ADAPTING KOLB'S EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING CYCLE IN ENHANCING ATTITUDE AND SKILLS AMONG UNDERGRADUATES THROUGH VOLUNTEERISM

Fazilah Idris[1], Wardah Mustafa Din[1] & Maisarah Tajuddin[2]

[1]Pusat Citra Universiti
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 UKM Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia

[2]Green Waste Selangor

Abstract

Previous studies show that most undergraduates do not participate in volunteering work and hence reduces the opportunity to gain essential skills such as communication, collaboration, creativity and critical thinking. The challenge to develop future-ready graduates is to equip them with the right set of skills and inculcate the right set of attitude. In doing so, experiential learning in a community based-setting would create a distinctive learning environment to achieve the latter. The objective of this research is to identify whether attitude and skills can be enhanced through volunteerism and service. In Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), LMCR1102 Volunteerism and Service Course is offered as an elective subject to all undergraduates. In this course student participates in experiential learning, execute community projects and explore the theories related. Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle was adapted as the framework in the development of the curriculum content and approach. This research employs a questionnaire survey which comprises of three sections, and 129 undergraduate participated by purposive sampling. Reflective writings at the end of the course were also analysed, and the results were triangulated with the survey results. From the analysis, there are seven attitudes which students gained during the volunteering work completed in the course which are nobility, responsibility, concern, sincerity, empathy, encouraging others, and sustainability. Among the skills that they acquired are communications skills, collaboration skills and managing diversity. In summary, essential attitude and skills that are pivotal for undergraduates can be gained through volunteering work. This study also highlights that students will continue to participate in volunteer work and community development after graduating.

Keywords: Volunteerism, reflective teaching, experiential learning, community development.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The university is a place where students strive for knowledge formally or informally. Nevertheless, some of them do not take full advantage of the time and opportunity while they are at the university to develop the attitude and skills, they need for the future what more to be involved in volunteering work. Past researches revealed that some of the undergraduates are less involved in voluntary work and this gives them less opportunity to obtain skills such as communication, collaboration, creativity, critical thinking and so on. One of the programs that can be implemented to equip students with the above skills is through experience-based learning in a community setting for example by registering in a volunteerism course. The questions are: What is the attitude gained through volunteering work? What are the skills acquired through volunteering work? Thus, the objective of this current study is to measure attitude towards volunteerism gained throughout the community project. Secondly, to identify the skills acquired through volunteering work.

1.1 Volunteerism

As defined by Merriam Webster Dictionary (11th Edition), a volunteer is can be generally be described as "a person who freely offers to take part in an enterprise or undertake a task". Volunteerism benefits both societies at large and the individual volunteer by strengthening trust, solidarity and reciprocity among citizens, and by purposefully creating opportunities for participation. The role and duty of a volunteer is massive, but with sincerity, it becomes a rewarding and fulfilling task. The key to being a volunteer is sincerity and tolerance. Total commitment from the volunteers are also necessary in ensuring that all plans and activities of the event is carried out effectively and successfully. Creak (2014) also affirms that a good personality and the enthusiasm for volunteering needs to be inculcated at an early stage as it is the basis of a good volunteer. In other words, volunteering is a way of giving back to your community while developing important social skills and gaining valuable work experience all at the same time.

Volunteerism goes beyond doing something without expecting anything in return. Volunteerism means serving in an area of need without consideration for compensation, personal preference, or personal convenience. It is easy to do good works when it comes naturally or is something you enjoy. Volunteering have become an effective, fast, and efficient method of obtaining human resources for any type of event not only for small scale events but also large-scale events at international levels. The term volunteerism was originally based on an action by a Frenchman in the 1600s who offered his services to the military (Morin, 2016). Three centuries later, 5th December was declared as International Volunteers Day by

the United Nations. Its objectives were "to heighten awareness of the important contribution of volunteer service, both at home and abroad."

