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SPECIAL ISSUE PAPER

Leisure and education in Ghana: an exploratory study of university students' leisure lifestyles

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While many studies acknowledge universities as important facilitators in the pursuit of leisure activities, few studies shed light on how this setting limits participation. Moreover, relatively little attention has been paid to the role of leisure education in developing countries or non-Western societies. This study sought to explore leisure lifestyles among university students in Ghana. Using the University of Cape Coast as a case study, a questionnaire survey examined students' leisure and free-time activities and the extent to which these were influenced by the university environment. The results show that the dominant obligations or preferences for leisure activities tended to be customary in nature. However, leisure participation was constrained by lack of time resulting from academic pressures. Implications are discussed in the context of leisure education in developing countries, with emphasis on the leisure and recreational management challenges facing universities.

Keywords: leisure education; leisure; culture; university students; Ghana

Introduction

This paper revisits the debate concerning the relationship between leisure and education (see, for example, Mundy, 1998; Mundy & Odum, 1979; Ruskin, 1984; Sivan, 1997). In the leisure education literature, much attention is focused on evaluating the impacts of leisure education programmes, the prevalence of leisure education, and people's views of leisure education processes and their implementation (Sivan, 2006). In particular, the literature is replete with analysis extolling the role of schools, colleges, and universities in promoting leisure education and developing the leisure attitudes, values, and skills of young people (Kelly, 1996; Mundy & Odum, 1979; Ruskin, 1984; Sivan, 2003). Yet the potential of school and university systems to *constrain* the pursuit of leisure experience remains largely an unexplored frontier, but is an exploration necessary for facilitating our understanding of the interrelationships between leisure and education. This paper seeks to help fill this gap by examining the leisure lifestyles of University of Cape Coast students and the implications of those lifestyles for leisure education. Based on a questionnaire survey of undergraduate students conducted during the 2009/10 academic year, the paper explores the hypothesis that, as formal socialising agents for leisure, universities can also serve to constrain the pursuit of leisure activities given the commitments required of students in universities' traditional roles of teaching and research. Although the data reported in this paper are restricted to the

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context of one Ghanaian university, highlighting the conceptual and practical issues involved suggests implications for other jurisdictions across time and space.

Leisure education

The literature unequivocally establishes education and leisure as good bedfellows. A commonly held assumption is that knowledge about leisure can be acquired through education. Thus, definitions of leisure education capitalise on the considerable role of education in fostering and engendering the interest of cultures and societies in the pursuit of hedonistic activities that are socially acceptable and individually satisfying. Sivan (1997, p. 47), one of the foremost authorities in the area, defined leisure education as “a lifelong learning process that helps people achieve through socially acceptable leisure activities their fullest leisure potential and desirable quality of life.” The context within which leisure education is created and implemented is crucial to the acquisition of leisure-related skills, knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions. It also hints at the challenges posed by an increasingly global economy and culture exploding the confines of leisure education. Current economic and financial volatility is reigniting the debate concerning the relationship between leisure, work, and identity (Cushman, Veal, & Zuzanek, 2005; International Labour Organization, 2011; Veal, 2004; Zuzanek & Mannell, 1983). Correspondingly, if unemployment rates increase, education in the context of leisure pursuits may assume a much greater role in enhancing an individual’s quality of life and identity.

One important agent of leisure education is the university (Fasick, 1988; Greene, Wheatley, & Aldava, 1992; Kleiber & Kelly, 1980; Rapoport & Rapoport, 1975). An entire body of research examines the association between academic pursuits and participation in extracurricular activities (Astin, 1984; Munson & Widmer, 1997; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1987). Literature suggests that university students’ participation in free-time activities impacts upon their adult lifestyles. According to Sivan (2003, p. 130), for example:

Through participation in academic and recreational activities at the university, young people experiment with lifestyles and explore their vocational direction. In this process, some may develop a culture of their own against the mainstream culture, which expects young people to concentrate on their study and be prepared for their careers. They may develop a sense of freedom from the constraints and demands of the future. Some may, however, perform according to what is expected of them and concentrate on their learning without risking being labelled as deviants from the mainstream.

It is difficult to disagree with this observation, because the university as a community provides access to leisure resources while upholding social norms regarding leisure experiences. However, this facilitation role can also represent a constraint if leisure choices are limited given the university’s traditional and more recent roles. Drawing on Jackson (1997), Raymore (2002) identified three levels of facilitation (and, by extension, constraint): intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural. Of particular relevance to the present paper is the structural level, which refers to “those social and physical institutions, organisations and belief systems of a society that operate external to the individual to enable or promote the leisure preferences and/or enhance participation in leisure” (Raymore, 2002, p. 43; see also Crawford & Godbey, 1987).

