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Managing Curriculum Change in Malaysian Higher Education: A Critical Review of the Literature

(Pengurusan Perubahan Kurikulum dalam Pengajian Tinggi Malaysia: Satu Tinjauan Literatur)

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Abstract

This paper provides a comprehensive and insightful critical review of the literature pertaining to curriculum change within the Malaysian higher education sector. Beginning with a concise overview of the historical context of curriculum change, the review is structured into distinct sections that delve into various sub-topics. These include an examination of the rationale behind the need for curriculum change, an exploration of the multifaceted processes and aspects involved in effecting curriculum change, an analysis of the crucial role of leadership in successfully managing such change, and an assessment of the prevailing directions and contemporary issues surrounding the organization and implementation of curriculum change. Ultimately, this paper underscores the significance of implementing diverse strategies to facilitate successful curriculum changes as a dynamic and ongoing process. Moreover, it emphasizes the imperative for higher education providers to possess strong leadership capabilities to foster agility and prompt responsiveness in the face of curriculum change challenges.

Keywords: Curriculum change, academic leaders, Malaysian higher education providers

BACKGROUND

The curriculum is the heart of education. It is the standard-based sequence properly planned and implemented by teachers to ensure students' achievement and proficiency. In layman's terms, it is simply the study plan or plans for classroom practices (learning, teaching, and assessment). From primary, secondary to tertiary levels, curriculum is broadly defined as a planned sequence of instruction or experiences of what is learned and how it is learned (Blackmore & Kandiko, 2012; Sund, 2022). As the student progresses and articulates through each level of education, the curriculum acts as the scaffolding for knowledge-building and preparing for the next level (Jang, 2022). With the rapid advancement of technology, stakeholders are arguing and debating on what higher education should achieve for its students and graduates. Are we preparing our graduates for the future or are we preparing our graduates to be future-ready? With the Covid-19 pandemic, the paradigm has shifted for how classes are presented, and the way learning outcomes are assessed (Hilt & Riese, 2022). As the old English saying, change is the only constant, it is inevitable for higher education providers (HEPs) to review their curriculum at the institutional level and be aware of the competitive climate (Blackmore & Kandiko, 2012). Therefore, HEPs should be more prepared for unprecedented times by being proactive and not reactive; by constantly reviewing their curriculum for change by being innovative (Hilt & Riese, 2022; Jang, 2022).

Simply put, the curriculum is an ongoing and cyclical process of planning, implementation, and assessing (Law, 2022; Prakosa, 2022; Simon, 2022). It involves a structured and holistic mechanism to be put in place and various stakeholders; both the academic and administrative staff (Honkimäki et al., 2022). Throughout the process, each stakeholder assumes different positions and takes up different responsibilities. Although independently executed, each outcome will contribute to ensuring the entire curriculum change is smooth and successful. So, what are curriculum changes? Curriculum change or reform has conflicting views from stakeholders (Blackmore & Kandiko, 2012). In HEPs, for academicians, the process can be realised as minor as course development with minimal changes or to the extent of large-scale institutionalized changes such as vision, mission, and strategy (Honkimäki et al., 2022). For other stakeholders, on the other hand, the success of any curriculum change depends on the conducive, dynamic, and supportive management or leaders (Honkimäki et al., 2022; Meier et al., 2022). The involvement of all stakeholders, especially at the grassroots level, is also perceived to be essential (Honkimäki et al., 2022; Jonathan & Sibiziwe, 2022).

Innovation in higher education is a process of HEPs adapting to environmental pressures from economic growth, whereby HEPs bring in new and enhanced innovative practices to implement curriculum change (Hasanefendic et al. 2017). As we are embracing revolution, while preparing for it, the expectation of learning experience and learning objectives have changed to be more competitive. It is no longer just about a planned and structured curriculum to achieve predetermined outcomes. According to Simon (2022), the concept of curriculum innovation is premised on the theory of learning and learners' experiences as opposed to learning objectives. However, curriculum change is used by governments in most developing nations as a policy instrument to promote intended societal change (Prakosa, 2022; Widiadi et al., 2022). This shows that most curriculum changes are emphasizing learning experiences rather than behaviour (Meier et al., 2022). Curriculum change or transformation of the curriculum in terms of its goals, structure, or content, and design are significant to political interest (Simon, 2022). Meier et al. (2022) reiterated that curriculum change that is provoked by societal changes is perceived to have the capability to integrate educational texts and context. Some other global drivers recognized to influence curriculum change or reform are pressure from the industries, maintaining competitive advantage, digitalization, globalization, and continuous improvement and innovation (Honkimäki et al., 2022).

