

THE WISDOM OF LEARNING FROM HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

In this globalization era, people are tempted to commodity knowledge, especially in higher education level because higher education is closely related to the job market. It means that higher education is often influenced by market requirements and more valued on its promising job prospects for its alumni than other functions. As a result, people tend to choose higher education with technological innovations and job market orientations.

KEY WORDS

Wisdom of Learning, the Quest for Truth and Social Responsibilities

1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The first waves of today's globalization had left almost no corner unwashed, our schools and universities were of no exception. In relation to that, I would like to argue that the *commodification* of knowledge is only an alternative chapter in the great saga of formal organization of learning in our age of globalization. Although, most society needs formal organization of learning if it is to function normally (Hughes & Kroehler 2002), to offer knowledge, as a commodity or any other form governed by market rewards, is purely a choice. However, we may agree that it is a difficult avenue to ignore, but it is inevitable nor unavoidable.

The lure to *commodify* is neither triggered nor a product of globalization. Commodification of knowledge is not, as might commonly perceived, a feature exclusive to higher education. It is potentially prevalent in primary schooling as well, as suggested in Baudrillard's postmodern social theory-after his break with Marxian Theory - where the rise of consumer society stimulates the loss of symbolic exchange (Ritzer 2003), hence the overtaking of society by market powers. However, state regulation (Dale 1989) and a multi-entry system (Tilgar 2002) may salvage primary schooling from market disorientation. On the other hand, higher education is put more under the spotlight because of its closest proximity to the job market (Dale 1989) in most chains of education and its special status as a learning place for the *cream of the crops* (Tilgar 2002, 2003). As a result, education is increasingly valued more on its capability for "technological innovations" to provide jobs (Shumar, 1997) than any functions.

Globalization provides the multiplier effect that *commodification* needs to make it profitable and gigantic in scale (Friedman 2000). We may argue that material rewards being promised by globalization to marketable *commodification* of knowledge done in formal organization of learning - or any other institution for that matter - are too enormous to impart. The reward is too great while the risk is perceived to be negligible.

Consequently provides the multiplier effect that *commodification* of knowledge, in fact, is a question to the motives behind the creation of knowledge in formal organization of learning. The argument runs two fold : first, why did higher education ever tempted and continually being influenced by the market to *commodify* and secondly, will the pace of knowledge creation be sustained without the market associated rewards that governed all occupation in our age of globalization. Consecutively the first argument probes at the supposedly decreasing attention to social empathy as results of market of dictating the terms of learning requirements (Waspolo 2002; Tilgar 2003), while the second argument queries to the independency of knowledge creation from market and economic forces (Nonaka & Toyama 2004). As market tend to be imperfect, hence creating social inequalities and even economic instability in a segregated world without major power of authority (Thurow 1983, 1996).

Higher education may be held responsible for the social problems that it contributed (Swasono 2003).

Globalization has two powerful energies; first, it eases the barriers to communicated and travel across the globe and beyond, and, secondly, it pervades conventional boundaries such as nation and culture (Friedman 2000). Coalesced, these energy form a strong drive towards an integrated living space that shudders local identities; play down community specifics, and, growingly, question the purpose for maintaining diversity of cultures. In the midst of escalating social crises, proponents of local identity saw a common struggle in multicultural education receives an increasing attention as an alternative approach to prepare responsible citizens (Semiawan 2003; Tilaar 2003). However, precautions should be taken seriously as the nature of multiculturalism advocates against settled clout, status-quo, and universalism (Azru2003; Hughes & kroehler 2002) - creating social and political conflicts of its own.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. A Shift in the Wisdom of Learning

From the early beginning, institutionalized education forums, such as Plato's *Academy* and Aristotle's *Lyceum*, focused more on philosophy in their discussion on knowledge (Ilook & Brickman 2004). This great attention towards rational and critical inquiry into basic principles of life can be perceived as representations of man's insecurity and ambiguity towards life. He is struggling to come to terms to his limited ability in explaining and controlling his immediate surroundings. In the modern world, scholars of consumer behavior such as Forrester (1971), Holland (1987), Blyth (1997), and Blackwell (2001) have even suggested that a subjective model of the world exists to facilitate people in their perception of daily lives (Dobbelstein & Behrendt 2003). Positively, this can be viewed as man's unflinching quest to discover the truth and to gain the wisdom of life. To worship to single, universal transcendence and source of sacredness (Armstrong 2000) is the common attitudes of ancient scholars and pupils toward knowledge and the wisdom of learning.

