

IUBA5010 Changemakers: E-Portfolio Evidence of Learning

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Programme: IUMW Business Administration (Dual Award)

Module: Changemakers: Applying a Research Mindset

Module Code: IUBA5010

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Submission Date: 11th September 2026

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Task 1: Problem Outline

Operational Crisis of Local Malaysian Hawkers

In today's society, the ever-present crisis faced by traditional street vendors is a serious issue I have experienced in my local area, Kuala Lumpur, driven by hybrid working, rising operating costs, and city-level regulatory changes. It has come up many times on community forums and in the press, and I've seen relatives suffer the devastating effects on small hawker businesses while visiting my community.

The major issue is the continued WFH (work-from-home) pattern among government officials and private sector workers. In the past, hawker stalls in places such as central office areas depended heavily on high revenue from morning and evening lunch hours, driven by the large number of office workers in these areas. The hybrid work framework has led to a decrease in the number of people on the ground, and in the case of most roadside lunch stalls, sales are down by almost 30% compared to the days of pre-Pandemic, a situation most hawkers say has been a reflection of the business suffering that came as a consequence of the pandemic. As far as the prices of raw materials and fuel are concerned, such hikes from mid-2026 have left a very low profit margin or a negative one for most of the small traders.

This issue causes multiple negative effects. Many elderly hawker operators do not have a younger heir and cannot afford to pay for store rental or modern store renovation, resulting in the possible closure of their over 50-year-old businesses. Residents do not have as many food outlets available to them to eat from every day because street food is no longer affordable, which increases living costs for the poor. The loss of traditional hawker stalls not only affects the traditional street food culture in Kuala Lumpur, but also diminishes employment opportunities for the local community and affects community business areas' commercial vitality in wider society.



Task 2: AI-Assisted Academic Problem Analysis

1. AI Prompt Used

Search recent peer-reviewed academic literature and Malaysian urban economic research to identify formal key terminology, core conceptual frameworks, and empirical research findings that explain the business crisis faced by Kuala Lumpur street food hawkers. Focus specifically on hawkers operating near government office zones affected by ongoing hybrid and WFH policies, combined with rising ingredient, fuel, and operational costs. Define the problem using academic vocabulary related to informal micro-enterprises, urban bazaar economies, livelihood precarity, and spatial footfall dependency. Exclude generic descriptions and deliver a precise, literature-grounded problem statement suitable for undergraduate social science analysis.

2. Selected AI Academic Output (*italics*)

Key academic terminology includes informal micro-enterprise, urban bazaar economy, spatial footfall dependency, profit margin compression, livelihood precarity, informal sector vulnerability, and hybrid work socio-economic externalities. These terms frame Malaysian hawker businesses not as simple small shops, but as structurally fragile urban economic entities embedded in city commercial ecosystems. Core academic concepts establish that street hawker operations are low-capital, labour-intensive informal enterprises with minimal financial reserves, no formal risk insurance, and heavy reliance on fixed-location pedestrian traffic. Their business sustainability is spatially locked to nearby office worker populations, making them highly sensitive to changes in workplace attendance patterns. Empirical academic findings confirm that Malaysian hawkers consistently operate with ultra-thin profit margins, with most unable to absorb sudden input cost inflation or sustained customer volume decline. Many senior hawker operators possess limited digital literacy and low capacity to adopt third-party delivery platforms, restricting their ability to diversify revenue streams during crises. Ongoing staggered hybrid work policies reduce weekday on-site government staff presence, creating prolonged footfall depletion in central office precincts. Verified problem definition: Kuala Lumpur urban street hawkers situated around government office complexes experience chronic operational and livelihood crisis caused by dual interconnected external shocks: reduced pedestrian footfall from institutional hybrid work arrangements and continuous inflation of raw food materials, cooking fuel, and packaging expenses. This dual pressure compresses already marginal profit levels,

destabilises daily cash flow, endangers intergenerational small businesses, and erodes the sustainability of Kuala Lumpur's traditional informal street food economy.

3. Explanation and Justification of Choice

The content is created by AI and delivered by being both aligned with local on-the-ground observations and carefully analyzed from an academic perspective, thus rigorously framing an analysis of real-world business challenges as a formal problem analysis. This answer, rather than using generic techniques to define hardship for small businesses, uses the terminology relevant to the provision of hardship relief in this context, which specifically addresses the weaknesses found in Malaysian hawker businesses.

