

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CO-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES BY INTEGRATED LIVING SKILLS UNIT IN ENHANCING STUDENTS' SOFT SKILLS

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ABSTRACT

Co-curriculum is a vital part of an education system that helps students to build their soft skills. Co-curricular activity is activities that usually complement regular co-curriculum. In order to produce holistic students, students need to have excellent interpersonal skills that can be developed through co-curricular activities in their college. Therefore, this paper aims to determine the effectiveness of Co-Curricular activities in enhancing students' soft skills. This study was conducted on students who enrolled in the third and fourth semester of Co-curricular in Integrated Living Skills unit at University Utara Malaysia and the data were obtained through the dissemination of survey questionnaire with randomly selected students. The primary data involve a large population of students about 510 students and the co-curricular unit have been group into four groups that are Scout, Outrec, Kor Siskor and Basic of Car Maintenance. The data were analyzed using Gap Analysis, Paired Independence T-test, t-test and Chi-Square. The data were collected using Stratified Random Sampling where the strata are the four stated co-curricular activities and the respondent are randomly selected. A gap analysis was used to examine the different level of students' soft skill before and after co-curricular activities that compulsory to all the students before graduation. Generally, the result shows that the students' level of soft skills is improving after they attend the co-curricular activities and the widest gap was in interpersonal skills, especially the skills of the ability to work and contribute to the group. However, critical research should be done in order to identify the overall co-curriculum unit on the effectiveness of students' soft skills.

Keywords: Co-curriculum, Integrated Living Skills Unit, Soft skills, Questionnaire.

INTRODUCTION

Co-curricular activity is an essential part of students' holistic education. Throughout co-curricular activities, students learn and develop their interests and capabilities while developing competencies and soft skills that will prepare them for a challenging world (David H., 2003). The co-curricular activities assumptions are to provide students with a wide range of knowledge and experiences to expand their interests, talents, mentality, physical, spiritual and positive aesthetic and social values. Participation in these activities will provide the essential skills as well as fostering a healthy lifestyle (Sandra & Anuar, 2016). In general, co-curricular activities are believed to be beneficial to students development such as an increment in academic performance, enhancement of social and competency skills, and assistance of youth development and

employment (Helen & Simon, 2018). Hence, since Malaysia had experienced a rapidly changing towards 2020 vision, they need to prepare a quality outcome from all institution in Malaysia.

Nowadays, academic achievement is not only the primary criterion for the fresh graduates to be selected in the job market, and the Ministry of Higher Education has recommended to all the higher learning institutions to conduct co-curricular activities so that the students can enhance their soft skills and get chance to be employed. From the article posted by JobStreet Singapore, 3 March. 2018 stated that one of the reasons why the graduates are hard to be employed is because of they are no skills. The reasons are every company is very concerned about the skills available in every graduate of the universities from both within and outside the country. In the previous study by R P C R Rajapakse (2017), various ideas were expressed in the telephone interviews they had with employers. Some mentioned there is a problem (lack/mismatch) of soft skills, and some others mentioned poor language and computer skills. Thus, by implementing holistic students development through the National Higher Education Strategic Plan (PSPTN), each of the students need to have soft skills among students' themselves (David H., 2003). In order to implement the plans, a survey has been conducted on undergraduates students attending co-curricular activities in Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM). This survey is designed to evaluate the effectiveness of co-curricular activities towards the development of students' soft skills.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Co-curricular is an activity that never been taught in the classroom. For that reason, the Malaysian government strongly emphasizes employment for students and requires students to be more skilled and have some necessary soft skills. From the perspective of Ahmad et al. (2019) said that the Government of Malaysia has already executed holistic student development through National Higher Education Strategic Plan (PSPTN) in order to make the students develop their soft skills. Abdul Rahman (2010) claimed that the primary cause of an individual's work failure is that they have failed to create a positive interaction with their community. This situation shows that communication skills in any field that is enrolled in the future are fundamental. Research from Lange and Technicon (2000), possessing skills such as being central in employer's consideration of choosing an employee or significant criteria used by registries to accept applications from students to boarding schools, cluster schools or even higher. Most school leavers, however, do not have the necessary skills and therefore failed to meet the requirements needed.

In the perspective of Jumali et al. (2019) said that co-curricular comprises the self-driven activity of student itself to gain knowledge and soft skills. The activity or projects depending on students' interests and tendencies that been carried out at different learning centres. This was aimed to increase their talents and skills in a learning environment which is lither and more entertaining. Besides, through the involvement of students in co-curricular activities, students can develop generic skills that can influence the personal development of students. Teamwork, leadership, and communication skills are skills that can enhance student interpersonal skills through extracurricular activities said by Noraini and Norashidi (2010). From the perspective of Abdul et al. (2005) on the perceptions of teachers about the correlation between student participation in co-curricular activities and their competency skills showed that those students who participate

actively in co-curricular activities are found to be more competent in communication skills, cognitive skills, self-management skills and academic performance.

