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SERVICE LEARNING MALAYSIA-UNIVERSITY FOR SOCIETY
(SULAM): ASSESSING ITS EFFECTIVENESS, KNOWLEDGE
TRANSFER, AND COMMUNITIES SATISFACTION IN
ACHIEVING QUALITY EDUCATION (SDG 4)**

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Abstract:

The Service Learning Malaysia-University for Society (SULAM) Program integrates experiential learning into higher education by bridging academic knowledge with community engagement. This study evaluates the effectiveness of SULAM, focusing on knowledge transfer and participant satisfaction as key determinants. The research assesses how SULAM contributes to student learning outcomes, community impact, and the overall enhancement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4: Quality Education. A quantitative approach was employed with total of 53 respondents participated in the survey. The study analyzed pre- and post-program knowledge levels to determine the impact of SULAM on participants' learning experiences. Findings indicate that SULAM significantly enhances students' and participants critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and civic responsibility. The correlation analysis revealed a positive relationship between participant satisfaction and program effectiveness ($r = 0.563$), as well as knowledge transfer ($r = 0.428$). Despite these benefits, challenges such as limited institutional support, resource constraints, and inconsistent engagement were identified. To strengthen the program, the study recommends enhancing

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knowledge transfer mechanisms, increasing stakeholder collaboration, and integrating structured evaluation frameworks. Providing institutional and financial support and incorporating SULAM into formal academic curricula will further sustain its impact. These findings highlight SULAM's role in fostering socially responsible graduates while reinforcing the importance of service-learning in Malaysian higher education.

Keywords:

Higher Education, Knowledge Transfer, Satisfaction, SDG 4, Service Learning, SULAM.

Introduction

The integration of experiential learning into higher education has gained significant attention as a means of fostering holistic student development and addressing societal needs. Service Learning Malaysia-University for Society (SULAM) is a structured service-learning initiative that bridges academic knowledge with community engagement, aligning with the broader goals of sustainable development (Wahab, 2024). By embedding real-world problem-solving within the curriculum, SULAM empowers students to apply theoretical concepts to practical challenges, reinforcing their academic learning while contributing to societal well-being.

One of the key Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emphasized through SULAM is SDG 4: Quality Education, which advocates for inclusive, equitable, and lifelong learning opportunities. SULAM enriches the educational experience by fostering critical thinking, civic responsibility, and practical skills among students. Through community-based projects, students engage with diverse societal issues, developing a sense of social responsibility and enhancing their professional competencies (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2019). This pedagogical approach not only enhances learning outcomes but also cultivates a culture of empathy, leadership, and active citizenship.

Moreover, SULAM's alignment with SDG 4 extends beyond individual student benefits, positively impacting the communities involved. By collaborating with underserved populations, universities contribute to educational accessibility and knowledge dissemination, addressing gaps in learning resources and capacity-building initiatives (Luísa Ribeiro Trigo et al., 2023; Naufal et al., 2024). This reciprocal exchange of knowledge ensures that higher education institutions serve as agents of social transformation, reinforcing their commitment to sustainable and inclusive education (Johan et al., 2022). Therefore, the key components of SULAM projects are illustrated in Figure 1.

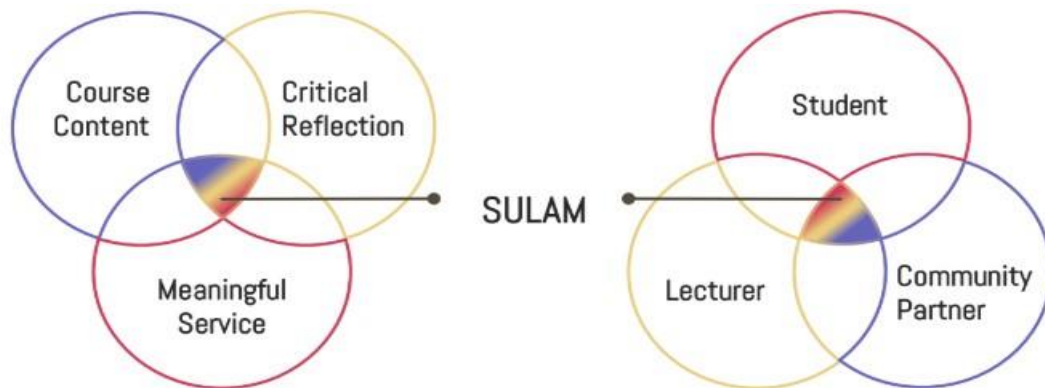


Figure 1: Key Components of SULAM Program

Source: Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia (2019)

Although SULAM offers a transformative learning experience, several challenges hinder its effectiveness. Institutional barriers, such as unclear policies and excessive administrative burdens on faculty, create inconsistencies in implementation (Ullah et al., 2023). Faculty often face competing priorities, limiting their capacity to design or sustain community-engaged curricula (Hallmark et al., 2023). Additionally, student engagement varies, with some perceiving SULAM as an extra workload rather than an opportunity for growth, particularly when alignment with academic goals is unclear (Le Salleh Hudin et al., 2018). A lack of structured training further limits students' preparedness for meaningful community interactions, undermining their ability to navigate complex social contexts (Shee & Sam, 2022).

