

Youth Involvement and Volunteerism: MEKAR Project at Selama Malaysia
(*Penglibatan dan Kesukarelawanan Belia: Projek MEKAR di Selama Malaysia*)

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ABSTRACT

Youth involvement and volunteerism have emerged as crucial components in addressing contemporary societal challenges. This article aims to explore the significance of youth engagement in volunteer activities, its impact on personal development, and community empowerment, and the broader implications for creating positive social change. This article also delves into the various forms of youth volunteerism, ranging from local community projects to global humanitarian efforts, highlighting the diverse avenues through which young people contribute to society. The article also examines the benefits of youth involvement in volunteerism, such as skill enhancement, increased civic awareness, and the cultivation of empathy and leadership qualities. By analyzing existing literature and case studies (MEKAR), this article underscores the potential of youth involvement in volunteerism to foster social innovation and positive transformation. The result emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between youth and the communities they serve, wherein volunteerism not only addresses community needs but also nurtures a sense of belonging and purpose among young participants. Hence, this article sheds light on the multifaceted aspects of youth involvement and volunteerism, portraying it as a dynamic force for social progress.

Keywords – Youth involvement, volunteerism, mekar.

ABSTRAK

Penglibatan belia dan kesukarelawanan telah muncul sebagai komponen penting dalam menangani cabaran masyarakat kontemporari. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk meneroka kepentingan penglibatan belia dalam aktiviti sukarelawan, kesannya terhadap pembangunan peribadi, dan pemeraksanaan komuniti, dan implikasi yang lebih luas untuk mewujudkan perubahan sosial yang positif. Artikel ini juga menyelidiki pelbagai bentuk kesukarelawanan belia, daripada projek komuniti tempatan hinggalah kepada usaha kemanusiaan global, menonjolkan kepelbagaian jalan melalui mana golongan muda menyumbang kepada masyarakat. Artikel itu juga mengkaji faedah penglibatan belia dalam kesukarelawanan, seperti peningkatan kemahiran, peningkatan kesedaran sivik, dan penanaman sifat empati dan kepimpinan. Dengan menganalisis literatur dan kajian kes (MEKAR) sedia ada, artikel ini menggariskan potensi penglibatan belia dalam kesukarelawanan untuk memupuk inovasi sosial dan transformasi positif. Hasilnya menekankan hubungan timbal balik antara belia dan komuniti yang mereka berkhidmat, di mana kesukarelawanan bukan sahaja menangani keperluan komuniti tetapi juga memupuk semangat kekitaan dan tujuan di kalangan peserta muda. Oleh itu, artikel ini memberi penerangan tentang pelbagai aspek penglibatan belia dan kesukarelawanan, menggambarkannya sebagai kuasa dinamik untuk kemajuan sosial.

Kata kunci – Penglibatan belia, kesukarelawanan, mekar.

INTRODUCTION

In this complex era, many individuals wish to contribute to society and volunteer their time and skills. Volunteers have a very important role in building positive change. The success of volunteers in helping local to global communities requires effective volunteer leadership.

The leadership role carried out by volunteers in an organization involves the ability to direct, motivate, and coordinate the activities of volunteers to achieve the desired results. Volunteer leadership goes beyond managing tasks and activities, it involves building relationships and inspiring and guiding volunteers to collective success.

Youth volunteering activities have been defined in the Palgrave Handbook of Volunteering, Civic Participation, and Non-Profit Associations as activities with positive social benefits undertaken by youth between the ages of 12 and 22 who volunteer without monetary reward. However, the term 'youth' is a more fluid category than a fixed age group. For example, the United Nations (UN) defines 'youth' as a person between the ages of 15 and 24, but in some country contexts, this ranges up to the age of 35. The experience of being young can vary greatly around the world. Therefore, geographical, and socio-economic contexts are always important guides in defining youth. Despite the different definitions of youth, volunteerism has become a key element in community development, especially among young people, but the contexts and modes of volunteerism are changing rapidly in the 21st century.

The growth and development of modern society demand the active participation of the younger generation in overcoming increasingly complex social challenges. The involvement of youth in volunteer activities has become an important element in addressing these various problems. This article aims to explore the significance of youth involvement in volunteer activities, its impact on personal development and community empowerment as well as the broad implications for creating positive social change.

The importance of the role of youth in the involvement of volunteer activities arises from an understanding of the leverage these groups have in inspiring positive change. They are not only contributors to volunteer spirit but also agents of change who have fresh and innovative views on social issues. Youth involvement in volunteer activities has seen increasing recognition from the community. Previous research focused on volunteerism motivation, barriers, and the impact of volunteering.

