

Measuring Student Perceptions and Engagement in University-Industry Experiential Learning: A Case Study of the Jelajah CEO@Faculty FGV 2026

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ABSTRACT

In contemporary higher education, the disconnect between academic curricula and evolving corporate demands poses a persistent pedagogical challenge in cultivating 21st-century workforce competencies. To evaluate the efficacy of executive-led academic interventions, this paper examines the Jelajah CEO@Faculty FGV 2026 programme a multi-campus university-industry initiative deployed across Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) branches. The curriculum bridged theoretical learning with corporate pragmatism by integrating executive mentorship, resume clinics, and human resource mock interview simulations designed to sharpen interpersonal communication, collaboration, and career literacy. Adopting a quantitative action-research methodology, this study analyses empirical post-programme evaluation data from undergraduate participants across the Central Zone and Southern Zone. Findings reveal an overwhelmingly positive shift in student engagement and self-perceived skill acquisition. Experiential components specifically real-time HR simulations significantly amplified students' perceived understanding of industry realities (95.4%) and curricular relevance (94.9%), with 97.6% expressing intent to join future interventions. Ultimately, this study demonstrates that structured corporate immersive programmes serve as vital catalysts for developing 21st-century skills by demystifying workforce expectations. The paper concludes with an actionable operational framework for higher education administrators to scale and sustain executive-led mentorship models for future-ready graduates.

Keywords: 21st-Century Competencies, University-Industry Collaboration, Experiential Pedagogies, Graduate Employability, Higher Education Policy, Action Research

INTRODUCTION

The higher education landscape of the 21st century operates at a pivotal juncture where traditional instructional methodologies face increasing scrutiny regarding their capacity to prepare graduates for an unprecedentedly volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) employment market (Bawaneh et al., 2023; World Economic Forum, 2023). Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) globally are tasked with a dual mandate: advancing academic research and delivering a talent pipeline equipped not only with disciplinary knowledge but also with high-order "21st-century skills"—specifically critical thinking, adaptive

communication, cross-functional collaboration, and strategic career literacy (Ananiadou & Claro, 2009; Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2019).

Despite significant curricular reforms, a systemic mismatch persists between higher education outcomes and industry requirements, commonly termed the "graduate skills gap" (Jackson, 2016; Tomlinson, 2017). Employers frequently report that while recent university graduates demonstrate adequate technical proficiency, they display marked deficits in soft skills, pragmatic business awareness, and emotional intelligence during high-stakes corporate transitions (Bridgstock, 2009; Succi & Canovi, 2020). In Malaysia, this challenge is underscored by national graduate employability tracking initiatives, which emphasize the urgent need for pedagogical innovation to transition undergraduates from passive consumers of theoretical knowledge into agile, industry-ready professionals (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia [MOHE], 2021).

To address this systemic disconnect, the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education introduced the CEO@Faculty Programme, an institutionalized policy mechanism designed to inject top-tier corporate leaders directly into university ecosystems. By bringing C-suite executives into academic spaces, the initiative seeks to align tertiary curricula with real-world industry trends, offer authentic mentorship, and enhance student engagement through experiential learning (MOHE, 2018). While the theoretical benefits of executive involvement in academia are widely acknowledged in literature (e.g., Perkmann et al., 2013), there remains an empirical gap in evaluating how such interventions manifest when operationalized as mobile, multi-campus roadshows targeting diverse undergraduate demographics.

This study examines the implementation and empirical outcomes of the Jelajah CEO@Faculty FGV 2026 programme, a collaborative venture between Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) and FGV Holdings Berhad, a major multinational agribusiness and consumer products conglomerate. Spanning multiple geographical zones, this initiative combined high-level executive keynotes on workforce opportunities and challenges with intensive, practical human resource workshops, including individualized resume clinics and real-time mock interviews.

The primary objective of this paper is to evaluate student perceptions, level of engagement, and self-assessed skill acquisition resulting from this corporate-academic intervention. Specifically, the study addresses three research questions:

1. How do undergraduate students across distinct campus environments evaluate the relevance, speaker engagement, and overall satisfaction of executive-led roadshows?
2. To what extent do practical micro-simulations (resume clinics and mock interviews) enhance students' understanding of corporate realities and 21st-century skill requirements?

