

Enhancing Student Engagement through Strategic Privatization: Analyzing the Impact of the HEPA
UKM Strategic Plan 2023-2026 at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
(*Permekasaan Penglibatan Pelajar melalui Penswastaan Strategik: Analisis Terhadap Pelan Strategik
HEPA UKM 2023–2026 di Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia*)

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ABSTRACT

The HEPA UKM Strategic Plan 2023-2026 outlines a comprehensive framework aimed at transforming Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) into a leading institution of higher learning by enhancing academic excellence, fostering research innovation, and promoting holistic student development. The HEPA plan, rooted in principles of privatization, aims to enhance student development by streamlining management processes and emphasizing student empowerment, autonomy, critical thinking, and active participation. This study investigates trends in student participation at UKM from 2021 to 2023, analyzing engagement levels across various faculties and institutes, both locally and internationally. Data analysis reveals a substantial increase in student involvement, with participation numbers rising from 772 in 2021 to 6,139 in 2023. This surge indicates a significant enhancement in both local and international student engagement, underscoring the university's commitment to fostering a more inclusive and participatory academic environment. The findings suggest that strategic initiatives under the HEPA framework, particularly those promoting student empowerment and autonomy, have effectively enhanced student engagement across multiple platforms. This research highlights the importance of continuous improvement in educational strategies to support student development and suggests implications for future programs that aim to further elevate UKM's status as a premier educational institution.

Keywords: student empowerment, strategic planning, student engagement, higher education, privatization.

ABSTRAK

Pelan Strategik HEPA UKM 2023-2026 menggariskan rangka kerja komprehensif yang bertujuan untuk mentransformasikan Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) menjadi institusi pengajian tinggi terkemuka dengan meningkatkan kecemerlangan akademik, memupuk inovasi penyelidikan, dan menggalakkan pembangunan pelajar yang holistik. Pelan HEPA, berakar umbi dalam prinsip penswastaan, bertujuan untuk meningkatkan pembangunan pelajar dengan memperkemas proses pengurusan dan menekankan pemeraksanaan pelajar, autonomi, pemikiran kritis dan penyertaan aktif. Kajian ini mengkaji tren dalam penyertaan pelajar di UKM dari 2021 hingga 2023, menganalisis tahap penglibatan di pelbagai fakulti dan institut, sama ada di peringkat tempatan dan antarabangsa. Analisis data menunjukkan peningkatan yang ketara dalam penglibatan pelajar, dengan bilangan penyertaan meningkat daripada 772 pada 2021 kepada 6,139 pada 2023. Lonjakan ini menunjukkan peningkatan yang ketara dalam penglibatan pelajar tempatan dan antarabangsa, menekankan komitmen universiti untuk memupuk persekitaran akademik yang lebih inklusif dan partisipatif. Penemuan menunjukkan bahawa inisiatif strategik di bawah rangka kerja HEPA, terutamanya yang menggalakkan pemeraksanaan dan autonomi pelajar, telah meningkatkan penglibatan pelajar dengan berkesan merentasi pelbagai platform. Penyelidikan ini menekankan kepentingan penambahbaikan berterusan dalam strategi pendidikan untuk menyokong pembangunan pelajar dan mencadangkan implikasi untuk program masa depan yang bertujuan untuk meningkatkan lagi status UKM sebagai institusi pendidikan yang unggul.

Kata kunci: pemeraksanaan pelajar, perancangan strategik, keterlibatan pelajar, pengajian tinggi, penswastaan.

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1970s, the Malaysian university sector has undergone significant transformations due to privatization policies, which have profoundly influenced both public and private institutions. The privatization of universities in Malaysia, which began in 1970, was driven by factors related to the liberalization, deregulation, and privatization of higher education (Sivalingam, 2007). Privatization offers several advantages, including cost-effectiveness in budget allocations and enhanced opportunities for student development, often surpassing those available at public universities (Yussof, 2001). Private universities, due to their financial flexibility and operational autonomy, have been able to invest more in student empowerment and development, avoiding the constraints typically associated with government-controlled institutions.

Overview of University Privatization

The establishment of private universities in Malaysia has demonstrated considerable potential, prompting public universities to adapt to these changes by developing special sectors focused on privatization. These sectors, such as UKMShape at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), UMCC ed at Universiti Malaya, and other similar initiatives, operate independently of government funding and the Malaysian Ministry of Education's selection processes. This independence allows for greater flexibility in administration and finance, thereby fostering innovation in educational offerings and student services.

At UKM, the Student Affairs Office has introduced the HEPA UKM Strategic Plan 2023-2026, which is rooted in the principles of privatization. This strategic plan aims to enhance student development by streamlining management processes and focusing on student empowerment, aligning with the university's broader objectives. The HEPA plan emphasizes the importance of fostering student autonomy, critical thinking, and active participation, elements that are

essential for holistic student development (Jones & Brown, 2019; Anderson et al., 2021). The plan is consistent with the Ministry of Higher Education's agenda, which includes promoting student autonomy in various areas, such as activity management, political involvement, and financial management (Mohd Suzeren Md Jamil et al., 2023).

HEPA UKM Strategic Plan 2023-2026

The HEPA UKM Strategic Plan 2023-2026 represents a critical response to these shifts, outlining a comprehensive framework aimed at positioning UKM as a leading institution of higher learning. The plan is structured around ten strategic goals designed to foster academic excellence, promote research innovation, and support holistic student development. These goals reflect UKM's commitment to enhancing educational quality and relevance in an increasingly competitive and globalized context. The plan emphasizes a renewed vision for UKM, focusing on its transformative impact on students and society through the integration of contemporary educational practices and a strong emphasis on research and community engagement.

Privatization within the higher education sector generally involves the transfer of public sector institutions or services to private management and ownership. The rationale behind this approach is the belief that private ownership can drive efficiency and improve financial health compared to public management. At UKM, the ten goals of the HEPA Strategic Plan provide a clear strategic direction for navigating the challenges posed by privatization. Each goal is supported by detailed action plans, exemplified by the Student Affairs and Alumni Centre's (HEPA-UKM) initiatives, such as the rejuvenation of the PUSANIKA complex (**Figure 1**). This project, in collaboration with UKMShape, JANA-UKM, the Treasury Department (Bendahari-UKM), and external companies, aims to enhance student services and transform PUSANIKA into a central hub for student activities.





