

BENEFITS OF CO-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AMONGST STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT–Co-curricular activities play an important role in developing soft skills and assist students towards success. Active participation in co-curricular activities has positive effects towards their success; let it be academic achievement, character, and skills development. These activities will help students to develop their essential skills, self-confidence and self-esteem. As well as students' healthy personality development, improve in disciplinary, in calculating moral values, better social interaction and contribute efforts to the community while maintaining their academic performances. Through co-curricular activities, students will gain extra skills in life such as communication skills, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, team working skills, leadership skills and other skills which will help them in career prospects. The school and university seem like a logical and convenient platform for students to experience these skills through cocurricular activities. This paper discusses the benefits of students' involvement in cocurricular activities in the aspects of leadership, personality development, teamwork, communication, and critical thinking.

Keywords: co-curricular, benefits, students

1. INTRODUCTION

In 2018, UTM has launched their foundation programme for SPM leavers. This programme offers a direct entry to Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM). In order to produce quality graduates, UTM has long initiated the execution of holistic student development through involvement in co-curricular activities. According to [1], students must not only master knowledge for subjects that have been offered to them in class, but they must also be exposed to other types of skills and attributes of a graduate outside of class. UTM Foundation Program is a one-year full time program. The students must attend lectures, complete assignments, and undergo periodical tests and end-of-semester examinations, similar to their counterparts in other pre-university education pathways. Their schedule is quite packed; however, this does not limit our students to partake in extra activities.

Some of our foundation students involved with co-curricular activities provided by UTM, such as rugby, futsal, ping pong and debate club. This shows, that foundation students' needs extra activities outside their normal classroom. However, little is known about their involvement in co-curricular activities provided by the university unless our students informed their respective lecturers through exempt letters or through their academic advisors. Therefore, this paper is written to discuss the benefits of co-curricular activities, in general, towards students.

Co-curricular activity refers to any activity, programme or educational experience that being taught outside of normal classroom which complement the requirements of the regular academic curriculum. Co-curricular activities are seen as the best medium to provide an effective learning experience which can be used to encourage students to participate in various activities offered by their learning institutions. Examples of co-curricular activities include sports, athletics, associations, scouts, clubs, debates, and volunteerism. These activities help mould students into well-round people with balanced personality development: mentally, physically, socially, morally, and emotionally [1]. These developments are in line with National Education Philosophy goals: fostering holistic development of individual's potential through creating a harmonious and balanced human intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically that is based on trust and obedience to God [2]. This philosophy aims to develop a student that is knowledgeable, skilled, virtuous, responsible, able to achieve personal well-being and contribute to the harmony and prosperity of the society and country [3].

Numerous studies have reported that there are many beneficial impacts of co-curricular activities in schools or university on students' performance. The benefits commonly include better academic performance, positive behaviour, positive character development, and better social interaction. Students who pursued their co-curricular activities tend to perform better in their studies and score better grades [4]. According to [5], students perform well because they know how to balance their co-curricular activities and academic matter, as well as how to prioritize and manage their time effectively. In addition, through co-curricular activities, students will learn the importance of persistence, motivation, focus and hard work to achieve a desired outcome. Their mindset gets stimulated, which will then help them to concentrate in the class.

Furthermore, participation in co-curricular activities teaches them about long term commitments and sense of responsibility to perform given tasks correctly [5]. Co-curricular activities increase the students' positive behaviour and encourage them to be more discipline and are less likely to misbehave or get engaged in delinquent

acts. Students who participate in regular organised activities are willing to attend school more regularly which leads to a decline in absenteeism rate [6]. Interesting and fun activities will attract students' interest to participate and develop positive viewpoints towards co-curricular activities, thus attract students to participate and eventually reduce the school dropout rate. Co-curricular activities may lead to a decrease in academic stress and tension, which are beneficial for students' physical fitness as well as mental health. Ultimately leads to an increase in productivity in their learning.

Participation in co-curricular activities afford the opportunity for students to learn soft skills such as leadership, communication skill, team skill, problem-solving skill and other skills that required by the industry. One of the researchers, [7] found that students in the higher institution use co-curricular as the platform to enhance self- confidence, teamwork, develop communication skills and creating a better intercommunication. Participating in co-curriculum activities helps the students to boost their self-esteem and build solid character traits and leadership skills [5]. These skills are highly relevant to students in the future, especially when they start seeking jobs after graduation [8]. Therefore, the learning institutions should take proactive steps to encourage their students to harness all these benefits through participation in co-curricular activities.

