SERVICE-LEARNING EXPERIENCE AND ITS APPLICATION TO ENHANCE EMPLOYABILITY: A CASE STUDY OF MALAYSIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT: *In this 21st century, innovation in teaching is necessary to introduce modern ways of teaching and learning environment in the classroom. Along with the dynamic approaches in teaching to cater the needs of developing holistic graduates, universities have begun to embrace the changing teaching paradigm and incorporate current techniques of creative teaching. To note, the application of service-learning, an innovative way to ensure the effectiveness of instruction in class, has been instituted into classrooms as a method to experience hands-on practices and venture the reality outside the classroom. Precisely, service-learning is closely related to work-based learning in regards to blending theories with practicality. For instance, these approaches allow students to undergo meaningful learning experiences which may be unavailable under traditional classroom procedures. In order to unravel the extent of service learning, a case study was conducted by a group of public university students. Particularly, the second and the third-year students were combined to organize a service-learning project with a group of chalet, resort and homestay owners in Pengkalan Balak, Malacca, Malaysia. As a matter of fact, the program took one semester to complete and was embedded in a course of the bachelor program. In this study, an ADDIE (Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, Evaluation) model was utilized to develop the program. Each phase was conducted concurrently according to the planned timeline. Right after the completion of the program, two groups of students who were involved in the four interview sessions were chosen to participate in the focused group interview. The interview questions were developed and validated by panel experts. Based on this study, four themes, namely leadership skill, communication skill, critical thinking skill, and teamwork skill were discussed. Then, the outcomes of the service-learning activity in accordance with the 21st-century skills required in the employment were presented. Specifically, the service-learning components appraised the value of employability skills regardless of the types of educational background obtained by the graduates.*

Keywords: Service-learning, volunteerism, employability skills, technical and vocational education and training (TVET)

1. INTRODUCTION

Basically, the overarching issue of graduate's unemployment is significant. Amidst the presence of economic downturns and challenging industrial demands, the employment market is constantly undergoing fluctuation. Evidently, the employment intake has dwindled over the last few decades in which graduates who obtained higher education level failed to obtain a job immediately. For instance, the Malaysian unemployment rate fluctuated between 3.2 percent and 3.5 percent in 2016 and experienced a significant increase in the third quarter of the year [1]. Clearly, this statistic shows the instability of the employment rate which may somehow have an adverse effect on the future generation.

Based on a report, approximately 45 percent of 278 graduates were employed in 2009 [2]. Primarily, the mismatch between employers' requirement and graduates' skills was found to be the main reason for unemployed graduates [3-6].

In actuality, a paramount of unemployment issues were reported by the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education [7]. As cited by Singh et al. [5], it was stated that the government ascertained the disconnection between industrial players and higher learning institutions (HLIs) as the primary reason which contributed to a large number of unemployed graduates. While HLIs continued producing graduates without a rigorous and up-to-date curriculum that aligns with the industrial needs, employers were often excluded from dialectical dialogues at educational policy meetings and conferences. Thus, the bilateral relationship between HLIs and industries is highly unlikely to occur at any level.

Consequently, this situation amounts to the accumulation of incompetent graduates who lack skills.

Previously, the traditional classroom which often endorses the idea of spoon-feeding students with knowledge has led to the decline of students possessing employability skills required by the employers. Alternatively, education platforms such as service-learning [8], flipped classroom [9], and online learning [10] have altered the process of disseminating curriculum content to be more fascinating and attractive for students. Despite the availability of alternative education which produces different outcomes, this matter does not accurately elucidate the abundant issues of unemployed graduates.