FIGURE 1. Pusanika Rejuvenation and Katarsis Space

According to UKM's HEPA Strategic Plan, the transformation of Pusanika, known as the "Pusanika Rejuvenation," is aimed at enhancing the facilities at Pusanika to provide a more comfortable and convenient environment for university students. This rejuvenation initiative comprises two main strategies: facility transformation and student welfare sustainability. The facility transformation includes upgrading and opening shops that sell essential items at more competitive prices. Additionally, significant upgrades have been made to various facilities, such as the establishment of a cyber cafe, with a total expenditure of RM 2.7

million. Furthermore, learning spaces and auditoriums have been upgraded with an investment of RM 3.2 million. As part of the student welfare sustainability efforts, a renewal visa center for international students has been constructed at a project cost of RM 500,000. Moreover, the upgrading of student association rooms was carried out with an expenditure of RM 3 million. These initiatives underline the university's commitment to creating a supportive and conducive environment for both local and international students, aligning with the broader objectives of the HEPA Strategic Plan to enhance student life and campus facilities.

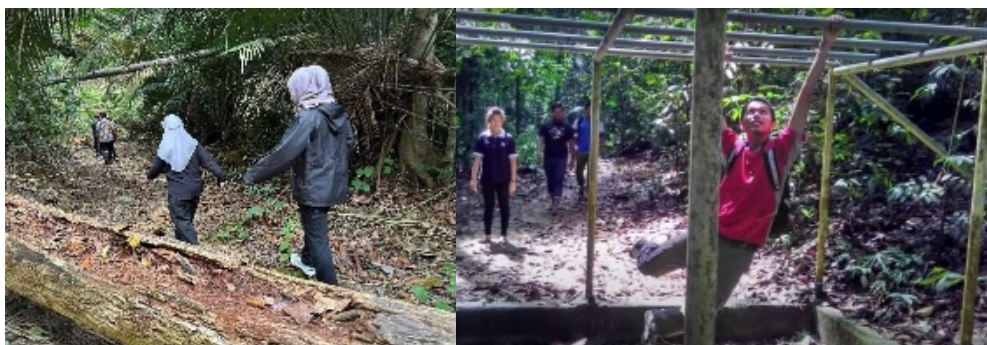


FIGURE 2. Forest Education Development Plan (HPA)

The Forest Education Development Plan (HPA) has also been upgraded as part of the facility transformation initiative (Figure 2). The HPA is a designated camping site at UKM, intended for students to engage in outdoor activities such as team building, jungle trekking, and wall climbing. As part of this upgrade, a nature-themed café will be established within the HPA. This café is designed with the concept

of nature therapy, aiming to support the mental well-being of students through a tranquil and restorative environment. This enhancement underscores the university's commitment to providing holistic support for students, integrating both physical and mental health benefits within the broader framework of the HEPA Strategic Plan.



FIGURE 3. Kolej@UKM Income Generation Target

A crucial component of the HEPA plan is the focus on student accommodations, which are essential for supporting student life and fostering a conducive learning environment. UKM's twelve residential colleges provide vital accommodations for students, particularly undergraduates, offering amenities that support both academic and personal development. The Student Housing Centre (PPP-UKM), within the HEPA framework, has developed a strategic plan that includes upgrading these facilities and establishing new accommodations, such as the 13th residential college at Kolej Idris Al-Marbawi (KIAM) and Taman Tenaga. These efforts aim to accommodate a growing student population, ensuring that approximately 15,026 students benefit from improved living conditions on campus.

According to UKM's HEPA Strategic Plan, there are several initiatives focused on income-generating activities that ensure the university's economic growth remains sustainable. These initiatives include Strategic Business Units (SBUs), Waqf/Endowment, and College Business Spaces. The Waqf/Endowment and College Business Spaces initiatives are designed to support and enhance student empowerment, particularly in the field of entrepreneurship. The first initiative, Strategic

Business Unit (SBU) Generation, aims to establish strategic income-generating units to strengthen the university's revenue-generating activities. This unit is responsible for identifying effective financial strategies and promoting university facilities to external parties. This initiative is more privatization-oriented, aiming to create sustainable revenue streams. Figure 3 shows that the expected income generated target will increase from RM20 million in 2023 to RM29 million in 2026.

The second initiative, Waqf and Endowment, focuses on supporting vulnerable student groups by offering free college accommodation. This initiative involves collaboration with UKM alumni, government agencies, and industry partners to help needy students. Finally, the third initiative, College Business Spaces, empowers entrepreneurial activities within the college by offering spaces for business ventures. This initiative seeks to create opportunities for students to engage in business, thereby fostering a culture of entrepreneurship within the university community. These initiatives are significant as they highlight the university's strategic approach to student empowerment and economic sustainability, emphasizing the role of income-generating activities in supporting the university's mission and enhancing student development.

Strategic Plan and Student Empowerment

Student empowerment, a central tenet of the HEPA plan, is pursued through initiatives that grant students greater autonomy in planning and implementing impactful programs, both domestically and internationally.

The plan's focus on empowerment aligns with the university's T.E.R.A.S. initiative, which aims to enhance the marketability of graduates by providing them with the skills and experiences necessary for success in a globalized economy (T.E.R.A.S. Naratif Baharu UKM, 2021) as shown in Figure 4.



FIGURE 4. HEPA UKM Strategic Plan 2023-2026 and TERAS UKM

The autonomy given to students by HEPA-UKM is aligned with the intention of the Ministry of Higher Education, which can be seen from the strategic plan; the strategies are divided into three phases. In UKM, the first phase of student empowerment

includes four key aspects of student autonomy: student management activities, financial management, political involvement on and off campus, and the election process for the student representative council (MPP), which is carried out entirely by students from 2023.