2. LITERATURE REVIEWS

2.1. Benefits of Participation in Cocurricular Activities

A co-curricular activity helps students to improve their knowledge and develop value-added skill which cannot be learned in the normal classroom. Studies have reported that co-curricular activities could benefit students. They will learn beyond what they have learned in the classroom [9]. These activities are a good way to develop social, physical and intellectual skills, moral and ethical values, personality development and character appeal that will be helpful in the holistic development of the students. All these skills will prove valuable to graduates in the future which help them to meet the job criteria set by employers due to the intense competition in the job market nowadays. Moreover, cocurricular activities is a channel that provide student with a wide range of knowledge and experience to develop and hone the potential talent, interest, and creativity of the students. There have been various literature mention benefits of students' involvement in cocurricular activities during their studies. This literature review is a survey of previous studies, which will discuss the benefits of co-curricular activities in the

aspects of leadership, personality development, teamwork, communication, and critical thinking.

2.1.1 Leadership

Leadership is fundamental to the organizational survival and plays the key factors to its success. According to [10], leadership is defined as the process of influencing the behaviour of others towards the accomplishment of goals in certain situation. In other words, leadership is the driving force that causes other to volunteer or willing to work together to achieve the goals set [8]. In educational institutions, leadership can be trained through student's participation in extracurricular activities such as uniform bodies, associations, clubs, and sports. Experiences in extracurricular activities enhance student learning experience which contributes to leadership development in undergraduate students [11]. Furthermore, involvement in associations, clubs, and outdoor recreations such as camping, hiking, and kayaking is seen as a medium to nurture leadership skills among students [12].

Previous studies have found that leadership skills can be developed through the involvement of students in co-curricular activities. Research has found that there is a significant relationship between active participation and leadership skills [13]. Due to the result of the study, an interesting module package was proposed to encourage students' involvement in co-curricular programme as a medium to foster leadership abilities. A study by [4] discovered that 88% of the students agree that extracurricular activities enhance the leadership qualities of the students. Students who participate in co-curricular activities demonstrate greater leadership skills, are more thoughtful in their ethical decisions, and able to articulate the benefits from their involvement [14].

2.1.2 Personality Development

A study conducted by [15] found that co-curricular activities have significant relationship with personality development of secondary school students. The selected personality traits involve self-confidence, honesty, adaptation, sociability, sympathetic attitude, social obligation and sense of responsibility. The study also claimed that co-curricular activities facilitate the personality development of students by making them confident, focused, interactive, extrovert and sociable. According to [16], students who participate in co-curricular activities show greater adolescents' character development especially in time management and leadership skills and more positive social development such as group activities build teamwork and communication skills. Besides that, participation in co-curricular

activities builds students' self-confidence, resiliency and ability to accept constructive criticisms which contribute to character development.

One study reported that co-curricular activities increase students' self-confidence, teacher perception and developed positive connection between students and school which raised students' self-esteem and motivation [17]. Having a high level of self-esteem will create the sense of belonging to their learning environment and positive attitudes towards the school, which boost their motivation to grow academically and personally. All of these acquired skills during cocurricular activities participation then being employed in studying and taking exams as well as into their everyday lives.

2.1.3 Teamwork

Teamwork refers to the ability and willingness of a group of people to work together in a cooperative environment to accomplish a common goal. According to [18], there are several successful attributes needed for effective teamwork including the commitment to team success and shared goals, positive interdependence team, interpersonal skills such as the ability to discuss issues openly with members, be honest, trustworthy, supportive and show respect and commitment to the team, open communication and positive feedback by actively listening to the concerns and needs of team members, willing to give and receive constructive criticism, appropriate team composition where all team members need to be fully aware of their specific role and understand the team expectation and contribution from them. Teamwork is one of an important skill element in soft skills which need to be attention and mastered by students. The skill is the key success to meet the job requirements as demanded by the employers and attain jobs in future [19][20]. Most of the cocurricular activities involve group activities which help build teamwork skill, cooperation, goal setting and time management.

A study by [19] reported benefits in interpersonal and teamwork skills for individuals who involved in cocurricular activities compared to those who were not. Another study by [21] investigate the effect of cocurricular activities university students' teamwork skills and found that there was a significant correlation between cocurricular activities and the acquisition of essential teamwork skills. According to [4], 82% of the students agree that cocurricular activities enhance teamwork. Another study by [22][23] found that teamwork skills can be nurtured and instilled through students' involvement in sports such as football and hockey. These skills also help shape self-management with the values of cooperation among team members as well as being able to self-discipline especially in team sports [23].

