

Strategic Human Capital Outcomes in Strengthening Research, Publication, and Commercialisation for Global Visibility: The FPN Experience

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the strategic transformation of the Faculty of Accountancy at Universiti Teknologi MARA in enhancing its global visibility through integrated efforts in research, publication, and commercialisation. Aligned with UiTM's aspiration to become a Globally Renowned University by 2025, FPN adopted a human capital-centric strategy that prioritizes academic leadership, a performance-driven culture, and structured institutional planning. Key initiatives—including *Fit to Publish*, *Route to High Impact Publication*, and the *Research Grant Venture*—have significantly improved research grant acquisition, indexed publication output, and commercialisation activities. Notably, FPN recorded a significant increase in research grant value and high-impact publications, and the successful commercialisation of a flagship CSR-fintech project. Furthermore, the faculty demonstrated academic leadership through an increase in research advisory roles and improved global rankings. These outcomes underscore the critical role of strategic human capital investment in elevating institutional reputation and improving MyRA performance. The paper concludes with policy implications and proposes a replicable model for higher education institutions aiming to enhance academic excellence and global competitiveness.

Keywords: Human Capital, Higher Education Management, Research Performance, Academic Leadership, Commercialisation, Publication Strategy

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia's higher education system has been shaped by comprehensive national frameworks, including the National Higher Education Strategic Plan (NHESP) 2007–2020 and the Malaysia Education Blueprint (Higher Education) 2015–2025. These policies emphasize global rankings, research productivity, graduate employability, and academic leadership as key performance areas. Within this context, human capital development has emerged as a foundational pillar, focusing not only on expanding academic capacity but also on enhancing quality through postgraduate training, international collaboration, and a supportive research ecosystem (MOHE, 2015; Yusof, S& Kadir, 2020). Incentives for high-impact publications, entrepreneurial mindsets among academics, and structured talent development programs are integral to this strategic approach (Ismail, Abiddin, & Hassan, 2017).

Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), the largest public university in Malaysia by enrolment and geographic presence, has positioned itself in alignment with these national priorities. With its GRU 2025 vision to become a Globally Renowned University, UiTM underscores the vital role of strategic transformation. Originally founded in 1956 to uplift the socio-economic status of Bumiputera communities, UiTM has evolved into a multi-campus institution with more than 170,000 students across 34 campuses. Recognising the demands of globalisation and the knowledge-based economy, UiTM has committed to four key strategic thrusts under its GRU 2025 agenda namely, research excellence and innovation capacity, internationalisation and global

networking, strategic leadership and governance reform, and human capital transformation. UiTM's commitment to human capital transformation is evident in initiatives such as the Academic Staff Competency Enhancement Program, postdoctoral appointments, structured sabbaticals, and a performance-based promotion system (Mansor & Hamzah, 2022).

Against this backdrop, this paper explores the strategic alignment between UiTM's GRU 2025 roadmap and the FPN's Publication, Research, and Commercialisation (PPP) initiatives. Specifically, it analyses how academic leadership and human capital strategies have shaped a research-intensive culture within the faculty. It further highlights the measurable outcomes achieved in research funding, publication quality, and commercialisation success. By showcasing the FPN experience, this paper contributes a replicable framework for other higher education institutions aiming to strengthen global visibility through academic excellence and human capital investment. The next section, Section 2 presents a review of the relevant literature, followed by Section 3, which outlines the research design. Section 4 discusses the findings, and Section 5 offers concluding remarks and policy recommendations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of strategic human capital development in higher education has gained significant attention as universities strive to enhance research capacity, global competitiveness, and societal impact (Barney, 1991; Teixeira et al., 2013). Within this context, human capital refers to the collective knowledge, skills, experience, and innovative capacity of both academic and administrative staff (OECD, 2019). As knowledge production becomes increasingly central to national economic development, universities are expected to function as engines of innovation—an expectation that necessitates a strategically aligned and highly competent academic workforce (Altbach et al., 2009).

Human capital theory, as formalised by Becker (1964), posits that investments in education and training enhance individual productivity, leading to improved economic outcomes. In the context of higher education, this theory extends to institutions themselves, wherein the recruitment, development, and retention of academic talent directly influence research output, teaching quality, and global rankings (Marginson, 2007). As such, strategic management of academic human capital has become a cornerstone of institutional excellence.

