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Rationalization of higher education: Should it be necessary?

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Rationalization of higher education

As it is understood, higher education's main task is to play an active role in improving and developing the quality of life, culture, science, and international cooperation to achieve world peace for the welfare of humankind. It's time for us to reflect on whether higher education needs to be rationalized. We need to look at this issue from a bigger perspective. There needs to be a new awareness, which involves not only reason but also inner understanding. It may be necessary to realize that the higher education system should be free from the capitalism of knowledge, social, economic and political that shape the world today. Awareness of liberation is needed. Many universities are unconsciously forced to follow trends and may deviate from their original purpose.



Higher education needs to be original. In a sense, higher education must solve the fundamental problems faced by the nation. The current system forces us to become victims of education capitalism driven by multinational companies such as Elsevier, Thomson Reuters and Quacquarelli Symonds (QS). Directly and indirectly, consciously and unconsciously, these capitalists' forces control higher education's vision and mission. As a result, many universities leave their wisdom.

Higher education becomes rational in detail but irrational in general. It seems logical with measurable instruments at the scientific, administrative level, such as research results in bibliography data, but irrational when we talk about the real contributions to science and technology and humanizing humans, especially in developing countries. Until now, we are still consumers, not producers of technological products. Higher education needs to be put on its original purpose, namely sovereign, dignified and humanized. It needs to ask, are we already free or become voluntary slaves of the capitalist forces that make up the higher education system today?

Criticism of the current higher education system

Herbert Marcuse from the Institute for Social Research, The Frankfurt School, said that the world community had become a one-dimensional system. One of the characteristics is the occurrence of total administration. There is a comprehensive administration of higher education, where everything is controlled to lose universities' uniqueness and potential. For example, all lecturers and postgraduate students are obliged and forced to publish their research results in indexed journals (Scopus and Clarivate Analytics). In this way, there is a tendency that universities think more about outcomes than processes. It doesn't matter whether the university has adequate laboratory facilities or not. Although

this policy is positive and rational in forcing lecturers to publish their work, it is necessary to evaluate whether this policy can empower higher education to have a real impact on society and the nation.

This becomes a dilemma when the management of research and technology is combined with higher education. The essence of higher education is wisdom. On the other hand, the essence of technology is the technological product. The indicators are also various. So, there is a dilemma to produce the policies to advance research and technology and higher education at the same time. Education has lost its focus on human development when it has also pursued other priorities. I often meet lecturers who don't have time to research with a high teaching load. I have also found that scientific publications were produced without the proper research methodology.

The second characteristic of a one-dimensional system is the use of functional terms. World Class University, university ranking, h-index, citation and so on are functional terms used in higher education. Many universities talk about the term World Class University without knowing what the word means. Often we are mistaken in looking at scientific achievements. Not always, a high h-index means high research quality, and not always, a low h-index means low research quality. The h-index can be increased just by writing a review article without researching in the laboratory.

Let us first see what misunderstanding means. The meaning is "having or showing faulty judgment or reasoning," which means to show a wrong judgment or reasoning about something. Perceptions can be shaped by media (including social media). Often, we mistakenly view people or institutions' scientific achievements because the media provide inaccurate information and explanations. Usually, this information is deliberately exaggerated to attract attention, even though it's wrong. For people who do not understand specific scientific fields, sometimes they only see the achievement only from bibliographic data such as citation, h-index and Scopus or Clarivate Analytics bibliographic data. This number game is very prone to manipulation and competition with number indicators.

The third characteristic is pretentious — attempting to impress by affecting greater importance or merit than is possessed. Many universities are pretentious that uses functional terms, such as World Class University and university rankings.

Epistemological process

I see this problem from the perspective of the epistemological process. The epistemological process begins with ignorance, doubt or curiosity. Knowledge is a combination of experience and reason. The combination of experience and reason will produce knowledge. If knowledge is properly managed, then its level will increase to become a science. Therefore, studying and researching will not develop into this stage if scientific experience and research — given to research facilities, funds and information to lecturers to conduct research — are not adequately managed. As a result, the epistemological process will not run well if all the supporting tools to gain scientific experience are incomplete and available. As a person involved in chemistry research, I

call it “literature of chemistry”; chemistry is produced without laboratory facilities, just theorizing without any research experience in the laboratory. In contrast to sciences that rely on paper and pen alone, such as economics and literature, without complete laboratory facilities, scientific work is impossible to produce from chemistry and applied science.

What needs to be done?

We dare to think and rethink, shape and reshape, and create and remake higher education according to the nation’s needs. A correct direction and a solid foundation must be laid and determined to bring higher education to a bright future. It is needed to make higher education sovereign, dignified and humanize.