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**INTEGRATING SERVICE LEARNING IN HIGHER  
EDUCATION FOR ENHANCED ENVIRONMENTAL  
CONSCIOUSNESS IN YAN, KEDAH**

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**ABSTRACT**

The Service-Learning Malaysia (SULAM) initiative is a credit-bearing program that focuses on experiential learning to enable students to work with faculty to solve community problems using the knowledge and skills they gained from their academic disciplines. SULAM projects carried out for the Environmental Administration Group A course in the Development Management Program at Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) during Semester A222 were conducted in collaboration with the community in the district of Kampung Singkir Darat, Yan, Kedah. The objective of these projects was to address environmental issues faced by the community. The methodology used in this project was designed based on the data obtained from SULAM activities, which explores various aspects including methods of implementation, evaluation and documentation. The findings of the projects helped to improve the knowledge and skills of the students, enabling them to become exceptional graduates and responsible citizens. However, there were challenges faced during the SULAM

projects, including communication barriers and resource constraints. To overcome these challenges, the students and faculty had to come up with creative solutions, such as using technology to communicate with the community and leveraging local resources to complete the projects. Overall, the SULAM initiative serves as a great example of how experiential learning can be used to solve real-world problems and create a positive impact on society.

**Keywords:** Service-Learning, Community Engagement, Environmental Awareness, Malaysia.

## INTRODUCTION

The Service-Learning Malaysia (SULAM) initiative is an important step forward in integrating experiential learning into higher education in Malaysia. Launched by the Ministry of Education, SULAM aims to enrich students' educational experience by allowing them to directly engage with community issues and apply their academic knowledge in real-world situations (KPT, 2022). This initiative is especially focused on producing graduates who are not only academically proficient but also socially responsible and capable of addressing local and global challenges. Incorporating service learning into the curriculum, SULAM promotes a comprehensive educational approach that prepares students for active citizenship and professional success (Alias et al., 2017).

The objective of this project in the SULAM initiative is to address community needs through collaborative projects that involve students and communities working together. This objective refers to the research question of to what extent collaborative SULAM projects, involving students and communities working together, effectively address the identified needs of the target societies. The SULAM projects for the Environmental Administration Group A course in the Development Management Program at Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) during Semester A222 were conducted in collaboration with the community in the district of Kampung Singkir Darat, Yan, Kedah. Students who undertook the projects aimed at resolving environmental issues in the area chosen. This hands-on approach not only benefits the community but also enriches the student's learning experience by providing them with practical challenges that require innovative problem-solving

skills. The integration of academic knowledge with community service exemplifies how service learning can create a meaningful impact on students and the communities they serve (Hanum et al., 2021).

The significance of the project on the Service-Learning Malaysia (SULAM) program is its emphasis on improving educational results and meeting community requirements. Through integrating hands-on learning into the academic program, SULAM prepares students with practical abilities and encourages a commitment to social responsibility and community involvement. This initiative supports Malaysia's Education Blueprint 2015–2025, which stresses the importance of developing well-rounded and entrepreneurial graduates (KPT, 2022). Through hands-on projects, including those undertaken in Kampung Singkir Darat, students apply their academic knowledge to real-world problems, thereby deepening their understanding of course content and developing critical soft skills essential for their future careers.

This article focuses on the practice and implementation of Service-Learning in public universities in Malaysia, Universiti Utara Malaysia. It explores various aspects, including methods of implementation, evaluation and documentation to summarise the positive impacts of service learning from the practice of practitioners and highlight the relationship between these impacts. In conclusion, the SULAM initiative serves as a compelling model for integrating service learning into higher education. By engaging students in community-based projects, SULAM addresses pressing social issues and enhances the educational experience by fostering a deeper understanding of course content and personal values (Maznah et al., 2022). In addition, the challenges encountered during these projects further illustrate the importance of adaptability and creativity in problem-solving. As SULAM continues to evolve, it holds the potential to significantly impact the educational landscape in Malaysia, preparing graduates to be proactive contributors to society and equipped to tackle the complexities of the modern world.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Service-Learning Malaysia (SULAM), also known as Service-Learning – University for Society, aims to enhance student learning

