Attitude of Undergraduate Students toward Leisure Activities

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ABSTRACT

DOI: 10.24818/mer/2024.02-01

The purpose of this study was to explore the attitude of undergraduate students towards leisure activities focussing on first-year and senior $(2^{nd} \text{ and } 3^{rd} \text{ year})$ students. A sample of 427 students enrolled in a South African University was selected to meet the analytical needs of the study. The instrument used is based on the Leisure Attitude Scale developed by Beard and Ragheb (1982). The results indicated that, overall, the study subjects are associated with positive attitudes towards leisure activities. One-way ANOVA procedure revealed a statistically significant difference between junior and senior students in overall leisure attitude and within cognitive and behavioural subscales. Pearson's Correlation Analysis showed a significant positive correlation between the overall LAS and different sub-scales.

KEYWORDS: *leisure activity, leisure attitude scale, South Africa, university students.*

JEL CLASSIFICATION: A12, L83, Z13.

1. INTRODUCTION

Leisure activities play an important role in individual and social human development. The leisure not only brings pleasure to a person, but also influences personal thinking and performance in various activities (Siyahtas & Çakir, 2021). Consequently, Zarotis and Tokarski (2020) argue that leisure activities are necessary for every human being. Leisure activity is described as a life domain in which persons find pleasure, fulfilment, friendship, enjoyment, and well-being. Therefore, participation in these activities contributes to an equally enhances personal health and social life maintenance (Padial-Ruz et al., 2020). Throughout the ages leisure time and activities have evolved from being a mere break from work, recreation, and/or entertainment in which pleasure is separated from work; and become one of the factors that increase both personal health and productivity contributing to a significant reduction in government costs (Bouargane, 2020). In some spheres of life, work and leisure have become intertwined or synonyms, where work became leisure, and leisure became work (Zarotis &Tokarski, 2020). Consequently, leisure attitude is considered one of the factors employed in predicting the direction and meaning of human-being lives more specifically during the yang ages (Liu & Da, 2022).

Irrespective of their importance, leisure activities can be associated with a positive or negative attitude (Freire, 2017). Positive leisure attitudes are improved only when the anticipated status of being is expected (Ma et al., 2012), while a negative attitude toward leisure evolves and is considered unnecessary if the desired state of being is seen as unproductive or a waste of time as it, in most cases, leads to regret and feeling guilty (Cho, 2021; Stone & O'shea, 2013). Given the controversial views concerning leisure activities, various research considered both internal (characteristics of individual's perception) and external (environments, activities and contexts) circumstances that influence life trajectories (Freire et al. 2016). Most recent studies

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emphasised the effect of positive benefits of partaking in leisure activities (Li et al., 2021; Gürbüz, 2017; Kara et al., 2019) as the latter is considered one of the sources of welfare growth and life satisfaction. Thus, the tendency or willingness about participating in leisure activities is often stimulated by an individual's attitude, expected results or benefit from that specific leisure activity (Ragheb & Beard, 1982).

Owing to work pressure, boring environment, overwhelming academic routine and fatigue; leisure time and activities have become an essential part of life within an academic environment. In this regard, leisure activities are perceived as recreational involving relaxation, regeneration, healing, and purification (Latip et al., 2020). Generally, recreational and/or leisure activities are described as those activities in which individuals freely participate in to regain and/or improve their physical fitness and mental creativity through lessening mental and physical exhaustion (Karaderi, 2021).

According to Teixeira and Freire (2013), leisure studies are generally built on affective, behavioural and cognitive attitudes toward leisure. In other words, the most known three factors of leisure attitudes are affective, cognitive, and behaviour. These factors also play an indispensable role in an individual's learning and academic life (Ragheb & Beard, 1982). Although there exists a vast literature on the concept of leisure and that leisure activities play a crucial role in both individual and social life development, there are few studies focussing on attitudes towards leisure activities in the South African context. Consequently, the current study aims at exploring the attitude of undergraduate students towards leisure activities focusing on the first year and senior students (2nd and 3rd year), at specific selected University. Prior to the methodology section that discusses data correction and analytical approaches, it is important to have a concise discussion on the linkage between leisure attitude and leisure activities. The subsequent section also discusses how the relationship between attitude and leisure activity can affect academic performance and satisfaction.

