



# Are you prepared for a research postgraduate study (Masters or PhD) in Malaysian universities?

Update (15 May 2013): I was interviewed by Samantha Joseph from the New Straits Times newspaper on my views on postgraduate studies in Malaysia. ["The realities of postgraduate education" was published today in NST Postgraduate Supplement issue \(pg. 2\).](#)

Some students go through a self-inflicted torrid time during their Masters or PhD programme in local Malaysian universities. There are many reasons for this, but they can be grouped into two issues. These students often have: 1) a wrong evaluation of their interests and capabilities, and 2) a wrong expectation of the amount of self-reliant work required from them in their postgraduate studies.



Yes, yes, you are interested in a research postgraduate degree in a Malaysian university, but are you really prepared for it? (photo from [www.wtsinternational.org](http://www.wtsinternational.org))

So, before you fill in the postgraduate study forms, you need to ask yourself the following questions.

## **1. Why do you want to do a research postgraduate study?**

**This is the most important question students should to ask themselves, but yet, students often neglect to do so. Doing a postgraduate study is not a customary progression after completing your first degree. And you should not do a Masters or PhD simply because some of your friends are doing it, or because you cannot find a job, or because you feel aimless after graduation.**



**Research work often involves plenty of work in labs (photo from [www.upm.edu.my](http://www.upm.edu.my))**

**Unbelievably, one of my former (and failed) students once disclosed that she wanted a PhD simply because she like the title “Dr.” to precede**

**her name! Some students also do a PhD with the belief that their employers would increase their salaries or their social status would rise.**

**A research postgraduate study should only be pursued if (and only if) you are interested in research or academic work. What you might be unaware is doing a research postgraduate study would limit your career options to only those in research and teaching. And even if you do find a job that is unrelated to research, do not expect your employer to pay you according to your highest training level. In other words, you would be paid according to your first-degree level. But in most cases, your job application would likely be rejected because you would be deemed over-qualified.**

## **2. Do you have sufficient money?**

**Another often neglected question is to ask is if you have sufficient funds to support your**

**postgraduate study. A Masters study would take two years, and a PhD four years. Shockingly, some foreign students have little qualms coming to Malaysia with insufficient money. *God willing, they might say, part-time work or additional money would come later.***



**Shockingly,  
some students**

**pursue their  
postgraduate  
studies with  
insufficient  
financial  
means.**

**Although  
plenty of  
scholarships  
are available  
to local  
Malaysian  
students,  
these  
scholarships  
are typically**

**unappreciated.  
These  
scholarships  
actually act to  
cause students  
to be lazy and  
slow down  
their work  
progress  
(photo from  
[www.themalay  
siantimes.com](http://www.themalay<br/>siantimes.com).  
my).**

**When you are stressed out  
thinking of money, is there any**

**room left in your concern for your research?**

**To put it simply, you must have sufficient funds to pay the tuition fees, accommodation, food, and other expenses.**

**And, no, part-time work is never a good option for additional income. The job, even though part-time, steals your precious time from research work. You must be fully focused on your research work. My students who have part time jobs have never been able to give their best**

**effort in their research or to complete their studies in time - never.**

**But what about scholarships?**

**3. Can you get a scholarship? And would you even appreciate the scholarship if you get it?**

**Supervisors in**



**Malaysian universities are blessed with ample research projects and with ample financial support for student scholarships.**

**However, these scholarships are competitive. There is**

**no guarantee you  
would get it because  
supervisors often  
have more than one  
student under their  
wings. Do not be  
surprised that a  
supervisor can have  
as many as five to  
twelve students at**

**any one time.**

**My university, UPM,  
along with five other  
universities, is  
recognized as a  
Research University.  
This means, UPM  
gets additional funds  
to offer scholarships  
to postgraduate**

**students. Local  
Malaysian students  
find it relatively easy  
to obtain one form of  
scholarship or  
another. Now,  
ironically, comes the  
problem with  
abundant  
scholarships. With**

**plentiful of  
scholarships available  
to Malaysian  
students, you might  
think this would  
make these students  
work even harder and  
more appreciative,  
right? Wrong. Easy  
access to**

