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From Classroom to Community: Understanding Community-Based Learning Practices in Malaysian Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract. Community-based learning (CBL) integrates the classroom learning and the community learning, as a pedagogical strategy, equipping students thereby with the skills needed, especially personal and soft skills. CBL also promotes student volunteerism, experiential learning, and community-based research. The current literature describes the numerous impacts of CBL, yet it is not widely discussed (the clear guidelines), nor how to implement it. Thus, this paper attempts to discuss the elements of CBL and the potential benefits of integrating CBL, as part of classroom learning particularly at tertiary educational level in Malaysia, using soft-system methodology; as this method can be used to analyse the intricate human activity systems. This qualitative study involved five registrars, 20 lecturers and 121 undergraduates from five public universities in Malaysia. Thematic analysis was used to interpret the data from the focus-group interviews. The findings showed that there should be six elements, in order for an effective CBL framework in Malaysian higher educational institutions. This framework would help to link between the courses' learning outcomes, its andragogical activities and assessments for all CBL courses in Malaysian higher institutions.

Keywords: Community-based learning framework; Malaysian universities; Soft-system methodology

1. Introduction

Malaysian Educational Blueprint (MEB) 2015-2025 sets forth the notion of Community-Based Learning (CBL), as one of the teaching and learning strategies

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to be executed by higher learning institutions, in order to produce local graduates, who can compete globally, whilst fulfilling the needs of Malaysian stakeholders (www.moe.gov.my). CBL incorporates course- learning outcomes, soft skills, and service to the community. In this regard, CBL enhances students' learning time through their involvement in community services, in which they have to solve community issues, while carrying out meaningful interactions with the local community. This paper reports on the study, which investigates the concept and application of the CBL model implemented by the five higher learning institutions in Malaysia. It is important to note that current research on the application of CBL at the tertiary level in the local context is still rare. Therefore, there is a need to deliberate on the issues and challenges faced by the institutions pertaining to the implementation of CBL in Malaysia.

2. The Literature Review

What is Community-Based Learning (CBL)?

CBL is an educational process that engages students and communities in learning (Ibrahim, 2010), while enhancing students' active involvement in practical erudition, volunteerism, and hypothetical curriculum recognition (Mooney & Edwards, 2001). Literatures on the attributes of CBL generally accentuate the enhancement of CBL (Durlak et al., 2011) and its impacts on students' interpersonal wellbeing (Moely et al. 2002; Simons and Clearly 2006; Vogelgesang and Astin 2002). According to Hatcher and Bringle (2012); Steinberg, Hatcher, and Bringle (2011); and Jacoby (2015), students' personal values can be improved through their participation in community programs. Furthermore, their involvement in the CBL programs can expose them to real life-situations (Bean, 2011), in which they need to apply not only their academic knowledge, but also their employability and leadership skills. (Vogelgesang and Astin 2000), volunteering skills (Astin, Sax & Avalos, 1999), as well as their social responsibilities (Astin and Sax 1999).

Citing the report by Amran and Ishak (2017), CBL is a sub-component of experiential learning. This coincides with the notion of CBL, as delineated by the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education, which denotes CBL as a learning-by-experience method that students apply and reflect on, as they participate in community programs, which would fulfill the needs of the community and fit in concurrently with their learning purposes (PPPM PT, 2015). With regard to transformative pedagogical learning, CBL is stated as one of the high-impact methods, which encompass experiential and service-learning (Amran et al., 2018). Likewise, this learning method would expose students to a wide range of new perspectives and experiences that are not available in their lectures (Aliyu et al. 2015). Students would be challenged to solve societal problems, while developing their soft skills simultaneously. Such CBL programs would impose positive impacts on students, lecturers, universities, and communities, by instilling a sense of social duty and citizenship skills, which include co-operation and leadership, cultural leniency, interacting skills, as well as the ability to initiate community changes (Amran et al., 2018).

The effectiveness of CBL on the community and organisation has been reported in several studies. For instance, Brownell & Swaner (2010) and Kuh (2010) confirmed that CBL allows students to integrate learning activities into social settings that could help to boost their personal and professional skills and abilities. Batchelder & Root (1994) proved that CBL has helped students to uplift their self-awareness and confidence, as well as positive societal development, as a result of their civic involvement (Welch 2009). In line with the previous studies, Mayhew and Engberg (2011) conducted a longitudinal research project on undergraduate students' involvement in the service-learning programs offered by a prominent higher learning institutions. The study deployed the pre-test and post-test methods to examine students' progress in terms of charity, as well as their social and environmental responsibilities, after going through a CBL course. The findings of the study disclosed that students who had undergone CBL courses demonstrated affirmative improvements in charity when compared with their social and environmental responsibilities.

