

# Transformational Change in Brunei Higher Education: A Case Study of Universiti Brunei Darussalam

**Mahani Hamdan**

UBD School of Business and Economics, Universiti Brunei Darussalam, Tungku Link, Brunei Darussalam

**Email address:**

mahani.hamdan@ubd.edu.bn

**To cite this article:**

Mahani Hamdan. Transformational Change in Brunei Higher Education: A Case Study of Universiti Brunei Darussalam. *Higher Education Research*. Vol. 2, No. 3, 2017, pp. 76-85. doi: 10.11648/j.her.20170203.11

**Received:** March 1, 2017; **Accepted:** March 20, 2017; **Published:** April 14, 2017

---

**Abstract:** Transformation through revolutionary changes, rather than through an evolutionary process, is increasingly shaping the global higher education scene. Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD), as an exemplary institution in Brunei, has over the years reformed its core activities and focus, in line with changes in technology, and already implemented several game changing initiatives to respond to higher expectations and changing demands from a wide and diverse group of stakeholders. Little or no research has been done to understand and analyse the extent and challenges of transformational change in UBD. The impact on organisational learning and performance with emphasis on global skills and restructuring of curricula will re-shape the global higher education market.

**Keywords:** Transformation, Globalisation, Collaboration

---

## 1. Introduction

Many higher education institutions (HEIs) today strive to be the best or seek to position themselves competitively for future success. Competitive positioning refers to how a university or an institution differentiates their offerings in order to create more value in the market. This is with respect to being able to attract quality students and staff, produce relevant and innovative degree programmes, offer best learning experience, provide quality learning facilities and environment, and produce high volume of quality research and publications. Just how do HEIs assess this process? It is mainly done through ranking. Although there is a growing trend among HEIs towards university rankings, there is a general consensus that ranking is only a benchmarking tool for diagnosing a university's problems or quantifying a comparison of performances among universities across the world including China, US, Europe, Middle East and Asia. The process of ranking helps the HEIs to assess where they are now and where they want to be in the next five or ten years. Yet, it is also important not to focus on the ranking too much and underestimate the value of stakeholders' insights on the complexity of real situations.

Understanding the reputation of universities, often expressed in terms of students' expectations, experiences,

and satisfaction, is imperative. Reputation may not matter much to public universities as compared to private universities, but it has the potential to drive higher education outcomes and academic success. People assume that public universities should inherently be free and fulfil the national vision. But today, we have seen dramatic changes in the national higher education landscape, characterised by significant growth in enrolment and the increasing number of institutions, both in rank and diversity. Public universities can no longer sustain only to become a "teaching university" as this does not prepare students for life. They must also no longer view themselves as local education providers merely to secure the goals of national interests, but rather as global education providers tapping into both local and overseas job markets. Rather than competing with several local or regional universities, HEIs must now compete on a global scale. In order to gain a foothold in a global higher education market, a university must go beyond internationalisation.

In the literature, many speak about the trends, opportunities, challenges and reflections on the future of global higher education in various settings. Nonetheless, there is still a dearth of information about how Brunei higher education sector responds to the challenges of globalisation including the needs of revolutionising education systems and providing more real-world training and experience with high-tech tools. The present research is among the first studies to

address this through the lens of Universiti Brunei Darussalam (as a case study). Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD), being the oldest and first national leading university in the country, can share its best practices and offer advice on how to better participate in the global higher education market. It has a role to play in making higher education more accessible and affordable, and create modules or programmes that sufficiently develop graduates' employability skills. This study has three key objectives: (1) to illustrate the key developments of UBD over the past 30 years since its establishment in 1985; (2) to identify factors contributing to the success of transformational change as the University pursues the global higher education market; and (3) to provide recommendations for the future higher education strategies and institutional development.

## 2. Literature Review

Globalisation has transformed much of the world as we know it, and the education sector is no exception. Globalisation is changing the world of higher education. It is dynamic and evolving, and it appears that there is no one best way to describe the term "global higher education market." The global market for higher education is multifaceted, entailing university rankings, quality assurance and accreditation, opportunities and life-changing educational experience, research capacity, and networking, to name a few. But most of the substantive interests fall under several broad themes including but not limited to internationalisation and globalisation, collaboration and competition, differentiation and branding, teaching and research universities, traditional and online education, and the contributions of local and global knowledge. All these are essential to inspire transformational change. Ackerman [1] who distinguished three types of change (developmental, transitional, and transformational), refers transformational change to a change in the underlying strategy, structure and processes which results in a shift of the organisational culture.

Internationalisation differs from globalisation in some respects. Saunders [17] explained that internationalisation looks at how a university can benefit from having more international students, whilst globalisation is more of a strategy that provides a strong foundation on which a university can build long-term, sustainable partnerships. Internationalization as an interactive response to globalisation focuses on activities including building an international network and internationalizing staff, students and the curriculum [7]. Globalisation is, on the other hand, a process of interaction and integration among all the constituent parts of the education system. Additionally it is about creating a new set of competencies that would enable a university to utilise resources effectively and efficiently, and to meet the changing expectations and practice demands across settings. Thus, to strengthen the global position of public universities, they need to "go global" and move beyond international recruitment. Put more simply, we denote globalisation and internationalisation as processes and activities respectively, with HEIs as actors

and they are seen as closely linked to economic development. OECD [15] reported that the growth of economic activity across national boundaries has three important implications for HEIs. New pressures result from international competition for students, researchers and grants; growing homogenisation across national policy frameworks challenge longstanding national systems and force HEIs to adapt, and lastly, globalisation offers opportunities as new possibilities for international networking and collaboration, and students and scientists become more mobile and can be recruited on a world-wide basis (p. 4).

