

Integrating Experiential Learning and Soft Skills through Community Services Towards 21st-century Education: Satisfaction Index Analysis

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Abstract

21st-century education in the future is an important theme debated today. Discussions focus on the most relevant knowledge and skills to prepare our children for the rapidly changing society. Many of these skills are categorized as “21st-century skills” that incorporate soft skills through the concept of experiential learning. Soft skill development is crucial for student empowerment, and the role of the high institution become more challenging with the skill not being formally taught in the education system. The Study purposely determined the level of satisfaction regarding soft skills in students among the local participant towards the community. The random sampling method uses to choose the respondent from three community projects. The questionnaire establishes as an instrument to collect required information after the project ends, and ninety respondents from three community projects fill-up the form accordingly. Analysis on (7) seven soft skills with Likert scale approach indicates interpersonal skill is the most highlighted by a community project participant. The preliminary finding indicates that most respondents were very satisfied with the community project. Furthermore, they emphasize that the students demonstrated soft skills during the project activity.

Keywords: Soft Skill, Local Community, Curriculum Activity, Satisfaction Index Analysis

Introduction

To be resilient and effective in society today demands a much broader and diversified set of skills and a wide range of behavioural and value-based dispositions than ever before. Increased globalisation and the development of a knowledge economy (Gilbert, 2005) have led to a greater need for enhanced cultural understanding, awareness, and empathy, and consideration of a set of different skills, dispositions, and attitudes. Brutal truth (Ranjit, 2012) in soft skill requirement quote by newspaper related to the current basis of selection in giving jobs to university graduates in Malaysia. Employers demand the values of soft skill as much as excellent academic qualification. As for the educational institution becomes a challenge to ensure the values are equip among their graduates. The Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia (Syed Ahmad, 2013), in collaboration with public and private universities, has strived to teach this added value into a real strength in each of their graduates. Various programs introduce, namely community service (Sideris et al., 2014), purification of identity in the subjects offered (Kania et al., 2019), and exposure to the realities of actual work (Opolot, 2014). According to (García et al., 2018), some are imposed on at the secondary

level before setting foot into university and adapt with the 21st-century education process. A 21st-century education is about giving students the skills they need to succeed in this new world and helping them grow the confidence to practice those skills. With so much information readily available to them, 21st-century skills focus more on making sense of that information, sharing, and using it in intelligent ways.

Literature Review

Experiential Learning

Experiential learning is an engaged learning process whereby students “learn by doing” and by reflecting on the experience. Learning that is considered “experiential” contain all the following elements: Reflection, critical analysis and synthesis. According to Kolb (2014), experiential learning is an educational concept that emphasizes the active creation of knowledge. The advent of experiential learning was propounded by John Dewey, which later gained recognition and was adopted by various academicians such as Kolb

(1984); Eyler (2009), and many more. David Kolb’s ELT constitutes the progression of creating knowledge, sense-making, and transferring the knowledge (Mughal & Zafar, 2011).

Therefore, experiential learning is a process that allows learners to grasp understanding, apply the knowledge, and reflect on the new knowledge. This process goes beyond their traditional classroom experiences. The 21st-century learners that our nation aspires to produce need an experiential learning environment whereby they can experience and practice what they have learnt in the classroom and undergo a series of reflections. This will hone their higher-order thinking skills. Experiential learning opportunities exist in a variety of course- and non-course-based forms and may include community service, service-learning, undergraduate research, study abroad/away, and culminating experiences such as internships, student teaching, and capstone projects, to name a few. When students participate in experiential education opportunities, they gain:

- i. A better understanding of course material
- ii. A broader view of the world and an appreciation of community
- iii. Insight into their own skills, interests, passions, and values
- iv. Opportunities to collaborate with diverse organizations and people
- v. Positive professional practices and skill sets
- vi. The gratification of assisting in meeting community needs
- vii. Self-confidence and leadership skills

Soft Skill

Based on the literature study by Voogt and Pareja Roblin (2010), eight 21st century skills are important in student development, namely, creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, collaboration, digital literacy, social and cultural skills, and self-regulation . In a related study, Soft skills (Marushkevych, 2020; Santos et al., 2021) contribute much weightage in graduates’ qualification in seeking preferences and desires position in the company. Internationally, most of the established companies seek potential employees with

soft skill oriented. There are seven common skills usually required during the interview process: leadership, teamwork, communication, problem-solving, work ethic, flexibility, and interpersonal skills. As for educational institutions, the soft skills values explore from theoretical to practice. Gathering all required resources is a must to ensure the graduate's competence in this informal credential.

