

Empower future leaders: The story of the Universiti Malaysia Terengganu's (UMT) BAKAT Camp  
(*Memperkasa Bakat Kepimpinan Pengalaman Kem BAKAT Universiti Malaysia Terengganu*)

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ABSTRACT

Higher education institutions are a great place to nurture the next generation of leaders. A great leader has the ability to excel in both academics and soft skills through study. The BAKAT Camp has been initiated by the Student Affairs Office (PHEP) at University of Malaysia Terengganu to address the situation. BAKAT is focused on developing leadership skills for undergraduate students at University of Malaysia Terengganu, particularly those in their first year. Based on profiling data, 140 first-year potential leaders were selected from academic and non-academic associations to attend the BAKAT Camp. BAKAT modules were designed using PHEP's tagline, 'BINGKAS'. BINGKAS is all about talent, integrity, determination, spirit, character, spirituality, and well-being. These elements have a significant impact on the development and nurturing of potential leaders. They were exposed to managing challenges, making decisions, having good communication skills, and being mentally tough. The delivery of BAKAT by students who served as facilitators was efficient. The use of this mechanism resulted in improved leadership skills for both first-year students who participated and those who facilitated. The BAKAT Camp is believed to have been beneficial in empowering future leaders among university students and boosting their confidence in their future careers.

Keywords: university students, higher education, leadership, PHEP UMT

ABSTRAK

*Institut pengajian tinggi merupakan persekitaran yang baik untuk melahirkan generasi pemimpin akan datang. Pemimpin yang hebat bukan sahaja cemerlang dalam akademik tetapi juga mempunyai kemahiran insaniah yang tinggi. Oleh itu, Hal Ehwal Pelajar dan Alumni (HEPA) Universiti Malaysia Terengganu telah mewujudkan satu modul Kem Bina Bakat Siswa (BAKAT) sebagai satu usaha untuk melahirkan pemimpin yang berkualiti. Matlamat BAKAT adalah mencungkil bakat kepimpinan dalam kalangan pelajar ijazah sarjana muda di Universiti Malaysia Terengganu khususnya pelajar tahun satu. Data profiling menunjukkan seramai 140 pelajar tahun satu yang merupakan barisan kepimpinan kelab akademik dan bukan akademik telah menghadiri Kem BAKAT. Modul BAKAT ini telah dibangunkan berdasarkan tagline HEPA 'BINGKAS'. Intipati BINGKAS adalah bakat, integriti, nekad, gelora, karektor, amal dan sejahtera. Elemen-elemen ini amat penting dalam membangunkan dan melahirkan bakal pemimpin yang mampu menghadapi cabaran, membuat keputusan, mempunyai kemahiran berkomunikasi yang baik dan kekuatan mental. Mekanisme pelaksanaan BAKAT yang melantik fasilitator dalam kalangan pelajar adalah efektif. Penggunaan mekanisme ini memberikan manfaat bukan sahaja kepada pelajar tahun satu sebagai peserta tetapi juga kepada pelajar yang menjadi fasilitator. Kem BAKAT mampu memberi manfaat kepada bakal pemimpin dan meningkatkan keyakinan diri dalam kerjaya akan datang.*

*Kata kunci: pelajar universiti, pengajian tinggi, kepimpinan, HEPA UMT*

## INTRODUCTION

In response to rising concerns about youth employability, it is essential to nurture capable young leaders who can foster the development of soft skills among their peers. Leadership skills are essential competencies that university students must acquire during their studies (Mazrona et al., 2023). This conceptual paper explores the transformation of undergraduate students as they grow from non-coastal backgrounds into confident and

competent leaders. This journey is guided by the Kem Bina Bakat Siswa (BAKAT) initiative.

The motto of Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT), “Ocean of Discoveries for Global Sustainability,” reflects the university’s commitment to leadership development beyond marine studies. At UMT, all students have the opportunity to build leadership skills through their respective faculties. As shown in Figure 1, UMT consists of six faculties (Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, n.d.).

