

STRENGTHENING HIGHER EDUCATION FOR A SUCCESSFUL WORKFORCE

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GENDER INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION: ILLUSORY OR A NECESSITY?

Hariyati Shahrina Abdul Majid and Ainol Madziah Zubairi

Introduction

Malaysia, which achieved its independence in 1957, has undergone incredible socio-economic changes that have brought about wealth to its citizens. The growth and development of the Malaysian economy can largely be attributed to the success of the Malaysian education system which has seen literacy rate increases from 80 per cent for men in 1980 to more than 90 per cent in 2000. Similar increase is also observed in women, albeit slightly lower; from 62 per cent in 1980 to 82 per cent in 2000 (Aminah, 1998). The Malaysian higher education system has also undergone great transformations in the last five decades with, to date, a two-fold increase in the number of government universities compared to before the turn of the century.

The main aim of Malaysian higher learning institutions is to enable all their graduates to compete in an increasingly global world of work, and therefore, the employability of students is an important consideration. Employability refers to “a set of skills, knowledge, and personal attributes that make an individual more likely to secure and be successful in their chosen occupation(s) to the benefit of themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy” (www.le.ac.uk/ssds/esac/employability/). The employability of graduates is, thus, a combination of subject knowledge and understanding, personal and key skill development, self-efficacy beliefs and the students taking responsibility for their own learning and personal development. These are important not just for enhancing academic learning but also for future career prospects. In short, the employability skills and attributes that are developed whilst studying are therefore most likely to be deployed in the work setting.