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THE CREDIBILITY OF STUDENT LEADERSHIP IN  
EMPOWERING YOUTH VOICES: REFORMING A  
PROGRESSIVE SOCIETY

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**Abstract:**

A progressive, knowledge-based society allows young people the right and freedom to express their important thoughts, notably in the realm of political leadership. The essence of educating students who are knowledgeable and able to think critically and creatively is academic freedom. This study's primary purpose is to argue the credibility of student leadership in strengthening youth voices, which is a reform for Malaysia's progressive society. This research utilizes the document analysis technique by referencing prior research on the credibility of student leadership in empowering youth voices. In the framework of recognising the youth's voice as one of the platforms for developing a progressive society like Malaysia, previous recommendations and findings will be examined and integrated. The following four major issues are discussed: (1) The Credibility of Student Leadership in Empowering the Voice of Youth as Drivers of a Progressive Society, (2) The Relevance of the University and University College Act 1971 (AUKU 1971) in Representing Student Rights, (3) The Rationale for Reforming the National Constitutional System in Implementation of Vote 18, and (4) Creating Guarantees of Freedom of Expression for Trust Transparency and Youth Responsibility. According to the study's findings, it is critical for the country to recognise the role of students in raising people's issues, because students are the driving force behind a civilised society, the generators of a great and quality generation of people, and the keepers of the country's harmony and prosperity. The purpose of this research is to focus on traditional political discussions such as elections, youth involvement, and voting 18, where empirical studies are not limited to the

interests of political parties alone and can assist the government in developing appropriate strategies to have a positive impact on all parties.

**Keywords:**

Student Leadership, Progressive Society, Youth Voice, University and University College Act 1971 (AUKU 1971), Vote-18

**Introduction**

Youth is a major population in society today. The youth population, i.e., those aged 18 to 40 years, constitutes more than half of the expected 32.4 million inhabitants in the country in 2022 (Berita Harian, 2022). Considering the advantages and strengths of the number of students in Malaysia, it must be acknowledged that all national development and advancement processes would inevitably entail the participation of students. Moreover, the future of Malaysia depends on the young population, particularly the students of today. Students are the backbone of the youth movement and play an important role in transmitting the youth's voice not only to certain parties but also to the community. The motto "Youth is the hope and pillar of the Nation" is frequently uttered not only by members of the community, but also by the nation's top leaders (Othman, Yusoff, Jupiter and Mokhtar, 2021a). This relate with the culture connotation of "Bahasa Jiwa Bangsa" (Language is the Soul of the Nation) as a reflection inseminating element that symbolises the solidarity of the national language of the Malay language in order to achieve synergies harmonisation Malaysians (Othman et al., 2021a).

In connection with that, the quantity factor also benefits integrating students into Malaysian society. Students must first be taught to lead in the present if they are to become leaders in the future (Chamhuri, Che Wan Ngah, Mohd Kamil, Jaharudin, and Muhamad Radhi, 2019). Students play an important role in raising issues that affect individuals, particularly young people. The youth stage marks the transition out of adolescence, when a person quits relying on their parents and starts to be independent (Suhaimi, John Abdullah, Arshad, Yeon, Azhar and Ayub, 2016). Youth are expected by society and the government to be of good character, hardworking, skilled, and trustworthy toward their families, friends, community, and nation. As is often stated, it is the job and responsibility of young people to shape a nation's character, principles, and way of life. As a country that recognises Islam as the official religion, Malaysia has its own uniqueness when it places emphasis based on the concept of Islam according to Quran and Sunnah. The interconnectedness of the majority Malaysians who are Muslim justifies the country's public universities to plan strategically and be competitive in ensuring Islamic studies as one of the components enshrined in the national higher education agenda (Othman, Ationg, Esa, Hajimin and Abang Muis, 2021b).

Youth development must be prioritised to ensure that the country can continue to develop as planned. Thus, we acknowledge that youth are the future assets and heirs of the country. Nevertheless, numerous concerns about youth are raised, but their opinions are sometimes ignored due to the community's scepticism especially related to social problems (Othman, Mohd Shah, Yusoff, Abu Bakar, Zulhaimi, Abang Muis and Muda, 2021c). The context of the discussion focused on and the youths' own youth and inexperience. As a result, the credibility of student leadership in strengthening the voice of the youth is critical in enabling the voice of the youth to be heard and taken seriously. Students' duty in bringing up people's issues is to be

the engine of a civilised society and the source of a great generation of people who contribute to the nation's peace and prosperity.

### Literature Review

Academic freedom is essential to the formation of students who are aware and able to think critically and creatively in an educational institution. Considering this approach, a society built on knowledge should have the right and freedom to express important opinions and ideas, especially when it includes political leadership. The young generation is essential to the future leadership of the nation. Therefore, youth must be educated and instructed with an emphasis on instilling discipline and the importance of responsibility. Youth should demonstrate self-confidence in order to earn the community's trust while bolstering the legitimacy of leadership supported by a college degree. This procedure does not produce quick results and requires years of development. The crucial age of youth occurs when they join university, where more mature thought is produced. However, numerous legal measures have restricted the freedom of Malaysian students.

The political fight of the younger generation in Malaysia has evolved since the country achieved independence on 31st August 1957. For the past 10 years, legal literacy and students' participation in the campus of the political landscape has given birth to an enthusiastic young generation with high leadership charisma, especially in developing countries such as Malaysia (Othman, Ibrahim, Esa, Ationg, Mokhtar, Tamring and Adam, 2021d). In accordance with the Law of Universities and University Colleges (Amendment) 2018 (AUKU), Act 30, Act 555, and Act 174 have been amended to permit higher education institute (IPT) students to engage in political activity on campus (Othman et al., 2021d). The University and University College Act, often known as AUKU 1971, is a legislative act partially administered by the Malaysian Ministry of Education (KPM). This act was first intended to regulate the administration and operation of the institution so that it would be more organised. Unfortunately, a section of this act prohibits student participation in politics, union members, and the formation of student organisations.

