

## The Role of Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) in Education and Social Mobility in Malaysia

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### Abstract

*The article examines the role of Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) and its role in promoting social mobility through education. The role of higher education exhibits differences and influenced by social origin, job mobility and class inequalities. In-depth interviews with six intergenerational graduates of UiTM and observations of general social mobility provide insights into the way in which UiTM graduates thrive themselves in the social landscape. Results illustrate that adaptation of UiTM graduates in the light of their social origin and earlier study in UiTM support the gross observation of a stronger chance of their betterment in the society. The potential to thrive by UiTM graduates appears to be related to their advanced education as well as their previous level of studies that contribute to the destiny and job mobility. Little direct evidence is found, however, to explain variations of adjusting to the society and job mobility by graduates whom are from middle to upper income families. A tentative suggestion is proposed that significant composition of graduates of UiTM has successfully reduced class inequalities among different races in Malaysia. It is recommended that future research should use different methods, such as experiments or detailed observations, to gain a better viewpoint on the impact of UiTM through its academic offerings.*

*Keywords: social mobility, UiTM, education, Malay, Bumiputera, affirmative policy*

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### INTRODUCTION

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It is of considerable importance to determine the fluidity of the social structure and whether education have made a positive through it are among the contentious issues in contemporary sociological and political forum. In retrospective, much of sociological literature was revolved around the principle that modern economies would have led to more meritocratic societies (Kerr, Dunlop, Harbison & Myers 1960/73; Treiman 1970; Parsons in Grusky 1994). In Malaysia, young generations are demanding

meritocracy and equal opportunities; otherwise, there are fears that social cohesion will continue to suffer, furthering the impetus to leave the country (Tyson, et al., 2011). In this context educational credentials become a very powerful indicator in the choice of a good worker. Ewan & Hugo (2018) found that, as more countries around the world expand to universal stages of higher education participation, there is likely to greater competition among graduates in the labour market. As a result, a growing proportion of graduates are likely to move down the occupational structure and to settle for employment in non-traditional roles and relatively low pay, while other graduates may face periods of unemployment. They further contended however, that such a trend is unlikely to put the brakes on the expansion of higher education participation, at least in the short term. Instead, higher education may be viewed as crucial by increasing numbers of young people for “survivalism” in unstable and competitive labour markets that characterise today’s economy.

There is, however, some concern in Malaysia that economic growth has stalled and that in order to take the next step to become an advanced economy there is an urgent need to increase productivity (Schuman 2010). This belief in an equalisation process led by modern economic developments has been put in doubt by numerous empirical studies which showed no evidence of this happening. In their well-known study, *The Constant Flux*, Erikson & Goldthorpe (1992) showed that relative differences among social classes have not substantially changed over time in nine industrialised countries (among them Great Britain and the US). In other words, the relative advantage of belonging to a middle class family compared to a working class family in acquiring higher occupational positions has remained constant. In one study in Brazil, it is found that people realize that there is a possibility of interstate migration gaining considerably higher incomes if they continue studying until they reach the qualification level of those migrants, when they are able to move to the same destination.

However, because the premium that these people could receive when they compare their current earnings to those obtained by middle- or low-skilled migrants is small or even negative, this leads to indifference on their part in terms of increasing their level of human capital (Pais et al., 2019). In a more recent study in India, Choudhary & Singh (2019) found that, the overall mobility and the upward component increase consistently as one moves from the lower parts of the income distribution to the upper parts of the income distribution. Apparently, a review of previous literature both on developed and developing countries often faced with many contentious issues. Therefore, this study was conducted to provide an understanding of role of UiTM in promoting education and social mobility among Bumiputera in Malaysia and to identify the issues pertaining to social origin and education attainment, job mobility and class inequalities. An extensive literature review was conducted at the early stage of the research. To further understanding the issues, an intergenerational analysis approach was adapted in this

study. In this approach, semi-structured interview was conducted to determine the impact of UiTM on education and social mobility. This paper is divided into four main sections. The overview of education and social mobility and Malaysia's Higher Education, as well as UiTM's role in engineering the destiny is discussed in the first section followed by the research methodology in the second section. Subsequently, the results and discussion of this study are presented and discussed in section three. Lastly, the conclusion of this work is drawn in section four of this paper.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

