

IMPACT OF MOTIVATIONAL PROGRAM ON STUDENT'S ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

This paper aims to present an overview of how motivational program using peer mentoring was applied to a group of University Selangor students who were the recipients of zakat funds to achieve better performance in their studies. These students mostly come from a low-income family background with less motivation to excel in their studies. A significant number of these students could not complete their studies due to poor grades in their examinations. The objective of this study is to know how far motivational programs may improve their academic achievement. For this purpose, observations on the pre- and post-examination results for these control group models were used. We focused on the two consecutive semesters, April and November 2019. The groups consisted of 114 students invited in four separate motivational programs to give them the opportunity to gain motivational input and simultaneously build team spirit. Consequently, students' motivation in the experimental group increased based on their examination results. However, there might be several factors that also contribute to the students' motivation. Limitations of this study are the small sample size and the short period in which students were asked to be part of a mentoring program. Further research should be conducted to determine the influence of students' motivation to enhance academic excellence.

Keywords: motivational program, peer mentoring, academic excellence

INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (2019) defined Zakat as a determined portion of wealth prescribed by the Almighty Himself to be dispersed to the eight categories (Asnaf) who are entitled to get it. Through zakat programs, the fund should also cover the education needs of

the asnaf. It can be religious education or general education as well (Kurnia et al., 2020). Lembaga Zakat Selangor (LZS), the leading agency to manage Zakat fund in Selangor, has appointed University Selangor (UNISEL) since 2015 as its representative collect and distribute zakat fund in UNISEL on their behalf. Zakat & Sedeqah Unit is then responsible for handling all funds collected through Zakat and charity for students who need financial assistance throughout their study period. An average fund of more than RM500,000 a year needs to be distributed to the respective recipients, including sponsoring their outstanding study fees, providing them food aid, pay their accommodation rental, and even giving them pocket money. The zakat-sponsored students in UNISEL can be categorized under two groups – LZS-sponsored students (directly sponsored by LZS) and UNISEL-sponsored students (identified by Zakat & Sedeqah Unit). LZS is sponsoring more than 350 students, while Zakat UNISEL sponsored more than 280 students. According to LZS, a significant number of warning letters issued to their UNISEL-sponsored students due to their Grade Point Average (GPA) was less than 2.0.

Heirdsfield et al. (2008) highlight that in attracting students to study at the university, an amount of money is invested; however, little is being invested in retaining them. Quite a number of students whom the zakat fund sponsored were found not to achieve academic excellence even though their study fees were entirely paid. Other personal financial assistance without them needed to worry about it. As a result, there were a number of dropouts from the university throughout the semester. The application of a mentoring scheme, especially peer mentoring, would be much helpful to reduce the problem. According to the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, “Mentorship is defined as a professional, working alliance in which individuals work together over time to support the personal and professional [and academic] growth, development, and success of the relational partner through the provision of career and psychosocial support” (NASEM, 2019, p. 37) as well as academic support. The peer mentoring relationship includes one peer with similar age and is more experienced or skilled than the other peer.

Numerous studies have examined the effectiveness of mentoring in a specific condition and several factors which may influence mentor-mentee relationships (e.g., Aikens et al., 2016; Byars-Winston et al., 2015; Daniels et al. 2016; Morales et al. 2018; Morales et al. 2019). Collier (2017) concluded that both hierarchical and peer mentoring are practical approaches in promoting college student success. Meanwhile, Lunsford et al. (2017) state that scholars have

reported the benefits of mentoring for those who participate in it. Based on the population participating in the mentoring program, the outcome relates to specific academic or job needs. However, there are a number of students amongst those being helped who were not doing well in their academic standing. Some were terminated from the university due to failing to achieve at least CGPA 2.0 for three semesters. This situation should not happen in the first place since money is not the main problem for them. All or part of their tuition fees were paid using the Zakat fund.