In the era of globalization and digitalization, innovation is the way forward. Abd Kadir (2022) in his study posited that several major innovations in the higher education sector are laptops or computers for students, incentivizing lecturers to adopt and incorporate technology into their classroom practices, wireless networks as well as technologically equipped learning spaces. In addition, Simon (2022) confirmed that while acknowledging the shift to adopt technology is important, the existing curriculum is not designed to provide flexible education pathways. The current curriculum is lacking in nurturing the talents and interests of learners by preparing them for the workforce and career progression. In the context of the higher education sector, this discussion will refer to universities (both public and private), university colleges and colleges as Higher Education HEPs.

Without a doubt, the higher education sector is the most affected when it comes to change. As the main supplier of the skilled workforce, HEPs need to be agile and quick to adapt to changes. Therefore, as the governing authority of the higher education sector, the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) under the purview of the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) has the direction for Malaysia to be a global education hub through the promotion of lifelong learning and flexible education (MQA, 2022b). Through innovative steps implemented for the Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF), MQA has launched the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) to provide access to flexible education and allow learners to convert their working experience for credit transfer (MQA, 2022a). This is a big, bold, and progressive move for Malaysia and its higher education sector.

Curriculum Change in Higher Education

In the higher education sector, continuous quality improvement is very crucial, and the process and mechanism in assuring it are rigorous. HEPs are required to set up an internal quality assurance department to manage these processes and mechanisms. Change is not something new or newly occurred, most organizations and individuals encounter it regularly. It is unavoidable and inevitable for HEPs as well (Abd Kadir, 2022). Every aspect of the HEPs is subjected to change to stay competitive. Theoretically and in practice curriculum should function as a guide (Meier et al., 2022). Therefore, curriculum change can be drawn from the connections between providing coherence in an environment and curriculum design to achieve goals and outcomes (Kandiko & Blackmore, 2012). In addition, Law (2022) in her review found that political, economic, social cultural, and technological factors are influencing curriculum change and pushing for innovation. Abd Kadir (2022) added that even though technology and the digital revolution are pushing innovation to happen, most of the change in today's curriculum is also due to the transition to a knowledge and data-driven future. It is also said that most HEPs are unprepared and do not provide more flexibility in their curriculum structures to enhance students' choices and achievements (Abd Kadir, 2022; Leong, 2022).

Without a doubt, the Covid-19 pandemic had significantly impacted curriculum change (Jonathan & Sibiziwe, 2022). The adoption of new technology in HEPs appeared to be apparent and consistent. The implications of the changes to the curriculum through classroom practices made possible by technical innovations are becoming increasingly visible (Hilt & Riese, 2022). Law (2022) further supported this by stating that HEPs are incorporating technology as part of curriculum change. Driven by technological changes, the higher education sector is also heavily influenced by factors such as globalization, knowledge and data, multiculturalism, and the redefinition of learning and knowledge acquisition (Simon, 2022). Any changes, whether it is institutional, social, cultural, or broader policy contexts change in the environment or ecosystem, will leave a dent or gap (Law, 2022; Meier et al., 2022). It seems like symbiosis; one affecting or triggering the other or one relying on the other.

