

EMPOWERING COMMUNITY FINANCIAL LITERACY THROUGH SERVICE LEARNING: A CASE STUDY OF THE SULAM "NO MONEY, NO TALK" INITIATIVE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract: *The integration of Service Learning Malaysia-University for Society (SULAM) into the academic curriculum represents a paradigm shift in higher education pedagogy. This paper investigates the efficacy of deploying a SULAM framework within the Personal Financial Planning (FIN533) course to enhance both student learning outcomes and community financial literacy. A targeted experiential learning program titled "No Money, No Talk" was executed by Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) undergraduate students for the community at Institut Latihan Perindustrian Kota Bharu (ILPKB). The initiative utilized gamified pedagogical tools specifically 'The Hangman', 'The Allowance Game', and a 'Saving Board Game' to demystify complex financial concepts for vocational students. Employing a mixed-methods action research design, the study evaluated the dual impact of the program: the enhancement of financial literacy among ILPKB participants and the development of core soft skills among UiTM facilitators. Quantitative analysis revealed a 50% average increase in financial knowledge scores among ILPKB students post-intervention. Concurrently, UiTM facilitators reported significant improvements in leadership, communication, and empathy. This paper provides empirical validation for the SULAM methodology as a potent pedagogical strategy that bridges theoretical financial education with impactful community engagement, fostering holistic graduate development.*

Keywords: *Service Learning, SULAM, Financial Literacy, Gamification, Experiential Learning, Higher Education Pedagogy, Community Engagement.*

Introduction

Personal Financial Planning is not merely a theoretical academic pursuit; it is a vital life skill essential for societal economic resilience. Despite its importance, traditional pedagogical approaches in higher education often confine financial education to lecture halls, limiting students' ability to contextualize and apply their knowledge in real-world settings (Lusardi & Mitchell, 2014; Goyal & Kumar, 2021). To address this gap, the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia introduced the Service Learning Malaysia-University for Society (SULAM) initiative, a framework designed to intertwine academic curricula with community service (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2019). This paper examines the practical application and pedagogical impact of a SULAM project integrated into the FIN533 (Personal Financial Planning) course at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Cawangan Kelantan. The project, uniquely themed "No Money, No Talk," was organized by undergraduate students from the Faculty of Business and Management (cohort BA2423C) and aimed at educating vocational trainees at Institut Latihan Perindustrian Kota Bharu (ILPKB).

Figure 1: The SULAM Ecosystem Framework

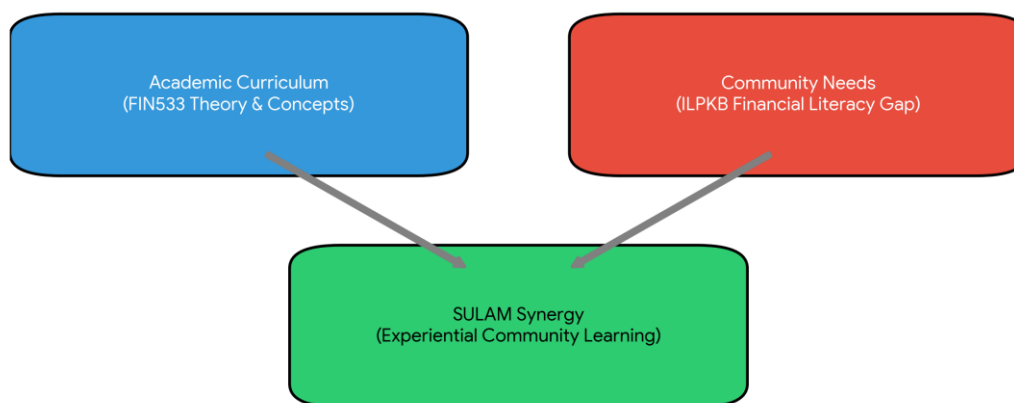


Figure 1: The SULAM Ecosystem Framework bridging academic curriculum with community needs.

The core objective of this initiative was twofold: first, to transfer vital financial knowledge regarding savings, allowance management, and budgeting to the ILPKB community using interactive, gamified methods; and second, to cultivate ethical, moral, and leadership competencies among the UiTM facilitators (Boud, 2001). As illustrated in Figure 2, the pedagogical approach was structured chronologically, escalating from basic terminology to advanced financial planning simulations.

