Implementation of Service Learning in Malaysian Higher-Educational Institutions: A Literature Review

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Abstract: Service Learning activities are increasing in Malaysia and have been implemented by many parties. Many higher education institutions (HEI) contribute to the communities by organizing service-learning programmes. The service learning activities measure students' personalities who do community voluntary work with total commitment without demanding rewards. The implementation of service learning needs to comply with the elements of service learning: personal growth, civic learning and academic enhancement. In Malaysia, higher education institutions include universities, colleges, and teacher training institutes. There are various methods of implementing service learning, such as community services, volunteer activities, and charity programmes that involve students during their studies. Service Learning frameworks are guidelines for planning and doing the Services Learning activities. This study will clarify the implementation of Service Learning by higher-educational institutions in Malaysia involving universities and Institut Pendidikan Guru (IPG).

1. Introduction

Higher Educational Institution (HEI) is a platform that produces balanced students holistically, academically and spiritually. Various institutions in Malaysia including universities, colleges and professional education institutes, provide education at the certificate, diploma, bachelor's degree, master's and PhD levels. According to Leubering (2023), higher education institutions include universities and colleges and various professional schools in fields such as law, theology, medicine, business, music, and art. Higher education also includes teacher-training schools, junior colleges, and institutes of

technology. So, this study will examine universities and Institut Pendidikan Guru (IPG) in Malaysia.

Service learning is a learning method practiced for a long time in Malaysia. According to Mamat *et al*. (2019), Service Learning in Malaysia started as early as 1977 when USM carried out a pilot project called the Rural Joint Service Plan. Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) also emulated the service learning project by implementing a Service Learning Soft Skills Course (Kursus Kemahiran Insaniah). Programmes like this often collaborate with external parties and communities such as Non-Government Organizations (NGOs), residents' associations and local communities. Apart from that, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) has also been actively implementing service-learning programs since 2009.

The adoption of service learning in higher educational institutions has emerged as a modern teaching and learning strategy (Salam *et al*., 2019). HEIs in Malaysia organize lots of service learning activities. It includes community services, volunteer activities and charity programmes. HEIs organize these activities, and service-learning is implemented based on each HEI framework, understanding, and practice. A few examples of Service Learning are building mini gardens, cooking classes, charity sales, and cleaning the local area, which are based on Service Learning frameworks by each HEI.

Even though there are many service learning activities, there is a lack of literature review studies related to service learning (Salam *et al*., 2019). However, Resch and Schrittesser (2023), in their research found that Service Learning in the academic curriculum at the tertiary level is seldom, and the content of Service Learning is unknown to most academicians. Therefore, this study was conducted to identify the implementations of service learning by higher education institutes in Malaysia.

2. Literature Review

This study aims to answer three major research questions; (1) How is Service Learning implemented in HEI? (2) What service learning frameworks are used as guidelines? In order to bridge this gap in the literature, a literature review was performed.

2.1 Searching Strategy

Various search strategies were used to find relevant research papers that best achieve this study's objectives. To identify relevant research papers, online databases, e.g., Google Scholar, Malaysian universities web pages and others, were used to search for relevant material. The search process included the terms related to service learning, e.g. 'service learning', 'service learning in Malaysian higher education', 'Malaysian service learning frameworks', and 'experiential learning'.

2.2 Selection Criteria

To achieve the objectives of this study, systematic and focused selection criteria were specified to find the most relevant studies in implementing Malaysian HEIs' service learning. This study specified the scope of the literature review with related criteria, i.e., the period was confined from 2016 to 2023, published related to Malaysian HEIs. The reason for searching for a short period (i.e. 2016–2023) data is to explore and understand the latest service-learning implementations by Malaysian HEIs.

By focusing on these criteria, this study found the most relevant studies that met one or more of the following criteria.

1. Studies that focus on Malaysia HEIs' service learning implementations.
2. Studies that highlight the service learning frameworks.

2.3 Study Selection

Study selection is one of the most critical steps involved in a systematic literature review. This study developed a thorough selection process, which encompassed the following three steps: (1) screening of the titles of all retrieved research articles relevant to the criteria; (2) abstracts review and screening of initially selected articles; (3) whole full-text review for final inclusion decision, by assessing their suitability and alignment with the objectives.