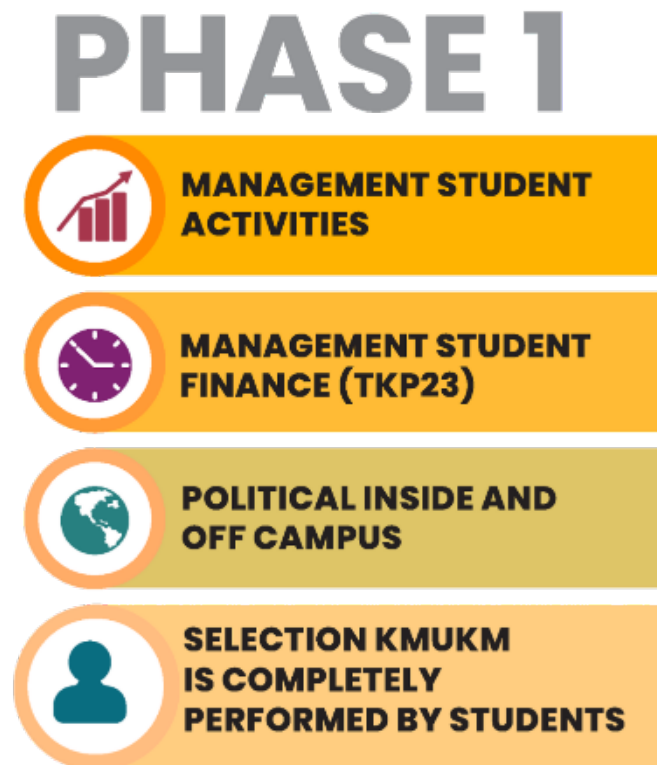


FIGURE 5. Phase 1: Student Autonomy

One of the most significant areas of student empowerment in universities is the management of activities within the institution. This autonomy allows UKM students to organize, lead, and participate in various programs, events, and clubs that reflect their interests and passions. In addition, UKM student-led organizations and clubs are given the freedom to plan and execute activities locally and internationally without any hindrance from the HEPA-UKM. They just have to register their programs or any events that they are going to organize through iSTAR, a Talent, Activity & Resume Management Integration System (iSTAR) to make sure they implement the program according to university procedures and to avoid problems in the future. This not only helps students develop leadership and organizational skills but also encourages them to take initiative and be proactive in creating opportunities for themselves and their peers. Through managing these activities, students learn to navigate challenges, collaborate with others, and develop a sense of responsibility, all of which are essential skills for their future careers and personal lives.

Financial management is another vital area where student autonomy is given in UKM. Through the HEPA Strategic Action Plan, autonomous power has been expanded, and Kesatuan Mahasiswa Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (KMUKM) is given full authority to determine the distribution of student activity funds (Mohd Suzeren Md Jamil et al., 2023). Starting in February 2023, the student leadership led by KMUKM has had a full role in distributing these funds fairly without any more interference from the university management. Before this empowerment agenda was implemented, the financial management of student activities was managed by KMUKM members with the intervention of the UKM Student Affairs Center. After having this autonomy for more than six months, KMUKM has developed a set of rules or procedures to make sure they manage their finances wisely and effectively. This autonomous power empowers leadership in several ways, such as accountability, flexibility in decision-making, the development of strategic planning and efficiency (Wan et al., 2020).

Another critical aspect of student autonomy that is given to the UKM students is the ability to engage in political activities, both on and off campus. Political autonomy enables students to express their opinions, advocate for their rights, and participate in the democratic process. In the context of UKM, this includes the freedom to form student-led parties, participate in debates, and engage in activism related to issues that concern them, as long as the movement is controlled and does not disturb the peace and student

safety on campus, with compliance to UKM's existing procedures and rules. Off campus, students may involve themselves in broader political movements, contributing to social change. This form of autonomy is particularly important in nurturing informed and active citizens who understand the importance of civic engagement. By allowing students to explore national political ideologies and participate in governance, universities play a crucial role in shaping the leaders of tomorrow.

At UKM, the selection process for the Majlis Perwakilan Pelajar (MPP), or Student Representative Council, is entirely student-run, from the nomination of candidates to the final voting. The president of the Student Representative Council selection committee is elected by vote in the student parliament to ensure that the elected president does not take sides and acts fairly throughout the election process. This level of autonomy in the election process empowers students to choose their representatives without external influence, ensuring that the elected members genuinely reflect the student body's interests and concerns. This process also allows students to experience the democratic process first-hand, fostering a sense of responsibility and active participation in university governance.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Despite the clear advantages of privatization, its impact on student empowerment remains underexplored. This research addresses a significant gap in the literature by evaluating how privatization, as guided by strategic action plans like the HEPA UKM Strategic Plan 2023-2026, affects student empowerment outcomes. It is essential to recognize that privatization initiatives are not merely tools for increasing profitability or covering operational costs; they should also be viewed as strategic investments in student development. This paper seeks to challenge the prevailing perception that privatization is solely profit-driven by highlighting its potential benefits for student engagement, development, and empowerment. The study seeks to contribute to the academic literature on higher education management and examine the impact of the strategic action plan on student empowerment. The findings will have policy implications for university administrators and government bodies. Privatization means a reduction in the level of state provisions and a corresponding growth of private provision in higher education (K.H. Mok, 2015). Privatization in higher education is identified as a shift in the balances of finance or control from public to private (Thompson, 2022).

However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this research. The study is focused specifically on the HEPA UKM Strategic Action Plan 2023-2026 and does not represent the entire scope of UKM's operations. Additionally, data availability and time constraints limit the research to information primarily sourced from the Student Affairs Office, which may not fully capture the broader university context. Despite these limitations, the study's findings are expected to offer significant contributions to the academic literature on higher education management and provide a basis for refining future research in this area.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This literature review was conducted using two approaches: systematic review and data analysis to determine the effectiveness of the research. For Phase 1, the systematic review involved manually searching academic databases such as Google Scholar and the University Repository website. The search aimed to identify studies that discussed the effectiveness of university privatization towards student empowerment. Keywords used in the search included "privatization policy," "university privatization," "student empowerment," and other related terms. The selection process involved screening titles and abstracts for relevance. This was followed by a full-text review to determine the suitability of the studies based on specific inclusion criteria. These criteria focused on studies that directly compared the significant impact of privatization on student empowerment and compared it with the HEPA UKM Strategic Action Plan 2023-2026, as shown in Figure 6.

