

***Serumpun* International Academic Symposium (SAAS 2023) Programme: Its Effectiveness and Role in Enhancing UiTM Pahang's International**

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Abstract: To bolster UiTM's pursuit of "Globally Renowned University" status by 2025, UiTM Pahang initiated *Serumpun* International Academic Symposium (SAAS 2023), a collaborative effort between UiTM Pahang, Universitas Hasanuddin (UnHas), and Universitas Muhammadiyah Purworejo (UMP), Indonesia with the aim of supporting UiTM's international agenda (PI007, PI008, PI009, PI010, PI084) and fostering closer ties with industry partners and UiTM Pahang alumni (PI080). In achieving these objectives, SAAS 2023 orchestrated a series of five international activities conducted via the Webex platform, involving a wide range of participants, including students, academics, alumni, and industrial players. A total of 139 respondents took part in the study. A survey using Google Forms was administered to measure the programme's effectiveness. Descriptive statistics was applied to obtain the findings. The findings indicated an overall satisfaction with the programme content and its clear objectives. The programme was also highly valued for its impact on attitude strengthening, self-development, continuous learning, and relevance to students' studies. It is concluded that SAAS 2023 is a testament to the potential of academic collaborations in fostering positive change, creating meaningful and strategic global collaboration, and strengthening industrial and alumni partnerships in higher education.

Keywords: Collaboration, GRU 2025, international agenda, programme effectiveness, SAAS 2023, UiTM Pahang

Introduction

Over the past few years, UiTM has embarked on a five-year strategic plan aiming to achieve "Globally Renowned University" status by 2025. This initiative outlines the university's transformation agenda, as it aspires to become a leading global university of science, technology, humanities, and entrepreneurship with the full support of all UiTM systems (UiTM Strategic Plan 2025, 2021). Undoubtedly, changes taking place in the UiTM systems need to be managed

conscientiously and require a high level of people management skills (Aminuddin, 2018). It is imperative for such changes to take place so that UiTM can remain relevant.

Despite numerous problems and challenges, each responsibility has been executed sincerely, driven by the belief that any hyper-change strategies undertaken by the organisation will significantly impact how an organisation is managed in the future (Lewis et al., 2004). UiTM Pahang is proactively dedicated to supporting this goal and achieving all designated performance indicators (PIs) across faculties, academic centres, and central administrative offices.

One of the initiatives involves organising the *Serumpun* International Academic Symposium (SAAS 2023) with a primary focus on fostering collaboration with existing international university partners in enhancing teaching, learning, research, and publication among academics and students, as well as promoting more significant involvement of the university alumni and industry in its academic excellence. SAAS 2023 was jointly organised by Universitas Hasanuddin (UnHas) and Universitas Muhammadiyah Purworejo (UMP) Indonesia. The event was carefully planned and successfully implemented, featuring five key activities to achieve its objectives. These activities were conducted via the Webex platform, with details outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. List of SAAS 2023 Activities

No	Activities	Host	Date
1	Gading Colloquium	UiTM Pahang	May 06, 2023
2	International Virtual Pitching Competition	UiTM Pahang	May 20, 2023
3	Talk by Employer	UiTM Pahang	May 20, 2023
4	International Colloquium on Economics and Agriculture	UMP	June 10, 2023
5	International Virtual Student Business Idea Pitching Competition	UnHas	June 17, 2023

The programme aims at fulfilling UiTM's international agenda (PI007, PI008, PI009, PI010, PI084) through its organisation. A total of 189 respondents participated in the programme, which included students, academics, alumni of UiTM Pahang, UnHas, and UMP as well as representatives from the industries (Petronas Malaysia and YJACK Technology Sdn Bhd, Indonesia) and Universitas Ahmad Dahlan and Universitas Gadjah Mada.

SAAS 2023 is envisioned as a platform for uniting the communities and fostering a sense of shared purpose in realising academic development across countries, particularly in improving the quality of education, exchanging information, and identifying collaborations that can benefit all parties involved. Despite various challenges and limitations, the programme strives to fulfil the high expectations set by the management. With the sheer dedication and determination of its committee members and university partners, SAAS 2023 was successfully organised, paving the path to nourishing UiTM Pahang internationally.

