

IMPACT OF MODEL UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCES ON INDIA'S YOUTH

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Abstract: Model United Nations is an academic simulation of the functions and organs of the United Nations system. It involves students taking up the role of diplomats while representing the different member countries of the UN. Model UN has been actively pursued by students in India since the late 1990s and today, India is host to over 200 annual Model UN conferences. Despite its popularity and relevance to the global world, the impact of Model UN on the economic, political and social remains as an unmeasured factor.

India's Youth, which accounts for over 50% of the entire population, is the driving force which will power India to global prominence in the 21st century. Model UN is an academic exercise which has been embraced by the Indian Youth with open arms and is transforming from the hobby of the elite to the practice of the masses. For the above mentioned reasons, the impact of Model UN on the Indian Youth is vital. This paper will seek to quantify the impact of Model UN on the Indian Youth in three levels viz. Economic Level, Political Level and Social Level.

On the Economic level, this paper will seek to establish the relation between Model UN and the Indian youth's role in the country's economy. With the surge in the number of economic and financial international organizations being simulated in Model UN, this also will help to reiterate the importance of globalization as well as the importance of the relation between India and the global economy in India's Youth. In the Political Level, this paper will seek to explain the impact of Model UN on youth's attitude towards politics and the government. As Model UN involves the representation of governments in an international forum, the youth are compelled to think like the legitimate government and hence there is a greater understanding of the political system of a country. Finally, the Social impacts of Model UN remain one of the most complex aspects of this academic simulation as it greatly influences the society. The concept of Model UN involves an important sociological concept of socialization: role play. When students take up the role of diplomats, they think and react as responsible people of power who represent a country and who think for the benefit of their country over personal gains. This role play instils a sense of public service, selflessness and social responsibility towards the society.

This paper will, hence, seek to establish the importance of Model UN in India and how Model UN will help India achieve sustainable and Good Governance while inculcating social responsibility into India's future Citizens

Keywords: Global Awareness, Good Governance, India's Youth, Model United Nations, Social Responsibility

INTRODUCTION

Human society has revolved around avoiding conflict and promoting peace. The 20th century is a testimony to the fact that war and peace are essential parts of human society and human history. Conflict and resolution are a result of increased social contact among people of various backgrounds with various beliefs and ideologies and form a major part of today's international scenario. In order to trace the evolution of "Conflict and Resolution" in the human society, certain events in the 20th century have to be examined carefully. One such event, in particular, to be understood is the formation of The United Nations. The United Nations was formed in 1945 by the "Big Three" of world politics with the purpose of preventing war and maintaining world peace. An interesting analysis of the formation of the UN is the fact that it was the first time in human history that men and women from different parts of the world would collaborate to deliberate on

conflicts and attempt to resolve them by mutual assistance and universal consensus. An element which is truly unique to the UN is importance of universal consensus amongst all of its 194 member nations; something its predecessor, the League of Nations, lacked. The achievements of the UN cannot be quantified in numbers or graphs, but it can be said that after 68 years of existence, the UN has achieved unparalleled success in many spheres of global importance such as the tireless fight against the HIV/AIDS epidemic¹, maintaining peace in war-torn regions², protecting and promoting human rights³ to name a few.

The world's first academic simulation of UN was held in 1953 at Harvard University, which as of today remains the most prestigious and successful Model United Nations Conference in the world by many standards. Harvard University wanted to recreate the diplomatic environment for the purpose of enlightening the students regarding the current affairs of International relations and the purpose of MUNs, so to say, was established. Harvard University's initiative to raise awareness about international issues transformed into a revolution which changed the perspective of co-curricular activities during a student's education. Today, 60 years after the first edition of HMUN Boston, there are over 400 annual and bi-annual Model United Nations conferences held all across the world (Yossinger, 2012). In India alone, the United Nations Centre for Information for India and Bhutan (UNIC) partners with over 50 MUNs which witnesses a participation strength of 15,000-20,000 students as of 2013 (UNIC, 2013). The actual number of MUNs hosted in India is significantly higher because many conferences do not have institutional backing i.e they are independent of any institutional support and hence are not recognised by the UNIC. In addition to the 50 UNIC-recognised MUNs, India may be hosting close to 200 small and large MUNs ranging from Intra-institution to international level conferences, which translate to a participation strength of close to 50,000 school and college students. MUNs in India have become a rage for students because it has become a ground for intellectual discussions on issues of global importance, something which would be impossible in India's conservative education system.

