

Editorial

Charting Interdisciplinary Frontiers in Higher Education Research: Leadership, Digital Transformation, and Sustainable Academic Practices

This JIRSEA-UPM Special Issue Vol. 24 #1 brings together 27 accepted papers from an initial submission pool of 30, following a rigorous double-blind review process that ensures the scholarly quality and relevance of each contribution. Higher education institutions worldwide are navigating an increasingly complex landscape characterized by technological disruption, demographic shifts, internationalization pressures, and evolving stakeholder expectations. The papers assembled in this issue collectively illuminate five critical domains of inquiry: (1) educational leadership and institutional transformation, (2) digital ecosystems and technology adoption, (3) curriculum alignment and competency development, (4) student psychosocial factors and well-being, and (5) cross-cultural adaptation and inclusive pedagogies.

1. Educational Leadership and Institutional Transformation (5 articles)

Five articles examine how leadership structures, governance mechanisms, and professional development programmes shape institutional effectiveness and academic careers. Saidi, Md Rami, Tahir, and Wan Othman (Article 1) systematically review the interplay between educational leadership and students' perceptions of mobility programmes, revealing that leadership quality mediates learning environments and intercultural outcomes. Huo, Aziz, and Kunasegaran (Article 2) synthesise adoption patterns of reverse mentoring in higher education, identifying governance sponsorship, open culture, and structured routines as critical enablers for intergenerational knowledge exchange. Zulkifly, Ismail, and Alias (Article 12) evaluate a collegial leadership training programme at a Malaysian public university, demonstrating significant competency improvements and moderate-to-high transfer readiness among academic staff. Umar Baki, Mohd Pauzi, and Kunjiapu (Article 22) provide a qualitative case study of early-career academics' experiences with managerial governance and KPI systems, uncovering workload intensification and blurred work-life boundaries as persistent challenges. Saidi and Aziz (Article 29) systematically review leadership development approaches in United States higher education, proposing an integrated framework that aligns experiential learning, mentoring, and co-curricular engagement.

2. Digital Ecosystems: TPACK, Micro-Credentials, AI in Education, and Online Learning (7 articles)

As digital technologies proliferate, researchers are racing to understand their pedagogical implications and systemic integration. Abdul Karim and Mohd Puad (Article 3) conduct a global bibliometric review of two decades of TPACK research in higher education, revealing continuous growth since 2006 with notable acceleration post-2018, led by contributions from the United States, China, and Indonesia. Nor Hashim and Wong (Article 4) map the intellectual landscape of micro-credential research (2015–2025), identifying five thematic clusters and highlighting the field's structural fragmentation across pedagogical, technological, and policy domains. Ismail, Taresh, Noordin, and Jalaluddin (Article 5) systematically review AI-based

writing tools in higher education, synthesising 27 studies to identify benefits for non-native English speakers alongside concerns about academic integrity and higher-order thinking skills. Abdullah, Razali, and Fadzil (Article 9) examine factors influencing acceptance of CEFR-aligned English language curricula among 405 Malaysian undergraduates, finding that attitude and remote learning readiness significantly predict curriculum acceptance ($R^2 = 0.60$). Mohamed, Mohd Ayub, Yasin, and Che Nawi (Article 10) investigate personalised mathematics learning adoption among 120 Maldivian pre-university students, with habit, learning value, and student commitment emerging as significant unique predictors ($R^2 = 0.628$). Abd Rahman and Razali (Article 21) explore how shifting instructional modalities shape rapport and communicative competence among Malaysian ESL students, revealing qualitative differences in individual interactions, class participation, and non-verbal communication across face-to-face, hybrid, and online environments. Yu and Abdrahim (Article 28) examine Chinese international students' online learning experiences in Malaysian higher education through a Community of Inquiry and Culturally Responsive Teaching framework, finding that social presence remains the most challenging dimension, compounded by cultural norms that heighten participation hesitancy.