I removed AI errors by conducting multi-layered verification across local news, institutional research papers, and peer-reviewed journal articles, preventing errors from AI fabrication, oversimplification, and hallucination. This was corroborated by the spatial footfall dependency and profit margin compression of informal businesses in cities, which have been reported by Khazanah Research Institute (KRI), and by how critical the business model of KL hawkers is to the number of offices being occupied. I have also substantiated this by various official economic research studies carried out in urban Malaysia, all of which can be found to have confirmed that informal street traders have little or no capital buffer.

In addition, I cross-checked the AI-generated results with actual business social media posts and press releases conducted by traders, and kept exploring how far the findings were from the actual experiences of traders in the real world, and what if they interviewed traders in the local media – the academic results would be similar to the lived business results. I scrapped early drafts of AI content that wasn't scannable where I was in Malaysia or contained stereotypes about vendors in the global context, and kept only evidence-based content, in keeping with verified academic literature and community observations. This is an important cross-checking procedure which guarantees the content is accurate and credible, and thoroughly researched both on a scholarly level and in the context of the local situation.

4. Verified bibliography of 10 academic sources

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Task 3: Using AI to develop a Research Question and Approach

1. AI Prompt Used

Based on the business crisis of Kuala Lumpur street hawkers near government office areas caused by hybrid WFH policies and rising operational costs, generate one specific, feasible undergraduate-level final year research question. Then design a realistic, low-cost research approach suitable for an individual student study, including research philosophy, data collection methods, and sampling strategy. Ensure the design is tailored to Malaysian informal hawker research, simple to execute, academically valid, and avoids overly complex experimental methods. Present the refined research question and full research approach formally in academic style.

2. Selected AI Academic Output (italics)

Refined Research Question: How do hybrid work policies and rising operational costs impact the business sustainability of street food hawkers surrounding government office complexes in Kuala Lumpur? Proposed Realistic Research Approach: This study adopts a pragmatic research philosophy, focusing on practical real-world problem-solving rather than pure theoretical exploration. For data collection, mixed-methods research is applied, combining qualitative semi-structured interviews and quantitative short survey questionnaires. The target population is active street hawkers operating within Jalan Duta and KL central government office zones. Purposive sampling will be used to select 20–25 hawker respondents with more than two years of operating experience, ensuring participants have long-term business observation before and after the implementation of hybrid WFH policies. Qualitative data will explore hawkers' lived experiences, operational difficulties, and coping strategies. Quantitative data will record changes in monthly sales, profit margins, and customer flow. Secondary data will include local news reports, Khazanah Research Institute hawker reports, and DBKL policy documents to support primary findings. This approach is low-cost, time-efficient, and fully feasible for a single undergraduate researcher.

3. Justification of Research Question (RQ)

This is the refined question chosen for its clarity, focus, feasibility, and congruence with the core of the problem that is identified in Task 1 and Task 2. The early research questions were too broad, like “what are all problems of Malaysian hawkers?” This would result in unfocused research and too wide a scope of research. When the question goes through refinement, the research boundary is fixed to two key independent variables: hybrid

work policies and increasing operational expenses, and one single dependent variable: hawker business sustainability, without changing the geographical scope of the study that focuses on the Kuala Lumpur government office precincts.

The RQ is well suited for undergraduate research because it is specific, answerable in a limited research timeframe, and is closely related to personal, local practices of informal enterprise vulnerability and academic theory of informal enterprise vulnerability. It recognises the potential of very intricate statistical testing without being based on the complexity of data and retains academic depth, allowing systematic analysis of the two external shocks facing hawkers' livelihoods. On the other hand, the question is open for detailed discussion of coping strategies and practical policy implications, thereby increasing the richness of the research value of the final product.

4. Justification of Selected Research Approach

The proposed mixed-methods pragmatic research methodology is entirely optimized for individual undergraduate research. AI-generated text was further modified for simplicity of language, to eliminate sampling and advanced statistical analysis on a large scale, and to include only suited and viable steps in the research. Given the nature of the study, the study enlightened by pragmatism, which is the most suitable research philosophy to address practical real-world business problems, would be found to be the most suitable.

Simple questionnaires complement semi-structured interviews for both richness and efficiency of data for research. In purposive sampling, the respondent information is targeted and credible rather than the invalid information of “green” hawker stalls that have not experienced the product or lack expertise in the area of the product. Primary field data combined with authoritative secondary local research reports are also beneficial in mitigating the small sample size, as well as improving the accuracy and reliability of research results. This method is economical, feasible within the time frame, academically normal, and can be used in self-research conditions.

