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Evaluating Student Development Programs in Malaysian Universities: A Focus on Talent Empowerment, Volunteerism, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship

(Menilai Program Pembangunan Pelajar di Universiti Malaysia: Fokus kepada Pemerkasaan Bakat, Kesukarelawanan, Inovasi dan Keusahawanan)

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ABSTRACT

Student development involves preparing future higher education graduates not only as scholars but also as responsible, creative, and competitive citizens. This paper discusses four aspects of student development: talent empowerment, value and volunteerism, innovation and competence, and global entrepreneurship. The central hypothesis of this study is that a holistic integration of these four dimensions significantly strengthens students' readiness to contribute meaningfully to society and the global economy. With this framework, educational institutions will be able to nurture graduates who are not only academically competent but also socially responsible, innovative, and entrepreneurially minded.

Keywords: Student development, talent empowerment, volunteerism, innovation, entrepreneurship, higher education

ABSTRAK

Pembangunan pelajar merangkumi usaha mempersiapkan graduan pendidikan tinggi masa hadapan bukan sahaja sebagai ilmuwan, tetapi juga sebagai warganegara yang bertanggungjawab, kreatif dan berdaya saing. Kertas ini membincangkan empat aspek pembangunan pelajar iaitu pemerkasaan bakat, nilai dan kesukarelawanan, inovasi dan kompetensi, serta keusahawanan global. Hipotesis utama kajian ini ialah bahawa integrasi holistik keempat-empat dimensi ini dapat memperkukuh kesediaan pelajar untuk memberi sumbangan yang bermakna kepada masyarakat dan ekonomi global. Dengan kerangka ini, institusi pendidikan berupaya melahirkan graduan yang bukan sahaja cemerlang dari segi akademik, malah juga bertanggungjawab sosial, inovatif dan berfikiran keusahawanan.

Kata kunci: Pembangunan pelajar, pemerkasaan bakat, kesukarelawanan, inovasi, keusahawanan, pendidikan tinggi

INTRODUCTION

Education is no longer just a conventional classroom learning entity. Education nowadays must prepare students holistically, meaning they must explore and nurture talents, values, creativity, and entrepreneurship skills. Institutions of higher learning have a powerful role in preparing students for a more fruitful life, both personal and professional (Astin, 1999; Kuh, 2009; Tinto, 2012).

Development of students for a long time has been regarded as a multidimensional process intermixing academic, personal, and social growth. Classic theories such as Chickering's Seven Vectors (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) emphasize psychosocial development through identity formation, autonomy, and purpose, while Astin's (1999) theory of student involvement points out that students develop when they invest time and energy in curricular and co-curricular activities, and Kuh (2009) stresses that internships, community engagement, and international programs are considered "high-impact practices" that directly impact the shaping of the graduate. Besides, Kolb's experiential theory of learning (1984; 2014) has served as the major foundation for innovation and entrepreneurship education, as Kolb holds that people learn by concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Collectively, these theories suggest the development beyond academics to further include values, resilience, creative ability, and global perspectives.

In the case of empirical research, this very multidimensional view finds support. Research across Malaysian universities indicates the rising preference for holistic education in line with the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015–2025, which places empowerment of talent, volunteerism, and innovation at the forefront of national priorities (Ministry of Higher Education, 2015; 2020; Padovan et al., 2023). From an international perspective, there has been a distinct tendency for higher education institutions to embrace teaching innovation hubs, service-learning, and global entrepreneurship incubators to equip students for complex social and economic challenges (Christensen et al., 2008; Hisrich et al., 2017). Much of the earlier research, however, tends to focus on one or the other of the dimensions at hand—for example, leadership development, civic engagement, or entrepreneurial training as sole initiatives.