As a result of these restrictions, a small number of Malaysian students have expressed dissatisfaction, particularly where the substance of AUKU 1971 has indirectly blocked their voices from being heard on the basis of their status as university students (Mohd Basori and Awang Besar, 2020). This occurs when the university feels they have lost their autonomy in university administration. At the same time, it leads to unfair judgements regarding students. The effect of AUKU 1971 has restricted the youth movement's ability to demand rights and freedom. In recent years, the government has amended a section allowing students to participate in political activities on campus, albeit in a limited capacity and under university supervision (Mazli, Mamat, Abdul Razak and Abdul Rashid, 2016). In essence, AUKU 1971 is still relevant, but certain provisions must be amended to provide students the freedom to express their thoughts and contribute to the nation.

The constitutional structure of Malaysia is undergoing a new change, and the government has decided to implement Vote 18. What is Vote 18? On 16<sup>th</sup> July 2019, Malaysia made history for the first time when a campaign to qualify young people under the age of 18 to vote and run for office was successful. A young representative, Syed Saddiq Syed Abdul Rahman, was responsible for bringing about the change (Mohamad Noor and Awang Besar, 2020). This is evidence of the young generation's efforts to empower democracy. When the voting was

completed, the 2019 Constitution (Amendment) Bill obtained the agreement of 211 of the 222 members of Parliament, or more than two-thirds of the House of Representatives members (Mohamed Amin, 2020). In that instance, Malaysia's voting age and eligibility to serve as a representative of the people were reduced from 21 to 18 years old.

As a result, our nation anticipates that the young generation will be able to bring fresh perspectives to political party leadership and long-term government policy through the historic moment of the new level of 18-year-old voting rights (Mohd Nizah and Mohamad Sharif, 2019). Beginning in February 2022, elections in this nation will use automatic voter registration for those who are 18 years of age or older. Voting is a personal decision, and all young Malaysians should have the right to vote. The participation of 18-year-old voters is an important factor in the formation of a government capable of representing the interests of all age groups and the community as a whole. It is hoped that the young generation or youth will now exercise their rights with maturity, discernment, and efficiency (Othman, Ahmad and Esa, 2022a). Despite the government's numerous attempts to achieve UNDI 18, there are still a few sceptics and lack of confidence individuals who believe that the youth are too young to choose a superior leadership position for the future government. However, maturity cannot be determined by a person's chronological age; rather, it can be observed by their conduct and manner of thinking. The future of the nation can be influenced by the rationale behind efforts to involve the youth in political power determination (Othman, Ahmad and Esa, 2022a).

Consequently, individuals who have reached the age of 18 should have the right to vote because they are able to contribute to the socioeconomics of the community, shoulder the responsibilities of citizenship, be subject to contractual agreements, pay taxes, and marry, work, and be responsible for oneself. This issue demonstrates that the right to vote must be granted to people who function as members of society and the people, and not on the basis of their political education and maturity. Indeed, Vote 18 is a valuable asset for our country, as it will allow us to observe the transformation of our country's leadership as a result of youth participation in elections. The formation of political aspirations benefitting in balancing the formation of the country from other aspects and encourage leaders in solving problems related to the country and the people (Othman, Radzi and Esa, 2022b). As a result, the ultimate goal of a cultured society should be national pride and sovereignty, and to do so, the dynamic Malaysian nation must develop an identity in order to become a civilised and glorious nation (Othman, Radzi and Esa, 2022b). Hence, the continuation of patriotism as well as the maximum appreciation of Malaysia's independence history to be nurtured and instilled among the younger generation, allowing Malaysia to exist as a strong country in politics, economy, social, and socio-culture (Othman, Radzi and Esa, 2022b).

According to the United Nations (UN), youth can act as a catalyst for change, economic growth, and the acceptance of technical innovation (Fadzil, 2020). Therefore, it is evident that youths contribute significantly to the country's success and development. There is no doubt that the proportion of students in the youth group is growing, thus the ramifications of the National Assembly decreasing the youth age limit from 40 to 30 years, which places a higher duty on the youth to quickly comprehend and transmit their trust. Obviously, a substantial proportion of the youth are enrolled in higher education, which raises the first question of whether these students are aware of their position as student leaders in the university. Malaysia's experience as a country that has to face various challenges in mainstreaming and expanding the National Higher Education's continuity strategically in the country's uncertain economic climate

scenario (Othman, 2021e). Disputation of the target of the discussion thoroughly emphasises the relevance of MOHE initiatives in reducing the unemployment rate, especially among high quality graduates where the group will make a huge contribution to the development and economy of the country. The second question is if they fulfil their responsibilities as youth leaders. Thus, the essence of further debate on the role of the education sector and institutions of higher learning as a field for society to develop knowledge, thus giving a positive impact to produce graduates with intellectual, physical, emotional and spiritual potential.

### **Methodology**

This study utilized the document analysis approach by referencing prior research on the credibility of student leadership in empowering youth voices. In the framework of recognising the youth's voice as one of the platforms for developing a progressive society like Malaysia, previous recommendations and findings will be examined and incorporated. The qualitative approach utilises secondary data content analysis methods that are the results of research journals, reports, books and online news sources (Babbie, 2017; Creswell, 2014; Flick, 2014; Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2016). Furthermore, the researcher conducted research of secondary sources, both online and offline, that refer to articles, books, papers, forums, and government policies related to various parties' efforts and initiatives to argue the credibility of student leadership in strengthening youth voices, which is a reform for Malaysia's progressive society. In the context of this study, the method produces research data that shows the importance the efforts and initiatives of various parties towards the essence of educating students who are knowledgeable and able to think critically and creatively is academic freedom. This is done based on clear information from document analysis placing the manifestation of a progressive, knowledge-based society allows young people the right and freedom to express their important thoughts, notably in the realm of political leadership.

### **Discussion Of Issues**

In the context of this paper's discussion, the author raises a number of arguments concerning issues such as (1) The Credibility of Student Leadership in Empowering the Voice of Youth as a Mobilizer of Progressive Society; (2) The Relevance of the University and University College Act 1971 (AUKU 1971) in Representing Students' Rights; (3) The Rationale for Reforming the National Constitutional System in the Implementation of Vote 18; and Creating Speech Freedom Guarantees for Transparency of Youth's Trust and Responsibility Towards the State.

