

Exploring the Efficacy of Malay Silat as Vehicle of Positive Youth Development in Malaysia

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Introduction

The indigenous art of Malay Silat has been described as an art of war which was rooted firmly in the Malay archipelago on the onset of the 15th century. The evolution of this art was traced to the early kingdoms of Langkasuka (2nd century CE), Champa (7th century CE), Srivijaya (7th century CE), Majapahit (13th century) and Melaka (15th century).

In Malaysia, Malay Silat is taught mainly as an after-school activity in gelanggangs (arenas) and also in independent gelanggangs all over Malaysia. The struggle towards independence of Malaya in the early 1950s facilitated the mass mobilization of Malay youth to embrace Malay silat. After independence, silat was accepted as an after-school activity and was formally introduced to primary, secondary schools, colleges and universities. Hence, it attracted many pre teens and youth into its programs.

Studies on the relevance or efficacy of Malay Silat as a vehicle for positive youth development (PYD) has never been conducted. No specific statistics are available to determine the number of youth who are actively involved in silat.

Methods

Although it is rumoured that there are over 500 types of silat in Malaysia, for the purpose of this study, 5 persilatans have been chosen which are Silat Seni Gayong Malaysia (Ipoh), Silat Cekak Pusaka Hanafi (Johor Baru), Gayong Pusaka (Kedah), Gayong America (Negeri Sembilan) and Silat Tua (Penang). Qualitative research method was employed as it allowed the researcher to obtain an exhaustive understanding about the efficacy of Malay Silat as a vehicle for PYD for Malaysian youth.

Teachers with over 10 years of teaching experience were selected from each of these persilatans through expert sampling and pursuant to that 5 students who have studied with them for over 2 years were snowball sampled to triangulate the study. Additionally, non-participant observations were carried out during classes at the various gelanggangs. Personal interviews were used as primary method of data collection for this study as it allowed the researcher to have direct contact with participants; create a close rapport with them, the situation around them and concentrate on the focus of the study which is the efficacy of Malay silat as a vehicle of PYD.

Findings and Arguments

The findings suggested that silat is well-poised to position itself as a vehicle for PYD as it accorded ample opportunities for youth leadership, fulfilled the 6 C's where competence and confidence are amassed as students gain mastery of the art; connection is established when youth are partnered with trustworthy, caring and knowledgeable adults, positive character is formed when students acquire positive social norms such as discipline, loyalty, respect for peers and elders, responsible as young leaders are tasked with undertaking their own gelanggangs and contribution where students went on to compete for district, state, national and international championships and many now are leaders of their own gelanggangs. In line with developmental assets outlined by Search Institute, Malay Silat fulfilled most by instilling positive values, enhancing social competencies and allowing the formation of positive identity for its students. In terms of ecological assets, silat students enjoyed profound and unconditional support by their silat teachers and silat families. Many positive social norms were amassed as students enjoy close and supportive relationships with their teachers and their extended silat families. Silat rendered them the opportunity to belong to an organization known for its mastery in its art and allowed them to build their self-defense skills. In addition to this, silat also allowed them to obtain empowerment as they experience efficacy and mattering as students are given early leadership and meaningful social inclusion opportunities. Finally, as students gain mastery of the art, they are better integrated with their families and able to collaborate with their communities. Aside from concurring with many researches pertaining to PYD and martial arts, two additional findings add to the possibility of silat positioning itself as a PYD program. Experiential learning was evident as most students who started learning silat in their mid teens were made silat instructors by their late teens or early twenties. These young instructors learnt how to teach while developing their own adulthood and

went on to become teachers for 10-40 years thereafter. Loyalty to the art is staunch as many who embraced silat in mid teens or early twenties are still passionate about either being actively participative or teaching the art 10-40 years later in their lives. Another surreptitious finding is that religiosity is heavily embedded in silat and it formed the core of its teaching and learning. Since Islam is fully entrenched in silat, students who participated in silat are found to be stalwart in upholding their beliefs in and out of the gelanggang. This study has evinced that silat is able to position itself as a vehicle for PYD but nevertheless, many issues such as government support, funding, lack of infra-structure, lack of promotion and support from arts and film industry plague and jeopardize its position as a hereditary art of the Malay people. This study, however, has contributed information which stakeholders can use to help silat regain its significance as a vehicle for youth development and help promote its efficacy.

The second research question which is “How can Malay Silat be improved so that it can be positioned as a vehicle for PYD for Malay Youth?” is answered through the following analysis. All respondents felt that silat would be better poised to be a vehicle for positive youth development but they lacked self-sufficiency, government support, have poor database collection and archaic administrative management, inadequate fee collection to supplement programs, poor promotion, negative perception, lack of infrastructure, lack of support from film industry, lack of empowerment for silat teachers and lacks contemporary appeal.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Hence, for silat to continue to thrive and position itself as a vehicle for positive youth development, silat organizations must be self-sufficient, support by all stakeholders must be enhanced, better database collection must be improved, better fee structure must be drawn, silat must be promoted as a national heritage by relevant ministries, all negative perceptions must be dispelled and sanctity of art must be safeguarded, better infrastructure with state of the art equipment, actively promoted by film industry, silat teachers must be empowered by having proper certifications and silat must embrace a more contemporary appeal.

Astounding opportunity for positive youth development via silat is impugned if silat is not given the help it needs to reinstate its relevance. Some silat membership boasts of staggering numbers

of upward 500,000 and most students who are incepted into silat are mid-teens. Huge potential for positive youth development is squandered if action is not taken to put silat in proper perspective and use it as vehicle for youth development. Silat has proven itself to be an appropriate after school program where students' physical and psychological safety are taken into account and readily exists within a school setting. Silat activities offer excellent peer group interaction opportunities and has clear and consistent rules which are heavily regulated and enforced by teachers and instructors of silat.

This research is limited to 5 different persilatans and only 5 respondents were interview for the purpose of this research. It is hope that more empirical research can be conducted to determine the efficacy of silat as a vehicle for Malay youths' positive development.

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