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The Impact of Extracurricular Activities on Skills Development of Learners: Evidence From Universities in Ho Chi Minh City

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KEYWORDS

Extracurricular activities, Soft skills, Hard skills, Culture and Sports activities, Academic activities, Community Activities.

ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the current status of students' participation in extracurricular activities at universities in Ho Chi Minh City, through a multivariate regression analysis model with survey data from 171 students from universities in Ho Chi Minh City, the study continues to test the impact of participating in extracurricular activities on the development of hard and soft skills of learners, thereby effectively promoting voluntary participation in these activities, contributing to improving skills and competitiveness of students in a dynamic and modern working environment. The research results show that extracurricular activities have a positive impact on the development of both hard and soft skills of learners. Based on the findings from the study, a number of recommendations have been proposed for universities and organizations to develop a highly skilled workforce in Vietnam.

1. Introduction

In the context of a developing world and increasingly demanding labour market, the need for comprehensive quality in workers, encompassing both professional knowledge and soft skills, has become paramount. These are the key factors determining students' success in their academic pursuits and future careers. Researches have shown that only 25% of an individual's success is attributed to knowledge, whilst the remaining 75% depends on their skills and attitude (Nguyen Thi Tu Trinh, 2023). Furthermore, in the study of Nandita Mishra and Sreeramana Aithal (2023), they found that both extracurricular and co-curricular activities contributed to the development of students' self-confidence, as well as their knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Therefore, equipping students with soft skills has become a top priority for educators worldwide, including Vietnam, aiming to produce a high-quality workforce capable of global integration. Recognizing the importance of this issue, most universities in Vietnam have been intensifying and diversifying extracurricular activities alongside traditional classroom instruction to enhance student training.

However, the current reality shows that a significant proportion of students still cannot meet the demands of employers, lacking essential soft skills for the workplace. This results in an inability to withstand work pressure, poor communication with colleagues or clients, and a lack of teamwork skills, etc. This also explains the high unemployment rate in some industries despite the high demand for labour in society, especially in Ho Chi Minh (HCM) City - a socioeconomic and cultural centre of Vietnam and

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the most populous city in the country with nearly 9.5 million people in 2023 (GSO, 2024). Thus, the question arises: "Do extracurricular activities commonly organized effectively develop students' skills?", and "Which outdoor activities have the greatest impact on students' skill development?"

Based on the pressing issues mentioned above regarding the extent to which extracurricular activities influence students' ability to develop competencies, the research team conducted a study entitled "The Impact of Extracurricular Activities on Skill Development of Learners in HCM City" to explore the reality of the participation in outdoor activities of students in order to effectively promote the voluntary participation in these activities, contributing to enhancing students' competitiveness in the dynamic and modern working environment. Although previous studies have explored both the relationship between extracurricular activities and skill development in various spaces and times, there has been a dearth of research that thoroughly and comprehensively examines the impact of each type of extracurricular activity on the skill development of students, particularly those majoring in Finance - Accounting - Auditing, within the context of HCM City. Therefore, it is essential to investigate the specific impact of these activities on learner's skill development within the educational landscape of Vietnam due to distinct economic and cultural characteristics. Furthermore, by understanding the level of impact of extracurricular activities on students' skill development, universities can adjust their activities, selecting engaging and effective organization forms to create a high-quality workforce that can comprehensively meet the requirements of businesses and society, contributing to the development of Vietnam's socioeconomic development.

2. Literature review and Hypothesis

2.1. Extracurricular activities

Extracurricular activities are those conducted outside of regular class hours, depending on the interests and aspirations of each student within the capabilities and organizational conditions of the school; it can be understood that extracurricular activities are entirely planned and scheduled by lecturers, taking place outside of the prescribed curriculum (Vu Thi Luong & Trinh Thi Chuyen, 2022). Likewise, according to Nur Munirah Roslan and Mohamad Shukri Abdul Hamid (2020), extracurricular activities are often supplementary to the regular curriculum, and are an important part of the education system that helps students develop soft skills.

Besides, voluntarism is the core characteristic of extracurricular activities, which means students participate based on their personal interests and desires, without being coerced by external factors. This intrinsic motivation encourages learners to select activities that align with their interests and personal development goals (Husna Mohamed & Kalafunja Osaki, 2022). Therefore, extracurricular activities are those that students themselves choose according to their interests or spontaneously participate in external social organization such as: self-study activities, socio-political activities, community service, cultural and artistic activities, sports activities, recreational activities, etc. (Le Thi Hong Lam, 2020).

