

Can Academic Performance Enhance Group Membership and Leadership among Student Entrepreneurs in Malaysia?

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Abstract

This study examined the effect of academic performance on social group membership and future leadership among student entrepreneurs in Malaysia so as to enhance good quality leaders in the future. Underpinned to Blau's social exchange theory, the study adopted survey method and proportionate stratified random sampling to collect data from 319 semester-5 university students from three public universities in Malaysia. Data analysis was done through descriptive statistics and regression methods. We found that high academic performance significantly and positively influenced future leadership among Malaysian student entrepreneurs. Therefore, the government and the universities management should initiate more advocacy programs to counsel students on the need to focus on their studies so as to earn better grades which would enhance their active participation in leadership activities after school. However, there was no evidence to prove that academic performance had any influence on group membership among the student entrepreneurs. The study was limited to university business students. Similar studies could be conducted on youths in other academic institutions such as secondary schools.

Keywords: academic performance, student entrepreneurs, group membership, leadership, Malaysia

1. Introduction

A critical observation of the leadership succession, especially in religious organizations, in some countries in Europe revealed that the quality of future leaders depends on the quality of education given to youths. It could be argued that good quality leaders in the future depend on the academic performance of the current youths. This could make for stability and positive social change in a country. Therefore, for these future benefits to be realized, an exchange of holistic academic training is required by the youths of today.

Several antecedents of academic performance have been established in the literature. For example, classroom social experiences (Flook, Repetti, & Ullman, 2005), social and leadership skills (Adeyemo, 2010), negative stigma (Love, 2008), group learning (Asoodeh, Asoodeh, & Zarepour, 2012; Vrioni, 2011), peer relations (Leka, 2015), membership in a student organization (Nadler, 1997) and after-school learning program (Shernoff, 2010) have generally been related to youth academic performance in various countries. Flook et al. (2005) found that lack of peer acceptance in class predicted poor self-concept and poor academic performance among pupils in America. Similarly, Love (2008) discovered that perceived bias and stereotype predicted lack of social connectedness and poor academic performance among American adolescents. Again, the research conducted by Shernoff (2010) among adolescent students in America indicated that students who engaged in after-school learning program, such as computer application and English proficiency training, recorded higher academic performance in English grade than those who did not. This is because such programs provided positive emotions and experiences while building social competencies in the students.

While Huang and Chang (2004) believed that the time spent on extracurricular activities could interfere with student's learning and so result in low grades; Wang and Shiveley (2009), Nadler (1997) and Pritchard and Wilson (2003) proved that students who participated in an extracurricular activities had better results than those students who did not. This confirmed that studies on student involvement and academic performance have inconclusive results.

Adeyemo (2010) found a positive effect of extracurricular activities on academic performance among Nigerian secondary school students. Asoodeh et al. (2012) discovered that cooperative or group learning provided opportunity for social acceptance and self-confidence (through acquisition of social skills) and academic achievement among elementary school pupils in Iran. The work of Vrioni (2011) provided evidence that group learning provided opportunity for discussion and inquiry, interpersonal relationship and social networking or connectivity which enhanced academic, social and personal knowledge among Albanian third-year university students. Leka (2015) concluded that the influence of peers on student's academic performance is not always negative but could be positive depending on the type of group the youths belong to.

Few other studies have examined academic performance and current leadership participation among youths. For example, Chen, Rubin and Li (1997) stated that heads of student organizations are elected by their fellow students and head-teachers based on high academic and moral standards. Their study provided evidence that academic performance was positively related to students' social competence and peer acceptance (leadership). Mastro, Jalloh and Watson (2006) concluded that academic achievement would occur when supported with extracurricular activities, group learning and community activities which enhance self-confidence and social connectedness. Except the work of James-Burdumy, Dynarski and Deke (2007), most of these studies concord and summarize that social environment enhances self-confidence (e.g Ekpe et al., 2011; 2012) and academic performance among students.