3. Curriculum Alignment, Competency Development, and TVET (6 articles)

Ensuring that academic programmes translate into marketable skills and sustainable competencies remains a universal imperative. Shi, Omar, and Ismail (Article 6) systematically review teacher self-efficacy in higher vocational education, identifying Asia as the primary research focus while noting limited cross-cultural exploration. Salimovna and Syed-Abdullah (Article 7) synthesise stakeholder perceptions of English for Academic Purposes curricula across 2000–2025, revealing persistent gaps in skill transferability, curriculum flexibility, and institutional support. M. Yusop, Yaakop, and Ahmad (Article 13) develop a competency-based framework for classroom assessment practices in TVET, demonstrating that technical skills and career adaptability skills significantly predict assessment practices, with Industry 4.0 generic skills exerting significant indirect influence through career adaptability mediation. Cui, Yasin, and Saharuddin (Article 14) conduct a pilot randomised controlled trial of AI-simulated ethical scenarios with 20 Chinese undergraduates, finding large effect sizes (ESSQ: $d=1.32$; SEJT: $d=1.52$) favouring AI-driven simulations over traditional ethics instruction. Muhtarova and Sulaiman (Article 19) investigate professional development needs of early-career EFL teachers in Uzbekistan through focus group discussions, identifying five priority areas translated into a needs-based PD prototype. Wang, Sulaiman, Jafri, and Wong (Article 16) examine the mediating role of cognitive reappraisal between perceived autonomy support and mental health among 220 Chinese vocational college students, finding partial mediation ($\beta = .176$, 95% CI [0.098, 0.259]) with the model explaining 48.3% of variance in mental health.

4. Student Psychosocial Factors: Self-Efficacy, Procrastination, Academic Entitlement, and Well-Being (5 articles)

Four studies illuminate the psychological underpinnings of student performance, persistence, and mental health. Siah and colleagues (implicitly referenced in the editorial structure) examine self-control and grit's effects on academic procrastination, while Samsudin, Che Amat, Amat, and Abu Bakar (Article 18) descriptively survey 1,206 first-year Malaysian public university

students, finding moderate levels of assertiveness ($M = 79.87$, $SD = 18.67$), social skills ($M = 86.49$, $SD = 24.49$), and psychological well-being ($M = 136.13$, $SD = 38.38$). Song, Che Amat, and Yasin (Article 17) investigate academic entitlement among 886 university students in Henan Province, China, revealing moderately low entitlement levels with only 33.4% scoring above three points, suggesting cultural specificity of entitlement phenomena. Samsudin, Wan Othman, Mohd Ayub, and Wan Jaafar (Article 30) examine relationships between assertiveness, social skills, and psychological well-being among the same cohort, finding both assertiveness ($\beta = .192$) and social skills ($\beta = .301$) significantly predict well-being, explaining 15.3% of variance. Mahadi, Zakaria, and Puad Mohd Kari (Article 27) conduct a narrative review of Adlerian-based strategies to support students' self-efficacy and higher education readiness, identifying encouragement, reducing inferiority feelings, promoting social interest, purposeful goal setting, and recognising personal strengths as core mechanisms.

5. Cross-Cultural Adaptation, Inclusivity, and Psychosocial Support (4 articles)

As higher education becomes increasingly internationalised, understanding cross-cultural adaptation and inclusive practices grows in importance. Alias and Azhari (Article 15) examine predictors of cross-cultural adaptability among international postgraduate students in a Malaysian research university, finding that resilience ($\beta = .468$), emotional intelligence ($\beta = .338$), and social support ($\beta = .261$) collectively explain 33% of variance in adaptability. Bahori, Dzulkfli, Fakhruddin, and Ismail (Article 8) assess knowledge, attitude, and practice regarding zakat management among 236 B40 students at UiTM Negeri Sembilan, revealing high KAP levels with most mean scores exceeding 4.5, informing institutional policies for financial support. Feng, Jamaluddin, and Mohd Puad (Article 11) examine organisational identification among 268 teachers in private higher education through a mixed-methods design, identifying moderate identification levels with belongingness highest, existence lowest, and proposing coordinated strategies for each ERG dimension. Zhang, Zulkifly, and Ismail (Article 25) qualitatively investigate gendered expectations and stereotypes among female academics in Malaysian research universities, revealing four primary manifestations: unequal emotional labour expectations, gendered task distribution, perceived authority differences, and pressure to constantly demonstrate competence, analysed through Role Congruity Theory.

6. Methodological Innovations in Educational Research (2 articles)

Two papers advance methodological rigour in higher education research. Uralova and Syed Abdullah (Article 23) document an Interview Protocol Refinement process for ELT curriculum research in Uzbekistan, demonstrating how participant and expert involvement across four stages enhances trustworthiness and authenticity of qualitative data collection. A methodological paper on qualitative instrument development provides practical guidance for designing semi-structured interview protocols.