by integrating theory with practice in real-world settings (Maharam et al., 2019). The program aims to achieve the following objective: Integration of theory and practice: SULAM seeks to bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world application by providing students with opportunities to apply the knowledge and skills they have acquired in their classes to develop practical solutions for community problems; soft-skills and civic-engagement: SULAM aims to enhance students' soft skills such as communication, teamwork and problem-solving through engagement in community service projects; meeting community needs through volunteerism: SULAM utilises students' expertise to address the needs of the community through volunteer activities by leveraging their knowledge and skills to contribute to the betterment of the community while gaining valuable real-work experience; creating a collaborative environment: SULAM fosters a collaborative environment between students, lecturers and the community, which encourages active collaboration among these stakeholders to promote effective problem-solving and community development; providing opportunities for external contributions: SULAM offers opportunities for agencies, corporate organisations and NGOs to contribute to the community through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), which promotes long-term benefits and positive social impacts (Eyler, 1999; KPT, 2022).

The SULAM program offers several advantages, including the practical application of knowledge, collaboration with local government agencies and the opportunity to effectively address community issues. By working together with local government agencies, students can employ their theoretical knowledge to real-world problems, thereby enhancing their understanding and skills (Hudin et al., 2018). The collaboration also enables students to contribute to the development of the community, which is a critical aspect of Service Learning. The SULAM program is a unique educational initiative aiming to provide students with a holistic learning experience. One of the key benefits of the program is that it encourages collaboration with the community, allowing students to work closely with local organisations and individuals to identify community needs and create solutions to address them. By doing so, students not only gain a deeper understanding of the community but also have the opportunity to leave a positive impact on the lives of others. Moreover, the integration of curriculum and real-world experiences is another important benefit of the SULAM program. This integration ensures that students learn not

only theoretical knowledge but also relevant practical skills for their future careers. In line with the curriculum of real-world experiences, the program prepares students for the challenges and opportunities they will face in the professional world (Guptan et al., 2021).

In addition to improving students' knowledge and skills, the SULAM program also focuses on developing soft skills, such as communication, teamwork and leadership, which are highly valued by employers and are essential for success in any field. By providing students with opportunities to develop these skills, the program helps them become well-rounded individuals who are ready to contribute positively to society (Muhamad et al., 2022). Overall, the SULAM program provides a comprehensive learning experience that goes beyond traditional classroom learning. By collaborating with the community, integrating curriculum and real-world experiences and developing soft skills, the program prepares students for success in their future careers while also making a positive impact on the community.

Service learning has been shown to have positive impacts on students, communities and higher education institutions (Eyler, 1999). For instance, the program has been found to enhance students' academic performance, civic engagement and personal development. Service learning also benefits communities by addressing their needs, promoting social responsibility and fostering partnerships between universities and communities (Maharam et al., 2019). Higher education institutions also benefit from Service learning by enhancing their reputation, promoting community engagement and providing opportunities for research and innovation. Additionally, service learning has a profound positive impact on students, enhancing their academic learning outcomes by increasing retention of course material and engagement in learning, besides fostering personal and social development through increased personal efficacy, self-understanding and moral/spiritual growth (Sandaran, 2012). Moreover, service learning provides practical experience and industry-specific skills, helping students build professional networks and become more attractive to employers, besides fostering a sense of social responsibility and commitment to community service, increasing awareness of social issues and diverse perspectives, as well as encouraging students to become more active and engaged citizens (Hatcher & Studer, 2015). Overall, service learning initiatives are experiential learning that allows students to engage in activities that directly address community needs. These

projects are designed to provide students with opportunities to apply their academic knowledge and skills to real-world situations, while also contributing to the betterment of the community.

Besides, through service learning projects, communities can benefit from a range of services and resources, including educational programs, environmental initiatives and social services. For example, students may work with local schools to provide tutoring services, develop after-school programs, or conduct educational workshops on topics like financial literacy or health and wellness. They may also work on environmental projects, such as cleaning up local parks or developing sustainable practices for local businesses (Butin, 2006). In addition, service learning projects can provide social services, which include assisting with food drives or supporting community-based health initiatives. Beyond the direct benefits to the community, service learning initiatives can also foster collaboration and partnerships between universities, students and community organisations. These partnerships can create a network of support and resources that can be leveraged to address complex societal challenges. For example, students may work with local organisations to address issues related to poverty, homelessness, or environmental degradation (Maznah et al., 2018). In doing so, they will bring their expertise, energy and innovative solutions to the table, apart from gaining a deeper understanding of community needs and developing stronger relationships with local organisations. Overall, service learning initiatives have a significant positive impact on communities and stakeholders by addressing real-world needs and fostering sustainable development. Engaging in these projects would allow students to gain valuable skills and experiences, while also contributing to the betterment of the community (Rozita et al., 2022; Ryu & Kim, 2018).