**scholarships only  
makes some  
Malaysian students  
lazier and slower in  
their research work.**

**Foreign students  
have it harder. The  
only scholarship  
available to you in  
Malaysia is through**

**your supervisor's research funds. You need to ask your prospective supervisor even before you apply for a postgraduate study if he or she has sufficient funds to support you.**

**4. Is your family or partner supportive of your studies?**

**What most students fail**



**to realize is  
doing a  
Masters and  
particularly a  
PhD can  
disrupt your  
family life and**

**social  
relationships.  
I have seen  
more than one  
case where  
parents  
threaten to**

**disown their**

**children**

**because their**

**children**

**wanted to**

**pursue a**

**postgraduate**

**study. This is  
because some  
parents fail to  
appreciate or  
are naïve  
about  
postgraduate**

**studies. These  
parents think  
a  
postgraduate  
study is an  
unnecessary  
and additional**

**financial  
burden to  
continue to  
support the  
children's  
seemingly  
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**studies.**



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**I have seen  
one of my  
former  
students  
receiving  
ridicule from  
relatives and**

**even from  
family  
members  
when they  
compare her  
to her ex-  
course mates**

**who have  
already  
graduated  
(from  
Bachelor) and  
who are  
earning good**

**money while  
she still slogs  
through a  
Masters  
programme.**

**I have seen a**



**marriage end  
up as a  
divorce  
because the  
wife cannot  
stand being  
alone for long**

**periods whilst  
the husband  
was busy at  
the field or  
lab. I have  
seen a long-  
term**

**relationship  
break up due  
to one partner  
(girlfriend)  
pursuing a  
PhD, while the  
other partner**

**(boyfriend)**

**was not.**

**Intellectually,**

**it appeared,**

**they grew**

**apart. On a**

**personal note,**

**my own ten-  
year-old  
relationship  
with my  
former  
girlfriend  
broke down**

**because of my  
long absence  
while I  
pursued my  
PhD in the UK  
while she  
remained at**

**home in  
Malaysia (no,  
long distance  
relationship  
do not work).**

**I have seen**

**one student  
who was so  
completely  
stressed out  
from his PhD  
that he was  
admitted to a**



**hospital**

**mental health**

**ward ... twice.**

**And I have**

**seen both**

**husband and**

**wife (both**

**PhD students  
at the same  
time) stressed  
out of having  
to take care of  
their newborn  
baby, their**

**financial  
difficulties,  
and their  
respective  
research; so  
stressed the  
husband was**

**that he was  
close to tears  
as he  
disclosed his  
troubles to me  
in my office.**

**Doing a  
research  
postgraduate  
study is  
stressful  
because it  
competes with**

**your family or  
your partner  
for your time,  
energy,  
devotion, and  
concentration.  
So, you may**

**be ready to do  
a PhD, but is  
your family or  
partner ready?**

**5. How is  
your  
English?  
English is**



**the**

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**academia**

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**Unfortunately, the  
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**such as:**

*“I would like  
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*May I know  
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*me?”*

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such as:**

*“...factors of  
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interact with  
one another;  
meaning*

*that a factor  
may not, by  
itself, have a  
unique  
contribution  
to aggregate*

*stability.*

*Instead, it  
jointly  
contributes  
with another  
factor or*

*factors to  
affect  
aggregate  
stability.*

*Such jointly  
contribution*



*s cannot be  
measured by  
simple linear  
regression  
or by  
correlations*

...”.

**So, if  
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**English is**

**less than**

**desired,**

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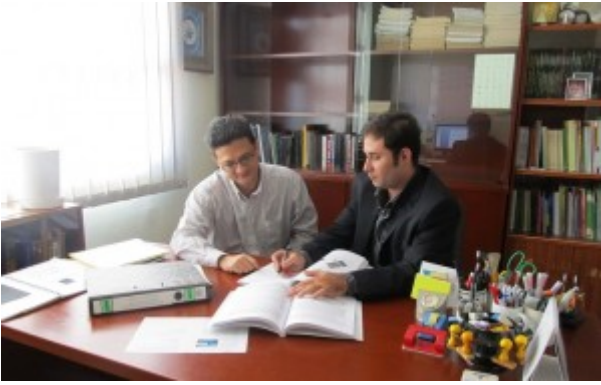
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