Like many progressive and developing nations, the curriculum in Malaysia is founded based on the national educational policy, cultural identities, and traditions, and therefore, cannot be taken out of the context it is applied to (Meier et al., 2022). Although change is inevitable, there are still limits and boundaries to change. So, what, and how does future education look like? Or even feel like it? There have been talks about students being given the freedom to choose what they want to learn. Through the Personalized Experiential Learning (POISE) framework, the curriculum is flexible, holistic, and can even be multidisciplinary (Ab Jalil et al., 2022). The POISE curriculum structure is passion-driven, mastery driven, and competency-driven. This is in line with the VUCA world environment. In the VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous) world, students are responsible for their learning and achievements (Panthalookaran, 2022). In Malaysia, this is evident through the pilot program, Bachelor of Science in Liberal Studies, designed and offered by Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. This program is flexible, multidisciplinary, and non-conventional whereby students can pick and choose what course they want to study. This future-focused curriculum is fluid and organic by allowing students to personalize their curriculum structure.

From a global perspective, through the Global Education 4.0 framework by World Economic Forum, it is said that curriculum change focused on self-paced learning, accessible and inclusive learning, lifelong and student-driven, and learning and skilling are endless – improving existing skills and acquiring new skills. At the same time, MOHE is championing lifelong learning through the Experiential Learning and Competency-based Education Landscape (EXCEL) program as part of ongoing reforms of competency-based output (Meier et al., 2022).

CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

RATIONALE AND BENEFITS OF CURRICULUM CHANGE

The higher education sector is a complex social system with several interrelated subsystems (Abd Kadir, 2022). As discussed earlier, every change will impact elsewhere. According to Law (2022), HEPs must be industry relevant by preparing the graduates for the future workforce whereby graduates can create employment opportunities – either job takers or job creators. What do curriculum changes entail? Although curriculum change can be assumed as a complex process, it is necessary and capable of providing a complete intervention. Simon (2022) posited that curriculum change has cultivated global consciousness, multiculturalism, environmental issues, and ethics and built talents infused through interdisciplinary approaches in curriculum and pedagogy. Hasanefendic et al. (2017) further supported that generally, HEPs are urged to innovate their teaching and learning and other classroom practices to complement today's turbulent job market and socio-economic needs change, as well as to sufficiently train the workforce. Future skill sets are essential in ensuring that graduates can keep on learning, unlearn and relearn.

PROCESSES AND ASPECTS INVOLVED IN CURRICULUM CHANGE

It has been said many times that change is inevitable. However, when change is mentioned, there is always resistance to change and there will always be stakeholders who refuse to change. Many scholars have discussed the management of change, and there is no one size fits all model (Kang et al., 2022; Song et al., 2022). The processes and aspects involved in curriculum change are varied and depend on the context, stakeholders, and external factors such as political and socio-economic (Cerna, 2013). To process a successful change implementation, HEPs should have a proper planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation strategy. The process should be cyclical and involve all stakeholders. Without stakeholders' buy-in, change will not be able to be implemented. Therefore, the change process and aspects can be discussed as two-dimensional implications; top-down and bottom-up (Pekkola et al., 2022).

In a study conducted by Honkimäki et al. (2022), showed that when HEPs used the top-down process to manage curriculum change or reform, it did not produce the best possible result. When further elaborated, from the perspective of academicians, the main challenge is in guidance on the process, managerial practices, and lack of involvement at the grassroots level (Buchashvili et al., 2022; Honkimäki et al., 2022). The bottom-up process, on the other hand, although can be self-organised must involve proper consultation with the appropriate, if not all stakeholders (Law, 2022). Therefore, to fully appreciate the role of change management in curriculum, going back to the basics is very essential by asking whether the intended change happened as expected (Simon, 2022).

It is also noticed that curriculum change is also part of the implementation of the intended curriculum in classroom practices (Goodwyn, 2022; Noel et al., 2022). Taking the top-down approach would simply be that policies are translated into the framework and applied across the board. In comparison, the bottom-up approach is about differentiating the process and involving the stakeholders right at the beginning (Meier et al., 2022). Law (2022) firmly believed that curriculum change should facilitate the feedback process. That way, improvement can be made to the change process through active engagement with stakeholders rather than merely ordering the change to be implemented (Buchashvili et al., 2022; Honkimäki et al., 2022). Managing the change process can be sensitive as it involves stakeholders from various levels. Stakeholders' cooperation can be lacking if there is not much engagement. But, if there is too much engagement, it can be viewed as intruding on stakeholders' professionalism and academic freedom. Therefore, to ensure or to achieve change, policy provisions must be put in place and implementation must provide stakeholders with experiences envisaged in the new curriculum (Simon, 2022).

