

Evaluating the Impact of Service-Learning Malaysia-University for Society (SULAM) on Student Learning and Community Engagement

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of the Service-Learning Malaysia-University for Society (SULAM) program on student learning and community engagement. SULAM, introduced by the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, integrates community service with academic learning, fostering critical reflective thinking and personal and civic responsibility. The program aims to enhance student learning, practical skill application, and societal contributions. The study evaluates whether the SULAM program effectively impacts the targeted society. A quantitative method was applied via a survey conducted among 62 students from a secondary school in Kedah to assess the SULAM program's effectiveness, namely the Finance Enlightenment Program. The findings indicate significant improvements in students' knowledge and skills in financial planning, with all the participants reporting enhanced understanding post-program. Additionally, students exhibited increased confidence in applying, sharing, and teaching acquired knowledge. The evaluation reveals high satisfaction levels with the program's location, duration, facilitator effectiveness, and delivery method. Over 95% of respondents positively rated these aspects, highlighting the program's successful execution. The study underscores SULAM's dual benefits: it enriches student learning through real-world application and fosters a sense of civic duty, while also providing valuable services to communities. The positive reception and significant knowledge gains among participants demonstrate SULAM's efficacy in bridging academic learning with community engagement, promoting a well-rounded educational experience that prepares students for future challenges and societal contributions. However, future studies should include a larger and more diverse group of respondents to ensure the findings are representative and can be generalized to a broader population.

Keywords: Service-Learning, Community Engagement, Student Development, Higher Education, Experiential Learning, Financial Literacy, SULAM, Malaysia.

Introduction

Service-Learning Malaysia-University for Society (SULAM) is an educational approach introduced by the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia with the aim to integrate community service with academic learning, focusing on critical, reflective thinking, and personal and civic

responsibility. This initiative provides significant benefits to students, universities, and the broader community, fostering a symbiotic relationship that enhances education and societal development (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2019). The benefits of SULAM can be categorized from two main perspectives: from the students' perspectives and society's perspectives.

First, from the students' perspectives, SULAM can enhance student learning and development. SULAM allows students to apply theoretical knowledge gained in the classroom to real-world scenarios (Naufal et al., 2024). This experiential learning helps reinforce academic concepts and improves understanding. For instance, engineering students may work on community projects that require designing and implementing sustainable solutions, enhancing their practical skills and technical knowledge.

Next, participation in SULAM activities helps students develop essential soft skills such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and leadership. These skills are crucial for their future careers and personal development, making them well-rounded individuals ready to tackle diverse challenges (Johan et al., 2022). Besides, SULAM encourages students to engage with their communities, fostering a sense of civic duty and social responsibility (Yusof et al., 2020). Students become more aware of societal issues and are motivated to contribute positively, developing a lifelong commitment to community service.

SULAM also provides huge benefits to the universities. Integrating service learning into university curricula enriches academic programs, making them more dynamic and relevant. Universities can offer unique, hands-on learning experiences that attract prospective students and improve overall educational quality (Johan et al., 2022). Furthermore, SULAM initiatives strengthen the relationship between universities and local communities, creating opportunities for collaboration and mutual support. Universities can leverage community partnerships for research, development projects, and practical learning opportunities, benefiting both students and community members (Sathorar and Geduld, 2021). Service learning promotes a culture of engagement and social responsibility within the university community. Faculty, staff, and students are encouraged to collaborate on projects that address community needs, fostering an inclusive and supportive academic environment.

Second, from the society's perspective, the SULAM project can have a huge impact on the target participants. SULAM projects are designed to address specific needs within communities, such as education, health, environmental sustainability, and social welfare (Naufal et al., 2024). By providing valuable services and resources, these initiatives help improve the quality of life for community members. Engaging with universities through SULAM empowers communities by providing access to expertise, knowledge, and innovative solutions. Community members gain new skills, resources, and support, enabling them to tackle challenges and achieve their goals more effectively (Mokthsim, 2023). SULAM fosters social change by addressing systemic issues and promoting sustainable development. Collaborative efforts between universities and communities can lead to significant improvements in areas such as education, healthcare, and environmental conservation.

Thus, this study aims to demonstrate the societal benefits of the SULAM program. To achieve this, a survey was conducted with 62 respondents who provided feedback on the SULAM initiative, namely the Finance Enlightenment Program. The survey results will help determine the effectiveness of SULAM in enhancing societal welfare and addressing community needs.

Literature Review

Service-learning is an educational approach that combines learning objectives with community service to provide a pragmatic, progressive learning experience while meeting societal needs. It integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities (Bandy, 2016). This pedagogical model allows students to apply academic knowledge to real-world issues, fostering a deeper understanding of the subject matter and its societal implications (Theledi, 2024).

In Malaysia, the Ministry of Higher Education introduced the SULAM program as part of its educational reform efforts to enhance student engagement and societal contribution. The SULAM program was introduced with the primary objective of integrating community service with academic learning, focusing on critical reflective thinking and personal and civic responsibility. It aims to provide students with experiential learning opportunities that enhance their academic knowledge, practical skills, and social awareness (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2019). The implementation of SULAM involves collaboration between universities and community organizations, where students participate in projects addressing real-world challenges while earning academic credits.

Service-learning has been shown to improve student understanding and retention of academic content. By applying theoretical knowledge to practical situations, students gain a deeper understanding and are more likely to remember and utilize the information learned (Prianto et al., 2022). Participation in service-learning activities helps students develop essential soft skills such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and leadership. These skills are crucial for personal development and future career success (Al Asefer and Abidin, 2021).

Service-learning fosters a sense of civic duty and social responsibility. Students become more aware of societal issues and are motivated to contribute positively to their communities, developing a lifelong commitment to community service (Thelma, 2024). Service-learning strengthens the relationship between universities and local communities. It creates opportunities for collaboration and mutual support, benefiting both students and community members (Compare et al., 2022).