As man eventually discovered that not all of his questions are easily resolved, nor those already elucidated are found satisfying, they turn their attention to the existence of Supreme Being for inner spirituality (Armstrong 2000). Duty, it was a time when religion -started within limited close-knit individuals then grow to a wide collectively organized society - played an important part in influencing how knowledge was formed and organized. As examples, Jewish scholars in the middle east studied the Talmud to promote religious, as well as secular, intellectual pursuits in the 7th Century AD. Meanwhile, Indian and Chinese scholars and students come to Nalanda in northern India to study Buddhism in the 5th Century AD. Christianity operated monestary schools from the 5th Century AD before being overrun by renaissance in the late 14th Century AD (Gutek, 2004). The

founding of the Al Azhar University, in Cairo, Egypt, during the 10th Century AD, institutionalized Islamic learning that have already been widely introduced throughout the Islamic world (Halsey *et.al* 2004).

As an example, in 1337, Ibn khaldun - a prominent Muslim philosopher of the later middle Ages -had endeavored an explanation to the pattern of changes in man's political and social organization as he scholarly built into his magnum *opus introduction to history* . Without hesitation, Ibn Khaldun positioned knowledge as divine and, therefore, making it intimately sought after by scholars and the pious, as well as kings and ordinary people, as source of enlightenment as well as source of power. However, Ibn Khaldun did not filed to recognize that knowledge, at least in the art of historical writing that he is most concerned with, is indispensable in building critical insights that can sort out the hidden truth (Rosenthal,1967). Truth was a central theme in the quest for knowledge in the Islamic world during its classical heyday (Hourani, 1962, 1991;Khalidi, 1985; Lapidus, 1988) as outlined in the general philosophy of education in Islam (Atlas 2003).

We may suggest that religions made an historical step as they became institutionalized (Lewis, 2003), not just because of the immense authority acquired but more from the institutionalization of learning they brought along in the process. To this ends, modern universities owe much to institutionalized religion to form their academic and intellectual characteristics (Lewis 1982), the provision of physical places, agreed set of time, designed curriculum, and books as mediums to facilitating teaching and learning may be seen as the basis of learning. However , Johan Heinrich Pestalozzi's (1746-1827) - a Swiss's educational reformer - appreciated more deeply when he stated "Not art, not books, but life itself is the true basis of teaching and education," to describe the essence of learning. The wisdom of learning, that is the quest for truth - as with life and the value man incessantly placed upon it - perpetually serves as a returning point to the shifts in the purpose of knowledge that culture greatly affected.

2.2. The Quest for Truth and Social Responsibilities

We may suggest that the quest for truth is most important in driving man to tirelessly search for knowledge. Consequently, the freedom and encouragement to seek that quest is also imperative to keep successive generations from being disinterested in observing a righteous calling. It is this essence of freedom that Sen (1999) argued competent human beings are capable of becoming reflective creatures. Therefore, nurturing for individual responsibility in the context of social commitment when man is detached from his social environment and losing his participation to amend social problems (Waspo, 2003). We may agree that there should be an ongoing process to learning, whatever quest may lie behind anyone's mind. To surmise the supposed "appropriate" length of education is to quote E.A.

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Filne's (1860-1937) words, "When a man's education is finished, he is finished." To append to Filne's observation, I would suggest that a man's education is beginning to a halt when his drive to learning is indifferent of social problems. In this logic, the nearer a man to the more contributive his social life and empathy becomes.

As time revealed, these institution of learning bears resemblance of a factory that produce goods and service; in the forms of graduates and the knowledge they acquired respectively. As more sophistication is introduced, came the issuance of formal titles that grant its holder a certain perceived qualifications and authority. In time, power and education become inseparable (Tilaar 2003) creating both positive and negative impacts in the process. In the beginning, the organizing of knowledge production under an institution may be seen as a way to better organize the dissemination of knowledge. However, skeptically, we can imply that the structuring of institutions also have the potential to limit access to its goods and services in the society (Rich 1999). More troublesome is the suppression, or at least the intimidation, of freedom to express and actualize the contributive aspects of social life in the pursuant of knowledge (WCCD 1996).

