

Effective Communication and Group Cohesiveness in the Outdoor Recreation Program Curriculum

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ABSTRACT

This research endeavor seeks to explore the correlation between effective communication and group cohesiveness within the framework of outdoor recreational programs' curriculum. The study delves into the two fundamental components of effective communication: external perception encompassing clarity and information dissemination, and internal dissemination focusing on conflict resolution. In addition, the analysis of group cohesiveness entails an examination of four dimensions: individual attractions towards the group in social contexts (ATG-S), individual attractions towards the group in task-oriented settings (ATG-T), group integration-social (GI-S) and group integration-task (GI-T). A set of questionnaires based on Interpersonal Communication Skills (ICS) and Group Environment Questionnaire (GEQ) was completed by 100 students who took an outdoor recreation program. The respondent in this study consists of male (n=58) and female (n=42) respondents. The result revealed that external perception is positively associated with group integration social (GI-S) but negatively associated with individual attraction to the group task (ATG-T). Internal disservice is not associated with individual attraction to the group social (ATG-S) and group integration task (GI-T). Conversely, negatively associated with group integration social (GI-S) and individual attraction to the group task (ATG-T). The findings underscore the complex interplay between external factors (such as perception) and internal group dynamics (such as conflict management) in shaping overall group cohesiveness and member engagement. These findings could help students and academicians understand the elements of group cohesiveness which can lead to more effective group work and improved learning experience for better educational achievement.

Keywords: curriculum development, effective communication, group cohesiveness, outdoor recreation program.

INTRODUCTION

The curriculum of outdoor recreational programs is a structured educational plan designed to enhance various aspects of an individual, such as intellectual, physical, emotional, social, and psychological well-being. Outdoor education categorizes the curriculum of outdoor recreation programs, aiming to provide students with experiential learning in natural environments, frequently utilizing outdoor recreational activities to achieve educational objectives. (Fang, Hassan & LePage, 2023). Outdoor learning enhances classroom-based education with a variety of positive outcomes and approaches by providing memorable relevant learning and authentic, contextually relevant experiences. The stated goals of outdoor education often include improving group cohesiveness, leadership abilities, problem-solving skills, self-conceptualization, trust, and communication (Shivers-Blackwell, 2004; Williams,

Graham, & Baker, 2003). In other words, intrapersonal connections are generally considered the central focus of outdoor education (Zink & Boyes, 2006).

Individuals' behavior does not solely develop without any reasons. Developments are caused by both internal and external factors (Schellens, Van Keer, Valcke, & De Wever, 2007). Changes must be made in a structured manner and on a regular basis so that the transformation process can be seen and is in line with what is expected (Hodge, 2014). Puberty is a stage of development that everyone goes through. In terms of the principle of social skills training, a person is seen as someone who already knows or has a skill in part. Not only being a passive receiver of information, but also taking part in the outdoor activities process can be a key to the best development transfer (McGraw, 1992).

Communication enables individuals to gather information about their surroundings and respond appropriately by taking appropriate actions and making appropriate choices (Scollo & Carbaugh, 2013). Interpersonal communication is the most effective type of communication in terms of changing behavior, opinions, perceptions, and attitude. This is in comparison to other forms of communication. Interpersonal communication takes place when two or more individuals engage in face-to-face conversation alongside the use of media in the presence of both direct and conscious feedback. This can take place in a group setting. As a result of the dialogical nature of interpersonal communication and the fact that participants are free to discuss sensitive topics, it is possible for this type of communication to be quite in depth and detailed.

Communication has become an essential bridge to many life necessities. It is a fundamental part of our existence. In fact, we likely spend more time communicating than on any other daily activity. Evidence shows communication permeates every aspect of life (Durant & Shepherd, 2009). Clear communication during outdoor recreation program can make group members become more receptive to feedback and willing to express their own ideas freely. Collaborative problem-solving requires clear communication, and a cohesive group is better equipped to navigate challenges through effective communication. This not only leads to successful program completion but also equips participants with communication skills valuable for future endeavors.