While the benefits of service-learning are well-documented, several challenges must be addressed to ensure successful implementation. These include logistical issues, such as coordinating schedules between students, faculty, and community partners, as well as ensuring that the service projects align with academic objectives (Naufal et al., 2024). Additionally, there is a need for adequate training and support for faculty to effectively integrate service-learning into their curricula (Smith et al., 2013). Preliminary studies on the SULAM program in Malaysia indicate positive outcomes for both students and communities. Students participating in SULAM have reported improved academic performance, enhanced practical skills, and a greater sense of civic responsibility. Communities have benefited from the innovative solutions and resources provided by university collaborations (Naufal et al., 2024).

The SULAM program exemplifies the potential of service-learning to enrich education and promote social good. By integrating community service with academic learning, SULAM fosters a symbiotic relationship between students, universities, and communities, enhancing education and societal development. Future research should focus on long-term outcomes and best practices for implementing and sustaining service-learning initiatives in diverse educational contexts.

Methodology

The study employs a quantitative research approach, utilizing a structured questionnaire to collect data. This methodology is chosen to systematically quantify the effectiveness and impact of the Finance Enlightenment program on participating students.

Participants

A total of 68 students from Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Ibrahim Sungai Petani, Kedah, participated in the Finance Enlightenment program. Out of these, 62 participants responded to the questionnaire, providing data for the analysis. The respondents were students from Form 1 to Form 4.

Survey Instrument

The survey instrument was a questionnaire comprising 15 questions, divided into four main sections: Part A: Demographic Information. This section includes three questions focusing on the respondents' age, grade level at school, and gender. Part B: Program Effectiveness. This section consists of six questions designed to evaluate various aspects of the program's effectiveness, including the appropriateness of the program objectives, content, and delivery. Part C: Knowledge Evaluation. This section assesses the participants' knowledge before and after the program, measuring the improvement in their financial literacy. Part D: Overall Evaluation. This section provides an overall evaluation of the organizer and the program, along with space for additional comments and suggestions from the participants.

Data Collection

The questionnaires were distributed to the participants at the end of the program. The students completed the surveys independently, ensuring their responses reflected their personal experiences and opinions about the program.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using IBM SPSS software. Descriptive statistics were employed to interpret the results, providing a comprehensive overview of the participants' demographic information, the effectiveness of the program, changes in financial knowledge, and overall satisfaction with the program and its organization.

Findings and Discussion

Socio-demographic Characteristic

Figure 1 shows the age distribution of 62 respondents. The breakdown is as follows: 35.5% of respondents are 13 years old, 21% are 14 years old, 32.3% are 15 years old, and 11.3% are 16 years old. The largest age group among the respondents is 13 years old, representing more than one-third of the total. Another significant portion of the respondents is 15 years old, making up 32.3% of the participants. This is followed by 14-year-olds at 21%, and the smallest group is 16-year-olds at 11.3%.

AGE

62 responses

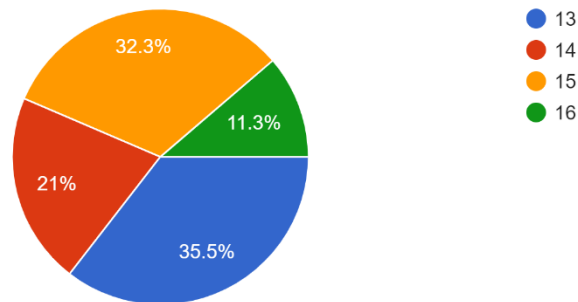


Figure 1: Age of respondents

FORM/CLASS

62 responses

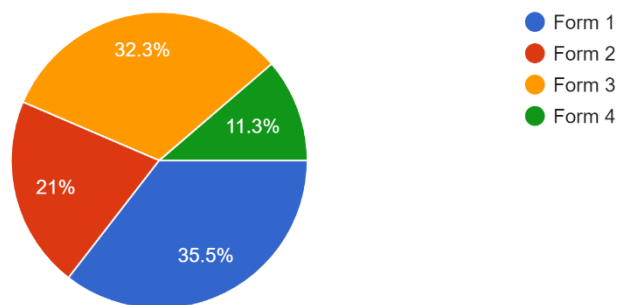


Figure 2: Grade level of respondents in school

GANDER

62 responses

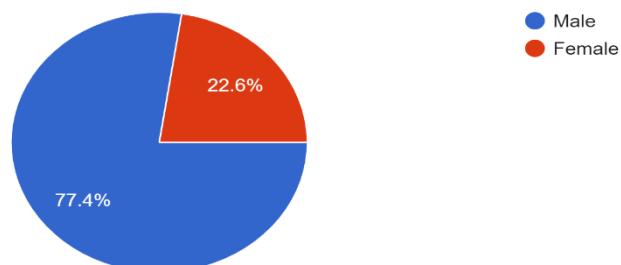


Figure 3: Gender of respondents

Figure 2 and Figure 3 show the class/form distribution and the gender of 62 respondents. The breakdown is as follows: 35.5% are in Form 1, 21% are in Form 2, 32.3% are in Form 3, and 11.3% are in Form 4. The largest group among the respondents is Form 1, representing 35.5%

of the participants. This is followed by Form 3 at 32.3%, and then Form 2 at 21%. The smallest group is Form 4, representing 11.3% of the respondents. This indicates a strong representation of early and mid-secondary students, with fewer older students participating. From a gender perspective (Figure 3), the majority of the program participants are male, representing 77.4%. The remaining 22.6% of participants are female.

Program Effectiveness Evaluation

In this section, measurement indicators were used, with a scale ranging from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied) with six questions had been asked.