This article aims to present the results concerning the effectiveness of the SAAS 2023 programme. To this end, it seeks to fulfil the following objectives:

1. To determine participants' learning and personal growth before and after the programme.
2. To ascertain the programme's effectiveness in objective achievement and task implementation.

Literature Review

The internationalisation of universities has become a strategic priority worldwide, emerging as a significant trend over the past few decades (Tran et al., 2023). Knight (2008) defines internationalisation as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions, or delivery of postsecondary education.” This process encompasses various initiatives, including student and faculty mobility, collaborative research, curriculum internationalisation, and transnational education programmes (Leask & Bridge, 2023). Each of these activities contributes uniquely to the exchange of ideas and the strengthening of institutional research capacity.

Internationalisation efforts aim to enhance academic quality, promote cross-cultural exchange, and foster global engagement among institutions (de Wit, 2020). In addition, they play a crucial role in facilitating student and faculty exchanges, encouraging joint research endeavours, and enabling the sharing of educational resources. These collaborations enrich the learning experience and extend the global influence of higher education. More importantly, they serve as key platforms for cultural exchange, bridging gaps and fostering international cooperation (Lazari & Matsoukas, 2025).

UiTM's commitment to internationalisation is reflected in its bold initiative, GRU2025, a strategic effort to enhance academic quality and expand its global reach. By prioritising excellence across areas such as curriculum, research, community service, student welfare, and international engagement, UiTM aims to strengthen its position among higher education institutions worldwide. Furthermore, its internationalisation efforts are expected to contribute significantly to societal well-being on a broader scale.

Faculty and Research Activities

One of the internationalisation strategies focuses on faculty and research collaboration, which plays a central role in nourishing universities. Activities and projects such as joint research projects, co-authored publications, and mobility programmes are among the best options to consider. Each activity provides uniqueness while promoting the exchange of ideas and strengthening institutional research capacity. However, based on the suggestion highlighted by Brandenburg and de Wit (2011), the philosophy of international collaboration must go beyond the ordinary. Due to globalisation and its changes, the internationalisation concept can be seen as a flaw because of an ignorance of the pure intention and its primary purpose. Therefore, internationalisation and collaboration in higher education are categorised as tradable commodities rather than embracing the concept of sustainability in education. Based on these ideas, SAAS 2023 is planned to fulfil the concept of sustainability in education by embracing the call for joint commitment at the institutional and personal levels. Many factors are considered, such as the opinion of the university's management, committees, and students. Though SAAS 2023 is a new internationalisation activity for UiTM Pahang, it is attentively planned to fulfil the best for its value and ensure that it will achieve what is meaningful.

Technology and Internationalisation

While significant effects of internationalisation activities are highlighted to nourish universities' efforts, challenges remain. Financial constraints, geopolitical issues, and the COVID-19 pandemic are some challenges that can impede the internationalisation of higher education. Technology and internationalisation are closely connected in many ways, including the higher education sector (Cloete, 2017). It provides the tools and infrastructure to realise internationalisation activities more efficiently. The existence of technology today may support and enhance activities such as communication between universities, lecturers, and students, as well as their engagement (Hashim et al., 2023) and adaptation to collaboration. As technology continues to evolve, there is a question of whether it is a well-founded pedagogy that suits the environment, especially the evaluation of the implementation (Aziz et al., 2022) and the benefits received by the students. However, Keengwe and Georguna (2017) argue that the application of technology could meet the needs of millennials, as the generation is well used to it. Based on this argument, it is posited that the technology platform used to implement SAAS 2023 will benefit the participants.

