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Research Article

INTEGRATING EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES INTO ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN HIGHER EDUCATION: IMPLICATIONS FOR HO CHI MINH CITY UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS AND FINANCE

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Abstract

In the modern academic landscape, universities are starting to cast their gaze beyond the classroom, as the demand for English proficiency grows in higher education. Nowadays, extra-curricular activities are considered as valuable supplements to formal English language teaching (ELT). This review investigates the contribution of these activities to the students' English learning at the university level as well as the implications for UEF. Based on research published between 2000 and 2025, it compiles the scholarly work on the definition of extracurricular activities, their roles, benefits and challenges. The present discussion is based on the use of central theories, including the Experiential Learning Theory, Situated Learning Theory, Self-Determination Theory and Intercultural Communicative Competence. The research indicates that English clubs, debates, cultural exchange projects, volunteer work and public speaking opportunities provide authentic opportunities for students to engage in language, to become independent learners, to remain motivated, and to develop intercultural and professional skills. At the same time, issues like limited time, lack of resources, and uneven participation continue to pose difficulties. Overall, the review indicates that the provision of extracurricular activities should be perceived as a component of the broader ELT context and not an add-on. It concludes with suggestions for the ways in which UEF can maximize the effectiveness of its extra-curricular programs to enhance student engagement, language development, employability and learning outcomes.

Keywords

Extracurricular activities; English language teaching; higher education; learner autonomy; intercultural communicative competence; student engagement.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

English is a universal language, used in education, in business and for communication around the world. In the higher education sector, English is one of the main factors that contribute to success and academic growth. It helps students become connected internationally and enhances their job market positions. Therefore, it is accepted that English Language Teaching (ELT) improvement and building of Learning Environment which build better communication competence (Richard's & Rodger's 2014) are agreed by the

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universities around the world.

In recent years teachers have become aware that the language learning process should not be limited to the school environment. Instructing in class is important for the language skills but, it is not enough time for real communication. The researchers also point out the need for students to have learning experiences outside of the classroom, in which they can engage in real contexts where they use English, can interact with others, and feel free to learn on their own (Benson, 2011; Nunan & Richards, 2015). The experiences will allow the learners to practise what they learn in class, consolidate the learning and apply the language in real life.

Extracurricular activities have become a hot topic of discussion among the various types of learning outside the classroom. They are planned learning, cultural, social and recreational events, other than lessons. They can participate in ELT clubs, Debate, Public Speaking Competition, Cultural exchange, Volunteer Work, Language Camp and Academic workshop. These activities have been successful in creating opportunities for students to communicate, collaborate and experience meaningfully and genuinely, resulting in the development of language and overall learning. (Zakhir, 2019; Mishra & Aithal, 2023).

They are more clearly manifested in tertiary education where the learner should be independent and actively participate in his/her learning process. The study revealed that extracurricular activities are able to improve language skills, motivation, intercultural knowledge, social skills of the participants such as teamwork, leadership, and problem-solving skills (Munadi et al., 2021; Abidin et al., 2024). These are essential for pupils as they progress to a wider range of academic and work situations.

They are particularly significant in the field of higher education where students are expected to be self-directed learners and proactive in their own learning. Research reveals that extracurricular activities can positively influence language skills, motivation, intercultural awareness, and soft skills like teamwork, leadership, and problem-solving (Munadi et al., 2021; Abidin et al., 2024). These outcomes are critical for students who are ready to go into higher and increasingly complex academic and professional situations.

As Vietnam integrates more into the global economy, the demand for English-proficient graduates has increased in Vietnam. To enhance language skills of the students, universities have already looked for new methods to enable them to increase their language skills. The studies have been conducted recently have emphasized the positive effects of extracurricular activities on English-learning of Vietnamese students. According to Nguyen (2019), extracurricular programs have positive impacts on the quality of foreign language learning, and Le and Le (2023), Le et al. (2023), and Cuong and Nghia (2024) state that the students appreciate the extracurricular programs as an added value to the foreign language learning process. These results indicate that extracurricular activities have great potential to enhance English learning at Vietnamese universities in general.

Table 1. *Main Findings of Previous Studies on Extracurricular Activities in ELT*

Theme	Main Finding
Language development	Improves speaking, vocabulary, and communication skills
Participation and preferences	Participation is influenced by motivation, time, and perceived benefits
Soft-skill development	Enhances teamwork, leadership, and confidence
Intercultural competence	Promotes cultural awareness and global perspectives

Extracurricular research in ELT centres on four connected ideas: language development, student participation, soft-skill growth, and intercultural competence. Together, the studies show that these activities support both language learning and broader student development. At the same time, they hint to ongoing challenges and research gaps—especially in Vietnamese university contexts—that need deeper investigation.

1.2 Problem Statement

However, traditional classroom English teaching is still widely adopted in many universities, and the importance of using it is gradually acknowledged. The emphasis in these methods is often on grammar, theory and exam practice, with little or no opportunity for authentic communication or experiential learning. This can mean that students can learn English academically, but do not know how to use it in everyday situations.

