

Youth and Sustainability: Leaders of the Future
(Sub Theme: Youth and Environmental Leadership)

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Abstract

One of the best ways of conserving the environment is by creating environmental awareness among society especially among the youth (students) as they are the future leaders and inheritors of the world. Youth play an important role in protecting our planet, environment and the quality of life of our societies in the pursuit of a sustainable tomorrow. This paper discusses on the role of youth as future leaders in protecting and conserving the environment. Youth have the power to enact positive change, which is not only limited to university communities but also to the world. Universities can be a platform for youth as they are a living lab and replicate how the real world functions. By increasing awareness and engaging youth on campus sustainability, universities can play a significant role not only in educating the youth but also in encouraging and improving the youth's abilities to put their knowledge into action. Engaging youth as sustainable agents can lead to a more just, peaceful, inclusive, secure and sustainable world.

Keyword: Youth, leaders, engagement, campus sustainability, awareness

Introduction

Campus sustainability has received increased attention from institutions of higher learning throughout the world (Horhota et al., 2014; Zwickle et al., 2014; Lozano and Young 2013; Lozano, 2006; Velazquez et al., 2005; and Cortese, 2003). Universities are incorporating sustainability into their operations due to the pressure from governments and the public that recognize that universities are one of the key entities for realizing a sustainable future. Mostafa Nejati and Mehran Nejati (2012) state that, *“Given the growing global interest on the university’s role towards promoting*

sustainability, an increasing number of universities are committing themselves to sustainability.” Furthermore, through sustainability, universities have managed to improve not only in reducing their expenses but also by enhancing their work efficiency, maintaining the environment within their vicinity and managing to reduce the amount of pollutants generated.

Today’s students are tomorrow’s leaders. Students prove to play a crucial role in realizing campus sustainability as they represent the majority of the community. In this study, we will focus on the youth’s involvement towards campus sustainability. Several aspects such as their awareness, behavior and engagement in practicing sustainability practices are investigated. Being future leaders, it is important to inculcate a sense of responsibility towards the environment early in students’ lives in order to create a prosperous and livable environment. Campus sustainability is a good starting point as campuses not only replicate how the real world functions, but campuses are also a living lab where youth/students can apply their knowledge to create a sustainable future (Farrell, 2010; HEFCE, 2008; Litten and Terkla, 2007; and Warburton, 2003).

Methodology

A survey questionnaire was distributed to 562 students from various faculties. The questionnaire was adapted from Sadusky’s study (2014) on college students’ perception and behaviour towards sustainability. The questionnaire consists of 18 questions comprising four (4) major sections which are students’ demographic profile, their daily routine/habits of a sustainable lifestyle, their awareness and knowledge of campus sustainable programs and their perceptions of the campus sustainability programs. Out of 562 questionnaires distributed, a total of 430 students responded of whom 260 were females and 170 were males.

Findings and Discussion

Demographic Profile

The study participants included first year to final year students. 352 students (81.86%) were staying on campus whereas the other 78 students (18.14%) stayed off campus. The students were from various faculties representing both Sciences and Social Sciences.

Sustainable Lifestyle

The findings indicate that a majority of the students practice sustainable lifestyles. From the responses given, 50.7% of the students walked to their classes while another 24.88% used public transportation. This figure clearly indicates that, combined, the students consider walking and using public transport to be the most sustainable mode of transportation on campus.

Besides sustainable modes of transportation, another sustainable practice measured was saving electricity, both on and off campus. The vast majority of students (89.53%) stated that they turned off lights when not in use. A majority of students (59.53%) also purchased their food from their college cafes, as the café's are cheaper and more economical than eating off-campus. However, some inhibiting factors prevent the students from carrying out sustainable practices such as utilizing a reusable water bottle (33.95%), recycling (7.67%) and using reusable shopping bags (23.02%). Students found it troublesome to bring along reusable shopping bags. Recycling was also burdensome as facilities were not widely provided.

Responses to Campus Sustainability Programmes

This particular section seeks out students' awareness on campus sustainability programmes. Among the programmes being organized were Recycling on Campus; Water Warriors (Water activities, knowledge transfer, gotong-royong, etc); UM Zero Waste Campaign and Save energy in College (Save electricity and water). The most popular programme was the Save Energy in College (Save electricity and water) which received 46.98% of student participation. The reasons why this activity was popular among the students was because it was done at the college level, it did not cost them financially, and only a short amount of time was required to carry out the activity.

Other sustainable activities carried out on the campus seemed to be less appealing. For these unpopular activities, students cited that they were either unaware of the activities or they did not have the time to participate in them. The number of respondents who were interested but did not have time to participate was quite high for Recycling on Campus (52.56%), Water Warriors (Water activities, knowledge transfer, gotong-royong, etc) (48.14%) and Zero Waste Campaign (42.09%). The percentage of students who were unaware of the sustainability programmes was high for the Zero Waste Campaign (46.28%) and the Water Warriors (33.49%). This clearly shows how

important the dissemination of information and publicity are for garnering students' involvement in campus sustainability programmes.

Attitudes toward Sustainability

Students were asked to select which sustainable practices they would like to see implemented or expanded at the university. Implementation of a Green Campus such as the planting of trees, less waste production, and energy efficient practices was the first choice. Other choices included sustainable buildings, educational programmes, sustainable community and the recycling of materials (hazardous and electronic), which also ranked high and received a huge amount of support from the students. This clearly shows that students support on-campus sustainability.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Campuses can act as a catalyst in nurturing future leaders who are not only knowledgeable and skillful, but also care about morality, ethics and responsibility towards the environment. Campus sustainability can help mold youth into future leaders by acting as microcosms for how the real world functions. Their involvement in campus-based programs and initiatives can enable them to use the university as a living laboratory to enhance learning.

In achieving the goal of producing future leaders through campus sustainability, it is important to ensure the students' participation in campus sustainability activities as it enables the students to understand what is required in order to create an environment where every individual can live in peace, harmony and comfort with the resources available to them. In addition, knowledge and awareness also proves to be vital towards generating future leaders that are capable of ensuring a brighter future. Therefore, campus sustainability initiatives can be one of the best options for producing future leaders that are concerned with producing a brighter and sustainable future for all.

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