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The Importance of Students Involvement in Associations amongst UTM Foundation Students

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ABSTRACT

Extracurricular or co-curricular is a crucial aspect that improves students' learning experience and producing a student that is well equipped with knowledge, ethics, positive attitudes, and value-added skills which are beneficial in their life and work. In order to produce quality graduates, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) has long initiated the execution of holistic student development through involvement in co-curricular activities. However, little is known about UTM Foundation students' involvement in co-curricular activities provided by the university. Therefore, this study aims to determine UTM Foundations demands for extracurricular activities. A quantitative survey was conducted in which questionnaires were used as the instrument to collect data from 121 respondents who were randomly selected among UTM Foundation students. Collected data was analysed using descriptive analysis which involves frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. Findings from this study indicate there is a demand for co-curricular activities amongst UTM Foundation students since it can give many positive impacts on students' learning experience and students' personality development. The study also suggests the implementation of co-curricular activities as an integral part of the programme as it complements the regular formal curriculum.

Keywords:

Foundation; co-curricular; extracurricular

1. Introduction

Since 2018, UTM Foundation program has recruited more than 400 students across Malaysia. The program was initiated to provide a pathway for SPM leavers who wish to pursue their degree at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM). Being a top-ranked-institution for producing quality graduates, the University is committed to graduating competent, creative and versatile professionals who are guided by high moral and ethical values in the service of God and mankind. In other words, the University will only cater crème-de-la-crème candidates that must not only excel in classes, but they must also excel outside of the classroom as well. In addition, students must not only master knowledge for subjects that have been offered to them, but they must also be exposed to other types of skills and attributes of a graduate. The university has identified seven graduate attributes which are communication skills, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, team working skills, information management and lifelong learning skills, entrepreneurship skills, leadership skills and proactiveness, and ethics and integrity [1]. These skills can be developed through various in-class learning activities, out-of-class activities as well as extracurricular activities. The in-class learning activities include class

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discussion, group work, brainstorming sessions, presentation, role playing and information management and lifelong learning skills, entrepreneurship skills, leadership skills and proactiveness, and ethics and integrity [1]. These skills can be developed through various in-class learning activities, out-of-class activities as well as extracurricular activities. The in-class learning activities include class discussion, group work, brainstorming sessions, presentation, role playing and apprenticeships. Meanwhile out-of-class activities include project assignments, independent studies, field trips, site visits, community placements and industrial attachments.

Extracurricular or curricular activities play an important role in students' holistic education [2]. These activities were introduced to enable students to explore and expand their interest and talent that may be limited in the prescribed curriculum of their studies. Co-curricular activities have also been identified as a crucial aspect in providing a wide range of knowledge and learning experience that can be integrated into their everyday lives. Nowadays, academic achievement is not only the main criteria that can guarantee a place in university, however a combination of academic excellence and active participation in co-curricular activities will enable them to stand a greater opportunity of securing a place in the chosen university. Later on, when the students graduate, having good academic qualification only is not a guarantee for fresh graduates to be secure a job due to the competitive job market [3]. Therefore, in order to produce quality graduates that meet the market demands, students should be involved in the co-curricular activities offered by their learning institutions. As stated in the National Education Philosophy, the implementation of co-curricular activities in Malaysia education system acts as a medium to produce all-rounder students that balances intellectually, spiritually, emotionally, and physically as well as developing students who are knowledgeable, skilled, virtuous, responsible, and able to achieve personal well-being and contribute to the harmony and prosperity of the society and country [4]. Within the extracurricular framework, students can choose the activities based on personal or academic interest, which can be classified as physical activities (e.g., educational activities, and social activities [5]. Example of co-curricular activities are sports, athletics, associations, scouts, clubs, debates and volunteerism. All these activities lead to many positive impacts for students such as better academic performance, positive behaviour, positive character development, and better social interaction [6][7]. In general, co-curricular activities provide a comprehensive education to nurture students' generic skills such as leadership and teamwork, improve in disciplinary, in calculating moral values, accommodating time with meaningful activities and contribute efforts to the community [8]. Furthermore, co-curricular activities build students' self-confidence, self-esteem, self-concept, resiliency, and ability to accept constructive criticisms which contribute to students' character and personality development.

