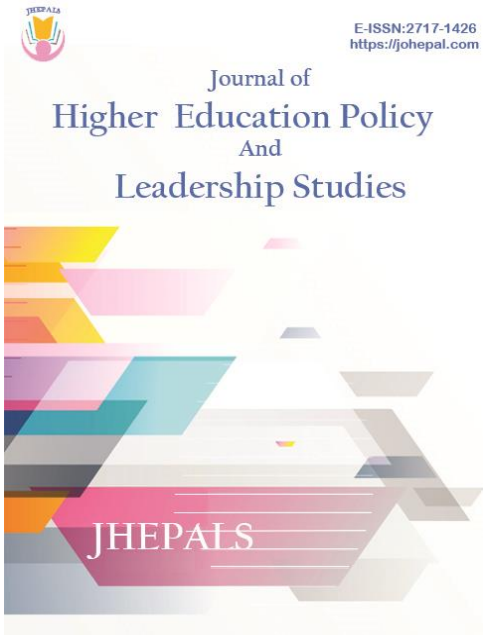
Journal of
Higher Education Policy
And
Leadership Studies

JHEPALS (E-ISSN: 2717-1426)

https://johepal.com

The Role of Higher Education Leadership in Developing Human Capital and Future of Jobs In ASEAN: A Study on Indonesia's Universities



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Article Received	Article Accepted	Published Online
2023/12/05	**2024/06/12**	**2024/06/30**

Cite article as:

Akbari, T. T., Muljadi, B., Maulana, D., & Pratomo, R. R. (2024). The role of higher education leadership in developing human capital and future of jobs In ASEAN: A study on Indonesia's universities. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Leadership Studies*, *5*(2), 36-51.
https://dx.doi.org/10.61186/johepal.5.2.36

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[DOI: 10.61186/johepal.5.2.36]

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E-ISSN: 2717-1426
Volume: 5 Issue: 2
pp. 36-51
DOI:
10.61186/johepal.5.2.36

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Abstract

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) recognizes universities as crucial drivers of progress, as per the 2015 Kuala Lumpur Declaration. However, graduates often face hurdles in securing employment, underscoring the need for universities to function as facilitators of professional growth and societal integration. It is incumbent upon these institutions to equip young talents with relevant proficiencies, enabling them to contribute meaningfully to their nations. Enhancing the capabilities of human resources nurtured by higher education stands as a significant asset poised to elevate Indonesia's development. This research aims to explore the leadership role within higher education in cultivating human capital and influencing employment dynamics in the ASEAN context, with a particular focus on Indonesian universities. Through a comprehensive literature review and qualitative analysis of interviews conducted with university leaders, the study delves into the challenges and prospects facing higher education institutions in preparing students for the evolving demands of the labor market. The paper argues that adept leadership is crucial in addressing these challenges while fostering innovation and collaboration among stakeholders. By prioritizing the development of human capital, Indonesian universities can wield considerable influence in shaping ASEAN's future employment landscape.

Keywords: Higher Education Leadership; Human Capital; College Leaders; Indonesia Higher Education

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[DOI: 10.61186/johepal.5.2.36]

Introduction

In Southeast Asia, especially Indonesia, higher education remains a crucial foundation for society, as it plays a significant role in enhancing their future opportunities. Within the Southeast Asian region, tertiary education reaches approximately 20 million individuals (Lau, 2021). In Indonesia, study from Indonesian Political Indicators in 2022 revealed that 82.1% of parents aspire for their children to pursue higher education following completion of high school or vocational high school (Bayu, 2022). This indicates that there is an expectation for universities to enhance people's lives. However, in recent times, concerns have been raised regarding the alignment of tertiary institutions with contemporary demands. In city of Malang, Indonesia, for instance, out of 34,000 graduates and diploma holders, 8,500 individuals are unemployed (Danin, 2023). Similarly, in South Sumatra province, 14.13% of graduates and diploma holders remain unemployed (Elko, 2022). Based on BPS data for 2022, Indonesia records 673,485 graduates and 159,490 diploma holders with unemployment status (Kusnandar, 2023).