Community participation also presents challenges, as differing expectations between universities and communities, coupled with weak collaboration mechanisms, can reduce the program's long-term impact (Amirah et al., 2023). Power imbalances and a lack of reciprocity in partnerships further exacerbate these issues (Aparecido da Silva & Pereira, 2023). Furthermore, assessing learning outcomes and societal contributions remains difficult due to the limitations of traditional academic evaluations, which often fail to capture qualitative or community-level changes (Amran and Daud, 2022).

Sustainability is another major issue, as many SULAM projects depend on short-term funding and lack institutional support, making long-term community engagement difficult (Compare et al., 2022). Universities often struggle to measure the sustained impact of these initiatives, leading to difficulties in justifying continued investment (Putra et al., 2024). Addressing these challenges requires structured policies, dedicated resources, improved assessment frameworks, and stronger university-community partnerships (Chan et al., 2021). By overcoming these obstacles, SULAM can enhance its role in fostering civic responsibility, experiential learning, and sustainable societal impact.

Thus, this study aims to evaluate the societal benefits of the SULAM program. Specifically, it focuses on the Smart Spending program, which seeks to educate communities on effective financial management practices. To assess the program's impact, a survey was conducted with 53 respondents who provided feedback on the program's effectiveness. The data collected offer insights into SULAM's role in promoting societal welfare and addressing community needs, ultimately highlighting the initiative's contribution to producing well-rounded, socially responsible graduates equipped for Malaysia's future societal and economic challenges.

Literature Review

SULAM is an initiative that integrates experiential learning within higher education institutions, emphasizing community engagement and real-world applications of academic knowledge. This literature review explores the theory of service-learning, the effectiveness of the SULAM program as the dependent variable, with satisfaction and knowledge transfer as the independent variables.

Service-Learning and Kolb Experiential Learning Theory

SULAM is an initiative designed to integrate community engagement into higher education curricula, aligning with experiential learning principles. Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) provides a relevant framework for understanding how students acquire knowledge through active participation in real-world experiences. This literature review explores the relationship between Kolb's ELT and SULAM, emphasizing how experiential learning enhances student learning, civic engagement, and social responsibility.

Kolb's ELT (1984) is based on a four-stage cyclical process where learners move through Concrete Experience (CE), Reflective Observation (RO), Abstract Conceptualization (AC), and Active Experimentation (AE). This cycle facilitates deeper learning as students integrate theory with practice. In the context of SULAM, students engage in community-based projects, analyze their experiences, develop conceptual understandings, and apply newfound knowledge in future initiatives (Kolb, 1984). Kolb's model emphasizes the importance of active participation and reflection, which are central to the SULAM framework.

Numerous studies support the effectiveness of experiential learning in enhancing student engagement and competency development. SULAM, grounded in Kolb's ELT, fosters the development of essential skills such as communication, teamwork, leadership, and social responsibility (Eyler & Giles, 1999). Research indicates that students participating in service-learning programs demonstrate increased civic engagement, empathy, and problem-solving abilities (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995). Additionally, integrating experiential learning into higher education promotes lifelong learning and enhances employability prospects (Kolb & Kolb, 2005).

Despite its benefits, implementing Kolb's ELT in SULAM faces several challenges. These include logistical constraints, assessment complexities, and the need for structured facilitation (Healey & Jenkins, 2000). Effective implementation requires well-designed curricula, faculty training, and sustainable community partnerships (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996). Furthermore, continuous evaluation mechanisms are necessary to assess learning outcomes and improve program effectiveness (Astin et al., 2000).

Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory provides a robust framework for understanding the pedagogical foundation of SULAM. By engaging students in meaningful, hands-on experiences, SULAM aligns with the ELT model, fostering holistic development and real-world problem-solving skills. Future research should explore innovative assessment methods and best practices to enhance experiential learning in service-learning programs, ensuring long-term impact on students and communities alike.

Effectiveness of the SULAM Program

The effectiveness of the SULAM program is a crucial factor in evaluating its impact on students and the community. Effectiveness in this context refers to the extent to which the program achieves its intended outcomes, including enhancing student learning, fostering social responsibility, and benefiting community partners (Mohamad et al., 2024). Research has demonstrated that experiential learning programs like SULAM contribute significantly to student development by promoting critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and civic engagement. According to Fantinelli et al. (2024), service-learning bridges the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, reinforcing student comprehension while simultaneously addressing community needs. In Malaysia, the Higher Education Ministry recognizes SULAM as a strategic initiative for improving graduate employability and social awareness by integrating real-world challenges into academic curricula.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of SULAM is assessed based on several key indicators, including student engagement, skill acquisition, and long-term societal impact. Studies indicate that students involved in service-learning programs demonstrate higher levels of empathy, leadership, and community engagement compared to those in traditional learning settings (Afzal & Hussain, 2020). Additionally, research by Naufal et al. (2024) found that SULAM participants exhibited increased motivation and adaptability, both essential qualities in today's dynamic workforce.

