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Experiences in, Benefits, and Perceived Instrumentality of St. Paul University (SPU) Manila Glee Club Participation: An Integral Human Development Inquiry

Alshamir Bryan B. Aripuddin[1]
Russel M. Indab
Pfotokho Kayina
Hito Kiho
Kemuel Quillao
Ericka M. Cruz
Michelle Jean A. Valeriano

College of Music and the Performing Arts
St. Paul University Manila, Philippines

Abstract

The study describes the manner in which participation in SPU Manila's Glee Club is instrumental in the lives of its members. Through a focus group discussion (FGD) involving eight members, the results revealed that the experiences of the students affect the physical, financial, political, and social dimensions of their lives, enabling them to achieve personal goals related to exposure, receive assistance, and develop self-confidence. These benefits result in the satisfaction of most of the members and a desire to continue with the group, provided participation does not get in the way of academic priorities. The study also revealed a desire among students to assert instrumentality in the chorale group as they sought more regular evaluations and frustrations over not being heard by their moderator/s.

Keywords Instrumentality, glee club, integral human development, St. Paul University Manila

[1] All correspondence corning to this paper should be addressed to Brian Saludes Bantugan at St. Paul University Manila, 680 Pedro Gil Street, Malate, Manila, Philippines or by e-mail at spumresearchcenter@gmail.com

Background

Singing has been consistently acknowledged as an activity that has positive effects on the well-being of a person (Heart Research UK, 2015). Furthermore, singing can be an effective approach to bringing a society to a positive state of well-being (Livesey, Morrison, Clift, & Camic, 2012). This is a reality that the ancient Greeks were already aware of and which led them to emphasize extracurricular activities as much as intellectual, aesthetic, and moral formation (William, 1969).

Group singing has a stimulating positive effect on an individual. The sharing of (sympathetic) vibrations within a group is both a thrilling and transformative experience as, individually, all of our bodily functions are working together in one steady rhythm, producing a level of resonance (Allard, 2015). In a choir, the effect is multiplied several times over. Researchers in Sweden noted that "the heart rates of singers slowly became synchronized, eventually beating as one" (Breyer, 2013, para. 1). It is not surprising that choral singing is believed to facilitate better social functioning, bringing a sense of solidarity within a community.

Research investigating the keys to a healthy and happy life among *a cappella* singers discovered that singing improves longevity, body figure, temperament, intelligence, social life, self-confidence, sexual attractiveness, and sense of humor (Breyer, 2013). This finding suggests that singing can be a potentially growth-inducing experience for students. Therefore, choral singing, via an organization like a glee club, could enhance the quality of life of students who participate in them.

Choral singing is a communal activity that gathers the members of the group during social functions. Choral singing is employed in liturgical functions such as praise and worship and church services. In a country like the Philippines, historical events are highlighted with religious celebrations that include community singing underscore the value of synchronized group singing in the life of a nation.

In a Catholic university like St. Paul University (SPU) Manila, religious celebrations are regular journey markers in the life of this academic community. A glee club, or a religious choir, in this context helps to make such celebrations more immersive and participatory, aside from contributing to the holistic well-being of those who take part. At SPU Manila, the choir that often serves in Masses is largely composed of students who are musically skilled and gifted. The glee club is considered an extracurricular organization, indicating that the academic programs of its members have nothing to do with any requirements for its members or determine the kind of projects they undertake. As an

extracurricular organization, it is usually considered secondary in importance with respect to co-curricular organizations and their activities, which directly impact the academic performance of their members.

Although the benefits of participation in the glee club (Heart Research, 2015; Livesey, Morrison, Clift, & Camic, 2012; Breyer, 2013; Steelman, 2011) do not reflect the limited value given to it by students (Harrison, Welch, & Adler, 2012), it seemed compelling to investigate its instrumentality, especially in a university where music is given more importance and experienced on a regular basis by students, members and non-members alike. This study, however, intends to focus on members of the SPU Manila Glee Club to clarify the ways in which the glee club contributes to the well-being of its members coming from different academic programs or disciplines in the university. By doing so, the authors hope the importance of the Glee Club will be acknowledged, should it prove that it is academically helpful.