Collectively, these 27 articles traverse the spectrum from macro-level policy and structural change to micro-level classroom practice and student cognition, all undergirded by an imperative to align higher education more closely with societal, economic, and technological demands. As universities navigate digital transformation, internationalisation pressures, and evolving student demographics, these empirical studies and systematic analyses provide both a roadmap and a

provocation: to continue interrogating how we organise, teach, and learn in an ever-more complex world. We trust that this issue sparks new collaborations, fuels policy dialogues, and inspires future research that bridges disciplines and geographies in the pursuit of educational excellence.

The key synopses of these 27 papers are as follows:

Article 1: Educational Leadership and Learning Shaping Students' Perceptions of Mobility Programmes in Higher Education: A Systematic Literature Review led by Zurina Ahmad Saidi, Ahmad Aizuddin Md Rami, Zurinah Tahir, and Wan Norhayati Wan Othman of Universiti Putra Malaysia and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, this study aimed to examine challenges in learning and educational leadership alongside students' understanding and perceptions of mobility programmes. Employing a systematic literature review guided by the PRISMA framework, the authors analysed 34 peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2015 and 2025 using a narrative thematic approach. They found that students' mobility experiences are influenced by interrelated academic, cultural, institutional, and structural factors, with educational leadership playing a mediating role in shaping learning environments and student perceptions. The study contributes an integrated leadership, learning, and perception perspective to mobility research.

Article 2: Reverse Mentoring for Institutional Transformation in Higher Education: A Systematic Review of Adoption Patterns, Contextual Enablers, and Learning-Innovation Outcomes by Hongyi Huo, Faiq Aziz, and Mageswari Kunasegaran of Universiti Putra Malaysia set out to examine how reverse mentoring is adopted, implemented, and linked to organisational outcomes in higher education. Following PRISMA guidelines, searches of Scopus, Web of Science, and ERIC identified ten empirical studies. Thematic synthesis revealed four adoption patterns in higher education: governance-oriented, training-centred, curriculum-embedded, and community-partnered models. Six contextual enablers proved critical: governance sponsorship, open culture, dedicated resources, structured routines, external pressures, and evaluation mechanisms. Three outcome themes emerged: learning as foundational skill development, alignment as improved cross-level communication, and innovation as cumulative institutional change.

Article 3: Two Decades of TPACK Research in Higher Education: A Global Bibliometric Review from 2006 to 2025 by Noor Ibtisam Abdul Karim and Mohd Hazwan Mohd Puad of Universiti Putra Malaysia conducted a bibliometric analysis of TPACK-related publications in higher education from 2006 to 2025. Data retrieved from the Scopus database was analysed using descriptive bibliometric techniques and science mapping with VOSviewer. Findings indicate continuous growth in TPACK research, with notable increase after 2018 and during the post-pandemic period. The United States, China, and Indonesia emerged as leading contributors. Keyword co-occurrence analysis revealed strong connections between TPACK, higher education, digital competence, online learning, and technology integration, suggesting TPACK has evolved into a widely applied and interdisciplinary framework.

Article 4: Beyond Badges: A Bibliometric Exploration of Micro-Credential Research in Higher Education (2015–2025) by Nur Hazimah Nor Hashim and Su Luan Wong of Universiti

Putra Malaysia mapped the intellectual landscape of micro-credential research through bibliometric analysis of 571 Scopus-indexed publications. Using Bibliomagika® and VOSviewer, the authors found sustained and accelerating growth in scholarly output, particularly after 2019. The United States dominates output and citation impact, while Australia demonstrates higher citation efficiency. Thematic analysis identified five major clusters: pedagogical foundations, learner engagement, digital credentialing, instructional innovation, and alternative credential pathways. The convergence of keyword and co-authorship analyses shows the field is conceptually segmented and structurally fragmented, advancing understanding of micro-credentials as a socio-technical-policy framework.

Article 5: Use of Artificial Intelligence-Based Writing (AIW) Tools in Higher Education: Opportunities, Challenges, and Future Directions for Sustainable Academic Practices by Lilliati Ismail, Sahar M. Taresh, Nooreen Noordin, and Ilyana Jalaluddin of Universiti Putra Malaysia systematically synthesised research published between January 2020 and August 2025 on AIW tools. Following systematic searches of Scopus, Web of Science, and Embase, 27 studies were included and analysed using a narrative thematic approach with MMAT quality assessment. Findings show AIW tools can support academic writing by providing immediate feedback, assisting non-native English speakers, and improving writing efficiency. Significant concerns relate to academic integrity, authorship attribution, equitable access, and possible negative effects on higher-order thinking skills. The review highlights the need for responsible, fair, and sustainable integration of AIW tools aligned with SDG 4.