3. Findings

3.1 Definition of Service Learning

Service Learning is a learning method that connects academics with community service activities. Referring to *Kamus Dewan Edisi Keempat (2005),*learning means the process (activity) of learning and service means service. It has been implemented globally by HEIs around the world. Service Learning can provide experience and academic skills to students. Robert Sigmon (1975) (as cited in Furco, 2003) defines service learning as an experience-based learning approach that is based on "reciprocal learning". However, according to Furco (2003), Service Learning has a more diverse meaning, among which is volunteering (volunteer) and community service (community service).

Service learning means service-based learning, a learning method implemented in teaching and learning sessions. VanderDussen (2009) stated that "service" explains the learning experience while performing community service activities, and it is applied with a network of knowledge related to doing (doing) and connecting students to interact with their community. According to (Ibrahim *et al*., 2020). Bringle and Hatcher (2000) defined Service Learning as a course-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and reflects on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a

broader appreciation of the discipline and an enhanced sense of personal values and civic responsibility. Stanton and Erasmus (2013) defined Service-learning is a way to provide students with experiences that link course content with skills to impart that knowledge to learners. Service-learning is reciprocal learning in which everyone is in service and can learn.

Service Learning is a pedagogical method that integrates classroom learning with community service and helps improve a student's learning experience. Through Service Learning, students will be exposed to community service activities based on the academic structure. According to (Yusop, 2022), Service Learning combines academic learning objectives, interpersonal skills, student service, and devotion to making a meaningful contribution to society.

However, the use of the term Service Learning differs according to the group that practices it. According to VanderDussen (2009), the term Service Learning differs between the terms used in North America and Europe. In this situation, it can be assumed that the practiced Service Learning structure can manifest in writing and research according to different groups. However, in Malaysia, service learning also defines volunteer and community-based activities as part of service learning as they comply with the elements of service learning. The elements of service learning are Personal Growth, Civic Learning, and Academic Enhancement (Ash & Clayton, 2009). Service learning also refers to volunteering activities such as community, community and social service (Shafie & Makhtar, 2020). This is supported by Ramlee & Hamzah (2022), who states that the service learning program is a voluntary activity in providing learning exposure to students. Mat *et al*. (2015)also stated that through service learning, the students' view of this teaching and learning method is positive overall, and an increase in identity, collaboration, communication, and information management can be detected. This finding is supported by VanderDussen (2009),who stated that Service Learning increases self-confidence, spreads awareness about work, increases self-worth, and improves relationships with coursework assignments. The implementation of Service Learning carried out in Malaysia is according to the program carried out by the institute itself.

3.2 Service Learning Implementations

There are many ways to implement Service Learning. However, the most important thing is that it has to comply with the set of service learning elements. Several elements of Service Learning are the core of the activities carried out. According to Ash and Clayton (2009),the three elements of Service Learning are Personal Growth, Civic Learning, and Academic Enhancement.

Figure 1. Service Learning Elements By Ash and Clayton (2009)

HEIs have implemented various methods of service learning. All implementation will refer to voluntary contributions to society. However, the implementation of service learning will focus on implementing community activities with reference to the study curriculum.

One of the compulsory academic structures are academic structures such as core academic courses, elective academic courses, core elective courses and participation in co-curricular activities. Every course followed by students is supervised to comply with the standards set by Malaysia Qualification Accreditation (MQA). Among the elements that are emphasized are soft skills (Kemahiran Insaniah). These soft skills are emphasized to provide academic and co-academic curriculum as well as the preparation of assignments and assessments such as social elements and volunteering. So, this will be emphasized on the implementation of teaching throughout the students' studies.

Service learning will involve students in carrying out volunteer activities with the community. For example, service learning will implement volunteering activities with the local community, in contrast to some opinions that state that service learning can be carried out in the same way as volunteer activities, such as cleaning the local area. On the other hand, HEIs organize collaboration programmes between Government Organizations (GO) and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) involving special needs students or disabilities societies like Special Education School (SK Pendidikan Khas) through the Program Pendidikan Khas Integrasi (PPKI) and the Program Pendidikan Inklusif (PPI). This is in line with the findings by Cipolle (2010) perceived Service Learning and social change in the context of enhanced awareness and critical consciousness, referring to deepening the awareness of self, developing a deeper awareness and broader perspective of others, developing a deeper awareness and broader perspective of social issues and seeing one's potential to make changes in society.

