

The effects of extra-curricular activities on the soft skills development of English major students at Ba Ria – Vung Tau University, Viet Nam

Nguyen Ngoc Thuan, Ho Van Han

School of International Training and Postgraduate Studies, Ba Ria-Vung Tau University, VietNam

ABSTRACT: This paper discussed the relationship between extracurricular activities and students' achievement at university level. The study focused on the impact of extracurricular activities on the soft skills development of English major students at Ba Ria-Vung Tau University. The general result shows that there is a close relationship between extra-curricular activities and soft skills development. If the students usually join activities out of classroom, they certainly improve their soft skills.

KEYWORDS: extra-curricular activities, soft skills development

Date of Submission: 08-06-2019

Date of acceptance: 25-06-2019

I. INTRODUCTION

With the international trade and the history dominance of British Empire as well as the current economic power impact of the United States of America to around the world makes the demand for using English which is expanding day by day. English becomes the third most spoken language in the world according to Barbbel Magazine (2018). Successful in learning this language gives us more chances to get better education and career as well. The global relationships and economic co-operations will be enhanced by English speakers (To, 2010). Importantly, Vietnam is a member of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Thus, the common language we use most is English which is an essential language to break all the language barriers. As the co-operation rules, people who want to work abroad and get well-paid jobs, English is the key for them. In the case of working in Vietnam, the English proficiency is one of the most requirements for every employee (Son, 2011). To people who wish to enhance their knowledge or reach the higher education, the good command of English will help them to understand and be able to gain the research material which are only available in English (Loi, 2011; Son, 2011). Therefore, English is the most popular language taught in Vietnam. The Vietnamese government has identified it as the most important foreign language at the national education system which is from primary school to the higher education (Hoang, 2008a; Lam, 2011; Loi, 2011; Trinh, 2005; Wright, 2002).

Basing on the rules of the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET, 2008b), there are two kinds of English language programmes in higher education including English major and non-English major programmes. The differences from these two groups are about the time spent in learning with English and the material used. Furthermore, the students who enroll in an English major, their degree will be focused on the major. For example, students who attend the Tourism English course will learn the English skills and Tourism as the main major. On the other hands, people who choose a non-English major degree will be required to take the English courses as a minor component. In that concept, the students who are learning English for specific purposes such as: business, tourism, teaching methodology and so on, have a big advantage of language skills. However, in the intergrating era, it is not enough for an international workforce. The employers have more requirements on the staff who should be better in languages and soft skills. The big amount of foreigners, who work and live in Vietnam is around 80.000 people (Nguoi Lao Dong journal, 2019) indicates that Vietnamese labors cannot be satisfied with their skills. Knowledge is a must for competing with the human resource from around the world. While language is supposed a skill, many headhunters says soft skills like office computer skills, communication skills, time management skills which are the key success for everyone in the modern workplace. Therefore, he should train himself when he is still at school if he wants to be a high-standard employee. When he has more time and can practice his academic knowledge and skills immediately after school.

However, to begin learning a new language and training new skills are not simple, many students easily stuck and get bored at the time. It takes them much time to learn and practice every single day. The motivation to encourage them is the most effective way to wake up themselves. Creating learner's motivation is a valuable condition for learning. The interest of students is the way to ensure their learning path continuously (Anderson,

1963). As a suitable learning method is extremely necessary. Normally, people often focus on these English skills such as: listening, writing and reading. They usually practice them by doing exercises from materials such as books or paper tests. Specially, speaking skill seems not having much attention. The lack of real situations prevents students from expressing their own view and opinions as well as improving their oral fluency and proficiency which leads to unsuccess in English communication. It also brings them to a passive world and makes them easy to quit the study. A Foreign language is learnt by its nature and with an interactive process. It is essential for learners who are studying English in non-English speaking environment, to experience authentic communication cases. The learners not only improve their writing abilities, reading skills and critical thinking, but also get a place for discussing works (Church and Sedlak, 1976). Learning through activities will help the students have real environments to practice and apply what they have learnt. Furthermore, students will have good opportunities to achieve their curricular goals. They discover their talents and develop their skills to reach the achievement. The way students choose to spend their time after school can affect their academic results (Stephen & Schaben, 2002). Following Eccles (2003), the level and frequency of participating in extracurricular also impact participant's future success. Thus, a common method most students and education leaders nowadays use to improve, train new skills and create motivation is joining extracurricular activities.

