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Students Facilitators Involvement in a University-Based Community Service: How It Benefits Them

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores tertiary students' perception on their involvement in a university-based cross-age tutoring community service project known as Edutainment. The project which received an industrial grant by KHIND Starfish Foundation was organized by Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Cawangan Johor Malaysia. The project involved thirty UiTM students who acted as the facilitators as well as five lecturers who were the advisors for the project. The project was carried out for eight weeks among underprivileged one hundred Standard Four and Five primary school students who were provided with special learning modules which focused on providing learning tips and motivation particularly in learning the English Language, Bahasa Melayu (Malay language), Mathematics and Science. After the project ended, the facilitators were asked to answer a set of questionnaires to analyse their perception regarding their involvement in the community service project and how it benefits them. The findings revealed that they perceived the project provides positive impacts towards their communication skill as well as motivation in community service volunteerism.

Contribution/Originality: This paper analyses tertiary students' perception on their involvement in a university-based cross-age tutoring community service project known as Edutainment. To date there are very few studies conducted on this area and hence, findings will contribute to the field of knowledge.

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1. Introduction

One of the best ways to help student's experience meaningful learning and at the same time contribute to the community is to get them involved in a good university-based community service project (Meyer, Neumayr, & Rameder, 2019). Students involved in community service are more likely to be intrinsically motivated to increase their level of involvement in the community, which helps to enhance their communication skills (Eyler & Giles, 2000). In addition, students who are actively involved in community service can be inquisitive and able to enhance their soft skills (Wan Zumusni, Ismail, Ratan Singh & Elias, 2009; Ismail et al., 2014; Ismail et al., 2015b). Moreover, community service projects provide students with an opportunity to learn beyond the bounds of the classroom and give them ample chance to increase their communicative and cooperative skills (Ismail et al., 2019).

2. Literature Review

On the effects of students participating in community service, several research have been done revealed that the programmes had various positive effects on the pupils who took part. According to a study by Eyler and Giles (2000), for instance, students who participate in community service are more likely to be intrinsically driven to increase their degree of involvement in the community, which aids in the improvement of their communication and learning skills. Students that participate in community service can also be curious and develop their critical thinking abilities (Ismail et al. 2006). As a result, community service projects give students the chance to learn outside of the walls of traditional classrooms and give them plenty of opportunities to improve their learning skills (Ismail et al., 2015b; Mey, Werner, & Villiers, 2018; Meyer, Neumayr, & Rameder, 2019).

Furthermore, a study by the Higher Education Research Institute USA found that community service has positive effects on learning in areas such as academic performance (GPA, writing skills, critical thinking skills), values (commitment to activism and racial understanding), self-efficacy, leadership and interpersonal skills, choice of service career, and plans to continue serving others after college (Astin & Sax, 2001). Participation in community service has also been linked to notable gains in academic performance, particularly in writing. These benefits of service improve the possibility that students will continue to grow interested in future service initiatives. Research on the Service-Learning learning outcomes was done by a team of Ohio University academics. A total of 113 students registered for one of the five courses built on the Service-Learning approach. The five courses are an interpersonal communication course in conference planning, an English technical writing course, a business management course on human resources, a teacher preparation course, and an educational psychology course on hearing and speech.

One research team created a pre- and post-test based on common measures of attitudes towards the service and perceptions of particular and general learning outcomes in order to investigate students' affective and cognitive reactions to these encounters. The pupils asserted that they had been able to sharpen their analytical thinking, which had improved their capacity for comprehension and problem-solving. More importantly, students become more cognizant of the social issues they are surrounded by and the importance of getting involved in the community. In other words, individuals not only improve their analytical thinking, which in turn improves their scholastic abilities, but

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they also grow in their capacity to be more dependable members of society (Greenwood et al., 2003; Goethem et al., 2014).

