Study of environmental awareness, practices and behaviours among UniMAP students

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Abstract: Environmental awareness has received much attention in recent years due to human population growth, even though science is improving every day. Still, that improvement comes with risks that can be avoided with a little bit of knowledge. Understanding the public's environmental awareness is essential to inform government approaches to addressing this issue. This study presents a cross-sectional survey of young generations, Universiti Malaysia Perlis (UniMAP) students between the ages of 20 and 25, to examine the perception, awareness and opinions of Malaysian students about the environment. The survey consisted of three sections, which included information on socio-demographic information, information on public perception of the environment, information on public awareness of the environment and its related impacts, and information on environmental attitudes and recommendations to address some of the related environmental issues. The results show that the value of environmental awareness and knowledge is good, which indicates that there is a high level of knowledge and awareness among university students. Of the 107 respondents, more than 70 per cent were positive and had an adequate level of environmental awareness, and 60 per cent showed positive environmental practices and behaviours.

1. Introduction
Rapid urbanisation and the public's determination to pursue luxury modern lifestyles have led to environmental degradation. Harmful waste generation, climate change, environmental pollution and the breakdown of ecosystems, to name a few, are environmental disasters that reduce quality of life. Considering that anthropogenic activities are the main causes of environmental degradation, human socio-psychological factors relating to the environment have both direct and indirect implications for the quality of life. Despite numerous environmental events and campaigns on anthropogenic pollution by government and non-government institutions aimed at changing public environmental behaviour, there is less research and reporting on environmental awareness and commitments. Public awareness and concern about environmental issues vary at different levels in order to influence their corresponding environmental behaviour. It should be emphasised that public awareness and behaviour of the environment can serve as a useful reference for policy decisions towards a better environment and therefore a better quality of life [1].
The study [2] shows that students have a high level of understanding, understanding and attitudes towards the environment, but the activities are still at a moderate level. More rigorous environmental education should therefore be extended to all students, particularly students in higher education institutions. This is because they will become potential decision-making leaders. Their decisions and actions will determine the future status of the environment.

Another research [3] found that 26% of high school students are at a low level of environmental awareness, 48% of high school students are at a moderate level of environmental awareness, and 26.6% of high school students are at a high level of environmental awareness. It is also found that environmental awareness among secondary school students is not having a significant impact. But school building an eco-club has a major impact on environmental awareness among high school students. Finally, there is a modest level of awareness in this analysis of environmental awareness among secondary school students.

The secondary school students of the Golaghat district of Assam India have a strong positive relationship between environmental awareness and environmental education. The reason for this can be attributed to the fact that environmental education has been introduced as a compulsory subject in the curriculum. The Honorable Supreme Court of India (22 November 1991) directed state governments and education boards to introduce environmental education as a compulsory subject at all levels of education (school to college). The student of secondary school is currently in contact with environmental content while learning the subject; the students' extensive knowledge and information on environmental concepts, their importance, problems and solutions [4].

2. Material and methods
Research conducted to analyse the level of environmental awareness and related practises and behaviour among UniMAP students. UniMAP or the Universiti Malaysia Perlis is a university located in Perlis, Malaysia. Students at this university have a variety of programmes to study, from engineering programmes to Business Innovation & Technopreneurship programmes to Human Development & Techno Communication programmes. The subjects of this study were none other than all the students at this university (undergraduate / postgraduate) and, in order to get to this large number of people, a set of questionnaires had to be prepared and distributed to all students in order to obtain a variety of respondents and a different view of the study. More than 200 respondents participated in the survey. The questions related to the survey are presented in table 1.

| Table 1. Topics and elements related to survey questions. |
|----------------------------------------------------------|
| **Topic** | **Element of Survey related questions** |
| Knowledge and Awareness | General Current Malaysia environment |
| | Current Environmental concern |
| | Major Contributor to Pollution |
| | The worst environmental problem |
| | Sustainable development |
| | Awareness on Law |
| Related Practices | Responsibility towards environments |
| | Practise by student in Reducing waste |
| | Recycling Practise |
| | Campaign Environment |
| | Improve and Preservation on environment |
The questionnaire included two main parts. The first part was a demographic study of respondents, while the second part involved questions related to the study, which included three different subcategories within:

1. Level of Awareness.
2. Related Practices.
3. Recommendations for encountering some related problems.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Demographic

Of the 107 students who responded to the survey, 55 of the respondents were male students and 52 of the respondents were female students, with a percentage of 51% and 49% respectively. 76 per cent of respondents were 20-25 years of age, 15 per cent were under 20 years of age and only 9 per cent were 26-30 years of age. Respondents also found 31 percent of third-year students to be the highest and 18 percent of first-year students to be the lowest respondents.

