

STUDENTS' DEVELOPMENT AND SUCCESS IN UNIVERSITY: INSIGHTS FROM PILAH THE EXPLORER PROGRAMME

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Abstract: *Student associations play a vital role in fostering a vibrant and inclusive campus environment while promoting the holistic development of students. The success of a university student is not solely determined by their academic performance; it also encompasses their involvement in extracurricular activities. This study evaluated students' achievement by engaging them as members of the organising committee throughout the development and implementation of the Pilah the Explorer programme. The programme was organised by Kelab Sahabat, in partnership with three other student clubs, namely Persatuan Bahasa Arab, Filmex Photo Vision, and Textile Society of Applied Science (TEXSAS). This programme involved the management of a treasure hunt activity consisting of 8 checkpoints around UiTM Kuala Pilah with activities designed to enhance the participants' cognitive capacities and critical thinking skills. A survey was given to a group of 42 students who served as committee members. The survey included 5-point Likert scale questions and 1 open-ended question to gather their input on the management of this programme. From their responses, the majority of the committee members believed that this activity enhances their interpersonal capabilities, including their capacities for communication, leadership, social skills, collaboration, and the formation of collaborative networks with their peers.*

Keywords: *Student Associations, Committee, UiTM Kuala Pilah, Interpersonal Skills*

Introduction

Extracurricular activities serve an important role in developing university students' overall development apart from academic study. These activities cover a wide range of interests, including sports, arts, community services, and academic organizations, which offer students opportunities to explore their passions, develop crucial life skills, and forge lasting relationships. In Malaysia, the focus of higher education is closely linked to the goal of developing a highly trained and flexible workforce by producing capable individuals who can compete on a global scale. As the country aims to become a developed nation, the importance of graduates in driving economic growth, innovation, and societal advancement is becoming increasingly crucial. This is in line with the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015–2025 initiated by the Ministry of Higher Education. The goal of the blueprint is to create highly skilled human resources, capable graduates, and proficient specialists. This will help Malaysia in its final phase of becoming a high-income country (Department of Higher Education, 2023).

Studies on extracurricular activity have highlighted the significance of complementing academic education with learning experiences that take place beyond the traditional classroom setting (Montelongo, R., 2002). Within this framework, through the use of physical interactions such as games, collaborative learning, and group rivalries, university students have the ability to swiftly form connections and create significant relationships with one another (Yang and Qian, 2024). Besides, our education system also aims to cultivate self-reliant individuals who contribute positively to society, prioritize social values, possess proficient communication skills, and demonstrate ability in accessing and processing learning resources (Altun and Yildirim, 2023). Thus, Ahrari, Samah, Hassan, Wahat, and Zaremohzzabieh (2016) suggest that higher educational institutions should facilitate active engagement of learners in civic activities through the organization of realistic social, political, and organizational events. Students need to have sufficient training to successfully work together with others from different backgrounds and handle unexpected situations, especially in a real-world professional setting (Rodzalan and Saat, 2015).

One of the main responsibilities of student associations at universities is event planning, which provides invaluable opportunities for personal growth, skill development, and community enrichment. These events serve as dynamic platforms where students can harness their creativity, leadership abilities, and organizational skills to conceptualize, plan, and execute initiatives that resonate with their peers and the broader university community. These programmes not only encourage a vibrant campus environment, but also cultivate teamwork, resilience, and effective communication skills, which are essential for preparing students for their future careers. In a highly competitive job market, participating in extracurricular activities can provide students with the chance to acquire additional skills. According to Clark et al. (2015), alumni have said that participating in extracurricular activities positively influenced their success in their first job, particularly by increasing their self-assurance and improving their interpersonal and communication abilities.

Therefore, in this study, the student's capabilities were evaluated by engaging them as participants of the organising committee throughout the process of developing and implementing a treasure hunt event named *Pilah the Explorer*. In the event, there were 8 checkpoints and each with different activities. Such activities were Pyramid Cup and Balloon, Colour Puzzle, Radio Rosak, Kotak Beracun, Treasure Hunt, Cham Cham Cham, Classic Balloon and Flick the Cap. This study aims to showcase the impact of fostering cooperation among student clubs in planning and executing events. It will highlight how these collaborations

encourage creativity, broaden viewpoints, and develop a vibrant campus culture that has a lasting influence on students.

Literature Review

University association programs, including student organizations, clubs, and extracurricular activities, significantly impact student development. These programs offer opportunities for leadership, social integration, and career preparation. Recent research highlights the role of student associations in fostering leadership skills. Johnson and Schall (2022) found that involvement in student organizations helps students develop essential leadership qualities, such as decision-making and team management. Their research highlights the importance of these associations in providing students with leadership experiences that help them get ready for careers in the workforce. Similarly, the work of Edwards and Muir (2023) supports these findings, showing that active participation in leadership roles within student associations enhances students' self-efficacy and leadership competencies.