Participation in service learning by students can enhance their educational experience and aid in their understanding of the material covered in their university courses. The effect of tutors with limited training on middle school students' pass/fail ratios in core topics like science, math, reading, and English is evaluated by Allen and Chavkin (2004) in a 2004 study. Tutors and students from one significant urban and two lesser-known rural school districts took part in the study. All of the participating campuses serviced a sizable percentage of families with low incomes, and many of them were inner-city schools. The study included a within-program control group that enables comparisons between participants who get more and less treatment. Based on the quantity of tutoring they got, students were split into two groups for the purposes of this evaluation. The results demonstrated that tutoring middle school kids by community members with little training can be successful.

Ismail et al., (2015b) examined student facilitators' perspectives on the advantages of community service, particularly with reference to the students' communication anxiety. Prior to and after participating in the community service project that their institution organised, the respondents were asked to complete a series of questionnaires that assessed their level of communication anxiety. In order to examine the subjects' perceptions of the project, a different set of questionnaires were also given to the participants. According to the report, students see the value of participating in community service. The students observed a significant decrease in their level of anxiety around ESL communication as well as an increase in enthusiasm and motivation to give back to the community.

Ismail et al. (2006) evaluated the effect of community service on the ESL speaking abilities of tertiary students in a different study. A group of student facilitators from UiTM Johor were pre-tested on their speaking abilities as part of this pre and post-test study. Based on the speaking sections of the MUET (Malaysian University English Test), the samples were assessed. The subjects then took part in the university's cross-age tutoring community service initiative, which required them to teach English to a small group of chosen primary school pupils. The subjects were required to take a post-project test. The results showed a considerable improvement in the task completion, communicative skills, and overall speaking performance of the student facilitators.

2.1. Positive Impacts of Cross-Age Tutoring

One of the reasons cross-age tutoring works may be that tutors and tutees speak a more similar language than do adult teachers and students. Tutees who are being taught by a peer or someone closer in age to them feel freer to express opinions, ask questions and risk untested solutions. The interaction between instructor and pupils is more balanced and livelier; therefore, this then stimulates the tutors to communicate well with the tutees. Therefore, involving university students in a community service project such as one which provides a cross-age tutoring service to some primary school students is a good move which can bring some positive outcomes (Baker, Gersten, & Keating, 2000; Ismail et al., 2020b) not just to the tutees (the primary school students) but to the tutors (the university students) involved as well, especially in terms of their communication skills and learning motivation as well as interest (Ismail et al., 2015b).

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Researchers have discovered significant beneficial effects on the English language skills achievement of tutors (Maheady et al, 2006; Ismail et al, 2019). The language areas being examined include English speaking skills with a marked improvement in terms of grammar, comprehension (task fulfillment), acquisition of vocabulary and fluency (communicative ability). The positive results were found for both short- and long-term tutoring involving secondary and elementary school students. Moreover, being able to practice using the target language such as English in an authentic classroom situation helps to further improve the tutors' English language skills particularly, their English-speaking performance (Ismail et al., 2020b). Therefore, the act of tutoring, particularly cross-age tutoring among ESL students should be looked upon as a valuable alternative to language teaching and as one of the means in enhancing ESL students' English performance, especially in terms of their speaking skill (Ismail et al, 2015a; Ismail et al., 2020b).

Ismail and Elias (2007) conducted a study which assessed the impact of community service on tertiary students' ESL speaking performance. The study was in the form of pre and post-test research in which a group of student facilitators from UiTM Johor were pre-tested on their speaking skills. The samples were evaluated based on MUET (Malaysian University English Test) speaking components. The subjects were then involved in the university's community service project on cross-age tutoring that required them to provide English lessons for some selected primary school students. After the project, the subjects were asked to sit for a post-test. The results revealed a significant improvement in terms of the student facilitators' task fulfilment, communicative ability as well as the overall speaking performance of the students.

Overall, extensive research in the areas of English-speaking performance relating to cross-age tutoring is still few and far between, particularly in ESL context. Therefore, the study hopes to gain further insights into this area.

