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**Exploring Benefits of Extracurricular Activities Used in English
Language Learning among Thai Undergraduate Students**



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Abstract

Extracurricular activities (ECA) play vital roles in English language learning for they help develop learners' language skills. Moreover, ECA are proved to also enhance social skills. Lawhorn (2008) explains that ECA give students a chance to form friendships and develop social skills as they can meet others who share those same interests. Mancha & Ahmad (2016) also state in their research that through extra-curricular activities, the students will be educated in the form of spiritual, leadership, teamwork as well as self-confidence. This study, therefore, was conducted in order to explore benefits students gain and different skills they achieved through their involvement in the ECA. It was also aimed to measure students' satisfaction when performing the activities. The subject of the study was eighty four university students studying in architecture and design related programmes in a state university. All of them experienced ECA through four different activities used to supplement their English language learning. All the activities were organised by their English language instructors who were the researchers of this study. The data were collected using survey questionnaires and the interview method. The research findings indicate that the students acquired different skills, both language and non-language, according to the activity they participated in. The benefits they obtained from all the activities also vary.

Keywords: Extracurricular Activities, Benefits, Skills, Satisfaction, English Language Learning

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Importance of the Problem

Extracurricular activities (ECA), defined by UNESCO International Bureau of Education, are a range of activities organized outside of the regular school day, curriculum or course intended to meet learners' interests. These activities can help learners become more involved in their schools or communities and can help them to develop social and soft skills and to promote wellbeing. In addition, ECA can be conducted in various forms such as sports, games, voluntary work, music, etc.

Due to their multiple advantages, extracurricular activities have been widely used in educational areas to develop learners' skills in various aspects. Massoni (2011) explained how ECA bring positive effects on students. First, they provide experiences that are not included in formal courses of study. Second, these activities educate behavior. Third, they also affect the school completion of students. Lastly, these lessons teach lessons in leadership, time management, etc.

ECA also play an important part in English language teaching and learning. To master English language skills learners need to be exposed to environment or activities that encourage them to use the language. For this reason, ECA serve the need. A study by Ginosyan, Tuzlukova & Hendrix (2019) shows that students' participation in various ECA could improve their English language skills when the activities were conducted in English. In addition, Daif-Allah and Alsamani (2014) state that ECA effectively fight students' low motivation, challenging them to learn a foreign language. For ECA, students learn English in a relaxed setting without the distraction of formal assessment, and this helps them to enhance their abilities in the language.

As university instructors who have organised and facilitated ECA for years, the researchers have tried to provide our students with a variety of activities to ensure that they learn English in encouraging atmospheres and develop both language and social skills at the same time. Therefore, this study was conducted to explore the benefits and skills the students gained as well as their satisfaction levels towards the ECA they attended.

1.2 Research Questions

1. What benefits do the students gain from each extracurricular activity they participated?
2. What skills do they develop through their participation in ECA?
3. How satisfied are they with the ECA offered to them?
4. How would they like the activities to be improved?

1.3 Research Objectives

1. To explore benefits the students gain and skills they achieve through their involvement in extracurricular activities (ECA)
2. To measure students' satisfaction levels when performing ECA
3. To seek students' comments and suggestions for improvement on ECA in future

1.4 Conceptual Framework

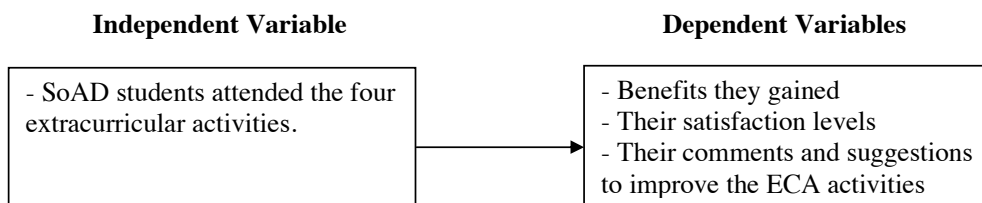


Figure 1 The conceptual framework of the study

Extracurricular activities (ECA) has been used by many education units worldwide in all levels to improve student's academic performance and other beneficial skills through variety of activities in many platforms (Buckley & Lee, 2018). Nowadays higher level educational institutions try to persuade students to participate in enhance their experience by offering many types of extracurricular activities for the progressive consequences of ECA arrangement through the use of integrating multiple skills for a balanced ECA activity that contains maximum academic and cognitive benefits for the students.