The Concepts and Elements of CBL

CBL Concept

There are two basic concepts of CBL. Firstly, CBL is integrated into a curriculum that is designed to be adaptable to the needs and interests of the community (O'Connor, McEwen, Owen, Lynch & Hill, 2011). Secondly, the CBL courses accentuate a structured time-planning throughout its execution, which provides opportunities for the students to reflect on their experiences. Quoting Bedri, de Fréin, and Dowling (2017), CBL also support the integration of industry into the communities in which it operates. Consequently, this confirms the significance of CBL.

Figure 1 illustrates the intersection of Service Learning and Community-based Research/Learning components in the Intersecting Model, as proposed by Berner (2008). It is apparent that Volunteerism and Community Outreach are detached from the Teaching and Learning (T&L) and Research components. This concurs with the study by Koekkoek, Van Ham and Kleinhans (2021), which found that university and community may consciously or unconsciously engage with each other. This also fits in the concept of civic university, as it was introduced by Goddard and Kempton (2016). It is interesting to note that stakeholders' involvement plays an important role in determining the success of CBL approaches, particularly with regard to the teaching and learning (T&L) and community engagement programs.

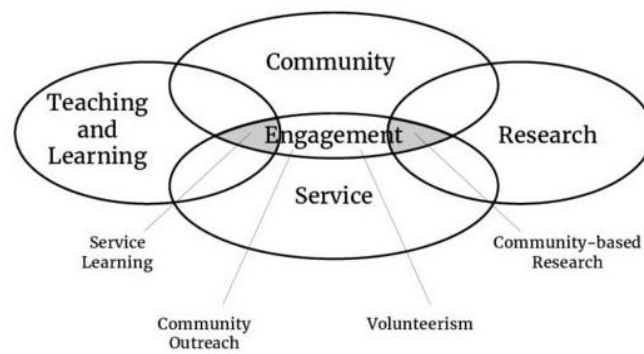


Figure 1. Intersecting Model

On the same note, Furco (1996) asserts that the concept of CBL is different from other existing service programs, such as service learning, internship, and field education. However, such community engagements work on a similar goal, which is to provide benefits to everyone involved. This will stimulate collaboration, sustainability, interconnectivity, inclusivity and flexibility among the community partners and the universities (Higher Education Academies, 2015). Indeed, CBL provides enriched learning opportunities for learners, instructors, and community leaders to foster new ways of thinking about their own practices, as they become more aware of the community resources and the available opportunities.

Elements of CBL

A CBL approach requires collaboration between the community, universities, and students. The CBL collaboration between these parties is sustained in a well-valued, balanced, and beneficial manner.

1. Needs Analysis

Mutual relationship and understanding between the universities and communities involved in CBL collaboration are crucial for the purpose of needs assessment and knowledge transfer, whilst ensuring that student learning can be enhanced. The communities would serve their roles in addressing their needs and what they want to offer (Koekkoek, Van Ham, & Kleinhans, 2021). Based on her study, Rosfazila (2019) states that students who were engaged in CBL programmes had initially consulted the community to understand the issues occurring in the community, before offering their help. In this context, the community would be clear of the expected outcomes. This enhanced the experiences of all the participants.

2. Learning and Reflection

Carlisle, Nitta, Murray, Gourd, and Shapiro (2020) noted that the integration of learning and community has been positively proven. This is especially true in regard to the new set of skills that students obtained both personally and professionally, which enhanced their self-worth, social confidence, and public engagement. It is interesting to note that students indicate diverse understandings through their experiences of integrating curricular and community learning in their critical reflections of CBL. These discerning reflections also point to how

students perceive knowledge, and how they converted that knowledge into an effective way of strengthening their learning experiences in serving the community (Rosfazila, 2019). Simultaneously, students can critically take up new adventures and learn emerging new skills that exist in the community.

3. *Partnership and Mutuality*

Patrick, Forrester, Backhaus, McGregor, Cain, and Lloyd (2019) stated that the design of CBL's place and procedure is equally important, as the learning outcomes that can benefit participating institutions, communities, and students. However, the implementation of CBL can be quite challenging; as it may lead to a failure, when the engagement between institutions and communities is unstable, due to communication gaps and insufficient follow-ups (Gibson, Canfield, & Beamish, 2020). Consideration from the institutions and communities are necessary; as there are communal risks in applying the CBL method, which may disrupt the harmonious relationship between both parties, and lead to vain collaboration.

