

Fostering Student Empowerment for Cultivating Future Leaders: A Concept Paper  
(Memupuk Pemeraksanaan Pelajar untuk Membudayakan Pemimpin Masa Depan: Kertas Konsep)

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the practical implementation of student autonomy in higher education institutions, focusing on financial and activity management autonomy, student engagement in politics, and establishing platforms like the Student Parliament and Leadership Camps. The study, set in selected public universities in Malaysia, specifically *Universiti Malaya*, *Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM)*, *Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia (UIAM)*, and *Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM)*, delves into the transformative impact of these initiatives on cultivating future leaders. The shift towards decentralised structures empowers students to take ownership of their education, fostering responsibility, collaboration, and innovation. Financial autonomy cultivates essential skills such as financial literacy and strategic planning while entrusting students with activity management nurtures event planning proficiency and teamwork. Engagement in politics, both on and off campus, develops civic responsibility and critical thinking. The Student Parliament and Leadership Camps provide forums for skills development, and involving strategic partners widens horizons. These initiatives collectively contribute to moulding a new generation of well-rounded leaders who are academically proficient, empathetic, and prepared to address global challenges, laying the foundation for a brighter future and a more enlightened and empowered society.

Keywords – Leadership Development, Student Empowerment, Educational Strategies, Holistic Growth, Future Leaders, Inclusive Environment.

ABSTRAK

Kertas kerja ini meneroka pelaksanaan praktikal autonomi pelajar di institusi pengajian tinggi, memfokuskan pada autonomi pengurusan kewangan dan aktiviti, penglibatan pelajar dalam politik, dan mewujudkan platform seperti Parlimen Pelajar dan Kem Kepimpinan. Kajian yang dijalankan di universiti awam terpilih di Malaysia, khususnya *Universiti Malaya*, *Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM)*, *Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia (UIAM)*, dan *Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM)*, menyelidiki impak transformatif daripada inisiatif ini dalam membudayakan pemimpin masa depan. Peralihan ke arah struktur terdesentralisasi memperkasakan pelajar untuk mengambil alih pendidikan mereka, memupuk tanggungjawab, kerjasama dan inovasi. Autonomi kewangan memupuk kemahiran penting seperti celik kewangan dan perancangan strategik sambil mempercayakan pengurusan aktiviti kepada pelajar memupuk kemahiran merancang acara dan kerja berpasukan. Penglibatan dalam politik, di dalam dan di luar kampus, membangunkan tanggungjawab sivik dan pemikiran kritis. Parlimen Pelajar dan Kem Kepimpinan menyediakan forum untuk pembangunan kemahiran, dan melibatkan rakan strategik meluaskan ufuk. Inisiatif ini secara kolektif menyumbang kepada membentuk generasi baharu pemimpin yang berpengetahuan luas yang berkemahiran akademik, empati, dan bersedia untuk menangani cabaran global, meletakkan asas untuk masa depan yang lebih cerah dan masyarakat yang lebih tercerahkan dan diperkasakan.

Kata Kunci – Pembangunan Kepimpinan, Pemeraksanaan Pelajar, Strategi Pendidikan, Pertumbuhan Holistik, Pemimpin Masa Depan, Persekitaran Inklusif.

## BACKGROUND OF THE PROGRAM

Malaysian higher education is undergoing a transformative shift that challenges traditional knowledge-sharing methods. To understand the significance of this shift, it is crucial to contextualise Malaysian higher education in its pre-evolution state.

Traditionally, educational institutions have played a vital role in imparting knowledge. However, they have often failed to cultivate the visionary leadership necessary for Malaysia's future prosperity. The conventional model, though robust in certain aspects, lacks the agility to adapt to the dynamic demands of the contemporary world. This change is proposed at the centre of the 11<sup>th</sup> agenda, a plan carefully crafted by the Honourable Dato' Seri Mohamed Khaled bin Nordin, the respected Minister of Higher Education Malaysia, marking a departure from the usual ways of sharing and gaining knowledge. This paper examines the plan and how it can cultivate promising future leaders.

This shift acknowledges that education isn't just about passing on facts and ideas. It's about nurturing knowledgeable individuals and visionary leaders who can steer Malaysia toward unprecedented growth and innovation. Under the wise guidance of the Minister of Higher Education of Malaysia, the call for empowering students resonates as a fundamental principle, urging academic institutions to evolve into nurturing grounds for cultivating insightful leadership.