2. Research Methodology

2.1 Research Design and Instruments

During September to October 2020, the researchers set up four extracurricular activities: Baking, Music, Movie and Debate for the first year undergraduate students who enrolled in the School of Architecture and Design (SoAD), King Mongkut's University of Technology, Thonburi (KMUTT), Thailand in the first semester of the academic year 2020. These activities were designed to be project-based activities to promote the use of English outside the classroom in a more natural environment. As per the situation of COVID-19 pandemic—despite being in the easing period of the COVID-19 control measures, each activity accommodated 25-35 students at a time to avoid crowdedness. Each activity, led by a facilitator, was provided four times and students needed to register their attendance for each activity in advance. On an activity day, each student had to attend his or her registered activity and he or she had to join other three different activities until finishing doing all four activities. The sequence of attending each activity for each student then might not be the same. As a result, all students eventually had the opportunity to attend all four different activities at the end of October 2020.

2.1.1 Baking Activity

This activity was planned to help students develop their use of communicative English through a daily activity like baking. They also had a chance to learn about a different culture through food and improve other skills: collaboration, time management and problem-solving. The facilitator started by distributing them a word search worksheet as they needed to find the hidden vocabulary related to baking. After that, the facilitator showed the students an ingredient of the dessert one by one to let them guess which recipe was to be made. Students then grouped up to prepare for baking as one group consisted of 4-5 students. Each group received the instruction and ingredients of the dessert at each baking station with cooking utensils. Students then started the process of preparing and baking under the supervision of the facilitator. They then could enjoy the dessert they made at the end of the activity.

2.1.2 Music Activity

The objective of this activity was to encourage students to use English by integrating multiple communication skills and creative thinking through the use of music. Firstly, the facilitator started by showing some key words from the selected song and brainstormed the ideas about the song from the students. Then students listened to the song, received a worksheet showing the song lyric with some missing words, and then added those missing words while listening to the song. Next, they were asked to take the role of a character mentioned in the song and acted to respond to the situation in the lyric by writing a Facebook post. Each writing post would be read aloud for others to listen to. The last was a small group work as they had to select one English song and create their live music video to show in front of the room.

2.1.3 Movie Activity

This activity was organised to encourage students to express opinions and practise critical thinking skill. To do the activity all the participants watched a movie selected by the facilitator in a provided room. Before watching the facilitator provided them the movie background so that they had some ideas about it. After the movie the participants performed discussions relevant to the movie.

2.1.4 Debate Activity

This activity aimed at helping students to improve speaking and thinking skills. Before the activity the facilitator explained how to perform a debate so that the students understood the basic process. After the students formed their team, the facilitator assigned a topic and allocated 15 minutes to the debaters for preparation. The debate was conducted for approximately 20 minutes for each round.

2.2 Population and Sample

There were 127 first year undergraduate students who enrolled in the School of Architecture and Design (SoAD), King Mongkut's University of Technology, Thonburi (KMUTT), Thailand in the first semester of the academic year 2020. At SoAD, in the academic year 2020, there were four undergraduate programs: Architecture, Interior Architecture, Industrial Design and Communication Design, all of which are design-related international programs. This means these students used English as their main language in their learning. Their English proficiency levels ranged from intermediate to upper intermediate (due to their standardized test scores submitted to SoAD during their enrollment). Based on the scores, their English skills were supposed to be good even though they were not English-major students.

The sample of the study was 84 first year undergraduate students of the School of Architecture and Design (SoAD) of King Mongkut's University of Technology, Thonburi (KMUTT), Thailand. These students were those who attended all four extracurricular activities: Baking, Music, Movie and Debate while the rest (43 students) did not attend all activities. Therefore, the researchers selected only the 84 students who attended all 4 activities as the sample of this study since they all shared the same experiences in doing these 4 activities in the same semester.

2.3 Data Collection and Data Analysis

After each activity was finished, each student was asked to answer questionnaires created online using Google Docs application. The questionnaires consisted of seven items in order to explore students' opinions, benefits they gained and satisfaction levels towards the activities they attended. The questions used in the questionnaire were both multiple response and open-ended questions in order to allow the students to express their opinions freely. Also in case of receiving any unclear answers, the researchers would interview the particular students more for better understanding of their opinions and feedbacks. A 5-point Likert scale question on their satisfaction towards each activity was as well included in the questionnaires. Researchers in sociolinguistic and education have normally used the questionnaires and interviews in their studies with satisfactory results (Creswell, 2002; Zakhir & O'Brien, 2016; Normah, 2017). The use of these two instruments offered a mixed quantitative and qualitative analysis of the collected data.

