

BELIEFS, KNOWLEDGE, VALUES AND YOUTH'S ENGAGEMENT TOWARDS CAMPUS SUSTAINABILITY

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ABSTRACT

Universities can play a significant role in educating youths on sustainability. They can encourage their graduates to be socially and environmentally responsible professionals. Previous studies have shown Malaysian youths' are generally aware of environmental issues but their involvement are only moderate. According to Emanuel and Adam, "... there seems to be little or no "knowledge gap" when it comes to campus sustainability, but there does seem to be a "commitment gap, " (2011). This paper discusses the involvement of youths from a local university towards campus sustainability, their awareness, beliefs and values. It looks at the understanding of the youths on the concept of sustainability, their awareness, their engagement and the values being practiced by youths on campus sustainability.

Keywords: youths, campus sustainability, engagement, awareness, values

1. INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development, is a common phrase which is being mentioned everywhere in the world. Every single aspect of activities such as development, management, economy, environment, societies and education in today's world are all incorporating the sustainable concept. Sustainable development was first developed in 1987 with the acknowledgement of the Bruntland Report which stresses on the development that, "*meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.*" Sustainable development focuses on two key concepts which are 'needs' and 'limits'. Needs is meant whereby, we only produce or consume the resources that we need in order to survive. Limits, on the other hand, is a concept which teaches us to limit the resources that we use so that we will be able to meet the present and future needs. The sustainable development concept was developed in order to tackle the pollution and depletion of resources issues that are happening in the world so that we will still be able to live in this world safely and in harmony with the availability of resources that ensures our comfort in life. Even though sustainable development is the most ideal way of developing the world, it proves not to be an easy task as it requires

every individual or party to participate. Besides the government and the private sectors, the society is also considered to be one of the pivotal players in making the idea of sustainable development a reality.

Various studies have been done on the role of universities in promoting the concept of sustainable development and on the programmes that are being implemented at the universities and higher learning institutions. In this study, we will focus on the youth's understanding of the word sustainability and to what extent are their engagement or involvement towards campus sustainability. Several aspects such as their beliefs, knowledge and values in practicing sustainable practices are investigated. At the same time, we hope from this study, we will be able to help the university in recommending more effective programmes in promoting the idea of campus sustainability among the youths.

2. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

While various studies on campus sustainability have been done by the western counterparts, universities in Malaysia particularly University of Malaya(UM) is relatively new to this concept or idea. In the University of Malaya, the concern for sustainability/environment was first mooted by the previous Vice Chancellor, Datuk Dr. Rafiah Salim who believes that environmental education and awareness are vital in instilling social-responsibilities among university community. Thus, UMCares was born and this volunteer-based environmental group links members of the university community together to share knowledge and ideas towards the betterment of the environment.

Of late, there are more and more efforts from the University towards sustainability. From projects like recycling, Earth Hour, Orientation Week, saving energy resources, trees labelling etc; these programmes are being carried out but without much involvement from the students or youths. This motivates us to find out why this is happening. Is it our awareness which is lacking or are we not concerned at all on our impact towards the environment?

This paper is a preliminary study of a research project on sustainability. It is driven by our concern to know more about the youths' and students' understanding of the concept of sustainability, their awareness, knowledge and engagement towards sustainable practices in helping the university to be more sustainable.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Universities are well known globally as an institution that are responsible for new innovations, educating the youths and also as a place where ideas are being transformed into reality. *"In the past, college campuses have often proven to be places of change, progressive think-tanks where ideas are born and tested. Most recently, this can be seen in the expansion of green technologies and smart design infiltrating universities, many of which are exemplifying how this sustainability can be achieved and promoted"* (Sadusky, 2014). The concept of sustainability is not considered to be a new concept but instead it has been known for a very long time with its