Thus, when combining these concepts, we have defined extracurricular activities as follows: Extracurricular activities are various informal activities that learners participate in after completing the official school day or outside regular academic commitments. These activities contribute to learners' academic achievement, personal development, and skill-building whilst also improving both physical and mental health. Moreover, extracurricular involvement not only cultivates learners', particularly students', skills but also facilitates the broadening of their social networks. For instance, through competitions, contestants can connect with enterprises to enhance their knowledge and increase job opportunities. Additionally, extracurricular activities can be classified into four main categories: sports and games, academic activities, volunteer work, and club activities related to hobbies (music, dance, fashion, etc.).

2.2. Learners' skills

Nguyen Thi Tu Trinh (2023) showed that individuals' skills are attributes inherent to each person, representing the ability to adapt to practical challenges and achieve success. They define who we are, how we work, and serve as a measure of our effectiveness in our endeavor. Skills can be categorize into two groups: hard skills and soft skills. However, this study will primarily focus on the latter.

Soft skills refer to a set of fundamental abilities that are voluntarily exercised based on knowledge of the work, the ability to integrate into society, attitudes, and behavior in interactions with society, community, friends, colleagues, partners, and organizations, with the aim of maximizing work efficiency and achieving life success (Nguyen Thi Thuy, 2017). These skills are considered the key to graduates' success and a crucial tool for students to learn effectively and develop their careers. From the perspective of Hunan Mohamed and Kalafunja Osaki (2022), soft skills encompass a collection of abilities that individuals need to appropriately address daily life challenges, including such personal transversal competencies as social skills, language and communication skills, friendliness, teamwork, and other personality traits that define interpersonal connections.

Thus, soft skills can be understood as a combination of skills and personal qualities that are not directly related to specialist knowledge but often influence life activities. These skills enhance self-confidence, interpersonal relationships, and overall success. For example, students possessing strong leadership qualities are more likely to secure managerial positions and higher compensation. Therefore, they are indispensable assets in the job market as they bolster individual performance, foster positive work environments, and contribute to organizational growth.

2.3. The correlation between extracurricular activities and learners' skill development

Whilst students can develop soft skills through certain courses offered at their institutions, these opportunities are often limited in terms of time and scope, resulting in insufficient and fragmented skill development. Consequently, they need to engage in extracurricular activities alongside traditional classroom learning to complement and enhance their abilities. These experiences not only provide students with a much-needed break from rigorous academic pursuits but also offer an ideal platform for holistic development, fostering essential soft skills such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and creativity (Carola Garrecht, Till Bruckermann, and Ute Harms, 2018). This aligns with the perspective of contemporary educators who argue that learning should extend beyond the classroom and occur anytime, anywhere. As demonstrated in the research of Vu Thi Luong and Trinh Thi Chuyen (2022), students who have the opportunity to learn and practice in a conducive and positive English language environment are better equipped to apply their knowledge and boost their confidence in English communication. Therefore, it can be concluded that extracurricular activities play a pivotal role in enhancing both soft skills and subject-specific competencies among learners.

Numerous studies indicate that participation in sports and community activities significantly enhances social skills among learners. According to Liu & Taresh (2024), sports provide a platform for students to develop teamwork, communication, and leadership abilities. These activities foster an environment where students learn to navigate social dynamics, build friendships, and resolve conflicts. Extracurricular activities also play a significant role in enhancing cognitive skills. Participating in sports can improve concentration and discipline, as highlighted by a study conducted by Udoh, E.J. (2024). Regular physical activity has been linked to better academic performance due to improved focus and cognitive function. Community activities often require critical thinking and problem-solving skills. According to Manaf et al (2018), learners engaged in service-learning projects develop critical analysis abilities as they reflect on their experiences and apply academic knowledge to real-world challenges.

The physical benefits of participating in sports are well-documented. Regular engagement in physical activities helps learners develop motor skills, coordination, and overall physical health. Researchers have noted that physically active students are more likely to perform well academically. For instance, some researchers found a positive correlation between physical fitness and academic achievement, suggesting that sports can indirectly influence cognitive development through improved physical health.

2.4. Research models and hypotheses

Based on the grounded theory synthesized from previous researches and Vygotsky's (1978) perspective on learning through social development along with Lave and Wenger's (1991) model of community-based learning, we propose the following hypotheses:

H1: Engaging in sports and games has a positive impact on the development of learners' soft skills.

H2: Volunteer work has a positive impact on the development of learners' soft skills.

H3: Academic activities have a positive impact on the development of learners' soft skills.

H4: Club activities related to hobbies (music, dance, fashion, etc.) have a positive impact on the development of learners' soft skills.

H5: Engaging in sports and games has a positive impact on the development of learners' hard skills.