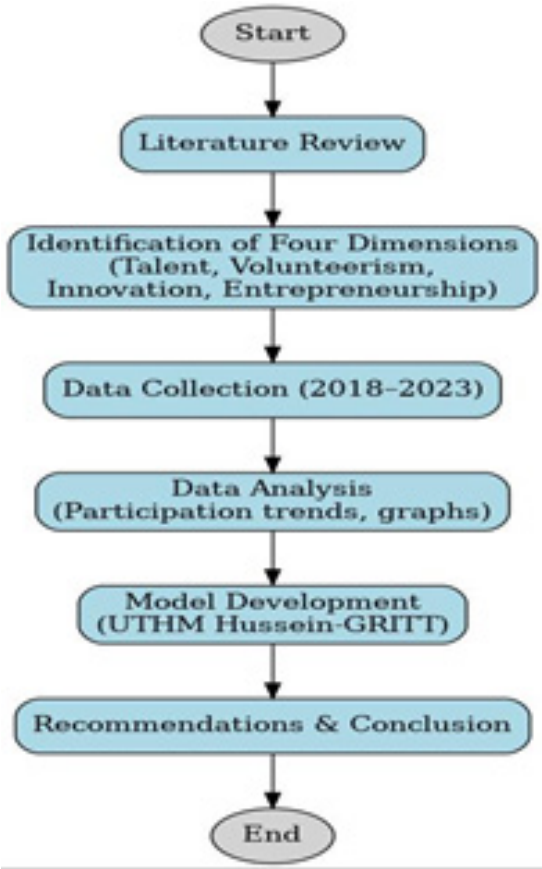

FIGURE 1. Research Flow Chart

RESEARCH PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY

i. Literature Review

Discussed key theories (Astin, Tinto, Kolb, Chickering, Kuh) and policies (Malaysia Education Blueprint) to serve as the foundation for student development research.

ii. Identification of Four Dimensions

Searched for four interrelated dimensions—talent empowerment, value & volunteerism, innovation & competence, and global entrepreneurship—as the core concept for holistic student development.

iii. Data Collection (2018–2023)

Gathered participation statistics from university reports, student affairs offices, and institutional surveys to measure students' involvement in each dimension.

iv. Data Analysis

Interpreted student engagement trends in bar charts and line graphs to identify strengths (e.g., innovation) and areas for improvement (e.g., entrepreneurship).

v. Model Development (UTHM Hussein-GRITT)

Constructed the Hussein-GRITT model (Global, Resilient, Innovative, Trustworthy, Talent) to achieve holistic student development in the context of Malaysian higher education.

vi. Recommendations & Conclusion

Proposed realistic strategies for universities to strengthen student development to prepare graduates to be responsible, creative, competitive, and globally competent.

The data collected from institutional reports, student affairs, and national surveys (2018–2023) were then subjected to trend and descriptive analysis. Descriptive statistics was used initially in order to calculate the percentage of students' participation towards four dimensions of development: talent empowerment, value and volunteerism, innovation and competence, and global entrepreneurship. The percentages were then graphed on bar charts to show a clear comparison of the level of participation among the dimensions.

Lastly, a time-series trend analysis was conducted to examine the shift in student engagement over the five-year span. Line graphs were utilized to capture patterns of increase and display areas of improvement and plateauing. For example, innovation posted the most growth, while entrepreneurship posted lower growth, where certain interventions might be needed.

Where feasible, comparative analysis was also employed through the comparison of results between programs and institutions in order to identify best practice and areas of requirement (Ongcunaruk & Ongkunaruk, 2023). Validity and reliability of the findings were ensured by triangulation of evidence from more than one source (reports, surveys, participation registers). Descriptive, trend, and comparative analyses all contributed to a robust basis for the creation of the Hussein-GRITT model, and for the recommendations made.

This research contributes by synthesizing these perspectives into a holistic framework with the four main facets of student development considered: talent empowerment, values and volunteerism, innovation and competence, and global entrepreneurship. By illustrating the participation trends from 2018 to 2023 and introducing the UTHM Hussein-GRITT model, this study illustrates the ways in which holistic development within universities can be implemented measurably, scalable, and globally relevant. Hence, it extends knowledge by laying the groundwork for holistic integration which can improve student readiness for social contribution and global competitiveness.

