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QUALITY doctoral thesis begins with effective supervision. Universiti Putra Malaysia Faculty of Modern Languages and Communications senior lecturer Dr Vijay Kumar Mallan believes research into doctoral education helps effectual doctoral supervision.

"Doctoral education is an area of research that we need to do (in Malaysia) so that university lecturers know how to supervise effectively," says Vijay Kumar at the recent International Doctoral Education Research Network (IDERN) conference 2010. Vijay is in the Chair of IDERN 2010 organising committee.

The conference, which was hosted by and held at Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), is aimed at raising students' and supervisors' awareness of recent advances in doctoral education.

Born out of the Research Pedagogies Conference held at Canada's McGill University three years ago, IDERN was set up to bring together experts in doctoral education who share the vision of broadening the field of research through transnational perspectives.

The network of researchers embarks on studies to improve not only the performances of doctoral students but also quality of their supervision, among others.

IDERN 2010 was attended by members from 30 countries which include Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, the United States

More to producing a thesis

and some European nations, among others.

Some 20 local public universities and 30 private tertiary institutions also took part.

The conference ran separate activities for postgraduate students and supervisors.

Students had the chance to attend sessions on how to come up with quality research proposals and guidelines on how supervisors should monitor them.

Vijay Kumar, who teaches at UPM's Department of English, admits that "bullying" in supervision exists.

"There are problems in how supervisors deal with students and vice versa," says Vijay.

While most supervisions are well performed, problems are encountered if students are not academically independent or may have language difficulties.

Vijay says: "It is a process in which postgraduate students have to be taught skills such as academic leadership, networking, communications, research and presentation. This will prepare them for life beyond doctoral education.

IDERN 2010 also highlighted the need for local researchers to aspire towards publication in academic



Shameem Rafik Galea

journals of international repute.

UPM's Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Department of Communications senior lecturer Dr Mohd Nizam says: "UPM postgraduate students are required to publish before they graduate under the new rule — one publication for those pursuing the Master's programme and two publications doctoral candidates."

UPM's English Department head Associate Professor Shameem Rafik Galea says: "You can't get into high impact factor journals if your work is not of (high) calibre. It will be rejected."



Vijay Kumar

Shameem adds that the doctoral process in Malaysia is designed to engage student in quality research which will in turn prepare them for research work that is worthy of publication in such journals.

"Local tertiary institutions are producing quality researchers and that must be made known to the industry," says Shameem who co-chairs the IDERN 2010 organising committee.

On concerns that Malaysia is lagging behind regional countries in terms of research in high technology and which has negatively impacted its export

competitiveness, she adds: "In Malaysia, unlike a lot of other countries, industries do not work together (with universities). Something is missing between the industry and university link."

Developed countries in the West realise the importance of industry working with institutions of higher learning.

"We have yet to see how university-industry linkages can be harnessed. Forging and developing good research projects to discover new findings in Medicine, Engineering and so on is not happening in Malaysia," she says.

Having a partnership with industry would be a win-win situation.

"Industry has to realise that we don't function in a vacuum. Institutions need industry support and access to industry," she adds.

To accomplish this, industry-linked doctoral programmes need to be timely.

"We do not want the duration of our PhD programmes to drag on for 10 years. The target should be between three and four years," says UPM deputy vice chancellor for academic and international affairs Professor Datin Paduka Dr Aini Ideris.