In light of this matter, universities have to develop new strategies in the teaching and learning environment to produce holistic graduates who possess a comprehensive understanding of theoretical and practical knowledge. In return, the graduates produced would be able to fulfill the industrial criteria for employment. Particularly, the application of knowledge in realistic industrial settings has always been a challenge. To make matters worse, insignificant attention has been paid to the substandard quality of graduates produced by the educational institutions. In response to this issue, service-learning was suggested. Generally, this study promotes the application of service-learning project by embedding theoretical knowledge and community service engagement through the systematic plan. Basically, the concept of volunteerism is an individual's free will to serve selected communities with time and energy. On

the other hand, service-learning combines theoretical knowledge of students and activities related to volunteerism to enhance their employability through authentic learning experiences. Often, volunteer-related activities are conducted through student's co-curricular activities which always focus on students' morale and positive values. However, such programmes are lacking in terms of developing students' employability skills which are more technical in nature. Therefore, this study aims to discover the elements of employability skills which are generated from students' service-learning experience. Also, through service-learning project, students will be able to recognize the significance of real-life experiences which are crucial for their future employment. Essentially, this project also helps students to instill positive cultures in order to prosper relationships between educational institutions and local communities.

THE SPIRIT OF VOLUNTEERING IN MALAYSIA
Inevitably, Malaysian youngsters and civilians are well aware of volunteerism activities. In fact, volunteerism is commonly practiced among Malaysians. Among the different entities which actively participate in volunteering activities are students from educational institutions, non-governmental agencies, and communities. Notably, volunteerism in Malaysia was advocated in the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2015 [11]. Clearly, the blueprint highlighted the value of volunteering as one of the fundamental pillars in shift number three to develop values-driven Malaysians (p.34). Precisely, the inclusion of volunteering is to produce Malaysians who have unshakeable core values and are able to embrace people of diverse religions, ethnicities, and nationalities.

In this context, students are expected to portray exemplary leadership skills and a strong sense of identity towards their country through multicultural acceptance and shared-governance. For instance, non-governmental organizations such as the Red-Crescent society, Malaysian Nature Society, and National Cancer Council Malaysia have provided volunteering opportunities in Malaysia. To note, primary school students at the International School of Kuala Lumpur have been exposed to volunteering activities. By doing so, students are able to enhance their courage and confidence when meeting new people.

Despite the high awareness of volunteerism among Malaysians, the effectiveness of the values, skills, and positive attitudes gained from these activities have not been clearly defined. As a result, the objectives to develop students' knowledge, skills, and core employability skills that are necessary for the 21st-century workforce [12] may fail due to the lack of preparation of students for employment.

Specifically, the introduction of a service-learning project in the curriculum offers systematic projects that exacerbate student self-reflection and knowledge making. With reference to the perspectives of volunteerism, service-learning involves the transfer of learning experience gained from the classroom to the community. Besides, the application of calculated credit hours in their course study which is based on the amount of involvement in service-learning projects will further encourage student participation.

2. SERVICE-LEARNING AS AN ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION
Undeniably, service-learning has been widely acknowledged in the educational settings worldwide. According to Kuh [13], service-learning is one of the top ten teaching approaches within the higher education systems in the United States. In general, the basis of service-learning combines two aspects into the teaching and learning environment: knowledge-based content and values related to community service task and engagement [14], has proven to be an effective 21st-century teaching methodology. Fundamentally, the premise of service learning is to integrate community services into academic content, [15] deliver theoretical knowledge and create a practical experience to enhance students' learning experience. As a matter of fact, researchers have studied the effects of service-learning in the learning environment [16-18] and confirmed that service-learning helps students to foster civic responsibility, social skills, and a positive personality. Consequently, this indirectly increases students' confidence and exposes students to the critical thinking culture to achieve a deeper understanding of the knowledge content. The introduction of this new teaching methodology is vital as students nowadays are inundated with curriculums which heavily emphasize theoretical knowledge and book-based learning. Thus, the current learning environment is boring and repetitive.

Interestingly, service-learning promotes external learning context that collaborates with communities to engage in bilateral learning environments. In particular, the whole community, the administration, and teachers implement networking with a mission to develop student interpersonal skills that include professionalism and employability skills [14]. Therefore, it is important to distinguish the difference between service-learning and volunteerism. Basically, the premise of volunteerism is closely related to activities which are non-monetary oriented and supported by individuals who have time and energy [19]. In contrast, service-learning works within the community context by interpreting and transferring knowledge content from the classroom which can be assessed through formative evaluation. Additionally, the application of service-learning takes into consideration students' interests, skills in problem-solving, and creating enjoyable learning experiences. Most importantly, when students become active learners through service-learning, this experience will eventually develop students' employability skills as they are relatively significant with present employment settings.