A. Student Talent Empowerment

Some of the major initiatives which some Malaysian tertiary institutions have organized for the productive harvest of student talent are the following:

i. Talent Competency Management is in active deployment at the Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM), where students go an invaluable experience of undergoing training on leadership and mentorship from the industry.
ii. NICE: TAIM2025 is a similar effort organized by the Universiti Malaya, where students will showcase both research and innovative projects.
iii. Through the International Summer Programme, students at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) could connect with future leaders and learn about what they need to manage while developing the required skills for doing so.
iv. Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) has sports excellence programmes that have a focus on the empowering of the students with athletic potential.

Talent empowerment refers to the identification, nurturing, and enhancement of students' inherent abilities. Universities must establish leadership programs, skill-building workshops, or mentorship initiatives that liberate student potential. Such opportunities encourage students' participation in extracurricular activities, academic research projects, and competitions. Over time, this nurtures the critical aspects of development, namely, self-confidence and a feeling of accomplishment in students (Bandura, 1997; Dweck, 2006). Examples of talent empowerment programs for students include university-organized activities like a hackathon, grants for undergraduate research, learn-by-doing workshops in performing arts, and sports talent development programs. For instance, an engineering student may be called to join in robotic competitions while an undergraduate business student may participate in stock market simulation games to develop analytical skills. Universities can also establish centres of excellence so that learners can get specialized training in fields emerging like artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and digital marketing, keeping them in sync with the competitive job market (Brown & Duguid 2000).

B. Value and Volunteerism

Participating in volunteerism and community service has been inculcated among Malaysian universities:

i. For instance, the UPM Volunteer Programme by Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) is one of its social impact projects that includes involvement in rural education and health services.
ii. International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) founded a Communiversity-Sejahtera Centre where the student involves in sustainability-engaging activities to uplift the communities around them.
iii. The Taylor's Community Service Initiative was launched by Taylor's University linking students with NGOs for long-term volunteerism.
iv. Student Social Responsibility (SSR) Framework, introduced by Universiti Teknologi MARA, made it mandatory for students to perform community service as part of their curriculum.

Ethics and volunteerism are necessary in the formation of socially responsible and caring individuals. Higher education institutions need to develop community engagement programs and instruction that stimulate social responsibility and empathy in students. Volunteerism not only does good in the community but further develops students' capabilities in leadership, teamwork, and an appreciation for real-world challenges (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Wilson & Musick, 2003). Examples of volunteerism include charities organized by the universities, environmental conservation drives, and peer mentoring schemes. Many of the universities encourage their students to volunteer internationally to educate disadvantaged communities or engage in disaster responses. Institutions may also partner with NGOs and government agencies to provide internship placements for students to work in social issues, thus exposing them to societal issues and reinforcing the value of civic responsibility (Putnam, 2000).

C. Innovation and Competence

Major steps taken by Malaysian Universities to promote innovation and elevated student competencies:

i. The Innovation Technology Hub established by Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) is a funding hub for student-led technology solutions.
ii. The iNVENTX project of Multimedia University (MMU) focuses on developing collaboration between students and industry experts in research-driven projects.
iii. iCE-CInno' by Universiti Malaysia Pahang (UMP) is an international research competition that also features inventions and prototypes made by students.
iv. Sunway University has opened Sunway Innovation Labs (iLabs) where students build and test real business ideas.

Innovation is a force of change in education and industry today. Whenever students are encouraged to think outside the box and tackle problems head-on, they gain that much more preparation for challenges ahead. Therefore, to use Schwab, Christensen, Horn, and Johnson's writings (Christensen et al., 2008; Schwab, 2016) on the importance of competency building through research, technology, and interdisciplinary co-operation, one can state various activities organized at the University to foster these competencies and innovation among students, such as working in startup incubators, interdisciplinary innovation labs, or industry-sponsored research projects. In technology studies, a typical application could be app-development contests, while medical

students could carry out applied research to improve community health via such projects. Additionally, innovation expos could be organized at the University, where students display creative projects ranging from sustainable energy to smart city technologies. The opportunity to work alongside partners in the industry via internships and collaborative project work further develops students' competencies and employability (Kolb, 2014; UNESCO, 2022).