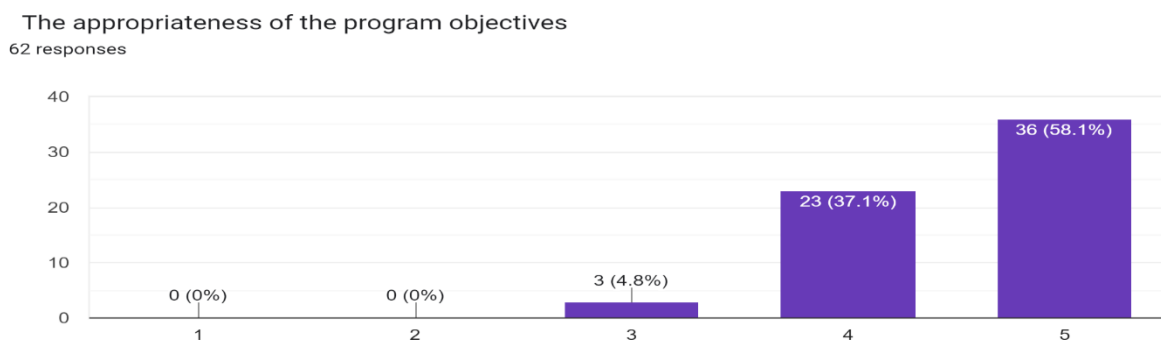


Figure 4: The appropriateness of the program objectives

Based on Figure 4, the majority of respondents (58.1%) strongly agree that the program objectives are appropriate. This indicates a high level of satisfaction with how the program objectives align with their expectations or needs. Combining the percentages of respondents who agree and strongly agree (37.1% + 58.1%), the analysis finds that 95.2% of the respondents have a positive view of the program objectives. This overwhelmingly positive feedback suggests that the program objectives are well-received and considered relevant by the vast majority.

A small fraction of the respondents (4.8%) remain neutral. This indicates that while they don't have a negative perception of the program objectives, they are not particularly enthusiastic either. This group might need further information or clarification about the program objectives to form a more definitive opinion. Notably, there are no responses in the strongly disagree or disagree categories (0%). This absence of negative feedback is a strong indicator of the program's effectiveness in meeting its stated objectives.

The program's content
62 responses

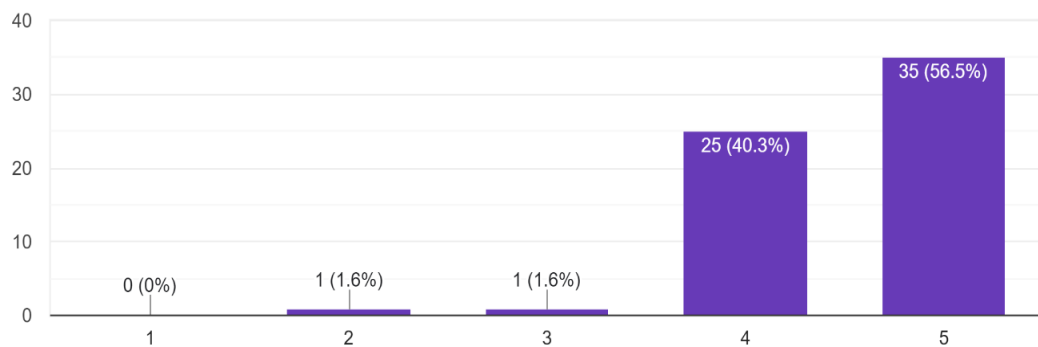


Figure 5: The program's content

According to Figure 5, a majority of the respondents (56.5%) strongly agree that the program's content is appropriate. This suggests a high level of satisfaction with the content delivered during the program. Combining the percentages of respondents who agree and strongly agree (40.3% + 56.5%), the analysis find that 96.8% of the respondents view the program's content positively. This indicates a robust approval rate for the content provided.

A very small fraction of the respondents (1.6%) remain neutral, and another 1.6% disagree with the appropriateness of the program's content. The low percentages in these categories suggest that there are minimal concerns regarding the program content among the participants. There are no responses in the strongly disagree category (0%). The absence of strong negative feedback reinforces the general approval and acceptance of the program content.

The speaker's expertise in delivering knowledge
62 responses

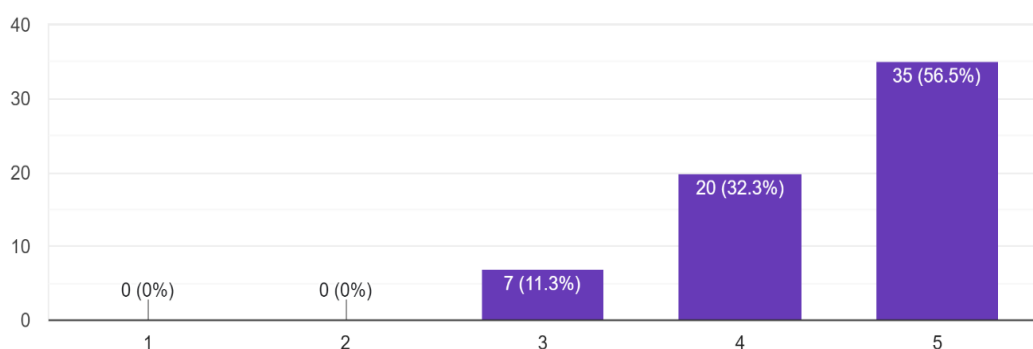


Figure 6: The speaker's expertise in delivering knowledge

Based on Figure 6, the majority of respondents (56.5%) strongly agree that the speaker's expertise in delivering knowledge is commendable. This indicates a high level of satisfaction with the speaker's ability and effectiveness. Combining the percentages of respondents who

agree and strongly agree (32.3% + 56.5%), the analysis find that 88.8% of the respondents have a positive view of the speaker's expertise. This overwhelming positive feedback suggests that the speaker was well-received and considered knowledgeable.