Several studies analysed the attitude towards university students' leisure activities. However, most of them generalised their approach by taking an entire university or many universities as a sample. The current study distinguishes itself from previous studies as it focuses on a specific group of students (second and third years) from one particular university in South Africa. Additionally, the recent regulations of the COVID-19 pandemic reduced students' involvement in leisure activities, so it is essential to evaluate students' attitudes towards leisure activities during this pandemic period. The remaining part of the paper is structured as follows: section two provides brief literature on leisure activities. The third section provides the data collection process and the methodology for data analysis. The fourth section reports and discusses findings, while the last section, section five, provides a concluding summary of the article, followed by the study's limitations.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW ON ATTITUDE TO LEISURE ACTIVITIES

Leisure is not an easy concept to define and study due to its association with psychological and sociological motivations and benefits that attract a person to participate in leisure activities (Chen & Pang, 2012; Haworth & Veal, 2004). Leisure activities, on the other hand, thought changeable contingent on nature and context, play a crucial role in both personal and social behavioural improvements. They assist in creating social identity, a sense of belonging, psychological well-being, and relief from work stress (Beggs et al., 2014). It is also important to highlight that there exist various ways of participating in leisure activities. These include activities such as reading an interesting book or journal, hanging out with friends, hiking or working, watching a preferred movie, or joining a sports club. Therefore, according to (Willits & Willits, 1986) leisure activity refers to any form of recreational activity that generates joy and gratification, which in return lead to the attainment of both personal and social goals. Individual benefits from leisure activities can simply be classified into three groups namely physical, mental, and psychological.

Leisure activities play an indispensable role in preserving social peace and welfare and maintaining individuals' healthy environment during their existence by enhancing of the quality their lives (Sahin, 2015; Güngör & Çelik, 2020). Irrespective of the general perception of the benefits of leisure activities, it is essential to highlight that some leisure activities might be harmful to individual and social well-being. Thus, it is fundamental to select good or beneficial leisure activities from bad and harmful ones. This can only be achieved if proper guidance is provided and if a positive attitude towards a given leisure activity is well developed (Güngör & Çelik, 2020) because the attitude is acknowledged to be a key driver and influence of human behaviour and to have a direct relationship with individual's actions (Tavsancil, 2014). If a person develops a positive attitude toward a given activity, it is more like that person will perform and consistent action toward that activity. In this regard, it is expected that a student whose positive attitude is oriented towards a given type of leisure activity would become more productive and gain satisfaction from that same activity. Attitude towards positive leisure activity can be learnt, guided and plays a crucial role in developing a positive attitude. Therefore, in his study on teachers' attitudes towards leisure activities, Öztürk et al. (2020) asserts that a teacher may encourage or discourage learners (who will soon become students)'s attitudes towards leisure activities in their academic lives or adulthood.

In addition to the endogenous factors that influence the relationship between attitudes and leisure activities, the literature also suggests an interaction between attitude and leisure activity. In other words, an individual's positive attitude toward leisure activity enhances the practice of that activity, while the regular practice of a leisure activity enhances the attitude towards that activity (Ozdemir, 2020; Ozdemir & Ayyıldız Durhan, 2020). Since attitude is a tendency attributed to a person that recurrently shapes their feelings, thoughts, and behaviours and the same attitude is intertwined with leisure, it can be concluded that leisure activities play an important role in university students' success (Ayhan & Bilge, 2020; Yaşartürk, 2020; Yaşartürk, et al., 2022).

