Developing Human Value through Extra Curricular Activities

Marjohan Jamalis, Universiti Putra Malaysia
Mohd Sofian Omar Fauzee, Universiti Putra Malaysia

ABSTRACT

The main objective of this study is to investigate students’ intrinsic and extrinsic motivations and the benefits accrued in participating in compulsory extra-curriculum activities. Secondly, the study examines the implications of these after-school activities towards students’ academic performances. The study employed a qualitative interview approach with 15 university students who during their time in high school education had been involved in extra-curriculum activities. The investigators approached students who were involved in extra-curriculum activities and invited them to participate in the study. An informed consent letter was signed by the respondents before the interviews took place and each of the interviews was tape-recorded. Each of the interviews was consequently transcribed and the researchers conducted content analyses of the collective whole. Results suggested that most of the students participated in after-school programs because of their interest in gaining new knowledge and for reasons of self-improvement, which they argued emerged from their own interests. It was also apparent from the study that although extra-curriculum activities are compulsory, for this sample of students their involvement came about in the main because of their own intrinsic interest (integrated regulation). These findings notwithstanding, two other important factors emerged from the study, which suggested that socializing with friends and developing a leadership role were key to the students’ participation in extra-curriculum activities. The results suggested too that after-school activities do not have any negative implications for students’ academic work as long as they are able to manage their study timetable effectively and in fact that this type of activity is more likely to have a largely positive and lasting effect on their academic work. The paper closes by making suggestions and recommendations from the findings for future research in this area of study.

Keywords: Developing human value, extra-curricular activities, leisure activities, and beneficial outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

A keen interest in learning more about participation behaviours in active leisure and physical activity has developed in Asia in recent years. What has also emerged with this trend is an increasing focus on sedentary behaviours. For example, the study conducted by Ng (1984) showed that watching television was the main leisure interest amongst young people in Hong Kong, leading the author to conclude that young people were in the main inactive. Salman (2001) also focused her work on the sedentary activities of Malaysian women, suggesting that a lack of time and appropriate facilities as well as inactive lifestyles were the key barriers to more active participation in leisure and physical activity. The focus of this type of research then has been on barriers to participation and sedentary habits and lifestyles, instead of exploring in more depth the reasons why some young people do actively get involved in more vigorous leisure and physical activity. In response to the limitations of extant empirical studies then the purpose of this empirical investigation was to explore and understand the positive experiences of students who are involved in extra-curriculum activities such as Scouts, Red Creasant, and Cadets during high school (In
Malaysia, it is compulsory to attend extra-curriculum activities outside school hours and this may take place after school and during weekends. A subsidiary aim of the study was to investigate the implications of providing extra-curriculum activities for academic facilitators. The extra-curriculum or co-curriculum continues to be a popular program of after-school activity that serves school children of all ages (Mahoney, Larson, & Eccles, 2005; Witt, 2001). Indeed after-school programs have long been considered to be a key part of the leisure activities of school students all over the world. These programs range from sports to music and arts and often involve activities which are not part of the core academic curriculum. In United States for instance, sports activities such as football, golf, tennis, and basketball are the most popular after-school choices among students. In the same country those who prefer music, theatre and journalism, tend to join specific after-school clubs that cater specifically for those activities.

In Malaysia there is an emphasis on obligation in after-school activities and teachers are expected to conduct extra-curriculum activities which are compulsory to school children. However, within this extra-curriculum framework students are free to choose from three categories of after-school activity: clubs and societies, the uniformed bodies and sports. The English language society, recreational society and history society are examples of the clubs and societies, while the uniformed bodies comprise activities such as scouts, brownies, red crescent, and army cadets. Sports activities are probably the most wide-ranging and comprise anything from soccer, hockey and volleyball to track and field activities. Part of the legacy of its colonial past means that most schools in Malaysia conduct these extra-curriculum activities on Wednesday afternoons and Saturday mornings. However, the scheduling of these activities is in reality more flexible, since the school day is between the hours of 7.30 am to 2.00 pm. It is also worth pointing out that because Malaysia is so near the equator it does not have to contend with the tribulations associated with four season’s weather and the implications of this for outdoor activities.