Effectiveness of Higher Education Internalisation

Higher education internationalisation has become a crucial strategy for improving academic quality, fostering global engagement, and enhancing institutional competitiveness. Studies have found that internationalisation benefits higher education institutions by enhancing educational quality, fostering global engagement, and increasing institutional competitiveness. According to Kayyali (2024), integrating global perspectives into curricula helps prepare students for a diverse workforce by incorporating international standards, multilingual coursework, and cross-cultural collaborations. Research also shows that internationalisation through mobility programmes could enhance the branding and reputation of higher education (Shayery et al., 2022).

The SAAS 2023 programme serves as a practical model demonstrating the benefits of internationalisation in higher education. The programme fostered cross-cultural exchange, collaborative learning, and interdisciplinary research by bringing together students from UiTM Pahang, UnHas, and UMP. These engagements align with internationalisation strategies emphasising modern teaching methodologies, knowledge sharing, and student mobility (Shayery et al., 2022). Moreover, SAAS 2023 enhanced its institutional reputation by promoting international networking and strengthening its participants' academic and personal growth. Effective internationalisation initiatives, such as those demonstrated in SAAS 2023, enhance individual competencies and position universities as competitive global institutions (Kayyali, 2024). As global engagement continues to shape higher education, structured programmes like SAAS 2023 provide valuable insights into the implementation and impact of internationalisation efforts.

Methodology

The study utilised a survey research design, collecting data exclusively through a survey. A quantitative approach was employed for data analysis, enabling the measurement of trends and patterns in the variables related to the programme's effectiveness.

Population and Sample

This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of SAAS 2023. Purposive sampling was used to select survey participants, involving all students who participated in SAAS 2023. In total, 139 participants, who were students of UiTM Pahang, UnHas, and UMP took part in the survey.

Instrument

An online survey using Google Forms was administered to measure the programme's effectiveness. The survey comprised two sections: Section A focused on demographic factors, gathering information about gender, academic programme, and university, while Section B focused on measuring the effectiveness of programmes in terms of participants' knowledge of the programme content, changes in attitude, self-development, and personal growth, the extent of continuous learning and knowledge sharing, and the overall effectiveness of the programme in achieving its objectives and implementing tasks, all before and after the programme. The items of Section B were adapted from the Institute Leadership and Development (ILD) UiTM programme response form. The survey adopted a five-point Likert-scale ranging from "1" (Very Unsatisfactory) to "5" (Very Good). Details of the survey items are listed in Table 2.

By analysing the programme's effectiveness and achievements, the researchers can determine whether it has met its objectives regarding knowledge gained, attitude changes, self-development, and motivating participants to continue learning and sharing knowledge globally before and after the programme. In addition, the survey would also be able to gauge the programme's effectiveness in assisting participants in completing tasks and studying more effectively.

Table 2: List of Survey Items

No	Main variables	Sub-variables
1	Learning and personal growth	Knowledge of programme content
		Attitude strengthening and self-development
		Continuous learning and knowledge sharing
2	Achievement of programme objectives	Clear objective
		Achieve objective
		The programme helps the implementation of tasks/study

Data Analysis

The data collected from the Google Forms survey was automatically analysed on the Google Forms platform. Descriptive statistics were applied to calculate percentages, and the results were visually represented through charts for more explicit interpretation and presentation.

Findings and Discussion

Participant Demographics

This section presents the participant demographics based on the survey.

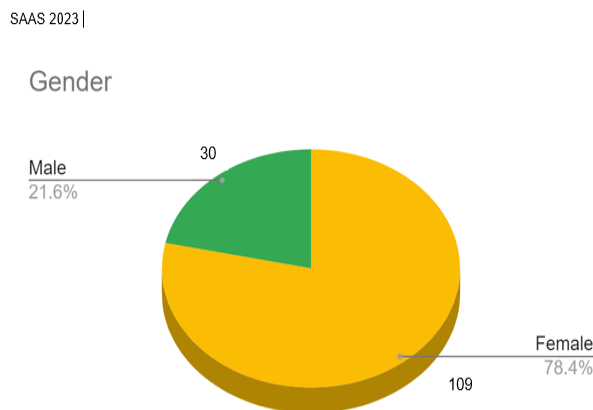


Fig. 1 Participants according to Gender

Figure 1 illustrates participant distribution, with 109 females (78.4%) and 30 males (21.6%). The majority of the participants across all programmes were female. Table 3 summarises the number of student participants in the five SAAS 2023 programmes, totalling 139 students from three universities.