#### ***The Credibility of Student Leadership in Empowering the Voice of Youth as Drivers of a Progressive Society***

(i) The duty of students in addressing the concerns of the populace includes serving as the engine of a developing and civilised society. Civilisation is the stage of human society characterised by the level of material advancement and the development of ideas (Kamus Dewan Bahasa Edisi Keempat, 2005). Therefore, in this period of globalisation, students should reaffirm their duties and obligations in all facets of a progressive society's life, particularly from an intellectual, spiritual, and idealistic perspective (Mohd Hed, 2012). Students are viewed as an intellectually and spiritually authoritative group of young people. This is due to the fact that the level of education of the students themselves is frequently associated with a developing culture that has the credibility to advance in spiritual and physical aspects by focusing on knowledge and physical (Othman, Mohd Shah, Yusoff, Norazah, Awang and Jupiter, 2017).

Students are expected to be more professional, have a more mature way of thinking, and be equipped with well-reasoned and insightful viewpoints when addressing the challenges of the people. Therefore, mastery of knowledge is essential for the development of a civilised society. In addition to intellectualism and spirituality, students should possess strong communication and social skills to avoid moral crises and a lack of creativity (Ali, Che' Rus, Haron and Mohammad Hussain, 2018). Communication is the process of exchanging ideas, information, and emotions. From this perspective, communication becomes a language-based channel for the conception of ideas. In other words, students must continually refine and improve their communication skills, not just for educational objectives but also as preparation for joining the workforce (Mamat, 2016). There is no denying that the vast majority of students are intelligent and of high calibre.

However, they have a tendency to be inactive and preoccupied with learning-related issues. This causes students, who should be a significant group and the voice of the community, to no longer be regarded as an essential component of the community's driving power. Students are marginalised when they demonstrate a lack of interest in local matters, let alone worldwide contemporary issues. Therefore, despite the fact that students are an intelligent group, their lack of empathy in echoing the voice of the people and supporting the plight of the common people has hampered the attempts of a few student leaders to resolve their problem. In addition to this idea, students must be better equipped to handle the challenge of being the voice of the youth and the community. Strictly speaking, daydreaming students must be awakened to fight for the formation of a progressive society (Zainon, Nadeya, Hashim, and Zulkifli, 2017).

This is due to the fact that one of the expectations placed on students is that they will make strategic efforts to enhance the prestige of the nation and society. Controversial attempts to address issues such as why are there still young people who do not understand or remember historical figures' struggles for independence? How do political aspirations among youngsters play an important role in looking at aspects of prosperity, unity and political stability? In terms of the agreement of independence, how important is it to sacrifice self-interest for national interest in order to form a free country? Thus, the primary focus of the debate is to identify the issues referring to political aspirations that can change over time in terms of strategy, but not in terms of the fundamental value of patriotism that does not change from the social contract or ethnic agreement in the formation of the Malaysian nation (Othman, Radzi and Esa, 2022c). Therefore, it is essential for everyone to recognise that the rejuvenation phase of students is a starting point. This is because an educated student is a valuable asset. Outstanding students should be recognised as the most precious generation in every nation on earth immediately.

In addition, academicians and students should build a vision of integrated greatness and implant a mind-boggling scientific aspect, which is an effective way to push students to pursue significant accomplishments after achieving success (Yaacob, Ali and Abd Wahab, 2017; Razak, Othman, Yusoff and Mohd Suki, 2016). Therefore, the advancement of knowledge cannot be detached from the pursuit of truth and the elevation of knowledge's stature for the benefit of society. As a result, all concerns should be handled with professionalism and not with haste. Students must be awakened from their slumber to fight for the cause that will create a civilised society.

(ii) Students also play a role as creators of a great generation of quality citizens, where they are categorised as a group of young intellectuals, but more importantly, they have an extensive network that determines the nation's fate. This quantitative advantage confers "bonus points" for broadly engaging students in societal change. Constantly, it is asserted that the student generation will inherit the leadership of the nation in the future. Disclosure of students entrusted with community leadership responsibilities begins progressively while they are enrolled in college and actively engaged in campus leadership (Othman et al., 2021c). In addition, the University and University College Act of 1971 (AUKU) permits students to participate in politics in order to express their opinions and critically evaluate contemporary concerns. In addition to be a symbol of the implementation of broader reforms, this amendment was enacted to foster the development of future generations and leaders who are more democratic (Berita Harian, 2018).

Students should have mental fortitude and be reminded of their role as a valuable asset in the ongoing struggle for religion, nation, and country. However, it is undeniable that there are a few students in this age of modernity who are so preoccupied with current events that they forget their role as the future generation of a progressive society (Othman, Yusoff, Awang and Jupiter, 2016). Among the challenges faced by the majority of students is a waning interest in learning. This is due to a lack of technological devices and poor internet connection quality. In addition, youths' age contributes to their propensity to abandon education in favour of time-consuming and unproductive activities. Even if the subsequent teaching and learning is conducted physically or face-to-face at school, this has a negative impact on students, who will feel less confident about learning in the long run. If this continues, it is believed that students would develop a disinterest in school, which could lead to a rise in the number of students who drop out.

In addition, one of the issues that must be addressed is the moral fall of the students. Morality is essential to the formation of high-quality students and the creation of a great generation (Shafie & Othman, 2016). Therefore, morality is more capable of producing people with high self-esteem. The difference in academic accomplishment resulting from varied educational backgrounds and students' negative perceptions of contemporary concerns, which are affected by subversive factors, are claimed to be among the greatest obstacles that have impeded students' ability to remain responsible. Therefore, students should be exposed to a variety of ways of thinking, particularly in terms of planning, strategies, programmes, and implementation techniques for addressing the obstacles that prevent them from becoming change agents and quality leaders. Numerous activities and initiatives have been implemented by the University and the Ministry of Higher Education (KPT).

