

**The Role of University Community Engagement Programmes
Towards Promoting Social Responsibility Among Students: A Case Study of
Asia Pacific University College of Technology and Innovation of Malaysia**

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Abstract

This study intends to discuss the behavior of students and how they stack up on the issues of ethics. The issues, inevitably, have been evolving around plagiarism, copied homework, purchased term papers, or cheating during examinations. In order to articulate the importance of educating students in tertiary level on social responsibility, a good starting point would be to embrace the concept advocated in the "Six Pillars of Characters" identified by Josephson Institute of Ethics (<http://www.josephsoninstitute.org>).

UCTI has been responding aggressively to this call by designing Community Engagement initiatives in its annual student's activities. These endeavours are aimed towards promoting social responsibility among students through development and inculcation of the six pillars of characters, namely: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship (Schermerhorn, 2010). This causal study, hence, is designed to assess the role of UCTI's Community Engagement Programmes to construct the Six Pillars of Characters towards promoting social responsibility.

Data were solicited through semi-structured survey interviews with 100 students from five UCTI's Community Engagement Programmes recently organised in rural areas of Malaysia. The respondents are expected to give their personal views based on their experiences gained during the community engagement programmes and their expectations and suggestions on how the

programmes can contribute towards inculcating the Six Pillars of Character. Our expectation is to establish positive developments in the characters of the students as in avoiding plagiarism, copied homework, purchased term papers, or cheating in examinations. The findings of this study would also be used in assessing the validity of the concept advocated in the Six Pillars of Character by Josephson Institute of Ethics.

KEYWORDS: Social Responsibility, Six Pillars of Characters, Josephson Institute of Ethics, Community Engagement Programme

Introduction

Community engagement programmes have been adopted as prominent co-curricular activities for many universities. Of late, university's roles have been questioned by stakeholders in terms of their contribution to the society. What are the contributions of the graduates to the society once they have completed their tertiary education? Many universities have introduced policies that incorporate community engagement programmes among their students as part of the core elements in promoting good values, image and quality. From Malaysian perspective, many Malaysian universities have now realised that it is imperative to consider these programmes as part of their contributions to the society. This contribution eventually adds value by invigorating soft skills development among university graduates. In view of this imperative, Asia Pacific University College of Technology and Innovation (UCTI) has seriously committed its resources to design academic programmes that will blend well with the composition of its eco-system that includes students, lecturers, community, and industry (Edrak & Hambali, 2010) . In securing a sustainable educational development, it is undeniably important to equip university students with skills for building a sustainable society as part of core competency for professional graduates (Kagawa, 2007). Clearly, community service represents an integral part of life for both students and the community. Recognising this integral relationship, irrefutably, service to the community has been routinely included in mission statements of most colleges and universities (Hellman et al, 2006). Moving along this principle, universities as part of the community have responded positively by formulating adaptable programmes and incorporating curricular and co-curricular programmes with goals of

increasing students' awareness on public issues and community needs. These initiatives have helped to foster the development of ethical leadership and encouraged students to assume a lifelong commitment to social responsibility (Bringle, 2003; Kendall, 1990; Fenzel & Peyrot, 2005). These initiatives also manage to provide opportunities for students to connect their personal goals with their academic studies and to apply what they are learning to real-world situations (Ngai, 2006) and reflect institutional practices and student behaviours (McClenney, 2007). Students are consciously required to establish themselves as part of the community where their academic backgrounds will benefit the community. This will also promote an interdisciplinary approach to academic study and break down barriers between school and community (Ngai, 2006) which need to foster this approach through intentional design of syllabi, in-and-out assignment, assessments, and other educational experiences (McClenney, 2007). One school of thought has realised the importance of the values of student's behaviour by constructing a conceptual framework called the "Six Pillars of Characters" (Josephson Institute, 2009).