Meanwhile, Zubaidah and Rugayah (2008) explored the attributes of non-technical knowledge needed in the Malaysian manufacturing industry by foreign and local companies. From an employer's point of view, they have identified seven essential non-technical skills, namely communication, creative thinking and problem solving, information management, leadership and organization, productive group work, teamwork, job-related behaviours, personal traits and self-management. Munir et al. (2005) identified students of arts and related subject areas' skills and abilities. Their study showed that the order of the list reflected, from the employer point of view, the importance of each attribute.

It shows that the skills rating of potential students is the following: leadership skills, personal qualities, communication skills, individually qualified people, thinking skills and computer skills, as required by employers.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Measurement of the effectiveness of a program is essential in order to show whether the outcomes of a specific program meet or exceed the objectives. (Jamal et al., 2014). In order to access the effectiveness of a program implemented, we need to be able to identify the best method and used it as a model to be applied by others. Thus, the evaluation of co-curricular activities is needed to point out their improvements in students' soft skills.

In preparing this report, the primary data collected by questionnaire. The questionnaire has been disseminated randomly to the undergraduate students who are involved in co-curricular activities under the Integrated Living Skills Unit in their last and second last semester of curriculum. In this study, only 219 questionnaires were returned. The method used in preparing this paper is Stratified Random Sampling where the Integrated Living Skills Unit has been group into strata which are Scouts, Outrec, Kor-Siskor and Basic of Car Maintenance. As suggested by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), the number of questionnaires returned is sufficient to represent the population of the students in the Integrated Living Skills Unit. After removing the incomplete responses and outliers to make the data normalized, 164 valid responses were used for the data analysis. Gap Analysis and Paired Sample t-test are used for analysing the collected data.

A five point's Semantic scale was used to estimate the improvements in students' soft skills. Descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage) were used to describe the characteristics of the respondents. The hypothesis of the two population means was used to test the students' perceived the effectiveness of co-curricular activities.

Table 1: Types of Soft Skills

Types of skills		Mean before	Mean after
Interpersonal skills	Able to work and contribute to the group	3.18	4.35
	Able to understand other people's feeling related to work	3.24	4.29
	Able to negotiate with group members		
	Able to encourage and motivate others	3.24	4.29
	Able of networking	3.20	4.20
	Able to work in diverse environment (ethnic group, religion and gender)	3.27 3.41	4.26 4.52
Computational skills	Level of key competence	3.19	4.13
	Ability to use Microsoft office software	3.51	4.27
	Ability to deliver effective presentation using computer software	3.35	4.25
	Ability to search and manage the relevant information from various sources.	3.48	4.35
Entrepreneur skills	Ability to explore and identify business opportunities	3.09	4.01
	Ability to develop business plan		
	Ability to develop business opportunities	3.03	3.91
	Ability to be self-employed	2.98 3.24	3.92 4.17
Communication skills	Ability to listen attentively and give appropriate feedback	3.35	4.35
	Ability to negotiate and reach consensus	3.26	4.22
	Ability to write and speak fluently in Bahasa Malaysia	3.97	4.63
	Ability to write and speak fluently in English	3.27	4.17
	Ability to communicate formally and informal with people from different backgrounds	3.42	4.34
	Ability to express own idea with confidence	3.21	4.20
Thinking skills	Ability to recognize and analyse problems	3.28	4.30
	Ability to generate creative idea	3.15	4.16
	Ability to think critically	3.11	4.12
	Ability to adapt with new knowledge and skills	3.21	4.35
	Ability to think out of box	3.09	4.15
	Ability to contribute new ideas which help build the future	3.19	4.27
Management skills	Ability to lead a project	3.03	4.12
	Ability to supervise group members	3.20	4.26
	Good time management	3.32	4.30
	Ability to monitor group members to achieve targets	3.23	4.27
	Ability to plan and implement an action plan		
	Ability to work under pressure	3.25	4.18
	Ability to work independently	3.23 3.35	4.24 4.40
Overall		3.26	4.23

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Demographic Background of Respondents

Table 2: Characteristics of Respondents

		Frequency	%
Sub-unit Co-curriculum	Scouts	56	34.1
	Kor Siskor	50	30.5
	Outrec	32	19.5
	Basics of Car Maintenance	26	15.9
Gender	Female	134	81.7
	Male	30	18.3
Race	Malay	126	76.8
	Chinese	17	10.4
	Indian	11	6.7
	Others	10	6.1
Semester	3	117	71.3
	4	47	28.7

Table 2 shows the characteristics of respondents in term of their sub-unit of co-curricular activities, gender, race and semester. By referring to Table 2, it presents that the majority of the respondents were Scouts students (34.1%). This is maybe due to the higher number of respondents in Scout, which is 56 of 164 students' response to the questionnaire. Students from Kor Siskor constituted 30.5 per cent and Outrec was 15.9 per cent of the total respondents while another 19.5 per cent of the respondents were students from Basic of Car Maintenance. Regarding the race, more than half of the respondents were Malay (76.8%). Chinese and Indian respondents were 10.4% and 6.7% respectively and while for others, respondents were 10% of the total respondents. Others respondents were "Bumiputera" students that excluding Malay students and foreigner students.

