



School Engagement of Undergraduate Students in Public and Private Institutions in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

It has been realized at present students' school engagement is a variable that plays an important role of promoting students' learning and achievement. The present study is an attempt to find out whether students in public and private institutions have significance difference in school engagement. The investigator will employ mixed methods of study including questionnaires, case study methods, and exploratory research. The research finding shows that the students in public institutions have higher level of school engagement compare to students in private institutions and significance difference achieved. Policies makers have to device policies to clearly reflect the importance of promote students engagement in private institutions. Teachers should play important roles to promoting students' school engagement.

KEYWORDS

School engagement, cognitive engagement, emotional engagement, behavioral engagement

Introduction

Malaysia is working its way to becoming a distinctive developed nation with its own identity and characteristics by the year 2020. Education is thus given the emphasis to nurture intellectual learning society that will contribute to the realization of the vision. However student achievement problems are often highlighted in mass media and therefore, it is pertinent for educators to be aware to study the factors related to student achievement. Student achievement are depend to how they study, how much time spend in academics, which means academic performance are highly related with their engagement. Ministry of Education Malaysia has taken the initiative to concentrate on school engagement in order to improve the quality of higher education in Malaysia. From literature, engagement become more and more important to policy maker, educators, parents and students, it functions as indicator of successful in academic performance.

Higher education in Malaysia is delivered through both public and private systems under jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education. Many studies been conducted on academic performance in public and private institutions in Malaysian. One of Malaysian researcher Abdul Karim based on the data gathered through the Malaysian Soft Skills Scale instrument where employers rate the graduated students' working performance. The results show that the mean scores achieved for each of the skills and knowledge range from 6.3 to 7.8 out of 10. The study finds that students from public institutions are more proficient compared to their counterparts from private institution.¹

Literature Review

School engagement refers to students' expression of opinions or attitudes and behaviors. Asian researcher Wonglorsaichon (2014) pointed out that school engagement results from intrinsic motivation or individual needs which make students have positive feelings and continue their practices with perseverance and self-confidence.² Previous studies conducted by Skinner Welborn and Connell (1991) have pointed out that students' behaviors in continuously and consistently carrying out learning activities enable them to have positive conditions.³ Also, learning activities will make students develop engagement through their participation in the activities (Charles, Bustard, & Balck, 2009).⁴

A review of the literature reveals that school engagement is divided into three dimensions as follows: cognitive engagement, emotional engagement, and behavioral engagement. Cognitive engagement refers to students' behaviors that reflect their thinking in terms of dedication which combines both ideas and willingness to take action. Emotional engagement is a positive feeling students have for their teachers, peers, and school. It is believed that promotion of school engagement results in willingness to work. Behavioral engagement is students' practices or behaviors that are related to studying that takes place in school

and brings about positive behaviors such as adherence to school rules, having no negative behaviors. (Fredricks et. al, 2004).⁵

Objectives of the Study

- To identify whether have any difference in school engagement between public and private undergraduate students.

Hypotheses

- There is no significant difference in the mean scores of cognitive engagement between undergraduate students in public and private universities.
- There is no significant difference in the mean scores of emotional engagement between undergraduate students in public and private universities.
- There is no significant difference in the mean scores of behavioral engagement between undergraduate students in public and private universities.

Research Methodology

In this survey research, the data were collected by means of the questionnaire, 9 item and 5 points Likert scale was constructed after 2 testing and amending, 5 means "most appropriate" and 1 means "less appropriate". In order to validate the questionnaire for each construct, content validity was examined and its value was equal to 0.7-1.0. The reliability was estimated using Cronbach's Alpha correlation coefficient. The reliability of school engagement construct was equal to 0.821.

The study samples consisted of 406 students. 247 students from public institutions located in North region of Peninsular Malaysia, 159 students from private institutions which located in North region of Peninsular Malaysia as well. Around 54.5% were female; the major students were Science (23%), Engineering (24%), Management (27.6%), and Arts (25.4%). More than two-thirds of students are sophomore and junior.

Statistical techniques used

For description statistics mean, SD and Chi-square were used. For inferential statistics t' test and ANOVA were used to verify the formulated hypotheses about the significant differences between the mean values of dimensions of school engagement and selected variables. Variables related to school engagement namely cognitive engagement, emotional engagement and behavioral engagement showed relationship among themselves. Hence the researcher proceeded with the analysis of data.

Table 1: t' Test Results

Variables	Institutions		t' value	df	P value	Sig/ Non Sig
	Public	Private				
	Mean SD	Mean SD				

Cognitive Engagement	4.05	8.95	3.84	9.71	3.215	262	0.002*	Sig
Emotional Engagement	3.92	10.59	3.76	6.43	1.375		0.015*	Sig
Behavioral Engagement	3.83	7.86	3.42	10.23	2.846		0.000**	Sig

Note: *P<.05, **P<.01, ***P<.001

The above table shows that 't' values for the dimensions cognitive engagement, emotional engagement and behavioral engagement of undergraduate students 3.215, 1.375 and 2.846 respectively. These values are all showed in significant level for df 262. Hence, the null hypothesis is accepted for these variables. So there is significant difference of the mean values between public and private students for the dimensions of cognitive engagement, emotional engagement and behavioral engagement. Comparatively, students in public institutions shows slightly higher mean value for the dimension of school engagement.

Findings

Students in public institutions have higher engagement especially in cognitive and behavioral because of the quality of teaching, advance equipments, more convenient and enjoyable learning environment, students willing to spend longer time in school. For private institutions due to lack of financial support from government, raising fund from public and minimize expenses become the major source of funds, it may be discourage students from study indirectly. Students in public and private institutions have great difference in behavioral engagement, this may be because public institutions providing excellent learning environment and also excellent teaching staff. The culture gradually influence students to be more self-efficacy and conscious of self-learning.

Conclusion

In the light of present study, it is understood that school engagement will affect the academic performance. Policy makers, educators, researchers and teachers should raise awareness of the significance of increasing the school engagement by knowledge about what school engagement is, how important it is, and which method can promote students engagement should be disseminated. Ministry of Education Malaysia should clearly reflect the importance of promote students engagement in private institutions. Teachers should be assigned to use methods to further promoting students' school engagement like to augment students' attitudes and motivation towards learning, implementation of the student-centered learning principles, promotes a more equal relationship between students and teacher, more discussion in the course, encourages students to practice the necessary skills that are necessary in their future employment.

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