Most education systems of developed countries usually encourage and create conditions for students who need real practice environment to join. More than half of American students who are attending at school participate in some kinds of out-door activities (Gardner, Roth & Brooks, 2006). Those activities include youth groups, academic or non-academic clubs, scouts, student council. In the past, the educational leaders of Saudi Arabia considered the ECAs as a mean of recreation and not have any effects the student achievement. As the result, after many studies and the growth of ECAs, they even believe that ECAs have the positive impacts of the academic performance and social skills as well (Amani Salmeen, Norah Alkhalidi, Renad Alshaber and Tahani Majrashi, 2019). In North America, learning and teaching second language cannot be a separate part with extracurricular activities (Campbell, 1973, Housen and Beardsmore, 1987). The current students in universities of The Philippines need to join out-door activities as many as possible to fill in their empty space in resumes as well as gain more experience for their future jobs. Because they understand the competitive of ASEAN Economic Community is going to expect more added skills among degrees.

According to a study from Hanoi University (2008) indicated that there are 78% students says that they just focus on general skills training course such as: presentation skills, trading skills, teamwork skills, and only 22% answers understand what exact and suitable skills for their future jobs. Understanding the perceptions of students, Ba Ria-Vung Tau University usually organizes many outdoors activities that provide students, including English major students, an environment to enhance knowledge and experience their interests. However, according to our observation, the quantity of participants is not as many as the organizers expect. Some students have been bored with the ECAs and lack of skills, just because of limiting practical environment. If the students have more friends who usually join different out-door activities, they can influence on them and take them there. They can widen relationships and have more missions to complete than being at home and get bored with homework. The attendance, academic performance, behavior, soft skills development strongly associate with students who participate in extra-curricular activities (Reeves, 2008; Prabhu, 1987). A survey was done by Trinh (2016) at Ba Ria-Vung Tau University shows that there are only 66 students answer they sometimes participate in school ECAs such as: English speaking club, Japanese club, camping and others in total 120 people were asked. More than one of fourth students never or rarely join any activities.

On the contrary, Eccles (2003) mentioned about the negative impact of some kinds of extra-curricular activities. If the students do not find common word among organizations, over-schedules or just involve in getting some personal advantages, the negative consequences will appear. Thus, the participant should have the orientation before choosing to take part in any activities to gain much benefit and suitable skills. It also could help them to avoid wasting time.

Following a research of Morrissey (2005), most people choose their career based on their participants in extracurricular activities which means that their job opportunities and income in the future may be relevant to what activities they join when they were in school. It's essential to encourage English students to be proactive and active in joining extra activities. According to our knowledge, Ba Ria-Vung Tau University still has not any research about this subject. Therefore, I expect this study will partly contribute to soft skills development of English major students at BVU who are seeking for an effective method to achieve the social skills through participating extracurricular activities.

II. AIMS OF THE STUDY

With the aim of researching the link between student achievement of social skills and extracurricular activities, the researcher will use the data through this research survey to recognize factors of extracurricular activities impact on BVU English major learners. Basing on the data collection, the researcher values factors impacting quality of extracurricular activities and testing the positive factors of extracurricular activities to

student soft skills development. Additionally, proposing administrative implications to improve quality of BVU's extracurricular activities and enhance the quality of English teaching and learning at BVU is also the purpose of this study.

Research questions

Question 1: What is the framework of extracurricular activities of BVU and English Language Faculty?

Question 2: What factors can measure the quality of extracurricular activities of BVU and English Language Faculty?

Question 3: How does the quality of extracurricular activities of BVU and English Language Faculty impact on the soft skills development of BVU English major learners?

III. EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES (ECAs)

Shulruf (2010) indicated that extracurricular activities are "external to the core curriculum". They are defined as the activities that are accompanied under the sponsors of the schools but fall outside of study time and not a part of the curriculum (Bartkus et al, 2012). It also means that the ECAs are activities that occur outside of the classroom where to study normal curriculum of schools and universities. Everyone may force to learn the same subjects in the course, however, they have right to choose what they want to join in their free time. If they participate in the extracurricular activities that basing on their interest, they will be more excited and proactive in joining. In this case, the strength of ECAs is performed. It is also believed that ECAs is a mean for enhancing their health, social interaction, leadership skills and self-confidence.

PARTICIPANTS

The participants of this study were 132 students who came from English major at Ba Ria-Vung Tau university, including Business English, Tourism English and Methodology of English. They consist of freshmen, sophomore and senior students. The students were just chosen randomly without any requirements. The first participants were 43 freshmen who just enrolled in the university about 6 months. Those participants have not had many opportunities to be familiar with college activities. 11 sophomores, and 36 juniors were the next participants who had more times to be involved in those activities. Finally, the most interactive participants were 42 seniors who had the longest attendance at the university. They have about 4 years to experience many occasions and various types of activities. They completed learning 4 skills: reading, speaking, listening and writing. Additionally, major subjects have been taught, for example: presentation skills, communication in business, etc. Most of them have part-time jobs or full-time jobs. They had most reliable comments.

THE EFFECTS OF EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES ON SOCIAL SKILLS

Besides the benefits of increasing academic performance, extracurricular activities also give us opportunities to train and practice our social skills. There a huge number of researchers who believe that ECAs participation have benefit in training and improving soft skills which contain the necessary skills for working in group, increasing positive attitude toward the school and behavior of participants. Participation in athletics activities provides students with unique chances that make their social self-concept. According to Massoni (2011) indicated that students who are involved in ECAs, get more chances to make friends. Those friends are people that have the same hobbies or background with the participants. They can help the participants to communicate and connect to other community. Especially, this community is different from the participants' friends circle. All the benefits can be taken by participating in various clubs also mentioned by Wilson (2009). People can base on the advantages of ECAs to make a significantly different of students interacting with others.

Reducing behavior problems is also a benefit of ECAs, Brown, M.D (2000) stated that the participants in sports have time to practice, train and follow the routine. They awake their responsibility of completing the tasks or missions. If joining football, basketball or dance routines, people are rewarded by their achievement and receive the respect. It helps to make their self-confidence, self-esteem. Education world states that "participation in school activities, especially athletics, leads to higher self-esteem and enhanced status among peers, which some argue is deterrent to antisocial behavior."

By completing learning task students were asked for, Prabhu (1987) cited that students who try to handle their tasks can create many new techniques. Teachers play the role of instructor in this process and students make their target language advance via involve in extracurricular activities. Students experience how to show their ideas, present the task, and handle discussions which contributed their language proficiency and communication ability. In addition, extracurricular activities are the environments for students to learn the skills including leadership, teamwork, organization, critical thinking, problem-solving and time management. It is like a mean of discovering their talents or future jobs. The colleges prefer students who have more connection to extracurricular activities in awarding scholarships. Moreover, career path may clear and suitable for the participants, who have more time to explore themselves and receive many practical lessons. Students often join

the organization with their interest, so they enjoy and easily find how to use it in their jobs. Being members of some organizations also helps students widen their relationship. Each type of clubs or volunteering teams give them chances to meet different people. Most of time they can share their interest, idea and experience as well. People who involve many extracurricular activities, can find their teammate, close friends, even the partner in future business. Those long-term joining times give students experiences and knowledge about many things which may not be taught at school. If someone look for a potential employee, they may choose people who have experience in that position though only by the participation in extracurricular activities.

Hinck & Brandell (1999), the Texas Council of Chief State School Officers found that “involvement in service learning affects students higher level thinking skills, motivation to learn, application of learning, insight, and basic academic skills.”