By analysing empirical feedback from $N = 292$ undergraduate participants across Central Zone and Southern Zone this paper contributes an empirical case study to the literature on experiential higher education, offering a validated operational framework for sustaining meaningful industry-academia integration.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework: Experiential Learning and 21st-Century Skill Acquisition

This study is grounded in Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory (ELT), which conceptualizes learning as a continuous four-stage cycle comprising Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualization, and Active Experimentation. In tertiary career development contexts, traditional didactic lectures often restrict students to abstract conceptualization, neglecting the concrete experiences necessary to internalize professional norms (Yardley et al., 2012). Executive-led interventions, such as the CEO@Faculty program, reconfigure this learning dynamic by inserting authentic corporate narratives into the classroom (Concrete Experience) and facilitating immediate practical application through resume reviews and interview simulations (Active Experimentation).

Simultaneously, the research integrates the 21st-Century Skills Framework (P21, 2019), which categorizes essential learning and career skills into critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and contextual literacy. As modern workplaces undergo rapid digital and operational transformations, static technical qualifications decay quickly; consequently, career literacy the capacity to navigate employment markets, articulate personal value propositions, and adapt to organizational cultures—emerges as a core meta-competency (Bridgstock, 2009; Succi & Canovi, 2020). Experiential learning environments act as crucial incubators for these skills by subjecting students to constructive external evaluation from active corporate practitioners.

University-Industry Collaboration (UIC) in Higher Education

University-Industry Collaboration (UIC) has traditionally focused on commercial technology transfer, joint patent development, and commissioned research and development (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000; Perkmann et al., 2013). However, a growing body of higher education literature argues for a paradigm shift toward human-capital-centric UIC, wherein industry partners actively participate in talent cultivation and pedagogical co-design (Healy et al., 2014; Plewa et al., 2015). When industry leaders enter university faculties, they provide real-time market intelligence that textbook publishers cannot replicate, demystifying corporate expectations and reducing graduate transition anxiety (Thune, 2011). In the Asian higher education context, policy-driven UICs have proven particularly vital. Studies on Malaysian higher education initiatives reveal that while universities excel at technical instruction, students often lack exposure to corporate governance, executive communication standards, and strategic industry perspectives (Ahmad et al., 2018; Asian Development Bank, 2021). The Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education's CEO@Faculty policy was designed to bridge this gap by appointing corporate leaders as adjunct faculty members. However, evaluating the actual pedagogical impact of these engagements requires empirical scrutiny beyond high-level policy declarations.

Micro-Simulations and Career Literacy: Resume Clinics and Mock Interviews

While keynotes and panel discussions offer valuable macro-level perspectives on industry trends, educational psychology highlights that sustained behavioural modification requires active, participatory engagement (Bandura, 1986; Prince, 2004). Practical micro-simulations, such as resume clinics and mock interviews, serve as bridge mechanisms that translate macro-level corporate advice into individualized self-efficacy (Lent et al., 1994). Mock interviews provide high-fidelity simulations of recruitment environments, allowing students to practice verbal articulation, non-verbal cues, and situational judgment under mild cognitive stress (Hansen et al., 2012).

Constructive feedback delivered by the corporate HR personnel rather than academic instructor carries higher psychological authenticity, prompting deeper reflection and targeted skill adjustment (Voelker, 2021). Similarly, resume clinics transform the resume from a passive record of qualifications into a strategic communication tool tailored to modern applicant tracking systems and recruiter expectations (McDow & Zobotka, 2016). Despite their documented benefits, integrating these high-intensity practical clinics into large-scale academic roadshows presents significant operational challenges that warrant empirical evaluation.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a quantitative action-research case study design aimed at measuring student perceptions, engagement metrics, and learning outcomes following exposure to the Jelajah CEO@Faculty FGV 2026 programme. Action research is particularly well-suited for evaluating educational interventions, as it enables systematic empirical observation within real-world instructional settings to inform iterative program optimization (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). The program was executed as a mobile roadshow across multiple campuses of Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM). This study analyses data gathered from two initial major executions:

- Central Zone: Conducted on 9 April 2026

- Southern Zone: Conducted on 27 April 2026

Demographically, the vast majority of participants belonged to the 18–25 age (>98%) matching the target profile of Generation Z undergraduates transitioning into the workforce.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

Data were collected using a structured, bilingual (English and Bahasa Melayu) digital questionnaire administered via Google Forms. The survey instrument was adapted from standard higher education event evaluation frameworks and validated by academic experts at UiTM's Division of Industry Network and Community Relations (ICAN).

