

ADVOCATING GREEN SCHOOLS FOR SUSTAINABILITY: KELAB SAHABAT UM- THE FRIENDS OF UNIVERSITY MALAYA APPROACH TO YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

The Kelab Sahabat UM Network is an initiative by UMCares – The Community & Sustainability Centre of the University of Malaya to reach out to the primary and secondary schools in its vicinity. Activities included under this programme range to sports skills, language and drama grooming to robotics workshops and competitions. Most of these programmes are conducted through collaborations with either internal (UM) or external (NGO or private business) parties so as to ensure a broad network of experts who can enhance the education and experiences of the school youth. Kelab Sahabat UM was launched in early 2014 but constant monitoring of its programmes and progress has led to some evolution in its offering. Programmes must now encompass a second session where participants can demonstrate knowledge gained or skills learnt. This might be in the form of a performance or participation in a competition. At the end of 2014, it was also decided that the concept of a green school would be a useful avenue through which community engagement can be coupled with engagement for sustainability. The details of this programme and the multiplier effect observed as a result of the implementation of the Network thus far will be discussed in this paper.

Keywords: green schools, youth, sustainability in schools, community engagement, innovations for inclusive development

1. INTRODUCTION

Primary and secondary schools in Malaysia have a set curriculum and syllabus that meet the needs of students at their respective levels. A particular group of government schools called 'cluster' schools are those recognized for exemplary results, earning them a little extra funding and more flexibility beyond the regular curriculum. Some of these programmes include (among others) robotics, drama and debate. Cluster schools are also required to interact with institutions of higher learning and either participate in or lead national-level events or competitions.

All Malaysian public universities are assigned cluster schools as part of a 'school adoption programme' where the institute of higher education is meant to offer enhancement and other programmes to these secondary and primary schools of excellence. In 2013, the University of Malaya (UM) ran a number of programmes for these cluster schools, offering workshops

ranging from robotics to sports skills and motivational camps, drama, debate, creative language skills programmes and others. Many of these were initiated by the university based on university staff expertise and interests, while others were requested by the cluster schools themselves.

At the time, these programmes were held by the UM Community & Industry Liaison Centre (CIItRa), which now no longer exists. For a number of the above sessions, less well-off and/or academically-weaker (non-cluster) nearby schools were invited to participate in the programmes. These events were always very popular and at times response was overwhelming – it was clear that there was a demand for programmes such as these. It soon became very clear, however, that the schools that truly benefited from and appreciated these sessions were the non-cluster schools, as they would not otherwise have access to and/or funding to provide them for their students.

1.1 The Kelab Sahabat UM Network

In 2014, the writer decided to set up the Kelab Sahabat UM Network (Friends of UM Club), in which a group of schools would become 'members' of a club and subsequently, a network linked to the university. The ministry-assigned cluster schools are a part of this network, as well as a number of non-cluster schools from the immediate vicinity of the university. This was a conscious decision to provide more opportunities for schools that were truly in need (the neighbourhood schools) and to encourage student interaction and peer learning through interaction with the more advanced cluster schools. The goal was to be able to train cluster school students to become facilitators for programmes for students of the 'weaker' schools. Enhancement programmes, workshops and other opportunities are also offered to all teachers of the schools.

The Kelab Sahabat UM Network was officially launched in 3rd April 2014, with a total of 24 schools as members of the network. Table 1 lists the types of schools involved.

Table 1: Types of schools involved in the Kelab Sahabat UM Network

Level	Number	Cluster schools	Non-cluster schools
Primary	11	3	8
Secondary	12	8	4
Matriculation	1	NA	NA
Total	24	11	12

In 2014, programmes under the Kelab Sahabat UM programme comprised the following areas:

1.2 Kelab Sahabat UM Objectives

The objectives behind the establishment of the Kelab Sahabat UM Network are as follows:

1. To enhance student learning beyond the curriculum
2. To provide access to content, workshops and seminars for both students and teachers that would not otherwise be available at secondary or primary level

3. To encourage peer-learning, interaction and facilitation between cluster and non-cluster schools
4. To encourage UM student voluntary involvement as mentors, facilitators or programme initiators
5. To facilitate the transfer of knowledge between university experts (academics and staff) and students/teachers
6. To facilitate schools' access to university facilities

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to capacity-build young people as stewards for the environment and actors for sustainability, they must be 'enabled' (Robinson & Glanznig, 2003). In general, humans – and young people especially, are social animals, and empowerment has been shown to be only truly effective when a wider community is involved in a particular action or movement (Lord & Hutchison, 1993).