Furthermore, global industries have undergone rapid changes in terms of employee intakes, trends in economic growth, and marketing strategies. In this competitive business era, companies highly prioritize employees who are capable of initiating and suggesting innovative solutions to problems instead of students who only excel in academics or memorization of knowledge [20]. For this reason, universities have been urged to construct a curriculum that integrates experiences into practice [21], elevate students' capabilities and refine employment in a real-life setting. To mention, service-learning provides its participants with unique opportunities to learn through serving beside learning how to

serve. Ultimately, such opportunities will develop students' competency and capabilities in fulfilling a specific task. Also, the notion of blending in with real-life employment settings, be acquired through service-learning.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF SERVICE-LEARNING

One of the theoretical foundations of service learning is the Kolb's Experiential Learning Model. This model comprises four elements, namely concrete experience, observation of reflection on that experience, formation, and synthesis of abstract concepts based on the reflection and active experimentation that evaluates the concepts in new situations. Even though participants are allowed to enter the cycle at any point, service-learning is designed to often begin with concrete experience. Inevitably, these four elements form a cycle or spiral of learning as illustrated in figure 1 below. To reiterate, Kolb [22] mentioned that the process of learning begins with concrete experience as the learners test their newly developed concepts and proceed with other elements.
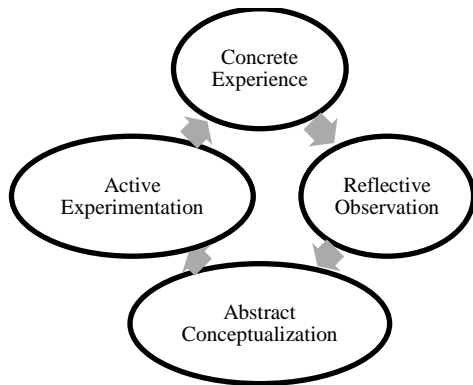
Fig (1) Experiential Learning Model, adapted from Kolb [22]

On the other hand, Jacoby [23] stated that service-learning is a form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs together with structured design to promote students' learning and development. In comparison, this is different than volunteerism and community service especially with the inclusion of explicit learning objectives with community interactions to meet the driven needs. To add on, Furco [8] also expounded that volunteerism only provides service with no intentional link to reflection and learning, while community service does not necessarily include reflection and may lack academic content. Thus, the misconception on service-learning with other forms of the programme will affect the participants' learning goal and community needs.

4.   METHODOLOGY

A case study based on the qualitative approach was employed in this study. In this study, an event which happened within the community was examined and emerging themes which were influential in the prediction of the program's effectiveness were identified. This measure was taken, to elucidate the benefits of the program for future projection

[24]. Evidently, the students who were involved in the service-learning project were primary resources for the data collection. Conversely, the secondary data were derived from the modules, program book, and reflection notes written by students which were subsequently utilized for triangulation.

Data Collection

In this study, a random sampling strategy was carried out to determine the participants of the study. The population of this study was composed of second and the third-year students from two different programs: (a) Bachelor of Education (Home Science) and (b) Bachelor of Education (Agricultural Science) from the Faculty of Educational Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM). For the purpose of this study, a focused group interview using semi-structured questions was employed to UPM students in a mutually agreed upon location. Simultaneously, the working environment of the students was observed. During the observation, field notes were taken to gain an initial understanding of how employability skills were being developed through the job scope.

Particularly, samples of students who enrolled in STE3602 (Manipulative Skills II) and STE3603 (Manipulative Skills III) courses were selected with regards to their basic pedagogical knowledge acquired from educational-based courses taken at the faculty. Precisely, a total of 80 students were requested to participate in the planning of the service-learning project. Then, both programs were required to develop a program based on the ADDIE model to ensure the service-learning project fulfills the different phases of the project.