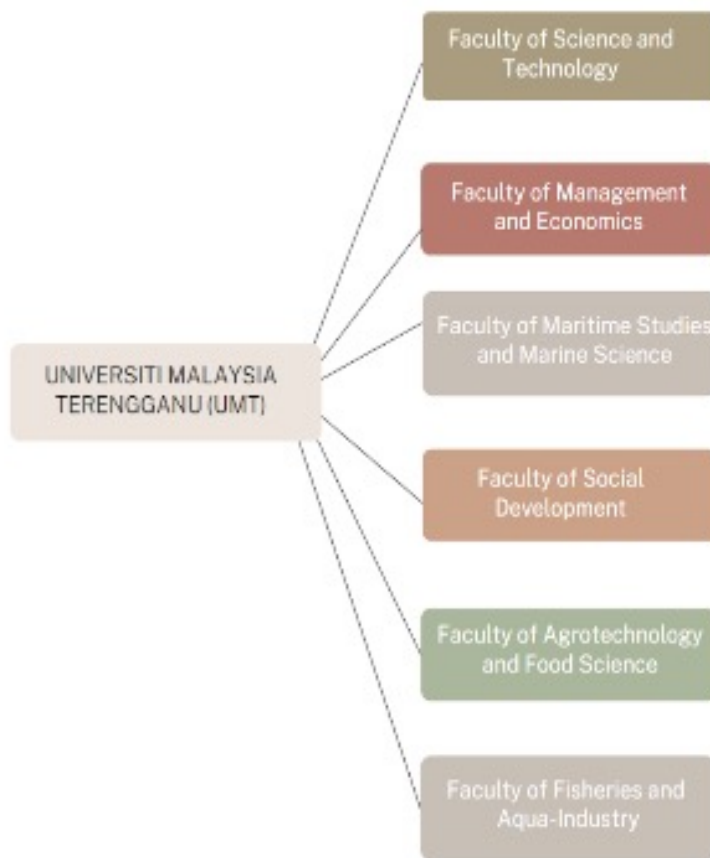


FIGURE 1. Faculties in Universiti Malaysia Terengganu

Student leadership plays a vital role in educational institutions. At Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT), student leadership goes beyond the Student Representative Council (MPP) and includes various organizations that require strong and capable leadership teams. These include the Residential College Representative Committee (JPKK), Off-Campus Representative Committee (JPLK), Campus Election Committee (JPRK), and the Executive Committee (MT). These core leadership bodies are responsible

for representing student voices and proposing improvements to address student needs. Such proposals are presented biannually during quorum sessions.

However, when student leaders lack fundamental leadership knowledge, it can hinder the ability of the administration, particularly within the Student Affairs Office (PHEP) to fully understand and respond to students' concerns. Weak leadership foundations can lead to inefficiencies in organizational operations. These challenges are compounded by the

limited management term of just one academic year for these student organizations.

To address these issues, the Student Affairs and Alumni (HEPA) department has introduced a strategic

initiative, the Student Talent Building Camp (BAKAT). This leadership development module is guided by five student representatives who serve as the core team driving the program forward.



FIGURE 2. Student Representatives with the Student Affairs and Alumni (HEPA)

#### Addressing the BAKAT program

The primary goal of the BAKAT program is to assess the leadership skills of first-year students at Universiti Malaysia Terengganu. The BAKAT program was first introduced during the 2023/2024 academic year with the aim of fostering a competent and robust team of leaders. The BAKAT program was initiated to address several challenges encountered by student leaders, such as inadequate communication abilities, insufficient mental resilience, emotionally driven decision-making, and teamwork deficiencies. Consequently, the Student

Affairs Office (PHEP) department at Universiti Malaysia Terengganu took the proactive approach by organizing an impactful camp aimed at proactively developing students with significant leadership potential.

The structure of the BAKAT program integrates the foundational principles of MADANI, which embody sustainability, prosperity, innovation, respect, trust, and compassion (Pejabat Perdana Menteri, 2023). BAKAT also uses the "Mind and Character" initiative of the Ministry of Higher Education (2023) and UMT's initial strategy of "Cultivating Talent for Student Excellence" as guiding principles in developing this

module (Hal Ehwal Pelajar dan Alumni Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, 2022).