Community engagement is another vital aspect of SULAM's effectiveness. According to a study by Tyndall et al. (2020), service-learning fosters meaningful university-community collaborations that lead to mutual benefits. In the Malaysian context, universities implementing SULAM have reported improvements in local communities' social and economic conditions due to student-led projects addressing issues such as financial literacy, environmental sustainability, and digital literacy (Wahab, 2024).

While SULAM has demonstrated substantial benefits, challenges remain in ensuring its consistent effectiveness. A study by Yusof et al. (2020) highlights that program success depends on institutional support, adequate training for educators, and active participation from all stakeholders. Therefore, continuous assessment and refinement of SULAM's implementation strategies are necessary to maximize its positive impact on students and communities.

Program's Satisfaction

Student and community satisfaction play a pivotal role in determining the success of service-learning initiatives. Satisfaction levels often influence student engagement and willingness to participate in future service-learning projects. According to Cain (2013), service-learning programs that align with students' academic interests and career aspirations tend to yield higher satisfaction levels.

In Malaysia, research conducted by Kasim (2024) indicates that students participating in SULAM report high levels of satisfaction due to the program's hands-on learning approach, which enhances their academic experience and personal growth. Similarly, community partners express satisfaction with SULAM projects when they observe tangible benefits, such as improved financial literacy, environmental awareness, and entrepreneurial skills among

beneficiaries (Wahi et al., 2024). However, satisfaction levels can vary depending on program structure, duration, and the degree of institutional support provided.

Knowledge Transfer

Knowledge transfer is a core component of the SULAM program, facilitating the exchange of academic knowledge between students and communities. Effective knowledge transfer ensures that the skills and expertise gained through service-learning projects are retained and applied in real-world contexts.

Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory by Kolb and Kolb (2005) suggests that active participation in community projects enhances knowledge retention and practical skill application. Empirical evidence supports this claim, with studies indicating that students engaged in service-learning programs acquire deeper understanding and practical expertise compared to those who rely solely on traditional classroom instruction (Jeyaraj, 2019).

In the Malaysian higher education landscape, SULAM has been recognized for its role in promoting community-based learning, particularly in areas such as financial literacy, environmental conservation, and health education (Syahmi et al., 2023). These projects not only benefit students but also empower local communities by equipping them with essential knowledge and skills that can lead to long-term improvements in their quality of life.

The literature underscores the importance of SULAM in fostering academic excellence, social responsibility, and community development. While the program has been effective in bridging the gap between academia and societal needs, further research is required to identify best practices for sustaining its impact. By addressing factors such as student satisfaction and knowledge transfer, universities can refine the SULAM framework to enhance its effectiveness and long-term sustainability. Therefore, the framework for this study as illustrate on Figure 2.

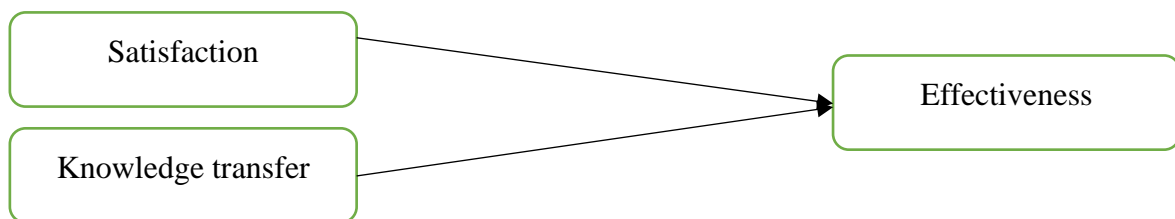


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework For This Study

Methodology

This study employs a quantitative approach to analyze the implementation and impact of the SULAM program. By utilizing survey-based data collection, the study aims to provide empirical evidence on how SULAM initiatives contribute to effectiveness, knowledge transfer and community satisfaction.

Sampling and Survey Instrument

The study employed a purposive sampling approach, targeting students who had participated in the SULAM program. A total of 53 respondents were selected, comprising part of Form 3 students from Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan (SMK) Amanjaya, Sungai Petani, Kedah. These

students were chosen based on their direct involvement in SULAM activities, ensuring that the data collected accurately reflected their experiences and perceptions of the program.