Service-learning Project

Based on this service-learning project, a one-day program was conducted with the Malacca Bumiputera Chalet, Resort, and Homestays Association. Notably, the module 'Safety and Accident Prevention' was utilized as the main service-learning content prior to the event. Then, an invitation letter was sent to all registered members of the association in *Pantai Pengkalan Balak*, Malacca. For this particular event, a total of 1300 rooms were booked and there were 136 entrepreneurs. Specifically, the tentative of the program consisted of two different approaches: (a) Educational-based program: in-group activities, shared-expertise, entrepreneur's induction program and (b) Technical based-course: safety and accident prevention hands-on practices and demonstration

Right after the completion of the service-learning project, 20 out of 80 students were selected as participants for the next phase using the fish-bowl technique. These 20 students were then divided into four focused groups and invited for the interview session on four different occasions and time. In order to proceed with the study, participants were required to sign a letter of consent. In actuality, all interview sessions were recorded and each interview session took approximately forty-five minutes to one-hour in-length and was conducted in an informal, conversational, and open-ended manner.

Among the structured questions posed were, "What is your general understanding of employability skills?" and "What is your definition of service-learning?" This is followed by the probing of more critical questions in order to gain a deeper understanding.

5.   RESULTS AND FINDINGS

From the analysis, four main themes were identified. These four main themes were developing leadership skill, developing communication skill, developing critical thinking skill, and developing teamwork skill. Then, subthemes were later discussed in this section as they provided consensus on the selected themes.

6.1 Developing Leadership Skill

First and foremost, this theme revealed how leadership skill was developed through the assimilation of a potential leader in different environments and communities, and how they inspired and cooperated with team members. For this theme, there are two categories, namely, build up a character as a leader and inspire the team members.

Build up a character as a leader. In the process of confronting their new environment, the students described how the leadership character was moulded and refined through the service-learning project, especially during the discussion session with team members. Besides, informants experienced various situations which involved the necessary steps of becoming a leader. Interestingly, some even commented that they felt more confident and were more proactive in their group with regards to decision making. Informant 1D stated that:

"So, for the first week, it was me, and my assistant … that took the risk to arrange all the tentative. I mean like, it was pretty hard for us to get in contact with … since she rarely replies. I made the decision on my own, I just base it on my gut feeling."

Meanwhile, other characters which had spurred them to become a good leader were the values of discipline and assertiveness when carrying out the tasks. In their perspective, they felt that in order to deliver the tasks smoothly, a leader should exhibit positive attitudes which would encourage the team members to be responsible. Informant 1C commented that:

"I think that I am the one who literally moves them to work and finished it on the same day. If I didn't do it, I have to be strict, if I am not strict, no work will be done. (It) will not be finished. I will ensure that I will divide the work, ask them whether they agree to it or not if they don't agree we will discuss the topic again to give them what they want. So, send it at this time, do it at this time to clearly show to them. I do this so that I would get exactly what I want in the form that I requested."

Furthermore, the students also experienced how to lead their respective teams in the right direction. Specifically, each student was exposed to the significance of delegating responsibilities among team members and providing essential details to all on how to conduct and deliver the tasks efficiently. In addition, some students commented that a good leader is knowledgeable and know the entire process in order to lead the members towards achieving the goal. To note, informant 4A described and felt that:

"…actually (it is about) how do we talk to others. Sometimes it is easier to communicate with a certain individual. We need to have the right communication skills, just because you are a leader that doesn't mean that you should enforce a gap. Like giving orders. We shouldn't give orders, but lead. We should be working together, despite that is not your designated task."

On the other hand, informant 1B mentioned that a leader should know how to synchronize and set clear objectives to ensure the tasks fulfill the necessary requirements. According to Informant IB, a leader should know, "…how to give out orders and handle two groups, how to synchronize them, how to come out with something that is positive well enough so that they could get what we are trying to convey". This argument was well supported by informant 3B who stated that:

"We had to make sure that those under us understand our objective, what must be done, we need to ensure that our objective is achieved. If we think that the objective is impossible to be realized, it is better for us to discard it and add in a new objective that is more realistic."

Besides, in relation to the leader character development, leaders should know how to effectively manage their stress level. Essentially, the productivity and work progress of team members will be affected and significantly lowered if stress is not managed effectively. Informant 3C commented that:

"When we become a leader, we have to think about all the ways to solve problems, and how do we handle those stress. That is where a leader has to know how to overcome the challenge and can't just lose their cool or panic."