The Glee Club

"Glees" were short songs sung by trios and quartets when glee clubs started (Bacon, 1820). Glee clubs or musical groups or choirs that sang glees became popular in schools in the late 19th century. While the glee club had its beginnings in Great Britain in 1787 in Harrow School in London and became very popular in Great Britain in the late 1850s before it was overtaken by choral societies. They became a tradition in American high schools in the mid-20th century when the "proper glee clubs" died out. The first American glee club was formed at Harvard University in 1858. Current musical groups in North American colleges and universities, still called glee clubs, are often choirs that no longer perform glees. American television revived popular interest in glee clubs via the TV series Glee, which started airing in 2009 and lasted until 2015 (Murphy, Falchuk, & Brennan, 2009-2015).

Glee Club and Student Life and Well-Being

Studies available online that are related to glee clubs go as far back as 1918. The research by Roberts (1918) titled *An Experiment in Socialization*, cited that the students' engagement in organizations that require work in "music, gymnasium, debate, declamation, dramatics, editorial work, and reporting" (p. 31) help facilitate socialization of students, which is considered critical after high school graduation; hence, completion of such work translates to credits toward high school graduation. It revealed that as far back as 1918, American high schools already considered such organizations as testing laboratories for the application of the knowledge students acquire in the classroom. Organizations also

offer a space where students can commit mistakes without fear of failure in their attempts to use their knowledge. Likewise, glee clubs help students develop control over their faculties and social skills. As a consequence, members learn to assert their individuality, preferences, and inclinations within a social context. It was reported that in one school in the city of Everett, Washington, USA, there were a total of eight musical organizations, most of which were glee clubs. The clubs were asked to perform in many on- and off-campus programs, many of which were based on musical and narrative traditions from "Ireland, Scotland, England, and France" (Roberts, 1918, p. 32).

In 1969, Williams wrote a summary of what the literature had emphasized about school organizations, including glee clubs. He wrote that fine arts programs were initiated to achieve the following: (1) enrich student interest; (2) provide options for worthwhile use of their free time; (3) facilitate the development of aesthetic values in students; (4) encourage self-expression; (5) form appropriate audience habits; and (6) acknowledge all kinds of achievements. He also noted that extracurricular activities in high school tended towards those which supported curricular pursuits, and those related to performance goals of musical organizations. Likewise, he underscored that only 10-15% of students tend to ignore extracurricular organizations and that those who join one tended to join more. Finally, he clarified that participation in extracurricular activities has no adverse effects on students' academic standing; hence, those who join organizations generally engage without sacrificing their academics. These data from early research findings are still observed; many schools, at all levels, allow for student involvement in non-classroom settings.

In 2010, Jones' *The Development of Collegiate Male Glee Clubs in America*, provided a historical overview that led him to conclude that glee clubs and similar groups add to the wealth of resources that make the US a creative culture. Citing the findings of the 2003 Chorus Impact Study of Chorus America, he reported that there were strong correlations between participation in musical groups like the glee club and success in life. He noted that those who were in engaged in singing groups tended towards philanthropy, civic involvement, and supporting the arts. This finding is relevant to a university because it suggests that glee clubs and similar groups could be the breeding ground of more socially concerned future benefactors. Aside from individual benefits to the students, any school had a lot to gain in terms of external institutional support from its glee club or choir alumni.

These data from very distant periods indicate that regardless of time or context, involvement in extracurricular activities provides growth opportunities for students and contributes to their holistic formation. That said, education that does not allow for such engagements that may hinder student development in many ways. Diversity of student

organizations is needed to be able to cover as many student interests and develop as many competencies as possible. However, the dearth of available literature on glee clubs points to a limited interest in it and in related areas. Thus far, a scan of available online articles resulted in mostly historical studies on the development of glee clubs in the US.

