

# Empowering Students and Educators Through Community-Based Mathematics Enrichment: Facilitators' Perspective

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## ABSTRACT

This study presents the experiences, roles, and reflections of facilitators comprising Diploma in Accountancy students volunteering in a six-month community-based mathematics enrichment program targeting Form Four students in Malaysian secondary schools. The program aimed not only to improve students' mathematical proficiency but also to provide meaningful teaching and learning skills for the facilitators themselves. Through structured tutoring sessions, interactive activities, and mentoring, facilitators supported students in developing stronger math skills while also enhancing their own confidence, communication skills, and instructional strategies. This study utilizes qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews with the facilitators, focusing on their involvement in areas such as instructional planning, classroom engagement, emotional support, and adaptability to student needs. The findings imply that many facilitators gained increased self-confidence in teaching, improved their ability to communicate with students, and discovered a sense of fulfilment in assisting others. Some facilitators also reported challenges in handling diverse learning levels and maintaining participants' motivation. Overall, the program highlights the dual impact of engagement initiatives, benefiting both learners and facilitators. The findings provide valuable insights for institutions planning similar outreach programs, aligning with literature on the importance of service-learning in fostering both personal growth and professional development among students.

**Keyword:** community engagement, mathematics education, community engagement, facilitators

## INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia, after completing six years of primary schooling, Malaysian students enter a secondary mathematics curriculum designed to enhance logical reasoning, creativity, and application of knowledge. The syllabus, covering Forms 1 to 5, includes key areas such as algebra, geometry, number theory, trigonometry, and statistics. Emphasis is placed on solving real-life problems, using mathematical models, and promoting high-order thinking skills (HOTS). Teaching strategies also foster positive attitudes and values towards mathematics. This curriculum prepares students for the Malaysian Certificate of Education (SPM) and future academics (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2023).

Mathematics achievement continues to be one of the main concerns within the Malaysian secondary school system, especially in the underserved and low-performing communities. Despite various educational reforms and programs, national and international assessments reveal that Malaysian students still face significant challenges in acquiring essential mathematical skills. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2022 results show that only 41% of Malaysian 15-year-olds achieved at least Level 2 proficiency in mathematics, compared to the OECD average of 69%. This level reflects the minimum ability to use basic algorithms, interpret simple data, and apply routine procedures (OECD, 2023).

Despite continued policy and curriculum reforms, mathematics remains a demanding subject for many Malaysian students. According to the curriculum, critical problem-solving is stressed, yet students' overall performance continues to fall short of international standards. The average achievement mathematics score for Malaysian Form 2 students of 411 points, a decline from 461 points in 2019, is below the international average

of 478 points. The drop in performance highlights continuing challenges in mathematics education and has been partly attributed to pandemic-related disruptions and the transition to digital assessments (IEA, 2023).

While efforts have been taken to address these gaps through curriculum reforms and digital learning platforms, less attention has been paid to the facilitators, both educators or student volunteers, who often serve as the frontline support in intervention programs. These individuals play a critical dual role as instructors and co-learners, especially in community-based projects designed to support students struggling with mathematics.

This study focuses on the community engagement initiative by a group of researchers which ran for six months involving underserved students from several Malaysian schools. Facilitators in this program not only assisted Form 4 students to improve their understanding of mathematics through structured lessons and mentoring but also underwent their professional growth journey. By working closely with students, changing how they taught, and thinking about what worked or didn't, facilitators helped students grow and also improved their own teaching skills. Thus, this study is undertaken to explore the experiences, challenges, and insights of facilitators, highlighting how academic service-learning can simultaneously support student growth and professional development. To better understand the professional development experienced by facilitators, the next section reviews key research on mentor-led educational support in community contexts.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Research shows that service-learning assists both students and the people who guide them. For facilitators, especially those new to teaching, it is more than just practice. It helps them build skills like communication, confidence, and understanding others. This review looks at how facilitators grow as teachers and as people by working closely with students, using different ways to support learning, and building strong relationships in communities that need more assistance.