On top of that, they also received pocket money for their use. Hence, academic motivation should play an essential role in education because it may produce positive outputs. Since academic motivation includes creative thinking skills and learning skills, but according to researchers, the concept of motivation has a more significant degree of multi-faceted, non-cognitive psychosocial structure, students' satisfaction from school, and reasons for school attendance and doing homework (Sivrikaya, 2019). Regarding this matter, Zakat & Sedeqah Unit is exploring another responsibility, i.e., developing these groups of students to achieve academic excellence through peer mentoring. As Gimbel and Kefor (2018) mentioned, the feeling of being connected to professional peers and colleagues is an integral part of helping educational leaders feel connected and be satisfied in their jobs. A group of selected excellent students was chosen and invited to join a particular train-on-trainer program. They are then expected to share and guide their colleagues in another separate program towards achieving better results in the examination.

This paper aims to establish a peer mentoring program among zakat-sponsored students and ensure they achieve at least a GPA of 3.0 every semester and reduce the number of failures among zakat-sponsored students. Based on the previously mentioned objectives, this study is determined to answer two research questions. First, what is the impact of the motivational program among zakat-sponsored students? Secondly, to what extent the motivational program may influence students' academic achievement?

METHODOLOGY

With some allocation contributed from several corporate agencies, Zakat & Sedeqah Unit has planned and carried out four motivational programs for these students (see Table 1). The selection of students for each program depends on the objective that needs to be achieved.

For the first program, all participants are expected to be developed as a mentor for other students. They are a group of excellent UNISEL-sponsored students who scored a GPA of 3.0 every semester. This program gave the task to plan and conduct a consecutive program that involved students with lower grades.

The second group was among the average student under UNISEL-sponsored students whom the first group will mentor. They are being chosen among those who obtained a GPA of 2.0 – 2.9 in their examination. The third and fourth groups were chosen from LZS-sponsored students. Due to the excellent outcome from the first and second programs, the latter two groups were targeted to provide the solution for the numbers of LZS-sponsored students who were given the warning letters. These groups were also expected to become mentors to their colleagues. However, due to the pandemic Covid-19, the follow-up programs with their prospect mentees have to be postponed to another date yet to be confirmed.

Table 1: List of motivational programs held

NO.	PROGRAM	DATE	PARTICIPANT	OBJECTIVE
1.	Kembara Asnaf UNISEL	30 August – 1 September 2019	24	To develop future mentors.
2.	<i>Towards 1st Class</i> Asnaf UNISEL	27 – 29 September 2019	24	To apply mentoring activities to mentees.
3.	Kembara Asnaf LZS	20 – 22 October 2019	40	To develop future mentors.
4.	Kem Pembangunan Asnaf LZS	4 – 5 November 2019	36	To develop future mentors.

The motivation modules applied to vary from one group to another. However, the elements of building self-confidence were included in all four programs. Students were taught to build their self-confidence through public speaking and other activities. They were encouraged to voice out their ideas and opinions throughout the programs. Students were free to use their creativity and imagination to fulfill specific tasks from the activities. Teamwork

activities will help them to feel more comfortable doing the task in a group. Apart from that, participants were also given spiritual input to strengthen their faiths to be obedient to Allah, the God.

The second program was planned and executed by selected participants from the first group. They become the mentor for a group of average students chosen to participate in the second program. Zakat & Sedeqah Unit acted as the advisor and observer throughout the whole program. From our observation, the mentor group has done a tremendous job organizing all the activities in the program. Even though they were the organizer, they took part in all the activities with the targeted students. The other participants did not feel like they were the object of the program.

Research Instruments

Feedback from all participants was collected once each of the programs finished through a simple survey. Overall, most participants were satisfied with the way the program is conducted. Moreover, due to their low-income family background, they could not afford to attend such a program before. As a result, they are also willing to become the mentor for the following program. Towards the end of the semester, all the participants' results were collected from the system provided by UNISEL Examination Unit for comparison purposes. The data collected were from the examination result from pre- and post-program. Since all the four programs being held between August and November 2019, in this case, the students' results were chosen for the April 2019 semester and November 2019 semester.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results taken from the semester before and after the program show an increase in students' results, i.e., their GPA. Figure 1 shows the average CGPA for male and female students, while Figure 2 shows the comparison of CGPA 3.00 and above before and after the program. This is a clear sign of the students' academic achievement increasing from the previous semester. Figure 3 focus more on the percentage of students who improved or maintained their excellent result. This result is in line with Tinoco-Giraldo et al. (2020), who stated that mentoring might reduce failure rates and lower dropout rates apart from helping students overcome difficulties in mastering several subjects in higher education.