Moreover, SULAM is a program offered by Malaysian universities to connect students and community members to share knowledge. This program combines community service with structured learning opportunities, creating a pedagogical approach that enhances student development while also serving the needs of the community (Sulaiman et al., 2020). Its main aim is to produce graduates who are knowledgeable, compassionate and active, thus contributing to the nation's development and fostering a culture of mutual respect, happiness and love (KPT, 2022). The SULAM program has been introduced in Malaysian universities to engage communities in

projects and incorporate their needs in course design. It is mandatory for undergraduate programs to embed at least one designated SULAM course. In Universiti Putra Malaysia's Faculty of Agriculture, the AMBER program was developed to enhance students' soft skills and adopted as a SULAM program called "Putra Kasih Bersama Komuniti P. A. Seri Perlis II". The program focused on sustainable agriculture techniques and knowledge transfer and involved 74 students from the Bachelor of Horticulture Science, 150 community members and agency partners (Agriquest, 2020).

In addition, Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) has conducted many SULAM projects focusing on experiential learning through community engagement. This program enhances students' educational experiences while addressing community needs. For example, students from the Development Management Program have collaborated with the local community in Yan, Kedah, to implement various projects aimed at environmental sustainability. These projects included activities that promote awareness and management of local environmental issues (Nur Aili Hanim, 2023). Moreover, other SULAM projects focus on organising ecologically responsible events. Students learn about sustainable practices in event management, such as waste reduction, energy management and promoting green initiatives. The program aims to prepare students to plan and execute events that minimise environmental impact (Asmahany, 2023). In other words, UUM provides students with practical experience and contributes positively to the local community, aligning with the goals of SULAM to create socially responsible graduates who are equipped to address real-world challenges.

Furthermore, the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education is supporting the implementation of SULAM in universities to transform the mindset of students who traditionally receive degrees by completing assignments and exams in a classroom setting, detached from the real world. SULAM is considered a crucial educational concept, as it goes beyond a mere civic program and involves active learning through community service. By engaging students in community projects, universities can enhance their ability to address social and environmental issues, hence cultivating a more aware and responsive generation to complex challenges (Isa et al., 2023). Among the top Malaysian universities implementing SULAM among undergraduates include UKM, UPM, UM, USM, UTM and UUM.

## METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in this study was designed based on the data obtained from SULAM activities carried out among the students of the Environmental Administration course, namely Group A, which included 16 students divided into two groups. The first group was assigned to study the topic of Reuse, Reduce and Recycle (3R), whereas the second group focused on the topic of composting. This study aimed to explore the effectiveness of these two sustainable practices in reducing waste and promoting environmental conservation. The data collected from the study was then analysed to help draw conclusions and recommendations for future research.

The process leading up to the commencement of the SULAM project on May 16 and 22, 2023, involved several crucial steps that were meticulously undertaken by the students. Initially, the students engaged in in-depth discussions within their group, focusing on clarifying uncertainties and addressing questions related to the project. These discussions were essential in ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the project's objectives and requirements. Furthermore, the students actively interacted with the lecturer, seeking guidance and clarification to enhance their project planning. Following the discussions, the students dedicated their efforts to preparing a detailed project proposal. This proposal served as a formal document outlining the project's scope, objectives and requirements. Importantly, the proposal aimed to secure contributions from a variety of stakeholders, including companies and specific organisations, which were crucial for successfully implementing the project and intended to be used as a point of reference for the support received.

Moreover, in parallel with the proposal preparation, the students undertook the task of establishing the project's organisational chart. This organisational chart was designed to clearly define the project's structure, roles and responsibilities. By creating this chart, the students aimed to ensure a streamlined and efficient implementation of the SULAM project in Yan. The organisational chart played a vital role in facilitating coordination, communication and overall project management, ultimately contributing to the successful execution of the project in a well-organised manner (Guptan et al., 2021).