In addition, leadership positions in student associations offer great chances for students to improve their communication abilities. According to Adams and Lee (2022), students who take on leadership positions in student organizations often engage in activities that require effective communication, such as public speaking, negotiation, and team coordination. Their research emphasizes that these experiences result in enhanced verbal and non-verbal communication skills, as students acquire the ability to express their thoughts clearly and interact effectively with others.

Furthermore, research has demonstrated that students who participate in extracurricular activities achieve higher academic performance. In addition, engaging in extracurricular activities not only has a positive impact on students' psychological well-being, but it can also minimize stress, promote mental health, and develop a feeling of belonging and community (C. Jalal, 2024). Similarly, research by Thompson and Green (2022) demonstrates that active participation in student organizations helps alleviate feelings of loneliness and social isolation, which are common among Gen Z students. Generation Z is often referred to as post-millennial, iGeneration, and digital natives with anyone born after 1997 (Abby Schukei, 2020).

Research Methodology

Pilah the Explorer is a collaboration programme between 4 UiTM Cawangan Negeri Sembilan Kampus Kuala Pilah's student clubs namely Kelab Sahabat, Textile Society of Applied Science (TEXSAS), Persatuan Bahasa Arab and Filmex Photo Vision. This programme was conducted on 18th May 2024. This programme aims to encourage and exercise the leadership skills and management among the committee members. The committee members have decided to conduct a treasure hunt where several activities were conducted in every checkpoint in the treasure hunt. Such activities were Pyramid Cup and Balloon, Colour Puzzle, *Radio Rosak*, *Kotak Beracun*, Treasure Hunt, Cham Cham Cham, Classic Balloon and Flick the Cap. Meetings were conducted to plan out all the activities, how and where to execute each activity and also to delegate the tasks which involved all 42 committee members from the 4 clubs. This programme started at 8:30 in the morning and ended at 3:00 pm with a closing ceremony and photo session.

Upon the completion of this program, the participants' abilities and competencies as organising committee were assessed based on their feedback provided in an online survey. A set of questionnaires containing 8 questions related to leadership were developed using Google Form, with a variety of question types, including seven 5-point Likert scale questions and one open-

ended question. Other sections of the questionnaire were demographic information such as name, student ID, Part, Course Programme and Club Association.



Figure 1: Some Activities During Pilah the Explorer Programme

The questionnaires were distributed to the students by sharing the link to the survey in a WhatsApp group which the members were in. The students were given one day to answer the questionnaire. A total of 42 questionnaires were distributed to the students and only 33 students returned the questionnaires. To analyse the data, a total of 6 variables were taken into consideration namely, gender, students' academic semester, students' academic achievement, students' academic programme, students' club association, and students' feedback on their abilities to manage the event. Results were presented through diagrams such as pie chart, bar chart and other descriptive statistics.

Results and Discussion

The data was obtained through the students' answers to an internet-based questionnaire. The survey included 5-Likert scale questions and one open-ended question to collect input on the event's management. This feedback will showcase the participants' acquired skills during the Pilah the Explorer programme. Only 33 out of 42 students responded to this survey, in which 93.9% are female students and 6.1% are male students. Figure 2 reveals that female respondents were remarkably higher than male; apparently due to the low number of male students who were involved in the student association. This observation is consistent with the findings of Wang et al. (2012), who said that girls have a higher level of involvement in extracurricular activities compared to boys. The findings of Sirard et al. (2006) indicate that boys are primarily motivated by social benefits, competition, and fitness, whereas girls are driven by social skill benefits, fitness, and competitiveness. This difference in motivating variables clarifies the complex structure of gender-specific preferences for involvement in extracurricular activities.