The SPU Manila Glee Club

The SPU Manila Glee Club was organized by Sr. Maria Anunciata Sta. Ana, SPC in 2005. She is considered a major contributor to religious or (Catholic) Church music in the Philippines. She is also one of the most accomplished music school administrators in the country. The SPU Manila Glee Club, through the leadership of Sr. Anunciata and mentorship of faculty member and choral conductor Mr. Oliver Rodriguez, has become a prominent student organization in the university but is largely composed of music students.

It is a choir that has since performed in various public classical music venues. They have regular concert appearances in a local parish and in the university's auditorium. In addition, they have performed in many provinces in the Philippines. They also sing in annual music festivals and perform together with more prominent orchestras like the Manila Symphony Orchestra and the Philippine Philharmonic Orchestra, and under the direction of distinguished international conductors, such as Ernest Hoetzl and Yusuke Kimoto. They also perform in international events, and have even performed in China.

The group performs classical and traditional local and Western choral pieces and institutional songs usually sung during institutional events; however, their repertoire is composed of mostly religious songs. Unlike other glee clubs in larger universities in Manila, their performances are usually not publicized, or, if at all, mentioned marginally as they only serve as support in musical and non-musical programs.

Considering the demanding work requirements of the group, one can surmise that participation can pose significant time and financial challenges to any student. Despite numerous engagements and the formative musical goals of the group, no research has yet been written about the organization and how it contributes to the holistic formation of students. For the purpose of considering how its activities impact its members, a research of this kind was deemed essential.

Statement of the Problem

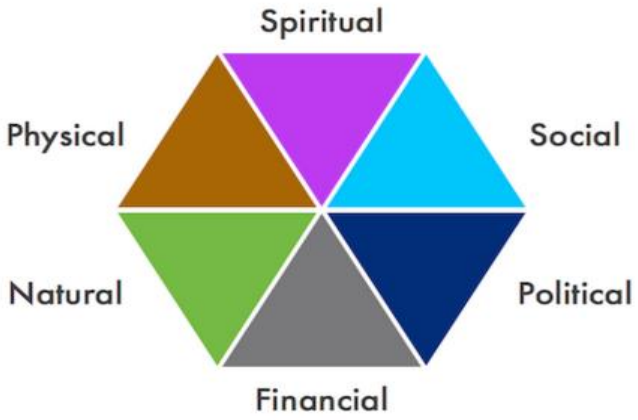
This study aimed to explore the instrumentality of the SPU Manila Glee Club as a tool towards the "Integral Human Development" (Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice, n.d.) of its members. Specifically, it answers the following questions: (1) How instrumental is the

SPU Manila Glee Club in helping its members achieve their personal goals?; (2) What experiences and benefits help towards the integral human development of the SPU Manila Glee Club participants?; (3) How do the experiences and benefits define the instrumentality of the SPU Manila Glee Club in facilitating the integral human development of its members?; (4) How satisfied are the SPU Manila Glee Club members based on the following? – (a) Willingness to make sacrifices for the Glee Club's rehearsal schedule and (b) The desire to join the Glee Club next school year.

