

Students' Awareness towards the Student Representative Council: A Survey Conducted at Northern Region Polytechnics of Malaysia

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Abstract: The higher learning institutions play the vital role in developing students with various aspects of skills and knowledge to face any challenges in the future. Besides attending an academic programme, students need to participate in campus election in order to select the Student Representative Council (SRC). So that this study aims to examine the three key factors correlated with the awareness of students towards SRC. These factors include voting rights, roles and selection criteria. This survey was conducted on 375 students of Malaysian Polytechnics in the Northern region, including Polytechnic Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin (PTSS), Perlis, Polytechnic Sultan Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah (POLIMAS), Kedah and Polytechnic Seberang Perai (PSP), Penang. Cluster sampling technique was chosen in collecting the data of the study. Descriptive analysis showed that the awareness of students was the highest mean score, followed by the factor of roles, voting rights and selection criteria. Meanwhile the analysis of correlation found that all three independent factors were positively significant with the awareness of students toward SRC. This study provides some enlightening information to the relevant parties to focus on SRC development in polytechnics as well as other higher learning institutions.

Key words: Awareness, voting rights, roles, selection criteria, Student Representative Council

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The higher learning institutions serves students as novice leaders the opportunity in developing their leadership skills through its educational environment. Besides that, students play an important role not only in every higher learning institution but also for the nations. The Students' Representative Council (SRC) remains an important stakeholder of higher learning institutions worldwide and is responsible for students' governance [1-2]. SRC represents the young voices of higher learning institutions, a council in which leadership qualities are demanded and should be well demonstrated. The council must always stay within the higher learning institutions directions in order to ensure the success of the institutions' vision and mission.

Over the past year, the importance of SRC has increased especially for the students and institutions itself. For the students, involvement and democracy in campus

are becoming a necessity in the present. At the most recent years, there is an increasing participation of students in decision-making on university activities that may affect them [3-4]. The important point is students will get more serious attention, through the participation of them in SRC which functions as part of the university's governance. Meanwhile University Sains Malaysia (USM) has formed a students' "parliament as a platform for all students" club and society leaders including the SRC members to have an intellectual debate and carry critical ideas while debating on certain matters [5]. This matter shows the importance of having a good SRC which comprises the quality leaders among students. Subsequently, the quality of SRC will reflect the quality of the university itself.

Besides that, students will get more experience from the elections and decision-making processes through democratic education in their campuses [6]. As stated by Mager and Nowak [4], the election of SRC in campus has been providing an effective context of citizenship education, especially to enable students to learn the

principles and processes of democracy and thus contribute in enhancing the skills and knowledge of students and improve the quality of the democratic process. Thus, the awareness of students of the existence of the SRC can be seen through the percentage of voting in campus election.

The role of SRC is also important as the students' voice in ensuring that learning institutions meet the requirements of their students and thus improving the quality of education [4]. Students should prepare themselves before voting, such as taking into account the characteristics of the SRC candidates that will be selected based on reliable sources and scrutiny. Why should the student vote and what factors make them vote? This paper may enlighten the issues around the awareness of students on SRC which include voting rights, roles and selection criteria.

Problem Statement

Student Representative Council (SRC) play the main role in hearing the students' voices and represent the students' requirements, rights, belief and desire. Traditionally, student representation has become an ignored topic in campus culture, except during the campus elections. The main problem of a lack of awareness among students of the existence of SRC is their lack of interest and participation in anything that is not affirmed in academics [7, 8]. Hamidah *et al* [7] found a high percentage of awareness among students toward the existence of SRC but they did not know the representatives of SRC. Their study reported that respondents were not clear about the roles of SRC thoroughly.

Meanwhile Hilliard [9] in her study stated that student leadership opportunities at the university level have been frequently at a low percentage towards their role in decision-making although they attended the elections and other activities. For this reason, higher learning institutions appear the need to make amendments in the rules or guidelines for SRC so that students are not only given the right to vote, but also the right to participate in decision-making and other activities in campus. The roles and influence of the SRC in making decisions about the regulation of social and cultural activities need to be more strengthen among SRC members [3].

In the voting process, the information of ballots and voters are easily exposed because the current voting system is not secure. Other than that, the organiser needs to set up the voting station that will reduce the man-power

and time during the election process. The reason for the lack of awareness towards voting in the selection of SRC is the attitude which assumes campus elections are not important [7,10]. Although the manifesto of the SRC candidate is very influential in influencing votes during elections, the selection of a candidate not only depends on the candidate's manifesto [8]. Features such as leadership or personality of the candidate also appear to determine the candidates' selection by students.