Last but not least, the students realized the importance of practicing democratic leadership when conducting this project. Undeniably, leaders are responsible for facilitating the conversation and encouraging everyone to share their ideas during discussion. Informant 3D sequentially described the experience as: "First, ask them, what they would like to add, ask them nicely, after that if it is possible to assimilate the idea then just do it". Then, informant 1D added, "We need to do it to know what she wants. If we are running a program, obviously we want to achieve a certain objective, however, we still have to listen to what they have to offer to us".

Inspire the team members. In this category, the students described that a leader should not only be able to delegate tasks equally to the team, but also inspire team members, provide proper guidance and monitor the progress of tasks closely. Consequently, the rapport that is established between the leader and team members will allow discussions to transpire effortlessly. According to most of the students, they prefer having a leader who is dedicated to providing fundamental advice rather than being left alone without support. Informant 4C stated that:

"(One more thing) the director would do the work together. They couldn't just bark orders to everyone, let the secretary do the work, the committee do their work. However, the director just barks out the order, and do nothing themselves. That is another factor why your subordinate does not want to do their work or give their full commitment."

In the context of group leadership, the students described that a good leader should supervise the progress of tasks occasionally. Significantly, this positive initiative will forge healthy relationships between the leader and team members, thus spurring each other to be fully committed to the tasks. Informant 1B told that "Personally, I would PM her and ask whether she is ok or not. The same with any one of our team members". Besides, informant 4D mentioned that:

"We need to get to know what they are doing. If you are asking them to do some work, at least get to know what have they done. At the very least then nobody will do a messed-up work and it would save you your fiery temper."

6.2　　Developing Communication Skill

In particular, this theme highlights the key areas of learning identified by the students in terms of developing communication skills with team members, lecturers, and communities in a new setting. Notably, the students described how their experience gained through the service-learning project has enabled them to effectively communicate with others, especially people from the industry. In fact, the two elements which were instrumental in this matter are 1) ensuring an effective communication and 2) strategy to start a conversation.

Ensuring effective communication. In this category, the students described the importance of effective communication in enlivening a presentation. Moreover, they also stressed that two-way communication skills must be enhanced in order to attract the audience's interest. Some commented that when questions were posed, prompt replies were received from the audience, thus indirectly revealing the audience's interest in what has been presented. Informant 4C told that:

"There's another one for the KM, our other slot at the chalet and then we informed the management about what could be improved in the chalet. I think that we had a two-way communication there, previously our events were with students but this time it is between students and adults."

Apart from that, the students emphasized the importance of attracting the audience's interest to establish effective communication, especially during the presentation. Informant 1D said that "…to attract his attention again, we have to just listen to the first and then bring them back over our point". Based on the informant's reply, the certain audience just required people who approach them to have good manners and a positive attitude. Similarly, informant 3B mentioned, "Just listen to them first. There was this old man who kept talking about his child wanting to go to Korea, he is afraid of letting his child go". Also, informant 2C commented that:

"Right, it seems that we are all seemed to be more about food like I presented on how to clean your hands correctly, and there were people who seemed to be not that interested so I pulled them to wash their hands."

Strategy to start a conversation. All of the students in this project had related their experience of communicating with communities which were older than them. In relation to this component, students are required to devise a feasible strategy which would allow communities to engage in a conversation with ease. For instance, informant 1D stated that,

"I've been there before due to a school program. I told … that the place has changed. "Have you been here before?" "Yes, I was here when I was in my form 5". We used our past experience to make him comfortable with us." Alternatively, informant 3A applied this strategy when trying to interact with them:

"I said to them that it is like this here, do you do this here or not? Since our focus is on this particular place, we don't have to include stories about other unrelated companies here. That is how I start to build our relationship there."

Interestingly, the students disclosed the essence of sharing personal information to the communities. For example, informant 1D explained, "When you reached there, introduce yourself. First, you must introduce yourself, and then let … introduce …. We're already starting on a good foot there." Undoubtedly, these students have obtained the first-hand experience through their interaction with the adults. Informant 4B told that:

"Let's say if I present about the food before we even begin I will ask … first. What do you work as? Are you the management? Are you aware of all of this? From there it will be easier for … to accept criticism."

