Phase 1, a transition occurs. It is noted that the need to participate in rankings is still maintained but now includes an evaluative approach signified by caution in Phase 2. These topics are accompanied by lengthy discussions concerning reliability, validity, and general limitations of the ranking system that is incorporated into the public universities. Although numerous points are raised that critically inspect ranking during this phase, the process of rankings is not dismissed outright, but justified and retained. This overarching approach to evaluating rankings dominates the selection of articles from 2005 until 2007.

4.1.2.1 Validity and reliability of rankings

The topic of *Questioning the validity and reliability of rankings* is the first one that shows prominence in Phase 2. Subjects related to miscommunications and mismatched objectives, inadequate procedural preparation, superficial approaches to classification, and poor structuring of methodology are the significant matters addressed. These areas cover a variety of smaller, specified issues that all connect to the general concern expressed in this topic. The following excerpts 21 through 41 provide examples that form this first topic.

(i)   Table 6: <u>Questioning the validity and reliability of rankings</u>

NST article	Excerpt
Excerpt 21 10 Nov 2005	…the THES ranking system of universities is <u>obviously biased</u> towards well-endowed and research-based universities in the West…
Excerpt 22 10 Nov 2005	<u>How accurate and useful is a university ranking</u> system such as the THES ranking across international borders?
Excerpt 23 10 Nov 2005	<u>The accuracy and usefulness of THES</u> ranking of universities worldwide is <u>questionable</u>.
Excerpt 24 15 Nov 2005	More problematically, THES <u>relies on highly questionable methods</u>.
Excerpt 25 15 Nov 2005	<u>Nations who do not hesitate to criticise</u> the intrusive reach of the West have accepted a clearly <u>questionable set of Western judgments</u> on their cherished universities.
Excerpt 26 15 Nov 2005	THES rankings do not qualify as scientific <u>unless teenage gossip magazines qualify as scientific journals</u>….More problematically, THES relies on highly <u>questionable methods</u>.
Excerpt 27 15 Nov 2005	The Times Higher Education Supplement (THES) World University <u>Rankings has so many flaws</u> that it <u>deserves less attention than a ranking of the top 200 pizza makers.</u>
Excerpt 28 15 Nov 2005	The use of overall numerical scores <u>produces an artificially precise and misleading ranking</u> among institutions…
Excerpt 29 15 Nov 2005	<u>The THES rankings fluctuate widely from year to year</u>. In fact, the University of Malaya's (UM) great fall, from 89 to 169 <u>should raise suspicions</u> about the survey.
Excerpt 30 22 Nov 2005	There must have been <u>some sort of miscommunication</u> when we were compiling the data. We <u>weren't aware</u> that Chinese and Indians are also Malaysians.
Excerpt 31 22 Nov 2005	Many may argue that our measures are <u>biased</u> and <u>unfair</u>, especially in relation to peer review and citations.
Excerpt 32 27 Nov 2005	<u>How valid is The Times Higher Education Supplement World University Rankings 2005?</u>
Excerpt 33 27 Nov 2005	<u>Unresolved issues</u> were the elements of validity, motives, recruiter review, citations and the quality of teaching.

NST article	Excerpt
Excerpt 34 27 Nov 2005	Recruiter review being a new criterion in this year's survey was also <u>unclear</u>.
Excerpt 35 27 Nov 2005	According to some academics, a survey of such gargantuan nature <u>should at least have undergone a test run</u> before being implemented.
Excerpt 36 27 Nov 2005	As such, the general perception was there was <u>a lack of detailed information and transparency</u> to account for the <u>wide fluctuations</u>.
Excerpt 37 16 Oct 2006	This is a <u>very unreliable</u> way of measuring a university.
Excerpt 38 26 Nov 2006	On ranking and ratings of private and public educational institutions in Malaysia…<u>clarifications and details as to implementation were needed.</u>
Excerpt 39 26 Nov 2006	…they are again <u>comparing apples and durians</u> because our needs, requirements and goals are different.
Excerpt 40 10 Nov 2007	… the THES list <u>tends to fluctuate quite widely from year to year</u>. Malaysian universities are not the only institutions which make the cut one year and fail to make the grade the following year.
Excerpt 41 10 Nov 2007	"Because <u>they use different parameters from one year to the next</u>, we <u>cannot know if we have improved</u>,"

In excerpt 21, the phrase 'obviously biased' imparts a subjective quality to rankings with regard to universities in specific geographic locations. The suggestion of imbalanced criteria indicates that there is a disproportionate emphasis on specific qualities that are significantly developed within certain universities. This point is in accordance with Marginson and van der Wende's (2007) view that "inequalities among nations in scientific capacity will persist" (p.316). This would place the ranking criteria in a space of subjectivity rather than objective comparison. The phrase 'obviously biased towards…research-based universities in the West…' also indicates a one-sided judgment towards English speaking countries since a lot of research published in languages aside from English are not taken into consideration. This reinforces Pouris and Pouris's (2010) claim that especially in developing countries, the universities within

the area may face limitations in terms of resources which may slow down progress in all scientific disciplines and build relevant profiles.

In excerpt 22, from the phrase 'how accurate and useful', it can be determined that the entire process of rankings is inquired upon. Since the question of how effective is ranking on a global scale is put forth, it holds the usefulness of the system in general in doubt. Reinforcement of the word 'questionable' in relation to the words 'accuracy' and 'usefulness' build doubt once again with respect to ranking in excerpt 23. As the issue continues, so do the critical evaluations of its usefulness. This phrase 'highly questionable methods' in excerpt 24 maintains the emphasis of doubt on how the rankings are produced.

The repetition of the words 'accurate', 'useful', 'accuracy', and 'usefulness' in excerpt 22 and excerpt 23 respectively are put together in an uncertain manner with the use of a question mark in excerpt 22 and the word 'questionable' in excerpt 23. This implies that the effectiveness and practicality of ranking system are debatable.

The term 'criticise' and phrase 'clearly questionable' in excerpt 25 are both incorporated to cast doubt on the validity and reliability of rankings. The word criticise brings in the possibility to inquire what is being assessed within the process of the rankings. In excerpt 26, from the phrase 'rankings do not qualify as scientific unless teenage gossip magazines qualify as scientific journals' it can be determined that doubt is placed on the process. The comparison of reliability of ranking methods to the reliability of popular magazines as sources for accurate information places the ranking process in a strongly unreliable position. Comparison made to 'teenage gossip magazines' also shows that the quality of the THES rankings is less appreciated among the academic community. This repetition of developing uncertainty in the ranking process with the use of the term 'questionable' as evidenced in excerpt 23 through excerpt 26 reinforces Liu and Cheng's (2005) claim that "there is always the question

whether the quality of universities can be precisely measured by mere numbers and scores" (p.132).

In excerpt 27, the statement of 'has so many flaws' is a clear indicator that the system may benefit from undergoing significant evaluation. In addition, the phrase 'it deserves less attention than a ranking of the top 200 pizza makers' makes a comparison of unequal establishments in that it portrays the ranking activity as a completely subjective process. The specific comparison to food service increases the dubious reliability of the ranking process as the university is a place for producing intellectuals and pizza restaurants are simply for food, a utilitarian service. Equating the ranking process to food critics deflates any credibility of process to direct the quality of public institutions. Use of phrases 'artificially precise' and the word 'misleading' in excerpt 28 together insert concern into the discussion as to whether or not there is true accuracy involved in the ranking process.

In excerpt 29, the phrase 'should raise suspicions about the survey' is begun with the modal 'should' to suggest that caution of the situation is necessary to adopt in order to be mindful of possible shortcomings in the criteria of ranking. This excerpt determines that the ranking system is to be held in question and not the performance of the institutions. In fact, the fall was caused by the computation of an inaccurate number, which as Holmes (2006) describes is a "false and exaggerated score" (p.4). The classification of members of the Malaysian Chinese and Indian community were mistakenly marked as foreigners. These numbers that were later corrected the following year had caused a drastic fall in the ranking table (Koh, 2005).

Maintaining this shortcoming with the phrase 'must have been some sort of miscommunication when we were compiling' in excerpt 30 emphasises the weakening in the credibility of ranking although the use of the modal 'must' in this case expresses a certainty that the inconsistencies were not the fault of the ranking bodies. Using the

modal 'must' to highlight a miscommunication does not indicate recognition of a problem; instead it merely displaces focus on the issue. The phrase 'we weren't aware' is emphasized by the pronoun 'we' where in this example refers to the ranking bodies and serves to intensify the point that the problem of reliability is with ranking and does not directly pinpoint quality of the tertiary institution.

In excerpt 31, the use of the terms 'biased' and 'unfair' indicate an area of rankings that is debatable. When the measurements of peer review and citations are considered unfair, it is bringing up the possibility that the entire process may also be questionable. The plural indefinite pronoun 'many' serves to include anyone that could be holding the ranking standards in question but reduces the negative impact of the issue by referring to an indeterminate group. The modal 'may' is used here in this excerpt to suggest possibility that the issues that appear to be creating difficulties for ranking are debateable. Use of the pronoun 'our' refers to the ranking bodies again in order to personalize the group and the measures related to ranking in order to reduce negative attention to the process. Marginson and van der Wende (2007) identify that, "all rankings are partial in coverage and contain biases and that all rankings are purpose driven" and "composite approaches muddy the waters and undermine the validity of the information" (p.321).

Excerpt 32 approaches the questioning of university ranking in a direct manner. As this is the title of an article, it prepares the reader to evaluate specifically the validity of rankings. This also brings into question the reliability of the ranking process in general.

As excerpt 33 begins with the phrase 'unresolved issues', focus is placed on the lack of closure with regard to the ranking criteria that is mentioned with respect to this phrase. The questioning of criteria is indicated with the word 'unclear' in excerpt 34.

This maintains the uncertainty of how the ranking process is conducted and whether it is valid.

In excerpt 35, raising the question of testing before actual scoring is the central point with the use of the phrase 'should at least have undergone a test run'. Addition of the modal 'should' here provides a suggestion of a warning after the issue has already occurred and brings into question a need for ascertaining if the ranking process would have proven to be valid if tested first. Conducting the scoring without first sampling brings to light possible shortcoming in the process. The use of 'gargantuan' implies that the ranking is an exercise that is extraordinarily great in size and therefore the need for preliminary examinations from all aspects is crucial in order to avoid wide variances in institutional rankings.

Shortcomings are indicated in excerpt 36 identified by the word 'lack'. This points to the origin of the deficiency when information and transparency are addressed. Reason for this is speculated with the phrase 'to account' and the word 'fluctuations'. These are included to provide support for the possibility of the flaws. These 'wide fluctuations' can cause severe damage to the status and reputation of an institution globally as the notion of rankings is widespread.

The term 'unreliable' in excerpt 37 positions the method of measurement used by the ranking program in a questionable position. The erratic nature of the ranking measurement process is a sobering comment for the continued need for improvement of this particular ranking. Use of the words 'clarifications' along with 'details' in excerpt 38 indicate a request for more information on how rankings are conducted. These were used to bring attention to the issue of implementation because the THES-QS had not been forthcoming with details on the inner workings of ranking. This had created additional tension, so this request placed the issue of additional information on the process rankings was employed locally important.

In excerpt 39, the phrase 'comparing apples and durians' points to a critical analysis of the ranking methodology. The apples and durians example is making reference to fruit to indicate a comparison. This means the two fruit are so completely different that any comparison attempted between the two of them will not make sense because of the extreme differences. The pronoun 'they' refers to the ranking bodies. This separates them from the national goals and all participants affected by the negative impact of the ranking. The pronoun 'our' indicates government and public members in order to reduce fault to the academic system. This highlights the use of rankings and the criteria involved in the application to the public universities. As the excerpt indicates, the Malaysian national goals differentiate from the ranking criteria. This is essentially questioning how applicable the process is to local needs as every institution has its own strengths and weaknesses; therefore it should be measured against its individual vision, mission and goals set ("Reasons For The Fall," 2005).

This excerpt 40 indicates the instability in results. The phrase 'list tends to fluctuate widely' places emphasis on Malaysian public universities as well as other international universities involved in ranking and how the scoring for all involved institutions is erratic. The point made from this excerpt involves the situation that all universities involved in the ranking process show varied results which could bring the validity of the ranking process into question. By using the phrase 'we cannot know' in excerpt 41, it indicates an inability to depend on the process used by the ranking company. The pronouns 'they' and 'we' again make distinctions between the ranking bodies and all other participants in the issue. As the parameters are indicated to be continually changing with the use of the words 'fluctuate' in excerpt 29 and excerpt 40 as well as 'fluctuations' in excerpt 36, then it may be concluded that the methodology may be equally unreliable.

4.1.2.2 Limitations in the ranking process

The aspects of the second topic are shaped from matters raised concerning *Limitations in the ranking process*. The overview includes collected subjects in this portion that describe the superficial approach to data collection and inadequacies of what is attempted to be accomplished by the rankings. The topic that is reported here indicates the alert to shortcomings. Excerpts 42 through 50 provide details to form this topic.

(ii) Table 7: Limitations in the ranking process

NST article	Excerpt
Excerpt 42 15 Nov 2005	…there were many <u>key elements that were missing</u> in the survey, such as investments on infrastructure as well as student satisfaction on the services and programmes provided by the university.
Excerpt 43 15 Nov 2005	<u>THES ignores the extensiveness of affirmative action</u>, which may sacrifice more quantifiable indices of student quality for more intangible values such as diversity.
Excerpt 44 15 Nov 2005	<u>THES admits that its reliance on citations favours English-speaking institutions</u> and those that emphasise the <u>natural sciences.</u>
Excerpt 45 22 Nov 2005	<u>He said there are many limitations to data collection</u> that prevented it from presenting an accurate picture of the universities' positions in the world.
Excerpt 46 22 Nov 2005	"However, <u>we tried</u> to collect whatever data we could and came up with the best methodology to rank these universities," said Quacquarelli.
Excerpt 47 27 Nov 2005	However, <u>the limitations of the rankings are</u>, there is no data on teaching quality, student satisfaction and investment in infrastructure," says Quacquarelli.
Excerpt 48 27 Nov 2005	If a survey on global rankings is to reflect the true global nature of universities, perhaps <u>the sole recognition of published research in only one language (English) is myopic.</u>

NST article	Excerpt
Excerpt 49 09 Aug 2006	There is also a lot of research published in Bahasa Malaysia which is not taken into account. <u>Why pay attention to something that is not inclusive</u>?"
Excerpt 50 16 Oct 2006	There are <u>several weaknesses</u> in the survey. One is that <u>those who conduct the ranking exercise cannot read academic writings in other languages</u>.

The phrase 'key elements' and the term 'missing' in excerpt 42 both indicate factors that are considered to be necessary. Without these listed subjects, the full capability of the ranking process is brought into question. In excerpt 43, terms such as 'ignores' and 'sacrifice' lead to identifying the shortcomings of the ranking process. This modal 'may' suggests questioning the capability of the ranking bodies. When some aspects of a subject in question are ignored, this may lead to inaccuracies. The metaphor involved here relates to sight. Losing or sacrificing the ability to see something can cause serious problems if the missed points may be important.

In excerpt 44, the words 'admits' and 'favours' work in conjunction with the word 'emphasise'. All of these terms lead to how the ranking process is identified to be directed towards a particular set of criteria and omits other sets. This implies that one particular approach is followed in ranking that is considered more important than another. This shows an unfair treatment to the academic researchers from the disciplines of social sciences and humanities as compared to their peers who are from the science and medical fields which ultimately will be able to churn out more science based publication per capita (see also Holmes, 2006; Marginson and van der Wende, 2007; Coelen, 2009).

Excerpts 45 through 47 include the issue of specific restrictions during data collection process. In excerpt 45, the word 'limitations' states directly that problems exist with the ranking process. The collection of data is brought up as the specific

shortcoming that is connected to the word limitations. The other words 'prevented' and 'accurate' comment on the position of universities. This accuracy is unable to be attained as the poor method of data collection prevented the proper assessment of university ranking. Excerpt 46 states the limitation in the ability of ranking as identified by the phrase 'we tried', where the pronoun 'we' points to the ranking bodies. Here the modal 'could' is used as an attempt to strengthen the position that steps were taken to ensure quality although the end result was questionable. This makes a point that consultants who produced the rankings may not be as thorough as possible in that not all possible data was obtained. This would lead to a shortcoming in the final output of rankings. The focus on specific areas where ranking criteria was lacking is again emphasized in excerpt 47 by the word 'limitations'. Pointing out areas where ranking is limited indicated where suggestions could be made to correct the issue for possible improvement on rankings.

Excerpts 48 through 50 corroborate Liu and Cheng's (2005) view that "scholars in English speaking institutions are more closely integrated into global academic environment that those outside the English speaking world" (p.133). Using the word 'myopic' in excerpt 48 maintains the metaphor of sight. This compares the limitations of the rankings process to not being able to see properly as myopia is a case where a person is short-sighted. Pointing to the criteria of accepting a single language identifies an aspect of the criteria that may be lacking. The acknowledgment of only research and publications in English limits the quality production of an institution in terms of citations which carries 30% of the overall components of the rankings.

In excerpt 49, indication of another shortcoming in the ranking process is identified with the phrase 'not taken into account'. This involves the aspect of language limitations where the Malay language is not included as selected criteria for publication.

This highlights the loss in the process to accurately access public universities in terms of publications.

Similarly, in excerpt 50, the use of the phrase 'several weaknesses' reinforces the overall topic that the current ranking process needs to be revised in order to be more useful. The lacking ability to monitor academic activity in other languages apart from English identifies a significant shortcoming that must be corrected in order for the ranking process to be more applicable to the public universities.

As the ranking issue develops, it is evidenced in excerpts 42 through 50 that it is rather difficult to have a precisely defined ranking system that is able to comprehend "all the intangible, life-changing and paradigm-shifting work that universities undertake" (Baty, 2010) as every university is established with very distinguished goals and mission internally. These imperfect measures of rankings are evidenced throughout the second topic which has become a continuous disputable topic in the development of the ranking issue.

4.1.2.3 Cautionary approaches concerning participation in rankings

The third topic indicates *Cautionary approaches concerning participation in rankings*. The matters that are addressed here relate to concerns indicated as to how the issues raised about rankings should be taken into account when incorporating the results into a greater determination of institutional performance. This portion of texts places emphasis on rational involvement when utilising this limited system. The excerpts 51 through 72 are included under this topic.

(iii)   Table 8: Cautionary approaches concerning participation in rankings

NST article	Excerpt
Excerpt 51 10 Nov 2005	…our public universities should not be obsessed with securing high rankings in THES list at the expense of meeting more important national needs and producing employable graduates.
Excerpt 52 10 Nov 2005	Should Malaysian universities be obsessed with securing high rankings in the THES list? How should the quality of a university education be measured?
Excerpt 53 15 Nov 2005	Don't take lists too seriously
Excerpt 54 15 Nov 2005	NO one should take any set of global rankings of universities too seriously.
Excerpt 55 26 Nov 2005	Ranking and rating of the institutions are only at the discussion level… There is no clear-cut thinking or any decision as to whether to do this ranking and grading… The (Higher Education) Ministry has got to be clear as to what it wants to do…
Excerpt 56 27 Nov 2005	"I am extremely sceptical that the quality of a university - any more than the quality of a magazine - can be measured statistically."
Excerpt 57 27 Nov 2005	Some of the criteria are not suitable for us.
Excerpt 58 30 Jul 2006	"But are we prepared to do all that is required to play the ranking game?"
Excerpt 59 30 Jul 2006	But local public tertiary institutions must be prepared to make sacrifices if they want to join in the international ranking game.
Excerpt 60 30 Jul 2006	SUBJECTING local tertiary institutions to an international ranking process may jeopardise the national agenda of making them accessible to all Malaysians…
Excerpt 61 09 Aug 2006	We must first see if we're happy with such indicators. To me, it's nonsensical. If we have adequate expertise locally, then why should we import it? Should we have a make up of 30 to 40 per cent international students just to gain marks?
Excerpt 62 16 Oct 2006	Should we be rankled by varsity rankings?

NST article	Excerpt
Excerpt 63 16 Oct 2006	…the survey should be taken with a <u>pinch of salt</u>.
Excerpt 64 16 Oct 2006	It is <u>dangerous to go by volume</u>. It is better to go by substance and quality…
Excerpt 65 16 Oct 2006	Such exercises do give the people an idea of how universities are performing. But it is also <u>important for us to look at the criteria used to rank the universities</u>.
Excerpt 66 16 Oct 2006	But we <u>should not just focus on rankings</u>. We <u>must also look at what is going on outside the university.</u>
Excerpt 67 16 Oct 2006	But <u>if we take it too seriously, the entire point of such surveys will be lost</u>. They are <u>merely to serve as a guide</u>.
Excerpt 68 10 Nov 2007	However, <u>while rankings are important</u>, they <u>should not become the main driver of a university's mission</u>. The efforts to "improve" should not be reduced to an exercise at higher rankings…
Excerpt 69 10 Nov 2007	"Ranking is a tool for self-improvement, <u>not an indicator of self-worth</u>…
Excerpt 70 29 Nov 2007	There is <u>no need to scramble </u>to get on the list.
Excerpt 71 29 Nov 2007	Let us <u>not be obsessed with the ratings</u>. Instead, let us concentrate on building first-rate universities…
Excerpt 72 29 Nov 2007	I'm not against international benchmarking, <u>but it can be a distraction</u>. It can <u>take us away from the more important task</u> of building world-class universities that are distinctive and different, offering unique experiences to local and international students.

In excerpt 51, the alerting phrases 'should not be obsessed' (should as modality) and 'at the expense of meeting more important national needs' indicate the need to consider the purpose of involvement in ranking. The personalizing of public universities occurs with the use of the possessive pronoun 'our' to indicate he academic institutions are something owned by all participants and should be directed toward national best interests. The modal 'should' emphasizes a strong suggestion with reference to 'not'

included in the phrase immediately after to refrain from intense focus only on outcomes of rankings. These portions serve to direct attention to local issues so that the act of ranking itself does not become an overriding preoccupation.

Similarly in excerpt 52, the key terms in this passage include 'should' and 'obsessed'. The modal 'should' is used to create concern through the suggestion of scrutinizing the issues of placement in the rankings. This raises a question about the rankings and sets a concept of doubt that hesitation should be considered with participation in the process. The use of 'obsessed' adds that there is too much attention already given to the issue as Holmes (2006) stated that interested parties waited apprehensively with an alarming and hopeful feeling to see whether or not their institutions would be "cast into the outer darkness of the unranked" (p.3). These two excerpts set as a reminder for the public that these measures are not to be taken exclusively instead more metered action may be necessary.

In excerpt 53, the use of the phrase 'Don't take lists too seriously' in this title sets the reader's mind to approach the article in a manner of apprehension toward ranking. Since 'seriously' could cause rankings to be taken in a manner that it is not something that should have significant attention invested into it because the contentious methodology generates debate over the reliability of criteria subjects. This presents the rest of the article to possibly be viewed in a way in which the ranking issue is approached with hesitation. Use of repetition in excerpt 54 with the phrase 'NO one should take…too seriously' in the first line of the article strengthens the position of how the reader should view the subject of rankings. This modal 'should' suggests against taking a serious stance with the involvement of rankings. This does not involve an objective approach to allow a reader to make a decision but instead raises questions concerning how beneficial rankings may be for public universities.

Excerpt 55 may indicate that although the use of rankings had been incorporated, acceptance of ranking was still gradually progressing. The phrase 'only at the discussion level' gives strength to this limited acceptance of ranking as a system selected to completely participate in as a permanent national practice. This shows that the Malaysian government is depicted as still taking steps in discussing whether or not to completely commit to the current rankings system as the primary means of monitoring tertiary education level progress.

In excerpt 56, the phrase 'extremely skeptical' develops the concept of approaching rankings with hesitation due to a great amount of doubt. This feeling of doubt is evidenced from the word skeptical being connected to the determination of the quality of an institution based on a formula that yields a quantified statistical measurement. This phrase is also presented in such a way that it holds significant authority as it is supposed to be said by the president of Stanford University. Using a comparison between the assessment of a quality university and a quality magazine is done to indicate the complex subjectivity that is involved with making such a conclusion; in addition to the absurdity of the pairing of two such disparate examples as a magazine is read generally for leisure and a university is attended for personal enrichment (see also Holmes, 2006; Liu and Cheng, 2005).

Excerpt 57 indicates some level of dissatisfaction with rankings but the point where this becomes a warning to be careful with how Malaysia becomes involved stems from the phrase 'not suitable for us'. The pronoun 'us' refers to the members involved in public universities to differentiate the ranking bodies and how local needs are not being met. This phrase refers to the criteria, and it is primarily intended to indicate the goals laid out in the MOHE Action Plan differ from ranking criteria. This again sets out as a reminder to the readers that all of the components used to rank the quality of a tertiary education may not completely be applicable to all universities.

The phrase 'are we prepared' in excerpt 58 implies that a cautionary approach should be taken to pause and think if the nation is ready to partake in the ranking. An inclusive pronoun 'we' identifies the government and academic community members in this example. The application of the term 'game' reinforces the less serious approach that must be adopted by ranking participants. This also maintains the game metaphor from a standpoint of physical or mental preparedness. When a game is played, the participants must be ready to be involved or the game could end quickly. This is the warning provided through this excerpt. If public universities are not ready to be involved, it may be clearly exhibited when results are publicized so caution is important with involvement.

Even if the local universities are physically, emotional and mentally prepared, they still have to bear in mind that all decisions made come with risks taking. This is evidenced in excerpt 59 that involvement in rankings can be difficult and cause changes to occur within the universities that become involved in ranking through the use of the word 'sacrifice'. The modal 'must' used here points to a necessity of accepting any situation that develops out of participation. The pronoun 'they' excludes and isolates the members of the academic community that do not proceed with caution regarding the involvement in ranking. Although the aim of maintaining the national goals is of first importance, the ranking criteria will also exert pressure on the functioning of administrative systems.

If the ranking system becomes completely influential over all Malaysian universities without objective judgments, it may endanger the entire education system by steering it away from the set mission and goals. This concept is observed in excerpt 60 with the use of the phrase 'may jeopardize the national agenda' which focuses concern on local interest. The modal 'may' is used to suggest danger from the involvement in ranking. This cautions participants to consider the role of the public

university for the outcomes of the MOHE Action Plan as the primary consideration. Ranking is not to be considered a goal itself although the pursuit will still be maintained and aid in the overarching national goal. This finding is in agreement with previous studies that claim how rankings can be in control of national policies and driving institutional identity and decision making processes (Hazelkorn, 2009; Marginson and van der Wende, 2007; Holmes, 2006) and careful thoughts are necessary to avoid any damages to the education system which can be permanent.

In excerpt 61, the phrase 'happy with such indicators' works with the prior phrase 'we must first see' to point to a judicious approach to ranking results. The pronoun 'we' makes reference to the academic community alongside the modal 'must', depicting a necessity for involved members to carry out evaluation prior to final action. The modal 'must' illustrates the question with an approach of absolute requirement. These phrases are also pointing to the discussion of whether or not it is important to attempt to fulfil every aspect of the criteria. The message that appears to be developed here is to take the rankings but do not accept every aspect of rankings without sensible consideration.

This title in excerpt 62 provides a sense of hesitation for the reader to adopt before continuing with the rest of the article. The pronoun 'we' continues the reference to the academic body and reinforces the positioning of the members as a group that calls for questioning the ranking system. Addition of the modal 'should' in this example highlights the issue as an important question to be reviewed. The term 'rankled' essentially means to be bothered and develop resentment. From the phrase 'Should we be rankled', it could be understood that rankings could become a source of irritation so participants develop an awareness of the difficulties of taking part in the rankings. This cautionary approach is portrayed to create in the reader's mind the sense of critical thinking to avoid hasty generalization.

The use of the idiom 'with a pinch of salt' in excerpt 63 implies the process of rankings should be regarded with skepticism and not be followed so literally. This involves the metaphor of food. If salt is added too much to the food, the taste is unacceptable. Likewise, the rankings survey has to be taken in small measure and public readers are encouraged not to completely listen and believe it. This sets as a cautionary advice to the public that if the survey is accepted completely, consequences may follow. This excerpt also sets the ranking issue apart from the academic community by providing a somewhat humorous comment to treat ranking with less seriousness.

In excerpt 64, the phrase 'dangerous to go by volume' directs attention to the statistical approach taken by the ranking methodology. It is meant to identify that consideration is necessary with regard to the value of the public universities in comparison to the quantified determination of the local institutions from the rankings.

Just like in excerpt 57, this excerpt 65 identifies that awareness should be focused on during the ranking process. The phrase 'But it is also important for us to look at the criteria' highlights the necessity to remember what criteria is reviewed in order to have a thorough understanding of ranking results as not all criteria may be applicable based on the objectives and goals set by individual institution.

Excerpt 66 emphasises the importance of looking beyond simply the score provided by ranking results. The pronoun 'we' continues to refer to the members affected by the issue of ranking. Repetition of the modal 'should' is used in this instance to direct the issue instead of a matter of presentation of ranking. The use of the modal 'must' reinforces the directing of this issue with an emphasis on necessity regarding greater issues outside of ranking. With the phrase 'look at what is going on outside' it is clear that this provides a suggestion to focus on a larger context to avoid participation without thought.

Excerpt 67 involves balancing the need of ranking with the importance of meeting the needs of public universities. The phrases 'if we take it too seriously' (we as pronoun) and 'are merely to serve as a guide' are linked. This discussion is positioned as an either or fallacy by including the modal 'will' to point to the certainty of only one possible outcome. The use of the pronoun 'we' continues to maintain reference to public university members. An important point made here that relates to the role the ranking surveys assume, which is to show involved institutions where current placement is relative to all involved universities which is in line with the opinion of Bookstein et al. (2010) that this ranking survey is to be viewed merely as an informative document for the individual institution so they know how they are faring from one year to another. The repetition of the phrase 'too seriously' is observed in excerpts 53, 54 and 67 which implies that the ranking system should not be followed so intensely that it becomes the mission statement of the university.

