



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

***MODERATING ROLES OF HARDINESS AND POWER DISTANCE ON
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN YOUTH PROGRAM QUALITY AND
POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AMONG UNDERGRADUATE
STUDENTS***

KATAYOUN MEHDINEZHADNOURI

IPSAS 2022 2



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By

KATAYOUN MEHDINEZHADNOURI

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,
in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

February 2022

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is specifically dedicated to all youth represented to this study.



Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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February 2022

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Positive youth development (PYD) is a strength-based perspective that prioritises the internal and external strengths of youth to the attainment of positive outcomes. Research has shown that PYD program quality is the best predictor of positive developmental outcomes. While the effectiveness of quality PYD programs on outcomes has been well-established in adolescent populations, few studies have explored the role of program quality in university-based programs.

In universities, undergraduate students often work closely with adults in co-curricular activities, often leading programs with adults in advisory or partnership roles. While a handful of studies have shown that program quality and youth-adult partnerships in university settings are important for the achievement of positive development among students, much of this literature is situated within a Western cultural context, where youth are more acculturated to engaging in power-sharing and collaboration with adult leaders. Few studies have considered how the cultural characteristics of program quality affect program outcomes.

Specifically, in Southeast Asian countries where Y-AP tend to be more heavily influenced by power distance, there is a dearth of research that explores these factors on the relationship between youth program quality and PYD. The ability of youth collaborate with adults could be affected by power distance. Scant past studies indicate that youth who are harder will experience greater benefits from their program experiences. Few studies have examined the role of power distance and hardiness on PYD outcomes, specifically.

To address these gaps in the PYD literature, the current study tested two moderation models. First, this relationship will be stronger for hardier students and second, students who experience less power distance in their relationships with program adults will also experience stronger PYD outcomes. A multi-stage cluster random sampling method was utilised to evaluate a total of 436 undergraduate students aged 19 to 24 years from public universities in Selangor state.

Quantitative analyses showed that undergraduates who reported higher youth program quality, especially Y-AP, high hardiness, and low power distance, were more likely to experience greater PYD. Hardiness and power distance partially moderated this relationship. The results indicated that indeed, program quality, especially Y-AP, predicted PYD, and that hardiness is a potential strength that can be harnessed and leveraged to overcome the limitations posed by power distance.

This study contributes to the growing body of evidence that youth programs are effective at promoting PYD. It also highlights the importance of Y-AP as a core feature of program quality, particularly for university-age youth. The findings provide further evidence from an understudied context that establishing meaningful relationships with adults and having opportunities to express their voice in the program setting are critical facilitators of PYD. The current study also advances the importance of hardiness as a potential moderating factor on positive development in cultural settings marked by high power distance relationships between youth and adults. The findings can be used by university policy makers such as those in the student affairs division, university students and university-based co-curricular program staff to develop co-curriculum programs that can enhance the developmental experiences and outcomes of undergraduate students.

Keywords: Youth Program Quality, Positive Youth Development, Hardiness, Power Distance, Undergraduate Students

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**PERANAN KEKERASAN DAN KUALITI JARAK KUASA SEBAGAI
MODERASI KEPADA HUBUNGAN ANTARA KUALITI PROGRAM BELIA
DAN PEMBANGUNAN BELIA POSITIF DI KALANGAN PELAJAR
SARJANA**

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Pembangunan belia positif (PYD) adalah perspektif berasaskan kekuatan yang mengutamakan kekuatan dalaman dan luaran belia ke arah pencapaian hasil tingkah-laku yang positif.

Dalam universiti, pelajar pra-siswazah sering bekerjasama dengan orang dewasa dalam aktiviti kokurikulum, dan pelajar sering mengetuai program manakala orang dewasa berperanan sebagai penasihat atau rakan kongsi. Walaupun banyak kajian telah buktikan kualiti program dan perkongsian belia-dewasa (Y-AP) penting untuk mencapai pembangunan positif, dimana belia lebih terbudaya untuk terlibat dalam perkongsian kuasa dan kolaborasi dengan pemimpin dewasa, khususnya, di negara Asia Tenggara dimana Y-AP cenderung untuk dipengaruhi oleh jarak kuasa.

Untuk menangani jurang ini dalam sastera PYD, kajian semasa telah menguji dua model kesederhanaan. Pertama, hubungan ini akan menjadi lebih kuat untuk pelajar yang mempunyai daya tahan tinggi dan kedua, pelajar yang menempuhi sedikit jarak kuasa dalam hubungan mereka dengan dewasa dari program itu akan melalui keputusan PYD yang lebih tinggi.

Analisis kuantitatif menunjukkan pra-siswazah yang melaporkan kualiti program belia yang lebih tinggi, terutamanya Y-AP, daya tahan tinggi, dan jarak kuasa rendah, lebih cenderung untuk mengalami PYD yang lebih tinggi. Daya tahan dan jarak kuasa sebahagiannya memoderasikan hubungan ini. Keputusan membuktikan kualiti program,

terutamanya Y-AP, menjangkakan PYD, dan daya tahan ialah potensi kekuatan yang boleh di dikawal untuk mengatasi batasan jarak kuasa.

Kajian ini menyumbangkan bukti keberkesanan program belia dalam mempromosikan PYD. Ia juga menunjukkan kepentingan Y-AP sebagai ciri utama kualiti program. Keputusan kajian ini mengemukakan bukti lanjut dari konteks yang kurang dikaji bahawa mewujudkan hubungan yang bermakna dengan orang dewasa dan mempunyai peluang untuk menyuarakan pendapat mereka semasa program dijalankan adalah fasilitator yang kritikal untuk PYD. Kajian ini juga memaparkan kepentingan daya ketahanan sebagai faktor moderasi yang berpotensi untuk pembangunan positif dalam budaya yang mempunyai jarak kuasa tinggi antara belia dan orang dewasa

Kata kunci: Kualiti Program Belia, Pembangunan Belia Positif, Daya Ketahanan, Jarak Kuasa, Pelajar Pra-Siswazah

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This thesis was submitted to the Senate of the Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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This is to confirm that:

- the research conducted and the writing of this thesis was under our supervision;
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The first chapter of this study provides the background of the present research. Subsequently, the problem statement is identified based on the related issue of this study. The research questions, research objectives, research hypotheses, problem statement, significance of the study, conceptual and operational of definitions follow.

1.1 Background of the Study

1.2 Positive Youth Development (PYD)

As teenagers mature, they face biological, psychosocial, and cognitive changes (Steinberg, 2008; Lerner, 2015), and they encounter various choices, opportunities, and challenges in their path towards adulthood (Geldhof et al., 2015; Lerner, Johnson, & Buckingham, 2015). To have a good overview of this psychological development, different facets of the life of youth can be examined, namely their identity and feeling of self-worth, ability to interact and get along with others, having compassion and concern for others, and their relationships with people in their setting (Lerner & Chase, 2019). These areas map onto the study of positive youth development, specifically the 6Cs framework of Confidence, Competence, Connection, Character, Caring, and Contribution (Lerner et al., 2000; 2015).

