



## Asian Journal of Management and Commerce

E-ISSN: 2708-4523  
P-ISSN: 2708-4515  
AJMC 2021; 2(1): 78-82  
© 2021 AJMC  
[www.allcommercejournal.com](http://www.allcommercejournal.com)  
Received: 08-12-2020  
Accepted: 10-01-2021

**Tilagavati Subramaniam**  
Faculty of Social Sciences,  
Quest International University  
Putra, Malaysia

**Ezhar Tamam**  
Department of  
Communication, Faculty of  
Modern Language and  
Communication University  
Putra Malaysia, Malaysia

**Jusang Bolong**  
Department of  
Communication, Faculty of  
Modern Language and  
Communication, University  
Putra Malaysia, Malaysia

**Moniza Waheed**  
Department of  
communication, Faculty of  
Modern Language and  
Communication University  
Putra Malaysia, Malaysia

**Correspondence**  
**Tilagavati Subramaniam**  
Faculty of Social Sciences,  
Quest International University  
Putra, Malaysia

# The relationship between engagement in Co-curricular diversity and civic responsibility: Exploring gender differences

**Tilagavati Subramaniam, Ezhar Tamam, Jusang Bolong and Moniza Waheed**

## Abstract

The amount of outside classroom engagement students gains while in the campus is important to develop their civic responsibility. Developing civic responsibility in the students allows the higher education to fulfil their basic mission which is the preparation of good citizen. The aim of this study is to analyze the relationship between engagement in co-curricular diversity and civic responsibility. Gender differences were also assessed. co-curricular diversity is involvement of student in sports, clubs, debate, drama, student council, volunteerism and other social events (Bowman, 2011; Denson, 2009; Reason, 2013; Shamsudin, Ismail, Al-Mamun, & Nordin, 2014) [5, 10, 17, 19]. Data are obtained through a survey questionnaire to total of 720 respondents from three public research universities in Malaysia. This study employs quantitative method using Spearman correlation and analysis of covariance (ANCOVA). The study found that there are some gender differences in the degrees of participation in co-curricular diversity activities and the development of civic responsibility characteristics. The more exposure student in outside classroom experiences, the more develop student civic responsibility. This study shows that there is small disparity between male and female students and their levels of engagement in activities that may ultimately influence engagement in civic life. Present study suggests University should create more co-curricular diversity opportunities for both genders to avoid disparity.

**Keywords:** Engagement in co-curricular diversity, gender, civic responsibility

## Introduction

The changes in social economic and technology patterns of society have produced shifting in younger citizen's mentality, which are less inclined to feel a sense of duty to participate civically in conventional ways, while displaying a greater inclination to embrace issues connected to lifestyle values, ranging from moral concerns to environmental quality (Ahrari, Othman, Hassan, Samah, & D'Silva, 2014) [2]. Education is a tool by which to help students learn about civic society. Higher education plays a major part in encouraging student participation in public life.

In Malaysia, higher education is entrusted to facilitate development of civic responsibility among students. In fact, the goal of higher education is not only to prepare students for productive careers, but also to shape a citizenry that can promote the public good. The continuous demand by the Minister of Higher Education in Malaysia to universities and colleges to produce highly qualified graduates, who can serve the society, is prompted institution of higher learning to consider the enhancement of civic responsibility through curriculum and co-curricular engagement.

The college and universities environment is a place where student learn to exercise their democratic abilities and prepare them for their impending moral and civic responsibilities (Lott, 2013) [12]. The amount of outside classroom engagement students gains while in the campus is important to enhance their civic responsibility. Developing civic responsibility in the students allows the higher education to fulfil their basic mission which is the preparation good citizenry upon graduation. Many studies have revealed involvement in co-curricular activities are beneficial in the multiple domains. Most of the researches on student engagement in co-curricular diversity has focussed on the impact in academic performance, development in leadership skill, political engagement, and civic outcomes (Zacherman & Foubert, 2014) [23] and comparatively less attention has been devoted to the examination of

Gender differences in the pathways towards enhancement of civic responsibility through co-curricular diversity. Such limitation is purpose of this study to explore gender gap in the relationship of student engagement in co-curricular diversity and civic responsibility.