While a great deal of research has been conducted on the role of extra-curricular activities in the school there is still a disparate body of literature. The results are distributed across different nations, institutions and activities, which limits the ability to develop a holistic picture of how the activities help to teach English in higher education institutions. There are various studies conducted in Vietnam about students' preferences and participation in training practices, with a need to synthesis the available evidence and draw practical implications for institutional development.

English has a significant role in helping students' academic achievement and career preparation at Ho Chi Minh City

University of Economics and Finance (UEF) in Ho Chi Minh City. Extracurricular activities may provide useful extension opportunities for students to acquire communicative competence and transferable skills, considering the university's emphasis on internationalization and professional skills. Yet, a systematic review of literature in the relevant field is crucial in order to identify effective practices and help in guiding future implementation.

1.3 Research Objectives and Research Questions

The purpose of this literature review is to discuss the extracurricular activity in the higher education in English

language education. This study is designed to unite the previous works that discuss the pedagogical role of ECA, the advantages and disadvantages of ECA, and the results of the studies and how they apply to English language teaching at Ho Chi Minh City University of Economics and Finance (UEF). The study tries to answer the following research questions to achieve these objectives:

1.How do extracurricular activities support English language teaching in higher education?

2. What benefits and challenges are associated with the use of extracurricular activities in English language teaching?

3. What implications can be drawn from the literature for implementing extracurricular activities in English language teaching at Ho Chi Minh City University of Economics and Finance?

The study represents one of several studies on language learning outside the classroom by integrating up-to-date studies on higher education's extra-curricular activities, which have also grown in number. It additionally offers practitioners practical ideas for teachers, administrators, and curriculum planners who want to design additional learning experiences that enhance English language instruction. In addition, recommendations are provided which can be used to design and implement extracurricular programs at Ho Chi Minh City University of Economics and Finance.

This paper is divided into five sections. In Section Two, the theoretical underpinning of the study is presented, including the three theories – Experiential Learning Theory, Situated Learning Theory, and Self-Determination Theory. Section Three discusses the concepts and didactic roles of extra-curricular activities in English language education. In Section Four, the advantages of extracurricular activities to language learning and student development are explored. The challenges and barriers related to their implementation are discussed in Section Five. In the end, Section Six draws implications for Ho Chi Minh City University of Economics and Finance, points out research gaps and provides final remarks.

2. Theoretical Framework

This literature review draws upon four complementary theoretical perspectives: Experiential Learning Theory, Situated Learning Theory, Self-Determination Theory, and Intercultural Communicative Competence.

2.1 Experiential Learning Theory

Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984) states that learning is an ongoing process, and knowledge is developed by changing experiences. Learning is not a passive process of listening to and taking in information, rather it is a process of experiencing, reflecting, forming new ideas, and applying those ideas to new circumstances. Learning is then a dynamic process that connects experience, reflection, conceptualization and action.

This is of great relevance to extracurricular activities as these activities enable students to use English in authentic and meaningful contexts beyond the classroom. Students do not engage in language practice through controlled exercises, but in discussions, presentations, competitions, and cooperative projects involving authentic communication. These experiences allow students to experience authentic communicative contexts and motivate them to use their language skills in practical ways.

For higher education, English clubs, debate, public speaking, etc. provide learning settings that enhance classroom teaching and learning. Students can try things and get feedback from others, and reflect on their work, which is in accordance with Kolb's belief that learning is reinforced by real-world, hands-on experiences.

This perspective takes an active look at extracurricular activities as not just a pastime. They are valuable supplement to the learning process, providing students with opportunities to practice classroom learning in meaningful contexts and to acquire communicative competence through experience.

2.2 Situated Learning Theory

Situated Learning Theory is thus one of the important explanations for the effectiveness of extra-mural activities as learning environments. These activities build language competence by engaging students in learning, rather than telling them what to learn, in environments where English is used as a means of communication and collaboration. Situated Learning Theory, described by Lave and Wenger (1991), suggests that learning is primarily social and that it takes place when participating in real communities of practice. The theory differs from the traditional approach that sees knowledge as being passed from teacher to student, to a focus on learning through interaction, collaboration, and shared activity.One the main concepts of this theory is community

of practice, which is a group of individuals who work together to achieve a shared purpose or passion and learn from each other's experience. New members are assigned to very basic tasks and then are given more complex tasks as they become more confident and competent. Learning occurs not in isolation but in relation to others.

This view is very applicable in the context of extracurricular activities in English language teaching. Learners have opportunities to communicate in authentic communicative contexts through English clubs, speaking forums, debate teams, volunteer projects and student organizations. These communities serve as sources for students to experience various language practices, and to gain communicative competence by participating in social activities.

The extracurricular activities may provide students with more flexibility, teamwork and initiative than traditional classrooms. Learners negotiate meaning, solve problems together and use English for real purposes. These experiences help develop language skills and active involvement, as well as a sense of belonging.

As such, Situated Learning Theory can also contribute to the understanding of why extracurricular activities can provide powerful learning contexts: English is used as the medium of communication and collaboration in communities, and thus students acquire language competence by engaging in meaningful activities, not being taught it.