This statistic is particularly alarming, considering that college graduates are generally anticipated to have superior employment prospects. Moreover, the number of graduates far exceeds the availability of job opportunities. Nizam, the Acting Director General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology, stated that each year Indonesia produces 1.8 million graduates and diploma holders (Hapsari, 2023). In August 2022, JobStreet found that there were 39,842 vacancies available, whereas the total number of active job seekers at the end of August stood at 560,994 (Antara, 2022). The Head of Human Capital at PT Praweda Ciptakarsa delineated the formidable task of identifying suitable candidates, emphasizing the imperative alignment between the capabilities of prospective employees and the organizational requisites (Caesaria & Kasih, 2022).

The advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) also presents a significant issue, as it is expected to eventually eliminate numerous occupations. Su (2018) asserts that AI has the capacity to drastically alter the economy by automating a wide range of employment functions, which could result in the loss of millions of jobs. AI capacity to significantly disrupt labor markets is incontrovertible, affecting workers across various professions and skill levels in both the short and medium terms (Korinek & Stiglitz, 2019).

Considering the 2015 Kuala Lumpur Declaration, in which regional leaders emphasized the critical role that universities play as catalysts for advancing the ASEAN agenda, this article highlights the necessity for universities to sincerely accept this mandate and acknowledge the critical role that higher education plays in enhancing human capital.

Literature Review

Higher education plays a crucial role in enhancing the quality of human resources by developing soft skills and hard skills. Despite the crucial role of higher education institutions in improving human quality, there is a global trend of new graduates experiencing unemployment. According to Tran (2015), underemployment is caused by three factors: an outdated curriculum, traditional teaching methods, and the absence of career guidance.

Higher education institutions must revamp their teaching methods, curricula, and operational practices to address these challenges. Leadership in higher education involves steering institutions to adapt to changing conditions effectively. Leaders in this sector are

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responsible for adjusting organizational operations as necessary. Effective higher education leaders proactively develop innovative strategies and remain acutely aware of the significance and impact of their actions (Black, 2015). Srivastava et al. (2023) assert that higher education leaders can boost faculty confidence in digital teaching and research through strategic initiatives that streamline resources and integrate technology. By empowering employees, fostering innovation, and adopting new digital methods, they create a culture of calculated risk-taking, which boosts digital self-efficacy.

Thus, this research seeks to address three pivotal inquiries: 1) Identifying challenges encountered by Indonesian universities in equipping graduates with relevant skills for the job market; 2) Exploring how higher education leadership in Indonesia can facilitate innovation and collaboration with industry partners to ensure students are prepared for future employment in the ASEAN region; and 3) Proposing strategies for universities to strengthen and prepare human capital effectively.

Research Methodology

For this study, the author used qualitative approach. This choice is rooted in the objective of qualitative research, which aims to elucidate and interpret the complexities of the world (Renjith et al., 2021). "It investigates local knowledge and understanding of a given program, people's experiences, meanings and relationships, and social processes and contextual factors that marginalize a group of people" (Mohajan, 2018, p. 23). Researchers use interviews and literature reviews as data collection techniques. "Interviews give the most direct and straightforward approach to gathering detailed and rich data regarding a particular phenomenon" (Barrett & Twycross, 2018, p. 63). The authors chose semi-structured interviews because it is versatile and flexible (Kallio et al., 2016).

Researchers interviewed four individuals: a university leader, two college professors, and a policymaker (the acting Head of LLDIKTI III). These interviewees were selected for their qualified perspectives and expertise on Indonesia's higher education landscape, particularly in the DIKTI III region. Region III was chosen for the study due to its quality disparities.

The interviews were conducted via Zoom, and the author explained that the interview statements will be incorporated into the author's research. The resource person also agreed with the author's aims and objectives. The author recorded the results of the interview via smartphone and the recording feature on Zoom. Following the interview and recording process, the author transcribed the interviews using Microsoft Excel, categorizing statements based on thematic content, which will be included in the analysis results. Grouping statements according to themes is a standard practice in qualitative research. Thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), involves reviewing qualitative data, identifying recurring patterns or themes, and interpreting their significance in relation to research questions. The process involves familiarizing oneself with the data, identifying themes, and conducting final analysis to draw conclusions.

