



## Transformation of University College to University: Academics' Perception of the Challenges

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Higher education Higher education provider Transformation University University College	Transformation of university college to university is part of Malaysian government's efforts to revolutionize higher education and to prepare its human capital to becoming a developed nation. Pressure of the transformation impacts the stakeholders in particular the academics who are responsible for carrying out most of the strategies to achieve the transformation objective. The study presents and analyses the challenges experienced by academics in the transformation process via qualitative research design. In the study, data were examined from academics' responses to semi-structured interview questions and document analysis during which the transformation was progressively taking place at a Malaysian university college. The results show ten types of challenges were identified. The results provide evidence to various types of challenges experienced by the academics and its effects on them in the process of transforming university college to university. Thus, the results assist the policymakers, leaders of higher education providers and/or the management to make critical modification and improvement to relevant policies, resources, and capability in course-correcting their strategies towards attaining the objectives of transformation process.

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

As a matter of fact, few studies concentrate on the challenges faced by academics in transforming university college to university. Furthermore, in realizing the transformational intents, the academics are compelled to revive their identity as teachers, researchers and manager-academics, to embrace career development for work gratification and motivation for university workforce and to undertake more multifaceted, expanded and specific tasks according to their disciplines and functions. Therefore, the main objective of this study is to identify and describe the challenges faced by academics in completing their tasks and responsibilities as teachers, researchers, tutors, and instructors, while university college undergoes the transformation towards becoming university. Apart from that, the study also investigated

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the contributing factors, impacts on academics and most impacting factor from the perspective of the academics.

The reason is the transformation of academic institution has vast impacts on academics including in the aspects of academic identity, academic career, and academic activities.

## 2.0 METHODOLOGY

Qualitative approach was employed to obtain data for the study; whereby interview and document analysis were utilized as instruments to gauge on the «how» and «why» of the challenges experienced by the academics in the transformation process. However, only twelve participants provided their consents and eventually interviewed for the study.

Table 1 indicates five semi-structured interview questions used in the study.

Table 1: Semi-structured interview questions

No.	Question
Q1	What are the challenges you have experienced in your institution's transformation to be a university?
Q2	What are the factors/causes that contributed to the challenges that you have experienced and why?
Q3	How do these challenges affect you as an academic?
Q4	Which factor that you just mentioned affects you the most as an academic and why?

Document analysis was utilized to attempt answering Q1. Documents such as memo, meeting minutes, strategic planning booklet and reports were retrieved from six different departments such as Human Resource Department, Risk Management Department, BAKAT Department, Innovation and Graduate Studies Department and Deputy Rector's Office, Academic Development and Quality Department. These themes were later compared with data from the interview to determine the similarities and differences to answer semi-structured interview questions in the study.

## 3.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

First, findings from the interview disclose ten types of challenges were substantial in the transformation to be a full-fledged university. The findings were similar with result of another study by who found that changing academic setting impacted the ways academics practice their professionalism in working towards realizing institutional KPI such as becoming full- fledged university.

Table 2 shows summary of the findings for the types of challenges experienced by the academics at the institution.

Table 2: Summary of findings for Q1- types of challenges

No.	Interview	Document Analysis
1.	Teaching & learning	Teaching & learning
2.	Supervision	Supervision
3.	Research, publication & commercialization	Research, publication & commercialization
4.	Consultation	Consultation
5.	Community program	Community program
6.	Career development	Career development
7.	Working culture & environment	Management
8.	Management	Funding
9.	Funding	
10.	Institution	

Additionally, the results confirm contributing factors to challenges of HEI transformation in relation to academics as suggested by. Second, findings from the interview reveal the factors contributed to the challenges from the perspective of the participants. The participants detailed out the factors for senior administrative supports such as funding and top management, robust design such as its lack of implementation, collaborative leadership such as lack of collaboration between management and staff in decision making and a strong leader, visible action such as observable strategic planning accomplishment and staff development such as employment status, comfort zone culture and bureaucratic training procedure. Hence, the findings strengthen contributing factors for HEPs transformation process to become university focusing on the academics as proposed by.

Table 3 tabulates five contributing factors for the challenges in the transformation of university college to become university.

Table 3: Summary of findings for Q2- factors contribute to the challenges

No.	Interview	Document Analysis
1.	Senior administrative support	Not Applicable
2.	Robust design	
3.	Collaborative leadership	
4.	Visible action	
5.	Staff development	

They highlighted three main areas that were affected by the process such as academic activities, academic career, and academic identity. The impacts on academic activities involve the growth of their task's specialization including teaching, research, administration, or a combination of any these three and their lack of control over the management of their preferred academic specialization. Meanwhile, the impacts on academic career concern more with HEPs staff management implementation including academics' appointment, promotions, and remunerations. Lastly, the impacts on academic identity focus the belief the academics have with regards their work scope as teachers, researchers, administrators or/and entrepreneurs.

The participants' responses suggest that the impacts on academic activities were mainly on teaching, research, or both. Those who preferred teaching mainly focused on T&L activities and had no room for research. Additionally, focusing on research had made certain skilled academics to neglect developing technical skills among the students. Alternatively, they concentrated on developing research skills for the undergraduate students to support their own research activities which did not spell out the objective of the institution to be a highly skilled university.

Additionally, their feedbacks on Q3 also reveal the impacts of the challenges on academic career. Table 4 lists the summary of findings on the impacts of the challenges of the transformation process on the academics.

Table 4: Summary of findings for Q3 – impacts on the academics

No.	Interview	Document Analysis
1.	Academic activities	Not Applicable
2.	Academic career	
3.	Academic identity	

Fourth, the most affecting factors pointed by the participants in the study were staff development, senior administrative support, visible action, and collaborative leadership, respectively. Others are equally significant indicating that improvements should be planned and implemented in this area. Table 5 presents the summary of the findings on the factors that impacted the challenges the most as revealed by the academics.

Table 5: Summary of findings for Q4 – most affecting factor

No.	Interview	Document Analysis
1.	Staff development	Not Applicable
2.	Senior administrative	
3.	Visible action	
4.	Collaborative leadership	

Finally, the participants highlighted their efforts to overcome the challenges that were within their reach. They thought of alternatives so that they can perform their tasks and did not rely completely on the management support. Furthermore, overcoming research and development was mostly mentioned by the participants. They performed research by collaborating with colleagues within the university college or with those from other universities. Furthermore, they submitted research projects and papers for competitions and publications as many as possible with the hope they were accepted and approached by the industry for commercialization opportunity.

Table 6: Summary of findings for Q5 – efforts by the academics to overcome the challenges

No.	Interview	Document Analysis
1.	Teaching & learning	Teaching & learning
2.	Supervision	Supervision
3.	Research, publication & commercialization	Research, publication & commercialization
4.	Consultation	Consultation
5.	Community program	Community program
6.	Career development	Career development
7.	Working culture & environment	Management
8.	Management	Funding
9.	Funding	
10.	Institution	

#### 4.0 CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION OF THE STUDY

As a conclusion, the findings from the study can be used to guide the future state of transformation process for other university colleges to be universities or possibly the transformation of one type of HEPs to another. Higher education and HEPs are constantly revolutionized to meet current national strategic plan and policies. Hence, as emphasized that the information attained from one organization engaging in similar transformation is significant in assisting the change process of another.

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