IPGM students have implemented service learning in various ways. Service learning and extracurricular activities are part of the academic curriculum. For example, in the Bina Insan Guru (BIG) curriculum, students must organize service learning activities as part of

their assignments. They will organise volunteer and community-based activities with the locals and comply with Kemahiran Insaniah's structure. Research on volunteerism, such as Community Service and Social Service, is being carried out. Masriyah *et al*. (2016)through his research conducted at IPGK, Pendidikan Teknik suggests that it is recommended that programs that can warm the atmosphere or climate of interaction between races be expanded in order to form a harmonious campus life and then be practised in life. In this context, service learning can play a role by promoting social development activities while promoting academic development. However, even though IPGM, the study about it, does many service learning activities, it is still at a low level.

3.3 Service Learning Frameworks

In 2019, the Department of Higher Education developed a service learning implementation framework, SULAM (JPT, 2019).SULAM acts as a guideline for implementing Service Learning at the university. With this framework in place, the implementation of service learning will be coordinated according to each institute.

Several universities use the SULAM framework as a service learning implementation guideline. Universiti Malaya and Tun Hussein Onn University of Technology Malaysia (UTHM) (UTHM, 2021) are among them. Through this SULAM, the implementation will be carried out according to credit points. Therefore, the implementation will be based on the academic course they follow.

Figure 2. SULAM Framework by UTHM (2021)

The same applies to the implementation at Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM). At UiTM, the service learning program is managed by the vice-chancellor. They have drafted the SULAM@UiTM Framework. This framework will refer to the characteristics of Service Learning that have been set (UiTM, 2020)
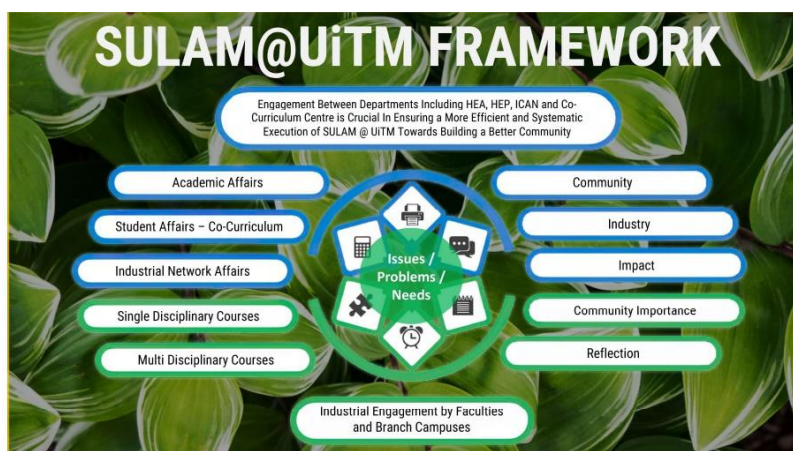
Figure 3. SULAM Framework by UiTM (2020)

An example of a Service Learning activity is carrying out community service focusing on growing vegetables to be shared with community groups voluntarily. Through this method, students indirectly apply horticultural knowledge and skills in real situations with the community. This situation will provide work experience as a volunteer farmer while sharing the crops for free with the community.

Apart from that, among the Institutes of Higher Education that implement Service Learning is the Malaysian Teacher Education Institute (IPGM). The implementation of Service Learning at the Teacher Education Institute (IPG) is of a community service nature. The curriculum incorporates the Community Service implementation element (IPGKT, 2023).

Implementing service learning at IPGM is also carried out as an extracurricular activity. Among the examples of Service Learning activities at IPG are volunteering activities to help orphans or any party facing problems such as floods and fires. However, IPG does not have a specific guide or framework for service learning. Because of this, the method of implementing service learning between IPG campuses is different. Suppose the Higher Education Ministry has SULAM as a guide for the implementation of Service Learning. In that case, IPG is only guided by the Community Service curriculum in academic courses such as the Teacher Development Course (Bina Insan Guru).

