

Talent Champion among Youth in Malaysia: A Conceptual Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Talent champions are critical in driving a nation's competitiveness in the new economy. However, Malaysia faces significant challenges in achieving this goal, as reflected by its drop to 45th in the Global Talent Competitiveness Index (GTCI) 2023. Despite the Shared Prosperity Vision 2030 (SPV2030) targeting 35% highly skilled workers, the Malaysian labour force remains dominated by 59.4% semi-skilled workers. This highlights the urgent need to analyse key indicators to improve tertiary education, enhance talent development policies, and benchmark Malaysia's talent competitiveness against other nations. Aligned with the objectives of the National Education Blueprint, this study aims to explore the need for talent champions among Malaysian youth, to measure the underlying indicators for youth talent champions and to develop a talent champion framework among youth in Malaysia. This study will utilize non-probability sampling, specifically purposive sampling, to select participants from Malaysian higher education institutions and subject matter experts from relevant organizations. Data will be analyzed using both manual methods and content analysis software (NVivo 12). The development of the talent champion framework involves a systematic process that includes data collection and analysis, indicator weighting, framework development, and validation. Talent champion aligns with multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities). By fostering a competent and competitive workforce, this study aims to support SPV2030's goals of shared prosperity and strengthen Malaysia's position in the global talent landscape.

Keywords— talent champion, youth, Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia has committed to integrating Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 4) indicators into its national policy frameworks, such as the National Education Blueprints, to achieve the goal of ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education while promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030. The Ministry of Education (MOE) provides 11 years of basic education to all students in the country, irrespective of their background or special needs. To meet the needs of diverse student groups, MOE has implemented various educational initiatives, including an automatic promotion system between grade levels. At the primary and secondary levels, students can access a wide range of subjects, which they can continue through Form 6 programs, polytechnics, community colleges, or private institutions.

However, despite the government's considerable efforts to improve education access, alarming trends have emerged. According to Utusan Malaysia (August 2022), a report by the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) revealed that 390,000 (72.1%) of 560,000 SPM candidates expressed interest in joining the workforce immediately after their exams, while only 170,000 intended to pursue further studies. This implies that three out of four SPM graduates do not plan to enter university. The situation is further exacerbated by the fact that 25,000 students chose not to sit for their SPM exams. DOSM identified three main reasons for this trend:

1. A growing interest in becoming social media influencers,
2. The availability of job opportunities in the gig economy, and
3. A perception that higher education does not guarantee better job prospects.

This phenomenon could significantly impact Malaysia's talent pool. The Global Talent Competitiveness Index

(GTCI) 2022 highlights Malaysia's drop to 45th place globally, compared to its 26th position in 2020. The report attributes this decline to a dramatic drop in business sentiment, including heightened private-sector concerns about skills gaps, which negatively affect employability, vocational and technical skills. Additionally, Malaysia's ability to attract talent has diminished, partly due to limited opportunities for domestic talent to enhance their socioeconomic status. While Malaysia's strongest pillars in the GTCI are global knowledge skills and the enabling environment, sustaining these strengths requires greater focus on talent development.

Malaysia aspires to become a high-talent champion, as outlined in the Shared Prosperity Vision 2030, which targets 35% highly skilled workers in the workforce. However, achieving this goal remains challenging. According to DOSM, the workforce is dominated by semi-skilled workers, who accounted for 59.4% of the labour force in Q4 2022. In contrast, the share of low-skilled workers rose from 12.5% in Q3 2022 to 12.7% in Q4 2022, while the proportion of those with secondary-level education far outweighs those with tertiary-level qualifications (56.6% vs. 31.6% in Q3 2022). Although the tertiary-educated labour force is increasing, the dominance of secondary-level education signals an urgent need to boost higher education enrolment.

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) underscores tertiary enrolment as a key indicator of a country's potential for a skilled workforce. As of 2022, Malaysia's tertiary enrolment rate was 43%, trailing significantly behind advanced economies like South Korea (96%), Singapore (86%), and Estonia (70%), as well as developing countries like China (54%) and Thailand (49%). This disparity highlights a pressing need to enhance Malaysia's human capital development.