2.1.4 Communication

Communication skills are divided into three elements, namely interpersonal communication skills, intrapersonal communication skills and non-verbal communication skills. This literature review will discuss on interpersonal communication skills only. According to [24], interpersonal communication skills including listening skills, questioning skills, speaking skills, feedback skills, language elements, changing attitudes and behaviours, appearance and non-verbal communication. A study by [25] defines communication as the process of transmitting information and common understanding from one person to another. Effective communication is very important to be practiced for better productivity because individuals interact and work together to achieve the organisation's goals. On the other hand, communication skills are one of the soft skill elements that need to be mastered by students because these skills can ensure a high degree of self-confidence among students for their successful future career after graduation [26].

Previous studies have shown that most graduates lack of communication skills and these skills need to be improved before they enter the world of work [27][28][29]. Many employers these days are progressively looking for skilled employees with good social and communication skills in addition to the competitive job market [27]. Research by [30] in their study states that cocurricular activities in university can provide environments that allows students to find different ways of interaction that will assist them with their communication skills and overcome high levels of communication apprehension. Activities such as competitions, association and club activities allow the process of communication and interaction more realistically and can also meet the value of understanding, respect for each other regardless of rank, race and religion [31]. Furthermore, participating in cocurricular activities develop beneficial skills such as positive network of friends and build relationship with supportive adults [16]. Another study by [32] emphasizes that cocurricular activities offer opportunity for students to train themselves in strengthening the interaction between students as well as developing students' communication skills. A study by [33] investigated the lecturer's perception on the integration of communication skills through cocurricular activities in Malaysian polytechnics. The study reported that the lecturers in polytechnics agree that cocurricular activities develop students' communication skills which will help them in the future career prospects.

2.1.5 Critical Thinking

One of the main factors that contribute to graduates' unemployment in Malaysia is the lack of thinking skills especially the capabilities to think critically [34]. Critical thinking skills have been recognised as an essential skill in to prepare students for facing challenges and responsibilities in life in the 21st century. According to [35] critical thinking includes the component skills of analysing arguments, making inferences using inductive or deductive reasoning, judging or evaluating, and making decisions or solving problems. Different researchers have come with different approaches to define critical thinking that reflect their respective disciplines [35]. In a study by [36], critical thinking has been defined as reasonable reflective thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do, while [37] mentions it as individual's ability to evaluate and analyse arguments, use inductive reasoning, recognize assumptions, and correctly deduce inferences and conclusions from data. For [38], critical thinking involves the mental processes, strategies, and representations people use to solve problems, make decisions and learn new concept. Generally, critical thinking is a higher-level thinking skill comprises of evaluating arguments or proposition and making judgments that can guide the development of beliefs and taking action [39]. On the other hand, critical thinking is a product of education, training and practice which require students to go beyond recalling or restating the available information, but to think about improving the ideas and process [35] [40] [41]. Overall, the main concept of critical thinking skills is based on making evaluation and processing the information rationally towards making a decision and need to be developed in nearly all disciplines of study [34].

These skills need to be mastered by students especially during their studies in higher education institutions. A study by [37] claimed that a primary goal of higher education is to help students develop critically thinking ability. The findings of the study indicated that students who involved in a variety of activities in clubs, organizations, peer and faculty interactions, and living on-campus may have experienced an improvement in their critical thinking ability [37]. Another study by [42] reported that the aims of co-curricular activities in Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) are to focus on the importance of developing soft skills, physical skills and critical thinking to support a sustainable future. In [43] study, it has been highlighted that it is essential for students to involve in cocurricular activities during the college years to acquire skill sets including effective communication, creative and critical thinking skills as well as psychosocial intelligence, to improve themselves thus increasing their employability. Furthermore, [44][45] in their study state that debate is an experiential learning activity for students in high

school and universities which functions to develop skills in critical thinking, analyzing, synthesizing, and impromptu speaking.

3. CONCLUSION

Based on the review of literature, it can be concluded that students' participation in co-curricular activities have proved to be beneficial to the students in all aspects of life such as work, education, family, health, friends and community. co-curricular activities are capable of developing holistic students by equipped students with leadership and communication skills, greater personality development, teamwork and critical thinking skills. It is recommended those parents, teachers and the universities to continuously come out with more interactive ways to encourage and build these skills among students. For future studies, researchers may look into the relationship between students' performance in their studies with participation in co-curricular activities. Overall, co-curricular activities play a fundamental role in developing overall students' personality while at the same time boosting their confidence as preparation for the world of employment.

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