A small fraction of respondents (11.3%) remain neutral. This indicates that while they do not have a negative perception of the speaker's expertise, they are not particularly enthusiastic either. This group might need more convincing or have had different expectations. There are no responses in the strongly disagree or disagree categories (0%). This absence of negative feedback is a strong indicator of the speaker's effectiveness in delivering knowledge.

The facilitator's efficiency in ensuring the program runs smoothly

62 responses

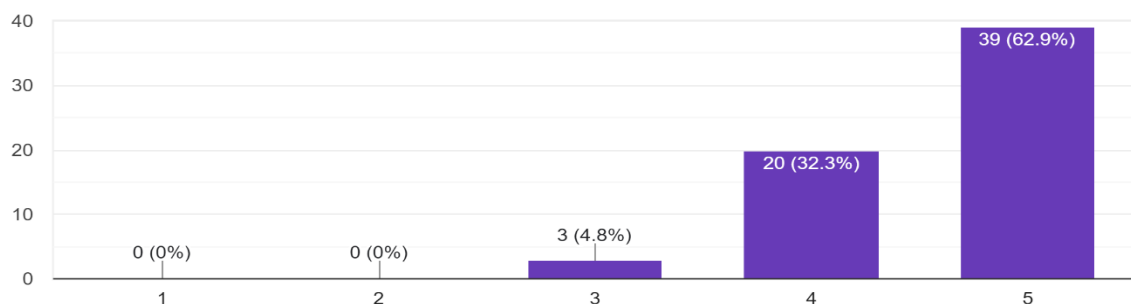


Figure 7: The facilitator's efficiency in ensuring the program runs smoothly

Based on Figure 7, the majority of respondents (62.9%) strongly agree that the facilitator's efficiency contributed to the smooth running of the program. This indicates a high level of satisfaction with the facilitator's effectiveness. When combining the percentages of respondents who agree and strongly agree (32.3% + 62.9%), the analysis finds that 95.2% of respondents have a positive view of the facilitator's efficiency. This overwhelming positive feedback suggests that the facilitator was highly skilled and competent in conducting the program.

A small fraction of respondents (4.8%) remain neutral. This indicates that, while they do not have a negative perception of the facilitator's efficiency, they are not particularly enthusiastic either. This group might need more convincing or had different expectations. Notably, there are no responses in the strongly disagree or disagree categories (0%). The absence of negative feedback strongly indicates the facilitator's efficiency in ensuring the program ran smoothly.

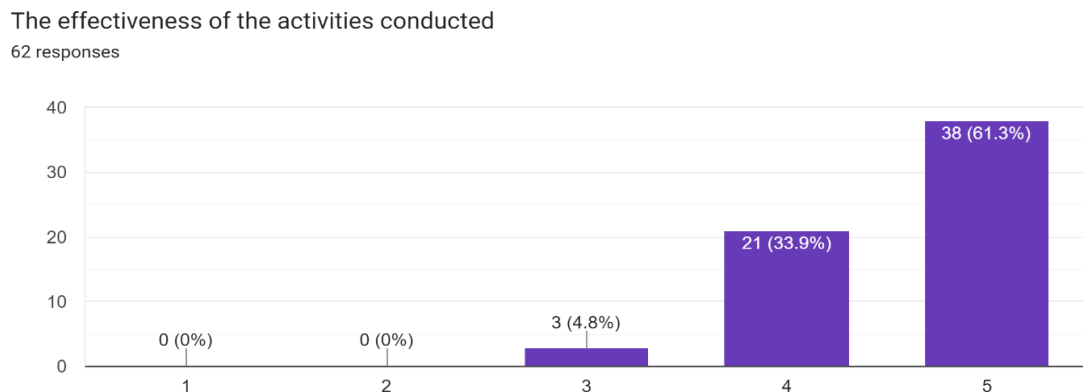


Figure 8: The effectiveness of the activities conducted

Based on Figure 8, the majority of respondents, 61.3% (38 out of 62), strongly agree that the activities conducted were effective. This suggests a high level of satisfaction with how the activities were structured and executed. 33.9% (21 out of 62) of respondents agree that the activities were effective. When combined with the strongly agree responses, this brings the total to 95.2% of respondents who viewed the activities positively.

A small fraction, 4.8% (3 out of 62), remain neutral. This group neither agrees nor disagrees with the effectiveness of the activities, indicating a need for potential improvements to engage these participants more effectively. There are no responses in the strongly disagree or disagree categories (0%). This absence of negative feedback is a strong indicator that the activities were well-received overall.

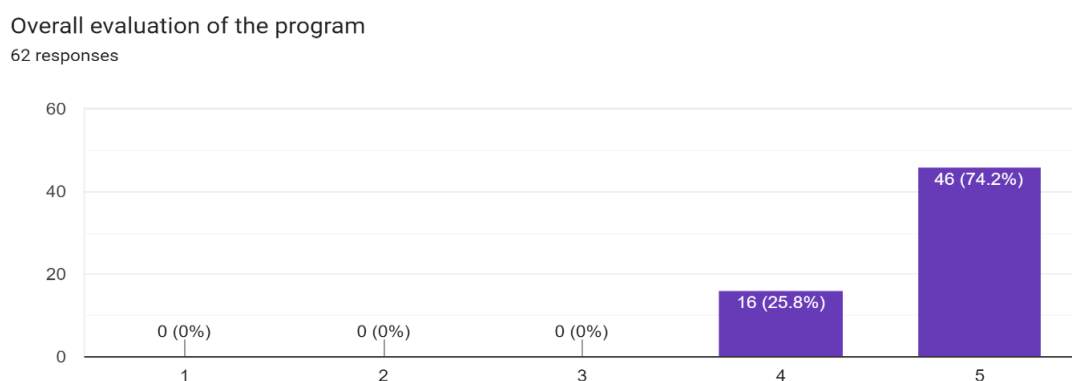


Figure 9: Overall evaluation of the program

Based Figure 9, a significant majority, 74.2% (46 out of 62), strongly agree that the program was overall very effective. This indicates an excellent reception and satisfaction with the program as a whole. 25.8% (16 out of 62) of respondents agree that the program was effective. Combining this with the strongly agree responses, a total of 100% of the respondents viewed the program positively. There are no responses in the neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree categories (0%). This unanimous positive feedback is a testament to the program's success and effectiveness.