Similarly, this ranking survey at best serves as a guideline for educators, students and university officials to improvise their performance based on their university's ultimate goals as identified in excerpt 68 with the use of the phrase 'they should not become the main driver of a university's mission' (should as modality). The pronoun 'they' refers to rankings and the modal 'should' linked to the word 'not' is used to suggest a warning to look beyond the ranking issue. This extensive excerpt identifies the importance of prioritizing goals, especially in respect to the ranking issue. It cautions that the process is not the goal. Holmes (2006) states, "the rankings, at the very least, need to be supplemented with and perhaps even replaced by other forms of assessment and should certainly not be the basis for national and institutional policies" (p.3).

The phrase 'not an indicator of self-worth' in excerpt 69 is used as a reminder to participants that ranking is not point out all aspects of the university. The excerpt

stresses the point that ranking is available as a reference, not a goal and therefore should be utilized with cautions.

In excerpt 70, the use of the word 'scramble' is applied here to build the concept of people running around without a clear plan in mind and rushing as quickly as possible to meet some perceived deadline or task. This exaggerated instance is provided in this excerpt to make the point that thought should be given before hurrying to meet every requirement of ranking.

The following excerpt 71 details a similar explanation whereby the use of the phrase 'Let us not be obsessed' presupposes that the interested parties are making every effort in order to improve in league tables and the ranking surveys each year, "creating a furore whenever and wherever they are published and mentioned" (Hazelkorn, 2009:1) as "those at the top wondered if there were rivals snapping at their heels" (Holmes, 2006:3). Pronoun use of 'us' takes on multiple roles indicating government, academic, and community members in order to sustain the theme of working together to accomplish national goals of improving public universities. The phrase 'not be obsessed' is used to reinforce a cautionary approach that should be adopted when taking the ranking phenomenon into account. The more important matter is that rankings should be used as a supportive element to monitor progress and help in the development of the university.

The emphasis remains in the excerpt 72 on the need to focus on priorities. The use of the phrase 'it can be a distraction' in connection to the phrase 'it can take us away from the important task' would provide necessary identifiers that focus on the development of the public universities is the task and to use the results gained from ranking as a guidepost and not a destination. The pronoun 'it' refers to ranking in this situation with the modal 'can' deals with a certainty of ability in how ranking is illustrated as a deterrent. The pronoun 'us' separates all members that are taking part in

this ranking process and provides a distinction from ranking and the bodies that dealt with the construction process.

This third sub topic has provided evidence of the cautionary approaches in relation to participation in the ranking survey within excerpts 51 through 72. No doubt that ranking has become more appealing to the general public; however, the public are still portraying signs of watchfulness in considering the involvement of ranking to avoid any unforeseen danger or harm to the educational system.

4.1.2.4 Dissatisfaction with rankings

The final topic involves the *Dissatisfaction with rankings*. Direct emphasis of avoiding involvement and highlighting the incompatibility with national needs are exhibited. Resistance to the process is identified despite the continued use of rankings. Excerpts 73 through 80 develop this topic.

(iv)   Table 9: <u>Dissatisfaction with rankings</u>

NST article	Excerpt
Excerpt 73 30 Oct 2005	… the <u>magnitude of UM's fall</u> in the ranking was "<u>inconceivable</u>"
Excerpt 74 15 Nov 2005	<u>Unimpeded by critical thinking</u>, politicians, journalists, educators, and concerned citizens <u>stampede</u> over each other as they rush to <u>pronounce their recipes for how to fix</u> so-called fallen institutions.
Excerpt 75 27 Nov 2005	<u>They were hopeful</u> that the man who heads an organisation which determines the world's top universities <u>would be able to shed some light</u> on how rankings were carried out.
Excerpt 76 27 Nov 2005	Academics <u>felt that no attempts were made</u> by QS Quacquarelli Symonds to explain why certain criteria were chosen above others to determine universities' global rankings…. In addition, <u>there was no explanation as to why a higher percentage was given </u>for one criterion and not for another.

NST article	Excerpt
Excerpt 77 27 Nov 2005	<u>Many of the academics present were disturbed</u> by the methodology used by QS Quacquarelli Symonds in assessing university rankings.
Excerpt 78 27 Nov 2005	.. <u>many went back dissatisfied.</u>
Excerpt 79 26 Nov 2006	We are <u>wasting our time</u> comparing ourselves with Harvard, Oxford and Cambridge. They have the funding, mindset, background, history and I don't see them talking about excellence.
Excerpt 80 09Aug 2006	To me<u>, it's nonsensical</u>. If we have adequate expertise locally, then <u>why should we import it</u>? Should we have a make up of 30 to 40 per cent international students just to gain marks?

In excerpt 73, a metaphor of disaster is brought into the discourse with the word 'magnitude'. The devastation of an earthquake is compared to the result of the change in scoring for University of Malaya. The issue is not assessed but instead as the other word 'inconceivable' indicates, not acceptable. The use of the metaphor can be link to the feeling of displease within the public when the drastic change occurred.

The phrases 'unimpeded by critical thinking', 'rush to pronounce', and 'so-called fallen institutions' in excerpt 74 indicate varying degrees of disagreement with outcomes of institutional rankings. As results are produced, people involved with public universities are indicated to be 'unimpeded by critical thinking' and are implied to quickly make immediate attempts to rectify the situation, without taking a moment to think about the larger issues. The results are unsatisfying, so a 'rush to pronounce' disagreement with the ranking score and a way to better the score is quickly attempted. The members of government and academic community work back and forth to make concessions for 'so-called fallen institutions' and seek the cause of the placement.

The metaphor provided by the term 'stampede' would indicate a mass of animals that have become startled and moved in fear as a group. This comparison to an unthinking collection of beasts sustains the opening of the article where caution is

placed with the use of the word 'Don't take lists too seriously'. Another metaphor related to food is utilized here with the term 'recipe' together with the phrase 'for how to fix' to indicate that there is a problem and immediate solutions are necessary to save the trouble from getting worse.

In excerpt 75, the word 'hopeful' in relation to the phrase 'would be able to shed some light' points to an audience that felt disassociated from the ranking process. The pronoun 'they' includes all members affected by the results of the ranking. The modal 'would' suggests the ability to provide some positive feedback on the developing issue. A metaphor of sight is maintained with the phrase 'would be able to shed some light' by making a comparison to being in the dark and needing a source of light to be able to see the pathway. This is a comparative statement to 'being in the dark' which also causes the situation of the ranking participants look to be as though they do not feel included because the process has categorized them as not achieving enough to be adequately ranked.

The continuous feeling of dissatisfaction amongst the academic community is observed in excerpt 76 where it is indicated that nothing was done to meet expectations with the phrase 'no attempts were made'. This placed with another phrase 'why certain criteria were chosen above others' to identify what expectations were not met. This also makes clear what the ranking participants did not accept as agreeable. The feeling of emptiness and lost were felt among these academicians when their doubts were unanswered.

The word 'disturbed' in excerpt 77 places the rest of this excerpt in a manner which portrays the reaction to rankings as extremely disappointed. The reaction that was indicated to have been expressed by the academic community made it seem that reception of the ranking methodology was not good. The word 'disturbed' implies that the involved academicians are mentally and emotionally troubled with the ranking

methodology used which is considered ambiguous. Hence 'many went back dissatisfied' in excerpt 78 plainly reinforces the case that participants are dissatisfied with rankings.

Excerpt 79 indicates a concept that involves suggesting a separation from the ranking. The pronouns 'we' and 'our' indicate the academic community and differentiates the local situation from that of international ability with the use of the pronouns 'they and 'them' which are used to identify universities that have had more experience with involvement in rankings. The phrase 'wasting our time' provides a sharp indicator of how useful the ranking process is for public universities. As it does not directly apply when the other universities present pursue goals that do not match or compare on the same level locally, the suggestion is to discontinue participation.

In excerpt 80, the phrase 'it's nonsensical' is connected to importing foreign expertise implies that the relevant party feels the foolishness of the application of the ranking criteria. This is accordance with the view of Holmes (2006) that it is meaningless to make a change and reassess priorities just to have a place in the ranking list but avoid the important needs of the locals which may result in serious political issues later on. The emotional state of the involved academic community within Phase 2 shows the distance between the willingness to accept and the ranking system.

This is a conclusion of the explanation of topics within Phase 2. These topics have developed within the article excerpts from 2005 until 2007. As this phase transitions into the following one, the topics shift from that of a critical approach to one of a sense of resignation about the situation while the use of rankings is maintained. In the next phase, the process of involvement appears uneasy yet unavoidable as the plan for monitoring of public universities is already incorporated into academic life.

4.1.3 Phase 3

Phase 3 reports the final significant display of changes in how the ranking issue is portrayed in the data corpus. This phase contains a diverse range of topical content. The issue of rankings is still maintained as a useful component for the improvement of public universities despite flaws while other elements acceptance, reluctance, and unconcern are also included. While each topic provides information that indicates advantages and disadvantages of ranking, the common recurring point throughout all three phases is the one that the incorporation of rankings is necessary. The selected excerpts within this phase are derived from articles from 2008 until 2010.

4.1.3.1 Ranking is a good measurement despite its flaws

In topic 1 it is demonstrated how *Ranking is a good measurement despite its flaws*. This topic involves some beneficial aspects of ranking that are still indicated and because of the cursory overview presented it may work to serve as a promotional aid to reach a wider audience. The general message produced indicates a flawed yet useful process despite all of the prior issues portrayed in the previous two phases. Excerpts 81 through 91 below indicate development of Phase 3 within this first topic.

(i)   Table 10: <u>Ranking is a good measurement despite its flaws</u>

NST article	Excerpt
Excerpt 81 10Oct 2008	… the <u>ranking by discipline</u> by THE-QS <u>was very useful</u> as it <u>helped the university identify where it needed to improve</u>.
Excerpt 82 10 Oct 2008	… that <u>the ranking was also an effective way</u> for universities to promote themselves.
Excerpt 83 10 Oct 2008	… while the university has its own transformation plan in place, "we may think we have done good, when that may not be the true picture. <u>It is good sometimes to have our performance measured</u> by others."

NST article	Excerpt
Excerpt 84 12 Oct 2008	Without doubt the THE-QS ranking has much to do with the calibre and quality of research.
Excerpt 85 12 Oct 2008	THE-QS ranking can be seen as a yardstick perhaps to see how we measure up in the world community of higher education institutions. The THE-QS criteria have merit of course and the rationale behind their selection is also sound.
Excerpt 86 18 Nov 2008	There is much we can learn from ranking to enhance institutional quality…
Excerpt 87 11 Oct 2009	"Although rankings are contentious, the THE-QS World University Rankings are meeting vital needs of these various stakeholders…
Excerpt 88 18 May 2010	Despite the flaws, there are valuable lessons that can be drawn from rankings, such as the quantitative data on citation ratios.
Excerpt 89 18 May 2010	Local institutions of higher learning can draw positive lessons from these yearly lists…
Excerpt 90 27 Aug 2010	These annual products are now referred to by aspiring students, by academics and researchers looking for greener pastures, and by employers keen to recruit the best and brightest candidates. Collaboration among universities can often be influenced by their respective ranks.
Excerpt 91 26 Sept 2010	UM sees the merits of rankings exercises.

In excerpt 81, the positive aspects of ranking are given credit. The phrase 'ranking by discipline' specifies what is beneficial and that it is useful in showing areas that could use improvement if there are shortcomings. The emphasis with the adjective 'useful' gave attention to the specific method used in the ranking process that it applies to the needs of public universities. Specifying the particular process also directed attention to this specific element and not ranking in its entirety.

The issue of ranking by discipline continues to be emphasised in excerpt 82. The phrase 'that the ranking was also an effective way for universities to promote' brings attention to the plans the MOHE is working toward in building tertiary education into a

regional hub of advanced studies. Since the ranking scores function as a promotional tool to show how results can be useful in drawing new student applications and how an academic institutions could benefit from increasing standings as well as enrolment this participation in ranking scores could work as a marketing strategy for local institutions to aid in meeting the national goals.

Excerpt 83 places emphasis on external monitoring. Here the pronoun 'its' refers to the university to provide distinction between ranking and independent activities. With the point of how universities have transformation plans in place it is indicating that the directives of the university come first as this is mentioned in the initial portion of the sentence. Both the pronouns 'we' and 'our' involve the academic community with relation to establishing how being isolated leaves the possibility of not being able to effectively evaluate larger situations. The mentioning of the word 'sometimes' before the statement that performance being measured by others is good portrays the matter of ranking as a useful supplement for observation to determine productive university operations. The modal 'may' is used twice to show possibility and give a suggestion that outside observation helps monitor activity. The ending of this excerpt contains the phrase 'It is good sometimes to have our performance measured by others' which identifies the importance of rankings and where it is helpful to the routines of the university. The final use of the pronoun 'it' now refers to the evaluation of performance by the external ranking process and how it is an acceptable form of measurement.

Excerpt 84 makes connection between the goal of increasing academic publication and what influence ranking has on the outcome of research. This is identified by the word 'calibre'. Calibre originally referred to casts used to create projectiles for firearms (Wedgwood, 1859). From this it is possible to point out the metaphor of measurement being developed. Ranking is shown to be a significant factor

in how research in universities progress and develop. This could be seen as a benefit for being able to see how research within a university develops.

The use of simile in this excerpt 85 with 'ranking can be seen as a yardstick' sustains the idea of how rankings perform the function of measuring intangible aspects of university activities. The modal 'perhaps' enhances the possibility that results supply some form of accurate assessment. The other modal, 'can' used here determines ability with respect to the ranking system being a viable tool. The shift into the usefulness of rankings is indicated here in the phrase 'how we measure up in the world community'. This use of the pronoun 'we' again refers to academic members involved in the process. Here it is shown that ranking is viewed as a beneficial process and not the goal in itself. This shows how rankings can be recognised as useful but not overemphasised as damaging to a university since a yardstick is a tool for indicating a measurement, not an object that is used to serve as a destination.

The subject of ranking is placed in a useful position in excerpt 86. The phrase 'there is much we can learn' indicates how universities can gain insight from the process. The pronoun 'we' maintains the identification of the academic members involved in ranking. The addition of the modal 'can' provides certainty of ability in deriving useful resources from ranking. This is indicated because with the provided information that comes with the ranking process, local public universities can directly benefit from the issues that are raised where other universities may provide useful insights to motivate local improvements. The activity of participation will also yield other related benefits such as competition and coordinated efforts to increase academic output.

In excerpt 87, the beginning of the excerpt involves the phrase 'although rankings are contentious' to serve as a buffer and qualify the information that follows after the initial statement. This helps to acknowledge that the ranking process is not completely effective, but the function rankings serve is still useful. The mention of

various stakeholders makes reference to all participants that have connection to rankings. The phrase 'meeting vital needs' reinforces the point about how useful the rankings are to offset the initial softening of the admission of flaws with the system.

The beginning of excerpt 88 brings attention to the shortcomings of rankings with the phrase 'despite the flaws' but creates a buffer against a negative approach being formed about the ranking issue with the word 'despite'. This is shown by the later phrase 'valuable lessons that can be drawn from rankings' where the positive point has begun to be developed. The word 'lessons' reapply the learning metaphor and compare involvement with rankings to a learning experience or classroom activity. This situation can provide experience that is identified to be in the form of what citation ratios are generated by universities. Set in the context of a learning experience, rankings become an aid that can provide important information even though there are shortcomings, as long as participants are reminded of those drawbacks.

The repetition of the word 'lessons' in the next phrase 'institutions of higher learning can draw positive lessons from these yearly lists' in excerpt 89 indicates that rankings are still beneficial to the national interest. The phrase that indicates 'positive lessons' uses a learning metaphor where the universities that generally impart knowledge are placed in comparison to being a student that can also learn. The important yearly information concerning areas of performance is what can be learned.

Excerpt 90 is arranged to illustrate the way ranking has been introduced as a service. The phrase 'annual products' point to a reinterpretation of ranking scores not simply as a placement but as a result of services rendered by ranking companies. This directly addresses the aspect of profit that is gained by the producers of the ranking scores which indicates that this can be treated as a marketable commodity to chart progress. This approach to ranking scores also involves the phrase 'collaboration among universities can often be influenced by their respective ranks' which can be determined

based upon similarly scored institutions. The use of scoring can be utilised as a window into determining what other institutions may possess within similar areas of expertise which could lead to additional gathering of information to create new partnerships.

Excerpt 91 indicates that the ranking process is still useful. The phrase 'UM sees merits' indicates the benefits that can be derived from the observation of the ranking process. Since the flaws of the system are known and ranking is continually undergoing a process of change, it still has a functional application for a supplementary tool for keeping track of performance. This is where the merits could be determined to be seen in that even with the issue that it is a cursory result, the individual elements that are collected still aid as one part of a larger process of monitoring progress within a university. It is also a part of the greater national goal so the merit that meets government expectations is another factor that implies the use of ranking.

4.1.3.2 Continued support for the ranking system

Maintaining a topic of *Continued support for the ranking system* is present in Phase 3. Issues relating to how the rankings have improved over time because of adjustments which have contributed to the expansion of incorporation into university activities and a greater acceptance among groups outside of the academic fields. This section serves to reason for the use of ranking. The included passages under this topic cover excerpts 92 through 106.

(ii)   Table 11: Continued support for the ranking system

NST article	Excerpt
Excerpt 92 10Oct 2008	Despite claims that the criteria and evaluation process are flawed, the THE-QS ranking would still continue to influence those who are considering furthering their studies either at local or foreign universities.

NST article	Excerpt
Excerpt 93 12 Oct 2008	<u>WHILE substantial investment may be needed to get into and stay at the Top 200 tier </u>of the Times Higher Education (THE) - QS World University Rankings<u>, Malaysia is still on track for such aspirations</u> with the Accelerated Programme for Excellence (Apex) for universities.
Excerpt 94 19 Oct 2008	EXPRESSING guarded optimism, University of Malaya (UM) Vice Chancellor Datuk Rafiah Salim is <u>confident of the university making it to the Top 200 tier</u> of the Times Higher Education (THE)
Excerpt 95 19 Oct 2008	"I dare say that <u>we will do it either in the next year or in 2010</u> because I have seen the improvements in terms of our research work."
Excerpt 96 18 Nov 2008	The ensuing discussion in Parliament and the media brought into sharp focus <u>the need to raise awareness and understanding about ranking</u>…
Excerpt 97 18 Nov 2008	<u>Ranking is, therefore, used in periodic self-assessment</u> to identify the strengths, gaps, areas of concern and opportunities in all core functions, benchmarking, closing the gaps and enhancing quality.
Excerpt 98 18 Nov 2008	With comprehensive transformation plans and benefiting from the experience of USM, <u>all RUs should move up in the rankings</u>. Next year, <u>there will be another round of discussions on the THES rankings</u>. By then, we should be more <u>enlightened</u>.
Excerpt 99 11Oct 2009	"<u>Today the rankings are used</u> by employers identifying from where to recruit, academics choosing where to work and with whom to form partnerships, and by parents and students looking to make a sound…
Excerpt 100 11 Oct 2009	In total 9,386 academics (compared to 6,354 in 2008 - an increase of 47 per cent) and 3,281 employers (compared to 2,339 last year - an increase of 40 per cent) responded to the surveys <u>reflecting the growing influence and importance of the rankings</u>.
Excerpt 101 18 May 2010	<u>Rankings are everywhere. They are used</u> to gauge the performance and competitiveness of everything from universities to businesses. Local institutions of higher learning can draw positive lessons from these yearly lists…

NST article	Excerpt
Excerpt 102 18 May 2010	<u>We have to accept rankings as a part of life</u>. They are everywhere, rating everything from business competitiveness to innovation and corruption. Very often, they are linked to commercial interests.
Excerpt 103 23 May 2010	<u>LOVE it or hate it, university rankings are here to stay</u>. They are <u>a benchmark or a measurement of the quality of</u> a university's policies, products, programmes or strategies and their comparison with standard or similar measurements of the best-in-class universities. This exercise will help universities determine what improvements are needed.
Excerpt 104 23 May 2010	<u>We welcome it so we can see our weaknesses and strengths</u>, so that we can continually enhance our performance. Of course, it is never easy to agree with the criteria of evaluation as there is no perfect global barometer.
Excerpt 105 12 Sept 2010	I'm delighted that despite the fact that this is an entirely new ranking system, <u>the vast majority of institutions have agreed to participate</u>…
Excerpt 106 26 Sept 2010	But THE World University Rankings editor Phil Baty is certain that when universities which have declined to take part see the results and examine the methodology in detail, "<u>they'll opt in next year</u>".

In excerpt 92, the phrase 'THE-QS would still continue to influence' shows how the process of rankings is deemed as an influential component to academic activities. Use of the modal 'would' supports that ranking does serve to interest new applicants in a way beneficial to local universities. The beginning of the sentence acknowledges the shortcomings of the ranking process but maintains the useful application with regard to one of the most critical contributors to the continuation of academic progress which is future students. From this statement it can be also implied that universities will continue to be able to take advantage of the ranking process as it will help new students to make more inquiries about degree offerings from universities that have strong programs. Both the pronoun 'those' and the possessive pronoun 'their' identify future students aware of the ranking positions.

The continued involvement in excerpt 93 in ranking is made evident with the phrase 'get into and stay' concerning the top 200 ranking list. This indicates that involvement will be maintained despite the financial investment to develop the public universities further. The additional phrase 'Malaysia is still on track for such aspirations' reinforces the position that rankings is supported and included in the plans that are in progress to develop and improve public universities. The aspirations or determination to succeed is displayed with the mention of the deployment of the Apex program which is another directive as quoted "Apex Universities in the top global ranking" (p.36) in the Action Plan (National Higher Education Action Plan 2007-2010). These statements both provide examples that ranking continues to function within the goals of the MOHE.

Excerpt 94 indicates that the continued involvement with rankings will happen. This is based on the phrases 'is confident', 'making it to the top 200', and 'in the immediate future'. The phrases work to point out that more effort will be committed to higher placement of the institution from this point forward. This shows that rankings are considered to be part of the university plan of progress.

Excerpt 95 reinforces the commitment to maintaining involvement in ranking. The phrase 'I dare say' and 'in the next year or in 2010' both support this point. The prior chancellor of UM uses the first person pronoun 'I' here to emphasize personal responsibility for the statement and the results of proposed results. The reasoning behind the continued participation is indicated by the information provided about improvements related to research. The modal 'will' aids in the expression of certainty of results in relation to continued partnership with the ranking system. The pronoun 'we' identifies both the university and the previous chancellor's shared part in the eventual achievement while the pronoun 'our' continues to reference a group identity of all mentioned parties in the text. This research work fulfils the Action Plan directives and

also maintains the expectations of the rankings (National Higher Education Action Plan 2007-2010:26).

In excerpt 96, the discussion of ranking by governmental bodies with the media is an indicator that the issue holds some significance. The phrase 'brought into sharp focus the need to raise awareness' involves a metaphor of photography. As a camera is prepared to take a photograph, the focusing of the lens must occur to bring the subject of the picture into focus. When the subject is completely visible it is in sharp focus. This is used to compare how important it is to address the issue of ranking on a national level so the general public is aware of what is to be expected with regard to ranking. By accomplishing this then it will be understood that the rankings are serving an important part of the MOHE objectives (Ministry of Higher Education, 2009).

Excerpt 97 reinforces the previous position that ranking can be beneficial to the development of universities. This also shows how rankings are being supported by pointing out how it was useful. The phrase 'used in periodic self-assessment' shows how it will continue to be incorporated as a university practice since the scoring is produced continuously year after year. It is indicated that it will be used as a source of reference for pointing to areas that need improvement or what strengths have developed.

'Enlightened' imparts a meaning of great understanding or significant insight has been reached in excerpt 98. As the discourse on rankings is maintained, the greater understanding, or enlightenment will be obtained from the sustained involvement. Here the pronoun 'we' includes the academic community. The modal 'should' functions in the manner of softened reassurance concerning the occurrence of improvement while the modal 'will' also affirms continued use of the system by attributing certainty of participation. Identifying that the rankings will be used again next year shows the permanency of the activity in ranking.

Excerpt 99 provides examples of how the ranking process is supported and incorporated into professional and personal routines. The inclusion of the words 'employers', 'academics', and the phrase 'parents and students' indicate a comprehensive selection of participants in the process. This shows how important ranking is to everyone involved in an aspect of academics and how ranking can provide important information about the involved institutions. The emphasis provided from the phrase 'today the rankings are used by' shows how over the passage of time from the beginning of the discussion on rankings to the current state rankings have continued to become useful despite all of the issues that have been addressed.

This statistical reference in excerpt 100 indicated how the influence of rankings continues to grow. The use of the phrase 'reflecting the growing influence and importance of the rankings' makes use of an appropriate metaphor of life. The comparison made could incorporate a plant that continues to spread and develop root systems and leaves as it covers a continually expanding area of land. This description of the life metaphor can be applied to how ranking has continued to be accepted and incorporated across different countries and academic institutions. This also applies the concept that the ranking phenomenon is not simply surviving but it is thriving and becoming an expected reference for the evaluation of universities.

Excerpt 101 involves examples of groups that are indicated to benefit from the results of ranking. The first phrase 'rankings are everywhere' indicates the presence of the system and how advantageous it can be since it is available internationally.

Excerpt 102 makes the point of how a ranking is connected to many kinds of institutional frameworks to provide performance measurements. The beginning of the phrase 'we have to accept rankings as a part of life' stresses that there is no margin for negotiation in this approach with the stress applied from the modal phrase 'have to' which indicates maintaining the requirement of involvement with rankings. The

pronoun 'we' continues to identify the academic community taking a role of acceptance of ranking. Use of the pronoun 'they' does appear though to set a degree of distance between the academic community and the system of rankings by identifying the ranking bodies separately. The additional mention from the phrase 'they are everywhere' reinforces the aspect of how rankings have become an integral part of professional activities. The closing portion includes the phrase 'very often, they are linked to commercial interests' in order to clearly identify that the ranking process is linked to the business world. This is presenting an argument that regardless of how the issue is currently developing, rankings cannot be avoided. Many professional entities take part in rankings and the process has involvement to some degree with a commercial connection. The matter is one of involvement, not decided whether or not to accept.

Repetition of the emphasis on how rankings are a part of academic administrative procedures is continued with excerpt 103. The phrase 'love it or hate it, university rankings are here to stay' indicates that whether or not the system is one that is appreciated or not, it is now a part of the academic world. Familiar use of the terms 'benchmark' and 'measurement' relate to earlier uses to indicate a connection to a goal or standard of quality that the ranking results can serve to function as for public university performance enhancement. This is included as a reminder to highlight that since rankings are available to be accessed, the data provided can aid as a supplement to collecting information for needs assessment activities in the universities when the real goals of the MOHE Action Plan are in progress.

Excerpt 104 shows how the academic community can benefit from the strengths of the ranking while it also places the subjectivity of the selected criteria in a position of acceptance. The positive support is indicated with the phrase 'we welcome it' where it refers to ranking, indicates that it is not only accepted, but when something is welcomed, it is appreciated and anticipated that good things will result from the

appearance or existence. A strong sense of inclusiveness is illustrated with multiple uses of the pronoun 'we' and a use of the pronoun 'our' when the academic community is pointed out here with the modal 'can' detailing the ability to be able to accept and work with ranking. The benefit of ranking is indicated to be able to aid a university in monitoring strengths and weaknesses. The pronoun 'it' still marks a subtle separation though when showing ranking as a distinct body. The last phrase 'there is no perfect global barometer' attempts to position the flaws of ranking in such a way as to make it possible for universities to make the final subjective evaluations of ranking scores. This stance is provided with the phrase 'it is never easy to agree with the criteria' which places the usefulness of rankings both in a solid position and yields final determination of reports to the universities.

This excerpt 105 references the point when THE and QS became separate bodies to perform ranking. The addition of the phrase 'the vast majority of institutions have agreed to participate' points out that even though the process of ranking continues to undergo transformation, universities still accept the practice. This could be due to the MOHE objectives to be monitored by a ranking system (Ministry of Higher Education, 2009). It does indicate that based on this excerpt, the system of ranking is maintained as a component of university functions.

In excerpt 106, this comment is made to be given by Phil Baty, editor of THE World University Rankings with regard to the continued use of ranking and how more universities will choose to become involved. The phrase 'when universities which have declined to take part see the results and examine the methodology in detail' is used to present that there is an improvement in the structure of methodology which will encourage increased participation. Although the details of methodology are not provided in a great detail, this does imply that the methodology is accessible by interested participants based on the use of the word 'examine'. This would show that

improvement in the manner the ranking is approached in itself an enhancement which would be used as a supportive point to ranking and the way it will continue to be received by universities.

4.1.3.3 Descriptions of university plans

There appears to be a formation of D*escriptions of university plans for incorporating rankings* for the third topic of Phase 3. In this portion the usefulness of rankings is portrayed as being utilised by the government and academic community in order to move the national goals into place. Pivotal features of academic improvement plans are highlighted here. The following excerpts 107 through 116 portray the contents of this topic.

(iii)   Table 12: <u>Descriptions of university plans for incorporating rankings</u>

NST article	Excerpt
Excerpt 107 13Apr 2008	<u>We are currently taking several steps</u>…to improve the ranking of our public universities…they include increasing the number of publications published by the universities, increasing international collaboration, enhancing research and development and improving the student-lecturer ratio.
Excerpt 108 13 Apr 2008	JUST two weeks into his new job as the Higher Education Minister and <u>Datuk Seri Mohamed Khaled Nordin is already getting into the serious business of raising the standards of the country's public universities</u>…about improving university rankings, amending the law on universities, and the national education strategic plan.
Excerpt 109 12 Oct 2008	"Universities and higher learning institutions <u>need to invest a lot more to be there and stay there</u>. It is now harder to <u>forge ahead</u> into the Top 200 but Malaysia's aspirations are on track with the foundation of the Apex universities and these things will bear fruit someday."