Previous research involving this author has demonstrated very clearly that the after-school program benefits children, schools, parents and communities as a whole. It also helps students themselves gain new knowledge and skills as well as educating them against developing unhealthy activities during their leisure time (Manaf & Fauzee, 2002). It has also been found that extra-curriculum activities help reduced academic stress and tension, helping students to become more alert and productive in their learning (Arip & Yusof, 2002). Ashaari (1996) has suggested too that well planned after-school activities can develop positive attitudes, fun and healthy lifestyles for children.

As well as these quite specific advantages, Witt (2001) identified three rationales for extra-curriculum activities: i) the growing needs for child care, ii) concern after-school activity has for improving educational achievements, and iii) the linkage between after-school program development and school reform agendas, meaning that students can improve their educational achievement through the after-school agendas that help to overcome unhealthy lifestyles and attitudes. As a whole, then, after-school activity has a key role in reducing unhealthy activities among adolescence that might cause longer-term problems for the community as a whole (i.e., Feldman & Matjasko, 2005; Fredricks & Eccles, 2006).

The other key issue for the community is that after-school programs are able to teach the discipline and moral values which could not be taught during a normal school session. Indeed, Mastufski and Keeter (1999) found in their study that 91% of police chiefs agree that greater investment should be made in after-school programs to help young people today. The main point to be made in this regard is that ultimately it is the wider community through the Government who will be required to pay for the affects of more crime and increasing welfare in the long term. Thus, the overall consensus is that after-school programs not only bring many advantages to the individual students involved but that they also have a
key role to play in helping the country to overcome problems relating to juvenile crime and health and welfare issues.

Most studies of leisure activities have focused on specific leisure perspective models or theories and have given their attention to barriers to participation and sedentary habits and lifestyles (Ng, 1984; Salman, 2001). However, since Malaysian students participate in extra-curriculum as compulsory activities, this study has chosen to focus its attention on the active involvement of young people in leisure and physical activities by drawing on psychological perspectives and using cognitive evaluation theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) as grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1968). Cognitive evaluation theory can be described as a sub-theory of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and in this sense bears a close resemblance to self-determinant theory. Intrinsic motivation can be described as motivation that is existential as it comes from inner self. Activities which are intrinsically motivated are those which interest individuals, because they are self-determined and they can engage in them freely with a full sense of volition and personal control (Abdullah & Fauzee, 2002). Extrinsic motivation is motivation that is externally stimulated and is related on the one hand to perceived benefits in the various forms of awards, money, prizes, social approval and the like and on the other hand fears of chastisement or punishment (Weinberg & Gould, 2007). The critical conditions of external motivation have been divided into four categories (Cox, 2002): external regulation (performed only to obtain extended rewards or avoiding punishment); introjected regulation (which evokes a greater degree of self-determination than other externally regulated motives); identified regulation (which relates to those engaged in exercise that is not interesting, but with which it is recognized by the participant that being involved can lead to other benefits that can fulfill their interest); and integrated regulation (which involves individuals in activities become personally valued and freely done). In relation to this research focus it is hoped that the findings will be of benefit to the Ministry of Education in developing and reforming both extra-curriculum activities and the core curriculum in the future.

**METHODOLOGY**

The sample comprised 15 (8 female and 7 male) university students (mean aged 21.5) who had the experienced being involved in the uniformed bodies during their high school days. The researchers originally approached 30 students (15 female and 15 male) but only 15 were willing to participate. They each signed an informed consent letter and all of the respondents agreed to be tape-recorded during the interview. Each interview session took approximately 45 to 90 minutes. The data were transcribed and were fed back to the respondents in order to validate the findings and make any amendments. The returned transcribed data were retyped for content analysis by the researchers.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

Since Malaysian high school students were required by the school authorities to participate in extra-curriculum activities, their motives for participation may or may not be considered as intrinsic motivation. However, due to school rules and the students’ avoidance of sanctions as a consequence of not getting involved, the motive that might fit their internal interest category is that which relates to the integrated regulation of extrinsic motivation. This category shows that students’ can participate freely but subject to the school regulation (Cox, 2002). The research also showed that it was their experience of taking part in other extra-curriculum activities, such as clubs and societies, that led them to develop a keen interest in
the uniformed bodies. That is the major reason why they seemed to choose integrated regulation as part of their extrinsic motivation. Furthermore, these show a linkage in students’ high school experience from form one to form five and the development of self-interest to participate in challenging activities and seeking new challenging experiences to improve their skills and self-discipline (c.f., Fredricks & Eccles, 2006). In other words, the results that emerged from the interviews found four major themes relating to the students’ motivations for participating in the uniformed bodies (see Figure 1). The themes were new experiences (i.e., integrated regulation of extrinsic motivation); self-improvement (i.e., integrated regulation of extrinsic motivation); socialization (i.e., external regulation of extrinsic motivation); and leadership role (i.e., identified regulation of extrinsic motivation). As an amalgam these four themes show that the students who had experienced co-curriculum activities apparently had more interest towards integrated regulation in order to gain new experiences and self-improvement. The external and identity regulation themes were also discovered to be important features in relation to motivated reasons for this sample of students to participate in the uniformed bodies.