Evaluation of participants' knowledge BEFORE and AFTER the program

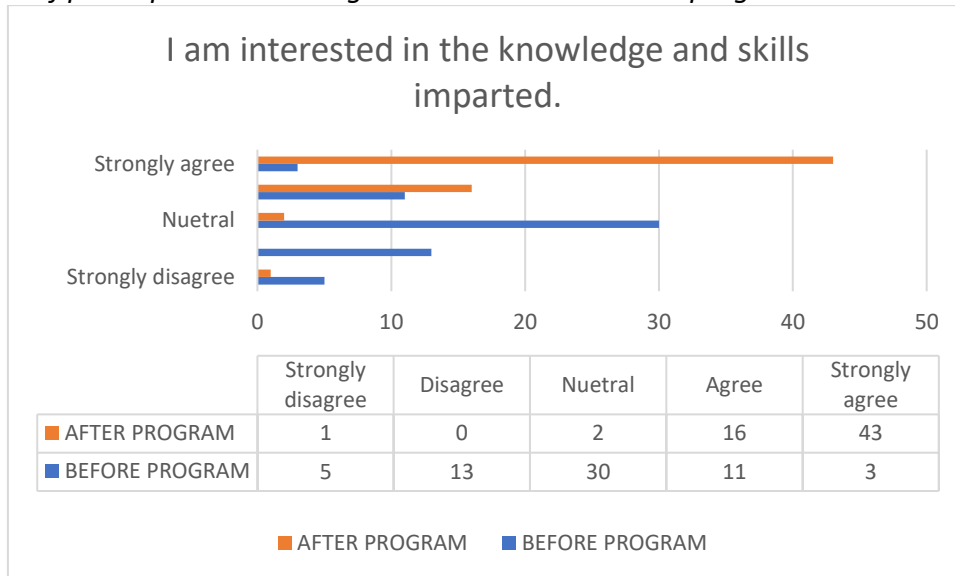


Figure 10: I am interested in the knowledge and skills imparted.

Figure 10 indicates a significant shift in participants' interest in the knowledge and skills imparted by the program. Most participants moved from neutral or disagreeing to strongly agreeing that they are interested in the knowledge and skills provided by the program. This positive trend suggests that the program was effective in engaging the participants and increasing their interest in the subject matter.

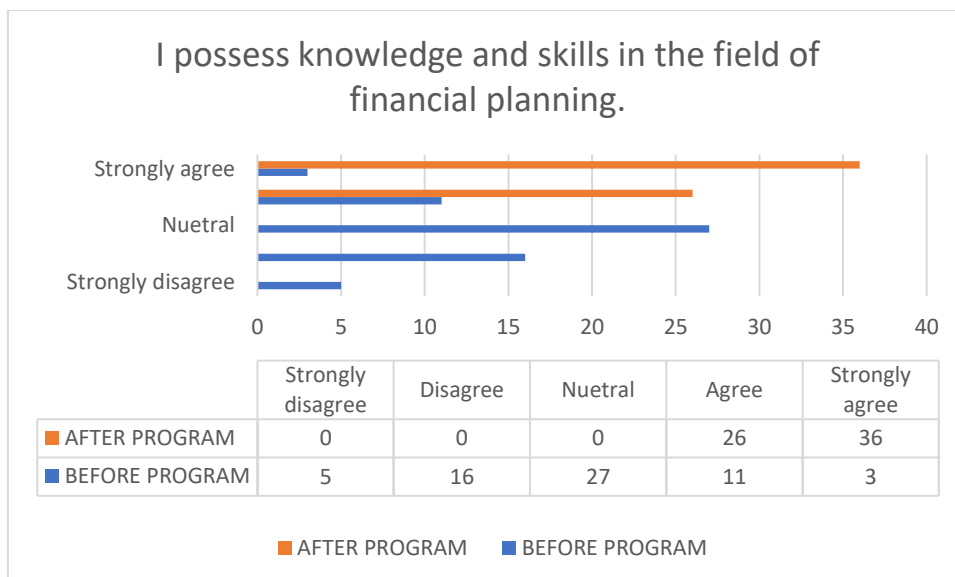


Figure 11: I possess knowledge and skills in the field of financial planning.

Figure 11 indicates that before the program, most participants were neutral or disagreed that they possessed financial planning knowledge and skills. However, after the program conducted, all the participants strongly agreed or agreed they had gained this knowledge and skills.

