

AN INVESTIGATION OF GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC UNIVERSITY INTERACTIONS IN LEADERSHIP SUCCESSION PLANNING

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Abstract

Leadership succession planning is crucial for preparing individuals for greater responsibilities in an institution. This study investigated the complex relationship between the Malaysian government and its public universities in leadership succession planning. Applying the Open System Model framework, the paper conducted a systematic literature review from 2012 to 2022 to understand how governmental policies have structured leadership succession planning in Malaysian public universities. The analysis found three themes: the centralisation of top leadership appointments via the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971, the Public Service Department's influence on employment and promotion frameworks, and the role of the Higher Education Leadership Academy in cultivating leaders, which aligned with the Open System Model framework. The findings showed a hybrid system that balanced centralised monitoring with institutional autonomy. While the government maintains power over the appointments of vice-chancellors, universities preserve the decision-making power in recruitment, promotion criteria, and the selection of candidates for leadership development. Therefore, this study concludes that successful leadership succession planning in Malaysian public universities needs balanced cooperation between governmental supervision and institutional autonomy. Finally, the study recommends that the Malaysian Government adopt a more transparent system for appointing vice-chancellors within public universities.

Keywords: AUKU, Government, Higher Education, Succession Planning, Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

According to Rothwell and Prescott (2022), leadership succession planning (LSP) systematically prepares lecturers to take on greater responsibilities and leadership roles in universities by improving their positions on the organisation's chart, such as Vice-Chancellors (VCs) and Deputy VCs (DVCs), which is also known as vertical promotion. Another function of LSP is to enhance lecturers' levels of expertise through promotions to higher levels of professional ability, such as professors in a university; this is known as horizontal promotion. LSP matters to universities

because skills and experiences at a lower-level leadership position, such as Dean, do not guarantee success at a high-level leadership position, such as VCs (Rothwell, 2015).

According to Rothwell (2015), a few critical elements fall under the umbrella of LSP, namely the recruitment, identification, and development of a talent pool, and appointment or promotion. Globally, LSP has been practised in universities for some time, and the results have been quite promising. The benefits include readiness in the institution's leadership, improved employee retention, enhanced institutional sustainability, smoother leadership transitions, and increased staff performance (Jackson & Allen, 2022).

Malaysia's public universities (PUs), like other universities around the world, also have their own LSP (Norzaini, Faizah, et al., 2012). To further strengthen PUs' talent development, the Malaysian Government (MG) issued a guideline for university LSP in 2017, entitled 'Strengthening Academic Career Pathways and Leadership Development, Universities Transformation Programme', also known as the Orange Book (Malaysia Ministry of Higher Education, 2017). Yet Malaysia's PUs face unique challenges in LSP, as 19 out of 20 PUs in Malaysia are governed by the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 (UUCA) (Government of Malaysia, 1971). The UUCA grants the government significant control over the appointments of VCs and DVCs.

However, the 2015 - 2025 Malaysia Higher Education Blueprint (MHEB) aims to reform the Malaysian higher education (HE) landscape (Malaysia Ministry of Education, 2015). The MHEB intends to empower University Boards and institutional leaders to lead the university by shouldering increased responsibilities in important decision-making and improving the governance effectiveness of PUs, including LSP. The MHEB also aims to free PUs from unnecessary bureaucratic management. The benefit of an in-house LSP is to enhance academics' awareness of their career trajectories, encouraging them to better fulfil their roles and improve their credibility as scholars (Norazharuddin et al., 2023). Yet bureaucrats often struggle to appreciate or understand the ideology of autonomy (Dzulkifli, 2012). Therefore, the MHEB's goal of university autonomy remains unsuccessfully implemented (Wan et al., 2020). Furthermore, the centralised control by the government via the UUCA (Government of Malaysia, 1971) contrasts with the Ministry of Higher Education's (MOHE) encouragement for PUs to develop their own LSPs, leaving the extent of institutional autonomy in LSP development unclear.