The Minister's progressive approach has given students more responsibilities and an active role in decision-making, transforming them from passive learners to active participants who shape their educational paths and contribute to the nation's growth. This shift recognises the need for hands-on experience in leadership, decision-making, and community-focused initiatives, often neglected in the traditional educational system. The paper's title, "Fostering Student Empowerment for Cultivating Future Leaders," captures the essence of the investigation into how empowering students can address this gap. It highlights the importance of cultivating insightful leaders through practical learning experiences as opposed to the passive reception of information.

Several vital aspects must be considered to build a solid foundation for the paper. First and foremost, we must deeply understand the philosophical basis behind student empowerment to grasp the motivations driving this transformative change. Secondly, comparing Malaysia's global education approach promotes cross-cultural understanding and uncovers opportunities for learning and adapting to different contexts. Thirdly,

delving into innovative teaching methods and immersive learning experiences helps us understand how leadership skills are carefully cultivated.

However, this transition is not without its challenges. Shifting towards a student-centred approach requires navigating a complex maze of obstacles, from adjusting curricula to overcoming institutional resistance. This paper will navigate these challenges while highlighting the potential collaborations that can be harnessed.

In summary, the Malaysian higher education system has undergone significant transformation, resulting in institutions serving as nurturing grounds for fostering sagacious leadership. This exploration explores the philosophical principles, practical methodologies, and shared aspirations fostering student empowerment as the pioneers of Malaysia's educational landscape. Illuminating these elements comprehensively, this study actively contributes to the evolving narrative surrounding the reformation of higher education in Malaysia.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In the dynamic landscape of higher education, cultivating future leaders has emerged as a paramount objective. This literature review delves into the intricate dimensions of student empowerment and leadership development, examining key elements, strategies, and empirical insights that illuminate the trajectory toward nurturing visionary leaders.

### Empowerment:

Before delving into the dynamics of student empowerment and its interplay with leadership development, a clear and concise definition of empowerment is crucial. "Empowerment" has been widely discussed across various fields, yet its prevalent use has led to ambiguity and misinterpretation. Genuine empowerment, as articulated by Perkins (2010), represents an intentional and ongoing process embedded within local communities. It entails mutual respect, critical reflection, empathy, and active group participation, enabling individuals to attain greater access to and control over valuable resources. Essentially, empowerment, as defined in Perkins (2010), empowers individuals to achieve mastery over their lives, actively engage in democratic community participation, and comprehensively understand their environment.

### Student Empowerment and Leadership Development:

Leadership development within academia and student empowerment are intertwined, envisioning the emergence of influential leaders who possess knowledge, autonomy, and confidence. Aligning with Bandura's (1994) self-efficacy theory, this review posits that self-efficacy, a belief in one's capabilities, serves as the cornerstone of empowerment and leadership. The significance of self-efficacy resonates with the assertion that successful leaders emanate from empowered individuals.

### Education and Self-Efficacy:

The education institutions serve as an instrumental arena for fostering self-efficacy, particularly in higher education. As Ackerman (2018) highlighted, the research underscores the correlation between the early cultivation of self-efficacy and lifelong benefits. Ackerman (2018) also states that the role of educators is paramount in this process; educators who harbour their robust sense of self-efficacy are better positioned to cultivate it in their students. Such educators provide nurturing platforms for students to develop a sense of autonomy, confidence, and empowerment.

### Leadership Training and Student Community Leaders:

An empirical exploration by Henri et al. (2018) delves into the experiences of student community leaders who embarked on a leadership training course to develop their autonomy and those they lead. This study, as in Henri et al. (2018), conducted through narrative inquiry, elucidates the pivotal role of collaborative leadership, need-supportive roles, and conscious reflection in shaping leaders' beliefs and practices. The study by Henri et al. (2018) underscores how these traits enable student leaders to create Communities of Practice (CoPs), fostering collaborative control and shared objectives. This empirical evidence bolsters the discourse on student empowerment and leadership, attesting to the potency of cultivating autonomy-supportive skills for sustainable community development.

Exploring student empowerment and leadership development in higher education, this review clarifies the definition of empowerment and its symbiotic relationship with leadership. It highlights educators as critical agents in instilling knowledge, confidence, and autonomy crucial for leadership roles. The synthesis provides a roadmap to cultivate individuals empowered with self-efficacy, transcending mere knowledge to embody resilience, innovation, and leadership within

the dynamic higher education landscape.

## LOCATION SELECTION

In constructing the framework for our concept paper, selecting research locations was meticulously guided by a combination of strategic factors, alignment with research objectives, and the potential for offering insightful perspectives. Our primary criterion was to identify educational settings that authentically mirror the dynamics of higher education, specifically those where the interplay between student empowerment and leadership development is actively unfolding.