There is a dilemma in providing education for the masses will not actually benefit from it. More acute the problem lies with higher education where naturally only a handful of selected individuals will attend (Tilaar 2003). Putting it to the extreme, we can relate to Ezra pound's (1885- 1972) - us poet and critic - lexis," Real education must ultimately be limited to one who insist on knowing, the rest is mere sheep-herding." When mass education is showing signs of failure in making the society better-off. If the quest in finding the truth shall not find an open hand, even in the institutions of higher education, then the public should be made aware of this impending. Moreover, if truth has been traditionally charged as a monopoly in religious discussions and debates, then the public should strive to make sure that religious and moral issues are never imparted from its public education. If we may agree on this point, then Thomas Arnold's (1795-1842)- a British educator- famous acumen, "What we must look for here is, first, religious and moral principles; secondly, gentlemanly conduct; thirdly, intellectual ability" may strike as a much needed encouragement. Following up upon this idea, to be considered in alignment with the quest for truth, higher education may be tasked to uphold moral standards and require social responsibility while maintaining academic honesty across all activities they are engaged with.

2.3. The Production of Knowledge in Universities

If we speculate that the production of knowledge is inherent in universities then there must be a remarkable motive that drives the process, just as the truth was suggested as motive strong enough to attract scholars to invest their time in these institutions.

Therefore, if material well being is as important, or suspected greater, than the quest for truth (Chapra 1995b), than market forces should have been playing as an immense agent in the production of knowledge. We are most interested with the issue of how constructive, or damaging, the market forces is doing to the production of knowledge.

Specifically, Shumar (1997), heavily influenced by Bourdieu, took a great interest in using cultural anthropology and ethnography to analyze the change that took place in universities and its production of knowledge. He saw himself as a marginalized intellectual that observed American Capitalism driving an immense force that make these alterations. While democracy seemed to be in pair with capitalism, they have a very different idea about the appropriate distribution of power. The complete equal distribution of power goes against the drive to be efficient (Thurow 1996), itself a "wisdom" in the market approach. In other words, to be efficient in the market is to be rich or have the desires to be one. Presumably at the expense of others or other non efficient institutions and, with the absence of effective regulations, by any means necessary. Consequently, it may be difficult for a state with limited funding - or lack of proportionate budgeting the education Sector - to continually sponsor its universities with the expectation of them becoming efficient while delivering quality education simultaneously (Dale 1989). This conflict of organization is more serious in countries where its governance is far from democratic, yet its economy is only partially capitalistic (Ahmad 1981). If Thurow and Dale are to be taken seriously, then market temptations may by assumed of doing more harm, by deliberately misleading or actively discouraging social benefits, to the process of learning universities.

The future, for any institutions, holds a wealth of uncertainties, potential turbulences, vexed inconsistencies, contradictions, and paradoxes. Upon those challenges, Takeuchi and Nonaka (2004) propose that companies need to concede a new management paradigm based on knowledge creation if it is to compete successfully now and in the near future. By treating universities as companies, a new paradigm knowledge creation if it is to compete successfully now and the near future. By treating university as accompanics, a new paradigm knowledge creation is urgently needed where stakeholders decide the outcome of the day. Moreover, universities- the most revered companies in the education industry- should worry more in the effectiveness of its knowledge production being able to penetrate markets. Especially when its stakeholders are more dynamic in the relocating resources when they interest are challenged (Thurow 1996) and 'the diploma diseases' has been running rampant (Tilaar, 2003).

In term creating knowledge, universities are relied upon by a many society to become its leading centers of advancement as well as its last bastion of idealism. Rightly so, the society should a pay a great consideration into the knowledge creating process

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time inside university classes and labs. If individual can be counted responsible to its society as Sen (1999) suggested, then universities should also be given trust to function as an accountable in light of a decadency running in most developing countries. The crucial point of accountability lies on how justice and just values will be learned in universities. Only then, we may hope that justice and just values are distributed at an acceptable level in the society that it does not created social nervous and breakdowns (Waspo 2003).

However, the borrow John Dewey's (1859-1952) - US philosopher and educator - philosophical wisdom, "The Educational process has no end beyond itself, it is its own end." we may be convinced that the process in the ultimate achievement in education. If the process of learning leads to justice and just values being revered and valued the highest, then education in universities may stand all in face of market disorientations ceremonial practice and standards in formal education, we should always look and criticize whether the educational process that it taking place in our universities has benefited the needs of the society.

