



**CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS OF THE CHALLENGES
FACED BY THE MALAYSIAN PRIVATE HIGHER
LEARNING INSTITUTIONS IN THE PROVISION OF
QUALITY EDUCATION**

BY

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ABSTRACT

Efforts at enhancing levels of quality education in private higher learning institutions (HLIs) by identifying the challenges faced and practical solutions to address the challenges have been initiated due to the vital role played by these institutions in producing human capital. Yet, there has not been much attempt in identifying the challenges faced by these institutions in providing quality education and the practical solutions for addressing those challenges, in a structured and systematic manner. This study fills the void by developing a hierarchical model that enables the ranking of the challenges faced by the private HLIs as well as each of their critical success factors (CSFs).

The specific objectives of the study are to: (1) identify the challenges faced by the Malaysian Private HLIs in providing quality education, (2) ascertain the CSFs that act as practical solutions in addressing each challenge, and (3) identify the most critical challenge as well as its most crucial corresponding CSF based on the ranking. The sequential mix method was adopted by combining qualitative and quantitative approaches in this study. Semi structured interviews with 29 participants were initially performed to identify the challenges and CSFs. This was then followed by a questionnaire survey collected from 158 respondents to prioritise the identified findings. Data for both stages was purposely accumulated from internal and external stakeholders of Malaysian Private HLIs ranging from relevant personnel, i.e., the quality directors, administrators and senior academics, to students, parents, prospective employers and regulatory agencies.

Thematic analysis was utilised in the qualitative stage, uncovering the eight identified challenges namely '*Academics*', '*Facilities*', '*Students*', '*Programmes and curriculum*', '*Competition*', '*Accreditation*', '*Finance*' and '*Research*' together with their corresponding CSFs. The four stages of Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) was subsequently applied in ranking these identified challenges which witnessed '*Finance*' as the most crucial challenge and '*High competency in managing the institution's finance*' as the most important CSF in addressing this challenge.

The hierarchical model developed in this study is expected to provide valuable guidance to Malaysian Private HLIs in areas where resources need to be prudently disbursed, specifically in resolving the structurally prioritised challenges. As they engage in efforts to improve quality education, they can use the model for assessment and planning purposes. The model will be useful not only to HLI practitioners and administrators but also in the design and implementation of policies by the regulatory agencies, particularly in assisting the operations of these private funding institutions that perform identical functions as the public HLIs in producing the nation's human capital.

الخلاصة

لقد تم الشروع في جهود تعزيز مستويات جودة التعليم في مؤسسات التعليم العالي الخاصة بتحديد التحديات التي تواجهها والحلول العملية لمواجهة التحديات وذلك نظرا للدور الحيوي الذي تلعبه هذه المؤسسات في إنتاج رأس المال البشري. ومع ذلك، ليس هناك محاولات كثيرة لتحديد التحديات التي تواجهها هذه المؤسسات في تقديم تعليم ذو جودة والحلول العملية لمواجهة هذه التحديات بطريقة منظمة ومنهجية. تملأ هذه الدراسة هذا الفراغ بتطوير نموذج هرمي يمكن من تصنيف التحديات التي تواجه مؤسسات التعليم العالي الخاصة وكذلك عوامل النجاح الحاسمة.

الأهداف الخاصة لهذه الدراسة هي: (1) تحديد التحديات التي تواجهها مؤسسات التعليم العالي الخاصة المألوية في تقديم تعليم ذو جودة، (2) التحقق من عوامل النجاح الحاسمة التي تمثل حلول عملية في مواجهة كل تحدي، (3) تحديد التحدي الأكثر أهمية وكذلك عامل النجاح الحاسم المقابل له بناء على التصنيف. تم تبني الطريقة التتابعية المختلطة وذلك بدمج الطرق الكمية والنوعية في هذه الدراسة. تم تنفيذ مقابلات شبه ممنهجة مع 29 مشارك لتحديد التحديات وعوامل النجاح الحاسمة. ثم أُتبع باستبيان جُمع من 158 مشاركا لتحديد الأولويات في النتائج المحصلة. تم تجميع البيانات في المرحلتين بشكل مقصود داخليا وخارجيا من أصحاب المصلحة في مؤسسات التعليم العالي الخاصة من الشخصيات المناسبة، أي مدراء الجودة، والإداريين، وكبار الأكاديميين، إلى الطلاب، والأباء، وأصحاب العمل المحتملين والجهات المنظمة.