For the focus of this paper, we deliberately chose several of Malaysia's public universities, including *Universiti Malaya* (UM), *Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia* (UKM), *Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia* (UIAM), and *Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia* (UTHM). These universities have commenced the implementation of the Ministry of Higher Education's four key autonomy domains. These domains represent a progressive framework for comprehensive university autonomy, and each university is working diligently to achieve all four. Upon successful attainment, universities are officially rebranded as "Student Union," which departs from the conventional "Student Representative Council."

UTHM, while currently working towards achieving all four autonomy domains, stands as a notable example of a university actively pursuing these goals. The institution's dedication to fostering student autonomy, engagement, and active involvement aligns with the core themes of our study. The diverse student composition within Malaysia's public universities ensures a spectrum of perspectives, significantly enriching our exploration into the nuanced relationship between empowerment and leadership.

Furthermore, these chosen universities actively organise and implement comprehensive programs and activities that facilitate collaborative learning, experiential education, and student-driven initiatives. UTHM serves as a specific case study, providing detailed insights into the activities organised to develop students' leadership skills and the established criteria for identifying future leaders.

By selecting these institutions as the focal point of our research, we ensure that our concept paper resonates closely with the chosen research context, significantly enriching the depth of our exploration. This alignment enhances the validity of our insights and positions our concept paper as a valuable contribution to the discourse on cultivating student empowerment for

the development of future leaders.

## MODULE

This section delves into the distinct realms of autonomy that higher education institutions in Malaysia strive to attain as they progress towards establishing student unions. We explore four key domains that underscore the evolution from student engagement to empowerment, drawing comparisons between institutions on their path toward student union establishment and those that have already achieved this milestone. These autonomies include financial management, activity management, the selection of student representative council to be entirely handled by students, and the permission for students to be involved in and off-campus politics. Each domain is explained to understand the impact of student unions on fostering student empowerment.

### Financial Management Autonomy

One of the significant shifts in fostering student empowerment within the university landscape lies in the domain of financial management. Under this autonomy, the student representative actively manages the financial resources dedicated to various clubs and activities on campus.

The Student Activity Funds (*Tabung Aktiviti Pelajar*) form the foundation of financial management autonomy, enabling students to allocate budgets based on the needs of their respective clubs. The allocation process hinges on careful consideration of past programs, focusing on equitable distribution and optimising the impact of the activities. This resource allocation process instils a sense of fiscal responsibility and empowers students to strategise, plan, and prioritise effectively.

While financial management empowers students, it's important to note that guidance and support play a pivotal role. University staff members become advisors, offering expertise to guide students in effective financial planning and management. Additionally, an auditor's role is essential to ensure transparency and prevent misuse of funds. This collaborative approach enhances financial literacy and accountability among students, preparing them for future leadership roles where managing resources responsibly is paramount.

A notable aspect of this autonomy is the establishment of a student-led parliament that mirrors the functioning of a government. Just as national budgets are presented in a parliamentary session, the student body presents and discusses the yearly budget

during this session. This democratic process ensures that all voices are heard, fostering a culture of inclusivity and collective decision-making. The parliament's deliberations provide a platform for constructive debates, enabling students to justify and advocate for allocating funds to various clubs and programs.

Financial management autonomy equips students with practical budgeting, financial planning, and decision-making skills and cultivates a heightened sense of ownership and accountability. This empowerment paves the way for students to emerge as responsible leaders capable of steering the direction of their campus activities. Through this autonomous financial framework, students evolve from passive participants to active contributors, driving positive change and innovation within their university community.

### Activity Management Autonomy

This autonomy centres on granting students the authority and responsibility to manage and oversee various campus clubs, associations, and events. While the initial approval of activities often rested with the Student Affairs department, this autonomy transfers the power of approval and execution to the student body, enhancing students' leadership and organisational skills.

At its core, this autonomy is about more than just event planning; it's a training ground for effective leadership. The student representatives who take on these roles are tasked with reviewing and approving activity proposals, ensuring alignment with university guidelines and objectives. This responsibility enhances their critical thinking, decision-making, and problem-solving abilities as they evaluate the feasibility and impact of each proposed activity.

Guidance and training play a vital role in preparing students for these responsibilities. Workshops and classes offered by the student body equip student leaders with the necessary skills for effective activity planning, including proposal writing, budgeting, and logistical coordination. These resources ensure that student leaders are well-prepared to handle the complexities of managing diverse activities and events.