The questionnaire was organized into three core sections:

1. Section A: Participant Profile: Captured demographic items, organizational affiliation, academic category, and age group.
2. Section B: Quantitative Construct Evaluation: Measured student ratings across five key experiential constructs:
 - Content Relevance (Scaled continuous item: 10-point scale for Central Zone, 5-point scale for Southern Zone).
 - Pertaining Industry Understanding (Scaled continuous item).
 - Speaker Engagement and Facilitation (Scaled continuous item).
 - Industry-Academia Collaboration Impact (Scaled continuous item).
 - Venue Facilities Assessment (5-point Likert scale).
3. Overall Programme Experience (5-point Likert scale: 1 = Unsatisfactory to 5 = Excellent).
4. Section C: Qualitative Feedback and Future Intent: Included open-ended items eliciting the valuable event components, suggestions for operational improvement, and a binary metric measuring longitudinal interest such as "Would you participate again?".

Data Processing and Statistical Analysis

Raw evaluation data were extracted from Excel spreadsheets (Programme Feedback Form Responses) and processed using Python within a specialized Data Science Python Interpreter environment. To ensure rigorous cross-campus comparability despite varying item scales between survey iterations (Central Zone utilized 10-point scales for specific construct items, whereas Southern Zone utilized 5-point scales), mean scores ($\bar{X}$) were normalized into standardized percentage metrics using Figure 1 in Equation (1), where $Scale_{max}$ denotes the upper limit of the respective measurement scale with this formula.

$$Normalized\ Metric\ (\%) = \left(\frac{\bar{X}}{Scale_{max}} \right) \times 100$$

Figure 1. Standardized percentage metrics using equation

As such, the longitudinal engagement metrics were equally robust. When asked whether they would participate in future iterations of the roadshow, 95.2% of respondents in Central Zone and 97.6% in Southern Zone responded affirmatively. The exceptionally high preparticipation intent in Southern Zone underscores a strong interest for corporate led experiential interventions within regional branch campuses.

Evaluation of Core Experiential Dimensions

A comparative examination of the core educational constructs reveals strong alignment between program design and student perception. Table 1 visually illustrates the normalized percentage scores across all evaluated dimensions for both campuses.

Central Zone	Overall Experience (95.2%), Content Relevance (93.3%), Industry Understanding (92.1%), Speaker Engagement (92.9%), Collaboration Impact (94.3%), Venue Rating (95.7%).
Southern Zone	Overall Experience (94.0%), Content Relevance (94.9%), Industry Understanding (95.4%), Speaker Engagement (95.4%), Collaboration Impact (94.9%), Venue Rating (93.9%).

Table 1: Comparative Evaluation of Experiential Learning Dimensions across Campuses

Content Relevance and Industry Understanding

The keynote address and subsequent discussions achieved high scores for content relevance, yielding 93.3% Central Zone and 94.9% at Southern Zone. Similarly, students' self-assessed understanding of corporate industry dynamics expanded significantly, scoring 92.1% and 95.4% at the respective campuses. Qualitative commentary reveals that students particularly valued Group Director, Oils and Fats Division, Mr. Zulkifli Othman's candid discussion of modern workforce challenges, including digital transformation, corporate resilience, and recruitment expectations in the agricultural and FMCG sectors. This aligns with findings by Succi and Canovi (2020), who noted that direct executive transparency reduces student misconceptions regarding entry-level workplace expectations.

Speaker Engagement and Facilitation

Speaker engagement rated among the highest-scoring dimensions in the study, securing 92.9% at Central Zone and 95.4% at Southern Zone. Observations from event logs and student feedback indicate that the "Sembang Teh Tarik" informal layout effectively broke down traditional power distance barriers between executives and students. Rather than delivering a dry, unidirectional corporate presentation, the executive speakers utilized interactive storytelling, personal career anecdotes, and active Q&A polling, embodying the relational facilitation style advocated in 21st-century experiential pedagogy (Prince, 2004).