Malaysia's higher education landscape has undergone considerable transformation since the early 2000s, guided by strategic national blueprints such as the National Higher Education Strategic Plan (MoHE, 2007) and the Malaysia Education Blueprint (Higher Education) 2015–2025. These policy frameworks emphasise research excellence, global visibility, graduate employability, and university-industry linkages. Mok (2015) interprets these reforms as part of a broader regional trend toward the marketisation and global benchmarking of Asian higher education. The Blueprint identifies human capital development as one of its key strategic shifts, calling for the cultivation of “talent excellence” through structured academic career pathways, leadership development, and international exposure (MoHE, 2015). UiTM's GRU 2025 roadmap aligns closely with these objectives, positioning academic talent as a critical driver of its ambition to achieve world-class university status.

Globally, world-class universities consistently invest in talent development through performance-based incentives, competitive recruitment, and international talent mobility (Salmi, 2009). Leading institutions such as the National University of Singapore (NUS) and Tsinghua University illustrate how strategic investments in academic staff can rapidly elevate institutional performance and global rankings (Yang, 2016). These examples underscore the importance of aligning human capital strategies with institutional missions to generate long-term research and innovation outcomes.

The literature further emphasises the need to cultivate enabling environments that support academic productivity. These include access to research funding, mentorship programs, robust infrastructure, and global academic networks (Enders & de Weert, 2009). However, critical perspectives caution against over-reliance on performance metrics and short-term outputs, which may incentivise quantity over quality and diminish academic creativity (Altbach, 2015). Additionally, challenges such as contract-based employment,

bureaucratic governance, and brain drain remain prevalent in many developing countries, limiting the sustainability of human capital strategies (Hazelkorn, 2015).

In the Malaysian context, public universities often face structural and resource-based constraints that hinder the implementation of comprehensive human capital strategies. Studies by Ismail et al. (2011) and Idrus, Ismail, and Johari (2016) showed that although policies for academic staff development exist, they are frequently fragmented, inconsistently implemented, and lack long-term integration. Success is contingent upon factors such as leadership commitment, institutional autonomy, and cross-departmental collaboration. UiTM is not an exception to this scenario. There is growing scholarly interest in UiTM's institutional transformation—from a mission-oriented institution serving the Bumiputera population to a research-intensive public university. Studies by Hussin and Ismail (2020) underscored UiTM's increasing emphasis on internationalisation, industry collaboration, and research productivity as strategic priorities under the GRU 2025 agenda. These elements are positioned as essential to enhancing UiTM's global competitiveness, fostering high-impact research, and strengthening university–industry linkages aligned with national and global expectations for higher education institutions. Despite these developments, empirical evaluations of UiTM's human capital programs remain limited, pointing to a gap in the literature that this paper aims to address.

In summary, the literature affirms the critical role of strategic human capital development in enhancing institutional performance within an increasingly competitive global higher education landscape. While Malaysia's policy frameworks have provided a foundation for reform, the success of these initiatives depends heavily on institutional leadership, governance flexibility, and resource allocation. UiTM's GRU 2025 initiative serves as a compelling case for examining how strategic investments in human capital can catalyse institutional transformation in emerging economies.

Research Design

Research Approach

This study employs a qualitative research design, utilising thematic content analysis as the primary methodological approach. Content analysis is widely recognized in qualitative research for its ability to systematically interpret textual data, enabling researchers to uncover latent meanings, patterns, and themes embedded within policy documents, institutional reports, and strategic frameworks (Krippendorff, 2013). This method is particularly valuable in policy and education research, where understanding both explicit and implicit framing is essential (Bowen, 2009).

Given the exploratory and interpretive nature of this study, thematic content analysis is especially appropriate to investigate how strategic human capital development is conceptualised, framed, and operationalised within national higher education policies and institutional strategies like UiTM's *GRU 2025*. Thematic analysis facilitates a flexible, yet rigorous analytic process, enabling the researcher to move inductively from the data to themes, while remaining sensitive to contextual nuances and discursive constructions of human capital transformation (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013).

