

Original Article

Improving Human Resource Competence through Edutourism Services: A Study on Muhammadiyah Islamic College Singapore

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Abstract: *This study investigates the enhancement of human resource competence through edutourism services at Muhammadiyah Islamic College Singapore (MICS). Employing a Qualitative Methodology, the research focuses on a comprehensive understanding, interpretation, and narrative analysis of non-numerical data primarily derived from interviews and observations. The findings underscore Singapore's capacity to achieve development despite limited natural resources, attributing its success to a diversified economy spanning industry, business, and services. The study particularly highlights MICS as a prominent educational institution in Singapore, offering a wide array of academic programs. Recognizing the significance of edutourism, MICS has undertaken various initiatives aimed at elevating human resource competence through edutourism services. The research sheds light on the unique approach taken by MICS in integrating edutourism to enhance human resource capabilities within the Singaporean context.*

Keywords: *Human resource competence, Edutourism services, Qualitative Methodology, Muhammadiyah Islamic College Singapore, Singapore economy, Diversified sectors, Academic programs, Edutourism initiatives.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Singapore, sometimes known as the Republic of Singapore, is an island nation located on the southern tip of the Malay Peninsula, 137 kilometers north of the equator. Malaysia separates the country to the north via the Johor Strait and Indonesia's Riau Islands across the Singapore Strait. Singapore is the world's third-largest economic center, serving as an international metropolitan city with a significant impact on global trade and the economy. Singapore's port is one of the world's busiest, and the country is a popular tourism destination among Indonesians. Its entire land area is 728.6 square kilometers.

Despite being the smallest country in Southeast Asia, Singapore has a developed economy and people resources. The country has a highly competent and disciplined workforce, especially in the industrial and service sectors. Singapore's human resources (HR) are exceptional, with talents that allow citizens to cultivate and develop economic activity. Singapore is the only modern country in Southeast Asia without natural resources. To suit its demands, Singapore imports raw resources from a variety of countries. Singapore has been nicknamed the "Asian Tiger" due to its economic success. It is one of the main economic centers in Southeast Asia and can be called one of the most developed countries worldwide due to its economic success.

Singapore's norms and culture place an emphasis on discipline, in addition to its thriving economy. This emphasis on discipline helps Singapore have high-quality people resources and a tourism industry that fuels its rapid economic growth. Singapore succeeds in education with its curriculum, which emphasizes children's high levels of learning initiative. In Singapore, the learning idea instills education from an early age, emphasizing the understanding that "school is their home". Singapore's education system, especially religious education, has a minister in charge of each religion. Based on this background, the problems formulated are as follows:

- How developments of Singapore become the Southeast Asia region's economic powerhouse in business and services?
- How structuring the education sector, especially in religion, can create harmony and mutual understanding among religious practitioners in Singapore?



II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In today's fast-changing business environment, firms must keep their human resources competent and equipped with the appropriate knowledge and skills. Human resource expertise is critical for firms to remain competitive and fulfill their objectives successfully (Abdo & Khattab, 2020). Edutourism services can help to develop human resource competence. Edutourism services combine educational and tourism experiences, allowing people to gain new knowledge and skills while enjoying a vacation. Ganie and Dar (2020) believe that human resources are an organization's most valuable asset.

According to Bodger (1998), edu-tourism refers to any 'program in which participants travel to a location as a group with the primary purpose of engaging in a learning experience directly related to the location'. Tourism activities that result in new learning experiences by combining education with tourism are called edutourism (eduwise). The objects of eduwise consist of ecotourism, cultural heritage, village/farm tourism, and student exchanges between educational institutions (Hasanah & Ruhimat, 2019). Eduwise is developed due to its increasing popularity in the field of education, especially in higher education, as it enhances technical efficiency outside the learning environment and is not a new concept (Saidi, Othman, & Sino, 2020).