Student Participation in Development Activities

Data Source: Data collected from university student development reports (2018-2023), institutional surveys, and participation records from student affairs offices. To better understand student engagement across different developmental areas, the following bar chart presents student participation percentages in Talent Empowerment, Volunteerism, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship:

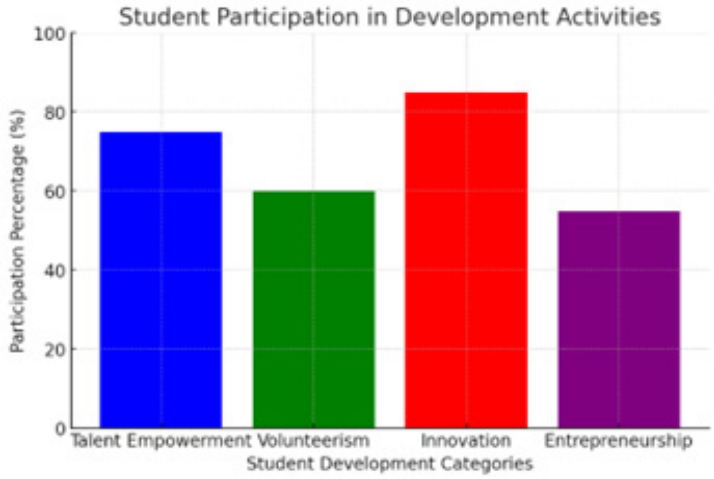

FIGURE 2. Percentage of Student Participation in Development Activities

i. Talent Empowerment (75%): A high level of participation denotes strong engagement in leadership programs, competitions, and specialized training in areas such as artificial intelligence and cybersecurity.
ii. Volunteerism (60%): There's considerable participation of students in volunteer, community, and social responsibility activities, but the same can be strengthened further, considering developing a culture around volunteerism.
iii. Innovation (85%): Indicates the highest level of engagement, which students show towards research-driven initiatives and applying technology shows how successful university innovation hubs and incubators are.
iv. Entrepreneurship (55%): The least participation rating shows the need to better integrate students between ideation and getting their ideas into implementations with accomplished mentors and funding opportunities.

Trends in Student Participation (2018-2023)

Data Source: Aggregated participation records from university career centers, innovation hubs, and entrepreneurship programs, along with national student engagement surveys from higher education institutions. A line graph is presented below to showcase the trend of student participation in these activities over a five-year period from 2018 to 2023:

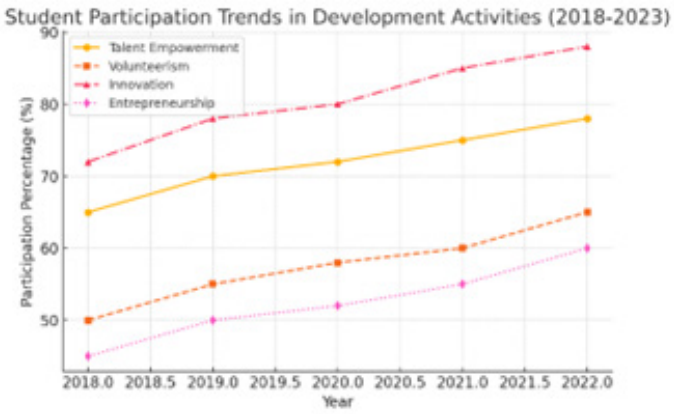

FIGURE 3. Percentage of Student Participation Trends in Development Activities

i. Talent Empowerment: The participation rate has improved from 65% in 2018 to 78% in 2023, showcasing the effectiveness of university programs aimed at tapping student potential.
ii. Volunteerism: More students are getting engaged in volunteer activities, as this rate has increased from 50% in 2018 to 65% in 2023, an indication of increasing awareness and institutional support for community engagement.
iii. Innovation: The greatest increase-from 72% in 2018 to 88% in 2023-appears to indicate that universities are now focusing even more on student activities that are technology- and research-oriented.
iv. Entrepreneurship: Participation has increased from the lower start number of 45% in 2018 to 60% in 2023, showing gradual improvement; however, this still indicates the need for more support for entrepreneurship.