Through volunteering activities, youth can

improve soft skills, increase civic awareness, and develop empathy and leadership skills. At University Utara Malaysia (UUM), students are involved in volunteer activities through the *Membina Kesejahteraan Rakyat* (MEKAR) programme. MEKAR is an initiative focused on building the well-being of the community in Kg. Sg. Tengas, Selama, Kedah Darul Aman Malaysia. This programme helped establish a sense of belonging and instill volunteerism among university students.

Through analysis of literature and case studies, the use of technology and digital platforms has facilitated the mobility of young volunteers and allowed them to connect with peers around the world. Moreover, this article also highlights the role of educational institutions, non-governmental organizations, and governments in creating an enabling environment for youth engagement and involvement in volunteer activities.

With the potential for enthusiasm, creativity, and dedication of the younger generation, society can face urgent challenges and contribute to a more just and compassionate world. This article aims to provide a holistic view of the various aspects of youth engagement and volunteerism, which are described as a dynamic force for social progress.

This article discussed youth involvement and volunteerism. The purpose of this study is to find out the benefits, and impressions of involvement and volunteerism in the "Membina Kesejahteraan Rakyat" (MEKAR) programme.

The objectives of MEKAR are :

- i. To find out the importance of volunteerism among youth.
- ii. To discover the benefits of volunteerism among youth.
- iii. To explore the impact of youth volunteerism on personal development and community empowerment.

RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE

In general, research on youth involvement and volunteerism has had an impact, namely: an understanding of increasing volunteer involvement, increasing organizational efficiency, and increasing social impact. Effective youth involvement and volunteerism can create an inclusive environment, empower volunteers, and increase volunteer satisfaction and retention. In addition, strong volunteer contributes to achieving organizational goals more efficiently, increasing collaboration, innovation, and shared

accountability. On a broader scale, youth involvement and volunteerism have an impact on beneficial social change, strengthen communities, and create positive, sustainable impacts.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

This paper aims to examine youth involvement and volunteerism using a descriptive qualitative approach.

Qualitative approach

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach, seeking to capture information that often cannot be expressed numerically. These methodologies often include some level of interpretation from researchers as they collect information via observation, coded survey, or interview responses. For this study, we used the focus group method. The respondents for this focus group are among students who have problems with

school attendance. Hence, 50 students were selected and divided into 10 groups. Through focus groups, we explored individuals' opinions, knowledge, perceptions, and concerns concerning volunteerism.

Source and Data Collection

The research was on the MEKAR volunteerism activity implemented by the Student Leadership and Development Committee Inasis Tradewinds, Universiti Utara Malaysia in Kg. Sg. Tengah, Selama, Kedah Darul Aman Malaysia. The respondents in this research are amount of 50 student leaders from Inasis Tradewinds students who were involved with the MEKAR project. In this research, qualitative questions were given to the focus group, and data collection was done through observation, documentation, and interviews.

Data analysis

The data analysis approach was done using thematic



FIGURE 1. Students involvement in the MEKAR programme

analysis. This method analyzes qualitative data that involve familiarization, coding, generating theme, reviewing theme, defining and naming theme as well as writing up the findings. Observation, feedback, and focus groups were conducted among 50 students during the MEKAR programme.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To answer the research question that has been explained in part 1, that is, about the perception and impact of following MEKAR activities, the results of the analysis are presented as follows. In the first sub, it is explained about MEKAR, then the second sub explains the perception of students, and the third sub presents the impact of students on MEKAR activities.

MEKAR (Membina Kesejahteraan Rakyat)

MEKAR is a programme organized by the Student Leadership and Development Committee (SLDC) and Resident Student of Inasis Tradewinds Universiti Utara Malaysia in collaboration with the Mosque and residents of Kg. Sg. Tengas, Selama, Kedah Darul Aman Malaysia. The MEKAR project is an initiative to build people's well-being, which has been implemented for 3 days from 6 to 8 July 2023 involving 50 members of the Student Leadership and Development Committee (SLDC) and Resident Student of Inasis Tradewinds (Figure 1).

The purpose of MEKAR is to improve the economy, pour devotion and reform education through Science & Mathematics, and strengthen the relationship

between INASIS Tradewinds students and the residents of Kg. Sg. Tengas, Selama. One of MEKAR's activities is to assist, especially with basic needs for the village community in Selama (Figure 1). The aid is the result of a donation from Puteri UMNO in the state of Kedah. In addition, this programme can also help to educate students to appreciate the sustenance they earn.