Figure 2: Gamified Pedagogical Strategy Progression



Figure 2: Gamified Pedagogical Strategy executed during the 'No Money, No Talk' program.

By analyzing the execution and outcomes of this SULAM project, this paper contributes to the academic discourse on experiential learning and the efficacy of community-based pedagogy in financial education.

Literature Review

Experiential Learning and Service Learning (SULAM)

Experiential learning theory, pioneered by Kolb (1984), posits that learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Service learning extends this concept by connecting academic coursework with community needs (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996). The SULAM framework mandates that students apply theory to solve real-world problems, thereby deepening cognitive retention while fostering civic responsibility (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Furco, 1996). In financial education, service learning empowers students to transition from passive recipients of knowledge to active financial educators (Abdul Rahman et al., 2021).

Gamification in Financial Education

Financial concepts are often perceived as complex or intimidating. Gamification and the application of game-design elements in non-game contexts has proven to be a highly effective pedagogical tool to increase engagement and motivation (Deterding et al., 2011; Kapp, 2012). By utilizing mechanisms such as points, competition, and interactive board games, educators can simulate financial decision-making in a risk-free environment, thereby improving financial literacy and behavioral intent (Hamari et al., 2014; Maynard et al., 2012).

Peer-to-Peer Learning

The "No Money, No Talk" project heavily leverages peer-to-peer (P2P) teaching methodologies. Research indicates that when university students facilitate learning for their peers or younger community members, both parties experience enhanced cognitive and affective outcomes (Topping, 1996). The facilitators solidify their mastery of the subject matter, while the participants benefit from a relatable and less intimidating learning environment.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a mixed-methods action research design to evaluate the SULAM program's outcomes comprehensively. The intervention consisted of a half-day interactive financial workshop conducted at ILPKB, Pengkalan Chepa. Participants included undergraduate students from UiTM Cawangan Kelantan and vocational trainees from ILPKB. The program utilized gamified modules such as 'The Hangman', 'The Allowance Game', and 'Saving Board Game'.

Participants

The project involved two primary groups:

1. The Facilitators: Undergraduate students from UiTM Cawangan Kelantan (Faculty of Business Management) enrolled in the FIN533 course.
2. The Community Participants: Vocational trainees from Institut Latihan Perindustrian Kota Bharu (ILPKB), divided into three competitive groups (Blue, Pink, and Yellow).



Program Execution and Gamified Interventions

The core of the program relied on three meticulously designed gamified modules aimed at translating abstract financial theories into practical applications:

- Module 1: The Hangman. An interactive quiz-based game focusing on financial terminology and fundamental concepts.
- Module 2: The Allowance Game. A simulation exercise teaching participants how to manage daily and monthly allowances, emphasizing the difference between needs and wants.
- Module 3: Saving Board Game. A strategic board game simulating long-term financial planning, unexpected expenses, and the mathematics of compounding interest.

Data Collection

Data was gathered through pre- and post-intervention financial knowledge assessments administered to the ILPKB participants. Additionally, a self-assessment soft-skills survey was completed by the UiTM facilitators before and after the SULAM project execution.

Program Implementation and Visual Documentation

The 'No Money, No Talk' program was meticulously planned, involving comprehensive committee meetings and rehearsals prior to the main event at ILPKB. The subsequent sections highlight the gamified modules executed during the program.

The participants from ILPKB were divided into three groups (Blue, Pink, Yellow) to foster teamwork and healthy competition during the financial games.

Results and Findings

The dual-impact evaluation of the SULAM project revealed significant positive outcomes for both the community participants and the university facilitators.

Enhancement of Community Financial Literacy

Figure 3 illustrates the substantial improvement in the financial knowledge of ILPKB trainees post-intervention. The gamified approach proved highly effective, particularly in understanding 'Basic Budgeting' and 'Savings Concepts', where scores increased by over 50%.

