

## Building Aspiration for Kolej GENIUS Insan with Strategic Internationalisation Plan

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### ABSTRACT

As a young, gifted institution, Kolej GENIUS Insan strives to make its presence felt in the academic landscape in this country and the region. This study explores the internationalisation programs that have been conducted by the college and discovers the participants' experience in their journey in some of the programs they joined. Their personal insights helped enlighten the effectiveness of the organised internationalisation programs in shaping their mind and understanding on cultural values of the place and people they visited. This paper analysed their individual reflections shared in the form of written journal, reports, and videos. In their own words, the students had been incredibly positive with their involvement in the programs as they valued the pristine environment, system and culture which were considered refreshing and tantalising to their conscience and awareness. This new form of learning was positively welcome by all participants as it successfully provided those lessons never imagined from their typical student's life in school. Their experience from the programs they joined would be valuable knowledge and skills that will stay with them in the years to come.

**Keywords:** Internationalisation; student mobility; gifted students

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Universities have always made the effort in improving the teaching and learning experience of the higher education institutions (HEI) to prepare and equip the graduates with the relevant and current academic and technical skills that will allow them to excel in their career and life. The quality of our current education system must match the expectations of the public and more importantly the potential employers as investment have been distributed in the millions every year from the government's budget. It is common to expect all graduates to be employment-ready and hitting the ground running while the reality is the young graduates are still trying and to a certain extent struggling, to find their footing in their job and new life. The lofty expectations from the stakeholders on the young employees have encouraged the improvements of academic program and curriculum as it responds to the needs and requirements for today's challenging work and life culture.

## The Changing Phases of Education

While the level of education around the world is not consistent, the movement towards improving the quality of education is still ongoing, albeit at an awfully slow pace. There are so many factors that affect the transformation of education and the quality it offers at different corners of the world. While developed nations and regions have boasted their economic power and dominance, education has seen a steady and established system put in place. The same cannot be said about many other parts of the world as the basic effort of putting daily food on the plates of the normal citizen is still a major struggle. Political and leadership will change the future of a nation will play a major role in the struggle to have a quality education and unfortunately, some regions do not have the privileges to dictate their own path in the growth and development of their human capital. While the others keep on growing and reaching for Mars, Industrial Revolution 4.0 remains a very foreign concept for many individuals all around the world.

In today's world of education, teaching and learning goes beyond the four walls of the common classroom. Information and communication technology (ICT) has been responsible in enabling the transformation of teaching and learning at every level of education. From kindergarten to university, technology has a huge effect and impact to how learning happens today. Digitalisation of education is fast changing the way universities are offering their courses. Online platforms, flexible program, short courses, credit transfers, international branch campuses, visiting Professors and many other initiatives have been introduced to enable students to enrol in various programs and courses offered by established universities around the world. These are some of what have been transpired by the internationalisation program adopted by many HEI (Knight, 2020).

The quest taken by the internationalization program by various IHEs has changed the landscape of global trend in education. During the recent decades, such programs had proven to be successful in increasing students' mobility, developing intercultural understanding and global competencies; building greater regionalization of policies and programs (Knight, 2020). The internationalisation programs also helped in innovations in information technology, growing internationalizing the teaching/learning process and curriculum, resulting in the rise in academic networks and research partnerships. There were many success stories that had helped the HEI in planning, organising and implementing the programs for the benefit of their students and academic institutions.

## **USIM and the Internationalisation Mandate**

The academic experience of learning during degree program has always been associated with the completion of the number of the required subjects with long hours of lectures and tutorials. The routine has been the normal academic practice in institutions of higher learning. The rise of the globalisation era presented a new approach in learning outside the classroom. The objectives of such students' mobility program are obvious as it helps them in discovering new experience and learning cultures which are foreign to them before. The planning, preparation and performing the actual activities are the real lessons that would not be found in any textbooks or academic assignments. The real-life experience would enrich them and at the same time teach the students the meaning of life and humanity from different global perspectives (Jampaklay, Penboon, & Lucktong, 2022). The appreciation and value towards this kind of experience is what is intended in many students' global mobility program organised by HEI.

