EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AND THEIR ROLES IN 
ENHANCING ENGLISH MAJORS LANGUAGE CAPACITY

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Abstract

Extracurricular activities (ECAs) are one of the most effective ways to enhance students’ English capacity as they help them acquire and produce language in a comfortable and fun environment. This article focuses on the ECAs organized regularly and annually at the Foreign Languages Department, Phu Yen University, and how they contribute in developing students’ language skills. A survey was conducted to gather information on the students’ motivation. Based on the responses of a sample by 100 English major students ranging from freshmen to seniors, the study finds out whether ECAs meet students’ needs, their attitudes towards extracurricular activities and how important they are in strengthening language ability and solutions to improve the quality of the activities.

Keywords: English major students, language skills, extracurricular activities

1. Introduction

Improving language capacity for English major students is always a primary concern of the Foreign Languages Department (FLD), Phu Yen University (PYU), because most students come to our local university from the rural areas in the province and the neighboring ones where they do not have a favorable environment to practice their language skills. For that reason, in addition to the development of curricula focusing on enhancing language skills, the updating of modern teaching methods and effective use of information technology, FLD of PYU thrives to orient the Youth Union, the Student Association and the English Club of the department in organizing ECAs related to the use of English skills. In this way, students have more opportunities to participate in the communication process and apply in reality the knowledge they learned in order to improve their language

2. Reviews

2.1 What are extracurricular activities?

ECAs are usually defined as learners’ activities that fall outside the normal curriculum of educational institution; they supplement the regular course of classroom instruction and are sometimes organized or conducted with some participation of instructors (Makarova, Reva, 2017). Extracurricular activities are activities performed by students that fall outside of the normal curriculum of school or university education but still are beneficiary for the academics Toyokawa (2002).

2.2 The effects of ECAs on student’ achievements

There are various forms of ECAs including sports, community service, employments, arts,
hobbies, academic activities, and so on. As Lunnenburg (2010) stated in his article, ECAs provide students with knowledge and experiences that are not taught in their formal classes. ECAs are also chances where students can apply what they have learned or known before into more practical environments (Jacson, 2015; Massoni, 2011; Reva, 2012). Thus, within the context of education, ECAs are considered to have positive effects on students’ behavior, academic grades, and social skills and social networks (Wilson, 2009).

First, students who often participate in ECAs are believed to be able to reduce behavior problems (Wilson, 2009). In any kinds of activities, the students’ responsibility to finish their duty correctly can be rewarded afterward, which can confirm their status among peers; thus increase their self confidence to be better through time. Furthermore, as students spend time joining other activities outside the classrooms but still under control of their instructors, their time for learning such poor behaviors as violence or the use of drugs and alcohol from some bad factors in the society can be avoided (Jacson, 2015).

The second positive effect from ECAs is the students’ higher academic grades in school. Since students are enjoying the activities organized outside the classrooms, they feel more relaxed, more open to connect to the people, more willing to learn new things, and even more ready to get back to the class. Moreover, the feeling of succeeding outdoor activities can lead to the wishing of gaining more accomplishment in academic performance. Hence, the students’ self esteem built from the ECAs can motivate themselves to get higher grades than those who are not involved in any (Campbell, 1973).

Last but not least, ECAs can enhance the students’ social life. Craft (2012) mentioned that ECAs give students additional skills that are essential for their life in many fields, such as the skills of teamwork, problem solving, leadership, organization, time management, etc. Moreover, students can meet and work with those who have the similar background or share the same interest with them by taking part in ECAs (Armstrong, 2012). It is understandable that students prefer learning from their peers to learning from the teacher (Bas, 2010). Therefore, it is a useful way for them to have a wide connection with other students, from which they can exchange their knowledge about different things around their lives.

To cap it all, ECAs have positive effects on the students’ improvement in their behavior, academic achievement, and social aspects. In the context of the university, it is important that ECAs be organized appropriately and effectively to attract students’ participation. In the next parts, let us have a closer look into how ECAs have been held to help English-major students improve their English in interesting and inspirable ways.

