

## From Classroom to Boardroom: A Best Practice Framework in Nurturing Young Talent at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

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### ABSTRACT

The transformation of higher education requires universities to prepare graduates who are not only academically competent but also adaptable, innovative, and industry-ready. This paper presents the Faculty of Management (FM) at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia's (UTM) Young Talent Pathway (YTP), a structured initiative under the theme “From Classroom to Boardroom”, as a best practice model for holistic student development. The YTP is designed to bridge the gap between academic knowledge and professional expectations by embedding multiple experiential components throughout the student lifecycle. These include voluntary internships, CEO attachment programs, undergraduate research opportunities, industry-supervised final year projects, and extended industrial internships. Using a qualitative case study approach, the study draws on program documentation, observations, and student testimonials to analyze the design, implementation, and outcomes of the YTP. Findings reveal that the program aligns closely with UTM's vision of developing holistic talents through knowledge and innovation. Key success factors include strong stakeholder engagement, systematic planning and coordination, performance-based evaluation, and sustainable practices such as student-led symposiums and research publications. The program enhances employability by equipping graduates with leadership, research, and problem-solving skills while also strengthening academia–industry–community linkages. The paper concludes that the YTP demonstrates a replicable framework for universities seeking to balance academic excellence with real-world relevance. It highlights how structured pathways, underpinned by strong institutional support and stakeholder collaboration, can transform students into future-ready leaders. The findings provide valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and institutions seeking to integrate sustainability and industry relevance into graduate development.

### Keywords

Young talent pathway; Experiential learning; Graduate employability; University–industry collaboration; Sustainable talent development

### Introduction

The global higher education landscape is transforming at an unprecedented rate. Universities today are no longer confined to their traditional role of disseminating knowledge; they are increasingly expected to act as catalysts for talent development, drivers of innovation, and partners in advancing the needs of industry and the community (Altbach & de Wit, 2018). This shift reflects broader changes in the global economy, which is now characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA). In such an environment, graduates must be prepared not only with technical expertise but also with resilience, adaptability, and the ability to collaborate across disciplines and sectors (Johansen, 2017). In Malaysia, this expectation is reflected in key national policy documents. The Malaysia Education Blueprint (2015–2025, Higher Education) emphasizes graduate employability, innovation capacity, and global competitiveness as critical outcomes of higher education (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2015). Similarly, the Twelfth Malaysia Plan (2021–2025) outlines the need to produce future-ready graduates who can thrive in disruptive economies, contribute to sustainable development, and support the nation's transition toward a knowledge-based economy (Economic Planning Unit, 2021). These frameworks underscore that universities play a central role in shaping human capital for nation-building, while also responding to international agendas, such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).

The Faculty of Management (FM) at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) has responded proactively to these shifts by pioneering the Young Talent Pathway (YTP), branded under the theme “From Classroom to Boardroom.” YTP represents a structured talent development ecosystem that blends academic learning with industry engagement, experiential learning, and leadership cultivation across multiple phases of the student journey. Unlike conventional programs that emphasize cognitive knowledge accumulation, YTP is intentionally designed to humanize education focusing on the holistic development of students, not only intellectually but also emotionally, socially, and ethically (Nordin & Omar, 2020). This approach aligns with calls for higher education to nurture “whole graduates” who possess graduate capital beyond academic credentials, including social, cultural, and identity capital (Tomlinson, 2017).

The uniqueness of YTP lies in its integrated model of experiential learning. Students’ progress through voluntary internships, CEO attachment programs, research mentorship opportunities, industry-supervised final year projects, and structured industrial placements. These carefully scaffolded experiences allow students to engage directly with workplace challenges, reflect critically on their learning, and apply knowledge in authentic contexts (Kolb, 1984; Smith et al., 2023). By doing so, YTP ensures that students are better equipped to navigate the complexities of modern workplaces and make meaningful contributions to industry and society. This paper explores the FM Young Talent Pathway as a best practice framework for higher education institutions in Malaysia and beyond. It investigates the rationale behind the initiative, situates it within scholarly debates on employability and experiential learning, examines the implementation methodology, and highlights findings on its impact and sustainability. Furthermore, the discussion positions YTP within broader conversations about the role of universities in nation-building, supporting knowledge economies, and advancing the SDGs.)