2.3 Self-Determination Theory

The study of how learning takes place is explained by two theories: Experiential Learning Theory and Situated Learning Theory, whereas the study of why students are willing to join in an extracurricular activity is explained by another theory, Self Determination Theory (SDT). SDT was introduced by Ryan and Deci (2000) and focuses on the significance of intrinsic motivation to facilitate meaningful learning and personal development. This theory suggests that people are more motivated to act when three psychological needs are fulfilled: the need for autonomy (choice and control), competence (feeling capable and effective), and relatedness (feeling connected to others).

These needs can be better fulfilled in extracurricular activities than in classroom instruction. The activities are voluntary and students are encouraged to select those activities in which they are interested improving autonomy in participation. Feeling competent is reinforced through achievement in presentations, competitions or group-based tasks. Meanwhile, the process of communicating with peers and collaborating with peers and teachers promotes a sense of relatedness and social belonging.

In an English language teaching environment, SDT can be used to explain why students are generally more motivated and engaged in other activities than in language learning. These activities provide rich social interaction and meaningful communication within them, along with personal choice, which can foster learning environments that promote language and personal growth.

2.4 Intercultural Communicative Competence

Communicating effectively in a globalized world demands more than just linguistic skill. Learners need to be aware of cultural differences, behave appropriately towards people from different cultures and communicate confidently in an intercultural context – known as intercultural communicative competence (ICC). Abidin et al. (2024) state that nowadays ELT should be aimed at developing not only language but also intercultural awareness; whereas Richards and Rodgers (2014) stress on preparing ELT learners to use English in diverse communicative situations instead of only on the basis of grammar. In this view, successful language learning is the process of developing the ability to interpret cultural meaning, to value and accept diversity, and to communicate across cultures.

Extracurricular activities are good sources of ICC development, as it is often in these activities that students interact with persons from other cultures or languages in an authentic way. Students are exposed to different perspectives and communication styles through cultural exchange programmes, international seminars, foreign study tour and international scholars. This is a learning of culture and an enhancement of English communication ability. ICC is particularly relevant in higher education as the graduates are more and more moving to international academic and professional fields. Communication, cultural sensitivity, and being able to work across cultures are valued traits in the workplace; extracurricular activities can help develop communication skills and prepare for global citizenship.

The four theoretical views mentioned above (Experiential Learning Theory, Situated Learning Theory, Self-Determination Theory and Intercultural Communicative Competence) will give a whole picture of the educational value of extracurricular activities in ELT. The following frameworks demonstrate how extracurricular activities complement learning by engaging in authentic experiences, participation in society, intrinsic motivation and intercultural engagement. Together, they illustrate how such activities enrich students' learning in the classroom and support their language, personal and professional growth.

Table 2. *Relevance of Major Theories to Extracurricular Activities in ELT*

Key Concept/Theory	Relevance to ELT Activities

Key Concept/Theory	Relevance to ELT Activities
Experience-based learning by Kolb (1984)	Supports language practice through authentic tasks
Communities of practice by Lave & Wenger (1991)	Encourages learning through interaction
Learner autonomy and motivation by Ryan & Deci (2000)	Explains voluntary participation
Intercultural awareness by ICC Framework	Supports cultural exchange and global competence

The theoretical foundations of this review are summarized as shown in Table 2. The four perspectives, namely Experiential Learning Theory, Situated Learning Theory, Self-Determination Theory, and Intercultural Communicative Competence, can be combined to give a comprehensive account of the role of ECA in language learning in terms of authentic experience, social participation, learner motivation, and intercultural interaction. Both theories together give conceptual grounds to analyze the role of extracurricular in teaching English in higher education.

Table 3. *Key Studies on Extracurricular Activities in ELT*

Study	Summary
Nguyen (2019)	Conducted in Vietnam; found that extracurricular programs positively support language learning.
Zakhir (2019)	In TEFL settings, extracurricular activities provide authentic opportunities for language use.
Dung (2024)	Reported improvements in students' speaking competence through extracurricular participation.
Le (2024)	Identified time constraints and motivation as major participation barriers.
Cuong & Nghia (2024)	Found that supplementary activities enhance student engagement.

A summary of key studies informing this review is summarized in Table 3. The research findings as a whole show the diverse functions of ECA in ELL. Nguyen (2019), Zakhir (2019), Dung (2024) highlight the role of such activities in fostering language development and authentic communication, and Le (2024) identifies potential barriers that might hinder students' participation. Furthermore, Cuong and Nghia (2024) present the impact of additional learning activities on student involvement in higher education. The studies discussed in this article indicate that extracurricular activities can play a valuable and significant role in language learning but its effectiveness is context-dependent and institution-specific.

3. Extracurricular Activities in English Language Teaching: Concepts and Pedagogical Functions

3.1. Defining Extracurricular Activities in Higher Education

Extracurricular activities are typically seen as organized learning experiences that are conducted outside of the formal school curriculum and enhance students' learning, personal, and social growth. In higher education, these can involve student clubs, volunteer work, leadership schemes, cultural events, academic competitions, and professional development workshops. Various English-speaking forums, debate contests, public speaking contests, cultural exchange programs, student newspapers, and industry-related forums are common to see in universities in Vietnam, including Ho Chi Minh City University of Economics and Finance.