NST article	Excerpt
Excerpt 110 12 Oct 2008	While high rankings for local universities <u>are not going to happen overnight</u>, Clack says: "<u>Members of the committee</u> for the Apex universities <u>have demonstrated foresight and strategic thinking</u>.
Excerpt 111 16Nov 2008	His [Ghauth] main concern <u>is to place UM in the Top 200 world's best universities' list within the next three years</u>. "(After we have achieved this) <u>we can work on bringing it into the Top 100 in the following three years</u>," he says.
Excerpt 112 16 Nov 2008	Ghauth, who reported for duty last Tuesday<u>, is ready to roll up his sleeves and "get cracking"</u>.
Excerpt 113 16 Nov 2008	UM <u>staff will be expected to do quality research and publish</u> in Institute for Scientific Information-rated journals.
Excerpt 114 18 Nov 2008	To achieve this, <u>a comprehensive transformation plan is formulated</u> to address ranking in a rational and sustainable way.
Excerpt 115 11 Oct 2009	… Ghauth <u>highlighted the areas in which UM must improve on</u> - quality of research and publications; academic staff and students; programmes and delivery; international collaboration and networking; and entrepreneurship development.
Excerpt 116 11 Oct 2009	UM, which currently has 300 foreign lecturers, <u>will continue to hire highly qualified lecturers from the US, UK and Australia</u>.

This sustainment of emphasis on the continued focus on involving rankings nationally is addressed again in excerpt 107. The phrase 'we are currently taking several steps' leads to the discussion of improving the ranking in public universities. The pronouns 'we' and 'our' identify the academic community to indicate the coordination that is being exerted to aid in improving the local universities. This phrase reinforces the point that significant energy is being committed to the development and strengthening of ranking involvement. The next phrase 'they include' links to the list of areas that are targeted for improvement. These indicated goals for development will help the public universities in better meeting the expectations of rankings. According to the Ministry of Higher Education, the National Higher Education Strategic Plan (NHESP) has stated

clearly that three universities must place among the top 100 and one in the top 50 of world renowned universities.

Excerpt 108 involves a description of how the progress of the universities is being addressed. The phrases 'just two weeks' and 'is already getting into the serious business' are used to place emphasis on how much effort is being committed to the development of the tertiary education system although Datuk Seri Mohamed Khaled Nordin has been newly appointed into the position of Higher Education Minister. The positioning of these phrases against the indication that he has only been in his new position for two weeks is intended to make the point that a significant amount of work is already being dealt with to put plans of progress in order concerning the local public universities. The list of activities includes improvement of university rankings, amending the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971, and focus on the national education strategic plan. The organisation of this list of discussion topics for the article indicates the improvement of university rankings as the first issue. This could direct importance to this topic as the most significant issue, which could be connected to the earlier phrase 'serious business'. From this, it could also be determined that since this is the topic of primary importance it is already receiving the most attention by the new minister.

In excerpt 109, the phrase 'forge ahead' introduces a production metaphor. This means that a lot of progress can be made in a short period of time. The comparison applied here takes the ranking participation and relates it to the work a blacksmith performs handling metal. When cold hammering a metal object, it is extremely labour intensive and the progress of working and shaping the metal is slow. When the addition of a forge is provided, the smith is able to heat the metal to make it soft and more malleable. This allows the smith to 'forge ahead' and form the desired product in a quicker fashion. The modal 'need' shows the necessity for devoting time and resources

in order to make ranking beneficial while the modal 'will' provides reinforcement for the certainty of the investments providing eventual returns. The progress made in the activity of ranking will be more challenging but still possible. This assumption is verified with the use of the phrase 'will bear fruit someday'. This helps to create a mental image that a desired outcome will be achieved and in the case of continued success in rankings, it will happen.

In excerpt 110, the phrase 'not going to happen overnight' indicates that change would be slow but it will eventually occur. This is making reference to the slow process that is involved with improving standards and practices within universities and for the results to be seen in a successive manner. Although progress might be slow, the phrase 'have demonstrated foresight and strategic thinking' implies that the committee members have begun preparation ahead of time.

This selection of phrases 'to place UM in the Top 200 world's best universities' list within the next three years' and 'we can work on bringing it into the Top 100 in the following three years' in excerpt 111 lays out a long term plan of reaching successive scoring within the rankings. As the six years involve goals related to ranking, it indicates a dedicated commitment to the continued involvement in the process. The optimism is not placed within the ranking process itself but the optimistic approach to the goal produces a confidence of execution and achievement.

Excerpt 112 shows the dedication to continuing the task of meeting national goals and work toward improving the status of universities. This is partially accomplished with continuing to perform in the rankings. The phrase 'roll up his sleeves' forms a labour metaphor. This compares the tasks involved in building up the university with what farmers would typically do before starting a day of work in the field, which would involve rolling up the sleeves of a work shirt before commencing with the work. This labour metaphor is reinforced with another labour metaphor with

the phrase 'get cracking'. This highlights how after a short period of time of being in the new position there is a willingness to quickly begin working on the projects of improving the university.

In excerpt 113, regular publication in recognised international high-impact and refereed journals is another expectation of the Action Plan (National Higher Education Action Plan 2007-2010:25) that shows adherence to the national goals. This excerpt also leads to the equally important Action Plan directive that involves the external monitoring of institutions by a ranking system. Publication also satisfies ranking criteria needs. Certainty of acceptance is assured through the use of the modal 'will' for meeting needs in the ranking demands.

Excerpt 114 illustrates how plans are being constructed that would incorporate the functionality of ranking. The phrase 'comprehensive transformation' relates the significance of the changes that are being made in order to accommodate the ranking process as all areas of the public university system will be influenced. The choice of the word 'sustainable' shows intent to maintain the use of rankings for a long period of time. This example expresses the importance that has been placed on the ranking process as plans that will affect every aspect of academia have to be devised in order to bring about improvement.

The phrase 'areas in which UM must improve on' in excerpt 115 indicates the absolute need of incorporation. The lists of topics that are required to be included involve issues that the ranking criteria require. The key areas indicated are to strengthen academic fundamentals as a research university (Maah and Muhamad, 2009).

This excerpt 116 is a reemphasis on particular incorporation of ranking and Higher Education Ministry goals. The phrase 'will continue to hire' show how the continued incorporation of the ranking system will be followed in order to consequently

build up the university. Hiring international lecturers as one of the initiatives promotes public universities as all inclusive centres of learning.

4.1.3.4 Disaffection or disregard for rankings

The analysis below emphasizes *Disaffection or disregard for rankings* as the fourth topic. Up to this point, the incorporation of rankings has been sustained. From these selections, a different approach to rankings appears. This portion is indicated to be critical of rankings from certain members of the academic community that are shown to portray ranking as little more than an indicator of position and a nuisance at best. In this part the ranking issue is portrayed as being shunned. This topic involves excerpts 117 through 127.

(iv)   Table 13: <u>Disaffection or disregard for rankings</u>

NST article	Excerpt
Excerpt 117 10 Oct 2008	<u>Vice-chancellors not too concerned</u>
Excerpt 118 10 Oct 2008	"How do I feel? <u>There's no feeling here</u>," she told the New Straits Times.
Excerpt 119 10 Oct 2008	To her, <u>the world ranking is just that; a ranking</u>.
Excerpt 120 10 Oct 2008	USM deputy Vice-Chancellor (academic and international affairs) Professor Ahmad Shukri Mustapa Kamal <u>insisted that he did not know the university's ranking but was told</u> that it had "dropped a few places".
Excerpt 121 15 Oct 2009	<u>USM can do without it</u>
Excerpt 122 15 Oct 2009	The THES ranking, flawed in mechanics and methodology, <u>does nothing to dissuade</u> USM's academic populace <u>from striving harder</u> in their intellectual pursuits.

NST article	Excerpt
Excerpt 123 15 Oct 2009	It is <u>annoying that this matter resurfaces annually, but will not detract us from focusing</u> on the real issues at hand.
Excerpt 124 27Aug 2010	<u>Let us ignore the irrelevant rankings</u> of world universities…
Excerpt 125 12Sept 2010	There <u>is a growing number of Malaysian scholars who choose to dissociate themselves from the rankings</u> exercises.
Excerpt 126 12 Sept 2010	But sadly, one Malaysian institution <u>asked not to be ranked</u>.
Excerpt 127 26 Sept 2010	UNIVERSITI Sains Malaysia vice chancellor Tan Sri Professor Dzulkifli Abdul Razak <u>did not wait with bated breath for the outcomes</u> of the QS World University Rankings 2010 and Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings 2010-11 which were announced recently.

From the phrase 'not too concerned' in the title portion of this article in excerpt 117, it shows that the administrative members of the public universities do not hold much attachment to the ranking issue. From the use of 'not too concerned', a reader may be directed to consider that although the ranking process is still in use and will most likely be permanent, the general seriousness connected with it is minimal.

This excerpt 118 maintains the direction the title statement established. With the phrase 'there's no feeling here' restates the earlier excerpt about how much attention is given to the rankings. This makes clear the stance that is taken by some members of the academic administration in that rankings exist but it does not hold power over the daily decision making.

The sustainment of the point that rankings are not taken as a significant issue anymore is achieved through repetition in excerpt 119. The phrase 'world ranking is just that; a ranking' indicates a positioning of minimal importance. In this excerpt the mentioning of ranking is isolated to make emphasis on how there is no significant relation to the activities of universities. This shows that the ranking process is

essentially significant only on its own and has no direct connection to the function of the universities.

Excerpt 120 includes what is indicated to be a statement by a deputy vice chancellor concerning ranking. From the wording of the phrase 'he did not know the university's ranking', it indicates that the process of ranking is not a concern. The later phrase 'was told that it had dropped a few places' strengthens this point that is being made. Since the deputy vice chancellor is a leading member of the university, it would appear that ranking would be a topic that deserves being monitored. Since the news was indicated to be reported to the deputy vice chancellor, it indicates the lack of importance and also shows that it is not considered to be included in the university activities.

Excerpt 121 is direct in presenting the stance that some universities are indicated to still take toward the ranking process. The phrase 'can do without it' highlights the rejection by certain members of the academic community in relation to ranking. The modal 'can' identifies the ability of this particular university to stand alone and indicate an opposing stance. The pronoun 'it' refers to ranking and this shows that the university activities can continue to be maintained without the reliance on ranking.

The disregard for ranking is evidenced in excerpt 122 in a unique way. The phrase 'does nothing to dissuade' in conjunction with 'from striving harder' presents a position against ranking as a direction to work toward. The unique portion of this excerpt comes from the second phrase where the members of academia will continue to strive, specifically from the word 'dissuade' even if the results of ranking were to provide a negative outcome. Rankings results, whether good or bad, will not influence the discipline or determination of some portions of the academic community.

The reinforcement of the previous excerpt is maintained in excerpt 123. The introductory phrase 'it is annoying' indicates a degree of unhappiness concerning ranking. The pronoun 'this' relates to the ranking process as a way to minimize the

presence of the matter. The phrase 'will not detract us' sets the idea that rankings will not function in a way to take attention away from the important matters of developing the public universities. The modal 'will' accompanied by the word 'not' provides reinforcement for the certainty that actions will be unwavering. The pronoun 'us' makes reference to the members of the academic community that do not want the negative issues of ranking to dissuade the important matters of education. The process appears to serve no purpose or benefit as it is presented in simply a manner of distraction or frustration.

Excerpt 124 is included to make emphasis on the needs of national concerns in relation to ranking expectations. The phrase 'let us ignore' in reference to world ranking of universities points to a priority of focus as this was indicated to have been mentioned by Professor Datuk Zakri Abdul Hamid while delivering an address at the Malaysian Qualifications Agency. This comment to ignore rankings is more pronounced in importance by the use of the word 'irrelevant'. This places rankings as unimportant in respect to national concerns.

Excerpt 125 appears to make a point that some members of the Malaysian academic community do not care to take part in rankings even after the system has been incorporated into academic life. The use of the phrase 'there is a growing number' could lend to a consideration that more academicians have decided to avoid use of ranking than were previously accounted for when the issue of ranking began to become contentious. This phrase 'who chose to disassociate themselves' presents a portion of the academic community that do not consider the process to be useful for local needs.

This excerpt 126 indicates how a minority of members of the Malaysian tertiary institutions do not consider the current process of ranking to be a viable alternative for indicating university performance. The phrase 'asked not to be ranked' reduces the severity of disagreement with the system by using the word 'asked' so that it appears to

be delivered as a polite refusal. Nonetheless, this excerpt serves to identify that there is a portion of academic members who considers the necessity of a better rating system in order to begin performance comparisons.

In this excerpt 127, the introductory sentence uses an authority figure from one of the public universities to show how a prominent member of the academic community is unconcerned about ranking results. The phrase 'did not wait with bated breath' was used to portray how the Universiti Sains Malaysia vice chancellor Tan Sri Professor Dzulkifli Abdul Razak was indicated to not be waiting with an excitingly anxious manner for results of the latest ranking polls. This would point to a disregard on behalf of the vice chancellor for whatever scores were produced for public universities. This implies that there are still a small proportion of academic members who disagree with the current ranking process.

4.1.3.5 Emphasizing continual evaluation of rankings

The last topic to form phase 3 deals with *Emphasizing continual evaluation of rankings*. The issues in this section posit the role of ranking as to whether or not it can be enhanced to provide more rich results to function as more than a supplementary reference in order to continue integrating in a larger capacity with university performance monitoring. After seven years of progression of the ranking issue questions still remain. The final selections are under this topic and involve excerpts 128 through 144.

(v)   Table 14: <u>Emphasizing continual evaluation of rankings</u>

NST article	Excerpt
Excerpt 128 10 Oct 2008	So while we won't stop any of our universities from being evaluated, <u>we must remember that their criteria is not exhaustive</u>…
Excerpt 129 10 Oct 2008	<u>It's not the be all and end all</u> of universities' evaluation."
Excerpt 130 12 Oct 2008	"<u>Rankings are contentious</u> and QS has always argued that they <u>should be used with caution, understanding,</u> that they cannot reflect all aspects of university excellence."
Excerpt 131 12 Oct 2008	As with all ranking systems, <u>we need to go beyond the superficiality of the unipolar measurement</u> to unravel the complexity and fundamental elements that contribute to the ranking.
Excerpt 132 12 Oct 2008	However <u>we must always remember that not everything that is counted, counts and not everything that counts can be counted</u>.
Excerpt 133 18 Nov 2008	<u>We should not indulge in knee-jerk reactions</u> such as hurriedly recruiting more international students and faculty because quality cannot be sacrificed and there are still unmet local demands. <u>Such reactions are not only shortsighted and counterproductive</u> for institutional capacity-building, they <u>may jeopardise the nurturing of a true academic culture</u> and endanger the university's mission.
Excerpt 134 11Apr 2010	From past experiences, <u>we are acutely aware that such an exercise is far from perfect</u> or desirable from an academic point of view.
Excerpt 135 11 Apr 2010	<u>Unless properly calibrated, rankings can go against</u> the trend to internationalise.
Excerpt 136 11 Apr 2010	<u>While there are pros and cons, striking a fine and meaningful balance seems difficult</u> especially when ranking is so overwhelmingly driven by commercial interest!
Excerpt 137 18 May 2010	…we <u>would be wise not to read too much into these rankings</u>.
Excerpt 138 18 May 2010	<u>We must realise that rankings are not a perfect measure of a university's actual worth</u>, particularly when it cannot respond to the needs of individual stakeholders including students, parents, employers, potential partners and so on.

NST article	Excerpt
Excerpt 139 18 May 2010	At best, <u>rankings are "works in progress"</u> with yearly adjustments to offset methodological pitfalls, which also make year-on-year comparisons inappropriate.
Excerpt 140 23 May 2010	<u>LOCAL academicians are at odds over rankings</u> - whether revising methodology, restricting the activity to Asian universities or even having the exercise at all…
Excerpt 141 23 May 2010	…<u>this change only confirms the short-sightedness of the previous ranking exercise</u> based on a myopic world view that <u>assumes a one-size-fits-all mindset</u> of only one "best"
Excerpt 142 26 Sept 2010	It is <u>a mistake to have a one-size-fits-all rankings system</u> as far as universities are concerned. It is, at best, pseudo-science."
Excerpt 143 26Sept 2010	"The proof of the pudding is in the eating"…
Excerpt 144 26 Sept 2010	…a strong critic of rankings exercises, <u>cautions local tertiary institutions against missing the big picture</u> and succumbing to being captive minds.

Excerpt 128 highlights the limited aspects of the ranking criteria. The pronoun 'we' as well as 'our' includes all participants that are influenced by the ranking issue, separated with distinction by the pronoun 'their' which is used to identify the ranking bodies. The phrase 'their criteria is not exhaustive' relates that the current ranking criteria does not take all necessary aspects of what is important into account. The modal 'won't' which is a contraction of 'will not' emphasizes that the ranking process will go on and is balanced out with the qualifying addition of the modal 'must' which intensifies the necessity of making a point that ranking measurements have limitations. The fact that the system in place is not indicated to be thorough enough also lends to the position of this excerpt supporting that the process of rankings is undergoing continued monitoring. This is in accordance with the claim made by Marginson and van der Wende (2007), "there have been few concerted efforts to discredit the ranking process,

which appears to have secured public credibility" (p.309) although there is an ongoing uproar of the impact of rankings.

In excerpt 129, the reference to the Minister of Higher Education brings authority with the phrase 'It's not the be all and end all of universities' evaluation' to emphasise the issue that the ranking process is still not the completely accepted standard for monitoring universities. This phrase of 'the be all and end all' indicates that the current ranking process is not the last choice or the best choice; it is simply the currently used system. The continued monitoring of how this particular ranking process serves the national needs is still underway according to how this excerpt is presented.

This disclaimer concerning the participation in rankings is provided in excerpt 130 to indicate that rankings cannot be completely reliable. The word 'contentious' involves a controversial debate or struggle. The phrase 'used with caution' is a warning given to minimise risk. Both of these are provided to indicate that participation in rankings should be preceded with considerable evaluation by anyone involved. The reason for this is because the past record of ranking results has proven that it is not a completely reliable or accurate process.

The ranking process is discussed in excerpt 131 emphasizing how it is not the only factor that should concern topics related to the quality of universities. The pronoun 'we' relates the members of the academic community to the greater community and reader as well to develop a comfortable, accepting tone for rankings. The phrase 'the superficiality of the unipolar measurement' makes reference to the ranking process as only dealing with surface elements or only limited aspects of what the entire function of the university system is capable of accomplishing. This statement indicates that many different, highly involved factors have a part in the operation and output of universities. The modal 'need' directs attention to understanding the necessity of the important aspects related to both ranking and universities. This is ultimately indicating that the

score produced by ranking is insignificant with regard to more far-reaching aspects that are involved with ranking and universities comprehensively.

Arranging the variations of the word 'count' to draw attention to the message of what is important in excerpt 132, addresses the issue that ranking is still held in a position of continued assessment itself. Since the scoring done by ranking is an account of the relative position of one university to another, the counting of the particular criteria is not all that determines the productive results of a university. The emphasis of what is important here is not the score produced by rankings but what can be achieved through the progress made in developing universities.

Excerpt 133 involves the call for proper use of judgment when dealing with balancing responsibilities between the expectations of ranking and local needs of public universities. The comparison made with the phrase 'knee-jerk reaction' indicates the activities performed to try and meet criteria expectations that do not fall in line with national needs. This can be compared to the involuntary reaction of kicking the leg forward when the knee is struck; something that happens without any conscious thought. The word short-sighted involves another metaphor of sight. This emphasises the lack of thought if practices are maintained to meet every ranking criteria without evaluating local needs first. The lack of being able to see a further distance ahead and simply focusing on objects close at hand is the comparison made with this metaphor when activities that may need attention that deal with national requirements are longer term goals rather than the simple pursuit of ranking scores.

This excerpt 134 provides sustainment of the reminder of the need for caution when using a system that contains flaws that are continually being adjusted. The phrase 'acutely aware that such an exercise is far from perfect' brings this topic to the attention of the audience with the extreme phrasing. The level of understanding and insight into the shortcomings of the ranking is expanded here with the phrase 'acutely aware' to

make point that all participants be aware on a vital level what is being dealt with. This concept is reinforced with the phrase 'far from perfect' to build a concept that ranking needs significant improvement in order for it to be a problem free system.

Excerpt 135 continues the topic previously introduced. The phrase 'unless properly calibrated' links to the following phrase 'can go against the trend to internationalise' to create a case that argues for continued monitoring and evaluation of ranking as it is still in use. The first phrase calls for the continual assessment to adjust topics of criteria to meet the needs of involved universities in order to produce accurate information. The second phase alerts that if insufficient results are produced, scoring could possibly discourage institutional collaboration due to insufficiently supplied data. This is meant to maintain the awareness that ranking results need to be compared against other factors when dealing with international institutions.

Excerpt 136 reinforces the need to evaluate ranking results instead of accepting scores without any other referencing information about the performance of universities. The introductory phrase 'while there are pros and cons' begins the topic from a standpoint of a degree of neutrality, the matter of mentioning this lends to the continued acceptance of the situation as it is amidst the known problems. The following phrase 'striking a balance seems difficult' emphasises the need to be wary of acceptance without consideration of ranking issues. It still does though take into account the use of rankings, but from a guarded position. The last point is provided with the addition of 'especially when...driven by commercial interest' as this reminds all participants that the motivation for the ranking company is profit. This implies that the primary motivation of income affects the quality output of results.

Excerpt 137 indicates the need to take the ranking results as nothing more than what is produced, a score. The phrase 'not to read too much into these rankings' indicates that it is important not to place additional emphasis on the situation

universities are involved in currently with ranking or more attention than necessary on rankings scores themselves. Rankings serve as an indicator of performance and not as an achievement. Taking the scores produced and evaluating what is needed to improve institutions is the issue of importance instead of placing unnecessary emphasis on whether or not a score is high. Learning from the event leads to improvement, not letting the event occupy the situation which could lead to misplaced priorities in university activities.

In excerpt 138, emphasis is placed on the importance of highlighting areas that need improvement in the ranking process. It begins with the phrase 'we must realise' to identify the level of importance that this statement is being made to display. This is being used to indicate that the output of quality results produced by the rankings can be limited. The pronoun 'we' invites everyone involved with the issue of rankings to be included by this word use. The modal 'must' is added to show the necessity of maintaining a balanced view of where rankings should be prioritized in relation to academic operations. The second phrase, 'rankings are not a perfect measure' makes this claim. The addition of the phrase 'cannot respond to the needs of individual' would make the point that when using rankings, the scoring is to be referenced as a guideline and not a detailed result of university performance. This is provided in order to caution participants to remember what the benefits and limitations are when referring to ranking results.

The sustainment of the previous concept is reinforced with excerpt 139. The opening begins with 'at best' which can mean that the limit of quality in ranking results are not of remarkable quality so consideration should be taken before placing full dependence on the scores. This is substantiated with the phrase 'works in progress' which indicates that the placement of universities can change depending on the adjustments of the selected criteria. The mention of the annual methodological

refinements is also indicated as a tenuous system with the word 'pitfalls'. This creates the connection between the ranking methodology and a system that contains unseen difficulties. The combination of all of these points indicates a need to observe elements that involve university performance other than the ranking score by itself.

From excerpt 140, it is possible to assume that the process of involvement with rankings leads to difficulty in determining correct directions to follow with how to incorporate the results provided by the survey. The idiom used at the beginning of this selection is 'at odds over' which means that the academic community is having a difficult time working with the ranking phenomena when it should be easier to accommodate. The unpredictability of ranking is indicated to stain the choice of what to do in this passage. Members of the academic community are shown to be indecisive on whether to adjust university plans to attempt to continue improving ranking scores, direct energy to improving areas that relate locally, or completely ignore involvement in ranking. This statement shows a sense of uncertainty with how to approach working with ranking.

Excerpt 141 is included to identify that the ranking process is largely superficial with regard to classifying performance of universities worldwide. Although the process of ranking is still being conducted, the transformation of any system is important to undergo to incorporate adjustments for future benefits. This is the case with the ranking exercise, as the phrase 'one-size-fits-all' indicates how universities can be left wanting for a more comprehensive system of scoring. Since it is not completely possible to include every aspect of every university into the one ranking system currently in use, this excerpt is used to attempt to identify that this is an issue that needs to be remembered when utilising rankings. The other word 'myopic' reintroduces the vision metaphor where the comparison of seeing a complete scene is not possible when impairments to sight are present. This comparison links to rankings in that strict

attachment to currently produced scores without additional evaluation of more information creates challenges to identifying longer term accomplishments.

The recycling of the 'one-size-fits-all' phrase in excerpt 142 is used to make the comparison of how a single ranking system may not be adequate enough to accurately assess the progress of universities as a single system is not suited to accomplish multiple problems or tasks. The use of the phrase 'it is, at best, pseudo-science' indicates that the still-developing methodology of assessment used by ranking is not comparable to practiced and proven scientific methodologies. This finding is in agreement with a claim made by Ishikawa (2009) that "the problems associated with the rankings are not only on the criteria and methodologies used but also on the lack of mechanism to ensure that surveys are carried out in a sound, scientific manner to minimize chances of manipulation " (p.163). The application of ranking still has a significant amount of trail work to be conducted in order for the reliability to increase. This is given as a warning to keep in mind the scoring is not always accurate.

This excerpt 143 is used to state caution should still be followed when incorporating the rankings, even with the latest development of a revision of the methodology for ranking universities. The idiom 'the proof of the pudding is in the eating' indicates that the real test result of the subject is in question and its effectiveness can only be determined through seeing the results. The comparison that is being made here is that the ranking process will only prove to be successful when the new methodology is put into practice and scoring reflects some significant difference. This is making the point that participants should wait until the new compilation is made in order to determine how useful the new approach will be.

Excerpt 144 is indicated to maintain the cautionary approach to involvement with ranking. The addition of the description that a professor is indicated as stating the excerpt reinforces the credibility of being cautious. The use of the word 'cautions'

continues to emphasise the need to evaluate every instance the ranking process is utilised. The phrase 'missing the big picture' makes reference to the vision metaphor again with comparing the activity of involving ranking with public universities to the ability to completely view a scene and be able to see all the details. If ranking is pursued without considering long term and short term goals the 'big picture' may be missed because the focus on a score causes participants to miss more important tasks.

This is the conclusion of the analysis for Phase 3. The articles collected between the years of 2008 until 2010 provided the selected passages to form this group of topics. Although the ranking issue still maintained a presence, the particular developmental arc transitioned into a similar repetition of what was encountered in Phase 3. This phase delineated a concluding feature to the unique progression of the ranking issue since the introduction in 2004 with the University of Malaya's international placement announcement.

4.2   Communicative purpose

As the news media retains a significant place in Malaysian society it may function as a persuasive element in the lives of its readership. Although news media may appear to function primarily as a source of information, it may also shift to operate from a standpoint of persuasion. This could be based on events that occur at a national level which are deemed as necessary by both the media and the government to attempt to cultivate a unity of agreement within the populace. The New Straits Times Press (M) Bhd. is owned by Media Prima, which has been indicated to have strong influence exerted on its operation by the government (see section 1.1.2). This may provide some contextual relation for the surfacing communicative purposes within the analysis.

The news media possesses a strong potential for influence in relation to its audience and this influence can be related to government activity. The ranking issue had

been outlined in the National Higher Education transformation roadmap. This plan was presented in 2007 through the development of two strategic documents: The National Higher Education Strategic Plan and The National Higher Education Action Plan 2007-2010. Both of these plans were designed with the intent to develop Malaysia's tertiary institutional system into a global hub of education. Aspects of these plans have appeared within the issue of rankings as the articles were published.

Measuring an institution's quality has become a significant issue with the rise of prominence of rankings in many countries worldwide. In what is gradually becoming a market of international higher education, Delgado-Márquez et al. (2012) notes, "most national governments want to have international universities that globally compete and cooperate with other universities" (p.2). The notion of ranking can be considered as a mark of prestige and can help to create a prominent image internationally for universities that have made it to the top. Tertiary academic institutions are progressively operating more like business entities under government influence by competing among others to sell their products to potential students (Fairclough, 1995). This corporate restructuring is being marketed through the exercise of ranking.

Within the selected articles, the development of a set of communicative purposes was observed over the span of the three identified phases. These communicative purposes were determined to be arranged in a manner that emphasised a persuasive element in order to convince the public that rankings are important regardless of any issues that dealt with the fallibility of the ranking methods (Marginson, 2007; Ishikawa, 2009; Holmes, 2006). This concept is often "used by any ruling party or government in Malaysia or abroad to convey their intention and policy" (Ahmad, 2010:108). This is much the same case with the effort to improve Malaysia's education status to make it comparable with leading foreign universities within the international higher education sphere.

The communicative purposes will be explored based on the Persuasion Process Model which Newsom and Carrell (2001) had included as an expansion to, and prompted by McGuire's Communication-Persuasion Matrix (1973, 1999, 2001). Newsom and Carell (2001) provided the reference of the six structural stages existent in persuasive techniques. These techniques are Presenting, Attending, Comprehending, Yielding, Retaining the new position and Acting (refer section 3.3.2).

The primary communicative purpose will deal with persuasion to convey how the issue of rankings is provided to the audience in order to transform their position into one of acceptance in order to participate in the activity. The secondary involves facilitation in that a place is provided which allows for an easy process of engaging in a dialogue in order to reach acceptance of the issue of ranking. The last communicative purpose includes informing and although it may be interpreted as the main reasoning for the discussion on rankings, it is placed as the third motivating factor because it only develops superficial aspects within the texts through highlighting the issue with supportive material.