Another key finding of the study was that the Ministry of Education should allow students from high school to participate in the after-school program conducted by community societies or other non-government agencies in order that those involved can better engender the feeling of getting involved freely without compulsion. The system employed now is good, but it would be better if more choices were given for students to choose their own after-school activities without any strings being attached. Essentially these research findings suggest that students are more likely to embrace after-school activities if they are allowed to participate in activities in schools other than their own, in clubs or community centres in their own localities and in other places of their own choice.

In the interviews, it was also found that all the students benefited in some way or other from their participation in the uniformed bodies. The major benefits identified were gaining new knowledge, self-improvement and new friendships (Feldman & Matjasko, 2007). As one of the female interviewees pointed out:

As I said earlier, I participated in this activity [Female Scouts] to gain new experiences and knowledge especially during camping. From the camping activity, I have learned to be more self-independent, and what I mean is that I can now do work by myself without the help from others. But I also recognize that at times I may need help from others if the work cannot be done alone. On the other hand, during camping I also have to experience doing new things, which I felt very challenging especially for a girl like me. The activity planned for us was really challenging for me and I really liked that. On the other side of it, I was also able to socialize with old and new friends male or female and be friendly with them during and after the activity.

Another female student outlined her thoughts in a similar way. She felt that by participating in the uniformed bodies her life was now more challenging. She also said that by learning new materials she could better socialize with other people. She elucidates:

I was motivated to participate in scout ...because I was interested to know in more depth the things associated with scouting. I felt like...I wanted to learn new things and gain new knowledge conducted in scouting. Just like what I had heard about the good things from others who had also participated in the scouts, I too want to be a part of it. Another thing is that I joined scout because I liked the tough activity and another reason is that I wanted to learn to march because before this I never knew how to march.
In a nutshell, people had said that scouting was the most popular society in the school and that's why I chose it...

The in-depth interests that involved the respondents wanting to know more about the activities seemed to play a major role in the reasons why they were motivated to join the uniformed bodies. The students felt that by joining the scouts or other uniformed bodies they could gain benefit in terms of learning and experiencing new things that could not be learned during the day-to-day school curriculum. This begs the question that if the normal schooling system is unable to engage students effectively and at the same time teach them the right social and moral values, is the education system doing enough?

The research findings also suggested that socializing factors were of key importance to the students and that the opportunity to socialize in extra-curriculum activities not only provided them with the opportunity to gain new friends, but also presented them with the opportunity to get to know people from other ethnic groups. This second socializing factor is clearly evidenced in the following statement by another of the girls:

Mostly the scouting activities involved many students...and it also involved interaction between different people [Malaysia is multiracial country comprises of three major races; Malays, Chinese and Indian]. My school is a multiracial school...but the scouting helped me to get along with people from other races even more.

As for the other motivating factors, the research showed that scouting helped the students to become better organized, more self-disciplined, and better able to manage their time. The findings also showed that scouting did not at all inhibit their academic performance, because they felt that the discipline that was involved helped them to better manage their time to reschedule their study activities. One of the respondents identified that:

For me involvement in a society such as scouting has no negative impact on their academic life if the individual knows how to manage their time. Actually...all the activities that were conducted have their own timetable and we were informed early. Apart from that, most of the activities had been arranged for weekends or during the school holidays. For that, I didn’t think it would affect my study...especially during the school period. I believed that it depends on the individual and if you know how to divide your time between scouting and academic work, I don’t think you have problems in your study. If you are a good scout, I don’t believe you are unable to be good in time management...because scouting teaches you how to manage time and be on time. I have proved myself by getting good results in my SPM (O level National examinations).