There are various terms and definitions used to refer to internationalisation program undertaken by educational institutions. For this article, the internationalisation program will refer to the practice applied in the context of Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM), generally, and Kolej GENIUS Insan (KGI), as a gifted secondary school in the country, specifically. The application of each program at the university and college level could also be different as it takes into consideration the target students and program goals. USIM implements an outreach program known as Global Islamic Students Outreach (GISO). It is quite an extensive and experienced program as it has been implemented for almost ten years, not during the COVID-19 pandemic though. While in KGI, the internationalisation program started only in 2017 with the visit by a group of university students from a neighbouring country of Thailand.

## **2. INTERNATIONALISATION INITIATIVE**

### **Global Islamic Students Outreach (GISO)**

This program began in 2011 with the intention of getting USIM students to be part of community service at the chosen city, preferably in a developing country. For the past nine years, until 2020 (before the pandemic), there were 452 successful trips with the participation of 10301 students covering 31 countries including Brunei, Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore, the Philippines, Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, Timor Leste, China, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan,

Australia, New Zealand, Sri Lanka, India, Mauritius, Maldives, United Arab Emirates, Turkey, Lebanon, Morocco, Kyrgyzstan, Madagascar, Austria, Czech Republic, Croatia, Bosnia Herzegovina, Jordan and Poland.

The total cost of all the trips for that duration was RM19,419,610.73 and USIM sponsored the total of RM2,028,503.00 (10.4%), while the balance was managed by students' collective contributions in their study fee (paid between RM450.00 or RM75.00 every semester for the duration of six semesters) and supported by various students' entrepreneurship programs organised over the years.

In the year 2019 alone, there were 117 GISO programs organised by USIM students, involving 2,789 students in 22 countries but in 2020, there were only 19 programs were completed as the COVID-19 enraged the world and the introduction the infamous Movement Control Order (MCO) throughout the nation that started on 18 March 2020 (Global Islamic Students Outreach. 2022).

### **Internationalisation Program at Kolej GENIUS Insan**

Kolej GENIUS Insan was established back in 2015 as a school-in-a-university concept for students who have been identified as gifted and talented Muslim students (Zakaria, Mohd Ali, Amin, & Usop, 2021). The gifted and talented program is part of the new effort in moulding the new generation of human capital as outlined in the new Malaysian Education Blueprint (Ministry of Education, 2015). The specially designed academic program for the gifted students has taken into consideration the needs and requirements of Muslim gifted students in Malaysia (Spawi, Islieh, Kamaruddin, Ali, Amin, & Usop, 2022).

Kolej GENIUS Insan is the first academic program that has taken the effort to integrate the teaching and learning of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) with the Islamic sciences and knowledge (Zakaria, Mohd Ali, Amin, & Usop, 2021). The integration of Naqli and Aqli knowledge (INAQ) in its curriculum has made KGI as a hybrid gifted and talented Islamic program that offer gifted Muslim students the opportunity to master the STEM subjects and understand the vast array of topics from the lenses of the Quran and Sunnah-the fundamental knowledge in Islam. This program has a niche area of education and has the potential to be expanded to other Muslim nations that have been looking for a similar approach to the development of gifted Muslim students of their own. The concept of INAQ for the gifted education program is enriched by its tightly knitted integration of STEM and the fundamental knowledge prescribed in Islam (Spawi, et. al., 2022).

As part of its internationalisation program, in 2017, the college appointed an international advisory panel (IAPM) among well-known academics from various international universities in Islamic institutions. The IAPM members were to recommend the college on activities and programs that could help KGI students' participation in various programs at international colleges and universities around the world. The internationalisation strategy was part of the expansion and continuous improvement process for the GENIUS gifted education program.