In practice, curriculum change requires a proper and structured mechanism in place, and the mechanism must also have a review and monitoring process in place. Jonathan and Sibiziwe (2022) supported this claim by stating that the change process needs to focus more on the practicality of the mechanism employed, from translating policy into practice. Jonathan and Sibiziwe (2022) also found that change should not focus too much on resource availability or implementer expertise. In contrast, Simon (2022) begged to differ by stressing that proper planning and sufficient resources such as human and monetary, are very crucial in the process and aspects of change.

As the process of change needed humans to be the drivers and receivers, Law (2022) pointed out that stakeholders should be motivated rather than ordered. In short, top-down cannot be implemented without being implemented through operational activities, while bottom-up focuses on organizational and national policies as well as international and global trends (Kang et al., 2022; Song et al., 2022). To summarize, planned change is top-down and directed by management through strategic and operational plans, while in the bottom-up approach, change is emergent and organic (Honkimäki et al., 2022).

LEADERSHIP IN CURRICULUM CHANGE MANAGEMENT

For a change to happen, it is very crucial to have a driving force. The role of leadership is the main driver in organizing and managing curriculum change. It is believed that stakeholders can be influenced and motivated by leaders, whether directly or indirectly (Abd Kadir, 2022; Law, 2022). In any organization, leaders are expected to create and implement new ideas by instilling culture. Leong (2022) posited that leaders should engage people early through communication, provide solutions to enhance confidence, establish clear communication, implement constant monitoring, and perform evaluation by adapting and engaging in continuous learning. On the opposing view, Buchashvili et al. (2022) pointed out that although believed to be the responsibility of leaders to drive and manage change, change can only happen if all stakeholders cooperate and drive the change at individual and personal levels. So, who are the leaders? At HEPs, academic leadership is a type of leadership referring to top management, chancellors, deans, or heads of

departments or those who are involved in decision-making at different levels (Leong, 2022).

Conventionally, HEPs are managed as loosely coupled whereby linkages between different stakeholders are loose while academicians have autonomy (Baumann & Leišytė, 2022). There were fewer policies, and the daily operations were less rigid, but there was still a certain extent of bureaucracy. This is part and parcel of governance and compliance to assure that quality and standards are maintained. Leišytė and Wilkesmann (2016) posited otherwise, stating that as the world becomes globalized, decision-making processes have recently become more top-down than ever. This claim was also supported by Honkimäki et al. (2022), whereby it is said that HEPS, with accountability demands, have become more corporate-like, and are more tightly coupled than before. For HEPs with different delivery locations, this is partly due to assuring quality, and the aim to standardise curriculum across different campuses in ensuring that all students are achieving the same learning outcomes and producing graduates with the attributes. Therefore, to ensure the smoothness of the change process, leaders should have prerequisite requirements in place to drive the change through institutionalization. The prerequisite requirements are and are not limited to, using technology in the process, managing resources, and collaborating effectively with stakeholders (Abd Kadir, 2022).

To bring out general improvements, any system, including the education system, ought to be revised regularly under the able and capable leadership of a leader (Phaiphai, 2020; Rice, 1993). According to the three stages of the Leadership Obstacle Course (LOC) model, the leaders in the education system can be a major driving force for curriculum change. The three stages are initiation, attempted implementation and incorporation (McGinity et al., 2022). In addition, the study also showed that statutory plus ministerial powers are better at leading policy implementation in the higher education sector (Jonathan & Sibiziwe, 2022). In terms of sustainability and effectiveness in the long term, is using force sufficient? And by using force, are the stakeholders embracing change wholeheartedly? In comparison, the Rand Change Agent Model accentuated that organizational variables are important in either encouraging or discouraging change at all stages throughout the process (Rashid, 2013). Therefore, institutional leaders must motivate stakeholders to always support the changes (Law, 2022), including stakeholders at different levels of the technical system (Honkimäki et al., 2022).