Agenda 21 (United Nations [UN], 2009) cites the importance of advancing the role of youth and actively involving them in the protection of the environment. Children and youth are the first step towards reaching the wider local community (both young and old) who are not directly involved in an environmental education programme (Toilli, 1996; Evans and Birchenough, 2001). Influencing an adult community is often a delicate endeavour as habits are well-entrenched and the desired behavioural change is sometimes in conflict with long-established or traditional means of earning an income (Periasamy, 2002).

While youth have the power to influence their parents and the community in general with proven changes in attitudes, behaviour and initiative (Toilli, 1996; Uzzell, 1999; Evans and Birchenough, 2001), the message taken back to the wider community is filtered (by the youth themselves) to content that is of particular relevance to them or specifically strikes a chord. In this way, facilitators are less likely to be authoritatively prescribing a set way of doing things, and is instead allowing for self-determination and a more locally-relevant means of achieving preferred lifestyles (Jickling and Wals, 2008).

Youth are the future of a nation. Environmental experiences at an early age have long-lasting and significant effects on the development of environmental behaviour (Periasamy, 2002; Aini and Laili, 2010). There is a need to develop and produce active citizens who want and are able to engage for the environment (Stapp, 1969; Breiting and Mogensen, 1999; Uzzell, 1999; Jickling and Wals, 2008).

Participation in a programme is not good enough however; the final goal of empowerment is for participants to take over and develop conservation initiatives. True participatory projects are those which empower people by building skills, interests and capacities that continue even after the project ends (Gustave and Borchers, 2008). This then means that social capital is built over the long run as the capacity for activities spread beyond the immediate project in both space and time (Gustave and Borchers, 2008).

Research has shown that in spite of existing efforts to spread environmental awareness, the level of national environmental citizenship and behavior is only at a 50% level (at best). One way to increase this percentage is to reach out to students and teachers in schools. WWF-Malaysia has a network of eco-schools which currently trains eco-schools teachers and students in environmental awareness issues/ teaching methods so that they in turn can multiply that knowledge and teach it to others. The Eco-Schools programme managed by WWF-M is an international programme operated by the Foundation for Environmental Education. It is the largest sustainable schools programme in the world; empowering students to be the change in a sustainable world by engaging them in fun, action-oriented learning.

However, the Eco-Schools programme requires a seven-step methodology that functions as a framework to guide schools on their path to sustainability (WWF-Malaysia website). The framework results in the school being assessed in order to attain certain levels of achievement, from which it can declare itself an Eco-School. Implementation of this programme in Malaysia thus far has shown that certification as an Eco-School can take a few years to attain, with much of the success hinging on true student initiatives for sustainability. Therefore, while the Kelab Sahabat UM Network would like to launch a green school initiative, it can only keep the Eco-Schools concept as an overarching goal, and not the immediate purpose of the programme.

The setting up of school gardens has long been shown to solve a number of problems related to sustainability at the ground level. According to the FAO (2009), crisis points today include issues such as nutrition, environment, livelihoods and governance. While the schools within the Kelab Sahabat UM Network are not faced with issues of malnutrition, exposure to the need for and benefits of small agricultural efforts can contribute positively to their well-being and life prospects. At the same time, these gardens can provide a source of alternative income for the school, or reduced costs for the school's cafeteria. Students learn how to grow their own food in a world where food security issues are growing, as well as the importance of access to safe, organic, chemical-free fruit and vegetables for their own physical and mental health. Spending time outdoors and working with the soil have also been shown to have positive psychological effects on both young and old. The involvement of the wider community in a school gardening project helps to advocate the replication of these small efforts to others, either as home gardens or for other schools not in the system (such as kindergartens, religious schools and hostels). Student initiatives in a school garden also develops leadership, ownership and teamwork skills that can then be put to good use once they leave school.

3. METHODOLOGY

The structure of the Kelab Sahabat UM Model allows it to be run at the centre level (under what is now called UMCares – The Community & Sustainability Centre) with minimal staff. The bulk of the work is taken on by collaborators, whether internal or external. This model also allows the centre to tap myriad existing experts so that the offering to the schools is holistic and varied. The model thus builds a network of experts that can contribute to the Kelab Sahabat UM Network, reducing the knowledge load required of the centre. UMCares thus functions as the programme leader and coordinator. Once the initial activities were launched and formalized (as has already been done by the writer), further ideas, programmes and offerings evolve

organically as spin-offs from earlier activities or are initiated by other parties (whether internal expert, student or external collaborator). Yet another pool of facilitators comes from the compulsory community engagement academic module and electives that are required courses for all undergraduates.

3.1 Kelab Sahabat UM Network Programmes

Apart from continuing the programmes that were held under the adopted cluster school programme, other opportunities were provided for students and teachers under the Kelab Sahabat UM Network. Table 2 below lists the activities that were conducted in 2013/2014, before the official launch of the network, while Table 3 lists the activities conducted since the launch.