Cohesion represents a dynamic process that is reflected in the tendency for a group to stick together and remain united in the pursuit of its instrumental objectives and for the satisfaction of member affective needs (Carron, Brawley, & Widmeyer, 1988). The existence of cohesiveness in the class allowed the members of the group to reap the benefits, such as engaging in group meetings, being more prepared for tasks, and being proactive in adhering to the group norms (Nibler & Harris, 2003). There are various other situations that frequently occur as a result of a group with high cohesion, one of which is the members increased desire to engage in every group activity (Bergart & Clements, 2015).

Therefore, the objective of this study is to investigate the relationship of effective communication and group cohesiveness in the outdoor recreation program curriculum at the faculty of sports science and recreation, UiTM Arau branch. This study is essential because it can significantly improve student communication skills and group cohesiveness as it provides opportunities for student to actively participate in interactions with the peers, build confidence, and develop interpersonal skills such as social effectiveness and teamwork.

METHODS

Research Design

The primary research design selected for this study is a quantitative research and questionnaire survey. The collection of data was done through a series of questionnaire surveys. Survey research is considered as one of the significant aspects of measurement in social research. It is a descriptive research methodology that does not involve experimentation. Survey research encompasses a wide range of measuring approaches that necessitate researchers to pose questions to respondents.

Participants

The participants in this study were students of outdoor recreation from the Faculty of Sports Science and Recreation at UiTM Arau branch. The samples were selected using purposive sampling, which is a non-probability sampling method where units are chosen based on their characteristics. This method is employed to select respondents who are most likely to provide relevant and valuable information, aligning the sample with the study's aims and objectives (Kelly, 2010).

Certain criteria were utilized during the selection process of the samples. The criteria for inclusion necessitate that the individuals must be students of outdoor recreation from the Faculty of Sports Science and Recreation at UiTM Arau branch, encompassing both genders at the diploma and degree levels, and possessing expertise in outdoor recreation. Furthermore, the criteria encompass individuals with a proficient comprehension of the English language. The total population of outdoor recreation students from the Faculty of Sports Science and Recreation at UiTM Arau branch amounts to 100. In this specific research, the total number of participants consisted of 100 respondents (N=100), comprising 58 males (58.0%) and 42 females (42.0%). These participants were categorized into two academic levels: diploma and bachelor's degree. The data revealed that 74 respondents (74.0%) were pursuing diplomas, while 26 respondents (26.0%) were enrolled in bachelor's degree programs.

Procedures

The initial stage entails the process of seeking approval to carry out the survey from the research ethics committee at UiTM (REC/12/2023 PG/MR/477). Subsequently, authorization is acquired from the instructor overseeing the UiTM Arau branch to disseminate questionnaires among their students. Upon receiving approval, students engaged in outdoor studies are assembled to participate in the survey. In the event that the respondents satisfy the specified criteria, they are furnished with a succinct clarification. Following this, qualified individuals are urged to fill out the questionnaire, which is distributed to them in a questionnaire format. Respondents are allotted a time frame of 15 to 30 minutes to finalize the questionnaire. To safeguard confidentiality, respondents are not mandated to disclose their identities on the questionnaire. The completed questionnaires are promptly gathered.

Statistical Analysis

The data gathered was examined employing the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 28, designed for Windows operating system. An assessment of the efficacy of communication and group solidarity within the outdoor recreation program curriculum at the Faculty of Sports Science and Recreation, UiTM Arau branch, was carried out utilizing a series of descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation.

Research Instrument

The questionnaire was structured into three distinct sections. Section A focuses on collecting data regarding demographic attributes, encompassing a total of six elements. These elements encompass queries related to gender, educational attainment, age, length of participation in outdoor recreational endeavors, experience in outdoor pursuits, and the degree of enhancement in communication skills during outdoor recreational activities. Section B involved the application of the Interpersonal Communication Scale (ICS) questionnaire developed by Weaver (1993).

