

INITIAL ASSESSMENT ON STUDENTS PERCEPTION TOWARDS CAMPUS SUSTAINABILITY

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an opinion piece on the initial assessment of the comprehension of Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) students' knowledge about UMS EcoCampus programs in the context of campus sustainability, and their suggestions for green initiatives. A total number of more than 350 students were sampled. The students were divided into a working group and worked on abstracts related to campus sustainability. A total number of 35 groups were formed as units of analysis for this study. The assessment process was conducted in four meetings over a one-month period after lecture. For data collection, the 35 working groups were required to come up with an abstract for each group, and the abstracts were being reviewed by several experts in campus sustainability or personnel familiar with the activities organized by UMS EcoCampus Management Centre. The result suggested that some of the students understood the general concepts of sustainability and some were uncertain about it. The uncertainty is mainly due to the context of 'campus' sustainability. The sustainability knowledge of students was mostly on recycle and reuse, electronic technology usage in substituting conventional management practices, and "go green" campaigns. Based on the findings, the result indicates that students of UMS would have to be given more exposure on campus sustainability, and it is best to include sustainability element into course syllabus. By then in the near future, the graduates will be "greener" and susceptible to the concept of sustainability.

Keywords: Sustainability; Campus Sustainability; Recycle; and e-learning

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) EcoCampus Management Centre was established in 2013. It is a platform for the University to provide a framework to be implemented, enforced, monitored, assessed and reviewed based on the key elements of the EcoCampus Transformation Plan. The core values of EcoCampus are: (1) Sustainable development, (2) Ecological protection, (3) Environmental compatibility, (4) Resource conservation, and (5) environmental stewardship.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

UMS is a member of the International Sustainable Campus Network (ISCN). It is a platform to support leading colleges, universities, and corporate campuses in the exchange of information, ideas, and best practices, for achieving sustainable campus operations and integrating sustainability in research and teaching. The Network is managed by the network's Secretariat, operated by Sustainserv Inc (ISCN, 2017).

The UMS EcoCampus elements that were integrated into the Plan are mindset change, infrastructure development, teaching and learning, research themes, and management and operational practices. UMS is committed to be a university of excellence in teaching and research (comprehensive university), as an EcoCampus that incorporates environmental considerations in planning and implementations by being innovative, relevant, and sustainable towards development, that address local and global environmental challenges. By supporting the values, UMS was committed in green investment and reducing carbon footprint within and immediate surroundings of the campus (UMS EcoCampus Management Centre, 2015).

As stated by the founding director of the Centre, Dr Awangku Hassanal Bahar stated that the blueprint charted the next five years strategy where UMS hope to become the first university in Malaysia to achieve the full status of EcoCampus in 2017. According to the founding director, the academic programs in EcoCampus incorporate the sustainability issues as a core component in the curriculum and eventually designate the primary focus of their academic to sustainability issues such as sustainable development, environmental education, and green engineering. Research and innovation activities also aim to enhance the understanding of the world's ecosystem and the development of applied solutions to the current sustainability of the world's ecosystem and the development of applied solutions to the current sustainability challenges. Campus life promotes the development and enhancement of green community outside the classroom through dedicated sustainability programs of staff and students' organizations (Awangku Hassanal Bahar, 2013).

3.0 RESEARCH DESIGN

A total number of 350 students participated this brainstorming session through various sessions of classes. 350 students were grouped into a 10 pax / group. 35 groups were formed. The grouping was formed in order to filter various (irrelevant?) ideas first and then to come up with an augmented proposal.

Each group was required to prepare an abstract if they were to conduct a research on ecocampus and campus sustainability. The abstract will be submitted to reviewing expert to decide whether the topics are relevant to campus sustainability. The objective of the research was to find out whether UMS students understand and comprehend well on the topic related to campus sustainability. The design of the study was to explore the mindset of students related to campus sustainability.

The method applied conducting this scientific process was all students were given equally an hour to think of an abstract, and they were supervised by an academician who has certain knowledge on campus sustainability. Students in group will get their discussion first, brainstorm and to propose one research topics. After an hour of brainstorming and topic selection, the students were given a week to prepare an abstract to research on the campus sustainability.