Rationales for internationalisation in higher education can be grouped into four dimensions: academic, social/cultural, political and economic rationales. When analysing these rationales, de Wit [3] argued that the diversity of stakeholders' groups in higher education including the government sector, the private sector and the educational sector, needs to be taken into account. Whilst competition today is driving HEIs towards innovation and creativity, collaborative network brings a positive impact on the quality of education both local-national and global international contexts. In increasingly knowledge-based societies, collaboration is the new competition [9]. It is a growing trend across countries whereby HEIs collaborate to advance their shared objectives. Collaboration in the form of "Triple Helix Model" (university-industry-government) is likely to be much more critical to meeting a nation's needs than in the past. Although collaboration among HEIs offers opportunities to extend unique and life-enhancing cultural and academic exchanges, the emergence of international rankings has become a manifestation of this competitive higher education environment [4; 13]. Collaboration has moved towards competition for funding, publications and the most talented students and scholars. In view of higher education has been transformed into a commodity, competition may have been seen as an appropriate response to enhance the position of HEIs in the global economy. However, this is not one-size-fits-all approach. For some institutions, partnerships in key areas and competition with and through collaboration are a step in the right direction. Regardless of whether the HEIs opt for a competition or collaboration, differentiation and distinctive strategies are always the top priority.

Today, almost all ranking-driven institutions have vertical differentiation where they differ in their reputation and research intensity. Whilst horizontal differentiation based on different functions (such as size, legislated mandate, type of programme offered and how research, teaching or services are provided by the institution), may serve different students in different ways. The latter however is not enough to acquire new students if the HEIs are looking for higher levels of objectively measured quality. To achieve a sustainable competitive advantage, the HEIs must enhance their vertical and horizontal differentiation. As differentiation, uniqueness, educational ability and outcomes become methods of identifying difference among public universities [2]; the question then is how can a university market itself when other institutions also focus on the same initiatives? One way

is through branding and reputation.

Branding is about relevance and differentiation. It is customer centric: it focuses on the products, services, and the promises that organisations give to its customers, as well as what commitment means to them. On the other hand, reputation is about creating legitimacy, and focuses on the credibility and respect that an organisation has among a broad set of constituencies [6]. Branding and reputation are related to, and influence, each other. Within these two, the reputation of an institution is a far more important factor. Reputation is the entirety of the public opinion about the HEIs' actions. It can be achieved through networking and improved relationships on a professional and personal level. Somo [18] described that if brand is image plus identity, reputation is these two combined plus the character of the institution. Although a positive brand image of a university can cause students and other stakeholders to assume a positive reputation, the inverse may not hold true. Most HEIs will embark on a strategy to either refocus their brand, or rebrand in order to serve a new or unexplored purpose, and some institutions simply refocus their strategies on a new and innovative way to reach and attract new students.

University branding is much more than logos, or being labeled as either a research or teaching institution. The real challenge facing the HEIs today is that many universities, particularly the older (and often top) institutions, are putting research before teaching. The importance of teaching has been denied as they see their reputation and standing in prestigious international rankings as being principally determined by scholarly output. Instead of polarising on the issues with teaching and research, the HEIs should consider an integrative approach whereby these two can complement and strengthen each other ("polarisation versus integration"). The faster the environment changes, the sooner knowledge becomes obsolete. Universities need a cultural change and active learning towards teaching, and research into educational approaches to transform the higher education sectors' understanding of teaching and learning [14; 19]. Engaging the students with scholarly literature is a professional expectation of academic staff in the HEIs [20].

Online education has gained wider acceptance, but questions remain about quality assurance and accreditation, the framework of dialogue teaching and the quality of multi-sided dialogue interaction, workload and the requirement of self-discipline. Despite the rapid growth of online learning, newer and more innovative teaching methods, many students still prefer the traditional lecture setting where they can have face-to-face interaction or choose a hybrid model ("blended learning"). One must understand that students learn differently, regardless of age, occupation and location. Thus, the focus of education must shift from "one-size-fits-all" to "one-size-fits-one." Blended learning is a combination of learning modalities involving face-to-face instruction and web-based learning delivery [12]. Although this modality has proven to be effective in terms of learning outcomes and ranked high on ratings of satisfaction with students and instructors [5], it deserves further exploration. The advent of

the Internet has brought about many options alternative to traditional education. Nonetheless, some valuable characteristics of the HEIs need to be protected rather than just following global trends in higher education, for example, embedding teaching and research in local contexts.

Local knowledge ("knowledge localisation") is as important as global knowledge. Robertson [16] conceptualised globalisation and the aspiration to preserve the national identity of the knowledge in so-called 'glocalisation' of knowledge and all aspects of life. The global knowledge of the scientific domain generally has a generic character, but local expertise is important to tackle all sorts of contextualised challenges. Therefore, global knowledge without including or testing in the local context can be practically useless [10]. Striking the right balance between academic structures focused on global knowledge and one centred on local context is something the HEIs need to work on.

### 3. Methodology

This study employs two methods: semi structured interviews and observation. Out of the four HEIs<sup>1</sup>, the study chose UBD as a case study to understand better the complex issues in a real learning institution and explore the applications of some approaches used in response to globalisation challenges. UBD as a university that had gone through a transformation has made major changes and choices leading to positive differences on their student learning outcomes. Understanding the existing demands, competition and cooperation, through the lens of UBD can enhance our knowledge and experiences, and add strengths to what is already known. The study aims at generating possible areas of research for the future of higher education and opportunities. Knowing UBD, whether through relatively similar or different sets of challenges and priorities compared to other institutions, will take readers to see how different institutional practices such as programme implementation, environmental factors, and work engagement, fit together to produce observable outcomes.