By focusing on this specific group, the study aimed to gain insights into the impact of SULAM on students' learning, engagement, and overall development. The selected respondents provided valuable feedback regarding the effectiveness of the program in fostering experiential learning and community engagement. Their responses were collected through a structured survey, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of the program's outcomes.

A structured questionnaire was designed as the primary data collection instrument to obtain quantitative insights into the effectiveness of the SULAM program. The survey employed a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) to assess respondents' perceptions across various dimensions of the program. The questionnaire comprised four main sections: Demographic Information, Part A, Part B, and Part C. Each section was designed to capture key aspects of participants' experiences and engagement with SULAM.

In addition to the Likert-scale questions, the survey incorporated an open-ended section where participants could provide suggestions and recommendations for enhancing the SULAM program. This section allowed respondents to share personal experiences, identify challenges not addressed in the structured questions, and propose actionable improvements for future program implementations.

Data Analysis

The collected survey data were analyzed using both descriptive and correlation analyses. Descriptive statistics, including frequency distributions and percentage analyses, were employed to summarize and interpret respondents' overall experiences and perceptions of the SULAM program. These measures provided insights into participation levels, perceived benefits, and key challenges faced by students.

To examine the relationships between key variables, correlation analysis was conducted using Pearson's correlation coefficient. This statistical method assessed the strength and direction of relationships between different aspects of the SULAM program. The correlation analysis helped identify significant patterns and determine the extent to which various elements of the SULAM program influence student learning outcomes and engagement levels.

Reliability Test Analysis

The reliability analysis of the study was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha, which measures the internal consistency of the items within each variable. A higher Cronbach's Alpha value, closer to 1, indicates greater reliability. Based on the commonly accepted thresholds (Nunnally, 1978), a value of ≥ 0.9 indicates excellent reliability, 0.8 - 0.89 is considered good, 0.7 - 0.79 is acceptable, 0.6 - 0.69 is questionable, and values below 0.6 suggest poor reliability.

The Satisfaction variable, consisting of four items, recorded a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.678, indicating questionable reliability as it falls slightly below the acceptable threshold of 0.7 as shown in Table 1. This lower reliability may suggest that the items do not fully capture the construct, potentially due to item redundancy, ambiguity, or varying respondent interpretations. Refinements such as rewording or modifying the items may enhance reliability. In contrast, the

Knowledge Transfer variable, with six items, achieved a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.904, demonstrating excellent reliability. This high score indicates strong internal consistency, suggesting that the items effectively measure knowledge transfer without inconsistencies. Similarly, the Program's Effectiveness variable, also measured with six items, attained a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.849, reflecting good reliability and ensuring that the construct is consistently measured.

Overall, while Knowledge Transfer and Program Effectiveness exhibit strong reliability, the Satisfaction variable may require improvements to strengthen its consistency. Future enhancements could involve revising item wording, conducting an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to detect underlying issues, or increasing the number of measurement items to better capture the construct.

Table 1: Result of the Reliability Test (Cronbach's Alpha Value)

Variables	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha Value)
Satisfaction	4	.678
Knowledge Transfer	6	.904
Program's Effectiveness	6	.849

Result and Discussion

Demographic

This section presents the research findings derived from analyzing the primary data collected through the survey. A total of 53 questionnaires were distributed, and the statistical methods applied included descriptive statistics and correlation. The demographic section comprised three questions: gender, age, and education level.

Table 2: Demographic Result

Demographic Profile	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	17	32.1
	Female	36	67.9
Age	15 years old	53	100
Education level	Form 3	53	100

According to Table 2, there were 17 male respondents, accounting for 32.1%, while the number of female respondents was higher, totaling 36 or 67.9%. Analysis shows that all respondents were 15 years old and currently in Form 3 at the secondary school level.

Enhancing Knowledge Transfer: Comparative Analysis Before and After Program Implementation

Evaluating participants' knowledge before and after the SULAM program is essential to understanding its effectiveness in facilitating knowledge transfer. By assessing their baseline understanding prior to the program and measuring improvements post-participation, this analysis provides insights into the program's impact on learning outcomes. The comparison highlights the extent to which SULAM enhances participants' comprehension, practical application of knowledge, and overall cognitive development. Identifying these differences helps determine the program's success in bridging knowledge gaps and fostering meaningful learning experiences within the community.