4. *Student Training*

It is crucial for the faculty members to ensure that their students are being guided to learn and work with community partners and to include them in the preparation of the tasks to be carried out in the community. Ngai, Chan, and Kwan (2018) suggested that students need to be assessed: (i) to gauge whether their engagement in the community events could improve their learning and (ii) to determine how far they have mastered the tasks and achieved the learning objectives. By doing so, the goal to address real community needs can be accomplished with worthwhile values. It has been discovered that the implementation of the CBL approach allows students to prepare for their career planning which can be applied during their internship and their future workplaces (Otto & Dunens, 2021).

5. *Mentorship and Leadership*

Mentoring in students' relationship is essential in CBL as it emphasises specifically the learner-centred approach. This empowers students to comprehend the guidelines and responsibilities within the curriculum and community partnership (Shen & Teng, 2019). The mentor usually provides the relevant materials that they think would sufficiently assist the students; however, learning efficacy is determined by how well the students learn for themselves. Arcos-Alonso, Elias Ortega, and Arcos-Alonso (2021) propound that the application of CBL in teaching and learning enhances students' learning efficiency by applying the knowledge they have learned in their classrooms and have later transformed it into community services. This constructs a bonding of knowledge related to the changing environment as well as maintaining their personal development.

6. *Assessment for Learning*

Appropriate assessments need to be executed to ensure that students can gain critical reflection of their learning. Furthermore, students can amend their thoughts and performance - not only for learning outcomes, but also self-efficacy, perceptions, lifestyles, and life connotation (Mace, 2020). The CBL method also

incorporates evaluation and grading by educators and community representatives, in order to assess the process of the program. The students also produce portfolios for assessment and evaluation purposes. The preparation of the portfolios helps the students to improve their skills; while the diverse sets of data and reflection process embedded in preparing the portfolios also enhance their learning.

Integrating CBL into the curriculum

CBL substantiates the sustainable development policy that has been implicitly incorporated into lifelong learning programs, such as engineering, medical, nursing, financial, liberal arts, etc. It has adopted this long-term development by overcoming the limited prospect and stimulus of the traditional learning methods (Smith, Kempster, & Trayner, 2019). The CBL approach is viewed as the finest component of learning that has been integrated with current technologies, particularly within this ongoing pandemic era. Furthermore, Shen and Teng (2019) emphasize that technology development offers trends which can change the future life if it is integrated into communal daily lives. With technology, engineers can predict problems that they might encounter with the solutions or products that they design and produce. Likewise, in the medical field, Lanier & Wodika (2020) stated that CBL incorporates communities' function and real needs, whilst integrating societal compassion, reassurance, fairness and mutual relationships in learning and services. CBL is considered as a start to the quality of learning activities that aims at protecting community, culture, inability, and education. Social research carried out by Noguchi, Guevara, & Yorozu (2015) has provided an example of elevating illiteracy in the mother tongue of indigenous communities and disseminating knowledge and traditions of the community to a wider horizon. It creates an outlook for the global community to discover the exceptional experiences and identities that should be preserved.

CBL practices in Malaysia

Given the government's goal to enhance students' learning and community service, as proclaimed in the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2015-2025, the Ministry of Higher Education has taken a proactive approach by launching the Service-Learning Malaysia (SULAM) with the tagline of 'University for Society'. Service-learning has long been adapted in the Malaysia's education system, since its introduction in 1977 through volunteering at the villages; and then it has been developed as service-learning until today (Maharam et al., 2019). Maharam et al. (2019) further states that Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) is one of the earliest public universities to adopt this learning approach in their syllabus. The SULAM approach integrates service-learning into traditional classroom teaching and learning (T&L) by providing students with the experiences in real-life situations, which inculcate the culture of critical thinking, risk-taking, and discipline (Department of Higher Education, 2019). It was designed to encourage student-learning activities that cater to students' personal development and community needs (Yusof et al., 2020).

Incorporating SULAM into the curriculum, which is a course-based program is different from the volunteering approach that was practised in previous years. This is because SULAM must conform to the course learning outcome and include

a structured learning method with thorough preparation involving several parties, which the university, students, and community can understand. Yahya et al. (2013) stress that learning in Malaysian settings should include both formal and informal activities; as they can achieve the most effective outcomes that accommodate all learners. The activities incorporated in SULAM, which are meticulously planned and designed became the main component adapted into teaching (Department of Higher Education, 2019). Shen and Teng (2019) also mention that solid guidance can support the well-established courses or classes when implementing the CBL approach and optimising students' learning experiences. The focus on both service and learning can give advantage to the providers and recipients of this program; as it involves a reciprocated relationship from both sides.