Positive youth development is both a domain of study and a field practice, which attempts to build the skills and competencies of youth specified by a positive sense to support and assist them to reach to healthy adulthood (Lerner, Johnson, & Buckingham, 2015). Positive youth development has gained acceptance as a strategy for working with young people since the mid-1990s. Central to the positive youth development approach is the belief that youth development is not just about preventing behavioural problems among young people but confirms that all youth should be developed (Geldhof et al., 2014). Hence, youth programs and practitioners that accept the positive youth development approach utilise a strengths-based attitude in cooperating with youth (Collura, 2016).

Positive youth development as a strengths-based and resource-focused approach emphasises that social involvement is important for the healthy development of youth and that of their communities. Accordingly, youth engagement in their communities and programs has the potential to make contributions toward ending cycles of poverty, to create resiliency, to improve social health, and to empower economies (Benson, Leffert, Scales, & Blyth, 2012; Patton et al., 2016). These contributions are assumed to offer behavioural components as well as ideological constituents for both youth and society (Lerner, von Eye, Lerner, Lewin-Bizan, & Bowers, 2010). When youth realise that they

can contribute to self and their surrounding contexts, they will act on this belief and advance in their positive development (Lerner et al., 2015). Access to activities that help young people achieve the five C's (competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring) can lead youth to achieve the final, or sixth C which is Contribution (Benson et al., 2012; Lerner & Lerner, 2013).

1.3 Youth Program Quality (YPQ)

Over the past several decades, scholars, practitioners, and policy makers have designed, performed, and assessed numerous studies, interventions, programs, and practices designed to enhance the quality of positive youth development programs. These works are usually obtained from theories and philosophies of the positive youth development perspective. Positive youth development scholars demonstrate that all youth have strengths and that the contexts are valuable resources for them (Benson et al., 2012). When the strengths of youth are aligned with the resources in their contexts, youth positive development is raised. For example, as reported in the study by Collura (2016), there is an improvement in the social behaviours, empowerment, and peer relations of students during program activities with higher staff-youth relations, advantageous program space, and the active engagement of students.

Resources such as youth programs aimed at elevating youth development (Averett, Crowe & Hall, 2015), which designed to promote youth development and look to understand, educate, and engage youth in useful activities (Fredricks, Naftzger, Smith, & Riley, 2017). A hallmark of youth programs is that programs are based on the notion that youth have strengths and abilities at their developmental stage and that they are not just "inadequate" or "undeveloped" adults. Youth programs assist youth in navigating adolescence in healthy ways and prepare youth for adult life via nurturing their positive development (Anyon, Kennedy, Durbahn, & Jenson, 2018), and aimed to increase positive psychosocial outcomes (Lerner & Lerner, 2013).

Youth programs include activities designed to engage people aged 10 to 25 years old. During youth programs, youth might be engaged in various activities such as sports, religion, community service, and outdoor education (Norze, 2018). Youth programs take a variety of forms such as extra-curricular, summer programs, and after-school programs. However, these programs vary widely in terms of location (school vs. community based), participants (elementary, middle, or high school, and university) and aims (academic enrichment, social development) (Durlak, Weissberg, & Pachan, 2010; Collura, 2016).

Research related to youth programs often emphasises the importance of relationships (Christens & Dolan, 2011), a supportive context (Ramey, 2013), and youth engagement that is linked to positive developmental outcomes (Ciocanel, Power, Eriksen, & Gillings, 2017). Studies of youth program quality have emphasised several important predictors, including the importance of meaningful youth participation, which youth development

is enhanced, and community engagement has promoted (Sullivan & Larson, 2010; Christens, Peterson, Reid, & Garcia-Reid, 2015).

A significant resource for positive youth development is co-curriculum programs in universities, which aim to build on the strengths of undergraduate students to support their ongoing, holistic development (Arnold, 2015). Program quality is context specific, hence, it must meet the specific needs of a target population, fit the environment, and support the specific aims of the program itself (Smith et al., 2013; Norze, 2018). Furthermore, the basic necessities including safety, positive relationships with others, and engaging in developmental process are universal and demonstrate the contribution of studies about the understanding of youth development (O'Mara-Eves et al., 2015). Scholars have discussed that there is a need to fully understand how to successfully implement program features into positive youth development (Collura, 2016; Norze & Cater, 2020).

Although evidence exists that program leaders have been concerned about the quality of the youth experiences in programs as early as the 1920s (Collura, 2016), research has only recently begun to focus attention on this topic. Over the past 10 years, researchers in the fields of youth development and youth programming have devoted considerable attention to identifying features that can help scholars distinguish high quality programs (Collura, 2016). Accordingly, this study provides an overview of the influence of youth program quality in the form of co-curriculum programs on positive youth development among undergraduate students. The following sections provide further elaboration on some of the core elements of youth development program quality including youth-adult partnership, safe environment, and program engagement.

1.3.1 Youth Program Quality: Youth-Adult Partnership (Y-AP)

The term youth-adult partnership is defined as opportunities for youth voice and supportive relationships with adults, and is often associated with positive youth development outcomes (Mitra, Sanders, & Perkins, 2010). The youth-adult partnership is a social discipline, a special set of activities, roles, and relationships that are the basis of positive youth development (Zeldin, Gauley, Krauss, Kornbluh, & Collura, 2017).

Youth-adult partnership is an influential developmental relationship because it shifts power in favour of the developing person while continuing to provide the scaffolding, empathy, and open dialogue that allows youth to benefit from the higher degree of control (Zeldin, Krauss, Collura, Lucchesi, & Sulaiman, 2014), allowing youth to remain active in their own development (Christens & Peterson, 2012). On these grounds, the youth-adult partnership in co-curriculum programs is one mechanism through which students can obtain practical and useful experiences (MacIntosh, 2013; Zeldin, Gauley, Krauss, Kornbluh, & Collura, 2017). The two core elements of youth-adult partnership, namely youth voice in decision making and supportive adult relationships, positively influence development by providing opportunities for young people to have a voice and

take responsibility in the context of the programs in which they are participating (Zeldin, Christens, & Powers, 2013).

One of the more promising approaches for enhancing positive development through participation in society is the youth-adult partnership at the undergraduate level, as this is an ideal time for social engagement. As the undergraduate years are when youth begin to interact in more substantive ways with adult society, young people need opportunities to build critical competencies for navigating the adult world.

Among co-curriculum programs, relationships between students and program staff are important vehicles for improving youth development (Yohalem & WilsonAhlstrom, 2010; Krauss et al., 2014; Zeldin et al., 2017). By this, when youth voice is coupled with support from staff within accessible and beneficial resources, positive development increases (Bowers, Waren, Johnson, Lerner, 2015; Gestsdottir et al., 2015; Mole, 2016). As students partake in programs with program staff, they see themselves as powerful actors in their own development. Hence, these experiences can make strong contributions to positive youth development (Flanagan et al., 2015) and a safe environment as another youth program indicator that is important to youth engagement, as discussed below.

