



## **University rankings and underemployment are illusions**

IN response to the letter “Ranking is not a clear indicator of university’s quality” published on June 16 (The Star, online at [bit.ly/star\\_ranking](https://bit.ly/star_ranking)), I would like to share my experience as a postgraduate student in a public university here.

After working for 10 years, I decided to take a sabbatical and returned from overseas to be close to home. Knowing that this public university had recently achieved new heights in world rankings, I gave it a try. Lo and behold, the quality of its lecturers is astonishing – not in a good way.

Two out of three lecturers are close-minded, not enthusiastic about conveying knowledge, had not bothered to update their lecture content which has been recycled for decades, and sometimes appear to not want to be in the class (Microsoft Teams class as everything is online).

A university is supposed to offer a vibrant knowledge exchange environment that stimulates our thoughts and inspires us to learn, but a lot of the time I just feel suffocated. Another alarming thing is the quality of the students, both local and international. Their command of the English language, depth of knowledge, analytical skills, curiosity – things that you expect from people in a higher education institution – are all lacking. It makes me wonder, how did they graduate and get into this postgraduate programme in the first place?

This brings me to the issue of skills-related underemployment. According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia’s Labour Force Survey Report 2020, Malaysia’s skills-related underemployment has grown from 27.2% in 2010 to 38% in 2020. Underemployment is defined as a person accepting a job that he or she is overqualified for. But is that really so in Malaysia’s case?

When universities produce graduates who do not have the knowledge or skills equivalent to their degree, how can employers hire them for the engineering, biotechnology, finance, etc, positions they claim to be qualified for? When graduates end up in semi- or low-skilled jobs and are unable to repay their PTPTN (National Higher Education Fund Corp) loans, whose fault is it?

We are churning out a record number of graduates each year, but no one has stopped to check the quality of these students and, most importantly, the quality of the universities that are producing them. If an institution sometimes dubbed the crown jewel of Malaysia’s tertiary education has questionable education quality, what about the rest?

I think it's high time we are honest with ourselves. Stop sending unqualified students to universities and wasting their time and money. Let them enter TVET (technical and vocational education and training) or go straight into the workforce. Universities, stop chasing ranking. Put the money into applied research and hiring top-notch lecturers who are keen to impart knowledge. Practise meritocracy. Only high-quality universities can produce a quality workforce. For now, we have none.

<https://www.thestar.com.my/opinion/letters/2021/06/22/university-rankings-and-underemployment-are-illusions>