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Academician Recruitment and Selection: Malaysia Higher Education Institutions Challenges

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Abstract

One of the activities in the practice of Human Resource Management (HRM) that can give a significant impact on the performance of an organization is employee recruitment and selection. In uncertainty in addressing various issues affecting Malaysia and the world today, it is unlikely that the offer of academic expertise will be an agenda in empowering Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Malaysia. Challenges such as technology and skill, financial and economy, political and administrative and social and work culture in the academic environment nowadays need to be taken into account as it will implicate the performance of HEIs and its rating standards internationally. This concept paper will try to discuss the challenges faced in the academic recruitment and selections and how it affects the performance of Malaysian HEIs.

Keywords: HRM, Recruitment, Selection, Malaysia HEIs, HEIs Challenges.

Introduction

In 2013, the Ministry of Higher Education (previously known as the Ministry of Education) has begun to draft the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025 (Higher Education) or MEB 2015-2025 (HE). Prior to the launch of this MEB 2015-2025 (HE), various feedback from local HEI leaders, Malaysian and international education experts, as well as the public was obtained. The field of education especially to institutions of higher education will certainly play a very important role in propagating this development.

Based on data for 2017, there are 20 public universities, 70 private universities, 91 community colleges, 33 polytechnics, 410 private colleges and 34 private university colleges involving more than 80,383 local and foreign academicians. According to Grapragasem, Krishnan, and Mansor (2014), the establishment of local and foreign colleges and universities in Malaysia has contributed more to the supply and development of human capital. A qualified and quality academicians contribute to the best organizational performance (Soon, Ling, See, Ling, & Huey, 2013). However, to recruit and to choose the most suitable academician at a world class level is not an easy task especially to the Malaysia HEIs.

Globalization has demanded the landscape of HEIs ecosystems to change globally. Meeting the challenges of the Industrial Revolution 4.0, the World Economic Forum (WEF) outlines the importance of the 4C elements of Critical Thinking & Problem Solving, Communication, Collaboration and Creativity at all levels of its student studies (Ahmad, 2017). In this regard, modern HEIs across the globe including Malaysia are alleged to have been transnational businesses operating in the global knowledge economy competition. Based on previous studies on the issues and challenges in HEIs, many discussed about leadership and governance (Inayatullah & Milojevic, 2016), globalization of academic and academicians (Osman & Marimuthu, 2010; Rostan & Antonio Ceravolo, 2015; Tan & Goh, 2014), innovations and political responses (Hasan Al-Banna, Ab. Mumin, & Siti Arni, 2014; Woo, 2015), working culture (Musah, Ali, Hussain Vazhathodi Al-Hudawi, & Hamdan, 2014; Rahman, Voon, & Firdaus, 2016), expatriate academic staff (Austin, Chapman, Farah, Wilson, & Ridge, 2014; Hoque et al., 2010) and lecturers' competency and quality of education (Ghasemy et al., 2018; Hanapi & Nordin, 2014; Nadarajah, Kadiresan, Kumar, Kamil, & Yusoff, 2012). However, there are still less previous studies that address issues related to the challenges faced by HEIs in Malaysia, especially on routine activities and practices (Ghasemy et al., 2018) such as challenges on recruitment and selection.

Therefore, this study will focus on four primary challenges on recruitment and selection process among Malaysian academicians which can affect the performance of HEIs. These factors are skill and technology, financial and economy, political and administrative and social and work culture. Hopefully this study can be used as a guide and reference to other researchers in dealing with issues related to HRM in Malaysia HEIs.