1.3.2 Youth Program Quality: Safe Environment

In line with Maslow's hierarchy of needs, it is confirmed that a sense of safety (both physical and psychosocial) residing at the most basic level is essential for positive youth development (Flanagan et al., 2015). A safe environment is described as a safe and friendly setting where youth feel valued, respected, and encouraged to reach their full potential (Wu, Weiss, Kornbluh & Roddy, 2014). Among youth programs, making a safe environment requires that program staff as adults provide opportunities for youth to express their voice and participate in the decision making process (Collura, 2016).

A safe environment in the program context is related to the positive development outcomes of youth. For example, a safe environment in programs is positively related to the psychosocial outcome of agency (Krauss et al., 2013), and less physical aggression (Gannett, Clark, Clarke, Richards, Weinstock, 2013). In a safe environment, youth mentioned that they trusted program staff and this made them more comfortable to be themselves and discuss personal issues (Collura, 2016).

Positive development is something that youth do for themselves with the support of adults. Therefore, to promote positive development, there is a need for the staff in co-curriculum programs to provide students with meaningful opportunities to become engaged and make a difference in their programs and societies. Thus, undergraduate students should be psychologically safe to be engaged in program activities, making

relationships with adults, and voicing their ideas, which are constructs for positive development.

1.3.3 Youth Program Quality: Program Engagement

Program engagement as an indicator of youth programs is defined as a deeper attention to learning, a desire for challenge, and a tendency to go beyond the necessities of duties (Hamre, Hatfield, Pianta, & Jamil, 2014). Engaging in program activities is associated with the competency of youth (Shernoff, 2010), selfconfidence and character building (Pilkaukaite-Valickiene, 2015), caring for others (Lawford & Ramey, 2017), making connection with others (Krauss et al., 2014), and contribution to their context (Collura, 2016).

Over time as students are engaged in program activities, they start to improve their knowledge, skills, and beliefs by taking up opportunities to practice and utilise those opportunities within their positive developmental pathways (Shernoff, 2010; Pellegrino & Hilton, 2012; Hamre et al., 2014). Research suggests that students who engage in program activities attain a sense of autonomy and increased confidence that helps them to build relationships within their communities (Zeldin, Krauss, Kim, Collura, & Abdullah, 2016). Program engagement provides youth with the opportunity to learn new skills (Shernoff, 2010). The engagement of students in program activities is one of the serious features of efficient programs (Mole, 2016) and positive relations with program staff that represent respect and acceptance of students should be the standard of programs (Serido, Borden, & Wiggs, 2014).

Youth engagement is important because they merit the right to express their own interests (Brewer, Nicotera, Veeh, & Laser-Maira, 2018). Co-curriculum programs in universities prepare undergraduate students with opportunities to learn outside of the classroom and acquire new skills by engagement in many enrichment activities such as improved social competence (Chung et al., 2018), academic achievement

(Ramey et al., 2018), and flourishing of the civic frequency of student activities (Brewer et al., 2018). Students who are engaged in program activities are more likely to receive the developmental benefits of program engagement (Collura, 2016).

1.4 Program Quality among University Co-Curriculum Programs

Research has shown that PYD program quality is the best predictor not only of risk prevention, but also positive developmental outcomes (Bean & Forneris, 2016). While the effectiveness of quality PYD programs on outcomes has been well-established in adolescent populations (Averett, Crowe & Hall, 2015; McDavid et al.,

2019), fewer studies have explored the role of program quality in university-based PYD programs.

Co-curriculum programs are a significant and substantial part of the university education system that prepares students to be successful adults (Shek & Yu, 2011). In the context of university-age youth, co-curriculum programs have emerged to increase the participation of undergraduates in social activities that promote positive developmental outcomes such as self-understanding, competence, resilience, spirituality, positive identity, and relationship building (Sun & Shek, 2012).

Since the goals of co-curriculum programs are in line with the goals of PYD programs and youth policy, they posit into the category of PYD programs as they are mentioned as key tools in promoting positive youth development (Roth & BrooksGunn, 2016). The contribution of undergraduate students to society is important since they are in an ideal developmental period for growth and future social development that can be increased through suitable youth programs (Asefa., 2011; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2016).

Regarding program quality among undergraduate students, when programs are applied as a standard process and are well organised, this will promote positive development for the undergraduate students (Durlak et al., 2010; Zeldin, Krauss, Kim, Collura, & Abdullah, 2016). These types of programs are considered as resources for youth development as they usually offer opportunities for students to have their own voice in decision-making.

In addition, students can participate in activities in challenging situations through sharing their power and knowledge with staff and develop mutually beneficial relationships with the program staff as adults (Benson, Scales, & Syvertsen, 2010; Zeldin et al., 2016). For many students, co-curriculum programs suggest different contexts to increase opportunities to have personal interactions with adults and to nurture a feeling of self-value that is an important factor in their positive development (Serido, Borden, & Perkins, 2011).

In the current study, four indicators of program quality tend to be prominent and most relevant to university-age youth. These are supportive relationships and expressing voices in the decision-making process (as youth-adult partnership constructs), a sense of a safe environment and a sense of program engagement.

1.5 University Co-Curriculum Programs in Malaysia

Undergraduate students of today are considered as a basic human resource of Malaysia and future leaders who will develop nation building. However, for a nation that is aiming for knowledgeable, skilled youth as outlined in the Malaysian youth policy, students

need to be empowered with values and strength of character to deal with the future with confidence (Musa, Othman, 2016). This contains character traits such as initiatives, resiliency and strength of character and mind, which enable students to face challenges. Students should have the capacity to contribute to the nation (Kuan et al., 2019).

Accordingly, co-curriculum programs become contexts to enable students to contribute to nation building, through equipping them with the relevant skills, competencies, and abilities (Zeldin et al., 2016). These programs are influential contexts for positive development as they provide opportunities for youth to have a voice in decision making, to work collaboratively with adults on activities, to take leadership roles on challenging tasks, and sharing power and reciprocity with program staff as adults (Zeldin et al., 2016). For instance, research noted that when youth take roles in co-curricular activities the result is a greater sense of belonging, attachment, and agency (Flanagan & Levine, 2010).

With the intention of positive youth development in Malaysia, co-curriculum programs among Malaysian universities are the best context to foster positive development in undergraduate students. Importantly, positive development is not something adults prepare for youth, but rather something which youth do for themselves while receiving the support of adults (Benson et al., 2012; Rosa & Tudge, 2013). Thus, to enhance the development of undergraduate students, co-curriculum programs are called upon to equip undergraduate students with meaningful and relevant opportunities to participate in programs and communities. Accordingly, positive youth development is very important since it aims to develop students as future leaders, through the acquisition of the 6 Cs as stated in the Malaysian youth policy. It must not only provide a productive role for Malaysian youth, but also allow youth to have a significant engagement in community development due to the view of students as contributors to society which is at the centre of attention in Malaysia (Ahmad, Rahim, Pawanteh, & Ahmad, 2012; Kwan Meng, 2012a; Krauss et al., 2014). Thus, one of the ways to obtain this goal is through co-curriculum programs offered in universities (Shamsudin, Ismail, Al-Mamun, & Nordin, 2014).