One noteworthy feature of this autonomy is establishing a systematic approval process. Activity proposals are scrutinised to ensure they meet the criteria and align with the university's values and objectives. The student body's involvement in this process fosters a sense of ownership and accountability as they take on the role of gatekeepers for campus activities.

This autonomy also provides an opportunity for cross-faculty interaction and collaboration.

Student leaders from various academic backgrounds and faculties foster interdisciplinary connections and expose students to diverse perspectives, enhancing their ability to work effectively with student representatives.

By entrusting students with the autonomy to manage campus activities, universities create an environment that nurtures leadership, innovation, and teamwork. The skills acquired through activity management extend beyond the university years, preparing students for future roles where effective planning, decision-making, and collaboration are essential. Through this autonomy, students transition from passive participants to proactive leaders, capable of steering campus activities competently and creatively.

### The Selection of the Student Representative Council Fully Handled by Students

A significant stride towards student empowerment within the university framework is the autonomous selection of the Student Representative Council (MPP) or Student Union members. This autonomy transfers the responsibility of selecting MPP or Student Union members entirely to the student body, fostering a sense of ownership, participation, and democratic engagement among the student community.

The MPP or Student Union is a cornerstone of student representation and governance, acting as a conduit for students to voice their concerns, needs, and aspirations. Under this autonomy, the MPP or Student Union selection process is no longer solely managed by the administration; instead, it is administered and executed by a dedicated body of students known as the *Jawatankuasa Pemilihan Majlis Perwakilan Pelajar (JPMPP)* or the Student Representative Council Selection Committee.

This autonomous selection process is comprehensive, encompassing multiple stages and checks to ensure integrity and transparency. The JPMPP comprises students without affiliations with other clubs or organisations to maintain impartiality and dedication to the selection process. The committee is entrusted with roles ranging from announcing the selection date, overseeing candidate registration, validating candidate nominations, handling objections and appeals, and the final announcement of eligible candidates.

The JPMPP's role extends beyond procedural tasks; they stand as custodians of the selection process's fairness and credibility. With great power and responsibility, the JPMPP carries out its duties diligently, ensuring that the selection process is free from bias and manipulation.

This autonomy offers students a first-hand

experience of the democratic process, mirroring the practices of real-world elections. By participating in the selection of their peers who will represent their interests, students engage in the principles of democracy and citizenship. This process empowers students to not only exercise their right to vote but also to actively contribute to the shaping of their student body's leadership.

Moreover, the autonomy of MPP or Student Union selection emphasises the significance of integrity, accountability, and commitment among candidates. Those who aspire to represent their fellow students must demonstrate not only leadership qualities but also ethical conduct and dedication to the student community's welfare.

Students' autonomous selection of the MPP or Student Union exemplifies the university's commitment to cultivating responsible and engaged citizens. This process nurtures leadership, civic engagement, and a deep sense of responsibility among students, preparing them for future roles as leaders who prioritise the welfare of their peers and advocate for their interests. Through this autonomy, universities are not only producing capable leaders but also fostering a culture of active participation and democratic principles within their student communities.

### Involving In and Off-Campus Politics

This module delves into the transformative concept of granting students the autonomy to engage in campus and off-campus politics, encompassing a broader sphere of political activities. Central to this discussion are the proposed amendments to the Universities and University Colleges Act (AUKU) of 1971, aiming to provide a regulated framework for students and lecturers to actively participate in political pursuits beyond the academic realm. Bernama (2023), these amendments underscore the importance of fostering an environment that encourages informed civic engagement.

The proposed amendments to AUKU 1971 maintain its foundational principles while seeking to remove provisions that currently curtail the political involvement of students and lecturers. This measured approach intends to balance academic commitments and political engagement, ensuring that the core duties of teaching and learning remain undisturbed. Scholars and academic experts advocate for these changes, highlighting the potential for educators to contribute their substantial research expertise to broader political dialogues.

The module underscores the significance of clear political participation guidelines for students and lecturers. The proposed changes, if effectively

implemented, have the potential to harness the intellectual capabilities of academics in shaping national administration through informed political discourse. Moreover, the permission for students to actively participate in campus and off-campus politics aligns with the broader "*Undi18*" initiative, advocating for enhanced civic involvement among the youth as depicted in (Bernama, 2023).

Recognising students' right to engage in off-campus politics is essential to fostering well-rounded and responsible citizens. This autonomy encourages students to actively shape political narratives within the confines of the campus and on a larger societal scale. It empowers students to articulate their viewpoints, advocate for their chosen causes, and meaningfully contribute to political discourse.

