

## Higher learning institutions play significant roles in nation building

UNIVERSITIES, regardless of public or private, play a significant role in shaping a person, society and a nation's holistic growth as a continuation of the formative years of learning spent after elementary to secondary school.

Today, the higher education system in Malaysia has developed rapidly and no longer serves a small pool of elite groups, but individuals from all walks of life have equal opportunity and access to tertiary education.

Malaysia annually produces a significant number of graduates who have obtained various certifications from the diploma level to degree holders and later post-graduates.

According to the **Department of Statistics Malaysia**, in 2021, the number of graduates in Malaysia increased by 4.7% representing 5.61 million individuals compared to 5.36 million individuals in 2020.

The data include individuals aged 15 and above with the highest certificate obtained either through universities, colleges, polytechnics, recognised bodies or equivalent, in which the duration of study is at least two years.

There are many higher learning institutions in Malaysia and out of the total, we have 20 public institutions or universities that serve the educational needs along with programmes and courses tailored specially for the different interests.

### Malaysia's First, Oldest Public University

The first and oldest public university in the country was the University of Malaya (UM) which was founded on Oct 8, 1949. UM was built upon a merger of King Edward VII College of Medicine and Raffles Colleges which was founded in 1928.

The merger of these institutions was due to demands to provide the education needs in both Federal of Malaya as well as Singapore which later laid a foundation for nation-building altogether as it formed a generation of highly skilled and educated men.

During the first decade of UM's establishment, its growth was rapid as it has to set up two autonomous divisions, one located in Singapore and the other in Kuala Lumpur (KL).

These two campuses eventually separated in 1962 into the University of Singapore in Singapore, and UM in KL respectively.

Being the genesis of the higher learning institution in Malaya, the establishment of UM also paved the way for self-governance in Malaysia as it was self-governed under its constitution.

It also received tremendous financial support from the government. Up till 1969 since its establishment, the government had provided RM61.2 million of the total RM65.6 million in capital development expenditure.

From its foundation in 1949, the university prided itself on a long history of accolades and high-ranked academic experience which accelerated the advancement of education in the country and pushed for the golden era of university autonomy.

On June 16, 1962, UM celebrated the installation of its first chancellor, who happened to be the country's first Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra and the first VC was Prof Oppenheim, a world-renowned mathematician.

The current chancellor of UM is the Sultan of Perak Sultan Nazrin Muizzudin Shah.

Since then, UM has produced many prominent Malaysian alumni that have extensively contributed toward the development of the country and political growth, and have been notable in various fields and areas of expertise within the country and beyond.

Notably, the university comprised distinctive faculties including the Arts and Social Sciences, Business and Accountancy, while part of it also for Dentistry, Engineering, Languages and Linguistics, Law, Medical Sciences and more.

Today, the public research university is well-positioned and rose to be among the top 100 universities in the world, according to the QS World University rankings 2019. At the same time, UM has also consistently increased in ranking to 59th in the world and ninth in Asia in the 2021 series.

It also has remarkably bridged the local aspiration for university education and remains a preferred institution due to its reputation as well as facilitative campus life.

#### Private Higher Learning Institutions Landscape

Throughout the years, Malaysia has been aggressive in fostering higher education and successfully created a conducive environment for that purpose. While the public institution was created, the emergence of private education also gradually took place as many parties realised it was important to the local economy and human capital development.

Interestingly, Malaysia is also recognised as an education hub worldwide and has sparked many world-class foreign universities' interests to expand their presence here, while empowering the youth and local talents with a high-quality education.

This resulted in the country having more than 50 private universities, six foreign university branch campuses, 403 active private colleges, 30 polytechnics and 73 public communities as of 2011.

#### Malaysia's First Private University

As for the private higher learning institutions, they began slowly gaining momentum three decades ago and one of the peaks was after the establishment of Multimedia University (MMU), the country's first government-approved private university in Malaysia established by Telekom Malaysia Bhd in 1997. Its inception was primarily to cater to the latest development in IT and multimedia as well as contributed to the advancement of the new millennium era.

Began as a catalyst for the development of the Multimedia Super Corridor and with a single faculty of IT, this private-government-linked university strives to bring change and create value to the economy and society through the advancement of technology.

Today, the university has undergone various changes and comprises nine faculties and 19 research centres including Distance Education Centre in Cyberjaya, Selangor. It has three campuses located in Melaka, Cyberjaya and Johor.

As more foreign students started to enrol in Malaysia, it also opened a new door for the first foreign private university to set its footing in Malaysia and Monash University did so in 1998.

Among other overseas universities available in the country is the University of Nottingham, Curtin University, Swinburne University of Technology, Newcastle University School of Medicine and the University of Southampton.

Monash University was set up in 1998 as one of the first foreign universities to establish a campus in Malaysia. It is located in the centre of Sunway city with approximately 9,400 students from 78 different countries.

It offers a vibrant and culturally diverse environment that is well-connected with the industry and government as a platform for research and education engagement with South-East Asia and beyond.

Monash University also actively collaborated with Sunway Medical Centre in granting internship opportunities for its students and partnering to create a safer medical device for national use.

Overall, the public and private institutions in Malaysia have grown leaps and bounds to support the role of tertiary education and most importantly contribute to the building of Malaysia into a developed nation.

By and large, even more, private institutions and colleges have been established in recent years, which offered students with options and increased the number of academic admissions from various domains in the country.

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