This review of previous researchers gave the positive effects of ECAs participation on the student soft skills development. There are the advantages of ECAs including self-esteem, self-confidence, leadership skills, teamwork, problem solving, organization, critical thinking, time management and others. Moreover, the relationship can be opened which helps the participant widen their circle of friends or finding their partner in business or life.

IV. RESULTS

There were total 132 students who were English major students, involved in 20 questions of the survey. The survey started with 3 questions about the habits and means of learning. Most people answered that they usually learnt at school. There were 19% students always learnt at school and the number of “never” was very low. It means that the students tended to learn at school at most of their time of learning. Besides that, they also used some other means of learning at home by books or electronic means. The numbers of “often” and “sometimes” were almost equal. Thus, the tendency of students seem like there were two types of learners who wish to practice more at home and others did not. As the writer mentioned before, the English Language Faculty had an English Speaking Club with the aim of helping students practice their English. It established in 2015 and worked for 4 years until now. Following the answers of the students, there were just 14,4% people who often joined. More than 17% people never participated in any activities of the club and 64,4% people sometimes had participations.

The following results focused on the skills that students could gain through taking part in extracurricular activities. There were more than 4 soft skills including teamwork skill, self-study skill, time-management skill and others. However, more than 72% students answered that they believed in the self-study skills would help them improve the English abilities. The extracurricular activities of the university and the faculty were known by the exchange culture programmes and English speaking practice meetings. The question for which soft skills were important for the future job received more than 76% answers for the communicative and negotiating skills.

According to the survey, around 70% students were not members of any clubs. Whenever a meetings or activities were organized, they rarely participated and just joined in case of having their friends. However, the participation also gave a number of their orientation for their joining. 24,2% had a good orientation at the beginning while there were about 40% students would change their purpose often.

Although, half of students were interested in the extracurricular activities, their evaluations of them were just at the normal level. Following their observations, they often participated in the activities with the quantity of more than 50 participants. Most of them believed that the role of extracurricular activities were essential in their studies and career path.

We used SPSS 20 to calculate the reliability of the questionnaires before analyzing the results. The finding was found that the number of Cronbach’s Alpha was $0.9 > 0.7$. Moreover, each question in the survey had the number bigger than 0.7. Thus, we will not eliminate any questions.

What is the framework of extracurricular activities of BVU and English Language Faculty?

The ECAs of the university

The students were asked about the kinds of the extracurricular activities that the university organized in multiple choices with these answers including conferences and meetings, culture exchange programmes, charity programmes and others. According to the data collecting from the students, there were 89,2% of students who have known about the culture exchange programmes and the rest was a negligible quantity.

The extracurricular activities of the English Language Faculty

The same with the question about the ECAs of the university, the students also were asked what they known about the ECAs of their faculty. The answers including conference and meeting, culture Exchange programme, practice speaking meeting. There were more than 90.6% people answered that the BVU-ESC was known by the practice speaking meetings.

The correlation between the ECAs of the university and the ECAs of the faculty

After collecting the data from the survey, we analyzed the correlation between the ECAs of the university and the ECAs of the faculty. The finding of Sig.1 tailed is $0,363 > 0,05$. It means both of ECAs have no correlation. Furthermore, we also see sig. 2 tailed $> 0,05$ too. Hence, we can go to the conclusion that there is not any relationships between the ECAs of the university and the ECAs of the faculty. It also means that those activities are not similarity.

What factors can measure the quality of extracurricular activities of BVU and English Language Faculty?

A “Yes/No” question was given to the students for the survey of the soft skills they gain through the extracurricular activities. The bigger percent belongs to the answer “yes” with the percentage of 94%. To discovery the deeper information, the researcher asked them more detail of what exact soft skills that they learn. There are 5 things they believed could learn through the ECAs such as being more confident in communication, opening relationship, improving teamwork skills, improving creative mind and being more flexible. However, most of students (90%) in the survey though they can get more confidence if they join ECAs regularly. Secondly, they also can improve creative mind and being more flexible. 67.6% of participants thinks that they can learn soft skills to improve their language skills through extracurricular activities.