Educational change is looking at the integration of innovations, thus academic leaders must embrace a collaborative approach by challenging team members to express ideas and concerns for solving any possible issues in classroom practices (Leong, 2022). Oftentimes, during the process of change, innovations are used and implemented in classrooms (Gundy & Berger, 2016). The biggest challenge noted for curriculum change is the lack of people who can lead and moderate the change (Hilt & Riese, 2022; Pekkola et al., 2022). The people are not well-trained and lack interest in adopting technology for teaching and learning. Abd Kadir (2022) stated that research also confirmed that leadership in instructional technology is still in its infancy stage. In research conducted, researchers found that academic leaders have a mixture of transactional and transformational leadership traits (Leong, 2022). This showed that academic leaders when put in a situation, can manage a dynamic transformation process while also managing educational technology innovation (Abd Kadir, 2022).

With clear direction, academic leaders can respond to any situation or change accordingly. Even when the top-down approach was observed, initially with rigid and mandatory requirements, academic leaders throughout the process are still able to find flexibility and permit minor changes (Leong, 2022). According to Simon (2022), curriculum change is a learning process for teachers, students, government, and the community. A good understanding of change and a clear conception of the curriculum are necessary conditions for the smooth translation of a new curriculum into practice. Change can be a rough process, given the exposure to external factors. Policymakers in developing nations are

vulnerable to internal and international pressures when it comes to policy and institutional reforms (Jonathan & Sibiziwe, 2022). This is because curriculum change required a better understanding of change management by policymakers, educationists, schools and teachers (Gundy & Berger, 2016). Stakeholders need to be acquainted with the change dynamics and prepare for implementation (Baumann & Leišytė, 2022; Rashid, 2013). Therefore, learning about change management should be a vital part of the process. According to Jonathan and Sibiziwe (2022), most curriculum reform processes took the traditional focus on the product and ignored the most important element of the process, which is utilizing the concept of hard and soft policy instruments as a theoretical construct and having the academic leaders implementing the procedure rather than innovating.

COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES OF CURRICULUM CHANGE IN GLOBAL CONTEXTS

As stakeholders' cooperation is crucial in determining the successful implementation of change, the next step is to empower them to self-adapt to the challenges to stimulate individual growth (Leong, 2022). However, it was found in a study that the support from the management was perceived as inadequate by stakeholders (Honkimäki et al., 2022). Different stakeholders have different needs and expectations. Some of the requirements needed by stakeholders can be categorized as teachers' concerns, administrative and professional support, administrative influence, environment, and facilities (Folkman et al., 2022; Guru & Al-Hilal, 2022). In addition, earlier studies also revealed that there are legal and policy gaps derailing the efforts of curriculum change to reach their full potential (Simon, 2022).

In the global context, contextualizing the education system by adjusting the curriculum is a common practice, especially in keeping up with the latest knowledge, social agenda, and technology (Jonathan & Sibiziwe, 2022; Noel et al., 2022). In this era of digitalization, and especially post-Covid-19, technological innovativeness is regarded as central to socioeconomic well-being (Jonathan & Sibiziwe, 2022). However, this mandate for change of using technology in education to entail the provision of accessible, high quality and cost-effective higher education are still disadvantaging marginalized groups in society (Jonathan & Sibiziwe, 2022). Therefore, even though as advanced as it is believed to be, the process and adjustment of curriculum change are considered complex matters to execute, involving the change of human habit, and the alteration to classroom practices with the addition of new technological gadgets (Prakosa, 2022). It is believed that technology, teaching and learning resources or materials can significantly improve the quality of learning experiences and improve learners' achievement (Simon, 2022). Abd Kadir (2022), on the other hand, said that just having a variety of technology does not equate to an excellent education. It was also elaborated that merely using technology as a supplement may not necessarily result in the desired learning outcomes. However, by having a good technology plan, cooperation, and collaboration with stakeholders, adopting new delivery methods could benefit classroom practices (Goodwyn, 2022; Guru & Al-Hilal, 2022). In addition, with the right stakeholders in place, HEPs can gain a competitive advantage and advance in the higher education sector under the guidance of specialists in classroom practices (Jonathan & Sibiziwe, 2022). This move is getting more apparent and evident post-pandemically, whereby most HEPs are moving toward open and distance learning modes of offering.