Table 3. Number of Responded Participants of SAAS 2023

University	Number of Participants
UiTM Pahang	96
Universitas Hasanuddin, Sulawesi, Indonesia	42
Universitas Muhammadiyah Purworejo, Indonesia	1
Total	139

Learning and Personal Growth

Knowledge Before and After Programme

Figure 2 compares participants' knowledge of programme content before and after the programme. The figure revealed a substantial improvement in participants' knowledge of the programme content before and after the programme. Before the programme, only 10.8% rated their knowledge as "very good," while 24.5% considered it "satisfactory" or better. After the programme, a substantial shift occurred, with 55.4% rating their knowledge as "very good" while 98.4% considered it "least satisfactory." This positively impacts participants' understanding of the programme content, indicating the programme's effectiveness in enhancing participants' knowledge levels.

Before and after the program (Knowledge of program content)

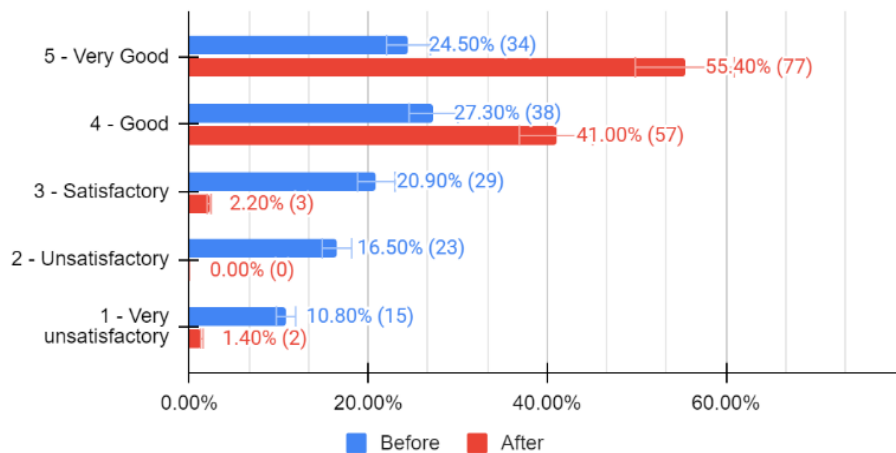


Fig. 2 Knowledge of Programme Content Before and After the Programme

Attitude Strengthening and Self-Development Before and After the Programme

Figure 3 shows a substantial percentage increase in attitude strengthening and self-development before and after the programme. Before the programme, participants' self-assessment regarding attitude strengthening and self-development showed smaller percentages in the higher categories, with only 24.5% rating it as "very good." After the programme, these percentages rose to 58.3%, rating it as "very good." The substantial increase in the percentage indicates the programme's effectiveness in strengthening the participants' attitudes while also contributing to their self-development.

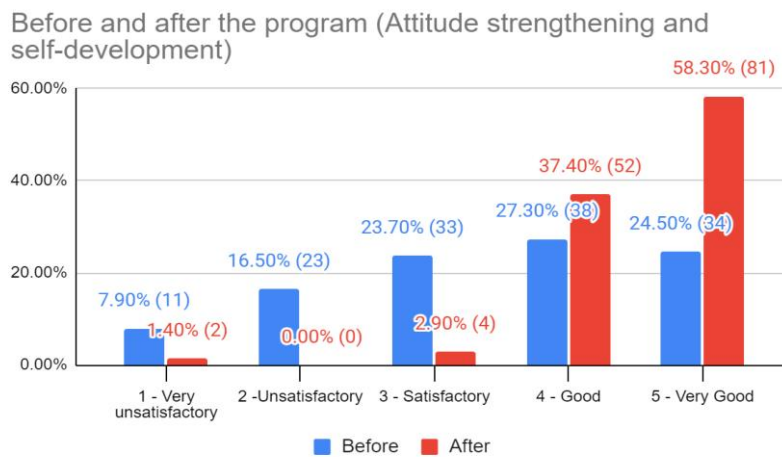


Fig. 3 Attitude Strengthening and Self-Development Before and After the Programme