We may consider that the most dangerous trap of any education system is the subjectivity inherent with every educator that - actively over passively - influence those undergoing the learning process. Bronson Alcott (1799-1888) - US philosopher - advocated the need to control one's self interests as mentor in the learning process, "The true teacher defends his pupils against his own personal influence." Even though universities, relatively, apply more freedom of learning than other than institutions of education (Tilar 2002), educator's subjectivity still lingers. Even more dangerous is when educator's subjectivity is driven solely by materialistic rewards. Material rewards are easily put into place when market forces concede. As studies of market behaviors, of its attempts to do just the opposite - to obstruct an understanding of the real functioning of markets (Swasono 2003) - are shouldered by economists, we shall poise the teaching of economic as a focus of further discussion. The teaching of economics in higher education in Indonesia is a monumental example of how difficult it is to break away from the mainstream of economics teaching -however shaky the foundations may have been revealed (Djermakoye 1979; Nazir 1979; Thuro 1983, 1996; Adelman 2001; Swasono 2003). In this sense, the production of knowledge may be considered at a standstill and process of learning of economics becomes repetitive. It failed what Takeuchi and Nonaka (2004) suggest about knowledge creation because it abort from reality, rather than deals with it, and it breakdowns as market imperfection, rather than take them into account and correct the modcls.

3. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Knowledge as a Tool of Hegemony

After seeing how knowledge may succumb to the greed power and globalization as

an innocent vehicle to the extension of power, we may contemplate that knowledge can, and have been used (Chocsin 2002), to maintain and expand the control of one group of people to others. In terms of globalization, local cultures are placed as subordinates of global cultures. What shall it take to justify the use of knowledge - or the monopoly and regulated uses of knowledge - to control others not so fortunate in developing their learning processes into a marketable form? That question has been relatively easier to answer with the dawn of today's globalization, that which brings huge sums or costs to universities. Researches, industrial competitions, and the rise of information technology brought by globalization have accelerated the commercialization of research and teaching and increased the movement of both outside universities (Trow 2001). Suddenly, it was economically make sense and politically correct to help people pay for their use of knowledge because some investments have been poured into its creation.

The monopoly in the uses of, patented, knowledge may become imperialistic in nature when the object is of another country, another culture, and another people. There may be a huge obligation to put multiculturalism and social responsibility aside when the prospect of becoming richer and more powerful is up for grab. A powerful country, like the United States, proclaims that its "American Dream" offers limitless possibilities to those with talent, energy, and motivation to create the next marketable knowledge (Trow 2001). The feeling of not wanting to share knowledge for free, because investments need profitable return-on-investments, that leads to the protection of its uses vehemently (Levine 2005). A variety of ways to protect this educational investments have been invented; be it a national rights, intellectual property, copyrights, or by means of secrecy. Lately, it may be seen not enough just to make people pay in using your patented knowledge, that you should convinced them to use your knowledge (Trow 1996)-force them only when other ways botched.

3.2. Is it Possible without Market Sustenance?

If at present knowledge creation is so seemingly dependent upon market system of reward, then it is possible to have it continue at today's pace without such sustenance? We may need to look briefly of how education and learning become a necessary part of modern society. What is so special about learning? Most sociologists may agree that learning is the process of a relatively permanent change in behavior or capability that results from experience. Since learning is crucial to the success in social life, it is seldom left to chance in individual instances (Hughes & Kroehler 2002). Most societies, therefore, institute a formal and systematic training to convey particular attitudes, knowledge, and life skills that they viewed best for themselves (Tilfar 2002). This kind of formal systematic institution is known as education and it is essential for effective participation in most societies.

While ancient Greece were primarily concerned with philosophy, the ancient Romans

had to wage continuous wars that they considered politics and civil administration as important subjects to be taught at schools (Gutek 2004). Religious institutions dominated medieval schools; whether they are studying Judaism, Christianity, or Islam. With the introduction of scholasticism by Saint Thomas Aquinas in the 13th Century AD, universities became a leading institution of learning while degree granting was acknowledged in the Islamic *madrasa* and *jami'ah* predating European's universities (Alatas 2003). With Renaissance, the rebirth of learning in Europe took a sharp turn in that worldly-secular-themes set aside religious topics as main interest with Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio in the central stage. Vernacular primary schools were product of the Protestant Reformation when education was made available for the lower classes of society in Europe with the introduction of works by Calvin, Luther, and Zwingli to name a few. The Age of Reason in the 18th Century AD brought a belief that the powers of critical thinking can improve the life of individuals and the society (Gutek 2004) and it has influenced the American Revolution.