Volunteerism often viewed as an altruistic act. In Malaysia, numerous volunteering activities are organized by a multitude of organizations. It exists in various forms, not only as non-governmental organizations NGOs, but also as quick shout-out for human capital resources according to situational needs such as providing assistance for any type of events. One such example can be shout out for a crowd assistance from an individual on social media for human capital resources to re-build a house for an elderly in a village. For organizations among their focus is in providing services to people who are less fortunate than others in their lives. One example is volunteering assistance to flood victims in Malaysia. This volunteering effort is frequently carried out in Malaysia as floods are a recurring situation in the country. Help and services provided are in various forms that will assist the victims to continue with their life post-disaster. Some organizations also provide aid relief to people in need in other countries such as Syria, Palestine and Rohingya. These organizations often send volunteers in relief aid missions in the name of humanity and as a mark of concern.

Volunteers and the willingness to volunteer are less prevalent in the society as many are selfseeking individuals, that can be attributed to the process of development and modernization (Danny Wong, 2011). Hence, the youths' appreciation of volunteering work must be addressed to ensure they that fully comprehend the roles and tasks of a volunteer. According to Azizan Bahari (2016), a person who becomes a volunteer must fully understand his responsibilities and roles especially when representing a particular organization that requires them to adhere to the organization's policy. Another important requirement for an efficient volunteer is the ability to communicate effectively and interact with a third party without being awkward or arrogant. He must also be broad-minded and tolerant (Creak, S., 2014). Muhamad, T. A., & Alauddin, A. N. M. (2013), emphasizes that an efficient volunteer must always be ready in any situation or condition that requires his services. Also, skills and experiences that are beneficial and can be shared with others are also an added advantage. A strong commitment from the volunteers will bring about a positive impact toward the task on hand. It will also benefit them and those around them.

1.2 Kolb's Learning Cycle
In line with the concept of Liberal Education and Liberal Education in the 21st Century (Association of American Colleges & Universities 2002; Greenstein 2012), emphasis is placed on project management skills, communication skills, critical thinking, building a network of knowledge and self-learning (self-learning) and experiential learning (Kolb 2005). Kolb's

experiential learning theory is one of the best-known educational theories in higher education. The theory presents a way of structuring a session or a whole course using a learning cycle. According to Healey and Jenkins (2000), Kolb's theory can be applied in university geography. The different stages of the cycle are associated with distinct learning styles. Individuals differ in their preferred learning styles and recognizing this is the first stage in raising students' awareness of the alternative approaches possible. emphasize the different learning styles of individual students and the necessity for teachers to use a wide range of teaching methods to meet their needs.

Shui Kau Chiu & John Lee (2019) adapted Kolb's learning cycle and they demonstrated a feasible and resource-saving way in conducting experiential learning within a normal classroom setting. The approach facilitated students to assimilate and apply the experience under four stages of Kolb's learning cycle because of its flexibility, this approach is suitable for classes with different sizes. As long as utilizing something like ICT that is already connected with students, with some modifications, it is possible to apply this approach, practice experiential learning and enhance students' learning motivation and engagement in other academic disciplinaries.

Experiential learning pedagogy is taking a lead in the development of graduate attributes and educational aims as these are of prime importance for society. Cecilia Ka Yuk Chan (2012) highlighted that a community service experiential project conducted in China had enabled students to serve the affected community in a post-earthquake area by applying their knowledge and skills. She documented the students' learning process from their project goals, pre-trip preparations, work progress, obstacles encountered to the final results and reflections. Using the data gathered from a focus group interview approach, the four components of Kolb's learning cycle, the concrete experience, reflection observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation, have been shown to transform and internalize student's learning experience, achieving a variety of learning outcomes. This community service type of experiential learning in the engineering discipline allowed students to experience deep learning and develop their graduate attributes.

Takahiro Sato, David D. Laughlin (2018) had integrated Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) within an undergraduate sport psychology course. He included detailed discussion of the structure of golf-putting tournaments, course design, and the use of reflective practice within a sport psychology classroom. Findings indicated experiential learning occurs through a continual process within the four-stage learning cycle: Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualization, and Active Experimentation.