This research aims to investigate the complex interplay between the MG and PUs in the realm of LSP, with particular emphasis on how governmental policies influence LSP within PUs. The findings of this research can potentially offer insights into LSP challenges for other nations with contexts like Malaysia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Anderson (1986) noted that during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Western universities were tied to powerful forces of nationalism. Politicians expected universities to shape and serve their national identity and interests while maintaining institutional autonomy and managing their internal affairs. Anderson's (1986) observation is aligned with the current role of Malaysia's PUs as federal statutory bodies, which remain heavily influenced by government monitoring (Government of Malaysia, 1971).

Subsequently, after the 20th century, some Western universities gained autonomy by taking control of recruitment, promotions, payrolls, rewards, and strategies (Musselin, 2013). For instance, Australian universities exist as autonomous entities, allowing them to progress with LSP unaffected by their government (Pelizzon et al., 2022). Musselin (2013) has argued that transferring authority can protect academic professionals from government intervention. Darvish and Temelie (2014) have further asserted that political plans and changes should not affect university LSP, as university leaders should focus on long-term strategies without the fear of

political shifts. Additionally, the government and politicians should minimise their influence on university LSP and appreciate the academic culture.

The concept of university autonomy is further supported by Pruvot et al. (2023). English universities have greater freedom in organisational autonomy and staffing autonomy related to LSP. Their scores are between 96% and 100%, which indicates English universities are free to recruit senior staff, design pay policies, and appoint executive leaders, such as VCs and DVCs, without the requirement for government approval. Thus, these universities are free from government intervention in their LSP.

As Malaysia was a British colony and adopted its university system, it is highly appropriate to compare Malaysia to British universities. When compared, it clearly shows that Malaysian PUs have distinct differences in university autonomy, especially in university LSP. For instance, the appointment of VCs and DVCs in Malaysian PUs is under the purview of the minister (Government of Malaysia, 1971). The stark contrast in governance between Malaysian and British universities is evident in the level of autonomy granted to institutions. While British universities enjoy considerable freedom in selecting and appointing their executive leadership without external approval, Malaysian universities face significant governmental monitoring. The interference in the governance of Malaysian universities holds back their ability to craft and execute effective LSP. The process has become entangled with political considerations and external influences that may not necessarily align with the long-term strategic objectives of the universities (Morshidi et al., 2012).

This is evidenced by the introduction of the UUCA (Government of Malaysia, 1971) and followed by the formation of the MOHE in 2004 to oversee the development of HE in Malaysia (Morshidi et al., 2012). Since then, PUs have been governed directly by the MG. The introduction of the UUCA directly shifted the authority of PUs' self-governance to the government (Wan et al., 2020). From the 1970s to the 1980s, the government exerted control over university budgets, financial regulations, and student intake. Additionally, the government exerted control over core academic and institutional autonomy as per the amendment to the UUCA in 1996 (Morshidi et al., 2012).

Persistent monitoring of MG signifies that the LSP of PUs in Malaysia constantly interacts with external environments. The pressure from external factors on PUs is comparable to the Open System Model (OSM) (Bush, 2011). OSM stressed the dynamic interaction of a university with its external environment in shaping university goals, structures, and processes. The OSM has three elements: inputs, processes, and outputs. Policies, acts, and institutions could represent the inputs from the MG. The process is how the university digests and processes the input from MG requirements and designs the LSP structures accordingly. Lastly, the output is the outcome of the university LSP.

Later, Soaib and Sufean (2012) conducted a study on Malaysian University Governance Trends and Models and proposed an OSM that fitted the Malaysian PUs' context, as shown in Figure 1. The model includes a supra-system, consisting of the government and society, with the university as a subsystem. Any interaction from the supra-system influences the subsystem. This is because, in the Malaysian context, PUs cannot separate themselves from the MG. PUs must respond to MG influences and seek collaboration from the MG to achieve their objectives. Hence, the OSM by Soaib and Sufean (2012), which was based on an earlier OSM (Bush, 2011), is used to frame this study, as the research objective is to understand the complex interactions between the MG and the LSP of PUs and how the MG shapes the LSP of PUs.