For instance, the *Rakan Muda* Secretariat of Sultan Idris University of Education (SRM) organises the programme 'Student Fellowship with Indigenous Students' at Pos Musuh National School LZ Tapah, Perak (Berita Harian, 2017), the programme of Friendship with the Indigenous People Community is organised by University Putra Malaysia (Centre for Curriculum and Student Development, 2020), and the Joint Programme with the Indigenous People Community of Kampung Paya Lebar, Hulu Langat, Selangor with the theme "Health Awareness: The Bonding of Love between Students and Native People" (Department of Indigenous People, 2022), and numerous other activities planned previously. This issue seeks not only to instil a sense of leadership and responsibility in students, but also to cultivate their relationships with communities of all races. The purpose of exposing young people to life

science research is to foster tolerance and empathy for social problems, which can have a significant impact on the development of self-patriotism for the love of one's own country.

(iii) Students also play a role as a group that seeks to preserve the nation's harmony and unity. Malaysia, as many people are aware, is a country with a diverse population and serves as a model for other nations in terms of pluralism and unity. Former religious leader of the Federal Territory Datuk Wan Zahidi Teh characterised the integration of Malaysia's many races as a recipe for peace and prosperity (Astro Awani, 2015). Ethnic unity is defined as the unification of every Malaysian regardless of language, religion, belief, or racial origin. Racial unity is one of the most important concerns that Malaysians must properly address, particularly students who frequently interact with students of other races. Therefore, there are a few things that students must take seriously, namely, they must stand up and recognise their role for unity in order to maintain the sustainability of the university.

In Malaysia, the difference in academic achievement between the native and non-native students has the potential to destroy racial peace. Without unity, the independence and integrity of the country, which have been battled for so long will quickly vanish. The National Principles was enacted on 31<sup>st</sup> August 1970 by His Majesty the Yang di-Pertuan Agong Al-Haj Tuanku Ismail Nasiruddin Shah to promote racial harmony and national peace (Ibrahim, Ationg, Esa, Abang Muis, Othman, Yusoff, and Mokhtar, 2021). This understanding has successfully instilled a sense of unity in the students, which will continue to expand as they enter adulthood. Therefore, it is the obligation of the students to maintain unity and assure sustainability in order to prevent a recurrence of past catastrophes. The most violent race riot in this country, which occurred on 13<sup>th</sup> May 1969, should serve as an example of how crucial it is for multiracial communities to remain unified and live in harmony (Rambely and Haniffa, 2018).

To prevent sensitive topics such as racism and religion from arising in a student's surroundings, it is crucial to ingrain harmony and integration within each individual. Students are the layer of national leadership that plays a crucial role in injecting the young generation with a noble attitude of unity (A'zmi, Mustafar and Abdul Karim, 2017). Students are a significant influence in promoting and preserving racial unity in Malaysia. In addition to awareness, students must be courteous and have good manners in order to develop a cohesive community. Although this mentality must be shared by society as a whole, it is the responsibility of students as role models and leaders to serve as unifiers of the populace. Indeed, education and higher education play a crucial role in maintaining the harmony and peace of the country, as institutions such as these encourage students to cooperate in pursuing and completing their studies and learning, while also demonstrating a cooperative attitude toward their fellow students regardless of gender, race or religion.

Therefore, all parties must distance themselves from the inherent essence of envy and jealousy, which might harm the national unity (Lukin, Esa, Abang Muis, Ationg, Mohd Tamring, Othman and Mokhtar, 2021). The resistance mindset is one of the obstacles to racial unification in Malaysia. In other words, mental barriers are considered as perception-related issues. Subjectively, it does not reflect reality or the actual state of things. Therefore, perception refers to a mental or emotional image or shadow of something. Mental barrier is also associated with behaviour that stems from the individual's programmed way of thinking and comprehension (Lukin et al., 2021). As a student who studies this topic, it is vital to begin rectifying society's image by establishing unification campaigns or a more robust answer.



### ***The Relevance of the University and University College Act of 1971 (AUKU 1971) in Representing Student Rights***

(i) According to Mat Saad (2020), academic freedom is a right and freedom that should be granted to experts in fields such as the analysis of any subject or topic, teaching, conducting research, and publishing the results of research conducted. Despite the problems and risks that must be confronted, the peak of students in the 1960s and 1970s played a crucial role in safeguarding the fate of the people (Mazli et al., 2016). Following the passage of the University and University College Act of 1971 (AUKU), the student movement has undergone major transformation. Not all elements of AUKU 1971 pertain just to students; other factors are also covered. There are two areas that are allocated exclusively for students. Sections 15 and 16 as well as Article 48 of the First Schedule mention components of the Student Representative Council (Mazli et al., 2016).

Prior to the enactment of the University and University College Act of 1971, students fought vigorously for the rights of the people. In the context of national challenges, it has been demonstrated that students will rise to the challenge of establishing the National Language as the language of instruction and the official language in university administration, thereby reducing poverty. Section 15 of the AUKU of 1971 prohibits students from engaging in political action (Mohamad Razali, Boyman and Hussin, 2013). It is evident that the gap between before and after the implementation of AUKU in 1971 has restricted the political participation of students. This violates Article 10 of the Federal Constitution, which guarantees the right to freedom of expression (Roslizawati and Mohd Rizal, 2017). The University and University College Act of 1971, which went into effect on 30 April 1971, can be viewed as the government's weapon against students who oppose it.

This demonstrates that AUKU 1971 has been misapplied to bolster the government's authority. Looking back at the chronology of the birth of this act, AUKU was born out of the country's conflicts and disorder. When Malaysia's first university, the University of Malaya was created, it was governed by the University of Malaya Act 1961, which replaced the University of Malaya Ordinance 1949 (Mazli et al., 2016). Students at University Malaysia have considerable autonomy and are entrusted with the leadership of the Student Union. The scope of the business refers to the flexibility to produce business to the best of their ability and to ensure that they have no trouble managing student-related concerns. In addition, they have the authority to highlight issues like poverty, people's fundamental rights, and the welfare of Malaysian students.

During the 1969 General Election, the University of Malaya Student Union held a programme in which they encouraged the public to vote sensibly and demanded the freedom of speech (Mohamad Razali et al., 2013). This event occurs throughout Peninsular Malaysia. As a result, the Alliance lost two-thirds of its seats in parliament at the election (Mohamad Razali *et al.*, 2013). The government is aware of the significant impact students have on politics in Malaysia. This scenario is becoming more dire because the events of May 13 occurred simultaneously with the creation of the University and University College Act 1971 by the government. Currently, the students have no decision-making authority. It continued until numerous issues occurred as a result of divergent viewpoints.

