



**A STUDY OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS'
INVOLVEMENT IN UNIVERSITY-COMMUNITY
ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES AT IIUM**

BY

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**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for the
degree of Master of Human Sciences in Sociology and
Anthropology**

**Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge
and Human Sciences
International Islamic University Malaysia**

APRIL 2016

ABSTRACT

Involvement in university-community engagement (UCE) activities is important for students' knowledge enrichment because it exposes them to fieldwork. Experiences gained will help students to prepare themselves for future careers and expose them to a holistic view of the community expectations toward university graduates. With direct engagement between students and the community, it encourages students to socialize with the members of the community. However, with the different social and cultural backgrounds of international students within the Malaysian context, this thesis attempts to explain the participation in UCE activities among undergraduate international students of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). Thirty undergraduate students participated in this study. Data analysis was performed using the qualitative approach. In general, there is minimal participation of undergraduate students in UCE activities at IIUM. Interestingly, social cultural barriers, particularly language barriers, time constraint, strict adherence to gender roles and the prohibition of mixing among the sexes are amongst the problems that discourage international students from participating in UCE activities. Indeed, UCE has become an important agenda in any university to develop the human capital. The university needs to strengthen its structural environment, thus to make students from various social and cultural backgrounds realize that they have a role to play in the community despite their differences.

ملخص البحث

إنَّ مشاركة الطُّلاب في أنشطة المجتمع الجامعي مُهمَّةٌ لإثراء معرفتهم لأهمَّاتٍ تعزِّز مهاراتهم في العمل الميداني. كما أنَّ الخبرات المكتسبة سوف تساعد الطُّلاب على إعداد أنفسهم لمستقبلٍ مهنيٍّ يجعلهم موضع نظرٍ شموليةٍ لتوقُّعات المجتمع نحو خريجي الجامعات. فضلاً عن ذلك، فإنَّ التعامل المباشر بين الطُّلاب والمجتمع يعزِّز التواصل الاجتماعي بين أعضاء المجتمع. على الرُّغم من الاختلاف الاجتماعي والثقافي للطُّلاب الدُّوليين ضمن السِّياق الماليزي، فإنَّ هذه الدِّراسة تحاول تسليط الضُّوء على طبيعة المشاركة بين الطُّلاب الدُّوليين في مرحلة البكالوريوس بالجامعة الإسلامية العالمية ماليزيا في الأنشطة المجتمعية. شارك في هذه الدِّراسة 30 طالباً وطالبةً من الطُّلاب الدُّوليين في مرحلة البكالوريوس. تمَّ إجراء تحليل البيانات باستخدام الأسلوب النُّوعي بشكلٍ عام، وقد أظهرت الدِّراسة أنَّ هناك حدًّا أدنى من مشاركة الطُّلاب الدُّوليين بالجامعة الإسلامية في الأنشطة المجتمعية. المثير للاهتمام، أنَّ الحواجز الثقافيَّة والاجتماعية، وعلى وجه الخصوص، الحواجز اللُّغوية، فضلاً عن المراقبة الصَّارمة لأدوار الجنسين، ومنع الاختلاط بينهما، هي من بين العقبات التي تحول دون مشاركة الطُّلاب الدُّوليين في الأنشطة المجتمعية. نظراً لفوائد الأنشطة المجتمعية التي تعمل بوصفها وسيلةً للاندماج والتماسك الاجتماعي، فقد أصبحت الأنشطة المجتمعية أجددً مهمَّةً في أيِّ جامعة لتطوير رأس المال البشري. لذلك، فإنَّ الجامعة تحتاج إلى تعزيز البيئة الهيكلية حتى تمكِّن الطُّلاب من خلفياتٍ ثقافية واجتماعية مختلفة كي يدركوا أنَّ لهم دوراً يؤدُّونه في المجتمع على الرُّغم من اختلافاتهم الثقافيَّة.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Human Sciences (Sociology and Anthropology).