From here on, the questions would be: What will be the outcome of the students when they have participated in community engagement programmes? Findings by some research have revealed that, after indulging themselves with community engagement programmes, students develop positive developments in their characters as in avoiding plagiarism, evading copied homework, rejecting purchased term papers, or avoiding cheating on exams (Schermerhorn, 2010). University responsibilities are not only to provide knowledge and educate but also having a civic responsibility to engage and enrich community (Bacon, 2002; Shannon & Wang 2010). Nonetheless, beyond the initiatives to control for initial differences between service-learning and control groups, few researchers have examined how the influence of participants' characteristics affects these outcomes. For example, participants have been reported to become less racist (Myer-Lipton, 1996; Mitchell, 2008), less prone to stereotyping (Elyer & Giles, 1999; Giles & Elyer, 1994; Mitchell, 2008) and are more aware of social inequality (Rhoads, 1998; Mitchell, 2008) as a result of service learning experiences from such community engagement programmes. The value of service learning in enhancing academic skills, in increasing awareness of the diversity of humanity, and in fostering students' social commitment is thus justified empirically (Ngai, 2006). Some research heralds traditional service learning, i.e. learning programmes for their transformative nature-producing students who are more tolerant, altruistic, and culturally aware, who are stronger in leadership, and who albeit marginally earn higher grade point averages and have stronger critical thinking than their non-service learning counterparts (Austin & Sax, 1998; Densmore, 2000; Elyer & Giles, 1999; Kezar,

2002; Markus, Howard & King, 1993; Mitchell, 2008). On the same note, these outcomes need to embrace multicultural curriculum in order to develop integrative knowledge about self and others among the students (Daniel, 2010). Community service learning can also be regarded as a “vehicle” for connecting students and institution to their communities and the larger social good, while at the same time instilling in students the values of community and social responsibility (Neururer & Rhoads, 1998; Mitchell, 2008). There are many successful benefits that can be gained by developing these university-community engagement programmes. The benefits include new insights and learning, better informed community practice, better job employment and career development, improved quality and learning, additional information and more frequent publications and more value of internationalisation (Davies, 1996; Landry & Amara, 1998; Keller & Goldstein, 1999; Mead et al, 1999; Amabile et al, 2001; Hollies, 2001; Buys & Bursnall, 2007). All these benefits are essential elements for students especially when they want to enter into the labour market. Some evidence indicated that the social responsibility attributes that the managers or future managers have gained during their tertiary education will drive them to stimulate a responsible social behavior in their company (Kletz, 2009).

Research Framework

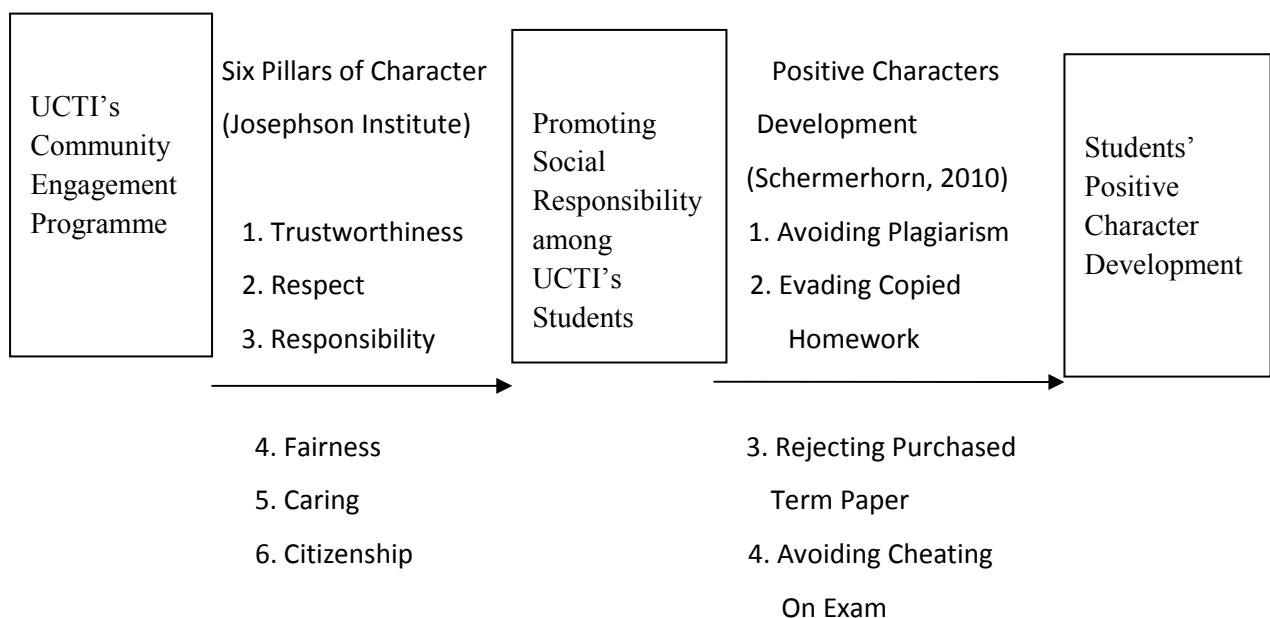
In this research, conducted through UCTI’s Community Engagement Programmes, we have taken concerted efforts to establish students’ perception on social responsibility. The research on UCTI’s Engagement Programme was designed to investigate the effectiveness of universities’ engagement programmes in promoting social responsibility among students. This research framework was designed by utilising the “Six Pillars of Characters” as outlined by Josephson Institute of Ethic (see www.josephsoninstitute.org) namely, trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship (Josephson Institute, 2009).