Currently, there is little study on the level of awareness of students in selecting SRC based on the factors of voting rights and roles despite the main focus on the selection criteria. In Malaysia, most of the studies are focusing on undergraduates in universities but a little focus has been given on the diploma students especially in the polytechnics. Although there has been research done in Malaysia and abroad, the findings are not consistent. Previous studies found several reasons in choosing SRC including factors of leadership [11], race [12-13], gender [11,14-15] and academic performance and personality [16, 12].

Thus the questions arise as below:

- a) What are the levels of voting right, roles and selection criteria towards the awareness of SRC among students?
- b) What are the relationships between voting right, roles and selection criteria towards the awareness of SRC among students?

The objectives of the study are outlined as such:

- a) To identify the level of voting right, roles and selection criteria towards the awareness of SRC among students.
- b) To examine the relationship between the voting right, roles and selection criteria towards the awareness of SRC among students.

This study contributes to the knowledge of students about the factors of voting rights, roles and selection criteria. This study can also help to expand the knowledge of SRC among students as the SRC forms the main channel of communication between student and their institutions.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Theory of Planned Behaviour

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) is the key theory underlying this study. Empirically, there are some terms used to explain the theory of TPB which links beliefs and behaviour. The concept was proposed by Ajzen [17-18] to improve on the predictive power of the theory of reasoned action by including perceived behavioural control. It is a theory explaining human behaviour. It has been applied to studies of the relations among beliefs, attitudes, behavioural intentions and behaviours in various fields such as advertising, public relations, advertising campaigns and healthcare. TPB focuses on the individual's intention to perform the behaviour of attitude. This theory contains the three independent determinants of intentions including attitude towards behaviour, subjective norms and the degree of perceived behavioural control. The addition of perceived variables control was found greatly to improve the prediction of behavioural intentions. As stated by Doll and Ajzen [19], the theory can be predicted from people's intention and from their perceptions of control over behaviour.

The theory shapes an individual's behavioural intentions and behaviour. According to the theory of planned behaviour, attitudes are believed to have a direct effect on behavioural intention [18]. Many researchers found that attitude is a significant predictor of behavioural intention. Ajzen [18] stipulated that attitudes towards compliance reflect feelings of favour and disfavour towards compliance behaviour. Attitude refers to a person's evaluation of a specified behaviour [19]. Practically, candidates now have been exposed to a number of SRC. They are likely to form a positive or negative attitude towards the implementation of SRC irrespective of whether they have experienced it or not.

Awareness of students in selecting SRC (AWS)

Characteristics that potentially increase the awareness of students towards the existence of SRC office can facilitate the procedures, settings of time and frequency of SRC meetings, communication between SRC and students, decision-making powers, level of support from the campus to the SRC and training provided to the members of the SRC. Awareness is defined as the knowledge, consciousness or interest [8]. In this study, awareness means a sensitive attitude, taking cognizance and being aware of the existence of SRC by students especially in terms of the existence and importance of SRC to the

students throughout their studies. The awareness of the existence of SRC can be seen through the level of student involvement in activities organized by SRC and the percentage of voter turnout at the campus.

This study aims to obtain a comprehensive overview on student's voting rights, roles and selection criteria of SRC. It also aims to explore the relationship between the awareness of students toward SRC. This study is underpinned by the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) consisting of variables such as attitude, subjective norms and perceived behaviour control [17]. As shown in table 1, a factor that was mainly focused in previous studies related to the awareness in selecting SRC was the selection criteria. Another two factors; voting rights and roles, gained attention lately by the researchers. This creates the interest of current researchers to examine both factors.

Table 1: Summary of Factors related to the Awareness in Selecting SRC

Factors	Authors
Voting rights	Ahiatrogah and Koomson [20], Hamidah <i>et al.</i> [7], Wildy, Pepper and Guanzhong [21].
Roles	Hamidah <i>et al.</i> [7], Hilliard [9], Luescher-Mamashela [3], Mugume & Luescher-Mamashela [8].
Selection criteria	Dugan and Komives [14], Hamid and Krauss [16], Khaidzir, Khairil, Shaharuddin and Jumali [15], Mohd Yusof and Azlan [22], Mohd Fuad, Junaidi, Abdul Halim and Noor Aziah [23], Oaks, Duckett, Suddeth and Kennedy-Phillips [12], Pascarella [13], Shim [11], Wan Kader [24].