3.4 Service Learning Malaysia-University For Society (SULAM)

SULAM is one of the elements of High Impact Educational Practices (HIEPs; High Impact Educational Practices)(UUM, 2019) (UUM, 2019). SULAM community services can be defined as services identified by Higher Education Institutions through formal or informal consultation with organizations, governments and communities that are not based profit to improve the quality of life of the community involved(UUM, 2019) (UUM, 2019).

Four SULAM Approaches are adopted and applied by Service-Learning practitioners and experts globally. The approach is Direct Service, Indirect Service, Advocacy Service and Research-based Service.

3.4.1 Direct service

SULAM Khidmat Langsung refers to EMBROIDERY projects carried out face-to-face. This approach involves the involvement of students and lecturers in providing services directly to solve the community's problems. For example, we organise English and Mathematics classes for school students and reading classes for adults in selected communities. Another example is students and lecturers conducting entrepreneurship training for potential traders and traders in districts that need help.

3.4.2 Indirect services

Indirect EMBROIDERY services are quite different from direct ones. The emphasis in SULAM's approach refers to identifying the cause of society's problems and not directly overcoming the problem. Among the high-impact examples that use this SULAM approach is the recycling project with the urban community, where students and lecturers join the community and the authorities in this project, and various other problems can be solved as a result of this project. Recycling projects can restore the local ecosystem, increase community income, raise awareness of the importance of the environment and reduce environmental pollution.

3.4.3 Advocacy

SULAM Advocacy Service refers to the strategy of persuasion and sharing knowledge with the community about an issue that is related to them and can positively impact their lives. An example of this SULAM project is holding a public forum related to topics of interest in the community, such as cyber security campaigns health and financial management.

3.4.4 SULAM research service

SULAM Research Service is based on research elements. This SULAM approach focuses on collecting and reporting data and information that contribute to solving community problems. An exciting example of this approach is producing research-based guidelines such as marketing guidelines for 'homestay' packages to local tourists. Another example is conducting research on wildlife for the safety of nearby residents.

3.4.5 Stakeholders

In SULAM Implementation, there are FOUR main stakeholders in implementing the SULAM project: Students, Lecturers, Community and Industry.

From the implementation aspect, students are responsible for carrying out the EMBROIDERY project with the help of the course lecturer. At the same time, the lecturer is responsible for designing the syllabus and monitoring the EMBROIDERY project. The community is the party that receives services through the SULAM project. The industry or sponsor acts as the party providing funds and physical contributions to make the SULAM project successful.

3.5 SULAM Implementation Phase

There are FOUR main phases in the implementation of SULAM. It starts with Analyzing, followed by Constructing, followed by Executing and ends with Manifestation. This model is also known as the ACEM SULAM UUM Model. Each phase is a process of planning, implementing and evaluating an EMBROIDERY project.
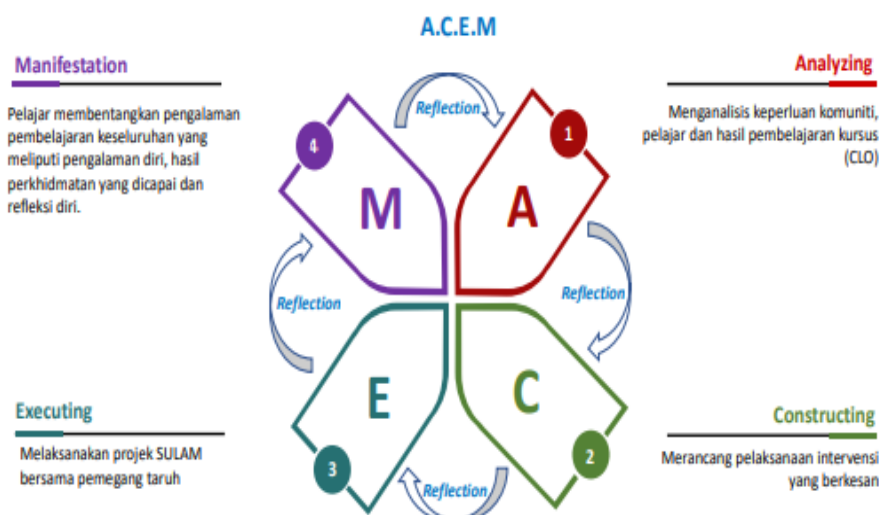

