

# Education in perspective

The Sun gets Tan Yew Sing, the forward-looking president of Inti Group of Colleges, to share his thoughts on the education industry

**Q:** What do you think of the private education industry in the country? And the proliferation of private institutions and the disturbing trends we should check?

**A:** The state of the education industry in Malaysia can be described as being in a state of flux. There have been many changes and significantly new developments which have arisen from a number of factors, such as the following:

1. Private education has proven to be a viable and very rewarding investment such that many industries and corporations are now jumping onto the bandwagon. However, this is an industry with a conscience where profit maximisation clearly is not an aim.

2. The enforcement of the new Education Acts that regulate private higher education and the National Accreditation Board Act of 1996 specify the kind of set-ups that private institutions should have plus the minimum quality standards that have to be achieved for academic programmes to be offered.

3. The enforcement unit of the Department of Private Higher Education has been activated to enforce all regulations that pertain to the running of private colleges.

These factors have caused private education providers to re-examine their set-ups so as to comply with the statutory requirements.

In so far as the proliferation of private education institutions are concerned, there are signs that many small private colleges are facing a steadily declining student enrolment and are not able to function efficiently.

Inti College is encouraged by the call by the Minister of Education for smaller private education institutes and colleges to merge to create institutions that are efficient and that can provide good academic services, infrastructure, and facilities. In light of this, we can say that consolidation and strategic alliances are the

current trends in the industry.

Education must never be allowed to develop to a stage where colleges compete for students at the expense of quality. This will happen if private colleges spend inordinate amounts of money for advertisements, promotions and road shows. There are already signs that this is happening with newspapers offering frequent supplements. Colleges which do not want to be left out, find themselves drawn to taking up advertising space. I feel this is a disturbing trend because money could be better spent on teacher-training, student facilities such as libraries and laboratories and research. In fact, the Malaysian Association of Private Colleges (Mapco), at its recent workshop, discussed this issue to see if this excessive advertising can be reasonably reduced.

**Q:** What kind of impact will globalisation have on the private education scene?

**A:** Globalisation will see the gradual removal of national boundaries and the opening up of communication. This means that students will be able to obtain education from whichever country they wish through distance learning. No government can prevent this from happening. However, distance learning will only benefit those who possess critical success factors such as being a self-starter, having self-discipline, high motivation, perseverance, and

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being goal-orientated.

The distance learning mode will be more suitable for students pursuing post-graduate programmes, but unsuitable in the Malaysian context for undergraduate studies.

However, the threat to private colleges will be more severe in the form of quality competition. By this, I mean that Malaysian private colleges will have to enhance the quality of their programmes in facing the challenge of internationalisation of education.

Globalisation will lead to more student and staff exchange moves, and various academic collaborations. Therefore, globalisation ought to be seen from the angle of helping us to become more open and creative as well as develop a global outlook.

**Q:** Some 36,000 graduates are unemployed in the country. The general perception is that these graduates possess the "wrong" degrees while some others are not the all-rounder sought by employers. The general belief also is that a lot of these grads do not possess the right attitude. What do you think?

**A:** University graduates being unemployed is not a new phenomenon. But to have this happen here in Malaysia is shocking especially since the country is aggressively undertaking efforts to address a shortage of human resource for the K-economy. It is difficult to discuss this issue at length because I do not have access to studies conducted on this matter. However, I would like to guess that these unemployed graduates may have been overly selective when applying for jobs.

Another possibility to be looked into is that the graduates may not have the necessary skills or competencies required by employers. It is a well-known fact that many graduates want to work in major cities in the Klang Valley or other major towns; many of them do not mind



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waiting until a suitable job located in a preferred location comes along.

Many years of robust economic growth and near full-employment in Malaysia has also contributed to attitude problems among our youths. Many of them expect to land good jobs when they do not even have the prerequisites. I think that perhaps some graduates may have to

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