Besides that, a study conducted at high school level has found that the majority of students were aware about the SRC [14]. Respondents thought that their school's SRC was effective in general and had a positive view towards the social and academic activities. Some of the schools found that establishing a SRC can effectively raise the standards of behaviour but this process should involve further changes in the selection process at the school. In relation with that, a study at university level also indicated that the majority of students knew about the existence of the SRC at the university but the SRC had not provided any assistance yet [7]. However, the study found

that there were no harmony programs were conducted among the students and this shows that there was no sharing of ideas by the SRC with the students like any other colleges and universities. Other than that, Hamidah *et al.* [7] found that the awareness of students toward the existence of SRC was high but they did not know the representatives of SRC. Respondents were not very clear about the roles of SRC thoroughly.

However, a study on university students showed that the SRC attended the elections and activities held at the faculty but they held a small role and influence in decision-making in all matters [9]. Despite the result, the study found that the level of student involvement in campus election was high. Therefore, it can be said that there is sensitivity, awareness and sufficient interest showed by the students in campus elections. Additionally, this study shows that the level of the SRC influence in making decisions regarding students was moderate. Students should be given the opportunity to voice out their opinions on what has been implemented in their campus. This study found that the roles and influence of the SRC president in making decisions about the regulation of social and cultural activities was low. The roles and influence of the SRC president in making decisions about transportation, hostel, cafeteria, canteen, food on campus was moderate. SRC seemed to have little influence in decision making on campus.

Independent Variables Related

There are three independent variables related in this study including voting rights, roles and selection criteria.

Voting Rights (VRG)

The word "vote" means to choose from a list, to elect or to determine the ideal candidate based on the voter's judgement. The main goal of voting is to come out with leaders of the voter's choice [25]. Campus election was involved with the objective in selecting the student representatives for each university. They will be selected by students themselves and nominated by students for certain positions in the council or committee. Students are allowed to nominate and select their own leaders. According to Hamidah *et al.* [7], students who are pursuing a full-time study course to get a degree or diploma are qualified to be a voter to select the SRC candidate.

The period of study at the higher learning institutions is the time for students to prepare themselves

by getting familiarized with politics and vote in facing the real world. Student representatives are nominated for campus election and then selected by students themselves for various positions in the SRC [20]. Students are allowed to nominate and elect their own leaders. Students who are pursuing a full-time study programme are qualified to be a voter to select the SRC candidate [7]. In Polytechnic, the students' affairs management is responsible to ensure that students have the freedom to select and be chosen in the campus election.

According to Wildy, Pepper and Guanzhong [21], for voters who showed interest to vote in the election, their cynicism was low and their efficiency was higher compared to voters who did not show the interest to vote in the election. Voters will also have the capability to be involved in politics and become the knowledgeable voters and at the same time, criticize the integrity of candidates and their performance. Besides that, voters will also increase their skilful in distinguishing the performance of the candidates.

Therefore, the hypothesis of this study can be summarized as follows:

H1: There is a significant positive relationship between voting rights and the awareness of students toward SRC.

Roles (RLS)

Role refers to listening to the voices of other students and being concerned about student welfare matters and providing services to students. SRC is also responsible to identify the problems of students and giving opinions and recommendations to the relevant departments of higher learning institutions [7-8]. Furthermore, the roles of SRC also include the strengthening of activities, organization and relationships with students [7, 9]. Campus elections are held in every Public Institutions of Higher Learning to select leadership that consists of students themselves. Students who win in the campus election will be appointed as members of the SRC for each polytechnic.

As stated by Hamidah *et al.*, [7], SRC represents the requirements, rights, beliefs and desires of students of their learning institution. Thus, their role is to listen to the voices of other students and concerned about student welfare matters and providing services to students. Besides, SRC also play the role to represent the students in issues that affect their learning in institutions, hold consultative meeting and feedback with students, fund-

raising and being involved in the various social activities and non-academic activities.

Polytechnic' students need leaders to represent them in decision making, to take care of their welfare, and to raise the voices of people who are represented by them on an issue or matter. SRC is responsible for identifying the problems of students and opinions and recommendations to the relevant departments of higher learning institutions. Other roles of SRC are encouraging the active involvement of students at their higher learning institutions. Other than that, roles of the SRC also include strengthening the activities, organization and relationships with students [9]. Hamidah *et al.*, [7] added that SRC plays a role in handling the issue of student welfare, educational issues of campus members, establishing good rapport with the association that exists inside or outside the campus and ensuring the culture of national integration exists among the campus community.