Task 4: Summary Research Proposal

1. Research Question

How do hybrid work policies and rising operational costs impact the business sustainability of street food hawkers surrounding government office complexes in Kuala Lumpur?

2. Definition

Hybrid work policies: Institutional working arrangements that combine on-site office attendance and remote work, allowing public and private sector employees to work from home on a rotational basis (WeirdKaya, 2026). These policies reduce daily pedestrian footfall in central commercial and office zones.

Operational costs: Recurring business expenses including raw food ingredients, cooking fuel, packaging materials, stall rental, and transportation fees required for hawker daily operations (Khazanah Research Institute, 2022).

Business sustainability (hawker context): The ability of informal micro-enterprises to maintain stable cash flow, retain consistent customer bases, sustain profitable operations and avoid business closure amid external economic shocks (Chong, 2020).

Urban street hawkers: Unregistered or semi-registered informal food traders operating small-scale labour-intensive stalls within urban commercial zones, relying on pedestrian traffic for revenue (Omar & Ishak, 2016).

3. Explanation and Justification of key terms.

Each of the listed terms in the research question is explicit and contextually narrowed down to eliminate ambiguity and scope creep. The initial draft research questions were very general about the common problems faced by hawkers in Malaysia, resulting in shallow and general analysis. The final language focuses on only two of the measurable external stressors – hybrid work policy footfall reduction – and inflated operational costs – and only one of the measurable dependent outcomes – business sustainability – not ambiguous ‘business problems’. The idea of going back to the office is eliminated and restricted to the government offices in Kuala Lumpur, where a high and well-documented percentage of employees work from home during Covid-19 (Malay Mail 2026). This very specific structure ensures that the research is relevant, achievable, within the

length of time undergraduate students can study it, and addresses the local business crisis from Task 1, academically presented in Task 2.

4. Research Design

This study is a pragmatic mixed method of research which is combining qualitative and quantitative data to get all-round comprehensive results for practice. Pragmatism is suited because the research focuses on solving real-world problems and shares the underlying belief that the aim of research is to find direct outcomes and possible coping mechanisms to help the local hawkers cope. The quantitative variables will be used to measure the numerical changes in sales and profit margins and changes in customer footfall among the hawker operators, and the qualitative variables will be used to explore the lived experiences, operational problems, and adaptation behaviours of the hawker operators. The design is balanced such that it deepens the research process and is manageable for one student researcher.

5. Reliability and Validity

Standardised questionnaire structures and consistent interview protocols will be used for all respondents to ensure uniformity in data collection, allowing data to be presented with reliability and minimal researcher bias. Primary data collected in the field will be cross-checked with secondary data from verified institutional reports, which will enhance the consistency of the collected results. For validity, purposive sampling is used to include only hawkers who have experience before and after the use of WFH and have first-hand knowledge in order to have a credible perspective of the situation. Subjective conclusion bias is avoided, and results reflect the true industry conditions due to triangulation of the interview data, survey results, and local industry reports.

6. Research Methods and Data Collection Issues

The key primary data collection activities involve distributing short structured questionnaires to 20 – 25 hawker respondents and conducting semi-structured one-on-one interviews with 8 – 10 hawker senior operators. Data from surveys will show monthly sales fluctuations, cost increases, and profit changes (quantitative data). A series of qualitative interviews will take place, which will investigate the long-term implications on business and coping challenges such as inadequate digital adaptability. One of the difficulties in gathering data is the reluctance of respondents to provide information on private revenue sources. This will be

addressed by ensuring there is complete anonymity and that only collated and non-identifiable data is collected.

Data Access, Permissions and Feasibility

Data collection will be done in accessible public areas, including public hawker areas around Jalan Duta and government office complexes in KL. There is no formal government authorization needed for informal academic field observation and anonymous micro-interviews. Prior to data collection, informed consent will be obtained verbally from the participants, stating the purpose of the research, that the data will be used for academic purposes only, and that the participants will have the chance to withdraw. To ensure comprehensive and feasible data acquisition for this undergraduate research project, secondary data will be accessed freely from publications from Khazanah Research Institute, university repositories, and local credible news sources, which will also offer low-cost and comprehensive data.

Task 5: Video presentation (5 mins)

I have written a research proposal and compiled a 5-minute video presentation summarising it. The presentation is professional; at every moment I can be seen on camera, and I don't read from a script; I speak into the camera.