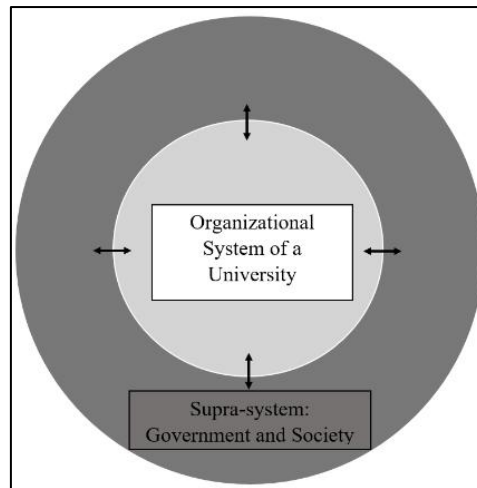


Figure 1. Open System Model for Malaysian PUs (Soaib & Sufean, 2012)

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a systematic review methodology following the framework of Bearman et al. (2012) for HE research. The process commenced with a search for relevant literature from the University of Malaya Library Online Database, which includes ninety-seven databases, such as Web of Science and Scopus. The keywords used were ‘higher education succession planning’ and ‘university succession planning’. The inclusion criteria were: (1) articles published between 2012 and 2022; (2) a focus on academic-related LSP; (3) Malaysian PUs; (4) written in English; (5) original articles; (6) empirical papers; and (7) review articles. Exclusion criteria were: (1) theses, (2) books, and (3) book chapters. The inclusion criteria for papers focused on the interaction of Malaysian PUs' LSP with the MG, as framed by the OSM for Malaysian PUs (Soaib & Sufean, 2012). In total, 3,025 results were obtained in August 2022. Out of the initial 3,025 articles, only 12 matched the inclusion criteria and were analysed. These articles are displayed in Table 1. Figure 2 shows the simplified PRISMA process of literature selection (Htet et al., 2025).

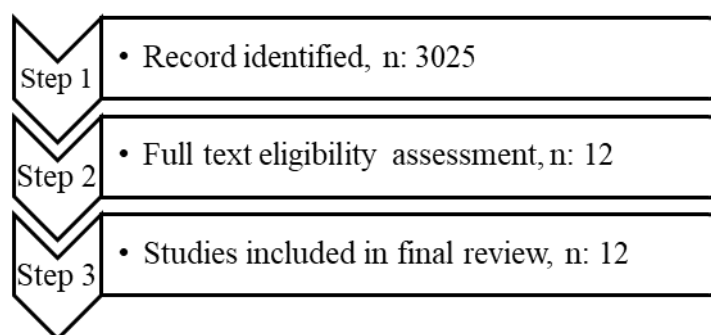


Figure 2. Simplified Version of PRISMA

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data from these 12 articles. The data analysis began with open coding, where each finding from the articles that referred to the research objective was coded line by line. Next, axial coding was performed, whereby similar data were grouped into categories. These categories formed the preliminary outline or classification system that reflected the recurrent regularities or patterns in this study. These regularities and patterns are known as themes. Three themes emerged from the analysis (Figure 3) and will be thoroughly discussed in the next section.

Table 1. List of articles that met the inclusion criteria

No.	Authors	Paper Types
1	Alina et al. (2012)	Original paper
2	Morshidi et al. (2012)	Original paper
3	Norzaini, Morshidi, et al. (2012)	Empirical Paper
4	Soaib and Sufean (2012)	Empirical Paper
5	Wan et al. (2015)	Empirical Paper
6	Rosmini and Zulkefli (2015)	Empirical Paper
7	Norzaini Azman et al. (2016)	Original paper
8	Pang et al. (2016)	Empirical Paper
9	Chapman et al. (2017)	Empirical Paper
10	Wan et al. (2020)	Original paper
11	Ismie Roha et al. (2021)	Empirical Paper
12	Wan (2022)	Original paper