(ii) The prohibitions listed in the regulations of AUKU 1971 make it difficult for students to make commitments and make it difficult for them to express their concerns. In fact, many parties are dissatisfied, and there is considerable controversy surrounding this subject. As a result, AUKU 1971 has been revised seven times by the Dewan Rakyat in Malaysia, specifically in 1971, 1975, 1983, 1996, 2009, 2012, and 2019 (Harian Metro, 2020). During the enforcement of this legislation, numerous issues concerning the right to freedom of expression and students were taken to court, including cases involving university-level discipline. This pressure resulted in the abolition of Section 15 (2) (c), which prohibits university students from engaging in political activities on campus. Freedom is a crucial pillar of democracy.

Freedom is related to the subject of human rights and obligations; a person's ability to get his rights and complete all of his responsibilities depend on his freedom (Chamhuri et al., 2019). Students must be allowed to develop their potential in the field of their choosing so that they can become national leaders in the field in which they excel. Therefore, it is essential that AUKU changes be made to provide students with more opportunity to express their respective viewpoints. The AUKU is generally seen as having two different perspectives by the community: those who believe it is still relevant and does not need to be repealed, and those who believe it should be repealed and replaced with a new act. This occurs as a result of their recognition of the significance of whether or not the repeal of AUKU will assist university students.

In that course, students will have the ability to join any political party and pursue careers in politics if the government decides to dissolve AUKU. The influence of politicians in the management of education can be curbed with the repeal of AUKU. However, it should be highlighted that the elimination of AUKU has a detrimental effect in that political parties can now use immature politics to sway the opinions of students. Students should exercise caution while discussing political concerns as a result. What is certain, however, is that the government must guarantee students' freedom of speech since it is crucial to their future in Malaysia.

(iv) Section 15 (d) of the Universities and Colleges Act allows the university to impose a pre-judgment penalty while the case is pending, even if there is insufficient evidence to show the student's guilt. Due to the university's autonomy, the accused might be judged guilty even in the absence of sufficient proof. As a result, the students were understandably outraged. As a result, different student movements, such as the AUKU Repeal Student Movement (GMMA) and the Higher Institution Reform Movement (GRIP), were created to fight for student independence (Mazli et al., 2016). Younger members of the community who are not fighting for their rights have been alarmed by the voices of former students who have been expelled from university and blacklisted from accessing any public university.

This circumstance reminds us of the tens of thousands of former students who were expelled based only on the subjective judgement of their supervisors, without any supporting proof. Obviously, this presented act has both advantages and disadvantages. The subject of AUKU 1971's applicability is still being vigorously debated at present. Undoubtedly, the 2012 amendments to AUKU have made it easier for students to participate in politics, but severe prejudice persists, preventing students from properly utilising this freedom. There are numerous instances where university administration is necessary to monitor student political activities (Roslizawati and Mohd Rizal, 2017).

For instance, if students participate in the Barisan Nasional (BN) campaign, no action is required. However, if students are discovered attending opposition meetings, they must be reported. In this context, the question is whether or not the government has abused AUKU for their political party's profit. The seventh amendment made in 2019 repealed provision 15 (2) (c), but its origins may still be found in the university's administrative structure. According to Abd Razak (2009), the best institutions of higher education are able to produce ideal students in terms of knowledge and living in society. However, if students are limited during the teaching and learning process, their potential cannot be truly achieved.

(v) Looking back over the past several years, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has prevented many college graduates from obtaining employment commensurate with their level of education. The relevance of the National Entrepreneurship Policy (NEP) 2030 in meeting the needs and strengthening the country's entrepreneurial ecosystem has yet to be proven (Othman, Mokhtar, Maidin and Moharam, 2021f). In this context, the focus is to identify various types of government development programmes in support of young entrepreneurs, while creating a strong and competitive enterprise. The direction of the government is on the country's desire to realise superior youth entrepreneurship thus strengthening the entrepreneurial development ecosystem. In fact, the emphasis of government programme initiatives is focused on measuring results, intensifying collaboration across ministries, agencies and industries, enhancing the ability of entrepreneurs to be resilient, competitive and global in character and preparing entrepreneurs to be catalysts of trends and markets (Othman et al., 2021f).

In the context of Malaysian higher education institutions and in accordance with the Industrial Revolution 4.0, all corners of the world are predicted to enter the era of mega trends in which digital transformation pervades all aspects of life, necessitating adaptation by the younger generation (Othman, Mokhtar, Tham and Yong, 2021g). Nonetheless, many graduates are trapped in the middle of the road and face unemployment; some even work in fields unrelated to their academic qualifications. Due of severe competition, the unemployment rate among university graduates in Malaysia is extremely high. Students play a crucial role in promoting unemployment-related issues as a result. To minimise the youth unemployment rate in this country, they must be allowed the freedom to express ideas or suggestions in parliament. For example, youth voice must be heard especially on emphasising the importance of universities and industry working together to increase employment opportunities and graduate marketability (Othman et al., 2021g). Acts or laws that are enacted must be able to excite students and significantly contribute to the modification and alteration of the narrative of student activism.

In fact, AUKU was introduced to regulate and balance the student movement, putting its aim in opposition with the student movement's worldview. AUKU's influence can also be observed in the university administration. Referring to section 4A, "For the purpose of selecting a qualified and suitable person for the position of Vice-Chancellor or for any other position that the Minister has the power to appoint under this act, the Minister shall, from time to time, appoint a committee to advise him on the appointment that" (AUKU 1971, Section 4A), and to the First Schedule of the University Constitution Article 14 (1), "The appointment of Board members, other than the Vice Chancellor, shall be made in accordance with. The statement highlights the concept of "management prerogative" when the appointment trend in university administration is considered.