Data Sources

The study draws on a diverse range of documentary sources, both primary and secondary, that are publicly available or institutionally accessible. These include:

- National Policy Documents
 - *Malaysia Education Blueprint (Higher Education) 2015–2025*
 - *National Higher Education Strategic Plan 2007–2020*
 - Circulars, ministerial speeches, and official policy briefs from the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE)

- Institutional Documents from UiTM
 - *GRU 2025 Strategic Plan*
 - *Annual Reports and Strategic Action Plans (2020–2024)*
 - *UiTM Talent Management Framework* and related internal circulars
- Academic and Grey Literature
 - Peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, and working papers on Malaysian higher education
 - Institutional performance dashboards and internal evaluation reports, where available

The selection of the documents was based on relevance, credibility, and their contribution to understanding the strategic role of human capital development within UiTM and Malaysia's broader higher education reform agenda.

Data Analysis Procedure

Thematic content analysis was conducted through the following iterative steps:

Step 1: All documents were reviewed for relevance and authenticity. An initial reading phase was conducted to develop a broad understanding of recurring themes related to talent management, research development, and institutional transformation.

Step 2: A hybrid coding strategy was applied, combining deductive coding—based on theoretical constructs such as *talent retention*, *research excellence*, and *leadership development*—and inductive coding, which allowed emergent themes to surface organically from the data (e.g., *sabbatical support*, *international hiring*, *bureaucratic constraints*).

Step 3: The codes were grouped into overarching themes that reflect strategic priorities and institutional practices. For instance, codes related to mentoring, postdoctoral training, and research upskilling were consolidated under the theme of “academic capacity enhancement.”

Step 4: Thematic findings were interpreted through the lens of human capital theory and organisational transformation, with comparative reflections on international higher education trends to situate UiTM's experience within a global context.

To enhance the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings, methodological triangulation was employed by cross-validating insights across multiple data sources, including national policy documents, institutional reports, and academic literature (Patton, 1999). This approach allowed for the convergence of evidence from different levels of policy and practice, thereby strengthening the robustness of the thematic analysis. In addition, informal member-checking was conducted through reflective discussions with UiTM academic staff and administrators to validate emerging interpretations and ensure alignment with the lived realities and institutional contexts (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016). These combined strategies were essential in ensuring analytical rigor and contextual relevance in the qualitative inquiry.

FINDINGS

A thematic content analysis of national policy documents and institutional reports identified eight interrelated themes that collectively reflect UiTM's strategic approach to human capital development. These themes demonstrate UiTM's alignment with Malaysia's higher education agenda while highlighting institution-specific initiatives and challenges in pursuing GRU status by 2025. The coding framework used in this analysis is summarised in Table 1.

A central and consistent theme across the analysed documents is UiTM's strategic emphasis on attracting and retaining high-quality academic staff. National policies and institutional plans underscore the importance of increasing the proportion of doctoral-qualified faculty, particularly within research-intensive departments. UiTM's internal strategies include targeted recruitment of PhD holders, fast-track appointment schemes, and international faculty hiring. Initiatives such as the "Academic Acceleration Scheme" and contract-based appointments for postdoctoral researchers reflect a proactive approach to addressing expertise gaps. Nevertheless, persistent challenges—especially in terms of salary competitiveness and brain drain—remain, particularly when competing with more autonomous research universities in the region. In response, UiTM has introduced non-monetary incentives, including research funding, sabbaticals, and mobility grants.

The development of academic capacity through structured professional development is another prominent theme. Institutional reports highlight a range of initiatives, including teaching and learning certifications, research methodology workshops, and coaching for grant applications. UiTM's GRU documents also emphasize the establishment of Centers of Excellence (CoEs) and faculty-based research clusters to promote multidisciplinary collaboration. Postdoctoral training emerged as a recurring sub-theme, viewed as a strategic pathway for cultivating future faculty researchers. However, postdoctoral programs remain underdeveloped, with ongoing challenges related to funding and scalability. There is a growing call for more structured mentorship programs to support early-career academics.