## **Literature Review**

### **Graduate Employability and Industry Readiness**

The discourse on graduate employability has shifted considerably over the last two decades, moving beyond narrow concerns of knowledge acquisition toward a broader conceptualization of graduate “readiness” for dynamic labour markets. Knight and Yorke (2003) conceptualized employability as a blend of skills, knowledge, and attributes that make graduates more likely to gain employment and succeed in their chosen occupations. More recent perspectives stress that employers expect graduates to demonstrate not only technical expertise but also soft skills such as adaptability, creativity, communication, and leadership (Jackson & Bridgstock, 2021). In Malaysia, graduate employability has become a central concern of national education policies, reflecting anxieties about graduate unemployment and underemployment. The Graduate Employability Strategic Action Plan (2021–2025) emphasizes the alignment of higher education curricula with labor market demands, promoting industry collaboration and experiential learning (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2020). Studies show that employers consistently rank problem-solving, teamwork, and digital literacy as equally important, if not more important, than disciplinary knowledge (Ng et al., 2021). The Faculty of Management’s Young Talent Pathway (YTP) responds directly to this challenge by embedding professional exposure and workplace-relevant experiences early in students’ academic journeys, thus preparing them to transition smoothly into competitive labour markets.

### **Experiential and Work-Integrated Learning**

Experiential learning has become a cornerstone of employability-focused higher education worldwide. Work-Integrated Learning (WIL), which includes internships, cooperative education, and applied research projects, is widely regarded as an effective pedagogy for bridging the gap between theory and practice (Smith, Ferns, & Russell, 2023). Kolb’s (1984) influential model of experiential learning identifies four stages concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation—through which learners deepen understanding and translate knowledge into practice. YTP operationalizes these stages through structured interventions. Voluntary internships provide students with concrete experiences in real workplaces; CEO attachment programs create opportunities for reflective observation by exposing students to senior leadership decision-making; industry-supervised projects promote abstract conceptualization through the integration of academic theories with business problems; and extended industrial internships demand active experimentation, where students assume professional roles and are assessed jointly by academia and industry. Research indicates that such systematic engagement improves students’ self-efficacy, problem-solving skills, and career readiness (Jackson, 2016; Cooper et al., 2020).

## University Industry Community Linkages

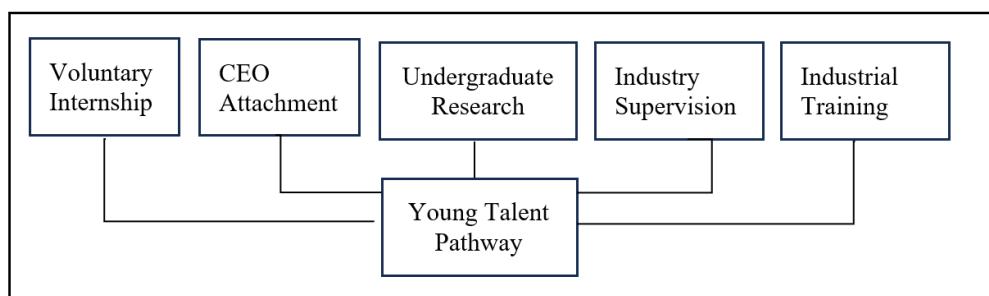
The triple helix model, advanced by Etzkowitz and Zhou (2017), highlights the evolving role of universities as entrepreneurial institutions that co-create innovation alongside industry and government. This model positions universities not only as sites of teaching and research but also as key actors in regional and national innovation ecosystems. In Malaysia, this resonates strongly with policy imperatives for stronger academia–industry linkages as drivers of economic growth and graduate employability (Rahman et al., 2022). Without such linkages, universities risk producing graduates who are academically proficient yet industrially irrelevant. Empirical studies have demonstrated that meaningful exposure to industry enhances students' ability to adapt to workplace expectations, while also generating innovation spillovers for industries engaged in collaborations (Ankrah & Al-Tabbaa, 2015). The YTP directly addresses this challenge by embedding early and sustained engagement with industry supervisors, CEOs, and professional communities. This not only strengthens students' applied competencies but also reflects UTM's institutional mission of holistic talent development through knowledge and innovation. Importantly, YTP extends beyond industry linkages to community-based learning through voluntary internships with NGOs, aligning employability with social responsibility.