Soft skills define as a personal attribute that enable someone to interact effectively and harmoniously with other people (Oxford,2010). According to (Snyder, 2020), there are seven skills required in soft skills: leadership, teamwork, communication, problem-solving, work ethic, adaptability, and interpersonal skills. Each skill equips with many items or element that demonstrate the foundation of each skill. About 51 crucial elements involve to supporting the skill. The detail crucial element in soft skill can be shows at table 1.

Table 1: Crucial Elements in Soft Skill

No	Skills	Item		Ref.
1	Leadership	Patience Empathy Active listening Reliability Dependability Creativity Positivity	Effective Timely Team building Flexibility Risk-taking Ability to teach feedback	(De Haro García, Romero Del Castillo, & Ortiz Boyer, 2018; De Pietro, 2019; Hayles, 2019; Rajenthiran, Shaharane, & Jamil, 2017; Santos et al. 2021; Snyder, 2020; Tan & Shahrill, 2015)
2	Teamwork	Communications Responsibility Honesty Active listening	Empathy Collaborations Awareness	
3	Communications	Confidence Friendliness Sharing feedback Volume & Clarity Empathy	Respect Nonverbal Cues Responsiveness	
4	Problem-solving	Active listening Analysis Research Creativity	Communication Dependability Decision making Team building	

5	Work Ethic	Dependability Integrity Honesty Professionalism	Focus on goals Dedication Inherent values Determination	
6	Flexibility	Adaptability		
7	Interpersonal	Active listening Teamwork Responsibility Dependability Leadership	Flexibility Patience Empathy Motivation	

Source: Author, 2022

Soft skill learning considers long-life learning. The more exposure made, the more learning process took place. Most successful employees are people who have a high level of soft skills. It is assessed based on the employer's satisfaction with the work results directed theoretically and practically. The translation of employer satisfaction towards employees in value is generally through 7 soft skills adopted at all levels. Therefore, the seven soft skills mentioned must be the core in exploring the diversity of possibilities for strengthening students at the university level. Therefore, the focus of the study was to explore the level of participant satisfaction towards students in community projects.

Methods

Nonexperimental research (Guerin, 2019) approach use for the research foundation. Primary data collection using questionnaire as an instrument apply to the target respondent. Three community projects choose randomly, with 30 respondents for each project, resulting in 90 respondents finishing the task. Respondents choose within structural indicator from participant involvement mostly from Jawatankuasa Kemajuan Kampung (JKK). Data analysis involving 5 Likert's scale approach (Manerikar & Manerikar, 2015) with alfa Cronbach (Silveira et al., 2013) reliability test. The satisfaction index analysis (SIA) formularies from the average mean (mean data from discrete frequency table) analysis and ranking. Method use to interpret the satisfaction level among respondent using 5 level of satisfaction namely, very satisfied (Average mean=1-2), satisfied (Average mean=2-3), neutral (Average mean 3), not satisfied (Average mean 3-4), very not satisfied (Average mean 4-5). The average mean analysis determines the level of satisfaction.

Results and Discussion

Reliability test on the skill

Table 2: Cronbach Alfa Values

No	Skills	Cronbach Alfa	Accepted level
1	Interpersonal	0.896	Very good
2	Leadership	0.890	Very Good
3	Teamwork	0.798	Good
4	Communication	0.860	Very Good
5	Problem-solving	0.722	Good
6	Work Ethic	0.787	Good
7	Flexibility	0.808	Good

Source: Author, 2022

The Cronbach's alpha test in table 2 shows that the alpha value is at a good level which is between 0.722 to 0.986. According to (Hanafi et al., 2018; Shrout, 1998; Yusup, 2018) the alpha value is at an acceptable level. In general, these tests show a high level of significance.