goal which is to tackle the issues of pollution and resource depletion. However, in the present, the concept of sustainability is being emphasized in every elements, especially colleges and universities. Emanuel and Adams (2011) states that, *"In recent years, US colleges and universities have increased their awareness of and commitment to sustainable practices"*. Velazquez, Munguia, Platt and Taddei (2006), defined a sustainable university as *"A higher educational institution, as a whole or as a part, that addresses, involves and promotes, on a regional or a global level, the minimization of negative environmental, economic, societal, and health effects generated in the use of their resources in order to fulfil its functions of teaching, research, outreach and partnership, and stewardship in ways to help society make the transition to sustainable lifestyles."* Many studies had been done on the role of the universities and campuses in driving sustainability forward. The reasons why universities are being identified as the main driver in sustainability is because, the universities happens to be a hub where future leaders are being nurtured in leading the government to build a more sustainable country and also to educate the societies on the importance of practicing sustainability in their everyday lives. *"Institutions of higher education are poised to play a significant role in the search for a more sustainable future"* (McMillin and Dyball, 2009). Knowing these responsibilities that had been given to the higher learning institutions, universities and campuses are intensifying their research and efforts in disseminating sustainability to the world. According to Waas, Verbruggen and Wright (2010), *"As we start the second decade of the 21st century, a growing number of universities and higher education institutes are embarking upon adopting more responsible behavior towards society and various stakeholders, and are increasingly pursuing sustainable development agenda."* This was later supported by Mostafa Nejati and Mehran Nejati (2012) stating that, *"Given the growing global interest on the university's role towards promoting sustainability, an increasing number of universities are committing themselves to sustainability."* Mostafa Nejati and Mehran Nejati (2012) mentioned in their studies that, the commitment of the universities towards sustainable development were further being enhanced by the Talloires Declaration in 1990, which is one of the first and most important motivation to obtain the commitment from universities in pursuing sustainable development in their organization. Up to the present time, it is believed that there are more than 600 universities in the world who have involved themselves in pursuing sustainability in their management by signing international treaties such as the, Bologna Charter, The Halifax Declaration, the Talloires Declaration and the Copernicus Charter for Sustainable Development (Emanuel and Adams, 2011).

The quest to reach a sustainable university standard does not end by just signing declarations, awareness to the concepts of sustainability, identifying the role of universities in realizing sustainability or even changing the vision or mission of the institutions. Instead, sustainability should be implemented into the development and administration of the universities itself. Emanuel and Adams (2011), stated in their study on the students' perception towards campus sustainability, focusing on the universities in Alabama and Hawaii, *"majority of students in both states agreed or strongly agreed that everyone in the university community should have to support sustainable solutions to environmental problems. They also agreed that the university should make sustainability a priority in campus planning, development, and day-to-day operations."* Emanuel and Adams (2011) further explained the situation by mentioning that, *"students may be waiting and watching to see a demonstrable commitment to sustainable practices from their university administrators."* In other words, what Emanuel and Adams are

trying to explain is that students requires a leader to lead this movement in which the leader will be leading and guiding the students in this movement. *"It is becoming more common that a university takes initiative to become more sustainable, through new building designs, student programs, and related research"*(Sadusky, 2014). Not forgetting the real purpose of universities being established, which is to educate the youths who happen to be the leaders of the future, education is also considered to be one of the most effective way to disseminate sustainability to the youths, thus, helping the universities to be more sustainable. *"Some scholars consider knowledge of sustainability as fundamental to the successful implementation of sustainable practices on college campuses"*(Eagan and Orr, 1992; Earl, Lawrence, Harris, and Stiller, 2003; Cosmann, Gray, Legge, Leous, Parry, and Valicenti, 2006). Emanuel and Adams (2011) also supported this concept by affirming that, the first step to implement the sustainable campus practices is through education. McMillin and Dyball (2009) on the other hand, believed that it would be more effective to form a collaborative network within the university itself to achieve campus sustainability, also known as a "Whole-of-University Approach". McMillin and Dyball (2009) stated that, *"By encouraging a collaborative space within the curriculum for students, academics and managers to critically reflect on university's performance with regard to sustainability, many positive benefits ensue, including raising the profile of university's sustainability initiatives; providing solutions to sustainability problems; building trust among students, managers and academics; and providing meaningful learning experiences for students."*

At the local front, *"UKM's efforts towards achieving sustainable development is further strengthened with the establishment of UKM Lestari Programme (Lestari is the Malay word for Sustainability) launched in June 21, 2007. The establishment of UKM Lestari Programme aims to coordinate research and implementation of sustainable development by the faculties, institutes and departments at the university."*(Fadzil, Hashim, Che-Ani, and Aziz, 2012).