### Facilitators' Confidence and Instructional Readiness

Facilitators who engage in service-learning within classroom environments often develop greater teaching confidence and clarity. The service-learning model strengthens students' confidence and teaching efficacy by aligning theoretical knowledge with real-world practice. In addition, supportive relationships with peers and instructors play a vital role in fostering personal development and enhancing comfort in teaching practice (Almond et al., 2025). According to Altarawneh & Marei (2021), educators exposed to live teaching conditions may gain practical pedagogical insight that strengthens their readiness for future professional roles. These experiences not only test their theoretical knowledge but also challenge them to respond creatively to unpredictable classroom dynamics. Alfayez (2022) further highlights that the interaction between diverse student groups enhances facilitators' mathematical thinking, enabling them to develop both conceptual understanding and procedural competence. This early engagement fosters both confidence and adaptability as key elements in supporting learners.

### Communication, Empathy, and Interpersonal Growth

Effective mentoring in community-based programs depends on good people skills. Lopez (2023) argued that being empathic, understanding different cultures, and having clear communication skills assist mentors in connecting with their students, especially in places with many languages or backgrounds. Mentors or facilitators build these skills by working closely with learners over time. This helps them to better understand the students and handle their emotional situations with care. These relationship skills support teaching by making students feel safe, belonging, and more willing to participate in the teaching and learning activities.

### Teaching Strategies for Different types of Learners

Facilitators play a key role in addressing the wide range of student abilities found in underserved classrooms. Hence, it is important to differentiate instruction by adjusting teaching methods, content, and pace to varied learners (Corrêa, 2021). To achieve this, facilitators are encouraged to apply student-centered approaches, including visual aids, peer collaboration, and inquiry-based tasks. These techniques are evident to not only enhance comprehension but also develop students' confidence and engagement. Samuelsson (2010) reinforced

this view by showing that cooperation, encouraging students to explore and ask questions help them enjoy and value mathematics.

### **Monitoring Progress and Encouraging Mathematical Thinking**

Tikhomirova et al. (2017) highlight that skill in solving problems is best nurtured when students are encouraged not only to solve problems but also to explain their reasoning. This emphasis on combining performance with verbal reasoning sets a solid foundation for deeper mathematical understanding. Building on this, Go et al. (2023) and Helsa et al. (2024) emphasize the function of formative assessment in responsive teaching. Effective facilitators or mentors use informal questioning, observation, and learner feedback. Facilitators can identify student misconceptions and adjust their learning instruction in real time. By this way, facilitators act as responsive instructors who monitor understanding and adapt their teaching to support student learning.

### **Structured Preparation and Instructional Quality**

The success of community engagement on math intervention programs often hinges on the training and structure provided to facilitators. Studies by Nickow et al. (2024) and Pellegrini et al. (2021) reveal that facilitators with clear guidance, aligned instructional tools, and embedded session schedules are more likely to create meaningful learning outcomes. Well-trained facilitators demonstrate better pacing, classroom management, and alignment with curriculum objectives. Moreover, instructional effectiveness increases as the facilitators adapt their explanations for language-challenged learners (Lopez, 2023) and foster a cooperative environment that promotes both skill-building and positive attitudes towards mathematics (Samuelsson, 2010).

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND METHOD**

### **Research Design**

This study employs qualitative case study approach to explore the experiences of student facilitators in a community-based mathematics enrichment programme. A qualitative design was appropriate as the study envisaged to understand the facilitators' views, experiences, and reflection throughout their involvement in the programme. On the other hand, the case study design was considered suitable because the research focused on one specific programme conducted within a particular setting over a period of six months.

### **Participants and sampling**

The participants in this study were 15 Diploma in Accountancy students who volunteered to serve as facilitators in the programme. They were selected through purposive sampling, as only those who had direct involvement in the teaching and learning activities were able to provide relevant insights into the study. These participants were chosen based on their active participation in the programme and their willingness to take part in the interview session.

Although the participants were not formally trained in mathematics education, they were considered suitable for the programme as the study intended to observe how student facilitators from a non-teaching background experienced guiding and supporting secondary school students in mathematics.

### **Data collection**

Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews. This technique was selected because it allows researchers to prepare a common set of guiding questions while still giving participants sufficient time to describe their own experiences in detail. The interview questions focused on several areas, including the participants' educational background, reasons to be part of the programme, preparation for teaching, challenges encountered during the sessions, ways of adapting to their teaching to the students' needs, and the changes they experienced in terms of boosting their confidence communication skills. A total of five researchers were involved in conducting the interviews, with each researcher having been assigned to equally interview three participants. Each interview lasted between 40 and 60 minutes. To maintain consistency, all researchers referred to the same interview guide and discussed the purpose of the questions before the interview sessions performed. This step ensures that the

interviews covered similar areas, while still allowing participants to speak freely about their own experiences, With the participants’ consent, the interviews were recorded and later transcribed for analysis.