The role of the researcher (as participant observer) is mainly to observe considerable changes of views and issues in the curriculum and structural developments of UBD within faculty and university meetings, and identify the challenges faced by the Brunei's higher education system. To maintain the depth and rigour of the study and obtain the perspectives of academic researchers on UBD's transformational change, we conducted semi-structured interviews (in an informal setting) with 10 current staff and five former staff from various faculties and centres based on simple random sampling and snowball sampling respectively. The category of staff (current and former) provides exclusive source of information in this study and has helped to increase the

---

<sup>1</sup> Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD), Universiti Teknologi Brunei (UTB), Universiti Islam Sultan Sharif Ali (UNISSA) and Kolej Universiti Perguruan Ugama Seri Begawan (KUPUSB).

validity and reliability of the information. The participant observation method was employed to identify new changes to the policies implemented in UBD's transformational process with respect to academic curricula (academic mobility, global or multicultural education, area studies and study abroad), teaching, research and services. The semi-structured interview, on the other hand, was conducted to gain insight into factors contributing to the successful transformational change of UBD in general and also specifically related to five factors: government support, university commitment, leadership, work culture (management team) and partnership strategies (collaboration versus competition). This study does not involve any form of invasion of the participant's integrity. Study participation is voluntary, and all feedback is reported in an anonymous way and non-traceable to individual participants.

This research is among the first evaluative studies undertaken in the context of Brunei and therefore, the paper is rather exploratory. The author is also concerned with finding out whether other stakeholders such as students and external stakeholders are any different in their perceptions towards UBD compared to the University staff, and to what extent each of these factors significantly contributes to the transformational change in UBD. These are few possible areas for future research where statistical processing will be of use and triangulation in the case-study research can also be better presented.

## 4. Results

**Table 1.** *UBD Academic Faculties, Research Institutes and Support Centres.*

| Types                   | Names  |
|-------------------------|--|
| Faculties (8)           | Academy of Brunei Studies (APB)                              |
|                         | Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS)                   |
|                         | UBD School of Business and Economics (UBDSBE)                |
|                         | Faculty of Science (FOS)                                     |
|                         | Faculty of Integrated Technologies (FIT)                     |
|                         | Institute of Policy Studies (IPS)                            |
|                         | Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah Institute of Education (SHBIE)       |
|                         | PAPRSB – Institute of Health Studies (PAPRSB-IHS)            |
| Research Institutes (8) | Centre for Advanced Material and Energy Sciences (CAMES)     |
|                         | Centre for Advanced Research (CARE)                          |
|                         | e-Government Innovation Centre (eGInC)                       |
|                         | Institute of Asian Studies (IAS)                             |
|                         | Institute for Leadership, Innovation and Advancement (ILIA)  |
|                         | Institute for Biodiversity and Environmental Research (IBER) |
|                         | SOAS Centre for Islamic Studies (SOASCIS)                    |
|                         | UBD I IBM Centre (UBD I IBM Centre)                          |
| Support Centres (2)     | Centre for Lifelong Learning (C3L)                           |
|                         | Language Centre (LC)   |

**Table 2.** *The Key Developments of UBD.*

| Periods      | Agenda  |
|--------------|---|
| 1985-1995    | Building up the curricula and expansion of facilities:<br>-Introducing new programmes, expansion of building and facilities and increase human resource recruitment (especially international academic staff).<br>-The set-up of Kuala Belalong Field Studies Centre (1992).<br>-UBD moved to its current location at Tungku Link (1995).   |
| 1996-2005    | Internationalisation and establishing a reputation:<br>-UBD focused on internationalisation strategy, introducing a one-year study abroad and twinning degree programmes.<br>Restructuring and transformation:<br>-Year of Transformation (2009). Introduction to GenNEXT programme. [The Generation Next Undergraduate Degree Rules & Regulations, Aug 2009]<br>-Introducing the School Leadership Programme (2010)<br>-Offered Graduate Research Scholarship (2010) [UBD GRS, revised May 2015]<br>-Discovery Year Programme (2011) [Establishment of DY Unit, UBD] |
| 2006-2015    | -Global Discovery Programme (2011) [Borneo Bulletin, May 19 2015]<br>-Brunei-US English Language Enrichment (2012)<br>-Introducing Master of Public Policy and Management (MPPM) and Joint Degree Programmes (2013)<br>-The set-up of Entrepreneurship Village (2014) [UBD News & Events, July 30 2014]<br>-Offered Hengyi Scholarship (2014) [Borneo Bulletin, March 11 2017]<br>-Joined the QS Asian University Ranking (2014)<br>-Collaborated with SMART (Singapore-MIT Alliance for Research and Technology) (2015) [Borneo Bulletin, November 27 2015]          |
| 2016 onwards | Technology, Partnership and Sustainable Development Strategies:<br>-Partnership with a local telecommunication firm, Telbru<br>-Offered iCUBE MOOCS Platform [http://www.icubeconsortium.org/]<br>-The set-up of the Centre of Lifelong Learning (C3L)  |