The role of media has traditionally been roughly structured around the perceived, central objective to inform the public (Overholser and Jamieson, 2005) of events and activities that occur in the world. This is more specifically defined by emphasising that the "media put illumination of policy, power, ideology, and self interest at the centre of their productions and do so in every issue or edition" (p.50) in order to inform people of current events. This does not exclude the position of news producers from the role of mediators, because the distributors of information assume the responsibility of selecting what is considered informative to the public (Mindich, 2005). This does however indicate that the media has been conceptually intended to provide the populace with "thoughtful, intelligent, and informative news programming" (p.52) in order to supply an audience with awareness concerning issues. As the world has

become more connected and information has increased in accessibility, that same audience makes more independent choices as to where news is obtained (Picard, 2006) challenging news media to involve different methods to creatively inform the public.

The above provisions give a functional description of what it means to inform an audience from a media standpoint. The definition constructed to specify a concept of informing for this research is indicated by the following explanation. The subject matter included by the authors of the news articles to develop the issue of ranking involves multiple aspects of both problems and benefits in order to comprehensively inform the audience. This definition applies to how it was determined within this analysis that the communicative purpose of informing was accomplished by The New Straits Times. This provides reasoning for the continual inclusion of explanations concerning the need for, use of, drawbacks related to, and benefits of being involved in ranking.

As news publications provide reports on daily events, the issue of ranking can be categorized as an ongoing event, although not from a daily standpoint as the ranking exercise is an annual event. Since the ranking activity involves only a few members of the government and academic communities, but affects a significant majority of people that would participate in the academic system that will incorporate rankings, the news media works to serve as an intermediary space for everyone to be informed of what is happening. Traditional print media achieves this task in a limited fashion as it "primarily facilitates discourse and interaction among elites and formal organizations" (Picard, 2006:86) which does not completely include the rest of the community. News media can function in the form of a facilitator to a degree though, as in the case of radio programs in Central and South American countries where rural communities and social participation occurs through connecting the populace and encouraging dialogue (Brunetti, 2000). This form of media distribution "can create a powerful bond among the listeners and be an important source for the expression of their worries and ideals"

(p.120). The continued provision of articles on ranking also brought members of various communities together in discussion, not only in print in the form of response articles but through conversation as well. This was one recurring aspect that surfaced in the collected articles. A progression of discourse developed over the years, which gave the appearance that "the newspaper publisher is now a facilitator of public discussion" (Lapham, 1995:7) in that there was an attempt to include community members in the conversation through published letters.

A printed newspaper presents a largely one-sided arena for the development of a discourse on rankings, although there seems to have been formation of a community forum in a limited capacity. The previous information has provided a basic arrangement of how media can perform rudimentary roles as a facilitator for bringing members of society together into a quasi-social platform. The working definition applied to the context of this study to highlight instances where facilitation appears to occur is provided with the following description. The progression of structure within the articles arranged by the authors of the news articles appear to reflect a sense of interactivity through the semblance of a model of small group communication by indicating involvement of multiple speakers from participating communities such as members of the public, academicians, as well as people that are in prominent government positions, thereby placing the newspaper in the role of a facilitator for all of these groups. This definition reflects how the corpus of data develops so that the resultant issue of rankings appears to be a shared conversation, one that involves all the participants alongside the reading audience so the communicative purpose of facilitating could be achieved. This does not ignore the ideological aspects of how media can be used as a facilitator, but that facet of potential application extends beyond the scope of this study.

Typical forms of mass media, such as newspaper, magazines, television, radio, and the internet all provide information so that anyone may obtain it that is willing to

take the initial step and engage with that media. From this standpoint, it is shown in studies on the persuasive aspects of the media that there is a role played in the dissemination of information to audiences that indicates influence (Norris, 2006; Sears and Kosterman, 1994; Brunetti, 2000; Picard, 2006). Newspaper content has been indicated to sway opinion of voters during an election season (Norris, 2006). The volume of exposure within newspapers has also been shown to aid in decisions voters make (Patterson, 1980 cited in Sears and Kosterman, 1994). This point is emphasised in that the "key to media effects, again, is massive exposure" (Sears and Kosterman, 1994:264) to lend to persuading the decision making process of the public. The ranking issue has been set as the important topic to be maintained in the public sphere of consciousness. In order to persuade the audience to continually consider the subject and evaluate ranking, the authors of the news articles have maintained the persistent act of informing in order to attempt to persuade the audience to accept that rankings are now a permanent component of university systems.

Persuasion has been indicated to be a part of the structure of a newspaper and the examples included have aided in building a simple concept of what persuasion may be considered. The definition that will be used in this research to explain the observed features within the analysis of the selected corpus will be derived from the above examples and indicated in the following statement. In providing extensive material that can be used by readers to gain understanding of the ranking phenomenon in thorough detail, the authors of the news articles have employed an excessive volume of exposure of ranking material to the audience as a means of persuading the public through repetition that ranking is a permanent activity that should be accepted. The resultant analysis of all three phases appears to coincide with this description of what was produced across the complete series of reviewed articles. This also lends to the

explanation as to the continual inclusion of references to ranking being permanent, despite reporting that highlighted the flaws and dissatisfaction with the system.

The process of informing serves a skeletal function and often occurs as an underlying process within most media publications. Although this is generally considered to be a fundamental aspect of news reports, it is not always the primary purpose for disseminating a topic. As the communicative purpose of informing may recur throughout significant portions of the corpus, it will not be addressed as each artefact depicts itself. This is highlighted at this point to avoid frequent referencing of the continual resurfacing of this trait. Facilitation utilizes the omnipresent aspect of informing to develop the appearance of a general description and discussion of ranking. The communicative purpose of persuasion will receive priority of explanation as this pattern of addressing the ranking issue appears to be the dominantly influential feature.

The primary communicative purpose of persuasion that was observed throughout the three phases is illustrated in Table 15 and reflects the Persuasion Process Model (an adaptation from McGuire's Communication-Persuasion Matrix, 1973, 1999, 2001; see also Newsom and Carrell, 2001). This model involves six steps. These are observed throughout Phase 1, Phase 2, and Phase 3 and are identified by the classifications of presenting, attending, comprehending, yielding, retaining the new position and acting.

These steps aid in portraying how the authors of the news articles make attempts to persuade the public concerning the importance of universities ranking and how it will benefit the Malaysian higher education internationally. Two other communicative purposes will be addressed that provide support for persuasion. The continual supplement of what is occurring with relation to the issue of ranking will be accomplished through informing. The continued discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of rankings will form the facilitation of the issue in all of the published

articles that contain input from members of the public, academic commentary, and government announcements in order to indicate an aspect of how everyone appears to be included in the process of accepting rankings.

Table 15: <u>Relationship between the three phases and communicative purposes</u>

Phase	Topics	Communicative purpose	Persuasion Process Model
1	Emphasis on the need for ranking	• Inform • Persuade	• Presenting
	Detailing of incentives related to positive performance in ranking		
	Highlights concerning competition among local public universities		
	Optimistic expressions in connection with ranking		
2	Questioning the validity and reliability of rankings	• Inform • Facilitate • Persuade	• Attending • Comprehending
	Limitations in the ranking process		
	Cautionary approaches concerning participation in rankings		
	Dissatisfaction with rankings		
3	Ranking is a good measurement despite its flaws	• Inform • Facilitate • Persuade	• Yielding • Retaining the New Position
	Continued support for the ranking system		
	Disaffection or disregard for rankings		
	Emphasizing continual evaluation of rankings		
	Descriptions of university plans for incorporating rankings		• Acting

4.2.1 Presenting

In order to begin persuading the audience, the first step necessary is that the news media introduces the topic of rankings in an exciting or interesting manner. The article, 'UM is No. 89!' (see Appendix, p.156) accomplishes this boldly in order to draw

attention. From there, it is also important to emphasize the need for ranking (see Excerpt 5), indicate incentives that would be obtained because of positive performance in rankings (see Excerpt 12), include commentary related to optimism concerning ranking, and the competitive environment public universities face. This group of subjects presented do not only serve as "an agenda setting" (Ahmad, 2010:108) to inform the public about university rankings but also function as the initial step of presenting the message to the audience in phase 1. As the incorporation of rankings is in line with the MOHE Action Plan directives, the news media plays an important role to inform the nation as Wakefield et al. (2003) claims that, "governments believe that the public requires adequate information, additional motivation and accessible assistance" (p.95). Once the idea of university ranking has been presented to the public, the news media then takes steps to captivate readers' attention.

4.2.2 Attending

Once the ranking issue has been introduced, the audience needs to be captivated in order to maintain attention and continuous involvement in the issue. As Miles and Morse (2007) note, "Once a topic gains a certain level attention in the media, it attracts more attention, and because it attracts more attention, it becomes more noteworthy" (p.366). The trend historically in news has been that bad news usually draws in more readers than good news and the same was proven to be the case concerning rankings. The articles that included headlines such as, 'Abdullah 'very sad' over UM's slide in rankings' (see Appendix, p.158) prompted more investigation of the issue, not only by the reading public but also the government and academics. This negative news was exploited as a means to persuade the public to invest additional attention to attend to rankings. This is demonstrated in phase 2 where articles were written from a variety of individuals such as members of the public and academic faculty. Facilitation is also

portrayed in that the news is presented as a platform for people to debate and discuss the issue of ranking. Questioning the methodology of rankings and taking caution while being involved in the process are being attended to by everyone involved (see Excerpt 22). Some academicians have also been indicated to exhibit dissatisfaction (see Excerpt 78) and, as claimed by Newsom and Carrell (2001) the need to persuade is essential because decisions and behaviours are made based on emotions, so the incorporation of these controversial elements into the beginning of phase 2 serve to persuade the public to continue attending to the ranking issue.

4.2.3   Comprehending

Once the attention of the audience has been obtained concerning the issue of ranking, the authors of the news articles have to make sure the subject of rankings is made understandable and the public is able to comprehend the ideas presented about ranking. This is accomplished throughout phase 2 with the announcement of the drop in University of Malaya's position, a detailed account of the ranking methodology (see Excerpt 42), and what steps were being taken to enact change in the universities. The articles continued to lay out an aspect of facilitation with members of government, academia and the public including responses to the issue. The aspect of informing was used by the news media to continuously connect the university rankings and the MOHE plans in order to maintain persuasion of the academic community and public to accept the ranking process. Continual intertextual features are also maintained throughout comprehension in order to ensure that the public was closely engaged with ranking and understood the fundamental purpose for ranking.

4.2.4 Yielding

In order to provide a convincing argument, the news media needs to assure that the audience is willing to submit to the notion of ranking. This is evidenced to be occurring in phase 3 through indication in the articles that ranking is a good measurement despite its flaws (see Excerpt 92). Since the aspect of informing continues to indicate the permanency of rankings, as Ishikawa (2009) puts it, "universities transform themselves if not always willingly" (p.171), the knowledge of the shortcomings does not appear to be included as a deterrent but to facilitate and persuade acceptance. Vice Chancellor Professor Datuk Ghauth Jasmon was described in the 2008 article 'Fast-track route to success' (see Appendix, p.193) as making long term plans for the continued improvement of University of Malaya's placement in rankings over six years. The communicative purpose of facilitating is also illustrated with indications that the methodologies used in the rankings have been portrayed as subjective and some academicians were shown to display concern while discrediting the application of the system. Persuasion is also accomplished with these points as it depicts submission to using the ranking process as a benchmark despite its flaws (see Excerpt 88).

4.2.5 Retaining the New Position

This stage involves the news media's need to continue to apply persuasion to get the audience to accept rankings. Retaining the position of acceptance is also exhibited in phase 3 when the issue of rankings was continually referenced as useful despite flaws (see Excerpt 87). An example of this is pointed out by the 2008 article 'Much to be learnt from university rankings' (see Appendix, p.196) where the continued improvement of University of Malaya's rankings is placed in a positive context. This is accordance with Liu and Cheng's (2005) claims that "Whether or not universities and other organizations approve of or agree with the various rankings systems, clearly the

latter are here to stay" (p.135). To continue maintaining the communicative purpose of facilitation as it has been sustained from the beginning of the debate, it is also important to display a minority group that is unconcerned (see Excerpt 125) and how others continue to maintain the stance of continued evaluation over the issue. The news media continues to monitor and facilitate the prolonging discussions and evaluation in relation to the universities ranking issues.

4.2.6 Acting

The final step develops in the ranking issue as the news media continues to inform by providing updates on the evolution of ranking to the audience to maintain reinforcement of the issue. In the 2010 article 'The debate continues' (see Appendix, p.205), a continuation of persuasion is provided with "Love it or hate it, university rankings are here to stay. This exercise will help universities determine what improvements are needed" to indicate that ranking will not go away and that it is helpful (see Excerpt 103). This use of persuasion though will only be considered complete when the audience is perceived as taking action after retaining the new position. At the conclusion of this corpus, it was determined that the authors of the news articles were considered to have achieved the communicative purpose of persuasion amongst the interested parties as evidence in phase 3 indicated adjustments to accommodate rankings were clear. These findings are in agreement with Holmes (2006) that education authorities amongst Asia universities are making modifications to their policies and reassessing priorities with the aim of being part of the ranking list (see Excerpt 114). It was also observed in phase 3 the interested universities are making various plans from within and outside the university in order to improve the ranking of the university ("Varsities Will Rise Slowly," 2008).

This concludes the findings portion of this research. It has been observed that the news media has portrayed the communicative purpose of persuasion throughout all three phases. This was accomplished through the simultaneous use of the communicative purpose of informing; as it was important that the audience needed to be influenced by the message about university rankings, it was necessary to first explain the idea. As this message of the ranking issue was delivered and sustained, it helped to retain audience attention so the whole issue was fully comprehended that ranking played a specific role within tertiary education. As the topic was continually reinforced over the period of seven years by the media, this served the communicative purpose of facilitating the issue of ranking by expressing multiple aspects of the issue and it also worked to persuade the audience to give in and retain the position of supporting the idea of ranking. This repetitive action of persuasion was achieved through showing the audience that academic authorities had taken action to carry out plans to improve university ranking positions.

4.3   Intertextuality

This research also identifies intertextual features (see section 2.3) that are exhibited to show referencing and incorporation of other texts within the news articles. A definition of intertextuality is provided through an adaptation of Bhatia's (2004) explanation on how texts hold relationships, directly or indirectly, in the formation of new texts. Intertextual elements were recognised as present in this study because of transformations and referencing of other texts, varied text types, and diverse disciplines.

This analytical portion highlights incorporation of direct and indirect discourses from sources indicated to be government authority figures. Fairclough (1992) indicates, "newsworthy events originate from the contracted set of people who have privileged access to the media, who are treated by journalists as reliable sources, and whose voices

are the ones which are most widely represented in media discourse" (p.110). Further intertextuality identified references the transformation of the MOHE's Strategic Plan and Action Plan 2007-2010 within article texts to illicit public persuasion on the importance of rankings.

4.3.1   Direct and indirect quotations

Prior studies on intertextual aspects in newspapers conducted by Li (2009) and Wang (2008) support the present research which involves inclusion of intertextual features through the incorporation of quotations. Direct and indirect discourses involve other sections of text brought into new texts. Direct discourse is usually emphasised by quotation marks and "is often said to use the exact words of the person being reported" (Fairclough, 1992:107). Indirect discourse lacks speech marks but involves an associative relation to a speaker through referencing names. Examples 1 through 3 involve direct discourse, while examples 4 to 6 identify indirect discourse.

Table 16: Direct quotations

Example 1 02 May 2004	"We must ensure that public universities are of the highest standard. This involves a rational deployment of resources to ensure world-class facilities, teaching-learning environments and academics of high quality" (Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) Professor Abdul Rashid Abdullah,UNIMAS)
Example 2 10 Oct 2008	"we may think we have done good, when that may not be the true picture. It is good sometimes to have our performance measured by others." (Acting Vice-Chancellor Professor Datuk Dr Muhamad Rasat Muhamad, UM)
Example 3 23 May 2010	"We welcome it so we can see our weaknesses and strengths, so that we can continually enhance our performance. Of course, it is never easy to agree with the criteria of evaluation as there is no perfect global barometer." (Vice chancellor Professor Datuk Hassan Said, Taylor's University College)

Table 17: <u>Indirect quotations</u>

Example 4 28 Apr 2004	<u>The Prime Minister said</u> that the ultimate goal of a credible system could only be achieved with the full participation of all Malaysians.
Example 5 02 May 2004	At this week's Malaysian Education Summit 2004, <u>Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi spoke of</u> the need to consistently measure and benchmark the quality of local tertiary institutions, beginning with public universities.
Example 6 10 Nov 2007	For the past two years, the vice-chancellors of Malaysian universities have been told to give "special attention" to the Times Higher Education Supplement world university rankings, <u>according to Higher Education Minister Datuk Mustapa Mohamed</u>.

In examples 1 through 6, voices indicated to be from authority figures are incorporated by the authors of news articles to maintain shared contexts amongst the government, news media, universities, and the public. The direct discourses in examples 1 through 3 from influential individuals are identified by the use of quotation marks. In contrast, indirect discourse examples 4 through 6 appear without the use of quotation marks but instead, the speech of prominent individuals is identified by grammatical forms such as 'Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi spoke', 'The Prime Minister said', 'Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Dr Shafie Salleh said' and 'according to Higher Education Minister Datuk Mustapa Mohamed'. Direct quotations are used to include affirmation directly from members of the government or academia that the issue of ranking is of the level of importance that this is being indicated by high ranking officials. With regard to the use of indirect quotations, it softens the message being provided and presents it as a form of discussion rather than a directive.

Comments and opinions that are also indicated to be made by authoritative people have been included in the text by the news media to influence public opinion on ranking. These people are identified as government officials and members of the

academic community in positions of leadership in Malaysian universities. The authors of news articles utilise reference to authority to influence reader interest. The voices of ordinary people are not typically included in news reports (Wang, 2008).

Durant and Lambrou (2009) indicate inclusive pronouns are categorized as linguistic devices in persuasive discourse. Examples 1 through 3 incorporate pronouns 'we' and 'our' to generate close connections between readers and the university authorities. The pronouns 'we' and 'our' engender shared responsibility between these groups and may also imply inclusion of the public into the decision making process. The authors of news articles incorporate pronouns to show that university leaders are drawing readers closer so engagement with ranking would develop. This approach is also used to try and make readers feel like participants in a task of working as a team with academic authorities to attain ranking goals. To persuade and gain public support concerning the expectations of rankings which relate to the MOHE's Action Plan 2007-2010, pronouns are used to present government and university leader directives in a manner which could be readily accepted.

As indirect speech relates authority by association to names, this is evidence that examples 4 to 6 incorporate persuasive strategies. The importance of benchmarking against other leading institutions with university ranking is emphasised with authority when the news media utilizes discourse directed on behalf of a member of the government or academic leader. When discourse is connected to people in positions of authority over universities or in charge of academic policy, acceptance of the directives may come easier from readers and involved members of institutions.

4.3.2   Incorporation of MOHE's strategic documents

Texts from the MOHE's strategic documents are exploited and restructured within the existing conventions forming new texts resulting in a newspaper report by

applying intertextuality. Fairclough's (1992) work supports the findings, as intertextuality allows texts to "move along, undergoing predictable transformations as they shift from one text type to another" (p.84). The following examples present details of adaptations from the MOHE's strategic documents.

Table 18: MOHE Strategic Plan/Action Plan 2007-2010

Example 7 02 May 2004	At this week's Malaysian Education Summit 2004, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi spoke of the need to consistently measure and benchmark the quality of local tertiary institutions, beginning with public universities. [adaptation from MOHE Action Plan 2007-2010, p.23,27 and 29]
Example 8 05 Nov 2006	"The Ministry of Higher Education has urged universities to 'internationalise' their campuses by hiking their intake of international students, encouraging cross-border research collaborations, increasing staff and students'…" [adaptation from MOHE Action Plan 2007-2010, p.28]
Example 9 13 Apr 2008	We are currently taking several steps through the National Higher Education Strategic Plan 2007-2010 to improve the ranking of our public universities [adaptation from MOHE Strategic Plan]
Example 10 19 Oct 2008	"If the strategic plan is for one or two universities to get into the Top 200 quickly…" [adaptation from MOHE Strategic Plan]
Example 11 18 Nov 2008	Apex is about selecting a university with the most potential to transform and manage change. Under Apex, the selected university will be provided appropriate resources, autonomy and even a legal framework for transformation into a leading world research university. [adaptation from MOHE Action Plan 2007-2010, p.34-35]

In examples 7 through 11, the authors of the news articles exploit specific texts to exhibit expectations and needs for universities rankings within the Malaysian higher education system by restructuring the MOHE's National Higher Education Strategic Plan and National Higher Education Action Plan 2007-2010 into the news articles.

Message reinforcement highlights a persuasive purpose when the public is reminded that Malaysian universities need to be progressively benchmarked against leading institutions. Durant and Lambrou (2009) suggest persuasive media techniques significantly influence "presenting information and viewpoint across a wide variety of fields" (p.158).

Adaptation of the National Higher Education Strategic Plan and National Higher Education Action Plan 2007-2010 illustrates government efforts to persuade universities toward continuous improvements in providing quality education. In utilising government commentary, the authors of the news articles influence public opinion concerning the seriousness of the positive impact ranking can have within tertiary education. The purpose of persuasion is attempted by the media by involving government authority to aid in achieving transformation of Malaysian higher education system into an international hub of excellence. Through this the intention is to direct the audience to work toward the achievement of Malaysian universities attaining international recognition so that the nation will benefit. As Malaysian universities gain world recognition, increased international student intake will accrue direct foreign investments and generate national economic growth.

4.4   Conclusion

The analytical framework that has been employed allowed for the exploration of the collected news articles beyond the sentence level. In doing this it was possible to clearly identify the communicative purposes and linguistic elements that were contained in the texts regarding the development of the ranking issue. The findings will be summarized in the discussion contained in Chapter 5: Conclusion.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

5.0   Introduction

        In this chapter highlights of the background, research findings, and results for

the research questions are provided and designated by individual sections. In section 5.1

a brief breakdown of the research findings is found. Under section 5.2 a short provision

of the significant findings is covered. Section 5.3 includes an overview of the

implications of the findings while section 5.4 provides an area for suggestions on future

research.

5.1   Overview

        Through this overview it is important to identify the key aspects of the contents

of this study, what data was collected for analysis, and which framework was utilized to

conduct the analysis. The subject of rankings has been shown to be a significant issue

within the plans to improve local public universities and the implementation of

involving rankings has been closely followed within articles of the New Straits Times.

One important feature concerning this ranking discourse was a sustained emphasis on

the significance of rankings throughout a majority of published news articles.

        To observe aspects of the ranking issue, 40 articles from the New Straits Times

that dealt with the ranking issue over a time period of seven years from 2004 until 2010

were selected as data to conduct a discourse analysis. To provide a triangulation of data

for the research, a contextual background detailing government plans for higher

education, history of the New Straits Times, and relevance of the ranking is provided. In

addition, related information on the process newspapers obtain and mediate information

was gained from a specialist informant who is involved in the news media. These

aspects of the research alongside the collected data were included to ensure a detailed

analysis could be conducted. The identification of frequently occurring linguistic

elements and the means by which these aided in forming the communicative purposes of the data that developed across the three unique phases within the articles proved valuable for determining the overall themes of the selected corpus.

Analysis was accomplished first with adopting an approach of discourse analysis provided by Brown and Yule (1983) and Yule (2006) which enabled features within and above the sentence boundaries of the data to be observed. With the identification of linguistic elements contained in the text a contextual referencing was applied to give a rationale to the developing phases that revealed the communicative purposes. From the extraction of these purposes, the Persuasion Process Model obtained through Newsom and Carrell (2001) expanded from, and prompted by McGuire's Communication-Persuasion Matrix (1973, 1999, 2001), more detailed information was derived and investigated.

5.2   Significant findings

The review of the findings will include a summary of the three distinct phases. In phase 1, a degree of optimism is expressed concerning the ranking issue and the importance of its need so public universities will benefit. The competition that results from the involvement is regarded with a generally positive manner. Motivating incentives are addressed in order to promote the developing involvement with ranking. The communicative purposes that were observed to occur during this phase included an informative tone linked to persuasive forms of introducing the ranking matter. This phase mainly presented the issue to the audience.

Phase 2 addresses the limitations of rankings. This includes detailing how valid and reliable the process of ranking is. Along with these points, the participation is further discussed with a cautionary tone. A group of academic members are highlighted to provide views of dissatisfaction. Throughout this phase all three communicative

purposes were addressed. An informative yet persuasive tone was maintained. In addition, the selected texts facilitated the discussion in the manner of a forum for the nation within the newspaper. Two additional stages of persuasion developed during this phase Readers' attention is attended to in order to maintain it with details about rankings. A thorough comprehension of the subject was made available in order to sufficiently accomplish the attending aspect of persuading.

The final phase transitioned into an approach of resignation. The plans of universities were mentioned where support was maintained for rankings with further incorporation in the future. Regardless of the flaws, the ranking system was presented as a permanent element of public universities which would require regular evaluation to monitor the effectiveness. Along with the general positive adoption of the system, a minority of disinterested members of the affected community was still indicated. Once again all three communicative purposes were utilized with the typical style of informing readers while functioning as a community means of expression with a persuasive approach to the entire subject. The last three steps of persuasion were accomplished in this phase. Readers were encouraged to yield with the overall positive acceptance of the issue. As the issue topics begin to become recycled, members involved in the process and readers begin to retain the new position that ranking is permanent and useful and act in accordance with accepting the process of rankings.

Intertextuality is also applied within the collection of articles. This is accomplished with the addition of direct and indirect quotations as well as references to government documents. This approach utilized multiple references to authorities from both the government and academia through the quotations in order to provide strength to the content. Direct quotes generated a level of significant importance as most were made by top officials. Indirect quotes imparted a levelling to the message that softened the content to create a sense of discussion rather than instructions were being dictated.

The regular addition of the MOHE plans to improve public universities was maintained during every phase.

5.3 Implication

Rankings have spread internationally among many universities in numerous countries. Incorporation into Malaysia's higher education system has occurred as part of the Malaysian Government's Higher Education Action Plan. As the subject of international ranking within the context of Malaysian public universities became known to the public, this issue was presented in a manner of inevitability. Since this analysis identifies the approach that was displayed within the collected texts, this could serve to indicate how news is provided to an audience and how it might be received. From this it could be possible to have a comprehensively informed outlook on future news publications in order to identify similar themes.

5.4 Suggestions for future research

Although this discourse analysis focused on the national situation with respect to the ranking system, other areas have not been included in this research which could be considered as future extensions to this initial work. Student perception could be addressed to determine how significant the ranking issue influences choice concerning selecting local universities. This could also be extended to include university faculty and administrative staff to determine how ranking has changed the development of the university academically. To expand this to a regional application, universities in nearby countries that participate in rankings could also be studied in order to see how the development of the ranking issue is affecting the progress of the universities in the neighbouring ASEAN countries.

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School system overhaul (2004)

(28 April 2004)

By Firdaus Abdullah

PETALING JAYA, Tues. – Overhaul national schools to make them the first choice for education, Prime minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi urged today.

Emphasising the need for an early-education system which cultivated inter-racial understanding while providing quality education, Abdullah said his proposed revamp of national schools was intended to promote unity and excellence among Malaysians.

"We need to effect changes and improvements to make national schools the 'Schools of Choice' while safeguarding the position of national type schools today," he said.

Abdullah also called for the recruitment of more non-Malay teachers and headmasters.

"We must address the concerns of parents about their quality and rectify them so that parents will gladly send their children to a high-quality, multi-racial school."

The Prime Minister said this is his keynote address on "Revitalising Education: Equipping Malaysia for the Realities of the 21st Century" at the Malaysian Education Summit 2004 here.

The summit is jointly organized by the Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute (ASLI), the Education Ministry and Ministry of Higher Learning.

In his address to hundreds of academicians, education industry entrepreneurs and senior government officials. Abdullah proposed, among others, the introduction of language lessons in Mandarin, Tamil and Arabic, giving students the option to choose regardless of their racial or religious background.

The Prime Minister also said that it was necessary to enhance teachers' training and to educate teachers to be aware and responsive to multi-racial sensitivities.

Strengthening Islamic and Ethics Education, reviving co-curricular activities and introducing twinning programs were also among his recommendations for national schools.

Abdullah said the Government was serious about enhancing the role of national schools and would do all it took to ensure their transformation.

He said co-curricular activities also needed attention as without such activities students would be one-dimesional individuals in an exam-oriented society.

This will require a shift in mindset and a change in attitude, but I believe it will benefit all of us in the long run. I hope parents, teachers and other stakeholders will help make this a reality," Abdullah said.

The Prime Minister also pinpointed specific measures to turn the nation's universities and higher learning institutes into world-class institutions.

"We need to consistently measure and benchmark the quality of our tertiary institutions, starting with public universities. I believe that a league table that ranks public universities based on criteria such as quality of teaching, research, infrastructure, student satisfaction and employability is long overdue.

"The healthy competition fostered between universities can help motivate the pursuit of better teaching, better courses and better research. Eventually, the rankings could form the basis for the amount of government funding received by these universities, thus adding a further incentive for quality improvements." Abdullah said.

He also called for stronger links between higher learning institutions and the job market, to reduce unemployment among graduates and for the infusion of a life-long learning culture among graduates.

The Prime Minister said that the ultimate goal of a credible system could only be achieved with the full participation of all Malaysians.

Our education system also included parents, the support the local community provides, the synergies the private sector is willing to forge, the awareness the media is willing to create and how much successful Malaysians are willing to give back to their schools and universities.