Study Framework

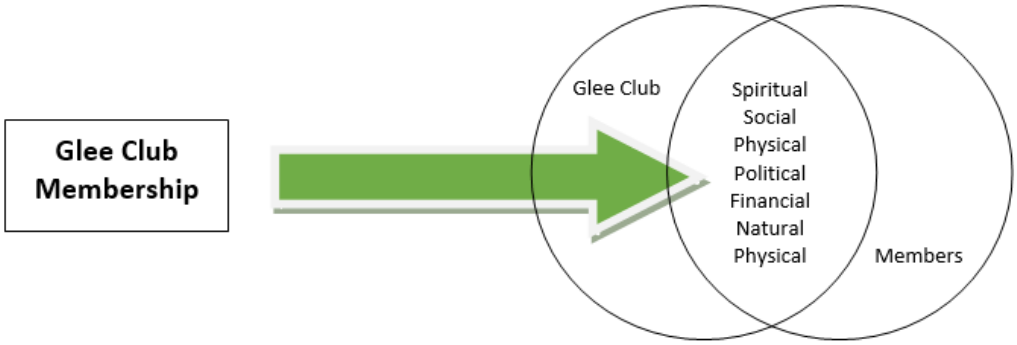
The study is guided by the Integral Human Development (IHD) Framework used by the Catholic Church, which is underscored in the Catholic Social Teachings of the Church (Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice, n.d.). This framework has been used as "the overarching development approach for International Programs (IP)" (Caritas Australia, n.d.) in the Catholic Church based on the 1967 encyclical *Populorum Progressio* of Pope Paul VI. This assumes that the SPU Manila Glee Club is organized to help facilitate the integral human development of students in the university, whether as a singer participating in the group or as a community member enjoying and benefitting from experiencing its performances. IHD posits that for integral human development to occur, any program must address all of its six dimensions. The six dimensions are the spiritual, social, political, financial, natural, and physical aspects of a student's well-being (shown in Figure 1). As an integral part of a student's holistic formation, the SPU Manila Glee Club must address the needs in all six areas of development. This study considers the organization to be instrumental.

Figure 1: Integral Human Development (IHD) Framework of the Catholic Church



The framework of this study includes concepts related to a theory involving instrumentality. According to Expectancy Theory (Schmidt in Kunes, 2016), instrumentality is defined as the perceived likelihood that performance will lead to desired rewards. Applied to choral singing, performance means singing in a group (such as the Glee Club) that conforms to performance standards of excellence. From the vantage point of the university, desired rewards are developments in the six dimensions of holistic formation. It also pertains to the members' perceived benefits of participating in the group. As an organizational function beneficial to members, instrumentality also refers to the members being beneficial to the group. This means that as students benefit from the Glee Club, the latter also benefits from the former. Attaining integral human development in its six dimensions results in the betterment of members and the organization. Figure 2 shows the integration of the ideas of integral human development and instrumentality.

Figure 2 Framework Integrating Instrumentality towards IHD



This framework is established on the grounds of phenomenological principles, where experiences, regardless of the number of experiencers, are considered valid sources of data. Phenomenology is interested in the individual experiences of people (Boyd, 2017). For IHD to be considered manifest, at least one person needs to attest to its occurrence. Such a testament to its occurrence is deemed sufficient to indicate that, given the right context, IHD is possible. In this sense, IHD need not happen to many or all involved to be considered conclusive. That said, statistical assumptions of quantitative research must not render individual experiences reliable or otherwise. Whether what was attested is what actually transpired is a different matter altogether. Phenomenological research does not delve into objective and tangible evidence behind claims of instrumentality towards IHD; it looks into meaningful experiences which participants attribute to their having been part of the group under investigation.

Research Design

Research Approach

This study focuses on the instrumentality of a choral singing experience, particularly in the SPU Manila Glee Club of SPU Manila, of which the majority of members are undergraduate students. Instrumentality is made apparent through the Glee Club members' experiences and benefits while participating in the group. Considering the experiences of individual members and of the collective, a qualitative study is needed, allowing for the reading of such narratives to arrive at common clusters of experiences and benefits.

Research Participants

The study involved purposively sampled informants. The informants were composed of eight members of the SPU Manila Glee Club, which constitutes 20% of the 40 members during the 2015-2016 school year, who were available during the scheduled time for the data collection and who agreed to participate. In a focus group discussion (FGD), it is said:

> *Moderators hold a very strong point of view that 8 to10 people is the ideal number. It is felt that if a group is larger than 10 there are too many people to control and it is difficult to get meaningful interaction among the participants. If the group is smaller than 8, the opportunity for varied inputs is reduced* (Groups Plus, 2008, para. 6).

