

# RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT AND AWARENESS OF LIFELONG LEARNING PROGRAMS IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES

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## Abstract

This paper aims to examine the relationship between the people residing in the vicinity of community colleges with lifelong learning program run by the community colleges. The study is focused on increasing awareness of the local community on lifelong learning programs. Awareness in this study was measured by the program as a donation, volunteer program, welfare and free short course. The results showed the program of "*free short course*" has the strongest positive effect on the awareness of lifelong learning programs while the "*donation*" has the low effect on the public consciousness. In addition, demographic and other factors also give an impact in the relationship between awareness and lifelong learning programs.

**Keywords:** Community involvement, awareness of lifelong learning programs

## 1.0 Introduction

Community Colleges in Malaysia, which is under the Malaysian Ministry of Education, will be the institutions that provide trainings and build skills needed at all levels to the society. These institutions provide opportunities through technical and vocational education for many people who are either interested in pursuing their post-secondary education prior to entering workforce or students dropped out of formal education.

More Community Colleges are being planned in different phases of the Ninth Malaysia Plan (9MP) to open up more opportunities for local communities to meet the main objective of Community Colleges, namely the commitment for knowledge sharing and capacity building.

As stated by Susan Allen-Gil et al. (2005), within the higher education field, the success learning approaches included learning through dialogue and collaboration with local communities. Besides that, is place-based learning, through direct observation and interaction with immediate, natural systems and human communities. The learning process which combines theories and internship (e.g. engaging directly in works related to agricultural landscape, having field trips or study tours, and taking part in a semester-long service internship) can improve students' ability to interact with local communities and increase their awareness on the importance of natural preservation.

These activities are adopted from the learning system used at higher education institutions abroad after being tailored to Malaysian customs and needs. It is worth noting that to raise communities' awareness on the importance of lifelong learning education, the Malaysian government is seeking to promote Community Colleges.

## **2.0 Problem Statement**

Lifelong learning refers to a concept aiming at creating active citizens and social equality through both formal and informal means, and is not subjected to temporal and spatial constraints. Third Outline Perspective Plan (2001-2010) promoted the significance of lifelong learning to improve knowledge and to build skills of local communities. Lifelong learning approach is applied by the Higher Education Institutions through distance education, flexible education, recognition of work experience, and short courses.

Long-distance education has existed in many countries for years and has been regarded as a model of education that can promote lifelong learning. This approach encourages many people to continue their education regardless of their age and gender, and without limitations of time and place. The main target groups are local communities, like working adults, housewives, and senior citizens who want to contribute to the country, to improve their knowledge, and learn different skills. Funding allocation for education to develop human capital under the 9MP in Malaysia amounted RM45.15 billion. Of this amount, a total of RM11.27 billion was allocated to support lifelong learning.

Based on the statistics from Community College Department, short course participants over the past 10 years have reached 1.3 million people who engaged in various activities conducted by Community Colleges. For example, Corporate Social Responsibility by collaborating with local communities. Given this fact, the management of Community Colleges should know how to increase participants' interests to engage in other useful activities.

Previous research focused more on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) than considering whether the community's involvement can influence people's awareness of lifelong learning or not. Many studies already discussed activities involving the community, donation, employees volunteering, non-partnership and partnership, and so on. However, these studies did not investigate free short courses conducted by Community Colleges in collaboration with local communities.

However, in my opinion, the number of short course participants should be followed up with efforts to reach out more people to be aware of advantages of lifelong learning. Awareness has been a major goal of institutions. Even though the Community Colleges well-establish, but there are no proof to show the activities from community involvement can develop the awareness for lifelong learning programs. The management of Community Colleges has a role and commitment to manage the short courses for community. Thus, this study adds value to the literature by understanding relationship between community involvement and awareness of lifelong learning programs based on Community Colleges context.

### **3.0 Objective**

The objectives of the research project are divided into two categories as the following:

#### **3.1 General Objectives**

To know to what extent activities engaging community influence community's awareness towards lifelong learning programs in Community Colleges.

#### **3.2 Specific Objectives**

- i. To understand which activities that influences the community's awareness towards lifelong learning.
- ii. To assess the relationship between community's involvement and increased awareness towards lifelong learning programs.
- iii. To know the most important activities in community's involvement that can result in more awareness towards lifelong learning programs.

### **4.0 Literature Review**

This study investigated which activities or projects initiated by Community Colleges can influence local communities to take part in short courses. Lo'pez (2013) said that there are five principles of instructional practices. The first one is the common experience which refers to pedagogical innovation designed to cultivate a common intellectual conversation across the campus. This enables the community to communicate properly with the organization about lifelong learning.