3. EDUTAINMENT 4 UPSR Project

EDUTAINMENT 4 UPSR is a university-based community service project which was sponsored by KHIND Starfish Foundation and was jointly organized by UiTM Cawangan Johor and Sekolah Kebangsaan Kampung Tengah, Segamat, Johor (SK Kampung Tengah). It involved thirty UiTM Cawangan Johor students who acted as the facilitators as well as five lecturers who were the advisors for the project. The project was carried out for eight weeks. In this project, one hundred Standard Four and Five students (aged ten and eleven respectively) from SK Kampung Tengah were provided with ~~a~~ special learning module which focused on providing learning tips and motivation particularly in learning the English Language, Bahasa Melayu, Mathematics and Science.

The main aims of the project were to provide learning opportunities to both UiTM student facilitators as well as the selected SK Kampung Tengah students. In this project, the student facilitators were able to learn how to conduct a community service program as it was solely organized by them in terms of writing the proposal for the KHIND Starfish Foundation grant, applying for the grant, going for the interview and so on until they managed to secure a four-thousand-ringgit grant from the foundation.

Furthermore, the students also had to do crowdfunding and they managed to do so by organizing a weekly sale of food for four weeks in which they sold food to UiTM students and staff such as Malay traditional Kuehs, Mee Hoon, drinks and so on from which they

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managed to get RM80 of profit. The crowdfunding money is a prerequisite for getting the grant from KHIND Starfish Foundation which covered the cost for running the program. In addition, the student facilitators also had to learn how to conduct cross-age tutoring sessions using the learning modules provided by the advisors and they must deal with one hundred primary school students from different backgrounds and academic levels. Therefore, they had to be patient and to be able to face the challenges in teaching the primary school students.

There were some limitations and problems faced such as they had to make some last-minute changes to the schedules already set due to the school's requests. In addition, during the first day, they had faced transportation problem as they were not able to book UiTM bus to go to the school as there was a problem in the application process, but they had managed to overcome the problem by using the allocated fund to hire a private bus. Moreover, the student facilitators also had to learn how to deal with the society, for instance they had a chance to communicate with the school's top management as well as the schoolteachers in managing the program. Hence, they had to learn to serve the community as volunteers and use their soft skills especially in terms of negotiation and leadership skills.

3.1. The Learning Modules

There were four learning modules applied in the program which include Bahasa Melayu, English, science, and mathematics. The modules were developed based on the Standard Four and Five Syllabus. However, it is important to note that the modules focus on providing some smart learning tips as well as training them to use their critical thinking skills. In addition, the primary school students were also encouraged to be active learning participants as there were many learning activities which gave them the opportunity to showcase their talents such as through role plays, drawings, colouring, singing, and dancing. Hence, the modules' objectives were to enhance the primary school students' learning interest and motivation.

4. Research Method

The study employs a quantitative research method. Thirty Part 3 diploma students from UiTM volunteered to be the facilitators for the project and the selected purposive sampling for the study. Two sets of questionnaires were deployed among the facilitators prior to and after the project was conducted to analyze their perception of the project and the benefits, they have gained from it. The 15 item questionnaires were first piloted on a group of thirty volunteer facilitators in the previous project and were then refined based on the pilot participants' responses. The questionnaire demonstrated good internal consistency across the four engagement factors; the coefficient alphas ranged from .76 to .82. The data collected was then analyzed quantitatively using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 2.

5. Findings

Figure 1 shows that before joining the program, 56.7% of the participants agreed that becoming a facilitator of the program will makes them more motivated to help other people and only 23.3% were strongly agreed. Whereas, after joining the program 93.3% of the participants were convinced and strongly agreed that program motivated them to help other people.

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Figure 1: Becoming a facilitator in this program makes me more motivated to help other people.