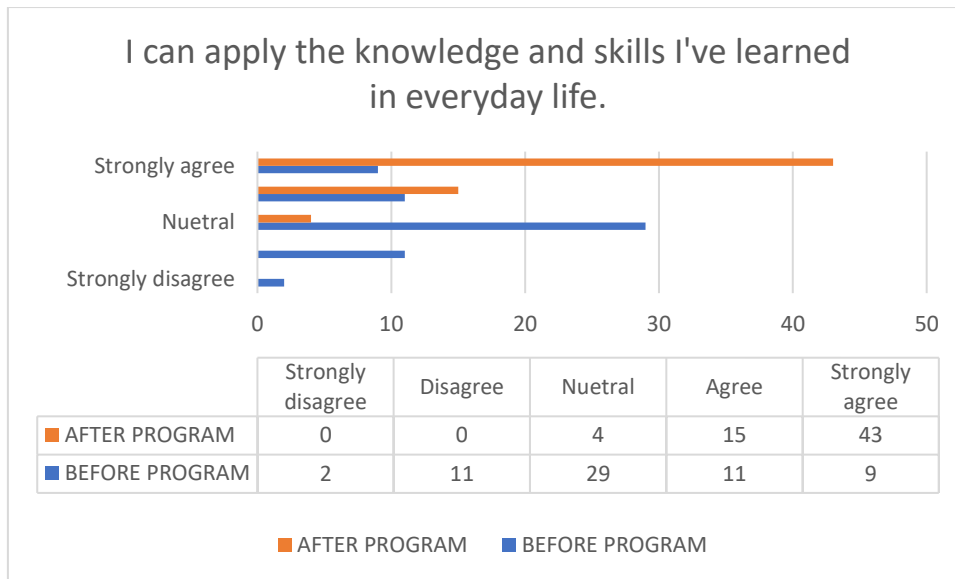


Figure 12: I can apply the knowledge and skills I've learned in everyday life.

Based on Figure 12, most participants prior to the program were neutral or disagreed they could apply their knowledge and skills in everyday life. However, their perception changed after the program, an overwhelming majority strongly agreed or agreed they could apply what they had learned.

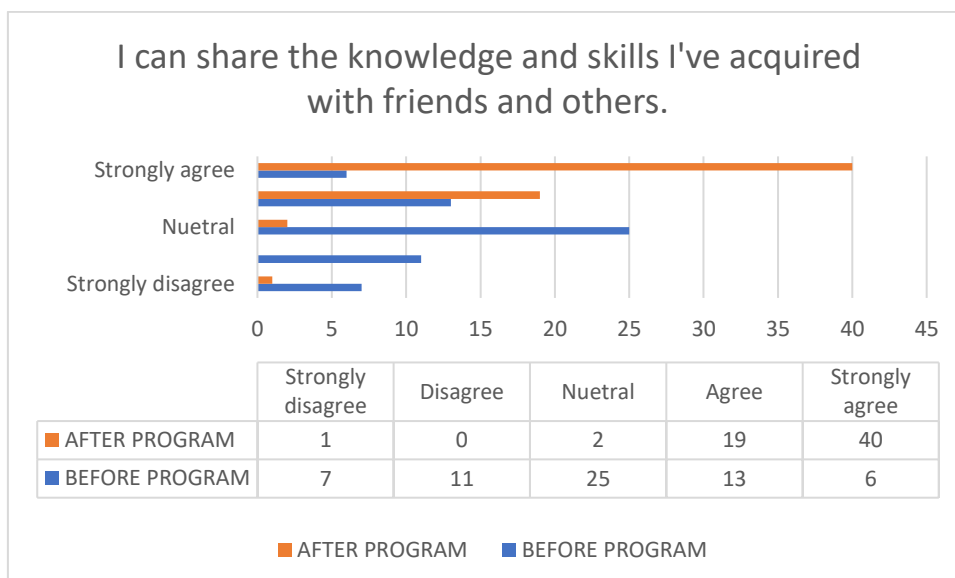


Figure 13: I can share the knowledge and skills I've acquired with friends and others.

Based on Figure 13, most participants prior to the program were neutral or disagreed they could share their knowledge and skills with others. However, their perception changed after the program, the majority strongly agreed or agreed they could effectively share what they had learned.

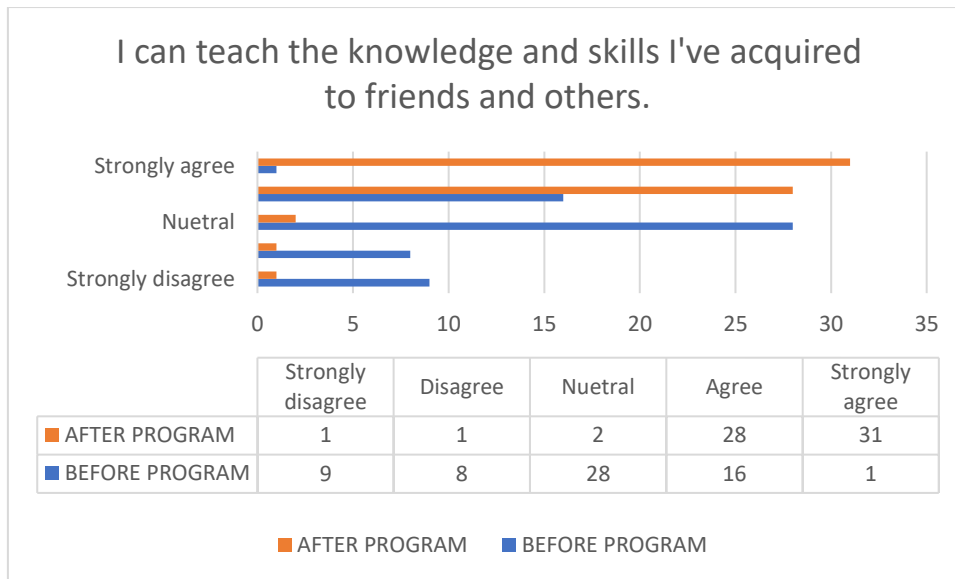


Figure 14: I can teach the knowledge and skills I've acquired to friends and others.

Figure 14 indicates that prior to the program, most participants were neutral, disagreed and strongly disagreed (45 out of 62) they could teach their knowledge and skills to others. However, their perception changed after the program conducted where the majority strongly agreed or agreed (59 out of 62) they could teach what they had learned to others.