"Numerous activities that reflect the environmental concerns are carried out by private higher education institutions (PHEIs) in Malaysia...Through the green initiative, the University hopes to groom a society that is committed to a sustainable environment through greater awareness and better earth friendly practices."(Hon Seng, 2012).

Despite the extensive studies on the role of universities in implementing sustainable development in their management, activities and curriculum, there seems to be very little or limited studies done on the students' engagement on campus sustainability.

This study seeks to fill the gap and explores the role and involvement of students and youths towards campus sustainability.

4. METHODOLOGY

A survey questionnaire was distributed to 25 students as this is a preliminary study. The questionnaire was emailed to the undergraduate students from various faculties and only 22 students responded. This questionnaire was adapted from Sadusky's study (2014) on college students' perception and behaviour towards sustainability, which also formed the theoretical

framework of this study. The questionnaire contains four major sections which consists of the demographic profile of the participants, their daily routine practices/habits, their awareness and knowledge of campus sustainable programmes and their opinions of the campus sustainability programmes at the University of Malaya.

5. FINDINGS

The data were analysed and categorised based on Heather Sadusky's (2014) study on students' perceptions and behaviour towards campus sustainability. Similar to Sadusky's study, four (4) categories from the data were identified and analysed. The four (4) categories were a) the demographic and basic information about the student respondents, b) their sustainable actions in routine life, c) their awareness and responses to sustainability programmes at the University of Malaya, and d) their responses to sustainability as a general consensus. The questionnaire consists of 15 questions. There were a total of 22 students; 13 females and 9 males. The female participants were from the Science and Medical faculties and the males participants were from the Science, Medical and Economics faculties.

5.1. Student's Demographic Profile

The first category is the students' profile. 22 students were involved in this study. They ranged from the 1st year student to the final year students. Majority of the students were from the third year with 10 students, and the least was from the first year which consisted of only 1 student. 19 students or 86.36% stayed on campus whereas the other 3 students or 13.64% stayed off campus. The students were from various faculties with 6 students majoring in medicine, 15 students in science and only 1 student in economics. In terms of gender, there are 9 males and 13 females (Figure 1).

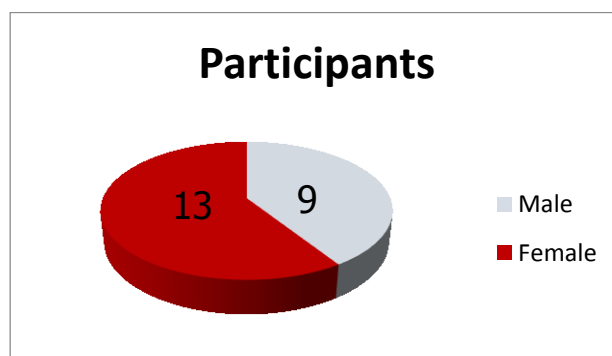


Figure 1. Participants

5.2. Student's Engagement in Sustainability Actions

The second category of the questionnaire focuses on the students' sustainability actions. The first question asked the respondents how they typically get to their classes daily. Based on the responses given, majority of the students/youths walk to their classes (45.45%) followed by those who travelled by using their personal vehicles (31.82%). Biking and using the public transport as a mode of transportation on the other hand, accounted for 13.64% and 27.27% respectively (Figure 2). There was an overlap in terms of the choice of transportation used as some students had ticked more than one options given in the questionnaire. For example, a student walked to class on certain days, took a bus on other days and rode a bike on certain days. Walking, biking and using public transports were considered to be the most sustainable mode of transport on campus.

