

Cultivating and Nurturing an Empathy–Ready Mindset Through Value– Based Innovation

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Social Innovation Project focuses on developing and implementing innovative solutions to impact students and the community positively. In this module, students are engaged in an interdisciplinary and collaborative setting to identify opportunities in today’s global and local environments that create and capture values. The project-based learning activities for this module emphasize situated learning, which deals with authentic and unique real-world issues. Students will be involved in collaborative decision-making and problem-solving as they have to discuss, consult, collaborate, and solve the problem to provide services or create a product for the desired community. After taking this module, students are able to enhance their creativity and instill values, such as leadership, teamwork, communication, and interpersonal skills, among students through the completion of the group’s project.

BACKGROUND OF THE PROJECT

As part of the graduating criteria, all local and international students pursuing degree programs in both public and private universities in Malaysia must complete a set of General Studies or *Mata Pelajaran Umum* (MPU) modules, including the MPU4. These MPU modules have been developed to inculcate value-based education embedded with affective, cognitive, and psychomotor domains in higher learning. The MPU4 modules are designed to complement the MPU1, MPU2, and MPU3 modules, which focus on philosophy, knowledge, skills, values, patriotism, and citizenship values.

Under MPU4 modules, universities are offering modules that allow students to become participative by being involved physically and directly with the outside community, such as community service modules and co-curricular modules, intending to produce students capable of utilizing their social and interpersonal skills. At Taylor's University, the MPU4 Community Service Initiatives was initially offered and designed to help foster a sense of care and concern among students for their community, environment, and the world at large through service experiences and the opportunity to apply their skills and knowledge in real-life situations.

Challenges of Students in Learning MPU4 Module

Several significant learning challenges were observed during the implementation of the MPU4 Community Service Initiatives in the past years. Firstly, there is a lack of emphasis on empathy among students when performing the social service activity through the Community Service Initiatives module. Based on students' course evaluations, most students were primarily motivated by task completion rather than attempting to comprehend the viewpoints and genuine needs of the community. This has left students unable to respond to the issue appropriately or avoid misinterpreting what the community is trying to say. This similar observation of behaviour was also seen in the lecturers. According to Gerdes and Segal (2011), empathetic values are essential for individuals who perform social work because they improve the effectiveness of the activity and lead to better outcomes. With students and lecturers merely motivated by the need to finish tasks, the social service given to the community may not reflect a high level of quality. Without learning what the community genuinely needs, the students created their assumptions to give a certain social service activity based on a simple observation of the neighbourhood area.

Secondly, because the community's true needs are not being met, it has been discovered that the community services provided have very little impact on the community. For example, suppose a certain neighborhood area is discovered to be filthy and littered. In that case, performing a clean-up project session in that community area is a typical social service activity. Such services are not sustainable because the same area will eventually require another cleaning session if the community's failure to keep the neighbourhood area clean is not addressed. While it benefits the community in the short term, the outcome of clean-up services can lead to failure due to resource fatigue and the need for labour to do the same thing over and over again, resulting in a lack of sustainability. Partnerships between the institution and the community must be mutually beneficial for a project to succeed to provide more substantial, useful, and sustainable contributions to the community.

Thirdly, the MPU4 Community Service Initiative module lacks a proper teaching and learning strategy, which limits students' learning opportunities. Despite working on a community-based project, it has been found that students' motivation to learn the module was poor and the experience was described as insignificant. Therefore, having no proper teaching and learning approaches has inhibited the students

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