However, scarcity of studies exists that measures the level of academic performance on youth's future leadership activities. Closest to this is the work of Greenberg et al. (2003) which concluded that academic performance should be seen in its ability to produce a knowledgeable, skilled and socially responsible graduate with good character and emotional competence capable of contributing to his/her family and community. The question now is: can scholastic achievement (high academic performance) lead to future leadership participation among youths? Furthermore, social networks are vital source of information and other resources, in any career, to people who can access them. Can high academic performance lead to youth's social group membership after graduation? This study seeks to provide answers to these questions in Malaysian context.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Arguments on Academic Performance, Leadership and Group Membership

This study is underpinned on Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964). The theory, for example, explains that social change and stability result from negotiated exchanges between parties. That is, human relationships are formed through subjective cost-benefit analysis. It could be argued that a country's good quality leaders in the future depend on the academic performance of her current youths. This could make for stability and positive social change in such a country. Therefore, for these future benefits to be realized, an exchange of holistic academic training is required by the youths of today. It was reported in Love (2008) that lower graduation rates could indicate limited career and limited higher education opportunities for youths in the future. Also, reported in Leka (2015), is the fact that academic performance points to the success of school administration, student's school completion, ability to assume adult roles, achieve self-sufficiency and contribute to one's community. Again, Chen et al. (1997) stated that heads of student organizations are elected by their fellow students and teachers based on high academic and moral standards.

2.2 Studies on Academic Performance and Leadership

Chen et al. (1997), in a two year longitudinal study, investigated the relationship between academic performance and social competence and peer acceptance among Chinese Grade 4 and 6 pupils. With a sample size of 482 children and regression analysis method, the study discovered that academic performance positively related to the pupils' social competence and peer acceptance (leadership). Leka (2015) concluded that academic performance indicated student's school completion, his/her ability to assume adult roles, achieve economic independence and contribute to his/her community development. Similarly, the study of Greenberg et al. (2003) suggested that educational agenda should produce a knowledgeable, skilled and socially responsible graduate with good moral character, capable of civic engagement. Therefore, we put up a hypothesis that:

H1: High academic performance is positively related to youth's future leadership

2.3 Studies on Academic Performance and Group Membership

Though paucity of studies exist that relate academic performance and youth's social group membership after graduation; however, few studies have examined social environment on academic performance and social networking (connectivity) while in school. Asoodeh et al. (2012), in a experimental survey of a total sample size of 26 (20 pupils and 6 teachers) of 2nd- elementary school pupils in Iran, and using paired sample t-test statistics,

found that cooperative (group) learning was positively related to social acceptance, self-confidence and academic achievement in Iran; as shown by the difference in the experimental and control group. Social acceptance here could mean group membership.

Vrioni (2011), with a sample size of 243 Albanian third-year university students from the Faculty of Foreign Languages, and using descriptive statistics, discovered that group learning provided social interaction which created favorable learning environment and enhanced academic, social and personal knowledge through interpersonal relationship and social networking (connectivity). Social networking as used here could mean social group membership.

Mastro et al. (2006), in experimental survey and with a sample size of 28 school drop-outs youths (Grades 3rd-8th) in America between 2005-2006 based on English and Mathematics assessment, concluded that academic achievement is most likely to occur if teaching and learning is supported with co-curricular activities, group learning and community activities which enhances self-confidence and social connectedness. It is arguable that social connectedness used here is social group membership. Therefore, we put up a hypothesis that:

H2: High academic performance is positively related to youth's future social group membership

3. Methodology

3.1 Survey Procedures

A survey was conducted on 319 semester-5 university undergraduate students (student entrepreneurs) of 2015/2016 academic session from three public universities in Malaysia Peninsular, using stratified proportionate random sampling. The population of study was 1,572 semester-5 students, and a sample of 319 students participated in the survey. Sample members were selected from entrepreneurship and business faculties. Since there was a known population, the sample size was selected based on Yamane's formula ($n = N/1+N(e)^2$) as reported in Israel (1992). A total of 97 questionnaires were returned which indicated 30.4% response rate. This satisfied the acceptable response rate of 30% suggested by Sekaran (2000). However, after data screening, data for 73 respondents were used for the analyses. Data analysis was carried out using descriptive statistics and regression methods.

3.2 Measures

Academic performance was operationally defined as student's learning outcome and was measured in line with Meyer et al. (1993) and Shernoff (2010). Social group membership was defined as social networks in terms of network diversity, network size and relationship strength; and was measured in line with Olomola (2002). Youth leadership was seen as youth's civic engagement and measured in line with Gazzar (2011). A 4-point Likert scale, made up of strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), agree (3) and strongly agree (4) was adopted on the research instrument (questionnaire) to get appropriate feedback from the respondents.