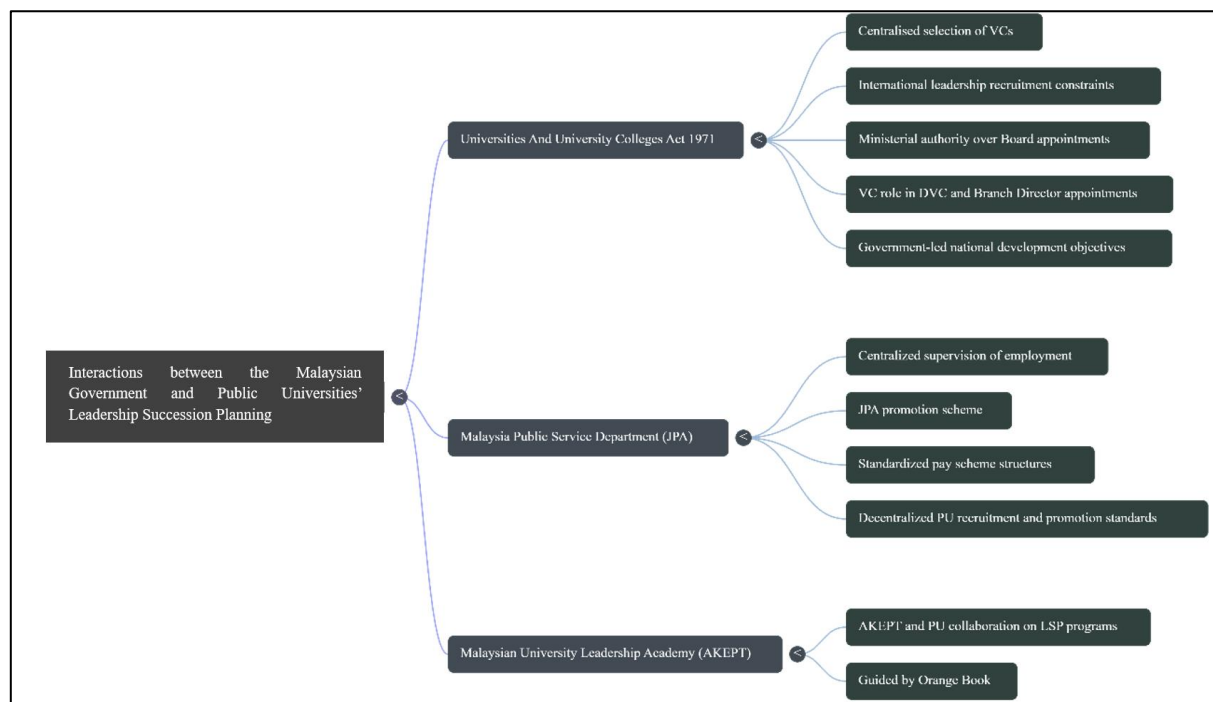


Figure 3. Interactions between the Malaysian Government and Public Universities' Leadership Succession Planning (Generated by Notebooklm on 29 March 2026)

FINDING

In total, three themes emerged from the systematic review: (1) the UUCA, (2) the Malaysian Public Service Department (JPA), and (3) the Malaysian University Leadership Academy (AKEPT).

Universities And University Colleges Act 1971

The thematic analysis revealed five sub-themes within the primary theme of the UUCA, demonstrating the substantial impact of this legislation on LSP in Malaysian PUs. These sub-themes are (1) the centralised selection of VCs, (2) limitations on employing international candidates for leadership positions, (3) ministerial power over Board of Directors (BoDs) appointments, (4) VCs acting as advisors to the Minister for the appointment of DVCs and Branch Campus Directors, and (5) government-led national development objectives.

First, the MG-PU interaction regarding LSP is centralised for top management positions. The UUCA grants the government the power to influence PUs' governance by appointing institutional leaders. The Minister is responsible for the appointment of PUs' VCs after recommendation from the search committee and the BoDs, as per UUCA Section 9(1) (Government of Malaysia, 1971). Morshidi et al. (2012) noted that the appointed personnel do not need prior leadership experience at other institutions. The appointment of PUs' VCs also depends on the professionalism of the Minister. The government's constant influence on the appointment of university leaders can potentially affect implementation and disrupt existing PUs' LSP (Alina et al., 2012).

