

Learning Curve

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H22-23

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EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION



**MSU helps
meet need for
doctors in the
country**

H17

COMMENT



**Curiosity
does not
always kill
the cat**

H21

EVENTS

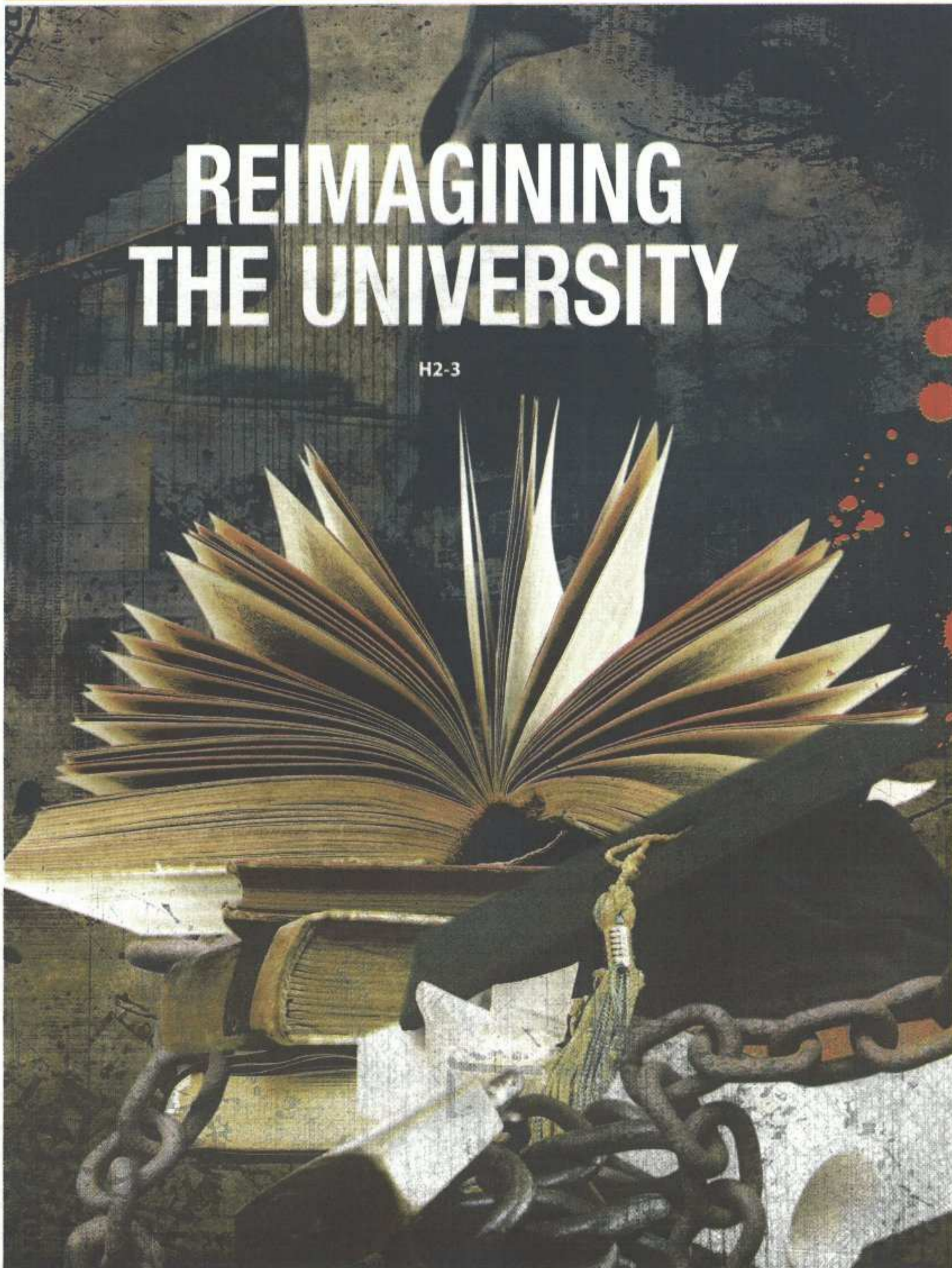


**Boosting
spirits**

H22

REIMAGINING THE UNIVERSITY

H2-3



Escaping from the clutches of colonisation

Academics from Asia and Africa met at a recent conference to challenge Western stereotypes of knowledge, write SUZIEANA UDA NAGU and SHARIFAH ARFAH