A good combination of attitude and leisure activity improves satisfaction and performance of other activities including academic or learning activities. A positive relationship between attitude, leisure activity and academic performance was supported by various studies. Ayhan and Bilge (2020) investigated the connection between leisure attitudes and life satisfaction levels of universities students. The findings of their study indicated that leisure activities improve the health and performance of universities students by reducing loneliness and stress experienced by students and; consequently, increase their performance. Cho (2021) also conducted a study on the leisure attitude and satisfaction relationship. Their findings revealed that leisure activities affect all spheres of human development and improve quality and academic satisfaction among the students within tertiary educational institutions. Furthermore, to assess the effect of attitude and leisure activities on students in science studies, Jdaitawi et al. (2020) conducted a study focusing on Engineering and Medicine Colleges from Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University. The study results suggested that a positive attitude towards leisure activities increases students' motivations in participating in learning activities and thereafter improves their performances in various subjects.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Participants and sample

The study participants consisted of 450 undergraduate students who enrolled at a South African University. After removing incomplete and incorrectly filled questionnaires, analyses presented in the current study were carried out on a sample of 427 participants. The sample selection followed a simple random sampling process to collect the necessary data. The random sample is the best-acknowledged probability sampling through which every element of the population has an equal chance to be selected (Churchill &Brown, 1996; Coldwell & Herbst, 2004; Zikmund, 2000). More than half of the participants were female students (54.1%), while the remaining 45.9 % were male. The mean age of the participants was 19.93 (SD=2.08) years and almost all of them were not married (95.9%). Of 427 participants, 49.9% were senior (2nd and 3rd) students; while 50.1% were first-year students. The racial distribution of the sample population showed that the majority (83.9%) of the students were Africans. The research study has complied with the ethical standards of academic research and approval was obtained from the authorities of the research ethics committee at the university. Participation in the research was voluntary, and participants were allowed to withdraw at any stage.

3.2 Research instrument

The used research instrument is a questionnaire that measured students' demographic characteristics and attitudes towards leisure activities. Question items that measured attitudes toward leisure activities were drawn from the Leisure Attitude Measurement (LAM) originally known as the Leisure Attitude Scale (LAS) developed by Beard and Ragheb (1982). This scale was selected because it has been validated by experts, tested in various similar samples, and is widely used. Thus, it does not require any additional validation. The LAM scale consists of 36 items describing a broad range of cognitive, affective, and behavioural attitudes toward leisure activities. The cognitive subscale contains 12 items related to information about people's general knowledge and beliefs about leisure and the benefits of participating. The *affective* subscale comprises 12 elements related to how people like or dislike leisure activities. The behavioural subscale accounts for 12 items related to people's present, past, and intended actions towards leisure activities (Ragheb & Beard, 1982). Participants rated each element on a five-point Likert-type scale with responses ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always). Interpreting those scores, Bowtell (1993) indicated that an individual with a mean score equal to or less than 2.5 in any subscale or total score needs to be educated about the benefits of leisure.

3.3 Data analysis

Ragheb and Beard (1982) consulted 31 experts in the domain of leisure attitude and social psychology, who confirmed the appropriateness and validity of LAS. However, internal reliability was tested in this study by the use of Cronbach's Alpha. In general, descriptive statistics including mean and standard deviation were used to analyse the data. Further, the analysis of variance (ANOVA) procedure was used to examine the difference in leisure attitude between the first year and senior students. To account for multiple comparisons, a Boferroni test was applied to the alpha level to adjust for errors associated with multiple mean comparisons.

4. RESULTS

Reliability analysis of leisure attitude showed a strong reliable measure with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.96, as well as each of the leisure attitude subscales (0.91 for cognitive, 0.94 for effective and 0.89 for behavioural factor). The analysis showed that overall, subjects have positive attitudes towards leisure activities (M=3.49, SD=0.71 and all subscales of LAS showed a positive attitude towards leisure activities. The highest rate factor was affective (M=3.64, SD=0.82) followed by cognitive (M=3.61, SD=0.78) and finally behavioural factor (M=3.20, SD=0.82). The highest rated item was "people need leisure activities" (M= 3.89, SD=1.15) while the lowest was "I engage in leisure activities even when I am busy" (M=2.88, SD=1.31).