On a separate occasion, informant 2D related:

"Like when it comes to the food, we split ourselves into groups so all of us will take a turn to meet the management and we will introduce ourselves, what are we doing and what will be happening."

6.3　Developing Critical Thinking Skill

Principally, this theme describes how the students managed and solved certain situations by applying critical thinking skills during the project, especially on dealing with the communities. In specific, the students described their experiences of how they handled the audience with contrasting personalities and mindsets. In this theme, two categories were particularly focused: 1) dealing with the ad-hoc situation and 2) dealing with the conservatives.

Dealing with ad-hoc situations. This category mainly reflects on how the students managed ad-hoc situation during their project. Specifically, these impromptu situations were unplanned and were not discussed in the classroom. In fact, the students embraced the ad-hoc situations with a positive attitude and tried figuring out ways to overcome them. To note, informant 4B narrated:

"During the last minute of work, we had to discuss a lot of things. Ad-hoc things, which needed to be dealt with there and then. We had two sides, one at the hall and the other one is at the outside. The one inside will present the theory, while us outside will present it practically."

Next, informant 3B recounted:

"For example, that day she suddenly said that those with English class that day couldn't go. … had already divided us so that there will be six people per room. So, when we were running low on people, we had to readjust to the situation. To make it worst, they seem to just love to inform us important things at the last minute."

Despite facing uncomfortable situations, the students remained undeterred and dealt with them professionally. Essentially, such circumstances help to prepare them before entering the real world. For instance, informant 2B shared, "Actually they had all thoroughly prepared for it but the man kept interrupting us. He was trying to be the teacher as well, so all of us had been silenced a bit because he suddenly took over the lesson". Meanwhile, informant 4A who encountered an unfavourable situation related:

"We talked to them nicely. So, when it came to a point where everyone couldn't say a thing and he was dominating the conversation as if he is the one that is presenting. So, our

lecturer felt like he was being very condescending towards the students, so he took over and told the administration that he is sorry and said that we were new."

Dealing with the conservatives. Generally, conservatives can be defined as a group of people who is averse to change and highly esteems traditional values and setting. In this study, the students described how they dealt with conservative audiences during their presentation. Surprisingly, they survived the grueling question and answer session with the communities. To recount, informant 2C described that, "They would twist our question to be their answer, for example when we asked them about the plan in case of a fire; he nonchalantly just said that "well the sea is nearby, so just run to the sea". In addition, informant 3C described that:

"The day before, we had a presentation in our class already but during the day itself, we got a lot of really unexpected questions from them. Some groups definitely panicked and had no idea how to answer some of the questions".

Apart from that, the students also experienced handling picky and more knowledgeable audiences. Informant 4D stated:

"On my group's side, they taught my friends' that. We couldn't really accept it because there are many ways to apply makeup. Maybe that's her personal preference, and maybe she couldn't accept our method. In the end, we just followed her. We just entertained her. This is when we have to handle the situation properly".

On a separate occasion, informant 4B related:

"However, we also need the knowledge to solve a problem. People will look down on us otherwise. They will assume that university students have no knowledge. They usually say that "aren't you teachers? You should know about this." They had no idea about how much stuff that we need to cover, well unless we only learn about a single topic then it will be really easy to present. That is the challenge".

6.4 Developing Teamwork Skill

This theme describes the learning area identified by the students in terms of developing their teamwork skill with team members during the project. Firstly, the students were divided into small groups and required to present their task to the communities. Also, some students were recruited in the top management team for this service-learning project. Overall, the students had positive remarks of the project, especially on developing their teamwork skill.

Under this skill, two categories were focused: 1) good cooperation and 2) commitment among group members.

Good cooperation among members. In connection with the project, cooperation was the key factor in completing the tasks. Informant 2C related, "…every group has their own topic, so everyone prepped their own topic but if a group can't, then other groups can step in". Additionally, informant 3B stated:

"For example, I'm doing the compiling and then the ones over here have already submitted but this one over here isn't needed yet, so when we are late it made me stressed. It can be solved because we were from the same class, and also, we could directly address the issue to the said person. It is not like they are our seniors or something like that".