Continuous Learning and Knowledge Sharing Before and After the Programme

Figure 4 compares participants' continuous learning and knowledge sharing before and after the programme. The results showed a substantial increase in the before and after scores, with only 25.2% rating it as "very good" before the programme compared to 60.4% rating it as "very good" after the programme. This indicates that after the programme, many participants agreed that the programme successfully promoted continuous learning and knowledge sharing.

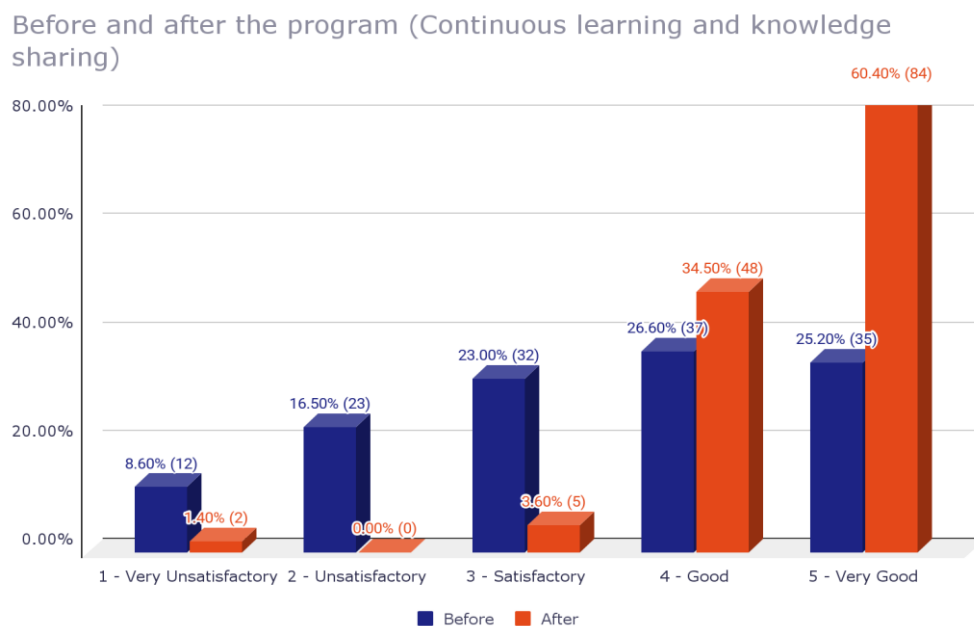


Fig. 4 Continuous Learning and Knowledge Sharing Before and After the Programme

Effectiveness of the Programme

Figure 5 displays the results of the programme's effectiveness in terms of its clear objectives. The majority of the participants rated it as "very good" and "good," with a combined percentage of

94.5%, compared to only 3.6% who rated it “satisfactory” and 1.4% “unsatisfactory”. The results indicated that the programme was effective in delivering clear programme objectives.