The analysis of the data focused on students' opinions and feedbacks towards each activity they participated. The obtained data were then classified into two comparative tables for each activity to show 1) the benefits they thought they gained while attending each activity and 2) their comments and suggestions to improve the activity. The data concerning their satisfaction levels were also presented in another table to compare the average satisfaction score of each activity. Also the number and percentage of the student's classified opinions of each activity are shown in each table. In addition, the non-language related skills the students thought they also gained from doing each activity were presented in the last table.

3. Findings

3.1 Introduction

From the study, it was found that most students realized the benefits they received from attending these four extracurricular activities, supported by the levels of satisfaction they felt. Also they did provide useful comments and suggestions to improve each activity they attended. The findings of each activity are discussed below.

3.2 The Baking Activity

Table 1 The benefits students thought they gained when attending the baking activity

| The benefits when attending the baking activity | No. of responses | Percentage |
|---|------------------|------------|
| They have great time doing this activity | 61 | 31.44 |
| They learn new knowledge/skills | 55 | 28.35 |
| They get relaxed with friends | 48 | 24.74 |
| They use English in a different situation outside class | 29 | 14.95 |
| They learn new vocabulary/words | 1 | 0.52 |
| TOTAL | 194 | 100 |

Regarding Table 1, the students mentioned the most obvious benefits they gained from participating the baking activity was “having great time” (31.44 percent), followed by “learning new knowledge and skills” (28.35 percent), “getting relaxed with friends” (24.74 percent), and “using English in a different situation outside class” (14.95 percent), respectively. Only 0.52 percent stated that they learnt new vocabulary/words in this activity.

Table 2 Student’s comments and suggestions to improve the baking activity

| Comments and suggestions to improve the baking activity | No. of responses | Percentage |
|---|------------------|------------|
| There is nothing to improve/It is already a good activity | 41 | 46.07 |
| More recipes, menus, or other types of food | 25 | 28.09 |
| Baking utensils or ingredients should be better and adequate/the environment should be nicer e.g. music | 9 | 10.11 |
| More time to do this activity | 8 | 8.99 |
| More amount of food/The recipe should be changed from a dessert to a main dish to fulfill hunger | 4 | 4.49 |
| Too complicate recipe/A baking instruction should be clearer. | 2 | 2.25 |
| TOTAL | 89 | 100 |

Owing to comments and suggestions of participants illustrated in Table 2, almost half of the participants (46.07 percent) thought the activity was already good and needed no changes. However, for those who wanted to improve the activity, their suggestions included more variety or different recipes to cook with (28.09 percent), better preparation in terms of baking utensils, ingredients and atmosphere (10.11), and more time to do the activity (8.99 percent). Additionally a few students wanted more amount of food to fulfill their hunger (4.49 percent) and few said the recipe used was too complicate or the instruction was not clearly understood (2.25 percent).

3.3 The Music Activity

Table 3 The benefits students thought they gained when attending the music activity

| The benefits when attending the music activity | No. of responses | Percentage |
|---|------------------|------------|
| They get relaxed with friends | 73 | 45.63 |
| They have great time doing this activity | 38 | 23.75 |
| They use English in a different situation outside class | 26 | 16.25 |
| They learn new knowledge/skills | 19 | 11.88 |
| They learn new vocabulary/words | 4 | 2.50 |
| TOTAL | 160 | 100 |

Table 3 presents almost half of students chose “getting relaxed with friends” (45.63 percent) as the most benefit they received while attending this activity. The benefits that came second, third and fourth were “having great time” (23.75 percent), followed by “using English in a different situation outside class” (16.25 percent), and “learning new knowledge and skills” (11.88 percent). The benefit they saw as the least (2.50 percent) was “learning new vocabulary/words in this activity”.

Table 4 Student’s comments and suggestions to improve the music activity

| Comments and suggestions to improve the music activity | No. of responses | Percentage |
|--|------------------|------------|
| There is nothing to improve/It is already a good activity | 27 | 29.67 |
| More creative activities e.g. to interpret songs without showing lyrics or compare songs from different eras | 23 | 25.27 |
| Include more variety of music/various music genres | 19 | 20.88 |
| There should be more participants in activity to create fun and concert-like atmosphere | 13 | 14.29 |
| More time to do this activity | 5 | 5.49 |
| Some activities are too difficult e.g. creating a live music VDO/Some activities should be easier | 3 | 3.30 |
| More snacks during the activity | 1 | 1.10 |
| TOTAL | 91 | 100 |

As per the data presented in Table 4, it can be seen that most students (70.33 percent) suggested the music activity should be improved. Approximately a quarter of the participants recommended more creative activities while one fifth of the sample preferred more variety of music or various music genres. It is also interesting that several students wanted to have more participants in the activity to create a concert-like atmosphere (14.29 percent). Meanwhile, a few requested more time to do the activity (5.49 percent) and few students wanted less difficult tasks (3.30 percent).