Furthermore, according to UUCA Section 4A, the Minister must form a search committee to advise him on the selection of a VC (Government of Malaysia, 1971). However, according to Wan et al. (2020), the VC search committee prefers to search for the best person for a job within Malaysia's universities instead of conducting an international search. Wan et al. (2020) proposed that universities need to compete internationally and look for the best and most qualified candidates to lead their institutions, irrespective of gender, nationality, religious beliefs, or race. It would be beneficial to consider an international search method for Malaysian PUs.

Additionally, UUCA Section 14(1) (Government of Malaysia, 1971) grants the Minister the power to appoint board members for a period of three years. Upon expiry, board members are eligible for reappointment. Likewise, the Minister has the power to appoint a DVC and Head of a Branch Campus for Malaysian PUs, as stated in UUCA Sections 9(8) and 9A(1) (Government of Malaysia, 1971). The Minister shall appoint the DVCs and the Head of a Branch Campus after consultation with the respective PUs' VCs. Qualified personnel may be appointed from internal or other universities as per the situation's requirements, like the VCs candidate, as in 4B(1) of the UUCA (Government of Malaysia, 1971). The terms of office and other service conditions of a DVC and Head of a Branch Campus shall be determined by the Minister after consultation with the respective PU's VC. This demonstrates that VCs function as consultants to the Minister on the appointment of leadership positions below the VC's level.

Overall, Malaysian PUs are monitored by the government, which emphasises nation-building (Wan et al., 2020), and the MOHE has encouraged PUs to have their own LSP (Wan, 2022). To do so, Morshidi et al. (2012) have stressed the need for a gradual transition from the ministry's dominance over PUs to granting university autonomy. The separation of power and authority is essential, and the University Board plays a central role in managing universities and documenting their activities to the government. All matters, including the appointment of senior executives at the university, should be supervised by the board. The role of the government as a regulator should be clearly defined and understood by all HE stakeholders to move towards self-compliance and self-regulation over time.

From the perspective of Soaib and Sufean (2012), OSM, theme one regarding the UUCA has demonstrated a bidirectional relationship of LSP between PUs and the MG, where the MG decides the appointment of the VCs and the Board Members, while leadership positions below VCs are appointed under the advice of VCs, who represent the PUs.

Malaysia Public Service Department

The examination of the JPA and its influence on LSP within PUs revealed three sub-themes: (1) centralised supervision of employment, (2) standardised pay schemes, and (3) decentralised recruitment and promotion standards. These sub-themes underscore the dual nature of centralised and decentralised interactions moulded by JPA governance, which substantially affect PUs' capacity to shape and execute effective LSP frameworks.

The first sub-theme involves both centralised and decentralised interactions. Malaysian PUs are legally classified as federal statutory bodies under the Statutory Bodies (Discipline and Surcharge) Act 2000 (Government of Malaysia, 2006), and their employees are deemed civil servants (Government of Malaysia, 1971). Subsequently, the JPA manages staff employment in PUs (Wan, 2022; Wan et al., 2015). Therefore, authorisation for staff recruitment is centrally monitored by the JPA. However, after receiving permission from the JPA to recruit new staff, PUs have the authority to decide whom to recruit.

Next is the academic promotion system. Academic promotion follows the JPA Civil Service Framework (Chapman et al., 2017). For PhD graduates, it begins with a lectureship at grade 51/52 and advances through promotions to the highest grade, TURUS III (EZSkim, 2022). Academic promotion differs from other public-sector employees because it is based on academic achievement criteria rather than vacancies (Norzaini, Morshidi, et al., 2012; Wan et al., 2015). PUs determine their own criteria for promotion, which may vary between institutions (Norzaini, Morshidi, et al., 2012; Norzaini Azman et al., 2016; Pang et al., 2016; Wan et al., 2015), notwithstanding the availability of guidelines (Kementerian Pengajian Tinggi Malaysia, 2012). This situation indicates a decentralised management approach.

Lastly, despite their varying locations and living costs, academics in PUs receive the same salary based on their grades (EZSkim, 2022). Unstandardised promotion requirements combined with identical pay schemes could cause dissatisfaction among PU talent, potentially leading to 'job hopping' (Norzaini Azman et al., 2016). Hence, the implementation of LSP has become difficult for PUs.