The students who engaged in the SULAM activity on 16 and 22 May 2023 visited Kampung Singkir Darat, Yan, to implement the project.

The tentative of the program is documented in Table 1. They utilised the bus service provided by Universiti Utara Malaysia for transportation. The students actively participated in the project, demonstrating their commitment to its success. They meticulously planned and prepared for the project to ensure its smooth execution. Notably, the students secured sponsors to fund the project, showcasing their entrepreneurial skills and initiative in taking ownership of the initiative. Furthermore, the students' engagement extended to liaising with the community to gather detailed information on the project's location, which reflects their consideration of the community's needs and preferences (Isa et al., 2023). This community-centered approach highlights the students' dedication to meaningful community engagement. Overall, the students excelled in the planning and execution of the SULAM project, showcasing their ability to organise, collaborate and engage effectively.

During their visit to Kampung Singkir Darat, the students shared their knowledge and insights on environmental topics with the local community. This experience provided them with valuable practical knowledge and skills for fostering personal development. For instance, the project enabled them to enhance their communication skills by interacting with individuals of varying ages within the community. Moreover, the initiative served as a platform for the students to educate the community on environmental protection practices, such as the 3R (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle) and composting, contributing to raising awareness and promoting sustainable practices within society.

To wrap up, the successful implementation of the project not only marked a significant achievement but also served as a pivotal learning opportunity for the students, offering valuable insights into the practical dimensions of environmental protection. By actively engaging in the project, the students managed to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world application, gaining a profound understanding of environmental issues in action (Sulaiman et al., 2020). Through hands-on involvement in the project, the students not only honed their practical skills but also deepened their comprehension of environmental protection concepts. This experiential learning approach allowed them to witness firsthand the impact of their actions on the environment and the community, fostering a more profound connection to the subject matter.

In essence, the project served as a transformative learning experience for the students, equipping them with practical skills, critical thinking

abilities and a heightened awareness of environmental issues (Hanum et al., 2021). By actively participating in initiatives like the SULAM project, the students not only enriched their academic knowledge but also contributed to raising awareness about the significance of environmental protection within the community. Besides empowering the students, this holistic learning experience also inspired positive change and sustainable practices in the realm of environmental conservation.

**Table 1**

*Program Tentative of SULAM Projects in Semester A222*

<b>Date</b>	<b>Time and Activity</b>
16th May 2023	6:30 a.m: Traveling from UUM to Kampung Kechil, Yan with UUM bus. 8:00 a.m: Arrival and preparation for a briefing session. 8:30 a.m: Registration with Kampung Kechil, Yan communities session. 9:00 a.m: Opening and Welcome Speech with Programme Director. 9:30 a.m: Briefing about Composting and Reduce, Recycle, Reuse (3R) with local communities. 1:00 p.m: Lunch break. 2:30 p.m: Ice-breaking session. 3:00 p.m: Demonstrate compost and 3R to local communities.
22nd May 2023	5:30 p.m: Returning to UUM. 6:30 a.m : Traveling from UUM to Kampung Kechil, Yan with UUM bus. 8:00 a.m: Arrival and preparation for composting and 3R with local communities in their respective homes by group. 1:00 p.m: Lunch break. 2:30 p.m: Independent session. 5:30 p.m: Returning to UUM.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

SULAM (Service-Learning – University for Society) is a pedagogical approach that integrates community service with academic learning

(Halim et al., 2023). In recent years, this approach has gained popularity in higher education institutions as a means to engage students in real-world problem-solving and foster civic responsibility. The SULAM projects at Kampung Singkir Darat, Yan, located in Kedah, serve as an excellent example of service learning in action. Through these projects, students can apply their knowledge and skills to address social issues in the local community. These projects also tackled a range of community issues such as access to waste management and food composting among local communities in rural areas. This article explores the experiences and insights gained from the SULAM projects and highlights the benefits of incorporating service learning into higher education curriculums.

One of the key advantages of SULAM in higher education is that it enhances students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Hanum et al., 2021). By engaging in real-world problem-solving, students learn how to apply their academic knowledge in practical situations and develop a more nuanced understanding of complex social issues (Rozita et al., 2022). In addition, SULAM provides students with opportunities to develop important soft skills such as teamwork, communication and leadership (Maznah et al., 2022).