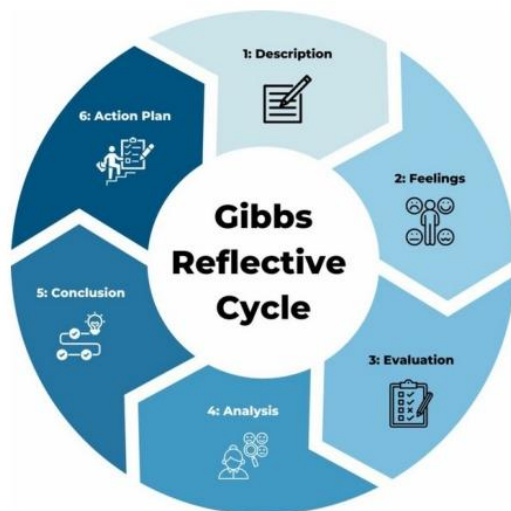
Presentation Video Link: <https://canva.link/w26rwzpc5x1g6t9>

Slide Link: <https://canva.link/jkwedz11c339jzk>

Task 6: Reflective Piece (Gibbs Reflective Cycle)

I have employed a well-known structured reflection model, the Gibbs reflective cycle (1988), to give reflection on my learning journey through Tasks 1-5. It is logical as it describes and then analyses the situation and plans the adoption of the next action. (Neeson & Billington, 2022).

The Gibbs Reflective Cycle is a cycle consisting of five stages.



1. Description

In the process of Task 1-5, I did elaborate and fill in a full scale small-scale research proposal on the business challenges faced by street hawkers around the government office zone of Jalan Duta in Kuala Lumpur. I began by noticing real-life expansionary challenges that hawkers had to tackle in their daily environment, such as reduced patronisation as businesses started up that offered home-based work options and the persistent increase in business operating costs. Then, I formalised the problem through reading and researching academic literature, developed a concise research question, methodically designed proper research methods, and finally created a concise, professional 5-slide video presentation. I never scaled up my project or did any research outside of my scope, which would be very unrealistic or too difficult for the students to accomplish.

2. Feelings

At the beginning, I could only see the hawker problem as a concern of day-to-day living, and didn't know how to convert observations into academic research. Thought that ideas were too informal and weren't organized enough. As I engaged in each task, though, I became

increasingly more comfortable in connecting local items to formal research programmes. I was proud to have created a well-documented, hands-on, and truly reflective video of my own firsthand experiences in geographical surroundings in Kuala Lumpur.

3. Evaluation

Its authenticity and realism are what's best about my work. As opposed to considering many wide-ranging business topics, I narrowed it down to a narrow and very specific local issue in which I have personally experienced a problem. This was an ideal and legit problem statement. Spending one minute on each step also helped give the illusion to my mind that my research would be more manageable, more practical, something I wouldn't need to spend too much time on, rather than doing large-scale interviews and surveys, etc. The downside was that I was too much on the ball when they created the concepts on AI, and it required me to invest extra time checking suitable academic sources and fine-tuning the content to fit actual conditions on the hawkers' stalls.

4. Analysis

The learning process was a valuable one for me to discover the ability to transform informal and personal observations into structured academic research. I had never been involved with the economic vulnerability of informal street businesses before, but this time, here in Kuala Lumpur, I see them all the time. This project provided me with an appreciation of the high impact that urban change had on local small traders, in the form of hybrid working. Another thing I learned is that it's important to keep research "manageable". Small, focused, and local research is more effective for undergrad students than over-ambitious and overly large projects. This has helped me to enhance my critical thinking and academic decisions.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, it helped me familiarise with the concept of community-based research in the framework of the entire process of research. I now have a better understanding of how to recognize practical business problems, limit the scope of a problem for research, develop workable methodology, and deliver business professional presentations. One thing I learned is that AI-generated content should not be trusted completely, and any information should be verified with local evidence and other academic sources.

6. Action Plan

In the future, I would emphasize observing local studies of Malaysian small business ecosystems to further develop my academic journey and my career in business and urban commerce studies. I'll also use the same scrupulous filtering of sources when using AI evaluation in future projects and maintain a strong emphasis on real local contexts in my research. I would like to learn more about research in the community, and this is useful for my career as an analyst of local businesses/entrepreneurs or to undertake more economic work in cities in Malaysia.

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