Regarding data analysis, Bingham (2023) outlined five stages for analyzing qualitative data: compiling, sorting, understanding, interpreting, and explaining. During the data analysis process, the coding procedure will remain flexible to ensure accurate interpretation and categorization of codes, thereby enhancing the precision of data presentation and

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explanation. Additionally, the author has incorporated secondary data from prior research to enrich the analysis of the primary data collected.

Results and Discussion

Employability and Higher Education Leadership Complexity Challenges

Jamaludin et al. (2020) highlighted several challenges preventing Southeast Asia universities from achieving global status, including institutional financial capacity and managerial readiness. In Thailand, universities face difficulties in promoting and maintaining the quality of education and financial stability (Scott & Guan, 2022). Meanwhile, in Vietnam, the challenges primarily revolve around coordination and collaboration at the government level, as well as the university financial capacity (Ryu & Nguyen, 2021).

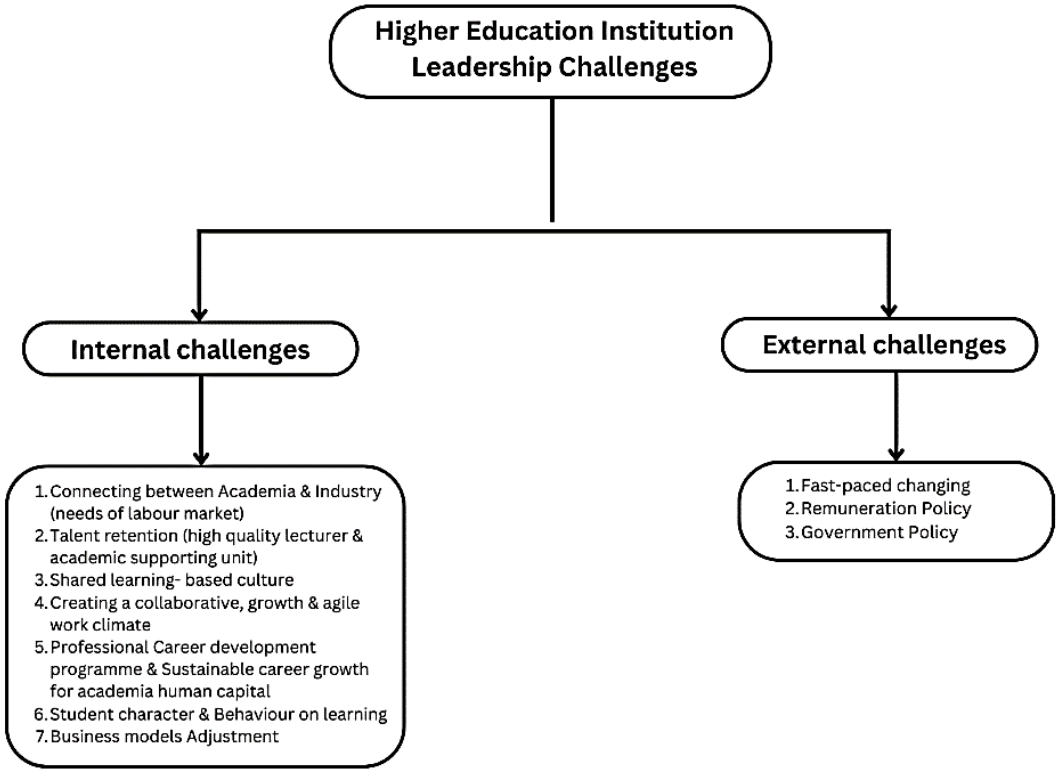


Figure 1. Higher Education Challenges (from author's primary data)

Indonesia also encounters comparable challenges affecting universities in Thailand and Vietnam. In Figure 1, the authors identified several challenges encountered by higher education leaders. One of the primary challenges is establishing connections between universities and industries to facilitate access to employment opportunities. Promsit (2019) identifies two causes contributing to this issue: a deficiency in information necessary for making informed career decisions, and insufficient resources provided by high schools to support students in this regard.