The influence of the JPA on PUs' LSP resembles the Soaib and Sufean (2012) OSM perspective, which considers PUs as subsystems in dynamic interaction with their supra-system, the JPA. PUs' permeable boundaries enable external factors, such as JPA employment, promotion, and payment schemes, to influence the internal processes of PUs' LSP outcomes.

Malaysian University Leadership Academy

Rosmini and Zulkefli (2015) highlighted the need for partnership between AKEPT and PUs in developing LSP programs. This collaboration aims to attract potential talent and inspire development initiatives that benefit PUs. The Orange Book was created for this purpose (Malaysia Ministry of Higher Education, 2017). Its objective is to guide Malaysian PUs in developing their own LSP systems within a framework that fosters academic ecosystems capable of nurturing excellence and leadership in teaching, research, professional practice, and institutional leadership. The goal of the Orange Book is to achieve Talent Excellence in HE, as outlined in the MHEB (Malaysia Ministry of Education, 2015). Talent Excellence means that academics in Malaysian PUs should be able to compete globally through a conducive, supportive, and meritocratic environment, with continuous professional development programs that help them adapt to evolving responsibilities and expectations. This approach enables PUs to attract, develop, and retain high performers through specialised pathways, including educators, researchers, leaders, and practitioners.

To achieve this, the process involves collaboration between AKEPT and PUs across four stages. PUs manage the first three stages, while the fourth stage involves joint efforts between PUs and AKEPT. The process begins with identifying potential talent, followed by talent grooming. An individual training needs analysis is conducted to monitor each talent's development; following this, talents are mapped according to PUs. Talent mapping includes creating individual profiles and nurturing leaders along four pathways: Teaching, Research, Professional Practice, and Institutional Leadership. Each pathway has distinct requirements, and academics may select any pathway based on their interests. However, the Institutional Leadership Pathway is specifically

reserved for those identified as transformative leaders in leadership positions (Malaysia Ministry of Higher Education, 2017).

The final step involves a partnership between PUs and AKEPT, where training and development programs are tailored to participants' current roles in academic management (Malaysia Ministry of Higher Education, 2017). This interaction includes both centralised and decentralised elements. Centralised aspects require PUs to send their talent to AKEPT for leadership development, while decentralised elements provide PUs with the autonomy to select individuals for training. After receiving the candidate from PUs, AKEPT profiles the candidate according to their academic competency skills for future university leadership purposes. The objective is to close the leadership competency gap between the candidate's current skills and those needed for future top management. According to Ismie Roha et al. (2021), the profiling process involves 'Behavioural Event Interview,' 'Strategic Plan Presentation,' and 'psychometric tests' approaches. Furthermore, AKEPT profiling methods are continually improved over time to ensure they are the best tools for ensuring leadership excellence in PUs.

Viewed through the Soaib and Sufean (2012) OSM lens, the cooperation between AKEPT and PUs operates as a vibrant ecosystem. AKEPT serves as the supra-system delivering training to the PUs' LSP, which functions as a subsystem. In return, PUs continually send potential talent to AKEPT for development and profiling. This mutual interaction, combined with AKEPT's ongoing profiling of new talent, guarantees the system's flexibility and efficacy in nurturing future university leaders.

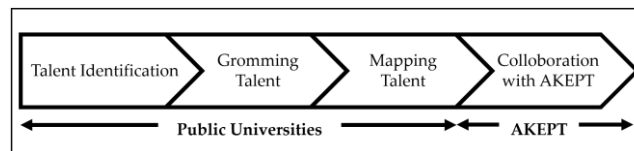


Figure 4. Partnership between PUs and AKEPT (Malaysia Ministry of Higher Education, 2017)

Based on the aforementioned themes, the PUs' LSP is categorised as a subsystem, while the MG, represented by the JPA, AKEPT, and UUCA, functions as the supra-system within the Soaib and Sufean (2012) version of the OSM, as illustrated in Figure 5. As depicted in Figure 5, the process commences with the JPA permitting PUs to recruit lecturers, with horizontal promotion adhering to the JPA-designed scheme. Subsequently, PUs send candidates to AKEPT for profiling and training. Finally, under the legal purview of the UUCA, the Minister appoints VCs and DVCs. Thus, the entire interaction is bidirectional. This situation mirrors the Bush (2011) OSM, which can be scaffolded into input, process, and output. The input originates from the supra-system, the process involves how the PUs handle those requirements, and the output is the institutional LSP, producing professors via horizontal promotion and VCs via vertical promotion.