Another key theme involves the implementation of performance-based systems, particularly those linked to research output and grant acquisition. Academic staff are evaluated using a standardized Key Performance Indicator (KPI) framework, which includes metrics related to indexed publications, research grants, postgraduate supervision, and community engagement. While this system has enhanced research productivity in some faculties, concerns have been raised about its heavy reliance on quantitative indicators. Several documents caution that the "publish or perish" culture may undermine academic integrity and discourage engagement in interdisciplinary or long-term research.

Table 1. Coding Framework and Emergent Themes

Main Theme	Sub-Themes / Codes	Description
Talent Acquisition and Retention	- Recruitment of PhD holders- International hiring- Competitive selection	Strategies to attract qualified academic staff, including global talent sourcing
Academic Capacity Enhancement	- Postdoctoral schemes- Research training- Sabbatical programs- Mentoring	Programs that build academic staff capabilities and research productivity
Performance Management and Rewards	- Performance-based promotion- KPIs for publications- Research grants	Incentive structures aligned with performance metrics and institutional goals
Leadership and Succession Planning	- Academic leadership training- Dean/Director pipeline- Strategic governance	Initiatives to nurture future academic leaders and strengthen governance
Internationalisation of Talent	- Staff mobility programs- Global research collaborations- Visiting scholar schemes	Strategies that promote international exposure and academic collaboration
Research-Industry Linkages	- Commercialisation of research- Industry placements- PPP involvement	Human capital strategies that connect research with economic and societal applications
Alignment with National Policies	- GRU 2025 KPIs- MOHE strategic alignment- Talent excellence targets	Institutional initiatives mapped to national higher education policies and targets
Challenges and Constraints	- Funding limitations- Bureaucratic inertia- Balancing teaching and research	Structural and operational barriers to effective human capital development

UiTM's GRU 2025 strategy also prioritises the development of academic leadership. Programs such as the "Young Scholars Leadership Pipeline" and "Executive Leadership in Academia" are designed to prepare mid-career academics for senior roles such as Dean, Director, or Head of Research Center. Internal succession planning documents reveal structured career pathways and competency-based assessments to ensure leadership continuity. Nonetheless, challenges persist in achieving gender balance and broader diversity in leadership

roles. Furthermore, top-down appointment processes may inhibit innovation and the advancement of junior academics with novel ideas.

Internationalisation is framed as a key driver of UiTM's global visibility and research impact. The university has launched multiple initiatives such as the Staff Mobility Program, overseas research fellowships, and strategic partnerships with ASEAN and European universities to facilitate international engagement. Visiting scholar programs and sabbatical leave policies further support both outbound and inbound academic exchanges. However, practical constraints including visa issues, logistical hurdles, and limited funding—have hindered full implementation. Moreover, the concentration of international linkages in a few faculties indicates uneven institutional benefits.

The analysis also highlighted the emerging role of Public-Private Partnerships in human capital development. Institutional plans frequently reference staff industry internships, research commercialisation support, and collaborative curriculum design as mechanisms to bridge academic and industry needs. These partnerships aim to enhance the relevance of academic work and improve graduate employability. However, current partnerships tend to be ad hoc and reliant on individual relationships, lacking institutional frameworks for scalability and sustainability. There is also limited alignment between industry and academia in setting research priorities or investing in long-term innovation

UiTM's GRU 2025 strategic plan shows clear alignment with the *Malaysia Education Blueprint (Higher Education) 2015–2025*, particularly in the areas of talent development, internationalization, and research output. This alignment is both deliberate and strategic, enabling UiTM to leverage national funding mechanisms such as the Fundamental Research Grant Scheme (FRGS) and the Higher Institution Centre of Excellence (HiCoE) program. The university's adoption of outcome-based evaluation systems further reflects its commitment to national human capital development goals, including producing high-quality graduates and globally competitive scholars.

Despite strong institutional ambition and strategic alignment, several constraints impede UiTM's human capital development efforts:

- Funding instability due to shifts in national budget allocations
- Bureaucratic procedures that delay hiring and international collaborations
- Workload imbalances, with academic staff struggling to manage teaching, research, and administrative duties
- Inconsistencies in policy implementation across campuses due to UiTM's decentralized governance model

These constraints suggest that achieving GRU status by 2025 will require not only strategic vision and alignment but also structural reforms, increased institutional autonomy, and sustained investment in academic infrastructure.