1.3 Coneptual Framework of Current Study

According to Kolb's experiential learning cycle (1984), there are four stages of learning which are concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation. Going through all these four stages, develops an effective learning for a learner to learn continuously and better. A learner reflects upon previous experience and creates an improved and better experience. Kolb's learning cycle in known to be adapted throughout multidiscipline fields and courses and is implemented by many instructors for an impactful experiential learning (Petkus, 2000).

In this paper we measured the impact of applying and adapting Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle in the elective course towards the students, by implementing the four stages of the learning cycle throughout the 14 weeks course. Impact were assessed with one batch of students in UKM through a posttest and reflective writing.
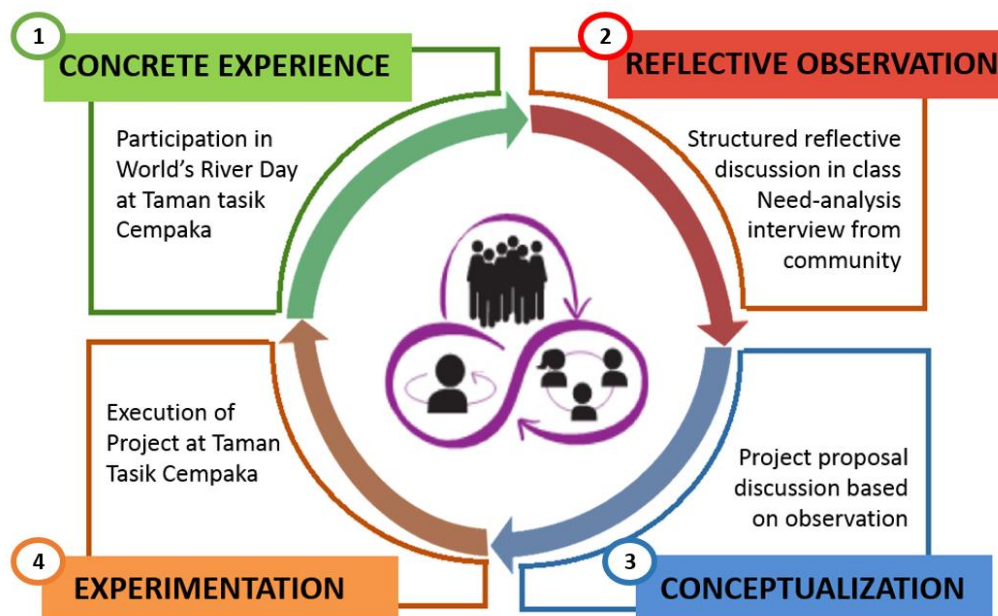

Figure 1: Adaptive Kolb's Reflective Cycle in LMCR1102 Volunteering Course

In Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), LMCR1102 Volunteerism and Social Service course is offered as an elective subject to all undergraduates. In this course student participates in experiential learning, execute community projects and explore the theories related. Kolb's experiential learning cycle was adapted as the framework in the development of the curriculum content and approach for the course. Experiential learning emerged as a preferred approach in learning which shift from traditional paradigm of teacher-centered knowledge transfer, to learner as the active participant and teachers as facilitators (Kolb & Kolb, 2006).

2.0 METHODOLOGY

To assess the impact of the course LMCR1102 Volunteerism and Service towards the undergraduates, a survey was conducted to 129 students and was self-administered. The respondents were chosen via purposive sampling. The questionnaire was developed by the researcher and consisted of three sections namely; demographic profile of the students, set of skills (7 items) and set of attitude (10 items) acquired. The questionnaire was administered online on the final week of the semester. The questionnaire uses Likert scale, with 1 to 5-point scale; 1 corresponds to strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree. Descriptive analysis was done using SPSS (V.26). Data from students reflective writing were analyzed using thematic approach which can be used to triangulate results of the survey.

