



“Forum on Doctoral Education in the Pandemic Era”



Doctoral education is considered the highest academic qualification, which signifies the greatest level of competence in the field of study. It is designed to create a cadre of researchers and scholars to expand knowledge and practice in diverse professions. The scrutiny of doctoral studies and discussion is relatively new, but it has been growing quickly recently.

Thus, on 17 March 2022, the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Facility organised an insightful and engaging online forum titled "Doctoral Education in the Pandemic Era" via Cisco Webex. This forum brought together distinguished panellists and postgraduate students to discuss the evolving landscape of doctoral education during these unprecedented times. The forum was structured around two main panel presentations and a special student-sharing session, providing a comprehensive overview of the challenges and opportunities faced by doctoral education in the pandemic era. The forum was officiated by Honourable Datin Noorazah Omar, the Undersecretary of the International Relations Division, Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia

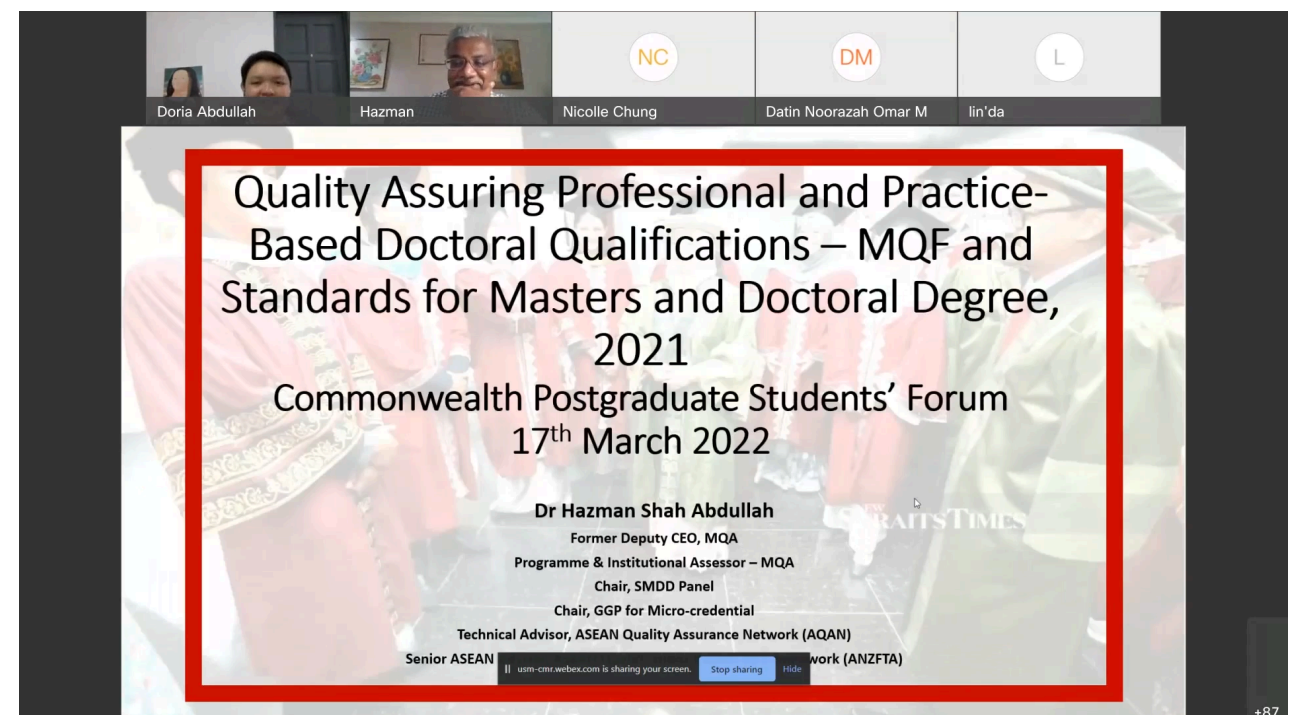
Doctor of Education (EdD) vs. Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

The first panel presentation delved into the distinctions and comparative advantages of the Doctor of Education (EdD) and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) programmes. Associate Professor Dr Thien Lei Mee, a renowned academic with extensive experience in both EdD and PhD programmes, led the discussion. Currently, she is the programme chairperson of the Doctor of Education program at the School of Education Studies, Universiti Sains Malaysia.

Dr Thien highlighted that while both degrees are rigorous and esteemed, they cater to different professional trajectories. The EdD is tailored for practitioners aiming to implement and manage educational policies and practices at the centre of learning. Conversely, the PhD is research-oriented and designed for those aspiring to contribute original knowledge to the field of education through extensive research and academia.