3.4 The Movie Activity

Table 5 The benefits students thought they gained when attending the movie activity

| The benefits when attending the movie activity | No. of responses | Percentage |
|--|------------------|------------|
| They get relaxed with friends. | 57 | 31.49 |
| They have great time doing this activity. | 52 | 28.72 |
| They use English in a different situation outside class. | 36 | 19.88 |
| They learn new knowledge/skill. | 31 | 17.12 |
| They learn another accent/pronunciation. | 5 | 2.76 |
| TOTAL | 181 | 100 |

From Table 5 the most outstanding benefit the students gained from participating the movie activity was “getting relaxed with friends” (31.49 percent), and the benefit that came second was “having great time” (28.72 percent). “Using English in a different situation outside class” and “learning new knowledge and skills” came third and fourth respectively. In addition, only 2.76 percent said they learnt about accents and pronunciation. It seemed that the benefits in terms of English language learning appeared less significant in this activity from the students’ point of views.

Table 6 Student's comments and suggestions to improve the movie activity

| Comments and suggestions to improve the movie activity | No. of responses | Percentage |
|--|------------------|------------|
| There is nothing to improve/It is already a good activity. | 29 | 32.95 |
| Students should be allowed to choose a movie to watch. | 25 | 28.40 |
| Snacks should be provided. | 13 | 14.72 |
| There should be a movie room for doing this activity. | 11 | 12.50 |
| More time to do this activity | 6 | 6.81 |
| There should be movies/documentaries related to their areas of study (art and design). | 4 | 4.54 |
| TOTAL | 88 | 100 |

When considering the comments and suggestions made by the participants in Table 6, almost one third thought the activity was already good and there was no need to change. However, the rest of the participants saw that the activity, to some extent, should have been adjusted or improved. The improvement they wanted the most (28.40 percent) was the freedom to choose a movie by themselves. The second most wanted item (14.72 percent) was snacks served while watching a movie. In addition, a few students said they wanted to view movies or documentaries that were related to their areas of study.

3.5 The Debate Activity

Table 7 The benefits students thought they gained when attending the debate activity

| The benefits when attending the debate activity | No. of responses | Percentage |
|--|------------------|------------|
| They learn new knowledge/skill. | 67 | 40.11 |
| They use English in a different situation outside class. | 47 | 28.14 |
| They have great time doing this activity. | 43 | 25.74 |
| They get relaxed with friends. | 10 | 5.98 |
| TOTAL | 167 | 100 |

Table 7 shows that the students chose "learning new knowledge or skill" the most for the benefit provided by the debate activity (40.11 percent), and the benefit they saw as the least (5.98 percent) was "getting relaxed with friends".

Table 8 Student's comments and suggestions to improve the debate activity

| Comments and suggestions to improve the debate activity | No. of responses | Percentage |
|---|------------------|------------|
| There is nothing to improve/It is already a good activity | 25 | 28 |
| Need more time to prepare for debate | 21 | 23.59 |
| The activity is rather difficult for first-year students. | 13 | 14.60 |
| Use easier debate topics | 12 | 13.48 |
| Want to have shorter debate time | 12 | 13.48 |

| | | |
|--|----|------|
| Use neutral topics that are fair to both sides | 6 | 6.74 |
| TOTAL | 89 | 100 |

According to Table 8, it can be explained that most of the participants (72 percent) wanted some improvement for the debate activity while 28 percent of them thought it was already good. The issue that they concerned the most was “time to prepare for debate” (23.59 percent), and the least was “using neutral topics” (6.74 percent).

3.6 Other Non-Language Related Skills Students gained from Extracurricular Activities

Table 9 The number of students who mentioned the non-language related skills they gained when attending each activity

| Each type of Non-Language Related Skills | Baking | Music | Movie | Debate |
|--|--------|-------|-------|--------|
| Collaboration skill | 79*** | 81*** | 13 | 82*** |
| Problem-solving skill | 47** | 57* | 9 | 77* |
| Critical thinking skill | 19 | 22 | 76** | 80** |
| Creative thinking skill | 11 | 72** | 18 | 32 |
| Time management skill | 25 | 30 | 5 | 75 |
| Presentation skill | 5 | 41 | 31* | 34 |

Table 9 shows that the non-language related skills students gained from each extracurricular activity, aside from the language skills. In the baking activity, almost all students mentioned they obtained the skill of collaboration (79 students), followed by the problem solving skill (47 students). Students who attended the music activity also stated they had a chance to mostly practise their collaboration skill (81 students). Moreover, the skills that became second and third most important for them were creative thinking skill (72 students) and problem solving skill (57 students). For the movie activity, students thought they used critical thinking skill the most (76 students), followed by the presentation skill (31 students). As of the debate activity, almost all students said they gained the collaboration skill (82 students), critical thinking skill (80 students) and the problem solving skill (77 students), respectively.