2.1 Adaptation of Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle

The course content and approach were built upon an adaptive framework from the Kolb's experiential learning cycle. The framework model is as presented in Figure 1. The learning cycle was adapted by incorporating three elements in all of the four stages, which are individual, group and the community. In all of the four stages, all of the three elements were taken into consideration in either the discussions, reflective writings and presentations in class and projects. By looking from all of the three perspectives, the learning cycle becomes more holistic and comprehensive, thus enrich the experience further.

The class started by involving the students in program that was initiated by an NGO. The students were involved in a concrete first experience in a volunteering project at Taman Tasik Cempaka during the World's River Day Program. This program was a collaboration between Green Waste Selangor (NGO) and the community. Students participated as a volunteer doing few small projects such as painting the bridge, cleaning the river and surroundings and engaging with the community at the booths. The participation was for half day program only, and the projects were completed there and then. Students were not involved in any planning prior the program. Concrete experience is important to stimulate the affective and cognitive domain of the students, so that they have experience to reflect upon later.

From this first experience, the students embarked on reflective observation as an individual, and in project groups. Structured reflective discussions were facilitated by the lecturers in class. Students were asked to write their reflective observations and emotions individually, then they discus in their respective groups. Collective observations of the group were then presented to the whole class. Structured reflective discussions and writings are very pivotal to make the experience meaningful to the students. The reflective writing and

discussions were divided into few important subtopics which are detailed experience, emotion and feelings before, during and after the event, important points they observed throughout the event, the impact that they feel to themselves, and the community from the event and what should be done for improvement of such event. In this stage, students also did a need analysis of the location which is Taman Tasik Cempaka. Need analysis were done by interviewing the community that uses the recreational park.

After the reflective process, students then go through the process of abstract conceptualization. This is done by guided planning of projects with basis of the need analysis and their reflections towards Taman Tasik Cempaka. Included in this exercise is to draft a complete proposal that can be used to apply funding to execute the projects. From their observations, experience and need-analysis, each group proposed a specific project to solve a problem in Taman Tasik Cempaka. In their draft proposal, students will identify the problem statement, then conceptualize the solution to the problem. The solution the students propose expands to the milestones of the planning, the cost of the project and the implementation and execution of the project. This exercise is very extensive and polishes critical and creative thinking skills from each student.

For the final process, students undergo experimentation stage of the learning cycle by executing their projects at Taman Tasik Cempaka. Altogether there are 6 different projects completed by 6 different groups. In this stage students implement their proposal at Taman Tasik Cempaka, guided by lecturers and the city council officers. The projects were completed in half day to one day. All students participated in the projects and were assessed for the course.

After the execution of the projects, students were asked to made yet another reflective writing and discussion to reflect upon their projects. This creates another concrete experience that will improve either next project if need to be done any time later. This process is very crucial so that students are given necessary advice upon their work, and are able to make improvements to themselves and their group. Skills that they acquired like collaboration and communications are guided with the reflections made from the lecturers and peers.

Table 1: Research procedure

No.	Cycle	Action	Participants	Instrument	Acquired skills
1	Concrete experience	Participation in World River Day as volunteer		Questionnaire Reflective writing	Communication Collaboration Managing diversity
2	Reflective observation	Structured reflective writing Need analysis interview		Reflective writing	Critical thinking Creativity
3	Conceptualization	Project proposal discussion	Undergraduates	Reflective writing	Problem solving Creativity Ethics
4	Experimentation	Execution of project at Taman Tasik Cempaka		Questionnaire Reflective writing	Communication Collaboration Managing diversity Critical thinking Problem solving Creativity Ethics

3.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Adaptation of Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle to the Course Outline

LMCR1102 elective course, Volunteering and Community Service, is a 2 credit course offered to all undergraduates in UKM. The objective of this course is to:

1. Inseminate passion towards community service and volunteerism towards social cohesion
2. Instill skills to organize programmes and activities that involves various stakeholders
3. Polish ability to generate and coordinate sources volountarily to be disseminated to the community

The course content includes formal face to face meetings, which covers theories and related issues in the form of presentations and discussion, sharing experience from other

students active in volunteering, and the project. Overview of the course plan for the 14 weeks are as presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Course structure for 14 weeks