Recent studies have pointed to the need for extracurricular activities to be more than just recreational. Rather, they serve as extensions of the learning environment. Mishra and Aithal (2023) point out that they have helped them improve in communication, leadership and social skills, while Munadi et al. (2021) mention that they have helped them develop soft skills which are hard to acquire in class.

Extracurricular activities are also very important in the EFL context as they are essential for facilitating meaning making and interaction in language learning. Clubs, debates and public speaking events in English provide a context for students to use English and develop their confidence and fluency. Zakhir (2019) claims that these activities serve as useful means of real communicative practice and allow the students to put into practice what they have learned in the classroom in practical situations. Hence, extracurricular activities should be comprehended as multidimensional learning experiences which will facilitate students' language, social and personal growth.

3.2 Extracurricular Activities as Language Learning Beyond the Classroom

The greater focus on extra-curricular activities is a result of a greater awareness that the learning process of language is not limited to classroom activities alone. The language foundational skills needed for learning are developed in the classroom, although many scholars have claimed that

meaningful language development also takes place outside of the classroom, in informal and semi-formal learning settings. Benson (2011) emphasizes the value of learner autonomy, whereby good learners look for opportunities to use the target language in their everyday activities outside class. Extracurricular activities assist in this process as they are voluntary, learner-centred, and offer an opportunity for student to select activities that reflect their interests and aspirations, to learn and self-regulate.

In the same way, Nunan and Richards (2015) stress the importance of spontaneous communication and social interaction in the development of language. Space outside of the classroom is more flexible and spontaneous than traditional space. Learners make statements, clarify their understandings and react to unexpected communicative situations, which build up communicative competence.

These are views that are supported by evidence from Vietnam. According to Khanh et al., (2021), university students often have to resort to engaging in extra learning activities outside of the class to develop their English skills. They concluded that pupils are aware of the constraints of classroom teaching and make use of outside opportunities to learn and practice. While Benson (2011) emphasizes autonomy, Nunan and Richards (2015) stress authentic communication, the two approaches go hand-in-hand: autonomous learners seek authentic experiences, and authentic experiences help to perpetuate autonomy.

Thus, the extracurricular activities should not be considered as supplements to language teaching. They are a critical component of a larger learning environment in which language learning takes place in the context of real use of the language and in which language knowledge is linked to language communicative performance.

3.3 Pedagogical Functions of Extracurricular Activities

According to the literature, there are four important pedagogical roles of extra-curricular activities in ELT that are: Authentic Communication, Collaborative Learning, Experiential Learning, and Students' Engagement.

First, extra curriculum activities provide for real communication. Dung (2024) demonstrates that students who enroll in these programs have better communication skills due to the involvement in meaningful communication in English. Zakhir (2019) also believes that these activities contribute to the gap between theory and practice in language use. The learners can communicate in spontaneous and meaningful English, which enhances their fluency and confidence.

Second, extracurricular activities are used to help promote collaborative learning. Students must collaborate to achieve common objectives in debates, group projects, volunteer projects and cultural events. Learners collaborate with others to share ideas, come up with meanings, and develop interpersonal communication skills. This is in line with the theory of Situated Learning in which learning takes place in communities of practice.

Thirdly, extra-curricular activities encourage experience-learning. Based on Kolb's (1984) learning model, students learn by doing, reflecting and acting. The real communicative situations give a chance to the learners to experiment language, to evaluate their performance and to apply the new knowledge in future communicative situation. In these experiences, learners can often experience something more real or gain more meaning than they can from classroom simulations.

Finally, students are engaged in extracurricular activities. Cuong and Nghia (2024) concluded that ELA would enhance participation and the relationship between classroom language and everyday language use. That is, when activities are relevant, enjoyable and meaningful students are likely to be more motivated, and thus learning outcomes are improved.

All these pedagogical functions make it clear that extracurricular activities are not just an optional extra in language learning but are an integral part of this process. They provide extended in-class opportunities for language development by effectively integrating authentic communication, collaboration, experiential learning, and learner engagement. Consequently, the role of extra-curricular activities in the preparation and enhancement of English language instruction in higher education and preparation of students for academic, professional and intercultural communication may be very prominent.

4. Benefits of Extracurricular Activities for Higher Education Students

4.1. Language Development and Communicative Competence

One of the most accepted and well-known benefits of extracurricular activities in English language teaching is its role in the development of language and communicative competence. Classroom language instruction is necessary for language foundations, but outside the classroom, students are given chances to practice their language skills in real-life situations. These activities are not constrained by curriculum needs or time limits and enable students to communicate for significant purposes, thus giving students access to more natural and spontaneous language.

There is an increasing amount of research indicating that extracurricular involvement can enhance students' speaking skills. Dung (2024) discovered that the skills of communication will be enhanced by using the activities of

presentation, discussion and collaborative projects, because the activities will encourage students to talk about the language. In the same way, Nguyen (2019) claims that the role of extracurricular programmes is to enable students to practice the target language out of the classroom, which helps to build their language fluency and confidence. English learners need to share their opinions, agree, and react to the messages conveyed in English in the clubs, forums and public speaking activities, which are part of communicative competence.