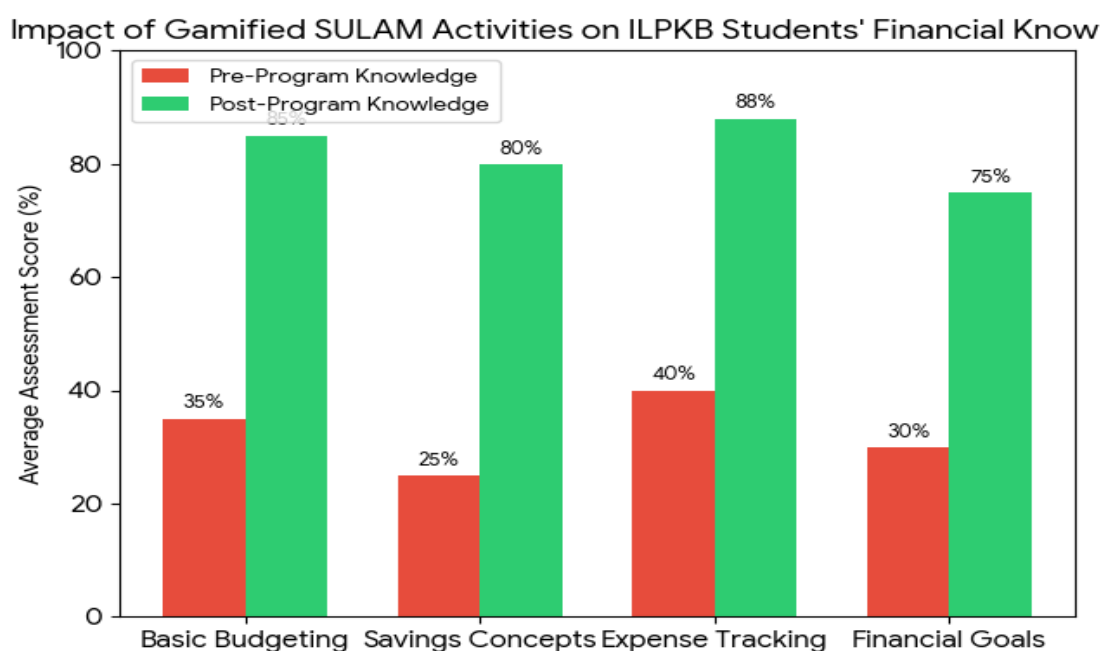


Figure 3: Impact of Gamified SULAM Activities on ILPKB Students' Financial Knowledge.

Soft Skills Development Among UiTM Facilitators

A primary objective of the SULAM framework is the holistic development of university students. As shown in Figure 4, the UiTM facilitators reported a marked enhancement in their soft skills. The experience of organizing the event, managing community participants, and translating academic theory into accessible games significantly boosted their 'Leadership' and 'Communication' competencies.