To address these challenges, Malaysia must prioritize investments in talent development to prepare for the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). Tools like the Human Capital Index (HCI) by the World Bank which evaluates education quality and health outcomes illustrate the necessity of raising Malaysia's talent profile to compete with countries such as Singapore, South Korea, Japan, and Hong Kong. Comprehensive efforts are required to:

1. Increase tertiary enrolment and its share in the labour force,
2. Mitigate the skills mismatch between job market demands and workforce capabilities, and
3. Reverse the decline in Malaysia's talent competitiveness ranking.

While Malaysia lacks its own talent competitiveness index, it is included in global assessments such as the GTCI (by INSEAD), the World Talent Ranking (WTR) (by IMD Business School), and the Global Creativity Index (GCI) (by the Martin Prosperity Institute). These indices evaluate nations on factors like talent attraction, retention, education quality, and workforce skills development. An analysis of youth talent champions in Malaysia reveals several gaps in the literature:

1. Limited studies exploring the youth talent champions (Kitagawa et al., 2022; Ma et al., 2022).
2. Focus on traditional talent pools (e.g., high-potential employees) rather than diverse talent, including underrepresented groups (Bonneton et al., 2022).
3. Neglect of contextual factors, such as cultural norms and economic conditions, that impact talent development (Harun et al., 2020).
4. Predominance of Western-centric studies, highlighting a need for research on talent champions in Malaysia's unique context (Yildiz & Esmer, 2023).
5. Data limitations in measuring youth talent indicators, particularly for disadvantaged populations (Pagan-Castaño et al., 2022).

Given the challenges and research gaps identified, this study aims to explore talent champions among youth in Malaysia (Abdul Kadir et al., 2021; Harun et al., 2020), and to investigate the underlying indicators influencing talent champion among youth (Aljbour et al., 2022; Khan et al., 2021). By addressing these issues, Malaysia can enhance its human capital strategy, enabling the country to build a robust talent pipeline for sustainable economic growth and global competitiveness.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In today's globalized economy, talent has become a pivotal factor in determining a country's prosperity.

Extensive research underscores that talent significantly contributes to economic development and national competitiveness. Nations that excel in attracting, developing, and retaining top-tier talent are more likely to experience higher levels of innovation, economic growth, and overall prosperity. A skilled labour force enhances business productivity, fosters innovation, and attracts foreign investment, all of which drive sustainable economic expansion (Rossi, 2022).

Conversely, neglecting talent development can lead to critical setbacks, including shortages of skilled labour, reduced economic output, and diminished competitiveness in high-tech industries (Subramanian & Suresh, 2022). The ripple effects of such neglect may include weaker economic performance, rising unemployment, and a declining quality of life for citizens. Additionally, the emigration of skilled workers, often referred to as “brain drain,” poses a significant challenge, undermining a country’s economic growth and long-term development prospects (Mao, Latukha, & Selivanovskikh, 2022).

Malaysia lags significantly in talent competitiveness compared to its regional and global counterparts. Despite substantial investments in talent development, the nation’s performance remains below expectations. According to the Global Talent Competitiveness Index (GTCI) 2022, Malaysia ranked 45th globally, a sharp decline from its 26th position in 2020. Similarly, the World Economic Forum (WEF) Global Competitiveness Report 2021 placed Malaysia 33rd out of 140 nations for overall competitiveness but ranked it only 65th in talent competitiveness. Although Malaysia has made notable progress in expanding its talent base, it continues to trail behind countries like Singapore, South Korea, and Japan in producing and leveraging skilled workers.

This gap highlights Malaysia’s inability to fully capitalize on its talent potential, thereby hampering its progress in fostering a high-skilled economy (WEF, 2021). These rankings emphasize the urgent need for Malaysia to strengthen its talent development strategies to remain competitive in a rapidly evolving global economy. Addressing these shortcomings will be critical to improving Malaysia’s position and unlocking its full economic potential.

Talent Champion among Youth in Malaysia

A talent champion is an individual who demonstrates exceptional abilities, skills, or potential within a specific domain and possesses the capacity to excel as a top performer or leader in their field (Park, Patel, Varma, & Jaiswal, 2022). These individuals are characterized not only by their talent but also by their creativity, innovative thinking, and commitment to refining their skills to achieve their goals. In addition to personal development, talent champions actively apply their expertise to achieve excellence and contribute meaningfully to their organizations and society (Kaliannan et al., 2022). Scholars have provided varying perspectives on the concept of talent champions: individuals with exceptional skills, innovative capabilities, and leadership potential in their chosen fields; high-potential individuals driven by ambition and motivation to excel and succeed; and those equipped with the ability, motivation, and opportunities to make significant contributions to their organizations and communities (Aljbour et al., 2022; Kitagawa et al., 2022). Talent champions, therefore, represent a unique combination of innate ability, dedication, and the capacity to drive change and innovation within their environments.