The existence of this regulation demonstrates that the AUKU framework is not in line with the spirit of unity that fosters student autonomy. In addition, this provision will make students dependent on universities and the government. As a result, students cannot make decisions independently, and they are even prevented from contributing suggestions. The University and University College Act (AUKU) is not the only act in Malaysia that restricts academic freedom; others such as the Sedition Act 1948 (Act 15), the Official Secrets Act 1972 (Act 88), the Defamation Act 1957 (Act 287) (Sharif, 2018). These statutes must be revised so that persons who speak the truth based on relevant facts and authority are not subject to excessive restrictions.

### ***Rationale for Reforming the National Constitutional System to Implement Vote 18***

(i) In refining the age limit for a person to become a voter, there are two schools of thought amongst academics. The rights viewpoint and the utility perspective are the two perspectives (Othman, Ahmad and Esa, 2022a). The rights perspective examines the needs of an individual and citizen as a voter or candidate in an election because it is a citizen's right. If one examines Western nations, however, there are a number of significant studies that validate ideas from a rights perspective. These 18-year-olds, 17-year-olds, and 16-year-olds: Are they making the most of their privileges? Or are young voters just one of the groups that contribute to the party's victory? Or is the right granted solely as an indicator of human rights?

In disputes regarding voting by young people, the utility perspective is frequently used as a framework. The utility perspective is a framework for argumentation that measures the social good in terms of voter participation and turnout, democracy and citizenship, elections, and the performance of national programmes. Due to the diminishing young vote around the world, active engagement in democracy needs the involvement of individuals in helping to determine the fate of a country. It is also an area that allows generational inequalities in political participation to be bridged. This is due to the fact that participation in political activities is a proxy for the growth of democracy and citizenship. The utility framework also facilitates the growth of a nation's social policy, despite the fact that not all nations have the same demographic mix. This is one of the facts necessary to comprehend the 18th Amendment.

However, the execution of Vote 18 faces numerous obstacles, such as the question of whether or not our youth can make optimal use of the rights granted to them. Or are youths only one of the partisan voting groups that contribute to the party's victory? Or is the right only granted as a measure of human rights? In disputes regarding voting by young people, the utility perspective is frequently used as a framework. It is a framework for argumentation that measures the social good based on voter participation and turnout, democracy and citizenship, elections, and the performance of national programmes. It also allows for the elimination of generational disparities in political participation. Participation in political activities serves as a proxy for the development of democracy and citizenship. Despite the fact that not all nations have the same demographic makeup, the utility framework also facilitates the growth of a nation's social policy. This is one of the considerations that must be made to comprehend Vote 18.

(ii) This leads to a discussion regarding conventional political socialisation and youth engagement, which is garnering an increasing amount of attention from political scientists and social policy academics. When the youth constitute a sizable portion of a society, they become a proxy for the democracy of that community or nation. The youth are viewed as the most

important group in society; hence the credibility of the group's leadership might indicate the future of a society. Conventional politics can be defined as any activity that conforms to political norms, such as campaigning, joining a political party, and voting (Mohd Nizah, and Mohamad Sharif, 2019). While non-traditional politics encompasses rallies, demonstrations, virtual campaigns, and revolutions aimed at challenging the government's status quo or violence in the name of politics, conventional politics excludes such actions (Mohd Nizah & Mohamad Sharif, 2019).

However, this definition is debatable because it depends on a country's customs. For instance, in nations with open and stable democracies, demonstrations are the norm, but they are not the usual in countries with new democratic and post-communist systems. Many nations, including Malaysia, have revised the age restriction for the young category. When the age restriction is reviewed, it indirectly affects the age at which a person or a young person can register and become eligible to vote. Therefore, from the start of the 1990s, several studies on the political socialisation of youth have flourished in a number of nations with stable and evolved democratic systems. However, this trend demonstrates that youth participation in political activities, including voting, continues to decline. Several countries, including the United States, Australia, Scotland, Norway, Germany, Austria, Japan, Brazil, Nicaragua, and Malta, have lowered or proposed lowering the voting age to 16 years (Mohamad Noor and Awang Besar, 2020).

Therefore, it is reasonable for Malaysia to allow youths as young as 18 to exercise their right to vote and determine who would govern the nation's political currents. Involvement of youth in conventional and nonconventional political activities is also prevalent. Young patriotism in emerging places, i.e., areas with the largest and most developed populations, such as large cities, is extremely worrisome, indicating that youth involvement is quite concerning. Similarly, the understanding, pride, love, belonging, loyalty, and production parts of patriotism are observed to be less prevalent than the discipline aspects (Mohd Noor, Ismail and Mohamed Noor, 2020). It is believed that this is achievable due to their lack of exposure to modernization in comparison to rural youths.

Through the influence of mass media such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, urban youths are more exposed to the preoccupations of the outside world, but they lack exposure to the actual meaning of patriotism. This circumstance may influence the vote of young people in the upcoming election. They may believe that their vote is meaningless and that there is no need to be concerned about the repercussions. This simultaneously impacts the percentage of votes in some locations, as the minimum voter turnout target cannot be fully met. Compared to other categories of eligible voters, the number of young people who are eligible to register as voters is relatively small; yet, if they do not demonstrate an interest in voting, the attempt to achieve VOTE 18 will be worthless. This type of youth should be exposed to enough current political topics so that they can evaluate and advocate for their own rights within the democratic framework of the nation.

(iii) The decision to modify the Federal Constitution to allow 18-year-old citizens to vote is a logical one. From the standpoint of the Election Commission's (SPR) organisational structure, young people should have a voice and the right to elect their representatives (Mohd Noor, Ismail and Mohamed Noor, 2020). He emphasised that every area of society should receive democratic justice. He added that the move to decrease the voting age is consistent with the

social landscape of Malaysia. This is due to the fact that the population of this country have a high level of education and easy access to information via the internet. However, the EC is not primarily responsible for educating and raising awareness of the necessity of these populations registering to vote.

Government, ministries, and non-governmental groups should all play a part in promoting this nation's democratic system (Akmal, Fatimah and Salman, 2015). It cannot be denied that youth's participation in the election will have a huge impact on the country's political landscape, since they are a group of millennials with fresh perspectives who are continually maturing. There is no reason to deny these young people the opportunity to vote because they have the right to voice and determine the next leader of our country. Efforts toward democracy and elections that are mature, fair, and equitable must be prioritised in order to further social and political growth in accordance with the alterations of the present era. Elections are the peak of democratisation in Malaysia, as can be demonstrated by referring to numerous historical studies on the subject.

