

Ungku Omar Polytechnic Students' Motivation in Participating in English Extracurricular Activities

Rashidah Radzi Rasalingam, Zulaikha Zulkflee, Syamsina Mohd Anis

General Studies Department, Ungku Omar Polytechnic, Ipoh, Perak

Abstract

Education is an integrated process with multiple dimensions that extends beyond classroom activities. It includes extracurricular activities that deepen and expand the knowledge gained in the classroom, enrich students' experiences, and create opportunities for growth in various fields. Education, which is related to goals, objectives, interests, needs, and experiences, influences changes in learners' behaviours. Polytechnic students learn to address real-world problems and acquire knowledge that satisfies their needs or aligns with their interests. Extracurricular activities (ECAs) are highly significant and play a crucial role in education. This study explores the motivations and participation of Ungku Omar Polytechnic students in English extracurricular activities organised by the Language Unit, General Studies Department. In Ungku Omar Polytechnic, the Language Unit of General Studies Department plans and organises different types of programs to encourage the students to participate and hence improve their language. Among the programs were public speaking competitions, debate competitions, podcasting, etc. Respondents for this study were all Ungku Omar Polytechnic students and the data was collected via questionnaire adapted from The Extracurricular Involvement Inventory (EII) questionnaire developed by Winston & Massaro (1987) based on Astin's theory of student involvement, to measure the quality and the quantity of the students' involvement in extracurricular activities. The data collected was analysed using SPSS 29.0 for descriptive analysis. The results demonstrate students are moderately motivated to participate in English extracurricular activities due to different reasons such as lack of confidence in speaking in English and fear of talking in public. The results suggest that by overcoming the issues/challenges, the students can benefit from the activities and hence improve their language.

Key words: *Extracurricular activities (ECAs), motivation, socio-cultural competence*

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, extracurricular activities (ECAs) have been acknowledged as an essential element of comprehensive student development in higher education institutions. These activities are essential in influencing students' academic achievement, social skills, confidence, and communication abilities, particularly in language acquisition (Mahoney et al., 2017; Zuo, 2024). Language-based ECAs, including public speaking, drama, debate, and podcasting, enable learners to utilize their classroom knowledge in genuine, real-world contexts, thus enhancing fluency, motivation, and confidence in English communication (Boiko, 2024; Holandiyah et al., 2024). In technical education environments like polytechnics, which prioritize vocational and practical courses, these language extracurricular activities offer significant chances to improve soft skills and language proficiency that are frequently undervalued in the curriculum (Le, 2024).

Despite the well-known advantages of English extracurricular activities, there exists a significant deficiency in student engagement at Ungku Omar Polytechnic. Lecturers from the Language Unit within the General Studies Department have indicated challenges in motivating students to participate in English-related activities, frequently attributing this to low self-esteem, anxiety, time limitations, and a lack of awareness or perceived significance (Kardiansyah & Qodriani, 2023; Le, 2024). Although these activities aim to be engaging and fulfilling, numerous students exhibit reluctance to participate, so constraining the efficacy of these programs in enhancing English proficiency and communicative competence.

Consequently, it is imperative to examine the motivational elements affecting student engagement in English extracurricular programs. Comprehending students' preferences, obstacles, and motivational sources will enable the department to devise more appropriately aligned activities and execute techniques that can enhance engagement and success in language acquisition.

The purpose of this research is to identify Ungku Omar Polytechnic students' motivation in participating in English extracurricular activities that were carried out by the Language Unit, General Studies Department. Apart from the compulsory subject that must be taken by these students, the extracurricular activities offer students a platform to explore their passions, discover new interests, and develop talents that may not be nurtured within traditional classroom settings. So the role of extracurricular activities is very important in helping the students to prepare themselves to carry out the required assessments. Even though extracurricular activities are a valuable complement to formal education, providing essential opportunities for practical application, increasing exposure, and enhancing motivation and confidence in English language learning.