Strategic Leadership in Higher Education Management

FPN at UiTM has adopted a data-driven, stakeholder-focused approach to strategic planning, guided by its academic leadership. This approach is encapsulated in the Strategic Action Plan (SAP) 2020–2025, which aligns directly with UiTM's three core strategic pillars: Quality Education, Global Excellence, and Value-Driven Performance. These pillars serve as the foundation for FPN's transformation and its contributions to UiTM's broader Globally Renowned University (GRU) 2025 agenda.

Through the SAP, FPN has operationalized this alignment via three core flagship initiatives aimed at enhancing academic performance and research visibility:

- **Fit to Publish:** This initiative focuses on strengthening staff capacity in academic writing, particularly in manuscript structuring, citation practices, and understanding the editorial standards of indexed journals. It provides tailored workshops, hands-on clinics, and peer review simulation exercises to address common publishing challenges faced by early- and mid-career academics.

- **Route to High Impact Publication:** This targeted strategy is designed to increase the faculty's presence in high-impact Q1 and Q2 journals indexed by Scopus and Web of Science (WoS). It includes publication bootcamps, senior researcher mentoring, and collaborative authorship models, contributing to a measurable increase in indexed publications since 2020.
- **Research Grant Venture:** This initiative facilitates access to national and international research funding through training in grant proposal writing, identification of relevant funding sources, and the promotion of interdisciplinary research clusters. It also provides support for grant tracking, post-award management, and knowledge transfer activities.

Collectively, these initiatives reflect a strategic shift from a compliance-based to a performance-oriented academic culture. The faculty leadership has emphasized collective ownership of the PPP agenda through inclusive planning and transparent performance monitoring. This cultural transformation has been essential in repositioning the faculty's focus from local engagement to global benchmarking. A key finding from the content analysis is FPN's successful transition from a reactive to a proactive research engagement model. Academic staff are no longer passive recipients of top-down directives but have become active contributors in shaping the faculty's research direction. This is evidenced by the growing number of internal collaborations, cross-faculty research proposals, and joint publications.

The faculty's focus on capacity-building has also played a crucial role in normalising a research-driven culture, particularly within a faculty traditionally known for teaching-intensive roles. By demystifying the publishing process and providing structured pathways toward high-impact publication, FPN has successfully lowered the entry barriers for novice researchers. Faculty progress reports indicate significant improvements in journal submission and acceptance rates from 2020 to 2024, especially in the areas of accounting education, public sector governance, and digital auditing. Additionally, the faculty's leadership has institutionalized research and writing culture through structured programming such as sabbatical planning workshops, PPP clinics, and writing retreats. These regular activities provide sustained support, foster internal accountability, and facilitate long-term research planning.

Another major finding is the integration of leadership development with research capacity building. Academic promotion and leadership readiness are now explicitly linked to research productivity and engagement in PPP initiatives. Emerging leaders are identified based not solely on seniority, but also on their success in securing research grants, publishing in indexed journals, and leading interdisciplinary teams. Promotion criteria now include indicators such as grant success rates, principal investigator roles, and participation in international research networks, further aligning research engagement with academic advancement. These developments are supported by a formal mentoring program, where senior academics guide junior staff toward achieving their publication and grant targets. This structured mentoring not only strengthens the faculty's research pipeline but also ensures the transfer of institutional knowledge across academic generations. This dual emphasis on leadership and research is consistent with global best practices in research universities, where leadership succession is closely tied to research leadership and innovation capacity.

Perhaps most significantly, FPN's strategic leadership has successfully initiated a mindset shift among academic staff—from national benchmarks to global aspirations. Faculty members have become increasingly aware of international citation databases, journal impact factors, and the importance of global research networks. This shift is not solely metric-driven but mission-driven, grounded in the belief that UiTM and its faculties can compete internationally. This cultural transformation is further reinforced through recognition mechanisms such as the Dean's Awards for High Impact Research, faculty research showcases, and annual PPP performance audits. These mechanisms not only incentivize research excellence but also cultivate a shared sense of purpose and institutional pride.