The status of “leisure” in Ghana

Leisure has a derogatory connotation in relation to traditional Ghanaian culture. Even in the post-independence era it was associated with idleness and irresponsibility (Akyeampong & Ambler, 2002), and successive governments have been unwilling to initiate the centralised collection of leisure-related information.

Adu-Febiri's (1988, pp. 40–46) discussion of leisure travel among affluent urban Ghanaians demonstrates how historical, political, socio-economic, and cultural contexts influence leisure attitudes. Adu-Febiri identifies three characteristics of travel in pre-independence Ghana, characteristics which throw light on leisure behaviour in modern Ghana. First, travel was viewed as an activity undertaken for serious purpose, not for pleasure or recreation. Contemporary Ghanaians generally associate tourists and tourism with frivolity and wastefulness. Second, travellers mainly patronised traditional non-commercial hospitality facilities – a system which minimised the cost of travel and prevented isolation of travellers from hosts. Modern hospitality facilities such as hotels are seen by some Ghanaians as “hideouts” for their patrons and are associated with extravagance, illicit business, and sexual immorality. Third, traditional culture required that hosts be warm and generous to “strangers” since the provision of such services was seen as part of the Ghanaian way of life. This orientation is being eroded by the increasing commercialisation of relationships. Travel in modern Ghana, unlike that in pre-independence Ghana, has an added dimension: leisure travel. Although only a small proportion of the resident population – including expatriates in urban areas – are involved, the majority are in high-income groups and are well educated.

Akyeampong (1996a), drawing on the work of Grinstein (1955), Dann (1977), and Crompton (1979), examines the motivations behind non-work and non-business travel by Ghanaians. He identifies three motivations for leisure travel: customary imperatives, peer imperatives, and escapism. The first two motives are described as “imperatives” because there is some obligation implied in those pursuits. Unlike the Anglo-Saxon situation where the principal motivation for a holiday is often to “get away from it all,” in most cases in Ghana there is an element of compulsion behind the non-work trip. For example, according to Akyeampong (1996a), customary imperatives dictate the leisure-related travel of the majority of Ghanaians as they seek to attend marriages, traditional festivals, and funerals. Motivations for leisure-orientated behaviour are borne out of obligations associated with one's traditional area or the extended family system. Peer imperatives drive the leisure and adventure travels undertaken by social and youth groups, members of religious and professional bodies, students, and scouts. Participation is “obligatory” because of peers' membership status or desire to take advantage of the relatively lower fares charged for such trips. “Escapism” is associated with the top echelons of society, whose members are in a position to take holidays away from home.

Other writers (Akyeampong, 1996b; Asante-Darku & Der Geest, 1983; Bame, 1985; Collins, 1992; Wyllie, 1968) have examined aspects of Ghanaian lifestyles, such as popular music, arts and theatre, play, games, sports, social drinking, and conviviality. However, the empirical relationship between universities and leisure education has not been well described and discussed. The present study investigated the leisure lifestyles of university students and the implications of these lifestyles for leisure education. More specifically, the study attempted to reveal: (1) which leisure

activities students participate in and with whom, the frequency of their participation, degree of satisfaction, and the importance of these activities; and (2) what constraints, if any, limit students' leisure participation.

Method

Study setting and participants

The data reported here were collected as part of a larger study examining the leisure habits of university students at the University of Cape Coast (UCC). The UCC is one of six public universities in Ghana. In recent years, the University has seen a significant influx of international students from Europe, North America, and from other African countries. In the 2009/10 academic year, there were 15,758 students (10,710 males and 5,048 females) pursuing various undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, with academic life centred around eight faculties and schools.

Sampling

The sample consisted of undergraduate students aged between 18 and 25 years. The sample size was calculated based on the assumption (given the lack of information available through official channels) that 70% of the total undergraduate student population fell within the specified age cohort. A minimum sample size of 323 was calculated using Fisher, Laing, Stoeckel, and Townsend's (1998) formula but sampling was extended beyond the calculated minimum to cater for attrition and/or refusals.

A multi-stage sampling method was used to select the respondents. The first phase involved obtaining a list of undergraduate students enrolled in the 2009/10 academic year from the Student Records and Information Management Section of the University. The second phase dealt with the proportional allocation of the sample size (355) among levels/years of study. In the final phase, a simple random sampling technique was employed to select the appropriate number of students for each year of study.