The study of talent champions among youth in Malaysia is essential for several reasons. Firstly, Malaysia's journey towards sustainable economic growth and global competitiveness hinges on its ability to cultivate a skilled and adaptive workforce. Identifying and fostering talent among youth ensures that the nation can meet the demands of a rapidly evolving global market. By evaluating talent development initiatives, policymakers and stakeholders can address existing gaps and implement targeted measures to strengthen Malaysia's position as a competitive player in the global economy. Secondly, studying talent champions among youth contributes to empowering Malaysia’s younger population by emphasizing the value of talent development. Insights from such studies help youth make informed decisions regarding their career paths and skill-building efforts, ensuring they are equipped to thrive in a competitive job market.

Recognizing and celebrating diverse talents also fosters confidence, resilience, and a culture of excellence among the younger generation. Finally, studying talent champions helps Malaysia benchmark its talent competitiveness against other countries, identifying areas for improvement and working towards becoming a more attractive

destination for global talent. By understanding how Malaysia compares to other countries, policymakers can develop strategies to attract and retain top-tier talent, ensuring that the country's human capital remains a key driver of economic growth and competitiveness.

While cultivating talent champions among Malaysian youth is essential, several challenges hinder progress. A major obstacle is the inadequate funding and support for talent development programs, particularly in areas. Limited access to quality education, training facilities, and mentorship opportunities in these regions hampers the ability of young people to nurture and showcase their talents (Liu & Li, 2021). Addressing this disparity requires investments in infrastructure, scholarships, and outreach programs to ensure equitable access for all. In Malaysia, cultural norms and societal emphasis on traditional professions—such as medicine, engineering, and law—often overshadow alternative career paths. This cultural bias discourages many young individuals from exploring unconventional fields or honing non-traditional skills, which stifles creativity and diversity in talent development. Broadening societal perspectives on career success is essential to fostering a more inclusive and innovative workforce.

Ensuring that talent development initiatives are inclusive and equitable remains a critical challenge. Underrepresented groups, including women, individuals from low-income families, and those in marginalized communities, often face systemic barriers that limit their access to opportunities. Without deliberate efforts to address these disparities, talent development programs risk perpetuating social inequalities and exacerbating the talent gap. The increasing reliance on technology and digitalization poses an additional challenge. Many youths, especially in rural and underserved areas, lack the digital literacy and resources necessary to compete in a tech-driven world. Bridging this divide is imperative to enabling all young people to harness digital tools for learning and career advancement. Malaysia's current talent development initiatives also lack a systematic framework for measuring success. Without consistent metrics to evaluate program effectiveness, it is challenging to identify strengths, address weaknesses, and align initiatives with national economic goals. Establishing a robust monitoring and evaluation system is essential for driving impactful talent development.

To overcome these challenges and foster a generation of talent champions, Malaysia must invest in education and training tailored to the demands of a dynamic global economy, promote diverse career paths by redefining societal perceptions of success, and ensure equitable access to opportunities, particularly for marginalized groups. Additionally, adopting a comprehensive framework to monitor and evaluate talent development programs and leveraging technology to bridge gaps and enhance accessibility will be crucial. By addressing these areas, Malaysia can unlock the potential of its youth talent, driving economic growth, innovation, and societal progress.

The analysis of youth talent champions in Malaysia is a critical area requiring further attention due to several notable gaps in existing literature. Firstly, there is a lack of empirical research that delves into the subjective experiences, motivations, and challenges faced by talent champions in identifying and nurturing talent (Kitagawa, Marzocchi, Sánchez-Barrioluengo, & Uyarra, 2022; Latukha, Shagalkina, Mitskevich, & Strogetskaya, 2022). While some studies have explored the characteristics and behaviours of talent, qualitative research focusing on the lived experiences of talent champions, particularly those working with youths in higher education institutions, remains scarce (Ma, Chen, & Jiang, 2022).