A weakness of modernisation theories lies in the inadequate attention paid to the association between social origin and educational attainment that ultimately affects the relation between social origin and occupational destination. Various explanations have been proposed to illustrate the mechanisms by which social class of origin affects the distribution of educational credentials (Marshall et al. 1997). Since Malaysia already has an intricate and comprehensive system of screening for university entrance, ACN Newswire (2015) propose an equally comprehensive system for screening work-related capabilities before students graduate. All these induced to the fact that "ascriptive forces find ways of expressing themselves as achievement". Social mobility implies that movement – of multiple kinds – is necessary, a notion which becomes increasingly problematic when considering the needs of individuals and the needs of the local region (Bradley et al, 2019). More recently, in a community perspective, some warn that social mobility is the wrong goal, as it does not necessarily imply more equality. They argue that social mobility could just mean that different people are poor and that individual success can never be the answer to the wider social problem of growing class inequalities, as many are left behind (Ana & Pedro, 2018). They found that, even when controlling for the effect of education, class differences in the chances of gaining higher occupational status persist. Moreover, over time, class effects have been increasingly mediated by educational attainment. A high rate of educational involvement among a population may be encouraging in terms of human capital development, which in turn should have a positive contribution to long-term economic development (Kamalbek & Burulcha, 2019).

### ***Social Mobility and Malaysia's Higher Education***

Consequently, for Malaysia, the emigration outflow, while substantially smaller than the inflow, is quite selective of particular groups. On the one hand it is highly skilled and well qualified while on the other it is highly selective of non-bumiputera (non-Malay) ethnic groups. For more than four decades, there has been government intervention in the

Malaysian economy in the form of preferential treatment for Malays in order to achieve a more equitable distribution of wealth between ethnic groups (Ibrahim & Sankaran, 2018; Wan & Sirat, 2018). This has led to Malays being given preferential access to education and training as well as employment opportunities. One of the responses to this has been a significant outflow of non-bumiputera (Chinese and Indian Malaysian) groups, especially the well qualified who can gain access to settlement in OECD countries. This emigration has definitely contributed to the shortage of skilled and well qualified workers in Malaysia.

Facilitated by the larger availability of economic and cultural resources, middle class families tend to invest in their children's education more than other families. Indeed, the maintaining of the social advantage of origin by their offspring depends more and more upon the acquisition of high educational qualifications. Moreover, since the financial crisis of 1997, the Malaysian economy has experiencing a persistent and increasing problem of graduate unemployment. Various studies have been conducted to studies the determinants of graduate unemployment. For instance, Lim & Normizan (2004) reported that around twenty per cent of the Malaysian graduates were in full-time employment that is not commensurate with qualification (overeducated). This amount is equal to those who obtained full-time employment that is commensurate with qualification. Similarly, Lim (2011) found that around twenty six per cent of the Malaysian graduates were overeducated and this amount is larger than those who are unemployed (around twenty three per cent). This highlights the problem of overeducated graduates can be prominent as unemployed graduates.

The study by Kamalbek & Burulcha (2019) is of particular interesting, especially for Malaysia - evaluate the relationship between school-to-work transition (STWT) and the education-job mismatch, and the mismatch effect on the wages of young individuals in Kyrgyzstan, as Malaysia. They concluded that higher education does not guarantee a corresponding job. On the contrary, young individuals without tertiary education are more likely to be employed with a right match (*ibid.*, 2019). This finding is robust to different job classification of university and non-university jobs. Another study by Sumer et al. (2008) examined gender, age, race/ethnicity, social support, English proficiency, and length of stay, and their relationships to depression and anxiety among international students. They found that students with lower levels of social support reported higher levels of depression and anxiety.