Research Objectives

1. To identify the students' motivation in participating in any language activities organised by the Language Unit, General Studies Department.
2. To identify the most preferred language activities chosen by the students.
3. To identify the barriers faced by the students in participating in ECA.
4. To find out ways to improve students' motivation in participating in language activities organised by the unit.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Function of Extracurricular Activities in Language Acquisition

Extracurricular activities (ECAs) are widely acknowledged as essential supplements to academic programs in higher education, particularly for fostering communication skills and language fluency. In polytechnic and tertiary settings, whose curricula emphasize technical and practical skills, extracurricular activities such as debates, public speaking, and podcasting provide genuine chances for language application that correspond with the concepts of communicative language instruction (Nguyen, 2024; Richards, 2006). Data from Tan Trao University indicates that students participating in communicative extracurricular activities—such as role-plays and group discussions exhibit notable enhancements in speaking fluency and confidence (Nguyen, 2024).

Research indicates that participation in extracurricular activities considerably enhances the whole development of students, including language learning. English extracurricular activities enhance fluency and bolster motivation via peer connection and social involvement as reviewed in Fang and Tang, 2021, which stated that peer support improves foreign language enjoyment (FLE) and diminishes anxiety. This relationship is mediated by regulatory emotional self-efficacy. These findings are particularly pertinent in a polytechnic environment, where students may experience a deficiency in confidence or opportunities to engage in a polytechnic environment, where students may experience a deficiency in confidence or opportunities to engage in English practice within formal classroom settings.

2.2 Motivation and Student Engagement in Extracurricular Activities

Motivation is crucial in second language acquisition and greatly affects students' readiness to participate in learning opportunities beyond the classroom. Deci and Ryan's (1985) Self-Determination Theory (SDT) posits that students are more inclined to engage in activities when they experience intrinsic motivation, which is fueled by internal incentives like enjoyment, curiosity, or personal significance. In polytechnic settings, where technical and practical skills are emphasized, intrinsic motivation is particularly essential for promoting participation in voluntary language-oriented extracurricular activities.

Astin's (1984) Theory of Student Involvement underscores that the quality and amount of student engagement in educational activities are substantially correlated with learning outcomes. This paradigm supports the utilization of instruments like the Extracurricular Involvement Inventory (EII), which assesses the degree and intent of student engagement in co-curricular activities. Utilizing these theoretical frameworks aids in comprehending the motivational dynamics of polytechnic students, especially in contexts such as English debates, public speaking, acting, or podcasting.

Recent empirical research confirmed and developed on these theories. Le (2024) identified that university students' engagement in English extracurricular activities is frequently impeded by time limitations, diminished self-assurance, and linguistic concern. Nevertheless, the introduction of peer support, flexible scheduling, and intrinsic relevance resulted in a substantial rise in participation rates. Zuo (2024) indicated that adult learners in EFL contexts exhibited increased motivation and language proficiency when participating in interactive ECAs, such as language clubs and role-plays, which promoted enjoyment and peer collaboration.

Holandyah et al. (2024) examined the influence of English-speaking clubs in higher education and found that students experienced increased confidence and motivation when the activities were collaborative, informal, and supported by peers. The findings correlate with Nguyen (2024), who determined that the integration of communicative ECAs into language curricula enhanced students' fluency, confidence, and social connectivity, particularly when activities corresponded with their interests and were conducted in low-anxiety settings.

Collectively, these research emphasize that student engagement in English extracurricular activities is most effectively facilitated when participants regard the activities as significant, pleasurable, and socially beneficial. Institutional strategies, such as enhancing student autonomy, providing flexible forms, and granting recognition can mitigate hurdles and cultivate sustained motivation among polytechnic students.

According to a research conducted on 487 vocational–technical students in Russia which revealed that their preferences for ECAs varied considerably over the course of their academic careers. Senior students prioritized job-related activities, such as professional courses and masterclasses, while first-year students preferred cultural and entertainment ECAs (e.g., theater, dance) (Sedorsov & Kuleshova, 2019). This emphasizes the influence of personal interests, which are influenced by academic progression and career objectives, on ECA decisions. The current study also found that students prefer group activities over individual

ones. Idris et al. (2023) conducted a study in Singapore that investigated the perspectives of polytechnic students regarding integrated and face-to-face problem-based learning. It was discovered that students substantially preferred collaborative learning in person, which supports the notion that they prefer group activities over individual ones. Based on these research findings, the students choose different types of ECAs to suit their personal interests.