A total of 200 students completed and returned the questionnaires, giving a response rate of 56.3%, which is widely considered an acceptable rate of return in self-completed questionnaire research of this kind (Chiu & Brennan, 1990; Yu & Cooper, 1983). The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 18) was used to facilitate the data analysis process. Several statistical analysis techniques, including descriptive analysis (e.g. frequencies), *t* tests and correlation analysis, were used to analyse the data.

Instrumentation

The self-administered questionnaire survey was conducted between January and March 2010. The instrument contained both open- and closed-ended items, which probed leisure experiences within a seven-category classification of recreation pursuits. Responses indicating the frequency of participation in 39 recreation-based activities (based on Neulinger, 1981) were open-ended and respondents were asked to indicate which of these activities they participated in, within each of the seven categories. The survey also contained questions that assessed how often respondents

participated in each leisure activity, the frequency of participation, and whether they recreated with others. Further, respondents were asked to indicate which factors limited their participation in leisure activities. (Unlike previous studies, no checklist of possible factors was provided.) The responses were then categorised using the “framework” method devised by Ritchie and Spencer (1994) to reflect Crawford and Godbey’s (1987) model of leisure constraints. In the final part of the survey, participants were asked a variety of demographic questions, including ones on gender, age, year of study, programme of study, marital status, and residential status.

Results

University as an expressive social setting

A checklist of leisure activities was provided and respondents were asked if they participated in activities other than those listed. About 62.5% answered “No,” while 37.5% said “Yes.” Respondents who answered “Yes” were then asked to indicate at least three such activities (see Table 1). Of the extra-curricular activities mentioned, “chatting on mobile phone with friends/family” (31.6%) and “visiting family and friends” (14.7%) were the most common intense leisure activities.

Interestingly, some respondents mentioned sleeping (12.0%) as an activity in which they engaged. Anecdotal evidence suggests that, for some Ghanaians, sleeping provides an excuse for non-active leisure participation, thereby avoiding the traditional connotation between “leisure” and frivolity and laziness.

Other activities reported included playing free computer games (11.6%) and cooking (11.1%). As indicated in Table 1, females (19.7%) spent more time on cooking than males (1.9%), confirming the relevance of traditional assumptions that cooking is a “female” activity.

Most respondents tended to participate in recreation activities with their friends (43.8%) or with parents (19.0%) and were also motivated by these leisure partners. Some also participated in recreational activities with members of their association

Table 1. Participation in recreational activities.

Activity	Male (%)	Female (%)	%
Chatting on mobile with friends/relatives	38.9	24.8	31.6
Visiting friends/relatives	17.6	12.0	14.7
Sleeping	10.2	13.7	12.0
Playing free computer games	13.0	10.3	11.6
Cooking	1.9	19.7	11.1
Debates/quizzes	8.3	10.3	9.3
Pleasure driving	5.6	3.4	4.4
Playing musical instrument	0.9	3.4	2.2
Painting/arts	2.8	0.9	1.8
Drama/theatre/dance	0.9	1.7	1.3
Total	100	100	100
<i>N</i>	109	91	200

(12.5%), while others indicated that they usually participated alone (5.3%) or only with siblings (9.3%).

Respondents were also asked to indicate how often they participated in leisure activities on campus. In summary, 13.5% reported participating in their chosen leisure activities at least once a week, while 18.0% participated twice or three times a week (see Table 2).

Participants were asked to rank their degree of satisfaction with their leisure participation on a four-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 ("Very satisfied") to 4 ("Not at all satisfied"). The results showed that 26% of respondents indicated they were very satisfied, 48% were fairly satisfied, 20% were somewhat satisfied, and 6.0% were not at all satisfied with their participation in free-time and leisure activities. Furthermore, a four-point Likert-type scale ranging from "Very important" to "Not important" was used to ascertain what respondents felt about the importance of their leisure participation. Sixty-six per cent considered leisure very important, 22.0% considered it fairly important, and 12.0% considered it somewhat important. Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to examine the relationship between the perception of the importance of free time, leisure, and recreational activities and their associated satisfaction level. Results indicated a significant positive correlation between reported importance of the leisure/recreational activities and its satisfaction ($r = 0.15$, $p = 0.02 < 0.05$, $n = 200$). (See Figure 1.)