This study extends the values into finding the outcomes by instilling the Positive Character Development (Schermerhorn, 2010) among students. This study attempts to establish the relationship that to become socially responsible individual, students must first possess the Six Pillars of Characters and once they have acquired all the Six Pillars of Character, subsequently Positive Character Development will be embedded in their personal traits. Through UCTI’s Community

Engagement Programmes, these elements of Social Responsibility can be promoted and hence may enable students to become good citizens through the development of positive characters.

In this research, the characters of attributes indicated by Josephson Institute (2007) were used as the variables elements for our survey. Hence, this study leverages on UCTI’s Community Engagement Programmes to investigate the effects of Social Responsibility towards developing Positive Character Development. This study also assumes that Positive Characters Development variables addressed by Schermerhorn (2010) are the elements that are necessary in developing student’s Positive Characters. The research framework of this study is depicted in Table 1.

Table 1: Framework for UCTI’s Student’s Positive Character Development.



According to Schermerhorn (2010), there are 4 variables for Positive Characters Development. The variables are avoiding plagiarism, evading copied homework, rejecting purchased term paper, and avoiding cheating on exam. All these 10 variables from the “Six Pillars of Character” and “Positive Character Development” were be used in this study to find out the outcome of the research. The questionnaire was constructed based on UCTI students’ perception and understanding of the objectives and the outcome of the UCTI Community Engagement Programmes.

Methodology

The purpose of the study was to analyse the relationship between social responsibility and positive character development for UCTI's Community Engagement Programmes participants. Data for this analysis were derived from semi-structured interviews that have been conducted among the participants of the programmes. The interviewing session was conducted two months after the completion of UCTI's Community Engagement Programme. The focus groups for this research have been sampled from UCTI students. UCTI students were selected from diverse personal and academic background such as nationality and academic programmes pursued at UCTI. The students were also selected from varying academic levels namely: Diploma, Foundation, Year 1, Year 2, and Final year. In terms of the economic background of the family, both Malaysian and foreign students, come from either medium or high income family. With reference to their demographic background, the majority of their parents are currently working as top-level government officers, doctors, business person and some other professionals. For this study, a selected sample was taken from more than 100 UCTI students who have participated in UCTI's Community Engagement Programmes.

The semi-structured interviews were designed to study participants' awareness and development in their social responsibility after they have participated in the community engagement programmes. The study was also intended to evaluate students' character development in their studies after they have inculcated the element of social responsibility. These semi-structured interviews include general and common questions in order to get the same response and comments from the respondents. This research instruments were designed in the form of self-recording interview and were divided into three sections, namely; Social Responsibility, Positive Characters Development, and Open-Ended questions. The interview questions consisted of 14 open-ended questions which reflected the factors on Social responsibility and Positive Characters Development, and 1 open-ended question for suggestions and comments. All interview questions were designed to obtain a "Yes" or "No" answers, reasoning and justification based on students' awareness and perception, and an open-ended question to receive any suggestion or comment from all respondents.

The perceived honest feedbacks received from UCTI students and community on social responsibility and its effects on positive character improvement served as input data. These data were significantly analysed to assess the Role of UCTI Community Engagement Programmes in promoting Social responsibility among students from Malaysian perspective. All the feedbacks from the students were recorded in written form.

Six procedures were adhered to in completing this study. First, a literature review was performed that led to a review and presentation of the Community Engagement or Community Service Programme in Institute of Higher Learning. Subsequently, the element of Social Responsibility was deliberated in the literature review. The review focused on invigorating the elements of Six Pillars of Character and their outcome in the form of positive character development through community engagement programmes. The procedure also involved reviewing respondents' acceptance of the community engagement programmes, their feedback and comments, and the impacts in stimulating social responsibility that eventually lead to the achievement of the objectives of the study. Additionally, the literature review served as a framework for the study in developing new findings.