Apart from that, feeling more confident and moral support from friends are among the motivations for the English language learners to participate in EVA. According to a research carried out by Haldolaarachchige and Hettiarachchilage (2024) who conducted a study in introductory physics classes that involved the conversion of individual duties into group activities, collaborative tasks substantially enhanced student engagement, communication, and mutual support. The authors conclude that group-based learning "improves the overall effectiveness of learning" in comparison to individual work by "building each other's support, connection, and communication.

Wen and Song (2024) conducted an analysis of the activity preferences of EFL learners in Hong Kong and discovered that informal, creative, entertainment-oriented activities (e.g., games, music, videos) were highly rated due to their ease of use, relaxation, and enjoyment. In contrast, more formal speaking tasks (e.g., presentations, drills) frequently resulted in tension and boredom. These researches proved that fun and enjoyable activities can help to improve students' motivations in participating in ECA.

2.3 Challenges in Participating in English Extracurricular Activities

One of the challenges identified in the lack of participation in English extracurricular activities among students is language anxiety, namely the apprehension associated with public speaking in English or the dread of being evaluated for grammatical and pronunciation mistakes. This is consistent with the initial findings of Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), and has been corroborated by further investigations. Kho and Ting (2024) investigated the experiences of diploma students at a Malaysian polytechnic and discovered that learners had considerable hesitation to engage in English-speaking activities owing to apprehension of embarrassment and insufficient proficiency. This psychological barrier is particularly evident in students from non-English-speaking backgrounds with restricted exposure to English beyond the classroom.

Apart from that, academic obligations and time limitations also act as significant impediments. Noor et al. (2020) recorded that students favored technical and core academic disciplines above English extracurricular activities, which are frequently seen as non-essential. This statement is supported by Li (2024), who discovered that the demanding schedules of tertiary students, especially in technical or engineering fields, afforded minimal opportunity for voluntary extracurricular participation. This is particularly difficult in polytechnic environments, where programs are generally rigorous and well organized.

Kho and Ting (2024) showed that students often perceived involvement in extracurricular activities as a choice rather than a need, resulting in diminished enthusiasm and commitment. In the absence of institutional incentives or acknowledgment, English extracurricular activities frequently rank low on students' priority lists.

Another significant challenge is the insufficient awareness or promotion regarding the presence and advantages of English ECAs. Noor et al. (2020) indicated that certain students were uninformed about accessible activities or lacked understanding of how these programs could enhance their academic and professional growth. Moreover, educators frequently prioritize exam preparation and technical subject matter, so limiting opportunities to promote or include extracurricular activities into the overall learning experience.

Research continues to show a strong link between self-perceived language proficiency and students' willingness to engage in English extracurricular activities. In a 2024 study at a Vietnamese private university, limited English proficiency was explicitly identified as one of the primary deterrents to involvement in English ECAs, alongside lack of confidence and time constraints (Le, 2024). A separate case study of Indonesian high school students found that participation in school-based English clubs significantly boosted speaking, listening, and reading proficiency. 81% of participants reported increased speaking confidence, although challenges such as limited vocabulary retention and pronunciation difficulties remained (Pratiwi, 2024). Together, these studies reinforce that involvement in English-focused ECAs can improve both proficiency and confidence, yet students with lower proficiency are less likely to join in the first place due to anticipated difficulty.

2.4 Strategies to Promote Active Participation in English ECAs

Recent empirical research has examined successful ways for improving student participation in English extracurricular activities (ECAs) within higher education contexts. Le (2024) underscores the critical importance of flexible scheduling and time-management assistance, highlighting that academic overload and conflicting obligations considerably restrict participation; providing evening or weekend sessions and clear planning guidance can significantly enhance involvement (Le, 2024). Srithep (2023) elucidates the efficacy of integrating Extracurricular Activities (ECAs), such as compulsory English dialogue forums, into first-year curricula at a Thai university, where participation influences course grades. Students indicated enhanced self-esteem, persistent motivation, and an increased propensity to utilize English in real-world contexts when ECAs were formally acknowledged and evaluated. A study conducted at Daffodil International University by Hossain and Ahmed (2017) indicates that incentive programs, such as language-focused clubs, organized debate events, and performance-based rewards, when combined with faculty participation and responsive feedback mechanisms, markedly improve motivation, confidence, and ongoing engagement in extracurricular activities. Collectively, these findings indicate that a comprehensive strategy, institutional integration, flexible delivery, and recognition incentives is essential for surmounting obstacles and promoting active engagement in English extracurricular activities among university students.