However, the comprehensive reorganisation of both primary and secondary education system has just started with the reform the Government initiated under

Education Blueprint. 2013-2025. For higher education, the issue of employability takes a centre stage through the Higher Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025, in which the Graduate Employability Skills Model (GEMS), was launched to address employability issues that currently plague Malaysian higher education. According to the researchers, the current Malaysian education system were primarily criticised for rewarding rote learning rather than skills better suited to a modern workplace (ACNewswire, 2015). Malaysian data indicates "a massive gap" between what higher education provides and what employers seek in graduates.

From 2007 until 2010, "the number of unemployed graduates had steadily increased to over 30,000 at both the diploma and degree levels," notes the Universiti Teknologi MARA research team. However in 2008, 67% of private companies increased their international worker population, "indicating that employers seem to favour foreigners and expatriates over local graduates." If graduates fail to display the requisite skills, the GEM would help identify and isolate specific areas of weakness that they can target for improvement or enhancement before they seek employment (Ibid). In the context of higher education institution, image has been used to develop positioning or repositioning strategy for reasons such as to be recognized as a world-class university, being reputable for its quality, prestige and the like. Image of a higher education institution covers a broad range of elements or dimensions and there has been no universal agreement (Yusof, et al., 2012).

### ***UiTM's: Reengineering the Destiny***

Affirmative action was introduced in 1971 when it became clear that the Malays, the majority in the population, held only 2 per cent of the country's wealth. The New Economic Policy was thus aimed at eradicating poverty and at closing the wealth gap between the Malays and the other races. However, there is evidence that a shortage of high productivity, high skilled workers is a barrier to Malaysia's further development and that this is not being fully satisfied by internal training or migration initiatives which are predominantly of low skilled workers. In this context the substantial outflow of highly skilled, productive native Malaysians must be an issue of concern (Hugo, 2011). Affirmative policies by allowing only Bumiputera students to UiTM are nothing new as it has been stipulated in UiTM Act 1976. Unfortunately, this become a limitation for UiTM to stand at par according with other universities following the global standard for ranking or rating purposes. It is particularly delicate subject to deal with when class inequalities are still persist today.

Moreover, even though upward mobility has always been greater than downward mobility, upward mobility has declined in the youngest cohorts. We argued that two processes have been underway. From at least the middle of the last century, labour market changes characterised by a contraction in manual jobs and an expansion of the service sector have offered higher opportunity for people who come from various social backgrounds to enter non-manual occupations. The focus on UiTM is very relevant for this study because in Malaysia, to date, UiTM has produced approximately 800,000 graduates. Since its establishment in 1956 (as a small Training Unit), UiTM has moved up leap and bounds. Without doubt, UiTM is a force to be reckoned with. Recently, as stated in the UiTM's Strategic Planning 2020-2025, the University aspires to be the main player in the global stage, with strong international linkages by staff and graduates who are employable overseas (UiTM, Strategic Planning 2020-2025).

## **ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK**

The assessment of the role of UiTM in promoting education and social mobility among Bumiputera in Malaysia and the issues pertaining to social origin and education attainment, job mobility and class inequalities requires a general analytical framework. 3 key hypotheses are proposed in this study.

As it is claimed by human capital theory, achieving graduation in higher education leads to important benefits both for the graduated individuals and for the economy as a whole and as such it is regarded as playing a significant role in influencing the process of social stratification (Doppelt, 2019; Andrietti, 2019, Becker, 1962). Of course, the role of the educational system as a “sorting machine” while widely recognized and appreciated does not always work in the same way across different societies. According to Antonella et al., (2019), in many countries, the more developed regions attract students not only because they offer adequate services and infrastructure and greater social well-being but also because they provide appropriate labour market conditions that, in turn, ensure more employment opportunities after graduation.