The advantages are not limited to speaking. Listening comprehension and vocabulary development is also facilitated through activities like debates, discussion groups, cultural events, and projects that involve collaboration. Learners will be exposed to new expressions, communication strategies and vocabulary related to the topic that may not be fully addressed in the formal instruction. These experiences will build language production and understanding.

Zakhir (2019) points out that extracurricular activities are important sources of authentic-language use. Students engage primarily in the communicative use of English rather than in the mastery of grammar. This is consistent with the communicative language teaching approach which sees language learning as a process of meaningful interaction. Learners are required to adapt their communication when they participate in activities like English contests, debates, cultural exchanges, public speaking, etc.

The literature has consistently demonstrated that extra-curricular activities are a valuable supplement to classroom teaching which provide opportunities for students to interact in English in a meaningful way. Students acquire and use their speech abilities, listening skills, vocabulary, fluency and communication confidence, through engaging in a variety of activities. Thus, extracurricular activities are an integral component of a complex teaching of English as a second foreign language in higher education.

The results of this study have implications particularly for Ho Chi Minh City University of Economics and Finance (UEF). Students have regular opportunities to talk about issues of the day and practise spontaneous speaking in a variety of activities, including the Speaking Forum. Similarly, Reading Portfolios promote independent reading beyond class, to build vocabulary, reading fluency and language development. The following examples show how extracurricular activities complement language learning and provide opportunities for authentic language use.

4.2 Personal, Social, and Intercultural Development

While language learning is usually the main purpose of the extra-curricular activities in ELL, its learning value is not limited to language learning. The research revealed that involvement in these activities was found to have an impact on students' personal growth, social development and intercultural communicative competence, which are essential skills for preparing students to live in a multicultural and globally connected society.

One of the key focus areas is intercultural competence. Abidin et al. (2024) believe that language skills are not enough for effective communication today, one must also be culturally aware, be able to show empathy towards others, and know how to interact with them appropriately. In this regard, language learning and intercultural learning are closely related. Extracurricular activities are especially effective for developing intercultural competence as they involve collaboration, interaction with others, and exposure to other viewpoints.

Cultural exchange programmes, international student events, English clubs and community projects promote opportunities for learners to engage with people from different cultures to their own. The exchanges enable students to gain cultural knowledge and an appreciation of other perspectives. In contrast to classroom discussions of culture, the practice of intercultural learning in the extracurricular areas is more meaningful and memorable as it is communicated directly and spontaneously through the act of participation.

The role of extracurricular activities in soft skill development has also been pointed out in the literature. According to Mishra and Aithal (2023), participation fosters leadership, teamwork, communication and problem-solving skills. Similarly, Munadi et al. (2021) conclude that extracurricular programs also have a significant contribution in developing soft skills in higher education. These skills may develop through collaborative project work, event planning, taking responsibility and achieving shared objectives.

In the same manner one can find opportunities to study abroad in Cultural Events, exchange programs, and lectures by international scholars at Ho Chi Minh City University of Economics and Finance (UEF). These programmes provide opportunities to experience various cultural viewpoints, and to interact with the international participants, promoting the development of language and intercultural skills which are increasingly needed in academic and professional settings around the world.

Importantly, soft skills and intercultural competence are closely related to successful language use. It isn't just enough to know how to communicate through language; one must also be able to communicate with people and understand their culture, as well as work together. For this reason, extracurricular activities serve to support the students' overall development, enhancing language skills, intercultural knowledge, and employability. From this point of view, participation in extracurricular activities is a multi-dimensional learning experience, which equips students to learn how to succeed in school and in their future careers.

4.3 Motivation, Engagement, and Learner Autonomy

According to the literature, another significant advantage of extracurricular activities is that they have a positive impact on student motivation, engagement and learner autonomy. While language proficiency is clearly one result of motivation, there is also a significant role of motivational factors in influencing long-term learning success.

This relationship can be explained using a theory referred to as Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The theory suggests that learning is deeper when the learner's needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness are fulfilled. Extracurricular activities are appropriate and effective ways to meet these needs as it is interest-based and voluntary. The activities are not mandatory in the classroom and provide opportunities for students to select from experiences that are congruent with their personal goals and help them feel more involved in the learning process.

A further perspective is the concept of student engagement. According to Kuh (2009), educational quality is linked to students' involvement in meaningful learning experiences. In this perspective, extracurricular activities can be seen as high impact practices since they encourage participants to collaborate, reflect, participate and learn independently. Pupils are not passive receivers, but active contributors.

Through the extracurricular activities, learner autonomy can also be developed by allowing students to look for opportunities to learn the language outside of class. Independent learners are self-directed, self-regulated and learning in a variety of settings. By this, the learning outcomes of the extracurricular help students move from the teacher's driven learning to the student's lifelong learning, which is an important objective of higher education.