(iv) Another concern frequently mentioned by experts is the extent to which young people are able to make decisions. Typically, our country holds elections every five years, at which point we will learn whether the cabinet leadership will change or whether the original cabinet rule will continue. Through the Vote 18 proposal, which permits youths as young as 18 to vote in elections, the youth vote will be a heated topic of discussion, as this will be the youngest vote ever recorded in Malaysia. However, can the youth determine who is deserving of the political throne of the nation? Their youthful age is commonly related with their maturity to vote, and the youth have very little political understanding compared to older individuals. Furthermore, the decision to decrease the voting age to 18 will boost the number of new voters by at least 1.2 million per year (Fadzil, 2020).

If no empirical evidence can be obtained in the near future and the constructed module does not conform to the original aim of the amendment, then it will invite a number of unpleasant outcomes. It is possible to predict the amount of national politics knowledge, which encompasses themes such as elections as a vehicle for democracy and the selection of future national leaders. Aside from that, the question of voter eligibility is determined based solely on age, or other factors must be improved. They may be readily swayed by the political agenda prevalent during election season, causing them to be concerned about their vote. This condition is quite worrisome since people may not pick or vote based on their beliefs, but rather on current political strategies.

### ***Creating Freedom of Speech Guarantees for Trust Transparency and Youth Responsibility to the State***

(i) Reforming the Student Representative Council (MPP) is one of the initiatives that may be taken to ensure that the voices of all students are heard (Ahmad Sabri, Abdul Aziz, Shafie and Nordin, 2014). The majority of public universities have taken the initiative to transform the MPP into the Universiti Malaya Student Union. Reforming university programmes based on students' experiences, desires, and expectations provides students the opportunity to communicate their thoughts to university administration. Check and balance is one of the sessions that drew the most responses from students (Ahmad Sabri et al., 2014). This session of checks and balances is necessary to ensure that the separation of powers functions correctly.

In Malaysia, a constitutional democracy, the concept of checks and balances is the practise and belief that each government body has the ability to limit and check the other two bodies in order to achieve a balance between the three independent entities. Therefore, the purpose of the check and balance procedure is to help resolve disagreements amongst organisational components, particularly among those who cannot cooperate. Therefore, it is essential that university-level students have the opportunity to build a guarantee of freedom, justice, and openness in the execution of their trust and obligation to the youth and the nation. Students must immediately begin this process in order to enter the most crucial phase of discipline and youth responsibility formation. During this phase, they are trained to cultivate an unwavering leadership spirit in order to ensure that not only the university administration, but also the government, particularly the Ministry of Higher Education, hear the students' voices.

(ii) Moreover, communication skills are one of the means through which students' opinions can be heard in an endeavour to provide freedom of speech for the transparency of youth's trust and responsibility to the nation (Yaacob, Ali and Abd Wahab, 2017). We cannot avoid talking with various parties as leaders. This is because communication is crucial in establishing relationships, conveying information, and obtaining accurate and up-to-date information in daily life. Effective communication during a question-and-answer session can instil confidence in the material being presented and elicit the precise feedback wanted by the presenter. In such a setting, students can converse, generate ideas, and demonstrate their abilities through improvement and problem solving. In fact, it teaches students to be courageous and develops them into leaders so that they can guide the youth of the world. This is because question-and-answer sessions can strengthen bonds and unite groups.

Providing MPP with the opportunity to participate in large-scale university activities, for instance, before implementing the programme, make exhaustive preparations and conduct a post-mortem to improve future initiatives. However, student conflicts cannot be avoided. This is because students are at an age where they want to be heard and want control over decisions made based on their input. This conduct is inappropriate for a leader. As youth leaders, they must have an open mind and set aside their emotions so that they can focus on the problem and find a solution. However, it cannot be denied that the procedure could assist students in maturing and enhancing their social interactions.

The statement is further supported by the definition of communication by James A. F. Stoner and Charles Wankel (1989), who define communication as a method of human communication involving a shared understanding or meaning under the condition that both parties must agree on the meaning of the terms used (Yaacob, Ali and Abd Wahab, 2017). This means that communication can be defined as any phrase or symbol that is agreed upon in terms of meaning and function and used in the process of relating to one another. The relevance of the Education Act 1996 as it moves parallel with the effort in upholding the Malay language as a language of knowledge was debated the propriety of the government's attempt to put the position of the national language to be appointed as the language of instruction in the education sector (Othman, Esa, Ationg and Muda, 2021h). In line with the objective of empowering the national language in order to build a nation-state, the enactment of laws related to education affairs has been introduced to strengthen teaching and learning in the school system, thus producing self-sincerity and determination of the younger generation to cultivate their mother tongue (Othman et. al, 2021h). As a youth representative, students must be able to communicate with both their classmates and the wider public and establish positive relationships with both.

(iii) According to a report by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the global population will reach 7.8 billion in 2021, of which about 50.5% will be under-30-year-olds (Suhaimi et al., 2016). In the context of this paper's presentation, the anticipated numbers have demonstrated that youth have the capacity to be given space and opportunities for nation-building and expansion. In reality, this group must be comprised of the most effective leaders, as they represent the future youth representatives of the nation. However, only a minority of today's youth are willing to contribute to the nation's development. The use of social media is one of the obstacles. Teenagers' primary source of distraction is social media. They use their iPhones for hours without feeling any remorse. The Covid-19 epidemic devastated not only the employment and commercial sectors, but also schools and universities, which were forced to shut down. College students are provided with online education.

Online education makes it simpler for students to view their lectures at home. This requires students to modify their approach to leading or managing online programmes. In fact, these students can expand their expertise while administering the programme electronically, when in the past all programmes were conducted in-person. This can develop intelligent and competent students. Internet connection, internet prices, a learning environment that is not suitable, and the effectiveness of virtual learning are obstacles that students must overcome. This difficulty prompted the students to speak out, and the government devised a method to assist them. This can continue to benefit the youth as well as everyone who is unable to speak their viewpoint regarding the same issue. For instance, the Ministry of Higher Education (KPT) spent nearly RM260.8 million through numerous programmes to assist students at Institutes of Higher Education (IPT) during the entire year of the Covid-19 pandemic that struck the country (Sinar Harian, 2021).