Model United Nations is a concept which has evolved with time and it has become more accessible to the masses due to the continuous efforts of eager students and the UN4MUN program of the United Nations which facilitates the setting up, functioning and ending a Model UN conference in India and for the rest of the world (UN, 2013). MUNs (College level MUNs) in India began in 1998 with Rotary International Model United Nations (RIMUN) Pune, being the very first conference to be held in India (RIIMUN, 2013). With the concept of MUNs existing in India for the past 15 years, there are bound to be some impacts on the student's mind. This can be analysed in three levels namely; 1) Economic Level, 2) Political Level, and 3) Sociological Level. On the Economic level, the impact of MUNs on the economics of school/college life cannot be overlooked. MUNs in India started as a purely academic exercise but have developed into competitions with sizeable cash prizes and other benefits. In a recently concluded survey, 70% (Figure 1) of the students who participated in MUNs preferred to be in a MUN with a cash prize in it. The common answer amongst all the survey participants was that a cash prize acts as a "justified incentive". Another interesting aspect of this analysis is the fact that students now could enjoy a significantly higher standard of living after attending and winning MUNs as the present norm is to host a MUN conference in lavish hotels with attractive cash prizes. Monetary incentives have also enabled students to become financially conscious and it is particularly effective for the Organising committee of a MUN as they handle books of accounts and bank transactions, which are both essential skills in today's world.

Not only do MUNs help in the practical aspects of economics, but it also helps in understanding complex theorems and application of these theories in international scenarios. 6% of the students who take part in MUNs consider MUNs as a tool used to understand economics in a more practical approach while 27% of the students accept that MUNs help in their school/college course work and contribute to their overall knowledge of the subject. (Figure 2)

On the Political Level, MUNs have ushered in a new age of political enlightenment and have greatly promoted a healthy political culture in India. Politics is defined as the 'art of pursuing power' and power is something which is often related to age, experience and respect in India. By exposing the youth to the nuances and intricacies of negotiation, consensus and cooperation, MUNs have positively changed the attitude of the youth towards politics as a career in India. Certain MUN conferences choose to simulate the Indian Cabinet as a committee wherein students can take up the role of Members of Parliament instead of representing different countries. This initiative increases the interest of the youth in India's domestic political issues, which in turn leads to political active and morally-guided responsible citizens who will form a pro-active civil society.

¹ <http://www.un.org/en/un60/60ways/health.shtml>

² <http://www.un.org/en/un60/60ways/pk.shtml>

³ <http://www.un.org/en/un60/60ways/rights.shtml>

MUNs primarily deal with issues of global reach and interest and students are bound to discuss and deliberate on topics which may or may not affect them. MUNs have effectively made Indian students more conscience of international issues and have broadened their perspectives on the world as a whole. In a survey of 70 school and college MUN attending students, 40 students were able to elucidate and give potential solutions for the ongoing Syrian crisis with factual accuracy. Many students displayed an unusual level of diplomacy while answering the question which only means that MUNs have helped school and college students become alert with regards to global conflicts and this also shows that the youth in India realises the plight of all the people in conflict. Figure 2 shows how MUNs have helped increased the popularity of domestic and international politics in India and figure 3 shows the response of the India youth if Model United Nations conferences would lead directly to employment with the United Nations.