The survey comprises seven items and was developed based on assessments of reliability and validity to explore individuals' inclinations towards interpersonal interaction. The ICS survey is composed of two main elements: Exterior Perception and Internal Disseverance. Exterior Perception pertains to an individual's capacity to engage with others, while Internal Disseverance indicates a propensity to diminish the gap between oneself and the individual they are engaging with. Research has shown that Internal Disseverance is a strong predictor of an individual's inclination to communicate,

adaptability, and communication prowess. Extensive statistical analysis has confirmed the scale's reliability and validity as an effective tool. Respondents answer the questionnaire using a 7-point Likert scale that ranges from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). For the validity test, Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for the overall scale recorded (ICS Scale $\alpha = .85$) and both sub-scales (External Perception $\alpha = .78$, and Internal Disseverance $\alpha = .74$). In Section C, we employ the GEQ questionnaire. This questionnaire consists of 18 items that measure the four dimensions of group cohesion proposed by Carron et al. (1985). The dimensions are Group Integration-Social (GI-S), Group Integration-Task (GI-T), Individual Attraction to the Group-Social (ATG-S), and Individual Attraction to the Group-Task (ATG-T). The questionnaire is scored on a 9-point scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 9 (Strongly Agree). The ATG-T and GI-S subscales consist of four items each, while the ATG-S and GI-T subscales have five items each. The GEQ contains four subscales of cohesion, namely ATG-T (Internal consistency, $\alpha = 0.75$), ATG-S (Internal consistency, $\alpha = 0.64$), GI-T (Internal consistency, $\alpha = 0.70$), and GI-S (Internal consistency, $\alpha = 0.76$).

Reliability Analysis

The scale reliability is measured by the reliability analysis test, which also provides information about the relationship between individual items in the scale. To determine the strength of reliability and consistency, Cronbach's Alpha, an internal consistency model based on average inter-item correlation, was employed. The original 25 questions in sections B and C underwent the reliability test. It is widely accepted that an α value between 0.6 and 0.7 indicates an acceptable level of reliability, while an α value of 0.8 or greater indicates a very good level of reliability (Hulin, Netemeyer & Cudeck, 2001).

Table 1 presents the outcome of the Cronbach's Alpha reliability test for the effective communication research questionnaire. The Cronbach's Alpha values for both external perception ($\alpha = 0.882$) and internal disseverance ($\alpha = 0.891$) indicate a good level of reliability. Additionally, the overall value of the Internal Communication Scale (ICS $\alpha = .927$) is also considered to be good. These results suggest that the scale is validated as reliable and acceptable, as Cronbach's Alpha values exceed the recommended threshold of 0.6.

Table 1: Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Test Result of Effective Communication.

Disseverance	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Interpretation	Number of Items
External Perception	0.882	Good	4
Internal Disseverance	0.891	Good	3
Total	0.927		7

Table 2: Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Test Result of Group Cohesion.

Group Cohesion	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Interpretation	Number of Items
Individual Attraction to the Group Social (ATG-S)	0.633	Acceptable	5
Individual Attraction to the Group Task (ATG-T)	0.909	Excellent	4
Group Integration Social (GI-S)	0.891	Good	4
Group Integration Task (GI-T)	0.679	Acceptable	5
Total	0.879		18

Table 2 shows the Cronbach's Alpha reliability test result of group cohesion of the research questionnaire. The highest Cronbach's Alpha value for group cohesion was individual attraction to the group task (ATG-T $\alpha = 0.909$) which can be interpreted as excellent. While Cronbach's Alpha value for

individual attraction to the group social (ATG-S $\alpha = 0.633$) and group integration social (GI-S $\alpha = 0.891$). For Cronbach's Alpha value group integration task (GI-T $\alpha = 0.679$) acceptable. For the reliability test, Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was calculated for the overall scale (GEQ Scale $\alpha = .879$). The total of questionnaire in group cohesion was 18 items. From Table 2, this questionnaire was acceptable since the Cronbach's Alpha value is above 0.6.

RESULTS

Data Analysis

Table 3 presents the characteristics of different variables measured in the study. Based on the sample obtained through the distribution of questionnaires, the majority of the respondents were male, accounting for 58% of the total, while 42% were female. The respondents were predominantly diploma holders (74%), outnumbering those with bachelor's degrees (26%). Regarding age, the youth aged 18 to 24 years old comprised the largest group, with 91% of respondents, significantly more than the adult age group (9%). In terms of experience in outdoor recreation programs, 55% of respondents had moderate experience, 25% were inactive, and 20% were active participants. All respondents had experience in outdoor recreation activities, and 98% reported improved communication skills while participating in the outdoor recreation program curriculum.