As a qualitative study that does not aim to generalize over all members of the Glee Club, seeking only gather preliminary data for further investigation and later evaluation. The sample is capable of establishing a pattern in the members' responses. The patterns were already observed in the discussion and reached the saturation point in common areas of concern. This group included those who were new members, seasoned members, an officer of the group, and an outgoing member in order to cover all possible levels of engagement with the organization. This sampling sought diversity, and consequently, saturation. For anonymity, the sexes of the participants are not revealed. SPU Manila is a female-dominated institution and the Glee Club members are familiar personalities so revealing the sex of members can potentially uncover the identities of the participants.

Research Method and Instrument

This study conducted a FGD involving the selected participants. The FGD was deemed appropriate, as this method allowed for collective recollection and affirmation of

experiences shared by discussants. The discussions were electronically recorded with the permission and informed consent of the participants. The FGD was completed within a period of 30 minutes. Snacks and refreshments were also served by the researchers to aid in the comfort and spontaneity of the flow of the discussion. An FGD guide was used to help facilitate the discussion.

Research Location

The FGD was conducted at the College of Music and Performing Arts (CMPA) of SPU Manila on October 5, 2015, at 5:30 pm in Room 219.

Data Construction and Analysis

After the FGD, the recordings were transcribed for analysis. The study made use of textual analysis with the help of a matrix of analysis. The experiences and benefits were categorized into the six dimensions of IHD and under the themes of "experiences" and "benefits." Direct quotes were underscored to serve as evidence for insights drawn from the responses in the FGD. Quotes were analyzed with reference to the IHD.

Results and Discussion

This study is purely qualitative and did not intend to measure any indicator under any component of the IHD framework. The quotes presented below have been removed from their sources. The study does not aim to relate the responses of the discussants to their particular contexts or circumstances. What it intends to do, however, is to bring out the many ways by which participation in the Glee Club becomes instrumental or beneficial for the well-being its members, regardless of their individual backgrounds. What is considered relevant here is that they share common experiences as students of the same school and members of the same organization. Readers should note that what is critical in the presentation below is the production of the bigger picture of the instrumentality of the Glee Club and not the details of its instrumentality in relation to specific discussants or Glee Club members.

Instrumentality of Participation in SPU Manila Glee Club

The instrumentality of the group appeared as it was revealed to have facilitated the following: (1) a sense of scale and sociality; (2) an experience of collaborative learning; (3) integration of theory and practice; and (4) empowerment towards practical applications. It should be understood here that any statement given by a Glee Club member is not

indicative of a general experience, but a unique experience which Glee Club participation made possible. In qualitative research, a single experience is considered valid, could stand alone, and need not be repeated by others' experiences to be considered legitimate or acceptable.

Sense of scale and sociality. In the case of the "sense of scale and sociality" (physical and social dimensions of IHD) a discussant shared: "Being a part of something big is really good." The context where this is made more meaningful will be found under the themes below.

Experience collaborative learning. "Collaborative learning" (social and political dimensions of IHD) was underscored with this response: "Yes, you learn how to sing cooperatively with others." The social dimension is inherent in cooperation while the "political" emerges from the Glee Club member's sense of agency in singing. This happens when non-singers in the group learn the skills required in choral performance by being with peers in the group. One member said: "… at first, it was hard because I'm not really a singer but as time passed by I learned more about singing…"

Integration of theory and practice. "Integration of theory and practice" (political and physical dimensions of IHD in that integration is an assertion of individual agency – hence, a sense of power or the political – and manifest the physical in relation to learning and improving embodied skills while in the group) refers to a discussant's having said the following: "It's a great advantage for voice majors. You get to apply the concepts of ensemble playing." The political aspect may be inferred from the student's specialization (voice major) while the physical is implied by the translation of theories learned into the physical plane (apply concepts) of enhanced performance. The manner in which integration happens is not covered by any of the discussions, and thus, is not part of the data presented.

