

THE IMPACTS OF COMMUNITY SERVICE ON STUDENTS' SOFT SKILL DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

This study is a survey to identify the impact of community service on students' soft skill development. In addition, this study also identified the level and dominant soft skills that influence the students after their participation in community service activities. 65 respondents were involved in this study. The instrument for this study was a questionnaire that consists of two parts: background of respondents and research questions. There were 35 items for pre-test and post-test based on five soft skill elements: communication, teamwork, leadership, professional ethics and morality as well as entrepreneurship skills which were measured using a Likert scale. The data obtained were analysed descriptively and inferentially by using Statistical Package for Social Sciences Version 20.0 (SPSS) software. The results showed that the level of soft skills among the students involved in community service was as high as 3.70 out of 4.00. Meanwhile, the dominant element is professional ethics and morality compared to other soft skills elements. This study can be used as a guideline to organise high impact soft skills development for other programmes and activities in the future.

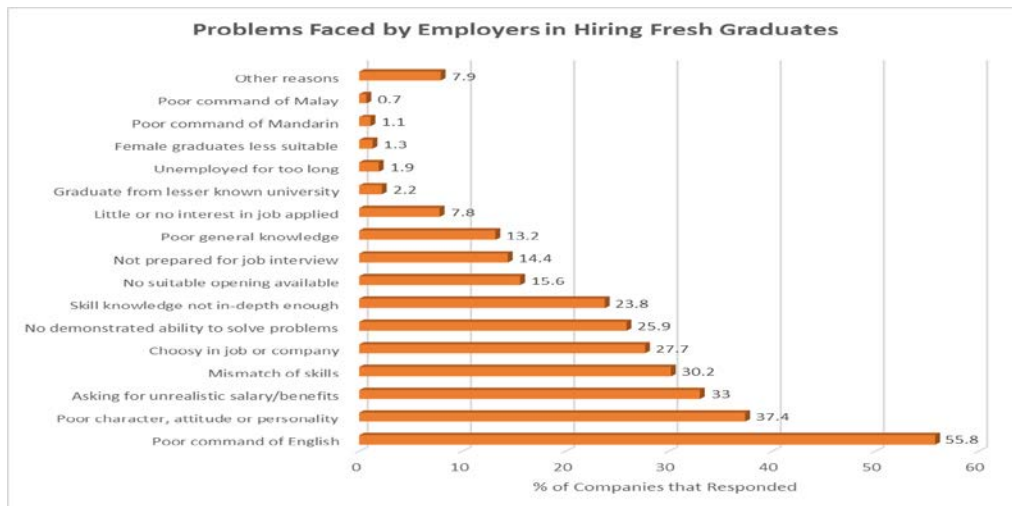
Keywords: Community Service, Student-centered learning, Soft skills elements, Community College.

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, the Higher Education Institutions like Community College not only prepare students with formal education or hard skills but also responsible to educate them with the soft skills. Community College is responsible to produce quality graduates not only in the academic field but also in other skills including leadership, communication skills, entrepreneurship and so on. These soft skills development will be going through natural processes such as growth, maturation and aging (Megat Aman Zahiri, 2007).

Also, the education sector is a source of generating knowledge, training, potential, interests and all the elements of quality for people who ultimately turn them into a more dynamic human capital and acquire the quality to mobilize the country's progress as evident in Japan and South Korea. In Malaysia, there are various government transformation plans implemented starting from 2010, aimed to strengthen a better quality education system in Malaysia as the foundation to produce a source of labor and graduates who are creative, innovative and highly-skilled (Muhyiddin Mohd Yassin, 2010). Now, under the Eleventh Malaysian Plan (2016 – 2020), 60% of the 1.5 million jobs offered will require Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) related skills. Meeting this demand require Malaysia to increase its annual intake gradually from 164,000 in 2013 to 225,000 in 2020. Yet, the challenge is not merely about numbers. Industry feedback consistently reveals a disconnection between the knowledge, skills and attitudes these graduates possess with what is required in the workplace (Eleventh Malaysian Plan, 2015). However, the question is, can the transformation implemented in the education system able to produce graduates who can

help develop the developing countries while also helping to reduce unemployment among graduates in Malaysia?