Table 2: Activities conducted under the adopted cluster school programme 2013/2014

Mth/ Yr	Activity	Pri Level	Sec Level	Cluster Sch Only	Non-Cluster Invited	For students	For teachers
April 2013	Star Making Exhibition and Camp (STARMEC 2013)		/	/		/	
Jun 2013	Sports Skills Clinic		/	/		/	
Jun 2013	English Debate Competition		/	/	/	/	
Julai 2013	Explorace	/		/		/	
Julai 2013	Musical Theater (<i>Bawang Putih Bawang Merah</i>)		/	/	/	/	
Julai 2013	English Camp : Literature in Action		/			/	
September 2013	Sports Camp		/	/		/	
Oktober 2013	Robotic Competition "Tug of War"	/		/	/	/	
Oktober 2013	Islamic World Carnival		/	/		/	
Oktober 2013	Summer Camp		/	/		/	
November 2013	Robotic Workshop	/		/	/	/	

Table 3: Activities conducted under the Kelab Sahabat UM Network

Mth/ Yr	Activity	Pri Level	Sec Level	For students	For teachers	UM expert	NGO expert
April 2014	Digital video making & Story Telling Workshop		/	/			/
Mei 2014	Excellence English Program		/	/		/	
April 2014	Intelligent Quiz		/	/		/	
Mei 2014	UPSR Workshop	/		/		/	
Jun 2014	English Teaching Workshop	/	/		/	/	
August 2014	Drama Workshop		/	/		/	
September 2014	Debate Competition		/	/		/	
September 2014	Football Academy		/	/		/	
September 2014	Junior Crime Scene Investigator (CSI) Workshop						/
ongoing /2014	Green School	/	/	/	/	/	/

3.2 Programme Evolution

Under the adopted schools programme (2013), activities offered to schools were one-off events, with no evidence of real take-away or programme effectiveness other than information provided in feedback forms. General feedback indicated that the programmes were of interest to the participants, and the students, especially, enjoyed the opportunity to learn in ways not usually offered in regular classes, as well as to be able to be out of school and on university grounds.

Under the Kelab Sahabat UM Network, it was decided that programmes initiated by the university need to show some sort of output or evidence of capacity-building, skills transfer or behavioural change. Thus programmes were devised so that there would be two parts to every session: one session for knowledge or skills transfer, and another to show evidence of increased knowledge, skills or output.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

While almost all programmes were well received by the school community, it was clear that the most effective sessions were those that could generate a visible output (performance, product or competition participation) from the participants. This would prove that the programmes had some impact, and that the recipients were able to learn skills and gain useful knowledge.

One of the last programmes launched in 2014 was the Green School initiative. In follow-up meetings with the Petaling Utara state agency for education, it was clear that sustainability efforts such as this were top of the agenda in state plans. Because our centre had also just restructured into a centre for community engagement and engagement for sustainability, it was thus decided that the Green School initiative would be the ideal channel through which we could consolidate the university's sustainability efforts into real engagement for external youth.

4.1 Kelab Sahabat UM's Green School Initiative

As a result of the initial response from both the selected pilot schools and the state education department, it was decided that schools would be informed of WWF-Malaysia's Eco-School programme, but only so that they would have a vision of a final target that they could set for themselves. Amongst the Kelab Sahabat UM Network are a number of schools (cluster and private) who are already certified as Eco-Schools and they will be called upon to share their experiences with other schools, as well as have their students act as peer mentors for those just embarking on the programme.

The Kelab Sahabat UM Network has thus far provided support to start small organic farm areas in two schools selected by the Petaling Utara state school department. These schools were initially selected for their lack of existing landscaping. Both the school's students and the university's undergraduates were involved in this first effort at school compound greening, with great energy, laughter and success. The state school department would now like for the programme to adopt another type of model demonstration school: to green a school with minimal land area. This would then require more innovation, perhaps with UM's UMCROPS initiative (now also parked under UMCares) in terms of container and vertical gardening.

Once these pilot efforts are completely in place, and the certified Eco-Schools are ready to share their experience with the other schools in the network, Kelab Sahabat UM will then launch its Green School competition. This would provide some incentive for the other network schools to get involved. The criteria for this competition would be derived partially from the Eco-Schools standards, as well as the UMCares Competition (an annual sustainability implementation competition held between UM residential colleges), but schools would be allowed to choose between the pillars of Water, Waste, Energy and Biodiversity. Extra points would be awarded to schools that are able to engage with external communities (families and neighbours) so as to either involve or capacity-build them for sustainability.