Secondly, most existing research focuses on traditional forms of talent, such as high-potential employees or top performers (Liu & Li, 2022; Núñez-Canal, de Obesso, & Pérez-Rivero, 2022). There is a pressing need to investigate how talent champions identify and develop diverse talent, including individuals from underrepresented groups, to ensure inclusivity in talent development initiatives (Bonneton, Schworm, Festing, & Tournon, 2022). Thirdly, contextual factors are often overlooked in current research. While some studies address talent development within specific industries or in developing countries, more research is needed to explore how factors such as cultural norms, social structures, and economic conditions influence talent development and the roles of talent champions across different settings (Harun, Mahmood, & Othman, 2020; Kitagawa et al., 2022).

Fourthly, most studies on talent champions focus on Western contexts and organizations, leaving a significant gap in understanding their roles in diverse cultural environments. Examining talent champions in varied cultural

and industrial contexts can offer valuable insights into the unique challenges and opportunities associated with developing and retaining talent globally (Yildiz & Esmer, 2023). Additionally, some indicators used in Malaysia to measure youth talent champions suffer from insufficient data, hindering the ability to obtain a comprehensive and accurate understanding of the nation’s human capital potential. These indicators may not adequately represent all segments of the population, particularly disadvantaged groups (Pagan-Castaño, Ballester-Miquel, Sánchez-García, & Guijarro-García, 2022).

A study by the Malaysian Institute of Economic Research (MIER) underscores that Malaysia's progress toward becoming a high-income economy and achieving sustainable development goals may be hindered by insufficient skills and talent, particularly among its youth (MIER, 2020). To sustain economic growth, enhance competitiveness, and reduce dependency on low-skilled, labour-intensive sectors, Malaysia must invest in the intellectual potential of its young talent.

The Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) has highlighted a troubling trend of over-reliance on semi-skilled workers within the labour force, coupled with persistent shortages of skilled workers. Notably, the number of semi-skilled workers in Malaysia has surged significantly, from 51,800 to 1.89 million individuals. Although there has been a marginal increase in the proportion of skilled workers, this growth is insufficient to offset the imbalance.

This reliance on semi-skilled labour is concerning, particularly as educational attainment heavily influences job placement. A large portion of Malaysia's workforce remains employed in roles susceptible to replacement by automation and digitalization. This emphasizes the urgent need for a strategic shift toward cultivating a more skilled and adaptable labour force to secure the nation’s economic future.

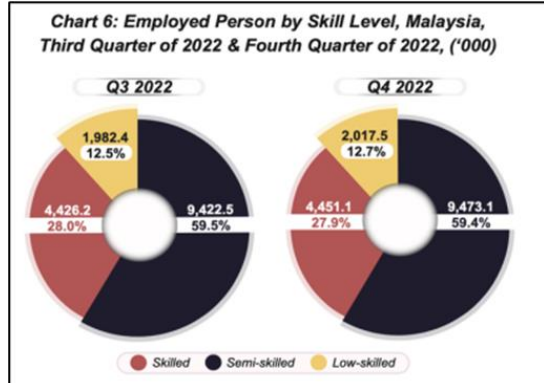
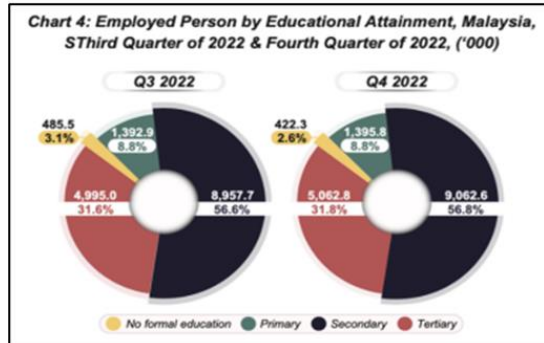
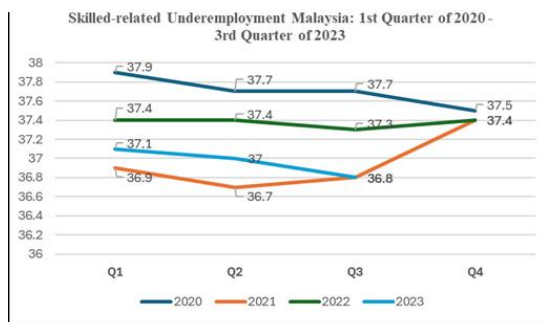