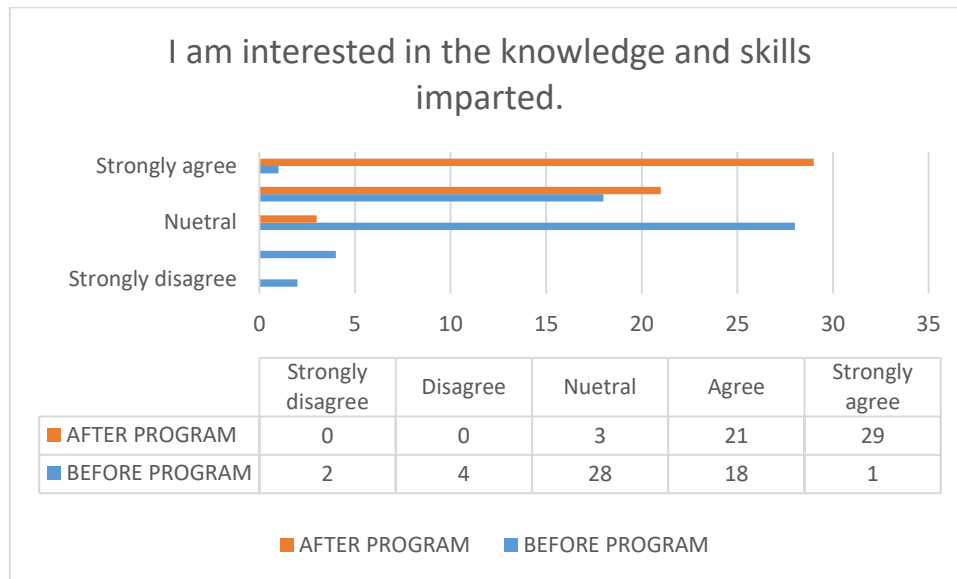


Figure 3: I Am Interested In The Knowledge And Skills Imparted

Figure 3 indicates a significant shift in participants' interest in the knowledge and skills imparted by the program. Most participants moved from neutral or agreeing to strongly agreeing that they are interested in the knowledge and skills provided by the program. This positive trend suggests that the program was effective in engaging the participants and increasing their interest in the subject matter.

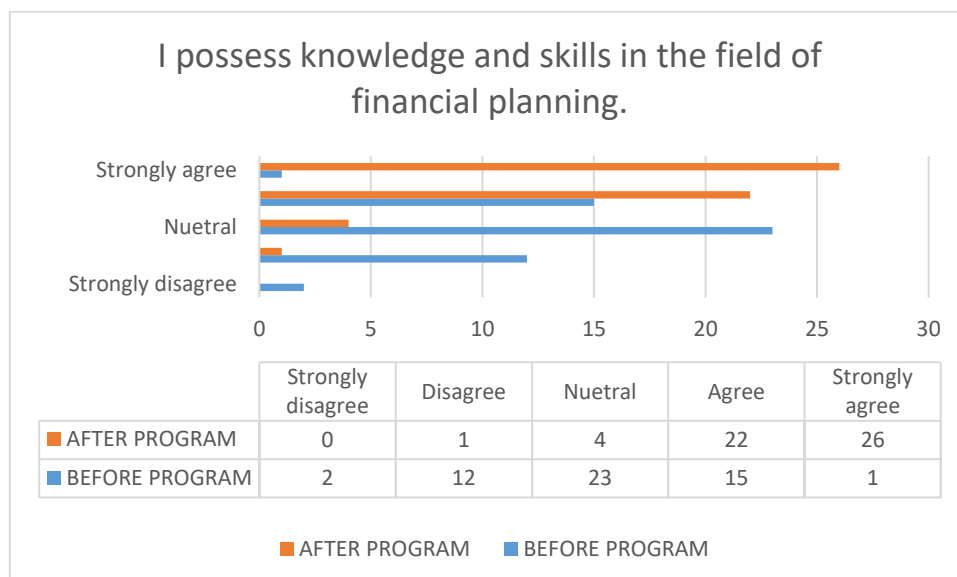


Figure 4: I Possess Knowledge And Skills In The Field Of Financial Planning

Figure 4 indicates that before the program, most participants were neutral or agreed that they possessed financial planning knowledge and skills. However, after the program conducted, most of the participants strongly agreed or agreed they had gained this knowledge and skills.