The 19th and 20th Centuries AD were abundant with innovations of learning practices, becoming accepted philosophies and too numerous to expose even selectively, coinciding with the birth of nationalism. It is difficult to separate the history of education and learning with the evolution of state and state thinking, as it is difficult to draw a general trend in the purpose of education. We may say that education, initially, began with the intention of serving the elites of a society for future leadership and or special professional positions, but sometimes revolutionary, changing into serving the masses. Only during the last half-century, we see the educational decay if the wisdom of learning, that is the detachment from social problem and its affinity, is relinquished for diploma, degrees, and title that smooth the way to jobs with high playing salaries.

The formalizing of education was not meant to damage the process of learning, rather to simplify the bureaucracy of formal organizations. However, it is almost impossible to have a formal organization without its dysfunctions as Weber idealized his vision of bureaucracy. Typical shortcomings found in most universities include operational inefficiency, fragmented and incoherent curriculum, lectures with disengaged students, and organizationally complex (Kuh 2001). To reform these shortcomings, may be seen as an awakening step into the fossilized procedures of many universities, Wilson (1999) elucidate that the ultimate challenge of curriculum reforms lies in the strength of political resistance to such changes that usually threat the status quo. If curriculum is that difficult to modify, what shall it take to transform its organization and "reeducate" it., facilities? It seems that learning is as challenging as unlearning, if that is of possible and desirable.

3.3. Does a Middle Path Exists?

Human behavior, as studied by sociologists, have shown that rational utility maximization - itself a behavioral assumption - are getting difficult to ever since its

rational assumption have been dropped by all social sciences, except economics, by the end of the nineteenth century (Thurow 1983)

The rational individual ought to act in the sense of maximizing its utility under all circumstances, be it against the accepted culture prevailed in a society. Holding on to this theory, economists rejected evidences that show individuals not in a rational utility maximizing behavior on the ground that they were market imperfections. Therefore, one utility maximizing individual behaves, as it "ought" to be than the rest of the society otherwise. Thurow (1983) used the term "prescription dominates descriptive economics" in describing this striking difference in the "supposed" study of human behavior.

A strong argument against this rational utility maximizing individual is evident in the process where human preferences are heavily influenced by social interactions than individual experiences alone. To the extreme, an individual may sacrifice his or her life for his country where that is not "rational" in light of his own survival; hence maximizing his chance to live and gain from the existence of his country. Then we shall question what universities has done to its graduates' continuum of preferences, have they become more "rational" and shunned "sacrificial" attitudes as non-profitable, or have they become more sensitive and energetically moved to amend social problems - sacrificing their own lives only when other means have been exhausted. There may be a middle path to this dilemma between market reward and the creation of knowledge in the form of socially accountable practices of knowledge creation.

A comment on multiculturalism - as it is the umbrella of this seminar - as a social theory is worth mentioning at the end of this paper. The early rise of multicultural theory was foreshadowed by the emergence of contemporary feminist sociological theory in the late 1970 (Ritzer 2003). It has taken diverse forms of theoretical spectrum, however some general characteristics can be pulled out to signify its stance. Multicultural theory rejects universalistic theories that tend to support those in power. Hence, it walks the line of political volatility as it takes the side of disempowered groups. Its proponents are not value free as they aim to change the social structure, culture itself, and - surprisingly - the prospects of individuals. Some even went as far as disrupting the intellectual world by making more open and diverse. It is difficult to separate between multicultural theorist and narratives, however it carries a "critical edge" using Ritzer's own words, in the sense that it is self-critical. Last but not least, one must understand that multicultural theorists' work is limited by the particular historical, social, and cultural context in which they happened to live in. Knowledge creation and globalization may have been, and continue to be, perfect and mutually "profitable" partners for so long as multicultural education remains in the background of our society neither challenging nor felt threatening.



4. CONCLUSIONS

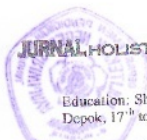
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We may suggest that religions made an historical step as they became institutionalized not just because of the immense authority acquired but more from the institutionalization of learning they brought along in the process. To this ends, modern universities owe much to institutionalized religion to form their academic and intellectual characteristics, the provision of physical places, agreed set of time, designed curriculum, and books as mediums to facilitating teaching and learning may be seen as the basis of learning.

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