In this progressive era, the Ministry of Higher Education in Malaysia has recently initiated a holistic framework that supports the existing SULAM framework, which is now called 'Experiential Learning and Competence- Based Education Landscape' (EXCEL) (Department of Higher Education, 2021). This framework promotes experiential learning instructions in higher learning institutions in Malaysia. EXCEL is categorised into four program thrusts namely: Personalised Experiential Learning (POISE), Community Resilience Experiential Learning (CARE), Industrial Experiential Learning (IDEAL), and Research-Infused Experiential Learning (REAL). to the concept of CBL, the closest thrust is the CARE program, which encompasses enhancing student learning and community improvement. The CARE approach will enable students to apply their knowledge from the classroom straight to the community, in other words, from theory to practice. The EXCEL framework indicates a major distinction between CARE and SULAM programs. In the case of the CARE program, it stresses on continuous education to the community in a longitudinal manner; whereas SULAM on the other hand, focusses only on certain subjects or targeted programmes (Department of Higher Education, 2021). It is safe to conclude that SULAM is the starting point of the CARE journey for certain academic programs in Malaysian universities. With these guidelines and given an opportunity from the ministry, different faculties in higher learning institutions can be more creative in building a strong network for larger scale projects that could benefit most if not all the stakeholders involved.

Connecting theories and real-life situations has proved to be a better method in exposing the students to learning (Yusof et al., 2020). It is recognised that this CBL approach has been conducted in various ways and ventures, such as the Capstone project, case studies, problem-based projects, research projects, and many more (Maharam et al., 2019). A project 'My Asean Community Initiative' carried out by the Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UiTM) and 'Moyog Family Literacy Project' by Kadazandusun Language Foundation were a few projects that used the CBL approach in conducting their projects. These projects had their own prominence that corresponded with MEB 2015-2025 in terms of transforming higher education learning and bringing on the collaboration between learning and communities for a better cause. The review of research studies has shown that CBL has been

popular among medical schools, even before SULAM was introduced (Malik and Malik, 2004; Arzuman, 2011; and Ahmad, 2016).

3. Methodology

Soft-Systems Methodology

This study utilised the Soft-System Methodology (SSM) in evaluating the findings; as it appears to be the fitting method that can analyse the intricate human activity systems (Gauthier, Guilbert, & Pelletier, 1997) particularly with regard to the CBL research approach on diverse community needs. The activities of CBL can be deemed as a system that connects the groups of the associated community involved in the projects; sharing the same purposes and drives. Betham, Sinnes, and Giøtterrud (2015) proclaimed that the SSM method might be impulsive; as it measures human beings with shared values, attitudes, and views, which could affect their decision-making process.