Impact on University-Industry Collaboration (UIC)

Participants recognized the strategic value of the event in bridging academia and industry, rating UIC impact at 94.3. (Central Zone and 94.9% (Southern Zone). The integration of physical product exhibitions (e.g., FGV's SAJI and ADELA product lines) directly alongside academic spaces reinforced the reality of corporate supply chains, enabling students to connect classroom concepts in business and language studies with consumer brand management.

Overall Student Satisfaction and Longitudinal Interest

The quantitative analysis demonstrates an overwhelmingly positive reception of the Jelajah CEO@Faculty FGV 2026 programme across both academic settings. As detailed in Table 1, overall experiential satisfaction reached 95.2% among Central Zone undergraduates and 94.0% among Southern Zone undergraduates on a 5-point scale.

Construct Dimension	Scale Max	Central Zone (n=42) Mean (SD)	Normalized Score (%)	Southern Zone (n=250) Mean (SD)	Normalized Score (%)
Overall Programme Experience	5	4.762 (0.484)	95.2%	4.700 (0.509)	94.0%
Content Relevance	10 / 5	9.333 (1.141)	93.3%	4.744 (0.521)	94.9%

Industry Understanding	10 / 5	9.214 (1.220)	92.1%	4.768 (0.442)	95.4%
Speaker Engagement	10 / 5	9.286 (1.175)	92.9%	4.768 (0.459)	95.4%
UIC Collaboration Impact	10 / 5	9.429 (0.991)	94.3%	4.744 (0.455)	94.9%
Venue & Facility Rating	5	4.786 (0.470)	95.7%	4.696 (0.563)	93.9%
Intent to Participate Again	Binary	—	95.2%	—	97.6%

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics and Normalized Scores across Campuses

The data shows stability across both cohorts despite differences in sample size and physical venue scale. Venue ratings were high at both the Central Zone (95.7%) and the Southern Zone (93.9%), indicating that logistical infrastructure successfully supported both small-group interactive mentorship and large-scale audience engagements.

Qualitative Insights: Micro-Simulations as Catalysts for 21st-Century Skills

Inductive thematic analysis of open-ended responses (n = 218 qualitative comments) provided deeper insight into the quantitative scores. Three primary themes emerged regarding how the micro-simulations cultivated 21st-century skills:

- **Practical Communication under Pressure (Mock Interviews):** Students frequently cited the mock interview sessions as the "most valuable part" of the event. Receiving immediate, unvarnished feedback from active corporate recruiters allowed students to identify verbal filler habits, refine body language, and practice structuring responses using the STAR (Situation, Task, Action, Result) technique. One student noted: "The mock interview was an eye-opener; the HR panel pointed out weaknesses in my confidence that my lecturers never mentioned."
- **Strategic Self-Presentation (Resume Clinic):** Feedback highlighted that the resume clinic demystified modern recruitment filters, such as Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS). Students learned to translate academic course projects into functional competency statements, directly building career literacy and digital self-presentation skills.
- **Adaptive Thinking and Demystification:** Interacting directly with senior executive leadership transformed students' perceptions of corporate culture from an intimidating, abstract entity into an accessible, human-centered environment.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The empirical findings from the Jelajah CEO@Faculty FGV 2026 case study confirm that executive-led university-industry roadshows serve as highly effective catalysts for enhancing student engagement, career literacy, and 21st-century skill acquisition. By combining high-level corporate keynotes with practical micro-simulations, the program successfully bridged theoretical academic instruction with real-world industry expectations, achieving satisfaction ratings above 94% across diverse university campuses. The study demonstrates that undergraduates deeply value authentic, transparent interactions with corporate leaders and human resource practitioners. When provided with constructive, real-time evaluation during resume clinics and mock interviews, students exhibit heightened self-efficacy and a clearer understanding of modern workplace demands.

However, scaling such programs requires addressing logistical constraints, specifically time compression during high-demand practical workshops. By adopting the proposed Integrated University-Industry Immersive Framework (I-UIIF), higher education institutions and corporate partners can optimize event operations, leverage digital pre-screening tools, and build sustainable talent pipelines that empower future-ready graduates.

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