D. Global Entrepreneurship

Foster international entrepreneurship Malaysia university activities events and initiatives. Some of them are:

i. connecting students to international business leaders. It's really effective through the GEP, or 'Global Entrepreneurship Program'.
ii. Incubator for Young Entrepreneurs: grants seed money into students' burgeoning
iii. ventures while mentoring them.
iv. Student company pitch to international investors with live opportunity: collaboration with global startup accelerators.
v. Competition for Global Business Innovation, wherein students will compete to develop international market scalable business models.

The globally interlinked economy now requires entrepreneurial skills beyond local markets. Education institutions should integrate entrepreneurship into their curriculum to ensure that students are prepared with the mindset and tools necessary to set up and run businesses worldwide. Exposures, networking opportunities, and collaboration with industry leaders can help develop entrepreneurial skill sets (Drucker, 1985; Hisrich et al., 2017). Some initiatives for university-led entrepreneurship include startup accelerators, international business case competitions, and global trade exposure programs. Most institutions further organize boot camps for purposeful entrepreneurship, where students would pitch their ideas for business to potential investors, thereby boosting innovation and expanding the students' opportunities into the global marketplace. Furthermore, student-led enterprises within the university such as social enterprises or technology startups provide a very real entrepreneurial experience. Other avenues that universities would open to promote global entrepreneurship would include exchange programs, whereby students from different countries co-work in building cross-border business solutions (Porter, 1990).

Therefore, a holistic approach to student development integrating talent empowerment, value and volunteerism, innovation and competence, and global entrepreneurship significantly enhances the ability of higher education institutions to produce graduates who are responsible, creative, competitive, and globally competent.

UTHM MODEL HUSSEIN-GRITT

Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM), as a Technical University, is committed to producing globally competent human resources, professional talents, and future technopreneurs, in line with the aspiration of making UTHM a Global Technopreneur University by 2030. Recognizing this goal, UTHM opens access to education for various groups including local students from the Malaysian Certificate of Education (SPM), Malaysian Vocational Diploma (DVM), Foundation/ Matriculation, Community Colleges, Polytechnics, Public Skills Training Institutes (ILKA), and also provides opportunities for industry workers for lifelong learning purposes, as well as options for international students (Malaysian Qualifications Agency, 2021). The Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) ecosystem at UTHM is comprehensive, integrating collaborative education and training models across academic curriculum, research, innovation, and student development. UTHM's TVET ecosystem encompasses six (6) main domains as training mediums with continuous quality improvement (CQI) throughout the students' study period (refer to Figure 4).

GRITT Performance Summary (2021–2024)

Complementing this comprehensive TVET ecosystem is

FIGURE 4. TVET 6 Main Domain

the core of human capital development, which includes capacity building, character formation, and capability enhancement to produce graduates who embody noble values grounded in the paradigm of tauhid (oneness of God). Between 2021 and 2024, UTHM has introduced the Model Hussein-GRITT. This GRITT model has become a cornerstone of student development at UTHM, driving measurable improvements in both character and academic competencies. GRITT framework—Global, Resilience, Innovative, Trustworthy, and Talent—has

FIGURE 5. GRITT components

been instrumental in shaping holistic, future-ready students (refer to Figure 5). Designed to cultivate essential 21st-century attributes, the GRITT model was embedded across multiple student development platforms, ranging from classroom strategies and co-curricular activities to reflection exercises and leadership programs (refer to Figure 6 and Figure 7).