3.2. Level of awareness

Starting off with questions about Malaysian general environment, 69% of the respondents believe that Malaysia has a good environment and 51% believe it’s one of the leading countries in the world in terms of environment. The big environmental issues of the world have been discussed as well. The results show 52.3% of the respondents think that air pollution is the worst environmental problem facing the planet, while only 27.1% think it’s the ozone depletion. Also, 47.7% of the respondents think that the most important thing that will make sure the environment is healthy for future generations is “People learn to live with less and be more efficient users of energy and materials”. Moreover, 58.9% of the respondents know what sustainable development is while the remaining 41.1% of them have no clue what it is.

Another issue was littering and the respondents’ views towards that were 58% of them believe that separated trash cans for different purposes is a good idea, and 58.4% agreeing to the idea of recycling glass and other items. Also 45.8% of the respondents think that buying organic food is a good idea in helping the environment. Conventional farming has been heavily criticized for causing biodiversity loss, soil erosion, and increased water pollution due to the rampant usage of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides.

When it comes to responsibilities, 76.6% of the respondents believe that the industrial facilities are the most contributors to the pollution of the environment. However, 52.3% of the students think that all people should be held responsible for any type of pollution happening no matter how small it is. While in fact, air pollution has been an ongoing problem in many countries in the Southeast Asia region, and Malaysia is one of the worst affected. The main cause of this haze is the slash and burn practice by farmers and peat fires blown by the wind from Indonesia.

3.3. Related practices

In this subcategory, the practices and behaviours of the students related to environmental issues will be discussed. The results show that 15% of the respondents believe that UniMAP students pollute the air badly, while 17.7% think that the students have never affected the air in a negative way. On the other hand, 51% of the respondents believe that students have tried to stop air pollution one way or another. Moving on to water pollution, 31% of the respondents believe that UniMAP students have a poor drainage system in their houses, and 63% are trying their best to maintain their drainage system by themselves. Also, 58% of the respondents have tried to stop water pollution one way or another and only 10.3% of them believe that they affect the water in a negative way. Another issue that was discussed is litters. The results show that 35% of the respondents said that they do throw litters. Results such as this can be caused due to laziness and carelessness that has bred a culture of habitual littering. On the other hand, 62% of the respondents said that they recycle different types of items, 68% said that they use the
dustbin at every place and 41% of the students compost their waste to fertilize. For noise pollution, 43% of the respondents usually experience noise pollution in their perspective hostels and 82.2% believe that the main source of noise pollution in their area are machines and humans.

3.4. Comparison
Comparisons such as that reveals that UniMAP students are in the average level when it comes to the level of awareness of environmental issues, and also practices and behaviors affecting the environment positively. However, the key to have a better outcome of those percentages is not just to trying to raise them, but it is in making those two percentages relatively close to each other. Having a moderated level of awareness, 70% and a moderated percentage of positive acts, 60% is not enough if the difference is great up to 10%. The huge difference might have been occurred due to the lack of sudden impact. When a person causes an issue of some kind and then see the consequences of their decisions, they’re more likely to adjust that behavior than the person that can’t see the consequences of their mistakes. The environmental issues are affecting all humanity on the long run, and that could be the reason why students are not acting positively while they know better.

Humans are continuously changing the relationships between human society and climate. Though highly regarded by others, the world is used and altered by a wide range of people with many different preferences and values. There are also difficulties about how best to protect our climate and natural resources. There will always be traffic offs and unforeseen or unintended consequences, many times. A well-managed climate, however, can provide goods and services which are both important for our well-being and for continued economic prosperity. This could be achieved with a better knowledge about the current issues facing the environment in general and caring a little bit more about the environment [5].

When comparing this to what was found in the study, the level of knowledge that was found among UniMAP students is high enough to provide goods and services which are both important for our well-being and for continued economic prosperity. Knowledge is the first stepping stone that needs to be considered in order for the economic prosperity to be achieved, and UniMAP students already possess that. The level of awareness that was found was high enough to be considered good. However, that level of awareness did not lead to a better environmental behavior. Which leads to the thinking that knowledge implementation about environmental issues is good, but practical implementations were nowhere to be found or at least not good enough to increase the level of positive behaviors of students towards the environment.

4. Conclusions
From the results it is safe to say that the results had met the criteria to be called significant. The results in the first section show that the level of awareness about the environment for UniMAP students is not at its’ best, but it’s still good enough for university students with roughly 70% of the students know enough about the environmental situation in Malaysia and around the world. However, the results for the practices affecting the environment positively were lower than those for the awareness section, which shows a lack of willingness in taking the initiative to do the right thing towards the environment and helping in saving it. Male students contributed with a big percentage of those lower results with 35% of those who have good knowledge about the environment but are not willing to apply that knowledge in their everyday behaviour.

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