Another two of the respondents built on this view by suggesting that:

I don’t agree with those who say that scouting affect your academic achievement. I believe that by participating in these activities you will increase your fitness levels and will improve your energy to study. That’s what others say too: that a healthy mind comes from healthy body...

Scouting does not interfere with my studies...I believe that academic achievement depends on our attitude and on how we divide our time properly. Yes, I agree that we should focus fully on academic...
work but it doesn’t mean that we should study 24 hours a day, we need to go away from books by getting involved in scouts. You really need to allocate time for this type of recreation...

These important points notwithstanding, one of the students pointed out that too much involvement in uniformed activities can be detrimental. As the student put it:

*Although I like scouting and I like to be leader, too much involvement in scouting will ultimately affect your studies. It happened to me in high school where I was too busy with the program and I had no time to review my studies. After being scolded by my parents, I reduced my activities. But because of the interest, I still participate but not as a leader any more. And it’s work especially during my SPM. So actually it does depend on the individuals to manage their time effectively....*

**CONCLUSION**

This research has identified that although participation in extra-curriculum activity is compulsory in Malaysia and that students will be admonished for not participating, they still have ample opportunity to select the types of activities they would like to be involved in through the authority of the school. The research has identified too that the motivation of those who have selected activities through the uniformed bodies societies, such as the scouts, can be understood through the concept of integrated regulation and that those individuals concerned demonstrate a large measure of free decision making in the process of organizing their involvement. The significance of socialization and the role of developing leadership skills were identified and discussed as two meaningful factors for the research respondents and it can be concluded that these must be taken into account by teachers who facilitate extra-curriculum activities. The research suggests that teaching programs should tailored to the needs identified by the students. This is particularly important bearing in mind the latter research finding which suggested that those unable to manage their extra-curriculum activity time effectively are likely to encounter problems in their studies. For this aspect, teachers should be trained to provide special counseling for those who have this kind of problem in order to make them able to manage time between extra-curriculum activities and academic work.

Another important pointer in relation to education policy that emerged from the research was that the Ministry of Education should be made more aware of the benefits of the extra-curriculum activity that could be incorporated into the core curriculum in order to provide a more challenging focus for those moribund aspects of the core curriculum that are lacking in terms of challenging activities, self-improvement activities, opportunities to gain friends, and those which stifle leadership skills. At the current time when academic subjects help students to improve their cognitive skills but seem unable to integrate the existentially understood ‘self’ and ‘social needs’ of individuals in order to be more challenging people the time would seem to be appropriate. This is significant when one considers the major findings of the current study which suggests that those who participate in the extra-curriculum such as scouting are in all likelihood going to be better organized persons. This point is all the more important when one considers those who do not want to get involved in extra-curriculum activities. Indeed, the question is: what will happen to them? If students are clever but unable to socialize effectively in society we are likely to be confronted with problems, because they will be socialized without the necessary ‘human touch’ (Fauzee, 2001; Fredericks & Eccles, 2006). It is the recommendation of this study then
that further investigations need to be conducted by researchers in the core curriculum in order to find some solutions as to how to interpolate more positive social values and challenging activities into the academic system. By doing so Malaysia will be much better placed to produce a more fully integrated education system where students can reap the benefits of the most invigorating and challenging of leisure experiences during extra-curriculum activities and the core curriculum.

REFERENCES


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**Figure 1. The beneficial outcome of extracurricular participation**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Higher order themes</th>
<th>Major themes</th>
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<td>Gaining new experience</td>
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<td>Experiencing challenging activities</td>
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<td>Developing new knowledge</td>
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<td>Experiencing different ways of life</td>
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<td>Improving skills</td>
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<td>Doing things differently</td>
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<td>Gain self discipline</td>
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<td>Can make good decision</td>
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<td>Self independent</td>
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<td>Self confident</td>
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<td>Self Mental toughness</td>
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<td>Good self time management</td>
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<td>Good self organization</td>
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<td>Improve self communication</td>
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<td>Self maturity</td>
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<td>Gain new friends</td>
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<td>Social relationship with others</td>
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<td>Gain friend from other ethnic</td>
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<td>Respecting others</td>
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<td>Gain popularity</td>
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<td>Leadership skills</td>
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<td>Role model</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learne to be a leader</td>
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New Experiences  
Self Improvement  
Socialization  
Leadership role