Youth involvement and volunteerism in the MEKAR programme for 3 days at Kg. Sg. Tengas can be defined by the number of volunteerisms activities as cooperation with the villagers, donations to the needy, interesting activities for the children, business exposure as well as the opening of business sites in the village. Those activities ranged from local projects to global initiatives. Hence, it will drive social innovation and positive change through a two-way street of benefitting communities and youth themselves.

From the research conducted, it was revealed that the younger generation has tremendous potential to shape positive changes in society. Youth involvement in volunteer activities not only provides a volunteer workforce, but also stimulates personal development, community empowerment, and the creation of social innovation. In exploring the various dimensions of this topic, several important findings and reflections can be drawn.

Students' Perceptions of MEKAR

This section discusses how students perceive MEKAR activities. The theme of this section is to examine the purpose and feelings of students during MEKAR activities. Figure 3 explains the students' perceptions.

TABLE 1. Perception towards MEKAR

Student's perception of MEKAR			
No.		Themes	
1.	Purpose	i.	Opportunity to volunteer
		ii.	Increase networking
		iii.	Community engagement
2.	Benefits	i.	Add experience
		ii.	Add insight
		iii.	Increase volunteerism spirit
3.	Impact	i.	Good feelings
		ii.	Healthy lifestyle
		iii.	Become enthusiastic

The results of the interview with respondents (students), regarding the purpose of participating in MEKAR activities, each student has almost the

same purpose in participating in MEKAR activities, which is to gain the opportunity to volunteer, increase networking, and have community engagement by

directly help activities carried out by the community in Kg. Sg. Tengas, Selama. Additionally, as for the benefits of the respondents (students), it gives positive effects such add new experiences, adding insight into new kinds of volunteerism activities, and increasing volunteerism spirit. Other than that, the impact of this MEKAR volunteerism activities is that students learn to have a good feeling, a healthy lifestyle, and be more

enthusiastic.

The impact students have on MEKAR activities.

In this section, we discuss the effects that students get when participating in MEKAR activities. The theme in this section is the benefits, effects, and contributions of following MEKAR activities.

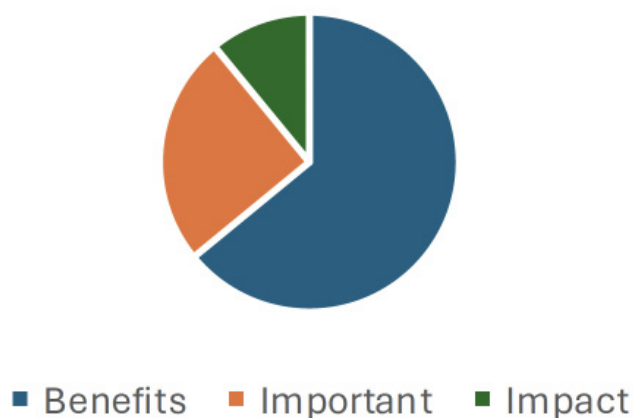


FIGURE 3. The impacts students have on MEKAR activities

Every activity benefits the student, such students helping able to help the community or villagers, able to shape themselves and their character for the better as well as having a high sense of gratitude.

As for the importance or impact students get when participating in MEKAR activities, the positive effect is increasing enthusiasm for helping citizens and increasing innovation and creativity.

The contribution that can be given when participating in MEKAR activities is, being able to learn to be a leader build personal development and learn to appreciate the opinions of others.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, it can be described the significance and positive impact of youth involvement in volunteer activities.

In the first place, the involvement of youth in volunteer activities such as MEKAR has proven that they are not only observers but also contribute to social solutions. In responding to global challenges such as climate change and social inequality, youth have shown creativity and passion in formulating innovative solutions. This impact proves that empowering youth with the opportunity to participate in volunteer activities has the potential to stimulate positive social changes.

Moreover, through involvement in volunteer activities, youth not only acquire practical skills but also experience character and leadership development. They become more aware of the social challenges that surround them and have an urge to actively contribute to finding solutions. Volunteering activities also help to form a strong civic sense, create strong social bonds, and encourage the growth of empathy.

In conclusion, youth involvement in volunteer activities has great potential to shape a better future. Through active participation in volunteer initiatives, youth can explore their potential, stimulate positive change, and build strong networks. Therefore, recognizing and supporting the role of youth in volunteering is an important step in creating a more inclusive, sustainable, and empowered society.

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