## Sustainable Talent Development

Sustainability in graduate employability has become an increasingly important theme in the literature. Tomlinson (2017) argues that universities must prepare students not just for first jobs but for sustainable careers in complex labour markets characterized by technological disruption and global mobility. Sustainability here refers to cultivating resilience, adaptability, and lifelong learning skills that allow graduates to thrive over time. YTP contributes to sustainable talent development through long-term initiatives that go beyond one-off internships or capstone projects. These include student-led symposiums, research publications, and participation in conferences, all of which ensure that students remain engaged in knowledge creation and dissemination. Jackson (2021) notes that embedding research and scholarly outputs into student development cultivates professional identity and academic confidence, both of which contribute to sustainable employability. Similarly, Rahman et al. (2022) emphasize that sustainable talent ecosystems require integration of academic, industry, and community resources, ensuring that employability is a continuous process rather than a terminal outcome of graduation.

## Comparative Models in Global Higher Education

Globally, higher education institutions have developed various models that integrate academic study with workplace learning. In Canada, cooperative education programs are well-established, combining classroom learning with alternating periods of paid work experience (Coll et al., 2009). In the United Kingdom, sandwich programs offer students year-long industry placements between academic study phases, often credited with improving employability outcomes (Wilton, 2012). In the United States, service-learning models integrate community engagement into curricula, emphasizing both social responsibility and employability (Bringle & Clayton, 2021). While these models share an emphasis on integrating learning and work experience, YTP stands out in its intentional combination of voluntary internships, CEO shadowing, undergraduate research, industry-supervised projects, and structured industrial placements. This multi-design framework provides multiple entry points for students to engage with industry and community throughout their degree, rather than concentrating experiential learning at the final stages. By prioritizing professional exposure throughout the academic lifecycle, YTP ensures that talent development is progressive, holistic, and sustained. Figure 1 shows the elements of YTP that combines the industry-based learning and theoretical learning



**Figure 1.** Young Talent Pathway (YTP) Framework

## Methods

This study adopts a qualitative case study approach, which is particularly suitable when the objective is to explore and understand complex educational practices in their real-life context. A case study enables an in-depth analysis of a bounded system, specifically the Faculty of Management's (FM) Young Talent Pathway (YTP) at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM). According to Yin (2018), case study methodology is appropriate when researchers seek to answer "how" and "why" questions and when contextual factors are integral to the phenomenon under investigation. The YTP, with its structured phases of student development and multiple stakeholders, provides a rich context for qualitative inquiry.

The Young Talent Pathway (YTP) was chosen as the focal case because it represents a comprehensive, institution-wide initiative designed to enhance graduate employability, strengthen experiential learning, and promote sustainable talent development. The program involves a diverse range of stakeholders, including students, academic staff, industry supervisors, CEOs, NGOs, and community partners, making it an exemplary model of higher education innovation in Malaysia. Its multidimensional design, encompassing voluntary internships, CEO attachments, undergraduate research experiences, industry-supervised final-year projects, and extended internships, offers multiple entry points for data collection and analysis. The initiative thus provides a rich context to explore how higher education institutions integrate academic learning with industry and community engagement to produce employable graduates equipped with both professional competencies and social awareness.