This methodology is focused on nurturing well-rounded individuals and fostering capable student leaders, in line with the vision of the BAKAT module to emphasize targeted student growth and empower students in a comprehensive manner that extends beyond just producing authoritative leaders.

The BAKAT module's main aim is to facilitate transformation by harnessing and empowering the potential of students. This aligns with PHEP's mission to support students in creating and executing powerful programs that resonate with local communities and current circumstances, while also meeting the aspirations and objectives of Universiti Malaysia Terengganu.



FIGURE 3. A Student joined The BAKAT Module

### The Spirit of BAKAT

The BAKAT module is not just only focused on building leadership qualities, but it goes beyond that. The first letter of the acronym BINGKAS stands for “bakat” or “talent,” which refers to the potential that exists within students. Each student has a unique set of talents that enable them to use these talents to shape their personal growth and as an advantage to contribute to society. This module includes multiple activities as a way to uncover hidden talents among the participating students. This module provides students with the opportunity to take on roles such as group leader or assistant leader. Through this module, students have the opportunity to take on roles to be group leader or assistant leader. Leadership roles are essential in Kem Bina Bakat Siswa (BAKAT) as they connect participants with facilitators. These leadership roles are vital throughout the Kem Bina Bakat Siswa (BAKAT) as they serve as a bridge between participants and facilitators. The selection process is based on recommendations and votes from the participants themselves, without any

interference from facilitators or PHEP officers. This ensures transparency and opens up opportunities for all participants to showcase their potential, which they may not have had a chance to do previously. This also aims to train participants to embody integrity, as effective teaching is best achieved through example.

The facilitators involved in this camp are the presidents and members of the executive council of both academic and non-academic clubs. Regardless of the participants coming from the same clubs, the facilitators perform their duties professionally by appointing an evaluation committee that operates independently in choosing potential participants. The committee uses a standardized rubric to evaluate the participants and identify 30 potential candidates who exhibit charismatic leadership qualities. The talents of these selected participants will be further developed in the next-level program, KEMSIS. KEMSIS is a platform that brings together future leaders who are committed and capable of becoming the next generation of university leaders.





FIGURE 4. Student participating in BAKAT



FIGURE 5. Participants of BAKAT

The talents mentioned are not restricted to leadership but also encompass cultural and social aspects such as dance, singing, and acting. This is due to the module's inclusion of an entertainment component called Cultural Night. During this session, participants were given a theme of modern Dikir Barat with a focus on leadership. Through this performance, students were given the chance to enhance their creativity and assess their knowledge of leadership. Sanggar Siswa, a gathering place for Universiti Malaysia Terengganu students, was the venue for the performances, which gave students on campus an opportunity to view and indirectly gain knowledge about leadership. Additionally, their performances were evaluated by

an appointed assessment unit and special judges from UMT's cultural unit, who provided valuable and constructive feedback. This activity resulted in many positive outcomes. The organizing committee was able to determine the level of knowledge of the participants, particularly with respect to local culture (Dikir Barat) and leadership, as a leader needs to be flexible in understanding various aspects of society. In addition, the organizing committee was given positive feedback from UMT students who attended the performances, stating that the idea was excellent and should be continued because the issues faced by students are not only bureaucratic but also social in nature.



FIGURE 6. Participants of Cultural Night



The BAKAT module is designed to promote students' strong determination and resilience through activities that help them enhance these qualities. The hiking element, which is mandatory for all BAKAT camp participants, is one of the activities that distinguishes this module from others. The organizers chose Bukit Maras, a hill that is 329 meters above sea level. During the climb, this hill can be quite challenging because it has waterlogged paths and steep inclines at certain turns. The act of conquering the summit of Bukit Maras

reveals a person's leadership qualities, as the strenuous climb demands a high level of endurance, determination, and a strong will to reach the set goal. Assisting other participants during this activity, ensuring that no one is left behind, and offering help to those who are injured during the climb are key parts of a good leader. Critical situations can reveal a leader's true nature, as they must decide whether to prioritize personal interests or serve those who are in need.