تم استخدام التحليل الموضوعي في المرحلة النوعية، والذي كشف عن ثمان تحديات تم تحديدها وهي "الأكاديميين"، و"الإمكانيات"، و"الطلاب"، و"البرامج والمناهج"، و"المنافسة"، و"الاعتماد"، و"التمويل"، و"البحث" مع عوامل النجاح الحاسمة المقابلة لها. ومن ثم تم تطبيق الأربع المراحل لعملية التحليل الهرمي في تصنيف هذه التحديات المحددة والتي أظهرت "التمويل" كأهم تحدي و"الكفاءة العالية في إدارة مالية المؤسسة" كأهم عامل نجاح حاسم في مواجهة هذا التحدي.

إن النموذج الهرمي الذي تم تطويره في هذه الدراسة يتوقع منه أن يقدم إرشاد قيّم لمؤسسات التعليم العالي الخاصة في المجالات التي تحتاج إلى توزيع حصيف خصوصا في حل التحديات ذات الأولوية البنوية. وعندما ينخرطون في جهود تحسين جودة التعليم، يمكنهم استخدام النموذج لأغراض التقييم والتخطيط. والنموذج ليس مفيدا لممارسي وإداري مؤسسات التعليم العالي الخاصة فحسب، بل أيضا لتصميم وتطبيق السياسات من قبل الجهات المنظمة، خصوصا في مساعدة تشغيل هذه المؤسسات الخاصة التمويلية التي تنفذ مهام متطابقة مثل مؤسسات التعليم العالي العامة في إنتاج رأس المال البشري للدولة.

APPROVAL PAGE

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Anis Kosni and Saniah Ahmad for laying the foundation of what I turned out to be in life.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a general overview of the present study. It begins with a discussion on the background of the study, on the importance of private higher learning institutions (HLIs) in general and specifically in Malaysia. This is followed by the research problem, research questions, research objectives, the scope and the significance of the study.

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In the last quarter of the 20th century, the private HLI sector had suddenly become the fastest-growing segment of higher education in almost all parts of the world (Li, 2014; Halai, 2013; Levy, 2006; Altbach & Levy, 2005) including Malaysia (Tierney & Sirat, 2015; Arokiasamy, 2011; Sivalingam, 2006). This drastic expansion may be attributed to two key factors. The primary factor is due to the growth of mass higher education which resulted in the inability of public HLIs to absorb the increasing demand for tertiary education (Mukherjee & Mukherjee, 2013; Bing, 2009; Shin & Harman, 2009; Altbach & Levy, 2005; Teffera & Altbach, 2004). Thus, this led to the creation of private HLIs as a substantial education provider in the higher education market which was previously dominated by the public HLIs. Secondly, the growth was an outcome of government policies that authorised the private sector to provide higher education (Shin & Harman, 2009).

Likewise, Malaysia was experiencing a similar scenario. The Malaysian government's initiative in launching three educational Acts in 1996, namely, the National Council on Higher Education Act 1996, the Private Higher Educational Institution Act 1996 and the National Accreditation Board, 1996 has resulted in increasing the number of private HLIs. To date, there are approximately 70 private universities (including Malaysian private universities and foreign branch campuses), 34 university colleges and 410 colleges which share the responsibility of providing tertiary education to the nation. The number is considered sizable, as demand for tertiary education cannot be absorbed by the 20 public universities, 33 polytechnics and 91 community colleges in Malaysia (Malaysia Education Blueprint, 2015-2025).

Besides complementing the public HLIs in producing human capital for the nation, private HLIs are also recognised as a contributor to the country's GDP and economic growth (Arokiasamy, Ismail, Ahmad, & Othman, 2011; Becket & Brookes 2008; Fahmi, 2006). It is estimated that Malaysian Private HLIs alone contributed RM1.3 billion annually to the national economy (Abu Bakar, Hashim, Ahmad, Md. Isa, & Dzakaria, 2009). As stipulated in the Tenth Malaysian Plan (2011-2015), the private HLIs are also anticipated to increase its contribution in GDP by 1.5 times to two per cent in 2015, particularly via international student enrolment (Yen, 2015). Approximately, each international student would contribute to a minimum of RM30,000 per annum to the economy. The existence of private HLIs in Malaysia also helped to reduce the currency outflow caused by sending students to study abroad, estimated at the minimum of RM60,000 – RM70,000 per student annually (Lim, 2009).

The issues discussed above highlight the prominent role of private HLIs. Apart from that, the private HLIs in Malaysia are required to collaborate with the