To capture the complexity of the YTP initiative, multiple data collection methods were employed, consistent with qualitative research recommendations for triangulation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Official program documents, including guidelines, rubrics, and institutional reports, were examined to gain insight into program design, objectives, evaluation criteria, and alignment with institutional strategies. Faculty Course Assessment Reports (CAR) and program committee meeting minutes were analyzed to understand how continuous quality improvement (CQI) processes were embedded within YTP. Observations were carried out during key program activities such as voluntary internship briefings, CEO attachment sessions, research methodology classes, and Final Year Project (FYP) symposiums, focusing on mentoring interactions and experiential learning dynamics. Informal observations conducted during symposium exhibitions further revealed how students demonstrated their learning through project presentations. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with purposively selected students who had participated in different phases of YTP to capture reflections on employability skills, personal growth, and industry readiness. Testimonies from alumni affiliated with various organizations were incorporated to provide longitudinal perspectives on the program's impact, while interviews with faculty coordinators and industry supervisors offered insight into their roles in guiding, evaluating, and sustaining the initiative. Additionally, secondary data sources, such as national reports, policy documents, and media publications on graduate employability in Malaysia were reviewed to contextualize YTP within broader national and international discourses on talent development.

A purposive sampling strategy was adopted to ensure representation of participants directly involved in YTP, including final-year students undertaking research projects or internships, faculty members serving as coordinators, supervisors, and academic mentors, as well as industry stakeholders such as company supervisors, CEOs, and NGO partners offering voluntary internship placements. This sampling approach ensured the inclusion of diverse perspectives that reflect the multi-stakeholder nature of the program. Data analysis employed a thematic approach as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2019), involving six iterative phases: familiarization with the data through repeated reading of transcripts and documents; generation of initial codes related to key concepts such as "industry relevance," "research innovation," "mentorship," and "holistic development"; identification of overarching themes linking these codes across stakeholder groups; and systematic reviewing, defining, and naming of themes to ensure conceptual clarity. The final stage involved constructing a coherent narrative that integrates evidence from all data sources. Credibility and trustworthiness were enhanced through triangulation across documents, observations, and interviews, member checking with selected participants to validate interpretations, and peer debriefing to challenge assumptions and strengthen analytical rigor (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

## Findings

The analysis of the Faculty of Management's Young Talent Pathway (YTP) revealed six major themes that collectively highlight its role as a best practice framework: alignment with institutional vision, stakeholder involvement, planning

and implementation, control and coordination, performance management, and sustainability. Together, these themes illustrate how the program has been systematically designed and executed to nurture future-ready graduates who are both academically competent and industry-relevant. First, the YTP demonstrates strong alignment with UTM's institutional vision of developing holistic talents and prospering lives through knowledge and innovative technologies. By integrating experiential learning, research, and industry engagement into the student journey, the program operationalizes the university's strategic goals. Observations during CEO attachment briefings and Final Year Project (FYP) symposiums revealed that students were consistently encouraged to frame their projects in terms of real-world contributions rather than academic exercises. Testimonials from graduates, such as those attached to Permodalan Darul Takzim (PDT), emphasized how YTP experiences provided confidence and clarity in career pathways, underscoring the program's capacity to bridge academic and professional expectations.

Second, stakeholder involvement emerged as one of the most distinctive strengths of YTP. Industry supervisors, CEOs, NGOs, and community leaders were deeply engaged in mentoring and evaluating students. This not only strengthened the program's industrial relevance but also reflected UTM's mission of holistic talent development through cross-sector collaboration. Students reported that industry supervisors provided practical feedback that complemented academic supervision, preparing them for the realities of the workplace. Importantly, the program also involved NGOs and SMEs in voluntary internships, ensuring that employability was framed as both corporate readiness and community responsibility. This resonates with the triple-helix model (Etzkowitz & Zhou, 2017), which emphasizes the importance of innovation emerging from collaboration among universities, industry, and broader society.

Third, the planning and implementation of YTP followed a deliberate staged model that develops student development across the academic journey. Voluntary internships in the second year provided early exposure to workplace cultures, CEO attachments offered leadership shadowing opportunities, the Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program (UROP) developed inquiry skills, and industry-supervised FYPs encouraged applied problem-solving. Ultimately, the structured 20-week internship allowed students to gain valuable experience in professional roles before transitioning into employment. This structured sequencing reflects Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle, where students progress from concrete experiences to reflective observation, conceptual integration, and active experimentation. Unlike conventional programs that limit industry exposure to final-year internships, YTP embeds multiple industry touchpoints throughout the degree, making professional learning a continuous journey.