**Table 3. Factors Contributing to the Development of UBD.**

| No. | Critical Success Factors  |
|-----|---|
|     | Strong government support and initiatives<br>“UBD is very fortunate that right from the beginning, the government has always been very supportive of its growth and advancement.” [Respondent 11]<br>“Funding is critical in today’s higher education faced by many institutions especially the non-profit making universities, but with the strong support from Brunei Government, I don’t see it as a serious problem here. Nonetheless, we shouldn’t get too comfortable. I strongly believe that UBD should engage in many revenue-generating activities.” [Respondent 5]<br>“With the government support in our hand, there comes a big responsibility to ensure that we serve for the purpose of national education interests. We, as academics, should be accountable for this. We will always be monitored and the future of our next generation relies on us.” [Respondent 6]<br>“Transformational change cannot happen overnight as it involves a drastic shift in people’s mindsets and attitudes, changes in organisational strategy and processes. ... Given that the Government is the key agent behind all this, so changes are possible and must happen.” [Respondent 10]<br>Strong sense of commitment to a mission and vision<br>“Indeed, some staff have already been greatly involved in government projects and even work very closely with several ministries to help achieve the national goals and outcomes” [Respondent 3]<br>“Everything we do in UBD, align with its mission and vision – to be in the top 50. This is necessary if the nation expects us to produce highly-educated, skilled and successful people” [Respondent 13]<br>“To achieve our mission and vision, we must commit. Regardless you are local or expatriate, we must work together hand in hand to get to where we aspire to be.” [Respondent 9]<br>“Commitment comes in various forms. As a researcher, my commitment is to help increase the university’s visibility through my research works and consultancies.” [Respondent 1] |
| (1) |   |
| (2) |   |
|     | Leadership – visionary quality and focuses on strategic goals<br>“UBD has managed to bring out successful transformational change including ranking because of strong leadership from the previous VC. He has the charismatic figure where people have the hard time to say ‘NO’ to him.” [Respondent 14]<br>“When he first became the VC, I had doubts on his leadership. He had introduced many new things within a short period of time. I myself was not happy on some of the changes, so as few others. But today he has proven his words through actions and dedication. [Respondent 12]<br>With Dato VC’s (the former VC) leadership, at least UBD has been listed in the QS Ranking though in my view, we are still far from reach to achieve our vision. The current VC (his successor) was previously in his management team. I have the confidence that she will continue doing the hard work and his legacy, and advance the university’s strategies.” [Respondent 15]<br>“GenNEXT and Discovery Year were implemented like 8 years ago, what’s next for UBD? We hope to see from the current VC more improvements and changes in how we do and create things around here. InsyaAllah, we will continue to give our support.” [Respondent 2]<br>Management team – having the right people on a team<br>“The key to successful management of transformational change in UBD is the people.” [Respondent 4]<br>“Each member in the senior management team is given certain portfolios (academic, global affairs, research and administration) to drive all the changes. They are also given the KPIs, so we will know their performance levels” [Respondent 7]<br>“I heard that the former VC was given the freedom to select his own management team members. So I guess this had made changes easier to implement. He chose the right staff members on board.” [Respondent 11]<br>“Dato VC (the former VC) is an inspiring leader, others are just followers.” [Respondent 13]  |
| (3) |   |
| (4) |   |
|     | Collaboration rather than competition<br>“We are relatively a small university in a small developing nation. I don’t see the point of competing with other HEIs. Collaboration is what we need in order to grow.” [Respondent 8]<br>“Competition is out of question. How can we compete? How unique are we to other HEIs regionally and globally? Better if we just cooperate, complement our expertise in research fields and do staff exchange for teaching and learning improvements and students exchange for diversity.” [Respondent 9]<br>“Collaboration in education is one thing, but the lack of doing collaboration right is a problem. UBD is quite selective with whom they partnered with and personally, I think it’s a good decision.” [Respondent 15]   |
| (5) |   |

This section illustrates two important findings: the key developments of UBD over the past 30 years and factors contributing to the successful transformational change of UBD. UBD was established in October 1985. It is the first national university in the country and was ranked 118<sup>th</sup> position in the 2015 QS University Rankings in Asia. Currently, it has eight academic faculties, eight research institutes and two support centres as shown in Table 1. Majority of the programmes offered by the faculties are taught in English. The University has a total of 3,029 students and 490 staff in which 22 percent and 50 percent are international students and staff. About 29.5 percent and 13.8 percent are outbound and inbound exchange students respectively.

Table 2 highlights the key developments of UBD from

1985 to the present (four time periods). Each time period reflects a specific type of change (Ackerman, 1997), theme agenda and accomplishments. During the first 10-year of formation (“developmental change”), the University focused on building up the curricula and expansion of facilities and research centres. In the period 1996-2005 (“transitional change”), the University began its internationalisation process by sending off their students to overseas for a study abroad and twinning degree programmes as well as admitted international students to study in UBD. This gradually raised the reputation of UBD internationally. During the 2006-2015 periods (“transformational change”), the University underwent through some restructuring process and changes. Year 2009 in particular marked the University’s transformation initiative plan and since then, it has been

consistently progressing and continually working towards the desired goals. From 2016 onwards (“transformational innovation”), revolutionary rather than evolutionary changes are critically needed to advance higher education for sustainable development. It captures the extensive use of technology in teaching and learning and adopts cooperative approaches to faculty development with strategic partnerships.

As the global higher education market operates in a changing environment, new risks and challenges will certainly emerge through time. Based on personal observation and informal conversations with both current and former staff, the study identified five critical success factors that influence how UBD progressed to the state where it is at today and responded to the challenges in transformational change and (Table 3). Table 3 also reported 15 selective responses, out of 28 interviewees, because some of the responses were similar in several significant respects. The list is not exhaustive and there are no single-occurrence factors but rather exist in a recurring series over time. A more detailed discussion on these factors is presented in the next section.

## 5. Discussion

UBD has made significant progress towards a more global approach (“globalisation”) to higher education, attributable to five aforementioned factors. Firstly, strong government support and initiatives. The University has received strong support from the Brunei’s Government for its educational and support services including training hundreds of students each year at various levels. For decades, the country has focused attention on the higher education system because of the growing importance of producing a trained and educated workforce – the key to meet the nation’s growing need for talent. Brunei’s core education strategy, under the purview of Ministry of Education (MOE), is to prepare the youth for employment and achievement in a world that is increasingly competitive and knowledge-based. In view of this strategy, the widespread recognition that education is a major driver of economic competitiveness in international markets and a key component to the country’s successful and continual development [15], has made the role of higher education institutions in Brunei more important than ever before.