Picture 1: Problem Faced by Employers in Hiring Fresh Graduates (Source: Originally from Jobstreet.com and published by the Ministry of Education in The National Graduate Employability Blueprint 2012-2017)

Picture 1 shows the statistics of Jobstreet.com published by the Ministry of Education in the National Graduate Employability Blueprint (2012-2017). This shows proof that graduates have lack of employability skill. About 37.4% graduates have poor character, attitude or personality and 23.8% graduates have insufficient skills in the job field.

Due to this, various activities are undertaken to produce quality graduates such as industry visit, industrial training, community services and so on. This study focused on the impact of Community Services Responsibility (CSR) to the Community College students in term of soft skills development including communication skills, teamwork skills, entrepreneurial skills, professional ethics and moral, and leadership skills. CSR is one of a widely used program that connects community service to classroom learning by giving students volunteering jobs that are relevant to the course to develop the soft skills among students.

Yet, CSR represents a potentially powerful form of pedagogy because it provides a means of linking the academic with the practical. The more abstract and theoretical material of the traditional classroom takes on new meaning as the student "tries it out", so to speak, in the real world (Lori, 2000). Besides, CSR provides a connection between Community College with the wider community and enables students to contribute to the society needs by emphasizing cooperation, moral responsibility, knowledge transfer and so on.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The phenomenon of unemployment among graduates is not a new issue. In the context of TVET, almost 80,000 Technical graduates remain unemployed and this is because they depend a lot on academic qualifications to get a job instead of having great employability skills (Ahmad, 2005). The main cause for this is due to their weak employability skills which involve their communication skills, critical thinking skills, interpersonal skills, problem solving skills, teamwork, leadership skills and entrepreneurial skills (Rahmah, Ishak & Lai Wei Sieng, 2011).

According to the Philosophy of Education, the main goal of Higher Education Institution is to develop individuals who are able to balance themselves intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically. Therefore, teaching and learning activities should focus on the achievement of learning outcomes in four domains namely cognitive or knowledge, psychomotor or physical skills, affective and social. However, the formal education system practice focuses more on cognitive and psychomotor skills and rarely developing affective and social domains. As a result, students are not as balanced as intended.

Therefore, the CSR programme is organized by the Higher Education Institution to deal with unemployment problems by improving students weak employability skills – improve the character, attitude or personality, ability to solve problem, knowledge and skills, and interpersonal skills.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Generally, the main objective of this research was to examine the level of soft skills in CSR among Community College students. The objectives of the study are as follows:

- i) To identify the level of improvement of soft skills (communication skills, teamwork skills, entrepreneurial skills, professional ethics and moral, and leadership skills) among students in CSR activities.
- ii) To identify the dominant soft skills elements that influences the student after contributing in CSR activities.

4. RESEARCH QUESTION

The questions of this study are as follows:

- i) What is the level of improvement (communication skills, teamwork skills, entrepreneurship skills, professional ethics and moral, and leadership skills) among students in CSR activities?
- ii) What are the dominant soft skills elements that influence the student after contributing in CSR activities?