In a study of young EFL learners, 40% of "fun" feedback was centered on excitement and curiosity (Cheng & Dewaele, 2024). In addition to fostering positive emotions, engaging in enjoyable English activities also improves the efficacy of learning (Cheng & Dewaele, 2024).

The findings from past studies have indicated that students are motivated to participate in ECA because of the benefits they could gain from involvement in such activities. This includes improvement of their ability to communicate in English language and increase of their confidence level. According to Nguyen Thi Thuy Dung (2024) who investigated the influence

of extracurricular communicative activities, including interactive tasks, group discussions, and role-plays, on the confidence and proficiency of university students in Vietnam in spoken English. According to the investigation, these exercises substantially improved students' proficiency and self-assurance in English communication (Dung, 2024).

According to a study conducted at Daffodil International University (2021), English extracurricular activities, including drama, debate, book clubs, and community service, not only enhanced communication skills but also boosted confidence and motivation, resulting in improved academic and language outcomes (Hossain & Ahmed, 2021). In addition, the findings also indicate that students' motivation to participate in the ECA also depends on the types of activities conducted. The students are highly likely to be more motivated to participate in interactive, non-academic activities which may also include their friends. Motivation is a substantial predictor of engagement in interactive methods, including group work and discussions, according to a study conducted at a university in Indonesia. The data indicates that students who exhibit higher levels of motivation. Motivation is a substantial predictor of engagement in interactive methods, including group work and discussions, according to a study conducted at a university in Indonesia. The data indicates that students who exhibit higher levels of motivation are more inclined to engage in interactive, peer-based tasks (Rhur et al., 2024).

Apart from the strategies above, giving students certificates, small prizes, and official recognition for their efforts can get them to participate in extracurricular activities a lot more. This is because it shows that the effort is appreciated and gives involvement more value. These rewards are in line with what students want to build, which is their portfolios and get extracurricular credit, which makes activities feel more useful. Formal recognition drives participation and supports repeat visits, especially among polytechnic students who have to balance personal and academic obligations (Yung, 2022; Gala et al., 2021; Guerrero & Jaume-i-Capó, 2024).

2.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, English ECAs in polytechnic environments possess significant potential to improve language proficiency, bolster confidence, and promote student development. Students' motivation to engage is affected by several psychological, social, and institutional aspects. Comprehending these dynamics and executing focused initiatives can foster increased participation and enable polytechnic students to fully capitalize on language-based extracurricular activities.

3. METHODOLOGY

This research employed a mixed-methods approach to examine the motives and involvement of Ungku Omar Polytechnic students in English extracurricular activities (ECAs) conducted by the Language Unit of the General Studies Department. The quantitative aspect comprised a standardized questionnaire, whilst the qualitative aspect entailed semi-structured interviews with chosen students. This methodology facilitated both quantitative analysis and a profound understanding of student experiences and viewpoints. The study participants comprised

students from different academic departments at Ungku Omar Polytechnic which are IT Department, Commerce Department, Mechanical Engineering Department, Electrical Engineering Department, Civil Engineering Department and Mechanical Engineering Department. A total of 101 students were selected using stratified random sampling to guarantee representation across various departments and semesters. In the qualitative phase, ten students with diverse degrees of ECA participation were intentionally selected based on their questionnaire replies to guarantee a broad array of opinions.

3.1 Research Instruments

Questionnaire

The questionnaire utilized in this study was modified from the Extracurricular Involvement Inventory (EII) created by Winston and Massaro (1987), based on Astin's (1984) Theory of Student Involvement, which underscores that student learning and development are closely linked to the quality and extent of their engagement in educational activities. The adaptation was tailored to align with the local polytechnic culture, emphasizing English language extracurricular activities.

The questionnaire consisted of four main sections:

- Section A: Demographic Information

Gathered data on gender, age, semester, and academic department to contextualize student responses.

- Section B: Participation and Motivation

Included both closed and Likert-scale items to assess students' participation frequency, motivational drivers, and perceived benefits of English ECAs. Motivation was assessed through statements such as "I feel motivated to join English extracurricular activities" and "English language events help me gain confidence," rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

- Section C: Activity Preferences

Focused on students' preferred types of English ECAs (e.g., drama, podcasting, debate), reasons for their preferences, and preferences regarding the format (group vs. individual, formal vs. informal).