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Revealed knowledge and Human
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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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To my parents, Mohd Nasir bin Mohd Khalid and Faizah binti Zaini, and my siblings,
Muhammad Naquiddin Fakhri bin Mohd Nasir and Nurul Farahin Mohd Nasir for
their endless support, remorseless understanding and infinite love for me to complete
this degree.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Alhamdulillah, all praises to Almighty Allah for allowing me to complete my dissertation. My sincere gratitude to my beloved family and supportive peers for their encouragement to me as a student of the Sociology and Anthropology Department, IIUM.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my honourable supervisor, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nurazzura Mohamad Diah for her remarkable concern in assisting me to complete this dissertation. Her patience and passion in teaching me has given impacts on my personal character, not only in academic matters but also in life. I will never forget her encouragement in boosting my self-confidence to present our first conference paper organized by Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM), Johor Bharu in May 2015.

My special gratitude goes to my beloved family for their abiding love. No words can describe my appreciation for their support and faith in my ability to attain my goals. I would like to extend my appreciation to my special friends, Salmi A. Rahman and Mustafa Ahmad for their endless support. To my mentors, Nurul Wahida Saad and Dr. Sohela Mustari, thank you very much for your guidance and knowledge.

My sincere thanks to Mr. Mohd. Khairulzain Abdul Rahman from UCCE-BUDI (previously known as CENSERVE), IIUM for his assistance in accomplishing this dissertation. Without his help, this study cannot be completed.

To all lecturers at the Department of Sociology and Anthropology and friends, thank you very much for the thoughts and experiences.

May Allah bless all. Ameen.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIKOL	Ahmad Ibrahim Kulliyah of Laws
CELPAD	Centre for Languages and Pre-University Academic Development
CENSERVE	Centre for University Social Responsibility
CENTRIS	Centre for Islamisation
IIUM	International Islamic University Malaysia
KICT	Kulliyah of Information and Communication Technology
KIRKHS	Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences
KENMS	Kulliyah of Economics and Management Sciences
KOE	Kulliyah of Engineering
KOED	Kulliyah of Education
MOHE	Ministry of Higher Education
UCE	University-community Engagement
UCCE-BUDI	University Centre for Community Engagement (BUDI)

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

A notion of a knowledge-based society has become synonym with the spread of modernization. In producing this kind of society, the university or the higher institution of education has been given the responsibility to integrate the concept of the education system with the human capital formation assisted by a technology-based orientation (Symaco, 2012). Products of the universities and the working industries are both linked, thus universities are required to provide the theoretical and practical knowledge in order to generate students who are able to adapt to the immense changes in the society.

With the need of knowledge-based graduates, universities are required to produce graduates who meet the expectations of the workplace. Universities should not only engage students with theoretical knowledge, but also practical knowledge as these institutions are regarded as a place for upward mobility where students aim to build their career to have a good life after they graduate (Kok, Cheah & Ang, 2011). Thus, in celebrating this idea, the university-community engagement (UCE) is one of the initiatives in connecting students with the society. In relation to this, universities play a pivotal role in implementing university-community engagement to serve the society in producing well-rounded students (Hall, 2009).

Community-engagement is a voluntary activity that involves the collaboration of many parties. Normally, it involves an engagement between the stakeholder and community where the stakeholder uses its own fund to assist the community, as the

receiver. However, nowadays, universities are also encouraged to participate in UCE activities.

There are two important concepts in discussing UCE: the discussion on the community and engagement. In discussing the first concept, Bacon (2009: 4), defines community:

“as a group of people who interact with each other in the same environment where it creates the feeling of belonging to one another which made them aims at building a community together”.

In the spirit of community building, they will try share the same values, principles and responsibilities as one community. Another concept in UCE is engagement. Aslin and Brown (2004) designate engagement in UCE as the active participation of people in building persistent relationships by giving full commitment to UCE activities. They claim this definition hinges to describing voluntary works because it implies commitment on the process of decision-making and performing the actions. This is where engagement skill is part of the crucial thing in handling and participating in community-engagement activities. According to Sandmann, Williams and Abrams (2009), engagement may take into consideration different methods, among others urging student participation in extra-curricular activities, outreach programmes, technological gadgets to rural students, demonstrating learning outcomes as well as aiming at improving the quality of education. Since there are different methods of engagement activities, Pardeck (2015) subsumes engagement as not an easy process especially in voluntary activities. However, he defines engagement through the ecological perspective which is based on the module taken from the social work engagement model by explaining the importance of developing engagement before aiding the people. This perspective highlights the requirement of understanding the human needs through the engagement skills.