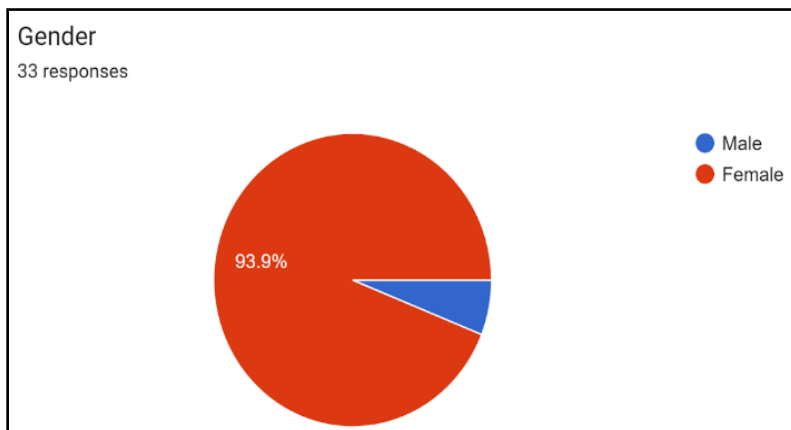


Figure 2: Participation According to Gender

In addition, the students' background has been determined, taking into account factors such as their gender, current CGPA, semester of study, study programme, and participation in clubs and activities. Figure 3 shows that the majority of the committee members are at the beginning of their studies. The biggest percentage of respondents, 51.5%, are in Part 2. 36.3% of respondents are in Part 4, while 9.1% are in Part 3. While the lowest percentage is 3% which represented by students from Part 5. Meanwhile, Figure 4 demonstrates that 94% of the students possess a CGPA exceeding 3.00, suggesting that most of them are outstanding students with excellent academic achievements. This indicates that involvement in extracurricular activities does not interfere with students' ability to achieve excellent academic results. Ribeiro et al. (2024) has proven that most extracurricular activities positively influence university students' academic success and employability.

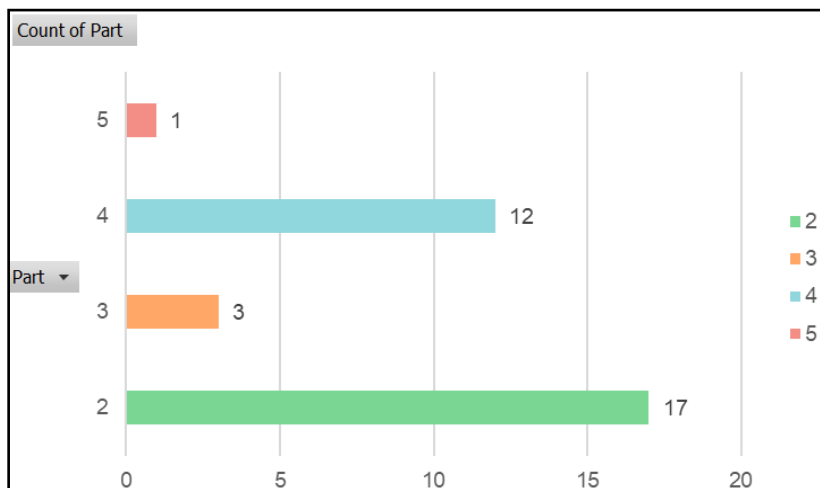


Figure 3 : Students' Academic Semester

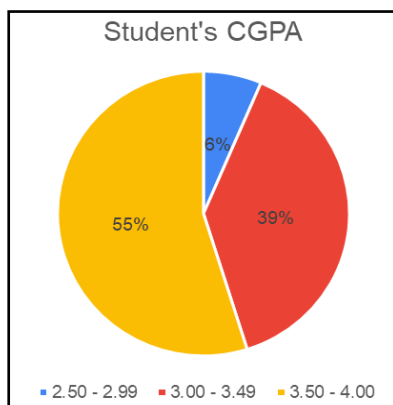


Figure 4 : Students' Academic Achievement

Figure 5 illustrates the diverse academic backgrounds of the students. Specifically, 31% of the students are enrolled in the AS122 programme (Diploma in Textile and Clothing Technology), 30% are in the IC120 programme (Diploma in Halal Management), 24% are in the AS114 programme (Diploma in Microbiology), 12% are in the AS116 programme (Diploma in Food Technology), and 3% are in the AS201 programme (Bachelor's Degree in Biology). In terms of their participation in the student association, 31% of them are members of Kelab Sahabat, 27% are members of Persatuan Bahasa Arab, 27% are members of TEXSAS Society, and 15% are members of FilmEX Photo Vision club, as shown in Figure 6.

In addition, the students' overall feedback regarding their capabilities in managing the Pilah The Explorer programme is presented in Table 1. The percentage was calculated by adding the scores of "agree" and "strongly agree" for each statement. According to the mean score value obtained, the majority of committee members agree that by organizing this event, it improves their interpersonal capabilities, such as communication, leadership, social skills, teamwork, and the building of collaborative networks with their peers.