Correlation between the framework of the school ECAs the quality of the ECAs				
		Do you know what extracurricular activities our school usually organize?	Do you learn any soft skills to improve your language skills through extracurricular activities?	In your opinion, what are the advantages of involving extracurricular activities?
Do you know what extracurricular activities our school usually organize?	Pearson Correlation	1	-.048	-.126
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
	N	132	132	132
Do you learn any soft skills to improve your language skills through extracurricular activities?	Pearson Correlation	-.048	1	.818**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
	N	132	132	132
In your opinion, what are the advantages of involving extracurricular activities?	Pearson Correlation	-.126	.818**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
	N	132	132	132

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

We see the sig. 2-tailed to calculate the linking of the ECAs and the quality. If the number of Sig 2-tailed smaller 0.05, it is proved that the items have the correlation. There is a correlation between the ECAs and the language skills basing on the number of Sig. 2-tailed = $0.00 < 0.05$. Furthermore, the ECAs also has a correlation with the soft skills which is proved by the Sig. 2-tailed = $0.00 < 0.05$.

The correlation between ECAs and the satisfaction of students and the attitude of the participants

The correlation between ECAs and the satisfaction of students and the attitude of the participants as well.				
		Are you interested in current activities of school clubs?	Will you introduce the programmes of school clubs to your friends?	Are you pro-active in joining extracurricular activities of the school or the faculty (ex: English club, picnic, quiz competition, etc.)?
Are you interested in current activities of school clubs?	Pearson Correlation	1	.874**	.893**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000

	N	132	132	132
Will you introduce the programmes of school clubs to your friends?	Pearson Correlation	.874**	1	.886**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	132	132	132
Are you pro-active in joining extracurricular activities of the school or the faculty (ex: English club, picnic, quiz competition, etc.)?	Pearson Correlation	.893**	.886**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	132	132	132

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

We calculate the correlation between ECAs and the satisfaction of students and the attitude of the participants as well. After analyzing, all the Sig. 2-tailed are smaller than 0.05. Thus, they have a correlation. More clearly, if the activities are good, the amounts of participants will increase.

What can administrative implications improve the quality of extracurricular activities of BVU and English Language Faculty to help students gain practical knowledge and skills?

The students gave a number of the frequent participants when they joined any extracurricular activities were more than 50 people. This number was told by more than 50% students who involved in the survey. There is also 90,7% students who believe that the participation in ECAs is (very) necessary.

V. CONCLUSION

Depending on the results, the researcher can answer three big research questions that are made at the beginning. In the question 1, basing on the previous reviews the author discovers the framework of school ECAs and the faculty ECAs. The school often carried out the events related to various field. However, they rarely concerned about the items such as what skills the participants could learn, what information they wish to learn, how to improve the participant's attitude to the topics and the finance abilities of students. The framework of school ECAs was the collection of many different events however there was no common visions. On the other hand, the framework of the faculty ECAs was indicated as a mean to improve the major students' English abilities and soft skills. After the findings, the author found some weaknesses of the programmes. Although, the organizations had the concern on the English abilities, soft skills training, the time from planning and holding, each event did not have a fix schedule. To sum up, two these frameworks of ECAs contain several positive items such as soft skills training, knowledge widening, attitude creating. Besides, it still existed some negative items including taking too much time and spending money from students.

The findings indicated that the school regularly organized the activities basing on the support and coordination from other partners. Thus, there was not any common concept for all the programmes which also limit the preparation and fixed schedule for the participants. However, they have a variety in the ECAs Framework. Unlikely, the ECAs from the faculty had more good points such as annual events, English practice for major students and cultural events. However, they were limited by the types of ECAs, population, finance for events, student's interest without fixed Schedule and so on. In conclusion the quality of ECAs was not good enough for the participants who wish it could be improved by the recommendation such as the improvement of content, concept, time and some related items. They can be used to motivate them in joining ECAs.