3.7 The Levels of Satisfaction of Four Extracurricular Activities

Table 10 The average scores of the satisfaction of students when attending each activity

| Each type of extracurricular activity | The average scores of students' satisfaction |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Baking Activity | 4.45 |
| Debate Activity | 4.42 |
| Music Activity | 4.36 |
| Movie Activity | 4.23 |
| AVERAGE SCORE | 4.37 |

From Table 10, as regards the results from the 5-point Likert question on the students' satisfaction levels towards the four extracurricular activities, it appears that the participants of these activities enjoyed attending these activities almost equally. The average score of the satisfaction of students was 4.37. The most satisfactory activity, however, was the baking activity (4.45) while the least was the movie activity (4.23).

4. Conclusion, Discussion, and Recommendation

4.1 Conclusion and Discussion

Overall, the participants were satisfied with these four extracurricular activities. It is clearly seen from the findings that they could realize the benefits of doing ECA to promote the improvement of using English in a more 'real-world' environment; that is, they could be able use the target language more naturally, aside from learning in an academic situation such as in the classroom with their teachers. Moreover, they also gained other non-language related skills while attending each activity as they were established to help the participants obtain multiple benefits in a project-based learning approach. These findings concur with the study of Zakhir (2019) that students consider extracurricular activities important to provide them a chance for improving their competencies in English, developing their personal qualities, affecting their approaches of learning and raising their motivation and self-confidence.

When focusing on the each activity in terms of the benefits students they thought gained, it was found that the types of interactive and project-based ECA such as the baking, debate and music activities that incorporated hand-on experiences and multiple tasks integrating different skills—both language related and non-language related ones—were more preferable for students (see Tables 1, 3, 7, 9 and 10) as they mentioned they obtained benefits in terms of improvement in their academic, linguistic, self-actualization and cognitive aspects. For example, for the debate activity, it is clearly seen that the students gained a number of skills in terms of both English language and non-English language. The result is consistent with Nisbett's (2003) statement. "Debate is an important educational tool for learning analytic thinking skills and for forcing self-conscious reflection on the validity of one's ideas".

On the contrary, the types of less interactive ECA such as the movie activity seems to be less interesting for students (See Tables 5, 9 and 10). When looking at the students' suggestions for improvement, quite a number of students wished they could choose the movie by themselves. Their need is understandable as people have different tastes and preferences. Based on the survey results, it can be concluded that watching a movie as a group activity is probably not the best option if it is particularly aimed for developing English language skills. It might be better if the activity is treated as self-directed learning which allows students to choose a movie to watch and practise language skills at their own pace. However, by this method of learning students will lose a chance to practise discussion and presentation skills. These findings are in accordance with the study by Ivanova and Logvinova (2017) that "the modern generation of students prefer interactive forms of events; they are not interested in being just spectators or listeners."

4.2 Recommendation

From the findings, it can be seen that the students enjoyed their participations in EAC provided by the School. They realized the importance of interaction with faculty and peers in a natural environment; therefore, ECA should be emphasized as universities should attempt to provide a supportive environment in establishing more ECA together with their formal academic teaching approaches (You, 2020).

However, when teachers consider to provide ECA, they should be aware of proper selection of the types of ECA as well as managerial elements such as processes on both issues of physicality like tools or time management, and of participants. For instance in the debate activity, some students needed more time to prepare as the activity required them to utilize a variety of skills, including presenting logical opinions and accurate information in a convincing manner (Alasmari & Ahmed, 2012). Also in the baking activity, several students suggested the activity should be more prepared with adequate tools and more time to do it.

Another crucial factor in doing ECA is variety in activity choices. As can be seen from the students' comments of all activities, 20-30% of students suggested that there should be more choices for them to choose. This is one concern teachers should be aware of how ECA can be adjusted to be more student-centered rather than teacher-centered to encourage students to join extracurricular activities for their own benefits related to the subject or specialty studied and their own personal development (Baynova et al., 2019).

Lastly, as of the recent COVID-19 outbreak in the global level, teachers may find it difficult to provide ECA their students in a face-to-face traditional platform. Fortunately, many online channels do exist in this era to assist the activities more or less. Still, it is interesting to study more on how ECA can be managed effectively online to help support and develop the students' academic and personal qualities with best efficiency.

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