FIGURE 7. Participants joined hiking in Bukit Maras

If a leader is committed to community involvement, they will also dedicate their free time to their subordinates. In the case of university students, it is crucial for leaders to listen to their peers' voices because they may not always be able to communicate directly with university management. The reason for this is that student leaders are the voice of students. Therefore, the BAKAT module committee has implemented activities that incorporate aspects of charity and well-being to impart to the participants. Charity can support students by encouraging positive personal values through spiritual, religious, and continuous practices, which will result in students who balance their worldly and spiritual lives. Well-being contributes to the development of

holistic students, who are characterized by their active minds and healthy mental states. This will equip them with the ability to think critically and positively. Siswa Masuk Kampung (SMK) is an activity that promotes the development of students with these ideologies and allows them to engage in community services in rural areas. Participating in bonding activities and interacting with the local community are required during community services. Participants are required to carry out communal activities with the locals and engage in two-way interactions with the villagers. Participants are tasked with preparing food that will be served after the communal work is finished. This charitable practice will contribute to the well-being of the students.



FIGURE 8. Participants doing activity for Siswa Masuk Kampung (SMK)

#### Challenges and Solutions

The Student Talent Building Camp (BAKAT) has been conducted in two series, with 70 participants in the first series and 100 participants in the second series. The first series was held in February 2024 for three days and two nights, focusing solely on the area of Universiti Malaysia Terengganu and Bukit Maras. The second series was conducted over four days and three nights and included off-campus locations such as Tasik Kenyir, Kampung Basung, Bukit Maras, and the entire Universiti Malaysia Terengganu area. These improvements were made by the BAKAT module committee after identifying several issues and implementing enhancements to strengthen and refine the BAKAT module, ensuring it remains relevant as a long-term guide.

The main challenge was attracting participants

to join the program openly. Most students at Universiti Malaysia Terengganu are less interested in participating in camp-style programs conducted around the university. This is because some students feel that programs held within UMT are bland and lack variety. Additionally, awareness of leadership is not widely promoted, especially among first-year bachelor's degree and diploma students. This lack of awareness results in leadership-related programs receiving less enthusiastic participation. To address the issue of participant involvement, several steps were taken. The organizing committee decided to hold the second series of the BAKAT camp outside of UMT, specifically at the Kenyir Natural Research Station (SPAK), UMT, for two days and one night. This was intended to attract first-year students to join the BAKAT camp, as SPAK, UMT offers water-related activities such as water confidence exercises and kayaking. These activities excited the



participants, encouraging a competitive spirit to join the BAKAT camp. Additionally, the organizing committee opened participation to uniformed body members who seldom have the opportunity to join such programs. The BAKAT committee sent invitation letters to the officers of the involved uniformed bodies, such as the Navy

Reserve Officer Training Unit (Palapes Laut), Army Reserve Officer Training Unit (Palapes Darat), Police Undergraduate Voluntary Corps (Suksis), and Civil Defense Corps (Sispa). This initiative also maximized the number of participants for the second series of BAKAT.



FIGURE 9. Participants of Navy Reserve Officer Training Unit (Palapes Laut) and Police Undergraduate Voluntary Corps (Suksis)

The second issue was the difficulty in instilling discipline among participants during the first series of BAKAT. The participants also displayed a careless attitude during the program, even though it was a leadership camp designed to produce competent and capable leaders. This situation occurred because there was no special committee appointed to specifically help build the participants' discipline and character, to ensure they have strong mental and physical resilience. To address this, the BAKAT module committee made improvements in the second series by appointing several facilitators from the Executive Committee (MT) of Suksis and Sispa to continuously train and

monitor the participants' discipline throughout the program, from registration until the closing ceremony of the BAKAT camp. These facilitators were given the authority to enforce penalties similar to those used in uniformed body training, such as physical training (PT) like push-ups and pumping. Although these measures may appear strict, they do not cause injury to participants and provide benefits, such as enhancing physical endurance so that participants are not easily fatigued during activities. As a result of this approach, participants became more aware of their surroundings and developed greater discipline.



