



The magic of the students' research houses: the effects of the students' research houses on the students' spirit and educational achievements

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ABSTRACT

Extracurricular activities have a lot of influences on the growth of spirit and happiness in students; furthermore, they give essential training to them indirectly. Most students and their parents are not aware of the existence and function of such centers which are related to and controlled by education departments. This study attempted to investigate the influences of the classes of the students' research houses on the spirit and the educational achievement of the students. Two parallel questionnaires each containing fifteen questions were distributed among 77 students who were attending the classes of these houses and 21 parents. Some interviews also were run. The data gathered were then analyzed. The results showed that the subjects and especially the students were satisfied with the efficiency of these houses.

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Introduction

Every person receives two kinds of education during his/her life: Formal education which is a classic form of education; it means that the person attends the classes during a certain time to be taught and at the end of the course what has been taught will be evaluated. In informal education, the second kind of education, teaching is a lifetime stream and people learn a tip or a skill in every place or every moment of life. Informal education may even be a one way current; it means that a person may learn something from others even when there is no plan for teaching and learning.

The most important kind of education is going to school, which includes two types of educational activities: Direct education by means of classes and indirect education through extra curricular activities and classes. Extra curricular activities include activities which are different from the lessons of school and are designed in subjects like economy, culture, science, sports, cooperative activities, and so on (Behtooyi, 2007a, 2007b). Extracurricular activities involve the students in both educational and non-educational activities inside and outside the school to improve students' personal and social skills (Ahmadi, 2007). Of course all the extracurricular activities are not held by schools. Other sections related to education departments such as Kanoon centers and students' research houses, private companies or companies related to other organizations and ministries may hold such classes for the public especially for students. One of the sections related to education departments which has an efficient but hidden role in educating children is the students' research house. These houses offer trainings in subjects and courses like robotics, building planes, macaroni structures, astronomy, creativity, computer, literature, and so on during the time when the schools are not working. Some of the courses in these houses are related to the students' lessons directly or indirectly. For example students who have been trained in courses like robotics, should be competent in

computer, C++ programming, and micro. Or students who want to be successful in macaroni structures should get training in AutoCAD at first.

The features of the classes of students' research houses

The classes of the students' research houses are very different from school classes and more enjoyable. Group work and cooperation is requisite of some of the activities of students' research houses which in turn leads to the flourishing of responsibility in students; this is requisite of any extracurricular activity (Ja'farian, 2010). Some of the activities are done in different places (observatory nights in astronomy classes) and most of these trainings involve dynamic physical activities, so most students enjoy these extracurricular activities (Shokoohi, 1979). The other positive aspect of students' research houses is the fact that all classes include theory and practice. Almost all the classes and trainings have competitions in the districts, the province, or the country which is a motivating factor for the participants of these classes. Flexibility is one of the most important requirements of the extracurricular activities (Shokoohi, 1979) and this feature is very common in these classes. This study, in absence of any other studies, as far as the authors know, tried to investigate the effects of these classes on the spirit and the educational achievement of the students.

Research questions

This study tried to answer these two questions:

1. What are the effects of the classes of the students' research houses on the spirit and behavior of the students?

2. What are the effects of the classes of the students' research houses on the educational achievement of the students?

Methodology

Participants

The subjects in this study included 77 students who attended the classes of different students' research houses of different districts of Isfahan and 21 parents.

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Materials

Two separate but parallel questionnaires for students and parents were prepared and sent for expert judgment to increase their validity and reliability and then distributed among the subjects. Also some interviews were run to triangulate data collection.

Procedures

Two groups of people were studied in this study: the first group included the students who were using the classes in the students' research houses and the second group included their parents who were external observers of the behavior of their children and whose ideas were important for the researchers. For each group a questionnaire including 15 questions in Likert scale was designed. The questionnaires were sent for expert judgment and were revised and edited by the experts and instructors of these classes to improve their reliability and validity. The students who were helping with the project distributed and collected the questionnaires among the students of the students' research houses of different districts of Isfahan and their parents.

Research findings

Question 1: How do these classes help the students learn the lessons of classes of schools?

Fifty point sixty six percent of the students chose the choices "much" and "very much".

Twenty four point sixty seven percent chose "average" and only 24.67 percent were not satisfied with the classes. Unsatisfied parents (33.33) were more than unsatisfied students 42.85 percent chose much and very much, and 23.80 chose average.

Question 2: How do these classes improve the students' spirit?

Eighty seven point zero one percent of the students chose much and very much, 11.68 percent chose average, and only one person (0.12 percent) chose low. Fifty seven point fourteen percent of the parents chose very much, 23.80 percent chose average, and 19.04 percent chose low.

Question 3: How does the physical condition of the students' research houses affect the students' interest in classes?