Research Performance and Strategic Outcomes

In 2023, FPN at UiTM achieved unprecedented institutional milestones, solidifying its position as a high-performing academic unit within the university. These accomplishments are the direct result of strategic planning, effective resource mobilisation, and the cultivation of a deeply embedded research culture. One of

the most significant outcomes was a 398% increase in research grant value, reaching RM6.81 million in 2023, a remarkable leap from previous years. This growth was distributed across three main funding streams:

- National grants, including the FRGS, PRGS, and TRGS schemes;
- Industry-funded research projects; and
- International collaborations, particularly with ASEAN and European partners.

This surge reflects not only enhanced grant-writing capabilities but also greater alignment between FPN's research priorities and national and industry needs. The *Research Grant Venture* initiative was pivotal in enabling these outcomes by offering structured support in proposal development, compliance review, and partnership facilitation. FPN also recorded a 168% increase in high-impact publications compared to 2022, culminating in 223 outputs, including indexed journal articles, conference proceedings, and book chapters.

A substantial proportion of these were published in Q1 and Q2 journals indexed by Scopus and Web of Science, underscoring the faculty's progress toward global research visibility. Several faculty-wide initiatives contributed to this surge in scholarly productivity:

- Mini Publication Sabbatical (MPS): A short-term release scheme that enables academics to dedicate time to writing and submitting manuscripts without teaching obligations.
- Editing & Formatting Hub: An internal service offering pre-submission review, language editing, and formatting to enhance submission quality and reduce rejection rates.
- Yuran Penerbitan Artikel (YPA) Fund: A dedicated fund to support publication and processing fees for articles accepted in high-impact journals.

These mechanisms addressed logistical and financial barriers to publication, significantly improving both the quality and acceptance rate of FPN-authored manuscripts. As a result, FPN achieved a publication-to-staff ratio of 2.1, placing it among the top three faculties at UiTM. This metric not only reflects robust research output but also contributes meaningfully to UiTM's *Malaysian Research Assessment (MyRA)* score and global rankings.

A landmark achievement in 2023 was the commercialisation of the i-Asnaf Act project, a fintech innovation that integrates *zakat* distribution with digital finance platforms. Developed through the Talent Cluster for Islamic Finance and Technology, this interdisciplinary initiative demonstrates FPN's capacity to combine academic insight with industry relevance. Collaborations with PERNAS (Perbadanan Nasional Berhad) and TERAS Teknologi enabled the pilot implementation of i-Asnaf Act in selected communities. This innovation aligns with UiTM's commercialisation KPIs and represents a matured capacity for applied research with measurable socio-economic impact. More importantly, the i-Asnaf Act stands as a model of CSR-driven innovation, promoting financial inclusion through Islamic social finance, and elevating FPN's visibility within both academic and industry spheres.

At the core of these achievements is FPN's Talent Cluster model, a strategic structuring of faculty into thematic research groups based on domain expertise, including:

- Sustainability and Governance
- Islamic Finance and Fintech
- Public Sector Accountability
- Digital Auditing and Analytics

These clusters foster interdisciplinary collaboration, peer mentorship, and knowledge sharing. They also enhance competitiveness in multi-authored and multi-institutional research bids. Each cluster is guided by senior mentors, aligned with specific KPIs, and embedded within the faculty's leadership development and succession planning frameworks.

The Talent Cluster model has improved internal coordination, reduced research redundancies, and fostered intellectual synergy across departments and research centers. This structure is not only instrumental in driving

productivity but also serves as a mechanism for institutional continuity and innovation. Taken together, the outcomes of 2023 signify a paradigm shift in how FPN defines, executes, and measures academic excellence. These achievements are not isolated events but the result of systemic, faculty-wide transformation grounded in strategic alignment, academic leadership, and evidence-based planning. Furthermore, FPN's accomplishments align with national higher education priorities, particularly:

- Strengthening Malaysia's position in the knowledge economy through applied research;
- Advancing university-industry collaboration; and
- Enhancing the global reputation of Malaysian public universities.