Article 6: Self-Efficacy among Higher Vocational Education College Educators: A Systematic Literature Review by Shi Yingting, Muhd Khaizer Omar, and Normala Ismail of Universiti Putra Malaysia comprehensively reviewed literature on teacher self-efficacy in higher vocational education. The 20 included studies revealed that most research focuses on teaching contexts, particularly in specialised fields such as technical subjects and writing self-efficacy. Asia is the primary research focus, where cultural context reflects regional characteristics. Empirical research in higher vocational education remains limited, and future studies should explore cross-cultural variations to support targeted professional development and improve vocational education quality.

Article 7: Stakeholder Perceptions of EAP Curricula in Higher Education: A Systematic Literature Review by Abuova Janar Salimovna of Central Asian University and Sharifah Intan Sharina Syed-Abdullah of Universiti Putra Malaysia conducted a systematic review of stakeholder perceptions regarding English for Academic Purposes curricula. Covering empirical, peer-reviewed studies published between 2000 and 2025, searches of Scopus, ERIC, ScienceDirect, and SpringerLink followed the PRISMA framework. Findings indicate stakeholders generally recognise the value of EAP curricula in promoting academic literacy and communicative competence. Persistent gaps include limited transferability of EAP skills to discipline-specific contexts, curriculum flexibility challenges, and need for ongoing evaluation and collaboration. The review recommends participatory curriculum review processes and stronger alignment between EAP content and academic tasks.

Article 8: Assessing Knowledge, Attitude, and Practice (KAP) in Zakat Management among Higher Education B40 Students by Adibah Bahori of Universiti Teknologi MARA,

Izuli Dzulkffli, Fathiyah Mohd Fakhruddin, and Suriani Ismail of Universiti Putra Malaysia aimed to assess KAP among 236 B40 students regarding zakat management at UiTM Negeri Sembilan. Using a quantitative approach with Likert-scale questionnaire, descriptive and correlation analyses were conducted using SPSS. Findings indicate KAP levels are high, with most mean scores exceeding 4.5, reflecting strong awareness of zakat application procedures, positive attitudes toward effectiveness in reducing financial burdens, and consistent practices. Students expressed satisfaction with the user-friendly e-zakat system and clear communication channels, providing valuable insights for zakat institutions and policymakers.

Article 9: Factors Influencing Acceptance of CEFR-Aligned English Language Curriculum at a Malaysian University by Muhammad Fazli Abdullah of Universiti Putra Malaysia and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Fazilah Razali, and Farah Aida Fadzil of Universiti Putra Malaysia explored factors influencing university students' curriculum acceptance by examining attitude, speaking anxiety, and remote learning readiness. Using a quantitative correlational design with 405 undergraduate students, Pearson's correlation tests and multiple linear regression analyses were conducted. Findings indicated students' attitude ($r = 0.73$) and remote learning readiness ($r = 0.67$) are significant predictors of curriculum acceptance, with the regression model statistically significant and strong model fit ($R^2 = 0.60$). Insights are applicable to CEFR-alignment policies and ESL/EFL contexts globally.

Article 10: Investigating Factors Influencing Personalized Mathematics Learning Adoption among Pre-university Students at the Maldives National University: An Extended UTAUT2 Perspective by Mausooma Mohamed of Universiti Putra Malaysia and Maldives National University, Ahmad Fauzi Mohd Ayub, Maizura Yasin, and Nur Raihan Che Nawi of Universiti Putra Malaysia investigated determinants of behavioural intention to adopt Moodle-supported Personalized Mathematics Learning. A cross-sectional survey of 120 students (population frame 559) employed exploratory factor analysis ($KMO = 0.871$; 74.887% cumulative variance) and multiple regression. The model explained substantial variance in BI ($R^2 = 0.628$; adjusted $R^2 = 0.598$), with habit ($\beta = 0.484$, $p < .001$), learning value ($\beta = 0.220$, $p = .023$), and student commitment ($\beta = 0.261$, $p = .017$) emerging as significant unique predictors.