A t test was conducted to examine the mean gender difference in the perceived importance of free time, leisure, and recreation participation and its overall satisfaction (Table 3). Males attached much more importance to their leisure experience and thus reported higher satisfaction scores compared to females. Overall, respondents scored highly on the importance of free time, leisure, and recreation participation (3.54) but recorded a relatively lower satisfaction mean score (2.94) when they were asked to evaluate their leisure/recreational activities. A paired-sample t test was conducted to ascertain whether a significant mean score gap (0.6) exists between the perceived importance of leisure participation and satisfaction level. Respondents recorded significantly higher perceived importance of participation than their overall satisfaction level with their free time, leisure, and recreational activities ($t(199) = 8.42$, $p = 0.00 < 0.01$). This significance gap was found among both male ($t(108) = 7.34$, $p = 0.00 < 0.01$) and female ($t(90) = 4.86$, $p = 0.00 < 0.01$) respondents.

Table 2. Frequency of participation in recreational activities.

Rate	Frequency	%
Once a week	27	13.5
2 or 3 times a week	36	18.0
1 or 2 times a month	10	5.0
Throughout the week	15	7.5
Each day of the week	71	35.5
At weekends	26	13.0
During holidays	11	5.5
Others	4	2.0
Total	200	100.0

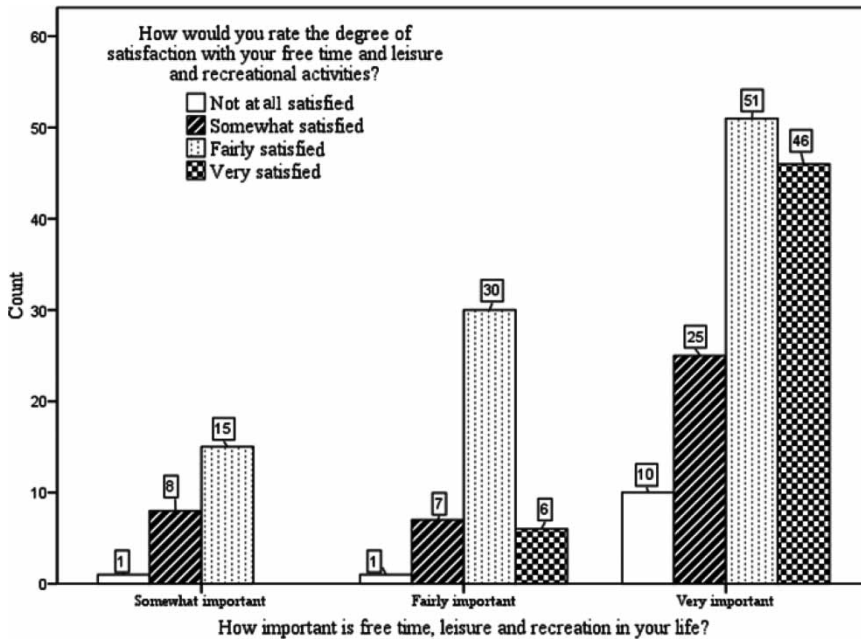


Figure 1. Relationship between importance of and satisfaction with free time and leisure and recreational activities.

Constraints on leisure participation

To gain insights into the experience of leisure constraints, respondents were asked to mention at least three difficulties they faced with regard to leisure participation. Table 4 provides a rank ordering of 10 constraints/items in terms of perceived importance. In the order of ranking, "Not having time due to academic work" (45.8%) was the main barrier. Some 20.8% said not having money was a barrier, while 8.0% said not having anyone with whom to practice limited their leisure

Table 3. Perception of importance of leisure/recreation and overall satisfaction level by gender.

Item	Perception of importance of free time, leisure, and recreation	Overall satisfaction with their free time, leisure, and recreational activities
Grand mean	3.54 (0.70*)	2.94 (0.84)
Male	3.65 (0.60)	3.05 (0.81)
Female	3.40 (0.79)	2.81 (0.86)
Levene statistic**	18.45	1.48
Prob (Levene statistic)	0.00	0.23
<i>t</i> statistic	2.43***	1.97***

Note: *The figures in parentheses are standard deviations.

**The Levene statistic is used to conduct the homogeneity of variance test.

***Indicates significance at the 5% level.

Table 4. Rank order of leisure constraints.

Obstacles	Frequency*	%	Rank
Not having time due to academic work	275	45.8	1
Not having enough money	125	20.8	2
Not having anyone with whom to practice	48	8.0	3
Lack of facilities/equipment	43	7.2	4
Lack of motivation	32	5.3	5
Not getting a feeling of accomplishment	26	4.3	6
Too many family restrictions	19	3.2	7
A feeling family or friends would not approve	16	2.7	8
Lack of opportunities to practice	11	1.8	9
Health problems or reasons	5	0.8	10
Total	600	100.0	

Note: *The frequency count exceeds 200 because multiple responses were possible.

participation. Another 7.2% and 5.3% cited lack of facilities/equipment and motivational reasons, respectively (see Table 4).