Speaking Portfolios and Reading Portfolios are activities for developing autonomy that are implemented at Ho Chi Minh City University of Economics and Finance (UEF) in which students must take control of their learning activities outside of class hours. These initiatives foster students' capacity to plan, monitor and evaluate their own English practice, which is in line with the concepts of learner autonomy advocated in the literature.

The current literature indicates that there is a positive relationship between the three elements of motivation, engagement, and autonomy, which shows that motivation and engagement are reinforcing, and that engagement and autonomy are reinforcing. Extra-curricular activities are more likely to be undertaken actively if pupils are motivated to learn; and confidence and engagement is even better when pupils are successful in their participation. The motivating advantages of activities also make sense of the positive language-learning outcomes that have been consistently related to extracurricular activities.

4.4 Evidence from Vietnamese Higher Education Contexts

The results from Vietnam's higher education institutions corroborate those of international studies. The findings of the studies conducted in various university environments indicate that students see extra-curricular activities as giving good opportunities for language learning, for communication and for personal development.

Le and Le (2023) reported that students preferred activities that provided them with interaction, collaboration, and authentic language use. Likewise, Le et al. (2023) stated that positive attitudes toward English-learning activities outside the classroom, particularly those that focus on communication and real-world application, were observed. They also found that academic background and personal characteristics influence students' preferences, which means that students' learning needs should be addressed in extracurricular programs.

The study further confirms Nguyen (2019) that extracurricular programs have a positive effect on foreign-language learning quality among the learners of the Vietnamese language. Recently, Cuong and Nghia (2024) discovered that students' involvement and the link between formal language and real language usage were improved through supplementary activities. In general, the studies show that the significance of extracurricular activities in the field of English language learning in Vietnam is getting more attention.

Based on the above results, current practices at Ho Chi Minh City University of Economics and Finance (UEF) are summarized. For instance, ESP Workshops are used to improve students' domain specific language skills in disciplines like business, finance and marketing. These activities bring together language learning and students' academic specializations and future careers, indicating how extracurricular programs can contribute to students' language learning and to their employment.

While these positive results have been achieved, there are also disparities in participation among various student groups and institutional settings. Academic demands, interests and institutional support may be factors which could affect students' willingness and ability to participate. However, the overall situation indicates that all the evidence of the extracurricular activities can be said to have a contribution to learning language and development of students in higher education in Vietnam.

5. Challenges and Barriers to Implementation

5.1 Student-Related Challenges

A common obstacle to participation in extracurriculars that students report is themselves. Le (2024) revealed that time constraints are one of the most challenging factors to engagement in English-related activities. University students frequently have to cope with heavy academic workload, busy deadlines, tests, and frequently a part-time job. This fact means that many have difficulty setting aside time for extracurricular study. Being overworked at school can also make students less likely to participate; while students may know that being involved in activities is good for them, they may feel that these activities take less priority than academic studies—particularly in schools where a focus is placed on academic achievement.

Additionally, participation is affected by personal factors. Some pupils do not feel confident in their ability to speak English, and may be anxious about speaking in front of others. Others may be less motivated by not seeing the point of extracurricular activities right away. Positive attitude towards the extracurricular activities does not necessarily mean students are active in these activities. The university should hence think about policies that can promote participation and yet take into account students' practical and psychological issues. By helping to build students' confidence, minimising participation barriers, and matching activities to students' interests, it is possible to increase engagement and ensure that the extracurricular programs are accessible to a broader student population.

Table 4. *Benefits and Challenges of Extracurricular Activities in English Language Teaching*

Benefits	Challenges
Language development	Time constraints
Communication confidence	Academic workload
Intercultural competence	Funding limitations
Soft-skill development	Limited teacher support
Motivation and engagement	Participation barriers

The literature reviewed in the preceding section reveals that extracurricular activities have a lot of learning values including language development, intercultural competence, motivation, enhancement of soft skills, etc. But this positive impact will not necessarily follow. There are several issues students and institutions experience that may prevent participation and/or decrease the effectiveness of extracurricular programs as summarized in Table 4. It is crucial to be aware of the barriers to participation to design sustainable, accessible and impactful extracurricular initiatives in higher education.

5.2 Institutional Challenges

There are also some institutional issues that the universities need to consider in implementing their extracurricular programs, apart from the factors related to the students. An effective activity needs the proper funding, facilities and administrative support. The lack of resources might make it difficult for institutions to make it happen to hold regular events or maintain long-term participation from students.

The need for good institutional support to sustain supplementary English learning activities is emphasized by Cuong and Nghia (2024). Similarly, Munadi et al. (2021) stress the need for coordination among the teachers, administrators, and student organizations to ensure successful programs. However, most universities have constrained budgets and competing priorities, which can have an impact on the quality, frequency, and sustainability of the extracurricular programmes.

Another important consideration is the role of the teacher. These responsibilities are frequently fulfilled by faculty members who also have the main responsibility of teaching regularly. It can be challenging to keep teachers engaged if there are no adequate incentives, adjustments in workload, or recognition. The need for institutional commitment and supportive policies is emphasized by this challenge.