Following the definition of community and engagement earlier, good UCE activities should have its own goals that can be shared among the people involved in this activity. The American Association of State Colleges and Universities (n.d) as cited in Roper and Hirth (2005) defines community engagement as:

the publicly engaged institution is fully committed to direct, two-way interaction with communities and other external constituencies through the development, exchange, and application of knowledge, information, and expertise for mutual benefit (p. 13).

Therefore, UCE activities which are entrusted to the higher learning centres have been seen as a good mediator to train students to engage with the society through outdoor activities. Since the university is set as being responsible to the society, UCE activities are also seen as an urgent response by the university to help the needy (Farish, 2014; Finn & Voelkl, 1993). In order to make it work, participation of students from the higher institutions of learning is important in ensuring the smooth running of the programme (Finn & Voelkl, 1993).

However, UCE activities require community participation in addressing their issues to the students, universities, stakeholder, agencies or government. The community is the important element in highlighting their needs to the doer of UCE activities to make sure it complies with the needs of the relevant community. This is due to the diverse nature of the community which has different expectations and needs. Surprisingly, the main challenges in doing UCE activities are always time and resources constraints. Therefore, values, principles and criteria should always be observed in the first place to run the community-engagement activities. To understand about values and principles, Aslin and Brown (2004) have illustrated the basic principles that can help in making good UCE activities (see Table 1). These principles

should be taken into consideration before and during the activity to ensure that it is good community-engagement activity.

Table 1: Principles of Community Engagement.

Principles “What Should Be”	
The Murray-Darling Basin Commission Values	Principles of Engagement
Courage	Mandate for change: recognize and act on a mandate for change – involvement in transformation not just transactions. Agreed values: apply Murray-Darling Basin Commission values in all internal and external engagements – ‘walk the talk’.
Inclusiveness	Effective communication: recognize that communication patterns need to take the form of a network or web – neither top-down nor bottom up, nor within closed circles, but to and from many sources within a system.
Commitment	Shared vision: shared commitment to a vision for a more sustainable basin made explicit in each engagement process – reality, as well as rhetoric.
Respect & honesty	Representativeness: as many interests as possible given respect and acknowledgment, and represented appropriately – whole system approaches, not fragmentation and division.
Flexibility	Mutual learning: generate fresh ideas and solutions through the mutual exchange of ideas – dialogue as well as discussion and debate.
Practicability	Long-term goals: accept that engagement goals are both here-and-now and future-oriented – they have both ‘roots’ and ‘wings’.
Mutual obligation	Negotiation, collaboration and cooperation: engagement process based on partners’ shared responsibility and accountability – collaboration and cooperation, not competition and division.

Source: Aslin and Brown (2004). Towards whole of community engagement: A practical toolkit (p. 17).

UCE activities also rely on the same principles as the activities designed to meet the expectations of the community.

In discussing university-community engagement activities, it can be reflected in different contexts, pertaining to the different needs of the community. Berberet (2002) cited in Nhamo (2013) says that community engagement in higher education is not new as it has been routinely included in the mission of higher education. This activity is used throughout the world to engage universities and communities in order

to understand the challenges occurring around the world (Sawasdikosol, 2009; Puteri Intan Safinaz, 2011 as reported in Gill, 2011).