For Phase 2, the data are being gathered directly from the HEPA UKM Office, which has been extracted from iSTAR. iSTAR is a platform for students to track their progress in terms of academics, extracurricular activities, and their involvement in the university. The data include types and numbers of student excellence categories, faculties, achievements, and levels of student participation. At the end of this study, the data will be analyzed to evaluate the effectiveness of the privatization initiated minimally from 2021 until the establishment of the HEPA UKM Strategic Action Plan 2023-2026. This analysis will focus on the most significant type of student excellence, faculties with the highest achievements, and the highest stage of excellence.

The Student Talent, Activity, and Resume Integration System (iSTAR) is a platform designed to

consolidate information regarding the involvement of students at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) in organizing or participating in programs both domestically and internationally. This system is accessible to all UKM students, including undergraduates, postgraduates, gifted foundation students, executive students, and distance learning students. It encompasses a wide range of student activities and programs, whether they are credit-bearing or non-credit-bearing.

The primary objective of developing this system is to compile all student participation data into a centralized database, where the information can be accessed by relevant stakeholders. iSTAR is an interactive system that integrates with various University Information Systems (SMU). The outcomes of this system benefit all parties involved; for students, it allows the generation of ePortfolios that document their involvement in programs, associations, clubs, and achievements throughout their studies. Furthermore, the recognition of credit-bearing courses under the Soft Skills program will be assessed through iSTAR. For UKM staff, the system enables the inclusion of their guidance and mentoring activities in programs with students in their annual performance evaluations and promotions. The system is being developed in phases. The first phase includes approval applications for organizing programs, the submission of activity reports after the completion of programs, the cancellation of programs if they cannot be carried out, and the recognition of student-led programs towards credit-bearing Soft Skills courses. The second phase will focus on the creation of ePortfolios, recording student awards and achievements, and integrating student program calendars into the University calendar. This system is crucial for the university as it enables seamless information sharing across different systems, thereby facilitating a more systematic and informative workflow for all parties involved.

To understand student achievements from 2021 to 2023, we used a two-pronged approach, which is to analyse both the numbers and the stories behind them. Quantitative data include the number of achievements across categories, faculties, and levels of recognition. This helped to pinpoint the most common types of achievements, high-achieving faculties, and the stages where recognition was most prevalent. By quantifying these trends, it will gain clear numerical insights into student performance based on the implementation of the HEPA UKM Strategic Plan started in 2023, compared with 2021-2022. For the qualitative data, this paper will focus on the specific nature and type of student achievement to help analyse which type of student excellence is more dominant year by year and