EYEBROWS raise whenever Professor CK Raju, a visiting professor of Mathematics at Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), talks about Modern Mathematics being wrongly taught to students for centuries.

He singles out Calculus as an example and says the subject is "erroneous" and clouded by "religious biases".

"It was brought to Europe from India and was misunderstood by the European (scholars) (and that) led to mistakes," says Raju, a distinguished professor at Inmantec, Ghaziabad, India.

In his recent paper on Decolonising Math and Science Education, the Indian national proposes correcting the subject ("like the rest of the racist history of Science") and removing its "theological prejudices".

"This will make (Calculus) easier and better suited for practical and scientific applications," adds Raju, who was a speaker at the International Conference on Decolonising Our Universities in Penang recently.

The response to his paper from participants was varied.

One felt that Raju had given "a different dimension to Science", while another thought it was "an eye-opener and raises more questions than answers".

The conference, jointly organised by USM and Citizens International in cooperation with the Higher Education Leadership Academy, was attended by some 60 like-minded scholars, intellectual and social activists from Asia and Africa.

They included Pavan K Varma (Indian ambassador to Bhutan); Dr Shadrack Gutto (Institute for African Renaissance Studies director, South Africa); Dr Molefi Asante (Professor of Africology at Temple University, the United States); Dr Syed Farid Alatas (associate professor of Sociology at the National University of Singapore); Mohammad Reza Aghaya (vice-president of University of Religions and Denominations, Qom, Iran); Dr James Campbell (Education Faculty, Deakin University, Australia); Professor Tan Sri Dzulkipli Abdul Razak (USM vice chancellor) and Professor Ahmad Murad Merican (Universiti Teknologi Petronas' Department of Management and Humanities), among others.

Raju's assertion about Mathematics and Science gelled with other opinions expressed at the conference whose goal was to start discussions on liberating non-Western learning institutions from Eurocentric frameworks and assumptions that they are modelled on.

These individuals were united in their opposition to the belief that Western stereotypes of knowledge are the



An academic claims that Modern Mathematics has been wrongly taught to students for centuries

universal truth.

As Citizens International chairman SM Mohamed Idris puts it: "Universities are the purveyors of imperialist world view and ideology. They play a role in perpetuating Western hegemony through their education models."

There appears to be a consensus that the Western method of teaching and research, which non-Western educational institutions had inherited from colonial times, is no longer suitable for universities in the South.

In reality, academics in these countries face many methodological barriers to pursuing research that truly reflects their communities.

Professor Ahmad Murad Merican points to the field of Social Science and Humanities as an example.

"Social Science and Humanities in Malaysia is based on a European model which relegates religion to the private sphere. The structure of Eurocentric epistemology is disconnected from Asian

society whose lives are centred on religion. This makes it difficult (for social scientists) to subscribe to (Eurocentric) Social Science," says Murad.

The time is ripe for scholars from countries under former colonial rule to escape from the yolk of knowledge imperialism and reclaim its rich tradition of knowledge.

"Asians have their own philosophical foundation and values which have been lost to colonisation," says Dzulkipli.

Academics believe the answer lies in a curriculum that is independent of European influence under a "reimagined" university.

Many at the symposium are in favour of restructuring the Social Science discipline.

"The curricular must be imbued with contributions of non-Western philosophers such as Ibnu Khaldun (Muslim historiographer, historian and forerunner of Modern Sociology and Economics) and Jose Rizal (national

patriot of the Philippines, poet and novelist).