5. SIGNIFICANCE OF RESEARCH

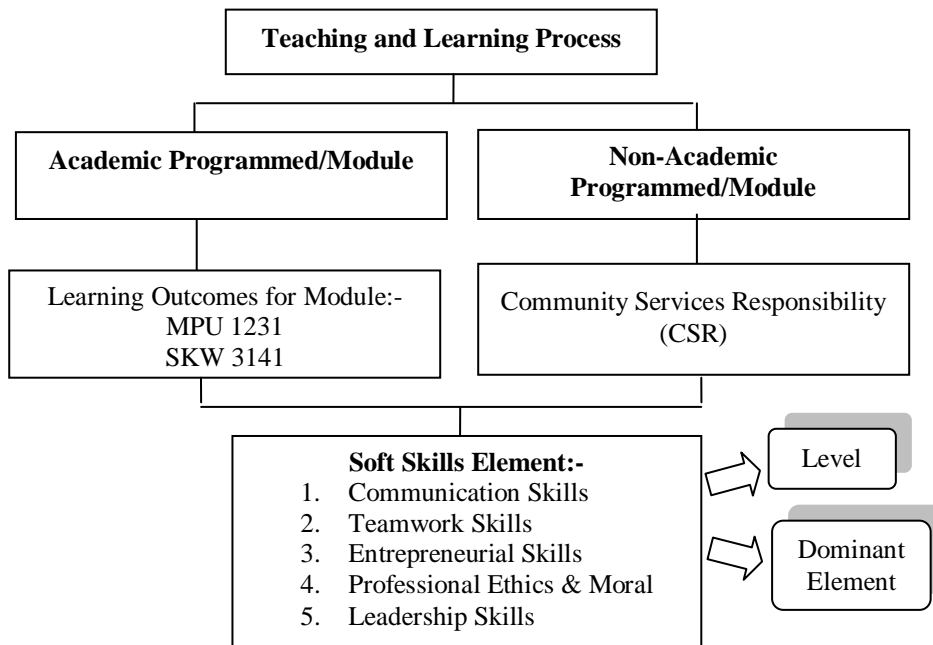
This study will be beneficial to the parties involved directly in the education field especially to the students who contributed to these CSR activities. In addition, the benefits of this study are as follows:

- i) Students: create awareness on the knowledge, understand and improve their level of soft skills as a preparation to step into the career field. These soft skills can help students to meet the manpower needs of the country.
- ii) Lecturer: create awareness and guidelines on the importance of soft skills development from the CSR activities. The knowledge transfer to the community is one of the positive reflections on teaching and learning process.
- iii) Institutions: create a rationale for and guide to plan, develop, implement and evaluate high impact activities to fulfill the needs for student career. The Institution is responsible to become a platform to educate the students with hard and soft skills. These soft skills should set the standard to be practiced in teaching and learning processes. If necessary, the existing curriculum should be improved by adding soft skills elements as their learning outcomes.

6. LIMITATION OF RESEARCH

This study involved only Bandar Penawar Community College students from two courses: Certificate of Building Maintenance and Certificate of Technology Construction. The respondents of this research were 65 students who enrolled in these two courses in July, 2016 session. Yet, these respondents had higher contribution with CSR like *Rumah Komuniti, Jom Masuk Kampung*, adopt school programme, community services in the rural and town area and many others.

7. FRAMEWORK



Picture 2: Framework of Study

Picture 2 shows the framework of this study. CSR acts as community engagement and alternative way to develop soft skills for the Community College students. This descriptive research focused on the five elements of soft skills development. Yet, the level and dominant element of soft skills development became subjects to be analysed through student contribution in CSR activities.

8. LITERATURE REVIEW

CSR is a pedagogical approach for increasing social responsibility in students, has gained increasing acceptance in higher education. As the term implies, content-area learning is directly linked to activities in which students address human and community needs (Jack, 2001).

Furthermore, CSR is a student-centered learning that is based on experiences and knowledge transfer learning process. The primary goal of CSR is to promote civic responsibility and social justice through authentic experiences which in turn lead students to become critical thinkers and activist. A well-structured CSR programme needs to have the potential to help students develop a greater understanding of the social conditions that are faced by others.

In addition, CSR can be defined as an activity that:

- a) promotes student learning through active participation in thoughtfully organized service experiences, coordinated with the community and the institution of higher education,
- b) fosters civic responsibility, and
- c) is integrated into and enhances the academic curriculum which includes time for structured reflection.