UTM Foundation Program is a one-year program. Within that period, the students must enrol 18 subjects spread over three semesters. Furthermore, the programme is only offered in full time mode where 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 extracurricular activities. The problem with this issue is that there are no pathways or clear systems or even equal benefits provided for UTM foundation students that have participated in co-curriculum activities provided by UTM as provided for undergraduates. They were not given merits or even recognition like the rest of the UTM undergraduates. Furthermore, having a packed schedule for classes only, UTM Foundation students requires co-curricular activities that fit with their packed schedule along with benefits for encouragement amongst UTM Foundation students (e.g., mentioned their involvement in their transcript or credit with merit). Hence, the purpose of this research is to cater UTM foundation students' needs by determining student's demands for co-curricular activities amongst UTM foundation students in UTM Johor and Kuala Lumpur.

1.1 Literature Review

According to Cole *et al.*, [9], student participation in extracurricular activities (ECA) has been identified as an important aspect of the education experience. However, there are quite a few debates regarding the exact definition of extracurricular activities (ECA) or co-curricular activities. According to the work of Bartkus *et al.*, [10], the concept has commonly been treated as self-explanatory with little need for clarification. This is a problem. Hence, a lack of a formal definition can serve to limit a researcher's ability to classify extracurricular activity, which in turn limits to conduct a thoughtful analysis, engage in critical reasoning, and enable creative problem solving. Therefore, Bartkus *et al.*, [10] has come up with a solution by proposing a definition based on classification, as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1
 Proposed definitions of extracurricular or co-curricular activities

No.	Proposed Definition	Classification
1	Extracurricular activities are defined as academic or non-academic activities that are conducted under the auspices of the school but occur outside of normal classroom time and are not part of the curriculum. Additionally, extracurricular activities do not involve a grade or academic credit and participation is optional on the part of the student.	Analyzing the context of extracurricular activities
2	A co-curricular activity is one that requires a student's participation outside of normal classroom time as a condition for meeting a curricular requirement.	Classifying activities that is aligned with a curriculum
3	Extracurricular activities can be considered from the perspective of a continuum that ranges from direct to indirect. A direct extracurricular activity is one that is more closely associated with the student's major or curriculum. An indirect extracurricular activity is one that is relatively unrelated to the student's major or curriculum.	Classifying activities that is not required but highly aligned with a student's major, the concept of direct and indirect extracurricular activities was proposed

The first definition does not fully grasp the idea for extra-curricular activities that is closely aligned with a curriculum, seeing that UTM Foundation program allocate 2 credits for co-curricular subject (Entrepreneurship) in their program structure. (<http://space.utm.my/foundation/>). Therefore, Bartkus *et al.*, [10] proposed the second definition by closely associate another term with extracurricular; namely, co-curricular is used. The first and second definitions are similar, in terms of occurring outside of the normal classroom time. The only difference is the co-curricular activity is aligned with curriculum objectives. Meanwhile, to help resolve conflict on classifying activities that is not required but highly aligned with a student's major, the concept of direct and indirect extracurricular activities was proposed (third definitions). Definition 2 and 3 seems fitting for this study.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

In this research, the demands amongst foundation students towards involvement in extracurricular activities were looked into. The methods applied in this research are divided into five stages. The stages are shown in Figure 1.

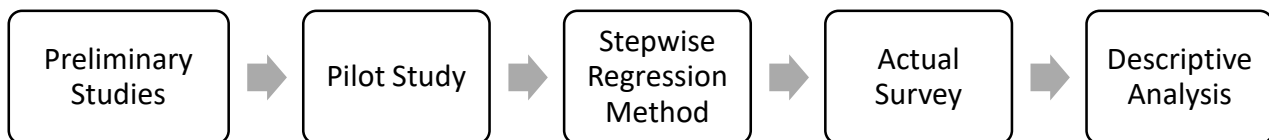


Fig. 1. Research flow

Before constructing a set of questionnaires for our respondents, literatures as well as examples of past surveys on said topic were thoroughly reviewed before initiating pilot study. Pilot studies can play a very important role prior to conducting a full-scale research project. In attempt to predict an appropriate sample size for the full-scale project and/or to improve upon various aspects of the study design, pilot study was conducted for this research. This study applied the stepwise regression method which involves studying the relationship between the students' demands with the factor of students' participation in extracurricular activities among foundation students from the survey. After a relationship was developed, the survey was further altered based on the relationship and later disseminate to our foundation students.