In this regard, FPN's 2023 performance transcends internal benchmarks, offering a replicable model of institutional transformation for faculties across the Global South, where building research capacity and cultivating a performance culture are critical to succeeding in competitive academic ecosystems.

Academic Leadership and Talent Development

A pivotal element of the FPN's strategic transformation is its deliberate and structured cultivation of academic leadership—both as a core competency and as a cultural ethos. Recognising that sustainable institutional performance relies not only on research output but also on the quality, vision, and influence of academic leaders, FPN has embedded a series of initiatives aimed at rewarding excellence, mentoring emerging scholars, and linking academic talent to global networks.

In 2023, FPN recorded a 267% increase in appointments of academic staff as national research advisors, reflecting growing external recognition of the faculty's intellectual leadership and its influence on national policy agendas. These appointments demonstrate the increasing credibility of FPN academics as thought leaders, with faculty members serving ministries, government-linked companies (GLCs), and industry consortia as expert advisors in areas including financial governance, Islamic social finance, and environmental, social, and governance (ESG) compliance. Concurrently, the faculty reported a 42% increase in visiting professor roles and international academic appointments, with FPN staff actively engaged in research programs and postgraduate supervision at partner universities in Indonesia, the United Kingdom, and Australia. These global academic roles elevate individual scholarly profiles while also strengthening UiTM's international visibility and research collaboration capacity.

Several FPN academics were also featured in the World Scientist and University Rankings (AD Scientific Index), receiving high scores in H-index, i10-index, and citation impact. This recognition underscores FPN's growing research excellence and its success in fostering a globally competitive academic environment. Together, these developments signify a strategic shift toward distributed academic leadership, a model where authority, influence, and responsibility are shared across multiple levels of the academic hierarchy. By decentralizing leadership functions, FPN has empowered mid-career and early-career scholars to take on active roles in research, innovation, and academic governance.

This distributed leadership approach is reinforced through several institutional mechanisms:

- The Research Champions Programme, which identifies high-performing researchers and pairs them with junior faculty to co-lead activities such as grant applications, scholarly publications, and industry collaborations.
- The Talent Cluster Development Model, which encourages collective responsibility for performance outcomes within thematic research areas, including digital governance, sustainability reporting, and Shariah-compliant innovation.

These initiatives serve dual purposes. First, they function as succession pipelines, preparing future department heads, research directors, and principal investigators. Second, they embed a performance-oriented culture, aligning mentorship, recognition, and promotion pathways with tangible scholarly contributions. FPN's approach to academic leadership goes beyond traditional human capital strategies; it reflects a redefinition of the faculty's institutional identity. Leadership is increasingly conceptualised as an academic function grounded

in research distinction, peer recognition, and strategic engagement—not merely as administrative assignment. This cultural evolution directly supports UiTM's GRU 2025 mission, aligning faculty-level leadership structures with international academic norms. Moreover, FPN's investment in leadership visibility and cross-border academic engagement enhances its attractiveness for future research collaborations, academic mobility programs, and international benchmarking exercises. These leadership outcomes contribute significantly to improved performance in MyRA indicators and to the faculty's rising profile within regional and global academic networks.

Institutional Impact and Policy Implications

This study also shows that FPN at UiTM exemplifies how targeted human capital investment, when combined with performance-driven leadership and strategic alignment, can yield transformative outcomes at both faculty and institutional levels. FPN's experience underscores the effectiveness of integrating leadership development, talent cultivation, and performance metrics to foster a sustainable research culture and institutional excellence.

The impact of FPN's integrated human capital strategy is evident across multiple dimensions of performance:

- Increased global visibility, reflected in the faculty's growing participation in international research collaborations, academic appointments abroad, and representation in global rankings such as the AD Scientific Index and UI Green Metrics.
- Improved performance in global rankings and national evaluations, notably through enhanced contributions to UiTM's standing in the Malaysian Research Assessment (MyRA) system. FPN has played a key role in advancing MyRA indicators related to research output, internationalization, and human capital development, thereby strengthening UiTM's national competitiveness and international profile.
- Enhanced engagement with industry and community stakeholders, as evidenced by successful commercialisation projects such as the i-Asnaf Act and expanded involvement in policy advisory roles. These collaborations have not only increased the societal relevance of academic research but also opened new channels for research funding and knowledge transfer.