- Section D: Barriers and Suggestions

Identified perceived barriers to participation, such as fear of judgment, lack of confidence, or academic workload. Suggestions for improving participation (e.g., offering incentives, scheduling changes, social media promotion) were also included using a Likert scale.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 students to verify and validate the quantitative findings. The interviews aimed to investigate:

- Personal experiences in English extracurricular activities
- Internal and external motivational influences
- Perceived challenges and obstacles
- Recommendations for enhancing the activities

Interview questions were designed based on topics derived from the questionnaire. Interviews were done in either English or Bahasa Malaysia according to participants' preferences and lasted roughly 20 to 30 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed for thematic analysis.

3.2 Procedure for Data Collection

The data acquisition occurred over a duration of four weeks. The questionnaire was distributed using Google Forms to enhance accessibility. Students were informed of the study's objective, and participation was optional. Subsequent to the questionnaire, 10 students were chosen for interviews based on their varied responses, especially in Sections B, C, and D, to embody a range of experiences and perspectives.

3.3 Data Analysis

The quantitative results from the questionnaire were examined utilizing SPSS version 29.0. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency, percentage) were employed to encapsulate participation patterns and motivated levels.

A methodological study provides a refined and field-specific adaptation of thematic analysis for education researchers, building on Braun and Clarke's foundational framework Kushnir et al., (2025). The transcripts were manually analyzed to find recurring themes and classified into three primary categories: motivational reasons, barriers to involvement, and solutions for improvement. This facilitated the contextualization and triangulation of the quantitative findings.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was secured from the research committee at Ungku Omar Polytechnic. Participants were guaranteed secrecy and anonymity, and informed consent was obtained

before participation. Audio recordings and data were securely preserved and utilized exclusively for scholarly reasons.

4. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Respondents' Demographic Information

This study was conducted among diploma students in Ungku Omar Polytechnic. The first part of the questionnaire aimed to gather information about the respondents' background. Table 1 shows the respondents' background which consists of four items including gender, age, semester and department.

Table 1 Respondents' Background.

	Item	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	51	50.5
	Female	50	49.5
Age	18 - 20 years old	92	91.1
	21 - 23 years old	8	7.9
	24 and above	1	1.0
Semester	Semester 1	34	33.7
	Semester 2	33	32.7
	Semester 3	5	5.0
	Semester 4	22	21.8
	Semester 5	7	6.9
Department	Civil Engineering	6	5.9
	Electrical Engineering	17	16.8
	Mechanical Engineering	18	17.8
	Commerce	36	35.6
	ICT	24	23.8

The questionnaire was answered by a total of 101 respondents. The distribution of respondents based on gender was almost equal, with 50.5% (n=51) of them being male and 49.5% (n=50) of them being female. In addition to gender, the respondents' age distribution was also

gathered. Majority respondents were between 18 - 20 years old, contributing to 91.1% (n=92) of the total respondents. Meanwhile, 7.9% (n=7.9%) were students aged 21 - 23 years old and the remaining 1.0% (n=1) was in the age group of 24 and above. Subsequently, the respondents were grouped according to their semester. More than half of the respondents were first year students, with 33.7% (n=34) in the first semester and 32.7% (n=33) in the second semester. While a substantial percentage of respondents were recorded among semester 4 students with 21.8% (n=22), only a small proportion of the respondents were in the fifth and third semester with 6.9% (n=7) and 5.0% (n=5) respectively. As for the department, the Commerce Department recorded the highest percentage of respondents with 35.6% (n=36). Additionally, 23.8% (n=24) of the respondents were from the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Department, 17.8% (n=18) were enrolled in the Mechanical Engineering Department and 16.8% (n=17) were from the Electrical Engineering Department. The remaining 5.9% (n=6) of the respondents were from the Civil Engineering Department.

4.2 Participation and Motivation

The findings from the second part of the questionnaire sought to identify the students' motivation in participating in any language activities organised by the Language Unit, General Studies Department. Table 2 illustrates the mean scores and standard deviations for each questionnaire item labelled B1 to B9.