Figure 5. Fasa Pelaksanaan SULAM

3.5.1 First phase (analyzing)

This phase analyses community issues that students can solve, student skills and CLO coordination with the SULAM project. Thus, this analysis requires the collection of information about the identified needs. For example, through the media, expert interviews, diverse population surveys, direct observation / personal experience, or action research, Students present a holistic learning experience that includes personal experiences, service outcomes achieved and self-reflection. Manifestation Executing Constructing Analyzing Analyzing the needs of the community, students and course learning outcomes (CLO)

3.5.2 Second phase (constructing)

This phase is about SULAM project planning. It covers the continuous acquisition of knowledge to address questions arising from the investigation, identification of student groups working on community problem-solving strategies, explanation of roles, responsibilities and timelines of student work groups; and continuous development of the skills needed to make SULAM projects successful. SULAM projects/activities require a minimum of 20 hours, including planning, project implementation and reflection. The SULAM project also needs at least 9 hours of face-to-face time and the opportunity to interact with community friends. The SULAM activity project/component must comprise at least 30% of the total assessment. Students are evaluated based on their effectiveness in integrating course material and community service activities, not just completing required services. Suggestions for activities that can be carried out for Service Learning are as follows:

3.5.3 Third phase (executing)

This phase is about the implementation of the SULAM project with the stakeholders. Suggested activities that can be carried out for this phase are monitoring the implementation of projects and reflecting on their projects.

In addition, students also need to prepare readings monitor writing assignments, journals, and project assignments designed to integrate the civic engagement component in an academic course.

3.5.4 Fourth phase (manifestation)

This phase is about sharing students' results from the SULAM project with stakeholders. Students present their learning, covering what has been learned, the learning process, and the contribution achieved. Students document each process in all phases to narrate what they have learned, including reflection on critical issues. Students acquire skills and hone their talents through presentation demonstrations that integrate technology.

4. Discussion

Service learning is now one of learning methods that are increasingly being practiced at HEIs. There are various universities that apply service learning in assignments and lectures as an alternative approach in delivering knowledge and experience to the students. HEIs implement service learning in various ways according to universities itself. Some HEIs like Universiti Malaya, Universiti Putra Malaysia and International Islamic University of University Malaysia (IIUM) implement service learning dengan merujuk kepada Service Learning Malaysia (SULAM) by Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education as guideline.

There are HEIs that adjust the embroidery frameworks with the implementation of the university itself. Few examples of universities that have their own frameworks are

Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM), Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM).

It is a different situation with Institut Pendidikan Guru Malaysia (IPGM). Even though universities in Malaysia apply service learning widely, IPGM is quite behind in the implementation of service learning. IPGM also applies service learning in their academic activities, but they engage more with volunteerism and community services. It is because IPGM did not have a service learning framework like the SULAM framework, which has been used by universities as guidelines. One reason is IPGM is a higher education institutes under Ministry of Education (MOE), and it differs from universities under Kementerian Pengajian Tinggi.

Besides that, HEIs also implement service learning by collaborating with communities with particular needs and NGOs. It can help students improve their communication skills and get broader views and experiences while organizing the programmes.

5. Limitations and Future Research Directions

This research is based only on Higher Educational Institutes in Malaysia. The research focused on service learning and implementation methods. It is suggested that IPGM carry out future research on service learning as trainee teachers are the future generations who will contribute directly to the communities. Service learning programmes can also help students better understand academics, primarily through physical and hands-on activities like Design and Technology (Reka Bentuk dan Teknologi). It is also suggested that more research service learning on special needs students and communities because they contribute to communities, especially in economy and human resources.

6. Conclusion

Service learning is a learning method that very effective in teaching and learning and widely used by HEIs in Malaysia such as universities and professional training schools like teacher training institutes and medical training institutes. Each HEI implements service learning by organizing programmes based on service learning frameworks. Malaysian universities implement service learning based on the Service Learning Malaysia (SULAM) framework by the Ministry of Higher Education. However, Institut Pendidikan Guru Malaysia (IPGM) did not have a specific service-learning framework. Even IPGM has organized many community-based programmes. There are also service-learning programmes that meet the particular needs of communities and can help contribute to the communities.

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