

Enhancing Students Achievement through Astin Theory of Involvement

Rusniza Abdul Rahman^{*a}, Noor Hafiza Zakariya^b, Saidatul Nurul Hidayah Jannatun Naim Nor Ahmad^a

^a*Tunku Intan Safinaz School of Accountancy, Universiti Utara Malaysia, Malaysia*

^b*School of Business Management, Univeristi Utara Malaysia, Malaysia*

Abstract

This study explores whether an active student's involvement in and outside of the classroom could enhance the student's achievement. The Astin Theory of Involvement was utilized to shed light on the study findings. In-depth qualitative interview was used to collect the data for this study. Three students of UUM who are highly active has been interviewed to know they experience and positive/negative effects of their active involvement in university programmes. Overall, students reported positive experience after they got involved actively where they gain various soft skills, knows how to manage time effectively, and getting a better result in their academic endeavour. Practically, from the findings, this study conformed to the Astin Theory of Involvement, which the right inputs into the involvement would positively affect the students' development. Thus, the characteristics and the campus ecosystem especially Individuals that hold roles in dealing with students especially educators and advisors should understand the students' development process is not exhaustive to only classroom interactions but also include their out of class activities.

Keywords: Astin's Involvement theory, student's achievement

1. INTRODUCTION

Student involvement refers to the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience. Thus, a highly involved student is one who, for example, devotes considerable energy to studying, spends much time on campus, participates actively in student organizations, and interacts frequently with faculty members and other students (Astin, 2014). The involvement concept also resembles closely what the learning theorists have traditionally referred to as vigilance or time-on-task. The concept of effort, although much narrower, has much in common with the concept of involvement. The theory of student involvement engages educators to focus less on what they do and more on what the student does: how motivated the student is and how much time and energy the student devotes to the learning process. Thus, the construct of student involvement in certain respects resembles a more common construct in psychology: motivation (Astin, 2014).

Astin Theory of Involvement is one of the informal theories in education. Informal theory could be referred to as the informal proposition, beliefs, views and attitudes that a person has about the world (Hillier, Y, 2020). Compared to academic theory, informal theory generally remains private, implicit, and does not involve extensive analysis and testing.

To extend the Astin's theory of involvement, the current study observed several traits and characteristics among the students interviewed. They have strong personality and characteristics such as leadership, communication and intrapersonal skills. They are actively involved and joined various activities and programmes at the college. Being a good leader or team member in their group assignment and activities also facilitate their leadership skill

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +60 1115394733
E-mail: rusniza@uum.edu.my

and other characteristics. Additionally, their involvement in co-curricular and programmes at school begin since primary school. Most of them also have achieved a good result in their academic performance. Hence, the researchers believe that by actively involving at the college, the students would perform better and succeed in their academic achievement.

Commonly at higher institutions, some students will actively involve in co-curricular activities (outside the classroom) and some students only active inside the classroom (academic oriented). While some of them are not actively involved in both aspects. For active students, their learning experiences inside and outside the classroom would be different from others. They often busy with their time schedule as they hold several positions and responsibilities at the college. Therefore, they need to manage their time efficiently and effectively and ensure that they would not be left aside.

Moreover, they tend to apply their knowledge, skills, abilities and experiences that they got from co-curricular and outside classroom's activities to deal with lecturers, administration officer, and upper level managerial that lead to extra skills learned. Their learning experience within the wall and outside the wall may affect their development in several ways either in cognitive, behavioural or emotional.

However, in some circumstances, these students might face numerous issues and challenges during their students' life such as conflict with their peers or roommate, less teamwork commitment, unsatisfied with college's facility and accommodation, and so on. Consequently, these problems might affect and give impact to their motivation, self-esteem, determination and persistence to involve actively at their college. Therefore, this project would investigate the factors that would affect their involvement, which in turns could affect their academic performance at the same time.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Theory of development suggests that humans develop in different facets and are influenced by the context or environment they are living in. Development is normally referred to a positive change happening to a particular person, such as cognitive behavior or social identity, particularly to the students at higher institutions (Jones and Abes, 2011). Knowing how students develop would instil educators to prepare a teaching and learning environment to suit the needs of new Millennials to support them to develop into a "whole person" (Rodgers, 1990).