In much of the sociological literature on social mobility, the role of social class background as a significant factor of social success (upward social mobility, protection against downward social mobility and securing privileged positions) has been considered in a number of studies (Krishna & Nolan, 2019; Jørgensen et al., 2019; Mok & Jiang, 2018; Bathmaker et al., 2016). According to Nash (1999) the generative power of social class, conceptualized as a set of structures of social relationships constitutes the major

cause of socially differentiated educational attainments. The economic, cultural and political structures affect families, students and schools and shape strategic responses of families to maintain or advance their economic, cultural and social position of their offspring. Hence, from the individuals' point of view education, also becomes an instrument for social mobility rather than for the maintenance of status over generations, in which people can exercise their choice-making and boost their educational attainment. This has been extensively analyzed by sociologists of education such as Shavit & Blossfeld (1993) in their comparative research on the effect of family background on children's educational outcomes in which that in many countries the association between social origins and educational opportunity is still strong: people from more advantaged social classes have higher chances of embarking on a long educational career than those from less advantaged classes.

Therefore, hypotheses for exploring the relationship between social origin and education attainment is derived as follows:

*Hypotheses 1: Social origin will increase education attainment*

The interplay of individual and structural characteristics, affect the relative chances to move to higher education. In recent years, official statistics present a picture of relative openness in higher education, in the sense that they show an increasing number of students (male and female) progressing to higher education. This is in line with the United Nation's International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights that calls for accessible higher education, stating that it is necessary for the "full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity." The spirit of the covenant underlies the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which recognize that access to higher education is vital to lifelong learning. SDG 4 includes access to higher education in its 3rd target: "By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university." (United Nation, 2019).

The above undoubtedly constitute progress in terms of gender equality for example, if one compares the situation prevailing until the first decades of the twentieth century in many countries when women did not go to school at all, and the situation today (within a time-span of just three generations) where more than half of the higher education population is female. But a close examination of the choices young individuals and their families make for their future and the social forms in which they are embedded, may reveal a more complex picture. With respect to social justice and equality of opportunities, this picture challenges the notion that education attainment offers equal chances to everybody and that it offers a way to success through academic achievement, eventually job opportunity and career advancement.

Therefore, hypotheses for exploring the impact of education on job mobility is derived as follows:

*Hypotheses 2: Education will foster job mobility*

Educational institutions can produce societal change and transformation, as much as generating and maintaining social inequalities and inequities. Higher education institutions, policy makers and professional associations to develop school leaders who strive to include all students, they must provide the space, time and resources required for leaders to question their own understandings of student diversity and reflect upon how they may be promoting inclusion of all or for some, and whether or not they are continuing the disproportionate distribution of privilege and inequity in modern society. According Pollock & Briscoe (2019), to recognizing differences or diversity within student populations can include categories that are more “visible” such as gender, ethnicity, some religious affiliations and disabilities. Other differences are less visible, such as class, academic disabilities or sexual orientation. The weaker labour market position of the lesser educated makes them more vulnerable to the consequences of economic shocks.

During the Great Recession of 2008, lesser educated workers were indeed more susceptible to the economic shocks than the higher educated (Vuolo et al., 2016). Having a higher probability of working in sectors most affected by the economic shock (e.g. the construction sector) and having lower job security, partly explains this (Verick & Islam, 2010). Additionally, during economic downturns, the likelihood of the more educated displacing the lesser educated increases, i.e. people with high or middle education who cannot find a job lower their reservation wage and accept jobs under their educational level. Employers tend to raise their educational requirements when economic circumstances worsen. This causes the highly educated to displace the middle educated and so on. Hence, the probability of being pushed out of the labour market increases more for the lowest educated (Klein, 2015). Studies show, however, that the impact of a crisis differs between countries (OECD, 2010; Verick & Islam, 2010) and that changes in the impact of education upon employment probabilities also differ between countries (Bell & Blanchflower, 2010). Hence, national characteristics mediate the severity of education-related risks including class inequalities, during an economic downturn. Explanatory factors for variations in risk distributions between countries, besides the structural changes, include institutional factors such as labour market policies (Bennett, 2016) as well as the specific social and cognitive composition of the low educated in a given country (Gesthuizen et al., 2011; Abrassart, 2013).