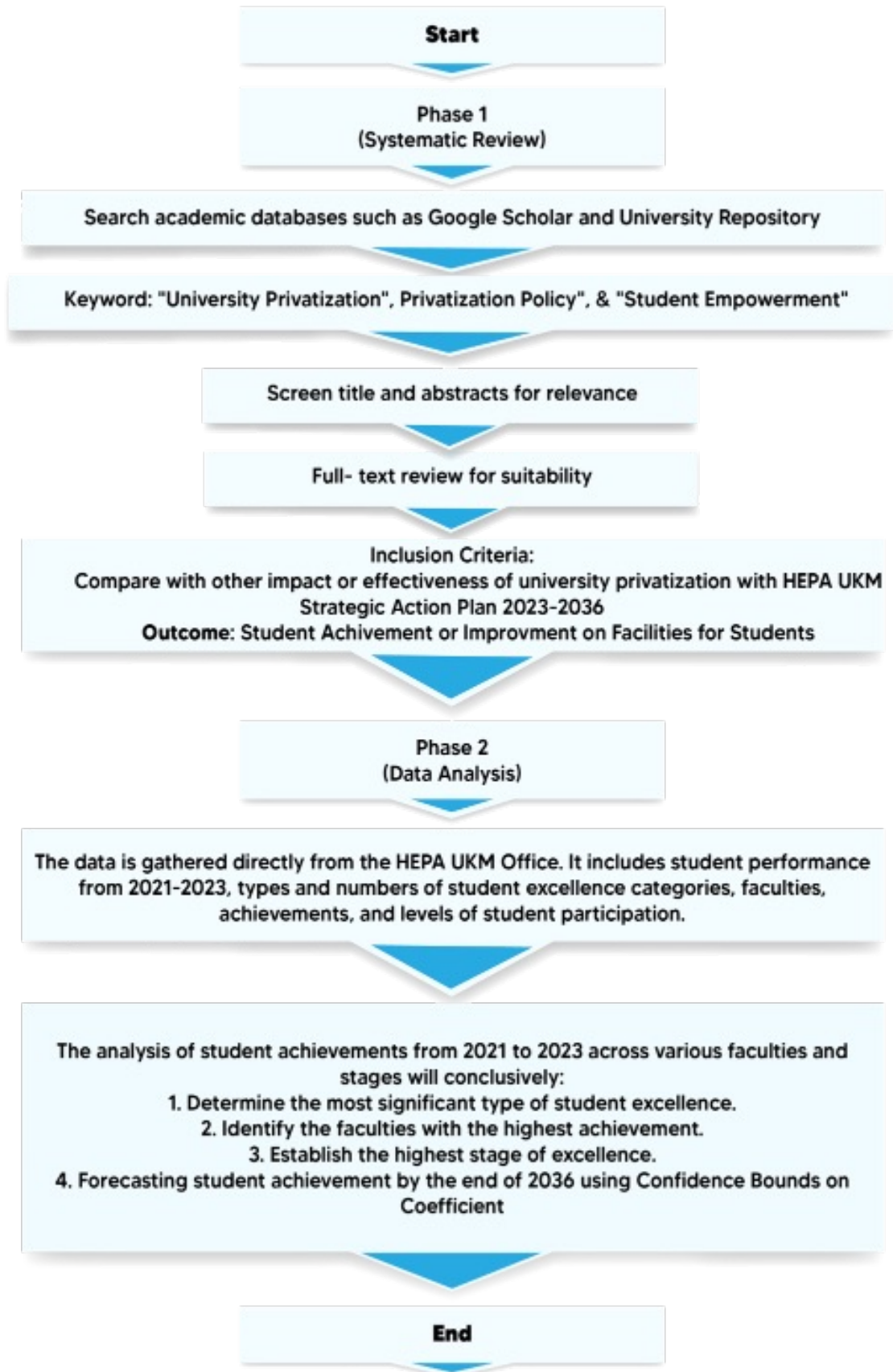


FIGURE 6. Methodology Flow

the significance of the achievement at various levels such as university, faculty, national and international.

Microsoft tools such as Excel will be used to handle both qualitative and quantitative data, which has proven capabilities for cleaning and organizing raw data that has been extracted from iSTAR, data visualization, pivot tables, and charts. Leveraging these methods and tools would provide an overall view of student achievement, a significant type of excellence, the faculty with the highest achievement and the stage where achievement is most recognized among the students. Hence, this approach will ensure a thorough and detailed understanding of the data, conclusion and recommendations. To forecast student achievement in 2036, the statistical method that will be used is the Confidence Bound on Coefficients, which uses past values in the series to predict future values and provide confidence intervals.

Forecasting models are pivotal in numerous fields, providing predictive insights based on historical data. A core component of these models is the coefficients, which quantify the relationship between predictor variables and the response variable. However, these estimated coefficients inherently possess uncertainty, which is typically expressed through confidence bounds. Confidence bounds (or intervals) on coefficients are crucial as they indicate the range within which the true value of the coefficient is expected to lie with a specified probability. This chapter elucidates the concept of confidence bounds on coefficients in forecasting, their significance, and the methods to compute them.

In forecasting, coefficients represent the relationship between predictor variables and the response variable. For instance, in a simple linear regression model, the relationship can be expressed as $y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 x + \epsilon$, where:

y is the response variable,
 x is the predictor variable,
 β_0 is the intercept,
 β_1 is the coefficient of x ,
 ϵ is the error term.

The coefficient β_1 quantifies the change in y for a one-unit change in x . The precision of this estimate is critical for the reliability of the model's predictions. Coefficients in forecasting models are typically estimated using methods such as Ordinary Least Squares (OLS). The OLS method minimizes the sum of the squared differences between the observed values and the values predicted by the model. The estimated coefficients, however, are subject to sampling variability

because they are derived from a sample of data rather than the entire population. This variability introduces uncertainty into the coefficient estimates. Confidence bounds provide a range within which the true value of a coefficient is expected to lie with a certain level of confidence, usually 95%. These bounds are significant for several reasons:

- i. Precision Assessment: They allow us to assess the precision of the estimated coefficients. Narrower bounds indicate more precise estimates.
- ii. Statistical Significance: They help in determining the statistical significance of the coefficients. If the confidence interval for a coefficient does not include zero, it suggests that the coefficient is significantly different from zero at the chosen confidence level.
- iii. Decision Making: They aid in making informed decisions by highlighting the uncertainty associated with the estimates.

Confidence bounds on coefficients are an essential aspect of forecasting models, providing a measure of the precision and reliability of the estimated relationships between variables. Understanding and correctly interpreting these bounds enable more informed decision-making and enhance the credibility of the forecasting results. As such, they are a fundamental concept for any practitioner or researcher involved in predictive modelling.

The population for the data that has been collected consists of undergraduate students who have registered from various faculties at UKM from 2021 to 2023. Based on the collected data record, the total number of students is approximately 8,758 in terms of academics, extracurricular activities, and involvement in the university. Using the same data source, the sampling frame was directly obtained from the university's Student Affairs Office, which includes sensitive information such as student matric numbers, contact information, and their respective faculties.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Student participation has been up in both local and global categories over the past three years. For local activities in 2021, 661 students got involved and for international activities, there were only 111 participants – which brings the total number to more than double up with a tally of just 778. This suggests that most of the local student participation in 2021 was by students who stayed within their country as shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Student Participation 2021

LEVEL OF STUDENT PARTICIPATION 2021	TOTAL
Locally	661
Internationally	111
Grand Total	772

The number of student participants increased significantly in 2022 to encompass 1,634 and 211 for local and international activities respectively. Total participation was at 1,845 indicating increased involvement in general. This indicates that more students from the region were motivated or had chances to participate in the local and international arena, as shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2. Student Participation 2022

LEVEL OF STUDENT PARTICIPATION 2022	TOTAL
Locally	1634
Internationally	211
Grand Total	1845

Over a year later in 2023, there was a huge boost in the number of those who took part in such programs; for example, 5,852 students were engaged locally while only 287 went abroad, making an aggregate of about 6,139. Thus, among other things, it seemed that this period witnessed some strong push or major focus on student involvement. There could be several implications, such as a high emphasis on local engagement initiatives or higher numbers of opportunities within reach of locals than others outside their borders, as shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3. Student Participation 2023

LEVEL OF STUDENT PARTICIPATION 2023	TOTAL
Locally	5852
Internationally	287
Grand Total	6139

Concerning the data overall, it brings out the positive trend in terms of local student participation both within the country and on an international level, as shown in **Table 4**. The surging numbers imply that the tactics employed to foster student engagement are working well, especially at a grassroots level. More than anything else, high figures on local involvement may show an easier or more instant opportunities package for students in their own countries; besides, global involvement continues to grow but at a reduced rate. Consequently, this increase in participation supports the university's wider objectives of wanting students to get involved and show their aptitude and capability in various ways, either nationally or internationally.