Fourth, the program benefited from robust control and coordination mechanisms. Program governance was led by committees that included the Dean, Deputy Deans, Heads of Department, and industry supervisors, ensuring accountability and oversight. Each pathway component had a designated faculty coordinator responsible for placements, mentorship pairings, and feedback monitoring. Standardized rubrics were used for FYP and internship assessments, ensuring fairness and transparency across student evaluations. Student attendance and progress were systematically tracked, and continuous quality improvement (CQI) was driven by feedback loops involving students, faculty, and industry. These measures ensured that YTP maintained consistency and integrity as an institutional initiative rather than a fragmented set of activities.

Fifth, performance management within YTP went beyond academic grading to include recognition, publication, and career outcomes. FYP symposiums served as platforms for evaluating and showcasing student projects, while high-quality outputs were encouraged for journal publications and book chapters. This integration of research dissemination motivated students to produce work that met scholarly standards and contributed to professional identity formation. Students expressed that the opportunity to publish provided a sense of accomplishment and reinforced the value of their work beyond graduation requirements. The use of awards and recognition ceremonies further fostered a culture of excellence and innovation, aligning with best practices in talent management that emphasize recognition as a driver of high performance.

Finally, sustainability emerged as a defining strength of the YTP model. Unlike one-off employability programs, YTP incorporated practices that ensured continuity and long-term relevance. Student-led symposiums cultivated leadership succession by involving junior cohorts in program management. Industry appreciation events reinforced strategic partnerships and encouraged industries to invest continuously in student development. FYP outputs were channelled into journal publications and conference presentations, embedding sustainability into scholarly contributions. Moreover, voluntary internships with NGOs reinforced social responsibility, ensuring that YTP graduates were not only employable but also socially conscious. This long-term orientation reflects Tomlinson's (2017) call for

sustainable employability, which emphasizes building graduate capital that endures across careers in volatile and uncertain labour markets.

In synthesis, the findings demonstrate that YTP aligns with institutional and national visions, leverages strong stakeholder partnerships, provides scaffolded pathways for continuous student development, ensures quality through rigorous coordination, motivates students through performance-based recognition, and sustains long-term relevance through research, leadership succession, and community engagement. Collectively, these elements establish YTP as a replicable best practice framework for higher education institutions seeking to balance academic excellence with industrial relevance and societal responsibility. YTP aligns with both institutional and national visions. Institutionally, it operationalizes Universiti Teknologi Malaysia's mission of nurturing holistic talent and prospering lives through knowledge and innovation, while nationally it responds to the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015–2025 (Higher Education) and the Twelfth Malaysia Plan, both of which emphasize employability, innovation, and global competitiveness. By embedding these aspirations into its design, YTP ensures that students are not only fulfilling degree requirements but also contributing to broader educational and developmental goals, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1** Themes Developed from the Data Collection

Theme	Description	Evidence from YTP
Alignment with Institutional Vision	YTP supports UTM's mission to nurture holistic talents and prosper lives through knowledge and innovation.	Students encouraged to frame projects in real-world terms during CEO attachments and FYP symposiums; testimonials highlighted career clarity (e.g., PDT case).
Stakeholder Involvement	Strong engagement from CEOs, industry supervisors, NGOs, and SMEs ensures learning is relevant and holistic.	Industry mentors provided practical guidance, NGOs broadened their scope to community responsibility.
Planning and Implementation	Structured, progressive design embeds experiential learning across the academic journey.	Year 2 voluntary internships → CEO Attachment → Undergraduate research → FYPs → 20-week internship.
Control and Coordination	Strong governance, oversight, and feedback mechanisms ensure consistency and fairness.	Program committees (Dean, HoDs, industry reps); standardized rubrics; CQI via student and industry feedback.
Performance Management	Goes beyond grading to emphasize recognition, scholarly outputs, and employability outcomes.	High-performing FYPs published as journal articles/chapters; recognition via awards and symposiums.
Sustainability	Designed for continuity and long-term impact beyond one-off initiatives.	Student-led symposiums, industry appreciation events, publication pipelines, NGO engagement.