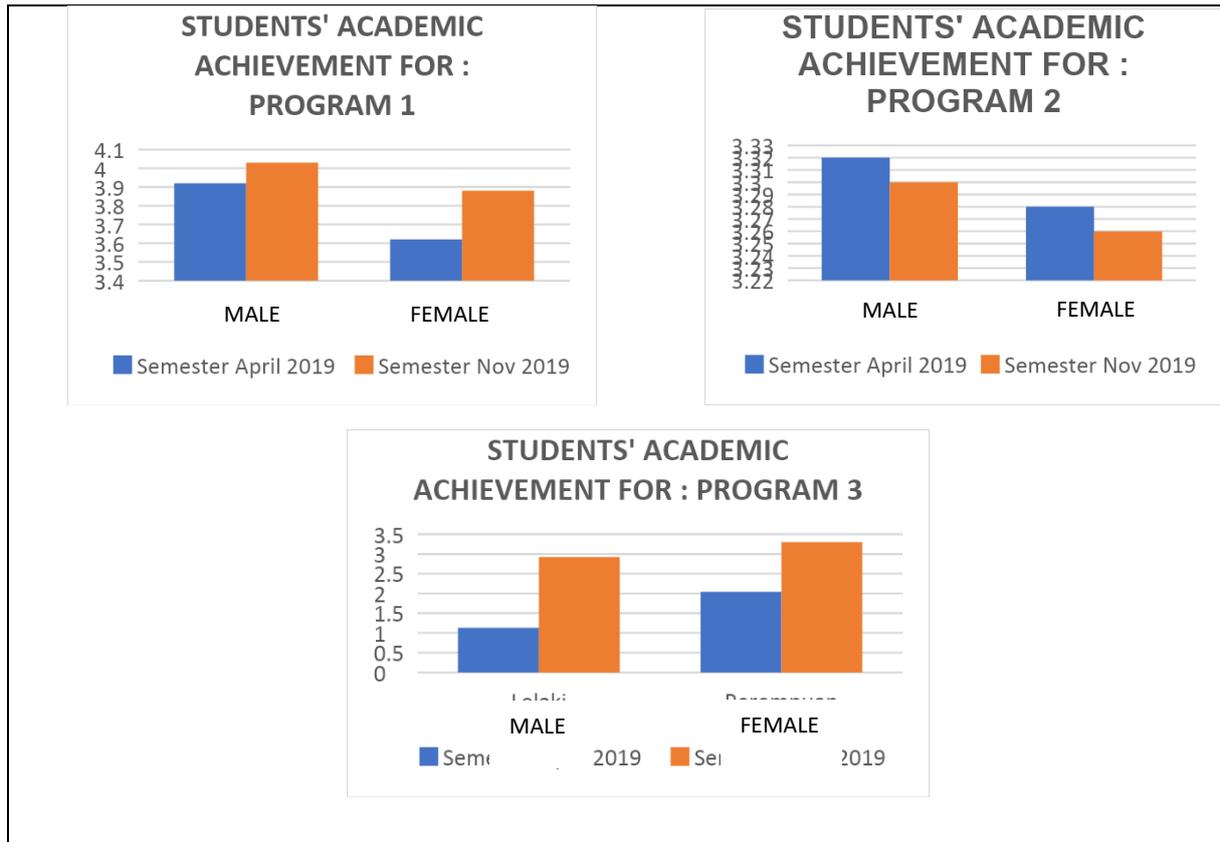


Figure 1: The comparison of students' academic achievement for 3 programs based on gender