Challenges in HEIs

Technology and Skill

In the field of education, HEIs serve as the intellectual human capital generator that the state needs to transform into a developed nation (Azman, Sirat, & Pang, 2016). Now the whole world is moving towards Industrial Revolution 4.0 (IR 4.0) and necessarily requires organizational commitment in training and human resource development. Skills that need to be emphasized on human resources include the five essential components of critical thinking and problem solving, communication, collaboration, creativity and emotional well-being (Makhbul, 2018). The changes that occur due to the phenomenon of Industry 4.0 require a knowledgeable and highly skilled human resource to enable competitiveness to be strengthened. This is reinforced by Palan (2003) where the quality of human resources can be assessed based on their knowledge, skills as well as its ability to survive in a dynamic and challenging environment which is called as competency. Competency comprises of five characteristics which are skills, knowledge, personal values, motivation and attitudes in doing a task. Similarly, according to Professor Ibrahim Komoo (2017) where in principle, academicians excellence is measured by six components namely academic excellence, new knowledge sharing excellence, excellence of financial research, the ability to attract outstanding students and the excellence of policy and innovation social.

The quality of a graduate which based on the excellent of academic achievement and the development of a good personality is depends on the quality of an educator (Ismail, 2012). This has been supported by data analysis from the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) which

mentions that "smarter teachers produce smarter students" (Han, Borgonovi, & Guerriero, 2017). Knowledge of technology and expertise that is assisted by reference materials that are used as well as conducive environment in learning sessions such as location, infrastructure, socialization and others are part of the qualifications required by the academician in determining the success of a HEIs. According to (Chaer, 2017) academicians with PhD degree qualifications are considered to have a high level of excellence in the quality of teaching and learning at HEIs. Thus the Malaysian government has set targets that by the year 2023, at least 60,000 Malaysians have a degree with a doctorate degree (Kementerian PendidikanTinggi, 2015). This will certainly give a challenge and pressure to HEIs who offer PhD programs at their respective institutions to acquire and produce these graduates. In addition for public HEIs, they need to achieve the target of 75% of PhD holders at their own institution. However, there is a new phenomenon in Malaysia where the existence of "Deanlets" is a "new order" for the academic industry. "Deanlets" refers to a person who has a postgraduate degree but is not an academic staff. They even pursue careers as managers or administrators. This may be because their interest in the academic field has been greatly reduced and ultimately the target to achieve the number of PhD holders among academics will be much more difficult.

The emergence of unlimited technology and the increased of new knowledge has given to a new challenges to the success of a HEIs. Candidate academicians need to prepare themselves with 21st century skills with exposed with a variety of training and skills in line with their prestige and their position (Chan, 2018) before they going to the field of teaching in HEIs. Candidate academician should have the expertise in the field of involvement, versatile and sensitive to current issues. Having an effective current pedagogical approach is a necessity for current education. It is as part of the requirement to ensure the readiness and improvement of academic community talent become more relevant, referenced and respected where it is in line with MEB 2015-2025 (HE) (Yusof, 2016). However, skills and technologies are sometimes improbable when compared to HEIs' readiness especially in infrastructure, physical networks, platforms, devices and equipment found in the institution (Osman & Marimuthu, 2010).

With the entry of an academician who does not have the skills and qualifications required by creating loose conditions will cause the quality of education in a risky situation (Rusmin, 2017). Therefore, prospective educators need to prepare themselves with these elements before being accepted for the education sector especially in the HEIs. In the process of selecting candidates these educators also need to be done in a transparent and meticulous way with the consideration of the knowledge and skills of the technology he/she has mastered.

Financial and Economy

It is common to know that the foundation for the economic stability of a country or an organization lies in a competitive, creative and innovative workforce (Othman, Khairiyah Khasbullah, & Wahid, 2015). However, if economic and financial conditions are unstable, will labor productivity and activity towards creativity and innovation will move more actively? The budget constraints and the increasing cost of operation each year also need to give attention in line with the increase in productivity and effectiveness of the HEIs system (Nadarajah et al., 2012) especially in the recruitment and selection process.

To improve the workers' qualities and skills, an organization needs to invest more and more in human resource. This can indirectly promote healthy competition in their respective careers (Muhammad Imran Rasheed, Humayon, Ahmed, and Din, 2014). This will definitely involve substantial and continuing investments by the government, particularly in terms of procurement or recruitment provisions in increasing the number of field experts, including those with PhD qualifications, professional qualifications and those with relevant industry or community experience (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2015). The HEIs challenge in attracting more and high-quality candidates will be consider on two policy levers: improving working conditions or by offering salaries that are competitive against other HEIs (Han et al., 2017).