Meanwhile, the students realized that group discussion is essential in order to prepare for the presentation. In actuality,

some audiences tend to ask random questions in order to gain the students' attention. Therefore, the students had to prepare themselves and brainstorm ideas with their respective group members. For instance, informant 4A shared:

"Before we presented, the man approached us. From the way he carried himself, it seemed obvious that he knows his stuff. So, we were pretty nervous. We went to our lecturer to explain in detail. Of course, we know about it, but the lecturers are more knowledgeable than it".

On the other hand, informant 2A also described how they discussed in order to ascertain the best idea before delivering to the audience:

"…when (those who) gave ideas said that our ideas aren't right but they provide their own piece of mind as well, then it is more acceptable. We could accept a difference of ideas, sometimes their ideas are all good too, it is from there that we evaluate which one is better".

Commitment among members. This category described how the students exhibited team spirit, became active and responsible members, and forged good relationships amongst group members. Undoubtedly, each member is responsible for the smooth delivery of the project. Informant 1A stated, "…for example if the Director is the only one doing the work while everyone else just turns a blind eye, nothing will ever get done. So, teammates are required to support each other". Besides, informant 4C mentioned, "that's right because this event is handled by the students themselves. 2nd-year students and 3rd-year students. The lecturer just monitored the progress. So, this is like a collective teamwork between the 2nd and 3rd year students".

Also, the students viewed responsibilities as necessary in order to achieve a common goal. Informant 3E told that "so far, I could still give it my all whenever I am given a task, so when I'm given responsibilities I would do my best to get the best outcome possible".

In addition, Informant 4D also commented:

"We need to be serious when we're working. At first, I wasn't that serious, it felt like a field trip. Then suddenly the lecturer pushed us to present and we all had to practice in class. We did a rehearsal a day before we go there".

Meanwhile, creating a healthy working environment and establishing good relationships amongst group members are essential to ensure every decision made is satisfactory. Ultimately, these measures will enhance teamwork skill. For instance, informant 2D shared that, "since we are working together, it feels wrong if we don't go and work together with them who are giving their full commitment. It felt very unfair". Next, informant 4C added, "…usually (we) would ask our friends about their opinions. They would give their two cents and we would have a better perspective and we all begin to share more things".

6. DISCUSSIONS

Based on the responses shared by the students, it can be deduced that they were overall satisfied with their self-development. Indisputably, the students also positively perceived the undertaking of the service-learning project in different settings as an experience which has indirectly enhanced their employability skills. In this project, students were assigned with major roles to deliver the tasks, including

assembling the committee members, planning the project, providing service, and interacting with different kinds of audiences. On the other hand, the jobs of the lecturers were to facilitate and provide the right platform for the students to deal with. Among the communities involved were Malacca Bumiputera Chalet, Resort, and Homestay entrepreneurs. Indeed, the opportunity to venture and conduct the project out of campus was an invaluable experience which cannot be found in a typical traditional classroom. Along these lines, the selected students have also required works on different types of related task and publish a module at the end of the semester upon completing the project.

From the study, it can be agreed that service-learning experiences have progressively developed leadership, communication, critical thinking, and teamwork skills of the students involved. The themes that emerged discover how they had developed their skills by doing this project. Similarly, this result was also evident with a survey conducted by The National Association of Colleges and Employers [25] among 260 employers with regards to their plans on hiring young graduates. Based on the survey, the traits of leadership skills and ability to work as a team were tied as the most important skill required by the employers with a percentage of 77.8%. In relation to this theme, Prentice and Robinson [26] stated that service-learning has been proven to equip students with relevant skills which are crucial for their future jobs, such as leadership and teamwork. Precisely, this project has shown that as students developed their leadership skills, they learned to build their character and how to inspire others. For instance, the opportunity in this learning environment to set up their top management and a small group has brought positive impacts on their leadership skills. To note, findings from meta-analysis also reiterated that service-learning can benefit students at different educational levels in many ways such as improving their social skills with regards to leadership and empathy [27].