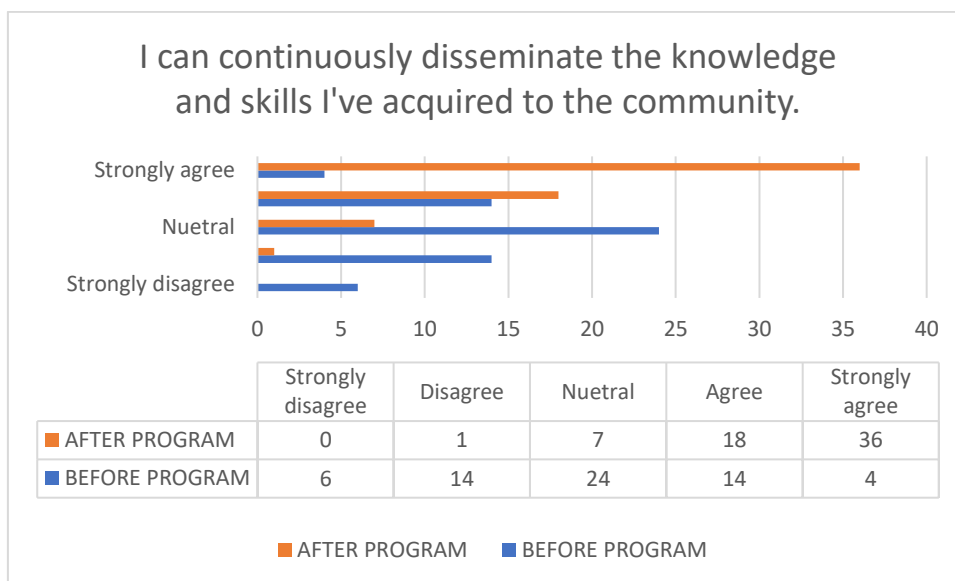


Figure 15: I can continuously disseminate the knowledge and skills I've acquired to the community.

Figure 15 indicates that prior to the program, most participants were neutral or disagreed they could continuously share their knowledge and skills with the community. After the program, the majority strongly agreed or agreed they could effectively disseminate what they had learned.

In summary, this financial enlightenment program was highly successful in equipping participants with applicable knowledge and skills, and empowering them to share, teach, and disseminate this information to others and their community. The data also indicates that this

program significantly improved participants' self-reported knowledge, skills, and abilities related to financial planning.

Evaluation of the Organizer

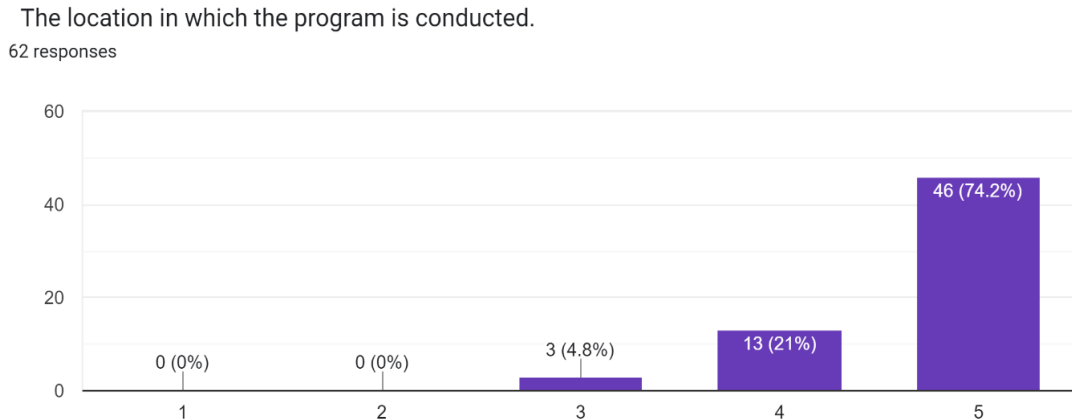


Figure 16: The location in which the program is conducted.

Based on the Figure 16, a significant majority, 74.2% (46 out of 62), strongly agree that the location of the program was appropriate and satisfactory. This indicates a high level of satisfaction with the venue chosen for the program. 21% (13 out of 62) of respondents agree that the location was suitable. When combined with the strongly agree responses, a total of 95.2% of the respondents have a positive view of the program's location.

A small fraction, 4.8% (3 out of 62), remain neutral regarding the location. This suggests that while these respondents do not have a negative perception of the location, they were not particularly impressed or felt it was just adequate. There are no responses in the strongly disagree or disagree categories (0%). The absence of negative feedback is a strong indicator that the location was well-received overall.

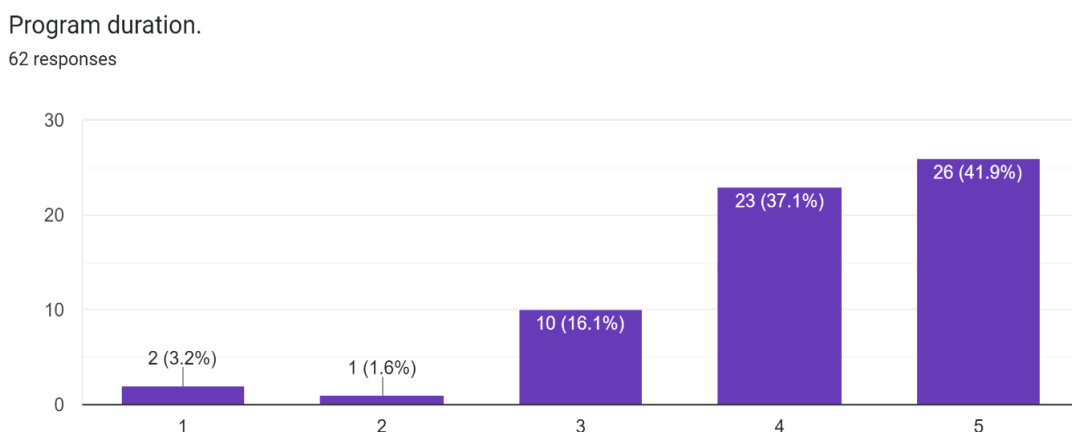


Figure 17: Program duration.