Table 3: Statistic Frequency and Percentage of Demographic Characteristic (N=100)

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	58	58
Female	42	42
N	100	100
Level of Education		
Diploma	74	74
Bachelor's degree	26	26
N	100	100
Age		
Youth (18-24Years Old)	91	91
Adults (25-64Years Old)	9	9
N	100	100
Experience in outdoor recreation program?		
Active (> 9 months per year)	20	20
Moderate (> 6 months per year)	55	55
Inactive (< 1 months per year)	25	25
N	100	100
Have you experience in outdoor activity in your life (excluded the subject matter of outdoor recreation in FSR, UiTM)?		
Yes	100	100
No	0	0
N	100	100
I improve my level of communication while participating in the outdoor recreation program curriculum		
Yes	98	98
No	2	2
N	100	100

This descriptive analysis was used to analyze hypothesis one which was to assess the relationship between effective communication and group cohesiveness in the outdoor recreation program curriculum at the Faculty of Sports Science and Recreation in UiTM Arau branch.

Table 4 shows mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) of dependent and independent variables in this study. For effective communication, the external perception in this study (M=5.31, SD=1.18). Next, for the internal disservice (M=5.77, SD=1.08), While, for group cohesion, individual attraction to the group social (ATG-S) (M=3.48, SD=1.34), individual attraction to the group task (ATG-T) (M=2.70, SD=1.62), group integration social (GI-S) (M=5.77, SD=2.08), and group integration task (GI-T) (M=4.04, SD=1.45).

Table 4: Descriptive Analysis

Variables	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Effective Communication		
External Perception	5.31	1.18
Internal Disservice	5.77	1.08
Group Cohesiveness		
Individual Attraction to the Group Social (ATG-S)	3.48	1.34
Individual Attraction to the Group Task (ATG-T)	2.70	1.62
Group Integration Social (GI-S)	5.77	2.08
Group Integration Task (GI-T)	4.04	1.45

Based on effective communication, external perception indicated the lowest mean score with M=5.31. This shows that the respondents who answered this questionnaire may not be actively engaging with the members in the program, leading to a lack of trust and loyalty among individuals. However, in group cohesion, group integration social (GI-S) has the highest mean score with M=5.77. By that, it can be concluded that they share a strong sense of similarity and connection with the other members of their group. This may imply that the respondent is more committed to the group objectives and ideals, leading to greater cooperation and interaction within the group.

Therefore, this current study (Table 5) summarizes that correlation analysis that were conducted on the relationship between effective communication and group cohesiveness in an outdoor recreation program curriculum revealed interesting findings among outdoor recreation students of the Faculty of Sports Science and Recreation in UiTM Arau branch.

- A very weak positive correlation was observed between external perception and group integration Social (GI-S) (.336**) with significance at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
- A moderate negative correlation was found between external perception and individual attraction to the group task (ATG-T) (-.347**) with significance at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
- No correlations were noted between external perception towards individual attraction to the group social (ATG-S) (.049) and group integration task (GI-T) (-.190).

Regarding internal disservice:

- A moderate negative correlation was observed between internal disservice and group integration social (GI-S) (-.515**).
- Additionally, a negative correlation was found between internal disservice and individual attraction to the group Task (ATG-T) (-.357**).
- No correlation was identified between internal disservice and individual attraction to the group social (ATG-S) (.039) and group integration task (GI-T) (.050).

Table 5: Correlation Result between effective communication and group cohesiveness in the outdoor recreation program curriculum among outdoor recreation students of Faculty of Sports Science and Recreation in UiTM Arau branch (N=100)

Variable	Mean (M)	Std Dev (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6
1.External Perception	5.31	1.18	.89					
2.Internal Disseverance	5.77	1.08	.804**	.90				
3.Individual Attraction to the Group Social (ATG-S)	3.48	1.34	-.049	.039	.63			
4.Individual Attraction to the Group Task (ATG-T)	2.70	1.62	-.347**	-.357**	.672**	.91		
5.Group Integration Social (GI-S)	5.77	2.08	.336**	-.515**	.441**	-.019	.90	
6.Group Integration Task (GI-T)	4.04	1.45	-.190	.050	.702**	.604**	.397**	.68

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed), n=100, alpha coefficient are presented on the diagonal (in italic), SD= Standard Deviation.