Key points of comparison that have been discussed included the nature of the coursework, programme structure and timeline, the focus of the dissertation and publications, and the intended career outcomes. Dr Thien emphasised that prospective doctoral candidates should carefully consider their career goals and professional interests when choosing between an EdD and a PhD. The presentation also included some survey results that the students had answered on choosing the EdD and PhD if they were given a second chance. It concluded with a lively Q&A session, where participants raised pertinent questions.

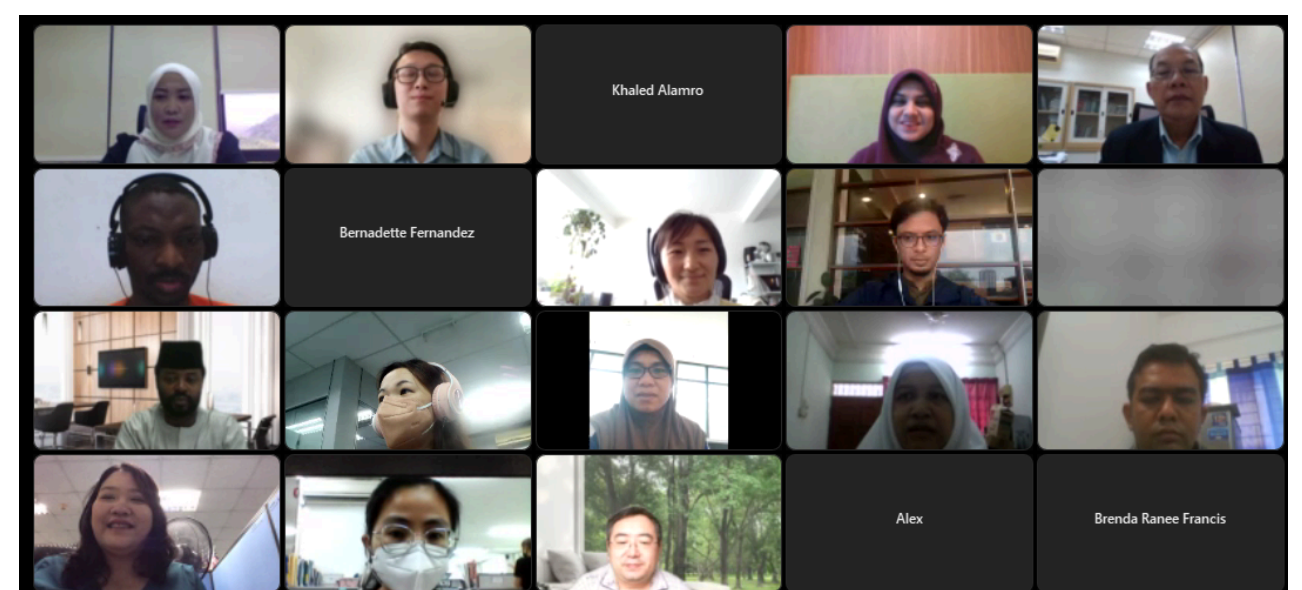
The presentation also addressed the quality assurance challenges faced by qualifications agencies and higher education institutions in adapting to the rapidly changing educational landscape, especially in the context of remote and hybrid learning environments necessitated by the pandemic. Dr Hazman also shared the best practices and innovative strategies implemented by MQA to uphold the quality of doctoral education during the pandemic. The session concluded with a dynamic exchange of opinions and experiences among participants, highlighting the collective commitment to maintaining excellence in doctoral education.



Student Sharing Session: Experiences and Expectations

The forum also featured a special student sharing session, providing a platform for postgraduate students to voice their experiences, expectations, and concerns. The session was moderated by Honourable Emeritus Professor Dato' Dr Morshidi Sirat. Three postgraduate students from the Universiti Putra Malaysia, Universiti Sains Malaysia, and the University of Nottingham Malaysia participated in the student panel presentation.

Later, the session was continued with an open-floor discussion on postgraduate education in Malaysia. Participants shared their unique experiences of pursuing postgraduate studies during the pandemic, highlighting both the challenges and opportunities they encountered. Common themes included the difficulties of conducting research remotely, the need for greater mental health support, and the desire for more flexible and adaptive learning environments. Students also expressed their expectations for the future of doctoral education, advocating for increased support from higher education institutions.

