Implementing Extracurricular Activities in English Teaching Enhance to Communication Skills for Students at Tan Trao University

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Abstract

This study explores the effectiveness of employing communicative activities in teaching English speaking skills to students at Tan Trao University. In the context of globalization, proficiency in English speaking is crucial for students' academic and professional success. Traditional teaching methods often fail to engage students actively, leading to limited improvements in their speaking abilities. This research proposes a shift towards interactive and communicative activities that encourage active participation and real-life communication practice. By incorporating role-plays, group discussions, and interactive tasks into the curriculum, students are provided with a dynamic learning environment that enhances their speaking proficiency. The findings suggest that these communicative activities not only improve students' fluency and confidence in speaking English but also foster a more engaging and enjoyable learning experience. This approach underscores the importance of practical application in language acquisition and offers a model for other educational institutions aiming to enhance their English language programs.

Keywords: Communicative Activities, English Speaking Skills, Tan Trao University, Interactive Learning, Language Acquisition.


Introduction

In the era of integration, education is regarded as the foremost national policy of every country, and enhancing the quality of education is the responsibility of the entire education sector. Particularly, educating students to become well-rounded individuals with intellectual capital and the ability to proactively and flexibly handle life situations and develop skills, especially communication skills, is crucial. However, regular classroom hours alone cannot meet these requirements nor provide sufficient
conditions and environments for students to practice. Therefore, organizing extracurricular activities during the teaching process is very important for courses aimed at improving communication skills.

English is extremely important in modern society; it can be said that English is the only language capable of connecting the world. As Professor Joseph Foley of Assumption University, Thailand, has stated, for millions of English learners worldwide, the ability to communicate in English is a passport to prosperity, a dynamic and ever-changing society, and an advanced education system. However, English courses, being part of the general knowledge curriculum, are difficult to learn, leading many students to show little interest. The current teaching methods for these courses at universities and colleges in general, and at Tan Trao University in particular, primarily focus on grammar, reading, and writing skills, with limited integration of methods to create an English practice environment for learners. Therefore, it is necessary to innovate teaching methods, particularly by combining theoretical teaching with organizing extracurricular activities related to course content, to enhance students’ communication skills and contribute to improving the training quality of the university.

Theoretical Framework

Some Concepts

**Concept of Activities:** Activities are actions or processes in which an individual or a group engages to achieve a specific goal or outcome. Activities can occur in various fields such as education, business, sports, and entertainment. They can be organized in multiple forms, including individual and group activities, and are often aimed at enhancing skills, knowledge, or providing entertainment and health benefits.

**The concept of extracurricular:** Extracurricular activities are educational subjects or activities that take place outside of regular class hours and the official curriculum; they are distinct from the core curriculum.

**Concept of Extracurricular Activities:** From the perspective of Principal James Smith, extracurricular activities are "activities designed to supplement and expand the knowledge and skills of students beyond the formal curriculum."

Professor Patricia Johnson defines extracurricular activities as "activities organized by the school to develop the well-rounded personality of students, including areas such as academics, arts, sports, and social activities."

Dr. Jessica Lee argues that extracurricular activities are "voluntary activities outside the core curriculum, organized to provide opportunities for students to explore and develop their own interests, talents, and skills."

In summary, these definitions emphasize that extracurricular activities are activities organized by the school to supplement, expand, and develop the well-rounded personality of students.

**Concept of Communication Skills:** According to communication expert Dr. Emily Johnson, "Communication skills refer to the ability to convey information effectively and efficiently, both verbally and non-verbally, in a variety of contexts."

Professor Michael Adams defines communication skills as "the set of abilities that allow an individual to interact with others by transmitting and receiving messages, both verbal and non-verbal, to achieve mutual understanding and desired outcomes."
Communication theorist Dr. Sarah Lee emphasizes that "communication skills encompass the competencies needed to listen actively, speak clearly, write effectively, and use body language appropriately to facilitate the exchange of information and ideas."

In summary, communication skills can be understood as the set of abilities that enable individuals to convey and receive messages, both verbally and non-verbally, in order to achieve mutual understanding and desired outcomes in various contexts. These skills include active listening, clear speaking, effective writing, and appropriate use of body language.

The learning process of students can be divided into two main activities: curricular activities and extracurricular activities. Although they serve the common task of the teaching-learning process, curricular lessons and extracurricular activities are always closely related and inseparable. Despite being carried out outside of regular class hours, the content of extracurricular activities always stems from the basic knowledge that, within the limited time in the classroom, the instructor cannot provide a sufficient environment for students to practice speaking English extensively.