The SULAM project in this course of Environmental Administration (GMJT3113) for Group A involves two groups. Their targets are to share knowledge about environmental awareness with the community comprising the local public in rural areas.

**Table 2**

*Group and activity of SULAM Projects in Semester A222*

<b>Group</b>	<b>Group Name and Place</b>	<b>Place</b>	<b>Activity</b>
1	Reduce, Reuse, Recycle (3R)	Kampung Singkir Darat, Yan, Kedah.	Reduce, reuse, and recycle solid waste for domestic use among local communities.
2	Komuniti Sifar Sisa: Pengkomposan	Kampung Singkir Darat, Yan, Kedah.	Foster community's awareness and sensitivity to environmental hygiene.

The first group, as shown in Figure 1, completed their SULAM project by introducing the importance of environmental education to

the local community of Kampung Singkir Darat in Yan. The group's program named "Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle (3R)" aimed to embed the responsibility of environmental preservation and conservation with the locals. The 3R project focused on sharing knowledge about waste management and emphasised the importance of reducing, reusing and recycling solid waste for domestic use. Besides, it was introduced to educate the local people about environmental hygiene and the impacts that may happen if they do not take care of the environment. The activities included ice-breaking sessions, informal explanations of 3R, the use of recycled materials and reflections. All of these activities were beneficial and helped educate the villagers about the components of recycling and its significance in daily life to decrease environmental pollution. In summary, the 3R project was a great initiative that helped promote environmental education and awareness among the local community while also highlighting the significance of waste management and recycling in reducing environmental pollution.

The 3R project was a comprehensive and effective initiative aiming at promoting environmental education and encouraging the principles of reducing, reusing and recycling solid waste for household purposes. The project had a significant impact on the local community's approach to waste management, as it instilled a sense of accountability for environmental preservation and conservation among community members. Through the project's various activities and campaigns, community members became more aware of the importance of environmental cleanliness and the repercussions of failing to care for the environment. As a result, the community's overall attitude towards waste management improved and they were more willing to adopt sustainable waste management practices. The success of the 3R project demonstrates the power of community-based initiatives in promoting environmental sustainability and generating positive impacts on the environment.

The second group of Environmental Administration, as outlined in Figure 2, has completed the SULAM project to promote environmental awareness and responsibility among the local community in Kampung Singkir Darat, Yan. Through their program named "*Komuniti Sifar Sisa: Pengkomposan*", the group has introduced the concept of composting food waste as a means to encourage the community's sensitivity towards environmental hygiene and the impact of neglecting it. The project has received a lot of positive feedback from the locals

who have welcomed the students with open arms. The program also involved group activities from house to house, allowing the villagers to share their knowledge and experiences and learn about the importance of maintaining cleanliness in the environment, particularly in food management. It aimed to encourage the community to apply these practices in their daily lives to ensure a cleaner and safer environment in the future.

Additionally, to promote environmental cleanliness and sustainability, an initiative was introduced centring on food waste composting. The program involved educating community members about the benefits of composting and how it could be used to reduce food waste and improve environmental hygiene. The positive reception from the locals demonstrates the success of the initiative. It showed that community members recognised the importance of environmental cleanliness and sustainable practices, as well as were willing to adopt these practices for the benefit of a safer future environment. The efforts of this group in implementing this program are praiseworthy. Their commitment to environmental responsibility and community empowerment was reflected in the success of the initiative. The program not only contributed to environmental sustainability but also helped build stronger communities by fostering engagement and knowledge sharing. Overall, the project has been a great success, and the efforts of this group are highly commendable rendering their hard work, effort and team building among them.

Nevertheless, according to the previous activities about the SULAM project in UKM (Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia), this project is an educational program that involves students in credit-bearing service activities to meet community needs. Through this program, students reflect on their experiences, leading to a deeper understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline and enhanced personal values and civic responsibility (SULAM UKM, 2021). The primary objective of the SULAM project is to produce well-rounded students capable of critical and creative problem-solving, fostering direct student involvement with the local community and creating a network of cooperation between the community, universities, industry and NGOs. The SULAM project has implemented various models of service learning, such as the Capstone project-based learning, Service Learning Internship Model and Undergraduate Community-based Action Research Model, all designed to enhance students' skills, understanding and preparation for employment (Amran & Che Daud, 2022).