Therefore, hypotheses for exploring the impact of education on class inequalities is derived as follows:

*Hypotheses 3: Education can reduce class inequalities*

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study adopts qualitative methods utilizing interview and the data sourced from UiTM's Centre for Strategic Planning & Information (CSPI). Apart from the extensive existing literature review, interviews with graduates from different age were conducted. For interview, purposive sampling is used, utilising snowballing technique through personal networks involving UiTM graduates of different decades. The graduates of 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s chosen for the research were interviewed both over the phone and in person. From an academic perspective, being UiTM's graduate themselves, the researcher's "insider" role represent a potential source of bias interpretation of findings but can also be regarded as "useful and positive" (Dawson, 2019). Informal discussions with fellow graduates as 'peer debriefing to enhance the accuracy of the account' (Ibid, 2019).

Six interview participants were chosen under the basis that they were able to furnish the breadth of graduate experiences and to identify themes that are relevant to the area of study. We first identified them based on our previous acquaintances and by interviewing key informants in the area. We undertook some desk research about social mobility and UiTM's mission to identify the informants. Selection of participants and identification of research teams took place between May and September 2019. Interviews by using an interview guide based on the objectives of the study were used to explore what they think about social mobility impacted by UiTM. What policy changes they are planning on widening the access to UiTM to respond to the country's demand for human capital? Participants were asked what do they think is their job best suitable for their destiny; how best they could use their skill and if they have an opportunity for mobility, what area would be their choice to be reskilled. We took detailed notes of the interviews. Conventional content manual analysis (inductive) was used in data analysis. This involved a process of generating a provisional list of codes/themes that were based on the research questions and objectives. The information collected from interviews and analysis of documents was then organized and rigorously interpreted to extract the key findings

using the content analysis method. Specifically, we analyzed the information using spiral steps for data analysis as proposed by Dawson (2019).

First, we organized the collected data into several forms (i.e. database, sentences, or individual word). Second, we scrutinized the collected data sets several times to obtain a complete picture or overview of what it contains as a whole by taking notes and summarizing the key points that suggested categories or themes related to the research. Third, the researchers identified and classified the general categories or themes accordingly. The themes that are applicable to this study are social origin, education attainment, destination and job mobility and class inequalities, among others. We used the data from the CSPI UiTM as well as from the Graduate Tracer Study data obtainable through all convocations, to analyse changes over time in the association between class of origin and destination. In specific, the data about the graduates provide us with some pictures regarding their career profiling, ie work in the private or public sector, becoming self-employed and their income bracket. We found that rates of absolute mobility among UiTM graduates have grown (CSPI). Finally, we integrated and summarized the data to describe the relationship between the categories or themes.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The above mentioned studies point towards an equalisation process in educational outcomes but they do not go further in investigating individuals' subsequent occupational outcomes. The results presented by the study by Yusof et al., (2012) indicate that UiTM management must take immediate actions to improve these aspects: which are 'academic reputation', 'competency of the graduates', 'graduates successful in their careers', 'graduates who are highly employable', 'potential to become a world class university' and 'well-managed university'. It is important to point out that the statement bearing 'has strong academic reputation' is the most important attribute to be a world class university. However, it was unveiled that the gap between the importance and performance means is the biggest. Yet the link among social class of origin, educational attainment and class of destination is of central concern to social mobility studies. This paper investigates this link by consolidating the views of the respondents during the interviews through the following hypotheses:

### **Hypotheses: Social origin will increase education attainment**

The deliberate choice of social origin opens access to tertiary education thereby lead to better education attainment thereafter. Access to higher education is happened when the basic certification from UiTM is recognized elsewhere including by foreign universities.

This way, graduates achieved upward mobility. Apart from certification of their technical knowledge, graduates are assessed against their generic skills such as communication, problem solving, critical thinking and other key elements that determine their employability. Progressing across time, as more and more students are coming from middle to upper income family now, respondents during interviews, suggested that access to higher education at UiTM now has not happened by forced, but rather by choice. This mean that some parents from wealthy family prefer their children to study in UiTM due to its reputation and quality education, rather than due to its relatively low academic fees. In anticipation, there are large amounts of data pertaining absolute mobility, especially upward mobility, which also benefited non-manual classes.