These results provide insights into the effective communication and internal dynamics impact group cohesiveness within outdoor recreation programs, highlighting both positive and negative correlations between different factors.

DISCUSSION

This investigation is focused on examining the correlation between effective communication and group cohesion within an outdoor program. The outcomes demonstrate a noteworthy connection between effective communication (external perception and internal disseverance) and group cohesion (individual attraction to the group task (ATG-T) and group integration social (GI-S)). Effective communication within a team plays a critical role in heightening consciousness and nurturing a sense of affiliation among athletes, consequently leading to enhanced performance.

The positive correlation between external perception and group integration social (GI-S) suggests that individuals who perceive their group positively from an external perspective tend to have a stronger sense of belonging and cohesion within the group social aspects. This finding aligns with previous research indicating that positive external perceptions can foster a sense of group identity and promote social integration among group members (Theobald, Eddy, Grunspan, Wiggins & Crowe, 2017).

However, the negative correlation between external perception and individual attraction to the group task (ATG-T) suggests that individuals who perceive their group positively from an external

perspective may be less attracted to the group task-related aspects. This finding could be explained by the notion that individuals who are highly focused on maintaining a positive external image of their group may prioritize social aspects over task-related aspects, leading to a lower attraction to the group tasks.

The moderate negative correlation between internal disseverance and group integration social (GI-S) suggests that individuals who experience internal disseverance within the group tend to have a weaker sense of belonging and cohesion in the group social aspects. This finding is consistent with previous research indicate that internal conflicts and dissension can hinder group integration and social cohesion (Theobald et al., 2017).

Similarly, the negative correlation between internal disseverance and individual attraction to the group task (ATG-T) suggests that individuals who experience internal disseverance within the group are less attracted to the group task-related aspects. This finding aligns with the previous research indicate that internal conflicts and dissension can undermine group members motivation and commitment to the group tasks (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003).

Moreover, team cohesion which refers to the inclination of a group to remain united in the pursuit of objectives and fulfillment of emotional requirements, represents another pivotal element influencing competitive triumph (Worley, Harenberg & Vosloo, 2020). Successful teams frequently display social proximity and effective communication, underscoring the significance of these components in accomplishing team objectives. To summarize, this investigation underscores the importance of effective communication in cultivating group cohesion, thus elevating performance and success in diverse group environments. The findings are consistent with prior studies that accentuate the association between effective communication and group cohesion.

In the absence of such research, students or participants may overlook valuable insights into enhancing team performance and communication, potentially resulting in difficulties in establishing cohesive teams and attaining effective teamwork. Nonetheless, this study encounters limitations, such as restrictions in obtaining immediate feedback from participants who are only accessible through social networking platforms like WhatsApp or Telegram instead of face-to-face interactions. These limitations are critical factors that researchers must confront as they advance in their inquiry.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion drawn from this study emphasizes the vital connection between effective communication and group cohesiveness. The significant correlation identified between external perception, internal disseverance, individual attraction to the group task (ATG-T), and group integration social (GI-S) underscores the importance of promoting clear and open communication channels within a group. These findings suggest that organizations can enhance team dynamics, collaboration, and overall performance by prioritizing and enhancing communication strategies to bolster group cohesion. The study indicates that improved communication effectiveness is closely linked to strengthened group cohesiveness, ultimately leading to better teamwork and performance outcomes.

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AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Syaza Nur Nadirah Afzainizam conceived and planned the study, verify the data, and supervised the discussion of the finding, and took the lead in writing the manuscript. Ellail Ain Mohd Aznan carried out the literature finding, data preparation and data collection. Ahmad Fikri Mohd Kassim carried out the data analysis and contributed constructive feedback on the analysis and paper. All authors provided important feedback and helped shape the research, analysis, and manuscript.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATION

We certify that the article is the Authors' and Co-Authors' original work. The article has not received prior publication and is not under consideration for publication elsewhere. This research/manuscript has not been submitted for publication nor has it been published in whole or in part elsewhere. We testify to the fact that all Authors have contributed significantly to the work, validity and legitimacy of the data and its interpretation for submission to Jurnal Intelek.

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