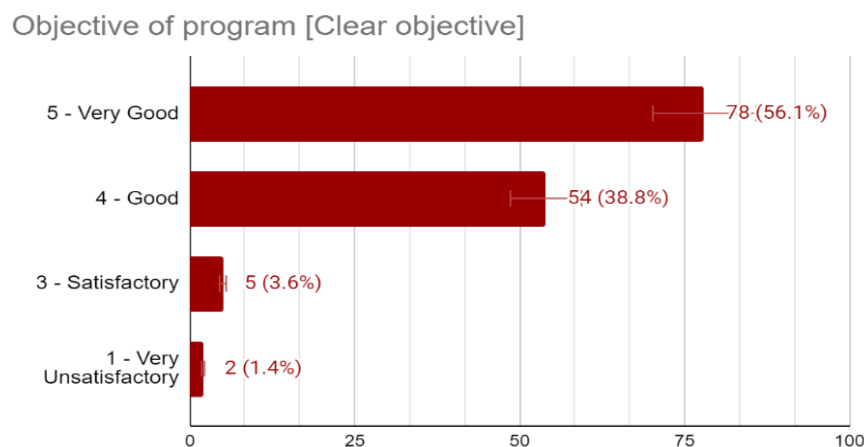


Fig. 5 Programme’s Effectiveness - Clear Objectives

Figure 6 displays the effectiveness of the programme in achieving its objectives. The majority of the participants rated “very good” and “good” (93.5%), while only a small percentage rated it as “satisfactory” (5.0%) and “very unsatisfactory” (1.4%). The results indicated that the programme had achieved its targeted objectives.

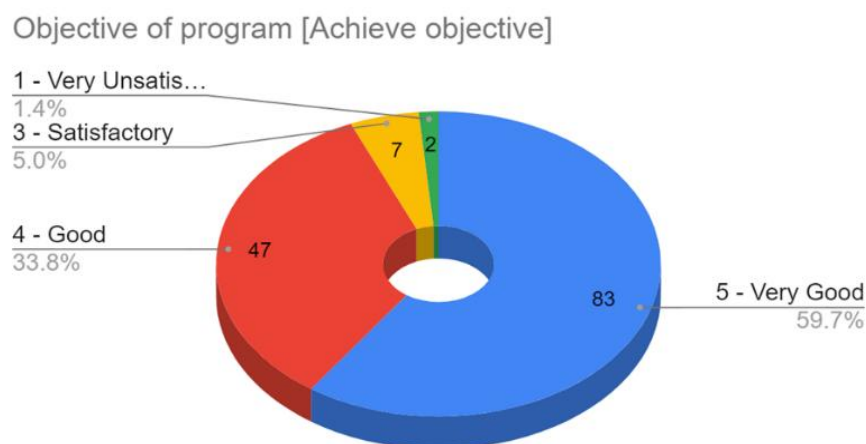


Fig. 6 Programme’s Effectiveness - Objectives Achievement

Figure 7 displays the programme's effectiveness in helping the participants implement their tasks or studies. An overwhelming majority rated “very good” and “good” (95.9%), indicating that the programme was very effective in assisting the participants in implementing their tasks and studies.

Objective of program (Program helps the implementation of tasks / study)