FIGURE 10. Participants trained by the facilitators

OBJECTIVES OF THE BAKAT MODULE

- i. Equipped students with soft skills such as communication, critical thinking, leadership, multitasking and professionalism.
- ii. Guide and assist students in developing and enhancing their leadership talents and personal potential within teamwork settings.
- iii. Identify students with the potential to be highlighted for leadership roles in the student leadership body at Universiti Malaysia Terengganu.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative method called purposive sampling was used to select participants. To select participants,

we used profiling data from each Responsibility Center (PTJ) at Universiti Malaysia Terengganu and representatives from both academic and non-academic clubs. The participants who are selected are those who possess potential for leadership, along with experience and an interest in becoming leaders. The selected students will be assigned to their respective faculties to analyze the representation from each faculty. Moreover, these individuals are eligible to stand for the Student Representative Council (MPP) during the 2024/2025 session. Therefore, this will be an early indicator of the proportion of representatives that each faculty is expected to send. Figure 11 displays the percentage of faculties involved.

The Faculty of Business, Economics, and Social Development (FPEPS) had the highest participation rate, with a percentage of 24.1%, while the faculty with the lowest participation rate was the Faculty of Computer Science and Mathematics (FSKM), with a

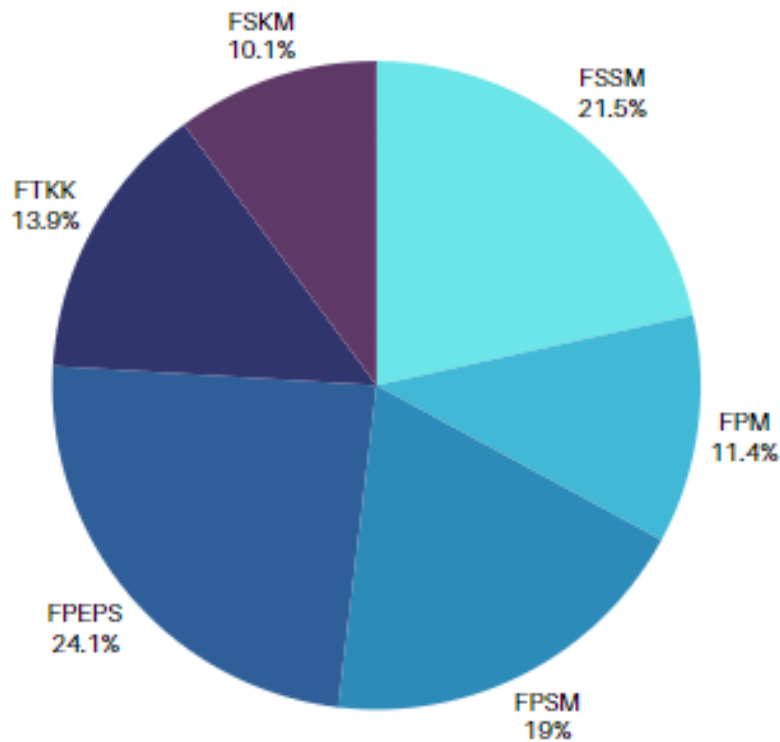


FIGURE 11. The percentage of faculties involved

participation rate of only 10.1%. This occurred because FPEPS is the largest faculty at Universiti Malaysia Terengganu and offers the most programs, whereas FSKM is the smallest faculty at UMT and has a smaller student population. Overall, the percentage of

participant involvement by faculty is logical.

Table 1 shows the number of participants involved in the second series of the BAKAT camp, categorized by academic and non-academic clubs according to faculty. The distribution of participation in



TABLE 1. Number of participants for academic and non-academic based on faculty.

FACULTY	ACADEMIC	NON-ACADEMIC
FPEPS	7	17
FSSM	4	18
FPSM	3	16
FTKK	4	10
FPM	2	9
FSKM	5	5
TOTAL PARTICIPANTS	100	

this series of BAKAT reveals that involvement in non-academic activities was higher compared to academic ones. This trend is due to most participants choosing to join non-academic clubs to enhance their personal

development, as these clubs offer exposure to new environments. In contrast, academic clubs typically only bring together students from the same field of study.