(Corporation of National Service, 1996)

The common principle of CSR, widely known as “Wingspread Principles”, stated that an effective and sustained program combines service and learning which can:

- a) engage people in responsible and challenging actions for the common good,
- b) provide structured opportunities for people to reflect critically on the service experience,
- c) articulate clear CSR goals for everyone involved,
- d) allow for those with needs to define those needs,
- e) clarify the responsibilities of each person and organization involved,
- f) match services providers and service need through a process that recognizes changing circumstances,
- g) expect genuine, active and sustained organizational commitment,
- h) include training, supervision, monitoring, support, recognition and evaluation to meet CSR goals,
- i) ensure that the time commitment for CSR is flexible, appropriate and in the best interest of all involved, and
- j) be committed to program participation by and with a diverse population.

(Porter Honnet & Poulsen, 1989; as cited in Jack, 2001:210)

The characteristics of CSR, which are to ensure that the purposeful, connected and relevant learning is advocated by many educational reformers, are as follows:

- a) CSR can be a context for authentic or performance-based assessment of skills.
- b) Community needs and proposed actions can supply themes for integrated teaching units.
- c) CSR in which students identify community problems and potential solutions can engage cooperation and higher order thinking skills.

(Root, 1994; as cited in Jack, 2001:211)

9. METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in this study was a quantitative analysis that was based on descriptive surveying. The data from this study were collected from the questionnaire distributed to students registered in July, 2016 session and focused on two courses: Certificate of Building Maintenance and Certificate of Construction Technology at Bandar Penawar Community College. The corresponding respondents or research sample were 65 students.

The questionnaire consisted of two parts:

- a) Part A: Background of Respondent including gender, age, education level and courses attended.
- b) Part B: Research Questions including five soft skill elements (communication skills, teamwork skills, entrepreneurial skills, professional ethics and moral, and leadership skills). Each element had 7 questions. Total questions were 35

questions. Also, the questionnaires had pre-test and post-test. The Likert scale used was (4 = agree strongly, 3 = agree, 2 = disagree and 1 = disagree strongly).

The data were obtained and analyzed descriptively and inferentially by using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences Version 20.0 (SPSS) software. All items in Section A were analyzed based on frequencies and percentage. Meanwhile, data from Section B were analyzed by using mean score and percentage. To identify the level of improvement for soft skill elements after contributing in the CSR activities, mean score analysis was needed (Azizi, 2007). The level of mean score is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Level of Score Mean Assessment

Score Mean	Level
1.00 – 2.00	Low
2.01 – 3.00	Moderate
3.01 – 4.00	High

10. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

According to research objectives, data were analyzed to identify the impact of CSR on students soft skill development based on five elements as stated before. Part A was background of the respondents which include gender, age, race and course taken. The corresponding respondents were about 65 students from two courses offered in Bandar Penawar Community College for the July, 2016 session. Table 2 shows the tabulation of respondents according to gender, in which male was the highest (51 students). This is because many technical courses is led by male.

Table 2: Tabulation of Respondents According to Gender

Gender	Quantity	Percentage (%)
Male	51	78.5
Female	14	21.5

Table 3 shows the tabulation of respondents according to age. The highest was 18 – 25 years old (63 students). This number was high because the Community College offers courses or programme for SPM leavers.

Table 3: Tabulation of Respondents According to Age

Age	Quantity	Percentage (%)
18 – 25 years old	63	96.9
26 – 30 years old	0	0
31 – 35 years old	1	1.5
>35 years old	1	1.5

Meanwhile, Table 4 shows the tabulation of respondents according to race. Malay respondents were the highest with the total of 62 students (95.4%).

Table 4: Tabulation of Respondent According to Race

Gender	Quantity	Percentage (%)
Malay	62	95.4
Chinese	0	0
Indian	2	3.1
Others	1	1.5

Besides, Table 5 shows the tabulation of respondents according to courses taken or program of study. A total of 46 out of 65 students were from the Certificate of Building Maintenance and 19 respondents from Certificate of Construction Technology.