H6: Volunteer work has a positive impact on the development of learners' hard skills.

H7: Academic activities have a positive impact on the development of learners' hard skills.

H8: Club activities related to hobbies (music, dance, fashion, etc.) have a positive impact on the development of learners' hard skills.

Based on these hypotheses, we propose two research models according to the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) model with four factors that directly impact a learner's skills. The details are provided in the following diagrams:

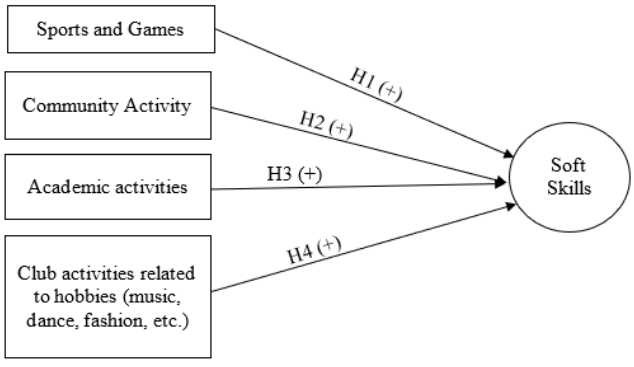

Figure 1. Model of the impact of extracurricular activities on soft skill development

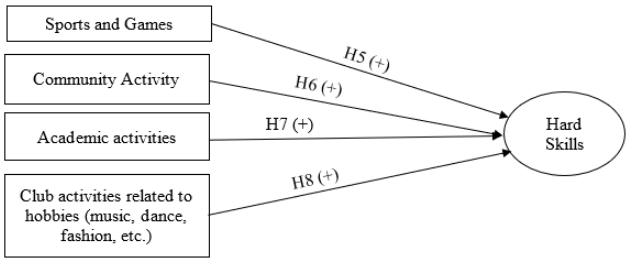

Figure 2. Model of the impact of extracurricular activities on hard skill development

3. Materials and methods

To address the research objectives, this study adopted a mixed-methods research design that integrates both qualitative and quantitative approaches. And, quantitative data was analyzed using exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with the aid of SPSS 26. A detailed description of the research methodology is provided in the following sections.

To explore the landscape of extracurricular activities and student engagement, a qualitative research approach was adopted. This phase aims to refine the operational definitions and measurement instruments for the study variables and to lay the groundwork for the development of a comprehensive research model.

As recommended by Hair et al. (2017), once a research model and its measurement scales have been established, quantitative analysis should be conducted to evaluate the model's goodness-of-fit, predictive accuracy, and the nature of the relationships among the study variables. To fulfil the third research objective, which is to quantify the influence of extracurricular activities on students' skill development, an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted using SPSS 26 software. This statistical technique was chosen to provide a comprehensive understanding of the underlying dimensions of the construct.

Based on the identified research objectives, the author collected data using a survey form via google form sent to students studying at universities in Ho Chi Minh City (by convenient sampling method). The survey consisted of three main parts. The part that surveyed the factors aimed to collect data for quantitative research was developed based on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly agree) to assess the overall research subjects. Each factor in the two research models was measured by separate scales with 23 observed variables in total, and these scales.

The survey results were sent to 200 students in Ho Chi Minh City, of which 180 students responded to the survey and finally after eliminating the responses that did not fully meet the requirements, 171 responses remained that met the standards for inclusion and quantitative analysis.

4. Results and discussion

Firstly, to ensure the reliability and validity of the aforementioned scales, we conducted the Scale quality testing and obtained the following results:

Table 1. Reliability of the scale

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.945	23

Table 2. Detailed information on observed variables for each scale

Item-Total Statistics				
	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
SG1	87.71	188.632	.660	.942
SG2	87.61	189.463	.629	.942
SG3	87.91	188.074	.601	.943
CA1	87.22	193.974	.569	.943
CA2	87.51	190.063	.674	.942
CA3	87.57	189.658	.658	.942
AA1	87.84	188.302	.594	.943
AA2	87.39	190.815	.631	.942
AA3	87.44	188.613	.680	.942
CLB1	87.73	193.189	.529	.944
CLB2	87.63	189.775	.578	.943
CLB3	87.70	189.495	.638	.942
SS1	87.32	189.923	.702	.941
SS2	87.22	190.492	.672	.942
SS3	87.53	189.533	.659	.942
SS4	87.39	189.240	.699	.941
SS5	87.25	191.810	.622	.942
SS6	87.35	188.582	.738	.941
HS1	87.30	192.152	.633	.942
HS2	87.20	192.231	.674	.942
HS3	87.39	192.533	.615	.942
HS4	87.45	193.790	.514	.944
HS5	87.40	190.595	.679	.942

