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Prosocial attitudes of Youth Expedition Project (YEP) participants: A preliminary study

by

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Introduction

Prosocial behaviour has been defined as “any actions that, as it happens, benefits others, or promotes harmonious relations with others, even if there is no sacrifice on the actor’s part and even if there is some benefit to the actor” (Hay, 1994). Prosocial behaviour has been found to be positively correlated with achievement of success and satisfaction (Rodd, 1989), social competence (Bar-Tal, Raviv & Goldberg, 1982), reduced frequency of delinquent behaviours (Ludwig & Pittman, 1999), school achievements (Ma, Shek, Cheung & Lee, 1996; Normandeau & Guay, 1998; Wentzel & Caldwell, 1997) and to social and school adjustment (Chen, Li, Li & Liu, 2000).

Development of prosocial attitudes and behaviour is significantly influenced by a number of factors such as parenting styles (Moore & Eisenberg, 1984; Staub, 1979), by peers (Ma, Shek, Cheung & Lee, 1996), and higher levels of moral reasoning (Fabes, Carlo, Kupanoff & Laible, 1999).

Service-learning experiences can also increase individuals’ levels of prosocial decision-making and prosocial reasoning (Batchelder & Root, 1994). Prosocial decision-making refer to the way individuals evaluate the need to offer help or not, from interpreting the need of the potential help recipient, statement of need, identifying possible ways to help, accessing own ability to help, and intention to help to the actual helping behaviour. Prosocial reasoning is measured by a 5-level model: 1) hedonistic (where individuals focus on the potential self-rewards from helping), 2) needs-oriented (just thinking of the needs of the person without role-taking or sympathy), 3) approval and interpersonal (thinking about approval or disapproval of others), 4) self-reflective empathic (shows sympathy, role-taking, shared values) and 5) internalized (concern for others, emphasis on moral obligations, need for equal treatment, respects for human worth, reflection on own values) (Eisenberg, Lennon, & Roth, 1983).

The effects of Service-learning, even one of a limited intensity and duration, can produce positive results (Giles & Eyler, 1994). In Giles and Eyler’s study, students

enrolled in an undergraduate course spent the first 5 weeks in small seminar groups discussing with representatives of social service agencies, and volunteered 3 hours per week for the remaining 8 weeks of the course at their selected social service agencies. Comparisons of pre-and post results indicate that students developed a stronger sense of social responsibility and self-efficacy. They were also less likely to blame the help recipients for their misfortunes. A more comprehensive review on the effects of service learning can be found in Campus Contact (2000).

This paper is a summary of the preliminary research on prosocial behaviour tendencies of Singapore participants in Service-learning programmes of the Youth Expedition Project. Research questions in the study are:

1. Would Service-learning experiences contribute to increasing prosocial behaviour tendencies of the participants?
2. Would Service-learning experiences affect prosocial behaviour tendencies of participants in helping at the individual, community and national levels?
3. Are there gender and age differences in the prosocial behaviour tendencies of the participants?
4. Are there age and gender differences in the helping intentions of the participants?

Methodology

Three instruments were used to measure prosocial behaviour tendencies. These are

1. *Prosocial Orientation Questionnaire*

The Prosocial Orientation Questionnaire (POQ) was developed by Cheung, Ma and Shek (1998), and first used with Hong Kong students. It was translated into English from Mandarin, and has 40 items in a 4-point scale of strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. There are four subscales:

- Helping behaviour – tendency to help others in various situations
- Cooperation and sharing – tendency to cooperate and share things with others
- Affective relationships – tendency to maintain friendly and sympathetic relationship with others
- Normative behaviour – tendency to behave in compliance with social norms

2. *Helping Intentions Questionnaire*

The Helping Intentions Questionnaire (HIQ) was adapted by the researchers from the Perceived Helping Intentions (PHI) developed by Li (1997). It has four components:

- Altruistic intentions, when help is given because helping is rewarding, or when the helper is concerned about the recipient's well-being
- Exchange intentions, when help given to repay a debt or in anticipation of future favour
- Relationship intentions, when help is given because the helper wants to establish or maintain a relationship
- Normative intentions, when the helper renders help because of social norms

3. *Social Actions Survey*

The Social Actions Survey (SAS) is a new instrument developed by the researchers and is still in the process of pilot testing. It aims to measure prosocial attitudes in social context and has nine scenarios or vignettes, at three levels of helping:

- at the individual level where prosocial behaviour is directed towards individuals asking for help
- at the community level, where help given is to a community
- at the national level, where prosocial action taken is in defense of one's country.

Participants are given four choices, each choice representing a different degree of prosocial action to be taken.

Participants

Participants involved in this preliminary study are diverse, comprising groups who went on expeditions to different countries. A list of countries visited by the participants is given in Appendix 1. Not all participants were involved in the post-tests. Although a total of 323 participants answered the three questionnaires, not all responded to all three questionnaires. There were 197 females and 126 males, who average 20.6 years in age. 97 of them participated in both the pre-test and the post-test for the POQ, 46 of them in both pre-test and the post-test for the SAS and only 21 of them in the pre-test for the HIQ.