2.2 Instrumentation

Data was collected using the google form developed by the researchers. The questionnaire consists of six (6) parts, namely Section A on demographic information of the respondents, Section B on awareness level towards co-curricular activities, Section C on level of students' participation in co-curricular activities, Section D on the importance of co-curricular activities for foundation students, Section E on the factors that encourage students' participation in co-curricular activities, and Section F on the students' perception on the goals of implementing co-curricular activities for foundation students. A five points Likert scale questionnaire was used, which measure response from 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree". In addition, the students' cumulative grade performance average (CGPA) was used as an index of their academic performance. The respondents were also asked to provide other general information that has assisted in the interpretation of the data. A preliminary study was conducted before the actual survey was carried out in order to identify potential problem and deficiencies in the research instruments prior to implementation during the actual survey. In preliminary studies, a total of 120 questions were used and disseminated to UTM Foundation students from previous and current batches. A total of 77 usable responses were obtained and used as reference source to revise and modify the drafted questionnaire items. In preliminary study, the data analysis was done by SPSS and R software to develop a relationship in order to check its reliability score by stepwise regression method. The relationship was then used to review and modify the questions and was reduced to 77 questions for actual survey. The questions were altered to ensure that the questionnaire was comprehensible, appropriate, well defined, clearly understood as well as to minimize repeated and unnecessary questions. A total of 121 respondents from UTM Foundation programme had participated in the actual study.

3. Results and Discussion

The collected data was analysed by descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation), charts and table using Microsoft Excel 2015. In actual survey, only 121 valid responses were accepted. Interpretation of mean score was used as a reference to answer the research questions represented by Sections B, C, D, E and F in the questionnaire. Data analysis was carried out to get the mean score for each section. The mean score was then interpreted based on the mean range of Likert Scale as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Likert Scale interpretation [11]

Mean Range	Level of influence
1.00 – 2.33	Low
2.34 – 3.67	Moderate
3.68 – 5.00	High

3.1 Section A: Demographic Information

Table 3 shows the demographic analysis of respondents; including gender, age group, race, intake session, latest CGPA and types of co-curricular activities that the students are interested in. By referring to Table 2, it presents that most of the respondents are 55% male, while 45% are female. This is due to the higher number of enrolments for male students in UTM Foundation programme compared to female students. Considering that our foundation students are the feeder for engineering programmes in UTM which mostly dominated by male, hence, male respondents is slightly higher in number than female respondents. Regarding the age group, 98.3% of the respondents aged between 19 to 20 years while 1.7% of the respondents exceed 20 years of age. Furthermore, all respondents were from 2020/2021 intake session. It can be said that majority of the respondents were Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) 2019 leavers who enrolled in UTM Foundation programme during 2020/2021 intake session in July 2020. Currently, they are in their final semester.

As per race, more than half of the respondents are Chinese (66.1%), followed by Malay and Indian respondents with 24.8% and 6.6% respectively, and while 2.5% are from other races (Bumiputra). Regarding the Cumulative Grade Performance Average (CGPA), 55.4% of the respondents' CGPA are within 3.67 to 4.00, 33.9% of them obtained 3.00 to 3.66, while 10.7% of the respondents achieves below than 3.00 for their CGPA. The most favoured type of co-curricular activities chosen by the respondents is sports, recreation and culture (57.9%), followed by academic and professional (26.4%), volunteerism (10.7%), and the lowest is uniform bodies, with 5.0%. This indicates that most of the students prefer to participate in the activities that take place outside of the regular formal curriculum. Participation in these activities will provide an opportunity for the students to socialize, gain knowledge and essential skills, as well as fostering a healthy lifestyle. By relating to the higher number of male respondents, this view is supported by Lapa [12] which state that male students tend to be more physically active than female students, especially to spend time in sports and social activities.

3.2 Section B: Students' Awareness Level towards Involvement in Co-Curricular Activities

By referring to Table 4, the overall average value of students' awareness level towards involvement in co-curricular activities is high based on the mean score (mean = 4.17 and SD = 0.217). The mean score for item 1 shows the highest values (mean = 4.40 and SD = 0.701) while the mean score for item 2 shows the lowest values (mean = 3.97 and SD = 0.930). This indicates that most of the

respondents aware that it is crucial to get involved in co-curricular activities and being active outside the classroom. They also realise that co-curricular activities are the best medium for them to learn and build their interest and capabilities, develop soft skills and attributes which are important for students and graduates. In addition, students have no problem to participate in co-curricular activities at the college or university, it is either they are willing to participate or not.