### Engagement in Co-curricular Diversity

Many scholars have reviewed that co-curricular diversity is involvement of student in sports, clubs, debate, drama, student council, volunteerism and other social events (Bowman, 2011; Denson, 2009; Reason, 2013; Shamsudin, Ismail, Al-Mamun, & Nordin, 2014) <sup>[5, 10, 17, 19]</sup>. Normally, these activities are not included in the formal curriculum and students who participate in co-curricular activities do not commonly gain any grade points for it. However, these activities eventually provide real-world experiences that are not included in the formal course of study. Through these programs, students learn how to employ the knowledge they have learned in the classroom to real world scenarios.

Astin's theory of student involvement (1984), examined that involvement in out-of-classroom experiences such as participating in clubs and organizations is beneficial to student development. In addition, student's engagement in co-curricular diversity is correlated with positive gains in citizenship confidence, civic responsibility, self-knowledge, and self-efficacy outcomes (Ahmad Farouk & Husin, 2011; Ballard, 2014; Fajardo, Lott, & Contreras, 2014) <sup>[1, 4, 12]</sup>. Engagement in co-curricular activities will equip students with knowledge, skills, and values for participation in society, and encourages the students to reconstruct their society and prevent problems like racism, addiction, and inequality.

### Civic Responsibility

Civic responsibility means active participation in the public life of a community in an informed, committed and constructive manner, with a focus of common goal. Civic responsibility is an attitudinal measure of obligation towards serving or creating change in one's community (McCrillis, 2013) <sup>[15]</sup>. Sense of civic responsibility is the sense of personal responsibility individuals should feel to uphold their obligations as part of any community. Civic responsibility consists of civic activities such as hours spent volunteering in the community, action taken to promote diversity, serving in organisation and sense of control.

Exposing students to different types of co-curricular activities is likely to help them develop positive attitudes toward civic activities and community efficacy, which may lead to them to greater civic responsibility. The best predictor of the development of civic responsibility is "the students' degree of involvement ... interacting with students and faculty through curricular and co-curricular activities (Gottlieb & Robinson, 2006) <sup>[13]</sup>.

In a consideration of civic responsibility among student in the universities, it is necessary to take gender into account. Extensive research has shown many gender differences between college students in a variety of areas such as academic performance, cognitive thinking, leadership role, behaviour and political engagement (Amir, Saleha, Mohd Jela, Ahmad, 2014; Da Silva, Sanson, Smart, & Toumbourou, 2004; Sakurai, Parpala, Pyhältö, & Lindblom-Ylänne, 2014; Verba, Burns, & Donahue, 2016) <sup>[3, 2, 18, 22]</sup>. Male and female student composition in the higher education population has been lopsided. Interestingly, most

of the studies showed that female student is progressively exceeding than male student in academic performance, career and volunteerism (Brennan, Osborne, & Osborne, 2008; EACEA; Eurydice, 2009; Sontam & Gabriel, 2012; Teoh, Abdullah, Roslan, & Daud, 2013) <sup>[6, 11, 20, 21]</sup>. Bearing this fact in mind, therefore this study examines whether there are gender disparities in the relationship between student engagement in co-curricular diversity and civic responsibility.

### Research Questions

In the present study we sought to explore whether there were gender differences in the level of engagement in co-curricular diversity on enhancement civic responsibility.

We sought to answer the following research questions.

Research Question 1: Do engagement in co-curricular diversity have a significant relationship with civic responsibility among final year undergraduates?

Research Question 2: Will male and female differ in the pattern of relationship between engagement co-curricular diversity and civic responsibility?

### Method

A total of 720 self-administered survey questionnaires collected from the respondents were usable and included in the analysis. The respondents were randomly drawn from a list of undergraduate students from the university campus. Random sampling was conducted from the sampling frame. Trained researchers and assistants met the respondents to invite their voluntary participation in the survey. Prior to data collection, approval to carry out the study was first sought from the residential college directors and student affairs department. Ethics approval from the college directors was granted and with their review of the survey questionnaire contents. The respondents were encouraged to answer all questions on the survey but were also reminded that their participation was voluntary and that they were free to decline to respond to any question that they were not comfortable answering. Those who gave consent were requested to complete the questionnaires. They received a small amount of money for their participation. The sample consisted of 409 Malay, 154 Chinese, 125 Indian and 32 other ethnic minority students. There were more female (56.8.6%) than male respondents (43.2%). Respondents' ages ranged from 21 to 31 years, with a mean of 24.22 years (SD=1.34).