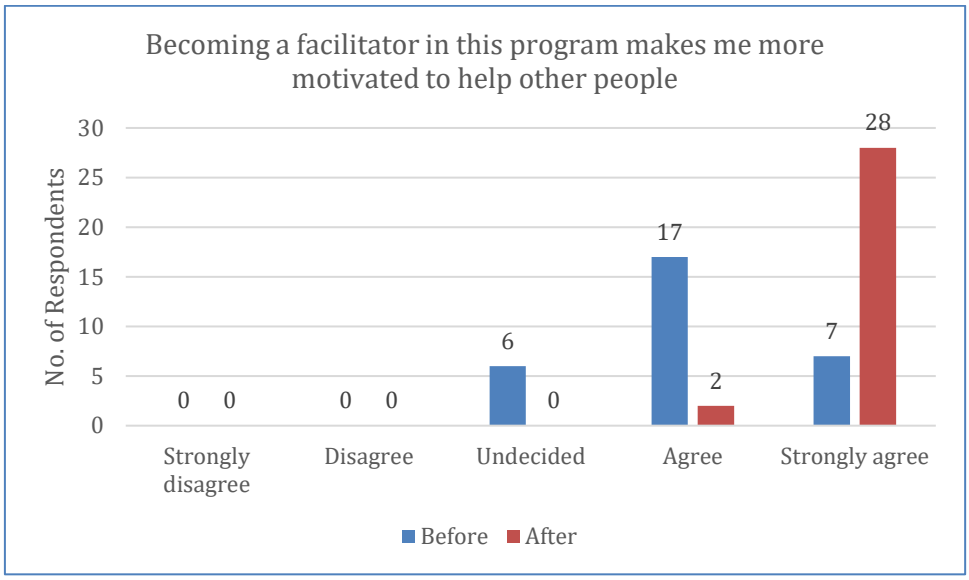


Figure 2 shows that only 16.7% of the participants believe that the program will make them more motivated to be involved in community service. However, all of the participant has responded that they were actually strongly agreed that the program does motivates them to be involves in community service. Therefore, Figure 1 and Figure 2 show that the respondents were strongly agreed that they become more motivated to join community service after they join this program because they get to help more people and this kind of program also inspire them to join more community services after meeting and interacting with new people during this program.

Figure 2: Becoming a facilitator in this program makes me more motivated to be involved in community service.

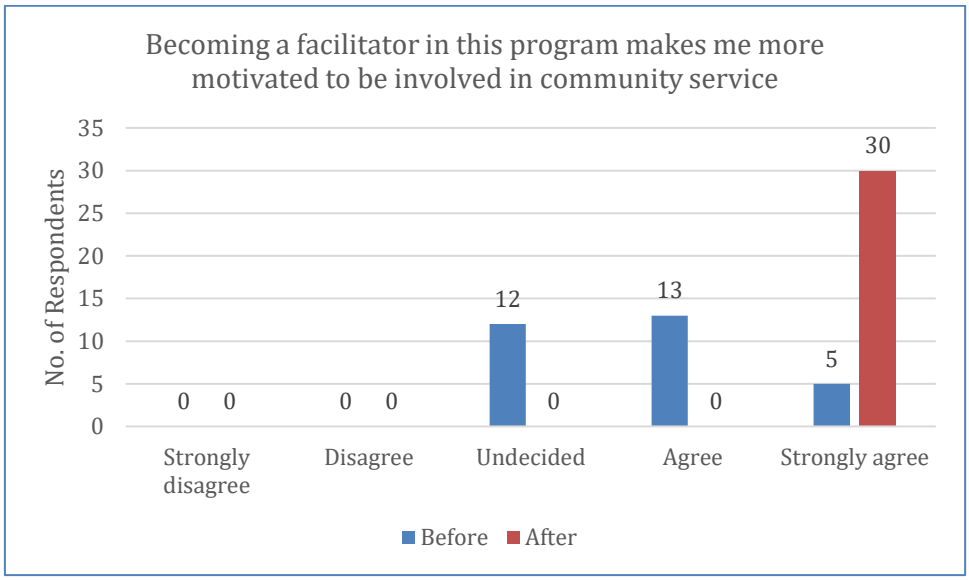


Figure 3 shows only 43.3% of respondent learn how to handle tasks such as completing a project and working paper and Figure 4 shows only 56.7% of respondents be cooperative with their team members before participating in this program. As we can see from the result, 100% of the respondents agree that this program give a very good

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experience for them to handle such a critical task as a group where they must do all the processes starting from the preparation of the paperwork, interaction with the students, up to the submission of the report.

Figure 3: I learn how to handle tasks such as completing a project and working paper.