The proposed amendments to AUKU 1971 herald a significant stride toward enabling students and educators to exercise their democratic right to engage in campus and off-campus politics. Bernama (2023) also states that this autonomy aligns with the ethos of nurturing active citizenship, equipping students with the tools to contribute to political discussions within the academic arena and the broader society.

## ACTIVITIES

Every institution conducted its own activities aimed at student empowerment. Nonetheless, this section will delve into a selection of notable activities specifically carried out at UTHM to bolster student empowerment.

### Student Parliament

Central to the ethos of democratic engagement, the Student Parliament at most public universities in Malaysia seamlessly emulates the proceedings of the real-life National Parliament. The University's Student Parliament, a key pillar of student governance, assembles student representatives comprising not only members of the Student Representative Council (MPP) but also representatives from various faculty clubs, state-affiliated societies, associations, clubs, and uniformed bodies.

At its core, the Student Parliament in UTHM serves a dual purpose: it addresses student concerns within the university. It elevates proposed solutions presented to the university's administrative bodies through the pre-welfare and welfare meetings. This platform aligns with the broader mission of nurturing student leadership and civic participation. The Student Parliament serves as a channel through which student

issues find their way into decision-making, fostering collaboration between the student body and university administration.

Additionally, the concept of the Student Parliament expands beyond the university's borders to encompass the National Student Parliament. This forum extends the discourse to a national level, gathering representatives from universities across Malaysia to deliberate on broader student issues. By bringing together representatives from diverse backgrounds and institutions, the National Student Parliament provides a platform for discussions that transcend individual campuses and tackle challenges from a national perspective.

The most recent National Student Parliament, held from August 19 to 24th, 2023, was organised collaboratively by the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE), the Malaysian Parliament, and the Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia (UIAM). This event saw the participation of 187 delegates from the National Students Consultative Council (MPPK), Student Representative Councils (MPP), and Student Unions (KM) representing various public and private higher education institutions in Malaysia. The discussions centred around four core themes: economy, student welfare, empowerment, and internationalisation.

The National Student Parliament is a vital platform for exchanging ideas, advocating for student rights, and collectively addressing issues that transcend individual institutions. Through this initiative, students engage with national-level policymakers, contribute to the formulation of student-centred policies, and play a significant role in shaping the landscape of higher education in Malaysia. The ultimate objective of the National Student Parliament is to foster a collaborative environment that propels higher education toward more outstanding quality, relevance, and responsiveness to students' needs.

The strategic integration of the Student Parliament into the university governance structure symbolises the university's commitment to empowering students as active stakeholders in their educational journey. The ability to engage in debates, propose ideas, and critically evaluate suggestions is a hallmark of this platform. It moulds future leaders capable of steering discussions, driving change, and shaping their academic environment. Just as the national parliament serves as the crucible of democratic governance, UTHM's Student Parliament instils democratic values and skills that will continue to resonate within the hearts and minds of its participants beyond their academic tenure.

### Approval of Students' Activity

The structure for approving student activity paperwork varies among public universities, with differences in budget thresholds and administrative setups. In the case of UTHM, the approval procedure is organised into distinct tiers delineated by budget ranges. It involves various portfolios within the Student Representative Council (MPP) and several administrative roles starting from May 2023.

#### Approval for Activities Under RM5,000:

The approval sequence involves multiple pivotal stages for student initiatives with budgets not exceeding RM5,000. Student groups from clubs, associations, the Students Leaders Council (*Majlis Kepimpinan Pelajar*, MKP), and faculties clubs initiate the process by submitting comprehensive activity proposals outlining objectives, logistics, and financial requisites. Subsequently, the Chairperson (*Yang Dipertua*, YDP) and Deputy Chairperson (*Timbalan Yang Dipertua*, TYDP) of the MPP UTHM will be in charge of approving the activity's paperwork after the Deputy Chairperson (*Naib Yang Dipertua*, NYDP) of the respective campus checks and approved on the activity's content and anticipated impact on the university. Additionally, the financial details undergo rigorous validation by the General Secretary (*Setiausaha Agung*, SUA) or Work Secretary (*Setiausaha Kerja*, SUK). Following approval, a dedicated financial ledger is issued to ensure meticulous financial tracking for every club throughout the session.

#### Approval for Activities Between RM5,001 to RM10,000:

Activities with budgets ranging from RM5,001 to RM10,000 are subject to an expanded approval process. Student groups from clubs, associations, MKP, and faculties clubs present their activity proposals, initiating a series of evaluations and endorsements. Here, authority transitions to the YDP and TYDP, supported by endorsement from the Director of Student Affairs (*Pengarah Hal Ehwal Pelajar*). As in previous steps, the NYDP of the respective campus checks, assesses and approves the content and projected impact. Financial validation continues with meticulous verification by the SUA or SUK. In cases requiring additional financial backing, the Director of Student Affairs (*Pengarah Hal Ehwal Pelajar*) provides the necessary support. The dedicated financial ledger ensures prudent fiscal management throughout the session.