Common experience also aims to enhance students' participation in the intellectual-academic life and to foster a sense of belonging across the campus. In other words, the common experience encourages people as members of local communities to change their behavior to be more positive, to contribute to social policy-making, to build a scientific understanding, to connect local and environmental issues to global issues, and to re-shape values for the purpose of sustainable education.

The objective of this research is to analyse which activities conducted by community college can give the high impact to the community. Customers' involvement is important in service production and its possible effects on the quality of service delivery as well as customers' satisfaction (Dadfar et al., 2013). However, it has different effects on the quality of service produced depending on the situation and the nature of services offered. In this case, activities which involve the community are important to get high impact from community's awareness.

Sustainable, effective, and partnership-oriented service-learning projects are difficult to design and execute, but they are extremely effective at enhancing students' awareness, learning, and development as global citizens (Hogner & Kenworthy, 2010). In this context, the measurement depends on the community's involvement to get the result of awareness. So, the design must be appropriate with the community to obtain the high impact of lifelong learning.

Another research from Millican & Bournier (2011) on the recent educational context indicated an acceleration of the expectations placed on higher education to develop socially responsible citizens and to create graduates who will be able to solve complex problems of an increasingly complex world. From lifelong learning programmes provided by Community Colleges, it is expected that the community can

have their own creativity to solve the problems through involvement, especially short courses.

This research focused on activities involving the community rather than on any factors that influence the increased awareness of the community. Recent studies outlined by Hansen & Spitzeck (2011) suggested that short-term activities through volunteering schemes can measure the awareness. Community involvement programs are large and diverse programs with social and environmental objectives.

According to Mele & Mammoser (2011), community's support included **"Giving back to the community"** through charity and donations, such as providing free tests for people suffering from diabetes and supporting the One-on-One program of the Midtown Educational Foundation ([www.midtown-metro.org/About-MEF/](http://www.midtown-metro.org/About-MEF/)). This study focuses on what actually goes beyond the "giving back to the community" activities, as opposed to win-win situation that community and organization can get.

Although a considerable number of researches have been devoted to probe the relation between community's awareness raising and effectiveness of lifelong learning programs, less attention has been paid to organizations dealing with lifelong learning. Meanwhile, it is worth mentioning that these organizations are responsible to attract more involvement from the community in all programs or events. Findings from I. Arli & Cadeaux (2013) revealed that community-business partnerships became a central element of the community's involvement practices of large companies. Regardless, cash donation, goods and services in kind, and employee times remain important elements in corporate's policies and programs. These elements were increasingly conducted within the framework of strategic partnerships with non-profit organisations.

So far, analyses were confined to public or social events held in a certain place during a particular interval of time. Events provided people with opportunities for learning and social networking within the context of having an enjoyable time (Lo'pez, 2013) and leaving the question of impact from the activities to community.

#### **4.1 Conceptual Framework**

Most research in the areas of strategic awareness and consensus focused on an examination of simple bivariate relationships between the extent of consensus among top managers as to the organization's strategy or goals, and its resulting performance (Kellermanns et al., 2005). In general, research findings tended to support expectations regarding the benefits of shared perspectives among the organization's leadership on the importance of competitive methods. In this study, awareness is conceptualized as community awareness towards lifelong learning programs at Community Colleges in various activities based on community's involvement.

The first activities in community's involvement that contribute to the increased awareness of lifelong learning programs are donations from organization to the community like a sponsorship (Hansen & Spitzeck, 2011). It is a cause-related marketing activity to promote customers' donations. Through this sponsorship, the community can be aware of the function of community colleges and be informed indirectly on lifelong learning programs.

The second one is a volunteering program which is a platform for short-term activities addressing social and environmental causes by inviting the community to related events and allowed them to join ( I. Arli & Cadeaux, 2013). For example, tree planting events and free services for senior citizens.

The third activities are related with the improved welfare of the society through community service projects. The only other significant correlation appears to be between perceptions that courses offering “hands-on”-type learning experiences (e.g. LEARN) and students’ perceptions that their college experience has enabled them to contribute to the community (WELFARE). In this case, the community will co-operate with concerned organizations. This is a good opportunity for Community Colleges to promote courses offered to the community.

Of all above mentioned activities, one activity should be added to measure the level of community’s awareness, namely free short courses provided by Community Colleges. The objective of this activity is to promote the importance of lifelong programs to the general public.

Below is figure 1 below that displays the conceptual framework regarding the relation between the community’s involvement and the increased awareness of lifelong learning programs.