Syed Farid agrees: "Jose Rizal has been largely ignored in Southeast Asian curricular".

Others warn of the threats of new colonialism practices such as rankings exercises.

"This is another form of imperialism as universities have to conform with publishing in ISI (Institute for Scientific Information) journals in order to be ranked among the best in the world," says Campbell.

There is also support for the drafting of "original or indigenous curriculum" instead of a "cloned" or "hybrid" model.

Other proposals include a system which "awards" graduates with a professional work portfolio instead of a diploma or degree upon graduation as practised in Swaraj University in Rajashtan, India.

That said blind rejection of "anything Western" also poses dangers.



CK Raju



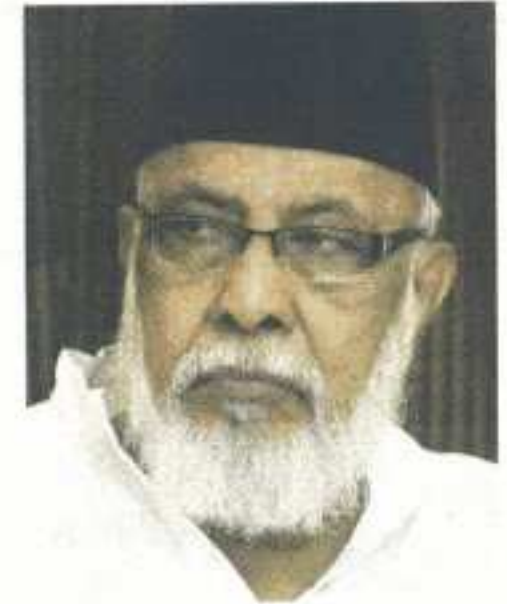
Dzulkipli Abdul Razak



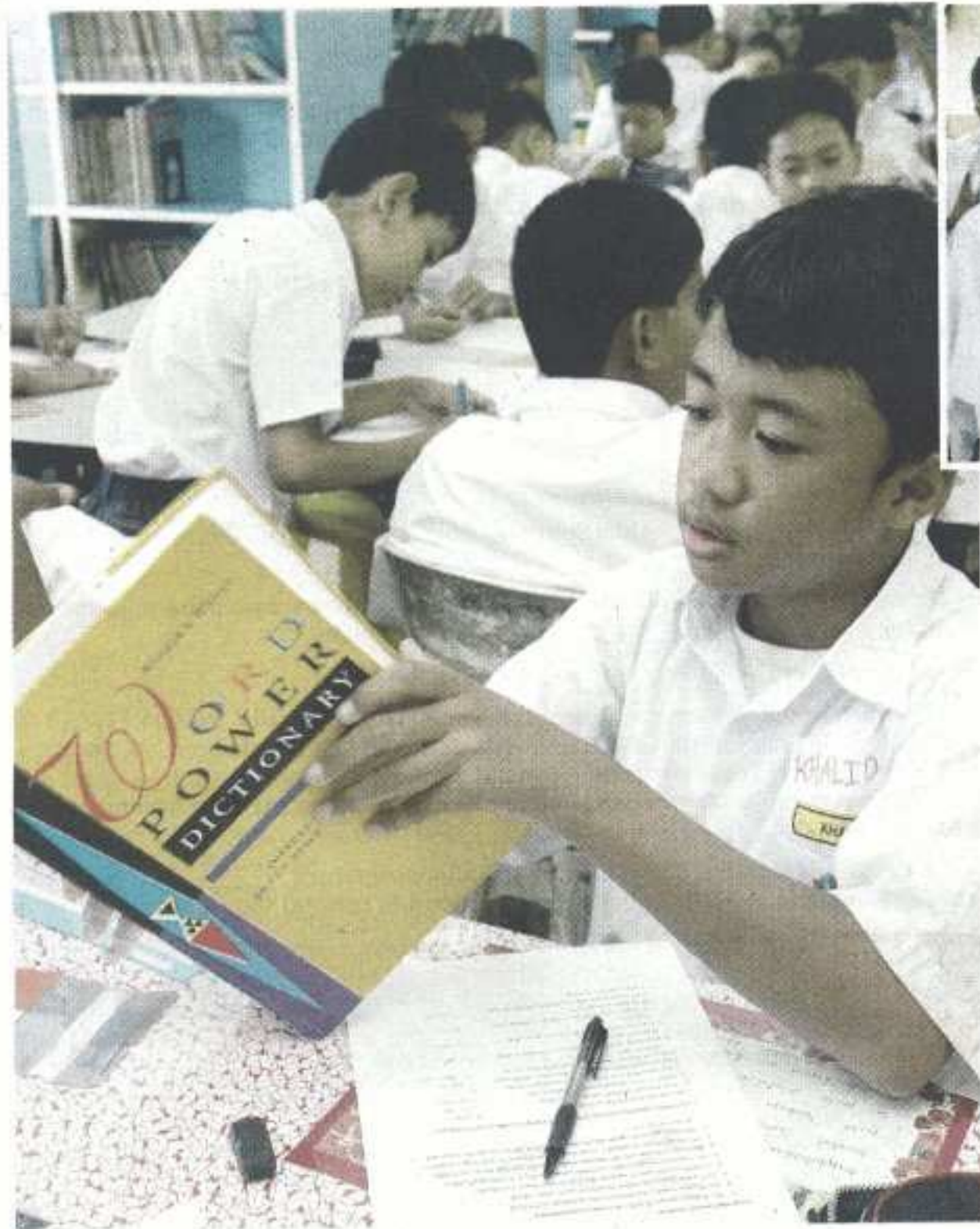
James Campbell



Ahmad Murad Merican



SM Mohamed Idris



Students with a strong sense of identity can speak English and still be true to their roots

"The last thing we want is to replace Eurocentrism with another ideology. This may give rise to nativism in which a community assumes it is superior to others," says Murad.

The desire to be part of an intellectual world as leaders and not as "peddlers or parrots" of European concepts among participants is clear.

But they acknowledge that bringing about change will be hard and require institutional commitment.

"Getting a debate going and raising people's awareness of the issues is the first step," says Dzulkipli.

Academics in Asia and Africa have taken baby steps towards creating their own practices.

USM pledges to reintroduce History

and Philosophy of Science at the postgraduate level before extending it to undergraduates.

"Poor understanding of the philosophy and history of Science makes the subject utilitarian," says Dzulkipli.

