

TVET in Malaysia

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(1) Introduction

Attracting foreign investments is one of the ways for Malaysia to realise its quest to achieve developed nation status by the year 2020. It goes without saying that among the determining factors that foreign investors look at is that of the skills and technical competencies of the local workforce. The Government is very much aware that the future of the country does not solely depend on educated personnel, but on having a large pool of skilled workers that can handle the rapidly changing world of work.

As such, through a multitude of government, semi-government and private agencies, a large number of technical and vocational development programmes are introduced in schools, universities, and training centres. According to the Malaysian Economic Planning Unit (EPU), under the Ninth Malaysia Plan, technical and vocational government schools are allocated approximately RM 629.2 million in development expenditure [1]. This is in addition to the many incentives – directed both to youths and the industry - which the Government introduces to encourage vocational training. For example, companies that take part in certain apprenticeship programmes qualify for tax incentives, whilst the apprentice is assured employment, is eligible for reimbursement of the training costs, and is given insurance protection, among many others [2].

Still, technical and vocational education and training (TVET) in this country has its own challenges, as described briefly in this paper.

(2) TVET Providers in Malaysia

There are numerous TVET providers in Malaysia. The Government is the main provider, having several ministries and agencies involved. These are:

- Ministry of Education (TVET is offered in secondary schools called ‘technical’ (or ‘vocational’) secondary schools. In 1990, the number of enrolment is 13,448 covering ten major occupational groupings).
- Ministry of Higher Education (TVET is offered in polytechnics and community colleges. In addition, vocationalisation of higher education is initiated in universities earmarked as ‘technical universities’).

- Ministry of Human Resource and Development (under which the Department of Skills Development, National Vocational Training Council (NVTC), Industrial Training Institutes, etc, are placed. The NVTC is established in 1989 by reorganizing the National Industrial Training & Certification Board set up in 1971. The Council has established 53 trade standards in a variety of occupational groupings and tested 15,379 candidates in 1990 [6]).
- Ministry of Youth and Sports (under which the National Youth Skills Institute is placed).
- Ministry of Community Development.
- State governments (under which institutions such as Terengganu Advanced Technical Institute (TATI), Skills Training Centres, etc, are placed).
- Private providers – for example under MARA, there are the *Institut Kemahiran MARA*, and *Pusat Giat MARA*, among others. There is also the Universiti Kuala Lumpur (UniKL), under which the German-Malaysia Institute, British-Malaysia Institute, etc, are placed. In addition, there are institutions such as the YWCA that offers vocational training to the public.

In 2005, there were 21 Industrial Training Institutes (ITI), 14 National Youth Skills Institutes (NYSI), three Advanced Technology Institutes (ADTEC), and 162 *Pusat Giat MARA* (skills training institutes under the MARA). All of these offer a variety of training and vocational-type of education [3].

(3) Some Challenges and Innovations in TVET Offering

(3.1) Challenge -- Demand-Supply Mismatch

Despite the many TVET providers in the country, TVET is not without issues and challenges. For starters, there are many reports of a demand-supply mismatch, which in part contribute to unfilled employment vacancies in the industry (for example, as reported in Star Education, 31 August, 08). There is obviously a need to improve links between schools and the industry [4] so as to minimize this mismatch. Chin [6], who reports on a compilation of Pillai [5] informs that response from the private sector to industrial training is lukewarm, with private (vocational) training institutions struggling to attract financial support and students.

(3.2) Challenge -- the Issue of Status

Some authors claim that too much attention and resources is given to ‘academic’ rather than vocational education [6]. As reported by many authors (for example [7] and [8]), vocational education in Malaysia suffers the same fate it suffers elsewhere – that it is only for those who do not do well ‘academically’ [9]. This view persists at the time of writing (2008), so much so that UNEVOC-UNESCO contemplates on changing the name TVET to something nearer to “Skill & Knowledge Development for Employability”.

(3.3) Challenge – Non-Homogeneous Participation of Ethnic Groups

Another issue faced by Malaysia is that of comparative participation of all ethnic groups in TVET. Malaysia being of multiethnic composition, it is imperative that every ethnic group is fairly represented in this arena. Thiruselvam [3] reported that Indian youths make up less than 3% of the total intake to TVET places offered in the country. To-date, there has been no academic examination as to why this happens.

(3.4) Innovation – the National Dual Training System

In 2005, the Malaysian Government implements the ‘National Dual Training System (NDTS), which aims to expose apprentices to actual situations in the industry. Apart from technical competencies, the NDTS also emphasizes human and social competencies such as team work, self monitoring, shouldering common responsibilities, and the like. Approximately 70-80% of the training is done in the industry, while the remaining 20-30% is carried out in training institutions, utilizing curriculum developed by the National Occupational Core Curriculum (NOCC) [2].

(3.5) Innovation – the Human Resource Development Fund

In 1993, the government introduces the Human Resource Development Fund (HRDF), which is a training levy-reimbursement scheme [10] that aims to provide accelerated industrial training and offer enormous opportunities and avenues for companies, industry associations and public/private industrial training institutions to contribute to more responsive and relevant skill development. An evaluation of the HRDF scheme has indicated that it has been “very effective in collecting the one per cent levy but has fallen short in actually accelerating industrial training -- probably due partly to the view taken by the smaller companies that training is a luxury that they can ill afford in terms of absence of employees from work” [6].

(3.6) Innovation – Vocationalisation of Tertiary Education

Starting 2002, the Government set up four new university colleges. This was the outcome of the finding of a task force to look into the possibility of revamping the science, technology, and engineering education system by incorporating some extent of vocationalisation in tertiary education. After a period of study, the task force came up with a proposal of a new technical education system called the ‘National Technical University System’. This new system was developed based on models such as the ‘fachhochschule’ (FH) in Germany, the polytechnic university system in Hong Kong, and a few others. The common ground for these models are that of the ‘practical-oriented’ approach, whereby students undergo intensive practical sessions. Hence, the main feature of this new ‘breed’ of education model is that of preparing students for applications-related schooling for professions which require the application of academic knowledge and methods [11].

(4) Closing

As reported and discussed during the recent 'International Round Table Meeting on the Changing World of Work – the Coming Back of TVET on International Development Agenda' organised by the Colombo Plan Staff College (CPSC), INWent (Capacity Building International) Germany, and UNESCO-UNEVOC on 27th-29th August, 2008, there are many issues and challenges surrounding TVET implementation every where in the world, and Malaysia is no exception. One glaring challenge is that of the availability of research findings in the literature concerning TVET in the country. Only when more academic study is carried out and written about TVET in Malaysia can one have a more comprehensive portrayal of the state this education segment is in.

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