### Approval for Activities Exceeding RM10,000:

For activities surpassing RM10,000 in budget, the approval process comprises a comprehensive framework designed to uphold financial prudence and program integrity. Here, the YDP and TYDP endorse activities of notable financial magnitude, with support from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Student Affairs and Alumni (*Timbalan Naib Canselor Hal Ehwal Pelajar dan Alumni*, TNC HEPA). The NYDP of the respective campus conducts an exacting appraisal of content and anticipated impact, maintaining the meticulous scrutiny inherent in UTHM's approval approach. Financial validation by the SUA or SUK remains integral. Similar to the previous categories, the flexibility to secure additional financial support from the Director of Student Affairs (*Pengarah Hal Ehwal Pelajar*) ensures robust financial backing for these significant undertakings.

The structured approval process for student activities at UTHM fosters responsible autonomy and effective leadership among student representatives. By mandating multi-tiered evaluations, the university empowers students to navigate decision-making, financial management, and program execution. This process aligns with the paper's focus on student empowerment within an autonomous framework, nurturing skills essential for future civic and political engagement.

#### Hosting Leaderships Camp for Schools

MPP UTHM has taken significant strides in fostering leadership skills among school students through its impactful series of Leadership Camps for Schools. An exemplary case is the "Hussein Future Leader" program conducted at *Sekolah Menengah Teknik Terengganu* from 8<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> June 2023. This initiative, organised by MPP UTHM, in collaboration with their Strategic Partner (*Rakan Strategik* or RS), is a testament to the organisation's commitment to nurturing the leaders of tomorrow.

The camp's itinerary is thoughtfully structured, starting at 4:30 AM on the second and third days to accommodate morning prayers. This attention to detail reflects the camp's dedication to providing a holistic experience for the participants. By incorporating various modules, the camp seeks to inspire and develop leadership skills among students while also offering valuable insights to the facilitating team and RS members. The modules are led by individuals appointed based on their expertise, such as the ice-breaking session, specifically the "War Cry" module led by Muhammad Shahrulazmi

(TYDP). This module, focused on fostering healthy interactions and camaraderie among participants, aims to instil teamwork, effective communication, ethics, professionalism, and self-confidence. Similarly, the "Organisation Management and Personality Understanding" (*Pengurusan Organisasi & Kenali Personaliti*) module, headed by Noratika (SUK) and Ahmad Farizal (Head of Department in MPP UTHM), delves into defining personality, assessing it, and utilising one's personality effectively for leadership roles.

Another notable module is the "Skills of A Supervisory Leader" (*Keterampilan Seorang Pemimpin Pengawas*), overseen by Muhammad Shahrulazmi (TYDP), which delves into the significance of personal image and its impact on the organisation. Through a blend of theory and practicality, participants are encouraged to cultivate a positive self-image and enhance their professional and personal skills as leaders.

Furthermore, the camp introduces participants to gamification strategies, where Muhammad Irfan Daniel (Head of Department in MPP UTHM) and Nurul Afiah (RS), along with Nur Fatimah (RS), guide participants through activities that assess their physical, mental, and intellectual capabilities. These activities foster teamwork, inter-group understanding, and strategic planning while promoting personal growth and a sense of companionship.

The camp culminates in celebrating "Young Got Talent" talents during the Cultural Night, led by Muhammad Shahrulazmi (TYDP). This segment provides a platform for participants to showcase their creative skills, nurturing a love for arts and culture. Beyond enhancing participants' non-academic talents, this module fosters self-confidence and mutual understanding among attendees.

While these leadership camps for schools undeniably empower students with leadership skills, they also hold broader significance. These camps contribute to MPP UTHM's financial sustainability, as their success translates to a self-generated income source. This financial autonomy aligns with the core principles of the student autonomy concept, emphasising students' ability to manage their resources effectively. By establishing a self-sustaining financial model, MPP UTHM fulfils its mission and sets a precedent for other student-led initiatives to thrive within the university framework. This collaboration between student empowerment and financial autonomy demonstrates the dynamic possibilities that emerge from involving students in decision-making processes and resource management.