Secondly, the study determines the sources of secondary data to be used in the selection of relevant information to establish social responsibility in the community engagement programmes. Secondary data are selected based on the area of the study so that the data from the sample can be included in the interview survey. After completion of the interview survey, all the data are compiled and validated for analysis. The survey was expected to receive a high percentage of response from the students and the members of the community due to the development of close relationship derived from the implementation of the Community Engagement Programmes. Thirdly, the interview questions were conducted among lecturers who were involved in the programmes to obtain their feedback on the objective of the survey, the analysis process, and to clarify the factors required to obtain the findings. Fourthly, the interviews were individually conducted on UCTI students after they have participated in the Community Engagement Programmes. Fifth, the results were assessed and the data for final finding were prepared. Sixth, the results were ready for the final presentation in the conference. Last but not least, the result would be further evaluated so that it can be set as a point of reference for future studies.

Analysis

100 students were invited for the interview sessions. The students were the participants in UCTI's Community Engagement Programmes at 5 communities namely, Kg. Batu Laut, Kuala Selangor, Kg. Makmur, Pekan, Kg. Relau, Penang, Felda Mempaga 1, Bentong and a School Adoption Programme at Bandar Baru Bangi, Kajang. The sessions were conducted in an auditorium in which 40 students turned up. From the data collected, we found out that the participants were from Malaysia, Yemen,

Indonesia, Maldives, Botswana, Tanzania, and some other Asian and Gulf nations. The students have participated willingly and voluntarily in this session and there had been no monetary inducement involved. Hence, it is safe to presume that the feedbacks given by the students are considered to be honest and positive. The students also provided sufficient justifications for their YES and NO answers. The interview questions were divided into 3 sections namely Social Responsibility, Positive Characters Development, and open-ended question to accommodate additional personal viewpoints. The variables for Social Responsibility that have been evaluated were Trustworthiness, Respect, Responsibility, Fairness, Caring, and Good Citizen. Meanwhile, for Positive Characters Development, the variables tested during the interview session were Avoiding Plagiarism, Evading Copied Homework, Rejecting Purchased Term Paper, and Avoiding Cheating on Examination. All these variables were analysed and empirically validated within the theoretical framework. From this point of view, the answers were regarded as significant due to participants' honesty and knowledge in the subject matters. The summary of the YES and NO answers are summarised as per Table 2 below.

Table 2: Summary of Response Analysis

Section A - Social Responsibility

	Attributes	YES	NO	% YES	% NO
Q1	Social Responsibility	33	7	82.5	17.5
Q2	Trustworthiness	33	7	82.5	17.5
Q3	Respect	34	6	85.0	15.0
Q4	Responsibility	33	7	82.5	17.5
Q5	Fairness	32	8	80.0	20.0
Q6	Caring	36	4	90.0	10.0
Q7	Good Citizen	36	4	90.0	10.0

Section B - Positive Development of Character

Q1	Avoiding Plagiarism	36	4	90.0	10.0
Q2	Evading Copied Homework	38	2	95.0	5.0
Q3	Rejecting Purchased Term paper	33	7	82.5	17.5
Q4	Avoiding Cheating on Exams	36	4	90.0	10.0

In summation, our analysis has found that most of the students have answered YES instead of NO to the interview questions given. All answers indicated that more than 80% of the students have answered YES (see table 2). In question 1 for Social Responsibility question, most of the students were aware of the objective of the programmes. The objective was to promote social responsibility among the students. In this question, 82.5% of the students have agreed that the UCEP programme will be able to promote social responsibility after they have participated in the programmes. From the overall findings, students have indicated that social interaction with the society, culture acculturation, contribution to the society, and team work were the main contributing elements that will assist the programmes to promote social responsibility among the students. The objective of the question was also to examine students understanding on Trustworthiness. In this question 82.5% of the students have answered YES with an understanding that UCEP programmes will be able to promote Trustworthiness among students. Two of the major elements that have been highlighted by the students were social cohesiveness and knowledge sharing. In term of social cohesiveness, the students expressed their thoughts by mentioning the importance of interaction in the society, to get acquainted with new friends, team working spirit, family ties, and task and responsibility. In knowledge sharing, the elements of communication, time, and sharing experiences can be assessed as the factors are essentially required in promoting trustworthiness. In Question 3, 85% of the students have agreed that the Respect element can be promoted in the UCEP programme. From the data that have been gathered, this study has revealed that due to the element of differences, it is essential to promote Respect among students. The differences can be categorised either by family background, nationality, ages, level of experience and knowledge, or values in the society and friendship. Through this analysis, the students were able to create the attribute of tolerance from the elements that have been indicated. From this point of view, student will eventually be able to inculcate the spirit of Respect among them. In question 4, the objective of the question was to examine the value of responsibility among students after they have participated in the programmes. 82.5% of the students agreed that UCEP will be able to promote responsibility among them. This finding was the evident of students support on the activities in the programmes which have been designed to make them work diligently, interact with the society, know their background and cultural differences and test them in problem solving activities. These initiatives have helped them to exercise responsibilities among themselves as well as the communities they were engaged in.