Week	Content
1	Course synopsis
	World River Day Program at Taman Tasik Cempaka
2	Sharing from Volunteers (Graduates of UKM)
3-11	Interactive discussion & presentation on theories and related issues
	Reflective observation discussion
12	Project discussion (Proposal)
13	Project execution at Taman Tasik Cempaka
14	Post Reflection of Projects and closure

Feedbacks were collected from the students to identify which teaching and learning approach during the course that were most impactful to enhance their attitude and skills (Figure 2). The results displayed that from all of the many approaches applied in the course, the most effective teaching and learning approach was the involvement in the World River Day program and the execution of their projects at Taman Tasik Cempaka. These were actions for the concrete experience phase and experimentation phase of the Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle. While many activities and courses can create a concrete experience for students, not many execute reflective discussions and create opportunity for constructive feedbacks in class, which is a crucial step to create meaningful experience (Trottier-Scully & Ritchie, 2019). Students feel the impact of the concrete experience, after they reflect and conceptualize the experience which adds values to the learning outcomes.

Besides that, 19% of the student were inspired more from the senior sharing in class. Senior sharing in class is a method of learning and reflecting from other peoples' experience. This method is equally important as their own experience, as reflections and observations can be made to help students construct their knowledge towards volunteerism. This approach also motivates and inspires the students as they are able to interact with a role-model, which has similar age and similar condition to them.

Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle has been applied to achieve meaningful learning experience to students in various fields such as medical students, engineering and instructional design (Butler et. el., 2019; Trottier-Scully & Ritchie, 2019; Miller & Grooms,

2018). Experiential learning increases knowledge, attitude and skills in job employability domains (Trottier-Scully & Ritchie, 2019), core-competencies and critical thinking (Butler et. el., 2019) and enhance skill transfer (Miller & Grooms, 2018). Not only that, experiential learning can also improve higher-order thinking skills among students, as students are actively involved in the subject matter through all the four stages of Kolb's Learning Cycle (Suanto et al., 2019).
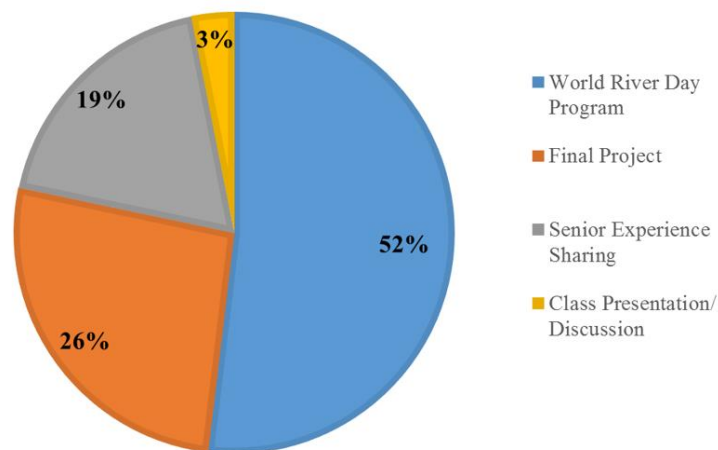

Figure 2: Items that gives most impact towards students (%)

3.2 Skills Acquired by Students

Skills that was listed were all the essential skills for the 21st century, as highlighted by Musa et. al., (2012). Besides the 4C's, which are collaboration, creativity, communication and critical thinking skills, we believe that there are three other essential skills that should be acquired by graduates in the university which are problem-solving skills, ethics and integrity and managing diversity skills.

Highlights from the analysis of the survey, shows that amongst all the skills assessed, the highest percentage of students strongly agreed that they acquired collaboration skills (59.7%). Collaboration is about working in teamwork to obtain a common goal. Collaboration skills are pivotal to graduates as they move to a working environment, where teamwork is inevitable. In this course, students from various faculties are mixed in a group to execute the project. They learn to collaborate with students with different backgrounds, starting from the reflective discussions in groups, to the abstract conceptualization stage, whereby students discuss their proposed projects, and in the end where they execute the projects. This finding is congruent with the findings of Musa et. al., (2012), which states that students develop teamwork skills in project-based learning through listening to group members, ask questions and practice assertiveness.