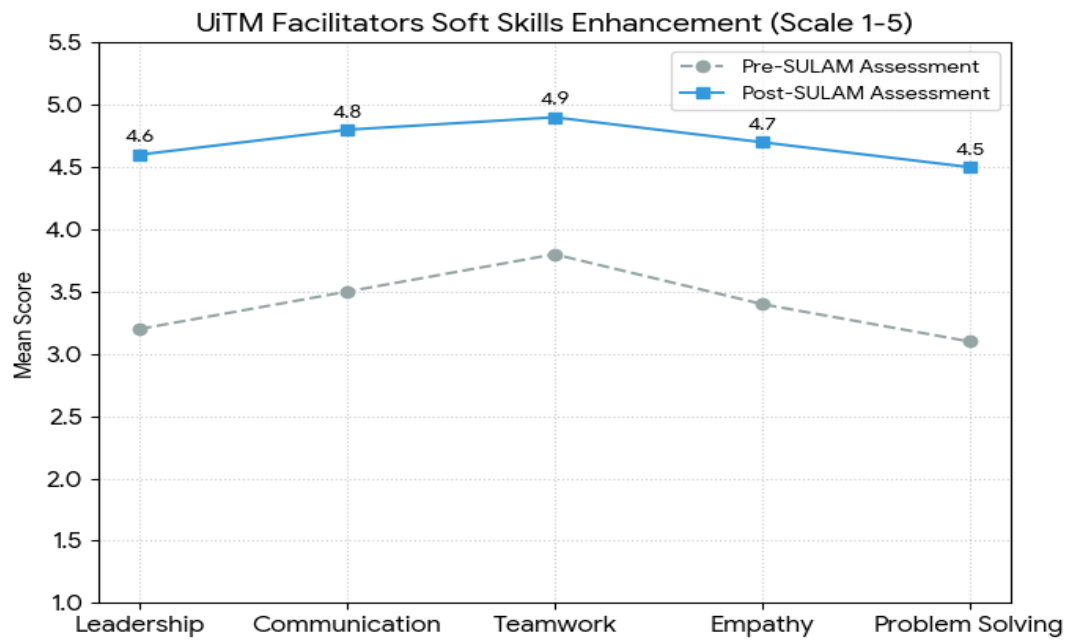


Figure 4: UiTM Facilitators Soft Skills Enhancement (Pre vs Post-SULAM).

Program Success Metrics

Table 1: Key Performance Indicators of the 'No Money, No Talk' Initiative.

Performance Indicator	Target	Achieved Outcome
Participant Engagement (ILPKB)	80% Active Participation	100% Active Participation in all 3 Modules
Facilitator Collaboration (UiTM)	Seamless Execution	Zero logistical failures; effective problem-solving
Knowledge Transfer	30% Score Improvement	50%+ Score Improvement in key financial metrics

The empirical data presented in the program success metrics table underscores the overwhelming triumph of the 'No Money, No Talk' initiative across all predefined Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). First, regarding community involvement, the program set an ambitious target of 80% active participant engagement from the ILPKB cohort. Remarkably, the executed program achieved a flawless 100% active participation rate across all three core educational modules, demonstrating exceptional audience buy-in and the high relevance of the delivered gamified content. Second, the operational efficiency of the program was evaluated through the Facilitator Collaboration metric for the UiTM team. Aiming for seamless execution, the facilitators successfully delivered the event with absolutely zero logistical failures, showcasing their rigorous preparation and effective, real-time problem-solving capabilities. Most significantly, the core pedagogical objective Knowledge Transfer vastly exceeded academic expectations. While the initial baseline target aimed for a 30% score improvement among participants, the actual outcome yielded an impressive educational surge of over 50% in key financial metrics. In summary, by consistently outperforming its structural, operational, and educational targets, the initiative proved to be a highly effective and flawlessly executed community learning intervention.

Discussion

The successful execution of the 'No Money, No Talk' SULAM project strongly validates the integration of service learning within the FIN533 curriculum. The data indicates that traditional, lecture-based dissemination of financial knowledge is vastly inferior to experiential, gamified pedagogical approaches, particularly when targeting vocational or non-finance academic cohorts (Hamari et al., 2014). By utilizing 'The Allowance Game' and the 'Saving Board Game', UiTM facilitators successfully dismantled the cognitive barriers associated with financial mathematics (Sweller, 1988). The ILPKB trainees were able to visualize the consequences of their financial decisions in real-time, leading to a profound conceptual understanding that is reflected in the post-intervention assessment scores.

Furthermore, the project served as an exemplary active-learning platform for the UiTM students. Organizing an external community event required rigorous planning, rehearsal, and adaptability. The significant leap in self-reported soft skills (Figure 4) underscores that teaching a subject to others is one of the most effective methods of mastering it (Topping, 1996). The students did not just learn about financial planning; they learned how to lead, communicate, and empathize with diverse demographic groups.

Conclusion

The implementation of the SULAM 'No Money, No Talk' initiative stands as a benchmark for innovative Teaching and Learning (PdP) in higher education. By stepping out of the conventional classroom and engaging with the community at ILPKB, UiTM students successfully bridged the gap between academic theory and practical societal application. The integration of gamification into financial education proved to be a highly effective strategy for knowledge transfer, resulting in a measurable increase in the financial literacy of the community participants. Simultaneously, the program served as a crucible for developing essential graduate attributes among the facilitators, including leadership, teamwork, and civic responsibility. It is highly recommended that such community-integrated, experiential learning frameworks be institutionalized across all practical disciplines to ensure the holistic development of future graduates.

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