Fig. 1 Employed person by skills in Malaysia

Source: <https://www.dosm.gov.my>

Talent Champion Indicators

Talent champion indicators serve as an essential tool for evaluating a country's human capital, encompassing the knowledge, skills, and abilities of its population (Latukha et al., 2022). These indicators are crucial in today's competitive global economy, where countries vie for top talent and investment. They enable policymakers and stakeholders to make informed decisions regarding education, training, workforce development, and talent retention strategies. Moreover, these indicators help identify strengths and weaknesses in a nation's human capital, allowing for targeted actions to address skill gaps and workforce shortages (Ma, Chen, & Jiang, 2022). Developing reliable talent champion indicators is a complex task, as it requires a comprehensive assessment of factors such as educational attainment, skills proficiency, research and development investments, and innovation capabilities. Accurate and valid indicators are fundamental to ensuring the effectiveness of policies and programs aimed at developing and managing human capital.

In Malaysia, various indicators are used to assess the success of talent development programs and the extent to which the country has cultivated talent champions. These include educational attainment, workforce skills, research and development (R&D) expenditure, innovation and entrepreneurship, talent attraction and retention, as well as employment rates and income levels. However, these indicators have limitations and do not offer a comprehensive view of the country's human capital potential. For instance, while indicators such as the number of patents filed or registered trademarks offer some insight into the country's innovation levels, they do not necessarily reflect the full scope of the nation's human capital potential (Núñez et al., 2022). Furthermore, many of these indicators are not tailored specifically to the youth population, which may lead to inaccurate assessments of youth talent potential. For example, the number of professionals registered with professional bodies might indicate the overall professionalization in the country but does not directly measure the talent development of the youth demographic (Khan et al., 2021).

Despite these challenges, some of Malaysia's talent champion indicators suffer from a lack of sufficient data, making it difficult to accurately gauge the country's human capital potential (Abdul Kadir et al., 2021). If the data used in these indicators is outdated or incomplete, metrics like the number of patents filed may not provide a true representation of innovation. Additionally, indicators meant to assess youth talent may not be suitable for all demographic groups, particularly those from low-income backgrounds. For instance, academic achievement as an indicator of talent may not accurately reflect the potential of youths from disadvantaged communities who may not have had access to the same educational opportunities as their wealthier peers. This highlights the need for more inclusive and comprehensive data collection methods that consider the diverse challenges faced by youth across different socioeconomic backgrounds.

Conceptual Framework

Existing studies fail to provide a comprehensive theoretical model for understanding talent champions among youth from both individual and organizational perspectives. While various theoretical frameworks, such as the Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory, Human Capital Theory, and Institutional Theory, have been applied to explore talent development in emerging economies, each has notable limitations.

For instance, Human Capital Theory may not adequately address socio-economic disparities and systemic barriers that impede the development of human capital, particularly among youth. Similarly, the RBV Theory, often focused on organizational resources, tends to overlook the unique challenges youth face in becoming talent champions, as it prioritizes institutional assets over individual growth and development. Institutional Theory, on the other hand, may fail to capture the distinct institutional obstacles confronting youth in the context of talent championing.

To bridge these gaps, the Person-Environment Fit (P-E Fit) Theory and Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) have been proposed as foundational frameworks for exploring talent champions among youth.

The P-E Fit Theory, rooted in psychological principles, emphasizes the alignment between individuals and their environments across various settings, such as corporate, educational, or community contexts (Xu, Liu, Chen, &

Feng, 2023). Different forms of fit are distinguished:

1. Person-job fit assesses the alignment between an individual's abilities and the requirements of a specific role.
2. Person-organization fit evaluates the congruence between an individual's values and those of the organization.
3. Person-environment fit broadly examines compatibility within diverse contexts.

Inadequate alignment can lead to dissatisfaction and reduced productivity, underscoring the importance of evaluating talent champions for Malaysian youth through the lens of P-E Fit (Guan, Deng, Fan, & Zhou, 2021).

The Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) provides a holistic framework for understanding career development by integrating cognitive, social, and environmental factors (Appling, Tuttle, Harrell, Ellerman, & Mabeus, 2022). Central to SCCT is the concept of self-efficacy, or an individual's belief in their ability to succeed, which is particularly relevant for youth from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. SCCT posits that career choices are influenced by individuals' expectations of the outcomes associated with different career paths. For youth, the theory highlights the importance of awareness of alternative career options and the role of performance feedback in skill development.