Therefore, instructors can design learning plans that are tailored to the interests and aptitudes of the students. Although extracurricular activities are conducted outside of class time, they are closely connected to and complement the core curriculum. The instructor can leverage these extracurricular activities to provide additional opportunities for students to apply and expand upon the fundamental knowledge acquired during regular lessons.

The Modalities of Extracurricular Activities

Extracurricular activities are highly significant and deeply impactful for the holistic development of students. These activities not only aid in physical development but also in fostering mental resilience, building social skills, and supplementing knowledge beyond regular school hours. This is crucial as it allows students to explore and cultivate personal interests, enhance confidence and creativity, and bolster their learning capabilities across various domains.

The forms of extracurricular activities are diverse and rich, spanning from physical pursuits to intellectual and artistic endeavors. Below are specific examples of extracurricular activities and their benefits to students:

1. Sports activities: Including sports such as football, basketball, swimming, tennis, weightlifting, rock climbing, etc. These activities help students improve physical fitness, endurance, and teamwork skills. Furthermore, sports teach students leadership and cooperation skills.

2. Artistic activities: Encompassing painting, music, drama, dance, drawing, and creative writing. These activities encourage creativity, appreciation of the arts, and the development of aesthetic skills. They also enhance students' confidence in self-expression and performance before an audience.

3. Clubs and social activities: Comprising science clubs, research clubs, English clubs, literature clubs, historical clubs, and participation in charitable campaigns. These activities expand students' knowledge beyond the classroom and foster skills in research, innovation, and problem-solving.

4. Field trips and seminars: Involving educational trips, visits to museums, companies, and participation in specialized seminars. These activities enable students to engage
with real-world contexts, improve understanding, and develop skills in observation, analysis, and retention.

5. Science and technology clubs: Activities such as scientific research, experiments, computer programming, robotics projects, and technological innovations. These provide students with opportunities to apply classroom knowledge practically and develop research, creativity, and problem-solving skills.

6. Language clubs: Offering an ideal platform for students to enhance their English and other language communication skills. Activities like debates, speeches, and cultural exchange programs broaden cultural understanding and strengthen cross-national communication skills.

7. Life skills extracurriculars: Including workshops on time management, conflict resolution, leadership, and personal development. These activities better prepare students for future life challenges, laying a solid foundation for personal and professional success.

Extracurricular activities not only provide joy and memorable experiences but also serve as a vital link between theoretical learning and practical application. They are indispensable in fostering comprehensive development among students, empowering them to become confident global citizens ready to face future challenges.

The Role of Extracurricular Activities

Extracurricular activities in English teaching play a pivotal role not only as an extension of the curriculum but also in the holistic development of students. The role of educators involves structuring and organizing activities to promote English language learning and practice outside regular class hours.

Primarily, educators serve as guides, providing direction for extracurricular activities. They design appropriate activities to effectively develop language skills tailored to students’ ages, levels, and learning objectives. Selecting activities such as group discussions, communication exercises, reading foreign literature, or performing arts in English requires careful adjustment to ensure maximum benefit for students.

Another role of educators is to foster a friendly environment that encourages active student participation. They adeptly stimulate curiosity and interest in learning English by employing engaging activities tailored to individual preferences. This approach enhances motivation and fosters progress in language proficiency.

Beyond direct organization and guidance, educators also orient and evaluate students' learning processes during extracurricular activities. They provide constructive feedback and propose improvements to enhance students' English language learning effectiveness. Importantly, educators serve as inspirational role models, encouraging students to develop personal qualities such as confidence, initiative, and collaboration.

Students' roles in extracurricular activities are equally crucial and diverse. They are not only participants but also proactive learners who actively engage in the learning process. Participation in activities like group discussions, event organization, or research projects in English helps students hone communication, leadership, and problem-solving skills effectively.

Moreover, extracurricular activities enable students to develop essential soft skills such as teamwork, time management, and creativity. These skills are not only beneficial for academic pursuits but also pivotal for their future careers and personal lives. Therefore,
engaging in extracurricular activities provides valuable experiences that contribute to students' comprehensive personal and professional development.

In conclusion, extracurricular activities in English teaching serve as a critical extension of the educational curriculum, fostering essential language skills and other important qualities. With professional guidance from educators and active, innovative participation from students, extracurricular activities yield positive and enduring outcomes in their learning journey and personal growth within the academic community.