The research reported here is part of a research study on diversity engagement among undergraduate students. The present report focuses on gender differences in the relationship of co-curricular and civic responsibility of final year undergraduate students studying in Malaysia public research universities. The data was collected between March and May 2015. The questionnaire was in Malay language and took approximately twenty-five minutes to complete. Students who gave their informed consent completed the measures in their classrooms or residential college, supervised by researcher and research assistant. The Likert-scale format of items was explained, and participants were informed that they could ask for clarification of items.

### Measurement

An index of co-curricular diversity engagement was specifically developed for the purpose of the study. The index consisted of 11 questions related to diversity

experiences. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of experience for co-curricular diversity with the 11 items. They were asked to rate their level of participation as never to always. The level of participation was measure on a three-point Likert scale (1=no, 2=yes, sometimes, and 3=yes, frequent). They were asked ‘Attended on-campus talks on social issues’, and ‘Attended cultural awareness program/activities’, ‘Attended a leadership workshop/seminar’. Respondents responded to ‘Participated in mobility program’, ‘Participated in performing or theatre group’, ‘Joined organization that promotes cultural diversity or multiculturalism’, and ‘Work or volunteered for campus election’. Respondents were asked ‘Incorporating analysis from different perspective according to different social group into courses (e.g. ethnic, women issues, social class)’, ‘Read a life biography/autobiography of successful people irrespective of their ethnicity/nationality’, ‘Read a novel that not related to your area of undergraduate study’ and ‘Participated in association/club to explore different perspectives or viewpoints’. The 11 items was with a Cronbach’s alpha level of 0.791.

Civic responsibility was measured through the 9 questions. The respondents were asked to indicate their degree of agreement on a seven-point Likert scale (from strongly disagree to strongly agree). The nine items for civic responsibility dimension included ‘social justice, to get care about the disadvantaged in society’, ‘working together to build a better society’, ‘helping others people’, ‘make community a better place to live’, ‘make sure people are treated fairly’. Respondents were asked ‘to speak up for equality (everyone should have the same rights and opportunities)’, ‘contribute to my community and society’, ‘make a difference in my community’, ‘to help reduce hunger and poverty in the society’. The 9 items was with a Cronbach’s alpha level of 0.927. The respondents were also required to state their year of birth and the number of semesters they had completed at the university, and to indicate their demographic details such as gender, ethnicity, program of study, and type of secondary school attended.

**Data Analysis**

This study measuring relationship between engagement in co-curricular diversity and civic responsibility used Spearman correlation and to determine whether there is a difference with gender in this relationship, we used analysis of covariance (ANCOVA).

**Results**

**Reliability Analysis**

Reliability test has been conducted to examine the internal consistency of the data. Table 1 shows reliability coefficient of the study instruments. The dependent variable, civic responsibility with 9 items (Cronbach alpha 0.927). The independent variables co-curricular diversity with 11 items (Cronbach alpha 0.791).

**Table 1:** Reliability Coefficient of Study Instruments

Study Instruments	Number of items	Cronbach Alpha
Civic attitudes	9	0.927
Curricular/co-curricular diversity	11	0.791

**Descriptive Statistic**

Complete data was collected from 720 respondents from

selected public universities in Malaysia. Among them, 56.8% respondents are female while 43.2% are male. The highest percentage (78.4%) of total respondents are aged from 23 to 25 years, followed by 14.1% of the total respondents aged between 26 to 28 years; only 0.9% of the respondents are aged more than 30 years and 6.8% are aged less than 22 years. As per races, 58.6% are Malay, 21.4% are Chinese, 51.74 % are Indian, and 4.4% are from other races. The highest percentages of program of study enrolled by respondent are from sciences technology (60.7%) and social sciences at 39.3%. There were five types of secondary school attended by respondent. Most of respondents are from national school (83.8%), followed by national types school, religious school, national and national type school and national and religious at 7.8%, 2.4%, 2.1% and 4% respectively.