**Researcher consistency and trustworthiness**

As five researchers participated in both interview and analysis process, attention was given to maintaining consistency to reduce possible bias. The use of a shared interview guide aided to ensure that the same general issues were tackled across all interview sessions. Besides, the researchers reviewed the transcripts carefully and discussed the emerging codes and themes together during the analysis process. These steps strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings and reduce differences in interpretation among the researchers.

**Data analysis**

The semi-structured interviews were analyzed through thematic analysis. After the interviews were transcribed, the researchers read through the transcripts several times to familiarize themselves with the data. Important statements and repeat ideas were then identified and assigned initial codes. Similar codes were grouped together and reviewed to form broader categories. From these categories, theme was developed to reflect common patterns in the participants’ responses. The themes were then discussed and refined by the researchers to ensure that they were clearly supported by the interview data and accurately represented the participants’ experiences. The interview recordings were first transcribed using TurboScribe and then checked manually against the original recordings to improve accuracy. This step was important ensuring that the meaning of the participants’ responses was preserved before the coding and theme development process began. The steps of data analysis in this study is graphically represented in Table 1 overleaf.

**Table 1: Stages of Thematic Analysis**

Stage	Description
1	Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed
2	The transcripts were checked against the recordings for accuracy
3	The researchers read the transcripts to familiarize with the data
4	Important and recurring responses identified and assigned with codes
5	Similar codes grouped into broader categories
6	Themes developed, reviewed, and refined through discussion among the researchers

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

**Participant profile**

A total of 15 Part 3 Diploma in Accounting students volunteered as facilitators in this program. Most of the participants were female, and many had strong academic backgrounds, including good prior performance in mathematics. Although they were not formally trained as mathematics teachers, they brought with them a willingness to assist, some prior experience in assisting peers, and genuine interest in supporting the secondary school students who desired additional academic guidance. This background is important because it shows that the participants were able to speak meaningfully about the roles as facilitators in the programme.

**Confidence in Teaching**

A major theme that emerged from the interview session was the facilitators' increased confidence in teaching. Many described feeling nervous at the beginning, especially because they were expected to guide students in mathematics despite coming from accountancy background. Over time, nevertheless, this uncertainty began to decrease as they gained more direct experience working with students. As one respondent stated.

*"I feel more confident in teaching my friends who are weak in certain subjects"* (R1) Facilitators like R2 also acknowledged the process of overcoming their fears: *"I really have started to be open to communicating... I have to be confident."* (R2) These responses suggest that confidence was not immediately developed, but it emerged

gradually through repeated interaction, practice, and responsibility in the teaching role. This supports earlier studies which suggest that authentic teaching can foster confidence and readiness for future professional roles (Altarawneh & Marei, 2021).

### **Communication and Engagement Skills**

The programme also appeared to improve the facilitators' communication skills. This was not only about speaking more clearly, but also about learning to explain ideas in simpler ways, responding to students from various backgrounds, and adjust communication to suit their level of understanding. For instance, R9 emphasized that, *"My communication skills have improved because I was able to interact with all kinds of students from different backgrounds."* (R9) This is consistent with Lopez's (2023) findings, which emphasize the importance of empathy and understanding in building effective teaching relationships. As the facilitators became more accustomed to the dynamics of the classroom, they adapted their communication strategies to better suit the students' needs, often incorporating real-life examples and interactive methods to keep students engaged.

### **Personal and Professional Growth**

Beyond confidence in teaching, the facilitators also described broader both personal and professional growth. They have gained insights into their own teaching practices, discovered the significance of patience, and learned how to control diverse classroom dynamics. One respondent, R3, shared, *"I am more confident when I have to make a presentation in class. This has helped me to speak more calmly during the presentation."* (R3) This reflects a broader trend of increased self-awareness and growth in professional competencies, supported by the structured training and mentoring they received. The facilitators' ability to adjust their teaching methods based on student needs was particularly notable. Similarly, another participant, R7, expressed, *"I give words or information to help people understand"* (R7) Taken together, these responses show that the programme functioned as a valuable learning experience for the facilitators themselves

### **Adapting to different levels of learners**

Another important highlight in the study was the facilitators' need to adjust their teaching style to students with different levels of understanding. The interview responses show that some facilitators used simple explanations, real-life examples, one-to-one support, and changes in a speed to assist struggling students. This is a significant finding because it shows that the facilitators were not simply delivering content but were trying to respond to different learning needs in practical ways. The concern here is not only that some students were weak in mathematics, but they learned at different paces and needed different forms of support. This condition explicitly discussed the importance of differentiated instruction in assisting learners with varied learning abilities.