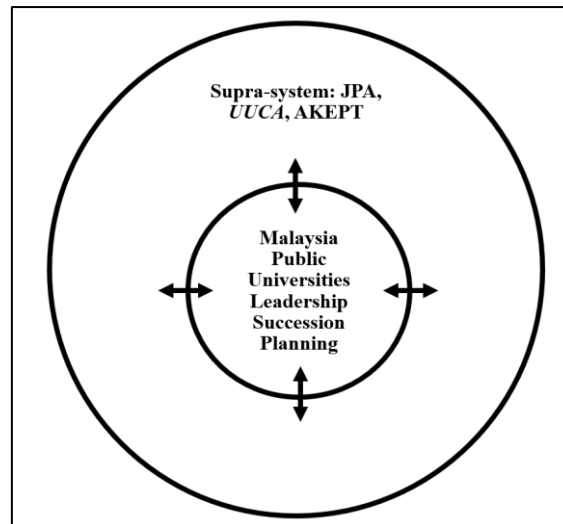


Figure 5. OSM for Malaysia public universities leadership succession planning (Bush, 2011; Soaib & Sufean, 2012)

DISCUSSION

The findings suggest that PUs' LSP is constantly influenced by three emerging themes from the supra-system: the UUCA, AKEPT, and the JPA. Consequently, Malaysia's PUs operate with only a partial degree of autonomy. Specifically, PUs function with both centralised and decentralised management concurrently. This is evidenced by how the UUCA empowers the Minister to appoint VCs for PUs, while the JPA monitors staffing and AKEPT profiles and provides training to potential candidates. These aspects reflect the centralised management approach of the government.

Conversely, PUs enjoy a certain level of autonomy in several ways within the sub-system of PUs' LSP. They have the freedom to architect their own LSP policies based on the specific needs of their institutions. PUs also possess the authority to hire, develop, and promote academics to professorships and leadership positions below VCs and DVCs. Moreover, PUs are independent in proposing suitable candidates for leadership development to AKEPT. These processes indicate elements of decentralised management. Thus, PUs exert a certain influence over potential future VCs by nominating candidates for AKEPT training and profiling. Typically, the Minister appoints VCs from the talent pool grown by AKEPT; while appointments from the private sector do occur, they remain scarce.

This situation blurs the notion that Ministers have full authority to appoint VCs, as the pool is influenced or decided by the universities themselves. If all 20 PUs select the most competent candidates for AKEPT development, this could reduce the likelihood of an incompetent VC being appointed. Even if an appointed VC transitions to a different PU, provided the pool consists of high performers, the newly appointed leader should be able to perform well and lead the institution towards progress.

However, Norzaini (2012) critiques this as a 'strange combination' of management, where autonomy is granted to PUs on internal matters while the most critical element of LSP, the appointment of VCs, remains under ministerial jurisdiction. This practice contrasts with English (Privot et al., 2023) and Australian universities (Pelizzon et al., 2022). To ensure the long-term efficacy and sustainability of LSP initiatives, it is crucial to minimise the distracting influence of short-term political agendas (Darvish & Temelie, 2014; Morshidi et al., 2012).

Moreover, when addressing LSP challenges in contexts like Malaysia, it is vital for various stakeholders, such as Senate members, BoDs, staff unions, student representatives, and distinguished personalities, to contribute to conversations with the Minister (Jackson & Allen,

2022). A round-table discussion to reach a consensus is essential to select the most suitable candidate, enhance transparency, and ensure the appointee possesses the values and skills required by the respective university. In the words of Rothwell (2015), the goal is to appoint the right person with the right skills at the right time to do the right job.