Contributing directly to the development of the community, UCE activities have taken place throughout the world. For instance, the University of Southern California in the United States and the University of British Columbia in Canada are examples of universities that promote UCE activities. Both universities train their students to participate actively in community-service learning which exposes their students to real life experiences and at the same time make them critically reflect their own experiences into academic writing. In addition, Boothroyd and Fryer (2004) report that the Thai government has encouraged its higher learning institutions to participate in poverty reduction work where indirectly it promotes social engagement between the institutions as well as the public to promote UCE activities. The Walailak University in Thailand is one of the universities which is involved in this programme in helping villagers to learn about business planning and management as well as in assisting in community development. Another example is the Liangnan University, which, in 2006, became the first university in Hong Kong to introduce institutionalized service-learning (or community engagement) with the aim to offer fieldwork experiences to students who would apply the knowledge and skills they have gained in their coursework (Ka & Ming, 2013). Ka and Ming (2013) also mention that this university has set involvement in UCE activities as a credited course, which becomes part of their initiative in providing the knowledge to students as well as to share knowledge between students and the community.

Malaysian universities are no exception in practicing this programme (Azrin & Dhiya, 2014). Norhidayah Ali et al. (2009) who studied UCE activities in Malaysia finds that students' grading becomes higher once they join outdoor activities unlike

those who do not. This is because they have expanded their social relationships through the UCE activities. This finding is parallel to the study in the United States which finds that participation in UCE activities affects the behavioral and emotional patterns of students (Reina, et al., 2014). Thus, encouraged by benefits gained through implementing UCE activities in different settings, Malaysia has also taken the challenge to promote UCE activities among undergraduates. According to Koo and Pang (2011), the National Higher Education Strategic Plan and the National Higher Education Action Plan 2007-2010 were established in Malaysia to furnish the students, especially university students to meet the development of human capital in realizing the current and future challenges in this country by introducing UCE activities to meet the National Education Action plans. Sindhu and Kaur (n.d) mention that community engagement activity is an important agenda so as to be at par with the other universities in the USA and Australia.




According to Roselina Shakir (2009), the Ministry of Higher Education has discussed seven soft skills that should be acquired by students: “communication skills, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, teamwork, lifelong learning and information management skills, entrepreneurship skills, ethics and professional moral and leadership skills” (p. 309). Accordingly, UCE is one of the initiatives to develop human capital when it was first launched in 2008 at Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) by using the concept of university social responsibility (Sawasdikosol, 2009). This activity is intended to “make ethical behavior training a mandatory part of all course instruction” (Sawasdikosol, 2009: 5).





In this study, the researcher focuses on UCE activities at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). At IIUM, UCE activities are coordinated by the Centre for Community Service and Continuing Education (CENSERVE) being a





responsible centre that guides students to do volunteer works apart from a class-based education.





CENSERVE, a centre at IIUM was established in 1995 and has gone through a series of changes in training students to run community service projects, locally and internationally. There are 15 clubs under this centre with various aims, target groups and modules initiated to help the communities (see Table 2).

Table 2: Student's Club supervised by UCCE-BUDI

Club(s)/Logo	Target Group	Nature
<p>Anak-Anak Berakhlak Islam Club (Akhi)</p> 	<p>To produce IIUM mentors to develop soft skills among school children from standard 4 to 6 (aged between 10 to 12 years old) who are from lower income families in Gombak area.</p>	<p>Mentoring school children.</p>
<p>Caring Club</p> 	<p>To produce IIUM mentors to be ready and aware of orphan issues and welfare. The clubs will organize and initiate programmes to support the development of the orphans academically and spiritually.</p>	<p>Mentoring orphans.</p>
<p>Community Outreach for Orang Asli Development Club (Comrade Club)</p> 	<p>To produce IIUM volunteers to serve and spread <i>dakwàah</i> to Orang Asli villages in certain areas as approved by JAKOA, JAKIM and the state religious departments.</p>	<p>Outreach to Orang Asli.</p>