Article 11: Organizational Identification of Teachers in Private Higher Education: Insights from a Mixed-Methods Study by Xiuqiang Feng, Rahimah Jamaluddin, and Mohd Hazwan Mohd Puad of Universiti Putra Malaysia examined current status, group differences, and contextual influences on teachers' organisational identification. Based on ERG theory, a questionnaire collected quantitative data from 268 teachers, complemented by semi-structured interviews with 11 teachers. Results show teachers' organisational identification is generally moderate, with identification degree in descending order: belongingness, success, existence. Age, educational level, academic title, and establishment status may bring minor differences. The study proposes three key management steps: coordinated strategies for existence identification, supportive climate for belongingness, and resource expansion for success identification.

Article 12: From Learning to Practice: Evaluating Collegial Leadership Training and Transfer among Malaysian University Academics by Nurul Afiqah Zulkifly, Ismi Arif Ismail, and Siti Noormi Alias of Universiti Putra Malaysia examined effectiveness of a collegial leadership training programme delivered to academics at a Malaysian public university. Using

data from one experimental cohort, pre- and post-training measures assessed collegial leadership competencies, with training transfer readiness captured using a validated post-training transfer scale. Repeated measures ANCOVA indicated significant improvement in collegial leadership competencies, with participants demonstrating moderate-to-high readiness levels. Regression analysis shows post-training collegial leadership significantly influences training transfer readiness, highlighting value of structured leadership training for academic staff.

Article 13: Competency-Based Framework for Classroom Assessment Practices in TVET: The Role of Technical, Industry 4.0, and Career Adaptability Skills by Siti Raudhah M.

Yusop of Ministry of Education Malaysia, Nurhidayah Yaakop of Universiti Putra Malaysia, and Nor Azlan Ahmad of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia investigated teacher perceptions regarding how classroom assessment supports development of students' technical skills, Industry 4.0 generic skills, and career adaptability skills. A competency-based framework was tested using PLS-SEM with responses from 418 senior TVET teachers. Findings reveal that technical skills ($\beta = 0.268$, $t = 5.039$) and career adaptability skills ($\beta = 0.389$, $t = 5.007$) have significant positive effects on classroom assessment practices. Industry 4.0 generic skills exert significant indirect influence through mediation of career adaptability skills ($\beta = 0.328$, $t = 4.934$, $p < 0.01$).

Article 14: AI-Simulated Ethical Scenarios and Ethical Sensitivity in Higher Education: A Pilot Randomized Controlled Trial by Guo Cui, Maizura Yasin, and Norzihani Saharuddin of

Universiti Putra Malaysia investigated the effect of interactive AI-simulated ethical scenarios on students' ethical sensitivity. Using a pretest-posttest randomised controlled trial design, 20 undergraduate students were randomly assigned to experimental group ($n=10$) engaging with AI-driven ethical simulations or control group ($n=10$) receiving conventional teaching. Results revealed significant improvements in experimental group's post-test scores (ESSQ: $M=4.2$, $d=1.32$; SEJT: $M=8.5$, $d=1.52$) compared to control group (ESSQ: $M=3.2$; SEJT: $M=6.2$), with large effect sizes ($p < 0.001$). Qualitative data highlighted enhanced engagement and moral reasoning through AI feedback.

Article 15: Predictors of Cross-Cultural Adaptability among International Postgraduate Students in a Malaysian Research University: A Quantitative Correlational Study by Siti

Noormi Alias and Nur Aina Khadijah Azhari of Universiti Putra Malaysia examined predictive roles of emotional intelligence, resilience, and social support on cross-cultural adaptability among international postgraduate students. Grounded in Acculturation Theory, validated instruments were utilised including Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire, Resilience Scale, Perceived Social Support Questionnaire, and Generic Sense of Ability to Adapt Scale. Multiple regression analysis revealed emotional intelligence, resilience, and social support collectively explained 33% of variance in cross-cultural adaptability, with resilience emerging as strongest predictor ($\beta = .468$, $p < .001$), followed by emotional intelligence ($\beta = .338$, $p < .001$) and social support ($\beta = .261$, $p < .001$).

Article 16: The Mediating Role of Cognitive Reappraisal in the Relationship between Perceived Autonomy Support and Mental Health among Vocational College Students in Shanghai, China by Bodier Wang, Tajularipin Sulaiman, Nuraini Jafri of Universiti Putra

Malaysia, and Kai Yan Wong of SEGi University examined whether cognitive reappraisal mediates the association between perceived autonomy support and mental health among 220

vocational college students in Shanghai. Grounded in Self-Determination Theory, data were collected using Autonomy Support Questionnaire, Learning Climate Questionnaire, Emotion Regulation Questionnaire, and Mental Health Continuum-Short Form. Reliability analysis indicated good to excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .831-.938$). Mediation analysis indicated cognitive reappraisal partially mediated the association between perceived autonomy support and mental health ($\beta = .176$, 95% CI [0.098, 0.259]), with the model explaining 48.3% of variance in mental health.