To overcome this problem, most respondents proposed several strategies that include, amongst others conducting tracer studies, development of generic skills, adjusting and upgrading curricula and activities to enhance their graduates' employment prospects, increasing the number of science and technology graduates, industrial attachments, improving proficiency in English, and benchmarking with established universities. More recently, however, the rate of expansion of low-skilled manual employment has slowed down, and so the children of parents who had been upwardly mobile between the 1980s and the 1990s now have less chance to be upwardly mobile or even to maintain their middleclass status than their parents had. But neither of these two processes involved a change in patterns of inequality. Findings from the study by Pouratashi & Zamani (2019) may provide empirically justified foundation for a university to encourage mechanisms such as accreditation of university and curriculum, employers' participation in curriculum development and work-based learning are useful in ensuring a good match between the supply of skills and the demand for skills. However, some respondents believe that based on the trend of social fluidity, the association between social class of origin and social class of destination has not changed in the last thirty years.

This may be due to the different phases of expansion which characterized by different level of academic programmes offering. At the middle of the 1980s, ITM then offered Advance Diplomas which is equivalent to bachelor's degree. But moving to middle 1990s, the rising number of private colleges and universities due to liberalization of tertiary education may have halted temporarily the students' admissions to UiTM. Competition for students hit hard, particularly at the first degree level, for UiTM. The offspring of the higher social classes were always more likely to attend the higher educational levels (outside UiTM) – some going abroad to continue their studies since end of 1980s. However, the gap is compensated by the rebranding of ITM to become UiTM in 1999, when UiTM is now a full-fledge University offering programmes even at

postgraduate level. In early 2000, Government has entrusted UiTM to widen its student intake with the target of 200,000 by 2015.

### **Hypotheses: Education will foster job mobility**

Education has been traditionally regarded as a noble solution to overcome poverty. The evolution of UiTM from just a modest training unit back in 1956 has brought a tremendous impact to the Bumiputera community. However, as indicated above, the education liberation and reform has created stiff competition among universities, both public and privately owned. The ability of new universities with aggressive marketing has slowly taken away the once recognized graduates of UiTM in selected programmes such as mass communication, architecture and hotel management. At the outset, job markets are evolving constantly as a result of new development in the economy brought about by forces such as globalisation. As such, there is a need to study the requirements of the market and adjust education to tailor to the needs of the market.

During the interview, respondents contended that all parties - government, industries and higher learning institutions need to join forces and work together in an effort to develop qualified graduates. Another issue that needs to be highlighted is mismatch between the skill mix of the human capital stock and the requirements of the industries in the country. Respondents opined that the decline in social inequalities in education has been mainly attributed to the transformation of the Malaysian education system in correspondence with globalization, neo-liberalisation and the nation-building processes. To clarify, Universities are compelled to justify what they are doing as “national agenda” and nation-building from the perspective of return on investment or “return on social investment”. Thus, it is important for public universities to negotiate and mediate the process of achieving a balance and this calls for a hybridised format and content (Wan & Sirat, 2018).

As for graduates, according to Pouratashi & Zamani (2019), responsibility, oral and written communications, critical thinking, lifelong learning and networking were the most important employability skills. Research on education (McPherson & Willms 1987) found that the gap between pupils from middle class and working class families in educational attainment in public examinations has reduced over time. These facts, however, does not address the issue of whether in Malaysia the equalisation process in education has also promoted an equalisation process in the occupational distribution of people from different social classes. Interestingly, some respondents concur with Mandler’s work (2019), that upward mobility of sons from manual social classes towards non-manual occupations was found to be largely independent of the acquisition of high levels of education. These results cast doubts among some respondents, on an

equalisation process which would have occurred as a consequence of recent developments in education in Malaysia.