Empowerment towards practical applications. Finally, "empowerment towards practical applications" (natural, political, and social dimensions) was manifested by this response: "Since I've been in the chorale [Glee Club] for few years, I've learned different techniques of conducting and I'll be able to apply it in my town's own chorale." The student's reference to his town points to the natural (or environmental) aspect; the ability to apply techniques pertains to the political; and being in the town's own chorale underscores the social. Note that the narrative above is not to be considered objective evidence but must be seen as perceived consequences of having participated in the group.

Social dimensions point to being part of a collective that allows for learning and

response to local contexts. Political dimensions include individual and community empowerment, particularly in having learned a new skill with great personal and communal value or utility. It must be underscored here that empowerment is seen in a member's having discerned that he has what it takes to apply it in a real and bigger world scenario. A person who has not realized his sense of power will not find avenues of application through his own agency. Physical dimensions arise from the sense of scale ("it's not just about performing to a larger or smaller group…") possible only in the experience of a group, recognition of the many forms of intervention ("… what is essential is that we know that in a chorale, improvement can be created? in many forms"), an awareness of the temporal state of things in one's self or others ("… there is also some improvement in terms of voice techniques, since I'm a voice major student, I'm having to make adjustment in singing"), and translating the theoretical and cognitive into the physical spaces of application. The natural dimension appears as one can recognize one's relationship to a larger social ecology such as one's own town chorale. The Glee Club member acknowledges that his or her agency is not limited to the school and its extensions off-campus but is also connected to his larger living environment.

Personal Goals

The personal goals that resonated with the above themes of instrumentality were political, social, and physical in nature. Personal goals like learning and being a help to others' learning are essentially political in nature as they pertain to the empowerment of people. The following quotes come straight from the core of political goals intersecting with the social: (1) "Of course, we are voice majors and lovers of music … We get to help other students, (have) exposure, and I get to develop my confidence in front of many people."; (2) "Improvement for self and with others – the fact that they are chorale members doesn't totally imply that they all are unaware of the chorale's objectives. Others may be a step ahead while others aren't."; (3) "… at first, it was hard because I'm not really a singer but as time passed by I learned more about singing because I got a chance to develop my self-esteem." Other personal goals manifest the intersection of the social and physical dimensions, as shown by this response: "In this context, it is more of the activity of socializing with one another in the different activities that can take place in a chorale." It should be noted that this paper underscores "agency" and not the "manner" by which the agency takes place; hence, the "attainment" of personal "political" goals is an aspect beyond the concern of this study.

Desiring for and the acknowledgment of the resonance experienced with other members in the organization are dominantly social goals achieved. A discussant attested:

"… the fact that they are lovers of music, they thrive in people's enthusiasm for music, (especially) if they know that they have a common ground with others." A similar statement was, "Fun… you get to 'bond' with other CMPA Glee Club member students."

Experiences and Benefits Towards Integral Human Development Framework (IHD)

Benefits Experienced. The perceived instrumentality of the Glee Club in the lives of its members stems from many experiences (particularly benefits or positive experiences), mostly involving learning (skills and techniques, and adjustment to new competency levels), social integration (collaboration and bonding with members), sense of empowerment (confidence building and assisting others). These highlight a member's sense of the sociality and scale (performance for big and small audiences, assisting a community larger than Glee Club, and even an improved self-confidence that is developed as one experiences increased public exposure during performances).

These experiences show an overlap of the political, social, natural, and the physical dimensions of the IHD framework. While the spiritual and financial domains do not appear strongly in narratives, they are incorporated in the life of the organization, particularly their service in the institutional Masses ("spiritually… since we are singing as a Mass choir, we sing in the Masses and we are blessed as we sing."), and in the lives of members – in the form of scholarships and other forms of financial support ("I feel so tired from practicing my major but I need to join the choir practice in the evening because of my scholarship."; "It's being taken care of, anyway.").