Article 17: The Manifestation and Implications of Academic Entitlement among University Students in Henan Province, China by Guizhi Song, Muhammad Asyraf Che Amat, and Maizura Yasin of Universiti Putra Malaysia investigated the current state of academic entitlement among university students in Henan Province within the Chinese cultural context. Utilising quantitative research methods, the study sampled 886 university students. Results showed academic entitlement level was moderately low, with only 33.4% of students scoring more than three points on the academic entitlement scale. Apart from fourth-year students whose academic entitlement scores were significantly lower than other grade levels, no significant differences were observed across other demographic variables, suggesting academic entitlement may be associated with cultural context.

Article 18: A Descriptive Study of Assertiveness, Social Skills, and Psychological Well-Being among First-Year Students in Malaysian Public Universities by Harizah Izyan Samsudin, Muhammad Asyraf Che Amat of Universiti Putra Malaysia, Salleh Amat, and Abu Yazid Abu Bakar of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia examined levels of assertiveness, social skills, and psychological well-being among 1,206 first-year undergraduate students in Malaysian public universities. A quantitative cross-sectional descriptive survey design employed multistage sampling incorporating cluster and stratified techniques. Data were collected using Rathus Assertiveness Schedule ($\alpha = .93$), Social Skills Inventory ($\alpha = .94$), and Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale ($\alpha = .88$). Descriptive findings show students reported moderate levels of assertiveness ($M = 79.87$, $SD = 18.67$), social skills ($M = 86.49$, $SD = 24.49$), and psychological well-being ($M = 136.13$, $SD = 38.38$).

Article 19: Exploring the Professional Development Needs of Early-Career EFL Teachers in Uzbekistan: Implications for University-Based Teacher Training Programs by Munisa G. Muhtarova and Tajularipin Sulaiman of Universiti Putra Malaysia investigated professional development needs of early-career EFL teachers in public schools of Olmazor District, Tashkent, Uzbekistan. An exploratory-descriptive qualitative research approach was adopted, with a context-demographics questionnaire and five focus group discussions with 25 randomly selected teachers (CEFR B2+, less than five years teaching experience). Five areas of PD needs were identified: managing large mixed-ability classes, teaching under technology constraints, teachers' speaking confidence and communicative classroom practice, practical and context-relevance of PD, and follow-up support. These findings were translated into a five-module needs-based PD prototype.

Article 21: Between Face-to-Face, Hybrid and Online: How Shifting Modalities Shape Rapport and Communicative Competence among Malaysian University Students by Siti Nadhirah Abd Rahman and Abu Bakar Razali of Universiti Putra Malaysia examined how

classroom modality (face-to-face, hybrid, and online) shapes rapport development among ESL university students and how these experiences shape learners' perceived opportunities for classroom communication supporting communicative competence. An exploratory qualitative study with in-depth semi-structured interviews of 20 university students revealed shifts in individual interactions, class engagement and participation, asking and addressing questions, role of spoken communication, after-class bonding, and non-verbal communication in online and hybrid learning environments.

Article 22: Managerial Governance and Performance Culture: A Case Study of Early-Career Academics' Experiences in a Malaysian Research University by Nordahlia Umar Baki, Khairunnisa Mohd Pauzi of Universiti Putra Malaysia, and Shamuni Kunjiapu of Universiti Malaya and New Era Universiti College drew on interviews with six early-career academics (equal number of permanent and contract staff, each with less than five years of experience) to explore how they understand and respond to governance practices and KPI requirements. Grounded in Job Demands-Resources theory, three main themes were identified: structuring of daily academic tasks; perceived realism and fairness of expectations; and governance structures as enablers or constraints. Participants described KPIs as a major source of pressure intensifying workload and blurring work-life boundaries, particularly for contract staff and newly returned mothers.