Table 4. Overall Student Participation 2021-2023

LEVEL OF STUDENT PARTICIPATION 2021-2023	TOTAL
Locally	8147
Internationally	609
Grand Total	8756

In 2021, the total student participation at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) was recorded at 772. This year saw the Faculty of Islamic Studies (FPI) leading with the highest number of participants, totalling 314 students, followed by the Faculty of Engineering and Built Environment (FKAB) with 91 participants, as shown in Table 5. Other faculties

such as the Faculty of Information Science and Technology (FTSM) and the Faculty of Science and Technology (FST) also had notable participation, with 57 and 63 participants, respectively. Overall, while the participation numbers were modest, they laid the groundwork for a more engaged student body in the subsequent years.

TABLE 5. Student Involvement by Faculty 2021

FACULTY & INSTITUTE	TOTAL OF PARTICIPATION 2021
CITRA	15
FEP	30
FFAR	29
FKAB	91
FPEND	15
FPER	22
FPI	314
FSK	31
FSSK	31
FST	63
FTSM	57
FUU	49
INBIOSIS	2
IPI	5
IVI	5
SELFUEL	5
UMBI	8
Grand Total	772

The year 2022 witnessed a significant increase in student participation, with the total rising to 1,845. The Faculty of Islamic Studies (FPI) again saw the highest involvement, with an impressive 702 students participating in various activities. The Faculty of Engineering and Built Environment (FKAB) also saw substantial growth, with participation numbers increasing to 277. Other faculties, such as the Faculty

of Social Sciences and Humanities (FSSK) and the Faculty of Information Science and Technology (FTSM), reported higher engagement, with 58 and 136 participants, respectively, as shown in Table 6. This upward trend in participation highlights the growing impact of the university's initiatives aimed at fostering student involvement.

TABLE 6. Student Involvement by Faculty 2022

FACULTY & INSTITUTE	TOTAL OF PARTICIPATION 2022
CITRA	11
FEP	54
FFAR	87
FGG	38
FKAB	277
FPEND	58
FPER	50
FPI	702
FSK	40
FSSK	58
FST	160
FTSM	136
FUU	67
IMEN	2
INBIOSIS	2
IPI	15
IVI	9
PERMATA	29
SELFUEL	27
UMBI	23
Grand Total	1845

By 2023, student participation had surged to a remarkable 6,139, reflecting the university's continued efforts to empower and engage its students. The Faculty of Islamic Studies (FPI) maintained its leadership with 1,108 participants, while the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities (FSSK) saw a dramatic increase to 1,050 participants. The Faculty of Engineering and Built Environment (FKAB) and the Faculty of Science and Technology (FST) also experienced substantial growth, with 576 and 507 participants, respectively, as shown in Table 7. This significant increase in participation across various faculties underscores the effectiveness of the HEPA Strategic Plan 2023-2026, particularly in enhancing student empowerment and engagement.

Over the three years from 2021 to 2023, the total student participation at UKM amounted to 8,756, with 8,147 participating locally and 609 internationally. The data shows a consistent increase in participation each year, with the most significant jump occurring between 2022 and 2023. This growth reflects the university's successful implementation of strategies to

increase student engagement, both locally and globally, as shown in Table 8. The HEPA Strategic Plan 2023-2026 appears to be playing a crucial role in this upward trend, particularly in fostering a more inclusive and participatory student environment across the university.

In 2036, the implementation of the HEPA UKM Strategic Plan 2023-2036 is forecasted to have a significant increase in total student achievement, as shown by the data using the confidence bounds on the coefficient, as shown in Table 9 and Figure 7. The data indicates that the soft approach privatization method employed in 2021-2023 had minimal impact on student achievement. However, there has been a significant increase in student achievement since the official implementation of the HEPA Strategic Plan in 2023. This demonstrates that the HEPA Strategic Plan effectively empowers students towards achieving academic or extracurricular activities.

The HEPA UKM Strategic Plan 2023-2036 has been effectively implemented within the context of university privatization, specifically through the

TABLE 7. Student Involvement by Faculty 2023

FACULTY & INSTITUTE	TOTAL OF PARTICIPATION 2023
CITRA	6
FEP	318
FFAR	580
FGG	338
FKAB	576
FPEND	105
FPER	71
FPI	1108
FSK	698
FSSK	1050
FST	507
FTSM	418
FUU	232
IPI	20
IVI	9
PERMATA	80
SELFUEL	6
UKM-GSB	1
UMBI	16
Grand Total	6139

Strategic Action Plan 2023-2026, leading to significant student empowerment. Despite the minimal impact of the soft privatization approach from 2021-2023, the official implementation of the HEPA Strategic Plan in 2023 has resulted in a notable increase in student achievement based on cumulative numbers from 2021-2023. This success demonstrates the plan's efficacy in enhancing both academic and extracurricular outcomes. The strategic focus on personalized learning, holistic development, and increased support systems has empowered students to achieve higher performance and develop essential skills, thus proving the plan's alignment with privatization goals and its role in fostering comprehensive student success.

This aligns with findings in similar contexts, such as the implementation of the Bologna Process in European universities, which also aimed at harmonizing educational standards and improving student outcomes through strategic reforms (Westerheijden, Don, et al. "The Bologna Process: Higher education institutions' perspectives." *European Journal of Education*, vol. 45, no. 4, 2010, pp. 531-548). Similar outcomes were

observed in the implementation of strategic plans in other universities, such as the University of California's "Framework for Excellence," which also led to significant improvements in student success metrics (Yudof, Mark G., et al. *University of California: A Framework for Excellence*. University of California Press, 2012).

The distribution of student achievements at UKM from 2021 to 2023, as illustrated by the bar graph, highlights significant trends and areas of focus within the university, as shown in **Figure 8**. Academics and sports emerge as the primary areas of achievement, with 4,758 and 2,177 accolades respectively, underscoring UKM's commitment to fostering academic excellence and athletic prowess among its students. This strong emphasis on academics and sports is indicative of the university's strategic priorities and the students' dedication to excelling in these fields.