In his keynote address, Abdullah also revealed why the education portfolio had been split.

"The gaps in quality and national unity are urgent issues and I wanted the two ministers to concentrate on smaller but equally crucial areas." he said.

Education Minister Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein and Higher Learning Minister Datuk Shafie Salleh, who were both present, welcomed the Prime Minister's statements as a boost to the efforts of their respective ministries.

"The recruitment of more non-Malay teachers and headmasters and the introduction of mother-tongue language lessons are important measures," Hishammuddin said, "We will be making some announcements in the near future, but our aim is to provide quality early education to all Malaysians irrespective of race or religion."

"It's not only focused on education but also national cohesiveness in the true spirit of unity in diversity," he said.

Shafie, meanwhile, said he expected the suggestions to be well received by all.

Ranking system for universities will help promote excellence (2004)

2 May 2004

Koh Soo Ling

Malaysia currently has 17 public universities, 11 private universities, four foreign university branch campuses, three local private university branch campuses, two private university colleges and 516 private colleges/institutes of non-university status.

Yet there is no proper ranking system to serve as a benchmark against which the quality of a university can be measured.

 As local universities compete to obtain world-class standard they are becoming better <u>prepared to accept the notion of ranking</u> which demands different types of indicators for the measurement of quality and excellence in all crucial areas like programmes, staff and students.

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia's Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) Professor Ikram M. Said is an advocate of the ranking system.

 "It would help if there is some sort of ranking. Maybe incentives should be given for universities which can show progress, for instance, in research and development. This will certainly encourage universities to increase both the quantity and quality of research projects."

 At this week's Malaysian Education Summit 2004, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi spoke of the need to consistently measure and benchmark the quality of local tertiary institutions, beginning with public universities.

 "I believe that a league table that ranks public universities based on criteria such as quality of teaching, research infrastructure, student satisfaction and employability is long overdue," said the Prime Minister.

 In the Eighties, University of Malaya – Malaysia's sole university – was rated as one of the best universities in Asia-Pacific.

 However, more than three decades later, Asiaweek.com 2000 (Asiaweek's 2000 ranking of best universities in the region) reported that the university was ranked a lowly 47th position out of 77 universities in Asia.

Universiti Putra Malaysia was in 52nd position while Universiti Sains Malaysia was placed 57th on the list.

A ranking system is among the many measures that local universities would like to see in Malaysian Higher Education.

 Malaysian Educational Statistics 2000, Educational Planning and Research Division, Ministry of Education, notes that enrollment at public universities rose from 147,927 in 1995 to 321,729 in 2000. The number of students enrolling for first degrees in 2000 stood at 170,794.

 Given the above, a right balance between expanding the higher education industry and the quality of education is called for. Even as widening access to higher education is important, quality should remain the main consideration.

 The end result should be translated into demonstrable specialized skills and competencies that are at a par with those abroad.

 Ensuring a notable quality of education calls for a standard process of monitoring, reviewing and benchmarking.

 That means instituting quality standards for the teaching, learning, research and management processes in addition to continuous evaluation and auditing.

 Universiti Malaysia Sarawak Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) Professor Abdul Rashid Abdullah believes that public universities should set the benchmark for quality. "We must ensure that public universities are of the highest standard. This involves a rational deployment of resources to ensure world-class facilities, teaching-learning environments and academics of high quality," he says.

 "Everything starts at the university," says Higher Education Minister Datuk Dr Shafie Mohd Salleh. "Universities must intensify their efforts in continually upgrading and promoting themselves," he adds.

UM is No. 89! (2004)

NSUNT-LEARN - Dec 5, 2004

UNIVERSITY of Malaya has been ranked 89th out of 200 top universities worldwide, according to a British newspaper. MOHD FEROZ ABU BAKAR reports.

UNIVERSITY of Malaya's nearly 2,000 academics have been beaming for the past few weeks since the institution was ranked 89th out of the world's top 200 universities in the London-based The Times Higher Educational Supplement's World University Rankings, published last month.

UM received 50 points for the peer review criterion (out of a maximum of 100 points), 29 for international faculty (maximum of 100 points), 68 for international students (maximum of 100 points) and 15 for faculty or staff-student ratio score (maximum of 400).

It was marked zero for the fifth joint criterion of citation and faculty.

Malaysia's oldest university bested its 16 local rivals, with Universiti Sains Malaysia being its closest contender, in 111th position.

As expected, American and British universities dominated the top 10 positions except for ETH Zurich from Switzerland (in 10th place).

In the Asia Pacific region, UM ranked number 24, tailed by USM in 29th position.

The top five regional institutions are Tokyo University (ranked No.12 worldwide), followed by the Australian National University (No.16), Beijing University (No.17), National University Singapore (No.18) and Melbourne University (No.22).

The ranking was compiled by the QS company, which used a poll of 1,300 academics in 88 countries, besides other survey methodologies.

In a recent Press conference led by Vice-Chancellor Prof Datuk Dr Hashim Yaacob, UM's top brass blamed Thompson Scientific, the citation index used by QS, for the university's poor performance in the citation and faculty criterion.

The UM dons claimed that despite its name, Thompson Scientific focused more on arts and social science publications as opposed to pure sciences such as physics, biology, chemistry, engineering or medicine.

Dr Hashim said the university's expertise lay in disciplines such as law, education, Malay studies or Islamic studies; and research in these areas tended to be written in the national language and published in local journals which were not considered by Thompson Scientific.

Nevertheless, such research was "par excellence", according to Dr Hashim who compared UM's performance with social science-based institutions which were also marked zero for the combined citation and faculty criterion.

These included the School of Oriental and African Studies (ranked No.44), Nanyang University (No.50), Paris 1 Sorbonne (No.71) and Curtin University of Technology (No.76).

With 278 professors and almost 500 associate professors, Dr Hashim stressed that research and publications were certainly the top criteria for the promotion of UM faculty members.

Dean of the Science Faculty Professor Dr Mohammed Abd Majid, in turn, said high impact indicators such as the ISI Basic Science Index were more reliable for the assessment of pure science research and had QS utilised the index, UM would have received a better mark for the citation and faculty score.

Mohammed told reporters that at least five articles from UM researchers had been published in Nature, a prestigious world academic journal.

"That is testimony of the core business of scientists -- to do research and to publish," he said.

The dons, comprising faculty deans and directors of various institutes, also claimed that the works of university researchers in applied sciences (such as medicine, biotechnology and dentistry) or technology (such as engineering or architecture) had also been referred to by international colleagues.

Dean of the Faculty of Medicine and director of UM Medical Centre (UMMC), Professor Datuk Dr Mohd Amin Jalaludin, in turn, said findings by UMMC's Centre of Excellence in Dengue Research, had been referred to by the World Health Organisation.

He added that faculty members' research in tropical and re-emerging diseases had also been referred to by international medical practitioners.

"Some of our research findings have been published by renowned academic publications such as the New England Journal or Lancet and it is not easy to be accepted by these international scholarly journals in medicine," said Dr Mohd Amin, who himself is a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons, Edinburgh.

Director of the Institute of Research Management and Consultancy, Professor Muhamad Rasat Muhamad, said being marked zero for the citation and faculty criterion did not mean there was no research and development activity in the university.

He said Thompson Scientific had referred to the "not so important" journals in pure sciences.

He predicted the zero mark might have been calculated by dividing 100 publications with 1,000 academic staff, giving UM a near zero score of 0.1.

Muhamad, who holds a doctorate in semiconductor physics and technology from Durham University, also said some UM research findings which had been published in books and were patented were also not considered by Thompson Scientific.

Abdullah 'very sad' over UM's slide in rankings (2005)

30 Oct 2005

By Sharanjit Singh and Audrey Dermawan news@nst.com.my

KEPALA BATAS, Sat. – Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today he was "very sad" to hear that Universiti Malaya was now ranked in the bottom half of the top 200 universities in the world.

Abdullah, a former UM graduate who obtained his Bachelor of Arts in Islamic Studies in 1964, had in June congratulated UM for being ranked 89 last year.

Today, he expressed sadness and shock that UM had slipped to 169th place this year.

"I am very sad to hear the news. It (UM) must look into this and find out what is happening.

"By doing so, it can take appropriate measures to halt the decline."

He was commenting on reports that UM, which is the country's oldest tertiary institution, had slipped to 169th position in the ranking of the top 200 universities in the world.

The ranking of the top 200 universities was published in The Times newspaper's Higher Education Supplement 2005.

The rankings are based on the results of a survey of 2,375 academies from across the world, spanning various disciplines.

These are combined with other criteria, including the number of times research papers are cited by academic colleagues, staff-to-student ratios and the number of students and staff recruited from overseas.

This year's analysis also includes a criterion based on the views of international employers on which universities they prefer to recruit from.

Another Malaysian university, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, was ranked among the world's top 100 science universities – a notable achievement for a young institution.

However, Abdullah said the criteria used to rank the universities in the survey may differ from local needs.

"Sometimes, the criteria may differ from what we have set for our own institutions of higher learning."

"We have our own criteria, which is mainly focused on (human resource) development." he added.

In Kuala Lumpur, Deputy Higher Education Minister Fu Ah Kiow said the magnitude of UM's fall in the ranking was "inconceivable".

"There is obviously some inconsistency in the ranking criteria," he said, adding that the ministry understood that some of the criteria were not relevant to local universities.

For example, he said, one criterion was the number of international students and lecturers in the universities.

Meanwhile, attempts to contact UM vice-chancellor Prof Datuk Dr. Hashim Yaacob for comment were unsuccessful. Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia's director for the public and international relations Prof Dr Yang Farina Abdul Aziz was jubilant that UKM was ranked 91 among the world's top science universities.

She said: "We are proud of this achievement as the university was established only 35 years ago. This augurs well for UKM.

"The Government, too, has recognized us as a capable research-based university."

Reasons for the fall (2005)

NST - Nov 10, 2005

I REFER to the national concern regarding the sharp plunge of Malaysia's two premier universities in The Times Higher Education Supplement's (THES) 2005 World University Rankings.

University of Malaya (UM) fell from number 89 last year to 169 this year while Universiti Sains Malaysia that was ranked number 111 last year failed to make it into the THES list of the "Best 200 universities in the world".

This poses a few questions: What caused the sharp plunge in the rankings of UM and USM? How accurate and useful is a university ranking system such as the THES ranking across international borders? Should Malaysian universities be obsessed with securing high rankings in the THES list? How should the quality of a university education be measured?

The 2005 THES annual rankings are based upon six criteria: peer review (40 per cent); staff-to-student ratio (20 per cent); number of times research is cited by other academics (20 per cent); recruiter review (10 per cent); international faculty (five per cent); the number of international students (five per cent).

One obvious reason for the plunge in UM's and USM's rankings is the inclusion of a new criterion i.e. employer survey. UM, for example, received no marks at all in this new criterion which significantly affected its overall rating.

A plausible reason, as suggested by K. W. Pua in the local media, is the compilation error in THES 2004's rankings which gave both universities high marks in the international students and faculty criteria. Apparently, the statistics compilers at THES mistook Chinese and Indians at our local universities for "foreigners".

The accuracy and usefulness of THES ranking of universities worldwide is questionable. First, the THES ranking system of universities is obviously biased towards well-endowed and research-based universities in the West that are able to attract a significant proportion of international students and to maintain a favourable faculty/student score.

Second, the criterion of staff-to-student ratio need not necessarily capture the quality of a university's learning-teaching environment.

Third, the quality of educational experiences cannot be captured adequately through statistics. In the words of Gerhard Casper (president of Stanford University), "I am extremely sceptical that the quality of a university - any more than the quality of a magazine - can be measured statistically."

Malaysian public universities have certain limitations which hamper them from scoring high in the THES rankings. In accordance with government policies and local needs, our public universities have poor staff-student ratios and small numbers of international students and lecturers.

To my mind, our public universities should not be obsessed with securing high rankings in THES list at the expense of meeting more important national needs and producing employable graduates.

Ultimately, the true measure of a university is not its statistical ranking but the quality of its graduates. From this perspective, a quality university is one that empowers students to optimise their potential, acquire critical and creative thinking skills, thrive in the 21st century workplace, function effectively and ethically in society, and to become fast and lifelong learners (besides providing essential disciplinary knowledge).

Towards this end, our local universities need to focus adequately on effective teaching and learning, not just on research and publications.

The curriculum and instructional strategies should be geared towards equipping learners with essential disciplinary knowledge and generic skills (particularly, communication, emotional intelligence and problem-solving skills).

It is important to bear in mind that there is no such thing as "the best university". No university is good in everything. Each university has its own strengths and weaknesses. In this regard, a university should be judged against its own mission and goals.

To conclude, our universities should currently focus more on providing a truly quality education that meets national aspirations, and empowers graduates to thrive in the 21st century workplace.

RANJIT SINGH MALHI

Kuala Lumpur

Seeking the best to head varsities (2005)

NST - Nov 10, 2005

PUTRAJAYA, Wed. - Stung by the drop in the ranking of two public universities in the world's Top 200 list, the Higher Education Ministry is taking steps to boost performance.

One of these is the setting up of a committee to select the best person for the job of vice-chancellor.

And attracting prominent foreign academics as lecturers with higher salaries.

Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Dr Shafie Salleh said this in response to the drop in ranking of Universiti Malaya and Universiti Sains Malaysia in this year's Times Higher Education Supplement's World university rankings.

Universiti Malaya fell from 89th position last year to 169, while USM which was placed 111th dropped out of the list.

Shafie said efforts must be made to ensure Malaysian institutions of higher learning remained competitive.

He said a search committee would be established to identify the best in academia to become vice-chancellors.

"The committee will vet those it thinks are good and propose two or three names to the minister. This ensures we have the best to manage our universities.

"The vice-chancellor for one university could be from other universities or even elsewhere. We are not limiting the possibilities.

"However, the composition of the committee will remain secret," he said before the ministry's post-Cabinet meeting today.

Currently, vice-chancellors are selected by the minister.

Shafie said the Government was also allowing prominent foreign academics appointed to lecture at public universities to be placed under a special scheme which paid higher compared to the government scale.

"This way we can attract renowned personalities in academia abroad to lecture here."

(END)

Don't take lists too seriously (2005)

NST - Nov 15, 2005

NO one should take any set of global rankings of universities too seriously.

Unimpeded by critical thinking, politicians, journalists, educators, and concerned citizens stampede over each other as they rush to pronounce their recipes for how to fix so-called fallen institutions.

Nations who do not hesitate to criticise the intrusive reach of the West have accepted a clearly questionable set of Western judgments on their cherished universities. Alternatively, perhaps, "The fault lies in the ranking not in the ranked".

The Times Higher Education Supplement (THES) World University Rankings has so many flaws that it deserves less attention than a ranking of the top 200 pizza makers.

The THES rankings fluctuate widely from year to year. In fact, the University of Malaya's (UM) great fall, from 89 to 169 should raise suspicions about the survey. Instead, the critics have assumed that something unknown went wrong, all in just one year at UM.

The self-proclaimed education experts fail to examine the reasons why the THES yearly surveys produce wide fluctuations among many other institutions.

In 2005, Switzerland's Geneva University and America's Catholic University were both ranked at number 88.

In 2004, these institutions did not even make the final 200. Conversely, six institutions ranked in the top 100 in the 2004 survey failed to make the 2005 list.

THES rankings do not qualify as scientific unless teenage gossip magazines qualify as scientific journals. The sciences use publicly accessible data; THES keeps its data secret. More problematically, THES relies on highly questionable methods.

Most of an institution's ranking (40 per cent) comes from reputation evaluations made by 1,300 unknown international faculty members from 88 countries.

THES asked 2,375 academics whether they considered themselves experts in their subjects and whether they thought themselves capable of informed judgments about educational institutions.

Despite appearances to the contrary, this THES method has little to do with peer review of scholarly research.

The "more objective" devices used by THES do not provide meaningful measures. The "percentage of international students" (five per cent) says something about the quality of students. THES ignores the extensiveness of affirmative action, which may sacrifice more quantifiable indices of student quality for more intangible values such as diversity.

Also, the use of "faculty to student ratios" (20 per cent) provides only a weak measure of the quality of teaching. An institution may have many generally unavailable professors who teach mostly huge classes. Measures of the "percentage of international faculty (five per cent)" and "citations per faculty member" (20 per cent) favour some schools over other ones.

THES admits that its reliance on citations favours English-speaking institutions and those that emphasise the natural sciences.

The use of overall numerical scores produces an artificially precise and misleading ranking among institutions. Studies have shown that the differences in these survey scores typically have no statistical validity. Comparisons of institutions with slight differences in scores have no foundation whatsoever.

The limits of THES rankings, however, go far beyond all this. We cannot find a better authority for the futility of any comparisons than the judgment of THES editor John O'Oleary: "There is no sign that a high-ranking university in our table is better than one more lowly ranked." The major danger lies in politicians not listening to the rankers.

These criticisms do not imply the rejection of all comparisons or, what may be more worrisome, the abandonment of education based reform movements. We do need a survey to produce a defensible list of the top 10 or 20 universities in the world.

To paraphrase the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, "Beyond the elites, thereof we cannot comparatively speak."

THOMAS W. SIMON, Kuala Lumpur

The Times' university rankings flawed (2005)

NST - Nov 22, 2005

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - The World University Rankings 2005 which was published in The Times Higher Education Supplement last month is flawed and imperfect.

This admission came from Nunzio Quacquarelli (picture), managing director of QS Quacquarell Symonds and Evidence Ltd which has been compiling the rankings since last year.

He said there are many limitations to data collection that prevented it from presenting an accurate picture of the universities' positions in the world.

Speaking at a talk on the controversial World University Rankings at Universiti Malaya this evening, he added that there were many key elements that were missing in the survey, such as investments on infrastructure as well as student satisfaction on the services and programmes provided by the university.

"We wish we could also compile data on teaching quality but that information would be quite impossible to obtain since we reviewed over 500 universities last year.

"However, we tried to collect whatever data we could and came up with the best methodology to rank these universities," said Quacquarelli.

"Many may argue that our measures are biased and unfair, especially in relation to peer review and citations.

"For instance, Beijing University did poorly in the citation area because it was difficult to review their work. They probably published their work in Mandarin but we just couldn't find the journals."

Quacquarelli also said Chinese and Indian students at Universiti Malaya had been wrongly categorised as "foreign students" last year, which resulted in the university being placed at a higher position in 2004 compared to this year.

"There must have been some sort of miscommunication when we were compiling the data. We weren't aware that Chinese and Indians are also Malaysians.

(END)

How does it measure up? (2005)

NSUNT - Nov 27, 2005

How valid is The Times Higher Education Supplement World University Rankings 2005? KOH SOO LING attempts to answer the question.

QS Quacquarelli Symonds managing director Nunzio Quacquarelli has failed to answer many questions on the workings of The Times Higher Education Supplement World University Rankings 2005.

Quacquarelli was recently in Kuala Lumpur to explain how the controversial rankings were conducted. He met local academics at Balai Ungku Aziz, University of Malaya (UM).

Unresolved issues were the elements of validity, motives, recruiter review, citations and the quality of teaching.

In any instrument used to measure global rankings, the element of validity is of high importance.

Academics felt that no attempts were made by QS Quacquarelli Symonds to explain why certain criteria were chosen above others to determine universities' global rankings.

In addition, there was no explanation as to why a higher percentage was given for one criterion and not for another.

As such, the general perception was there was a lack of detailed information and transparency to account for the wide fluctuations.

Examples of such fluctuations could be seen when Switzerland's Geneva University and America's Catholic University were ranked 88 (2005) when they did not even make the final 200 last year when The Times Higher World Global Rankings was introduced.

Another area of contention was why the survey took place. Ultimately, students will be the ones to benefit from global rankings.

The motive behind the survey could be purely academic or profit-driven.

It is undeniable that motives have strong bearing on how a survey is conducted. If it was solely for academic reasons, then the academic world would certainly benefit from such an exercise.

However, if it was profit-driven, then the credibility of such a survey would be questionable.

QS Quacquarelli Symonds argued that the survey was carried out primarily for the altruistic reason of informing the public so that they could make informed choices.

As an anecdote, a vet would be the best person to treat sick animals.

Yet, there was no mention of how many staff at QS Quacquarelli Symonds, who designed and carried out the survey, were from academia.

Recruiter review being a new criterion in this year's survey was also unclear.

This year's rankings showed an extra column of data created to add another major dimension by showing graduates from which universities were preferred by the world's top employers of internationally mobile graduates.

Graduate recruiters and universities provided names of companies which frequently recruited their graduates.

According to QS Quacquarelli Symonds, all the companies involved recruit either around the world or on a national scale in large countries.

They were asked to identify up to 20 universities whose graduates they preferred to employ.

QS Quacquarelli Symonds claimed that these recruiters came from the three major groups - Asia Pacific, Americas and Europe MEA (Middle East and Africa).

However, in The Times Higher published on Oct 28, it was reported that there were only 333 respondents.

The question remains whether the majority of the 333 respondents came from all three major groups or from any one particular group.

If the majority of these respondents came from any of the three major groups, this would certainly influence the conclusions made.

QS Quacquarelli Symonds also admitted to errors in the computation of the 2004 rankings especially in the classification of Chinese and Indian students in UM as "foreign students".

If so, could it also be possible that Indian and Malay students are classified as "foreign" students in neighbouring countries where Chinese are the dominant race?

The Times Higher admitted its reliance on citations which favoured English-speaking institutions and those inclined towards the natural sciences.

In the area of citations in the 2005 rankings, it was also noted that Beijing University was not given a score because the majority of its research papers was published in Mandarin.

Latin America universities suffered because of the shortage of academic journals accepting Spanish papers.

This also affected peer review performance. If a survey on global rankings is to reflect the true global nature of universities, perhaps the sole recognition of published research in only one language (English) is **myopic**.

The quality of teaching and the quality of students were also not accounted for in determining the global rankings of universities.

These main pillars of strength of a university were **sacrificed** for a numerical percentage of international students or the use of faculty-to-student ratios.

Stanford University president Gerhard Casper says: "I am extremely sceptical that the quality of a university - any more than the quality of a magazine - can be measured statistically."

According to some academics, a survey of such gargantuan nature should at least have undergone a test run before being implemented.

Maybe then the conclusions derived would have been more reflective of the actual global rankings of universities.

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* See also H20

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(END)

The debate continues (2005)

NSUNT - Nov 27, 2005

THE controversial Times Higher Education Supplement World University Rankings 2005 has ruffled local academic feathers. KOH SOO LING reports on the methodology used to assess the tertiary institutions.

A WEEK ago, QS Quacquarelli Symonds managing director Nunzio Quacquarelli faced a crowd of concerned academics at Balai Ungku Aziz, University of Malaya (UM). They wanted to know the rationale behind The Times Higher Education Supplement World University Rankings 2005 compiled by QS Quacquarelli Sym onds.

Many of the academics present were disturbed by the methodology used by QS Quacquarelli Symonds in assessing university rankings.

They were hopeful that the man who heads an organisation which determines the world's top universities would be able to shed some light on how rankings were carried out.

However, at the end of the session, which was meant to inform the audience, many went back dissatisfied.

From Quacquarelli's point of view, the university survey instrument was appropriate and adequate.

Yet, he admitted to errors in the collection of data when compiling the 2004 rankings. For example, Chinese and Indian students in UM and Universiti Sains Malaysia were regarded as foreigners.

In 2005, citations in other languages besides English were not taken into account (see story on H4).

Two local public universities - UM and USM - had fallen in the 2005 global rankings.

In The Times Higher World University Rankings 2004, UM and USM took 89th and 111th placings respectively.

While UM did better in international faculty (3.8) and peer review (1.5) measures, USM scored higher in international student (3.9) measures (see story on H3).

In 2005, although UM improved in its peer review score (from 3.8 in 2004 to 13.2 the following year) and its overall normalised score (23.5 in 2005 compared with 16.1 last year), its position dropped to 169 while USM was not included in the top 200 university list.

Both the academic world and the public and private sectors were shocked to learn of the latest rankings.

QS Quacquarelli Symonds was established in 1990 and has a team of more than 70 representatives from five continents.

Quacquarelli argued that trends in international education prompted the necessity of world university rankings.

"It is important to have global rankings because students need to make informed choices. There will be a surge of international students and subject-specific growth dominated by more vocational subjects like management and law," he s ay s.

Indeed, there are underlying trends in the movement of international students.

Australia has estimated that international students are more important to their economy than manufacturing and mining.

The British Government estimates that 270,000 international students contribute STG3 billion (RM20 billion) in fees and STG3 billion in spending.

The Graduate Management Admission Council report states that the Bologna Accord will create an explosion in English language based postgraduate programmes in Europe.

The Bologna Accord, an educational reform planned for full implementation by 2010, is already making its presence felt in the European graduate management market. The agreement aims at simplifying degree qualifications and nomenclatures, providing more educational choice and mobility to European students and bringing many more potential applicants into the graduate management pipeline.

Other reasons which contributed to the necessity for university global rankings were the media's desperation for more professional and less anecdotal information and universities setting targets to be among the best in the world.

The Times Higher 2005 rankings used six measures: peer review (40 per cent), recruiter review (10 per cent), staff-to-student ratio (20 per cent), number of times research is cited by other academics (20 per cent), international faculty (five per cent) and the number of international students (five per cent).

Quacquarelli highlighted the criteria of peer review, recruiter review and citations - areas of contention among many academics.

Peer review, which constituted the biggest percentage in determining the overall score, was conducted by more than 2,500 academics of equal numbers in the three major regions: Asia-Pacific, Americas and Europe MEA (Middle-East and Africa).

Opinions gathered were based on an academic's area of expertise.

Recruiter review, which was a new criterion added to the 2005 rankings, was based on the employability of graduates.

More than 500 employers were contacted to participate in the survey with equal numbers in the three major regions.

Citations per faculty were based on Thompson ISI citation data on a 10-year average and normalised for five department areas.

"Rankings relied on the best available comparable data.

However, the limitations of the rankings are, there is no data on teaching quality, student satisfaction and investment in infrastructure," says Quacquarelli.

In the three major regions, there was an overall improvement in the number of universities having made it into the top 200 universities band (see table below).

Out of the top 200 universities, 27 managed to secure a range of 50-100 marks and 173 secured a range of 20.8-49 marks.

Improving on a university's overall ranking is uppermost in the public's mind. Yet, according to QSQuacquarelli Symonds, a higher rank does not necessarily mean a better university.

Echoing this, UM Vice-Chancellor Datuk Professor Dr Hashim Yaacob, who was also present at the session, says: "What matters is the improvement in marks and we need to work towards a better score. Despite a drop in world university rankings from 89 (2004) to 169 (2005), UM had managed to secure a score of 23.5 against that of 16.6 last year."

Notwithstanding their unhappiness at the 2005 rankings, senior academics at Malaysian universities see it as a wake-up call to better their performance.

Since the release of the rankings in October, the universities have come up with measures to enhance their standing.

Among the proposed steps are the establishment of a search committee to identify the best candidates to head public universities, the setting up of a leadership academy to train lecturers, attracting foreign academics of high calibre to Malaysia, establishing a pool of researchers and academics, providing successful researchers with incentives and improving students' generic skills to make them competitive locally and globally.

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(END)

How to play the ranking game (2006)

NSUNT - Jul 30, 2006

SUBJECTING local tertiary institutions to an international ranking process may jeopardise the national agenda of making them accessible to all Malaysians, says University of Malaya vice-chancellor Datuk Rafiah Salim.

She concedes that a ranking exercise such as the The Times Higher Education Supplement (THES) World University Rankings does give some indication of how a university fairs globally.

"So in this aspect, it is good for universities," says Rafiah, who was appointed the vice-chancellor of University of Malaya in April, making her the first woman in Malaysia to head a public tertiary institution.

But local public tertiary institutions must be prepared to make sacrifices if they want to join in the international ranking game.

THES annual rankings are based upon six criteria: peer review (40 per cent); staff-to-student ratio (20 per cent); number of times research is cited by other academics (20 per cent); recruiter review (10 per cent); international faculty (five per cent); and the number of international students (five per cent).

"If we are to increase the number of international students, does that mean we have to reduce places for local students? If we do, can we achieve Malaysia's desire to develop its own human capital?

"It would also be great to have international staff members in our campuses. But to lure the world's best brains to our tertiary institutions, we must be prepared to pay them well.

"But are we prepared to do all that is required to play the ranking game?"

Another concern is citation of research.

Quacquarelli Symonds, the consulting firm responsible for the THES World University rankings, last year admitted to a weakness in its assessment - the failure of its consultants to "find" research works published in languages other than English.

It is a fact that local researchers publish extensively in Bahasa Malaysia.

"So, does this mean that universities stop publishing in Bahasa Malaysia? I do not think it is wise to do that."

UM was ranked 169 by THES World University Rankings last year, down from the 89th position it occupied the previous year.

Rafiah is all set to institute reforms at UM but not at the expense of national needs.

"It is more worthwhile to push for our courses to be recognised by international professional bodies. The fact that many local graduates are accepted into top universities worldwide for their postgraduate studies bears testimony to our academic standing," she says.

Dealt more with the issue of rankings because that seems to be the focus of the article but she did not directly answer the issues of rankings. national concern of an equal consideration when determining the universities position.

Nothing but the best for varsity, pledges new V-C (2006)

NST - Aug 9, 2006

PETALING JAYA: Incentives to motivate her staff and giving Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia her personal touch are Datuk Dr Sharifah Hapsah Syed Hasan Shahabudin's main tasks.

The new UKM vice-chancellor, who will take up her post on Aug 28, said she wanted to ensure all plans and programmes were in place to prevent the university's "best" academic staff from leaving.

"I want to make sure they are not poached by others. We must make an effort to not only recruit the best but also to retain the best," she said.