### **Summary and Suggestion**

Students are responsible as the driving force behind the pulse of a civilised society, the creators of a great and quality generation of people, and the keepers of national harmony and prosperity. Good communication and social skills are necessary to prevent a moral crisis and a lack of ideas, which are among the obstacles encountered by students and parties tasked with completing this project. Second, the declining interest of students and undergraduates in academics, accomplishments, and university activities. Third, there exists a culture with an obstruction mentality, i.e., a society that believes their impression or perspective is correct and cannot be refuted. In a societal context, pupils are expected to serve as a bridge between one race and another. Students are also frequently exposed to programmes that unite Malaysia's diverse racial groups. This highlighted the important use of the Malay language among plural societies in Malaysia which refers to the empowerment of the Malay language that is being worked on by the Ministry of Higher Education (Othman, Ahmad and Esa, 2022d). The continuation of the impact of the Malay language's empowerment as a language of unity and one of the mediums that play a role in realising our country's aspirations, which is to create racial harmony.

From a communicative and sociological standpoint, such occurrences can facilitate the formation of communal cohesiveness. Moreover, in this age of globalisation, students must project a favourable image to society and serve as role models for other youth groups. Strictly speaking, students are the beginning of the development of a new Malaysia and aid in bringing the people's concerns to light. This view is supported by the role of students as present and



future authoritative leaders not just in the fields of science, economics, and similar disciplines, but also in politics. This is due to their huge attraction and influence among young and old individuals. Through numerous events offered by the university or institution of higher education, students are also able to develop their personality, idealism, talents, and leadership. Therefore, students are the answer to present and future problems and obstacles.

This perception is supported by the constant attempts of educational institutions to engage students in communicating the community's concerns. In addition, their bravery in retirement demonstrates that students may be genuine advocates of the voice of the people at any time. In conclusion, it is crucial for students to take an active role in a variety of contemporary topics. In addition, students and the rest of the community should assist one another, as if climbing a hill or descending a valley together.

Referring to the discussion surrounding the reform of the Universities and Colleges and Universities Act (AUKU), it should be realised that it is crucial to resolve certain concerns and problems that arise among students, particularly in terms of freedom of speech. Student action in our day must have its own identity and worldview. Since the implementation of the AUKU, students' freedom has been constrained, resulting in numerous difficulties that have sparked demonstrations. There are student movements such as the AUKU Repeal Student Movement (GMMA) that struggle for the rights of student autonomy. Multiple cases involving students are brought to court, and the matter takes a considerable amount of time to resolve. The 2019 revision to AUKU 1971 has provided students with greater freedom to participate in political activities. However, discrimination still exists, preventing some students from speaking freely about the topics they wish to highlight.

The government must therefore take the necessary actions to empower and shape the student movement. The government must enact a new statute or act to replace AUKU as the foundation and framework for more progressive, equitable, and well-balanced student activities. In addition, the government must monitor political extremism on college campuses. This is designed to prevent problems from occurring and disrupting the students' order. To avoid interfering with students' academic pursuits, outside political activities should not be required to provide room for students to repeat their coursework. In addition, the Ministry of Education must ensure that students engaged in political activities are able to maintain a balance between on-campus and off-campus studies without affecting their academic performance. These are actions that can be taken so that students can simultaneously receive knowledge at the university and benefit from their participation in the campus political arena.

In this light, the government's choice to abolish AUKU must be accompanied by a commitment to AUKU's continued significance, rather than being motivated solely by political expediency. Therefore, modern youth must be exposed to a range of knowledge in order to generate ideas and develop their potential. The government must provide opportunities for young people in a variety of sectors in order to build an intelligent generation of students who are fearless and able to express their thoughts. While the debate over the motion to approve vote 18 is viewed as a commendable effort by the government to shape a nation that continues to be successful in forming a new and innovative political trend, it is argued that the vote should be rejected. With the votes of our nation's youth and the rebirth of the minds of millennials attuned to the country's political currents, new voices will undoubtedly be heard.

Since the government party will now consider the welfare of all youth, including rural children who were previously ignored by some local leaders, the rights of local youth development can now be fairly defended. The government must continue to monitor and assess the effectiveness of Vote 18 in establishing a healthier and more systematic political hook, as the youth vote can also have a substantial impact on the local election process in our country. In order to assert their rights as youth in their home country, young people must also take advantage of the opportunities provided by the government. Youth should take advantage of this opportunity to be responsible Malaysians by participating in upcoming elections. Youth rights must always be considered by the government. In accordance with the Malaysian Constitution, they can now vote for whichever political leader they believe will steer the nation in a more stable direction, regardless of political, economic, or social challenges.

When both parties, the government and the youth, are aware of their respective responsibilities in the election process, we will undoubtedly be able to create a combination of political changes that is more effective and can ensure the protection of all sectors of society. As a result, Vote 18 should be utilised as effectively as possible as a sincere approach for the government to listen more to the problems of the people themselves, given that the youth in our country are constantly connected to the mass media platform. Vote 18 must be widely publicised so that all young people are aware of their rights and responsibilities in selecting the new political leaders of the nation and can be counted on to safeguard our nation's future. In conclusion, it is time to give young people the opportunity to lead, if not collectively. Even though Malaysia is a developed country, young leaders continue to be underrepresented.

The implication is that not enough young people are involved in formulating national policy, and as a result, the generation, especially students, are drowning in government-allocated benefits. Before entrusting the next generation with leadership responsibilities, the youth empowerment agenda must be well plan and the direction of the nation's young development must be clear and convincing to the older generation. When this process should begin, which is with students, is the most vital stage in the development of juvenile responsibility and discipline. They receive training throughout this phase to develop a strong sense of leadership in order to ensure that the Ministry of Higher Education and institution administration hear students' concerns. Students are the nation's future heirs and protectors, as well as its future youth leaders. Their actions will determine the dignity of the nation, state, and religion.

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