Table 2 Participation and Motivation

Item	Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation
B1	I always participate in English extracurricular activities.	2.88	1.306
B2	I feel motivated to join English extracurricular activities.	3.41	1.017
B3	I enjoy improving my English through non-academic activities.	4.14	0.949
B4	I believe joining English activities improves my communication skills.	4.24	0.961
B5	English language events help me gain confidence.	4.08	1.036
B6	I am interested in activities like drama, podcasting or debate.	3.44	1.212
B7	I feel more confident participating when friends are involved.	4.25	1.014
B8	I prefer fun and interactive English activities over competitive ones.	4.19	0.987
B9	I understand the benefits of joining English language activities	4.20	0.949

Based on the highest mean score in Table 2, the respondents indicated a high level of motivation to participate in the ECA when their friends are involved (M=4.25, SD=1.014). In addition, the respondents also reported a high level of motivation to participate in ECA because they believe that joining the activities would help improve their communication skills (M=4.24, SD=0.961) and they understand the benefits of participating in ECA (M=4.20, SD=0.949). This is supported by interview responses by 5 out of 10 respondents who mentioned:

S2: "Working in teams made it less nervous,...when I'm scared... ermm... friends support."

S6: "My friend and I signed up together for the public-speaking event peer support got me to

attend.”

S8: “Small buddy groups in English club made me talk more, it felt safe.”

Furthermore, the respondents also indicated a high motivational level for participation in fun and interactive English activities over competitive ones ($M=4.19$, $SD=0.949$), enjoyment to improve their English through non-academic activities ($M=4.14$, $SD=0.494$) and confidence development through English language events ($M=4.08$, $SD=1.036$). The following interview responses further supported the quantitative findings.

Most of the 10 respondents agreed that fun activities such as drama and podcasting helped them in improving their confidence and their English language proficiency. Students reported that they find activities to be enjoyable, less stressful, social, challenging, and engaging. These motivations are supported by psychological and educational research. When activities are enjoyable, learners are more likely to participate as highlighted by Cheng & Dewaele, 2024. In addition to fostering positive emotions, engaging in enjoyable English activities also improves the efficacy of learning (Cheng & Dewaele, 2024). According to some of the respondents:

S1: “Acting in drama is fun, not stress...I feel free.”

S4: “I enjoy podcast tasks, very interesting and challenging.”

Additionally, the findings also illustrate respondents’ moderate level of motivation to participate in activities like drama, podcasting or debate ($M=3.44$, $SD=1.212$) and to participate in ECA in general ($M=3.41$, $SD=1.017$). With the lowest mean score of $M=2.88$ ($SD=1.306$), the respondents also indicated a moderate level of motivation to always participate in the ECA organised by the Language Unit at the polytechnic.

The findings from both the questionnaire and interviews suggest that although the students possess a moderate level of motivation to participate in the ECA in general, they exhibit an increased motivation because of the benefits they could gain from involvement in such activities. This includes improvement of their ability to communicate in English language and increase of their confidence level. This is in line with a study by Nguyen Thi Thuy Dung (2024) who investigated the influence of extracurricular communicative activities and the study conducted by Hossain & Ahmad (2021).

In addition, the findings also indicate that students’ motivation to participate in the ECA also depends on the types of activities conducted and this is supported by the research carried out by Rhur et al. (2024).

4.3 Activity Preferences

The third part of the questionnaire sought to identify the most preferred language activities as indicated by the respondents. Table 3 shows the activity preferences among respondents for each questionnaire item labelled C1 to C4.

Table 3 Activity Preferences

Item	Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation
C1	I prefer formal speaking activities.	2.74	1.993
C2	I prefer informal creative activities.	4.37	1.405
C3	I prefer group activities over individual participation.	4.40	1.258
C4	I would join English activities if they relate to my personal interests.	4.47	1.221

Based on Table 3, the highest mean score indicated the respondents' agreement to join the ECA if they relate to their personal interests ($M=4.47$, $SD=1.221$). Also, with a high mean score of $M=4.40$ ($SD=1.258$), the respondents showed a high preference for group activities rather than individual ones. This is further consolidated by the interview responses on the types of activities they preferred. The excerpts are taken from the interview:

- S4: *"I like group activities because...can share ideas with friends...not so nervous when doing activity together."*
 S7: *"Work in group more fun. We help each other and I feel more confident to speak English."*

When asked for the reasons of their preference, the respondents highlighted several reasons which include less stressful and more fun. Apart from that, most of the respondents preferred more challenging activities to improve their communication skills, such as podcasts. The following interview excerpt supports students' preference of such activities.