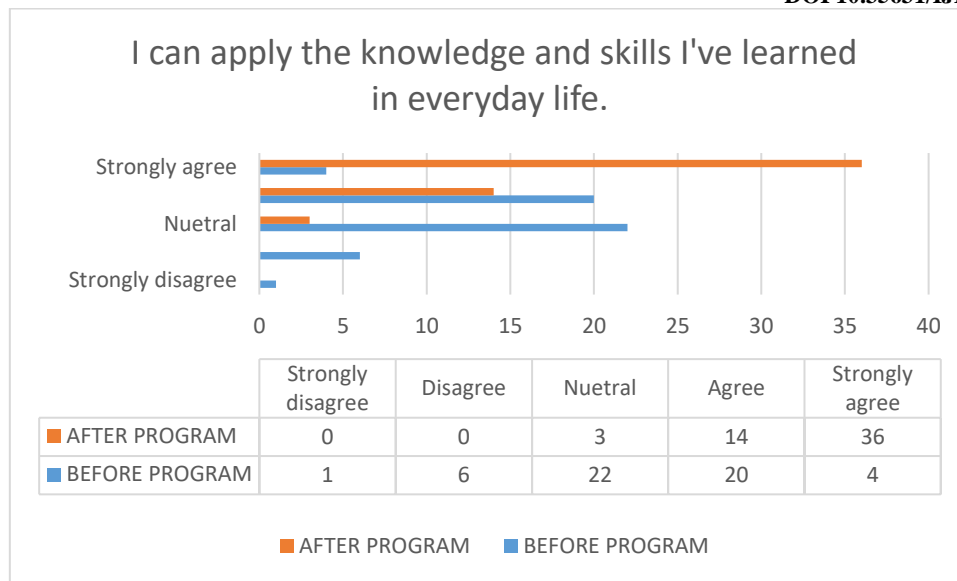


Figure 5: I Can Apply The Knowledge And Skills I've Learned In Everyday Life

Based on Figure 5, most participants prior to the program were neutral or agreed they could apply their knowledge and skills in everyday life. However, their perception changed after the program, an overwhelming majority strongly agreed or agreed they could apply what they had learned.

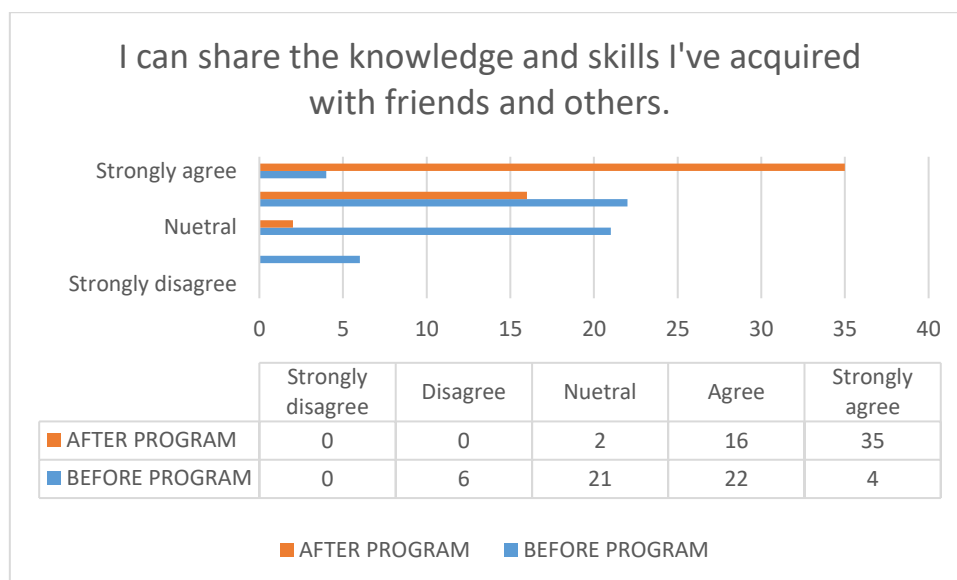


Figure 6: I Can Share The Knowledge And Skills I've Acquired With Friends And Others

Based on Figure 6, most participants prior to the program were neutral or agreed they could share their knowledge and skills with others. However, their perception changed after the program, the majority strongly agreed or agreed they could effectively share what they had learned.

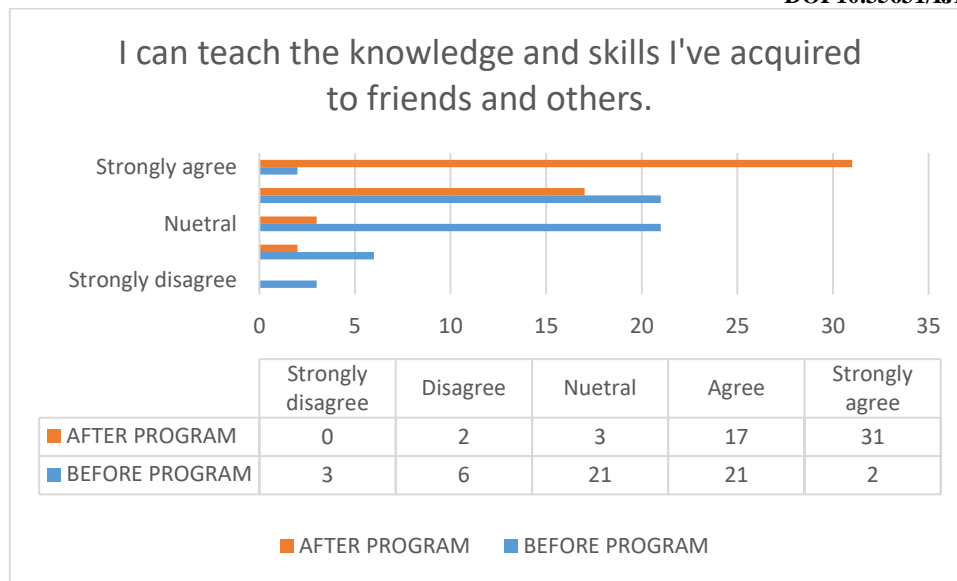


Figure 7: I Can Teach The Knowledge And Skills I've Acquired To Friends And Others

Figure 7 indicates that prior to the program, most participants were neutral and agreed (42 out of 53) they could teach their knowledge and skills to others. However, their perception changed after the program conducted where the majority strongly agreed or agreed (48 out of 53) they could teach what they had learned to others.

