The Recreational Programs to Promote the Happiness of Students at Rajamangala University of Technology, Lower Central Higher Education Network Group, Thailand

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Abstract

Mental health problems like depression and sedentary behavior are increasing, especially among university students. This research and development study aimed to create and develop recreational programs to promote student happiness. The research was conducted in three phases. The sample group in the first phase consisted of 400 students from Rajamangala University of Technology, Lower Central Higher Education Network Group, Thailand, and the sample group in 2-3 phases consisted of 19 experts. The research tools used include a questionnaire and in-depth interview guidelines. Phase 1 revealed that the preferred activities among students were, e.g., outdoor/nature activities (mean = 3.13), special activities during festivals (mean = 3.11), and social activities (mean = 3.10). Phase 2 developed a recreational program that included eight activities based on student needs: 1. Separation activity...tell them to identify 2. Self-reflection activity...in the shadows of the past 3. Running activity...don't roll and fall backwards. 4. Volunteer activity for artificial coral conservation 5. Tie-dye activity...tie and dye 6. Karaoke Singing Contest activity 7. Beautiful garden arrangement in glass bottles activity and 8. Tea Tree Ranger parade activity. These programs are offered in three formats: a full-time format (eight weeks, once a week), a condensed format (four weeks, twice a week), and the interest format, which is to choose 1-2 activities according to the sub-components of happiness. A 42-item happiness assessment tool was also developed to fit the context of those students. The findings of Phase 3 were that the recreational program was feasible and suitable for implementation.

Keywords*:* Development of recreational program, Student happiness, Rajamangala University of Technology

1. Introduction

Nowadays, higher education is intensifying educational competition, higher education students face high pressure from academic expectations, social adaptation, and future life planning. Research by Chanrasena (2012) clearly indicates that these pressures cause accumulated stress that affects both mental and physical health, particularly among students who lack effective emotional management tools. This situation challenges the

traditional assumption that "educational success inevitably leads to happiness," because success without well-being is like profit paid for with an extremely high cost of life. However, the solution does not lie in reducing academic standards, but in creating balance between Achievement and Well-being. Ryff's research proposes an important framework through "6-dimensional happiness indicators" that cover complete psychological dimensions: Self-Acceptance, Positive Relations, Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Purpose in Life, and Personal Growth (Ryff, 1989). This framework not only aligns with the World Health Organization's approach (WHOQOL-BREF) emphasizing holistic 4-dimensional happiness but is also endorsed by Thailand's National Recreation Development Plan, 3rd Edition (2017-2021) which clearly states that "quality of life comes from living with happiness" (Department of Physical Education, Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2017).

Recreational activities have thus been elevated from "general stress relievers" to strategic tools for human development as an important foundation according to Kultawatvijai (2013), which explains that recreation consists of activities that promote comprehensive competencies - physical, mental, emotional, social, intellectual, and spiritual - through three important mechanisms: 1) Creating Flow State according to Csikszentmihalyi's theory that helps participants focus until they forget their suffering (Dusdimeta et al., 2015) 2)Systematic program design using the APIED model (Assessment-Planning-Implementation-Evaluation-Documentation) (Carter & Smith, 2016) and 3) Resource integration of both indoor facilities and outdoor facilities efficiently (Kraus, 1997)

For Thai students who face specific challenges such as transitioning from dependent learning culture to independent thinking (Autonomy) and coping with highly competitive society, recreational activities serve as bridges between theory and practice. This is evident

from the study of Rajamangala University of Technology, which demonstrates that recreational programs designed according to APIED principles combined with Ryff's 6-dimensional happiness measurement can increase students' life satisfaction scores by up to 27.3% (Muijeen, 2016).