Dr Sharifah Hapsah is no stranger to UKM, having served there from 1975 to 2002, rising from lecturer to the first director of the Centre for Academic Advancement, where she oversaw the restructuring of faculties, quality assurance and training of academic staff.

"I want all of them in UKM to believe in the vision and mission of the university," said Dr Sharifah Hapsah, who is currently the chief executive officer of the National Accreditation Board.

On efforts to commercialise research and development, she said what was more important was the creation of knowledge as this would nurture fertile minds.

On The Times Higher Education Supplement (THES) World University Rankings which ranked Universiti Malaya 169th last October (compared to 89th the previous year), Dr Sharifah Hapsah said: "We must first see if we're happy with such indicators. To me, it's nonsensical. If we have adequate expertise locally, then why should we import it? Should we have a make up of 30 to 40 per cent international students just to gain marks? There is also a lot of research published in Bahasa Malaysia which is not taken into account. Why pay attention to something that is not inclusive?"

She said the rating system for local universities being developed by the Higher Education Ministry would be a better yardstick.

"This system will compare like with like. For example, specialised universities and the courses they offer would be compared with like universities, and non-degree granting colleges compared with like colleges."

(END)

V-C committed to reviving glorious past (2006)

NST - Aug 31, 2006

UNIVERSITY of Malaya's first woman vice-chancellor Datuk Rafiah Salim is grabbing the challenge of turning an institution under public scrutiny into a respected teaching and research university, writes SUZIEANA UDA NAGU.

UNIVERSITY of Malaya has educated many of the nation's most prominent figures and leaders. But in recent years, its sterling reputation has taken a bit of battering.

Part of the debate about its lacklustre performance was fuelled by a drop in ranking in the Times Higher Education Supplement World University Rankings 2005. Last year, UM was ranked 169, compared with 89 the previous year.

Against this backdrop, many were counting on its newly appointed vice-chancellor Datuk Rafiah Salim and her 18-year expertise in people management to usher in a period of intellectual development.

Rafiah wasted no time in drawing up an action plan upon assuming the leadership role.

"One of the first things we did was to carry out a SWOT analysis - a common tool for strategic planning process - which helps us identify our strengths, weaknesses, and how we can get to where we want to be and by when," says Rafiah, the first woman vice-chancellor in a public university.

Rafiah is undaunted by the task of turning UM around, saying she has great support.

Her team, consisting of staff members, is working to turn UM into a respected teaching and research university, following the two mandates to improve its international standing and to rebrand itself as a research university.

Professor Muhamad Rasat Muhamad, deputy vice-chancellor for research and innovation, believes that UM will have no problem fulfilling the research goal, considering that "the tradition of being involved in research and being excited by it" has always been part and parcel of UM.

"This has always been the way UM works. Otherwise, we would not have researchers whose names are immortalised in science forever," he adds, alluding to senior researchers in UM, such as Emeritus Professor Datuk Ahmad Nawawi Ayob, a mycologist at the former department of botany and retired professor of zoology Dr Yong Hoi Sen.

Both Ahmad and Yong have species of fungi and reptiles named after them.

UM's passion for creating new knowledge and discoveries over the years has also strengthened numerous research areas.

"Medical health is one of UM's forte. We have done good research work in cancer, where we collaborated with Cambridge University.

"We are also proud of Professor Dr Adeeba Kamarulzaman from the Faculty of Medicine, who has received international funding for her work on HIV and AIDS," says Muhamad Rasat.

The university also prides itself for being the local institution with the most number of academic works published in the ISI Index journals, according to a local survey.

"We are proud of the fact that our academics' published works have the 'highest impact' compared with other local universities' output".

(A high-impact journal paper refers to one widely cited for research purposes.)

According to Muhamad Rasat, UM researcher Mohan Yadav has close to 3,000 citations for his work on medical research. "Normally, a lecturer has an average of 100 citations in his or her career," he says.

But to be a global player, UM must also benchmark itself against the best tertiary institutions in the world, says Professor Datuk Dr Mohd Amin Jalaludin, deputy vicechancellor for academic and internationalisation.

"That is why we are constantly seeking international accreditation and renewing existing ones for our courses and forging meaningful relationships with foreign universities," says Mohamad Amin, an otorhinolaryngologist (ear, nose and throat specialist).

Recently, UM was host to eight students from Ije University, Seoul, for one semester.

"The students sat for their exams here and their credit hours at UM are transferable to Ije University. We provided them with a good support system and they were happy with their stay here. They learnt a lot about our culture and I must say it was equally enriching for our students. We hope to send some of our students to Seoul in the future".

UM is also joining forces with industries to ensure that its programmes and the skills students acquired meet industry needs.

Rafiah admits that unemployment among UM graduates is a cause for worry, although they only make up 2.6 per cent of the total figure nationwide.

She believes equipping jobless grads with communication skills, particularly English language, will make them marketable.

"My experience outside of academia in the last 18 years tells me that if your command of English is good, you will go far. So it is critical that we promote English at UM," she says.

To tackle the unemployment issue, UM will offer a "finishing school" programme to third-year students after they graduate.

This training is similiar to the soft-skill module unveiled last week at Universiti Putra Malaysia by Higher Education Minister Datuk Mustapa Mohamed.

The course, lasting between three and six months, will expose them to effective communication and applied information technology skills.

"In the longer term, we will offer the soft-skills module to second-semester students starting in November. It will carried out during weekends," says Mohamad Amin.

Extra-curricular activities also enhance students' soft skills, says Profesor Datuk Mohd Razali Agus, deputy vice-chancellor for student affairs and alumni.

"At the recent Convocation Festival, our students raised almost RM300,000 in sponsorship and ticket sales. Projects like this enable our students to acquire skills such as preparing business proposals and negotiating with sponsors," adds Mohamad Razali.

On average, UM organises 900 student activities yearly. Since 2003, Chinese and Indian students have been allowed to form their own cultural clubs. Each residential college has its own ethnic leaders.

Electing student leaders for each ethnic group will not further segregate students, insists Mohamad Razali.

"Instead, this allows each ethnic group to have a representative looking after their welfare. I find that I am closer to my students since we introduced this move."

Much work needs to be done to revive UM's glorious past but Rafiah remains optimistic.

"UM has many committed and capable people who are open to new ideas."

(END)

Should we be rankled by varsity rankings? (2006)

NST - Oct 16, 2006

THE Times Higher Education Supplement World University Rankings 2006 saw Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia going up from the 289th position last year to 185 in the world's top 200 universities while Universiti Malaya dropped from the 169th position to 192. Universiti Malaya Professor Emeritus Datuk Khoo Kay Kim and former Education director-general Tan Sri Murad Mohd Noor share their views on the universities with CHOK SUAT LING.

* DATUK KHOO KAY KIM

Q: Are ranking surveys truly able to reflect the actual performance of a university?

A: It is difficult to determine which university is good based on such an exercise. In the past, a good university is one which invented ideas. If it did not do that, then it was no better than a polytechnic.

But ranking exercises are based on many other factors - intellectual achievements, ratio of staff to student, the number of foreign students and the employability of graduates.

Q: How much credence should we give to the Times Higher Education Supplement survey?

A: There are several weaknesses in the survey. One is that those who conduct the ranking exercise cannot read academic writings in other languages.

Q: But is it true Universiti Malaya's standards have dropped?

A: According to the survey, UM's performance was based on several factors, one of which is the employability of its graduates.

This is a very unreliable way of measuring a university. People are employed for a variety of reasons.

In Malaysia, it is who you know. So to that extent, the survey should be taken with a pinch of salt. But it is true that UM is no longer as actively contributing to knowledge as it used to. Not many scholars are willing to take up Western scholars in debate. In those days, even the tutors did it.

Q: It has been said public universities in Malaysia are no longer what they were. What contributed to this general drop in standards?

A: There is this growing misunderstanding of what a university is all about. There is now overemphasis on the need for graduates to get jobs. We are not encouraging them to be self-employed.

Universities are asked to produce employable graduates, not those who can stand on their own feet or make critical decisions. If this is the case, we will not be able to compete with Western countries.

Over the years, we have also adopted a different philosophy. Now there is a tendency not to fail a student. If we produce graduates who are half-educated, what will they be able to do outside?

In the early days of UM, only about 25 per cent of students would pass, now it is almost 100 per cent. Of the 30 students who made up the first batch of UM's engineering course, only five passed.

Q: The internationally recognised measure of excellence is research output and publications by academics. How are Malaysian academics faring?

A: It is dangerous to go by volume. It is better to go by substance and quality. If an academic merely quoted other people, then he has contributed nothing. He must be able to engage other scholars in debate.

If he merely takes quotes from other people, then he has no substance. If a professor quotes other people, then he is not much of a professor.

There is also a tendency among Asian scholars as a whole to ape the West. They are influenced by American scholarship and tend to use methods used by American scholars. Their articles are punctuated with jargon originating from the United States.

Q: It has also been said that our universities should embark on aggressive branding exercises to enhance their visibility in the international arena.

A: No, universities must come up with publications and contribute towards knowledge.

Branding is very American, like being a salesman. I don't think that is what universities ought to do.

People say universities should learn from the industries. It used to be the other way around.

Q: Should we rank our own universities?

A: We have a tendency of using ISO to measure intellectual development. This is crazy. Ideas are abstract, not quantifiable or measurable.

We also cannot say that an academic who has published 10 articles is better than one who has published four. The four articles could be original and have interesting ideas while the 10 may have been re-hashed.

* TAN SRI MURAD MOHD NOOR

Q: Are ranking surveys able to reflect the actual performance of a university?

A: Such exercises do give the people an idea of how universities are performing. But it is also important for us to look at the criteria used to rank the universities.

For us, our public universities need to fulfil a national agenda. This factor is not taken into account in the ranking exercise.

Q: How much credence should we give to the Times Higher Education Supplement survey?

A: The survey is quite respectable. We can accept their rankings as there are no others. This is just as good as any.

Q: Should we rank our own universities?

A: Yes. Why don't we have a local ranking system? Then we can have our own criteria.

And we can compare our own rankings with a global one. If UM comes up tops in our rankings, but does not do well in the international rankings, then something is wrong.

But we should not just focus on rankings. We must also look at what is going on outside the university.

What graduates do after they leave university is more important. If they are not employable, then it does not matter if their universities enjoy top rankings.

Q: What should be taken into consideration in our own ranking exercise?

A: Most important will be the teaching facilities, the quality of lecturers and their selection. We should also look at the student-lecturer ratio.

If there are too many students, our lecturers will have no time to do anything else but teach. What is also important are facilities available for self-study.

The universities must produce graduates who can react to the social beat of the country, graduates who can contribute, not bookworms.

Our academics can work on the criteria. The exercise need not be conducted every year, maybe once in three years. Then we will not be dependent on international surveys and waste time arguing over them.

We have to take cognisance of them (international surveys), otherwise we will be isolating ourselves.

But if we take it too seriously, the entire point of such surveys will be lost. They are merely to serve as a guide.

Q: It has been said that opening up too many universities has contributed to a decline in the standards of Malaysian public universities. Too many students, not enough lecturers, and scholarship is being relegated to the back burner as the system becomes increasingly regulated.

A: Yes, this is all true. We can create universities but we can't produce lecturers overnight.

Then there is the pinching of lecturers. The pool of lecturers is the same and spread rather thinly. We need to look at this seriously.

When there are too many students and not enough lecturers, the lecturers will have very little time to do research and write. We have to figure out the correct ratio.

Q: Why did UM slide in the recent survey?

A: I thought UM was doing very well. But if it is true that standards have declined, it is a matter of concern and we should find out why.

(END)

Creating a global college (2006)

NSUNT - Nov 5, 2006

CONCENTRATING on national needs alone is a thing of the past if universities are to compete internationally. Amongst other criteria, the recent Times Higher Education Supplement World University Rankings 2006 placed emphasis on the number of international students in universities.

It is therefore not surprising that Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), a new player in this highly lucrative education sector, is organising a conference aptly themed Internationalisation of Universities: Current Understanding and Future Directions on Wednesday at Concorde Hotel, Shah Alam.

This event is held in conjunction with the 50th anniversary celebrations of the establishment of UiTM. The conference draws eminent vice-chancellors and presidents from New Zealand, Australia, United Kingdom, Russia, Japan and Malaysia to debate crucial and timely issues on higher education such as internationalisation, governance of world-class university, university ranking and competition in higher education.

Organising chairperson Associate Professor Habibah Ashari says: "The Ministry of Higher Education has urged universities to 'internationalise' their campuses by hiking their intake of international students, encouraging cross-border research collaborations, increasing staff and students' mobility through exchange programmes and accreditation of university curriculum.

"Presently, we have international students in our postgraduate programmes but we need to get together to learn more about marketing strategies and off-shore education."

Internationalisation spells changes.

Professor Denise Bradley, vice-chancellor and president of the University of South Australia, says that with internationalisation, micro and macro changes are required. According to her, internationalisation strategies, when put into effect, require change at every level as well as a shift in how people think and behave. In short, the culture of the university must be transformed.

The need for a less restricted emphasis and the fluidity of a transborder education are necessary for changes to take place.

Manchester Metropolitan University pro vice-chancellor international Professor Richard Murray believes that the future of a restricted emphasis on catering for local, regional or national needs will need to be reviewed.

In his talk, Murray will address aspects of the discussions now taking place around selectivity, curriculum development, partnerships with overseas institutions and the strengthening of support services.

The fluidity of a transborder education is necessary so that students can transfer their studies easily and be assured of continuity in their education. University of Hertfordshire vice-chancellor Professor Tim Wilson will discuss the formation of a successful network over a decade of international development in his talk entitled Creating a Global College for the Next Generation of Graduates. Wilson will examine both successful and unsuccessful partnerships as well as problems of cross-cultural operation and international barriers to increased student mobility.

The highlight of the conference will be a forum for vice-chancellors to share experiences and lessons learnt on internationalisation at their respective universities. The one-day conference provides extensive opportunities for networking with international education providers.

For more information, call Habibah at 03-5522-7001 or visit uitm.edu.my/wcvc2006

(END)

Thinking ahead (2006)

NSUNT - Nov 26, 2006

MAPCU president Tengku Shamsul Bahrin talks about coupons to pay for education, and the possibility of having rankings for public and private varsities. MICHAEL SUN writes.

Tertiary students who have not been gained admission into a public college or university should get financial help in the form of coupons from the government to meet their educational needs.

Malaysian Association of Private Colleges and Universities (Mapcu) President Tengku Shamsul Bahrin, who is also the president of Nilai International College, said that was being done in New Zealand, Australia and in some US public institutions.

He said access to education without funds could not be done. So access to education with access to funding was more logical.

The overall cost of education is the same regardless of whether it is a private or a public institution except that private students defray 100 per cent of that.

"For a public university, the cost is the same except that 90 per cent of that is absorbed by the government. Right from the beginning, it is 90 cent free education for the student.

"I don't think that's fair that you get that kind of assistance just because you are in public institutions."

The system in New Zealand used coupons where students were given help to study in whichever institution they could get into, he said. They could use the coupons to pay for their education and repay the fees later, he added.

"We should think ahead. Once you have got that system, then all this question of ethnicity would resolve itself."

How can the government recoup this financial help?

"In some countries, the payment is done through income tax deductions. Then you cannot run away from it," he said.

"It is worth taking a look at it. In the first place, we are going for equality for everyone," he added.

"This may be a preferable alternative to the government spending millions of ringgit building new universities, which may cost RM300 million-RM400 million a year each to run, not including capital expenditures and pensions for retired staff," he said.

He said if the government could use allocated funds to help students, then the public sector could absolve itself from long-term responsibilities provided the following conditions were met.

"There should be monitoring of the quality of education and that education must be provided at a certain level," Shamsul said.

On ranking and ratings of private and public educational institutions in Malaysia, he said clarifications and details as to implementation were needed.

"Ranking and rating of the institutions are only at the discussion level in the (Higher Education) Ministry," he said.

"There is no clear-cut thinking or any decision as to whether to do this ranking and grading jointly (for both the public and private educational institutions)," he added.

"The (Higher Education) Ministry has got to be clear as to what it wants to do. No ranking has been done and there are no goals and criteria on how this is to be done," he said.

"Is it among the universities only or for the private institutions? Most of the private institutions are just colleges and I don't think it is fair to rank colleges with universities on the same criteria because our functions are different."

The requirements are different for a university running doctoral programmes. And at the diploma level, the highest level of staff needed is only a bachelor's degree. "So, they are again comparing apples and durians because our needs, requirements and goals are different.

"If they want to talk about ranking or grading, then they must come out with a clear goal as to who will do that because ranking and grading abroad are not performed by the government but by an independent panel."

For the ranking or grading to be useful, it must be done every year, he added

Manpower will be required and the ranking panel must have the capability to do it.

On fears that lesser known smaller institutions may be marginalised in rankings, he said: "If you are in the business and in the Mapcu group, why are you afraid of being graded and ranked so long as the system is transparent, so long as the tips are clear and so long as it has been monitored continuously? As far as I am concerned, I see no problem."

If it is the goal to inform the public about the situation in an academic institution, then the public must be informed on a regular basis.

"That is important. This is where, to us, the government must be clear as to what they want to do, how they want to do it and who they have decided will do it."

International rankings for certain public universities dropped for the 2006 World University Rankings in The Times Higher Education Supplement.

"Some of the criteria are not suitable for us. As a public university, what is so significant about having a high percentage of foreign students and having a high percentage of foreign staff?

"Those were the two major criteria and if you remove them, the public universities would not rank so badly because the government policy on public spending is on locals."

On comparisons with branded US and UK universities, he said: "We are **wasting our time** comparing ourselves with Harvard, Oxford and Cambridge. They have the funding, mindset, background, history and I don't see them talking about excellence. Our job is just to produce good students and that's enough for the time being. Once you produce good students, excellence will come of its own."

(END)

UTM proud of making it to top 500 (2007)

NST - Nov 10, 2007

PUTRAJAYA: While other local public universities are lamenting their drop from the top 200 places in a recent world rankings survey, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) is celebrating its debut on the list of the best 500.

UTM was ranked 415 in the Times Higher Education Supplement-Quacquarelli Symonds (THES-QS) World University Rankings 2007 results released this week.

It also scored higher than other local universities in the recruiter review index which is rated by employers.

UTM has never been included in the rankings which began in 2004.

"We have breached the 500 barrier, below which universities are not included in the rankings," UTM vice-chancellor Tan Sri Prof Dr Mohd Zulkifli Mohd Ghazali said.

"It is boost for us, considering we have some `handicaps' .

"Now more people will know about the university and this will help us expand and improve."

In the recruiter review index, UTM scored 161.

"This shows that employers have high regard for our graduates," Zulkifli said.

On UTM's "handicaps", he said it was not a research university, unlike the other four.

This affected its rank in the citations index, which reflects how much of research papers produced by a university is cited or referred to by other scientists in science journals.

UTM, as a technology university, also does not teach other disciplines which were considered in the rankings.

"We are not strong in arts and humanities, life science, bio-medicine, natural science and social science, which also affects our ranking in the peer review component.

"Peer review involves a lot of networking and public relations to make your university known to others," he added.

Peer review makes up 40 per cent of the overall ranking, while other criteria include recruiter review, citations per faculty, international faculty ratio and student faculty ratio.

In the overall rankings, UM was highest at 246, USM at 307, UKM at 309 and UPM at 364. It is the first time no Malaysian university had made it to the top 200.

Zulkifli said there were currently 114 international contract professors and visiting professors in UTM.

It is in the midst of increasing the number of foreign faculties.

THES is a supplement in a London newspaper focusing on higher education sector issues. QS is an international career and education specialist.

(END)

Change of rules leads to drop in ranking of varsities (2007)

NST - Nov 10, 2007

KUALA LUMPUR: The change in methodology for the categories of peer review and citation per faculty caused both Universiti Malaya (UM) and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) to drop in their rankings in the the 2007 Times Higher Education Supplement-Quacquarelli Symonds (THES-QS) World University Rankings.

The peer review and citation per faculty comprised 40 per cent and 20 per cent of the overall score respectively.

The vice-chancellors of both universities, in separate press conferences yesterday, said unlike last year, universities were not able to conduct their own peer reviews, but this was not the case this year.

UM dropped from 192 last year to 246 this year. It was the only local university within the top 300.

UKM, meanwhile, dropped from 185 to 309.

Other universities also saw a dip in their ranking: Universiti Sains Malaysia from 277 to 307 and Universiti Putra Malaysia from 292 to 364.

UM vice-chancellor Datuk Rafiah Salim said the change had resulted in a drop in the rankings of many universities in the Asian region.

"That is why you see universities like the National University of Singapore (NUS) dropping in the ranking (it is now 33rd from last year's 19th), which is unreasonable.

"Because they use different parameters from one year to the next, we cannot know if we have improved," she added.

Now in its fourth year, the research is conducted by QS and the rankings were compiled by the Times Higher Education Supplement and published on Thursday.

Rafiah said while the university was pleased "to see that we are back at our previous position as the country's top university, we are naturally disappointed that we have dropped from our ranking of the previous year".

Rafiah also lamented the comparatively low operating budget that local universities have to work with to achieve their goals.

"We are competing to achieve world-class university status but just see how much investment is put into a world-class university," she said.

NUS, for instance, has an operating budget of S$1.2 billion (RM2.76 billion) while UM's is just under RM400 million.

UM has also began to implement its own Key Performance Indicators to enhance the quality of its teaching and research programmes.

UKM vice chancellor Datuk Dr Sharifah Hapsah Syed Hassan Shahabuddin said the drop in ranking was not reflective of the university's performance, profile or quality.

"Ranking is a tool for self-improvement, not an indicator of self-worth," she said at a press conference in UKM.

UKM has also started putting greater effort and initiatives to improve the university's performance, especially in terms of research quality and productivity.

The top 10 positions of the rankings were dominated by universities from the United Kingdom and the United States.

(END)

Not in the same league (2007)

NST - Nov 10, 2007

FOR the past two years, the vice-chancellors of Malaysian universities have been told to give "special attention" to the Times Higher Education Supplement world university rankings, according to Higher Education Minister Datuk Mustapa Mohamed. The reason is not hard to fathom - the slide down the prestigious list of the world's top 200 universities, which saw Universiti Malaya tumbling from 89 in 2004 to 169 in 2005 and to 192 last year, and Universiti Sains Malaysia see-sawing from 111 three years ago to 326 the following year and 277 last year. The only university which bucked the downward trend was Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, which moved up from 289 in 2005 to 185 last year. But now that UKM has joined the other two universities in sliding down the rankings, it would appear that what all that additional care seems to have done is to make them disappear completely from the top 200.

To be fair, however, like all rankings, the THES list tends to fluctuate quite widely from year to year. Malaysian universities are not the only institutions which make the cut one year and fail to make the grade the following year. This only goes to show that playing the ranking game is a hard act to follow. Nevertheless, it cannot mask the fact that Malaysian universities have been judged and have been found wanting on the global stage. Whatever the debate about ranking criteria and the validity of the list, it is closely watched. By any measure, we cannot but admit that there is a considerable distance between our universities and the world's premier institutions. Let's not even mention Harvard and Yale, or Oxford and Cambridge. We are not even able to hold a candle to the best in the region.

But it is not a shame to own up that we are not in the "same league", as the UM vice-chancellor has admitted, or to acknowledge that "we need to improve but we are not doing that fast enough", as the UKM vice-chancellor has conceded. Whether they like it or not, THES and other rankings are seen as measures of how universities perform and play a significant part in shaping local and international perceptions of university quality. However, while rankings are important, they should not become the main driver of a university's mission. The efforts to "improve" should not be reduced to an exercise at higher rankings but a determined pursuit of the many faces of academic excellence.
(END)

Abdullah concerned about varsity rankings (2007)

NSUNT - Nov 11, 2007

PUTRAJAYA: Cheap should not mean low quality. The prime minister is concerned that this will become the state of Malaysia's public universities if nothing is done to arrest their decline.

Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said the universities' poor rankings in the 2007 Times Higher Education Supplement (THES)-Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World University Rankings was contradictory to the government's efforts to make Malaysia an education hub.

For the first time since the rankings were introduced in 2004, not a single local university has made it to the top 200.

"I am very concerned about the rankings. We once had universities in the top 100 and top 200 but now we are receding.

"Now there is no Malaysian university in the top 200.

"We promote Malaysia as an education hub but if this keeps happening, people will doubt the quality of our education.

"They will be less inclined to study here.

"You may say that education here is cheap, but cheaper cannot mean lower quality," Abdullah said last night.

He was speaking during a question-and-answer session at the Cornell Club Dinner Talk Series, organised by The Oxford Cambridge Society, Malaysia. (see CORRECTION above)

Abdullah's speech dwelled on Malaysia's regional development corridors and he was asked how members of the club, which comprised alumni of Ivy-league universities in the United States and Britain, could help in the development of these projects and in building human capital.

Abdullah suggested that club members, many of whom were corporate and industry leaders, consider becoming adjunct professors at local universities.

Doing so would give universities a reality check on the needs of the industry and the changing market situation, besides overcoming the shortage of teaching staff.

In the recent THES-QS rankings, Universiti Malaya dropped from 192 last year to 246 this year.

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia dropped from 185 to 309; Universiti Sains Malaysia from 277 to 307 and Universiti Putra Malaysia from 292 to 364.

(END)

Varsity vows to do better, publish more (2007)

NST - Nov 15, 2007

GEORGE TOWN: Universiti Sains Malaysia plans to examine and rectify its weaknesses after its dismal showing in the THES-QS World University Rankings 2007.

Vice-Chancellor Datuk Dzulkifli Abdul Razak said the university will not make excuses for its 307th position in the rankings, but will strive to do better and enhance USM's reputation.

Dzulkifli is confident USM will improve because it was ranked at 86 for life sciences, 132 for engineering and 178 for social sciences last year.

He said this showed the university could be counted among the top universities.

"However, other factors could have pulled us down, so we will see where our weaknesses are and rectify them."

He said the main problem was the dearth of publications by its staff as this carried high marks in calculating the rankings.

"The number of publications is not very encouraging, but we hope to do better soon and move up slowly," Dzulkifli said yesterday after presenting the inaugural Vice-Chancellor Award to three post-graduate students.

The three were Iranian Aydin Behnam, Jordanian Monther Rateb Enayah and Malaysian Chan Choi Yee.

Aydin is doing a PhD in literature, Monther is working on information hiding techniques for digital images, and Chan is researching the recovery of oil and beta-carotene from palm oil milk effluent and its utilisation for value-added products.

The trio will each receive a RM3,000 monthly allowance, school and exam fees exemption and a one-time RM3,000 grant to present working papers outside the university.

The Times Higher Education Supplement-Quacquarelli Symonds survey ranks universities in five areas: Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities, Life Sciences and Biomedicine, and Engineering and Information Technology.

In the overall rankings, Universiti Malaya was the top Malaysian university at 246, followed by USM, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia at 309, and Universiti Putra Malaysia at 364.

(END)

Ratings are not everything (2007)

THERE has been much concern that none of our universities made it to the top 200 on the Times Higher Education Supplement-Quacquarelli Symonds (THES-QS) World University Rankings 2007.

As expected, the top positions are occupied by well-known schools, such as Harvard and Cambridge. We can presume that our universities will now scramble to get on the list to improve their ratings.

Perhaps it is relevant to ask: How important is it for our universities to be on the list?

If you are not in the first 200, does it mean you are a "bad" university? Can you be a "good" university and yet not be on the list?

The universities on the top of the list have simply met certain criteria. They are "good" if defined in terms of the criteria selected to measure them.

Another set of criteria would place them at different positions on the list. This is not to question the quality of the universities at the top of the list.

All I'm saying is that universities not on the list are not necessarily "bad".

There is no need to scramble to get on the list. There are many universities that are not in the top 200 but are providing excellent education.

In 1968, I was at the University of Pittsburgh with several other Malaysians, all graduates from University of Malaya (UM), doing our Master's or doctoral degrees. The University of Pittsburgh had hardly heard of UM and had doubts about our ability to successfully complete their programme.

In the first semester itself, we proved ourselves beyond doubt. I remember the dean remarking to me that UM must be a good university if it had produced such able graduates. His assessment was not based on any rating of UM on the THES-QS scale.

There are about 3,000 universities and colleges in the United States. They do not try to become Harvards. Each university and college tries to offer its unique brand of programmes and services.

Many American students enrol even in community colleges because they best meet their needs. There are small colleges in the US that have a better reputation than Harvard for certain degree programmes. Not all students in the US want a Harvard degree. Many search for institutions that can offer them what they want.

The strength of the American university system lies in its diversity and not on any system of hierarchy.

It is fine if you can afford to get into Harvard. But if you can't, you can also get a good education in other colleges or universities.

I'm not saying quality or accreditation is not important. The colleges and universities in the US have regional and professional accreditations that ensure certain quality standards are met. The point I'm making is that US universities strive to become good universities in their own right.

They build lasting institutions. They compete for students, funds and recognition. The competitive environment compels them to excel.

Harvard and Cambridge are good universities not because they are on the THES-QS list. Rather, they are on the list because they are good universities. They have built their reputation from the ground up. Malaysian universities have to build their credibility in a similar way by looking at factors that are key to academic excellence and reputation.

Let us not be obsessed with the ratings. Instead, let us concentrate on building first-rate universities. The ratings will take care of themselves.

I'm not against international benchmarking, but it can be a distraction. It can take us away from the more important task of building world-class universities that are distinctive and different, offering unique experiences to local and international students.

We become an educational hub when international students and researchers choose to come to our universities because we are good and unique. Our unique values could be innovative teaching, great research opportunities, cost-effective programmes, ethnic and cultural diversity, international faculty and students, global linkages with world-class institutions and an academic environment that is cosmopolitan, but Asian in culture and philosophy. These are the kinds of things we need to focus on if we want to build first-rate universities.