Based on the Figure 17, a significant majority, 41.9% (26 out of 62), strongly agree that the program duration was appropriate and satisfactory. This indicates a high level of satisfaction with the allocation time chosen for the program. 37.1% (23 out of 62) of respondents agree that the time allocation was appropriate. When combined between strongly agree and agree responses, a total of 79% of the respondents have a positive view of the program's duration. Besides, 16.1% (10 out of 62), remain neutral regarding the program duration. This suggests that while these respondents do not have a negative perception of the time allocation, they were not particularly impressed or felt it was just adequate. There are two responses in the strongly disagree and one response on disagree categories.

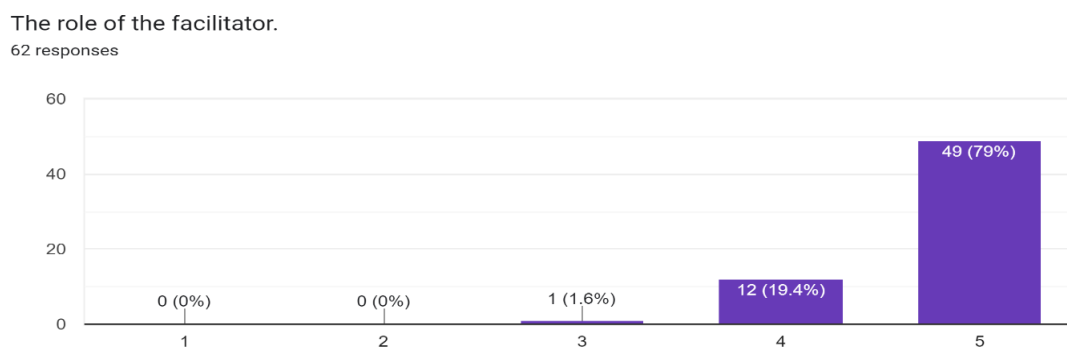


Figure 18: The role of the facilitator.

Based on the Figure 18, a significant majority, 79% (49 out of 62), strongly agree and 19.4% (12 out of 62) of respondents agree that the role played by facilitator was superb. The data suggests that the facilitator played a central role in guiding the participants through the program content and activities. When combined with both scales, a total of 98.4% of the respondents have a positive view of the role played by facilitator during the program. A small fraction, 1.6% (1 out of 62), remain neutral regarding the location and no responses in the strongly disagree or disagree categories (0%).

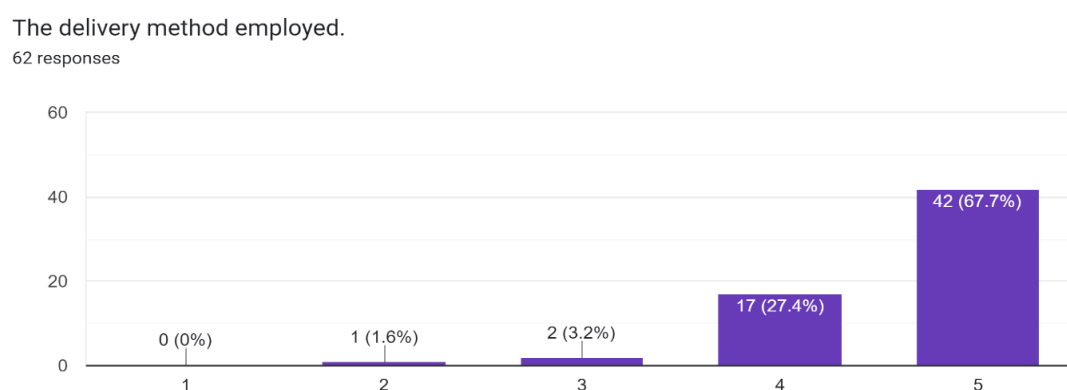


Figure 19: The delivery method employed.

Based on the Figure 19, a significant majority, 67.7% (42 out of 62) strongly agree and 27.4% (17 out of 62) of respondents agree that the delivery method employed in this program was suitable. The data suggests that the right delivery method employed played a central role in

educational programs to meet the needs and interests of students effectively. This argument aligns with the many studies such as Ghaleb et al (2021); Rokeman et al (2024) which emphasized the importance for program organizers to understand the detailed background of participants. Ensuring that program content aligns with participants' interests makes the program more meaningful and beneficial for all parties involved.

Overall, the program was highly successful in achieving its objectives, effectively engaging participants, and imparting valuable knowledge and skills. The overwhelmingly positive feedback across various aspects of the program, from content and delivery to facilitator efficiency and venue suitability, underscores its impact. The shift in participants' self-reported knowledge, skills, and abilities before and after the program demonstrates its practical benefits, empowering participants to apply, share, and teach their newfound knowledge.

Conclusion

SULAM is a transformative approach that bridges the gap between academic learning and community service. By enhancing student learning and development, benefiting universities, and positively impacting communities, SULAM plays a crucial role in promoting education and societal advancement. Its emphasis on practical application, civic responsibility, and community engagement makes it an essential component of modern higher education, fostering a more informed, skilled, and socially responsible generation.

The study demonstrates the significant benefits of the SULAM program, particularly the Finance Enlightenment Program, to society. The positive feedback from the participants underscores the effectiveness of the program in meeting its objectives, delivering relevant content, and providing knowledgeable speakers and efficient facilitators. Additionally, the substantial improvement in participants' financial knowledge and skills post-program highlights the program's success in achieving its educational goals.

Acknowledgment

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