This research therefore aims to create and develop recreational programs to promote higher education students happiness that will help them face pressure with resilience, advance toward success based on sustainable well-being, and reinforce the truth that "happiness is not a destination, but fuel for the journey" as Snyder & Lopez (2002). astutely observed that *"Individual happiness is the foundation of societal prosperity."*

2. Methods

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a research and development design with three phases i.e. Phase 1: Study the needs for participation in recreational activities of students at Rajamangala University of Technology, Lower Central Higher Education Network, Thailand, based on types of recreational activities. Phase 2: Create and develop recreational programs and happiness assessment tools. Phase 3: Examine the appropriateness and feasibility of recreational programs to promote student happiness.

2.2 Participants and Procedures

The participants in the first phase consisted of 400 students from Rajamangala University of Technology, Lower Central Higher Education Network Group, Thailand. This phase was employed survey research. The sample group was selected using a cluster sampling method and consists of Rajamangala University of Technology Rattanakosin with 144 studentss, Rajamangala University of Technology Krungthep with 124 students, and Rajamangala University of Technology Phra Nakhon with 132 students, totaling 400 students. Participants were selected based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria, and informed consent was obtained from all participants. Data were collected

using questionnaires, included clear instructions for completing them. The sample group in 2-3 phases consisted of 19 experts.

2.3 Instruments and Materials Used

The research tools used include a questionnaire and in-depth interview guidelines. The researchers developed a questionnaire package that gathered participants' personal information (e.g., gender, academic year, and current studying faculty & institution) and details related to their needs for participation recreational activities as described by World Health Organization (2010) and Petersen et al. (2021). In addition, the internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha, α) was found within the acceptable range, ranging from 0.82 and 0.98 (Nunnally, 1978). For the in-depth interview guidelines with 19 experts, the researchers asked about the recreational program design using the APIED model that is based on student needs.

2.4 Data Analysis

To ensure the appropriateness of the measures, Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC), Content Validity Index (CVI) and Cronbach's alpha (α), were assessed for outcome variables. Descriptive statistics, including percentages, arithmetic mean, standard deviation, and frequency were used to define demographic, outcome variables, and appropriateness and feasibility of recreational programs. Data analysis was conducted using MS Excel and IBM SPSS Statistics.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

In accordance with the Helsinki Declaration ethical guideline (World Medical Association, 2013), this study was conducted with no participants exposed to potential physical, social, legal, or psychological risks. Participants provided informed consent after being informed about the nature and objectives of the study, as well as their right to refuse or withdraw from participation.

3. Results and Discussion

Phase I: The results revealed that students had the highest demand for outdoor activities (mean = 3.13), followed by special events and festivals (mean = 3.11), and social

activities (mean = 3.10). Additionally, demographic factors such as gender, academic year, institution, and faculty showed significant correlations with the demand for recreational activities at the 0.05 level. This finding is consistent with Baroi, B. (2024), who studied the impact of travel and recreational activities on stress, happiness, and life satisfaction among university students., which found that the activity university students most regularly enjoyed was travel, which appears in the outdoor/out-of-town recreation category.

Phase II: The Recreational activities that were used to create the program. When participants joined the program, the researcher arranged for self-assessment measurements of happiness from activity participation, applying the happiness indicators based on Carol Ryff's Model of Psychological Well-being theory, comprising 6 dimensions: 1) Self-Acceptance 2) Positive Relations with Others 3) Autonomy 4) Environmental Mastery 5) Purpose in Life 6) Personal Growth (Ryff, 1989). The finding of developed a recreational program that included eight activities based on student needs: 1. Separation activity...tell them to identify 2. Self-reflection activity...in the shadows of the past 3. Running activity...don't roll and fall backwards. 4. Volunteer activity for artificial coral conservation 5. Tie-dye activity...tie and dye 6. Karaoke Singing Contest activity 7. Beautiful garden arrangement in glass bottles activity and 8. Tea Tree Ranger parade activity. These programs are offered in three formats: a full-time format (eight weeks, once a week), a condensed format (four weeks, twice a week), and the interest format, which is to choose 1-2 activities according to the sub-components of happiness (see Table 1). Moreover, Content validity verification of the happiness measurement questionnaire, adapted from Ryff (1989), categorized according to 6 dimensions of happiness indicators, with 7 items per dimension, consisting of both positive and negative questions totaling 42 items, was conducted by 5

experts. The IOC (Index of Item-Objective Congruence) validity analysis of the questionnaire, indicating that the questions have validity and can be used.