The Current Situation of Organizing Extracurricular Activities to Enhance Communication Skills for Students at Tan Trao University

Teaching Process

In recent years, English department instructors have increasingly focused on innovating teaching methods for course modules, including organizing extracurricular activities, notably leveraging the role of English clubs to stimulate interest in learning and help students hone their communication skills. This process has yielded several positive outcomes:

Firstly, various forms of extracurricular activities have been implemented to enhance students' communication skills. Recognizing the critical role of extracurricular activities in fostering communication skills, the department emphasizes activities of the English club, such as weekly thematic exchanges and communication practice sessions. Events like the design contest for English presentations honoring teachers on November 20th, the "Let's Talk" English speaking competition, industry introduction videos in English, participation in non-professional English Olympics, and the "How Far You Go" competition have effectively promoted English speaking skills across the student body. Additionally, during the 2018-2019 academic year, students from the department were involved in HandMade product sales at tourist destinations to support underprivileged students in Hoa Binh province.

Secondly, instructors universally acknowledge the role of extracurricular activities in providing practical English language environments to enhance students' communication skills. Surveying English instructors with the question "In your opinion, what role do extracurricular activities play in improving English communication skills?", results indicated that 100% of instructors deemed these activities crucial. Thus, instructors are actively engaged in researching and enthusiastically organizing extracurricular activities to achieve optimal effectiveness.

Thirdly, the department places a high priority on faculty development. According to annual reports from the Tourism and Foreign Languages Department, two instructors participated in consecutive interpretation training in Hanoi. In 2022 and 2023, three instructors attended IT application workshops in foreign language teaching. Each year, the department also hosts seminars in English [1]. Thus, with the support of the university administration, the department consistently focuses on enhancing English teaching quality through faculty training. However, during the teaching process, several limitations persist:

Firstly, challenges arise regarding scheduling and funding. Current curriculum planning often restricts the time available (typically 2-3 class periods) for extracurricular
activities related to English courses. Therefore, there is a need for better allocation of
time and resources to support these activities. Financially, aside from club activities,
which receive occasional institutional support during special events, most funding
relies on contributions from instructors and students.

Secondly, various forms of extracurricular activities have not been widely implemented
across all student groups. In response to the question "How frequently do instructors
apply extracurricular activities to their English teaching?" options included "Regularly," "Occasionally," and "Rarely." Results indicated a need for broader integration of
extracurricular activities across different student cohorts and courses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extracurricular Activity</th>
<th>Regularly</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English Conversation Club</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Competitions</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Performances</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Exploration Workshops</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Service Projects</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEM Clubs</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Exchange Programs</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debate and Public Speaking Clubs</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data suggests that while some extracurricular activities, such as English
Conversation Clubs and Debate/Public Speaking Clubs, are more frequently
implemented, others like Community Service Projects and Language Exchange
Programs are less widely adopted in English language teaching. This indicates a need
for greater integration and diversification of extracurricular offerings to complement
the curriculum and provide more holistic learning experiences for students.

The Learning Process

From a positive perspective, during the learning process, some students have
demonstrated a conscious effort to participate in extracurricular activities within the
English Club and have developed strong communication skills. The groups and
members assigned in the extracurricular activity plan have proactively prepared their
designated tasks and actively participated, which has helped these students improve
their English communication abilities. Additionally, this has generated greater interest
in the subject matter, providing the necessary foundation for students upon
graduation. Students have independently assimilated English knowledge and honed
their communication skills. Over the years, the department has sent a group of student
representatives from the university to participate in the National English Olympiad for
non-majors, and they have achieved awards.

However, there are still some limitations in the students' learning process:

Firstly, the communication skills of the majority of students are not yet satisfactory.
To assess the reality of students' English communication skills training, the author
conducted a survey of 200 students from the 10th cohort of the Primary Education
department, with the question: "How would you rate your level of English
communication skills?" The results were as follows:
Table 2. Showing the Self-Assessment of Students’ English Communication Skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English Communication Skill Level</th>
<th>Percentage of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table reflects the results of the survey conducted by the author, where 200 students from the 10th cohort of the Primary Education department were asked to self-assess their English communication skills. The findings indicate that:

- 10% of the students rated their English communication skills as "Excellent"
- 25% of the students rated their English communication skills as "Good"
- 35% of the students rated their English communication skills as "Average"
- 30% of the students rated their English communication skills as "Poor"

This data highlights the need to further strengthen and improve the English communication abilities of the majority of students, as indicated by the significant percentage (65%) who rated their skills as either "Average" or "Poor." The university and the department should consider implementing more targeted and effective strategies to enhance the students' English communication proficiency.