2.3 ECAs for English majors of FLD at PYU

On the threshold of the new academic year, a meeting among the leaders of FDL, executives of Student Youth Union, the chair committee of the English Club and monitors of the classes, is organized to discuss and plan the activities with specific characteristics suitable for English major students. Before then, students had to prepare ideas about the prominent activities to present in the meeting for discussions. After reaching a consensus, the plan is submitted to FLD for consideration and consultation by the staff before being included in the academic school year plan. The activities often keep abreast of the training objectives of the university, meet the students’ needs, aim at volunteer activities and community development such as music, sports, environment, charity work and so on but mainly focus on supporting learning activities to boost students’ language capacity. Below are the ECAs involved in fostering students’ language skills which the FLD of PYU implements.

2.3.1 Introducing the English Club

At the beginning of each academic school year, we introduce the English club to freshmen. This activity is integrated in the program “Welcome freshmen” performed by PYU’s Students Youth Union. The English Club can participate with several special performances related to its major and introduces the club’s ECAs to make them known popularly. In this way, there will be more enrollments for membership of the club. Once there are more members, the activities will surely be of variant forms and good quality.

2.3.2 Halloween Night
Halloween night is a good chance for students to participate in the event and experience the air of the festival. This is an occasion not only for English major students but also for those who are interested in learning English to know more about the cultures of English-speaking countries and to upgrade their language skills as well. The activities on Halloween Night include an introduction to the origin of Halloween, quizzes about it, music performances such as songs, dances and drama, contests of best costumes of handsome and beautiful ghosts, and of pumpkin carving and watching ghost movies. All are in English. Halloween night is often very successful and leaves a good impression on students who sometimes feel sorry when the party comes to an end because they would like to continue the preparation and rehearsal of the event. However, they have motivation to plan for the next activity to create an even more exciting atmosphere.

2.3.3 Activities to celebrate Vietnamese Teacher's Day

Each class makes a poster in which they present poems, short stories or prose about their feelings for their teachers, classes and the university. The posters will be on display for all the students of the department to appreciate. They are then assessed by a judge board to choose the three best ones. The most meaningful poems will be performed by the authors. The organizers also combine other activities like music performances in English so as to create a friendly and enjoyable atmosphere for both teachers and students.

2.3.4 Activities to celebrate Christmas and New Year

English Club members share information about the customs of Christmas and New Year of some countries around the world. Each class prepares a fashion show together with a speech in English. In addition, games and quizzes are also included for audiences to participate in with small gifts for those who have the right answers. This creates an exciting environment for students to stay until the end of the program.

2.3.5 Miss Beauty contest

Representatives elected from each class register to take part in this contest. Candidates prepare a full body shot, a picture of 3x4 cm and a biographical video in English about themselves: name, date of birth, place of birth, class, hobbies, talents and viewpoints. They will be voted on the fan page of the contest. In the preliminary part of the contest, the candidate with the highest vote will be admitted directly into the final round. In parallel, the jury has the preliminary selection for 9 other contestants. The shortlisted ones will go through the Charm and Talent round in which candidates introduce and demonstrate their talents (singing, dancing, flower arranging, martial arts, eloquence, dance etc.). After the result of these two rounds is announced, the five finalists will come to the Interview round. Each contestant chooses one question and gives her response within 3 minutes in English. Based on the result marked by the judge board, Miss Beauty and two other prizes will go to the most beautiful, talented and intelligent contestants.

2.3.6 Cultural exchanges with volunteers, English teaching assistants or foreign experts working at the university

Annually Phu Yen University welcomes experts, English teaching assistants or volunteers from different organizations coming to work at the university. This resource is exploited suitably to develop students’ communication skills and help students understand more about the cultures of English-speaking countries. The cultural exchanges between foreign experts or volunteers and students are regularly organized with topics scheduled in advance. For each meeting, a group of 2-3 students will give a presentation on a topic in Vietnam and volunteers exchange information relating to that of their country. Moreover, they increase students’ communication skills through small talks/discussions among a group of 10 to 15 students. At the end of each month, leaders of FLD and the chair committee of the Club and representatives from each class will summarize experience, give suitable suggestions and solutions for the activities of the following month. Interest is also an important element which needs paying attention to in order to attract more students to take part in the activities.