4.0 RESULTS

The result for this study is explained in two perspectives: (1) observations made by the authors who supervised the brainstorming process, and (2) abstracts submitted to reviewing experts. Based on the observation made, students that were represented in 35 groups, know well about sustainability. The perception of 'sustainability' described in few dimensions

which are lifestyle, transportation, and curriculum design, It is observed that there is a difference between a group that has members who are active in social activities (green projects, CSR, community), and a group that has no members active in social activities. Group with active students were found easier to absorb the ideas / concept of campus sustainability.

Secondly, through observations, students with personal experience of being 'green' or active in CSR projects possessed better knowledge in managing information related to campus sustainability. The information they produced are more systematic and scientifically approached. These groups of students are found to be more conscious on the sustainability issue.

Apart from observation, the researchers also had some conversations with students who practice 'green' at home, and active at campus. The only note to be made here is there is a slight difference between students who practice at home and getting involved in campus activities. The slight difference was students who being 'green' at home seldom to get involved or actively involved in campus activity. This is an interesting point to point out lifestyle at home may not influence the activeness at campus area. It is rather to say, practicing 'green' at home is more of personal consumption. This is probably similar of paintings collectors that buy and collect paintings for personal consumption, but not for public display.

Third result from the observation, the students found it easy to explain or conceptualizing the sustainability, compared to the term 'campus sustainability'. Although as such, it does give different facets of it. The details of the observation is explainable that students seeing sustainability is at individual level, and when it comes to campus sustainability, it relates to transportation, teaching and learning, and campus activities.

The only concern is the adaptation of sustainable leadership versus sustainability leadership. In search of data, students tend to make mistake by searching sustainable leadership that projects a different meaning than sustainability leadership. More often the sustainable leadership is about sustaining leadership, and to retain power control. Of 35 groups of students, it is estimated about three groups had the misperception.

Based on the total abstract submitted to the reviewing committee, the main themes that can be categorized from the submission were: (1) transportation, (2) curriculum and co-curriculum, (3) lifestyle, (4) e-learning and online learning, (5) recycling, (6) awareness, and (7) waste management.

In relations to promote public transportation, it is seen that students who proposed the topics are aware of the pollution caused by transportations. However, when further enquired, the students who proposed for taking public transportation to be more sustainable, were not aware of the cost of establishing solar panel, electrical car, and hybrid technology. Simplification was made by not considering the behaviors of car owners as why would they refuse or not taking public transport. Specifically, the students who proposed the idea were only looking into smaller concept of carpooling or taking UMS buses. The generalization was also included the idea of proposing to use bicycle for going green, without considering the landscape of UMS to travel from faculty areas to lecture hall centre.

For teaching and learning, there is a strong correlation between teaching and learning process, and e-learning. Most of the groups proposed online learning as a medium to replace conventional teaching without calculating the total cost saved, and reduction of

papers in numbers. General concept was there, only when comes to quantification was barely considered. One of the groups suggested to proposed on online exam as a method to reduce use of paper.

There are few groups that suggested to green purchasing or research relating to green behavior. The idea proposed was about to assess the influence of sustainability issue on students' behavior on online purchasing.

Most of others categorized their idea about campus sustainability is to promote the benefits of go green / being sustainable. Students who proposed to campaign for sustainability was seemed to be clueless for the idea of campus sustainability. Most of the suggestion is to create awareness and benefits of campus sustainability. It is also observed that the groups of students who proposed the idea would have less involved in green lifestyle, and sustainability lifestyle (programs conducted in the University).

5.0 CONCLUSIONS

Of the 350 students in 35 groups observed, it is clear that UMS students do understand the concept and practices of sustainability and the values of EcoCampus. To enable them to be the community catalysts, it is important to have sustainability topics to be incorporated in course syllabus or teaching activities. With additional readings on various materials, it would enhance the general knowledge of students to be better leaders in future.

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