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**ENVIRONMENTAL CITIZENSHIP: AN IMPOSSIBLE MISSION? –
A REVISIT**



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Abstract

Issues on environment will always be of concern to everyone. Efforts to improve human green attitude and practices are endless although not much changes are gained. Studies carried out on many aspects of environmental conservation and sustainability have yet to show encouraging results. This paper intends to revisit the exploration done by the researcher years ago. It aims to find out and make comparison should there be any changes in the public's knowledge, attitude and practices on the environment. The result of the study will then be related to nation's aspiration in the construction of environmental citizenship amongst Malaysians especially the youths. This study will also look at the effects of social media in contributing to such green aspiration. The previous study focused on the university students as representing Malaysian youths. Similarly, this research will focus on this group of respondents. The findings will also provide some vital inputs that can be of great importance in instilling the spirit of environmental citizenship. In addition, this study will act as a preliminary study to future studies on green initiatives.

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1. Introduction

Sustainable development has increasingly become a leading agenda around the globe. Environmental issues are among the main concern for many policy makers. Hadjichambis and Reis (2020, p. 2) writes, “Environmental Citizenship could contribute to the solution of the current environmental problems and will prevent the creation of new environmental problems.”

So what is Environmental Citizenship? According to Dobson (2010) Environmental Citizenship is a concept used to explain 'pro-environmental behaviour' in public and private, driven by a belief in fairness of the distribution of *environmental* goods, participation and co-creation of sustainability policy.

For a community to achieve this level of citizenship, it has to grow in a secure, healthy and sustainable environment. Several scholars suggested that education can be the “fundamental tool that can adequately contribute to behavioural changes in citizens, which can eventually be translated into aspects of Environmental Citizenship” (Hadjichambis & Reis, 2020, p. 4). In other words, it requires a paradigm shift in the way people think and act towards the environment.

In Malaysia, many environmental programs were conducted to highlight the importance of environmental stewardship. In order to change the society’s paradigm regarding environment, these green activities must be used as channels for environmental education. Although environmental education has already taken place for decades, but the results are still not impressive. Table 01 shows the statistics gathered from past related research regarding knowledge, attitude, and practice (KAP).

Table 1. List of research on the KAP on environment among Malaysians and their results

Research/year	Knowledge	Attitude	Practice
Subahan et al. (2010)	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Ahmad et al. (2011)	Moderate	Low	Moderate
Abdul Latiff et al. (2012)	Moderate	High	Moderate
Mohd. Jalil (2012)	Moderate	High	Moderate
Ahmad et al. (2015)	High	High	Low

Until 2015, not much has changed in people’s knowledge, attitude and their practices regarding the environment. In fact, Ahmad et al. (2015) reports that the level of environmental practice has dropped from moderate to low. Such inconsistency shows that Malaysia has still a long way to go in achieving its objectives in building an environmental sustainable nation.

2. Problem Statement

Chapter 36 in Agenda 21, that was issued by the United Nations (UN) has outlined the three most important things to do to ensure environmental sustainability (Abd. Rahman, 2011). First is the need to promote environmental education. Second is to create awareness about the importance of environmental safekeeping amongst the community. Third, in order to achieve sustainability society must also be trained to recognise and acquire skills related to environmental sustainability.

The Malaysian government has been emphasizing on environmental efforts, formally or informally, since the early of 1970s. Environmental education was introduced in schools although not formally as part of the curriculum with the aim of creating a society that is aware of the importance of environmental preservation. This issue on environmental preservation has then escalated to the level of “sustainability” that emphasizes human needs for safe environment that go beyond safekeeping. To achieve this level of well-being one must achieve the status of environmental citizenship.

Dobson (2010) suggests that an environmental citizen must have the belief that environmental sustainability is for the common good. He/she must be driven by not only self-interest towards such issue but is also motivated by other related factors. An environmental citizen believes that knowledge of ethics and morals is as important as techno-scientific knowledge. He/she has the belief that the environmental rights of others create environmental responsibilities and these responsibilities are not only to one's neighbours or fellow citizens but also to strangers. He/she must also be aware that nature-related actions alone can have a broader environmental impact.

In order to achieve the status of environmental citizenship one will need to fulfil those criteria. These criteria can be gauged by measuring the people's knowledge, attitude and practice towards the environment.

However, until today very little progress can be seen. As mentioned in Table 01, generally the level of KAP among Malaysian society is only moderate. Ahmad et al. (2015) even showed that the society's behavior has dropped as compared to the earlier research findings where the environmental practices were consistently at the average.

Thus, it is important to measure the public's knowledge, attitudes and practices in order to ensure that the right messages are sent out to them. Messages constructed inaccurately may not be well understood by the audience. Hence changes that are expected to happen may not be realised.

This research intends to measure the current level of Malaysians' knowledge, attitude and practices regarding environmental issues and to gauge if Malaysians are ready to become environmental citizens.

3. Research Questions

This study is a baseline study on the society's KAP on environmental stewardship. Therefore, the questions for this research are:

- What is the students' level of knowledge regarding environmental safekeeping?;
- What is the students' level of attitude towards environmental safekeeping?; and
- What is the students' level of practice of environmental safe keeping?