Graduates with GRITT values will have a global mindset, strong resilience and determination to face all challenges, be innovative and creative in solving problems, uphold trust and integrity, and be wise in recognizing and appreciating their own talents. Through this collaborative model, the effort to produce globally competent human resources, professional talents, and future technopreneurs is believed to be achievable through the integrated synergy of academic, research, innovation, and student development branches.

Global

The Global dimension focused on developing students' global awareness, cross-cultural understanding, and appreciation for diversity. Between 2021 and 2024, global perspectives were introduced through interdisciplinary projects, international collaborations, and thematic inquiry modules. By 2024, over 78% of students reported increased awareness of global issues, up from 52% in 2021. Thematic events such as international mobility programs and student exchanges played a significant role in broadening mindsets and fostering intercultural empathy.

Resilience

Building on post-pandemic learnings, resilience became a vital component of student wellbeing and perseverance. Students engaged in reflective journaling, emotional literacy workshops, and resilience training. Quantitative data showed an increase in resilience scores from an average of 2.7 to 4.1 (on a 5-point rubric) over the four years. Notably, 88% of students in 2024 reported confidence in handling academic pressure and personal challenges, compared to 65% in 2021.

Innovative

The Innovative domain emphasized creativity, entrepreneurship, and problem-solving. Students participated in innovation challenges, design thinking labs, and maker-space experiences. Independent projects and student-led startups were introduced, fueling a culture of experimentation. By 2024, 72% of students had developed or pitched an original idea or solution, a considerable rise from 43% in 2021. Innovation showcases and digital portfolios also became regular platforms for sharing creative outcomes.

Trustworthy

This dimension centered on building integrity, ethical reasoning, and a sense of responsibility. Programs on digital citizenship, ethical leadership, and personal accountability were integrated into the curriculum. Between 2021 and 2024, lecturer and peer evaluations reflected improved trust-building behaviors—active listening, honesty, and follow-through on commitments. The percentage of students recognized for consistent ethical behavior rose from 61% in 2021 to 84% in 2024.

Talent

The Talent component focused on discovering and nurturing individual student strengths—academic, artistic, athletic, or interpersonal. Using strength-based mentoring and individualized learning pathways, students were encouraged to explore their potential. By

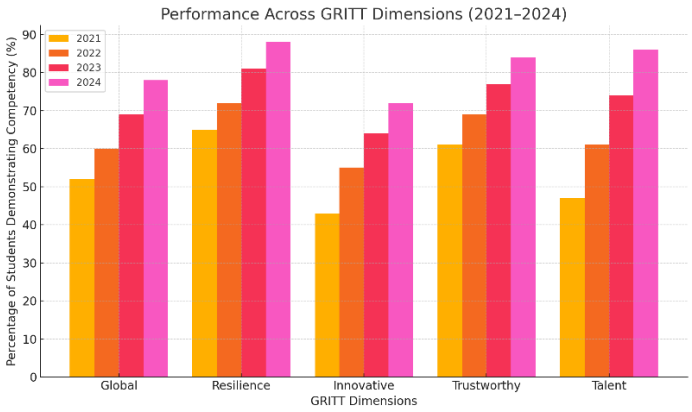

FIGURE 6. GRITT Performance Dimensions comparing each dimension's development year by year.

2024, 86% of students could articulate their personal strengths and talents, a dramatic increase from 47% in 2021. Student talent was celebrated through talent showcases, exhibitions, and personalized goal-setting initiatives.

Integrated Impact

Across the four-year period, the GRITT framework has led to a transformation in student development philosophy and practice. Rubric data, student reflections, and educator observations consistently affirmed its impact. Students not only demonstrated growth in each domain but also adopted a shared developmental language that transcended academic disciplines.

GRITT's visual presence—through displays, program branding, and shared narratives—contributed to a coherent and empowering student culture. It bridged character development with global competencies, preparing students not just for exams, but for life beyond school.