### **Impact on Students and Motivation to Continue**

The facilitators reported feeling a strong sense of accomplishment when their students began to understand and engage more with the subject matter. Several facilitators, like R1, shared how they adapted their teaching methods to ensure that the students were not only comprehending the material but also developing a love for learning mathematics, *"When I find out that they have completed all the work, I feel happy too."* (R3) The respondent remarked, reflecting a sense of pride in student progress. Additionally, the facilitators' experiences in this program motivated them to continue supporting students in the future. Many reported that their time as facilitators strengthened their desire to pursue teaching, while others gained a deep respect for the challenges educators face daily, as highlighted by other respondents' reflections on the difficulties of teaching.

### **Challenges and Suggestions for Improvement**

Although the programme brought many benefits, the interviews also revealed that the facilitators faced real challenges, particularly in adapting to the varied levels of student understanding and the initial discomfort of teaching. Some facilitators mentioned that they struggled to engage less motivated students, with R10 noting the difficulty of working with slow learners, *"And then he was really slow, like oh, he's so slow."* (R10) This was

compounded by the challenge of adapting their teaching methods to cater to both advanced and struggling students. Some students were cooperative whereas others were not. As Facilitator R13 suggested, *"The main challenge I face is the attitude of these students; some are ok and some are not."* (R13) These responses show that the challenge was not only related to academic, but rather behavioral and motivational factors, suggesting that subject knowledge alone was not enough. The facilitators also need to equip themselves with strategies to manage engagement, respond to different attitudes, and adjust their teaching method according to students' readiness. This strengthens the argument better preparation for their sessions and more structured training before starting their roles. *"If we get the title early, that will make it easier for us to understand the manual better when we get it later."* (R3) The facilitator suggested that, in the future, facilitator training should be conducted earlier so that they will have ample time to understand the manual better.

## OVERALL DISCUSSION

Overall, the findings reveal that participation in the community-based mathematics enrichment program significantly contributed to the facilitators' personal and professional growth. Through hands-on teaching experiences, they developed greater confidence, improved communication skills, and learned how to adjust their instructional approaches to meet diverse student needs. Despite their initial lack of formal training in mathematics, the facilitators demonstrated resilience, creativity, and a willingness to learn, traits that were strengthened by consistent support from lecturers and a well-structured teaching framework. These insights not only confirm the value of academic service-learning in preparing students for future roles in education and community engagement but also suggest that such programs can serve as powerful tools for nurturing important soft skills in future professionals. Facilitators indicated that the program had a positive impact on their career outlooks, with some expressing interest in teaching as a future career path, while others felt better equipped to interact with students from diverse backgrounds. Furthermore, their suggestions for improvement, such as better preparation and training, indicate that the program is a promising foundation for enhancing the facilitation of service-learning opportunities. The findings demonstrate that community-based service-learning programs, when well-structured, offer significant potential not only to support student learning but also to develop key professional competencies in the facilitators themselves.

## CONCLUSION

The study explored the experiences and development of Diploma in Accountancy students at a local university in Malaysia, who served as facilitators in a six-month community-based mathematics engagement program. Using a qualitative stance through semi-structured interviews, the research examined how these students, despite not having a mathematics background, improved their teaching skills, confidence, and communication through real-life tutoring sessions with Form 4 students struggling in mathematics. The findings suggest that academic service-learning provides invaluable opportunities for university students to apply their classroom knowledge in meaningful, real-world contexts. The facilitators not only gained practical teaching experience but also experienced significant personal growth. Their development was particularly notable in areas such as communication, confidence in teaching, teamwork, and adaptability. The facilitators expressed an increased ability to connect with students, adapt their teaching methods, and engage with students from diverse backgrounds. This research highlights the potential of community-based engagement programs to benefit both university students and the wider community in need of academic support. Facilitators noted that the program lifted their self-confidence, enhanced their interpersonal skills, and assisted them in developing greater patience and empathy, traits necessary for both teaching and professional growth. Overall, this study highlights the power of community-based programs, indicating how they can foster essential skills in university students while also addressing the educational needs of underserved communities. The research affirms the value of such projects as a tool for personal and professional development, paving the way for future service-learning opportunities that can continue to support both educational and community goals.