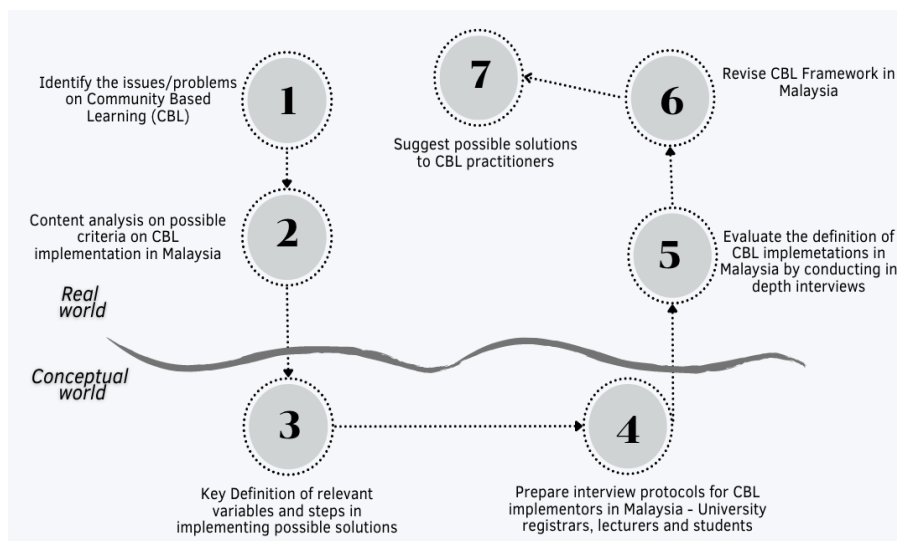


Figure 2. Stages of Soft Systems Methodology

Figure 3 describes the seven stages of SSM implemented in this study. The SSM model was carried out in stages, starting with collecting the data on the CBL framework in Malaysia and other selected countries. Using the bibliometric-analytical process, 478 research articles were screened in the SCOPUS open access database. This enabled the conduct of stage 2, the needs analysis in ensuring the problems that occurred in executing the CBL approach in Malaysia. The third process for this SSM approach is determining the root of Malaysia's CBL model framework that fits in the educational setting and environment. The CBL elements were defined by congregating the literature reviews throughout the countries in the world to get the different ideas on this program. Patel (1995) used this stage, in order to identify the responsible actors, the key transformations, and the knowledge resources that are appropriate to the needs of all the stakeholders. In SSM, this root definition is characterised by the CATWOE (Checkland and Scholes, 1990). The definition of CATWOE used in this research is listed in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Definition of CATWOE for CBL Practices in Malaysia

C (Customers)	Implementors of CBL in Malaysian HEIs
A (Actors)	Registrars, lecturers and undergraduates
T (Transformation Process)	CBL practices of Malaysian HEIs courses/ programmes to the surrounding community and how it impacted the undergraduates' learning and the community involved.
W (World View)	The belief that a validated CBL Framework in Malaysia by all stakeholders would help to cultivate better CBL practices and produce higher quality human capital development.
O (Owner)	Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia and HEI Lecturers
E (Environment)	Courses offered in Malaysian universities which use a wide variety of instructional methods and programs, in order to connect what is being taught in schools with the surrounding communities

In stage 4, interview protocols were developed, based on the key definitions from stage 3. Piloting the interview protocols was done during this stage, as well as in ensuring that the questions were valid and reliable. The pilot study was carried out to test and assess the interview questions for community-based learning, which were adopted and adapted from Shen and Teng (2019). The interview questions were revised, after completing the pilot study to ensure that the questions were related to the study and answered the research questions. Subsequently, the data collection was done in stage 5. Researchers interviewed the designated respondents on their experiences in handling and participating in CBL programs. The respondents were selected by using purposeful sampling to generate the theory/concept sampling to enable the researchers in understanding and measuring the practices of CBL in Malaysia.

Table 2. Respondents

University	Respondents		
	Registrars	Lecturers	Undergraduate Students
Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin	1	4	23
Universiti Teknologi MARA	1	4	24
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia	1	4	25
University of Nottingham	1	4	24
Universiti Poly-Tech Mara	1	4	25
TOTAL	5	20	121

At this stage, five registrars, 20 lecturers and 121 undergraduates from five public universities in Malaysia were interviewed. The registrars were selected on the basis of their roles, as the persons-in-charge at the university to circulate the information they received from the Malaysia Ministry of Higher Education to all the lecturers regarding the latest experiential learning strategies, including CBL. All the registrars were posted at the university's Centre of Knowledge Transfer and Industrial Linkages. They also keep track of active lecturers and/or courses that implement SULAM and CAR; hence, the registrars were the key persons for researchers to gain information. For this study, four programs were chosen from each HEIs; two from applied science and another two from social science or humanity programs. The lecturers who lead the CBL were interviewed. Face-to-face in-depth interviews were carried out with the lecturers, as well as the registrars. The main aim was to explore how CBL was implemented in their courses; and to enquire about their suggestions and reflections to improve their CBL practices. A list of names of undergraduates involved in CBL was given by the lecturers; and the researchers randomly chose ten from each program. Two focus group interviews per program were conducted. The interview conducted in the pilot study sparked a meaningful discussion and engagement, as informants compared different experiences and outlooks from their CBL experience. By using the three types of informants, triangulation of the data helped to enhance the reliability of this study.

Next, the collated data were analysed; and subsequently, the revised CBL Framework in Malaysia was produced. Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software, ATLAS.ti 9.0, was used; and the emerging themes were deployed to improve the current framework. In this study, the recurring codes were grouped into six main themes, namely: (1) needs analysis, (2) learning and reflection, (3) partnership and mutuality, (4) student training, (5) mentorship and leadership, and (6) assessment for learning. In ensuring reliability and the validity of the themes, a member-checking procedure was done. During this process, it was agreed that data saturation had been achieved.