Almost all public universities offer co-curriculum programs for undergraduate students, which include many opportunities in various fields such as entrepreneurship, sport, arts, community service, culture, volunteering, innovation and invention, public speaking, and leadership (Ministry of Youth and Sports, 2019). The increased focus on co-curriculum programs at the undergraduate level has proven to increase autonomy, social involvement, character improvement, academic achievement, and personal growth of those participating students (Shamsudin, Ismail, Al-Mamun & Nordin, 2014). To have a deeper understanding of youth program quality among undergraduate students, the beliefs and attitudes of students need to be evaluated. From this, more meaningful future social improvement opportunities can be developed (Ministry of Youth and Sports, 2019).

As declared earlier, positive youth development is defined as an approach which leads communities to make structured programs, therefore, students will be able to develop to their complete potential (Bowers et al., 2014) since due to the collectivist culture of Malaysia, undergraduate students usually face disengagement from adults outside of the home. Accordingly, the Institute for Youth Research, Malaysia, (2015) highlighted the main principles regarding youth development such as youth positive outcomes, youth voice, strategies that target all youth engagement, the long-term participation of youth in the community, social connection, and focus of cooperation.

Today in Malaysia, the participation of undergraduate students as emerging adults in social processes requires students, specifically those aged 18 to 25 years old, to reconcile to their new social responsibilities such as making proper relationships with adults, making decisions, and contributing to social activities (Mohamed, Nor Hidayah and Hamzah, 2016). These responsibilities require encouraging undergraduates to engage in program activities and the decision-making process, which prepare them to become involved in social change and demonstrate positive outcomes. The youth population is a precious asset to Malaysia; hence, it is important to improve and equip youth with knowledge, skills, and attitudes that Malaysia needs for youth development and to empower them to be stronger to deal with challenges in their life (National Youth Policy, Malaysia, 2018).

As there is a tendency to use positive youth development constructs in programs in universities (Mohamed et al., 2016), there is a necessity to review the relevant constructs so that program implementers and policy makers can have a better understanding of the conceptual basis of positive youth development among cocurriculum programs. Furthermore, positive development depends on the cultural system in which youth grow up (Puni & Anlesinya, 2017). Prior studies mentioned that culture plays a significant role in prosocial behaviour (Lian, Ferris, & Brown, 2012; Puni & Anlesinya, 2017), yet few research studies have evaluated the effect of culture on positive development within youth programs in one specific culture.

As traditional Malaysian culture emphasises hierarchy, and youth are socialised to accept the duties and rules tied to their roles in the hierarchical system, values such as power distance are at a high level in the Malaysian collectivist culture (Hofstede, 2015). Thus, this study has attempted to evaluate the influence of power distance as a cultural orientation on positive development based on a sample of Malaysian undergraduate students.

1.6 Power Distance (PD)

Power distance orientation, as defined by Hofstede (1991), is the extent to which a less powerful individual expects and accepts unequally distributed power in a social context. Individuals with low power distance are less constrained by the supervisorsubordinate relationship or consider it as a mainly social support (Qian, Han, Wang, Li, & Wang, 2014).

They are more willing to explore and exploit other social resources aside from the formal interpersonal relationships in their setting. In addition, they are more openminded and inclined to respect the differences between individuals that are based on experiences and ability rather than mere position (Hofstede, 2011). A diverse society showing a high-power distance will simply accept a ranked order in which everybody has a place. These societies simply accept their inequality and show quality leadership-follower relations (Fu, Lv, Yang, Yu, & Wang, 2018).

1.6.1 Power Distance in Malaysia

The main theoretical premise behind power distance is that there is a massive difference on youth from one culture to another culture and who are distinguished as a different stage of life and transitioning to adulthood as this usually depends on different cultural contexts (Patton et al., 2016). Thus, Malaysia is an essential cultural context for research because of its collectivist culture that has a high score of power distance (Hofstede, 2015).

In collectivist culture society, social hierarchy is prevalent and institutionalises that sense of inequality such that adults are therefore, expected to solve problems as well as make all the difficult decisions. Youth will simply agree with adults rather than challenge or try to arrive at their own solutions in dealing with difficulty and seldom challenge the power of adults (Hofstede, 2015). Put simply, youth in collectivist cultures accept a higher degree of unequally distributed power than do youth in individualist cultures (Hofstede, 2011).

On a related note and following the reasoning of Hofstede (1983), Asian countries are on the high-power distance side of the spectrum (Hofstede, 1983). Undergraduate students as emerging adults in high power distance cultures, tend to believe that power and authority are facts of life. Both consciously and unconsciously, these cultures as collectivist cultures teach their members that people are not equal in this world and that everybody has a right place, which is clearly marked by hierarchical arrangements (Hofstede, 2011; Qian et al., 2014).

As mentioned in some studies on youth programs, when a relationship quality is high, it points to high-quality communication for both students and program staff as adults (Qian et al., 2014). In low level of power distance programs, supportive adults are more willing to share information, their thoughts and concerns without denying, exaggerating or ignoring any feelings of being psychological safe, and this builds higher confidence in students (Eby, Butts, Durley, & Ragins, 2010; Qian et al., 2014). In addition, students are more willing to share life stories with supportive staff, try their best to sense and internalise the support of staff and to use and benefit as much as possible from the relationship with staff as adults (Qian et al., 2014).

In the context of university, the major issue of power distance is how an academic setting can handle inequality (Qian et al., 2014). In most situations, the higher the power distance, the more disconnected the students feel as their presence seems not to be important to the corporation or organisation. In contrast, students with low power distance strive to equalise the power (Qian et al., 2014). Therefore, for program staff that want a quality structure with less disconnected students, it is important for them to overcome the adversity of the organisational structure (Monea, Bengaa, & Opreb, 2016).

Although Malaysia is a fast-developing country in South-East Asia, unfortunately, Malaysian undergraduate students usually experience traditional assistance from society (Abdollahi, Abu Talib, Yaacob, & Ismail, 2015). Hence, this study attempts to introduce power distance as a moderator in the relationship between co-curriculum program quality and positive youth development among undergraduate students and examine how power distance affects the positive development of undergraduates.

As conclusion, the youth-adult partnership is a social discipline, a special set of activities, roles, and relationships that are the basis of positive youth development (Zeldin, Gauley, Krauss, Kornbluh, & Collura, 2017). Youth-adult partnership is an influential developmental relationship because it shifts power in favour of the developing person while continuing to provide the scaffolding, empathy, and open dialogue that allows youth to benefit from the higher degree of control (Zeldin, Krauss, Collura, Lucchesi, & Sulaiman, 2014), allowing youth to remain active in their own development (Christens & Peterson, 2012).