In the competition for the best and excellent academicians as well as financial resources is one of the issues that are often discussed for most of HEIs in Malaysia or around the globe. HEIs with a good performance will gain more income and government allocation than lesser performing HEIs (Abubakar, 2017). The large financial allocation from the government is based on performance-based and the number of students (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2015). Strong financial resources are vital for mobilizing HEIs effectively (Myrna Gusdorf, 2008).

According to Baharuddin (2010) and Irshad, Muhammad Zohaib Irshad, & Mahmood, (2012) in the matter of offering salaries, professionals private HEIs who have a good ratings and solid reputation of financial resources certainly have the advantage of attracting qualified and highly skilled candidates based on the attractive schemes and allowances. Academicians, especially from public HEIs, which aims on financial and non-financial incentives such as attractive teaching facilities, will certainly shift to private HEIs and this will definitely give some impact to the improvement and development of public HEIs.

Hence Malaysian HEIs need to change from fully expecting financial assistance by the government to think about how to secure a sound financial source with the involvement of all parties accordingly (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2015) to mobilize HRM activities and further enhance the performance of HEIs. It should also be noted that making poor recruitment decisions will undoubtedly affect the cost and employee turnover (Nadarajah et al., 2012), and indirectly lowering of morale in the existing workforce (Paisey & Paisey, 2018).

Political and Administrative

In order to ensure the accredited academicians to the HEIs are perfectly in quality and fully qualified, the HEIs are encouraged to ensure that these two activities are enhanced. Firstly is a resource aspect where HEIs need to identify a good talent from new sources with scope and search criteria meet regional and global standards (Azman et al., 2016). Second is recruit whereby every HEIs need to improve the standard operating procedure (SOP) for the recruitment and execution of processes that can attract a potential talent (Neri, Wilkins, & Neri, 2018). HEIs are encouraged to identify top international academics to support the transfer of knowledge and the construction of local talent (Austin et al., 2014)

Academicians and HEIs need a policy and leadership that is effective especially in terms of recruitment and selection of academicians because without a good policy and direction it will

definitely give a bad impression on organizational structure especially for students and HEIs (Hrnčiar & Madzík, 2017).

The need for more leaders at all levels of international reputation, excellent professional experience, administration skills and transformational academic leadership experience is required among HEIs management and administration members (Inayatullah & Milojevic, 2016)

Career pathways as relatively rigid for academician at this time as well as a limited capacity-based specialization have made it difficult for HEIs to attract, retrieve and retain the best talent (Azman et al., 2016). Therefore, the higher education system should shift from a standard approach to a more flexible approach to enable HEIs to provide various career paths and have different institutional excellence models. The autonomous power transfers involving HRM functions such as hiring and dismissal of employees, employment and promotion from ministries to the HEIs are one of the means of giving space to implement this career path (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2015). This will give the HEIs management more freedom in making decisions as well as to prevent the "disruption" of the process of recruiting the academician to the HEIs through external political interference. This "disturbance" of politics will certainly give a bad impression to the organization which may affect the right person for the right job at all levels of the institutions. It coincides with opinions by Inayatullah and Milojevic (2016) where to optimize one's talent, it is crucial to recruit candidates who are reliable and rigorous and not influenced by external often political factors.

Social and Work Culture

Higher education around the world is experiencing a significant new culture due to the advent of unlimited digital technology and new delivery models (Selwyn, 2016). The competition among regional and global HEIs are so intense. This may be due to its international nature where besides the emergence of new forms of provision of higher education and the community has the option of choosing the best education for them (Burgess, 2016).