## Strategic Partner

To cultivate visionary student leaders, the Mentor and Mentee program takes centre stage as a dynamic initiative embodying collaborative empowerment. This section outlines the strategic underpinnings of the program and its potential to seamlessly transition the educational landscape towards a student union, fostering a culture of cooperative collaboration and proactive leadership.

Existing literature, such as the work of Bosch-Sijtsema and Postma (2009) in the *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, sheds light on the mutual strategic benefits of cooperative innovation projects. These projects emphasise that partnering entities gain access to each other's technological prowess and co-create knowledge about organisational intricacies and market dynamics. This research forms the bedrock upon which the Mentor and Mentee program is conceptualised, reinforcing the transformative potential of strategic collaborations.

Within the Student Representative Council (MPP) of UTHM, the strategic partner program, aptly termed "*Rakan Strategik*" (RS), has emerged as an embodiment of the collaborative spirit envisioned by cooperative innovation projects (Bosch-Sijtsema & Postma, 2010). RS signifies a conscious shift towards a student union model, championing cooperative engagement between student representatives and the broader student community.

Under the RS initiative, students from diverse disciplines are invited to join the program, contributing their unique talents and perspectives. Categories like "Hussein Volunteers" and "Hussein Creative" exemplify the niches within which students collaboratively engage to elevate the university experience. The prefix "Hussein" symbolises unity and belonging, drawing inspiration from Bosch-Sijtsema and Postma's (2010) findings that partnerships extend beyond technological capabilities.

The RS program reflects a paradigm shift in the conventional understanding of student empowerment. It reimagines empowerment as a shared responsibility, transcending the boundaries of the Student Representative Council (MPP) to involve every student. This approach echoes the essence of Bosch-Sijtsema and Postma's (2010) research, highlighting that the cooperative aspect of partnerships contributes to the overall growth and learning of all involved parties.

As the university strides towards a student union, the Mentor and Mentee program, with the RS initiative at its core, is poised to redefine student leadership. The program's emphasis on collaborative



empowerment aligns seamlessly with the ethos of strategic collaborations and promises to shape a future generation of coactively engaged, visionary student leaders.

#### Interfaculty Games (Sukan Antara Fakulti or SAF)

The Interfaculty Games (SAF) is a significant university-wide event in UTHM that fosters a sense of camaraderie and competition among the various faculties at the university. This large-scale sports championship encompasses a diverse array of sporting events involving nine different faculties competing against each other to showcase their prowess in sports. This initiative plays a pivotal role in nurturing well-rounded student leaders. The event is organised through the collaborative efforts of several bodies, including the MPP UTHM, the University Sports Centre (*Pusat Sukan Universiti*, PSU), and the Council of Deputy Deans for Student and Alumni Affairs (*Majlis Timbalan Dekan Hal Ehwal Pelajar dan Alumni*, Majlis TDHEPA). By emphasising sports development and instilling the values of sportsmanship, the Interfaculty Games aims to cultivate leaders adept at managing teams, embodying a spirit of competitiveness, and promoting healthy rivalry.

One of the Interfaculty Games' primary goals is to enhance students' individual identities and fighting spirit, particularly when they represent their respective faculties in more significant competitions. This platform not only promotes healthy competition but also reinforces the values of teamwork, as collaboration among team members is essential to succeed. This facet aligns with the core principles of leadership, where effective teamwork and collaboration are crucial.

The SAF event contributes to developing holistic student leaders with academic excellence, a keen sense of sportsmanship, leadership insight, and the ability to channel competitiveness into positive endeavours. The exposure to intense sports competitions enhances personal growth, fostering a sense of resilience, discipline, and determination. By participating in the Interfaculty Games, students are better equipped to face challenges within and beyond the sports arena and emerge as well-rounded individuals ready to contribute positively to their communities and future leadership roles.

In summary, the Interfaculty Games (SAF) is a significant platform for fostering holistic student leadership by promoting sports development, sportsmanship, and teamwork. Participating in this event encourages students to embrace competition, hone their leadership skills, and become well-rounded

individuals capable of achieving success in various domains.

## PROGRAM IMPACT

This section thoroughly examines how each activity has played a pivotal role in shaping the potential of future leaders, strengthening their involvement, and fostering positive relationships within the university community.

#### Student Parliament

The impact of the Student Parliament initiative is far-reaching, as it serves as a crucible for honing future leaders' leadership and decision-making skills. Through active participation in parliamentary proceedings, students not only gain a deeper understanding of democratic processes but also develop critical thinking abilities, practical communication skills, and the art of negotiation. By emulating the structure and dynamics of the national parliament, the Student Parliament experience equips students with valuable insights into governance, public policy, and the intricate workings of administrative systems. Moreover, this engagement empowers students to advocate for their peers' welfare, enabling them to emerge as proactive change agents within the university's governance framework. This immersive experience within a simulated political environment cultivates a heightened sense of responsibility, fostering leaders better prepared to engage in meaningful discourse, champion community concerns, and contribute constructively to the institution's development and progress.