Sixty one point zero three percent of the students chose very much and much, 31.16 percent chose average, and 7.79 percent chose low. Only one person (4.76 percent) of the parents chose low, 42.85 chose much and very much, and 52.38 percent chose average.

Question 4: How do the facilities of the students' research houses like pedagogical aids, CD players, microscope, and other instruments help the students learn?

63.63 percent of the students chose much and very much, 22.07 percent average and 14.28 percent low. And 61.90 percent of parents chose much and very much, 4.76 percent chose average, and 33.33 percent low.

Question 5: How much skillful are the students attending these classes in comparison to those who have not attended these classes?

Seventy five point thirty two percent of the students chose much and very much, 15.58 percent average, and only 9.09 percent low. Seventy six point nineteen percent of the parents chose much and very much, 14.28 percent chose average, and only two persons (9.2 percent) chose low.

Question 6: How do these classes improve the average of the students?

Thirty six point thirty six percent of the students chose much and very much, 27.27 percent average, and 36.09 percent low. Forty seven point sixty one percent of the parents chose much and very much, 19.04 percent chose average, and 38.09 percent low.

Question 7: How do classes of the students' research houses influence the students' learning of the lessons at school?

Forty five point forty five percent of the students chose much and very much, 24.67 percent average, and 29.87 percent low. Forty seven point sixty one percent of the parents chose much and very much, 23.80 percent average, and 28.7 percent low.

Question 8: How does the ability of the instructors make the students interested?

Seventy point twelve percent of the students voted for much and very much, 20.77 percent average, and 9.09 percent low. Sixty six point sixty six percent of the parents chose much and very much, 19.04 percent average, and 14.28 percent low.

Question 9: How do the classes improve the students' group skills and cooperation?

Seventy seven point ninety two percent of the students chose much and very much, 27.27 percent average, and 7.79 percent low. And 66.66 percent of the parents chose much and very much, 28.57 percent average, and 4.76 percent low.

Question 10: How do these classes influence the students' mental activity and creativity?

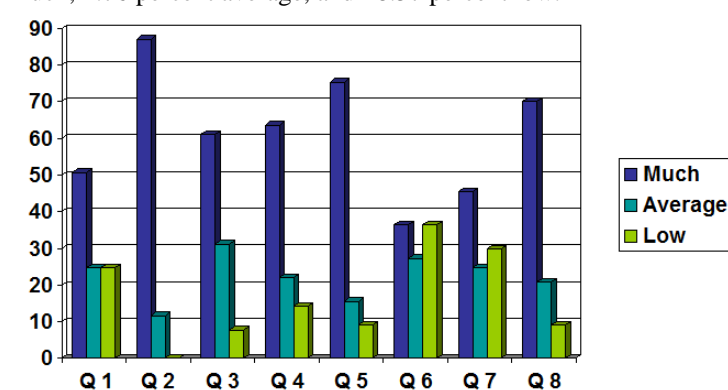
Sixty seven point fifty three percent of the students chose much and very much, 16.88 percent average, and 10.38 percent low. And 66.66 percent of the parents chose much and very much, 19.04 percent average, and 14.28 percent low.

Question 11: How do these classes help the students choose a job and major (field of study)?

Sixty four point ninety three percent of the students chose much and very much, 19.48 percent average, and 15.58 percent low. And 52.38 percent of the parents chose much and very much, 14.28 percent average, and 33.33 percent low.

Question 12: How suitable is the time of holding the classes of the students' research house?

Sixty two point thirty three percent of the students chose much and very much, 18.18 percent average, and 19.48 percent low. And 66.66 percent of the parents chose much and very much, 4.76 percent average, and 28.57 percent low.



Question 13: How do festivals and competitions of the students' research house influence the motivation of the students?

Seventy two point seventy two percent of the students chose much and very much, 12.98 percent average, and 14.28 percent low. And 61.90 percent of parents chose much and very much, 14.28 percent average, and 23.80 percent low.

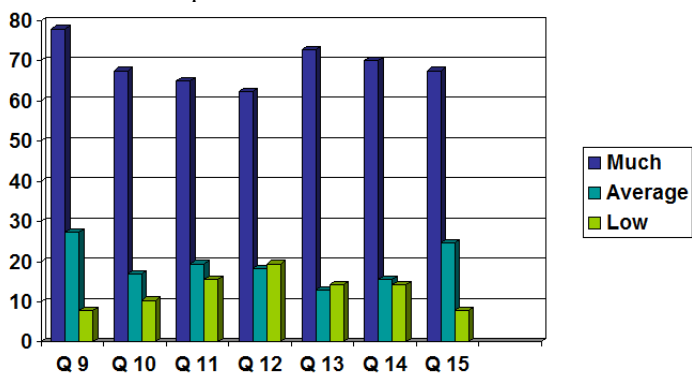
Question 14: How do the classes increase the self-reliance of the students?