While in UiTM (Universiti Teknologi Mara), various projects have implemented SULAM, one of which included the “*Program Komuniti Budaya dan Etnik Bidayuh Borneo*” carried out by students from the Faculty of Computer Science and Information Technology. Furthermore, in collaboration with 33 cadet officers from Kor SISPA UCS, the disaster relief program “*Bantuan Asas Kecemasan*” was organised by the *Kor Siswa Siswi Pertahanan Awam* (Kor SISPA) of UiTM’s *Cawangan Selangor* (UCS) under the SULAM initiative (SULAM UiTM, 2023). The SULAM project at Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) aimed to equip university students with the skills and knowledge to become public intellectuals, accountable for solving society’s problems and improving people’s lives. This initiative focused on providing students with a learning environment that combines theory and practical problem-solving in the community. The project integrated real-world experiences, providing students with opportunities to develop professionally and gain other benefits (Maznah et al., 2022). In UiTM’s School of Civil Engineering, the SULAM project became an integral part of the Engineers in Society (EIS) course. This project-based learning approach addresses community needs through complex engineering problem-solving. It emphasises the importance of engineering ethics and the engineer’s duty to safeguard public safety while considering the economic, social, cultural, environmental and sustainability consequences (Maznah et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the SULAM projects at USM (Universiti Sains Malaysia) aim to promote social innovation and knowledge transfer to support USM’s APEX Agenda. These projects are designed to empower the underprivileged and enhance USM’s reputation as a leading knowledge powerhouse. The projects align with the Ministry of Higher Education’s efforts to position universities as knowledge transfer hubs for the community’s benefit. USM’s Social Innovation & Knowledge Transfer Unit emphasises the importance of innovation in improving the community’s quality of life. By utilising the university’s knowledge and expertise developed through research, USM aims to assist people in adopting new technologies, managing finances effectively and addressing community challenges. USM has been collaborating with various agencies and government entities to implement programs covering socio-economic development, education, human capital enhancement and community engagement. In 2022, a significant investment of RM18,118,404.90 has been allocated for 25 programs/projects (SULAM USM, 2023).

In brief, SULAM is a powerful pedagogical approach that can potentially transform higher education. The projects of SULAM at Kampung Singkir Darat Yan, Kedah demonstrate the advantages of incorporating SULAM into higher education curriculums, including enhanced critical thinking and problem-solving skills, the development of important soft skills and increased civic responsibility, as well as community engagement among adult students. Nevertheless, each university in Malaysia has its objectives and goals for undergraduate programs, which include SULAM projects. The aim is to provide students with hands-on experience and equip them with skills that will be useful in their future careers (Halim et al., 2023). As such, SULAM should be considered an essential component of higher education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Figure 1**

#### *Group 1 Activity*



### **Figure 2**

#### *Group 2 Activity*



## **CONCLUSION**

The Environmental Administration (GMJT3113) Group A class has worked with two groups to complete their SULAM projects. These projects aimed to address various environmental issues and

target different groups. The successful completion of these projects is a significant achievement for the students and their respective universities. The projects have helped to improve the knowledge and skills of the students, enabling them to become exceptional graduates and responsible citizens. It is hoped that these projects will also contribute to the development of renowned centres of excellence in environmental studies. Overall, the efforts of the students involved in these projects are commendable, and their contributions towards environmental sustainability have been highly appreciated.

In addition, SULAM is a powerful pedagogical approach with the potential to transform higher education into a better move (Amran et al., 2022). The pilot projects of SULAM at Yan, Kedah have demonstrated numerous advantages, including enhanced critical thinking and problem-solving skills, the development of important soft skills and increased civic responsibility and community engagement among adult students. By implementing SULAM, higher education institutions can provide a more holistic and effective learning experience for students (Maznah et al., 2018). The emphasis on critical thinking and problem-solving equips students with the necessary skills to navigate complex challenges in their academic and professional lives (Ashikin et al., 2021). Meanwhile, the development of soft skills, such as communication, collaboration and adaptability, further enhances students' overall competence and prepares them for success in various contexts (Straus & Eckenrode, 2014). Moreover, SULAM encourages civic responsibility and community engagement among adult students. By integrating real-world issues and projects into the curriculum, students are not only exposed to practical applications of their learning but also actively contribute to their communities. This fosters a sense of social responsibility and instils values of active citizenship (Cheuk et al., 2020).