The overall Cronbach's Alpha is 0.945 > 0.6 and all observed variables have item-total correlations > 0.3. In conclusion, 23 observed variables are of good quality and none are excluded. Specifically, the factor of Sports and Games has 3 observed variables, respectively SG1, SG2, SG3, which meet the criteria; the factor of Volunteer works has 3 observed variables,

namely CA1, CA2, CA3, which meet the criteria; the factor of Academic activities has 3 observed variables, respectively AA1, AA2, AA3, which meet the criteria; the factor of Club activities related to hobbies has 3 observed variables, namely CLB1, CLB2, CLB3, which meet the criteria; the factor of Soft skills has 6 observed variables, respectively SS1, SS2, SS3, SS4, SS5, SS6, which meet the criteria; and the factor of Hard skills has 5 observed variables, namely HS1, HS2, HS3, HS4, HS5, which meet the criteria.

Secondly, to explore the interrelationships between variables within each factor with the aim of detecting and eliminating variables with ambiguous factor loading or initial misclassifications, we conducted the Exploratory factor analysis. For 12 independent variables, we obtained the following results:

Table 3. Rotated Component Matrix of Independent variables

Rotated Component Matrix[a]		
	Component	
	1	2
CLB3	.798	
CLB2	.787	
CLB1	.752	
SG1	.683	
SG3	.642	
SG2	.611	
CA3		
AA3		.840
AA2		.836
AA1		.682
CA2		.656
CA1		.651

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.[a]

a. Rotation converged in 3 iterations.

Based on the rotated component matrix above and loading factor of 0.55, which was selected due to the sample size of 171, because variable CA3 was excluded from further analysis due to its negligible loading on all factors. Therefore, a subsequent EFA was conducted on the remaining 11 variables, and the results are presented below:

Table 4. Rotated Component Matrix

Rotated Component Matrix[a]		
	Component	
	1	2
CLB3	.795	
CLB2	.793	
CLB1	.758	
SG1	.688	
SG3	.641	
SG2	.618	
AA2		.850
AA3		.847
AA1		.688
CA1		.644
CA2		.640

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.[a]

a. Rotation converged in 3 iterations.

The rotated component matrix reveals that the 11 observed variables were classified into two factors, F1 and F2, with all variables having factor loadings greater than 0.55, and no bad variables were found. However, whilst the initial hypothesis suggested that CLB1, CLB2, and CLB3 belonged to the CLB scale, and SG1, SG2, and SG3 belonged to the SG scale, student feedback indicated that these variables should be grouped together. Consequently, we labelled this combined factor "Van hoa & The thao" (Culture & Sports) and coded it to VHTT. Similarly, AA1, AA2, AA3, CA1, and CA2 were grouped into a new factor labelled "Hoc tap & Cong dong" (Academic and Community Activities - AACA) and coded it to ACAA. Next, for the dependent variable Soft Skills, we obtained the following results:

Table 5. Component Matrix

Component Matrix[a]	
	Component
	1
SS1	.832
SS6	.824
SS2	.820
SS4	.775
SS5	.770
SS3	.732

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. 1 components extracted.

As shown in Table 5, when "Soft Skills" was included as a dependent variable in the EFA, a single factor emerged with all six observed variables loading substantially (greater than 0.55). Given the strong factor loading, this factor was retained and coded to "SK" for subsequent linear regression analysis. And for the dependent variable Hard Skills (HS), we obtained the following results:

Table 6. Component Matrix

Component Matrix[a]	
	Component
	1
HS5	.821
HS2	.802
HS1	.781
HS3	.777
HS4	.724

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. 1 components extracted.

As can be seen from Table 6, when "Hard Skills" was included as a dependent variable in the EFA, a single factor emerged with all five observed variables loading substantially (greater than 0.55). Given the strong factor loading, this factor was retained and coded to "Hard skill" for subsequent linear regression analysis.

Finally, we conducted Linear regression analysis for each research model to find out the impact of extracurricular activities on the development of learner's skills. For the model of the impact on soft skill development, we obtained the following results:

The results indicate that both independent variables, CASA (Culture and Sport Activities) and AACA (Academic and Community Activities), have Sig. = 0.000 < 0.05. This suggests that the independent variables are significantly correlated with the SS (Soft Skills) variable with a confidence level > 95%; in other words, both CASA and AACA have a significant impact on the development of soft skills. Furthermore, the absence of multicollinearity was confirmed by the VIF values of less than 10 for all independent variables.