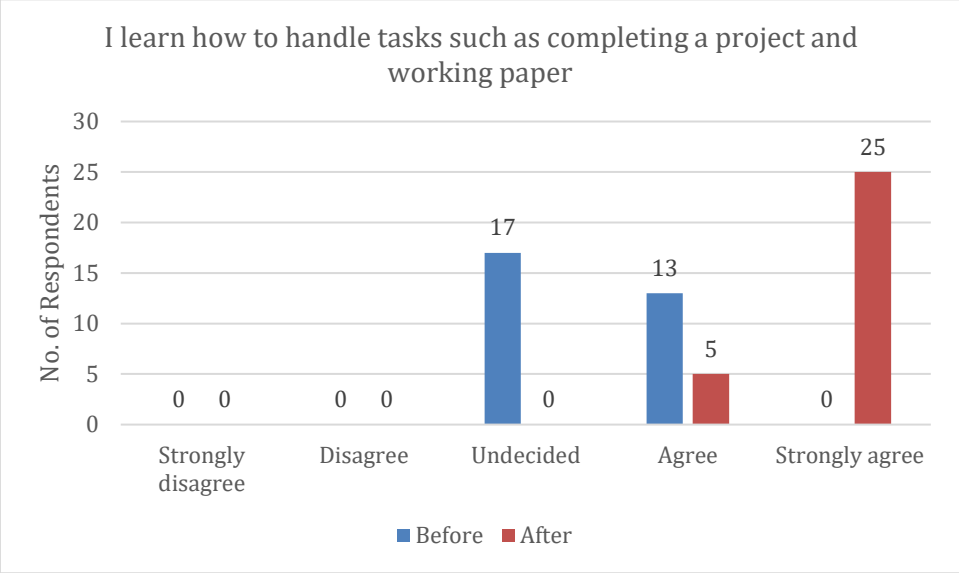


Figure 4: I learn to be more cooperative with my team members.

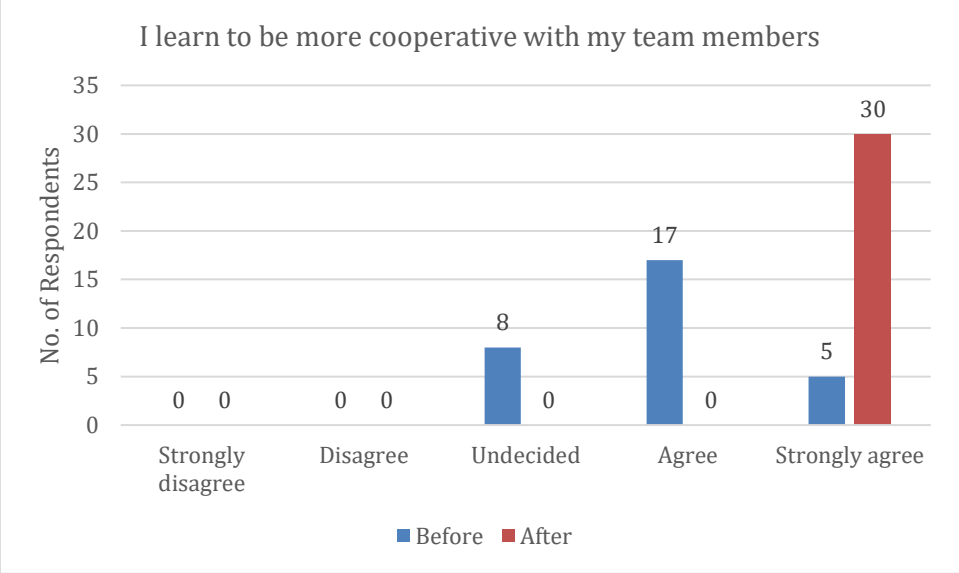


Figure 5 and Figure 6 show positive significant of the program. Before joining this program, only 73.3% of respondent feel that handling younger students make them become tolerant while 56.7% of respondent learn how to become a good tutor to younger students. However, there is a very positive impact through this program where 100% of the respondent agree that this program makes them become a better tutor and mentor to younger students because they learnt and met various personalities, hence manage to develop good skill to be more tolerate in teaching the students.