Fortunately, the positive of ECAs participation such as academic achievement time mangement skills, communication skills, leadership skills, etc, becomes a motivation for many students. People who understand the significant of ECAs, easily interact with their desires and practical eviroments. In testing the positive factors of ECAs participation that affects on the student soft skills development, the author recognizes the match between the theories and students perceptions. In the research survey, the participants revealed the same factors with the previous review in literature review including being confident in communication, opening their relationship, improving teamwork skills, developing creative and more flexible.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Amani Salmeen, Norah Alkhaldi, Renad Alshaber and Tahani Majrashi. (2019). Extracurricular Activities and Student Performance at Jubail University College. *International Journal of Liberal Arts and Social Science*. Vol.7.
- [2]. Anderson, L., VanDyke, L. (1963). *Secondary School Administration*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- [3]. Campbell, H. (1973) *Extracurricular foreign language activities*. American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, New York, N.Y.

- [4]. Church R. L. and Sedlak M. (1976). *Education in the United States: An Interpretive History*. New York: the Free Press. USA
- [5]. Eccles, J. (2003), Extracurricular activities and adolescent development. *Journal of Social Issues*, 59(4),865-889.
- [6]. Gardner, M., Roth, J., & Brooks-Gunn, I. (2008). Adolescents' participation in organized activities and developmental success 2 and 8 years after high school: Do sponsorship, duration, and intensity matter? *Developmental Psychology*, 44(3),814-830.
- [7]. Hoang, V. V. (2008a). The current situation and issues of the teaching of English in Vietnam. *Khoa học và Đời sống [The Journal of Science and Social Life]*, 3(9), 7-16.
- [8]. Housen A., Baetens Beardsmore H. (1987). Curricular and Extra-Curricular Factors in Multilingual Education. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 9, pp 83-102.
- [9]. Lam, T. L. (2011). The impact of Vietnam's globalization on national education policies and teacher training programs for teachers of English as an international language: A case study of the University of Pedagogy in Ho Chi Minh City. Ed.D Thesis 3463876, Alliant International University, San Diego, California, USA.
- [10]. Loi, N. V. (2011). Dynamic conceptions of input, output and interaction: Vietnamese EFL lecturers learning second language acquisition theory. PhD Thesis, University of Waikato, New Zealand.
- [11]. MoET. (2008b). Quyết định về việc phê duyệt đề án "Dạy và học ngoại ngữ trong hệ thống giáo dục quốc dân giai đoạn 2008 - 2020. N0 1400/ QĐ - TTg. [Decision N0 1400/ QĐ - TTg on the approval of the project "Teaching and learning foreign languages in the national education system in the period 2008 - 2020]. Hanoi, Vietnam: Vietnam National Politic Publications.
- [12]. Morrissey, K. (2005), The relationship between out-of-school activities and positive youth development: An investigation of the influences of communities and family. *Adolescence*.
- [13]. Reeves, D. B. (2008). The extracurricular advantage. *Education Leadership*, 86-87.
- [14]. Son, L. T. (2011). Teaching English in Vietnam: Improving the provision in the private sector. PhD Thesis, Victoria University, New Zealand.
- [15]. Stephens, L. J., & Schaben, L. A. (2002). The effect of interscholastic sports participation on academic achievement of middle level school activities. *National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin*, 86, 34-42.
- [16]. Trinh, Q. L. (2005). Stimulating learner autonomy in English language education: A curriculum innovation study in a Vietnamese context. PhD, University of Amsterdam, Netherlands.
- [17]. Vo Thi Thu Trinh & Ho Van Han (2016). Promoting active learning method & Strategies for students at BVU, Vietnam.
- [18]. Wright, S. (2002). Language education and foreign relations in Vietnam. In J. W. Tollefson (Ed.), *Language Policies in Education: Critical Issues* (pp. 225-244). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Nguyen Ngoc Thuan. "The effects of extra-curricular activities on the soft skills development of English major students at Ba Ria – Vung Tau University, Viet Nam." *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*. vol. 24 no. 06, 2019, pp. 74-80.