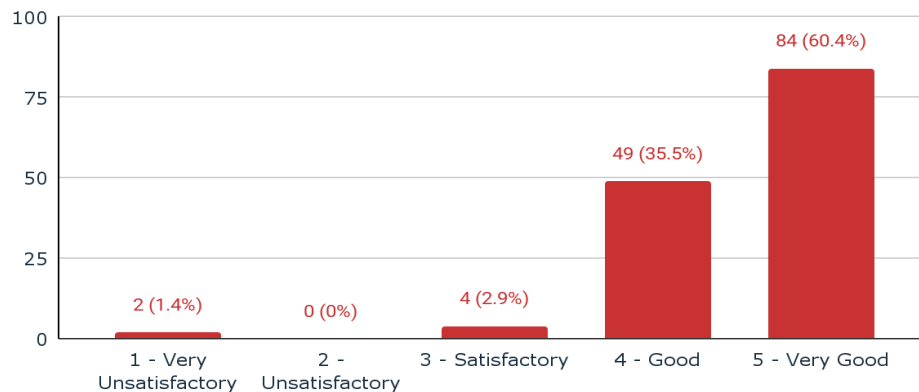


Fig. 7 Programme's Effectiveness -Implementation of Tasks/Study

Discussion

The five meticulously planned activities within the SAAS 2023 - comprising the Gading Colloquium, International Virtual Pitching Competition, Talk by Employer, International Colloquium on Economics and Agriculture, and International Virtual Student Business Idea Pitching Competition, constituted the SAAS 2023 programme's strength. Some of the activities in the programme are shown in Figure 8. These activities aligned precisely with the programme's primary objective, which was to reinforce the UiTM Pahang's internationalisation agenda. They also aligned with the performance indicators of UiTM Pahang and UiTM as a whole, specifically in three performance indicators involving the organisation of programmes centred on inbound and outbound student exchanges within specified time frames, as well as the participation of alumni and experts from the industries in the activities conducted. For instance, the Talk by Employer programme featured a session where two alumni of UiTM Pahang alumni –the Finance Manager of Kulicke & Soffa (Malaysia) Sdn. Bhd. and an Engineer from YJACK Technology Sdn Bhd, Indonesia were invited to share their experiences in an actual working environment. Students were actively involved in discussing the topic and giving their opinions. Hence, these complementary engagements generated conducive learning environments that benefitted the students.

The International Virtual Pitching Competition and the International Virtual Student Business Idea Pitching Competition, in which students from the three universities engaged in information exchange and competed in diverse facets of innovation, demonstrated significant relevance to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) about industry, innovation, and infrastructure (The United Nations, 2015). Most of the projects developed were characterised by innovation and derived from proposals put forth by the participating students. The project evaluations revealed that a significant proportion of these innovation projects were capable of practical implementation and could be presented for commercial purposes and broader dissemination.

Moreover, students' participation in such activities enhanced their practical and affective skills, including their ability to engage in two-way communication through queries posed by judges and fellow participants. This allowed students to develop their individual and group knowledge-sharing skills through the innovation projects they create. Additionally, the involvement of industry experts and alumni appointed as judges and speakers, who shared their experiences and provided specific improvements, particularly in terms of industry requirements, is an added value to the organisation of such activities. Hence, all of these contributed significantly to industrial partnerships, particularly concerning innovation projects carried out by students and participants from the two countries involved.

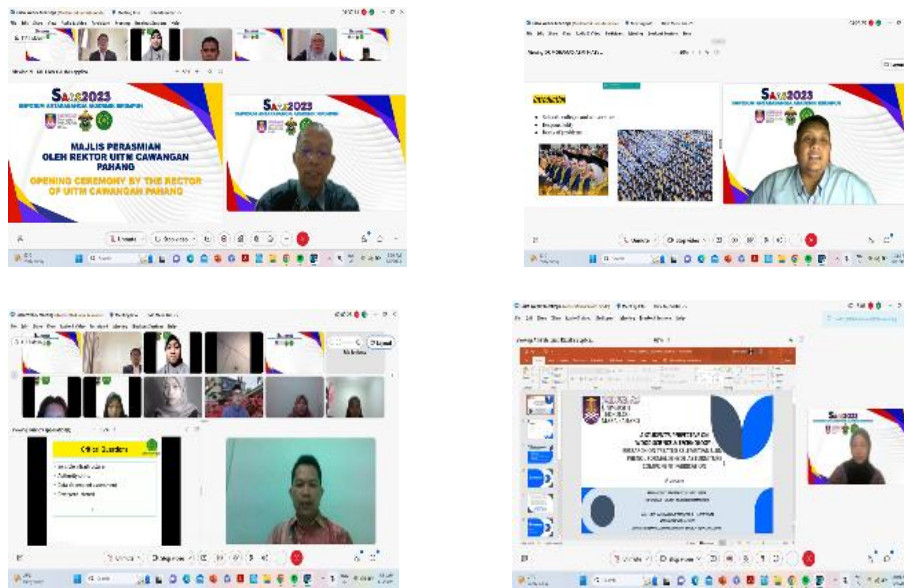


Fig. 8 SAAS 2023 Images during Opening Ceremony and *Gading* Colloquium activities

The *Gading* Colloquium and the International Colloquium on Economics and Agriculture have the potential to facilitate global cooperation among the three universities in several domains, encompassing the exchange of exemplary methodologies, research endeavours, and experience across numerous academic disciplines within the institutions. This relationship presents an avenue for international discourse between Malaysia and Indonesia on educational matters between the two nations, particularly in the domains of science and technology and social sciences. These activities featured discussions on current and pertinent issues such as artificial intelligence, opportunities in the furniture industry, and current teaching and learning approaches, which aligns with the second objective of SAAS 2023, which is to promote the interchange of ideas and foster international partnerships among participants, thereby enabling students to benefit from their shared experiences directly. This collaboration is also relevant to developing and enhancing technology utilisation, particularly in the context of teaching and learning in higher education institutions.