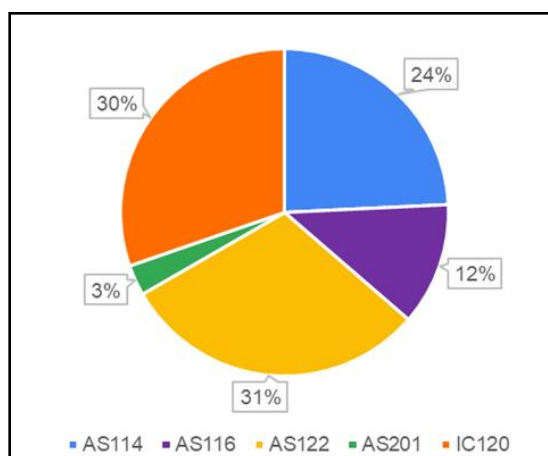


Figure 5 : Students' Academic Programme

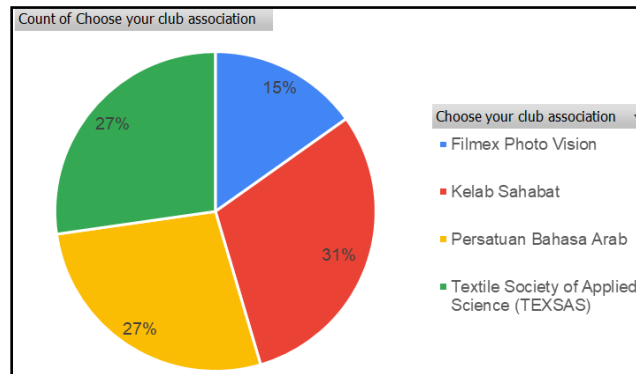


Figure 6 : Students' Participation In Association

Table 1 : Students' Feedback On Their Abilities To Manage The Pilah The Explorer Programme

No.	Statement	Mean score value	Percentage (%)
1.	Organising Pilah the Explorer program has enhanced my leadership abilities.	4.15	84%
2.	The communication process was clear and effective throughout the planning and execution of the program.	4.21	84%
3.	Working in teams to organise the program has strengthened my collaboration skills.	4.21	87%
4.	I feel more confident in my ability to delegate tasks after being involved in Pilah the Explorer planning process.	4.21	84%
5.	The program provided opportunities for me to practise problem-solving and decision-making skills.	4.27	87%
6.	Participating in Pilah the Explorer program has improved my social interactions and networking skills.	4.33	93%
7.	Participating in the Pilah the Explorer program has fostered a sense of camaraderie and teamwork among the organisers.	4.21	87%

The last part of the survey included questions about the obstacles or challenges encountered. Pilah the Explorer Programme has been successfully implemented according to the plan that has been made. The success of a program must have shortcomings and opportunities for improvement that can be made. Among the main obstacles and problems were those related to time management and communication. The problem of time management can be seen in two aspects. Firstly, time management before the program refers to time management among

committee members to give commitment to every task related to the program, i.e., last-minute practice happened because of the busy and different schedule among committee members. Secondly, time management during the program refers to time management among committee members, participants in the program, and the time taken by each activity itself, i.e., the time taken to solve the activities, which were supposed to take 15 minutes per group, but the other groups had arrived.

The problem of communication can be seen in two aspects too. Firstly, medium of communication refers to ineffective communication due to a lack of face-to-face meetings, i.e., a number of students have a hard time keeping up with what is happening currently because of a lack of face-to-face meetings. Secondly, miscommunication among the committee members refers to a lack of communication with other committee members, i.e., late updates of information from committee members. Above all, the committee members did their great job to ensure that the program went smoothly, and everything ended up well. One student pointed out that they can “communicate well even though many clubs are joined together and hope to collaborate again in the future.” With the cooperation and team spirit of all clubs, the program ran smoothly. Despite the challenges, with all the cooperation and teamwork from all associations, the programme ran well since there were frequent meetings to discuss the implementation of the program. It can be broadly concluded that soft skills are essential for enhancing the performance of self-employment graduates, addressing needs both in Malaysia and globally (Esa et al., 2014).

Conclusion

Overall, the extracurricular activities at the institution foster a positive environment among the students by promoting their mental well-being and providing escape from academic stress, allowing them to relax and nurture a balanced way of life. Furthermore, the impact of extracurricular activities goes beyond the individual benefits. It is not simply optional additions to a student's education, but rather important components that enhance their learning experience. Through the organization of the Pilah the Explorer programme, it has provided UiTM students with the opportunity to develop their leadership qualities and enhance their interpersonal skills, such as communication, social, teamwork and leadership. These skills assist them to become holistic and competitive graduates, and capable of successfully navigating the challenges of the professional world in the future. Besides, the future research on potential correlations between some of the independent variables could also be conducted to reveal other implications towards influencing the intention to adopt Islamic financing facilities.

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