Results

1. Reliability of the instruments

The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the POQ scale for the pre-test is 0.86 and 0.91 for the post-test. These values are higher compared to Cheung, Ma and Shek's (1998) study of 0.81. Li (1997) did not report the alpha values for the PHI, but in this study, the HIQ yielded a high alpha value of 0.81 for the pre-test. There is no post-test conducted for the HIQ. The alpha values for the SAQ is 0.47 for the pre-test and 0.52 for the post-test. Table 1 gives the alpha coefficients of the three instruments.

Table 1: Alpha coefficients of instruments

Instruments	Pre-test alpha values	Post-test alpha values
POQ	0.86	0.91
HIQ	0.81	--
SAS	0.47	0.52

Correlations between the pre-test and post-test were calculated for the POQ and the SAS their subscales. All correlations were significant at $p < .01$ except for helping the community level in the SAS (see Table 2).

Table 2: Correlations between total POQ pre-test and post-test

POQ Subscales	Correlations between the pre-test and the post-test
Total	0.62 ^{**}
Helping behaviour	0.52 ^{**}
Cooperation and Sharing	0.39 ^{**}
Affective Relationships	0.62 ^{**}
Normative behaviour	0.63 ^{**}
SAS Subscales	
Total	0.49 ^{**}
Helping at individual level	0.51 ^{**}
Helping at community level	0.27
Helping at national level	0.53 ^{**}

^{**}Correlation is significant at $p < .01$ (2-tailed)

Correlations were also calculated between the subscales for all three instruments. These were stronger in the POQ and the HIQ than for the SAS. For the POQ and HIQ, correlations were significant, $p < .01$, except between the HIQ subscales of altruistic reasons and exchange reasons ($p = 0.23$, see Table 3).

Inter-instrument correlations were also calculated. There is a significant correlation of $r(23) = .54$, $p < .01$, between the POQ subscale of helping behaviour and SAS individual level of helping in the pre-test. In the post-test, there is a significant correlation of $r(24) = .49$, $p < .05$, between the POQ subscale of helping behaviour and SAS community level of helping. Correlations between the subscales of the POQ and the HIQ range between 0.21 and 0.59, but these were not significant.

Table 3: Correlations of POQ, HIQ and SAS subscales on the pre-test and post-test

POQ Subscales				
Pre-test correlations	Helping behaviour	Cooperation & Sharing	Affective Relations	Normative behaviour
Helping behaviour	1	0.61 ^{**}	0.44 ^{**}	0.22 ^{**}
Cooperation & Sharing		1	0.50 ^{**}	0.64 ^{**}
Affective Relationship			1	0.42 ^{**}
Normative behaviour				1
Post-test correlations	Helping behaviour	Cooperation & Sharing	Affective Relations hip	Normative behaviour
Helping behaviour	1	0.54 ^{**}	0.56 ^{**}	0.59 ^{**}
Cooperation and Sharing		1	0.68 ^{**}	0.66 ^{**}
Affective Relationship			1	0.58 ^{**}
Normative behaviour				1
HIQ Subscales				
	Altruistic reasons	Relationship reasons	Normative reasons	Exchange reasons
Altruistic reasons	1	0.57 ^{**}	0.55 ^{**}	0.23
Relationship reasons		1	0.76 ^{**}	0.56 ^{**}
Normative reasons			1	0.52 ^{**}
Exchange reasons				1
SAS Subscales				
Pre-test correlations	Individual level	Community level	National level	
Helping at individual level	1	0.17	0.22	
Helping at community level		1	0.09	
Helping at national level			1	
Post-test correlations	Individual level	Community level	National level	
Helping at individual level	1	0.37 [*]	0.12	
Helping at community level		1	0.39 [*]	
Helping at national level			1	

^{**}Correlation is significant at $p < .01$ (2-tailed)

^{*}Correlation is significant at $p < .05$ (2-tailed)

2. Prosocial behaviour tendencies

Paired t-tests on the total POQ scale revealed a significant difference between pre-test and post-test results, $t(96) = 1.55, p < .001$. Prosocial behaviour tendencies of participants showed an increase from a mean of 126.0 at the pre-test to 127.4 at the post-test.

Paired t-tests were also conducted on the four subscales of the POQ to investigate pre-test and post-test differences. Only the normative behaviour subscale showed a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test. Participants increased in normative behaviour tendencies from a mean of 32.56 at the pre-test to 33.16 at the post-test.