Table 3: Percentage of students that acquired the 7 skills assessed

Skills	Percentage (%)				
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree
Collaboration	-	-	7.8	32.6	59.7
Creativity	-	0.8	12.5	39.8	46.9
Critical thinking	-	-	10.1	45.0	45.0
Communication	-	-	3.9	37.8	58.3
Problem solving	-	-	9.3	39.5	51.2
Ethics	-	-	3.9	41.1	55.0
Managing diversity	-	-	6.2	38.0	55.8

Communication skills are constantly one of the most appreciated skill sets pursued by companies. According to Choren (2015), students with advanced communication skills, will see increased career prospects and promote personal development. Communication is also believed one of the most vital levers of management that a company can carry out for the formation of teams and accomplishing precious performance (Bucăţa, G. & Rizescu, 2017). In line with that, findings in this study showed that besides collaboration skill, students perceived that they have acquired communication skill (58.3%) while participating in the project. Students must communicate well to get sponsor, to convey information to group members, to explain how they wanted the project to be done and so on. These activities have helped them to enhance their communication skill.

Managing diversity is a skill that is important for graduates especially in Malaysia, as Malaysia is a multi-racial and multi-ethnic country. The skill is essential not only for employability, but also is crucial in producing good citizens. In this course, students worked together from different ethnic and religion throughout the 14-week course. Students learn to manage the diversity and work together to complete the volunteering project. In a research on medical students, managing diversity is reported to be a 'must-have' skill, to provide fair treatment to all patients regardless of the religion, ethnic, and economy status (Siraj et. al., 2011).

The skill that shows the least percentage is critical thinking with only 45% of students self-perceived that it is gained through the course. According to Paul (2005), critical thinking is the art of thinking about thinking in an intellectually disciplined manner. Flores et. al., (2012) defines critical thinking in a simple definition, which is the ability to see beyond the simple facts and think at a more comprehensive level. Our findings are in line with research from Flores and team (2012), which concludes that critical thinking has to be nurtured from kindergarten and it's a skill that takes a long time to develop. Critical thinking is not to be learnt through 'programs' but it should be a culture nurtured from an early stage. It is adequate that students get the exposure to critical thinking through this course, in the abstract conceptualizing stage by drafting the project proposal. This is also true for creativity which is learnt through 'personal experiences' which influences factors such as cognitive, personality, motivation and social influences and expands more with experience (Dacey & Lennon, 1998). Hence, critical and creative thinking are not skill sets that can be learned in one module or course, but is learnt from early years and develops through a lifetime, and have personality and up-bringing influences. In a review on creative thinking skills for Muslim education system, highlights that exam-oriented approach to learning might create a barrier to creative thinking (Said et al., 2018).

All the skills assessed are important skills to be acquired by graduates, and it is displayed that they do acquire these set of skills through participating in the course. Some label these skills as 'soft-skills' and are important to personal and professional development (Khasanzyanova, 2017). All these skills are important to the students to continue to participate in volunteering and community service, and when they start to work in the real working environment.

3.3 Attitudes Instilled in Students

Attitude towards volunteerism was assessed by the survey and triangulated with findings from reflective writings of the students. We analyzed the structured reflective writings and extracted the attitudes that the students highlighted in their writings. From the survey, the value that is most gained by the students were the sense that volunteering work is noble (89.1%). Besides that, students also strongly agreed that they gained the sense of responsibility (80.5%), care (83.7%), sincerity (73.6%) and empathy (79.8%). The course also succeeded in instilling the will to encourage peers to join in volunteering work, as the findings shows that 94.6% of the students responds that they will invite peers to join in any volunteering work. 93% students responded that they will continue to participate in volunteering work after the course ends.

Students highlighted seven main attributes in their individual reflections upon thematic analysis. The seven values are nobility, responsibility, care, sincerity, empathy, encouraging others, and sustainability. We quote some verbatim transcripts that highlights all the seven values which have been extracted from students' writings as below as an example.