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Concurrently, universities grapple with talent retention issues. The scarcity of qualified academic staff is a concern, with only 2.61% of lecturers holding the title of Professor (Larasati, 2023). This was alluded to by Professor S, Professor at a university in Indonesia:

> "Internally, tertiary institutions face a significant challenge in retaining or improving their highly skilled and proficient human resources. This challenge is exacerbated by intense competition from both the industrial sector and other educational institutions, which frequently provide more attractive remuneration packages." (Professor S)

The scarcity of talent within universities impedes the development of a collaborative learning culture. This challenge became particularly pronounced during the pandemic when higher education institutions had to adopt technology extensively. "The pandemic has necessitated the largest and quickest transformation of pedagogic and assessment practice ever seen in contemporary universities" (Brammer & Clark, 2020, p. 454). Adedoyin and Soykan (2023) emphasize the importance of meticulous planning to facilitate the transition to online learning. However, there are several challenges, including lack of infrastructure and technological understanding and inadequacies in human capital competence (Akbari & Pratomo, 2022). Professor D assert the lag in teaching staff's adaptation to the swift pace of technological advancements.

The universities also face the imperative of adapting to the distinctive characteristics of Generation Z, which differ significantly from those of previous generations. As per the 2022 Indonesia Digital Literacy Status survey, 35% of Generation Z individuals spend over six hours daily on the internet (Kominfo & Katadata, 2022). Generation Z is a generation of creators, some of whom develop digital content and share it in many media (Hernandez-de-Menendez et al., 2020). The character of Generation Z creates new challenges and opportunities for educators to recalibrate their teaching methods.

In addition to the aforementioned challenges, Professor M articulated that higher education faces a paradigmatic dilemma: Is human development the responsibility of the government, universities, or an individual matter? Additionally, Rosalina et al. (2022) found that college costs are escalating, making it increasingly challenging for parents to afford their children's higher education, especially since salary increases are not keeping pace with education inflation.

However, the sustainability of higher education institutions is greatly influenced by external factors, particularly government policies. At the same time, "Government were under ongoing pressure, especially from middle class families, to facilitate the growth of higher education until saturation was reached, using both expanded supply and financial support for participation" (Marginson, 2016, p. 259). Consequently, addressing the challenges plaguing higher education in Indonesia and Southeast Asia necessitates a comprehensive solution, with leadership playing an indispensable role. Furthermore, Indonesia was ranked 96th out of 176 countries in the 2020 Human Capital Index. Additionally, several ASEAN countries, including Cambodia (118), the Philippines (103), Laos, and Myanmar (120), also exhibited low scores on the human capital index (World Bank,

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2020). These findings emphasize the critical need for transformative initiatives in higher education.

The Significance of Strategic Leadership

Akbari & Pratomo (2022) proposed six roles for implemeting transformation in higher education: 1) develop a holistic transformation framework, 2) equip members with the necessary and adequate capabilities, 3) foster a culture of change and progressive thinking, 4) restructure organizational systems, 5) enhance cross-sector collaboration for infrastructure development, and 6) develop a new mindset to ensure universities relevance. Regarding mindset, the Acting Head of the Institution of LLDIKTI Region III emphasized the importance of forward-thinking:

> "We need to anticipate our position in the next four to five years by preparing a blueprint and roadmap. College leaders must exhibit agility, avoiding fundamental errors and embracing rapid innovation." (Dr. L)

Research conducted by Mascareño et al. (2020) illustrated that visionary leaders have a significant impact on fostering creativity and innovation by aligning goals. It is imperative for every higher education leader in Southeast Asia, particularly Indonesia, to develop a comprehensive strategic plan. Organizations that embrace a growth mindset will motivate their employees to develop abilities, mutual learning, and perceive failure as a learning process (Canning et al, 2020). Professor D recommends that educators cultivate a growth mindset to initiate higher education transformative process.