4. Results

4.1 Data Cleaning

A series of data cleaning and treatment approach was used in this study. These include: identification and treatment of missing data, outliers, normality, multicollinearity and so on. In this study, there was no missing data. Also, in handling outliers, a table of chi-square statistics was used as a benchmark to determine the best values, in line with the suggestion of Hair et al. (2010) and Coakes and Steed (2003).

4.2 Goodness of Measures

The principal component analysis (EFA) revealed that the independent variable, academic performance, with one component (improved grade in test and examination) had total variance expected (TVE) as 64.323% and measure of sampling adequacy (KMO) as 0.865. The EFA also showed that the criterion variable converged into two components renamed (enhances future leadership) and (enhances group membership), with a total variance explained (TVE) as 68.256% and measure of sampling adequacy (KMO) as 0.700.

After the principal component factor analysis (EFA), the data were standardized (mean of items) to become variables for subsequent analyses such as 'reliability'. However, for regression, the variables were centralized to avoid high multicollinearity (Aiken & West, 1991).

Reliability test was performed on the factors after the exploratory factor analysis. High academic performance was 0.886. Alpha for future leadership was 0.837; and group membership was 0.722. This is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics (M, SD) and reliability

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Cronbach' alpha	No. of items after EFA	Sample size (N)
High academic performance (AP)	3.05	0.57	0.886	6	73
Future Leadership (FL)	3.08	0.57	0.837	4	73
Group Membership (GM)	2.83	0.66	0.722	3	73

Table 1 provided a summary of the descriptive statistics of the variables. It is evident that the independent variable, high academic performance (improved grade), had a high mean value (3.05) and standard deviation (0.57). This proved that Malaysian student entrepreneurs perceive that high academic performance would ultimately prepare them for future leadership.

Table 2. Regression analysis of high academic performance on future leadership

Variables	(IV-DV 1) Beta	Hypothesis
High academic performance (AP)	0.577****	H1
R square	0.333	
Adjusted R square	0.324	
R square Change	0.333	
F Value	35.517	
Sig. F. Change	0.000****	

Note: * $p < 0.10$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$; **** $p < 0.001$

DV = Future leadership

Table 3. Regression analysis of high academic performance on group membership

Variables	(IV-DV 2) Beta	Hypothesis
High academic performance (AP)	0.122	H2
R square	0.015	
Adjusted R square	0.001	
R square Change	0.015	
F Value	1.078	
Sig. F. Change	0.303	

Note: * $p < 0.10$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$; **** $p < 0.001$

DV = Group membership

Hypothesis 1 predicted a positive relationship between high academic performance and future leadership among student entrepreneurs. The regression result in Table 2 indicated that high academic performance (beta = 0.577****, $p < 0.001$) had significant effect on future leadership among the student entrepreneurs. Thus, hypothesis 1 was supported.

Hypothesis 2 predicted a positive relationship between high academic performance and social group membership among student entrepreneurs. As shown in Table 3, the regression analysis result, revealed that high academic performance (beta = 0.122) had insignificant effect on social group membership among the student entrepreneurs. Thus, hypothesis 2 was not supported.

5. Discussion

The results of this research agreed with previous works (Chen et al., 1997; Greenberg et al., 2003; Leka, 2015) that high academic performance is positively related to future leadership among student entrepreneurs. Even right in school, high academic performance is a major requirement for election into leadership positions, aside good moral character (Chen et al., 1997). Furthermore, in many other developing countries, there are specific academic qualifications required to contest for political positions. Therefore, motivating the youths to achieve high academic performance would enhance availability of good quality leaders in the future. In this study, however, there was no evidence to support the existence of causality between academic performance and future group membership among student entrepreneurs in Malaysia. This is consistent with practice because academic performance is not a mandatory requirement for social group membership. For example, a third-class degree graduate could belong to social media network, micro-credit group, community club or professional body.

6. Conclusion

The regression outputs of this study revealed that the overall model of high academic performance and future leadership among Malaysian student entrepreneurs was significant. Therefore, the government and the universities management should initiate more advocacy programs to counsel the students on the need to focus on their studies so as to earn better grades which would enhance their active role in leadership activities after school. This would enhance availability of good quality leaders in the country in future. This study was limited to students from university business faculties in Malaysia. Similar studies could be conducted on youths in other academic institutions such as secondary schools.

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