2.3.7 English speaking contest

English speaking contests play an important role in fostering students’ speaking skills as well as finding gifted students. They not only give candidates opportunities to improve themselves but also
create chances for other students to learn and thereby increase their language capabilities. Henceforth, Eloquence competitions are an indispensable activity in extracurricular programs held by FLD annually. Topics can be obtained in the curriculum or from the current hot issues that interest students such as love, life, environment, population, public health, traffic, etc. Contestants from each class will take a preliminary test and 15 of them are chosen into the final round. The content of the last stage consists of 2 parts: the presentation on the topic and interviewing. The organizers also arrange games and quizzes with interesting gifts for the audience so that they are more excited to join the activity and express their knowledge and language skills.

2.3.8 Competitions on a special topic

This type of ECAs varies each year based on real needs in order to develop students’ skills. For instance, the creation of teaching aids is organized for teacher education students to support their teaching experience. For this activity, each class can take part in the competition with three products such as models or visual aids which can be used for a lesson in the textbook of their level. A representative will explain how they are used or will present a microteaching activity with their product. The best ones will get prizes and will be kept for later use.

Also, the best tourist guide is held for students majoring in English Linguistics to equip them with necessary knowledge and skills for future jobs. Students are asked to make a PowerPoint or a pro-show to introduce an unspoiled landscape in Phu Yen province or to make video of filming themselves as tourist guides to those destinations. The most successful presentations will be awarded and posted on the fan page of the club.

Another form of this ECA is writing about Phu Yen tourism which is conducted for both language and teacher education students. In this competition, students write about a place which is not well known and can attract foreign tourists. A 300-word article allows students to describe the tourist site, its beauty and attraction, why it is worth visiting. Students are encouraged to share pictures and photos. The best article will be chosen and posted on the website of PYU. Besides, FLD sometimes organizes field trips for language students and volunteers to experience and practice language skills.

3. Methodology

Objectives of the study

The study aims at finding out whether ECAs done by FLD of PYU meet students’ expectations, help upgrading English majors’ language ability, how they evaluate quality of ECAs and give suitable suggestions to the FLD as well as PYU so as to make the movement better and better.

Participants

With regard to the participants, 100 English majors from classes DC13STA01, DC13NNA01, DC14STA01, DC15STA01, DC16STA01 and DC16NNA01 were chosen to take part in the study. They belong to the four-year tertiary training system majoring in English teacher education and English linguistics. The numbers 13, 14, 15 or 16 mentioned in their class names means the year their course starts. Their ages range from 18 to 22, and the majority of them have previously studied English for at least 7 years.

Data collections and analysis procedures

In terms of the collections of the data, a questionnaire is employed for this study. The survey questionnaire (sample and the survey results are in the appendix) focuses on the three following aspects:

1. students’ perceptions of the ECAs
2. the importance of ECAs to students’ language ability
3. the students’ satisfactions at the frequency of ECAs
4. the students’ suggestions for future ECAs at PYU

The data collected are analysed and discussed in the following section.

4. Findings and discussions
The results of the survey show that eighty eight percent of the students liked ECAs while only five percent said they did not like them much and seven percent were undecided. Just a minor part of the students admitted that they rarely joined ECAs (7%) and around 66% always and usually participated in every event. None of the students interviewed never attended any ECAs. Approximately half of them joined ECAs held by FLD for fun (51%), to expand their relationships network (55%) and to broaden major knowledge (49%). Around 73% of them strongly agreed that ECAs in English strengthen their language skills considerably.

In terms of language skill development, they ranked ECAs in the order of importance as follows: speaking skill with 95%, listening skill with 80%, reading skill with 22% and writing skill with 11%. The most important ECAs are “Cultural exchanges”, “English speaking contests”, “Small discussions” with volunteers and “Competitions” on a particular topic with 95%, 95%, 92% and 91% respectively. Those which are of equal importance are “Posters on Teacher’s day”, “Writing about Phu Yen Tourism and New Year” with around 75%. Nearly half of the students taking part in the survey considered the rest important.

It is quite obvious that ECAs are beneficial in bettering students’ language ability. Actually, activities such as cultural exchanges with experts or volunteers, English speaking contests or music performances (English songs, dramas and storytelling) requires students to concentrate for better communication and interaction. Other ECAs help students gain confidence when standing in front of crowds, practicing correct pronunciation and communicating better. Writing poetry, prose and short stories for posters enhances students’ writing skills and creative writing. To have the best article for the competition, students have to search for information, prepare, write, reread and review the product carefully and thoroughly. Through that, their knowledge of grammar and vocabulary is enriched dramatically. Reading skills are also reinforced through the preparation for ECAs.