To further capacity-build the schools, UMCares will network with UM Living Lab projects that work on the areas of interest, as well as tap residential college students who have implemented similar projects in their college grounds or with partnering communities to spend time with the Kelab Sahabat UM schools as mentors or trainers for their green school initiatives. The programme will also work with teachers to enable them to bring their daily curriculum outdoors and to a safe space within the school grounds.

4.2 Multiplier Effect & the Education Enhancement Model

Several levels of capacity-building have been illustrated in this paper, and this then is the Kelab Sahabat UM Model that could be replicated and implemented elsewhere. At the most basic level, students are taught directly by UM researchers or other parties, but most of the programmes have multiple levels of learning and knowledge transfer. Figure 1 below illustrates the model.

The model indicates that the multiplier effect takes place in capacity-building of either UM student facilitators or mentors and Kelab Sahabat UM teachers. These parties then go on to transfer knowledge to Kelab Sahabat UM students. In some activities, UM student facilitators, UM experts or External Collaborators train cluster school students who then go on to facilitate non-cluster school students. This then brings in a peer-learning component to the model, which has often been shown to be a highly effective learning tool. With the application of this model to sustainability initiatives such as the Green School, it is clear that action and attitudes for sustainability can be learnt and disseminated to the wider community for the greater good.

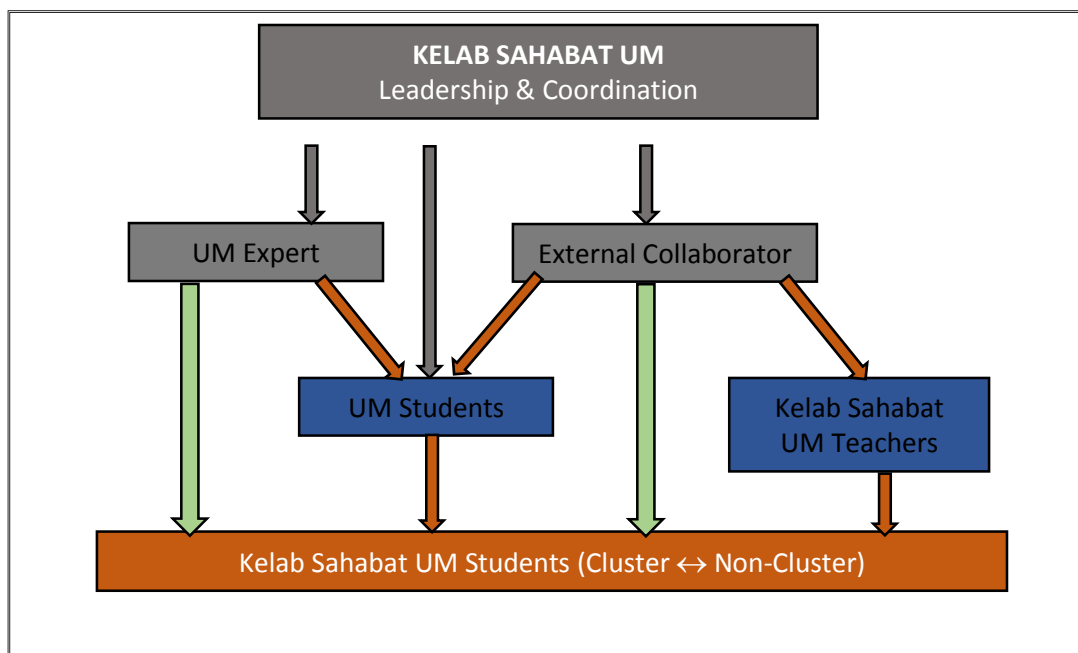


Figure 1: Kelab Sahabat UM Model and Multiplier Effect

5. CONCLUSION

This paper has shown that collaboration within the university, as well as with external partners through the Kelab Sahabat UM Network model can create valuable holistic offerings to the university's adopted schools. There is a strong multiplier effect in the levels of capacity-building that takes place in the programme, enabling teachers and university students to continue the dissemination of knowledge and skills-building well beyond the limits of the immediate programme. It is clear that this model can be replicated elsewhere, with minimal adaptations for specific needs and locations.

The application of this model to sustainability initiatives such as the Green School has great potential for success in terms of effective implementation and environmental action and attitude change. Programmes that allow youth to head outdoors have been proven effective in garnering interest (especially with academically weaker students) and stand as a visible testament to the university's efforts with the school community. It can also serve as an empowerment, team-building and leadership-development tool for school youth, as well as a welcome distraction from the rigors of classroom study.

While it is too early in the programme to quantifiably evaluate knowledge gain or behavioural change, built-in structures and programme requirements allow for some qualitative assessment that has been shared here. This model has the potential to empower many pockets of the population, especially if it is replicated by other branches of UM or other institutes of higher education – and in particular in the field of sustainability.

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