Regarding academic retention, differentiated promotion requirements and pay schemes across PUs are essential for addressing talent shortages (Norzaini et al., 2016; Posiah et al., 2009). Ibrahim et al. (2017) emphasised that PUs should initiate a system that encourages meritocracy and rewards high performers. PUs should consider a performance-based payment system (Minasyan et al., 2017) instead of the current 'one-size-fits-all' model under the JPA (Chapman et al., 2017). Ibrahim et al. (2017) further contend that, to achieve this, universities must be pushed more rigorously to establish their own autonomous schemes of service, rather than remaining under the monitoring of the JPA, as discussed previously. Additionally, university top management should demonstrate creativity and resolution in innovating and moving beyond the current status quo. Through such measures, it is possible to lead PUs toward higher performance and global competitiveness via a comprehensive LSP system. Australia serves as a successful precedent, having passed legislation that prevents the government and politicians from intervening in the operations of national universities, despite these institutions receiving state funding (Pelizzon et al., 2022).

This research expands upon the OSM by Soaib and Sufean (2012), which was built upon the Bush (2011) OSM, by applying and broadening their relevance to LSP in HE. The study underscores the complicated interplay between supra-systems, such as governmental organisations, and subsystems, such as universities. It reveals how external factors influence internal LSP processes and how PUs, in turn, process and respond to the supra-system, particularly through the nomination of academics to AKEPT for development and profiling.

Moreover, by examining the permeable boundaries of PUs, the research demonstrates the coexistence of centralised control and institutional autonomy within Malaysian PUs, offering valuable insights into governance challenges and strategies applicable worldwide. It further develops the Soaib and Sufean (2012) OSM by addressing LSP as a crucial subsystem and providing evidence of institutional feedback mechanisms. Additionally, the study emphasises the significance of collaborative ecosystems, exemplified by the partnership between PUs and AKEPT, illustrating how such collaborations can enhance leadership capacity while ensuring institutional longevity. These contributions serve to enrich the Bush (2011) and Soaib and Sufean (2012) OSMs, advancing their applicability to contemporary issues in HE governance and leadership.

CONCLUSION

The examination of Malaysian HE shows a sophisticated balance between centralised and decentralised influences that shape LSP in PUs. The UUCA demonstrates the MG's extensive control through centralised leadership appointments, while acknowledging the necessity for some institutional autonomy in LSP. The JPA's involvement further complicates matters, with centralised monitoring of employment and career progression contrasting with decentralised recruitment and promotion practices within each PU's LSP.

The creation of AKEPT indicates a shift towards a more cooperative and decentralised approach to leadership cultivation. Examined via an OSM lens, AKEPT plays a vital role in cultivating a vibrant ecosystem where PUs and AKEPT collaborate to identify, nurture, and support future leaders. This cooperative strategy, while acknowledging the need for centralised guidance, empowers PUs to take charge of their LSP processes and adapt them to their unique requirements and circumstances.

Nevertheless, the study also uncovers several obstacles. The centralised nature of certain aspects of the current system, such as the JPA's influence on employment and the restricted scope

for international recruitment of VCs, may potentially delay the development of truly world-class leadership within Malaysian HE. Tackling these challenges demands a nuanced approach that balances national priorities with the need for greater institutional autonomy and flexibility in the LSP process.

In conclusion, the successful implementation of LSP in Malaysian PUs requires ongoing dialogue and collaboration among all shareholders, including the MG, PUs, AKEPT, and the JPA. This collaborative endeavour is crucial for establishing a sustainable and dynamic system capable of effectively addressing the evolving needs of HE and producing the visionary leaders needed to navigate the complexities of the 21st century. Furthermore, it is recommended that the MG adopt a more transparent system for the appointment of VCs in PUs. Therefore, for future research, it is recommended to investigate the specific VC appointment decision-making processes utilised by the government.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors would like to express their gratitude to Wong, Pit Chooi, Aai, Sheau Yean, and Jiao for providing valuable input to this study.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI AND AI-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES

The authors declare that Large Language Models were utilised solely for proofreading and enhancing the grammatical precision of this manuscript. While AI was employed to improve the academic register and ensure adherence to UK English conventions, the authors have thoroughly reviewed, edited, and verified all generated output. The authors remain fully responsible for the final content and the integrity of the research findings.

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