Finally, the seventh stage was to validate the framework with the stakeholders, and then to suggest possible solutions to CBL practitioners. This stage was important to ensure the trustworthiness of this study. Validating the CBL framework was a step in assuring that the interviewers had answered the enquiry of the research questions without any bias. This would increase the possibility for data clarification, and in ensuring the findings to be credible and reliable. It is worth mentioning that many of the practitioners threw in more feedback and suggestions in defining each element of CBL after the draft of the CBL Framework was shown to them. Therefore, spending time to meet the interviewees and members of communities after drafting the initial framework was deemed essential in this study.

4. Results and Discussion

Several themes emerged from the interview with the respondents. The themes comprise a needs analysis, learning and reflection, partnership and mutuality,

student training, mentorship and leadership, and assessment for learning; these are explained in detail below.

Needs Analysis

Lecturers and registrars from five Malaysian universities highlighted the importance of addressing the community needs, in order to find solutions for the issues encountered by the locals. A thorough needs analysis that matches the needs, as well as achieving course learning outcomes (CLO) of a CBL course is essential; and it must be given top priority. Quoting one of the registrars, *“There is no issue that the current CBL’s CLOs are aligned with the assessments. However, on many occasions, the real needs of the locals were not taken into consideration; since they t didn’t cover the lecturer’s scope (of teaching).”* (R4)

Therefore, lecturers need to strategise and be more organised in their application of knowledge to ensure ongoing sustainability of the network between the universities and the community. This would make the CBL project more meaningful for both parties.

Learning and Reflection

In a new teaching and learning environment, both the lecturers and the students need to enhance their cognitive and practical flexibility, especially when working with a real live ‘customer’. Lecturers need to prepare students for the ‘real deal’ before and during the project. Reflection is one of the key factors to ensure significant learning. This was highlighted by one of the lecturers, *“Hands-on group-work in our mission to be accomplished with the customer must be done before class. Then, we need to be prepared with different circumstances that may occur during our project. Reflection is key. It is the real deal. We need to make sure that their (learners’) motivation is always high. Giving feedback on their reflection is a great learning process”.* (L17)

Partnership and Mutuality

The analysis showed that mutual understanding of each other’s needs is vital, in order to ensure a successful CBL program. Close collaboration and frequent discussion with the partners would ensure that both parties achieve each other’s goals that are set within the parameters of the CBL programs. Therefore, it is crucial to conduct the needs analysis prior to the program.

“It is a great accomplishment at the end of a 14-week program when partnership can be seen between our students and the community members. But before that, we need to set mutual agreement first for the students to achieve this kind of learning”. (L9)

Student Training

The analysis disclosed that the students were being prepared on how to handle interactions with other stakeholders. The skills needed, such as leadership and communication skills that are crucial for social interactions were developed during this time. In the interviews, the respondents also recalled what they had experienced during their study and applied in the workplace. The following remarks illustrate the case in point:

“Not once or twice, in a lot of circumstances, I applied the skills and tips that I had learned from a CBL program at work”. (S87)

“At work, I need to explain stuff using layman language, easier phrases and vocaulary, as when I did a CBL program in the beach community”. (S53)

Mentorship and Leadership

This section explains the students’ experiences throughout the CBL program. CBL was commonly conducted in groups, which were led by the student leaders. By working together on their plan for a successful program the students learned to get to know their team members closely and they co-operated with maximum synergy. This also fostered a sense of responsibility among the students - not only for the purpose of their study, but also for that of the community.

“During a CBL program, I need to make a lot of decisions. I learn to have quick online or face-to-face meetings to decide. Those skills, I still apply (at work)”. (S114)