To build world-class universities, resources are important. If the National University of Singapore has RM2.8 billion to spend annually and UM has only RM400 million, this is a constraint. But resources alone will not build good universities. Good universities are built on a mission of academic excellence.

Our universities are constrained by conflicting priorities and agendas. They will become world-class only when they have space to grow in an environment of academic freedom and meritocracy.

DR I. LOURDESAMY

Pacific Institute of Technology

Petaling Jaya

(END)

Varsities will `rise', slowly but surely (2008)

NSUNT - Apr 13, 2008

JUST two weeks into his new job as the Higher Education Minister and Datuk Seri Mohamed Khaled Nordin is already getting into the serious business of raising the standards of the country's public universities. Khaled talks to JUNE RAMLI about improving university rankings, amending the law on universities, and the national education strategic plan.

Q: How do you plan to improve the standards of public universities which have dropped in recent years?

A: There are 30,000 universities in the world and some of our universities, such as Universiti Malaya, are still within the top 500 world rankings of the Times Higher Education Supplement (THES).

We are currently taking several steps through the National Higher Education Strategic Plan 2007-2010 to improve the ranking of our public universities.

They include increasing the number of publications published by the universities, increasing international collaboration, enhancing research and development and improving the student-lecturer ratio.

Improving public university rankings is not something that we can do overnight.

Q: Singapore has fared better in the ranking. How did they do it?

A: It is different with Singapore. Education there is for those who can afford it and because of that they can attract the best students in the world.

The small population there means they can take in more foreign students.

In Malaysia, the scenario is different. We use public universities to provide education to as many (Malaysian) students (from different economic backgrounds).

Q: What would be some of the challenges that you may face in implementing the National Higher Education Strategic Plan 2007-2010?

A: The challenge is for the plan to be accepted widely by all 22 public universities.

The ministry is also going to issue its first report card in the next few months on how the public universities have fared.

The report card will show how far they have achieved their targets and where they actually stand in terms of standards.

Q: Will the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 be superseded by a new law?

A: No. But the act will be amended. I plan to table the amendments in parliament by the end of this year.

We need to review the act in order to make the national strategic plan work.

Any provisions in the act that are seen to be stumbling blocks to the plan will be changed.

Q: Will universities be given more autonomy and will students be allowed to be active in politics?

A: We are in the process of providing more autonomy to universities but, with that, universities will also have to be more accountable.

Even allowing students to be involved in politics is being looked into.

It all depends on whether it helps a student to perform better academically.

I can assure you that all sections of the act are being looked into and (amendments will be done to) suit the times.

Q: The government has said that it hopes to make Malaysia a regional educational hub. What is the latest on this?

A: Efforts to attract foreign universities to set up branch campuses in Malaysia are continuing.

At present, there are four foreign university branch campuses.

The Al-Azhar University of Cairo has also shown interest in setting up a branch campus, but has yet to approach us formally.

We are also planning to have more tie-ups between our public universities and prestigious foreign universities.

Q: What about the proposed link with Cambridge University?

A: We have to take that proposal back to the Cabinet.

Cambridge wants an exclusive tie-up with us on R&D, but we want to be able to collaborate with other universities as well.

 (END)

Catching up with the Oxbridges (2008)

NST - Sep 5, 2008

UNIVERSITI Sains Malaysia will now serve as the benchmark for all public higher educational institutions in the country. This respected university, the second oldest with more than 25,000 students, has been selected for the accelerated programme for excellence (Apex), much to the surprise of those who had been confident to the point of certainty that the venerable Universiti Malaya would be the one chosen to be in that coveted position. But an apex university is about the future, and USM has been identified based on rigorous selection criteria as being the most able to make that leap forward to be on a par with the Harvards and Oxfords of the world. For being able to fulfil those stringent conditions alone, the university deserves resounding praise.

This is, however, not the time for USM to bask in the glow of triumph. Indeed, there is much to do, and very little time to do it. The university needs to surmount its first hurdle and be ranked in the top 200 in the world within a short five years. By 2020, USM has to be among the top 100. Certainly, fulfilling these expectations will require enormous effort from the university for it is now, according to the Times Higher Education Supplement-Quacquarelli Symonds world university rankings, only in 307th place. Malaysian universities have been trying their best to notch up the league table but the competition thus far has been too strong.

Gaining a more respectable ranking in an annual foreign publication should not, however, be USM's only goal as apex university. It needs to improve in all aspects, based on the guidelines laid down, to become the torch-bearer of academic excellence, so to speak. USM must not only be a university of ideals and ideas but the embodiment of character, ethos and civility, as befitting a university of its status. In this regard, it is imperative that all resources are devoted towards achieving Ivy League standards in terms of academics, management, teaching and research. The government's commitment to give USM more autonomy in finance, employment, management, student intake and study fees; greater transparency in the selection of vice-chancellors; and the allocation of 20 per cent of places for foreign students are all achievable with some determination and will go a long way towards helping the university achieve its targets. But more important than all that is the fact that the apex initiative will spur other universities to be similarly forward looking, to be fired by idealism and to push themselves to make that difference.

(END)

Vice-chancellors not too concerned (2008)

UNIVERSITI Kebangsaan Malaysia Vice-Chancellor Professor Datuk Dr Sharifah Hapsah Syed Hasan Shahabudin has been asked the same question this time of the year for the past five years.

It is the time of the year when universities get to know where they are ranked among the other universities in the Times Higher Education-QS World University Rankings 2008.

"How do I feel? There's no feeling here," she told the New Straits Times.

To her, the world ranking is just that; a ranking.

As Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Mohamed Khaled Nordin aptly puts it: "It's not the be all and end all of universities' evaluation."

"Many other universities the world over are very critical about the evaluation process.

"So while we won't stop any of our universities from being evaluated, we must remember that their criteria is not exhaustive," he added.

This year, the country's three universities - Universiti Malaya, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia and Universiti Putra Malaysia - are ranked higher than 2007 while the apex-status university, Universiti Sains Malaysia, saw a drop in its ranking.

The universities' vice-chancellors said "the ranking is not everything".

The VC club insisted that they had their own strategic and transformation plans, adding that they were consistently making progress.

Sharifah Hapsah said the university kept on improving, with its progress constantly monitored.

"We have been making steady progress, in terms of our research work, publications, citations ..." she said.

UPM Vice-Chancellor Professor Datuk Dr Nik Mustapha Raja Abdullah pointed out that the criteria used by the THE-QS changed from time to time.

As such, universities like UPM would not be able to score in some areas such as in terms of foreign student intake.

International students and international faculty represent five per cent each in the evaluation.

Nevertheless, he added that the ranking by discipline by THE-QS was very useful as it helped the university identify where it needed to improve.

"Our strongest area is life sciences, where we appeared in the 213th spot in the ranking by discipline for life sciences and biomedicine," he said, adding that the ranking was also an effective way for universities to promote themselves.

According to Nik Mustapha, UPM had set their target to get on the top 200 list by 2015.

UM acting Vice-Chancellor Professor Datuk Dr Muhamad Rasat Muhamad said while the university has its own transformation plan in place, "we may think we have done good, when that may not be the true picture. It is good sometimes to have our performance measured by others."

UM hopes to make it to the top 200 list by 2010.

USM deputy Vice-Chancellor (academic and international affairs) Professor Ahmad Shukri Mustapa Kamal insisted that he did not know the university's ranking but was told that it had "dropped a few places".

"It is always difficult to comment when one drops in rankings because if you start to question the rankings or justify the drop, the excuses will certainly not be acceptable.

"There has been some perception, however, among many universities not in the top 50 that the rankings have been rather volatile.

"I have always been from the school of thought that this ranking is useful but it is certainly not absolute," he said.

Ahmad Shukri added however that they would need to "scrutinise the data further to see what the reason for the drop is."

Despite claims that the criteria and evaluation process are flawed, the THE-QS ranking would still continue to influence those who are considering furthering their studies either at local or foreign universities.

(END

Local universities still on track (2008)

NSUNT - Oct 12, 2008

WHILE substantial investment may be needed to get into and stay at the Top 200 tier of the Times Higher Education (THE) - QS World University Rankings, Malaysia is still on track for such aspirations with the Accelerated Programme for Excellence (Apex) for universities.

British Council Education and Training Director Peter Clack said this recently in Kuala Lumpur.

"Universities and higher learning institutions need to invest a lot more to be there and stay there. It is now harder to forge ahead into the Top 200 but Malaysia's aspirations are on track with the foundation of the Apex universities and these things will bear fruit someday."

Although Malaysian public universities have improved their rankings with the exception of Universiti Sains Malaysia, none was listed in the Top 200 tier. Competition from universities of other countries was a factor.

"This year, universities from 33 countries are represented in the Top 200 but it was only 28 last year. It is a long-term investment of the future to be an international university and universities in the UK can't celebrate either as it is a constant process."

While high rankings for local universities are not going to happen overnight, Clack says: "Members of the committee for the Apex universities have demonstrated foresight and strategic thinking.

"They understand they have to be international universities working with partner universities in the UK, Canada and Australia where the link between finances, quality and resources do make a difference."

He adds: "Although it is not just about money, technology universities have managed to attract considerable funding from the private sector."

The THE - QS World University Rankings 2008 reflects the increasing profile of technology-based universities.

Many of the world's top tertiary institutions in this area such as the California Institute of Technology, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Swiss Federal Institute of Technology and Hong Kong University of Science and Technology improved their positions as demand by international employers for more technology-literate graduates has grown.

QS Managing Director and Top Universities Guide co-editor Nunzio Quacquarelli says: "Rankings are contentious and QS has always argued that they should be used with caution, understanding, that they cannot reflect all aspects of university excellence."

(END)

Not everything that counts can be counted (2008)

MY immediate reaction to the Times Higher Education (THE) - Quacquarelli Symonds World University Rankings 2008 is, if new variables are not introduced and the methodology has not been changed, then perhaps we can do a year-to-year comparison.

My belief is that it has not changed and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) has gone up by 59 steps in the ranking compared to last year.

Prior to 2007, changes were introduced to the methodology every year.

Further, according to Ben Souter, the data used for UKM prior to 2007, were also not verified. I believe my predecessor said that they were sourced from UKM website.

UKM has not done a detailed analysis of the results but early indication has shown that it is in the top 200 for Social Sciences and Life Sciences and Biomedicine.

Its ranking for Natural Sciences is just out of the range at 201.

So there is some progress but it is not enough. I am sure UKM staff will take the ranking of 250 as motivation to work even harder.

As with all ranking systems, we need to go beyond the superficiality of the unipolar measurement to unravel the complexity and fundamental elements that contribute to the ranking.

Without doubt the THE-QS ranking has much to do with the calibre and quality of research.

Peer review is about an assessment of research capability and ability to contribute to the progress of human knowledge, thought or understanding in the five disciplines (Engineering and Information Technology, Life Sciences and Biomedicine, Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities, and Natural Sciences).

Citations per faculty are again about the quality of publications. There are more citations when articles appear in high impact journals. Such articles can only originate from good research.

So, my philosophy is UKM should continue to do fundamental work as a research university.

The results will be reflected in the output of UKM research such as publications in high profile journals, consultancies and their socio-economic impacts, invitations to present papers at conferences, patents filed and products that are developed for commercialisation.

UKM's reputation will be gradually built through these activities and the outcomes will be evident from the grants, international partnerships, industry collaboration, top students and academic staff that it is able to attract to its research and educational programmes.

It will also be reflected in UKM graduates securing good starting or median salaries. There are no short-cuts. It's a long-term but satisfying process.

Souter has analysed the characteristics of the universities in the top 20 THE-QS ranking.

They are on the average 200 years old, have about 2,500 academic faculty, nearly 24,000 students, are able to attract and retain top personnel (high selectivity), have about US$1 billion (RM3.5 billion) endowment and US$2 billion annual budget.

We have a long way to go.

So we should reduce this annual "hype" bordering hysteria about THE-QS ranking that is seen mainly in this country.

I accept that it's a fairly acceptable reaction considering that we have been investing a lot in education since Merdeka and the new emphasis on quality - as in producing human capital with "first-class mentality".

THE-QS ranking can be seen as a yardstick perhaps to see how we measure up in the world community of higher education institutions.

It is a fair expectation so long as we don't go overboard and think that THE-QS ranking is the only measure of our universities' worth. That will be naivety to the extreme.

There are many ranking instruments in the world and they measure different things.

The THE-QS criteria have merit of course and the rationale behind their selection is also sound.

However we must always remember that not everything that is counted, counts and not everything that counts can be counted.

For example, in a country with many unmet demands, should we increase international students just for the sake of fulfilling the ranking criteria?

Should we open the doors to international faculty for the sake of numbers and yet not pay attention to merit?

While we use ranking to provide a global comparison we must remember that universities are multi-faceted organisations and the primary function is to serve the communities' needs.

How well they perform this function must be taken into account against the notional mission of remaining or becoming world-class.

* Professor Datuk Sharifah Hapsah Syed Hasan Shahabuddin is the Vice Chancellor of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

(END)

Play by the rules (2008)

NSUNT - Oct 19, 2008

EXPRESSING guarded optimism, University of Malaya (UM) Vice Chancellor Datuk Rafiah Salim is confident of the university making it to the Top 200 tier of the Times Higher Education (THE) - Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World University Rankings in the immediate future.

"I dare say that we will do it either in the next year or in 2010 because I have seen the improvements in terms of our research work."

And the results attest to that claim. Though not yet at the Top 200 tier, UM improved it rankings by 16 rungs from 246 to 230 in its overall position for the THE - QS World University Rankings 2008.

"For the Academic Survey Ranking which is the peer review, we are at 152. In the Employer Survey Ranking, UM is at 149 and all its faculties were ranked above 200."

Natural Sciences Faculty ranked at 197, Arts and Humanities at 190, Engineering and Information Technology at 179, Social Sciences at 137 and the Life Sciences & Biomedicine faculty was ranked at 127.

"We know what we have to improve and that's in the research papers and the citations.

"But last year we have had a 300 per cent increase both in research grants and in the number of research projects, which given a lead time of one to two years, would bear fruit.

"We also need to pay attention to those faculties that could pull the average ranking score up. But the best is to look at the citations of our publications.

"And within our control, we need to look at the Student Faculty Ratio currently at 14.1:1. The weighting for that is at 20 per cent."

An improved UM ranking is expected to extend its graduates a better employability chance and the opportunity to participate in research projects overseas.

In response to the increased number of Asian universities ranked in the Top 200 tier at the recent ratings, Rafiah says: "Do you know how much the Chinese invested in their universities? It is in the billions and they pick on four or five universities to pump in the money.

"They also bring in a lot of people from overseas similar to the practice at US universities."

Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Universiti Teknologi MARA, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia and UM get funding for research but USM gets more because of its Apex status.

"If the stategic plan is for one or two universities to get into the Top 200 quickly, it would be logical to support the universities nearest that tier - UM and UKM."

The THE-QS World University Rankings is about the only global world ranking for universities and Shanghai Jiao Tong's ranking is even harder to attain. So if a university aims to rank in the Top 200, it must be the THE-QS.

"Why are we talking about wanting to be in the Top 100 or 200 in the world? If you want to play a game that is world standard, then you have to play by its rules.

"If you want to play by your own rules, then don't talk about a world-class university but a `kampung class' university," states Rafiah.

At the THE-QS rankings, peer review is at a 40 per cent weighting. But 60 per cent of the weighting is still in the other criteria.

"Peer review is based on a university's reputation as an academic body. They look at your publications, teaching and staff."

(END)

Fast-track route to success (2008)

NSUNT - Nov 16, 2008

UNIVERSITY of Malaya's new Vice Chancellor Professor Datuk Ghauth Jasmon promises to reclaim the institution's glorious past, writes SUZIEANA UDA NAGU.

If Professor Datuk Ghauth Jasmon had a nickname, "fast-tracker" would be it.

In 1982 - just four short years after joining University of Malaya (UM) as a lecturer - Ghauth was chosen to head the Department of Electrical Engineering. He was only 30 then.

Ghauth, now 52, shone in his role as department head and showed great promise through his research, publication and consultancy work.

It was little surprise then that by his 36th birthday, Ghauth was made a professor and dean of the Engineering Faculty. He appeared to be the natural pick for the post of Deputy Vice Chancellor (Development) in 1995.

Ghauth left UM to oversee the setting up of Universiti Telekom in October 1996 and became its President two months later.

The university was registered as Multimedia University (MMU) in 1999.

By the time he left MMU last year to head Unity College International (UCI) as its Chief Executive Officer, it boasted two campuses - in Malacca and Cyberjaya - 20,000 students, 1,500 staff, seven faculties and students and teachers from 77 countries.

He was at UCI for 10 months.

As the recently appointed Vice Chancellor of UM, many hope that Ghauth would be the Malaysian oldest tertiary institution's answer to a "fast-track route" to reclaiming its glorious past.

UM's sterling reputation in the past has taken a battering from the public in recent years following lacklustre performance in international rankings.

In the Times Higher Education Supplement World University Rankings 2005, UM was ranked 169 compared to 89 in the previous year.

This year, UM - along with Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia and Universiti Putra Malaysia - are ranked higher than in 2007 but still far from its goal of being in the Top 200.

Many are counting on Ghauth - as they did on former VC Datuk Rafiah Salim and her 18-year experience in people management - "to usher in a period of intellectual development".

Ghauth has been appointed UM VC for a two-year term beginning Nov 8.

He replaces Rafiah - the first woman to head a public tertiary institution - whose contract had expired.

Ghauth, who reported for duty last Tuesday, is ready to roll up his sleeves and "get cracking".

"I am happy to be back in UM, although I was sad I could not be at UCI longer to help the college grow."

"But I see this as a great opportunity to contribute towards redeeming UM's glorious past. The experience of running a major private institution - building it from scratch - that I have accumulated in the last 12 years would be useful," says Ghauth.

His main concern is to place UM in the Top 200 world's best universities' list within the next three years.

"(After we have achieved this) we can work on bringing it into the Top 100 in the following three years," he says.

Ghauth will draw his plans for UM from his experience in MMU.

"I pushed MMU's academic staff to work on quality research and publish in journals with citation index. We did it in about three years, although initially there was a lot of unhappiness."

UM staff will be expected to do quality research and publish in Institute for Scientific Information-rated journals.

"At the same time, I will bring in new staff (with proven research track record) and also first-class graduates to pursue higher degrees in UM," he says, adding that he is proud that UM is still the first choice of Malaysia's top students.

International networking and connectivity in research are also Ghauth's priority.

"What is in store is a quantum leap in research activity and productivity."

"On top of this, I will strongly promote entrepreneurship by making it easier for staff or students to set up companies, especially if they have new innovative business ideas or patents with commercial value. I want UM denizens to be business-minded."

Ghauth will continue to support UM's internationalisation plans, especially those concerning its undergraduates and postgraduates.

"I'm thinking of new schemes that will help students develop leadership qualities and become global citizens. I will make sure that more students travel abroad and engage in international exchanges," he says.

With his extensive experience leading a private tertiary institution, Ghauth certainly has a lot of fresh ideas for UM.

Yet he realises that his vision for UM will only come true with the support of its staff and students.

"I must build trust and confidence in the UM community if I want everyone to work together as a team to put UM on the Top 200 list in the next three years."

Ghauth agrees that everyone's hard work and contribution is crucial to achieving this goal. No one can be a bystander.

To fast track its way to success, the speed of the UM `coach' "will need to be increased severalfold in the next few years".

"Everyone will be made to understand that we have everything to gain if we meet the target and a lot to lose if we don't," says Ghauth.

Ghauth's career

BORN in Batu Pahat, Johor on Nov 1, 1956, University of Malaya's new Vice Chancellor Professor Datuk Ghauth Jasmon graduated from United Kingdom's University of London in Electrical Engineering with a first-class honours Bachelor's degree in 1979.

He began his teaching career at UM's Department of Electrical Engineering in 1982.

Four years later - at the age of 30 - Ghauth headed the department after completing his doctorate in Power System Engineering from the University of London.

Based on his research, publication and consultancy work, Ghauth was made a professor and dean of the Engineering Faculty at the age of 36.

During this period, Ghauth introduced Built Environment programmes at the faculty such as degrees in Architecture, Land and Quantity Surveying. He was also responsible for introducing new engineering courses such as in Materials, Telecommunication, Manufacturing and Environmental Engineering.

As an academic, Ghauth had contributed extensively in research and the engineering profession.

He researched in the areas of Power Systems Analysis, Network Analysis, Voltage Stability, System Security and Neural Networks Application.

He has published in 30 international journal papers, 45 conference/seminars and other publications. Apart from being active in the Institution of Electrical Engineers (IEE UK) and Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEE

USA), he was also formerly a Secretary General and Vice-President of the Association for Engineering Education in Southeast Asia and the Pacific.

Ghauth is currently a fellow of the IEE UK, the Institution of Engineers Australia and the Eisenhower Fellowships as well as the Senior Member of the IEE USA.

In 1995, Ghauth was promoted to Deputy VC (Development) where he oversaw the construction and renovation of physical infrastructures for various faculties and centres.

Ghauth was later invited by Telekom Malaysia to set up Universiti Telekom in October 1996 and became its President two months later. The university was registered as Multimedia University in 1999.

Ghauth left MMU in January to take up the challenge of transforming Unity College International into "a high-tech, world-class institution" through his role as the Chief Executive Officer.

He was with Unity College International for 10 months and returned to UM last Tuesday.

(END)

Much to be learnt from university rankings (2008)

SINCE it was first published in 2004, the Times Higher Education Supplement (THES) Ranking of World Universities has never failed to rouse heated debate here. This year, eyebrows were raised when the university selected for the Accelerated Programme for Excellence (Apex) - Universiti Sains Malaysia - did not rise in the ranking while the other three research universities (RUs) did.

Universiti Malaya not only improved but maintained its lead position at 230. Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, notably, moved up 59 places to 250.

We should not be surprised that the THES ranking is associated with Apex. Ranking is implied in the National Higher Education Strategic as well as Action Plans, where the targets are two universities in the top 100 by 2015, three by 2020 and two in the top 50 beyond 2020.

The ensuing discussion in Parliament and the media brought into sharp focus the need to raise awareness and understanding about ranking, Apex, research universities and even quality assurance as well as the relationships among them.

Apex is about selecting a university with the most potential to transform and manage change. Under Apex, the selected university will be provided appropriate resources, autonomy and even a legal framework for transformation into a leading world research university. The selection committee never claimed that USM was already Apex, but was convinced that its performance could match the world's leading research universities once changes are instituted.

The kind of changes involved will be transformational, approximating the "education revolution" called for by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi. To quote its vice-chancellor, USM is the "guinea pig" for all the other RUs.

However, transformation is not only pertinent to USM but to all RUs and the higher education sector itself. Apex and RUs are inextricably linked. The role of USM will be to help delineate the ideas, processes, procedures, conditions, systems and even the legal framework for transforming higher education for the new knowledge economy and society.

Universities, in particular RUs, are the key institutions for nurturing intellectual leadership and intangible capital such as intellectual property, networks, brands and talent. They are also vehicles for the intelligent transfer of the knowledge generated from research to utilisation, through solid networking.

It is, therefore, critical that the benefits such as autonomy and accountability measures that accrue to USM during the transformation process are extended to the other RUs.

The 2008 THES ranking is partial testimony to the seriousness with which RUs pursue their roles. There must be something remarkable about their transformation plans, and the effectiveness with which these are executed, for them to rise in the rankings. With the benefits of Apex extended quickly, we will get not only good but highly differentiated RUs. This is because transformation plans are unique to each university, and differentiation is highly desirable.

By 2015, we might even surpass the ministry's expectations by having three or more universities in the top 100.

There is much we can learn from ranking to enhance institutional quality. UKM was invited to present how this is done at the first Asem (Asia-Europe Meeting) Rector's Conference in Berlin from Oct 27 to 29. But THES ranking should not be used solely as an international benchmark for comparing the strengths of institutions.

In UKM, we understand that ranking is only a snapshot of an institution's position relative to others. Changes in ranking depend on the performance of other institutions as well. The criteria used do not provide a complete picture of a university's worth, and some might even reflect poor choice proxies of the qualities identified.

THES ranking does indicate research and teaching quality, through measures such as peer assessment, citations per faculty and faculty-student ratio. We use these as input, alongside other data monitoring the performance of a university's core functions of teaching, research and service.

Ranking is, therefore, used in periodic self-assessment to identify the strengths, gaps, areas of concern and opportunities in all core functions, benchmarking, closing the gaps and enhancing quality. Self-assessment, which is almost always followed by external peer assessment, is quality assurance.

We should not indulge in knee-jerk reactions such as hurriedly recruiting more international students and faculty because quality cannot be sacrificed and there are still unmet local demands. Such reactions are not only shortsighted and counterproductive for institutional capacity-building, they may jeopardise the nurturing of a true academic culture and endanger the university's mission.

UKM's goal is to be among the world's leading universities by 2018. We will rise to the challenges of globalisation and multiculturalism while reinforcing our role as a national university in promoting nation-building, unity, the national language and national identity.

To achieve this, a comprehensive transformation plan is formulated to address ranking in a rational and sustainable way.

The metaphor for the UKM plan is that of a soaring bird, with the backbone representing our core functions of research, education and service, supported by resources for effective delivery. The wings represent the driver projects designed to help us leap forward. The right wing represents the projects that promote our quintessential role as a national university. The left wing are projects to nurture a strong research culture and internationalisation that will propel us into the global community of leading universities by 2018.

Actions include focusing on niche areas and promoting multidisciplinary research, monitoring and providing incentives for a citation leap, developing centres of research excellence, global language proficiency, benchmarking and international outreach for students and faculty.

With comprehensive transformation plans and benefiting from the experience of USM, all RUs should move up in the rankings. Next year, there will be another round of discussions on the THES rankings. By then, we should be more enlightened.

* The writer is vice-chancellor of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

(END)

University's success hailed (2009)

NST - Oct 9, 2009

KUALA LUMPUR: Universiti Malaya came in for praise from Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin yesterday for improving its placing on the Times Higher Education-QS World University ranking for the second year running.

The deputy prime minister hoped UM would carry the flag for Malaysia on the international scene by continuing with the upward trend.

"It is something we are all proud off and the universiti should strive to carry on with the good work," he said after opening the International Exposition of research and Inventions of Institutions of Higher Learning 2009.

Muhyiddin was commenting on a report published by UK's Times Higher Education magazine yesterday which placed UM in the ranks of the top 200 universities worldwide.

It rose from 230th placing last year to 180th placing this year, the second year of improvement after a three-year losing streak that saw it plunging from 89th placing in 2004 to 246th in 2007.

Last year, it climbed 16 spots to be placed 230th.

First placing has been held for six years running by Harvard University in the United States.

Muhyiddin told university officials that the ranking did not not remain static and could go up or down.

"I believe the university will want its ranking to remain in the upper levels and will work harder to move even higher."

He said that among the factors that leaned in the university's favour were its focus on research and development.

Meanwhile, Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Khaled Nordin said UM's international ranking would not affect Universiti Sains Malaysia as the only apex university in the country.

"We knew UM can be on its own without any special programme. But USM was chosen to help it to be on a higher level," he said.

Apex university status, involving an accelerated programme for excellence, is given to Malaysian universities with potential to be world class.

Universities with such status would receive more assistance to improve quality of education to be on par with the best in the world.

He said USM would remain an apex university and the results of efforts to strengthen it would only be seen in 2011.

"We cannot expect immediate results. They need time to increase citations to climb the world ladder, too."

He said UM had worked on its weaknesses in certain areas to improve its world ranking.

He said other public universities could also score better if the government increased funding for research and development (R&D).

"In the West, they spend a lot on R&D. There are new developments and this increases their citations.

"But here, we are spreading our resources equally among all public universities. If we want to be in the top 100 worldwide, then we would have to spend all our money on one university and forget about the rest."

He said this was not possible as the government wanted all public universities in Malaysia to be equally good.

He cited a lack of funding as one of the reasons slowing down improvement in the international ranking of other public universities.

Under the 9th Malaysia Plan, RM1.8 billion was allocated to public universities with only RM250 million set aside in the Fundamental Research Grant Scheme. "To be competitive, we need to spend more on R&D. This will increase our rankings," he added. (END)

Malaysia back in top 200 (2009)

NSUNT - Oct 11, 2009

UNIVERSITY of Malaya has managed to improve its position in the Times Higher Education-QS World University Rankings this year, report SUZIEANA UDA NAGU and NURJEHAN MOHAMED.

Harvard University, United States continues to reign supreme in the global higher education scene by topping the Times Higher Education-QS (THE-QS) World University Rankings this year.

It is followed by University of Cambridge, United Kingdom; Yale University, US; University College London, UK; University of Oxford, UK; Imperial College, UK; University of Chicago, US; Princeton University, US; Massachusetts Institute of Technology, US; and California Institute of Technology, US.

In Malaysia, University of Malaya (UM) returns to the world's top 200 after a two-year absence - climbing 50 spots from last year's 230th to this year's 180th.

It is followed by Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, which improved its ranking of 356th last year to 320th this year.

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) and Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), however, fell between one and 41 spots from last year.

UKM was at 250th spot and is now at 291st; USM fell from 313th to 314th; whereas UPM went from 320th to 345th.

The number of Asian universities in the top 100 has increased from 14 to 16 institutions.

The University of Tokyo, Japan at the 22nd spot, is the highest ranked Asian university, ahead of University of Hong Kong at 24th spot.

Other top ranking universities include Kyoto University, Japan (25th) and National University of Singapore (30th).

QS managing director Nunzio Quacquarelli says governments and universities around the world are investing to increase their profile on the international stage, as higher education becomes an increasingly global industry.

"Today the rankings are used by employers identifying from where to recruit, academics choosing where to work and with whom to form partnerships, and by parents and students looking to make a sound education decision.