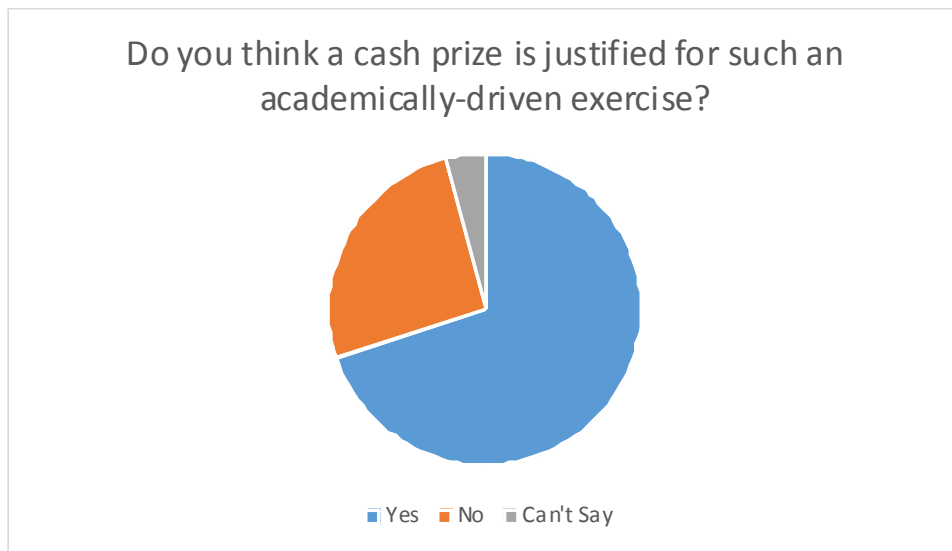


Figure 1: showing Students' opinion about cash prizes in a MUN

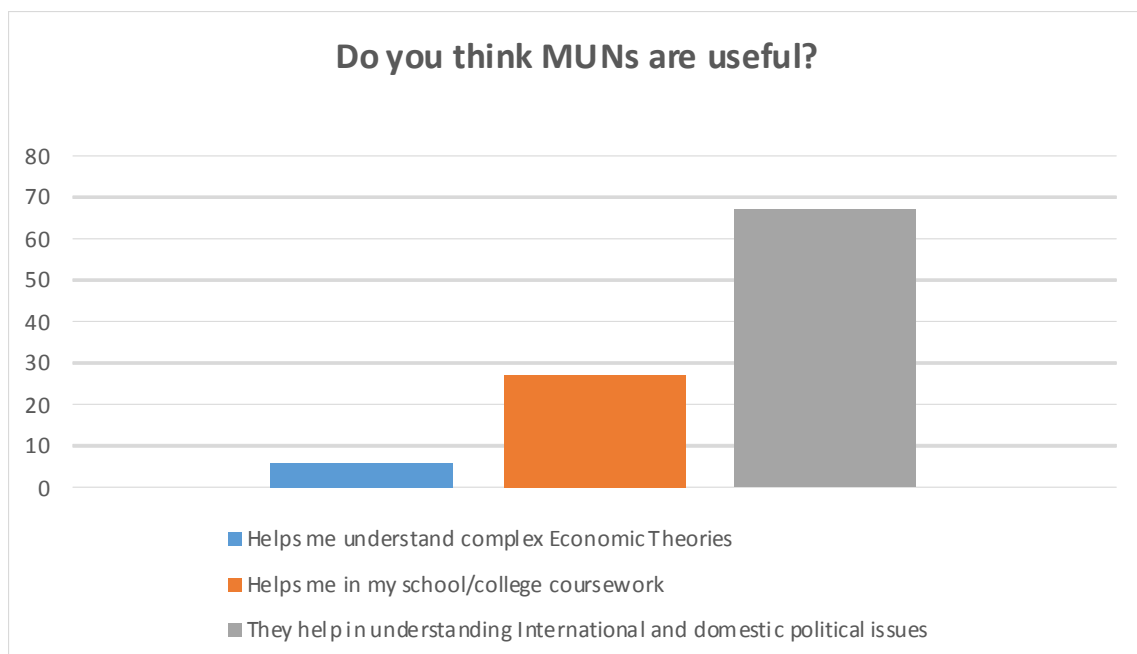


Figure 2: showing the importance of MUNs according to the Indian Youth

Finally, the Sociological impacts of Model United Nations remain the most interesting and crucial aspect of MUN Conferences as MUNs have the power to influence an entire generation of people and it has evident in India for the past 15 years.