In summary, it can be concluded that the institutional obstacles that were identified indicate that the success of extracurricular programs is not only dependent on the students' motivation, but also on the ability of the university to equip them with resources, to coordinate them, and to continue offering them support. Commitment from the institutions is therefore crucial in order for the extra-curricular activities to discharge their effectiveness in higher education in the long term.

5.3 Challenges in the Vietnamese Higher Education Context

Additionally, certain implementation challenges are rooted in the wider educational landscape in Vietnam, where traditional approaches to learning persist and impact student behaviour and expectations. Despite the shift towards student-centred/communicative approaches in universities, there are still many learners who are working within long standing academic norms.

In Nguyen's (2019) findings, numerous students are still very much in mind of exam performance and achievement. If assessments are the main source of success, then activities that are not directly related to the test might not be paid the same attention. Similarly, Le Thi et al. (2024) state that for

extracurricular endeavours to be successful, there is a need for institutional support and the development of supportive learning environments.

The other challenge is students' awareness about the teacher-centred learning tradition. In these settings, the learners might have grown used to the idea of learning from the teacher and might not view learning as an independent choice. This can reduce willingness to participate in voluntary, student-driven activities. This may require extra work to encourage involvement, raise awareness of the benefits, and encourage a culture of active involvement in the university.

However, these factors should not be overlooked as they are part of the context and do not take away from the worth of extracurricular activities. Rather, they emphasize the need to tailor implementation strategies to the realities of local education and student needs. When the institution can match extracurricular activities to students' expectations, motivations, and learning practices, it can design more culturally relevant programs that promote meaningful language learning.

5.4 Research Gaps and Future Research Needs

Although there is an increasing interest around extracurricular activities in the English language teaching domain, some literature gaps exist. First, many studies have used cross-sectional designs and self-reported perceptions, thus limiting the ability to establish a long-term effect of the participation in extracurricular activities on language proficiency. Sustained Learning Outcomes would be better evidenced from longitudinal research that follows learners over longer time.

Second, there are relatively few studies that are private university specific. Many of the studies in Vietnam have been carried out in public organizations, and there is a need for studies in other organizational and cultural settings that explore how extracurricular activities operate. This is especially important for Ho Chi Minh City University of Economics and Finance (UEF) in a private sector context.

Third, little consideration has been paid to the English for Specific Purpose and Business English situations. An exploration of the role of extracurricular activities in the discipline-specific language development and professional communication skills is still needed, particularly in the context of UEF's focus on economics, business, and finance.

The literature offers ample evidence that extra-curricular activities have positive educational values. There is, however, a need for further research to build the evidence base and to create additional context specific implementation issues. These gaps provide a clear rationale to focus on the implications of the findings of this review for future practices and initiatives at Ho Chi Minh City University of Economics and Finance.

6. Implications for Ho Chi Minh City University of Economics and Finance, Future Research, and Conclusion

6.1 Implications for English Language Teaching at UEF

All the literature reviewed in this paper demonstrates that participation in extracurricular activities is an important factor that contributes to the development of language competence, intercultural communicative competence, learner motivation, and soft skill development. The results have significant implications for the teaching of English in UEF.

One of the main findings of the review is that most universities continue to view extra-curriculum activities as an extension of the language program and not as a part of it. The theoretical frameworks previously mentioned, however, especially Experiential Learning Theory, Situated Learning Theory and Self-Determination Theory, indicate that it is often in non-classroom contexts that meaningful language learning takes place. Traditional teaching methods alone are not sufficient to foster meaningful interaction and communication among learners and teachers, and to nurture learner autonomy. Therefore, because of this, it is best to think of extra-curricular activities as integral to the English language teaching programme and not as an extra to it.

Table 5. *Existing English-Language Extracurricular Ecosystem at UEF*

Domain	Activities
Language Development	Speaking Forum; Speaking Portfolios; Reading Portfolios; English Contests; Speaking Clubs
Professional Development	ESP Workshops; Mock Interviews; Industry Talks; Overseas Internships; Career Networking Activities
Intercultural Development	Cultural Events; Student Exchange Programs; Overseas Field Trips; International Scholar Lectures; Global Partnership Activities
Academic Development	English Seminars; Student Publications; Research Symposiums; Academic Presentations; Conference Participation

The table lists a variety of the extracurricular activities offered at UEF that can be used to support English language learning. These initiatives are linked to four areas of student development—language development, professional development, intercultural development, and academic

development. Together they create a complete environment that goes beyond the classroom to further develop students' English skills and their academic, professional and global skills.

The implication is very relevant to UEF. This is not the case at many other universities, where additional, English-related, extracurricular activities are not yet available. UEF already has a broad spectrum of English related activities available. They are English seminars, ESP workshops, speaking forums, speaking and reading portfolios, English contests, student publications, cultural events, industry talks, lectures by international scholars, student exchange programs, overseas internships, and bilingual academic programs. All of these programs provide students with several opportunities to be immersed in authentic, academic, professional, and social contexts in English.