By addressing the unique challenges and aspirations of Malaysian youth, SCCT offers valuable insights for developing a talent champion framework tailored to their needs and circumstances. Together, P-E Fit and SCCT provide a robust theoretical foundation for understanding and fostering talent champions among youth in Malaysia. Figure 2 illustrates the variables incorporated into the proposed conceptual framework, grounded in these theories.

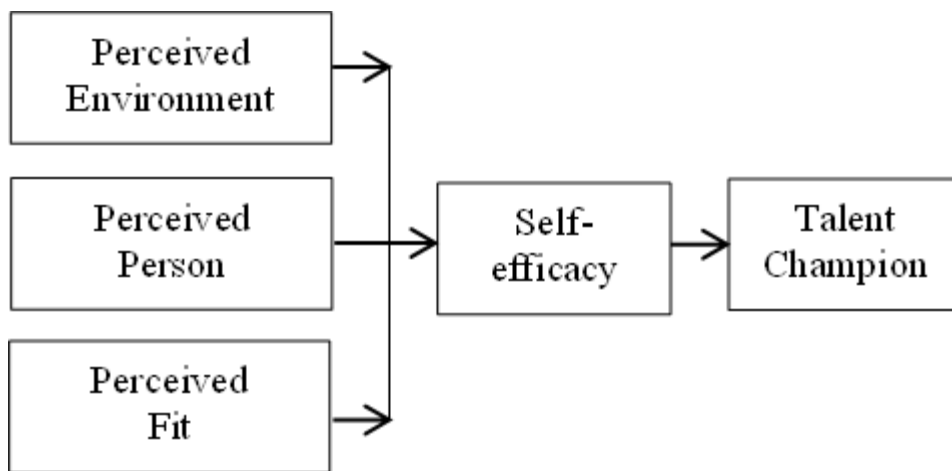


Fig. 2 Conceptual Framework

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative approach, an essential tool for developing a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the talent champion among youth in Malaysia. The talent champion framework entails analysing and measuring the aspects and indicators that contribute to young talent development and competitiveness, which demands a deep knowledge of the experiences, perspectives, and attitudes of those involved. Qualitative research techniques may be used to analyse the talent champion index since they allow for in-depth participant experiences and viewpoints. This may assist researchers to understand the issue and how people interact with talent development programmes. Creswell (2013) recommends qualitative research methodologies for exploring complex social phenomena or understanding the perspectives of individuals.

This study employs focus group discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews (IDIs) to discover professional knowledge and practical experiences in the field of talent champion among youth by using “how” and “why”

questions (Alam, 2020). Professional knowledge and practical experience are important for the talent champion index because they provide a comprehensive understanding of the skills, competencies, and attributes that are required to develop and nurture talent. FDGs demonstrate the shared and diverse opinions and experiences of participants, rather than depending on retrospective analyses of separate statements from each participant to make such inferences. Individual interviews assume that the informant has more to convey, which enables them to generate greater depth and coherence. IDIs typically involve open-ended questions and probes, which allow participants to express themselves freely and in their own words. The concept of IDIs involves using a focused and in-depth approach to gather rich qualitative data that can provide valuable insights into the experiences, perspectives, and attitudes of research participants.

In FDGs, participants can share their opinions and experiences with one another, sparking new insights and ideas that might not emerge in individual interviews. Meanwhile, IDIs allow for a more personal and detailed exploration of individual experiences and perspectives. The insights gathered through FDGs and IDIs can inform the development of talent management strategies that better address the needs and aspirations of youth. Additionally, these methods can help to ensure that youth are engaged and empowered in the talent management process, which can improve their satisfaction, motivation, and retention.

Unit of Analysis and Respondents

The study adopts an individual unit of analysis. It is important to note that the choice of the unit of analysis should be consistent with the research objectives and the research questions being investigated. Adopting an appropriate unit of analysis (individual) for the qualitative research approach ultimately contributed to providing a more detailed understanding of talent champion among youth in Malaysia.