Discussion

The present study investigated the leisure lifestyles of students at a Ghanaian university and the implications for leisure education. The results showed that respondents participated in sedentary activities, albeit social ones, as manifested in “Chatting on mobile phone with friends/family” and “Visiting family and friends.” With regard to the first of these, statistics from the National Communications Authority (2010) showed that, since the inception of cellular mobile service, the number of mobile phone users increased from 19,000 in 1992 to about 15.5 million in February 2010. With the global presence of mobile phone providers in Ghana, both pre-paid and post-paid subscribers are subjected to massive promotions, with discounts on day and night calls. This has increased talk time, as most university students are able to stay in touch with friends and family and call those abroad at local peak rates, thus enhancing their involvement in this form of electronic communication. In addition, many mobile phone operators have invested in the promotion of sports, music, entertainment, and social programmes on university campuses as part of their corporate social responsibility. In fact, “hall weeks” on campus are normally sponsored by one or other mobile phone company.

“Playing free computer games,” in which males predominate (see also Furlong & Cartmel, 1997), is possible because students on university campuses have access to personal computers.

Most respondents participated in leisure activities with their friends or with family – predominantly the former. Csikszentmihalyi (1997) indicated that the most positive experiences reported by adolescents were usually those involving friends. Our findings are also consistent with O.A. Akyeampong (1996), who found that many activities shared with family were not perceived as leisure time because of their obligatory component.

Perhaps a more important finding, in terms of the objectives of this paper, was that the university setting constrained students' leisure participation. "Not having time due to academic work" ranked first among perceived obstacles to leisure participation (see Table 4). Respondents attributed their lack of leisure participation to their studies. Time management is one of the difficulties most students face on university campuses (Levitz & Noel, 1989). Though it is expected that students will manage their time productively, the hassle involved in combining classes and extracurricular activities creates a borderline that most students find very difficult to manage. And in a situation in which weekends are interrupted with lectures, field trips, laboratories, and quizzes, many students are almost too exhausted to engage in any meaningful *serious* leisure (Stebbins, 1992, 1999).

Economic constraints on student leisure participation are evident in our results. Undergraduate students in Ghana do not work while undertaking their studies. (University regulations do not permit this.) It is not surprising, then, that the second ranked obstacle to leisure participation identified by respondents related to "Not having enough money." In terms of Raymore's (2002) and Crawford and Godbey's (1987) leisure constraints framework, those offered by the respondents were skewed towards structural rather than intrapersonal or interpersonal constraints.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to relate the leisure lifestyles of university students to leisure education. Looking back at the results presented, several consistent tendencies concerning the socio-cultural meanings of leisure pursuits among university students emerged. These reflect the university's crucial role in providing greater autonomy and independence in establishing one's own identity (Chickering, 1969; Shaw, Kleiber, & Caldwell, 1995). Examination of students' leisure lifestyles revealed that they mostly participate in social recreational activities that engender relationships outside their family circles. Moreover, as with the remainder of the population, identity plays a part in students' leisure lifestyles. However, in a globalised world where it is easy to lose one's identity and where constraints limit choices, leisure education is one aspect of human development that may offer a way for young people to develop personal and social connections (Kleiber & Kelly, 1980).

In building towards a clearer implementation of leisure education curricula and programmes for university students, new aims should be incorporated into future research. More emphasis, for example, could be placed on studying the role of the university as a facilitator of students' affective responses to leisure experiences. Do universities provide conditions conducive to students experiencing socially acceptable leisure activities whilst on campus which they then continue outside the university precincts and beyond their university studies? If they do, then this will be consistent with understandings of leisure education as a lifelong learning process. Further, in the context of societies such as Ghana with traditional and unfavourable understandings of "leisure," any promotion of leisure which has lifelong implications would represent a particularly important leisure education role for the university sector.

More emphasis in future leisure education research in developing countries on the *contexts* in which relationships between leisure and education are established would make a valuable contribution to knowledge. For example, research might

substantiate the observation that, in many developing countries, especially in Africa's rural hinterlands, the low standard of living experienced by the majority of citizens severely limits available leisure choices. Any leisure education initiatives in such communities need to take note of this and other structural constraints on leisure as well as being sensitive to how "leisure" is introduced and promoted in contexts where traditional cultural thinking is resistant.

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