Although the data showed that the majority of the youths/students get to their classes by walking, the number of students travelling by personal vehicles was still high. In order to reduce this percentage, some measures need to be taken. Public transport must be regular, efficient and reliable. The university management plays a crucial role in ensuring the effective management of transportation for students. Biking should be encouraged by providing safe bicycle lanes and proper parking spaces.

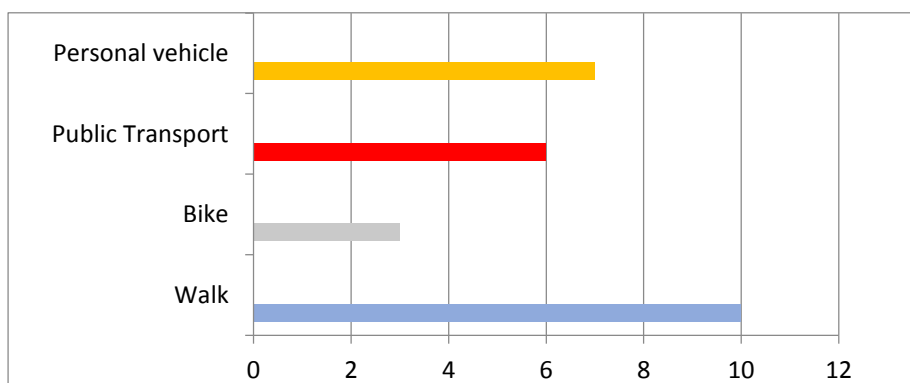


Figure 2. How students typically get to classes

Another aspect of sustainable practices that is worth mentioning in this study is the practice of saving electricity on and off campus. Approximately 87% of the students turned off the lights when they were not in use daily, whether they stayed on campus or off-campus. This achievement is considered to be on the right track with the campaigns being done by the colleges in UM in reference to the sustainable campus programmes, which urged the youths to reduce the amount of electricity they used in colleges. Faculties even took the same initiative by promoting the energy saving idea. Sensors are used in toilets where lights are only switched on when there are people using them and will be automatically switched off when not in used. Hallway lights and street lights also used timers to reduce electricity consumption. Even bus stops at various residential colleges and main buildings relied on solar panels for their functions. Majority of the respondents in this study, 63.64%, practiced sustainable lifestyle. 31.82% utilized reusable water bottle daily. They also bought food from their college cafes because it

was economical and cheap. Furthermore, they did not have to travel as traveling could incur more money. However, only a few supported the practice of both recycling and using reusable shopping bags. The practice amounted to 9.09% and 22.73% respectively (Figure 3). Students found it troublesome to bring along reusable shopping bags. Recycling was also burdensome as facilities were not widely provided. However, these sustainable practices are very common and on the rise in countries such as America, Japan and Europe. The university can play a role here by instilling, encouraging and aggressively promoting the idea of recycling and using reusable shopping bags to the students. If this practice is carried out regularly it will become automatic and habitual. Thus, the idea of a sustainable lifestyle can be practiced at the university level by the youths and students as they are the driver towards a sustainable future.