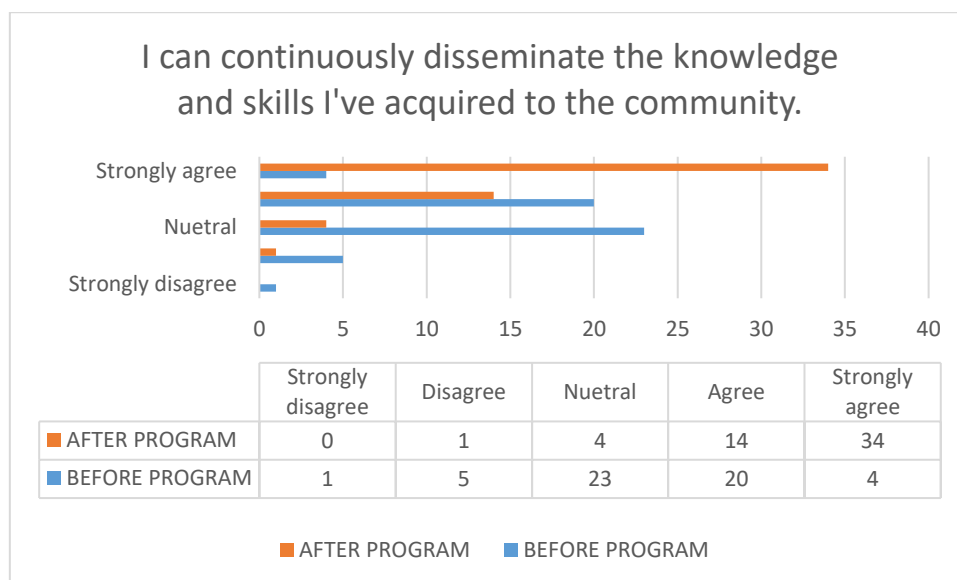


Figure 8: I Can Continuously Disseminate The Knowledge And Skills I've Acquired To The Community

Figure 8 indicates that prior to the program, most participants were neutral or agreed they could continuously share their knowledge and skills with the community. After the program, the majority strongly agreed or agreed they could effectively disseminate what they had learned.

In summary, this Smart Spending program was highly successful in equipping participants with applicable knowledge and skills, and empowering them to share, teach, and disseminate this

information to others and their community. The data also indicates that this program significantly improved participants' self-reported knowledge, skills, and abilities related to financial planning.

Relationship between Satisfaction, Knowledge Transfer and Effectiveness of SULAM Program

The correlation between satisfaction and program effectiveness is strong, while the relationship between knowledge transfer and effectiveness is moderate. The positive correlations suggest that as satisfaction and knowledge transfer increase, the perceived effectiveness of the Smart Spending program also improves. These findings align with Cohen's (1988) interpretation, where correlation values between 0.50 and 1.0 indicate a strong association, and values between 0.30 and 0.49 reflect a moderate relationship.

Furthermore, the significance level (**), at 99% confidence, confirms that these relationships are statistically significant. This underscores the importance of both satisfaction and knowledge transfer in determining the program's overall effectiveness. Table 3 presents the Pearson's correlation results, highlighting the degree of association between independent variables and the program's effectiveness. The analysis reinforces that participant satisfaction plays the most substantial role in enhancing program outcomes, while knowledge transfer remains a crucial but slightly less influential factor.

Table 3: Correlation between Satisfaction, Knowledge Transfer and Effectiveness of SULAM Program

Variables	Pearson Correlation
Satisfaction	.563**
Knowledge Transfer	.428**
Program's Effectiveness	.563**

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Additionally, this study invited respondents to provide suggestions and recommendations for improving the program. Their feedback was analyzed and visualized using WordSift software, as presented in Figure 9. This qualitative input offers valuable insights into areas for enhancement, ensuring that future iterations of the program better align with participants' needs and expectations.



Figure 9: Snapshot Of Feedback And Recommendations From Participants*

* This keyword analysis uses WordSift (<https://wordsift.org>), where the most frequently repeated words are displayed as the largest words.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several key recommendations are proposed to enhance the effectiveness of the SULAM program, particularly in the areas of knowledge transfer and participant satisfaction.