By implication, globally, curriculum changes are driven by the government and often related to political support and goodwill. Whether the HEPs are government-owned or linked or privately owned, there is always a unique mutual relationship with the government, to provide the initial infrastructure in housing the change (Jonathan & Sibiziwe, 2022). In terms of internal management, HEPs are supposedly loosely coupled organizations with smaller operational units and have better abilities to recognize a need for change in their environments (Patria, 2012). However, as much as it is seen to be more progressive management, HEPs are more tightly coupled now and organise changes in a bureaucratic way (Honkimäki et al., 2022). To comply with regulators, a more

centralized approach is needed, and the top-down instructions must be applied during the change, to make it mandatory for all stakeholders to implement the required change (Leong, 2022).

According to Jonathan and Sibiziwe (2022), politicians and scholars have always questioned the role of HEPs in change, innovation, adaptation, and policy implementation in the higher education landscape. In Africa, the change in educational policy seems to be deprived of grounded conceptual frameworks for explaining variables leading to success of the educational reform (Jonathan & Sibiziwe, 2022). In Malaysia, on the other hand, it was found that there was a clear chain of instruction and communication between the stakeholders through continuous monitoring with constructive feedback (Leong, 2022). Interestingly, although top-down, it was found that no elements of laissez-faire leadership traits were detected in the successful management of curriculum change (Leong, 2022). This can be further supported by Meier et al. (2022) that in many countries, neoliberal ideals are increasingly influencing education policy with the imperative of performance and output accountability.

According to Prakosa (2022), curricula in Indonesia were changed and adjusted around ten times in the last fifty years, in response to factors such as political, social, pedagogical and technological. Although for the obvious reasons to address external factors, it was found that most Indonesians perceived that the change happened due to dynamics inside the government (Prakosa, 2022; Widiadi et al., 2022). Take, for example, the curriculum change on the structure of learning outcomes in history education no longer prioritizes understanding of concepts but instead emphasizes the elements of process skills (Widiadi et al., 2022). This is believed that process skills can train students for historical thinking skills, which have been applied in other countries. But this new attribute or learning outcome brought new challenges to how to teach these skills to students (Widiadi et al., 2022). Therefore, in Indonesia, scholars have looked at new methods to deliver history education to instil historical thinking skills among students. It can be said that with challenges come opportunities and curriculum change is believed to open opportunities for all stakeholders (Law, 2022).

For discussion, education policy these days is strongly influenced by neoliberal ideals, which should be inclusive and diverse (Meier et al., 2022). Curriculum change should be leading to a better society through empowerment (Law, 2022). Since the pandemic, the paradigm has also shifted for the assessment of student learning. Due to remote and distance education, HEPs are designing more innovative and sustainable assessments, while ensuring that learning outcomes are appropriately measured as well. According to Shin et al. (2022), formative assessment is used to improve teaching and learning and other classroom practices throughout the semester. The curriculum needs to be agile and fluid now. It can be observed that HEPs are implementing alternative assessments as part of their formative, summative and even final assessment. Alternative assessment is not seeking the right answers, but seeking the best answer (Hunter et al., 2022). Therefore, there are no right or wrong answers and students are encouraged and motivated to be creative in providing solutions with proper justification.

DIRECTIONS AND ISSUES OF CONCERN IN MANAGING CURRICULUM CHANGE

Although rarely mentioned or admitted, the education system is political while aiming to create democratic equality for society (Law, 2022). Any form of change is best accomplished from inside the organization (Abd Kadir, 2022). In today's digital and technological era, the direction of managing curriculum change is involving the usage of technology. Abd Kadir (2022), in his study, noted that introducing and managing change requires credibility, understanding of the academic environment, role support, and the use of technology. As HEPs embrace change by implementing new technologies, there is a need for systemic thinking concerning the instructional design process and change

management skills (Abd Kadir, 2022; Bozkurt et al., 2015; Jonathan & Sibiziwe, 2022). All stakeholders must cooperate and embrace the change.