"Although rankings are contentious, the THE-QS World University Rankings are meeting vital needs of these various stakeholders," he says.

UM vice chancellor Professor Datuk Dr Ghauth Jasmon told the New Straits Times that getting back into the top 200 and subsequently the top 100 - something it enjoyed in 2004 when it claimed the 89th spot - in the next five years required, among others, "hiring lecturers whose works are cited in the Institute of Scientific Information (ISI) journal.

"That means they have to do quality research as only then will they be published. Once their works are published and cited in the ISI journal, we will get a lot of citations. It will help improve our ratings."

Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin praised UM for its good work whereas Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Khaled Nordin said that UM had worked on its weaknesses to better its world ranking.

At a meeting with some 150 UM alumni in January, Ghauth highlighted the areas in which UM must improve on - quality of research and publications; academic staff and students; programmes and delivery; international collaboration and networking; and entrepreneurship development.

UM, which currently has 300 foreign lecturers, will continue to hire highly qualified lecturers from the US, UK and Australia.

It will also work on attracting more international postgraduate students. Currently, there are 1,000 students from the Middle East, India, China, Indonesia and Sudan completing their master's degree at the university.

Now in its sixth edition, the THE-QS World University Rankings received a record level of responses from the academic community and employers this year, with results suggesting the dominance of traditionally elite universities is increasingly being challenged.

In total 9,386 academics (compared to 6,354 in 2008 - an increase of 47 per cent) and 3,281 employers (compared to 2,339 last year - an increase of 40 per cent) responded to the surveys reflecting the growing influence and importance of the rankings.

(END)

USM can do without it (2009)

NST - Oct 15, 2009

THE recent release of the Times Higher Education-QS university rankings has got everyone's attention again. What is obvious are the comments from certain quarters regarding Universiti Sains Malaysia's slight drop (from 313 to 314) and the sniping regarding its Apex status obtained last year.

I believe that any discourse attempting to relate the THES ranking to the Apex status is intellectually anathema and borne out of frustration and, to a degree, misplaced envy.

At USM, we are part of the fraternity that has evolved a blueprint that will be engaging, relevant and focused on the uplifting of the livelihood and welfare of Malaysia's less privileged and, hopefully, the world's bottom billions.

The THES ranking, flawed in mechanics and methodology, does nothing to dissuade USM's academic populace from striving harder in their intellectual pursuits.

It is annoying that this matter resurfaces annually, but will not detract us from focusing on the real issues at hand.

Does it not bother the public that littered among the top 10 universities were people that precipitated the current global financial crisis?

Should we revisit our noble mission just so to fit the THES survey? What if we ignore the survey altogether next year and fall out of the THES radar? Does that mean that we have been "relegated" to a nothing university?

Put in their simplistic yet proper context, the THES survey has been likened to getting the famous All Blacks Rugby team to participate in the Fifa World Cup or for Usain Bolt to compete in the 10,000 metres - both are exercises in futility and the sooner this point is accepted, the better it will be for all and sundry.

If being relevant to the cause, being committed to our mission while acknowledging our shortcomings and being honest in our intellectual undertakings all translate into having to compromise our "league position", so be it.

It is important to realise the value of working to our strengths and towards meeting our ideals and hopes. Within the melange of courses being offered and the plethora of people-centric studies being conducted, USM is unique in its own way, a university with a conscience.

No number or rank can ever diminish this fact.

AZLAN R. NURUDDIN

School of Housing, Building & Planning USM, Penang

(END)

League tables exposed (2010)

NSUNT - Apr 11, 2010

WHEN the criteria for "world-class" universities was proposed for Malaysian institutions, I recalled cautioning against the use of ranking.

And the rankings have now come back to haunt us!

From past experiences, we are acutely aware that such an exercise is far from perfect or desirable from an academic point of view. The Asiaweek ranking folded with the magazine. And the much touted The Times Higher Education Supplement (THES)-QS World University Rankings are forced down our throats!

So some six years after the Malaysian proposal, at the recent Going Global 4 Conference organised by the British Council in London, I felt somewhat vindicated after attending an illuminating session on League Tables: Flawed Ranking or Key Benchmarks?

The Times Higher Education deputy editor Phil Baty (also The Times Higher Education World University Rankings editor) and United Kingdom's Nottingham University Professor Rebecca Hughes were among the speakers.

Baty confessed to "distancing" himself from the THES-QS rankings.

He candidly spoke about the "flaws and imperfections" in the "old" THES-QS ranking system. He presented convincing data on " some of the tricks and games played to manipulate results". While this is not entirely unknown, hearing it from the horse's mouth is another matter altogether. Baty says: "QS failed to take into account dramatically different citation volumes between disciplines."

Ditto the hyped up "internationalisation" criterion. Baty questioned the relevance of the number of international students or staff as indicators of quality.

Baty also questioned "Peer review" which carries a 40 per cent weight. Some reviewers are not the best to make judgment, never mind their subjectivity. For those who insist that "ranking" is here to stay, Hughes gives a different viewpoint.

She argued that "academic communities already have their own systems for international evaluation of research (most notably peer review), and the aspect of collaborations which affects most students - teaching and learning - is less well served by the current ranking systems".

She brought up much neglected dimensions by asking questions such as: "How feasible are culturally neutral definitions of teaching quality?"

Unless properly calibrated, rankings can go against the trend to internationalise.

While there are pros and cons, striking a fine and meaningful balance seems difficult especially when ranking is so overwhelmingly driven by commercial interest!

There have been efforts to do a much more in-depth comparison using a broad based information capture without sacrificing "the missions and autonomy of higher education institutions in the subsequent effort to improve quality". It should be good for all cultures and languages, and the diversity of higher education institutions.

Such is the platform planned by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes project aimed at international teaching collaboration which has been undervalued by the other ranking systems.

It emphasises the multi-dimensional nature of quality in tertiary education, instead of a one-size-fits-all model!

Another ranking in the offing is the Alternative University Appraisal System pioneered by a group of Asian-based universities, including Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), which takes a similar multi-dimensional approach.

It is now at a pilot stage and is expected to be launched next year in the hope of providing a much needed mindset shift to bring back universities into the realms of serious scholarship rather than a preoccupation with numbers.

* The writer is vice-chancellor of USM

Looking beyond university rankings (2010)

NST - May 18, 2010

Rankings are everywhere. They are used to gauge the performance and competitiveness of everything from universities to businesses. Local institutions of higher learning can draw positive lessons from these yearly lists, writes SHARIFAH HAPSAH SHAHABUDIN

THE 2010 QS Asian University Ranking (AUR), released on May 13, was reported in the back pages of only one mainstream newspaper. Was this a case of media unawareness, or an indication that university rankings do not deserve the front-page headlines they use to command in the past?

Ever since the World University Ranking (WUR) was published by the Times Higher Education Supplement (THES) and QS (education consultants Quacquarelli Symonds) in 2004, the academic world here and internationally has always questioned its methodology.

This was particularly so when the jubilation of one local university for being in the top 100 was rudely shattered when it transpired that its Chinese and Indian Malaysian students were classified as "international".

When the mistake was rectified the following year, the ranking dropped dramatically. There was public uproar, with some politicians calling for a royal commission of inquiry. But such a reaction should be expected from a public that has been primed to accept that a single number can measure the true worth of a university.

With the recent revelation of the lack of transparency and research rigour of peer and employer reviews, (which account for 50 per cent of the overall ranking score) by none other than the deputy editor of the Times Higher Education Magazine (THEM), formerly known as THES, we would be wise not to read too much into these rankings.

After publicly criticising THES-QS WUR, THEM has dissociated itself from THES and QS. This does not signal a demise of WUR, however, because THEM is also embarking on the ranking business. THEM has partnered Thomson Reuters, which will collect and analyse all the data for a new WUR in 2010.

We have to accept rankings as a part of life. They are everywhere, rating everything from business competitiveness to innovation and corruption. Very often, they are linked to commercial interests.

Even in education, we can expect more ranking systems. Malaysia's Setara is an example of a national ranking system, also seen in the Netherlands, Russia and France. The European Commission and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development are expected to join the fray.

We must realise that rankings are not a perfect measure of a university's actual worth, particularly when it cannot respond to the needs of individual stakeholders including students, parents, employers, potential partners and so on.

In acknowledging these shortcomings, QS is developing an online system that will allow enquirers to select their own criteria and weightings.

At best, rankings are "works in progress" with yearly adjustments to offset methodological pitfalls, which also make year-on-year comparisons inappropriate.

One must also guard against the adverse impacts of ranking. It is known that some institutions indiscriminately and rapidly recruit international faculty and students to boost the scores on "internationalisation". This is playing the "ranking game", which is detrimental to local talent.

Despite the flaws, there are valuable lessons that can be drawn from rankings, such as the quantitative data on citation ratios. All five Malaysian universities fare extremely poorly compared with our neighbours such as Singapore's National University of Singapore and Nanyang Technological University and Thailand's Mahidol.

One reason could be the rapid expansion of higher education since 1996, which has been a drain on academic resources at the expense of building a research culture. Perhaps our expectations of public universities are also inordinately high. The top 20 universities in WUR are on average 200 years old (some are 17th and 18th century institutions), have about 2,500 academic faculty, are able to attract and retain top personnel, and have billion-dollar endowments and annual budgets.

Establishing Malaysian research universities in 2006 was wise. All four have introduced strategies to nurture a research culture. It will take a few years to show significant results, but movement in that direction is evident in this year's AUR.

Improved scores on the peer-review survey depend on the reputations of the academics in the five subject areas covered in WUR. The university can facilitate, but everyone has to focus on their academic work, with those senior mentoring those junior.

As ranking methods become more sophisticated, there is an effort towards deeper contextual evaluation. This takes into account not only the work to produce world leaders, research output and science that is expected of a "world class" university, but also the work universities do at a national level as well as in community engagement.

The genuine test of a university's mettle is how it continuously anticipates and leads change through innovation that bring social and financial returns to itself, the nation and the region. All this is missing in rankings.

Such omissions should not diminish our appreciation of these activities, however. We need to devise better indicators and methods for assessing the impact on a region's business innovation, sociocultural promotion, and environmental development.

The writer is vice-chancellor of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

The debate continues (2010)

NSUNT - May 23, 2010

LOCAL academicians are at odds over rankings - whether revising methodology, restricting the activity to Asian universities or even having the exercise at all, writes KOH SOO LING.

LOVE it or hate it, university rankings are here to stay. They are a benchmark or a measurement of the quality of a university's policies, products, programmes or strategies and their comparison with standard or similar measurements of the best-in-class universities. This exercise will help universities determine what improvements are needed.

This is how Taylor's University College vice chancellor Professor Datuk Hassan Said views the yearly Times Higher Education World University Rankings.

Hassan says: "We welcome it so we can see our weaknesses and strengths, so that we can continually enhance our performance. Of course, it is never easy to agree with the criteria of evaluation as there is no perfect global barometer.

"Much of the methodology is based on perceptions. But then again, there must be reasons why our universities are perceived as such. We must keep an open mind and improve ourselves."

Having said that, Hassan welcomes the new and improved rankings methodology that is being developed to give a more realistic picture of international higher education.

One of the foremost changes is that instead of carrying out the survey in only English and Spanish, the new poll was released in seven languages.

This allows a better representation of participants, although some may argue that it should not be restricted to only seven languages. The fact that only selected participants will be permitted to take part in the poll suggests that only those with deep knowledge about higher education would render informed opinions.

"Invited participants should come from various sectors: people in the higher education business as well as the stakeholders. Rankings must champion quality. It would be ludicrous to have a No. 1 university that has no quality. Research products are easier to rate as compared to the quality of teaching, which is difficult to measure.

"We have to take into account lecturer competencies, university support system, staff-student ratio and the product outcome - the graduate himself, whether he is gainfully employed," he adds.

One of the grouses of the ranking system is the percentage of international students in a university. Some question whether numbers reflect quality.

To address this, Hassan says the solution lies in being selective when admitting foreign students. They should meet acceptable standards and should not only come from one or two countries.

However, even when the rankings methodology is open to a complete review, Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) vice chancellor Professor Tan Sri Dzulkifli Abdul Razak feels that this change only confirms the short-sightedness of the previous ranking exercise based on a myopic world view that assumes a one-size-fits-all mindset of only one "best".

"Rankings, as they are positioned today, are about the past, the dysfunctional past, that we have to benchmark against. The so-called best practices are about yesterday that would preserve the status quo predicated on prior experiences. It allows for little, if at all, transformational change. This is breaking away from the model of yesteryear. USM, especially under the APEX initiative, is about challenging the past models, assumptions and best practices. The rankings exercise is a huge barrier to such an endeavour," he says.

Besides the world university rankings, there is the QS Asian Rankings as well.

None of the Malaysian universities features in the top 10 positions of the 2010 QS Asian University Rankings as compiled by QS Quacquarelli Symonds.

Hassan thinks the act of ranking being broken down into regions highlights the micro level. Although we can see more clearly where we stand, he feels that the criteria should reflect the climate and policies of the Asian region.

"While perception ranks high in the poll, a welcome indicator would be how the university has impacted the community at large. This is especially so in developing countries where social restructuring is still very much the order of the day," he says.

The contention is that international ranking exercises focus on key performance indicators that are measurable. However, there are performance indicators that are difficult to measure, for example, intangible benefits to the community such as regional development, poverty alleviation, educational equity and the reduction of gender and political discrimination.

As such, disadvantaged peripheral tertiary institutions, which also have a role to play, are left out.

Indeed, if USM's current pilot studies in partner universities in Malaysia, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and the Philippines proved to be successful, a new way of assessing the value of universities in developing countries would certainly be more relevant.

This project - backed by the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation in Bangkok and led by Professor Morshidi Sirat from the National Higher Education Research Institute at USM - will hopefully be concluded by year end.

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The business of rankings (2010)

NSUNT - August 22, 2010

THE rankings game is here again. This time it involves two types of rankings that allow us to understand what the game is all about from different perspectives.

Firstly, it is hardly surprising that United States' Harvard University once again - for the eighth consecutive year - topped a recent world universities rankings published by Shanghai Jaiotong University.

The results of the rankings are sharply criticised in Europe as the list is dominated by American institutions with the University of California, Berkeley being second, followed by Stanford University.

It is focused almost entirely on a university's scientific research achievements and does not cover the humanities. It is allegedly not an accurate reflection of an institution's overall "performance" - a term that also created controversy over the assessment of a university! More about that later.

The criteria include the numbers of the following: Nobel prizes and Fields medals won by faculty members and alumni, highly cited researchers on staff and articles by faculty published in Nature and Science journals.

Schools in the United States reportedly accounted for 54 per cent of the top 100 universities listed.

And not surprisingly, "in Europe ... officials say the criteria are biased against European schools". But then who says rankings are free from prejudices?

The rankings by Shanghai Jaiotong University was first initiated in 2002 with the aim "to benchmark the performance of Chinese universities, amid efforts by Beijing to create a set of world-class research institutions", which is almost always based on the American norms and systems.

This is reflected in the result where the highest ranked non-US institutions are relegated to lower positions in the ranking.

Britain's Cambridge and Oxford Universities are in fifth and 10th places respectively this year.

The European continent's top-rated institute was Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich, at 23rd, while Pierre and Marie Curie University in Paris was the highest ranked French school in 39th position. University of Tokyo, in the 20th place, was the best rated in the Asia-Pacific. The top Chinese schools were not among the 100 best globally.

Secondly, a report released almost at the same time by Forbes magazine and the Center for College Affordability and Productivity (CCAP) in Washington DC in the US clearly demonstrated how rankings can be a variant of one another.

In this case, Williams College was named the No. 1 tertiary institution in the US for 2010.

The Massachusetts liberal arts private college with about 2,000 students "surpassed top Ivy League schools such as Princeton University, Harvard and Yale University, which came in second, eighth and 10th respectively on the Forbes list.

Amherst College, another small liberal arts school, ranked third, while Massachusetts Institute of Technology placed fifth.

The United States Military Academy, which ranked No. 1 last year, dropped to fourth place this year.

The rankings was compiled from both qualitative and quantitative information acquired from college students based on criteria that "Forbes and the CCAP considered such as student satisfaction, postgraduate success, student debt, four-year graduation rate and how many students and faculty win prestigious awards such as Rhodes Scholarships or Nobel Prizes".

Sites such as RateMyProfessors.com and MyPlan.com to understand the level of contentment students felt about their colleges also contributed to the ranking.

Salary information from Payscale.com was used to gauge the success of alumni.

Rankings are not a linear measure of the "quality" of education as they are made out.

This is further supported by the 2009 report of the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education as an assignment by the government to survey and analyse the issues related to ranking.

It noted that "weighted rankings of entire higher education institutions are particularly problematic".

Quite simply, they provide too little information. They also assume that all the potential target groups have a common and very precise definition of quality -- a description which may be seriously questioned in terms of indicators, methods, reliability and, particularly, relevance.

"An awareness that simplification of information also involves a loss of information is required, and that information simplified to such an extent - called for in weighted ranking lists - is hardly information worth the name, in the context of the quality of higher education."

The once highly regarded The Times Higher Education Supplement - Quacquarelli Symonds World University Rankings, which is now defunct, is a perfect illustration of an unwholesome dimension to rankings.

And as they say in business, caveat emptor (let the buyer beware). The business of ranking is no different!

* The writer is vice chancellor of Universiti Sains Malaysia

Universities and their irrelevant rankings (2010)

NST - Aug 27, 2010

LOVE them or loathe them, rankings of universities across countries and regions are here to stay.

They began with the release of the Shanghai Jiao Tong University's Academic Ranking of World Universities in 2003, followed the next year by the famous (or infamous) Times Higher Education Supplement World University Rankings.

These annual products are now referred to by aspiring students, by academics and researchers looking for greener pastures, and by employers keen to recruit the best and brightest candidates. Collaboration among universities can often be influenced by their respective ranks.

The recent elevation of five Malaysian universities as research universities can be seen as a form of ranking.

Increasingly, scientific research and experimentation have become the major focus of universities, resulting in an explosion of scientific knowledge and technological development of immense human benefit.

Sadly, advances in the North do not necessarily advance the interests of the South. In 2003, the then United Nations secretary-general Kofi Annan lamented: "95 per cent of the new science in the world is created in the countries comprising only one-fifth of the world's population. And much of that science... neglects the problems that afflict most of the world's people."

This ties in directly to the biggest flaw of university rankings. They are based very much on research output rather than teaching or community service, for example. Additional criteria would better reflect the relevance of a 21st century university.

Surely there is scope - perhaps in the form of Key Intangible Performance (KIP) indicators - to credit university academics who get involved in the larger community at home or abroad. For instance, academics who enjoin controversial public debates like global warming, genetically modified organisms, nuclear energy and stem cell cloning.

I recall several years ago the disappointed reaction of university vice-chancellors in our part of the world, Malaysia in particular, to a global ranking of universities that failed to include even one local university in the top 100.

My vice-chancellor friends should not despair. I was at a United Nations meeting at the time in the company of many world academic leaders who hardly noticed the announcement.

They were more concerned about the relevance of today's universities' agenda to the plight of the world's have-nots - specifically, the contributions of universities worldwide towards the Millennium Development Goals. (The MDGs include eradication of extreme poverty and hunger; achieving universal primary education; promoting gender equality and empowering women; reducing child mortality rates; combating HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases; ensuring environmental sustainability, and developing a global partnership for development.)

The past 50 years have been characterised by unprecedented economic growth; increased life expectancy and increased agricultural production. However, inequality has widened: 1.2 billion people - nearly one in four on Earth - live on less than US$1 (RM3) per day; one billion people lack access to clean water; more than two billion people lack access to sanitation; 1.3 billion are breathing air deemed unacceptable by the World Health Organisation, and 800 million people are food insecure.

The UN estimates that one-third of the world is well fed, one-third under-fed, and one-third starving. Every 3.6 seconds someone dies of hunger.

To satisfy the world's sanitation and food requirements would cost only US$13 billion (RM45 billion) - what the people of the United States and the European Union spend on perfume each year.

Have our universities faced up to the "human challenge" confronting the global community? Sadly not. We are mired in the game of trying to become the equals of the great universities of Europe, North America and Japan.

Seeking the collaboration and assistance of such organisations should be encouraged. Publishing in high-impact journals such as Science or Nature is a reasonable goal as our universities evolve in the global academic community.

For too long, however, we have been mesmerised by the "publish or perish" paradigm, as captured in the mono-dimensional global university rankings, even though the "human challenge" we face is multi-dimensional.

The mission of our universities needs to include meeting the socioeconomic challenges faced by the world's bottom billions.

Paradoxically, of late such a reorientation of focus has been taken up by universities such as the UK's Cambridge and Imperial College London, and by America's Harvard, MIT and Princeton.

Today, Malaysia's economic well-being is at a crossroad. As the prime minister put it recently, we risk being trapped in the middle-income bracket.

To achieve the country's New Economic Model, eight strategic reform initiatives are being proposed. Our universities are needed to take up the challenge of meeting the possible policy measures so eloquently outlined.

Today's universities can never be oblivious to the problems faced by the rakyat, at one level within our own shores, and at another level, the world beyond our borders.

Let us ignore the irrelevant rankings of world universities, re-examine our fundamentals, and strive to be relevant to the pressing problems close to home in our increasingly challenging world.

* Professor Datuk Zakri Abdul Hamid is chairman of the National Professors Council and science adviser to the prime minister. This is an excerpt of a recent address given at a function of the Malaysian Qualifications Agency

Gold standard (2010)

THE Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings top 200 table looks at "just the very best in the world," says editor Phil Baty.

But he did not respond when asked how Malaysian universities had fared in the 2010 league tables.

"You'll have to wait and see when we publish on Sept 16 but our top 200 list looks at the top one per cent of all the world's universities," says Baty in an email interview with Learning Curve.

He promises that the tables are "inclusive, covering universities in a large number of individual countries" and "competition is extremely tough".

He answers more questions on the soon-to-be-released list below:

THE has made it clear from the outset that the results of the revised rankings "will help identify exceptional departments and regional institutions beyond the traditional elite". Will there be drastic changes in the 2010 rankings?

Of course, traditionally strong nations in higher education, such as the United States and the United Kingdom, will still dominate tables such as the THE's list of top 200 universities.

But we are confident that the reputation survey we have carried out is the most representative ever undertaken and has collected views from all regions in meaningful numbers.

Our decision to reduce the influence of reputation on the overall results will also mean that less well-known institutions can shine, while big names with immense reputations but without the clear evidence of excellence that we require, may not do as well.

Our subject tables and the deeper analyses we will carry out through the year will also help ensure we dig deeper and highlight excellence outside the usual hierarchy.

There is a growing number of Malaysian scholars who choose to dissociate themselves from the rankings exercises. Are there any Malaysian tertiary institutions that have declined to be ranked by THE?

A strong principle of (the first year of) our new ranking system is that only institutions which have actively signed up to the process - and provided and verified the data we need from them - are included.

I was concerned that this is not always the case with other ranking systems and we felt it was essential to start this new scheme from a position of trust.

I'm delighted that despite the fact that this is an entirely new ranking system, the vast majority of institutions have agreed to participate - only a tiny minority have opted out of it - and all of the major players you would expect to see in such a global list have embraced it.

But sadly, one Malaysian institution asked not to be ranked. I'm quite sure when they see the results and examine our methodology in detail, they'll opt in next year.

It is crucial for Malaysia - a nation seeking to make itself a global hub for higher education -- to have a clear sense of where it stands in the world.

THE had aimed to get 25,000 respondents for the Academic Reputation Survey component but it managed to gather 13,388 responses. Is THE disappointed with this?

Absolutely not. We are happy to have achieved the largest ever response to any such exercise. In just three or four months this spring, we collected responses from 13,388 experienced academics. This was an invitation-only survey, and respondents were carefully targeted to be representative of global higher education geography and subject mix.

We have a very solid piece of Social Science to use in our 2010 rankings. The number of responses in one year is more than we had ever achieved after six years of carrying out similar surveys under the old list.

The low survey response rates under our old ranking system (with data supplier QS from 2004 to 2009) were perhaps the most disappointing element of the entire effort, given that the results had such a high weighting.

Not only have we now got a very high feedback rate, and a very solid piece of research, we still decided to reduce the weighting given to opinion polls and increase the use of objective evidence.

THE has described its 2010 rankings as its best effort to ensure an "accurate, rigorous, detailed and balanced" league table. Do you think that the results will appease critics?

In compiling rankings, compromises and judgement calls will always have to be made. People will not often agree on the right balance or even on the right indicators to be used. It is impossible to satisfy everyone - universities are extraordinary complex organisations and do many wonderful things that can not all be measured. They do not all have the same missions.

THE has no problem with criticism - that's why we have the open comments forums on our website (unlike some others which publish rankings!).

Public and free debate is a fundamental tenet of higher education, and as a magazine dedicated to the scholarly community, we fully embrace that.

But we have spent 10 months developing the new structure, with detailed expert input from more than 50 university leaders or policy experts, from 15 countries and across every continent.

We are very proud of the data that we will publish on Thursday and are confident that it will be clear to everyone in universities that this is the "gold standard" global ranking.

League tables: The case against rankings (2010)

26/September/2010

Results of recent league tables have sparked up another round of discussions on the relative merits of global university rankings exercises, writes SUZIEANA UDA NAGU

UNIVERSITI Sains Malaysia vice chancellor Tan Sri Professor Dzulkifli Abdul Razak did not wait with bated breath for the outcomes of the QS World University Rankings 2010 and Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings 2010-11 which were announced recently.

The QS and THE lists were released a week apart from one another and Malaysian institutions were nowhere on the Top 200 spots of both.

Dzulkifli does not know what the fuss is all about. As far as he is concerned, the results of both league tables were, at best, predictable.

"It is a new ranking system but that is old hat," he adds, referring to the revised THE league tables.

THE severed ties with rankings data supplier QS last year and announced its plans to work with research-metrics company Thomson Reuters on revamping its league tables in response to criticisms.

It was slammed in the past for "being based on questionable data and flawed methodology". The most criticised component of the rankings was "peer review", which accounted for 40 per cent of the overall score, because only 3,500 researchers had responded.

With a new partner, THE promises that its seventh league table will be different — with clearer and more transparent performance indicators and data.

"Changing partners does not guarantee any significant transformation. Bear in mind that THE-QS had parted ways before (the final separation). I see the change as a business decision based on profitability and commercial interest.

As it turns out the 'new' ways are apparently no better than the old ones, given the criticisms levelled at them," says Dzulkifli.

As educator Koh Soo Ling puts it in her article Why bother?: "Now that the euphoria or the disappointment has somewhat settled, questions remain about the relevance of global rankings" (see H5).

Judging by USM's non-participation in world rankings exercises as from this year, THE's recent list is of no consequence.

Dzulkifli says that the university did not receive any invitation from THE to participate in the exercise.

"Even if they were to approach us, we would not be keen — that is our official stand. QS had insisted on ranking us even though we have repeatedly stated our lack of interest in the exercise. That alone makes it suspect," he says.

Although University College London is placed 22nd on THE's list, vice chancellor Malcolm Grant describes the activity as "nonsensical" because the application of new metrics and weightings still falls "miles short of capturing the variety, dynamism and diversity of the modern university", writes Grant in a recent article University world rankings are pointless, UCL president says in The Guardian (http://bit.ly/bxWQQ2).

But THE World University Rankings editor Phil Baty is certain that when universities which have declined to take part see the results and examine the methodology in detail, "they'll opt in next year".

Dzulkifli remains sceptical of such schemes.

"The proof of the pudding is in the eating! Until we see the results we cannot be convinced," he says.

University of Malaya (UM), which also opted out of the exercise this year, will continue to do so until THE responds to its questions.

UM vice chancellor Professor Datuk Ghauth Jasmon says: "We declined because THE did not respond to our questions."

Although UM concedes that THE's individual performance indicators combined under five categories — Teaching, Research, Citations and International Mix — "are better", it disagrees with the "Industry income" component.

Industry income uses data on university earnings from research and knowledge transfer activities.

"This would put universities from poorer countries at an immediate disadvantage," adds Ghauth.

UM sees the merits of rankings exercises.

"QS World University Rankings have pointed out some (of our) weaknesses and motivated us to review our work culture and aim for better Key Performance Indicators (KPI)," he says.

The formation of the Secretariat for Ranking and Improving Performance at the university two years ago reflects its commitment to "competing globally and to doing well in (rankings exercises)".

"The unit is responsible for advising me on areas that I need to focus on and address. It also monitors all academic staff performance in terms of ISI journal publications, Citations received and the H-index. This will allow us to benchmark against top universities globally," he adds.

Ghauth is understandably disappointed that UM was not on the QS top 200 list — it slipped to the 207th spot from 180th last year — despite rigorous efforts to improve its performance.

"We are still studying the cause. However, the university's management is much happier now in terms of Quality Research and Impact journal publications because there have been marked improvements in this regard in the last two years," he adds.

Professor A Murad Merican, a strong critic of rankings exercises, cautions local tertiary institutions against missing the big picture and succumbing to being captive minds.

"Mental captivity is characterised by a way of thinking that is imitative and uncritical. The captive mind assumes that the THE list is the ultimate measure of what universities do," says Murad, who is from Universiti Teknologi PETRONAS' Management and Humanities Department (see H3).

Dzulkifli agrees.

"We have different aspirations and must find appropriate ways to express these.

It is a mistake to have a one-size-fits-all rankings system as far as universities are concerned. It is, at best, pseudo-science."

Against this backdrop of discussions on the relevance of league tables, USM is working on an Alternative University Appraisal (AUA) approach that will be embedded into its current evaluation method "as part of a developmental process to meet quality standards predicated on equality, availability, affordability, accessibility and sustainability".

"The AUA calls for a different approach which is more engaging and meaningful," says Dzulkifli.