The majority of respondents were female, as was expected of the selected group of students. This was reliable, as reported by Professor Datuk Dr Morshidi Sirat, General Director of the Department of Higher Education, and the higher number of female students at local universities. (The Star, 2013, July 12). There are statistics in 2017 that presents the number of students enrolled in public higher education institution in Malaysia from 2012 to 2018, by gender. From the statistics clearly show that female students' enrolment in higher than male students from the year 2012 till 2017 although the number of female students' enrolment has dropped slightly (R. Hirschmann, 2019). The respondents for semester 3 is about 71.3% higher than semester four, that is 28.7%. This is due to the enrolment of students in semester four during the dissemination of the questionnaire. However, even the percentage of semester 3 is higher than semester four but it still corresponds to the total population of students in both semester.

Effectiveness of Co-curricular Activities

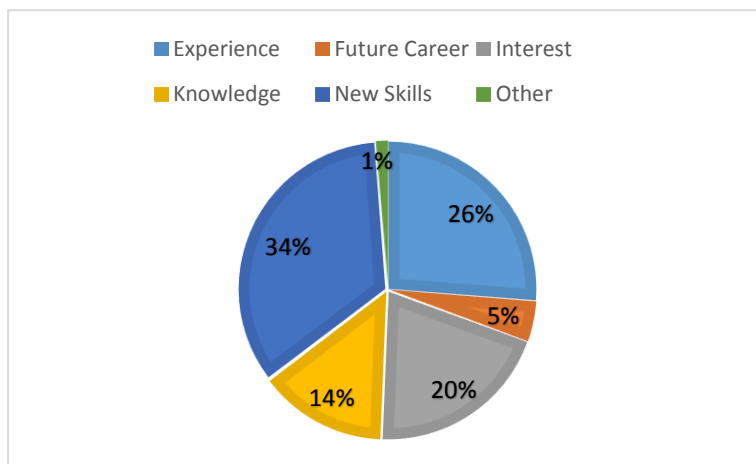
Most of the student’s consent that they were contented with all the soft skills listed after they sit in on co-curricular activities with a mean of 4.2290. This show that from the insight of students, the co-curricular activities that been held in universities give a positive impact to improve students’ soft skills. The most apparent soft skills that been developed by the students were their Interpersonal Skills, where the mean increases from 3.2561 to 4.3191 (Table 3).

Thus, by referring to Table 3, the value of mean for the skills listed after attending the co-curricular activities was higher than before attending the co-curricular activities. Fascinatingly, the value of the mean for the soft skills after attending the co-curricular activities points out that the students’ tend to show no significant difference. In a nutshell, the majority of the students agreed that they were satisfied with their soft skills development after attending that co-curricular activity.

Table 3: Paired Sample Test

	Before co-curriculum		After co-curriculum		p-value
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	
Interpersonal Skills	3.2561	0.60372	4.3191	0.41709	0.000
Computational Skills	3.3826	0.64674	4.2530	0.48599	0.000
Entrepreneur Skills	3.0823	0.61244	4.0046	0.59036	0.000
Communication Skills	3.4126	0.60628	4.3191	0.47515	0.000
Thinking Skills	3.1717	0.58247	4.2266	0.46773	0.000
Management Skills	3.2282	0.59750	4.2517	0.48975	0.000
Overall	3.2556	0.3205	4.2290	0.2948	

Figure 1: Reasons for students’ participation in co-curricular activities



As a whole, the mean for students' perception of the development of soft skills after attending co-curricular activities (4.2290) is higher than the soft skills before attending co-curricular activities (3.2556). The mean difference is found to be significant with the significant value of almost zero (paired sample t-test). We can conclude that there is a significant difference between skills possessed by students' before and after attending co-curricular activities.

Furthermore, Figure 1 shows that from the perspective of the students on the reasons why they are joining the current co-curricular activities, measures using a checkbox (at most 1). It means that by using that checkbox, the respondents can only tick one box for this question and indirectly most of the student will fill up with the best reasons of why they are joining the current co-curricular activities. Figure 1 shows that most of the respondents joining current co-curricular activities to gain new skills (34.1%) follow by Experience (26%) and Interest (20%).