TABLE 2. Academic and Non-Academic Clubs

ACADEMIC CLUB	NON-ACADEMIC CLUB
BIOSIS	SPORTS
BIOD	ANAK NEGERI
AECC	KEBUDAYAAN
KESMIA	KEUSAHAWANAN
MSC	KEROHANIAN
MARINA	SOSIAL
GEOCEANS	EKSEKUTIF
NAPHYS	BADAN UNIFORM
SCI-MET	
PEKA	
NREC	
MAR'C	
TOURMAC	
HISAAC	
HEVOTECH	
REVOF	
MAPEM	
KEMAFIZ	
NAVAL	
HIMMAT	
BLASTEMA	

Table 2 shows the names of academic clubs and types of non-academic club clusters that sent representatives from first-year undergraduate and diploma students to participate in the second series of the BAKAT camp. Each academic and non-academic club was required to send at least one first-year representative from each faculty to attend the program. Although there are 31 academic clubs and 9 non-academic club clusters at Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, only 21 academic clubs and 8 non-academic clusters sent representatives from each faculty. All six faculties successfully sent representatives from both academic and non-academic clubs to the BAKAT camp.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The purposive sampling method employed for selecting participants ensured that those with leadership potential, experience, and interest were chosen from both academic and non-academic clubs. This strategic selection aimed to foster a diverse representation from each faculty, providing a robust analysis of faculty involvement and leadership potentials.

Table 1 shows a notable difference in participation between academic and non-academic clubs. The number of participants in non-academic clubs was higher, with 57 compared to 20 in academic clubs. The trend indicates that there is a preference for non-academic clubs among participants, probably because they offer a wider range of personal development opportunities and new experiences. The diversity of non-academic clubs is a factor in personal growth, while academic clubs tend to be more focused on students within the same field of study, potentially limiting their appeal.

The academic and non-academic clubs that sent representatives to the BAKAT camp are listed in Table 2. Despite Universiti Malaysia Terengganu having 31 academic clubs and 9 non-academic club clusters, only 21 academic clubs and 8 non-academic clubs participated. The importance of enlisting a diverse group of clubs to ensure comprehensive representation is highlighted by this selective participation. The diverse array of non-academic clubs, including sports, cultural, and social clubs, exemplifies the diverse interests of the participants and their commitment to enriching their experiences beyond academic pursuits.

The BAKAT camp's results provide valuable insights that can be used to enhance leadership development initiatives in the future. The high involvement of non-academic clubs suggests that leadership training programs should place more

emphasis on integrating such activities. In addition, the data highlights the significance of including all faculties and club types to ensure a comprehensive development experience for participants. The participation rates and club representation data provide a basis for refining future programs, enhancing engagement strategies, and fostering a more inclusive environment that accommodates the diverse interests and needs of students.

However, challenges remain. The short, one-year leadership term poses continuity issues, and students from diverse regions face adjustment barriers. The need for structured mentorship and sustained leadership support was evident throughout the camp.

Overall, the BAKAT camp provided insightful data for improving future leadership programs. Emphasis should be placed on expanding participation across all faculties and clubs, integrating cultural elements, and formalizing facilitator training. Longitudinal tracking is also recommended to assess the program's long-term impact on student leadership development.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Student Talent Building Camp (BAKAT) module was established with the primary goal of serving as a comprehensive guideline for developing a cadre of competent and authoritative student leaders. This module is a result of the PHEP's thoughtful and proactive approach in addressing and resolving emerging administrative issues that hindered timely intervention.

The BAKAT module was specifically designed to address challenges and gaps identified in past administrative processes. By implementing this module, the PHEP has demonstrated its commitment to refine and improve leadership development practices within the university. This initiative is not only focused on addressing current shortcomings but also anticipating future needs, ensuring that similar issues are handled efficiently and effectively in future sessions.

The proactive approach of this step emphasizes the importance of continuous improvement and adaptation in leadership training programs. The BAKAT module aims to foster a robust and dynamic leadership environment, which ultimately contributes to the overall success and growth of the student body. By addressing these challenges head-on and making necessary adjustments, the university is better equipped to support and cultivate the next generation of leaders, thereby enhancing the overall quality and effectiveness of its student leadership programs.



The BAKAT module introduces a strategic and forward-thinking approach to leadership development, which reveals the university's commitment to producing impactful and long-term improvements in student leadership and administration.

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