One-way ANOVA test revealed a statistically significant difference between first-year and senior students in overall leisure attitude (F=3.28, p<0.01), within cognitive (F=9.99, p<0.01) and behavioural (F=15.68, p<0.001) subscales. Senior students indicated a better attitude towards leisure activities (M=3.60, SD=0.70) compared to their junior counterparts (M=3.37, SD=0.72). Further analysis showed that senior students were significantly inclined to cognitive and behavioural reactions (M=3.73, SD=0.73 and M=3.35, SD=0.80 respectively) relatively to junior students (M=3.50, SD=0.8 and M=3.05, SD=0.88 respectively) while they expressed similar levels of agreement with the affective attitude. Table 1 depicts the perceived attitudes to leisure activities among junior and senior students. To confirm the ANOVA results, the Mann-Whitney U test was estimated as a non-parametric test, and the P-values of the U test are in the last column of Table 1. These non-parametric results confirm the findings from the ANOVA test.

Table 1. Leisure attitude						
Factor	Μ	SD	F	U*P-Values*		
Overall leisure attitude	3.49	.9 0.71	10.78	0.002		
	5.49		(0.001)			
Cognitive	2.62	0.79	9.99	0.004		
-	3.62 0.78	0.78	(0.002)			
Affective	3.64 0.85	0.85	2.52	0.15		
	5.04	0.85	(0.113)			
Behavioural	3.20	0.82	15.68	< 0.001		
5.20	0.82	(0.00)				

P-values in the brackets, *U = Mann Whitney U test statisticSource: Authors' estimations

Table 2.	Correlation	between	factors

Factor	Cognitive	Affective	Behavioural			
Cognitive	1	0.77**	0.55**			
Affective		1	0.64**			
Behavioural			1			

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). Source: Authors' estimations

Pearson's Correlation Analysis was used to examine the relationship between factors of LAS. As it is shown in Table 2, all factors of LAS showed a significant positive correlation to each other. This suggests that those students who reported higher levels of affective attitude also reported higher levels of affective and behavioural attitude. Pearson correlations between subscales ranged between 0.55 and 0.77. Cognitive and affective subscales showed the

highest correlation in this study (r=0.77; p <0.001). The correlation between the affective and the behavioural subscale (r=0.63; p <0.001) was higher than that between the cognitive and the behavioural subscale (r=0.55; p<0.001).

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Results indicated that the LAS had strong reliability. The analysis showed that overall subjects are linked with positive attitudes toward leisure activities. LAS could be taken as an important instrument in the leisure study, since positive attitudes appear to be associated with greater participation in leisure activities (Teixeira & Freire, 2013). Therefore, the experience from participation in leisure activities tends to be positively evaluated, which improves knowledge about the relationship between behaviours and attitudes. The mean scores showed that the cognitive dimension had the highest score relative to other subscales. This finding indicated a strong association between knowledge and attitude towards leisure activities. Participants rated the behavioural factors the lowest, compared to other subscales, indicating a weak association between attitudes and behaviours. This low rate of behavioural component shows that attitude towards leisure appeared to be more cognitive and affective reactions. These findings are consistent with those of Teixeira and Freire (2013) and Ragheb and Beard (1982), who find cognitive to be the highest rated factor, followed by affective and then behavioural.

All factors of LAS showed a significant positive correlation to each other, as Teixeira and Freire (2013) also found it. This suggests that those who reported higher levels of affective attitude also reported higher levels of affective and behavioural factors of LAS. Similar to the findings of Ragheb and Beard (1982), the cognitive and affective subscales showed the highest correlation in this study. The correlation between the affective and the behavioural subscale was higher than that between the cognitive and the behavioural subscale. Ragheb and Beard (1982) argued that behavioural intentions result from feeling rather than knowledge about leisure activities. This indicates the existence of a gap between what participants felt and knew about leisure.