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Figure 5: Handling younger students makes me become more tolerant.

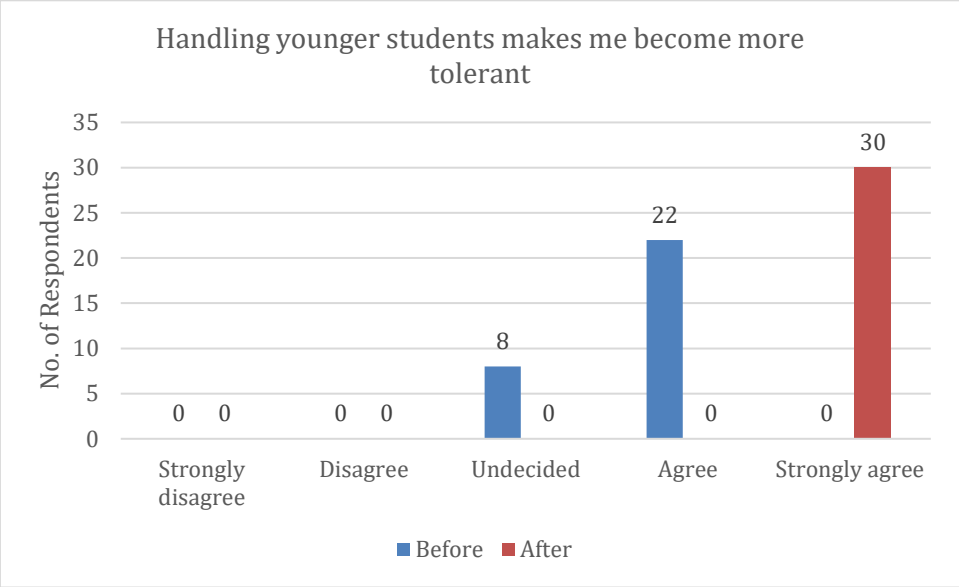


Figure 6: I learn how to become a good tutor to younger students.