On the other hand, power distance, is the extent to which a less powerful individual expects and accepts unequally distributed power in a social context. Accordingly, in Malaysia, co-curricular programs are a key strategy for raising youth competencies and leadership proficiency (Mohamed et al., 2016), which it has yet to attain the favourable potential for powerful partnerships between youth and adults. Also, youth-adult partnership is an issue of growing concern. This is borne out by continuously low engagement of youth's participation in youth program activities (Krauss et al., 2020). These issues are of concern to Malaysian policy makers. They run counter to the inherently Malaysian collectivist culture, include powerful common values and social belief (Malaysian Youth Index, 2016) by prioritize connection to make youth for productive leadership roles and competencies, as well as for engagement in community development, societal issues, and universal citizenship besides adults (Ahmad et al., 2012). Researchers propose a significant reason that is youth-adult partnership is hard to perform with quality due to the power distance of Malaysia culture (PDI rate is 104 out of 120) (Hofstede, 2015). Many undergraduate students do not have the proficiency or orientation to make relationships with program staff as adults and share their ideas and making decisions as they be convinced by hierarchy systems and believe the hierarchy.

1.7 Hardiness

Hardiness is defined as a personality trait characterised by resilience and the ability to cope properly with difficulty. The hardiness concept was introduced by Kobasa (1979), as a set of positive attitudes to explore how a person manages himself/herself under hardship, which includes three components named commitment, control and challenge to prepare a person for managing issues.

Commitment describes that a person is dedicated to activities that are more meaningful and interesting. Control is when a person has belief of his/her handling and influence on life experiences. By this, s/he can make decisions that can affect the environment and events through the sense of responsibility, optimistic view, and resiliency. Finally, challenge describes that one believes change as an exciting encounter. S/he views the world as an opportunity for development (Kobasa, Maddi, & Kahn, 1982).

Kobasa and her colleagues (1982) mentioned that hardy people are actively engaged in program activities by improving and keeping positive attitudes and aims, which are aligned with a sense of responsibility, caring, and engagement. They accept challenges and see change as a reason for positive development. Also, this ability gives the ability to stay and make connection with others in their context. They believe that they can control and manage their feelings and events that enable them to comprehend stressful status as challenges, rather than as threats. The hardy people are more open to experience their environment and are more confident.

Recently, there has been increasing academic research in relation to student strengths and positive development (Gestsdottir et al., 2010; Campbell et al., 2013; Holt et al., 2017). However, investigation into program quality and positive development is yet limited, since there is a lack of research of the variables that explain this relationship, especially, in a diverse cultural context. Hence, to explain this, hardiness as a positive attitude of youth could play a significant role to increase the relationship between youth programs and positive development (Skomorovsky & Sudom, 2011). Much of the current evidence on the relationship between youth program quality and positive youth development has been conducted in a linear fashion, without considering the role of intervening variables that can help explain the relationship in different cultural settings (Silliman & Schumm, 2013; Fredricks et al., 2017; Ramey et al., 2018).

Following the hardiness theory, two mechanisms have been presented to illustrate the effect of hardiness: first, hardy undergraduates are more optimistic within their setting and second, they evaluate activities as challenging and controllable. They try to obtain experience from engagement in the program activities through communication with program staff and use hardiness as a strategy to voice their ideas and opinions. Thus, the present study examines the role of hardiness as a moderator between co-curriculum program quality and positive youth development in undergraduate students.

1.7.1 Hardiness in Youth Program Context

Along these lines, this study intends to expand the hardiness attitude to positive youth development programming contexts among Malaysian undergraduate students. The literature review affirmed the value of hardiness for positive development. However, few studies have examined the role of hardiness on positive youth development (Nezhad & Besharat, 2010; Skomorovsky & Sudom, 2011). Through a hardy attitude, undergraduate students may consider their interaction with adults in the program context and feel motivated to being engaged in the program activities. By this, undergraduate students are able to make decisions, which leads to positive outcomes such as self-confidence (Erbes et al., 2011), resiliency (Kermani & Mahani, 2015), and psychological well-being (Skomorovsky & Sudom, 2011).

Following the reasoning of Kobasa and co-workers (1982), among undergraduate students, hardiness can be a predictor of several positive psychosocial outcomes such as reduced stress (Abdollahi et al., 2016), happiness and emotional healthiness (Delahajj, Gaillard, & van Dam, 2010) through interpreting difficulties as opportunities for positive development.

To demonstrate that how hardiness affects the positive development of undergraduates, some further explanation is required. Hardiness evaluates the reasons why some students can deal with co-curriculum program activities, and why some students are not engaged in the program activities. There are individual differences in the perception, reaction, and ability to connect with the contexts. Undergraduates use hardiness as a way of understanding the relation with staff and to face challenges to achieve their goals.

Particularly, the collaboration of undergraduate students and program staff as adults within co-curriculum programs could elevate positive development. Thus, it is reasonable to expect that hardiness can improve the personal attitude of undergraduates to be engaged in program activities, collaborate with staff, and voice their ideas, which ends in positive development. That is, since co-curriculum programs have structure to prepare undergraduate students with a hardy-attitude, students could form meaningful relationships to raise the positive mutual relationships that are related to positive youth development (Linver et al., 2015; Patton et al., 2016).

1.8 Problem Statement

Youth program quality has become increasingly important to positive youth development. Low youth program quality has been shown to have negative associations with positive youth development (Bean, Kramers, Camiré, FraserThomas, & Forneris, 2018). When students lack connection to their program contexts, they are likely to become more excluded from program activities over time and this leads to less positive outcomes (Collura, 2016).

A strength-based positive youth development has been emphasised steadily over the past decades, in contrast to the deficit-approach (Brink & Wissing, 2012). Thus, the current study provides knowledge by utilising the strength-based approach to promote positive youth development. In Malaysia the youth population is a valuable asset as they are the future leaders for the continuity and sustainability of development (Ministry of Youth and Sports, Malaysia, 2019). Positive youth development arises by a purposeful process that provides opportunities, relationships, and support necessary for youth to realise their potential (Eichas, Ferrer-Wreder, & Olsson, 2019). Among university students, youth development occurs from the intentional process that promotes positive outcomes for undergraduate students by providing opportunities for them to participate in learning by taking part in activities (Chauveron, Linver, & Urban, 2016).

While a handful of studies have shown that program quality is important for the achievement of positive youth development, much of this literature is situated within a Western cultural context, where youth are more accustomed to engaging in powersharing and collaborating with adults as equals. Undergraduate students, as emerging adults, usually work closely with adults in co-curriculum program activities and lead the program, with the adults in advisory or partnership roles. The relational nature of these working relationships is predicated on effective youth-adult partnerships, where youth and adults engage in collaborative partnerships to maximise youth mattering and voice (Zeldin et al., 2017) since advantageous youth-adult partnership results to positive outcomes (Krauss et al., 2014).