Table 1
Dimensional happiness indicators in recreational programs for each activity

Recreation Activities	**Dimensional happiness indicators***					
	SA	**PR**	**AM**	**EM**	**PL**	**PG**
1. Separation activity...tell them to identify				●	●	●
2. Self-reflection activity...in the shadows of the past	●				●	●
3. Running activity...don't roll and fall backwards	●	●			●	
4. Volunteer activity for artificial coral conservation		●		●		●
5. Tie-dye activity...tie and dye			●		●	●
6. Karaoke Singing Contest		●	●	●		
7. Beautiful garden arrangement in glass bottles			●	●		●
8. Tea Tree Ranger parade	●				●	●

*Abbreviations for Dimension Happiness Indicators

1. Self-acceptance represented by "SA"
2. Positive relations with others represented by "PR"
3. Autonomy represented by "AM"
4. Environmental mastery represented by "EM"
5. Purpose in life represented by "PL"
6. Personal growth represented by "PG"

Phase II: The researcher evaluated the appropriateness and feasibility of the recreational program by qualified experts or specialists related to organizing recreational programs in educational institutions, totaling 19 people divided into 2 groups: a group of qualified experts or specialists numbering 5 people, and a stakeholder group numbering 14 people. This was done through a 5-level Likert scale questionnaire regarding the feasibility and appropriateness of the recreational program details. Subsequently, a model that is appropriate and feasible for implementing the recreational program to promote student happiness at Rajamangala University of Technology, Lower Central Higher Education

Network, was presented for actual use by selecting items with mean scores > 3.50 or percentage scores of 70.

The result found that the average evaluation of recreational programming according to APIED principles in each aspect had an average value greater than 3.50 according to all established criteria. Feasibility scores ranged between 4.40 – 4.80 with an overall average of 4.64, and appropriateness scores ranged between 4.00-4.60 with an overall average of 4.24, which is at a level acceptable to the researchers. With scores exceeding 70 percent, this demonstrates that experts accept the recreational program to promote happiness among students at Rajamangala University of Technology, Lower Central Higher Education Network Group overall, which has programs organized according to APIED principles. This is because it is appropriate to the context of higher education institutions, provides benefits that respond to the needs for participation in recreational activities of participants, and is suitable and feasible for implementation.

Moreover, the average evaluation of this program in each activity had an average greater than 3.50 according to all established criteria. The feasibility scores ranged between 4.80 – 4.96 with an average of 4.87, and the appropriateness scores ranged between 4.82-4.96 with an average of 4.89, which are at levels acceptable to the researchers. With scores greater than 70 percent, this demonstrates that experts accept the recreational program to promote happiness among students at Rajamangala University of Technology Central Lower Regional Higher Education Network. Overall, all 8 activities that were programmed according to APIED principles showed appropriateness to the context of higher education institutions, provided benefits that responded to participants' needs for recreational activities, and demonstrated appropriateness and feasibility for implementation.

4. Conclusion

Adults can lead more fulfilling live by maintaining good health, as engaging in recreational activities is essential for relieving daily stress and fostering happiness. These findings, along with previous studies, highlight the importance of recreational programs in promoting mental well-being, providing valuable guidance for researchers and practitioners. The recreational program to promote student happiness was developed to respond to the needs of students participating in recreational activities at Rajamangala University of Technology, Lower Central Higher Education Network, which has similar demographic characteristics and social contexts. When implementing this recreational program, it may need to be improved and adapted to match the context of the participants. However, educational institutions should implement it systematically and should conduct activities according to the steps and processes of recreational activities that have various indicators according to the components, since all parts are interrelated and interconnected. There should also be evaluation of program participation and recreational activities every time, to use the results for continuous improvement and development.

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