To facilitate the smooth transition for the change, the Overcoming Resistance to Change (ORC) model can be applied. The ORC model can be implemented to handle unrelated concerns and the attitude of "this change is not my business" (Tran et al., 2022). There is a study indicating that incentives were used as inducement mechanisms to increase the buy-in rate amongst stakeholders (Jonathan & Sibiziwe, 2022). Communicating the change through awareness is also very crucial in ensuring buy-in. When stakeholders understand the need for change and how they can contribute to the change, they are more likely to accept the change (Mayfield, 2014). Therefore, to change, ignorance is not bliss. Stakeholders have concerns that must be addressed appropriately to manage the change successfully.

Law (2022) indicated that the concerns can be categorized into four developmental stages.

Unrelated Concerns

At this stage, academicians in the Malaysian higher education sector do not see a relationship between themselves and the desired curriculum changes. For example, the curriculum in the era of revolution intends to focus on empowering students with technology. As a result, new programs will be introduced to ensure that students learn what is expected in the field. Yet, academicians may not be concerned with the changes, especially if they can continue with their current teaching methods.

Personal Concerns

At this stage, academicians in the Malaysian higher education sector are concerned with how the desired curriculum changes will affect what they are currently doing. For example, the change requires the adoption and usage of technology. The older generation will fear not being able to cope and unable to perform their task. They will also have the fear of being replaced in the workplace by the younger generation. Therefore, Honkimäki et al. (2022) iterated that engagement arises from a collective acceptance of the need for change.

Task-related Concerns

At this stage, academicians in the Malaysian higher education sector are concerned about achieving the newly introduced changes within the stipulated guidelines. With artificial intelligence and Internet-of-Things, administrative and repetitive tasks are and can be replaced by technology. There is concern among stakeholders that their job might no longer be needed or required. On the side, the usage of technology can create additional tasks as well, requiring additional steps to a normal manual process. Many stakeholders perceived that the educational changes are imposed on them with inadequate consideration of their beliefs and values (Honkimäki et al., 2022). Therefore, targeting the bureaucracy would eliminate negative attitudes and resistance (Jonathan & Sibiziwe, 2022).

Impact-related Concerns

At this stage, academicians in the Malaysian higher education sector are concerned about how the change will impact other members of society. Curriculum change is a typical embodiment of educational reform, which is implemented at the institutional level (Honkimäki et al., 2022). Therefore, there are concerns about whether the change is beneficial. As the impact of the curriculum is the learning outcomes, HEPs should focus on students' needs in learning to ensure all stakeholders understand the long-term goals (Law, 2022).