Thus, it would be better for UEF to focus on enhancing the connections between current extracurricular programs and official English learning outcomes, instead of developing new proposals. If students can see the connection between their extracurricular activities and their academic success and career aspirations, they will likely think of these activities as a worthwhile part of their language learning journey, rather than an unnecessary burden. Extracurricular activities can then be used to complement the broader and student-centered learning experiences that build academic success and career readiness.

6.2 Recommendations for Extracurricular Activities at UEF

After reading the literature and analysing the UEF's existing environment of extracurricular activities, the following recommendations for enhancing the role of extracurricular activities in the English language learning process can be made.

First, UEF should maintain the development of activities with a focus on speaking. Speaking Forum, English contests, speaking portfolios are some of the methods that afford good opportunities for spontaneous communication, fluency building, and confidence building. The activities are very similar to those encouraged by research that focuses on authentic language use and engaging learners.

Second, UEF should further enhance opportunities where the learning of English is related to students' academic disciplines and future career paths. There is already effective integration, through ESP workshops, industry talks, mock interviews and overseas internships. The departments of economics, business and finance, marketing and related fields are primarily focused on UEF and extracurricular activities can play a significant role in connecting language learning with professional communication. English could be used for business case competitions, project-based presentations, entrepreneurship pitches, and industry simulations to further enhance this connection.

Third, the importance of intercultural learning should not be lost again. Students are exposed to a variety of linguistic and cultural viewpoints through cultural events, student exchange programs, overseas field trips, and lectures by international scholars. The literature has shown that such experiences are helpful in developing language skills as well as in developing the competence of intercultural communication that is increasingly required in a globalized workforce.

Fourth, greater efforts might be made to bridge the gap between student research and academic communication in the context of extra-curricular language learning. The student publication projects and the annual research symposium by UEF are already venues for students to share their research in English. Increasing the participation in such activities could foster academic writing, presentation, and critical thinking skills.

Table 6. *Alignment Between Literature-Based Recommendations and Existing UEF Practices*

Literature Theme	Recommended Activities in Literature	Existing UEF Practices
Language Development	English clubs, speaking activities, extensive reading	Speaking Forum, Speaking Portfolios, Reading Portfolios
Communication Skills	Debates, speeches, public speaking events	English Contests, Speaking Forum, Mock Interviews
ESP and Employability	Business English projects, workplace communication	ESP Workshops, Industry Talks, Overseas Internships
Intercultural Competence	Cultural exchange programs	Cultural Events, Student Exchange Programs, Overseas Field Trips
Authentic Language Use	Real-world communication opportunities	Lectures with International Scholars, Bilingual Events, Collaborative Programs
Student Engagement	Voluntary participation and active learning	Student Publications, Seminars, Forums, Contests

As can be seen in Table 6, the majority of the recommendations found in the literature are already implemented in the current UEF practices. It indicates that the university has laid a solid base for the development of extracurricular English language learning. Work should thus

be directed towards enhancing coordination, participation and integration, rather than new programmes.

6.3 Future Research Directions

Although there has been an increase in interest in the field of extracurricular activities in English language teaching, there are some fields that still need to be explored. It is recommended that further research be conducted to explore the effectiveness of extracurricular activities in different institutional settings, such as UEF. Empirical studies with UEF students may yield important information on participation, learning results and perceptions of various activities.

Secondly, longitudinal studies are required to establish whether continuous engagement results in significant gains in language competence, employability skills and intercultural competence. Most of the current literature is based on what people think has changed and improved over a long period, rather than on facts and data.

Thirdly, further studies should be undertaken on the link between EFSP learning and extracurricular involvement. A study to explore the role of industry talks, internships, business competitions and professional business networking events in developing language would be of special interest for UEF given its disciplinary focus.

Finally, comparative research between public and private universities in Vietnam would help to have a general view on the effects and implementation of extracurricular activities in English language teaching in different institutional contexts.

6.4 Conclusion

This literature review analysed the impact of extra-curricular activities on English language teaching in higher education and discussed the implications for Ho Chi Minh City University of Economics and Finance (UEF). The reviewed studies reveal that extracurricular activities have positive impact on the learners' language competence, communication confidence, intercultural communicative competence, learners' motivation, and soft skills. These results suggest that extracurricular activities provide genuine learning experiences in which students can apply knowledge acquired in the classroom in real-world social, educational, and occupational situations.

Time constraints, academic workload, and institutional resource limitations and lack of participation were also identified as challenges to implementation. The issues discussed make it clear that a firm institutional support and strategic planning are essential for the effectiveness and sustainability of the extracurricular programs. A significant finding is that UEF already has a very strong position in using extracurricular activities to support the learning of English. The university has established a comprehensive learning environment, encompassing seminars, workshops, forums, competitions, cultural events, international partnerships, exchange programs, internships, and bilingual programs, among others, that go beyond the classroom setting. Therefore, the main challenge to be addressed by UEF is not to develop new activities, but how to enhance the linkage between the development of existing activities and the formal English learning outcomes.

In general, all extra-curricular activities should be considered an integral part of the overall program of English language instruction in college education. When used properly in conjunction with formal learning, they can be used in the learning of the language as well as in the academic, professional, and personal development of students.

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