> "(Starting from leaders), all lecturers and educational staff are encouraged to cultivate a growth mindset through ongoing and consistent learning processes or workshops." (Professor D)

Transformative higher education leadership is relevant today due to their multi-layer impact on the organization. Figure 2 illustrates the pivotal role of higher education leaders in enhancing human capital by improving various aspects such as faculty expertise, research and innovation, teaching and pedagogical skills, diversity and inclusion, professional development, institutional culture, alumni network, and industry connections. These elements must be strengthened for Indonesian higher education to become globally competitive, especially in the ASEAN region.

Dr. L urges higher education administrators to implement a forward-thinking curriculum that accounts for future requirements in light of these difficulties. In response, the Indonesian government, through the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbud-ristek), introduced the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) initiative. This curriculum aims to equip students with the skills needed to excel in the industrial sector. Central to the MBKM perspective is the belief that a quality curriculum maximizes graduates' employability in the business and industrial sectors, while facilitating their seamless integration into the informal job market (Kodrat, 2021).

Curriculum improvements should align with instructors' teaching capabilities and pedagogical methods, catering to both in-person and remote instruction formats. From the

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author perspective, to enhance teachers' instructional capabilities, a comprehensive strategy is essential, incorporating engaging and interactive teaching methods. Implementing these principles enables educators to assess mastery across a spectrum of competencies within their field. In addition, Dr. L emphasizes the need for universities to bolster governance to ensure compliance with national standards and strive for excellence.

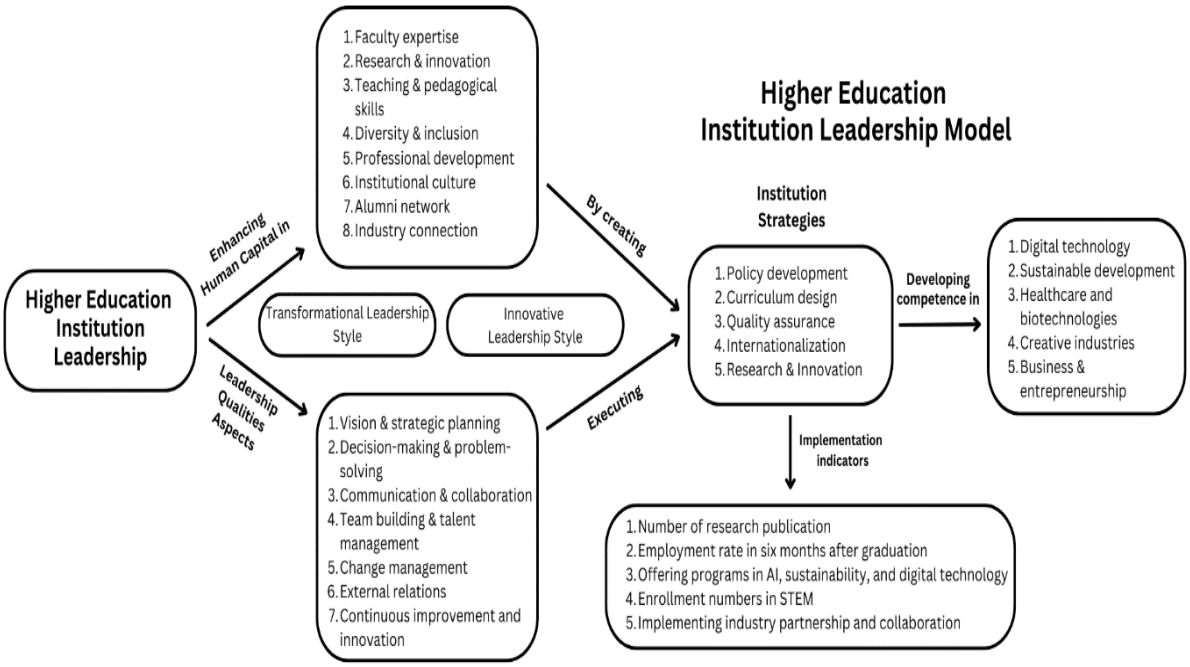


Figure 2. Higher Education Institution Leadership Model (from author's primary data)

Dr. L also highlights government initiatives aimed at enhancing the efficiency of the university sector. Over the years, the government has consolidated 800 private universities into 230, with plans to further merge 330 private universities into 70 entities. It is anticipated that this combination will simplify university operations. Nonetheless, universities must also undertake strategic planning to enhance higher education performance comprehensively. To bolster human capital within universities, Professor D emphasizes the importance of remaining adaptable to changes prompted by the external environment.