<p>Gemilang Club</p> 	<p>To produce young and talented mentors among IIUM students in motivating and inspiring school kids standard 4 to 6 (aged between 10 to 12 years old).</p>	<p>Mentoring school children.</p>
<p>Inspire Club (Former name: Karisma Club)</p> 	<p>To produce trained facilitators to be prepared for handling and inspiring problematic students.</p>	<p>Facilitation and motivation of problematic students.</p>
<p>Joint Association with Orang Asli Club (JASA)</p> 	<p>To produce IIUM volunteers to serve and spread <i>dakwàah</i> at Orang Asli villages with the approval from JAKOA, JAKIM and State Religious Departments.</p>	<p>Outreach to Orang Asli.</p>
<p>Jami'yatul Khadamatil Qur'an Club (JKQ)</p> 	<p>To produce <i>huffāz</i> among IIUM students to be a mentor for kids or <i>huffāz</i> junior at PPR Air Panas, Setapak, Kuala Lumpur.</p>	<p><i>Qurānic</i> based project.</p>

<p>MISI Club</p> 	<p>To produce IIUM volunteers especially from Sarawak and Sabah to serve their state's communities which are less fortunate and from underdeveloped areas.</p>	<p>Outreach to rural community.</p>
<p>Perkim Secretariat</p> 	<p>To produce IIUM volunteers to support all activities involving <i>Muallaf</i> community and Orang Asli.</p>	<p>Outreach to <i>Muallaf</i> community.</p>
<p>Semaian Budi Club (Sendi Club)</p> 	<p>To produce IIUM mentors to support mentoring programmes for primary school children standard 4 to 6 (aged between 10 to 12 years old).</p>	<p>Mentoring school children.</p>
<p>Student Facilitating Team Club (Steadfast)</p> 	<p>Produce facilitators to facilitate motivational camps, invitational programmes, and training events.</p>	<p>Facilitation and motivation on student leadership.</p>

<p>Quranic Youth Club</p> 	<p>Produce facilitators among IIUM students to assist in seminars, interfaith dialogues, and be part of Street <i>Dakwàah</i> project.</p>	<p><i>Quranic</i> based project.</p>
<p>Titian Asli Club</p> 	<p>Produce volunteers to be actively involved in Orang Asli programmes.</p>	<p>Outreach to Orang Asli.</p>
<p>Titian Wahyu Club</p> 	<p>Produce volunteers to be actively involved in helping the homeless, educating Rohingya children & supporting disabled people. The club also has a mentoring programme with SRA Al-Huda, Gombak, Selangor.</p>	<p>Outreach to special communities (disabled Rohingya refugees & homeless) and mentoring project.</p>
<p>UMISSION CLUB</p> 	<p>Produce volunteers to be actively involved in reaching out to the global communities in Cambodia and Thailand.</p>	<p>Outreach to global communities (Cambodia and Thailand).</p>

Source: UCCE-BUDI (CENSERVE), 2015

In February 2015, this centre has rebranded its name to become the University Centre for Community Engagement (UCCE-BUDI) in line with the aspiration of Y. Bhg. Tan Sri Datuk Sri Utama Dr. Rais Yatim, the President of IIUM. By holding to its aim to build generations that can spread virtues and live virtuously, UCCE-BUDI actively

encourages more IIUM students to participate in voluntary activities. Thus, university-community engagement activities provide great opportunities for international students to see, learn and experience life in the Malaysian communities.

Even though bountiful benefits can be gained by students through their participation in these university-community engagement activities, this has not happened in IIUM. UCCE-BUDI, IIUM, can testify to this based on the record of participation by IIUM students, both local and international (see Table 3):

Table 3: Participation of international undergraduate students from all clubs supervised under UCCE-BUDI in UCE activities

Year	Number of students	
	Local Students	International Students
2010	2,184	16
2011	2,482	18
2012	3,598	70
2013	3,733	17

Source: Ratio taken as of October 16, 2014 from UCCE-BUDI

Taking into their different backgrounds and difficulties they may encounter, this study finds that these international students are faced with issues which prevent them from taking part in UCE activities. Therefore, it intends to investigate the issue of participation in university-community engagement activities in IIUM.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Feeling alienated is part of the emotion felt when you are far from home. To feel accepted by the new community around your new environment is highly needed especially when you are alone in this new atmosphere. This is so much related to the international students who come from their countries to seek knowledge. They may