Razzaq and colleagues (2011), reported that youth in their particular youth programs feel less involved in the creation and organizing of activities, and adults comprehend them as receivers rather than collaborators in program development initiatives. Accordingly, it is unsurprising that few youth feel actively involved in developing solutions to challenges that affect them (Razzaq et al., 2011).

In Malaysia, co-curricular programs are a key strategy for raising youth competencies and leadership proficiency (Mohamed et al., 2016). Youth-adult partnership is an issue of growing concern, however, due to continuously low youth participation in youth program activities (Krauss et al., 2020). These issues are of concern to Malaysian policy makers. They run counter to the inherently Malaysian collectivist culture, which includes common values and social beliefs (Malaysian Youth Index, 2016) by prioritizing connection to make youth for productive leadership roles and competencies, as well as for engagement in community development, societal issues, and universal citizenship besides adults (Ahmad et al., 2012).

Besides, in Malaysia, the quality of co-curriculum programs at undergraduate levels is not fully understood. Thus, the strategies like youth-adult partnerships are efficient strategies to engage undergraduate students in meaningful activities that contribute to positive youth development that can be infused into co-curriculum programs. The present study aims to strengthen the knowledge of how youth-adult partnerships can be optimised in cultural contexts where youth are not accustomed to working with adults.

According to the Malaysian government and youth policy, it is intended to foster knowledgeable graduates with positive behaviours to contribute to a civilised country (Higher Education Development Plan 2015-2025). This has become the basic premise of the current study.

Researchers propose a significant reason that is youth-adult partnership is hard to perform with quality due to the power distance of Malaysia culture -PDI rate is 104 out of 120-(Hofstede, 2015). Many undergraduate students do not have the proficiency or orientation to make relationships with program staff as adults and share their ideas and making decisions as they be convinced by hierarchy systems and believe the hierarchy.

Undergraduate students as emerging adults in high power distance cultures, believe that authority and power are reality of life, and adults must make all decisions and also, they are less likely to participate in program activities and make partnership with program staff. Thus, the present study responds to this call as in Malaysia, where youth-adult relationships tend to be more heavily influenced by power distance, there is a dearth of research that explores these factors on the relationship between youth program quality and positive youth development.

Emerging adulthood is an important stage in the transition to maturity. Emerging adults in a high-power distance culture experience minimal adult support and deficit development of executive functioning making them at risk for reduced contribution in their developmental process. Thus, it is important to understand pathways to support positive development in undergraduate students as emerging adults.

Eccles and Gootman (2002) noted the importance of program context by arguing that program quality features need to fit well with youth participants, as the features exist as an interaction with the program setting and are not independent from one another.

The ability of youth to work with adults in collaborative relationships, feel safe and be fully engaged could be affected by feelings of power distance, or their ability and comfort level working with adults as equal partners. Furthermore, undergraduate students face many challenges such as new freedoms and independence, new duties, and new tasks with academic and social stress, during transition to university (Haas, Hendin & Mann, 2012).

In making future-oriented decisions despite the different stresses undergraduate students are experiencing, hardy attitudes are necessary to believe in the importance of connected with adults that are going on (commitment), have an influence on outcomes (control), and learn from their experiences (challenge) (Kobasa et al., 1982). As hardiness assists youth control stress (Vidrine et al., 2013), problem solving skills (Abdollahi, Hosseinian, Zamanshoar, Beh-Pajooch, & Carlbring, 2018), resiliency (Kermani & Mahani, 2015), and well-being (Rizvi, 2016), few studies have evaluated the relationship between

hardiness and positive youth development. After all, lack of hardy attitudes lead undergraduates to be affected by stressful settings by powerlessness and passivity, isolation and detachment, , and a threatened willing for safety and easy comfort (Maddi et al., 2012). Conceptually, therefore, the 3Cs of hardy attitudes are effective and useful in courageously facing the unsureness and ambiguity of experience.

This study explored the hardiness attitude to create a healthy student with respect to positive youth development to determine whether hardier students are more able and successful in working with adults in co-curriculum programs, and thus benefit more from their involvement. Hardier students are actively engaged in program activities by improving and keeping positive attitudes, which are aligned with a sense of responsibility, caring, faces with challenges, and engagement. Thus, hardiness could be as a moderator of relationship between youth program quality and positive youth development.

Against this backdrop, this study aims to examine the contribution of program quality to positive youth development, and further explores the role of hardiness and power distance as moderators of these relationships. The study focuses on public universities in Malaysia that prioritise positive youth development in alignment with the national youth development policy, which prioritises youth as a critical cohort for nation building.

1.9 Research Questions

Based on the study background and stated problem, this study explores the following questions:

- 1) What is the relationship between youth program quality (youth voice in decision making, supportive adult relationships, safe environment, and program engagement) and positive youth development among undergraduate students in public universities in Selangor, Malaysia?
- 2) To what extent does power distance moderate the relationship between youth program quality (youth voice in decision making, supportive adult relationships, safe environment, and program engagement) and positive youth development among undergraduate students in public universities in Selangor, Malaysia?
- 3) To what extent does hardiness moderate the relationship between youth program quality (youth voice in decision making, supportive adult relationships, safe environment, and program engagement) and positive youth development among undergraduate students in public universities in Selangor, Malaysia?

1.10 Research Objectives

General Objective

The main purpose of the present study is to examine the moderating roles of power distance and hardiness on the relationships between youth program quality and youth positive development among undergraduate students in Malaysian public universities.

Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of this study are:

- 1) To determine the relationship between youth program quality (youth voice in decision making, supportive adult relationships, safe environment, and program engagement) and positive youth development among undergraduate students in public universities in Selangor, Malaysia.
- 2) To determine the moderating role of power distance on the relationship between youth program quality (youth voice in decision making, supportive adult relationships, safe environment, and program engagement) and positive youth development among undergraduate students in public universities in Selangor, Malaysia.
- 3) To determine the moderating role of hardiness on the relationship between youth program quality (youth voice in decision making, supportive adult relationships, safe environment, and program engagement) and positive youth development among undergraduate students in public universities in Selangor, Malaysia.

1.11 Research Hypotheses

The present study employs hypotheses based on the objectives of the study as follows:

Objective 1:

- Hypothesis 1) There is a significant positive relationship between youth voice in decision making and positive youth development among undergraduate students.
- Hypothesis 2) There is a significant positive relationship between supportive adult relationships and positive youth development among undergraduate students.

- Hypothesis 3) There is a significant positive relationship between a safe environment and positive youth development among undergraduate students.
- Hypothesis 4) There is a significant positive relationship between program engagement and positive youth development among undergraduate students

Objective 2:

- Hypothesis 5) Power distance negatively moderates the relationship between youth voice in decision making and positive youth development among undergraduate students.
- Hypothesis 6) Power distance negatively moderates the relationship between supportive adult relationships and positive youth development among undergraduate students.
- Hypothesis 7) Power distance negatively moderates the relationship between a safe environment and positive youth development among undergraduate students.
- Hypothesis 8) Power distance negatively moderates the relationship between program engagement and positive youth development among undergraduate students.