The targeted population for this study involves students from selected higher education institutions in Malaysia and the subject matter experts from related agencies and organisations. Tertiary students are a suitable sample for talent champion among youth in Malaysia for several reasons:

1. Tertiary students are in the transition phase from being a student to becoming young adults, and they are at a critical stage of their career development.
2. Tertiary students are more likely to have a high level of education, knowledge, and skills that are crucial to the development of talents.
3. Tertiary institutions are also considered as a strategic platform for talent development in Malaysia, and they play an essential role in preparing the future workforce for the country development programs in tertiary institutions and identify areas for improvement; and
4. Focusing on tertiary students allows for a more targeted approach to talent development, as it is easier to identify the skills and knowledge that are needed for specific industries and professions.

Subject matter experts (SMEs) may include professionals such as academics, researchers, consultants, practitioners, industry experts, or individuals who have direct experience in the subject matter being studied. In some cases, SMEs may also be individuals who have experienced a particular phenomenon or event firsthand and can provide insights based on their personal experiences. SMEs are essential for designing and implementing effective talent development programs, as it helps to identify the key areas of focus, the most appropriate strategies and methods, and the necessary resources and support systems. On the other hand, it enables talent developers to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities that arise in actual practice and to adjust their approaches and interventions accordingly.

Sampling Technique

This study adopts non-probability sampling, and purposive sampling is an appropriate sampling technique to select participants based on specific criteria and characteristics relevant to the research topic (Creswell, 2013). Purposive sampling is a non-random sampling method that involves selecting participants based on a specific purpose or criterion. This method is suitable for qualitative research, particularly when the research aims to

understand a specific phenomenon or experience among a particular group of people. Purposive sampling ensures that the participants selected are relevant and can provide valuable insights into the research topic. According to Patton (2015), purposive sampling is commonly used in qualitative research because it allows the researcher to identify and select participants who are knowledgeable and experienced in the research topic. The table below shows the plan of data collection activities for this study.

Selecting a representative sample, especially an essential set of demographic components connected to the study field, begins with determining the target population. This qualitative study needs a modest sample size to collect data from selected people. In determining the number of participants for this qualitative research, experts suggest: 15-20 participants (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006); and 9-17 participants (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). Previous studies revealed that research based on qualitative techniques like focus groups or interviews often reaches saturation at a sample of 20 to 30 participants (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Morse, 2000; Patton, 1990). In this study, a total of 30 participants from selected Malaysian public higher education institutions students will be involved in FDGs, and 6 informants from selected agencies and organisations will be involved in the in-depth interviews as subject matter experts.

Data Analysis

This study employs both manual methods and content analysis software (NVivo 12) to analyse the data. Nvivo is a software program that is commonly used for qualitative data analysis. It is designed to assist researchers in managing, analyzing, and visualizing large amounts of unstructured data, such as interview transcripts, survey responses, and other text-based data. The analysis will be conducted in three stages data familiarisation, generating primary codes, categorising themes, capturing codes, revising themes and group formation, pattern development, and establishing the link between themes. In the first phase of analysis, the interview transcripts are reviewed and revised into codes. At this phase, researchers emphasise common terms, examples, and a variety of evidence-based participant responses. The second step includes extracting themes from several codes and linking them to the accompanying text. For final writing and analysis, researchers made use of group subcategories. These approaches allowed researchers to create results by generating concepts and identifying themes.

This study uses NVivo software for managing massive amounts of data and constructing a model for themes and subthemes. This allows for the study of large amounts of text in qualitative research and is an effective method for developing codes, topics, and categories. There are several reasons to use NVivo: a) greater flexibility to categorise rich-text data; b) improved quality of generated results; c) reduced time and effort; d) identifies trends and cross-examines information; and e) the ability to analyse, classify, and categorise vast amounts of data from interviews, notes, and published documents. For internal validity, this research will employ a three-stage method to theme analysis, since the rich data analysis comprised brainstorming by participants, focus group sessions, and semi-structured interviews from various firms. The highly adaptable method of identifying, analysing, and reporting themes from the data is thematic analysis. Finally, the interview data will be transcribed as part of the description and analysis.