4. Purpose of the Study

The main objective of this study is to measure the levels of UUM's students' particularly the communication students' knowledge, attitudes, and practices regarding environmental issues. As this research is a revisit to a previous similar research done in 2012, this research is intended to specifically:

- Compare the findings regarding Malaysians' knowledge, attitude and practices on environmental safekeeping from this research with the previous findings; and
- Identify if there exist any progress in the students' knowledge, attitude and practice of environmental safekeeping.

The results of this research could determine if Malaysia is on the right path to achieving the status of environmental citizenship.

5. Research Methods

This is a baseline study that measures the levels of environmental knowledge, attitudes and practices of the population mentioned earlier. A baseline study can produce quantitative data that are easily interpreted and understood (Launiala, 2009). The findings from this study may be used to assess the existing green policies and programs that could enhance better understanding on the need for sustainability and environmental consciousness in order to achieve the standard of environmental citizenship.

The quantitative data was collected using the same questionnaire from the previous research carried out in 2012. The same population is used that is UUM communication students. However, the number of respondents has increased to 217 due to the increase in the population. Due to the current development of the Covid-19 pandemic questionnaires have to be distributed online. The responses received were low and slow. Until this report is written only 85 responses were received. Thus, this report is treated as a preliminary report with the hope that more responses will be received in the next few months.

For this research, the measurement for Likert scale from 1 to 5 shown in Table 02 is used to measure the levels of knowledge, attitude and practice of the respondents.

Table 2. The levels of knowledge, attitudes and practices based on mean scores

Mean Score	Level
1.00 – 2.66	Low
2.67 – 3.99	Moderate
4.00 – 5.00	High

6. Findings

This section discusses the findings of the level of knowledge, attitudes and practices on environmental issues amongst UUM Communication Students.

Level of knowledge on environmental issues and care.

With reference to table 03, this research finds that the level of respondents' knowledge is different from Ahmad et al. (2015) study, although there is a similarity with Ahmad et al. (2011), Abdul et al. (2012) and Subahan et al. (2010), research findings. The level of knowledge of respondents involved in their research was moderate. While Ahmad et al. (2015) study found that the level of knowledge was low,

this research found that the knowledge of the respondents remained the same as it was in the researcher's 2012 research which is moderate.

Level of attitudes towards environmental issues and care.

This research finds the respondents' attitudes towards environmental issues and care is low – a total opposite to that of the 2012 findings which is high. This finding is the opposite to most of the findings of the other three studies done earlier. Abdul et al. (2012); Ahmad et al. (2015); Subahan et al. (2010) indicated that the respondents' attitude of the respective studies as moderate.

Many chose to stay neutral to questions like “love for animals” and “participate in discussions on environment”. They either have no opinion regarding the matters or do not agree directly.

Level of practice on environmental issues and care

The findings of this study on the respondents' level of environmental practices show a drop from the result of the 2012 research. Although there are those who do recycle their waste and avoid using plastic bags and Styrofoam containers, sadly many did not do the practices listed in the questionnaires. Disposing garbage properly is most practiced behaviour of all the choices given in the questionnaire. Maybe because this practice may be the easiest to do.

Table 03 below shows the results on mean score and standard deviation of the research.

Table 3. Mean score and standard deviation of knowledge, attitude and practice on environmental issues amongst UUM Communication Students

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Attitude	85	1.00	5.00	2.6597	1.44683
Knowledge	85	2.19	3.00	2.8750	.14626
Practice	85	1.72	2.89	2.4686	.22897

6.1. Discussion

Based on the findings, below are a few suggestions the researcher would like to highlight:

- The society must be taught, guided and reminded continuously on to how to value and appreciate the environment. The findings from this research sadly is a deterioration from what was achieved in the previous research. Recent cases of river pollution in Selangor can be of evident of the degree of ignorance the public can be of environmental safe-keeping.
- Environmental education should not only be intended for knowledge but more importantly to invoke environmental awareness amongst Malaysians and consequently leads to environmental practices. The findings of this research show that what information on environmental issues and safekeeping delivered are not as effective as it should be. Therefore, a more aggressive enforcement must be carried out to ensure that the environment is well taken care of.
- Emphasis should also be given to education at the very early age. Pre-school curriculum must be injected with syllabus on sustainability so that positive attitudes towards the environmental can be instilled in these children and ultimately create a sense of commitment to environmental

stewardship. Such commitment will also manifest in a constant environmental practice. This commitment will then lead to the formation of environmental citizenship.

7. Conclusion

This research is a preliminary research as the number of respondents who responded to this research was only about 40% of the total number of questionnaires distributed. Although the findings from this research is discouraging, the researcher hopes that the second phase of this research can produce a better finding.

A baseline study serves as a basis for other studies as it provides the basic information on a population's knowledge, attitude and practice. Data collected may be used to further related research. Recommendations given may be used to improve the current environmental and sustainable development initiatives. Such initiatives are hoped to be able to pull Malaysia onto the right track, elevate the effort to improve the country's sustainability and ultimately achieve the status of environmental citizenship.

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