Table 3
Demographic Analysis

Item		Frequency	(%)
Gender	Male	67	55.4
	Female	54	44.6
Age in 2021	19 – 20 years	119	98.3
	> 20 years	2	1.7
Race	Malay	30	24.8
	Chinese	80	66.1
	Indian	8	6.6
	Others	3	2.5
Intake Session	2020/2021	121	100.0
CGPA	3.67 – 4.00	67	55.4
	3.00 – 3.66	41	33.9
	< 3.00	13	10.7
Types of Co-curricular Activities that Students Interested In	Sports, Recreation and Culture	70	57.9
	Academic and Professional	32	26.4
	Volunteerism	13	10.7
	Uniform Bodies	6	5.0

Table 4
Level of students' awareness towards involvement in co-curricular activities

No.	Item	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level of Influence
1	I know the importance of involvement in co-curricular activities.	4.40	0.701	High
2	I have no problem to participate in co-curricular activities at the college/university.	3.97	0.930	High
3	Interest, talent, and skills that I have can be channelled through co-curricular activities.	4.13	0.865	High
Average		4.17	0.217	High

3.3 Section C: Level of Students' Involvement in Co-Curricular Activities Organised by College/University

The analysis from Table 5 reveals that the level of students' involvement in co-curricular activities organised by college or university is high based on the overall average value (mean = 3.93 and SD = 0.094). The mean score for item 1 shows the highest values (mean = 3.99 and SD = 0.094). The results indicate that respondents love to be active in co-curricular activities organised by the college or university and they are willing to spend their leisure time by participating in any co-curricular activities that suit their interest. Students also believed that they will not be left behind in lessons if they take part in co-curricular activities. Furthermore, being involved in co-curricular activities will paved a way

for students to reduce with academic stress and tension, which lead to an increase in productivity in their learning [13].

Table 5

Level of students' involvement in co-curricular activities organised by college or university

No.	Item	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level of Influence
1	I love to be active in co-curricular activities organised by the college/university.	3.99	0.851	High
2	I will not be left behind in lessons when involve in co-curricular activities organised by the college/university.	3.86	0.916	High
Average		3.93	0.094	High

3.4 Section D: The Importance of Involvement in Co-Curricular Activities for UTM Foundation Students

Table 6 shows the average score for each aspect that contribute to the importance of involvement in co-curricular activities. Overall, findings revealed that the importance of students' involvement in co-curricular activities in all aspects is at a high level. This indicates that most of the students agree that through the involvement in co-curricular activities, students will be able to develop leadership qualities and personality, enhance teamwork and communication skills, as well as improve critical thinking ability. The most apparent soft skill that was developed by student's participation in co-curricular activities was personality development (mean = 4.22 and SD = 0.076), followed closely by teamwork skill (mean = 4.20 and SD = 0.107). This shows that from the insight of students, participating in co-curricular activities helps them to develop the all-round personality, improve in disciplinary and time management skills, discover their strengths and weaknesses, teach ways to develop self-confidence, self-esteem, commitment, responsibility, and healthy respect for college authority as well as their ability to accept criticism [6,14]. The other aspects that contribute to the importance of participating in co-curricular activities were also at high level which are leadership (mean = 4.01 and SD = 0.254), communication (mean = 4.03 and SD = 0.112), and critical thinking (mean = 4.04 and SD = 0.123).

Table 6

Average score for each aspect

No.	Aspect	Average Mean	Average Standard Deviation	Level of Influence
1	Leadership	4.01	0.254	High
2	Personality development	4.22	0.076	High
3	Teamwork	4.20	0.107	High
4	Communication	4.03	0.112	High
5	Critical thinking	4.04	0.123	High

3.5 Section E: Factors that Encourage Students' Involvement in Co-curricular Activities

By referring to Table 7, the overall average value of factors that encourage students' involvement in co-curricular activities is high based on the mean score (mean = 3.86 and SD = 0.212). The mean score for item 1 shows the highest values (mean = 4.12 and SD = 0.737) while the mean score for item 4 is at moderate level with the lowest values (mean = 3.55 and SD = 1.111). The results indicate that students are very committed when participating in co-curricular activities despite their packed academic schedule. As students take part in sports or club activity, they build connections with others

who have similar interest and goals, which increase their motivation, to commit for the long-term to an activity than can also be their source of enjoyment. Consistent participation in a co-curricular activity will help to polish the potential talents, abilities, and interests of students in various activities either by uniform bodies, clubs, associations, and sports. Furthermore, the factor that co-curricular activities are required by the university shows moderate level of influence since they love to take part willingly without being forced. However, there are respondents who are not very active and prefer not to participate in any co-curricular activities outside of the classroom, but rather choose to focus on academic achievement.