As far as the frequency of activities is concerned, they have different ideas, but most of them think that English club activities like Christmas, Halloween or Miss Beauty etc. should be held every two months while small talks or discussions with volunteers or English teaching assistants should be done weekly or every two weeks. Just a small part of the students, 13%, are undecided and dissatisfied with the organization of the events. The reason for their dissatisfaction is that the place for organizing activities should be adequate with the number of the students in the department and for those who are interested in. The English club should be not only for FLD students but for students of other departments in the university as well. However, a majority of them, 77%, are quite pleased.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

The above analysis has identified the importance of ECAs in improving language skills for students. They compensate for the practice of language skills they are deficient in learning due to large classes. Therefore, the organizing of ECAs creates opportunities for students to put gained knowledge into practice. The fact that ECAs are held annually and regularly is an effective support in making students feel more confident with their language capacity and other skills as well. They contribute to upgrading students’ language ability and most importantly students find joy in ECAs which can exert a better attitude on learning. In order to enhance such contributions, a lot of efforts are needed and much support should be provided. The following recommendations aim at strengthening ECAs for English majors at PYU.

5.1 ECAs movement cannot be successful without the participation and leadership of the youth unions in FLD. Therefore, FLD needs to invest human resource by providing enough full-time administrative as well as skillful staff and PYU should provide enough budget for the activities.

5.2 In the future, ECAs at PYU should aim at communicating and collaborating with people beyond national boundaries and enhancing students’ global awareness, especially within the region. PYU should have several cooperative programs with other universities in the area especially in those countries where English is spoken as a second language. Such collaboration will foster not only students’ language skills but other necessary skills as well and al-
so increase the mutual understanding among the countries

6. References


Reva, A. (2012) The Role of Extracurricular Activities in Foreign Language Learning in University Settings, University of Saskatchewan, retrieved from https://ecommons.usask.ca/bitstream/handle


**APPENDIX**

**Results of the survey**

This questionnaire aims to find out whether extracurricular activities held by FLD meet students’ needs and do some research. Please circle your choice corresponding to your answer or write your comments in the blank in each of the following questions.

1. Are you a ……. …….?

   - freshman 15%  
   - somophore 25%  
   - junior 42%  
   - senior 18%

2. Class: DC13NNA01, DC13STA01, DC14STA01, DC15NNA01, DC16STA01, DC16NNA01

3. Do you like extracurricular activities?

   - No, not really  
   - Not much 5%  
   - Undecided 7%

   - Yes, to some extent 38%  
   - Very much 50%

4. How often do you participate in extracurricular activities?

   - Never  
   - Rarely (participate in one or two events) 7%
5. What is/are your main purpose(s) when taking part in extracurricular activities? (You may have more than one choice)

- Curious 3%
- For fun 51%
- Expanding your relationship network 55%
- Broadening your major knowledge 49%
- Improving your language skills 73%

6. Which language skills do extracurricular activities held by FLD help you improve? (You may have more than one choice)

- Listening skill 80%
- Speaking skill 95%
- Reading skill 22%
- Writing skill 18%
  Others:
  - Grammar and structure 11%

7. Which of the extracurricular activities held by FLD do you think are the most important in enhancing your language skills?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of ECAs</th>
<th>Unimportant</th>
<th>Little important</th>
<th>Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Halloween</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christmas</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Year</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss beauty</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Speaking contest</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posters on Teacher’s Day</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing about Phu Yen Tourism</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music performance</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quizzes</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural exchange with volunteers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussions/small talks on topics with ETAs/volunteers</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitions on a topic (i.e: Making teaching aids, The best tourist guide)</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
8. According to you, how often are extracurricular activities organized is suitable?

☐ Once a month 52% ☐ Every two months 26%

☐ Every three months 10% ☐ Other: - Every two weeks: 8% - Weekly: 4%

Reasons:

9. How are you satisfied with the extracurricular activities held by FLD?

☐ Very dissatisfied 2% ☐ Dissatisfied 7% ☐ Undecided 4%

☐ Satisfied 76% ☐ Very satisfied 11%

10. What are your suggestions to improve the extracurricular activities?

Thank you very much for your time.