Beyond academics and sports, there is a noticeable drop in achievements in other categories. The "Others" category, along with "Volunteering/Community Service," with 867 and 623 achievements

TABLE 8. Overall Student Involvement by Faculty 2021-2023

FACULTY & INSTITUTE	TOTAL OF PARTICIPATION 2021-2023
FPI	2124
FSSK	1139
FKAB	944
FSK	769
FST	730
FFAR	696
FTSM	611
FEP	402
FGG	376
FUU	348
FPEND	178
FPER	143
PERMATA	109
UMBI	47
IPI	40
SELFUEL	38
CITRA	32
IVI	23
INBIOSIS	4
IMEN	2
UKM-GSB	1
Grand Total	8756

respectively, reflects students' engagement in diverse activities and their commitment to contributing to society. The notable achievements in leadership (619) and culture/arts (456) further demonstrate the students' involvement in leadership roles, creative projects, and cultural activities. These figures suggest a well-rounded approach to student development, where extracurricular

activities play a significant role in enhancing students' skills and experiences.

Even academics is the highest, it consists of academic categories such as education, public speaking, publication and writing, and research. At the lower end of the achievement spectrum are categories such as education (332), public speaking (284),

TABLE 9. Student Involvement Forecast Value

Year	Total Student Achievement	Forecast Value	Confidence High Bound	Confidence Low Bound
2021	772	-	-	-
2022	1845	-	-	-
2023	6139	6139	6139	6139
2024	-	8406	10265	6547
2025	-	10962	12858	9067
2026	-	13518	15493	11543

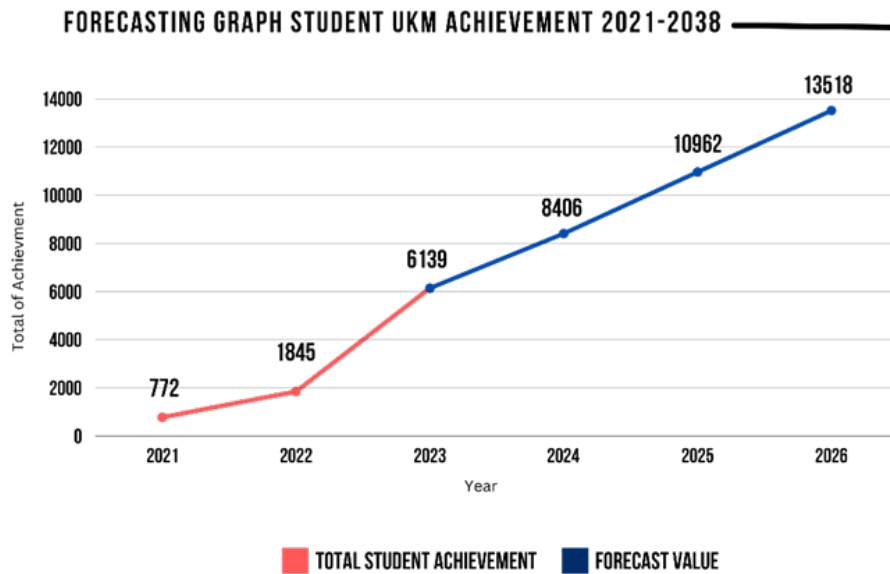


FIGURE 7. Forecast Graph of Student Achievement

religious activities (214), publication/writing (158), and research (158). While these areas have fewer recorded achievements, they remain crucial aspects of student life and personal development. The relatively lower participation in research and publication/writing indicates potential areas for growth. By allocating more resources and support to these activities, UKM could further diversify and enrich the student experience. Overall, the data presents a comprehensive view of student achievements, highlighting both strengths and opportunities for enhancement in various extracurricular domains.

The significant increase in student involvement at UKM in 2023 is closely tied to the full autonomy granted to students over their financial management. This empowerment, which includes complete control over budgeting and financial decisions for student-led activities, has played a crucial role in the observed surge in participation and achievements. From 2021 to 2023, UKM saw a steady increase in the number of student achievements, with a notable spike in 2023, where total participation reached 6,139 compared to 1,845 in 2022 and 772 in 2021. This dramatic rise aligns with the period when students were given full control over their financial resources, enabling them to allocate funds more effectively towards activities that mattered most to them.

The autonomy over financial management meant that students could prioritize funding for key activities such as academics, sports, leadership, and

innovation. For example, the data shows that academic achievements were the highest, with 2,274 accolades, followed closely by sports with 2,177 achievements. These areas likely benefited from targeted financial support, allowing students to excel and increase their participation. Moreover, the substantial achievements in leadership (619) and innovation/invention (594) in 2023 reflect how financial autonomy enabled students to invest in opportunities that fostered personal and professional growth. The ability to directly manage funds likely facilitated the organization of more relevant and impactful events, which in turn boosted student involvement in these areas.

Financial autonomy also empowered students to be more proactive in organizing and executing events. This proactive approach is reflected in the data showing a significant increase in activities under categories such as "Others" (867 achievements) and "Volunteering/Community Service" (623 achievements), indicating that students were able to channel resources into diverse and meaningful engagements. The increase in student activities and involvement in 2023 can be directly linked to the financial autonomy granted to students. By having full control over their financial management, students were able to create more tailored and relevant activities, leading to a marked rise in participation across various domains. This empowerment through financial independence is clearly reflected in the data, highlighting its critical role in enhancing student engagement at UKM.