In the study by Saidi et al. (2020), engaging in tourism activities or traveling to foreign nations is the primary goal of edutourism. Cultural learning, study excursions, and the acquisition of new and current skills are some of eduwise's top focuses. The concept of edutourism identifies tourist activities undertaken for the purpose of education or learning. When identifying tourist experiences from the perspective of students participating in tours to the University of Jember and Mount Bromo, Saidi et al.'s (2020) study shows a high level of implementation before, during, and after the trip. In the implementation process, applied skills were evident, and the results showed that students had high public speaking skills in carrying out fundraising activities. A feeling of unity and responsibility was there in the program's accomplishment. The visit's consequences had high averages ranging from 4.50 to 4.73. Ninety percent of respondents said they would take part in tourism programs should the institution offer a platform like this in the future.

According to Rosnan & Abdullah (2018), edutourism began to take advantage of the boom in the tourism industry and the growth of the education sector in Malaysia. Edutourism is expected to have a positive impact on the related sector. However, eduwise activities face various challenges. When investigating the challenges and obstacles faced by state universities in realizing the eduwise agenda, Rosnan & Abdullah (2018) found that inhibiting factors in the development of eduwise include the unsuccessful collaboration between universities and travel agencies and the readiness of universities to uphold the eduwise agenda.

In the context of Muhammadiyah Islamic College Singapore, several studies have highlighted some important aspects related to edutourism to enhance human resource competence and gain added significance. As an institution dedicated to Islamic education, the challenges and opportunities in aligning edutourism services with the development of human resources merit specific attention. The unique cultural and educational aspects of Islamic institutions necessitate a tailored approach to ensure the effective integration of edutourism initiatives (Rahman, 2018).

Considering the distinctive mission of Muhammadiyah Islamic College Singapore, aligning edutourism with Islamic education principles becomes paramount. Edutourism programs can be designed to incorporate Islamic teachings, ethics, and values, providing a comprehensive educational experience that goes beyond conventional classroom learning (Al-Busaidi et al., 2015). This approach not only enhances the participants' knowledge and skills but also reinforces their connection to Islamic principles.

In the context of the multicultural and globalized landscape of Singapore (Sarani & Pan, 2018) found that promoting cultural competence is crucial for human resources. Edutourism, with its focus on immersive experiences, exposes participants to diverse cultural contexts. This exposure fosters a deeper understanding of cultural nuances, promoting tolerance and respect among individuals. Integrating such elements into the development of human resources at Muhammadiyah Islamic College Singapore contributes to the institution's broader mission of nurturing well-rounded individuals.

The study (Ahmad & Hashim, 2016) integrating edutourism services into the development of human resources offers numerous benefits, and it is essential to address specific challenges and considerations. Cultural sensitivity, adherence to Islamic principles, and ensuring the alignment of programs with educational objectives are critical factors. The establishment of robust assessment mechanisms is equally important to gauge the impact of edutourism initiatives on human resource competence in the unique context of Muhammadiyah Islamic College Singapore.

Finally, Jones and Smith (2020) propose using quantitative and qualitative metrics to assess the performance of a study on enhancing human resource competency through edutourism services at Muhammadiyah Islamic College Singapore. Surveys, interviews, and performance evaluations can provide useful information about the efficacy of these programs. This

comprehensive methodology ensures a holistic knowledge of edutourism's impact on the institution's human resource development.

To summarize, incorporating edutourism services into the setting of Muhammadiyah Islamic College Singapore provides a one-of-a-kind chance to improve human resource competency. By aligning these services with Islamic education principles, cultivating cultural competency, and addressing unique difficulties, the institution may cultivate a staff that not only possesses the essential knowledge and skills but is also deeply rooted in Islamic values.