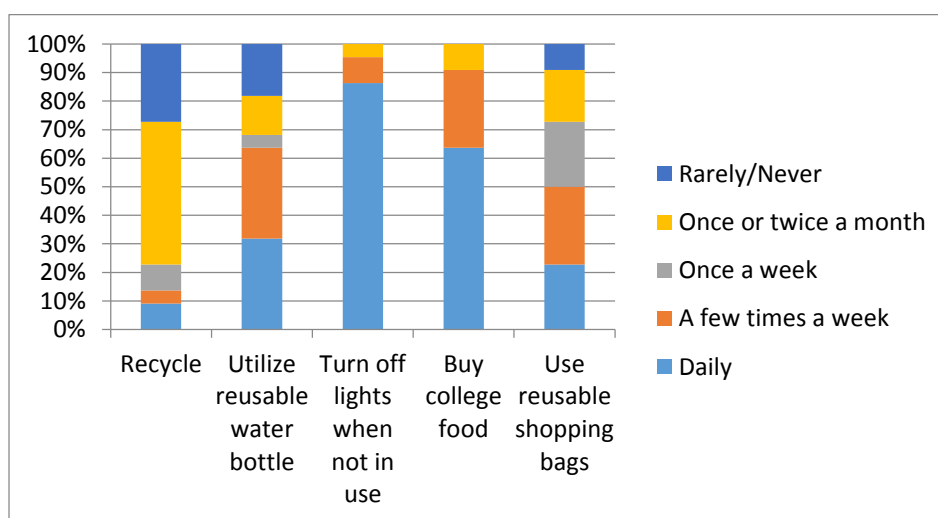


Figure 3. Student’s engagement in sustainable actions: types and frequencies

5.3. Student’s Responses to Campus Sustainability Programmes

The responses given by the students for the question on whether they do participate in any UM campus activities that were related to sustainability were very diverse. The activities listed were Recycling on Campus; Earth Hour; Water Warriors (Water activities, knowledge transfer, gotong-royong, etc); Project Revival (Gotong-royong Varsity Lake); Earth Day: Tree Harvesting@ Rimba Ilmu; Micro Electric Vehicle (MEV) in UM; and Save energy in College (Save electricity and water). The most popular programmes that seemed to get the students’ or youths’ involvement in which they were ‘currently participating’ were the Earth Hour and Save energy in College both with 72.73% and 63.64% respectively. The reasons why these two activities were popular among the students’/youths were because, first, it was done at the college level and as for the Earth Hour because of the worldwide publicity and global participation. Furthermore, these activities did not cost them financially and only a short amount of time and effort were required to carry out the activities.

Other sustainable activities carried out on the campus seemed to be less appealing in which, less than 10% of the students was currently participating, and for some activities, the

percentage of score was 0% or no participation at all. For these unpopular activities, students cited that either they were unaware of the activities or they did not have the time to participate in them. The number of respondents who were interested but did not have the time to participate was quite high for Project Revival (Gotong-royong Varsity Lake), with 68.18%, Recycling on Campus and Water Warriors (Water activities, knowledge transfer, gotong-royong, etc), were both at 45.45%. The percentage of students who was unaware of the sustainability programmes was also exceptionally high for the Micro Electric Vehicle (MEV) at 77.27% and the Earth Day: Tree Harvesting@ Rimba Ilmu at 59.09%. The figures indicate that the students were unaware of most of the sustainable programmes on campus. Unawareness is the main reason for the low participation of students in the campus sustainable programmes. Hence, it is important that publicity, promotion, information and advertisements on these activities be disseminated so that more participation from the students can be attained.

Students were also asked to evaluate the level of sustainable practices at University of Malaya. Majority of the students; 63.64% believed UM ranked as average in terms of sustainable practices. Others believed UM to be above average (9.09%) and another group felt not enough sustainable practices (27.27%) were carried out in UM. Majority of the students/youths also said that they have learned more about sustainability since enrolling at UM by taking classes and self-teaching. This suggests that education seems to be the main driver in disseminating the knowledge and increasing the awareness among students on the importance of sustainability.

5.4. Student's Attitudes toward Sustainability

In investigating how committed were the students/youths in championing the sustainable movement, a question related to monetary aspect was asked. Respondents were given choices ranging from no amount of money they would spend in the sustainable movement to a total of 50 Ringgit Malaysia or more (none, RM5, RM10, RM25, RM50 or more). The results showed that 22.73% would spend "none", 40.91% would spend RM10, 13.64% would spend either RM5 or RM50 or more and 9.09% would only spend RM25 to help the campus achieve a higher level of sustainability (Figure 4). The reason to the amount the youths can spend was most probably influenced by their financial capabilities and their status as students where they had no solid income.