Secondly, UBD’s strong sense of commitment to a mission and vision. The University’s commitment to Brunei Vision 2035<sup>2</sup> is based on a vital pathway to greater opportunities in education specifically through government scholarships. Prior to 1985, Bruneians who wished to continue their studies at the higher education level had no choice but to apply for admission to overseas universities largely in the United Kingdom, Singapore and Malaysia. Even after UBD was formed in 1985, the Government still provided scholarships

for qualified Bruneians to do their degree programmes at overseas. Priority was given to programmes that were not available locally such as forestry, agriculture, psychology, law and forensic science. This shows that right back to the early days, the Brunei Government has continually been very supportive towards a global higher education movement, mainly focusing on educating, mobilising and organising staff and students [7]. The Government allocated a huge sum of money every year offering a number of scholarships, loans, grants, internships, study abroad programmes and community projects – to create opportunities to Bruneians (including citizens and permanent residents) for study, work and research, volunteering and further enhance their creativity abroad.

Opportunities in education means the opportunity to improve and achieve a higher standard of living, have a good job and career development and contribute to one’s community. All this depends on the success of high-quality educational institutions and strong support from ministries, private industry and non-governmental organisations. Despite the fully-funded scholarships from the Brunei Government, there were some scholarship holders who gained relevant experience abroad particularly in the tertiary sector and among highly-skilled workforce (including academics, medical doctors, lawyers, engineers and architects, graphic designers, ICT professionals, media and communications graduates), but did not return home to serve the country. This is the problem of “brain drain” faced by many developing nations. In 2012, about 20 Bruneian doctors and other medical specialists did not return after finishing their training [11]. There has been an intense discussion on the “brain drain” issue at the higher education level. Although the Brunei Government Scholarships have a “bond” requirement whereby scholarship holders are required to serve the country for a certain period of time after they completed their studies, this has, to some extent, failed to work, as observed among those who did not return to the country upon completion of their studies. It was only recently that the Government prepared a legal action at least against government-funded students who refuse to come home after completing their studies abroad. What Brunei’s HEIs must do as a whole is to rethink the relationship between higher education and employment. The Brunei Government offers too many scholarships but too few jobs, which somewhat implies that Brunei’s economy is not diversifying fast enough to create jobs.

Not only is there a mismatch between the quantity and quality of graduates and the number of jobs available in the country, the skills gap between UBD and overseas graduates has been a constant source of conversation and debate, and for good reason. It is a national issue, with implications for employers, educators, and the competitive standing of the country itself. Some organisations viewed that the local graduates were too dependent, less reactive and proactive. They lack in creativity and innovative ways of looking at things, and not even fully aware of their surroundings (what is really going on outside the world). This is apparent in job interviews. Instilling a sense of

<sup>2</sup> That is to transform Brunei Darussalam into a nation widely recognised for the accomplishments of its well-educated and highly-skilled people as measured by the highest international standards; its quality of life that is among the top 10 nations in the world; and its dynamic and sustainable economy.

patriotism within individuals might be one way to address this problem, but it is not a quick fix solution. Nothing comes easy, and UBD has responded to this through the implementation of its Discovery Year activities<sup>3</sup>. These activities reflect how committed the University is to integrate academic studies with workplace training in making their local graduates more employable. Also for this reason, entrepreneurship, leadership and innovation, and environmental awareness are embedded in all GenNEXT modules.

Entrepreneurship education in UBD has been taken on a different level. It has become a national agenda because entrepreneurship has been shown to account for a large share of job creation and to promote innovation and growth. UBD's initiative of setting up the Entrepreneurship Village on campus aims to promote entrepreneurship among students and entrepreneurial culture towards a more responsible and inclusive globalisation. UBD graduates need to become job creators, not merely job seekers – meaning that this is not all just about the way Brunei is growing economically, but also the way higher education institutions maintain a pace with the work force. Higher education institutions must continue to provide cutting-edge courses that will equip students with industry ready skills and expertise. Employability skills are the key skills that graduates need for the world of work – passport to a global career. Further to that, it is a calling for a more altruistic yearning to make a difference. UBD graduates do have what it takes by all means to make a difference to the world.

Thirdly, quality of a visionary leader is one who focuses on strategic goals. This excites and motivates people to uphold UBD's vision. The former Vice Chancellor (VC) of UBD (2008-2015), Dato Paduka Dr. Hj Zulkarnain Hj Hanafi, was an exemplary of a visionary, dynamic and inspiring leader in Brunei HEIs. He brought significant changes ("Game Changes") such as the introduction of GenNEXT<sup>4</sup>,

3 The Discovery Year (DY) offers students an array of choice to gain first-hand experience outside of the university. Students will embark on the DY activities during their third year (wherein all students must go), and engage in two semesters of any DY activities. Four broad choices are available for them to choose from during their DY. Study abroad for students to gain academic knowledge in an established international university over one or two semesters. Incubation is where students spend a semester on developing a potential business idea and transform it into a final product or service to potential target markets. Internship provides students with real life and work experiences for a semester in an organisation, locally or abroad. Finally, community outreach where students spend a semester engaged in a non-profit community project aimed at reaching out to the needy community.