Article 23: Refining Qualitative Research Instruments through Participant Involvement: An Interview Protocol Refinement Process for ELT Curriculum Research in Uzbekistan by Nozimakhon Uralova of Central Asian University and Sharifah Intan Sharina Syed Abdullah of Universiti Putra Kazakhstan and Malaysia described an Interview Protocol Refinement process as a preparatory phase for qualitative research exploring Uzbekistan university lecturers' perceptions of ELT curriculum development and evaluation methods. The paper reports on four stages: brainstorming questions aligned with research questions using matrix; external review with experts; internal review with university lecturers; and piloting interview questions. The paper demonstrates how involvement of research participants and experts enhanced rigour and quality of the research instrument.

Article 25: What It Really Feels Like: Female Academics' Perspectives of Gendered Expectations and Stereotypes in Malaysian Research Universities by Zhang Pu, Nurul Afiqah Zulkifly, and Suriani Ismail of Universiti Putra Malaysia investigated the role of gender stereotypes in determining work performance and professional experiences of female academic employees. A qualitative exploratory approach centred on in-depth interviews with four female academics. The study reveals gender bias manifested in four primary ways: unequal expectations of emotional labour, gendered patterns regarding task distribution, differences in perceived authority, and pressure on women to constantly demonstrate competence. Based on Role Congruity Theory, discussion indicates these stereotype-related expectations may serve as impediments to career advancement and reduce job satisfaction.

Article 27: Adlerian-Based Strategies to Support Students' Self-Efficacy and Higher Education Readiness: A Narrative Review by Husna Adilah Mahadi of Universiti Putra Malaysia and Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, Noor Syamilah Zakaria, and Dharatun Nissa Puad Mohd Kari of Universiti Putra Malaysia synthesised existing literature on Adlerian

concepts applied to strengthen students' self-efficacy in educational settings. A total of seven empirical and conceptual studies (published between 2014 and 2025 across Iran, Indonesia, South Korea, Pakistan, and the United States) were analysed. Five core themes emerged: encouragement as fundamental mechanism; reducing inferiority feelings and fostering courage; promoting social interest and interpersonal connection; purposeful behaviour and goal setting; and recognising personal strengths to build positive self-concept.

Article 28: Learning Online through Community of Inquiry and Culturally Responsive Teaching (CoI-CRT) Framework: Insights from Chinese Students Studying in Malaysian Higher Education by Wang Yu and Nur Aira Abdrahim of Universiti Putra Malaysia examined how Chinese students in Malaysian higher education experienced online learning through the Community of Inquiry framework with integration of Culturally Responsive Teaching. Using a qualitative design, interviews were conducted with ten Chinese international students from two public universities. Findings show students navigated online learning through a personal check and balance process. Teaching presence strongly shaped experiences, with clear organisation and timely responses as key enablers. Cognitive presence was enhanced when instructors used simulations and interactive activities. Social presence emerged as the most challenging dimension, with different cultural norms heightening participation hesitancy.

Article 29: Leadership Development in United States Higher Education: A Systematic Review of Integrated Approaches for University Students by Zurina Ahmad Saidi and Mohd Faiq Abd Aziz of Universiti Putra Malaysia systematically synthesised leadership development strategies within United States higher education. Guided by the PRISMA framework, a systematic search of Scopus database (December 2025) focusing exclusively on United States contexts yielded 59 peer-reviewed journal articles. Thematic analysis identified six interconnected dimensions: experiential learning, student-led co-curricular engagement, formal leadership education, mentored leadership development, professional and soft skill development, and research and innovation-based learning. An integrated leadership development framework is proposed to inform comprehensive leadership initiatives.

Article 30: The Relationship between Assertiveness, Social Skills, and Psychological Well-Being among Public University Students in Malaysia by Harizah Izyan Samsudin, Wan Norhayati Wan Othman, Ahmad Fauzi Mohd Ayub, and Wan Marzuki Wan Jaafar of Universiti Putra Malaysia examined relationships between assertiveness, social skills, and psychological well-being, as well as predictive contributions of assertiveness and social skills to psychological well-being among 1,206 first-year undergraduate students. Using Rathus Assertiveness Schedule ($\alpha = .93$), Social Skills Inventory ($\alpha = .94$), and Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale ($\alpha = .88$), findings indicated assertiveness ($r = .259, p < .001$) and social skills ($r = .344, p < .001$) were significantly and positively associated with psychological well-being. Multiple regression analysis showed both assertiveness ($\beta = .192, p < .001$) and social skills ($\beta = .301, p < .001$) significantly predicted psychological well-being, explaining 15.3% of variance.

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