Relationship between Sub-unit of Co-curricular and Reason of Students' Involvement

According to the Chi-Square test, the study indicates a positive result where there is a relationship between the two groups stated. It means that the sub-unit of Integrated Living Skills Unit, which are Scout, Kor-Siskor, Outrec and Basic of Car Maintenance have a positive relationship with the reasons of students' participation in their current co-curricular activities. Table 4 shows a piece of evidence that the significance value of Pearson Chi-Square is less than alpha (0.05). Thus, it can be concluded that there is a relationship between the sub-unit of co-curricular activities and the reasons why they join co-curricular activities. This reveals that the respondents who participate in co-curricular activities can be related to the reasons for respondents involvement in co-curricular activities.

Table 4: Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	51.032	15	0.000
N of Valid Cases	164		

Different in Gender and Development of Soft Skills

In this section will see the significance of gender in developing their soft skills after attending co-curricular activities. Every people have their way of developing soft skills while attending co-curricular activities. Based on the perspective of gender, mostly female respondents agreed that they are good at developing communication skills (4.3386) after they participate in co-curricular activities followed by Interpersonal Skills with a minimum gap of 0.0016 which the mean is 4.3370. The third highest mean for females will be Computational Skills (4.2743). However, most of the male respondents agreed that they are good at developing Interpersonal skills (4.2383) after attending co-curricular activities. It is followed by Communication Skills and Management Skills which are 4.2330 and 4.2280 respectively. In overall, Table 5 indicates that female respondents have a higher mean compare to the male, which is female is 4.2236 and male is 4.2082.

Table 5: Group statistics between gender and soft skills

Gender	Female		Male	
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
Interpersonal Skills	4.3370	0.41484	4.2383	0.42658
Computational Skills	4.2743	0.47382	4.1583	0.53532
Entrepreneur Skills	3.9664	0.58714	4.1750	0.58409
Communication Skills	4.3386	0.45427	4.2330	0.55785
Thinking Skills	4.2288	0.44251	4.2163	0.57601
Management Skills	4.2567	0.46154	4.2280	0.60848
Overall	4.2336	0.37671	4.2082	0.48800

In order to indicate that the gender of the respondents has a significant difference in developing soft skills, a t-test was performed in order to clarify the final results. The test was run to see whether both males and females have a difference in emerging soft skills while participating in co-curricular activities. Therefore, by referring to Table 6, when we test for three variables is significant, with 10% of significant value and alpha value (0.1) which are Communication skills, Thinking skills and Management skills. All three variables accounted for 0.03, 0.005 and 0.01, respectively. Thus, it found that all the variables are not significant when we test for t-test for Equality of means. Because of that, we can conclude that it is no different in developing soft skills between male and female. It means that in developing soft skills by female and male have no different skills.

Table 6: Independence Sample t-test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2 tailed)
Interpersonal Skills	Equal variances assumed	0.249	0.618	1.172	162	0.243
	Equal variances not assumed			1.151	42.168	0.256
Computational Skills	Equal variances assumed	1.270	0.261	1.182	162	0.239
	Equal variances not assumed			1.094	39.798	0.281
Entrepreneur Skills	Equal variances assumed	0.006	0.938	-1.760	162	0.080
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.766	43.124	0.084
Communication Skills	Equal variances assumed	4.797	0.030	1.102	162	0.272

	Equal variances not assumed			0.967	38.067	0.339
Thinking Skills	Equal variances assumed	8.260	0.005	0.132	162	0.895
	Equal variances not assumed			0.111	37.029	0.912
Management Skills	Equal variances assumed	6.743	0.010	0.290	162	0.773
	Equal variances not assumed			0.243	36.819	0.809

CONCLUSION

At the end of this project, the study wants to reveal the students' level of soft skills towards the participation of co-curricular activities. The results present the students have an improvement towards the development of soft skills after they are attending co-curricular activities and it is related that mostly the students participate in co-curricular activities due to gain new skills. Besides, it shows that there is a relationship between students who participate in sub-unit of co-curricular activities and the reasons they join that co-curricular activity. Lastly, the results of communication skills, thinking skills and management skill give a significant difference between gender and the development of soft skills. Thus, it has found that when checking for t-test on equality of means, all variables are not significant. We can, therefore, assume that the formation of soft skills between men and women does not vary.

Nonetheless, it does determine that computational abilities were considered by students to be least relevant and perhaps because of this, the corporation was not hired. It was a matter of concern because of the employment scenario in the industry is influenced by the growth of technology in IR 4.0 (Fathiyah et al., 2019). Therefore, students need to be aware of the importance of soft skills for advancing their career and how they can build and practise these skills. In overall, the students perceived that they are satisfied with the whole co-curricular courses that they attend. They also agreed that the co-curricular activities are productive and have made improvements towards the development of soft skills. However, the critical research should be conduct to all the co-curricular unit in order to obtain the more exact on the level of soft skills towards students. In this paper, the Integrated Living Skills Unit was chosen to complete the analysis.

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