4 The impetus of GenNEXT starts with the status quo that UBD degree programmes are too narrowly focused on specific discipline and limit students' knowledge, skills and abilities to master other subject areas. For example, graduates specialise in Economics but have no greater understanding on how leadership and management come into operation in an organisation. The marketability of UBD graduates further dampens when the job market shows a strong preference for overseas graduates than the local graduates. To address this, UBD introduced GenNEXT in 2009 to enhance students' knowledge and competency in specific disciplinary areas as well as broad-based knowledge outside their major discipline, providing students with flexibility in choice of careers. GenNEXT involves a balanced combination of depth and breadth. Restructuring process led to downsizing the number of undergraduate degree programmes from many to only four namely Bachelor of Business, Bachelor of

Discovery Year and Graduate Scholarships, just to name a few. He executed all the University's initiatives with confidence and dealt issues with integrity to create success. There were undoubtedly signs of resistance to change, but many of them also began to understand and appreciate the learning opportunities created for staff and students. Based on our interviews with the current and former staff, all the changes in UBD constituted fairly strong evidence that the former VC has the ability to change the mindsets of people (though not all) and take their thinking to new desired behaviours. Those in growth mindsets can learn to high levels. His leadership rather focused on future strategic goals than operational objectives. He worked confidently toward the university's vision (UBD to be in the top 50 in Asia) and strategic goals by initiating vigorous actions and persuading others to buy in on his beliefs. Not only was he good with his actions, he connected with the people and had the ability to empower relationships. He had high expectations and could articulate his beliefs in order to inspire others. He was a highly respected leader and praised by other counterparts in HEIs for his clear vision and charisma. The researcher personally experienced this when attending conferences overseas. People expressed how fortunate UBD was to have him as a leader and some were even interested to know about his action plans to bring the University to the next level. UBD has somewhat received worldwide recognition and gained reputation through him.

Reputation must be earned and maintained but not made [18]. When UBD faced tremendous pressures from the ministries and industries to produce quality graduates with high potential for jobs that are available in the market as well as criticisms from the public on how things were conducted in UBD, he took the challenge and viewed this as a time of tremendous growth and potential. Today, UBD is ranked in the top 50 for several criteria in Asia QS ranking and has become Bruneians' first choice for higher learning in both science and social science streams. Even with the recent leadership change in 2016, the vision of the former VC still holds. The question now is how far will UBD meet or maintain these commitments that were previously made, and how much will they remain as aspirations rather than reality? This depends on the people. Leadership can change but people will generally stay. All this would also not have been possible without the support of many people. In the transformation process, Dato VC not only personally selected his own management team, but also ensured getting his strong voices heard in meetings. Hence, having the right people on a team is the fourth factor for successful transformational change.

Today's higher education environment has become increasingly competitive, driven by a number of forces including the growth of profit-making HEIs, a buyers-market

Arts, Bachelor of Science and Bachelor of Health Science. In each degree programme, about 50-60% of the credit requirements are in major subjects and 40-50% in breadth or broad-based modules. GenNEXT equips students with essential skills of critical thinking, reasoning, communication, quantitative analysis and with both national and global perspectives.

for students and advanced telecommunications delivery systems. Conventional strategic planning which typically means seeking broad strategies for advancing institutional interests related to teaching, research and service, may not be sufficient to provide UBD with a viable strategy for positioning themselves competitively. Such planning should focus more on embracing effectiveness in selected core missions – for instance, improving the quality of undergraduate teaching and learning, increasing research opportunities and fostering community partnerships. Being a small university (relatively in size) in this region, should UBD then, compete? This takes us to the fifth factor in which we see more positive value in collaboration rather than competition particularly when HEIs have common objectives. In 2013, the University partnered with top partner policy schools in the United States of America through a graduate degree programme (Master of Public Policy and Management). The following year, the University partnered with local and international firms like Telbru and Hengyi Industries (Petrochemical firm) on sponsorship award. UBD also collaborated with the Singapore-MIT Alliance for Research and Technology (SMART) to facilitate academic mobility of students and academic staff, for both research and training. No one can argue that collaboration is difficult to achieve and sustain because it requires long-term efforts and processes. Collaboration is doomed to fail if UBD relies heavily on their own experiences, goals and international students [4; 9; 13]. Taking a collaborative approach certainly comes with risks. There are factors the University cannot control, such as government laws, regulations and funding issues. Strategic decisions that focus on the benefits and value added to teaching, research, and service missions of the University will help to minimise risks.

Technology has made educational services within reach and enabled effective interactions in the virtual and physical space within and across institutions. It brings people together whereby they do not need to be in the same location. Investment in ICT in terms of infrastructure and content development in higher education - the key to facilitating distance education, online and blended learning, requires much more than a technology upgrade. How does UBD equip their students with an adequate education in their field of study, and at the same time, to arm them with the right skills and knowledge required to leverage technology effectively in the workplace? The University's emphasis on leveraging technology is through multidisciplinary collaboration. The use of new technologies in higher education can stimulate the development of partnerships between HEIs and other organisations. For example, UBD's International Consortium of Universities for the Study of Biodiversity and the Environment (iCUBE) coordinated partnership involving eight institutions bringing new educational opportunities and producing fruitful and innovative relationships.