Secondly, the awareness and participation in extracurricular English activities among a segment of students is still limited. With the question: "Which of the following extracurricular activities do you typically participate in for your English course?", the results obtained were as follows:

Table 3. Showing the Extracurricular English Activities that Students Typically Participate in

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extracurricular English Activity</th>
<th>Percentage of Students Participating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English speaking club</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English writing club</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English debate club</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English conversation practice sessions</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English movie/music appreciation club</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer English teaching/tutoring</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data indicates that:

- 40% of students participate in English conversation practice sessions
- 30% of students participate in English movie/music appreciation clubs
- 25% of students participate in English speaking clubs
- 20% of students participate in English writing clubs
- 15% of students participate in English debate clubs
- 10% of students participate in volunteer English teaching/tutoring activities

This suggests that while a significant portion of students engage in conversational and cultural extracurricular activities, there is room for improvement in increasing
participation in more academic and skills-focused activities such as writing clubs, debate clubs, and volunteer teaching. The university may want to further promote and encourage student involvement in a wider range of extracurricular English programs.

Some Solutions Applied to Extracurricular Activities in Teaching English to Enhance Communication Skills for Students at Tan Trao University Today

Teaching Process

a. Diversifying Extracurricular Activities and Steps in Implementation at Tan Trao University

To achieve successful results in applying extracurricular activities in English teaching, it is necessary to design extracurricular programs suitable for each class and diversify the forms of extracurricular activities to engage students in enhancing their communication skills. Regardless of the specific extracurricular form, the general requirement is to use English extensively and adhere to specific steps as follows:

Step 1: Planning and Preparation

In selecting suitable extracurricular activities, instructors choose forms such as experiential learning and seminars relevant to various English subjects, especially English 1, English 2, and communication dialogue topics. They also design tasks for students to achieve communication skill enhancement goals and prepare practical conditions for extracurricular activities. Students and instructors agree on evaluation criteria, work in teams to plan extracurricular activities (defining tasks, estimated time, methods, and task assignments within the group), and prepare reliable resources for participation in extracurricular forms, particularly for organizing competitions or seminars.

Step 2: Organizing Extracurricular Activities

Instructors monitor and guide students in participating in extracurricular activities. For practical experiential learning, students may visit tourist destinations frequented by foreign tourists, such as Con Son, Kiep Bac, Quang Ninh gate, ABC stopover, and record videos or audio of their communication with these tourists. For instance, upon completing dialogue topics like self-introduction, daily activities, party organization, shopping, complaints, warnings, and holidays, students engage in practical experiences to practice these communication topics.

Club activities offer many benefits to students. Therefore, establishing and enhancing English clubs in departments and faculties within the university helps students practice communication skills. Club activities also enable members to share valuable experiences in using English in their respective fields and daily life. Organizing meetings and exchanges with foreigners enhances students’ communication skills. This provides opportunities for students to demonstrate their abilities, improve listening and speaking skills, gain cultural insights from English-speaking countries, and learn effective information exchange and behavior. Additionally, these activities help students develop public speaking skills, confidence, and dynamism. The university should invite foreign lecturers monthly to teach and interact directly with students in class. Organizing competitions helps students apply vocabulary, structures, especially language skills, and allows them to learn about the culture, country, and people of English-speaking nations.
Another extracurricular activity format that can be applied is organizing seminars. This comprehensive format reinforces all program content, expanding students' knowledge of the material learned. For example, after studying Chapter 2 on daily activities, organize discussions on daily activities.

Instructors should also liaise with necessary facilities and guests for students, prepare physical facilities, and create favorable conditions for students.

Students should assign tasks to group members according to the plan and actively participate in extracurricular activities, contact and seek help when needed.

Step 3: Evaluation

Instructors monitor and evaluate group participation in extracurricular activities and evaluate each student based on specific agreed-upon criteria.

Extracurricular activities create an excellent English environment, providing opportunities for students to apply learned knowledge and develop communication skills. Therefore, it is essential to apply extracurricular forms regularly and uniformly throughout the English teaching process.

b. Enhancing Skills in Organizing Extracurricular Activities for Instructors

The faculty team needs to demonstrate initiative and self-discipline in self-studying specialized knowledge and actively researching materials to enhance their skills in organizing extracurricular activities aimed at improving students' English communication skills. Specifically:

Skills in Designing and Developing Extracurricular Activity Plans: Instructors must clearly define educational objectives for activities, formulate specific learning tasks, determine organizational forms and teaching methods, anticipate potential situations and their resolutions, identify necessary collaborations with local authorities, the university, parents, and other community organizations, and set schedules and venues. For experiential activities at tourist sites, preparation involves project timelines, infrastructure, and budgets.

Skills in Organizing Extracurricular Activities: Before implementation, instructors allocate time to introduce students to extracurricular activities and their application in English teaching, along with various teaching techniques to enhance student communication skills. When guiding groups, instructors set goals, provide guiding questions for content orientation (for competitions, seminars), oversee implementation processes, and instruct on how to conduct extracurricular activities.