In terms of developing communication skills, students who participated in this project were exposed to how to interact with communities, especially with experienced adults and much older individuals. As highlighted earlier, service-learning had been proven to refine students' communication skills. This finding is similar to a study by Tucker and McCarthy [28] which underlined that service-learning improves the students' self-efficacy and confidence in communication with the audience. As a matter of fact, all students in this project had the opportunity to present their tasks in front of audiences. Eventually, this opportunity allowed them to strategize on initiating conversation and establish effective communication with the audience. While presenting their tasks, the students were also aware of the importance of negotiating and creating mutual understanding with the communities. In fact, most of the students were identified to be concerned about their level of communication and presentation, thus acknowledging the impact of effective communication to the communities. Likewise, a study done by Coffey and Lavery [29] found that pre-service teachers managed to steadily enhance their confidence and communication skills while engaging in the service-learning project.

Besides, the ad-hoc situations also taught students to improvise on the spot. For instance, some students experienced dealing with the conservatives that were adamant and held firm to the traditional approach. In response to this matter, students applied their critical thinking skill in order to solve the problem instantaneously with their current abilities and knowledge. Interestingly, a past research on students' experience in the service-learning project showed the development of critical thinking skill as the process unfolded, whereas most of the students enjoyed their time spent in the project. For instance, Sedlak et al. [30] discussed the perception of nursing students towards the development of critical thinking skills in a 14-hour service-learning project. Essentially, the results pinpointed that 94 nursing students benefited from the project in terms of developing critical thinking skills.

Apart from that, the students who were involved in this project learned the value of cooperation within their groups when fulfilling the tasks given. In particular, every member was required to exhibit a full commitment to their respective groups when discussing and preparing for the presentations. Although the students were from different batches and classes, they managed to collaborate and make the project a success. Indirectly, these service-learning activities had brought positive impact on students' teamwork skill, particularly in cooperation and commitment among the members of the group. Additionally, the findings of Dumas [31] in management education also indicated that service-learning is a promising means of developing managerial skills such as teamwork, critical thinking, leadership, and cooperation.

Concisely, the active participation of students which is well-received by the different communities allows for more similar opportunities to take place. Specifically, the students expressed their interest to engage in other service-learning projects, particularly with the school and people with disabilities. However, some students highlighted that there is still a need for more in-depth analysis of the planning and structural process of service learning projects. However, the priorities of the project are still focused on students' learning objective and meeting the needs of the communities. In this light, such projects would serve as a stepping stone for students to discover themselves and improve their personal development.

7. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, it is important to distinguish the difference between service-learning and volunteering activities. Undeniably, service-learning activities are very much relevant to the context of volunteerism. Nevertheless, when students are able to comprehend the difference between volunteerism-typed activities and service learning, the learning objectives of the planned activity will be clearer and more succinct. Therefore, service-learning projects must be planned according to the structured curriculum in the course of which the students are enrolled in. In specific, service-learning is conceptualized on students' participation in relation to the curriculum content. On the contrary, the volunteerism concept strategized in the Malaysian Education Blueprint for 2013 to 2025 is more general and applicable for

people of different levels. In this case, volunteerism accommodates people who are willing to spend money, time, and energy to work with people in need. Based on these two methodologies, the concept of service-learning seems to be more synchronized with the vision and mission of the blueprint. Most importantly, this statement justifies the prioritization of the service-learning methodology to achieve a holistic and comprehensive learning outcome.

Furthermore, in line with this study, a succinct framework or model towards adopting the inserting elements of service-learning in schools must be structured carefully, especially in the TVET school system.

Particularly, the model will provide a clear guideline on producing students who possess employability skills required by employers. Additionally, students also will also be exposed to the real-life employment settings based on their participation in the service-learning project. Indeed, the introduction of a service-learning portfolio in teaching and learning procedures will assist educators in encouraging students to participate in community service activities. Significantly, this curriculum will create a generation who genuinely loves, cares, and is socially-engaged with the communities.

The introduction of service learning as a form of work-based learning enhances the curriculum at the university level and improvises university's 21st-century learning practices in the classroom. Consequently, the synergy between the curriculum and industries will increase employment opportunities among graduates. Clearly, educational experiences are meaningful and prepare students to succeed in their future working environment. In other words, the essence of service-learning will pave way for the development of human capital in alignment with the recommendations stated in the blueprint. Thus, this progress will elevate UPM's status to a high-class educational provider which embraces community based-approaches and achieving excellence in academics.

9. REFERENCES

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