The adjusted R^2 of 0.574, coupled with a significance of F-test = 0.000 < 0.05, suggests that the independent variables account for 57.9% of the variance in SS. The remaining 42.1% of the variance is likely due to factors not included in the model. Furthermore, the Durbin-Watson statistic (d) of 2.214 indicates the absence of auto-correlation among the residuals.

Table 7. The significance of regression coefficients

Coefficients[a]								
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF	
1	(Constant)	-9.935E-17	.050		.000	1.000		
	CASA	.479	.050	.479	9.574	.000	1.000	1.000
	AACA	.592	.050	.592	11.821	.000	1.000	1.000

a. Dependent Variable: SS

Table 8. The explanatory power of the model

Model Summary[b]										
					Change Statistics					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	Durbin-Watson
1	.761[a]	.579	.574	.65241283	.579	115.698	2	168	.000	2.214

a. Predictors: (Constant), CASA,AACA

b. Dependent Variable: SS

Table 9. The goodness of fit of the model

ANOVA[a]						
	Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	98.492	2	49.246	115.698	.000[b]
	Residual	71.508	168	.426		
	Total	170.000	170			

a. Dependent Variable: SS

b. Predictors: (Constant), CASA,AACA

Table 10. The significance of regression coefficients

Coefficients[a]								
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF	
1	(Constan)	-9.455E-18	.055		.000	1.000		
	CASA	.427	.056	.427	7.671	.000	1.000	1.000
	AACA	.546	.056	.546	9.808	.000	1.000	1.000

a. Dependent Variable: HS

Table 11. The explanatory power of the model

Model Summary[b]										
					Change Statistics					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	Durbin-Watson
1	.693[a]	.480	.474	.72543054	.480	77.520	2	168	.000	1.694

a. Predictors: (Constant), CASA, AACA

b. Dependent Variable: HS

Table 12. The goodness of fit of the model

ANOVA[a]						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	81.590	2	40.795	77.520	.000[b]
	Residual	88.410	168	.526		
	Total	170.000	170			

a. Dependent Variable: HS

b. Predictors: (Constant), CASA, AACA

As can be seen from the ANOVA results, the regression model has a Sig. = 0.000 < 0.05, indicating a linear relationship between the independent and dependent variables. This suggests that the linear regression model is suitable for the data. For the model of the impact on hard skill development, we obtained the following results:

The results indicate that both independent variables, CASA and AACA, have Sig. = 0.000 < 0.05. This suggests that the independent variables are significantly correlated with the HS variable with a confidence level > 95%; in other words, both CASA and AACA have a significant impact on the development of hard skills. Furthermore, the absence of multidisciplinary was confirmed by the VIF values of less than 10 for all independent variables.

The adjusted R^2 of 0.474, coupled with a significance of F-test = 0.000 < 0.05, suggests that the independent variables account for 48% of the variance in HS. Furthermore, the Durbin-Watson statistic (d) of 1.694 indicates the absence of auto correlation among the residuals.

As can be seen from the ANOVA results, the regression model has a Sig. = 0.000 < 0.05, indicating a linear relationship between the independent and dependent variables. This suggests that the linear regression model is suitable for the data.

5. Conclusion

Informed by the proposed theoretical models and hypotheses, a quantitative research design was adopted to measure the scale of the factors and to empirically test the hypotheses. The results indicate that engagement in sports, clubs related to hobbies, volunteer work, and academic activities have a positive impact on the skills development of learners of universities in HCM City. This suggests that a majority of students perceive the benefits derived from extracurricular involvement and acknowledge their contribution to skills enhancement. Furthermore, the results of this study not only provide valuable information for learners but also offer institutions of higher education a more nuanced understanding of the evolving needs of students in a globalized context. These findings can inform the development of institutional strategies and

programs, enhance the student learning experience, and ultimately contribute to the development of a more competitive and adaptable student body.

In conclusion, this study has provided empirical evidence of the significant impact of extracurricular involvement on the development of learners' skills. The results of this study have important implications for universities and organizations seeking to cultivate a highly skilled workforce that can meet the complex demands of the contemporary workplace and society. Specifically, through the research results, it has been shown that in addition to training activities on specialized knowledge, promoting extracurricular activities for learners such as cultural and sports activities will help improve health, thereby increasing concentration and improving the quality of learning. In addition, increasing extracurricular community and academic activities will enhance communication skills and problem-solving skills, thereby helping learners quickly integrate into the working environment and be more confident in their work.

The adjusted R^2 of 0.474, coupled with a significance of F-test = 0.000 < 0.05, suggests that the independent variables account for 48% of the variance in HS. Furthermore, the Durbin-Watson statistic (d) of 1.694 indicates the absence of auto correlation among the residuals.

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