Moreover, they argue that if educational expansion and the introduction of a more comprehensive system in Malaysia have had a positive effect in reducing inequalities in reaching different social classes of destination “we would have found increased social fluidity, which is not the case”. Does it mean that educational expansion has equally benefited middle class children and working class children (ie class inequalities in education have not reduced), or possibly even mainly benefited the middle class (so that inequalities would have widened)? How could we reconcile such a conclusion with the findings noted above that inequalities among different ethnicities, ie Bumiputera versus non-Bumiputeras has not declined?

### **Hypotheses: Education can reduce class inequalities**

Class inequalities in educational attainment have remained substantially unchanged over time in many countries including Malaysia. In response, “education is a crucial intervening link between the social background of individuals and their later class destination” (Müller & Shavit 1998: 1). Nonetheless, this may reinforce social inequalities and reduce social mobility. This study highlights an important finding which is the relationship between the learning components (provided by the learning facilities and industrial linkages) and emotional attachment being insignificant when it is not mediated by total experience. Students need to go through certain experiences in order to establish emotional attachment. For most respondents, it makes sense for UiTM to understand that support given in the form of providing functional learning facilities and industrial linkage experience, as well as empathy from the management, foster strong emotional attachment in the student's heart.

In accordance with the view of many respondents, we found that changing patterns of social mobility were due to changes in the occupational structure and not to changing patterns of social inequalities. An alternative explanation of stability in social fluidity among UiTM graduates may derive from the analysis of the association between education and class of destination. It may be possible that even though there has been an increase in educational opportunities, the importance of educational credentials in the labour market has reduced over time. As argued by respondents, if an increasing proportion of people acquire higher educational qualifications but job opportunities do not increase at the same pace, credential inflation may occur. Thus, a possible explanation of stability in social fluidity may be related to a weakening in the association between education and class of destination. This may bring the offspring of middle class families to rely on alternative resources (such as social capital), which are not equally available to

other social classes. Or differently, as a result of credential inflation, employers may decide to recruit on the basis of workers' characteristics other than formal attainment (Jackson et al. forthcoming), such as communication ability or capacity to work in a team, which may be more likely to be acquired in a middle class family than in less advantaged families (Goldthorpe 1996).

A third explanation of the stability in social fluidity in Malaysia could be that both the association between class of origin and education and the association between education and class of destination have remained unchanged. This would be a scenario of complete stability. This scenario would be equally interesting since it would testify that the educational changes of the last decades have had little or no effect in reducing social class inequalities, particularly among different ethnicities – nonetheless, which may be a little bit out of the scope of this study.

## CONCLUSION

This study analysed the role played by UiTM though its education offering in the process of intergenerational social mobility in Malaysia. This is mostly relevant by studying populations that have been given privileged in a country where higher education is arguably the solution to inter-ethnic malaise. Educational impact research concerning Bumiputera has centered mostly on the affirmative policies for higher education. Examining how UiTM's education policies and the social context of reception affect the survival of the Bumiputeras, and indirectly their socio-economic activities, also has applied implications. UiTM is a particularly interesting case to study because, even though it has similar aspiration to the rest of public universities, it has a distinct education policy. The UiTM education system is more comprehensive than those in most public or private universities in the country and affirmative intake by Bumiputera only is peculiar to UiTM only. These differences may have shaped in a different way the patterns of social mobility.

The proposed project broadens the understanding of the relationship between quality high learning education and the potential to leverage the best impact in life. By the same token contemporary social inequalities in terms of social class effects in university education may not lie in accessing but the choice of field of study and the choice of prestigious and highly selective of higher education institutions which frequently offer more symbolic advantages to graduates in the labour market. As we found, instead of having systems characterized by class-based inclusion and exclusion, we now have a more differentiated fields of higher education. While more and more students enter university, inequalities arise from the wider horizons within which middle

class students engage in choice-making at higher education. This of course could not have been addressed in this study but this issue points to the direction where future studies should look into to study contemporary inequalities. This is the most difficult area to intervene with policies as often mechanisms of education attainment, class inequalities and job mobility produce stratification in the educational system due to factors that may not necessarily educationally related. One such group of factors for example relate to familial social capital resources which are mobilized to materialize educational credentials, industries' biasness when choosing graduates to be employed, and economic crisis.

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