Objective 3:

- Hypothesis 9) The relationship between youth voice in decision making and positive youth development is moderated by hardiness among undergraduate students.
- Hypothesis 10) The relationship between supportive adult relationships and positive youth development is moderated by hardiness among undergraduate students.
- Hypothesis 11) The relationship between a safe environment and positive youth development is moderated by hardiness among undergraduate students.
- Hypothesis 12) The relationship between program engagement and positive youth development is moderated by hardiness among undergraduate students.

1.12 Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the field of positive youth development by extending our understanding of how PYD programs can be carried out more effectively in an understudied cultural context. First, a potential barrier to the effect of program quality and youth-adult partnership on PYD — power distance – and second, through a potential contributor to PYD – hardiness. In so doing, the study adds valuable knowledge to the application of bio-ecological system theory by empirically showing that undergraduate students with less supportive relationships with adults experience lower levels of PYD.

AS bio-ecological systems theory posits, development occurs through interactions between a youth and his/ her environment over time. The influence of these interactions varies based on characteristics of both the youth and the environment (Williams & Deutsch, 2016). The macro-system level of Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological framework is mentioned as the culture in which the individual is embedded, include of the cultural values, laws, and customs, which influence the micro-, meso-, and exo-systems (Algood, Harris, & Hong, 2013). While youth development programs influence development at the micro system level, more distal aspects of the macro system like culturally normative power-distance orientation between youth and adults can indirectly impact youth development.

In the case of countries with high power-distance, this often occurs through role expectations and working relationships between youth and their adult program leaders. Adults' perceived higher position in the society leads them to view youth as less experienced, capable, and competent. This perception, in turn, hinders adults' ability to value youths' views and program inputs (Hofstede, 2001; Punnahitanond, 2005). Youth, on the other hand, often avoid directly engaging with adult leaders out of fear of being seen as challenging adults' authority (Dawes & Larson, 2011). The resulting disconnect with adult program staff ends in youth not being able to benefit from adult guidance, knowledge, and wisdom. It can also reduce both parties' motivation to participate actively, thereby reducing the program's influence on youth development (Williams & Deutsch, 2016).

To offset these challenges, hardiness theory stresses that hardier youth will be more actively engaged in program activities by maintaining attitudes that are aligned with a sense of responsibility, caring, and engagement. As such, hardier youth tend to be better able to control and manage feelings, which enables them to comprehend stressful events as challenges rather than as threats (Florian, Mikulincer, & Taubman, 1995). A hardy psychological status can directly affect youth's program interactions by making them more willing to embrace opportunities to practice voice, making decisions, making relationships with adult program staff, and contributing to program activities even when adults are less forthcoming in providing opportunities to do so. Hardy coping contrasts sharply to addressing stressors through a regressive coping approach (Maddi et al., 2002) of denying and avoiding, which tends to be common in collectivist cultures characterized by sharp role distinctions between youth and adults and deference to authority figures (Akiva et al., 2014; Umar, et al., 2017). Therefore, youth who have adopted hardier attitudes might perceive the need to practice voice and making decisions in the face of challenging role expectations as an opportunity for growth, thus, neutralizing the challenge faced.

The outcomes of this study will add valuable knowledge to theoretical expansion by confirms the claims of the bio-ecological system theory by explaining empirically, that undergraduate students with poor relationships with adults are less engaged with society. Also, to the policy development through clarifying youth-adult partnership in co-curriculum programs. Also, regarding youth developmental programs, practitioners should combine the basis, values, and strategies of youth-adult partnership into youth

programs such as co-curriculum, structures such as planning bodies, practice like training, and communications, as the findings are the first to illustrate a potential linkage between youth program quality, power distance, hardiness, and youth positive development.

The study expands the bio-ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) by integrating it with hardiness theory (Kobasa, 1979) to clarify the relations between the studied variables among Malaysian undergraduate students. Hardiness theory helps to explain the bio-ecological system theory within the co-curriculum program context. In the context of Malaysian universities, the combination of Malaysia's high-power distance organizational culture and the natural stress experienced by undergraduate students during the transitioning to university decreased the positive developmental outcomes of undergraduates. Hardiness theory can help to explain the psychological needs of youth and why some are able to benefit from their experiences in university co-curricular programs more than others.

Hardiness theory purports that when youth have sufficient and available resources to overcome challenges within their contexts, they are better able to manage stressors. Furthermore, the bio-ecological systems theory points to the mutual connection of youth and context that could affect their attitudes, which ends in positive development. As bio-ecological system theory states that co-curriculum programs are an important context to foster youth's positive development, hardiness as a positive attitude emerges in this context can change the student's attitude regarding having relationships in their setting and participating in program activities to making their own decisions. This contributes to the literature regarding positive youth development and program quality in Malaysia as a different cultural setting and for undergraduates as a specific sub-population of youth.

This study contributes to the local knowledge of co-curriculum programs. This study, therefore, is not only of use to the broader academic field, but it is an effort to improve the local co-curriculum program. From the perspective of empirical research, the study contributes by extending prior research through examining the psychological factors of youth program quality related to positive youth development in the context of a university. First, when considering the advantages of positive development in undergraduates it is important to account for the strong connection in the context, a low level of power distance, and a high level of hardiness.

Second, hardiness can alter the attitude of students and change their thoughts regarding participating in challenging activities and collaborating with adults. That is, since in Malaysia, PDI was rated as high, it negatively influences the relationships between youth and adults. Hence, hardiness, as a set of positive attitudes (commitment, control, and challenge) can change the concept of undergraduates about their connection to program staff in program setting. Thus, undergraduates through having high hardy attitude can experience low power distance, which raises positive development. Accordingly, the combined hardy attitudes of commitment, control, and challenge constitute the best

available operationalization of collaboration courage (Maddi, Khoshaba, Harvey, Fazel, & Resurreccion, 2011). The hardy attitudes structure how undergraduates think about their interaction with others in program setting and provide motivation to do difficult things.

When they occur together, the 3Cs of hardy attitudes facilitate awareness that undergraduates formulate life's meaning for themselves by the decisions they make, and that choosing the future regularly despite the stress of uncertainty leads to the most vibrant life. Specifically, the attitudes of commitment, control, and challenge framing undergraduates' hardiness correspond at the organizational level to the hardy values of cooperation, credibility, and creativity. When hardy undergraduates interact in program activities, translation occurs of their attitude of commitment into valuing collaboration with others, their attitude of control into valuing the credibility that signifies taking responsibility for actions, and their attitude of challenge into valuing creativity as the search for innovative problem solutions.

Third, power distance can affect the engagement of students in the program through altering their view of inequality in distributed power in society. By this, undergraduate students realise their own power that causes them to participate in decision-making procedures. These are important factors to incorporate into cocurriculum programs. Therefore, a further understanding of positive youth development among undergraduate students could lead to greater results.