Table 5: Tabulation of Respondents According to Courses

Certificate	Quantity	Percentage (%)
Building Maintenance	46	70.8
Construction Technology	19	29.2

For Part B, the items consisted of five elements of soft skills development namely communication skills, teamwork skills, professional ethics and moral, leadership skills and entrepreneurship skills. There were 35 items for each pre-test and post-test questionnaire. The analysis was conducted to identify the level of improvement and dominant elements for the impact of CSR on students soft skills development. Summary on the level of improvement for soft skills development is shown in Table 6. From the analysis, all elements had high level of improvement after the students contributed in the CSR activities.

Table 6: Summary of Level According to Soft Skills Development Elements

Elements of Skills	Mean	Level
Communication	3.68	High
Teamwork	3.60	High
Leadership	3.59	High
Entrepreneurship	3.51	High
Profesional Ethics & Moral	3.70	High

For dominant elements, paired t-test was conducted to compare mean from pre-test and post-test. The entire elements showed the positive trend of soft skills development after students contributed in CSR activities. It can be seen in Table 7, as all the values were $\alpha < 0.01$ and the means were in high range (3.01 – 4.00). The dominant element was professional ethic and moral with score mean of 3.70.

Table 7: Summary of Paired t-test for Pre-test and Post-test for Each Soft Skills Development Element

Elements of Skills	Mean		t	α
	Pre-Test	Post-Test		
Communication	2.66	3.68	14.982	0.000
Teamwork	2.69	3.60	12.182	0.000
Leadership	2.55	3.59	14.763	0.000
Entrepreneurship	2.51	3.51	14.079	0.000
Profesional Ethics & Moral	2.72	3.70	14.961	0.000

From the CSR activities, there are many direct and indirect benefits and exposures to the students through specific responsibilities in the field work. Also, students use multiple learning approaches to ensure CSR activities are successful and fulfill the objectives of the programme designed by the organization. Student-centered learning has been developed including task assignment, group discussion, problem solving, teamwork assessment, sharing knowledge and so on. Indirectly, this learning process establishes and improves the level of soft skills development. Furthermore, CSR activities have the potential to build character of leadership and communication skills among the students. Thus far, by contributing to the CSR activities, students of different races and religions can work together and mutually assist

each other to complete the task. The great relationship between the students and community will enhance positive value-added and helps them to become a better person. In summary, CSR activities provide awareness, exposures, experienced and good reflection to the career path of the student.

11. CONCLUSION

Community College, as a Higher Education Institution, plays an important role to provide students with all the value-added called soft skills. Teaching and learning process in the classroom does not give in-depth effect to increase a student's soft skills. Therefore, Community College is encouraged to use a student-centered program like CSR activities to improve the soft skills among students. Bandar Penawar Community College has implemented CSR activities to develop the soft skills elements such as communication, leaderships, teamwork, professional ethics and moral, and also entrepreneurship skills. In this study, researchers investigated and identified the impact of CSR activities to improve soft skills among the students. In this context, CSR activities clearly shows high impact performance (mean >3.01) of soft skill development. Professional ethics and moral is the dominant element that has been developed through these activities, followed by communication skills. It also introduces the Community College contribution to the community through the involvement of staff and students by channeling expertise, use of facilities and institution equipment, sharing knowledge, team work, decision making and so on. CSR activities can be seen as a promotion to introduce Community College to the community. Through these activities, students can contribute to society by adapting and adopting knowledge and skills learned in classroom to solve the community needs and problems. While at the same time, these activities successfully added elements of soft skills to the students. Overall, the CSR activities achieve the goal in developing and applying the soft skills elements. All soft skills elements are found to provide high impact on student's behaviours especially on professional ethics and moral element. These CSR activities not only have an impact on pedagogical aspect of cognitive, affective and social, but also impressed by the activities which can contribute to the community while providing a positive response among the public. As discussed previously, it is proven that CSR programme is one of the high impact programmes capable of educating student by performance-based assessment of skills, fulfill the community needs, solve the problems by potential solution and higher order thinking skills. With that, CSR should be applied as on-job training to student to test their hard skills and soft skills in a way to improve their employability skills requirement.

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