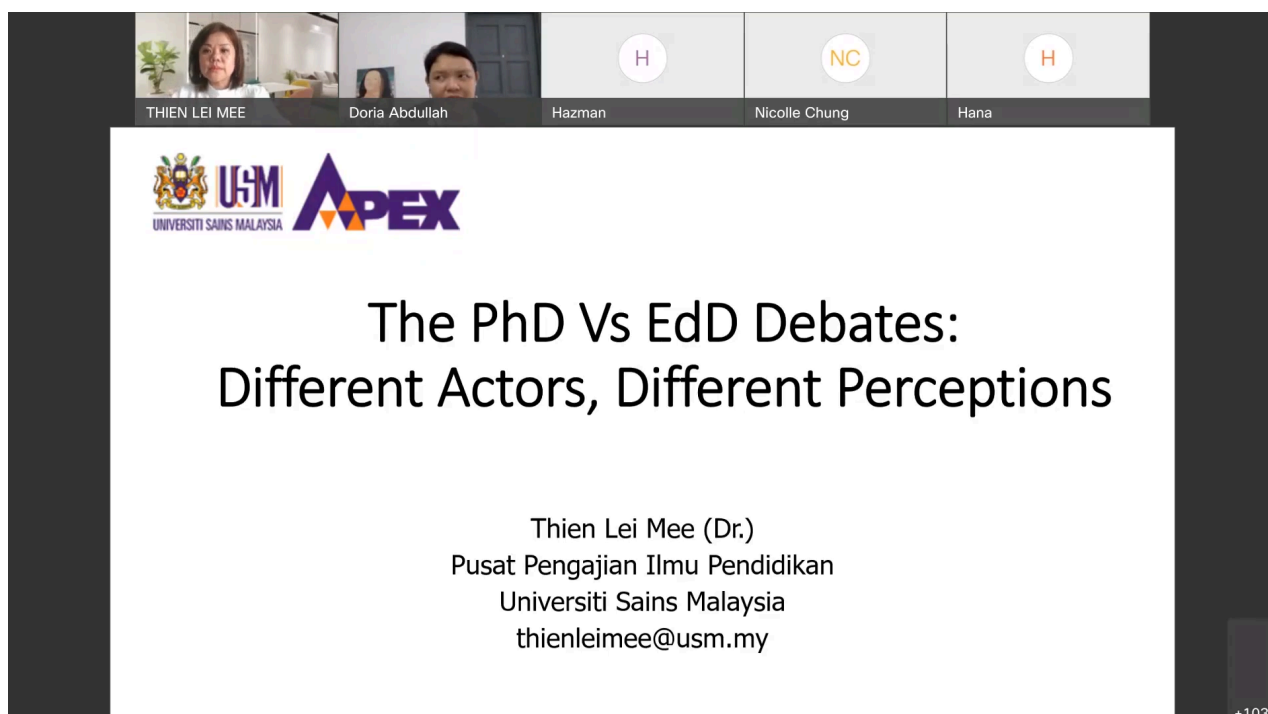


Conclusion

The "Doctoral Education in the Pandemic Era" forum was a resounding success. It facilitated meaningful discussions and provided valuable insights into the current state and prospects of postgraduate studies, mainly doctoral education. The event underscored the resilience and adaptability of academia in navigating the challenges posed by the pandemic. As we continue to move forward, the insights gained from this forum will undoubtedly contribute to the ongoing efforts to enhance and sustain the quality of doctoral education.

The Director of CTEF, Associate Professor Ts Dr Wan Fatma Zuharah, made the concluding remark of the forum by extending heartfelt thanks to all the panellists, students, and participants for their active engagement and contributions. Dr Wan Fatma also reminded all to be together and remain committed to advancing the field of doctoral education and supporting the academic and professional growth of doctoral students.

Prepared by,
Sri Jeyanthirar Subramaniam



Quality Assurance in Doctoral Education

The second-panel presentation, led by Dr Hazman Shah Abdullah, focused on Quality Assuring Professional and Practice-Based Doctoral Qualifications. Dr Hazman is an expert in educational quality management and provided an in-depth analysis of the mechanisms and standards that ensure the integrity and excellence of doctoral programmes. Dr Hazman was also the former Deputy Chief Executive Officer and the Programme and Institutional Assessor of the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA). Dr Hazman discussed quality assurance by focusing on the Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF) and the Master's & Doctoral Degree Standards. He explained that the mentioned Standard describes the generic requirements for master's and doctoral degrees based on MQF-level descriptors and areas of evaluation in the Code of Practice for Programme Accreditation (COPPA).

The Standard outlines a set of characteristics that describe the minimum levels of acceptable practices in the seven quality assurance areas, namely programme development and delivery, assessment of student learning, student selection and support services, academic staff, educational resources, programme management, programme monitoring, review and continual quality improvement based on the stakeholders' feedback and good practices in postgraduate education.