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## Appendix

### Summary Of Interview Responses

QUESTION	SUMMARY OF RESPONSES
1. Can you tell us a little about your educational background before joining this program?	Participants generally have strong academic backgrounds, with several excelling in mathematics (e.g., A's, A's in math and accounting). Participant also come from several streams science, accounting and others with non-math subjects but have good results in mathematics.
2. What motivated you to become a facilitator in this math enrichment program?	Most of the participants joined the program with aims to help underprivileged students, gain teaching experience, and improve their communication skills. They expressed a desire to share their knowledge and help others succeed in mathematical subject.
3. How do you prepare before starting a teaching session with students, given your background in accounting?	Participants' preparation methods included reviewing materials provided by the lecturers, revisiting high school math topics, and using online resources like YouTube. Some participants felt they need more time to do the preparations.
4. Do you have previous experience teaching or helping classmates in any field?	Many participants had previous experience in teaching peers or assisting classmates in subjects like accounting and mathematics, while others had no teaching experience. However none of them have formal teaching experience.
5. How did you feel when you first met the students you were facilitating, especially in a rather challenging mathematics subject?	Initially most of the participants felt nervous, but they become more comfortable as they built rapport with the students. Some were excited to help students improve their skills and engage with them.
6. Can you share your hopes and expectations before joining this program, especially in terms of teaching mathematics?	The most important thing was to help students learn maths better and feel more confident. They hoped the students would succeed and apply the knowledge in their exams.
7. What are the main challenges you face when leading mathematics lessons for Form 4 students, and how do you overcome those challenges as an accounting student?	Common issues were coping with varied student knowledge, managing different learning speeds, engaging less engaged students, and teaching mathematics to struggling students. Some participants found it difficult to teach in a non-classroom setting.
8. How do the structured preparations and teaching manuals provided help you in conducting mathematics teaching sessions?	The given manuals were deemed useful for designing classes, guiding teaching approaches, and resolving frequent misconceptions. Some participants believed the guides could benefit from more difficult exercises that corresponded to exam-level problems.
9. Can you tell us about an experience where you had to adapt your teaching methods to meet different levels of student understanding?	Participants modified their instruction by providing simpler explanations for slower learners, using real-life examples, and modifying their pace based on student needs. Some utilized one-on-one instruction or group exercises to help struggling students catch up.

<p>10. What steps do you take to engage students who are less interested or have difficulty understanding math topics?</p>	<p>Strategies to engage disinterested students encompassed the use of relatable examples, positive reinforcement, interactive activities, assessments, and motivating students through commendation.</p>
<p>11. What do you feel has changed in you after taking this program, especially in communication skills and self-confidence?</p>	<p>Many participants reported significant improvements in communication skills and self-confidence, especially in teaching and interacting with students they didn't know before.</p>
<p>12. How do you balance your role as a facilitator with your accounting duties and studies?</p>	<p>Most participants employed time management skills to reconcile their facilitator position with academic commitments, with some experiencing the strain of balancing both roles. Some adjusted their schedules to accommodate both facilitating and studying.</p>
<p>13. What methods do you use to monitor student progress throughout the teaching session and provide constructive feedback?</p>	<p>Participants observed student progress by monitoring and examining student's work, providing spontaneous comments, and asking student feedback to enhance their teaching methods.</p>
<p>14. Has this experience affected your views on a career in teaching or education?</p>	<p>Some participants expressed great appreciation for the teaching profession, noting the challenges and rewards of being an educator. A few became more interested in pursuing a teaching career after this experience.</p>
<p>15. Based on your experience, what suggestions for improvements do you have for facilitator training or the structure of this program in the future?</p>	<p>Suggestions included providing earlier access to teaching manuals, improving teaching environment for better engagement, and offering more training or guidance for facilitators. Some suggested the use of online meetings for facilitator discussions.</p>