With over two million students worldwide seeking an education outside their home country, UBD must transform their curricula and support global higher education mobility. Although there has been a long history of distance learning,

online education has steadily grown in popularity. Through the recent formation of the Centre of Lifelong Learning (C3L), UBD has created a platform for online and blended learning using learning management systems and provided massive open online courses (MOOCs) for the study of biodiversity and the environment. The concept of MOOCs is generating widespread interest in higher education circles [5; 12]. It has opened up strategic discussions in national higher education and boardrooms about online education, blended learning and the implications. The workplace transformation and the changing nature of work has changed the notion of “going to work” from going to a specific location to having more flexibility in choosing where and when to work. Work engagement of academics warrants our attention, as there is an ongoing shift in the higher education landscape towards professional schools and training for human capacity building, which in turn affects the changing functions of academics. Academics in a higher education institution are generally expected to perform the following key services: teaching, research and administrative or community services. Our question is, are UBD academics today doing their part in delivering these key services? If they were able to deliver services among the triple roles, how can we better define the function they perform in society? In our view, the role and place of the academic is changing. The role of academics is not solely to build a career, but to make a difference. Academics contribute to improvements in practice, influence a new generation of professionals, and develop innovative ways of thinking about some of the key issues in their fields. Even so, UBD is no different compared to other globalised HEIs.

UBD's uniqueness depends on its differentiation or branding strategy [2]. The dynamism of global economy and rapid changes in the students' demographic has forced the University to identify their uniqueness and the benefits that the students will receive after their enrolment and graduation. UBD's branding (as a national university guided by the values of Malay Islamic Monarchy) has helped to differentiate themselves through the strong relationship between their educational products and students. At this juncture, further research is needed to identify and understand what the customers want and need as this will help the University to craft its market strategy through the branding process. The University's increased efforts and commitment towards global higher education market are reflected in their reformed higher education policies. These are strong signals of readiness to engage internationally and to support the University's global positioning.

Internationalisation connects to emerging themes with respect to student mobility, international collaborations in teaching and research as a means for capacity building, offer a range of scholarships and funding opportunities to international staff and students, and partnering with institutions and organisations across the globe. In terms of research and publications, much has been done but there is still much to do. Research was conducted rather in the form of conferences, seminars and other services such as consultancy and training (executive development

programmes and workshops). UBD began to accentuate research outputs beginning 2009. To create opportunities for research, all faculties were asked to identify their research niches and so as collaborators with other HEIs within and outside the University to complement their research expertise and needs. A huge sum of funding was allocated annually for research grants and scholarships. UBD Graduate Research Scholarship introduced in 2010 aimed to attract high-quality students to undertake research and they become the next generation of research-qualified professionals. To find talent, the university needs not only compete for students [‘cream of the crop’] but focus on improving students’ performance and outcomes. Although much of the research contributions are working towards the national-interests, UBD has successfully penetrated the global market for research by recruiting top notched professors and forming strategic partnerships with research leading institutions, industry and government (embracing “The Triple Helix Concept”).

The impact of lower oil prices on the economy has led to limited research funding. In early 2016, the University re-branded its Graduate Research Scholarship and named it to University Bursar Award and University Graduate Scholarship. Money is still available to fund the research activities, but the University must become more prudent now with their financial disbursements. More importantly, the workflow needs to be as lean as possible (‘lean delivery’) to expedite the funding procedures. UBD indisputably has no option but to look at the opportunities and strategise on diversifying their sources of funding whilst devoting greater efforts to rich interface platforms and technologies. Many universities had increased their tuition fees to compensate for declining state funding and rising costs, and in return ensured that every student receives a high-quality experience during their time in higher education.

## 6. Conclusion

While top universities (such as National University of Singapore, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia and University of Gajah Mada) progressively gain their reputation in the global higher education market, new or small universities like UBD are also making an attempt to make their presence felt. Is UBD attractive enough? Can UBD really compete in a global higher education market? All these require detailed contextual analysis. One must understand that a public university like UBD cannot move completely away from “a provider-driven” model to “a consumer-driven” form of higher education but this should also not be seen as an obstacle towards globalisation efforts. Instead of competing with other HEIs, a way to move forward is to collaborate. This study reinforces the collaborative efforts in the Triple Helix Model within the context of higher education - the interconnected elements between university-industry partnerships and government. To establish an effective collaboration, UBD must continue to broaden their network, establish mutual relationships and differentiate themselves from other institutions. The needs of the academic community in UBD could still be collectively

satisfied so far as different areas are covered or complemented by different universities. The use of technology in the education delivery process has also profoundly altered the global higher education landscape, but the quality of teaching and learning competitive with that of other technologically advanced societies is under question. Concerns are consistently expressed over the quality of education in numerous fields, which signifies that quality assurance and reputation are just as important as ranking. HEIs have brought education much closer to the communities, and as the world of education grows more connected, digitally and physically, people are interacting in ways they never have before. In conclusion, we can never know the exact qualification, knowledge and training needed in the globalised job market domain, but we want to ensure that our graduates of today will have the skills for tomorrow and this shapes the future of global higher education landscape.

## Recommendations

This study provides several recommendations in which UBD and other HEIs can benefit and learn from each other.

- (1) The higher education strategy should be dynamic and changing constantly over a period of time to contend with the shifting landscape of higher education.
- (2) Networking has become an increasingly important tool in the growing competition for research resources. UBD must therefore raise the bar for quality research so that both staff and graduates can thrive in the global economy.
- (3) Globalisation is as important as differentiation. A university must look into two forms of differentiation: functional (horizontal) and quality/reputational (vertical). Most public universities in the world today have been coping with the new trends in the global higher education in the context of shrinking budgets. Thus, a university must continue to differentiate themselves from other HEIs in the market.
- (4) A more differentiated system supported by a strong commitment from the government and institutions will lead to labour market ‘readiness’ of students and enhance the competitive positioning of an institution in the global arena. Functional differentiation can potentially alleviate the disparity in demand for university education. Yet, the reputational differentiation where universities compete based on higher quality and admission standards can occur within the framework of functional differentiation as the market enlarges [8].
- (5) Strong leadership figure and team commitment are crucial for successful management of transformational change in HEIs, and transparency and accountability agreements to optimise outcomes desired by the stakeholders including students, public, government and industry.
- (6) Competition is not a ‘one-size-fits all’ solution for HEIs in the global market. A university cannot

eliminate programmes just because they are not popular or not currently in demand. It is important that we keep elements of the traditional model in higher education while considering student preferences for applied education and the larger labour market.