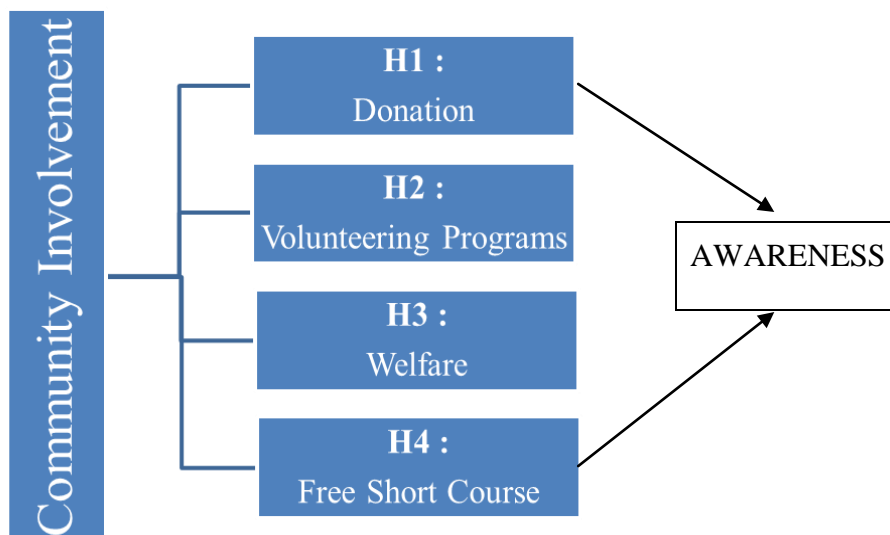


Figure 1: Relation between the community’s involvement awareness of programs.

( Hansen & Spitzbeck, 2011 and Mele & Mammoser (2011)

## 5.0 Methodology

This study used primary data through questionnaires and secondary data taken from information from Community Colleges Department to ensure data reliability and effectiveness. First, distributed questionnaires directly to participants or via postal.

Meanwhile, collected the secondary data through official websites and o from the staff in-charge at the concerned department. Once all necessary data were obtained, calculated the result by using statistical model.

To find the relationship between community involvement and the level of community’s awareness of lifelong learning, selected respondents within the community that took part directly in activities conducted by Community Colleges.

This study involved two (2) zones of Community Colleges in Malaysia with a total of seven (7) colleges chosen as a sample to represent the zones. Selection is based on the total number of participants. The number of respondents is 1,000 consisted of those who attended any activities, courses, or programs organized by the Community College in 2014.

In determining the sample for this study, the simple random sampling technique was used. This technique divided the number of colleges by zone. The number of randomly selected sample was 200 participants. Below is figure 3.1 that shows the sample of respondent who involved actively in activities organized by Community Colleges according to Krejcie & Morgan's (1970).

Information was collected from every individual in the sampling population. This makes it very difficult to study the population of participants of this research. For example, the total participants enrolled in programs conducted by Community Colleges are around 1 million. For the purpose of this study, the scope of sampling population should be much smaller to facilitate data collection process

## 6.0 Findings

According to the result of multiple regression test of Independent Variables of Donation, Volunteering, Welfare and Short Course Program, and Dependent Variable Program Awareness, the  $R^2$  is equal to 0.142.

This score indicates that 14.2% of the total dependent variable is explained by changes in the independent variables. The other 85.8% cannot be explained by these independent variables thus possibly able to be explained by other factors that are not included in this model.

Table 6.1 : Result of multiple regression test

### Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.376 <sup>a</sup>	.142	.124	.36674

a. Predictors: (Constant), IV4, IV1, IV2, IV3

To test the indication whether the dependent and independent variables are significant by looking at the F value. In below ANOVA table, F-value is equal to 7.999 at two degree of freedom, with p-value at 0.000 ( $p < 0.05$ ). Therefore, the test is considered significant and can proceed to test each hypothesis by referring to coefficient table.

Table 6.2 : Result of ANOVA

**ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	4.303	4	1.076	7.999	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	26.093	194	.134		
	Total	30.396	198			

a. Dependent Variable: DV

b. Predictors: (Constant), IV4, IV1, IV2, IV3

To determine which independent variable is more significant compared with the other, beta ( $\beta$ ) value should be interpreted. The higher the beta ( $\beta$ ) values among the independent variables, the stronger the effect to dependent variable. According to coefficient table 6.3, the beta ( $\beta$ ) value of donation (IV1) is  $-0.89$  and the beta ( $\beta$ ) value of welfare (IV3) is  $-0.152$ . Both Beta ( $\beta$ ) values are negative whereby these numbers indicate that there are negative relationship between independent variable and dependent variable. This score signifies that any 1% changes happened in the independent variable donation, then the dependent variable program awareness decrease by 0.152%. While for welfare, any 1% changes happened in the welfare, the program awareness is expected to decrease by 0.89%.

Moreover, table 6.3 shows that the beta ( $\beta$ ) value of independent variable volunteering is 0.86. It signifies positive relationship between variables, any 1% change in volunteering will change program awareness as much as 0.86%. For independent variable 4 free short courses, the beta ( $\beta$ ) value is 0.439 and indicates a positive relationship between variables. Any 1% change in free short course will change 0.439% of program awareness.