**Correlation Analysis**

Spearman correlation was used to measure the relationship between the independent variables and dependent variables. The objective of this test is to measure the strength and direction of the association. Co-curricular diversity was correlated with civic responsibility ( $r = 0.124, p < 0.001$ ). The correlation was significant at confidence level alpha 0.05. Independent variables had significant positively relationship with the dependent variable, civic responsibility. Direction of relationship was positive and strength was negligible. According to Guildford rule of thumb ( $<.2 =$  negligible,  $.2 =$  low,  $.4 =$  moderate,  $.7 =$  high, and  $.9 =$  very high) (Cohen, 1988).

**Table 3:** Correlation analysis

Variables	r	p
Co-curricular diversity	0.124	0.001

**Analysis of Covariance**

A one-way analysis of covariance was conducted using gender (male and female) as the independent variable, civic responsibility as the dependent variable and engagement in co-curricular diversity as the covariate. The purpose of this research question was to examine the possibility of a significant difference in civic responsibility based on gender (male and female) while controlling for an individual’s engagement in co-curricular diversity. Results were statistically showing there is a no difference between male ( $M = 54.12, SD = 7.2$ ) and female ( $M = 54.54, SD = 6.9$ ) on the relationship engagement in co-curricular diversity and civic responsibility:  $F(1,716) = 0.630, p = .423, \eta^2 = .001$ .

**Table 4:** Test of between subject effect for Dependent Variable

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p	$\eta^2$
Corrected Model	566.994	3	189	3.86	.009	.016
Intercept	71997.30	1	71997	1469	.000	.672
Gender	46.51	1	46.51	.950	.330	.001
Co-curricular	517.24	1	517.24	10.56	.001	.015
Gender*Co-curricular	30.873	1	30.87	.630	.430	.001
Error	35069.12	716	48.98			
Total	2163330	720				

$R^2 = .012$

**Discussion**

This study was carried out to determine whether there were

gender differences in the level of engagement in co-curricular diversity on enhancement civic responsibility among final year undergraduate students from three selected local public universities.

The first objective of this study was to explore relationship between engagement in co-curricular diversity and civic responsibility. Through Spearman correlation was conducted to shown relationship between engagement in co-curricular diversity and civic responsibility. Furthermore, a significant relationship was found between the dependent variable (civic responsibility) and independent variable (co-curricular diversity).

Engagement in co-curricular diversity in the campus will increase student positive feeling about importance of being socially involved in civic life. Celio (2011) <sup>[7]</sup> describes that involvement in the co-curricular activities in the college as an instrument for accruing social capital and that can facilitate to enhance civic responsibility among the students. Therefore, universities are recommended to increase more community – based activities for students. That will augment student social awareness. Miller, Rycek, & Fritson (2011) <sup>[16]</sup> added that by creating more deliberate opportunities for students to reflect on their in- and out-of-class experiences as both contributing to the same developmental goals, institutions may be able to develop their learning environments and better prepare students to meet their responsibilities to society upon graduation.

The second objective was to explore the differences male and female in the pattern of relationship between engagement co-curricular diversity and civic responsibility. The results indicate that there are no significant differences between males and females in the pattern of relationship between engagement in co-curricular diversity and civic responsibility. The F test examines the differences between males and females on engagement in co-curricular diversity and civic responsibility. This test indicated that males do have slightly higher in the relationship between engagement in co-curricular diversity and civic responsibility than females in the samples.

### Conclusion

This study shows that there is small disparity between male and female students and their levels of engagement in activities that may ultimately influence engagement in civic life. This research provides support for the importance of students' engagement in clubs and organizations in universities campuses. The more exposure of students in outside classroom experiences, the more develop civic responsibility. Given that civic responsibility is an important developmental outcome, it is suggested by the finding of the present study that more opportunities need to be created for students to actively engage in co-curricular diversity and enhance civic responsibility, and that should focus on both genders to avoid disparity.

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