First, to improve the effectiveness of knowledge transfer mechanisms, SULAM programs should incorporate structured learning modules with clear learning objectives. Universities should develop standardized guidelines to ensure that students effectively apply theoretical knowledge to real-world challenges. Additionally, digital platforms can be leveraged to facilitate continued engagement between students and community partners beyond the program's duration.

Second, strengthening program evaluation and feedback is crucial for refining the program continuously. Establishing a systematic feedback mechanism will help measure participants' learning outcomes and identify areas for improvement. Regular pre- and post-assessments should be conducted, while real-time feedback collection methods, such as surveys, should be integrated to enhance future program design and delivery.

Third, increasing community engagement and partnerships is essential for the effective implementation of SULAM. Strong collaboration between higher education institutions (HEIs) and community stakeholders can ensure sustained community impact. Universities should establish long-term partnerships with local organizations, encouraging community leaders to take an active role in program planning to improve relevance and inclusivity.

Fourth, enhancing student involvement and motivation can maximize participation and satisfaction. Universities should integrate SULAM into credit-bearing courses or offer incentives such as certifications and awards. Providing students with opportunities to showcase their work through conferences, exhibitions, or publications can further motivate them to engage meaningfully in service-learning activities.

Fifth, providing institutional and financial support is necessary for the sustainable implementation of SULAM. Adequate funding and institutional backing are required, and universities should allocate dedicated budgets for training, logistics, and materials. Additionally, seeking funding from government bodies, private organizations, and NGOs can further ensure the long-term viability of SULAM initiatives. Establishing a national funding framework for service-learning programs will also enhance sustainability.

Lastly, promoting awareness and policy integration can expand the impact of SULAM. Awareness campaigns should be conducted among students, faculty, and external stakeholders. Integrating SULAM into higher education policies and making it a mandatory component in selected disciplines can institutionalize the program, ensuring its sustainability in the Malaysian higher education landscape. In summary, the recommendations for this study are illustrated in Figure 10.

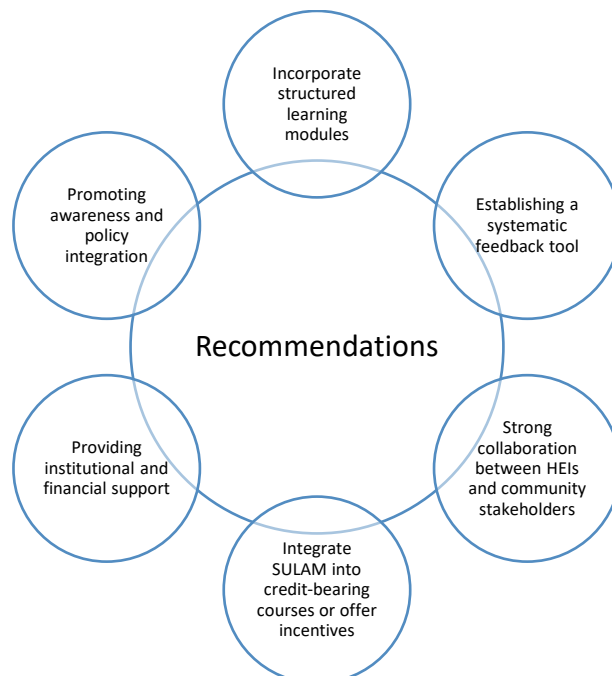


Figure 10: Snapshot Of Feedback And Recommendations From Participants

By implementing these recommendations, the SULAM program can be further strengthened to enhance knowledge transfer, improve participant satisfaction, and maximize its societal impact. Ultimately, these efforts will contribute to the realization of SDG 4: Quality Education in Malaysia.

Conclusion

This study highlights the effectiveness of the SULAM program in fostering experiential learning and bridging academic knowledge with real-world applications. By integrating service-learning into university curricula, SULAM enhances student engagement, knowledge transfer, and societal impact, aligning with the objectives of SDG 4: Quality Education.

The findings demonstrate that SULAM significantly improves students' critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, and civic responsibility. The program also facilitates meaningful knowledge transfer, benefiting both students and the communities they serve. Correlation

analysis indicates a strong positive relationship between participant satisfaction and program effectiveness ($r = 0.563$), as well as between knowledge transfer and effectiveness ($r = 0.428$). However, challenges such as limited institutional support, resource constraints, and inconsistent participation remain barriers to maximizing its impact.

To ensure the long-term success of SULAM, universities should enhance institutional support, establish structured evaluation frameworks, and provide sustainable funding. Strengthening university-community partnerships and integrating SULAM into formal academic assessments can further reinforce its effectiveness. Additionally, expanding training for educators and students will help create a more impactful and structured service-learning ecosystem.

Ultimately, SULAM serves as a transformative initiative that empowers students, fosters community engagement, and contributes to a more holistic higher education system. By addressing its challenges and leveraging its strengths, SULAM can continue to play a crucial role in shaping socially responsible graduates and supporting Malaysia's broader educational and societal goals.

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