CONCLUSIONS

A talent champion can be a valuable tool for countries to assess and compare their talent competitiveness relative to other nations. By focusing on key indicators, a talent champion helps to identify the strengths and weaknesses in a country's talent pool, which in turn can inform targeted policies and strategies aimed at improving talent development and attraction. This is especially important in an increasingly competitive global economy where human capital is a key driver of growth and innovation. The concept of a talent champion can also serve as a benchmarking tool for businesses and investors, providing them with valuable insights into a country's potential for talent investment. By evaluating the quality and availability of a country's talent pool, businesses can make more informed decisions about where to invest or expand, while governments can focus on developing and retaining their most asset, namely human capital (Seven, 2022).

By measuring a country's talent pool and identifying areas for improvement, policymakers can create more effective strategies that enhance talent development and retention. This can contribute significantly to achieving

key Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) such as SDG 8, which promotes sustained and inclusive economic growth, SDG 4, which emphasizes inclusive and equitable quality education, SDG 9, which aims to promote resilient infrastructure and foster innovation, and SDG 10, which seeks to reduce inequalities within and among countries. These efforts can create greater opportunities for economic growth, development, and social progress.

Focusing on youth talent champions is crucial for the future prosperity and competitiveness of a nation. The growing recognition of the importance of a highly skilled workforce has led to the development of several indices designed to measure a country's talent competitiveness. These indices assess various factors, such as the ability to attract, retain, and develop talent, as well as the innovation capacity of a nation. Notable examples of these indices include the Global Talent Competitiveness Index (GTCI), the World Talent Ranking (WTR), the Global Creativity Index (GCI), the Human Capital Index (HCI), and the Talent Sustainability Index (TSI). The GTCI, developed by INSEAD, evaluates a country's ability to foster talent attraction and development, while the WTR, developed by the International Institute for Management Development (IMD), assesses investments in education, apprenticeships, and workforce training.

The GCI, created by the Martin Prosperity Institute, measures creativity based on education, technology, and cultural openness, whereas the HCI, developed by the World Bank, evaluates human capital by looking at factors like health, education, and work opportunities. The TSI, by the Adecco Group, examines the sustainability of a country's talent pool, considering factors such as skills development, talent mobility, and gender equality. These indices not only provide a framework for countries to gauge their talent competitiveness but also serve as a benchmarking tool for businesses and investors looking to assess the potential of a country's human capital investment opportunities.

In Malaysia, the development of talent champions among youth is important for several reasons. First, it helps to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the country's talent development initiatives, providing insights that can inform future policy decisions and program developments. By identifying gaps and areas of improvement, Malaysia can adopt a more targeted approach to cultivating a highly skilled workforce. Secondly, focusing on the development of talent champions among youth is essential for equipping young people with the necessary skills to succeed in an increasingly competitive workforce. By measuring the impact of talent development initiatives, youth can understand the value of investing in their own education and skill development, enabling them to make informed decisions about their future career paths.

Finally, the concept of a talent champion can help Malaysia benchmark its talent competitiveness against other countries, identifying areas for improvement and working toward becoming a more attractive destination for global talent. This is crucial for fostering economic growth and innovation, as a competitive workforce can significantly enhance productivity and contribute to the country's overall economic development. The development of talent champions among youth aligns with key national strategies and frameworks, such as the Shared Prosperity Vision 2030, the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025, the Malaysia National Youth Development Policy (2020-2030), the 12th Malaysia Plan (2021-2025), and the Malaysia Digital Economy Blueprint (2021-2030).

Despite the importance of developing talent champions among youth in Malaysia, there is a lack of specific research focusing on the gaps in this area. However, several studies have pointed out broader issues related to talent development and competitiveness in the country. For instance, a study by Khan et al. (2022) highlighted that Malaysia's current talent development initiatives lack a comprehensive framework to measure talent competitiveness. These initiatives also suffer from insufficient systematic measurement and evaluation of their effectiveness.

Similarly, a study by Harun et al. (2020) found that there is a need for more targeted and coordinated talent development efforts in Malaysia, particularly to address gaps in critical skills and competencies required by the industry. The research also emphasized the need for stronger collaboration between industry and academia to ensure that talent development initiatives align with industry demands. Furthermore, several weaknesses in Malaysia's higher education system need to be addressed to enhance talent development. These include limited access to higher education, outdated curricula, insufficient exposure to practical experience, limited access to research opportunities, and the challenge of brain drain. Addressing these issues will be crucial to ensuring that

Malaysia can cultivate and retain its talent champions and strengthen its position in the global economy.

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