Furthermore, SULAM, which stands for 'Service Learning Malaysia - University for Society', is a holistic approach to education that emphasises the development of various skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, communication and teamwork, among others. Unlike traditional lecture-based instruction, SULAM provides students with hands-on learning experiences that enable them to apply the knowledge they gained in real-life situations (Eyler, 1999). This approach not only enhances students' learning but also prepares them for the challenges and opportunities they will face in their academic,

professional and civic lives. By embracing SULAM, higher education institutions can provide their students with a comprehensive education that goes beyond the acquisition of knowledge. Students who undergo SULAM training are better equipped to handle complex problems, work collaboratively with diverse groups of people and communicate effectively in a variety of contexts (Maznah et al., 2018). These skills are highly valued in today's rapidly evolving world, where adaptability and flexibility are essential for success.

One of the primary difficulties faced by students and lecturers is financial constraints. For instance, in the case of Kampung Singkir Darat, Yan, where the SULAM project was implemented, the location was quite far from UUM (Universiti Utara Malaysia), and the costs of travel and food could be quite high. This can make it challenging for students to participate in the project and can also limit the scope of the project. Another issue that arose was the difficulty in finding sponsorship from companies. Most SULAM projects require funding to cover the costs of materials, transportation and other expenses. However, it can be challenging for students to secure sponsorship, especially if they lack the necessary networking skills or if companies are not interested in supporting their projects. Furthermore, issues with building relationships and rapport with the community can also pose a challenge. In some cases, not all locals may be friendly or welcoming to socialise with students, which can make working together difficult. Lastly, the maturity level and self-confidence of students involved in service learning projects are also important factors to consider. Without proper guidance and support, students may struggle to navigate the challenges associated with community engagement, which can affect their confidence and maturity levels (Ashikin et al., 2021).

Despite these challenges, the SULAM project remains a valuable initiative that provides students with unique learning opportunities and helps to address community problems. With the right support and resources, students and lecturers can work together to overcome these challenges and make a positive difference in their communities. Also, to overcome this situation, students and lecturers could sit together and have thorough discussions. Both parties can carefully plan and structure SULAM projects to maximise efficiency and minimise costs. This includes creating detailed Gantt charts, dividing tasks among team members and leveraging technology to reduce expenses.

Students can also leverage in-kind contributions and resources from the community and university to reduce the need for direct funding; for instance, utilising the UUM bus service.

Finally, SULAM projects in higher education have the potential to bring about significant positive change in the community (Ramlie & Nor, 2021). However, to make the most of these projects, several improvement recommendations can be implemented. One of the most critical aspects is securing adequate financial support. Grants and partnerships with external organisations can help alleviate financial constraints and ensure the sustainability of projects. This financial backing will enable universities to invest in the necessary resources and infrastructure to execute the projects successfully.

Apart from financial support, fostering stronger collaboration between universities, students, and community partners is crucial for the success of SULAM projects. Clear guidelines and assessment frameworks must be developed to align project objectives with learning outcomes. This will help ensure that the projects are designed to provide valuable learning experiences for students while benefiting the community. Project planning and management strategies must also be enhanced to ensure that the projects are efficiently executed within the allocated budget (Johan et al., 2022). Additionally, promoting meaningful community engagement to address real societal needs effectively is essential. These projects must be designed to bring about sustainable change in the community by addressing the root causes of social problems (Isa et al., 2022). By strengthening financial backing, improving collaboration and implementing structured guidelines, SULAM projects can achieve greater impact (Ramlie & Nor, 2021). These projects can provide students with valuable learning experiences while also benefiting the community. Ultimately, the success of these projects depends on the commitment and dedication of all stakeholders involved.

In conclusion, SULAM should be regarded as an essential component of higher education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Its comprehensive approach to education provides students with the skills and qualities necessary for success in today's world. By embracing SULAM, higher education institutions can better prepare students for the challenges and opportunities they will encounter in their academic, professional and civic lives.

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