The number of international students in Malaysia is expected to increase with the opening of new markets through joint ventures and innovative programs. By the year 2025, it is estimated that 250,000 students will attend education in this country (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2015). Statistic in 2017 shows that there are 7,273 foreign academicians whereby 5,733 from private HEIs and 1,540 from public HEIs (Education, 2017). The challenges to the prospective and existing academics are because the international academicians come from a varied background with great academic qualifications. As a result they pose a challenge to the local academician. The local academician needs to adapt a different organizational cultures brought in by the foreigners to the HEIs, the competition from the point of work quality and the improvement of students' achievement from the impact of these experienced and skilled foreign lecturers (Hoque et al., 2010). Therefore, the academic community needs to be prepared to deal with these changes, especially in working methods, and work with various parties in the process in boosting the performance of HEIs (Rahim & Daud, 2013).

Another challenge to be faced by HEIs in recruitment is cooperation and networking with high education people either from within or outside HEIs (Kirabo Jackson, Rockoff, & Staiger, 2014). An academician needs to have a good internal network among peer groups. Studies have shown that academicians who can work with effective peer groups can provide a more effective work

environment compared to the academicians working in less social environment institutions (Burgess, 2016). An academician will be driven by academic excellence from all aspects and cultures of knowledge that not only involve the faculty of an institution, but also the entire academic community and the broad network (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2015).

According to Okusanya and Oseji (2016) HEIs need to create an enviable environment and work culture and it can indirectly attract the quality talent (academic staff, students, researchers), and so on to provide the expected impact of all parties, especially to HEIs. Malaysia's aspiration to become a premier education hub supported by the global online learning platform needs to be seen globally and work culture based on renewal acceptance need to be applied to each HEIs (Arkorful & Abaidoo, 2015). The role of academic staff is being expanded from the traditional element of research and teaching to a broader and more meaningful definition, encompassing all elements relating to discovery, integration, interpretation and application of knowledge (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2015).

Conclusion and Future Agenda

Perhaps for most organizations emphasis on financial capital, technology and excellent processes are considered important but in the end, personnel and individual employees are one of the most important elements that need to be focused and taken into account. To increase the level of competence and productivity of academicians, various initiatives and changes need to be made either at the national and faculty/department level to be able to compete effectively locally or globally. Academicians should take the '*dare to change*' approach in the upgraded science, skills and technological emergence scenario in ensuring the success of academicians' careers. Candidates of academics need to equip themselves with 21st century skills in line with their prestige and their position. Therefore, they should be ready to take risks to be different and to be challenged primarily with the emergence of the ever-growing IR 4.0 in today's global marketplace.

Financial constraints and global economic instability are among the HEIs challenges in attracting prospective academicians in which they need to compete with local HEIs as well as international HEIs to acquire and maintain a truly quality human resource (Tan & Goh, 2014). For public HEIs who have the highest number of students compared to private HEIs, they need to be more proactive in developing the organization's financial funds and not just relying solely on government aid. Collaboration with all parties whether within or outside of the organization needs to be done more actively.

The autonomy distribution that includes the government's human resource management functions to HEIs especially to universities should not be taken advantage or taken easily by the management. Effective planning, control and implementation methods are fair and transparent should be done. Improved management system and SOPs in the process of finding talented and quality candidate academics need to be expanded. The best international academicians recruiting is one of the methods in supporting the transfer of knowledge and the building of local talent.

The identity of an academicians is the willingness to deal with changes in terms of working methods. Government policies that change frequently each year certainly require an academicians who has high mental and discipline resilience. The role of an academicians will certainly be expanded from the

traditional element of research and teaching to elements related to discovery, integration, interpretation and application of knowledge.

These are among the criteria that need to be taken into account in the recruitment and selection of candidates to the academician in the HEIs. Initial preparations before being accepted into the academic field are necessary in order to align them with the change that goes out there. HEIs learner students are also expected to be good in both areas whether in academic or soft skills before they are ready to enter the work environment in their respective industries and it is absolutely necessary that a 'teacher's job' is very important to ensure that these skills are attainable. The string between the government and management of HEIs will devise strategies to ensure the HEIs remain competitive posed by the global education market and so on to ensure Malaysia's HEIs can achieve world-class status and operate as a hub for higher education in the Southeast Asia region.

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