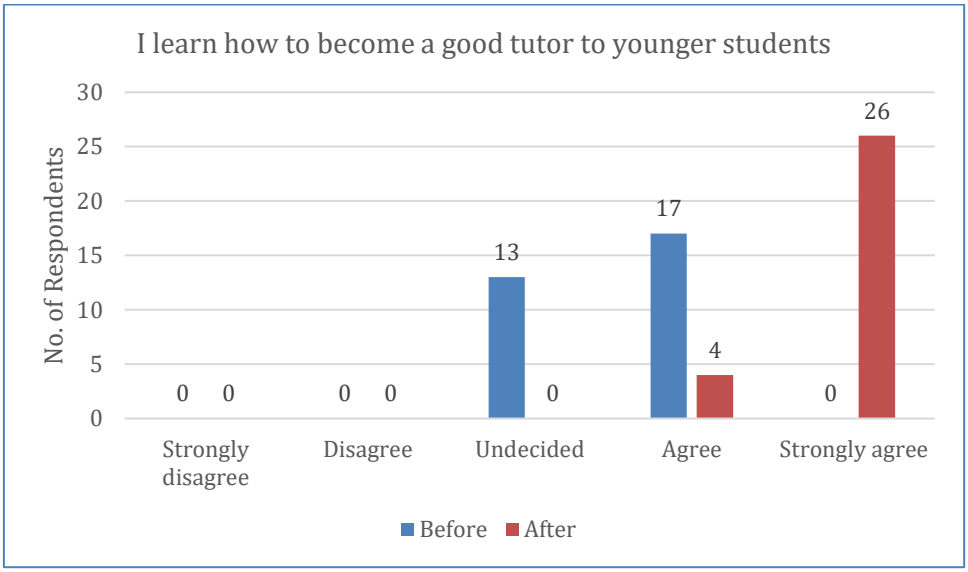


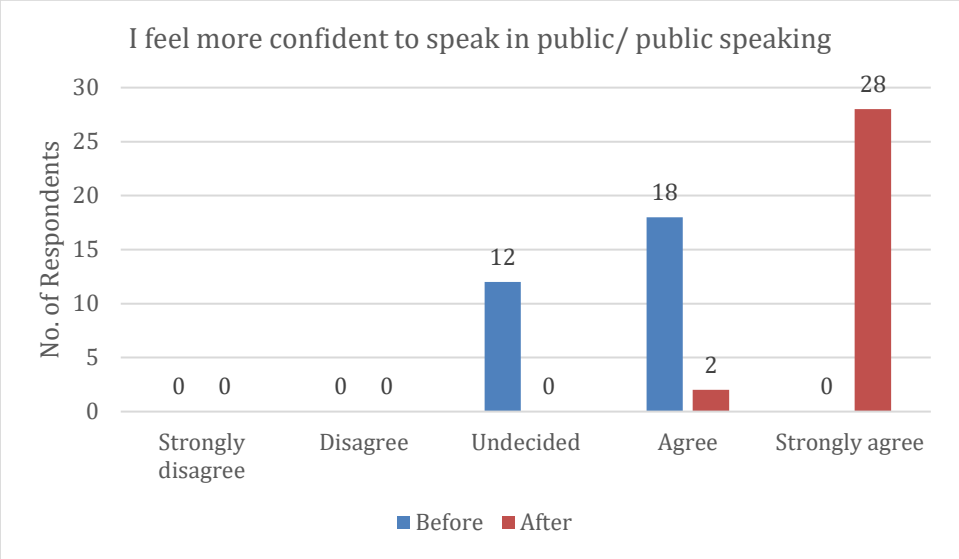
Figure 7 shows that before joining this program, only 60% of respondent feel confident to speak in public. Surprisingly, all the respondents feel more confident with their speaking skills after participating in this program because they need to communicate with the students and moreover the students responded well towards their instruction. Besides no one has judged them during the communication process, so it increases their confidence level.

These findings are in line with the findings from some previous researches conducted on university-based community service such as by Mey, Werner & Villiers, 2018; Meyer, Neumayr & Rameder, 2019) which reported the benefits of community service on university students The students who work on the community service were found to not only able to produce better academic performance especially in social studies including English communication and public speaking but the subjects were also found to be very

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motivated to be involved in future projects on community service as they have experienced a marked improvement in their social and communication skill.

Figure 7: I feel more confident to speak in public/public speaking.



Therefore, involving university students in a community service project such as one which provides a cross-age tutoring service to some primary school students is a good move which can bring some positive outcomes not just to the tutees (the primary school students) but to the tutors (the university students) involved as well, especially in terms of their communication skills in English (Maheady, Mallette & Harper, 2006; Ismail et al, 2020a).

5. Conclusion

It is clear from this study that university students can develop in many ways by serving as project facilitators for community service, especially in terms of their attitudes about speaking in public and communicating in ESL. In addition, the students get the chance to serve the community, learn to cooperate with others and to be more tolerant, which increases their desire to participate in future service initiatives. This also gives the chance to better both themselves and others.

University-based community service proponents contend that it can be a potent reform instrument that aids educational institutions in meeting academic objectives, imparting civic responsibility, and tackling a variety of pressing issues of Community need (Astin, & Vogelgesang, 2001; Greenwood, Dcarta, & Hall, 2003). As shown by the study's findings, students who participate in community service have the opportunity to improve their social skills, increase their desire and enthusiasm in learning as well as their level of comfort with peer interaction and group participation. This motivates them to participate in upcoming initiatives of a similar nature (Ismail, Elias & Ratan Singh, 2015b). Indeed, supporters believe that university-based community service performed benefits students in "the picture" The academic, social, and personal spheres of students' lives are unquestionably expanded thanks to the university's support and the sponsorships of the different businesses that support these learning activities and programs. There's no denying that volunteering at a university can have a positive impact.

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Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

The researchers used the research ethics provided by the Research Ethics Committee of Universiti Teknologi MARA. All procedures performed in this study involving human participants were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee. Informed consent was obtained from all participants according to the Declaration of Helsinki.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of Interest.

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