Innovating for Human Capital Enhancement

In Southeast Asia, there is significant potential for rapid growth in the digital economy. Reports from Google, Temasek, and Bain and Company 2021, the value of ASEAN's digital economy in 2025 will reach 360 billion dollars (Bain & Company, 2021). ASEAN will also move to increase green jobs amid global demands. Green jobs are a priority that many ASEAN leaders pay attention to. According to Bain and Company, in 2020, developing a green economy in Southeast Asia could provide up to $1 trillion in annual economic opportunities by 2030 (Hardcastle & Mattios, 2020). The country can effectively harness the potential of

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the digital economy with competent and expert human capital. Therefore, it is deemed important to have high-quality human to capitalize the opportunity, and these responsibilites lies on the higher education.

Transforming higher education demands continuous effort and multilevel leadership commitment with a unified vision for reform. Klempin and Karp (2018) stated that transformation requires several things, namely a shared commitment to reform and goals and integration between leadership at the multilevel. Higher education leaders need to focus on something important, as Professor M emphasizes:

> "Focus on core values and principles. We need to prioritize skill development and place consciously effort to nurture young people. We only have one opportunity to foster young people development." (Professor M)

Professor D exemplifies these approach at Petra University by revitalizing a culture of discussion among lecturers and educational staff, fostering the exchange of perspectives and the accumulation of new knowledge. Similarly, the metamorphosis narrative of IPB (Bogor Agricultural University) in Indonesia provides insightful information. Akbari and Pratomo (2022) explained how IPB initiated the transformation by establishing the Directorate of Information and Digital Transformation under new leadership. This directorate facilitates the integration of information systems across all units within the university.

Figure 3 highlights that the transformation of higher education must encompass the curriculum, a fundamental aspect of learning in tertiary institutions. Professor D advocates for the development of students' hard skills, soft skills, and the inculcation of national values. He recommends that teamwork and interdisciplinary collaboration be given top priority in student activities. Meanwhile, Professor M underscores the imperative for young individuals to cultivate essential abilities essential for success in the technological era:

> "We must promote the cultivation of hindsight (reflecting and interpreting past events), insight (analyzing and understanding current situations), and foresight (using knowledge to make projections into the future). Many colleges primarily emphasize hindsight alone. Therefore, there is a need for a curriculum that integrates hindsight, insight, and foresight." (Professor M)

Professor M also emphasizes the importance of creating dynamic classroom environments that foster two-way dialogue between students and lecturers. Nicol et al. (2014) research indicates that incorporating feedback reviews engages students in evaluative judgment, promotes reflection, and empowers them to take control of their learning process. The MBKM program initiated by the government exemplifies the efficacy of these principles. As noted by Professor Nizam, nearly 500,000 students have participated in the MBKM curriculum by the end of 2022. For MBKM alum, the waiting time for getting the job is 2.8 months, and their first income reaches 2-2.5 times the national wage (Napitupulu, 2022).