The role of the SRC is to manage, identify and handle the problems and needs of students. The role played by the SRC is not only to defend the rights of students and representing them, but also to offer a number of activities and recreational tasks that meet the requirements and needs of students. SRC also plays a role to defend the rights of students, inform and solve the problem of students with the administration [26].

Therefore, the hypothesis of this study can be summarized as follows:

H2: There is a significant positive relationship between roles and awareness of students toward SRC.

Selection Criteria (SCR)

The specific criteria for candidates to determine the job or playing a particular role has been termed as the selection criteria. These criteria include the abilities, competencies, skills, knowledge or other attributes [27]. Other than that, the selection criteria for SRC candidate is also e based on race, personality, appearance, leadership and academic qualifications.

A study by Mohd Yusof and Azlan [22] found that the race factor was still related in the election. All races emphasised on a candidate who was highly educated and of the same race. In their study, the respondents also stated that the selection criterion of candidate was based on a good leadership personality. This statement was also

supported by Gwirayi [28] who found that the criterion in selecting SRC was based on good leadership qualities.

The fact that a selection criterion is based on race and personality is also supported by study of Mohd Fuad, Junaidi, Abdul Halim and Noor Aziah [23]. In their study, they found that the candidate's personality becomes the main selection criteria and consideration is given to candidates who are well-educated, ideology and same race with respondents.

Therefore, the hypothesis of this study can be summarized as follows:

H3: There is a significant positive relationship between selection criteria and the awareness of students toward SRC.

Proposed Conceptual Framework

The discussion explicitly describes several factors that relate to the level of students' awareness regarding the selection of SRCs in the higher learning institutions. Those factors include voting rights, roles and selection criteria. The discussion has developed three hypotheses which are the main objectives of this study. Based on the discussion in the above literature guided by TPB Theory, the conceptual framework of this study is outlined in the figure below.

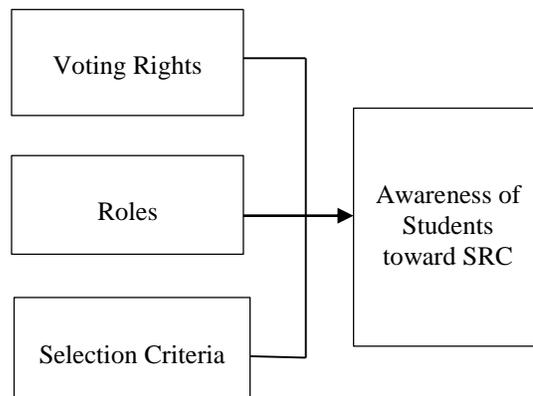


Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Framework

Referring to Figure 1, there are three relationships in the study involving; H1: Voting rights with the awareness of students toward SRC, H2: Roles with the awareness of students toward SRC and H3: Selection criteria with the awareness of students toward SRC.

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The discussion of the research methodology of the study covers the aspects of the population and sample, the measurement and also the reliability of instrument tools.

Population and sample

There were 14, 075 respondents for this study involving the students who were studying at polytechnics in the northern region including Polytechnic Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin (PTSS) (Perlis), Polytechnic Sultan Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah (POLIMAS) (Kedah), and Polytechnic Seberang Perai (PSP) (Penang). Referring to the table for determining the sample size by Krejcie and Morgan [29], a total of 375 students were chosen as the sample. Subsequently, the cluster sampling technique was used to collect the primary data of the study.

Measurement

The instrument used in this study was the questionnaire. All twenty items for the questionnaire were adapted from Hamidah *et al.*, [7]. The questionnaire contained the items focusing on the awareness of SRC, the factors of roles, voting rights and selection and demographic of the respondents. The respondents were required to choose the answer of 5-points numerical scale ranging from '1' (strongly disagree) to '5' (strongly agree). However, for the demographic factor, all items used close-ended questions including institution, gender and race.

Reliability of Instrument

A sample of 30 students was selected in the pilot study in order to measure the inter-reliability of items. As mentioned by Pallant [30], an analysis of Cronbach alpha was used and its strength was detailed to several levels as very weak (0.0 to 0.2), poor (0.2 to 0.4), medium (0.5 to 0.6), high (0.7 to 0.9) and very high (0.9 to 1.0). A high value of alpha indicates that the factors have a high reliability. The analysis carried out the yield value for the factor of awareness of $\alpha=.815$, voting rights of $\alpha=.670$, roles of $\alpha=.776$ and selection criteria of $\alpha=.658$. From the analysis, it can be concluded that all items for the study were accepted for data collection.