Struggles. Not all experiences are easily celebrated as beneficial. Knowledge, socialization, and scholarships are not without a number of costs, one of which is rehearsals. One discussant elaborated on the time demands of being in the Glee Club: "… two to three hours once a week if there's no performance, but we get to rehearse every day when there's [a] performance." This requirement becomes burdensome when the time demanded is not available. The manner in which the members rehearse were not discussed but one of them indicated that they have trouble accomplishing performance targets with the limited two to three-hour weekly rehearsals: "The problem is we don't have enough time, especially when we have big productions, everything is in a rush. We don't have enough time to prepare and to memorize the pieces." It becomes even more difficult when a member is made to choose between academics and choir practice.

Natural struggles pertain to issues that relate to the educational environment or ecology (the relationship between the competing time-space concerns of members), in general. The following underscore the natural (ecological) challenge: (1) "I want to

practice. I want to focus on my major. I feel like I'm neglecting my major because there's too much focus on choral rehearsals."; (2) "It's a big responsibility, you have to think of your practice and then you have to manage the organization. It's hard to balance the time for your own personal practice time and for the college's organization [ecology]."; The physicality (space-time) of the burden was elucidated by another response: (3) "Physically, it really affects me because it's very tiring, especially to other members who live in very far places outside Metro Manila."

The ecological aspect of the physical domain of IHD may be easily found in the ecology or the relationship of the many areas in one's life that are affected by one's participation in the Glee Club (situated within a specific time-space). Social and political struggles that come with participation involve irritable encounters with co-members. One discussant mentioned that peace and order is possible "… as long as one does not get upset, like when a frequently attending member complains about another member's unfair practice with frequent absences." Not being heard is also a cause of irritation and stress for members. One member noted: "We tried our best to give our suggestions but they just get ignored."

How Experiences and Benefits Define the Instrumentality of SPU Manila Glee Club Towards IHD

As shown in the data above, the instrumentality of the SPU Manila Glee Club is shaped by all six dimensions of the IHD, largely by the political, social, physical, and natural, and marginally by the financial and spiritual. Development, as perceived by the discussants, comes because of the many positive (beneficial) experiences that lead to the attainment of personal goals of members (collaborative learning and self-development being one among many mentioned earlier) that seem to compensate adequately for the struggles that impact the same dimensions.

Satisfaction of the Selected SPU Manila Glee Club Members

The eight discussants were mostly satisfied with the organization, notwithstanding the challenges that it presents to them. Members know their priorities and are willing to let go of their Glee Club membership once it gets in the way of their learning and their acceptable performance in their academic courses ["… I would reconsider (my membership) for my final year in the CMPA because I have to prepare for my graduation recital."]. Others are more willing to sacrifice more as long as activity objectives are set ["Objectives should be outlined."], improvements are seen in the productions ["… we are just looking for some improvements in the performance and production."], and a regular

evaluation of the organization's activities and officers is conducted ["Activities and officers should be evaluated."]. The lowest evaluation score (5 out of 10) was given during the FGD by the member experiencing space-time-related or physical difficulties. Three other discussants gave scores between 8 and 9. The mean score given by members of the Glee Club is 7.5 - a score that translates to an intent to stay in the organization.

Conclusion

Through an FGD involving eight members of the SPU Manila Glee Club, the results revealed that the experiences of the students affect the physical, financial, political, and social dimensions of their lives, enabling them to achieve personal goals related to exposure, receiving assistance, and developing self-confidence. The benefits result in satisfaction of most of the members and a desire to continue with the group, provided participation does not get in the way of academic priorities. The study also revealed a desire among students to assert instrumentality in the chorale group as they sought more regular evaluations and frustrations over not being heard.

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Biographical Notes

The authors are graduate students of the College of Music and the Performing Arts of St. Paul University Manila. Their specializations vary from music education, performance, and music therapy. They can be contacted through Brian Saludes Bantugan, PhD. at St. Paul University Manila, 680 Pedro Gil Street, Malate, Manila, Philippines or by e-mail at spumresearchcenter@gmail.com.

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