Conclusion

The findings indicate that the SAAS 2023 programme was highly effective in enhancing participants' knowledge, attitudes, self-development, and ability to implement their learning. Participants demonstrated a clear improvement in their understanding of the programme content, a strengthened attitude toward self-development, and an increased commitment to continuous learning and knowledge sharing. The programme also effectively achieved its objectives, providing participants with clear guidance, achieving its intended goals, and supporting them in applying their knowledge to tasks and studies. The results confirm the programme's success in fostering learning, personal growth, and academic development.

In addition, the SAAS 2023 programme has undoubtedly impacted UiTM Pahang, the collaborating universities, and its participants. It reinforces UiTM Pahang's internationalisation agenda while achieving its key performance indicators. The carefully planned activities have fostered innovation among students, enhanced practical skills, promoted knowledge sharing, and contributed to the Sustainable Development Goals. The involvement of industrial partners and alumni adds value, strengthens industrial and global partnerships, and, more importantly, exposes and prepares students for the international employment market.

With its multifaceted approaches, SAAS has tremendously benefitted the participants and successfully fostered strategic international collaborations. Nonetheless, the programme has its limitations, primarily the challenges posed by relying entirely on virtual deliveries. The variability of

internet connections and lack of suitable devices among the participants were among the issues faced, which sometimes hinder smooth communication, impacting the overall effectiveness of its implementation. Given these issues, future programme implementations should consider conducting the event in a physical, face-to-face format. It would not only eliminate problems with internet connectivity but also offer more enriching and immersive experiences to the participants.

In the subsequent implementation of future SAAS, it is also recommended that greater student involvement be promoted by entrusting them with the responsibility of planning and organising selected activities. The student bodies of collaborating universities should also be encouraged to participate. Empowering students in this way would help nurture their leadership and organisational skills while instilling a strong sense of ownership in the programme.

In conclusion, SAAS is a testament to the potential of academic collaborations in fostering positive change, creating meaningful and strategic global cooperations, and strengthening industrial and alumni partnerships in higher education.

Suggestion for Future Research

To broaden the scope of future research, it would be beneficial to include partner universities from other regions besides ASEAN. This may include areas such as Europe, China, and Central Asia. Such expansion would contribute to UiTM Pahang's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) discussions and programmes gaining global recognition. These endeavours would benefit UiTM Pahang as an institution, especially if they involved collaboration with departments and schools that already have memoranda of understanding. This approach would amplify the impact of performance measures linked to collaborative activities with internal and external partners, such as universities and industries.

Action research and conceptual studies based on the collaboration outputs could examine the SAAS programme's long-term effects and efficacy for UiTM Pahang and its collaborators. Programme studies should broaden their scope to include fields within the social sciences, such as accounting, linguistics, and marketing. As a comprehensive university, these topics are relevant to discuss.

Many faculty members and students may delve into the globalisation issues affecting them, leading to the development of fresh perspectives and cutting-edge research that tackles pressing problems, particularly in this age of digitisation and the paramount relevance of sustainability issues. Additionally, UiTM Pahang should prioritise involving students from all academic levels, as analysing programme feedback could transform this involvement into action research. Furthermore, involving students from all over the world might boost the programme's improvement efforts. A wider range of perspectives is offered, which could spark future innovations in the programme.

Co-Author Contribution

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest in this article. All authors participated in fieldwork and were directly involved in all organised activities. Author 1 and Author 2 prepared the literature review and reviewed the overall article. Author 3 was responsible for writing the discussion section. Author 4 conducted the statistical analysis, while Author 5 handled the interpretation of the results.

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Head of Schools/Academic Centre of UiTM Pahang, alumni of UiTM Pahang and Committee members of SAAS 2023.

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