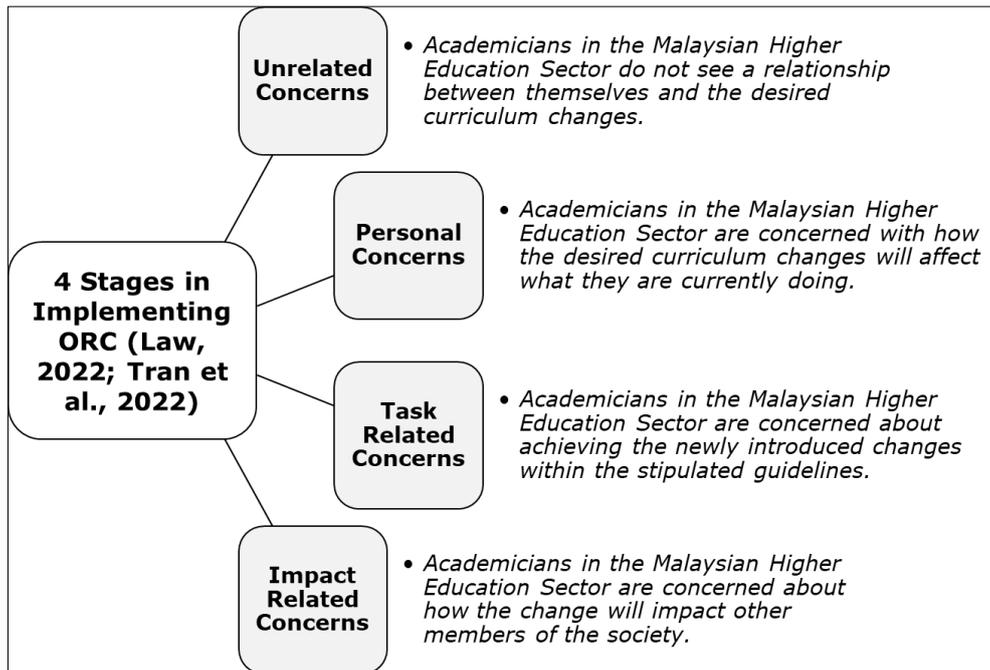


Figure 1. Overcoming Resistance to Change Model

According to Simon (2022), to implement curriculum change, the common and widely accepted fact is that there must be a policy framework in place. Jonathan and Sibiziwe (2022) agreed by stating that hard policy instruments can be put in place to reduce resistance, while soft policy instruments incentivize stakeholders. So, what are the challenges? Simon (2022) identified several challenges in managing change – lack of teachers, inadequate well-trained teachers, limited financial resources, large class size (poor staff-student ratio), requiring a high degree of parental involvement and support, and lack of technological resources strongly affecting access to proper teaching and learning by stakeholders. Jonathan and Sibiziwe (2022) supported the claim by adding lack of access to digital devices, the Internet, and sufficient bandwidth contributed to the digital divide, especially in rural areas. With all these challenges noted, Leong (2022) found that the major challenge identified by academic leaders was ensuring students' satisfaction level and rate. Without a doubt, the success of curriculum changes is challenging, and much discontent occurred among stakeholders, especially in driving the change with a planned agenda, guidelines, common goals and recourses that can be limited (Honkimäki et al., 2022). To address this challenge, Jonathan and Sibiziwe (2022) believed that it can be done through capacity building by providing budget provisions to invest in material, intellectual or human resources.

According to Jonathan and Sibiziwe (2022), while hard policy instruments were effective during the initiation and early implementation phase, to overcome resistance, a backup plan is always needed to sustain any hostile situation in the higher education landscape. In a perfect world, a successful curriculum change process has trust among the stakeholders. But that is far from the truth. Honkimäki et al. (2022) highlighted that trust is built by showing appreciation through feedback and engagement with stakeholders. So, to summarize, the conceptualization and implementation of curriculum change is a long and continuing process, and there may never be a final or complete product. Therefore, to remain timely and relevant, Meier et al. (2022) reminded us that curriculum should be diverse, equitable, inclusive, and socially just in the pluralistic societies of the 21st century.

CONCLUSION

Regardless of method or mechanism, curriculum change, or reform can fail simply due to rejection from stakeholders (Simon, 2022). It is believed that change driven by clear policies and top management has a higher chance of transcending barriers and being implemented successfully (Jonathan & Sibiziwe, 2022). In addition, stakeholders perceived that the top-down and bottom-up approaches in curriculum reform have different impacts (Honkimäki et al., 2022). To conclude, successful curriculum changes as a process may require the implementation of different strategies. Therefore, for HEPs to be agile and quick to respond, strong leadership is needed.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This paper only covered managing curriculum change in the Malaysian higher education sector. For future research, researchers can consider a more in-depth analysis of what are the factors and challenges affecting the implementation of curriculum change in education. In addition, researchers can also study the similarities and differences in curriculum change challenges between public and private HEPs. Furthermore, researchers can explore promising approaches used in different countries that HEPs in Malaysia can adopt. Lastly, this paper only covered curriculum change. Therefore, for future research, researchers can consider a study on curriculum innovation and the relationship between curriculum change and curriculum innovation.

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