4.0 DATA ANALYSES AND RESULTS

Data collected from the questionnaire was analysed using SPSS version 23 software. Several types of analysis were carried out for the purpose of this study. The analysis also

includes profile of respondents, descriptive and correlation.

Profile of Respondents

The analysis of profile of respondents was carried out in assessing the characteristics of the respondents including the institutions, gender and race. The details are shown in Table 2 as below.

Table 2: Profile of Respondents

Character istics	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Institution	PTSS	104	27.7
	POLIMAS	161	42.9
	PSP	110	29.3
Gender	Male	179	47.7
	Female	196	52.3
Race	Malay	152	40.5
	Chinese	93	24.8
	Indian	65	17.3
	Siamese	64	17.1
	Others	01	00.3

Table 2 illustrates the respondents' profile consisting of the information on institutions, gender and race. For institution characteristic, the majority of the respondents were from Polytechnic Sultan Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah (POLIMAS) (42.9%), followed by Polytechnic Seberang Perai (PSP) (29.3%) and Polytechnic Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin (PTSS) (27.7%). While for gender characteristic, females dominated the total of respondents with 52.3% and males with 47.7%. However, in terms of race characteristic, the majority of respondents were Malay (40.5%), followed by Chinese (24.8%), Indian (17.3%), Siamese (17.1%) and others (0.3%).

Analysis of Descriptive

A descriptive analysis was used to determine the score of the attributes such as mean and standard deviation of related factors. This analysis was aimed to identify the level of voting right, roles and selection criteria towards the awareness of students in the selection of SRC. Table 3 showed the descriptive statistics of the related variables.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation
AWR	1	5	4.0027	.74338
VRG	2	5	3.8213	.66988
RLS	2	5	3.8587	.64780
SCR	2	5	3.6869	.70355

From the above table, awareness was ranked the highest level among the factors examined with the mean of 4.0027. However, roles resulted in the highest mean among other independent variables (3.8587), followed by voting rights (3.8213) and selection criteria (3.6869).

Analysis of Correlation

The objective of conducting a correlation analysis was to identify the relationship between voting rights, roles and selection criteria toward the awareness of students in the selection of SRC. Table 4 showed the results of correlation analysis for the related variables.

Table 4: Analysis of Pearson Correlation with N = 375

Variables	AWR	VRG	RLS	SCR
AWR	1.00			
VRG	.593**	1.00		
RLS	.670**	.701**	1.00	
SCR	.330**	.521**	.415**	1.00

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

As shown in Table 4, all three factors (voting rights, roles and selection criteria) were analysed significantly and positively correlated to the awareness of students towards SRC at 99% level of significance. In terms of rank, the role factor obtained the highest score with $r=.670$, followed by voting rights ($r=.593$) and selection criteria ($r=.330$).

5.0 CONCLUSIONS

The findings from the descriptive analysis show that the main factors associated to the awareness of SRC was the role factor followed by voting rights and selection criteria. However, all three factors resulted in the moderate level among respondents. While the correlation analysis shows that the three factors have a significant and positive relationship with the level of awareness of SRC. However, the strength of the relationship between these three factors is different toward the level of awareness of SRC. Roles have a strong relationship while voting rights has a

moderate relationship and selection criteria have a low relationship with the level of awareness of SRC.

This study is useful to related parties that deal directly with SRC and students. In higher learning institutions, the department of student affairs should emphasize the role of the SRC in empowering students and its activities. The important role of the SRC is to build students' personality and thus provide the nation with bright future leaders. Thus, the information pertaining to the SRC's descriptive and correlation analysis is beneficial in strengthening the capability of students and then to produce the best graduates in the future.

Despite the significant relationship between all the hypotheses tested, this result may contribute to the discovery of a new direction regarding the different level of relationship' strength involving the factors of roles, voting rights and selection criteria. A more detailed study across a wider geographic scope of Malaysian polytechnic is needed in the future as the current study only focused on the polytechnics in the northern region of Peninsular Malaysia.

As a conclusion, higher learning institutions should primarily focus on students and student leaders, especially to the SRC. This is due to the students' awareness of the role that their leaders should take in the SRC. The role of student leaders should be enriched by the institution so that the problems and needs of the students are handled well. The role of the SRC in linking both parties can create a conducive campus environment and then develop high quality graduates.

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