Akomolafe Adebayo Clement, assistant lecturer at Covenant University's Department of Psychology in Nigeria hopes to do his part by reviving the art of storytelling as "stories of capitalism, progress and development infringe on what it means to be an African."

Calling his project Nchethaka (Ibo dialect for 'remembering'), Adebayo recommends using storytelling networks to replace academic psychology therapy sessions.

"Stories are part of a social construct



Poor understanding of the philosophy and history of Science makes the subject utilitarian

which nurture our identity and reconnect us to the past," says Adebayo, a clinical psychologist.

Dr Sue-san Ghahremani Ghajar, a lecturer at the Faculty of Persian Language, Literature and Foreign Language, University of Alzahra in Tehran, intends to produce a collection of materials in English suited for Iranian English language learners.

Reference books for the teaching of English in Iran largely come from the West.

"Values associated with being American and British find its way among English language learners," she says.

Growing up, she witnessed speakers of English and Farsi being treated differently.

"Those who speak English are seen as high-class and sophisticated," says Sue-san, who has 27 years of teaching experience.

"Telling American jokes even though it is alien to Iranians is also perceived as the trait of a good English speaker," adds Sue-san, who has written four books on language learning.

But students with a strong sense of identity can speak English and still be true to their roots, she says.

The conference ended on a positive note and participants are confident of countering Eurocentrism.

"Some criticise the fact that we are still discussing Eurocentrism after 40 years. But now is the time to take action and develop workable modules for the university community," says Dzulkipli.

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More next week



Sue-san Ghahremani Ghajar