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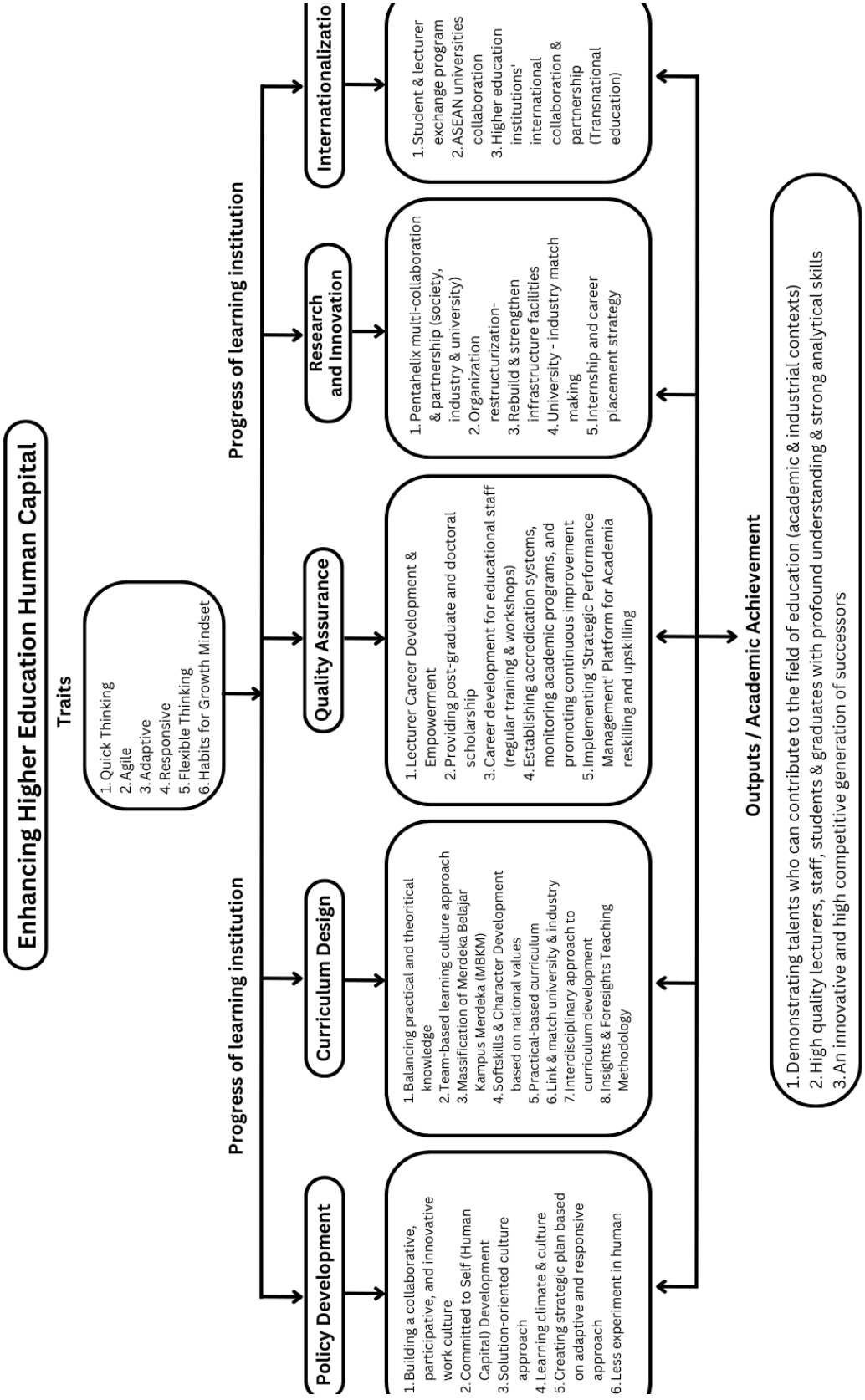


Figure 3. Enhancing Higher Education Human Capital (from author's primary data)

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Curriculum improvements must be complemented by enhancements in teaching quality, service delivery, and personnel development. Professor S highlights the significance of investing in the professional development of lecturers and education staff to nurture their potential. Acquiring true skills goes beyond traditional qualifications and requires ongoing reskilling and upskilling efforts, as highlighted by McKinsey & Company (2023). For instance, Sam Ratulangi University collaborated with the Open University to conduct a Training of Trainers program aimed at enhancing lecturers' abilities in online learning (Muhammad, 2022).

In addition to enhancing the capacity of lecturers and educational staff, universities must prioritize providing ample opportunities for students to gain exposure to the industrial world. Collaborative initiatives like the Markija Internship Program, organized by Madiun State Polytechnic in partnership with Markija Berdaya, facilitate internships for Indonesian vocational students in prestigious companies abroad, such as Skoda Transportation in the Czech Republic (Tempo.co, 2023).