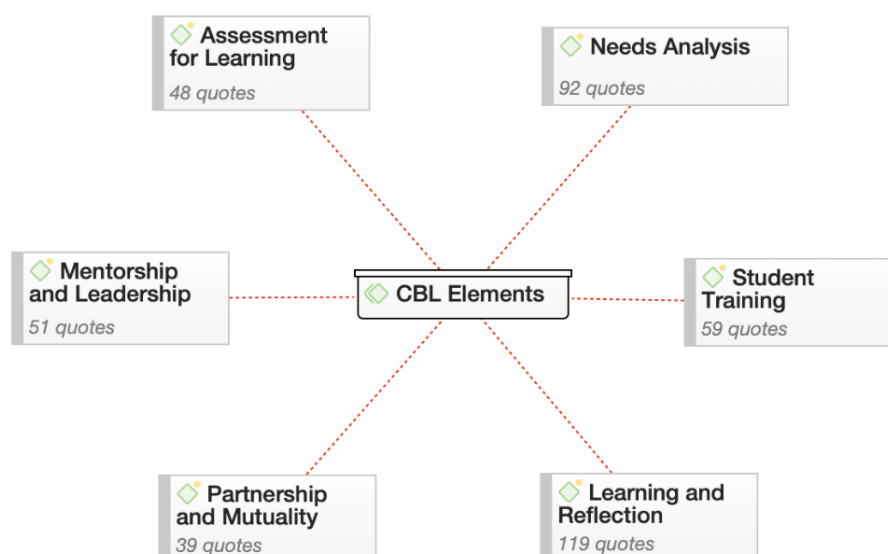
Assessment for Learning

The effectiveness of the CBL program was assessed through the survey that was distributed to the researched community. The findings indicate that a CBL project can be productive and meaningful when there is evidence of knowledge being transferred and applied into the communities’ daily life. As for the students, they were assessed, based on the milestones of the project; from the beginning to the end. A student pointed out:

“I can still remember the assessment for my CBL project. We were asked to observe teens’ activity after school, then we needed to report to the local leader, so that we could plan better activities for them. Although it seemed simple, the assessments actually teach us something, which was new!” (S90)

In summary, the figure below illustrates the elements needed for planning a CBL program in Malaysian higher learning institutions. The number of quotes gathered from the respondents are stated under each CBL element.

Figure 3. Network of CBL elements and quotations from the interviewed data analysis



Challenges of CBL

Mismatch of needs

One of the main findings of this study is the intercession between institutions and communities that have different perspectives on life. This can be quite challenging for both parties to balance and adapt with each other. Pawlowski (2018) asserts that the community should be informed of the purpose of the CBL course to be able to participate from the beginning of the project. Implementing CBL without the knowledge of the community's needs would cause a failure to the project. The community should be well-informed to ensure that they are in the know of the purpose of the CBL project. In return, the students would be guided throughout the partnership, and thereby, saving their time on figuring out the community needs. This partnership should be linked closely to the process or outcome of the project; and there should be reciprocal relationships to all. This concurs with the findings from Patrick et. al. (2019). Inadequate support and direction from the community partners also contributes to the challenges encountered by the students. In this regard the students faced difficulties to connect and communicate with their community counterparts in their attempt to create infinite solutions and consultation to the community's needs (Lanier & Wodika, 2020). Therefore, to solve this issue, the needs analysis of the community must take place at the beginning of CBL implementation. It will prevent mismatch of needs; and services must be provided to the community. With prior discussion with the community, stronger partnership and mutual understanding could be accomplished; and at the same time, students' learning and greater network between the lecturers and community would be enhanced.

Andragogical Competence

The informants in this research generally highlighted on students' learning as one of the essential issues in CBL pedagogy. Without proper andragogical knowledge and competence of a CBL model, lecturers were unable to shape learners to be self-directed and autonomous. Learners were unable to optimize their knowledge and experience; since guidance from their lecturers was not extensive enough to help them relate to what they had learnt in the class, and how they should implement this in a real-life situation. This finding relates closely with the study by Yusof et. al. (2020). Kruger et al. (2015) recommended higher learning institutions to find solutions to overcome the issues concerning the lack of training and information provided for the students prior to CBL experience, which may lead to inefficient learning. In line with Ong and Ahmad Tajuddin (2021), this study discovered a lack of andragogical competence, as observed in the poorly aligned given assessments. It is important to highlight that professional development for lecturers is important in improving CBL course outlines, teaching and learning techniques, as well as assessment for learning.

One of the expected outcomes of CBL is students' ability to reflect critically on their experiences during the running of the CBL project. This brings forth the emergence of new skills and opportunities in the students' learning environment (Rosfazila, 2019). This study found that lack of eminent real world community experiences during the implementation of CBL had caused a failure of the learning objectives, and this agrees with the finding from Ngai, Chan and Kwan (2018). This CBL strategy is meant to produce students of good quality, while

instilling high self-value for their future graduating purposes (Su & Zhang, 2020). It is imperative to include training of soft skills in the CBL projects learning outcomes; as it will improve learners' communication, self-confidence, critical thinking, and complex problem-solving skills.

Previous study by Yusof et al. (2020) exposed lecturers' unwillingness to implement and conduct CBL courses due to several concerns. These include students' ability to sustain their focus on the learning contents, CBL projects might not be relevant to the students' skills, and to the lecturers' capacity to engage students in a meaningful learning relationship, while they are doing the community's work. In the current study, it was clear that CBL approach can be integrated entirely into the students' learning. However, the lecturers' highlighted the need to consider and make proper arrangements pertaining to their supervisions and capacities to carry out the CBL projects.