Profile

Table 3 indicates that 72.2% were male respondents, and the rest were female respondents, with a percentage difference of 44.4%. While for the age group, 63% are respondents aged between 35-44 years, followed by respondents aged between 45-64 years with a total percentage of 31.2%.

Table 3: Profile

No	Item	Quantity	(%)
1	Gender		
	1.Male	65	72.2
	2.Female	25	27.8
2	Age		
	18-34	4	4.4
	35-44	57	63.3
	45-54	14	15.6
	55-64	14	15.6
	65 and above	1	1.1

3	Education		
	Tertiary Education	63	70.0
	Cert & Diploma	20	22.2
	Bachelor	7	6.8
	Masters & PhD	-	
4	Community Involvement		
	>2	-	
	2-5	-	
	5 < x > 10	61	67.8
	10-20	17	18.9
	<20	12	13.3
5	Have you/organization involved with the University Programmed		
	Yes	90	100
	No	-	-
6	Position in organization/Community		
	Board member	17	18.9
	Member	68	75.6
	Non member	5	5.6

Source: Author, 2022

In contrast, the remaining 8.8% are respondents aged 34 years and below and more than 64 years. For educational background, most respondents have tertiary education level with a total percentage of 70.0%, followed by respondents who have a cert and diploma with 22%. The rest are respondents with a degree of 6.8%. Aspects of involvement in community activities, most respondents have extensive experience of between 5 to 10 years with a total percentage of 67.8% and respondents with more than ten years of experience with a total percentage of 32.2%. All respondents, 100%, have been involved with programs organized by universities from all over Malaysia. Most of the respondents registered as community members with 75.6%, followed by committee members at 18.9% and the rest of the unregistered members at 13.3%.

Satisfaction Index Analysis (SIA) on average mean by Skills

Table 4 shows the average mean values of the seven skills with 51 support elements assessed by participants directly involved with community projects in the three Areas involved.

Table 4: Mean Value

No	Skills	Item	Average Mean (AM)	SIA Rank
1	Interpersonal	9	1.6086	1
2	Leadership	14	1.6722	3
3	Teamwork	7	1.6556	2
4	Communication	8	1.8792	7
5	Problem-solving	8	1.7828	4
6	Work Ethic	8	1.8111	6
7	Flexibility	1	1.8000	5

Source: Author, 2022

The lowest AM reading close to the value of 1 is the best. In general, interpersonal skill has the lowest AM value of 1.6086 and teamwork with an AM value of 1.6556. While the third place with an AM reading of 1.6722 is leadership, followed by problem-solving with a reading of 1.7828. While the fifth rank is flexibility with a value of 1.8000, followed by work ethic with an avg mean value of 1.8111. The seventh rank of 1.8792 is the maximum value. However, all readings obtained from the seven skills involved show that respondents as a whole are very satisfied with the soft skills demonstrated by students in community programs conducted in three designated area

Conclusion

he 21st-century learning era encourages educators to diversify their teaching methods and pedagogy, whether at the school or university level. The importance of 21st-century learning causes educators to always think of ways to highlight the skills of 21st-century students to be more relevant and in line with the development of the globalization era. In the context of education in Malaysia today, the Malaysian education system is designed to empower students to acquire and impart the knowledge learned to be shared and benefit society. The education system is expected to cultivate caring citizens who are able to contribute to the progress of society. In addition, our National Education Philosophy aims to produce holistic individuals who are knowledgeable and possess high moral standards in preparation for the 21st century.

In general, the study results have shown success through the soft skills integration approach of community projects among participants shown a positive reaction. The community participant's satisfactory level initially demonstrates the sweetness of the soul purpose in the community project. It can be a space to hone the soft skills that exist and do not yet exist in the students involved. This study has given a new dimension to the strengthening and

applying essential soft skills towards the students involved, especially in community services. This study can be a catalyst for soft skills to be explored theoretically and practically.

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