Comparisons on the other subscales were not significant. Means and standard deviations of the POQ total and subscales in both pre-test and post-test are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Means and standard deviations of the POQ on the pre-test and post-test

POQ	Pre-test		Post-test	
	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.
Total	126.02*	9.60	127.42*	10.61
Helping behaviour	30.45	2.30	30.65	2.54
Cooperation and sharing	21.91	2.22	22.00	2.12
Affective relationships	36.04	3.30	36.31	3.65
Normative behaviour	32.54**	3.14	33.16**	3.27

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

ANOVAs of the POQ and the HIQ with age and gender did not yield any significant results. However, there a negative correlation of $r(134) = -.25, p < .01$, between age and total POQ post-test scores. Similar correlations of $r(139) = -.25, p < .01$ were obtained between age and POQ subscales of cooperation and sharing, and $r(139) = -.24, p < .01$, between age and affective relationships at the post-test.

Paired t-tests on the SAS revealed significant differences between pre-test and post-test scores on the total scale as well as all three subscales. In all cases, post-test means were significantly higher than those in the pre-test for all levels of helping. Participants showed an increase in helping at all levels after their Service Learning experiences. Means and standard deviations of the SAS total and subscales in both the pre-test and post-test are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Means and standard deviations of the SAS on the pre-test and post-test

SAS	Pre-test		Post-test	
	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.
Total	21.80**	3.18	23.83**	3.30
Helping at individual level	6.93**	1.64	8.00**	2.07
Helping at community level	7.41**	1.11	8.06**	1.08
Helping at national level	6.85**	2.19	7.98**	2.07

Results also indicate gender differences in helping tendencies of the participants on the SAS. One-way ANOVAs of SAS post-test subscales on helping at the individual and community levels with gender were found to be significant ($F(1, 45) = 4.58, p < .05$, and $F(1,45) = 5.44, p < .05$) respectively. At both the individual and community levels of helping, males were found to have higher means than females after their Service Learning experiences (see Table 6).

Table 6: Gender differences in the SAS subscales of individual and community levels of helping

SAS	Males		Females	
	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.
Helping at individual level	8.82*	1.59	7.52*	2.19
Helping at community level	8.53*	1.07	7.79*	1.01

Discussion

Both the POQ and HIQ showed high reliability in terms of internal consistency with alpha coefficients above 0.8, and test-retest reliability of subscales as seen in correlation values between pre-test and post-tests scores, as well as correlations between subscales. Pre-test and post-test correlations of the POQ and HIQ were all significant except for the correlation between altruistic and exchange reasons on the HIQ. One possible explanation for the lack of correlation could be due to the opposite meanings in helping for altruistic reasons and helping for exchange reasons. The two instruments can thus be used in future studies with some degree of confidence.

The SAS subscales did not correlate well with each other in the pre-test. However, in the post-test, helping at the individual level correlated moderately with helping at the community level. The latter also correlated moderately with helping at the national level. Helping at the individual and national levels did not correlate with each other. One possible explanation could be because of different levels of identity at the individual and national levels, a difference between personal identity and social identity. Research on Self-categorisation theory has demonstrated differences in attitudes and behaviours at personal and social identities (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher & Wetherell, 1987). Service-learning experiences may have helped narrow differences between personal and social identities reflected in helping scores at individual, community and national levels. More research has to be conducted to verify this. Moreover, the SAS, being a new instrument, would need further validation and studies with larger sample sizes.

Findings on the POQ seem to indicate that Service-learning experiences of Singapore participants did contribute to an increase in their prosocial tendencies, particularly their normative behaviour. In other words, it is possible that Service-learning experiences could have made participants more appreciative of rules and norms of Singaporean society. (Normative behaviour subscale included items such as “I am always on time” and “I always obey rules and regulations”.)

Findings on the SAS also indicate differences in helping at individual, community and national levels of the participants. Male participants were found to be more helpful than females. This could be due to the nature of help to be rendered, requiring more

activity in the scenarios for individual and community levels that at the national level. The age of the participants did not seem to influence their prosocial behaviour tendencies.

Negative correlation between age and total POQ scores, as well as the subscales of cooperation and sharing, and affective relationships at the post-test seem to suggest that the prosocial behaviour tendencies in these areas tend to decrease for older participants.

In summary, the results of this study suggest that Service-learning experiences contribute to increasing normative behaviour of the participants. Results seem to indicate that the prosocial behaviour tendencies of participants in helping at the individual, community and national levels tend to increase after their Service-learning experiences. Males tend to be more helpful at the individual and community levels of helping.

It is important to reiterate that this study is a preliminary investigation. More research is required using larger sample sizes, involving control or comparison groups, and with different instruments that measure moral and prosocial reasoning decision-making (Eisenberg, Lennon & Roth, 1983, Batchelder & Root, 1994), problem-solving, ethnic sensitivity and stereotyping, political awareness, and patriotism and nationalism .

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Appendix 1

Number of participants and countries visited

Country visited	Number of participants
China	54
Laos	39
Singapore	40
Thailand	43
Thailand, Laos	17
Vietnam	50
Unspecified	128
TOTAL	371*

* 48 participants did not specify their age, gender or both.