Among other regression results, only coefficient independent variable 4 (IV4) and dependent variable that is significant. The correlation of free short course is significant at 0.000, thus the free short course is the most influential factor or determinant key in respondents awareness towards the program.

Table 6.3 : Result of coefficients

**Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
	(Constant)	3.354	.349		9.609	.000
1	IV1	-.089	.056	-.107	-1.606	.110
	IV2	.086	.071	.095	1.204	.230
	IV3	-.152	.119	-.157	-1.284	.201
	IV4	.439	.113	.434	3.886	.000

a. Dependent Variable: DV

## 7.0 Discussion

The purpose of this section is to highlight major statistical results from chapter four to be analysed. First, I set several research questions which guided this study. Next, I made several hypotheses to be proven through quantitative analysis. Thereafter, by using reliability test and designated variables, I measured the data to determine whether each of my hypotheses can be accepted or not. Lastly, I made a correlation between findings of this study to education in Community Colleges in general.

In this study, reliability functions to test all dependent and independent variables. The result of reliability test against independent variables (i.e. donation, volunteering, welfare, and free short courses) is above 0.7. It means that the instruments are considered acceptable. Based on the Pearson Correlation analysis tool, the relationship between variables was higher because the score is close to +1. It also signifies that there was a strong relationship between variables.

The result of correlation value shows a negative correlation between both variables. Although Community Colleges participated in giving the donation, the tendency of awareness of respondents towards lifelong learning is low. So, donation does not have a correlation with community's awareness.

For volunteering activities and program awareness raising variables, the correlation is significant. The correlation value shows that there is a relationship between these variables. The positive value shows that the more volunteering activities were conducted, the more likely that respondents became aware about lifelong programs.

For welfare and program awareness raising variables, it was revealed that that there is a positive relationship between the two variables. The correlation score shows that the more welfare programs were conducted, the more likely that respondents became aware about lifelong programs.

The relation between the independent variable four, namely free short courses, and program awareness raising variable is significant because the result shows that most respondents are aware about the lifelong learning program. Of all regression results, the significant correlation was only applied to free short courses variable and program awareness raising variable. Thus, this independent variable is the most influential factor or determinant key in increasing respondents' awareness towards the lifelong program.

From the data of findings, shows that the donations not contribute to the awareness of lifelong learning program because almost respondents said that Community Colleges didn't give the funds to them to run the program. So, indirectly level of awareness is low. But, in free short course program, the result shows that almost respondent interested with that program. Through that program, it creates more awareness to lifelong learning program and the most important activities that Community Colleges should do.

The argument in this paper contributes to complement existing literature on lifelong learning and community colleges. This research was undertaken upon a thorough literature review related to the topic of this inquiry. So, this study constitutes a contribution to knowledge. This is part of literature review.

To make a contribution to knowledge is to propose a framework for reviewing it. Sometimes such a framework will also highlight an area in which relatively small amount on that aspect of the topic. In this study, proposed a framework for reviewing the literature into the field of research supervision and looking it as the side bar suggests as:

- Advancing knowledge
- Management
- Relationship



This study found some implications of lifelong learning programs upon local communities. First, this research provides information on which programs can be effective to increase community's awareness and participation. Besides, this study used mix-methods which complement each other. It means that statistical figures were verified by triangulation from the side of respondents.

## **8.0 Conclusion**

Based on the results of this study, it is suggested that the management of Community College need to take effective measure to increase awareness of the community concerning lifelong learning by focusing on which activities are attractive to local communities. In this regard, the statistical analysis revealed that the independence variable 4 (i.e. free short courses) can increase more awareness to the community which resulted in the improvement of lifelong learning programs, proven by the regression results indicating that only coefficient for independent variable 4 and dependent variables is significant (correlation is at 0.000).

Therefore, recommended the idea to provide more free short courses to the community can be implemented into Community Colleges'. It will contribute to the lifelong learning programs and build the community awareness.

People's awareness is difficult to raise and to measure. However, there are many activities that can be effective to address this issue. This study submitted that free short courses are the most effective factors to raise community's awareness on lifelong learning programs. At the same time, the management of Community College have to improve their programs to be more attractive, such as conducting volunteering programs and welfare programs. Last but not least, the management should also seek to improve the services quality of Community Colleges, so that more people can leverage from their better policies.

The more detailed and comparative studies on factors which drive increased awareness of the community related to Community Colleges to be undertaken in the future. First, future studies should identify the people that will have the potential to get involved in programs conducted by Community Colleges. Second, it is necessary to determine which factors attract people to engage in those programs. Finally, various strategies to raise awareness should be tested to determine which one is the most effective to be replicated by Community Colleges.

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