There are many theories, which discussed student psychosocial development (Schuh, Jones & Harper (2010). Among them are Athur's Chickering and Reisser (1993) and Astin Theory of Involvement. Both theories explain and predict how people grow and develop, and they are interconnected in term of the final output of the development process, which is personal identity and values. Chickering and Reisser (1993) emphasise on the seven (7) vectors of development, which are (1) developing competence, (2) managing emotions, (3) developing autonomy, (4) establishing identity, (5) interpersonal relationship, (6) developing purpose and (7) developing integrity. These seven development directions could happen in many settings, including "constructed environments" as categorised by Shuch et al. (2010, p. 132) and discussed explicitly in Astin's Theory of Involvement.

Astin's Theory of Involvement indicates that students who are actively involved in campus activities, the more they are consistent in their academic performance and personal psychosocial development (Schuh et al., 2010). This is because of the influence the university environment or "constructed environment" have on students, in which it explains the psychological and sociological change in students (Astin, 1984). Astin' theory of involvement explains that students will experience changes in their personal identity as they involve themselves in students-faculties relationship and this change would revolve around the 7 vectors of development to develop personal identity such as self-esteem and sense of purpose.

Focusing on the active students in UUM, this study planned to employ theoretical perspective which encompassed the concept of student involvement i.e. Astin Theory of student involvement (1984). Astin (1984) posits that the amount of student learning and personal development are the result of the students' scarification of their physical and psychological energy into learning experience quantitatively or qualitatively in higher education (student-faculty interaction) both inside and outside their classrooms. This theory assumes the process of student development occurs by two contributing inputs, the characteristic of the students and supportive advisors (Astin, 1984). Supportive advisors refer to the educators who believe that what students do is more important for them to develop instead of what educators do. Astin (1984) also suggested that different types of involvement would result in different development directions as discussed in Athur's Chickering and Reisser

(1993). How the students characterise their learning experience inside and outside classrooms shape their current personality and future take away personality before graduates. This is parallel with the findings by Goldman, Goodboy, and Bolkan (2016), where they found students that have out of class communication experiencing better cognitive development and improve learning outcomes.

Astin (1984) also highlights that through his longitudinal research that some of the involvements turn into negative ways, which might decrease the ability of students to get good grades and improve their academic status while their personality development is at a hike. This is a result of the breadth and the depth of involvements of the student to campus activities. Ivanova and Moretti (2018) recently found that the student was experiencing GPA dropping when their level of involvement became extensively higher and more massive. From the reviews above, it can be understood that students' energy and commitments towards their involvements serve as a process of developing their own identity positively or negatively before the graduates. The students need to balance their involvement outside campus activities with pure academic learning activities for them to develop holistically and hopefully in a positive way.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

To answer the research question, qualitative in-depth interview has been used to enable the researcher to identify the implicit and tacit beliefs which they hold about active involvement and academic achievement at college. The purpose of the investigation was to establish the relationship between students' involvement and their academic performance. To achieve this, the researchers had collaborated with respondents on making sense of potential factors through Webex Meeting Platform, which was conducted on 18 October 2020 at 9.00 pm. The details of the research plan could be summarized as below:

- 1- Interviewee: Three (3) undergraduate students from Majlis Tertinggi Inasis Grantt, UUM
- 2- Research Question: Does actively involved at college would influence their academic achievement?
- 3- Interviewee selection- A group of active students (ranging from semester 3 to 5) are selected. They hold a position in various college and University level programs.

3.1 Interview Protocol

General

Tell us about you as UUM student (who are you inside classroom, and who are you outside the classroom, The activities outside classroom that you involve. (which level, the position you hold)
How many programs have you involved or handled?
Tell us about the most remembered learning experience that you had in UUM. Why?
Tell us about the most important lesson you have in UUM. From whom, from where? Why do you characterize it as most important lesson?

Inside classroom

The best classroom experience and the worst classroom experience. Why?
Do you find any differences in classroom experience after you become active?
Do you feel the changes into the positive way or negative way? How is the changes happened?

Outside classroom

Why you become active in outside classroom activities.
Tell us about the good learning experience happened, and how it happened?
How this involvement helps you in academic.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

The recording video of the interview session was first transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. Thematic analysis organizes and describes the data in rich detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

5. FINDINGS

Students interviewed reported several positive outcomes from their active involvement inside and outside of the classroom. Across all interviewees, they reported that active involvement makes them better in time management skills, as they value their time even more and reduce procrastination habit, which in turn enable them to complete all given task in a timely and structured manner, hence better academic results attained.

“The best part is I feel pressure and realized that time is limited, hence I will definitely settle all task or assignment as soon as possible and mostly right after the class end. So, I will not be having problem as such redundant work, I did submit task and assignment in the first place, good impression from lecturer as I followed their instructions.”