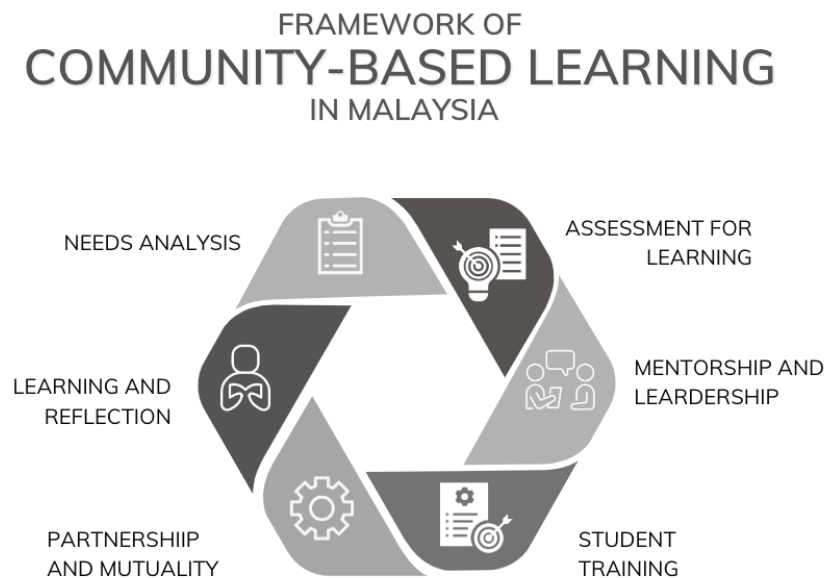
Furthermore, lecturers' inclinations towards CBL should also be taken into consideration. Mentoring and collaborating with other CBL lecturers are deemed necessary, in order to maintain and engage lecturers' interest in the CBL teaching approach. It is also suggested that proper guidelines must be given to those lecturers who are interested in implementing CBL.

5. Recommendations for CBL Practices in Malaysian Higher Learning Institutions

CBL offers great potential for the development of students' academic and personal skills. However, the execution of CBL requires a clear guideline or a standard to ensure that students can gain optimum benefit out of it. A CBL project should contain knowledge of planning, managing ideas, thorough assessment, and rightful evaluation to ensure a maximum impact (Bedri et al., 2017). Some important aspects, such as an extensive strategy, reflective supervision, engaging projects, and functioning assessment. These issues need to be deliberated to ensure a successful CBL project. Furthermore, higher learning institutions also must be aware of possible issues, such as conflicts and time management, which might arise in the running of CBL projects.

Smith and Rust (2011) also pointed out that the CBL project must be inclusive of all staff and their talents, in order to make sure that everyone in the organisation shares equal partnerships to achieve the same CBL goal. It is crucial to get the support from everyone in an institution, especially the administrative and technical staff, academia, and students. By taking part in the CBL events, members of the institutions would be exposed to a new teaching and learning approach, and have gained new knowledge and experiences. Therefore, the institutions must provide training, but especially for new staff and students on how to manage CBL projects effectively so that they would be able to fully utilise all possible sources and talents to achieve their CBL target. Figure 4 displays the Framework of CBL in Malaysia, which is created from thorough data analysis and discussions of this study.

Figure 4. Framework of Community-Based Learning in Malaysia



6. Conclusion and Implications

This paper has looked at the effectiveness of CBL elements and practices in Malaysian higher learning institutions. With the new challenges brought by the global pandemic, technological and andragogical changes, Malaysia has no other options but to embrace experiential learning to ensure that the objectives of an academic program are achieved. The concept of CBL in higher learning institutions in Malaysia is embedded within SULAM and CARE; since both are initiated by the Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia to enhance undergraduates' experiential learning. A needs analysis with the community must be done prior to CBL activities to ensure interconnection between education and the local needs. Additionally, continuous professional development for lecturers is essential to integrate CBL elements in their course learning outcomes, andragogical activities and assessments. Departments and faculties within each university need to strategise their effort to optimize CBL programmes by establishing one centre to lead the networking activity with communities. This would help in getting the most out of both 'worlds' whereby the undergraduates will cater for the real needs of the community, while also achieving the learning outcomes and enhancing their own skills and values. Integrating CBL into the process of teaching and learning enables the students to explore and apply their knowledge. Nevertheless, the study reported in this paper was conducted among the undergraduates in five Malaysian public universities, hence, the results do not represent other higher learning institutions in the country.

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