The other variable that has been investigated was Fairness. The question was designed to ask the students whether UCEP will be able to promote fairness among students. From our analysis, 80% of

the students answered YES and this percentage is the lowest from all the questions. The students have expressed their opinion by addressing the concept of equality, justice, sharing, feeling different and unique based on different culture and background. In question 6, the question was related to the concept of Caring that can be instilled among students. From the analysis of available data, it was indicated that question 6 and 7 managed to generate the highest percentage with 90% having answered YES. In question 6, the view of the students were mainly focused on the issue of sense-of-belonging and togetherness, interaction with the society, establishing a relationship, team working, and respect with others. Last but not least, question 7, the core of the “Six Pillars of Characters” that we would like to examine among UCEP’s students. From this finding, the students who agreed with the questions have described their opinion in view of their roles as students, norms and values, human nature, and cultural background. In summing up section A, this study may conclude that UCTI’s Community Engagement Programmes are able to promote all the “Six Pillars of Characters” with the major variables being the differences in family and cultural background, social interaction, team working, and sharing.

In part B, the next phase of the study was generated in order to investigate further if all the “Six Pillars of Characters” could be inculcated among the students after they have participated in the programmes. In our research framework, 4 crucial areas of Positive Development of Characters were identified for students of Institutions of Higher Learning (IHLs). The focus areas of the questions for positive character development are avoiding plagiarism, evading copying other student’s homework, rejecting purchased assignment or project, and avoiding cheating in examination. In this interview session, the questions were designed in a positive light to lead the students to provide honest justifications. From this analysis, all the questions for the variables that have answered YES lay within the range of 82.5% to 95%. In summary, student’s perceptions were consistent with the research framework of which the UCTI’s Community Engagement Programmes are able to promote social responsibility through the element of Six Pillars of Character. This, eventually, leads to Positive characters Development while studying in IHLs.

Limitation

The sampling for this study is focused on UCTI students who were participating in 5 UCTI Community Engagement Programmes. Hence, the findings only reflect the impact of the programme on UCTI

students' Six Pillars of Character and Positive Characters Development skills without any due regards to other focused groups from other universities and communities. Out of 100 students called for the interview, we managed to receive responses from 40 students. From the findings of this preliminary analysis, a bigger dimension of variables for each Six Pillars of Characters can be constructed. The study can extract the elements which are being discussed and expand the research framework into a bigger scale. From this point of view, quantitative method approach can be conducted by quantifying all the dimension of variables of Six Pillars of Character from UCTI perspective. Apparently, in term of accepting the research framework, hypotheses can be developed where relationship and correlation testing with the demographic factors can be further analysed. This triangulation research method would be able to discover the best outcome and confirm the hypotheses by accepting the framework. It is hoped that this outcome can be used as a point of reference for further research by other Malaysian IHLs.

Conclusion

From this analysis, all the variables of Six Pillars of Characters and Positive Characters of Development can be applied to promote social responsibility among students. In our sample, majority of the students are International students. These students choose to study abroad due to various factors. From our personal questions about their family background, most of the students originate from family backgrounds that are either involved in business or holding high government positions. Differences in family background and cultural attributes could also be one of the attributes for this positive outcome. Meanwhile, for Malaysian students, they also originate from different ethnics coming from different states within Malaysia with diverse cultural background. Some of the feedbacks from our open-ended questions were their expression of happiness for being involved in such programmes. Generally, the participating students would like to participate more in future UCTI's Community Engagement Programmes. In term of their personal characters, they are more committed and focused in their studies, being friendlier and have generated a sense of belonging to the university and the community. In conclusion, we may conclude that the UCTI's community Engagement Programmes would be able to promote social responsibility among the students.

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