



The Role of Co-curricular Activities on Graduate Employability

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper was to explore the link between student co-curricular activity and graduate employability. In an increasingly competitive graduate labor market, the potential benefits of students engaging in co-curricular activities to aid personal growth and development, build CVs and obtain a greater competitive advantage in the job market, appear increasingly attractive. This paper studies the relationship between co-curricular activities and graduate employability through literature review. However, there was a lack of evidence to demonstrate whether students' participation in co-curricular activities increased their employment prospects.

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Introduction

The issue of employability of graduates has become very serious and critical in many countries including Malaysia. The biggest challenge facing by institutions of higher learning is to develop employable skills, enhance knowledge and make local graduates more attractive to employers (Yassin et al. 2008)[1]. Both local and global workplaces are demanding workers that are able to transform knowledge and skills learnt into successful workplace performance. Audibert & Jones, (2002)[2] indicated that empirical studies on work found soft skills such as leadership, communication, team building and entrepreneurial interest have become critical for hiring and promoting employees to key positions. Somerset (2001) [3] stressed the importance of soft skills in contributing to organizational success in the workplace for an employee, manager or leader. According to Muir (2004)[4] found that soft skills are the essential tools enabling employees to contribute to their fullest potential. Nevertheless, participation in co-curricular activities is one example of activities that improve soft skills among students. Co-curricular activities provide students with hands-on skills, and training, alongside opportunities to increase self-esteem. Participation in co-curricular activities is considered an individual human capital investment. The involvement in such activities assists in the development of good personal characteristics (e.g., motivation, leadership, communication skills) that will, in turn, strengthen the employability attributes of graduates in the labor market (Shahiri, 2015)[5]. Thus, the knowledge and experienced gained through participation in co-curricular activities becomes values added to graduate labor during the process of seeking employment. The formater will need to create these components, incorporating the applicable criteria that follow.

Literature Reviews

Co-curricular activity is a very important and essential part of an educational system. Through Co-curricular activities, students discover their interests and talents while developing values and competencies that will prepare them for a rapidly changing world (David, 2003)[6]. Besides that, co-curricular activities refer to a series of activities that are associated with institutional programs necessary for the overall development of students outside the course subjects for

an examination scheduled (Mehmood et al., 2012)[7]. The examples of these activities are sports, choir practice, debate, music lessons, religious study, charitable fund raising, theatricals, science clubs, as well as hobbies like gardening, crafts, dancing and home economics (Marais, 2011)[8]. Gyanunlimited (2011-2014)[9] enlisted the following importance and benefits of co-curricular activities:

- Co-curricular activities stimulate playing, acting, singing, recitation, speaking and narrating in students.
- Activities like participation in game debates, music, drama, etc., help in achieving overall functioning of education.
- It enables the students to express themselves freely through debates.
- Games and Sports help to be fit and energetic to the child.
- Helps to develop the spirit of healthy competition.
- These activities guide students how to organize and present an activity, how to develop skills, how to co-operate and co-ordinate in different situations-all these help in leadership qualities.
- It provides the avenues of socialization, self-identification and self-assessment when the child comes in contact with organizers, fellow participants, teachers and people outside the school during cultural activity.
- Inculcate the values to respects other's vies and feeling.
- It makes you perfect in decision making.
- It develops a sense of belongingness.
- Co-curricular activities provide motivation for learning.
- Co-curricular activities develop the values like physical, psychological, ethical, academics, civic, social, aesthetic, cultural recreational and disciplinary values.

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)[10]. It has also been found that extra-curriculum activities help reduced academics stress and tension, helping students to become more alert and productive in their learning (Arip & Yusof, 2002)[11]. Witt (2001)[12] 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.

Norani & Noorashidi (2010)[13] examined the awareness among students concerning the effects of participation in extracurricular activities on their personal development. The results indicate that 89.2% of students agree that a strong relationship exists between involvement extracurricular activities and personal development especially in regards to communication skills with peers. Student participation in extracurricular activities exposes such students to the potential avenue of soft skill and personal development that directly contribute to their employability (Norani & Noorashidi, 2010)[13]. Co-curricular activities have similarities and differences with extra-curricular activities. Extra-curricular and co-curricular activities mean student recreational and/ or leisure pursuit that takes place outside or regular curriculum or program of disciplinary learning outcomes. These activities are pursued beyond the classroom and/or online learning. Activity examples include university sport, club/society membership, and student leadership. Whereas extra-curricular activities are separate and apart from formal learning program, higher education institutions align co-curricular activities with formal schooling so that such activities are part of overall learning experience. Extracurricular activities are referred by many other terms, including co-curricular activities, extra class activities, pupil activities, socializing, allied activities, student activities and school activities (Esa et al., 2012)[14]. Co-curricular activities are designed to work in conjunction with the discipline curriculum to support employable graduates. One way in which students can contribute to their own personal development is through participation in extra-curricular activity (Jones & Hill, 2003)[15].

Employability is a difficult concept to define. It is a multi-dimensional concept, and there is a need to distinguish between factors relevant to obtaining a job and factors relevant to the preparation for work (Little, 2001)[16]. Employability is not just about students making deposits in a bank of skills (Morley, 2001)[17]. Knight (2001)[18] & Yorke (2001)[19] consider the concept of employability to be a 'synergic combination of personal qualities, skills of various kinds and subject understanding'. Employability is defined as "a set of achievements-skills, understandings and personal attributes that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupation, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy". However, graduate employability means that higher education alumni have developed the capacity to obtain and/or create work. Furthermore, employability means that institutions and employers have supported the student knowledge, skills, attributes, reflective disposition and identity that graduates need to succeed in the workforce (Hinchliffe & Jolly, 2011)[20]. Schulz (2008)[21] explain the importance of soft skills in contemporary job markets, which are getting more competitive and require job searchers to be prepared to compete in such an environment. Additionally, Schulz (2008)[21] also notes that candidates who are seeking for jobs must possess sufficient knowledge and soft skills that suit the needs of employers and organizations. McQuaid & Lindsay (2002)[22] emphasize that a lack of basic skills, qualifications, and work experience will contribute to a longer duration of unemployment. Surprisingly, Nemanick & Clark (2002)[23] report that extracurricular activities listed on an applicant's

resume influences the favorability of the applicant in the eyes of potential employers.

From an employer perspective, Juhdi et al. (2010)[24] find that 90% of the 329 employers sampled in their study agree that high performance; fast learning and adaptation; and good leadership skills are three important criteria that employer looks for during the hiring process. Furthermore, Andrew & Higson (2008)[25] add that employers also search for candidates with have good communication, presentations, and teamwork skills; and that are able to think outside the box.

Conclusion

This paper explored the role of co-curricular activities that affects students' employability. There was a high level of awareness of the soft skills which graduate can acquire through co-curricular activities. The level of importance that the employers placed upon these qualities might give the potential to enhance their business or organizations when appointing graduate that actively involved in co-curricular activities. These appear to be an opportunity for students to involve in co-curricular activities which can increase their advantage in a job market.

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