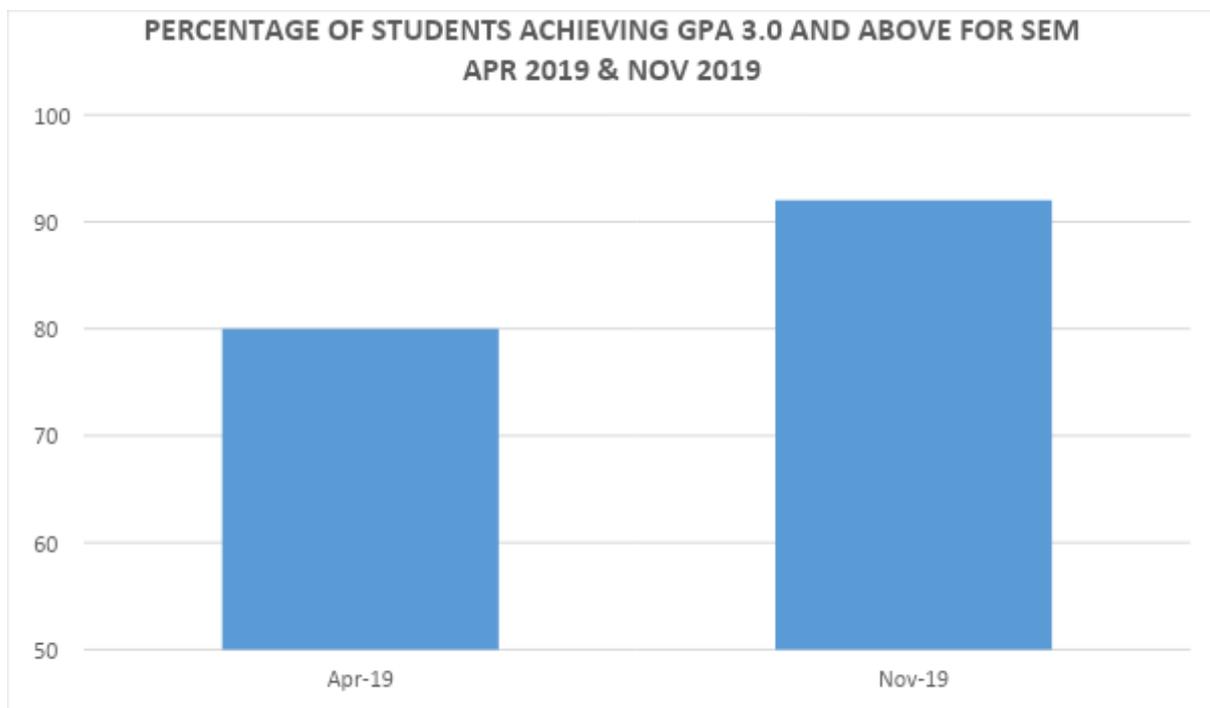


Figure 2: Percentage of students achieving GPA 3.00 and above in two-semester consecutively