The KGI internationalisation program aims:

- To allow students to take part in various activities and socialise with international students' community
- To promote the college initiatives and talents for networking and sponsorship from various entities and organisations in the region
- To collaborate with international gifted schools and institutions in sharing knowledge and best practices in research and development of similar programs

The first activity was organised by the college in early 2017. The collaboration was set up with the Prince of Songkhla University (PSU) of Thailand. The program conducted a science camp for the students of PSU. There were 48 students of mixed gender joined the camp. It continued for the following two years and later interrupted by the pandemic in the year 2020. Other programs followed and they included short-term attachment, students' mobility, and international visits to countries such as Indonesia, Japan, South Korea and participation in internationally initiated program such as 'Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange & Study'. Among the internationalisation programs that had been conducted by KGI are listed here:

**Table 1:** List of KGI Internationalisation Programs

No	Name of Program	Location	Year
1.	KGI-PSU Science Camp	KGI	2017-2019
2.	Global Insan Outreach	Indonesia	2019
3.	Academic Visit to Tokyo Metropolitan Mita High School and Toyama Super Science School	Japan	2019
4.	9th Toyama Science Symposium	Japan	2021
5.	Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange & Study (YES)	USA	2021-2022

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper employed a qualitative approach in analysing written journal, reports, and videos of the programs' participants. Program reports and videos were prepared by a few participants on voluntary basis and the videos were made available on KGI 's Facebook and other social media channel, including YouTube. There were two videos uploaded so far and the program reports for Toyama Science Symposium were prepared by six program participants. The participants' text and video records were randomly selected, and the analysis of the data was set to fulfil the following research objectives:

- To understand the program participants' opinions and views on the overall program's goals.
- To identify the success factors of the program from the participant's perspective.

Based on the objectives, the study was set to answer the following research questions:

- What are the participants' opinions and views on the program as a whole?
- How did the participants benefit from the program they attended?

### 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

From the internationalisation programs that had been carried out over the past few years, pre- and post-pandemic time, participants had been sharing positive views on the overall program. Since there were some programs that had been done in Japan, the participants were grateful for the opportunity to experience the different language and culture, away from the comfort of their home and people. The environment visiting a new country with a different weather condition was highlighted as a welcoming factor that left a heart-warming impact never felt before in their life. The melancholic tone was too strong in their truthful assessments of the wonderful experience, and they valued the lasting impression of their short, amazing journey of a temporary home.

The learning aspect was a prominent subject mentioned in the reports and video. The participants took the effort to explain in detail how learning occurred to them. The people in the new "house" were too good to be real as they mingled with their newly found friends and family. They started to look at their life and culture from a new perspective and the process of adapting oneself to the new system seemed so effortless as it received them with open arms. Those learning aspects were too precious to be left behind. The human aspects-the culture and the values learned and acquired from their adopted country moulded them to appreciate, value

and care.

Personal challenges and problems were also part of the adapting process (Hepple, Erika, Alford, Henderson, Tangen, M. Hurwood., A. Alwi., & ZAH Shaari, 2017). In some cases, such as the participant in the student's attachment program did mention that he felt isolated and alone at first, when he just arrived and was trying to adjust himself to the unfamiliar environment, language, and culture (Purwantoyo, Peniati, Rudyatmi, Avriana, & Sukmawati, 2019). Food and weather were common issues that the students had to deal with as they assimilated themselves to the adopted country. The adaptation process could vary individually, and it was taken as part of the learning steps everyone must take in their progress.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

The increase in internationalisation program for KGI in the future will obviously benefit more students who are qualified. New programs and activities should be planned ahead to provide more opportunities to the gifted students as it suits them well academically. The curious mind will find the strengths and develop themselves with the "survival skills" to prosper in the new environment (Zakaria, Hilmi, & Spawi, 2017). With more successful internationalisation courses, the education program and the academic institution will have the advantage of getting notice by potential sponsors among business corporations or organisations. Financial aids as in scholarships for the students will also enhance the image and brand of the academic program and school. In addition, networking and research collaboration with other gifted institutions are also possible outcome of the program.

The students' shared insights and views underlined many important aspects that could be improved in future programs. Proper orientation and mental preparation could be offered to the selected participants. Training and guidance would also help them to settle in faster and better. Students are expected to face personal problems and the best way to handle it is to prepare them with the skills and knowledge needed in the new place and environment (Zakaria, Hilmi, & Spawi, 2017). It is a learning curve everyone should anticipate.

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