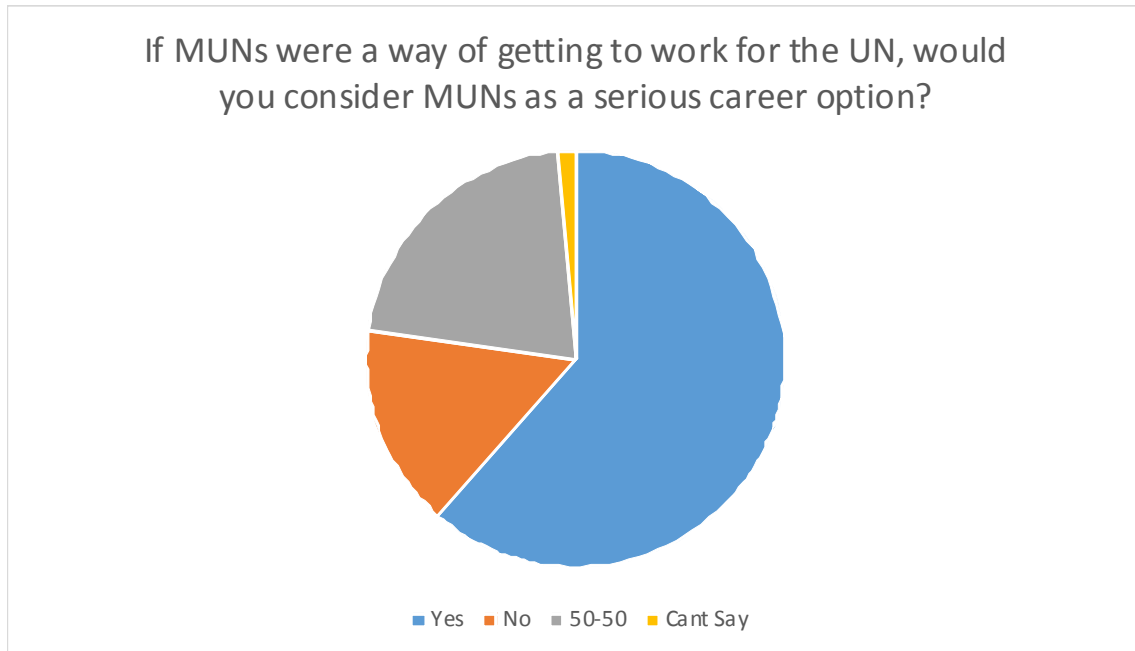


Figure 3. Showing the percentage of the Indian Youth who want to work with the United Nations

In sociology, there is a process called “Socialization” where infants learn the norms and beliefs of the society by interacting with family, peer groups, the media etc. One important aspect of socialization is the factor of ‘role play’ which involves students emulating the role of a diplomat in the UN and this is called “Role socialization”, a process by which a person incorporates knowledge, skills, attitude and affective behaviour associated with carrying out a particular role (Free, n.d.).

Socially, MUNs are academic exercises which inculcate a habit of social responsibility of an individual towards his/her society. When a student takes up the role of a diplomat discussing climate change and carbon credits, the student is compelled to think in the same line views of thought as the diplomat would use and hence, he is forced to reconsider his personal towards the agenda in favour of what would be more socially accepted. Role play is also a method of youth empowerment as students abandon individualist agendas in order to serve the society by becoming more socially responsible. Certain committee like the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) are a great example of how students use role play to serve the society in a more effective manner. What a student may deliberate in UNEP regarding waste management can be easily adopted in his life style or the student may use this new-found knowledge and spread it for the betterment of the society. MUNs cease to remain as an exercise and they become a medium of mutual assistance and transfer of coveted knowledge between people.