In reviewing the accessible literature, as far as is known no research has been carried out regarding the relationships between youth programs, the influence of power distance and hardiness with positive youth development. This study can develop the knowledge and provide a deeper understanding of positive youth development and the quality of co-curriculum programs. Also, it can increase the literature related to hardiness and power distance with the positive development of youth in the context of university as this population is considered important to contribute to nation building.

From the perspective of national policy, improving positive development in undergraduate students is an essential aim of the Malaysian youth policy makers as youth are an important asset to the nation building. A generation with disengaged youth and less contribution from youth can ruin the life and character of the youth. In turn, this could make nation building difficult as youth would feel alienated from society and more vulnerable to risky behaviour such as illegal or criminal activities (Shamsudin et al., 2014). Thus, the outcomes could be useful for policy makers in organising behavioural policy in the national co-curriculum program to enhance developmental outcomes among undergraduate students. Accordingly, the Ministry of Youth and Sport and the Ministry of Higher Education should promote youth and training to develop useful youth program quality and to improve hardiness with the aim of raising positive developmental outcomes in undergraduate students as emerging adults.

From the perspective of university policy, undergraduate students are considered an important part of the nation due to the aim of the Malaysian government to prepare knowledgeable graduates with positive behaviours and desires to build a civilised society. Thus, universities should promote university-based co-curriculum programs and training for effective hardiness to increase positive attitudes toward contribution to society during adulthood. It will inform the university counsellors so that they are able to recognise any deficiency of the engagement of students in the program and to assist students to manage any less engagement in the program appropriately, such that the result is positive development, which leads to healthier communities.

The findings from this study are useful for program staff as adults, since they will be able to recognise any disengagement of students from program activities. Additionally, the process of program participation and decision-making requires supportive staff and settings. Through this, students may gain a great understanding of beneficial resources and supportive relationships. Therefore, this supportive context equips students to manage difficulties effectively, and ultimately it contributes to an increase in positive development, which leads to powerful youth for society.

From the perspective of university co-curricular practice, since program quality contributes to the emergence of positive youth development, these factors along with the attitude of students (hardiness) and their perception of power distribution (power distance) are central to the comprehension of positive youth development and importantly, its intervention in the understudied Malaysian culture. This study provides a special selection of recently produced work, which entail new approaches to the study of positive youth development in Malaysia as an Asian collectivist culture and provides a timely relevant overview of current investigation into positive youth development and its applications.

1.13 Scope of the Study

This study was carried out in the state of Selangor in Malaysia since this state is the most populated state in Malaysia. The population of this study included undergraduate students at public universities aged 19 to 24 years old who attended co-curriculum programs offered by the universities. Also, this study used correlational design regarding data analyses.

1.14 Definition of Terms

1.14.1 Positive Youth Development (PYD)

Conceptual definition: Positive Youth Development is defined according to the definition by Lerner and colleagues, (2006). Positive youth development comes about as an intentional procedure which enhances positive outcomes for youth through offering

opportunities, connections, and support to increase the results of Competence, Character, Caring, Confidence, Connections, and Contribution.

Operational definition: In this study, positive youth development was operationalised according to the measure by Arnold and Gifford (2014), which included the Six C's (as listed above) of the Positive Youth Development Inventory (PYDI) to assess the positive youth development.

1.14.2 Youth Program Quality (YPQ)

Conceptual definition: In this study, program quality is defined and operationalised from a developmental view. Program quality is based on the experiences that take place in the program context, comprising the relationships between staff and youth, the psychosocial safety of the program, and the engagement of youth in the program activities.

Operational definition: While the literature puts forth many different formulations of program quality, in this study program quality was measured by four measures: youth voice in decision making, supportive adult relationship, a safe environment, and program engagement by using the Youth Program Quality Scale by Zeldin and colleagues (2014).

1.14.3 Power Distance

Conceptual definition: Power distance refers to the way in which power is distributed and the extent to which the less powerful accept that power is distributed unequally.

Operational definition: Power distance refers to the score of the respondent on the scale developed by Dorfman and Howell (1988).

1.14.4 Hardiness

Conceptual definition: Hardiness has been identified as a cognitive capability including three components (Commitment, Control, and Challenge). Commitment is explained as an attitude of managing difficulties and changing those difficulties into meaningful situations. Control is described as attitudes and thoughts with which a person has an influencing role in an event. Challenge is defined as an attitude that can change an unwanted event into an opportunity for positive development (Kobasa, 1979b).

Operational definition: Hardiness refers to the score of the respondent on the Personal Views Survey (PVS-III-R; Maddi and colleagues, 2006). A higher score means that the respondent has a higher attitude of hardiness, and vice versa.

1.14.5 Demographic characteristics

Conceptual definition: Demographic characteristics are a series of features and properties of a person to determine his or her description (Christenson, Rounds, & Gorney, 1992).

Operational definition: Demographic characteristics in the present study refer to the household size, time spent on co-curriculum program activities, collaboration with program staff, age, gender, and ethnicity.

1.15 Assumptions of the Study

The main assumption of this study is that hardier undergraduate students, and students who experience less power distance, will benefit more from PYD. According to hardiness theory (Kobasa, 1979b), hardiness is a set of beliefs about oneself, the world, and how they interact. Specifically, hardiness changes two appraisal incorporators: it decreases the appraisal of threat and increases one's beliefs that coping attempts will be successful. Accordingly, hardier undergraduate students take control of their lives, believe that commitment to program activities will result in positive outcomes, and comprehend stressors as challenges.

Moreover, Bronfenbrenner (1979), in bioecological systems theory, sets that youth development is a transactional procedures in which development is affected by youth's interplay among the social setting. This theory sets that youth development is affected by youth's communications with others, and the nature of those communications. Youth who are given considerable support by adults, in the form of close partnerships, to make decisions, therefore, benefit more from these opportunities for positive development.

The deficiency of beneficial youth-adult partnership and high-power distance orientation are negatively related to youth's positive development. This is further supported by a secondary assumption that in Malaysia, as a collectivist culture, high power distance orientation ensures that program staff as adults usually make decisions in youth program setting. Thus, this study examines these relationships within programs, specifically the relationships between undergraduate students and program staff, and the relevancy with undergraduate's positive development.

1.16 Chapter Summary

The first chapter as an introduction to the present study discussed positive youth development among undergraduate students, and the relationship between the study variables (youth program quality as an exogenous variable, power distance and hardiness as moderators) and positive youth development as an endogenous variable.

Among youth development programs, the positive development of youth, especially, their contribution to program activities is a focus under the citizenship mission mandate. The contribution of undergraduates is important because it assists in positive development by allowing undergraduates to explore their internal motivations, establish a sense of control over their lives, and develop a moral understanding. Finally, the background of the study, problem statement, research questions, research objectives, research hypotheses, significance, and scope of the study, and finally, the conceptual framework and operational definitions are explained.

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