Apart from enhancing the capabilities of educators and students, universities must foster an innovative research and development environment for their faculty. This requires restructuring organizational, which includes revitalizing infrastructure, refining funding mechanisms, and facilitating collaborative research with external stakeholders. Moreover, “Universities are centres of innovation and technology transfer, and they play a particularly strong role in the countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) with developing technology programs” (Chaipongpati et al., 2022., p. 846). Universities must fulfill this role effectively to enhance human quality.

The Indonesian government acknowledges the necessity of fostering an innovative research and development ecosystem within universities. Consequently, it has initiated programs like Kedaireka, a platform aimed at promoting collaboration between universities and industries for conducting applied research. Over the past three years, the number of users of the Kedaireka platform has increased yearly. In 2021, there are 18,337 college students. Then as of February 2023, the number has nearly tripled, namely 45,671. This growth underscore Kedaireka popularity and the benefits it provides to universities in terms of research collaboration opportunities. For instance, Mulawarman University partnered with PT. Swadaya Putra Jaya (Mesra Group) to develop educational tourism products for the Capital City of the Archipelago (IKN) (Fairoussaniy, 2022).

In addition to fostering a research ecosystem that bridges universities and industry, international exposure is crucial for universities to elevate the caliber of human capital in research, innovation, and curriculum development. The Acting Head of the Institution of LLDIKTI Region III said that the government has taken numerous initiatives to facilitate international exposure for Indonesian universities:

> “We have embarked on a project involving Indonesian universities and Singapore's Nanyang Technological University, collaborating with four major universities in Indonesia on an ambitious project valued at 60 million dollars. The aim of this collaboration is to stimulate innovation and foster meaningful partnerships.” (Dr. L)

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> "We are also inviting foreign campuses to facilitate collaboration and provide affordable education options. Monash University is already established in BSD. This year, King's College London will be in Surabaya, Deakin and Lancaster in Bandung, and Western Sydney University will soon enter Indonesia as well." (Dr. L)

"Providing opportunities for experiences with communities of different backgrounds and views can enable individuals to develop values and attitudes to reform society to become more sustainable and internationalized" (Ramaswamy et al., 2021, p. 393). In Indonesia, universities are actively pursuing internationalization initiatives tailored to their context. For example, the Faculty of Engineering at the University of Indonesia has established a collaboration with the University of Birmingham to offer double-degree programs for bachelor's and master's degrees (Nurmansyah, 2023) Similarly, Sultan Agung Islamic University (Unissula) welcomed 54 international students across undergraduate, master's, and doctoral levels as part of their strategy to elevate their global standing (Imanulhaq, 2023).

In summary, enhancing human capital across various dimensions aims to empower tertiary institutions to effectively educate students, enabling them to excel in their respective fields and compete globally in the industrial landscape. Successful education outcomes not only foster alumni loyalty but also contribute to the overall quality enhancement of the institution. Trust and commitment are the two main keys to the involvement and loyalty of university alumni (Snijders et al., 2019). The commitment to advancing human capital in higher education can catalyze improvements in the institution's overall quality and competitiveness.

Conclusion

There is an urgent need to enhance the quality of higher education across various dimensions, encompassing curriculum, teaching methodologies, facilities, infrastructure, and faculty capabilities. The higher education leadership model proposed in this research can serve as a roadmap for current higher education leaders, offering guidance for initiating transformative changes. This model can serve as a guide for higher education leaders to initiate transformative changes. Collaboration among all stakeholders is essential to enhance the capabilities of young people, enabling them to actively contribute to Indonesia, ASEAN, and the global community.

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Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declare that the there are no conflicts of interest.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not for profit sectors.

Human Participants

Prior to data collection, the researcher provided respondents with detailed information about the study's objectives. All participants signed informed consent forms, and their anonymity was guaranteed.

Originality Note

The authors confirm that the manuscript is their original work, and if others' works are used, they are properly cited/quoted.

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