Seventy point twelve percent of the students chose much and very much, 15.58 percent average, and 14.28 percent low. And 80.95 percent of parents chose much and very much, 9.52 percent average, and 9.2 percent low.

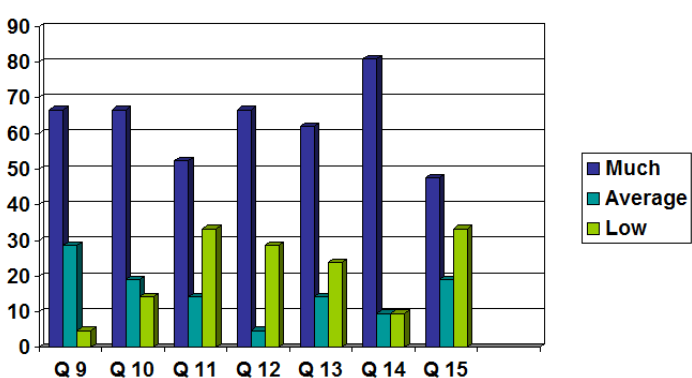
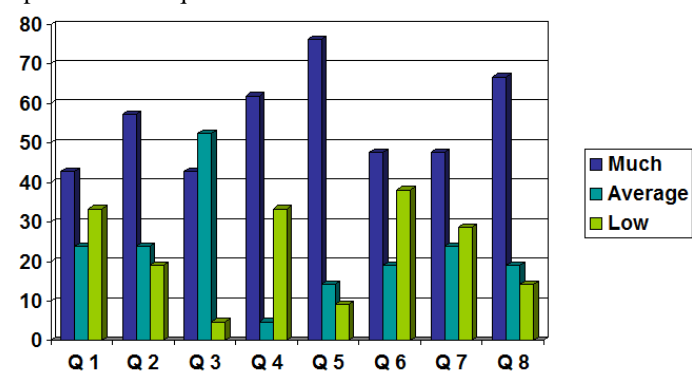
Question 15: How various are the classes of the students' Research house?

Sixty seven point fifty three percent of the students chose much and very much, 24.67 percent average, and 7.79 percent low. And 47.61 percent of parents chose much and very much, 19.04 percent average, and 33.33 percent low.

The following diagrams show the percentage of the answers of students to the questions.



The following diagrams show the percentage of the answers of parents to the questions.



Discussion and the results

The questions number 1, 6, and 7 deal with the relationship between what has been learned in the students’ research house and its effects on the learning of academic lessons and educational achievements. Both the students and their parents declare that they are quite satisfied with the classes, although they believe there is no absolute relationship. This is because some of the classes in the students’ research house have no direct relationship with the lessons presented at schools. The dissatisfaction of the parents is mostly due to their anxiety about the education of their children.

Questions 2, 9, 10, and 14 have evaluated the effect of these classes on the spirit, skills, group work, cooperation, the improvement of mental activities, and self-reliance of the students. In comparison to the parents, students have expressed more satisfaction in questions 2 and 9. It means they enjoy these classes. The students and their parents have similar ideas on question 10 and both groups believe that the students’ research house classes have improved the children’s self-reliance. The satisfaction of the parents (80.95) is higher than the students

(70.12); this is due to the fact that parents act as external observers of the behavior of the children and see changes better. This fact is in accordance with their responses to question 5 regarding the improvement of skills.

Question 11 is an intermediate question for all questions mentioned above and assesses the effects of these classes on the job and educational guidance for the future of the students and the answers to this question are in accordance with the answers to questions 1, 6, and 7, which means both students and their parents are quite satisfied.

Questions 3, 4, 8, 12, 13, and 15 evaluate factors like physical conditions of the classes, the facilities, the competence of the instructors, and the time of the classes, and the effects of these factors on attracting students. The choices of both students and their parents show that they are almost satisfied. Just in answering question 15 students and parents have answered differently; it seems that parents want more variety. Some of the parents in the interviews run said that they had to come to the students’ research house and stay there until the classes ended and they could take them back home; they asked for some classes for these waiting parents.

Analyzing the data shows that the students’ research houses studied in this research have successfully attracted the students and their parents to a satisfying extent and have had positive effects on both the spirit and the educational achievements of the students. Convincing students and their parents about the features, the subjects under study in the classes, methods of teaching, and the facilities of the students’ research house can attract families more and can create a good relationship between these classes, the schools, and the students.

Conclusion

The answers of both students and their parents to the questions show the relative satisfaction on all the factors studied which in turn shows the success of the students’ research houses, although more work and planning is needed to enhance the performance of these houses. It seems if these houses improve their points of *strength* and *difference*, in comparison to schools, they will be more successful in attracting families, points like the variety of class subjects, combination of theory and practice, holding regular contests and festivals related to the subjects, group work, and variety in the environment of learning, factors absent in formal school classes in Iran.

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