#### Approval of Students' Activity

This multifaceted procedure significantly contributes to the holistic growth of future leaders. Involving students in decision-making nurtures responsibility, accountability, and resourcefulness. The approval process fosters a keen sense of ownership and collaboration among students through a tiered structure that empowers various student representatives. As they navigate the intricacies of budget allocation, proposal evaluation, and activity planning, participants develop financial acumen, negotiation skills, and a profound understanding of event management. This experience enhances their ability to initiate and execute initiatives that resonate with their peers, ultimately shaping them into adept leaders who can navigate diverse challenges and effectively lead.

### Hosting Leaderships Camp for Schools

By providing a platform for students to orchestrate such camps, they learn to design impactful modules, foster team dynamics, and inspire fellow students to embrace leadership roles. This endeavour imparts organisational skills and ignites creativity and adaptability as participants curate engaging experiences for their peers. Students gain exposure to external perspectives and practices through collaboration with a strategic partner, enriching their leadership repertoire. By effectively managing logistics, mentoring participants, and shaping transformative experiences, students sharpen their leadership, mentoring, and event planning proficiencies, ensuring their readiness to inspire and guide others.

### Strategic Partner

Collaborating with external entities cultivates an understanding of real-world dynamics and challenges, imparting participants a broader perspective. Engaging with strategic partners enhances students' negotiation skills, partnership-building abilities, and the capacity to leverage external resources for mutual benefit. This exposure fosters an adaptable leadership style characterised by an openness to new ideas and an aptitude for forging impactful collaborations. Consequently, future leaders emerge equipped with the skills to engage stakeholders effectively, devise innovative solutions, and harness diverse resources to drive positive change.

### Interfaculty Games (Sukan Antara Fakulti or SAF)

By organising and participating in these games, students embrace the spirit of healthy competition and develop teamwork, resilience, and sportsmanship. The planning, execution, and coordination of the event require students to manage resources, communicate effectively, and demonstrate organisational prowess. The games cultivate leadership qualities such as delegation, conflict resolution, and decision-making, moulding individuals who can navigate complex group dynamics and motivate others toward shared goals. The experience fosters an environment of unity and collaboration, preparing future leaders to lead teams with purpose, integrity, and a spirit of camaraderie.

## CONCLUSION

Pursuing student autonomy within higher education

institutions is not merely theoretical but a practical framework with transformative implications. Through exploring key components such as financial management autonomy, activity management autonomy, student engagement in campus and off-campus politics, and the establishment of platforms like the Student Parliament and Leadership Camps, this paper has underscored the significance of these initiatives in nurturing future leaders.

The shift from traditional hierarchical structures to a more decentralised approach empowers students to take ownership of their education, fostering a culture of responsibility, collaboration, and innovation. The delegation of financial decision-making cultivates financial literacy, strategic planning, and a profound understanding of resource allocation – skills essential for effective leadership. Similarly, entrusting students with managing diverse activities nurtures event planning proficiency, teamwork, and adaptability, all integral aspects of well-rounded leadership. Furthermore, students' engagement in politics, both on and off-campus, instils a sense of civic responsibility and an understanding of the larger societal landscape. Platforms like the Student Parliament provide a forum for developing critical thinking, debating, and public speaking skills, preparing students to be articulate, informed, and empathetic leaders. The hosting of Leadership Camps imparts essential leadership traits such as mentoring, communication, and organisational expertise, enabling students to inspire and guide others effectively.

Moreover, including strategic partners widens future leaders' horizons, exposing them to diverse perspectives and collaborative possibilities. This exposure enhances their ability to navigate complex challenges, leverage resources, and drive meaningful change. The overall impact of these initiatives extends beyond campus boundaries, contributing positively to communities and society.

In essence, the evolution towards student autonomy cultivates a new generation of leaders who are not only academically proficient but also well-rounded, empathetic, and ready to address the multifaceted challenges of the world. By embracing autonomy, educational institutions are laying the foundation for a brighter future, where leadership is synonymous with responsibility, adaptability, and a deep commitment to positive change. As we navigate an ever-evolving landscape, student autonomy stands as a beacon of progress, shaping the leaders of tomorrow and fostering a more enlightened and empowered society.

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