## Discussions

The findings from the Faculty of Management's Young Talent Pathway (YTP) highlight how a well-structured, multi-stakeholder program can successfully bridge the gap between academic learning and professional readiness. This section discusses the implications of the findings in light of existing literature, drawing connections between employability theory, experiential learning practices, and the broader policy agenda in Malaysian higher education. One of the strongest contributions of YTP is its clear alignment with institutional and national visions for graduate employability. By embedding experiential components throughout the student journey, the program directly supports the goals of the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015–2025 (Higher Education), which calls for future-ready graduates who are globally competitive yet locally grounded (MOHE, 2015). This alignment demonstrates that employability initiatives are most effective when they are not ad hoc or peripheral but instead embedded into the institution's core mission. As Altbach and de Wit (2018) argue, universities that integrate talent development into their strategic plans are better positioned to navigate the pressures of globalization and respond to changing labour market needs. YTP therefore represents not just a faculty-level program but an institutional manifestation of UTM's broader aspiration to be a premier global university.

Stakeholder involvement also emerged as a key factor in achieving success. The integration of industry supervisors, CEOs, NGOs, and faculty into student development processes ensured that YTP delivered a holistic and authentic learning experience. This finding echoes Ankrah and Al-Tabbaa's (2015) systematic review, which found that university-industry collaborations are most effective when stakeholders are treated as co-creators of knowledge rather than peripheral partners. Students in YTP benefited from dual mentorship, where academic supervisors emphasized theoretical rigor while industry mentors stressed practical application. This duality allowed students to experience the "best of both worlds," cultivating graduates who are both academically competent and industry-relevant. The involvement of NGOs and SMEs further expanded the scope of employability to include social responsibility, resonating with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4 on Quality Education and SDG 8 on Decent Work and Economic Growth). In doing so, YTP avoids the risk of reducing employability to narrow corporate readiness and instead positions graduates as well-rounded contributors to society.

The staged planning and implementation of YTP provide another layer of innovation. Unlike traditional programs that concentrate industry engagement in final-year internships, YTP embeds multiple industry touchpoints throughout the degree. This sequencing reflects Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle and supports the notion that employability skills are not developed overnight but cultivated progressively through repeated practice and reflection. By exposing students to voluntary internships in Year 2, leadership shadowing in Year 3, and applied research in their final year, YTP ensures that graduates are not passive recipients of workplace training but active participants in their professional formation. Jackson (2016) emphasized the importance of pre-professional identity in shaping employability, and YTP contributes to this identity formation by offering scaffolded opportunities for students to see themselves as professionals-in-the-making.

The program's robust control and coordination mechanisms further enhance its credibility. Standardized rubrics, CQI processes, and systematic tracking ensured fairness, transparency, and accountability. This governance model reflects Lincoln and Guba's (1985) principles of dependability and confirmability in research, suggesting that quality in employability programs requires institutionalized monitoring rather than informal oversight. In practical terms, such rigorous coordination reassures both students and industry partners that YTP is not a symbolic gesture but a serious institutional commitment to talent development.

Performance management in YTP also deserves attention. Beyond grades, the program emphasized recognition, publication, and employability outcomes. Encouraging students to publish their FYP outputs in journals or present at conferences elevated the stakes of their projects, motivating them to aim for quality that meets scholarly standards. This practice aligns with Jackson's (2021) findings that research dissemination strengthens students' professional identity and enhances employability by positioning them as contributors to knowledge rather than mere consumers. Recognition ceremonies and awards further reinforced a culture of excellence and innovation, echoing Greene's (2020) argument that recognition is a powerful driver of intrinsic motivation and sustained high performance.

Perhaps the most significant theme emerging from the findings is sustainability. Many employability initiatives suffer from being "once-off" interventions that provide short-term benefits but lack continuity. YTP, by contrast, embedded sustainability mechanisms such as student-led symposiums, industry appreciation events, and publication pipelines. These practices ensure that YTP is not dependent on a single cohort or funding cycle but continues to generate value over time. This long-term orientation reflects Tomlinson's (2017) concept of sustainable employability, which emphasizes building graduate capital that endures across multiple career transitions. Moreover, involving junior cohorts in symposium organization ensures leadership succession, while ongoing industry partnerships create a feedback loop that sustains relevance in evolving job markets.