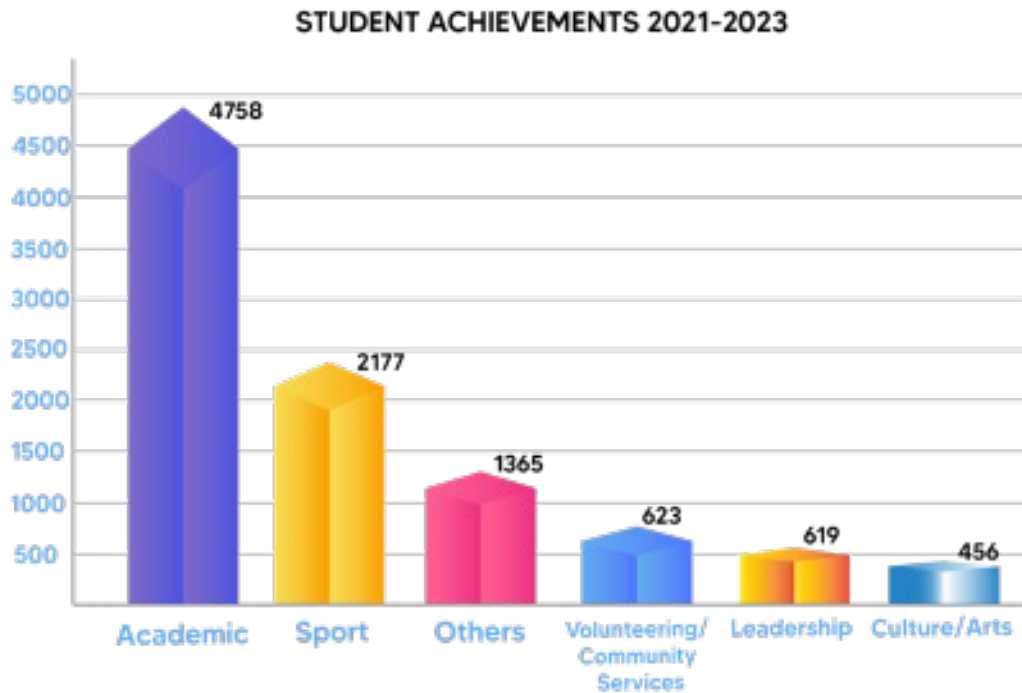


FIGURE 8. The distribution of student achievements at UKM from 2021 to 2023

The HEPA UKM Strategic Action Plan 2023-2026 was designed to enhance student achievements and overall university performance by focusing on key areas such as academics, sports, leadership, and innovation. As evidenced by the data from 2021 to 2023, there is a significant concentration of student achievements in academics and sports, with 4758 and 2177 accolades respectively. The academic categories include innovation, education, research, publication, and writing. This aligns with the HEPA Strategic Plan's objectives, which emphasize fostering academic excellence and promoting athletic prowess. The substantial achievements in these areas indicate that the student body has effectively implemented and received the strategic initiatives and resources dedicated to these domains.

Student empowerment, a core focus of the HEPA Strategic Plan, is evident in the remarkable rise in student involvement. This empowerment includes four key aspects of student autonomy: management of student activities, financial management, political involvement on and off-campus, and the election process for the Student Representative Council (MPP), which is carried out entirely by students. The autonomy given to students in these areas has allowed them to take ownership of their development, resulting in increased participation and achievement. The freedom to manage financial resources, for instance, has enabled students to allocate funds where they see fit, directly contributing

to the rise in student activity and involvement.

In addition to the top-performing categories, the plan also aimed to bolster student engagement in leadership, innovation, and community service. The achievements in volunteering/community service (623) and leadership (619) suggest a positive response to these initiatives. However, there is a notable disparity when compared to the top categories, indicating areas where further enhancement and resource allocation might be necessary. The focus on cultural activities (456 achievements) also highlights the Strategic Plan's effort to provide a holistic educational experience. This comprehensive approach is essential for nurturing well-rounded individuals who excel not only academically and athletically but also in leadership, creativity, and social responsibility.

The significant increase in student achievements from 2021 to 2023 reflects the success of the strategic empowerment initiatives. As students gained more control over their activities and finances, their involvement in key areas of university life surged, leading to impressive outcomes. However, the lower achievements in categories such as culture and arts (456) indicate that while the empowerment strategy has been effective in some areas, there is still room for growth in others. To fully realize the benefits of student autonomy under the HEPA Strategic Plan, continued focus on diversifying empowerment efforts across all categories of participation will be crucial in creating

a more balanced and comprehensive educational environment.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The privatization of universities in Malaysia, as explored in this study, has demonstrated significant benefits in terms of efficiency, resource allocation, and student empowerment. The implementation of privatization policies since 1983, and more intensively in higher education since the 1970s has led to improved cost-effectiveness, the introduction of diverse educational programs, and enhanced student development opportunities. The study specifically assessed the HEPA UKM Strategic Action Plan 2023-2026 at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) and the student empowerment that has been embedded, which is student autonomy in terms of student management activity, full financial management by the student and political involvement on and off campus has found it to be highly effective in empowering students. The plan's strategic focus on student autonomy, comprehensive development, and performance metrics has resulted in significant increases in student achievements from 2021 to 2023. This aligns with broader trends observed in the privatization of higher education globally, where similar strategic initiatives have fostered improved educational outcomes and institutional performance.

Given the positive outcomes observed from the HEPA UKM Strategic Action Plan 2023-2026, it is recommended that other public universities in Malaysia adopt similar strategic frameworks. These frameworks should emphasize student empowerment, autonomy in financial and activity management, and the introduction of private-sector efficiencies into public institutions. Moreover, there should be continuous monitoring and evaluation of these strategic plans to ensure they align with evolving educational needs and global best practices. Expanding partnerships with private entities to leverage additional resources and expertise can further enhance the quality and reach of educational programs.

The study's primary limitation is its narrow focus on the HEPA UKM Strategic Action Plan 2023-2026 and its impact on student empowerment at UKM. The findings are based on data from a single university, which may not fully represent the broader Malaysian higher education landscape. Additionally, the study relies on data collected from student affairs offices, which might not capture the complete spectrum of student experiences and achievements across different faculties and departments. Time constraints and the

availability of data also limited the depth of analysis that could be performed.

Future research should aim to expand the scope of this study by including multiple universities across Malaysia to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of privatization on higher education. Comparative studies between public and private universities can offer deeper insights into the specific benefits and challenges associated with privatization. Longitudinal studies that track the long-term effects of strategic action plans on student empowerment and institutional performance would also be valuable. Additionally, exploring the perspectives of various stakeholders, including students, faculty, and administrators, can enrich the understanding of privatization's multifaceted impacts on higher education. Finally, investigating the integration of new technologies and innovative teaching methods in the context of privatized education can help in shape future policies and strategies.

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