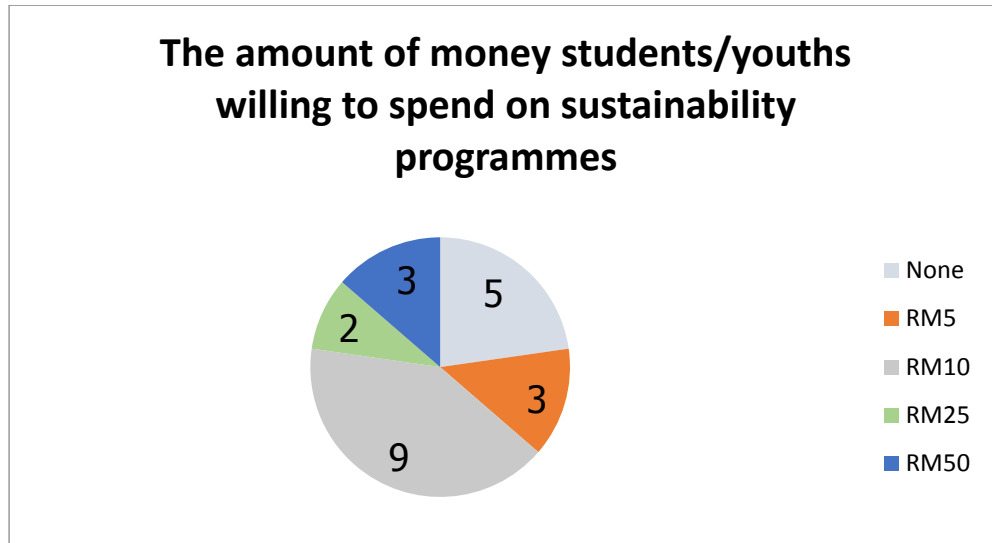


Figure 4. The amount of money students/youths willing to spend on sustainability programmes

The final part of the survey questionnaire focused on the students' opinion on which sustainable practices they would like to see implemented or expanded at UM. They were given a list of choices ranging from projects to infrastructures. The most popular choices among the students were that they would like to see the implementation of a Green Campus such as the planting of trees, less waste production, energy efficient and etc. Other choices such as sustainable buildings, educational programmes, sustainable community and the recycling of materials (hazardous and electronic) also ranked high and received a huge amount of support from the students. This clearly shows that the students or youths are supporting the sustainable cause.

6. CONCLUSION

The role of university in instilling knowledge and awareness on sustainability is definitely undeniable. As stated earlier, universities are places where future leaders are being nurtured and shaped to become responsible leaders; leaders who believe that the environment is their social responsibility.

Universities are currently taking the step not only to be an educational hub for sustainability but are also becoming more eco-friendly campuses. These are achieved through developing more efficient and pollution free infrastructures and building designs, organizing students' programmes that promote the sustainable cause and conducting more research on the importance of sustainability. Current research shows that students are largely aware of and in support of sustainability, yet the awareness does not necessarily reflect the action. There seems to be a gap between knowledge and action (Sadusky, 2014).

This preliminary study has managed to gathered useful information that can be used in promoting the level of awareness and commitment towards campus sustainability programmes. This study finds out that students do support the sustainable cause but time constraints was the obstacles towards active participation. In this aspect, the University needs to find a way to bridge the programmes through curricula so that a win-win situation can be attained. The University gets the students' involvement and participation and reaches the campus sustainability goal whereas the students get the knowledge as well as the credit hours, merits or certificates from their involvements in the programmes. As for the unawareness level on the sustainability programmes at the university, some measures need to be taken. Steps like campaigns and publicities need to be done intensively through announcements, posters, pamphlets and social media. Sustainable practices at the university and colleges need to be instilled and nurtured in the students from their early years at the university. The responsible bodies and the relevant parties at the university should also conduct roadshows and double up their efforts in disseminating information on sustainability programmes to the students at the faculties, residential colleges and students' centres. However, the act of sustainability is a personal choice.

The youths are the future leaders of the world, but they are currently the consumers of today. Therefore, it is vital that we show them the path to reach a sustainable future so that the future generations could also enjoy the resources that we have today. An ancient Indian proverb said that, *"Treat the earth well: it was not given to you by your parents, it was loaned to you by your children. We do not inherit the Earth from our Ancestors, we borrow it from our Children."*

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