Collectively, these outcomes affirm that investing in academic talent—beyond infrastructure and technology—can deliver measurable institutional returns when embedded within a strategic performance framework. From a higher education policy perspective, FPN's case highlights several critical imperatives for institutional leaders, government agencies, and policymakers:

1. Human capital should be treated as a long-term asset rather than a one-off intervention. FPN's structured development programs including mentorship pipelines, sabbaticals, and editorial support hubs—demonstrate how continuous professional development can be institutionalized to sustain academic productivity.
2. FPN's success in publication and research grant acquisition is closely linked to reward mechanisms that recognize and incentivize scholarly contributions. Initiatives such as the YPA fund and competitive internal grant schemes have promoted accountability, encouraged engagement, and lowered barriers to high-impact publishing.
3. Embedding research leadership into succession planning, faculty appointments, and recognition systems has enabled the creation of a distributed leadership model. Programs like the *Research Champions Programme* and *Talent Cluster Development* ensure that emerging academic leaders are groomed with a long-term institutional vision in mind.

These efforts culminated in a significant institutional milestone when FPN was honoured at the 2023 UiTM Excellence Awards with the Top Faculty for Globally Marketable Academic Talent distinction. This recognition not only validates FPN's strategic direction but also reflects the faculty's success in embedding research excellence and academic leadership into its core institutional identity. More than just an award, this accolade serves as a symbolic and strategic signal, demonstrating to internal and external stakeholders alike that academic talent development and performance excellence are measurable, replicable, and achievable through coherent strategy, sustained investment, and collective commitment.

CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the strategic transformation of the FPN at UiTM, driven by a data-informed, stakeholder-engaged approach to human capital development and institutional alignment. Anchored in UiTM's Strategic Action Plan (SAP) 2020–2025 and aligned with national higher education priorities, FPN has operationalized its commitment to research excellence, global competitiveness, and value-driven academic performance through flagship initiatives such as *Fit to Publish*, *Route to High Impact Publication*, and *Research Grant Venture*. The findings illustrate that academic leadership, when strategically aligned with institutional benchmarks and national aspirations, can catalyse tangible performance gains. FPN's 2023 milestones including a 398% increase in research grant value, a 168% rise in indexed publications, and the successful commercialisation of a CSR-fintech innovation (i-Asnaf Act)—are not merely quantitative indicators of success. They represent a deeper cultural shift toward research engagement, accountability, and global benchmarking. At the heart of this transformation is FPN's capacity to foster collective ownership, institutionalize research infrastructure, and cultivate academic talent through structured mechanisms such as the Mini Publication Sabbatical (MPS), the Editing & Formatting Hub, and thematic Talent Clusters. These interventions have helped normalise research participation, narrow performance gaps across academic ranks, and stimulate interdisciplinary collaboration.

This study affirms that strategic human capital development—when embedded within an enabling ecosystem of academic leadership and performance culture—can drive sustainable excellence, even in faculties with traditionally teaching-centric orientations. FPN's experience offers valuable lessons for peer institutions across Malaysia and other contexts in the Global South aiming to enhance research output, secure competitive funding, and strengthen global academic visibility. As UiTM advances its goal of becoming GRU by 2025, the FPN case underscores how faculty-level innovation, leadership, and performance alignment serve as critical levers of institutional and national transformation. The evidence suggests that UiTM is making deliberate and structured efforts to position human capital development at the core of institutional advancement. Its alignment with national education strategies, investment in leadership development, and integration of performance metrics reflect global trends in higher education reform. Nevertheless, several challenges, both internal and systemic—must be addressed to fully realise the GRU 2025 vision. These include issues of funding stability, governance flexibility, and equitable resource distribution across campuses.

In conclusion, UiTM's case offers broader insights for universities in emerging economies. Strategic human capital development must be holistic, combining recruitment with sustained talent nurturing, retention, and leadership succession. It must be supported by adaptive governance structures and inclusive, mission-driven academic cultures that collectively enable institutions to thrive in a competitive global academic landscape.

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