Taken together, the findings position YTP as a best practice framework for higher education institutions seeking to balance academic excellence with industry relevance and social responsibility. The program demonstrates that employability is not a narrow set of technical skills but a holistic ecosystem involving institutional vision, stakeholder collaboration, scaffolded experiential learning, structured governance, recognition of performance, and mechanisms for sustainability. It provides empirical evidence to support the argument that universities must adopt systemic and long-term approaches if they are to prepare graduates for volatile and uncertain labor markets (Johansen, 2017).

The findings raise important implications for policy and practice. For policymakers, YTP demonstrates the value of integrating employability initiatives into institutional strategies, rather than treating them as extracurricular activities. For universities, it highlights the importance of stakeholder partnerships and structured coordination in ensuring quality

and relevance. For employers, it demonstrates that meaningful engagement with universities can yield graduates who are better prepared to contribute from day one. Finally, for students, YTP underscores the value of proactive engagement in opportunities that extend beyond classroom learning, reinforcing the idea that employability is co-constructed through both academic and non-academic experiences. In summary, the discussion reinforces the idea that the Faculty of Management's Young Talent Pathway is not merely a local program but a model with broader applicability in the Malaysian and global higher education landscape.

## Conclusion

The Young Talent Pathway (YTP) at the Faculty of Management, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, demonstrates that preparing graduates for the complexities of today's workforce requires more than traditional classroom learning. It requires a structured, holistic ecosystem that integrates knowledge with practice, connects students with industry and community partners, and sustains their growth beyond graduation. Unlike conventional approaches that only provide industry exposure through final-year internships, YTP offers multiple and progressive entry points into professional life. From voluntary internships in the early years to CEO attachments, undergraduate research opportunities, industry-supervised Final Year Projects, and extended internships, the program creates a continuous journey of development. This design allows students to gradually build confidence, leadership, adaptability, and critical thinking competencies that are increasingly valued in volatile and uncertain work environments. The program's strength lies in the depth of collaboration it fosters. CEOs, industry leaders, NGOs, and academic mentors collaborate as co-creators of learning. Their involvement ensures that student experiences are not limited to abstract theory but are grounded in real-world challenges and solutions. Students themselves have noted that the practical feedback from industry supervisors complements the academic rigour of faculty guidance, giving them a balanced and realistic preparation for their careers. At the same time, community-based internships with NGOs ensure that employability is framed more broadly, encompassing not just career readiness but also social responsibility. This approach reflects a commitment to producing graduates who are not only employable but also capable of making significant contributions to sustainable societal development.

Another notable contribution of YTP is its integration of recognition and performance management into the student journey. Through symposiums, awards, and opportunities for publication, students are encouraged to see their work as valuable contributions to scholarship and practice. This recognition motivates them to strive for excellence, while also positioning them as knowledge producers rather than passive learners. It reinforces the idea that employability is linked to identity formation and confidence, not just the accumulation of skills. Most importantly, YTP has been designed with sustainability in mind. Student-led symposiums ensure leadership succession, while ongoing partnerships with industry guarantee that the program remains relevant to current labor market needs. By encouraging research outputs such as journal articles and book chapters, the program extends its impact beyond immediate cohorts, contributing to institutional credibility and knowledge transfer. This long-term orientation ensures that YTP is not a short-lived initiative but a model that continues to evolve and generate value. In conclusion, the Young Talent Pathway provides clear evidence that employability should not be treated as an isolated outcome or a one-time intervention. It should be built as a culture, integrated into institutional missions, national education goals, and sustainable development priorities. The YTP reveals that when universities incorporate vision, collaboration, experiential learning, recognition, and sustainability into their practices, they produce graduates who are not only ready for the boardroom but also prepared to lead, innovate, and contribute to society. As higher education continues to face global disruptions and new challenges, the Young Talent Pathway offers a powerful blueprint for nurturing holistic, future-ready graduates.

## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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