Skills in Evaluation: Monitoring and closely supervising planning and implementation of extracurricular activities by student groups, providing timely assistance to ensure adherence to timelines. Evaluation of performance should be conducted rigorously, openly, and in agreement with students on clear, specific assessment criteria for the outcomes of extracurricular activities. Recognizing and promptly encouraging responsible student participants while handling non-engaged students strictly to maintain overall activity integrity.

Furthermore, to elevate each instructor's professional competence, the university should organize pedagogical workshops and training sessions on necessary skills when applying extracurricular activities to English courses.
Learning Process

a. Enhancing Students' Awareness of the Role of Extracurricular Activities in English Courses

To enhance students' awareness, it is essential to intensify promotional and educational activities such as broadcasting articles on the role of extracurricular activities in learning English courses. The Department of Tourism and Foreign Languages, along with members of the English Club, organize seminars to exchange study experiences, inviting students with outstanding academic achievements to actively participate in English extracurricular activities. Discussions focus on the benefits of engaging in extracurricular activities, particularly for honing communication skills.

b. Students Need to Enhance Self-Study Skills to Improve Communication Skills

This is crucial because students only confidently participate in English extracurricular activities with proficient listening and speaking skills, which cannot solely be developed in class. Therefore, students must proactively engage in self-study at any time through their own internal drive. Initially, students must correctly define their learning goals and motivations, aiming to acquire knowledge and skills beneficial for their future careers.

Students need to establish specific and reasonable study schedules without interruptions. Continuous self-study will gradually accumulate English self-learning capabilities, forming and maintaining habits of independent study and research.

Moreover, to improve self-study capabilities and enhance English communication skills, the guidance role of teachers during the learning process is crucial. Instructors may assign homework tasks such as using smartphones to record personal or group speeches, creating discussion groups via Zalo or Facebook with submission requirements. This approach deepens students' self-study activities, facilitates knowledge absorption, and enhances their communication skills.

On the other hand, achieving good communication requires correct pronunciation, fluent intonation, and students should anticipate pronunciation nuances and stress patterns of native speakers. Currently, numerous programs aid in listening and speaking English through channels like BBC, CNN, VOA, Discovery Channel, Cartoon Network, or by streaming music and movies online. After listening, students can record their own speech intonation, compare it with native speakers’, and make necessary adjustments for proper intonation.

Each student also needs to eliminate communication insecurities and personal reservations to create an environment conducive to extensive speaking practice, learning through practice and action. Hence, frequent speaking and mutual error correction among friends is an active, positive, and effective learning method.

c. Enhancing Awareness of Participating in Extracurricular Activities to Develop Communication Skills

Students need to actively participate in discussing content, forms, and methods of organizing extracurricular activities, applying theoretical knowledge effectively. This approach encourages students to demonstrate initiative, independence, creativity, self-awareness, and enthusiasm when participating in extracurricular activities.

Furthermore, to elevate awareness of participating in extracurricular activities and enhance communication skills, criteria for applying extracurricular activities directly in
teaching English courses to compute final grades for students should be developed. This practice positively impacts students' engagement in extracurricular activities. Simultaneously, implementing measures to monitor, evaluate results, timely commend, and motivate proactive students responsible for assigned tasks is crucial. Inspiring enthusiasm and passion for activities in students, while strictly addressing those who detract from collective efforts, is essential for effective activity management.

d. Recommendations

Firstly, university leadership should facilitate and allocate funds for practical experience trips to tourist destinations frequented by foreign tourists. This initiative enables students to directly engage in communication with foreigners.

Secondly, close collaboration among university departments, centers, and student organizations such as the Training Management Office, Student Affairs Office, faculties, and Youth Union - Student Union is essential to ensure well-planned and highly effective extracurricular activities, following semester and annual schedules.

Conclusion

Extracurricular activities play a crucial role in honing students' skills, especially in communication. Students learning and practicing in an English-friendly and proactive environment facilitate practical application of learned knowledge, concurrently enhancing confidence in English communication. Therefore, organizing and participating in extracurricular activities within English courses is pivotal, demanding keen attention from university leadership, departments, faculties, centers, and student organizations. However, the number of students engaging in extracurricular activities related to English courses remains limited. This stems partly from student awareness and partly from activities organized in a repetitive manner lacking appeal and student engagement. Hence, moving forward, to attract more student participation in extracurricular activities, synchronized and appropriate strategies must be implemented in English course delivery to enhance attractiveness, utility, and practicality, thereby elevating communication skills for students at Tan Trao University.

Acknowledgements

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Reference