One-way ANOVA procedure revealed a statistically significant difference between a junior and senior student in overall leisure attitude and within cognitive and behavioural subscales. Senior students were significantly inclined toward cognitive and behavioural factors relative to the junior student, while they expressed similar levels of agreement with the affective factor. The plausible explanation could be that orientations have not contributed enough to first-year students, especially in terms of leisure activities. Additionally, our survey was carried out one month after the beginning of the academic year which explains that the firstyear student was still new on the campus and surrounding places. If this study was carried out at the end of the year, maybe different results would be found. A less motivation to participate in a certain leisure activity might lead to a poor attitude towards that leisure activity (Hsieh, 1998) while, a positive attitude and experience with leisure promote participation in leisure activities (Freire & Fonte, 2007).

The overall findings of this study show that students' attitude influences involvement in leisure activity and this is critical as participation in leisure activities has a significant implication on students' attitude towards academic activities and their satisfaction and/or success. In other words, Attitude, leisure activity, and academic performance are interactive and complementary in various spheres of human development. This study's findings revealed that students with positive attitudes tend to exhibit higher levels of engagement, persistence,

and self-regulation, which ultimately contribute to improved academic performance. This is similar to the findings of other studies (Ayhan & Bilge, 2020; Cho, 2021; Öztürk et al., 2020; Yaşartürk, 2020; Yaşartürk, et al., 2022), which concluded that leisure activities and positive attitudes improve various aspect of human development. Positive attitudes toward leisure and learning foster a desire to acquire knowledge, embrace challenges, and embrace a growth mindset, positively influencing students' ability to overcome academic limitations (Ayhan & Bilge, 2020). Subsequently, leisure activities incorporate several recreational pursuits that students willingly engage in during their free time. These activities offer crucial opportunities for students to relax, unwind, and explore their personal interests beyond the academic environment (Cho, 2021; Öztürk et al., 2020). Therefore, our findings confirm that proper engagement in constructive leisure activities certainly influences academic performance.

Participation in leisure activities aligned with personal interests enhances academic performance and improves students' focus, motivation, self-confidence, concentration, self-efficacy, and cognitive abilities (Güngör & Çelik, 2020). In this regard, leisure activities act as a buffer against academic stress, fostering mental well-being, and preventing burnout while facilitating academic success (Ozdemir, 2020). Furthermore, a positive attitude to learning activities stimulates the students' possibility to be involved in advantageous leisure activities that influence academic performance (Ozdemir & Ayyıldız Durhan, 2020). It is important to highlight that a positive attitude encourages a proactive approach to pursuing leisure activities that contribute to students' personal growth and intellectual development. Thus, the plausible explanation behind our findings is that a positive leisure attitude increases leisure activities, which serve as a tool to enhance academic skills, foster positive feedback, and eventually increase academic achievement. Similarly, other recent findings in the literature indicate that the three concepts not only influence each other, but are also the core engine of human development (Belo et al., 2020; Cho, 2021; Jdaitawi et al., 2020).

6. CONCLUSIONS

The main purpose of this study was to explore the attitude of undergraduate students enrolled in a South African University toward leisure activities. Firstly, the reviewed literature review has provided a brief association between attitude, leisure activities, and academic performance. Results from analysis of collected data indicated that undergraduate students had a positive attitude towards leisure activities. The mean scores showed that the cognitive dimension had the highest score relative to other subscales, while the participants rated behavioural factors the lowest. A difference was found when comparing junior and senior students regarding their attitudes toward leisure activities, indicating the importance of student familiarity with the campus environment. These findings suggest intervention programmes such as orientations of new students have not contributed enough to the integration of first-year students at the selected university and other similar South African universities. Thus, intervention programs promoting positive beliefs about leisure and strategies of participation in leisure activities are needed during campus orientation, while trying to minimise the constraints and maximise adherence to structured leisure opportunities available. The limitation of this study is that it only focused on the attitude without exploring how such attitudes translated into involvement in leisure activities. Thus, future research can examine how attitudes towards leisure activities translate into actual participation in leisure activities and possibly assess the types of leisure activities that improve academic performance. Furthermore, future research needs to investigate the perception of the importance and role of leisure to individuals with different demographic aspects within a different cultural context.

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