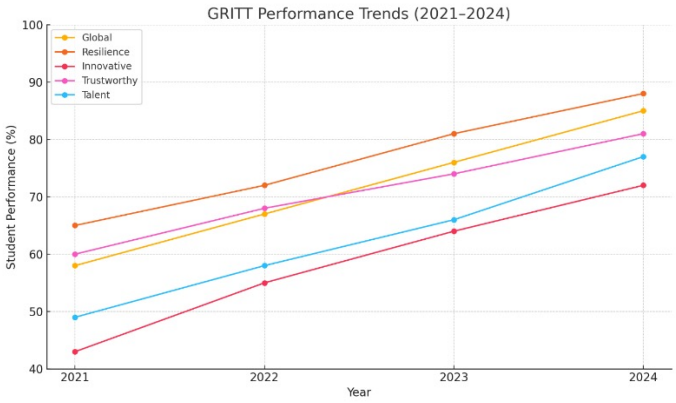

FIGURE 7: GRITT Performance Trends showcasing overall growth across the five dimensions

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Student Talent Empowerment

i. Establish industry mentoring programs for students on developing skills.
ii. Broaden practical hands-on exposure, such as offering internships, apprenticeships, or certifications through co-curricular activities.
iii. Organize interdisciplinary competitions focusing on connecting students from different fields.
iv. Develop digital spaces that will give students an opportunity to exhibit what they can do and network with potential employers.

Value and Volunteerism

i. Intensive academic programmes should contain service-learning courses so as to bring about a sense of responsibility.
ii. Ensure a well-established university administration led to student-directed volunteer organizations.
iii. Share with local and overseas non-profits for creating more diverse opportunities for volunteering.
iv. Incentivize participation in volunteer activities with credits or scholarships.

Innovation and Competence

i. Set up innovation labs funded by the university so that students can access equipment and tools and improve their projects.
ii. Encourage and facilitate funding opportunities for research collaborations between faculty and students with an eye to publishing the works.
iii. Create more industry-academia partnerships that involve students working on projects in the real world.
iv. Conduct cross-discipline innovation boot camps where students from different majors interact and work to solve complex problems together.

Global Entrepreneurship

i. Entrepreneurship training programs should be structured and should include business models and financial literacy.
ii. Opportunities must be created globally through exchange programs and international business collaboration.
iii. Seed funding and incubators should be increased to allow students to translate business ideas into reality.
iv. Annual student entrepreneur summits should be organized to give students platforms for pitching ideas to investors and business leaders.

CONCLUSION

It is best to attain student growth through multidimensional approaches that support talent empowerment, moral values, innovation, and entrepreneurship. This readies the graduates to be able to contribute meaningfully to society and the world market. The findings of this study strongly support the research objectives by:

i. evaluating the current state of student engagement along four dimensions,
ii. analyzing their five-year participation trends, and
iii. justifying the need for a unified framework such as the Hussein-GRITT model.

Innovation participation is high (85%) evidence of the success of technology and research programs driven by universities, and moderate change in volunteerism (50% in 2018 to 65% in 2023) reflects increasing awareness of civic responsibility. Entrepreneurship participation is the lowest (55%) however, referring to a critical shortfall in the translation of ideas into real businesses. Talent empowerment (75%, up from 65%) records steady growth, yet also indicates the necessity to increase practical exposure and cross-disciplinary possibilities. These findings corroborate the general hypothesis that holistically integrated, the four dimensions significantly enhance student preparedness for societal contribution and global competitiveness.

At the policy level, the implications are that entrepreneurship incubators, innovation hubs, and service-learning must be made part of the institutionalization by higher education authorities as essential components of student development, as envisaged in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015–2025. Participation data can also be employed as benchmarking indicators in the measurement of institutional performance and graduate attributes.

At the operational level, universities must deepen industry-academia mentoring for talent empowerment, increase credit-bearing volunteerism and global mobility programs, and scale up successful innovation practices into entrepreneurship pipelines. Institution-wide infusion of the Hussein-GRITT framework can be a practical blueprint for curriculum design, co-curricular programming, and student affairs management for the production of graduates who are academically qualified, socially responsible, innovative, and globally competitive.

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