[Student 1]

“I am glad to say that I made huge improvements in terms of time management as I am also a normal student who deals with assignments, quizzes and exams. This helps me to force myself to be able to balance both worlds in good terms.”

[Student 2]

When I become active outside the class, I can simply manage my time well and so by that I could also manage my academical tasks or in class assignments that given by the lecturers in the class really well. I do really think it helps a lot in term of building and engaging my discipline in term of completing the task a lot.

[Student 3]

Furthermore, students also reported that they have gained various soft skills such as leadership skill, communication skill, decision-making skill, and skill of report/proposal writing that are important for their future career from the active involvement in class and outside of class.

“Joining leadership programs adds up my soft skills which is marketable when it comes to finding a career.”

[Student 2]

“When I hold the position of program director for Logtrans Induction Day, I was still in the first year and it was the first steppingstone and learning step for me to learn more to become a good leader. I learned a lot technically in term of completing the program’s paperwork, proposal and report.”

[Student 3]

“The involvement in programmes taught me to communicate well with others.”

[Student 1]

Overall, students reported a better academic result achievement after they become actively involved in and outside of the classroom.

“My academic result is surprisingly getting better and up until now during my degree studies, I still managed to get dean’s list award, even for the third semester in a row.”

[Student 3]

The advantages of the previous involvement in many programmes help a lot to make the assignment to be the best among the best because of the toleration when dividing the task. If the assignment is individual, I know how to complete the assignment with the highest management and it turns out good.

[Student 1]

6. DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION OF FINDINGS

The findings above clearly show that the informal propositions that have been mentioned before are truly supported. Interpreting process has led into a various perspective of students’ involvement theory. It becomes clear that who are actively involved at the college would perform better and succeed in their academic

performance. Based on the answers from the respondents, most of them felt positive changes once actively involved in the curricular and development programs at the college.

As supported by Astin's Theory of Involvement, when the students are actively involved in their learning and development programs, directly it would increase the chances of success in their academic performance. It generally supported by this findings that once they were actively involved at the college, their academic performance will getting better, and of these in terms of commitment will also increase and enhance their skill to do effectively time management.

In addition, the respondents also mentioned that by actively involve at the college with several activities, programs and hold a position as a leader at college will help them to polish their skill in making good decision. Apart from that, they tend to give more contribution to others and tend to practice good organizational citizenship behavior at their college. Also, they also mentioned that by actively involving with co-curricular activities and programs will assist them to improve the quality of their resume in seeking the job vacant in the future. In other words, they believe that by having a lot of learning experience at the college will establish a good reputation for the career searching in the future.

On the other hand, students tend to feel positively transformed by involving in the co-curricular and development programs at the college. As mentioned in Astin (1984), the positive changes are the impact of the psychosocial interactions when they invested their energy into campus activities. Students developed wider network, teamwork which led to the development of inter and intrapersonal skills, leadership skills and other soft skills. Their improvement in various skills help them administer themselves properly in term time management, assist them in class presentation as they feel more confident and maintain or improve their academic results. This is true as found Goldman, Goodboy, and Bolkan (2016) that students who benefited from their non-academic activities tend to have better outcomes in learning. The process then continues as the students start developing self-esteem and sense of purpose of gaining knowledge.

Practically, from the findings, this study conformed to the Astin Theory of Involvement, which the right inputs into the involvement would positively affect the students' development. Thus, the characteristics and the campus ecosystem especially Individuals that hold roles in dealing with students especially educators and advisors should understand the students' development process is not exhaustive to only classroom interactions but also include their out of class activities.

Students also need to understand themselves and be fully aware of the skills they want to develop and the extent of the activities that they can take. As posited by Astin (1984), students develop differently relative to the activities that they are involved in. This is because their characteristic is one of important input the Theory of Involvement.

At educators' perspective, this theory and findings agreed with the connotation made by Astin (1984) which "what the students do is more important to them for their development compared to what educators do". Therefore, educators should prepare the ecosystem and take part to prosper a student into a new positive personal identity by adapting to more student-centred learning and emphasize more student-faculty relationships in delivering knowledge. Besides, educators also should be able to identify if the students develop adversely because of heavy involvement in non-academic activities. Implicitly, educators have to keep abreast with the theory of student's development in order to produce versatile and holistic students. Moreover, educators could also engage inactive students to involve in the campus activity instead of only focusing on academics as other skills needed to be polished to achieve a certain vector of development.

Theoretically, this study adds to the body of knowledge in terms of expanding the applications and understanding about theory of students' development in higher learning. The theories are interconnected, and future research has to be done to bring evidence on the type of student development and the construct that stimulate the process.

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