Table 7

Factors that encourage students' involvement in co-curricular activities

No.	Item	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level of Influence
1	I am very committed when participate in co-curricular activities.	4.12	0.737	High
2	My friends and I would rather have group discussion then participating in co-curricular activities.	3.86	0.960	High
3	Friends help me in choosing co-curricular activities that I want to participate in.	3.69	1.025	High
4	I participated in co-curricular activities because it was a requirement by the university.	3.55	1.111	Moderate
5	I participated in co-curricular activities due to the availability of proper facilities.	3.98	0.806	High
6	A variety of exiting co-curricular activities conducted by the advisory lecturer encouraged me to participate.	3.97	0.894	High
Average		3.86	0.212	High

3.6 Section F: Students' Perception on the Objective of Co-Curricular Activities Implementation for UTM Foundation Students

Table 8 shows the average value of students' perception on the objective of co-curricular activities implementation for UTM Foundation students. Overall findings revealed that the students' perception on the objective of curricular activities implementation for UTM Foundation students was at high level based on the mean score (mean = 4.17 and SD = 0.103). The mean score for item 6 shows the highest values (mean = 4.27 and SD = 0.658) and while the mean score for item 2 shows the lowest values (mean = 4.00 and SD = 0.866). The results indicate that students are more likely to enjoy the co-curricular that they are engaged in which proved to be fun activities rather than being dull and boring. Students love to experience interesting and enjoyable learning environment by involving in co-curricular activities. Nevertheless, the perception that co-curriculum course should be compulsory for all UTM Foundation students shows the lowest values. This may be due to COVID-19 pandemic situation and students are all staying at home going through online class, which impossible for them to do activities outside of the classroom for the time being.

Table 8

Students' perception on the objective of co-curricular activities implementation for UTM Foundation students

No.	Item	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level of Influence
1	Participation in co-curricular activities made me became more confident.	4.21	0.729	High
2	Co-curriculum is a course that should be compulsory for all UTM Foundation students.	4.00	0.866	High

3	Participation in co-curricular activities made my campus life be much more complete.	4.19	0.756	High
4	I am very excited and enjoy participating in co-curricular activities at university.	4.12	0.808	High
5	Participation in co-curricular activities could improve students' soft skills in the aspects of cooperation, racial unity, credibility, and competitiveness.	4.26	0.704	High
6	Participation in co-curricular activities could create an interesting and enjoyable campus culture.	4.27	0.658	High
Average		4.17	0.103	High

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings show that students are interested to be active in sports, recreation, and culture activities, at which these activities are held outside of the formal classroom. Examples of these activities include badminton, football, rugby, theatre, choir, trekking, camping etc. This study reveals that level of students' awareness and involvement in co-curricular activities both are at high level. This is a good sign indicating that most of the students are given a good exposure to co-curricular activities during their schooling; also, they understand the importance and benefits obtained through these activities. Furthermore, students are willing and love to take part in co-curricular activities that been held in college or university, while staying focus to excel academically. In addition, the results show that the importance of UTM Foundation students' involvement in co-curricular activities is at high level. This indicate that participating in co-curricular activities provides them with an education that encompasses all aspects to develop more all-rounded students in terms of personality, teamwork, leadership, communication, leadership, and critical thinking.

Moreover, the factors that encourage student to involve in co-curricular activities shows high level of influence, indicating that students are influenced by positive elements such as friends, facilities, environment, and teacher. Overall, the students give more positive feedback towards co-curricular activities which means students perception on the objective of co-curricular implementation for UTM Foundation students have numerous positive impacts on their learning experience and the development of students' personality. Therefore, it can be concluded that demand for co-curricular activities amongst UTM Foundation students is at high level. It is suggested that the education system that currently lack of co-curricular activities should implement these activities as an integral part of the programme as it complements the regular formal curriculum. Besides, this study recommends an in-depth exploratory study to examine how it affects the programme outcomes and future studies should also include how co-curricular activities affects students' academic achievement.

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