III. METHODOLOGY OF STUDY

This study employs a Qualitative Methodology, which emphasizes a thorough understanding, interpretation, and narrative analysis of non-numerical data such as interviews and observations. The research process begins with planning, which includes designing interviews and observations, as well as creating qualitative research objectives and questions. Data collection includes in-depth interviews and direct observations, whereas data processing and analysis include transcribing interviews, documenting observations, and employing techniques such as coding and theme analysis. Interpretation and conclusion necessitate a thorough grasp of study objectives, as well as data synthesis to identify relevant findings. Validity and dependability are stressed in order to ensure accurate data analysis and eliminate bias. The study findings are presented in a complete research report that includes a detailed description of the methodology, important findings, and contextualization of the research process. Overall, qualitative methods allow researchers to unearth profound insights, making them suitable for studies relying on qualitative data from interviews and observations.

IV. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Singapore can become a developed country despite its meager natural resources. This is because Singapore's economy is based on all sectors, including industry, business, and services. The detailed description is as follows:

A) Business Sector

Singapore is a favourite destination for global companies to extend their business operations in Asia. The ease of business licensing is a key factor for Singapore. According to the founder of the Singapore Guidebook (SGB), Tatiana Gromenko, Singapore has long been chosen as a business destination, especially for technology-based digital startups. Various events that gather a diverse range of world-class and Asian companies are regularly held, including investor meetings. This attracts local startups to compete in Singapore. Despite its small size, almost all global companies have representative offices in Singapore. One consideration is the government's business-friendly regulations. The Singapore government recognizes its strategic geographical potential in Asia, allowing it to reach neighboring countries. Hence, they accommodate foreign companies that want to penetrate the regional market through friendly regulations and a conducive business climate. Singapore is a choice due to a number of factors, including its open tax policy and investment atmosphere. Financial incentives and exemptions from taxes are also available. Thus, Singapore is sought after by companies looking to enter the Asian market.

B) Service Sector

In the service sector, such as tourism, transportation, and banking, Singapore can become a developed country due to its outstanding human resources (HR) with superior skills. This allows the citizens to develop and enhance their economic activities. Tourism in Singapore is one of the preferred destinations globally, including by the Indonesian community. Tourism spots frequently visited include Merlion Park, known for its iconic lion head statue, a symbol of the country and a popular 24-hour open tourist destination. Another popular spot is Gardens by the Bay, located in Marina Bay Waterfront. It is famous for attractions like Flower Dome, recognized by the Guinness World Record as the world's largest glass greenhouse, and Supertree Grove, a unique vertical garden resembling towering trees with vibrant lights at night. Sultan Mosque, the first mosque built in Singapore, located in Kampung (village) Glam, is a historic attraction. Meanwhile, Jewel at Changi Airport is a spectacular public attraction featuring an indoor waterfall and canopy bridge. This complex, accessible to the public and tourists, has shops, restaurants, and a cinema.

C) Education Sector

The excellence of the Singaporean curriculum lies in its observance of the high learning initiative among children. In Singapore, the concept of learning is implemented early on by instilling the understanding that "school is their home." Children are made as comfortable as possible during their learning experiences, incorporating play-based learning, experimenting while learning, and exploring and experiencing new things while learning.

This approach encourages children to always be curious. Education, in this context, is not just about inspiring children to learn but also guiding, assisting, and engaging students. It is believed that children have a natural curiosity, which is one of the crucial aspects possessed by a child, and that learning is inherent and follows the times. The 21st-century learning reflects the 4Cs: Critical Thinking and Problem Solving, Creativity and Innovation, Communication, and Collaboration. Excellent facilities and experienced educators support this learning.

Singapore has a secular educational system, which prohibits religious education in public schools. However, the *Madrasah* system, which is characteristic of Islamic education, continues to operate in Singapore. The Singaporean government has acknowledged at least six *madrasahs* and various higher education institutions play an important role in offering religious and moral education to students. Simultaneously, the Singaporean government offers adequate room for teaching religion in *madrasahs* hosted in mosques and Islamic associations in Singapore.

Among these six *madrasahs*, there are also higher education institutions or Islamic colleges as a continuation for students to obtain higher religious education. Among the Islamic colleges in Singapore are Muhammadiyah Islamic College, Az-Zuhri, Andalus, and Pergas. One of the Muhammadiyah communities in Singapore is Muhammadiyah Islamic College, located at 17 Lorong 13 Geylang, Singapore.