- (7) Collaboration needs to be as inclusive as possible. HEIs must collaborate at many different levels. One essential aspect in collaboration is establishing relationships. To establish a university as a true global higher education provider, a university must ensure their relationships with national, regional and international partners are built on a foundation of trust, respect and communication. Multinational universities are set to dominate the future.
- (8) Through collaborative efforts and partnerships, a university can facilitate transformation of people and communities. It can concentrate their resources and efforts on core areas (interdisciplinary/multidisciplinary research) while collaborating with other institutions in areas that complement the research areas. Moreover, building credibility is just as important as building partnerships.
- (9) The academic of the future will not be tied to an institution but be a thought leader, communicator and teacher undertaking a range of activities on a freelance or consultancy basis – and that the world will be a better place for it. Therefore, we strongly encourage HEIs to engage fully with academics on the implications of job demands and job resources on their work engagement. Flexibility of employment is the future.
- (10) In the global context of the knowledge society, lifelong learning, blended learning and community services have an important place in the efforts to open access ‘education for all’ and increase participation at the tertiary level of education. It is the evolving nature of education for the future.

---

## References

- [1] Ackerman, L. (1997). Development, Transition or Transformation: The Question of Change in Organisations. In Van Eynde, D., Hoy, J., & Van Eynde, D (Eds.), *Organisation Development Classics*. San Francisco, Jossey Bass.
- [2] Cevallos, F. J. (2013). Against the Windmills: The Commoditisation of Higher Education. *Presidential Perspectives: Responding to the Commoditisation of Higher Education (2012-2013 Series)*. Retrieved from <http://www.presidentialperspectives.org/pdf/2013/2013-Chapter-0-and-1-Against-the-Windmills-HE-Commoditization-Cevallos.pdf>
- [3] de Wit, H. (2005). *Rationales for Internationalisation of Higher Education*. Retrieved from <http://www.ipv.pt/millennium/wit11.htm>
- [4] de Wit, H. (2016). Competition or collaboration for change? *University World News*. Retrieved from <http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20160421103022691>
- [5] Dziuban, C. D., Hartman, J. L., & Moskal, P. D. (2004). Blended Learning. *Research Bulletin, Educause Centre of Applied Research*, 2004 (7), 1-12.
- [6] Ettenson, R., & Knowles, J. (2008). Don't Confuse Reputation with Brand. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 49 (2), 19-21.
- [7] Fok, W. P. (2007). Internationalisation of Higher Education in Hong Kong. *International Education Journal*, 8 (1), 184-193.
- [8] Greenaway, D., Hine, R., & Milner, C. (1995). Vertical and Horizontal Intra-industry Trade: A Cross Industry Analysis for the United Kingdom. *Economic Journal, Royal Economic Society*, 105 (433), 1505-18.
- [9] Hecht, B. (2013). Collaboration is the New Competition. *Harvard Business Review*. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2013/01/collaboration-is-the-new-compe>
- [10] Kreutz, C. (2008). *Complexity Trap: Local vs. Global Knowledge in Development Work*. Retrieved from <https://www.crisscrossed.net/2008/05/12/complexity-trap-local-vs-global-knowledge-in-development-work/>
- [11] Maierbrugger, A. (2013). Brunei's Brain Drain Problem Can Be Addressed. *Investvine*. Retrieved from <http://investvine.com/bruneis-brain-drain-problem-can-be-addressed/>
- [12] Morrison, D. (2013). Is Blended Learning the Best of Both Worlds? *Online Learning Insights*. Retrieved from <https://onlinelearninginsights.wordpress.com/2013/01/17/is-blended-learning-the-best-of-both-worlds/>
- [13] Naidoo, R. (2016). The Competition Fetish in Higher Education: Varieties, Animators and Consequences. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 37 (1), 1-10.
- [14] Neimi, H. (2002). Active Learning – a Cultural Change Needed in Teacher Education and in Schools. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 18, 763-780.
- [15] OECD. (2011). Higher Education Institutes. *Actor Brief: Higher Education Institutes (HEIs)*. Retrieved from <http://www.oecd.org/innovation/policyplatform/48373782.pdf>
- [16] Robertson, R. (1992). *Globalisation: Social Theory and Global Culture*. UK: Sage Publications.
- [17] Saunders, S. (2013). Defining Internationalisation vs. Globalisation within Higher Education. *University Outlook*. Retrieved from <http://universityoutlook.com/topics/international/defining-internationalisation-vs-globalisation-wthin-higher-education>.
- [18] Somo, L. (2016). Reputation vs Brand: What's the difference? *Mail & Guardian (Special Reports)*. Retrieved from <http://mg.co.za/article/2016-09-30-reputation-vs-brand-whats-the-difference/>
- [19] Walker, M. (2013). Feedback and feedforward: Student Responses and their Implications. In Merry, S., Price, M., Carless, D., & Taras, M. (Eds), *Reconceptualising Feedback in Higher Education: Developing a Dialogue with Students* (pp. 103-112). New York: Routledge.
- [20] Wareing, S. (2014). How a University Research Strategy Can Support and Complement Learning and Teaching. *Bucks New University*. Retrieved from [https://bucks.ac.uk/whoswho/vc\\_office/blog/research\\_alligned\\_with\\_teaching\\_pvc\\_018/](https://bucks.ac.uk/whoswho/vc_office/blog/research_alligned_with_teaching_pvc_018/)