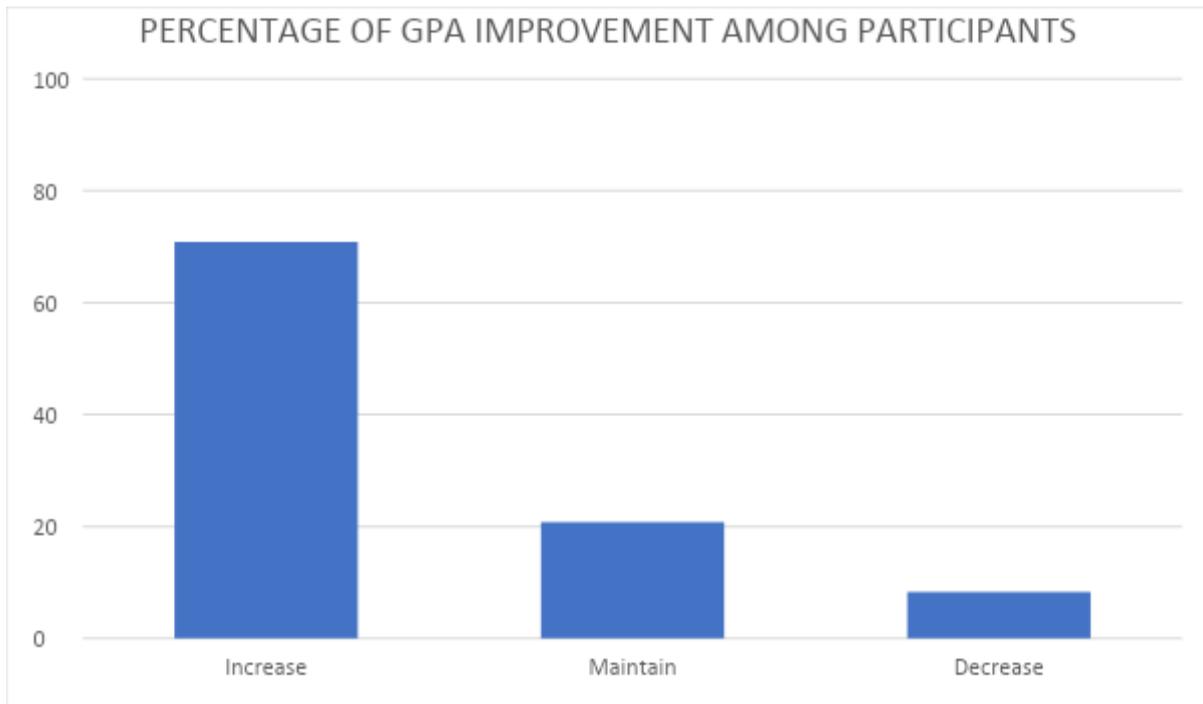


Figure 3: Percentage of GPA Improvement

Even though other factors may contribute to better achievement of the participants, at least it is a good start to improve the study in understanding them more in the future. The immediate result of their CGPA obtained before and after the program can be justified as the direct impact of the motivational program. According to Srivikaya (2019), academic motivation is an essential concept in education in producing motivational output. Figure 1 shows that three programs were conducted for the target group to compare students' academic achievement for the two semesters, April - before joining the program and November semester after the program was conducted. The average achievement was increased due to the impact of the motivational program. Figure 2 shows that more than 90% of the participants managed to obtain Cumulative Grade Average Point (CGPA) above 3.0 compared to only 80% in the previous semester. It shows a significant improvement in overall participants. Figure 3 focuses on the percentage of students who gained a higher GPA compared to the previous semester. More than 70% of the participants achieved a better GPA, while another 20% maintained their achievement. Only less than 10% of the participants have a slight decrease in their CGPA. However, this less than 10% of students were still having their CGPA still above 3.0.

Hence, we were convinced that these groups of students need more motivational programs to boost their motivation to achieve a good GPA and CGPA. The budget allocated for such a program will be a good investment, measured through their academic results. On top

of that, they will be more comfortable being motivated by their colleagues through the mentoring program. In offering assistance to new students, mentoring programs should be applied to provide more advanced students new connections and welcome and connect them in the environment for everyone involved (McConnel, 2019).

CONCLUSION

The result clearly shows that these students need some motivational programs apart from their regular syllabus in the classroom to boost their academic performance. A detailed study needs to be carried out to determine the real factors that might hinder them from excelling in their examination. The main challenge in carrying out the motivational program among all these students is their participation. It is pretty challenging to get these groups to participate in the motivational program due to no enforcement being applied upon those who do not attend. It is suggested that future programs will involve lecturers who may consider participating in such programs may contribute to the students' coursework marks. There is also a need to restructure the allocation of zakat funds so that they are being spent to assist them financially and, more importantly, the need to allocate some portion for human development in producing students with towering personality and academic excellence through the motivational program.

The outcome of this study can be shared with the main stakeholder, i.e., Lembaga Zakat Selangor. Since they face how their sponsored students do not do well in their examination, such input should assist them in planning for future human development programs especially involving students from low-income family backgrounds. Other higher educational institutions may find these results beneficial for their planning since each institution has its department or unit that manages the zakat fund. For other corporate agencies who contributed their zakat portion to academic institutions yearly, such a program's outcome may satisfy them, especially when sponsoring the program. For future research, there should be a detailed survey on each participant to know better what factors transpired them to achieve better results in their study. They will also contribute their opinion in determining which module during the program affects them most. Through such feedback, the existing module can be improved to develop a mentor from time to time. This study may be extended in the future for other sponsoring agencies like Majlis Amanah Rakyat (MARA) or Public Service Department (PSD). They would like to know and plan for their future student development program.

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