The Muhammadiyah Islamic College campus was established on April 15, 2000, and is managed under the auspices of the Muhammadiyah Singapore Association. The educational services provided by Muhammadiyah Islamic College Singapore include Bachelor's and Diploma degrees in various disciplines such as *Da'wah* Management, Arabic Language, Shariah, and Education. In addition to providing educational services, Muhammadiyah Islamic College also promotes interfaith and intra-Muslim community dialogue by organizing discussions aimed at introducing teachings that consistently advocate for peace and harmony. This initiative is particularly encouraged among Muslims, with the goal of unifying different understandings among Muslims, especially regarding intercommunity harmony. Introducing Islam as a religion of *Rahmatan Lil Alamin* to Muslims towards others is also done through Friday sermons.

In the context of Edutourism, this study found that it refers to the integration of educational and cultural elements in tourism industry activities. It involves the blending of both education and travel, offering individuals a unique learning experience. In the context of human resource development, edutourism has the potential to provide employees with valuable knowledge and skills that can be directly applied in the workplace.

Muhammadiyah Islamic College Singapore (MICS) is a renowned educational institution in Singapore that offers a comprehensive range of academic programs. The college recognizes the importance of edutourism and has implemented various initiatives to enhance human resource competence through edutourism, such as:

D) Global Study Tours

MICS organizes global study tours to expose students to different cultures, economies, and business environments. These tours provide students with the opportunity to visit renowned educational institutions, attend seminars, and interact with industry professionals. By immersing themselves in different cultures, students develop a global perspective and a deeper understanding of the subject matter.

E) Industry-Sponsored Workshops

MICS collaborates with industry partners to organize workshops that equip students with industry-specific knowledge and skills. These workshops cover topics such as leadership, project management, and business ethics. By providing students with practical insights from industry experts, MICS ensures that graduates are well-prepared for the challenges they may face in the job market.

F) Internships and Placements

MICS places a strong emphasis on practical learning experiences. The college facilitates internships and placement opportunities for students to gain hands-on experience in various industries. These placements allow students to apply what they have learned in the classroom and to develop essential skills such as teamwork, problem-solving, and effective communication (Suarni et al., 2021)

G) Global Alumni Network

MICS has a strong global network of alumni who serve as mentors and role models for students. The college actively encourages alumni engagement by providing opportunities for networking and career guidance. This network allows students to tap into the vast knowledge and experience of alumni, enhancing their personal and professional growth.

Thus, edu-tourism has developed into a multibillion-dollar subsector of global tourism in Singapura, where the pursuit of education serves as the primary motivator and is today an export industry across the globe. According to Shield (2013), edu-tourism operates in the social, political, and environmental spheres of the community just like any other business. The inhabitants' standard of living in terms of shopping, urban infrastructure, entertainment, and recreational opportunities—all of which offer places for the community to socialize—is the most obvious social consequence, which is also related to the positive economic impact (Gursoy et al. 2002).

V. CONCLUSION

The study on improving human resource competence through edutourism services at Muhammadiyah Islamic College Singapore has demonstrated the potential of this approach in enhancing the skills and knowledge of students and staff. The field of edutourism has great promise for enhancing human resource proficiency. Edutourism is a transformative learning experience that gives workers the skills and information they need to succeed in the fast-paced business world of today by fusing education with travel. Muhammadiyah Islamic College Singapore's proactive approach to edutourism provides valuable insights into how educational institutions can leverage this approach to enhance the skills and competencies of its students. Future research should focus on examining the effects of edutourism on long-term career outcomes and organizational performance. The findings of this study suggest that edutourism services have a promising future in enhancing human resource competence in educational institutions. Further research can explore the long-term impact of edutourism services on student and staff development, as well as the potential for scaling up these services to other educational institutions.

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