Table 4: Reflective writings of students

Attitudes	Verbatim transcript
Nobility	'I feel that what we are doing is very noble and everyone should do it..'
Responsibility	'When I cleaned up Tasik Cempaka for the first time, I feel that it is my responsibility and the community to maintain the cleanliness of this recreational area…'
Care	'The impact to me on this program is my awareness increased of the importance of care to the environment not littering waste everywhere…'
Sincerity	'What I learned is that we should not expect any rewards while doing any volunteer work, what's important is we do it sincerely and continuously…'
Empathy	'… after doing the project of installing the information boards, then only I know that the work is not easy and requires special skills. We shouldn't look down on the worker that does this …'
Encouraging others	'I invited my friends to join in our volunteering work because it's fun and gives a lot of experience…'
Sustainability	'Having been involved in these volunteering course activities has create interest in continuing to engage in volunteer activities after this..'

As the key findings of this research shows, nobility is the utmost self-perceived attitude gained during the course. Nobility is a noun for being noble in character. The feeling of doing a noble act makes volunteering a meaningful event, hence creates a meaningful life, as showcased by Vuuren & Pathof (2019). Noble values are inculcated through formal education and non-formal process. Formally it can be instilled via classroom classes (Othman et. Al., 2018), but some researchers' states that it is more effective when trained outside the formal arrangements such as through storytelling (Thambu 2017), religion and belief system (Kabir 2013), volunteerism (Sahri et al., 2016) and via sports (Hochstetler, 2006). In a classroom setting, responsibility, teachers' desire, religious, class control, subject requirements, school environment and culture are among the factors that encourages implementation of noble values (Othman et al., 2018). Apart from that, other attitudes that are instilled through

volunteerism reported by other studies are eye-opening and open-minded, growth mindset and sense of fulfilment by helping others (Roman et al., 2018).

A study conducted in the United Stated on sustainable volunteering participation among Gen Z highlighted that attitudes towards volunteering work is influenced by four motives which are values, career, learning and self-esteem (Cho et. al., 2018). This is might also be the motives that influenced positive attitude towards the volunteering experience of students participated in this study. Both attitude and skills that can be gained in volunteering participation helps in job-seeking and enhances the opportunity to be included in the labour market (Pajo & Lee, 2011), thus making volunteerism a great platform for undergraduates. Furthermore, a study on youth participation in volunteerism gives long-term consequences on their participation later as adults (Kim & Morgül, 2017).

The limitation of this study is that the procedure was done upon students in UKM of an elective course, which freely chose to attend the course for 14-weeks throughout the semester. Students might have biased perceptions towards the outcome of the course and might affect the result of the study. The results might not also reflect other group of students elsewhere. Undeniably, structuring volunteerism through Kolb's experiential learning holds tremendous benefit to both the instructor and student, as it structures the course content easy for the instructor to monitor the learning outcomes, and effective for the students to reflect upon their experiential learning with the four stages clarified.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Volunteerism through experiential learning is an important approach in inculcating the right attitude and skills that are essential to produce future-ready graduates. Soft-skills that are learned through the course will effectively extend cognitive and affective domains of students, as the experience that they indulge in creates important memories and stimulates most senses. Kolb's Learning Cycle is an effective pedagogical tool that structures teaching and learning through constructivist approach in constructing knowledge and skills. The four stages of Kolb's learning cycle structure the framework for the course, making it more effective on all domains of learning. In summary, research findings indicate that the undergraduates, through this volunteering work, develops essential skills for the 21st century such as collaboration, communication, creativity, critical thinking, problem solving, integrity and ethics and managing diversity. The volunteering work also equips students with pivotal values like empathy, care, sincerity, nobility, sustainability and encouraging others. Thus, the findings demonstrate that the research objectives have been fulfilled. Further research should be conducted with more

respondents with various background using qualitative method such as focus group discussions that will provide more rich data.

5.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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