Individually, MUNs provide a platform for self-development and self-help. Figure 4 shows the common positive effects of MUN on a student, taken from a recent survey. MUNs greatly improve the analytical and oratory abilities of a person as the student now understand what and how much to has to be said or written. These soft skills are greatly required for anyone in order to succeed in our highly competitive world and MUNs act as a soft-skills training for the same.

Another positive impact of Model United Nations conferences is the overall development of the personality of a student. After attending MUN conferences, students feel more alert and responsible towards their society. This also contributes to the increase in Good and Effective governance of a country because if the

youth is empowered with a vision for a better country with a global perspective, policy makers will be forced to formulate youth-friendly and socially-relevant policies that will be most beneficial for the society.

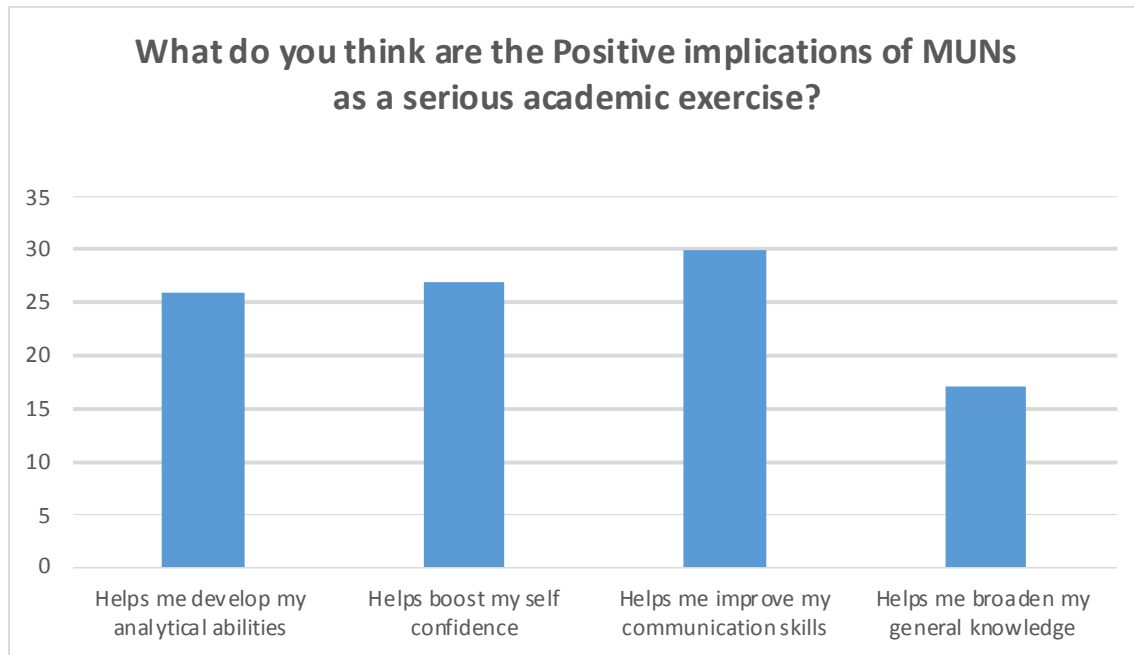


Figure 4. showing the Positive Implications of MUNs on the youth

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Model United Nations is an academic exercise which aims at promoting awareness of domestic and international issues among students who look to emulate the functions and roles of the United Nations and its organs. After analysing the role of MUNs in India, the result of this paper is that the level of impact Model United Nations Conferences have on the India's youth is unprecedented. No other event/program/activity has engaged so many students with ardent fervour before and no exercise will ever replace the formidable foundation of diplomatic negotiations of a MUN conference. Model United Nations Conferences do not invite students to deliberate on alien issues, rather, MUNs make responsible citizens out of eager and committed students.

CONCLUSIONS

This study effectively demonstrates the impacts of Model United Nations conferences on the Indian youth and co-relates the presence of MUNs with the increase in good and responsible governance. In conclusion, it can be said that Model United Nations is one such co-curricular activity which has the potential to influence millions of children in India and around the world and that Model United Nations has the power to influence the outcome of the present and future generations in India.

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