- S8: *"I enjoy podcast...very interesting and challenging and i can share my ideas with friends"*

The respondents also indicated a higher preference for informal creative activities ($M=4.37$, $SD=1.405$) over formal speaking activities ($M=2.74$, $SD=1.993$). From the interview responses, activities like drama and language games are preferred by more students because they are fun and less stressful. Eight out of ten respondents expressed their preference for such activities as depicted in the following interview responses:

- S6: *"I enjoy language games. It's fun and I don't feel stress...like playing and learning."*

The findings from the third part of the questionnaire and interview responses suggest that students may have different preferences based on their personal interests. Feeling more confident and moral support from friends are among the reasons highlighted by the respondents during the interview sessions, similar to the findings of Haldolaarachchige and Hettiarachchilage (2024) This is consistent with the discovery of this research on the high mean score, which suggests that students hold a strong preference for group-oriented activities over individual duties.

Besides that, the findings also suggest that students prefer informal creative activities rather than formal speaking activities such as drama, podcast and language games. Among the

reasons for their preference include they are more fun, less stressful and easy, which aligns with the findings of Wen and Song (2024).

4.4 Barriers and Challenges Faced by the Students in Participating in ECA

For Section D, which is Barriers and Suggestions for Improvement, this research objective was achieved by carrying interviews to the respondents. Out of 101 respondents, 10 participants were chosen to be interviewed to identify the challenges faced by the students in participating in English extracurricular activities organised by the English Language Unit in Ungku Omar Polytechnic. Apart from that, these students were also asked for their opinion on what can be done to improve students' participation in English extracurricular activities. The respondents were asked on the issues or challenges that they faced and this section discusses four key emerging themes that reflect students' responses. The findings are supported by both qualitative responses from interviews and existing literature.

The respondents were asked if they have participated in English extracurricular activities held by the English Unit. 7 out of 10 respondents said that they have participated and the remaining 3 respondents have never participated in the activities organised. Then they were asked about the challenges or barriers that they have faced in participating in ECAs. 3 out of the 10 respondents expressed that they feel a lack of confidence in speaking English. This view was reflected in multiple responses, with individuals conveying anxiety around grammatical mistakes and the fear of ridicule. The following excerpts were taken from the interviews:

- S3: *"I actually want to join the English activities, but I'm too scared to speak in front of others. I always feel like they'll laugh at my grammar or pronunciation. That really stops me from taking part."*
- S5: *"... my grammar isn't good, and sometimes I get stuck. It makes me embarrassed, so I just avoid speaking altogether."*
- S6: *"I get scared that I might say the wrong thing or pronounce it badly. It's easier to just stay quiet or not join the activity at all."*

These responses were supported by past research. A qualitative research in rural and tertiary contexts similarly reports that fear of making mistakes and shyness significantly hinder students' oral fluency (Muhammad Ahsan et al.) More recent research identifies many English learners reported that low self-confidence and fear of negative evaluation limit their willingness to participate (Indiana learners study).

Apart from lack of confidence, the interviews also revealed that students 4,5,6 and 7 respondents also mentioned that poor English language proficiency was the reason they hesitated to join the English language extracurricular activities. These findings are aligned with the research carried out by Le (2024) and Pratiwi (2024). The following excerpts were taken from the interviews:

- S4, 5 & 7: *"...I'm not good in English."*
- S6 : *"... I don't know what to say in front of everybody."*

Other issues or challenges faced by the students in participating in ECA in Ungku Omar Polytechnic were too many academic assignments and the activities clashed with their

schedule. Most respondents cited excessive academic assignments and conflicting schedules as reasons for not attending ECA activities. The following excerpts were taken from the interviews:

S1: "I have a part-time job. I cannot attend anything after class."

S2,3,5,6,8 & 9: "I'm busy with other things."

S2 & S10: "...missing classes is not an option."

While research highlights the developmental advantages of extracurricular activity participation such as enhanced self-esteem and retention, poorly managed scheduling might discourage lower-performing or highly engaged students (CSU study; Wang et al.). This can be seen based on the responses given by the students. According to the respondents, their timetable was too packed for them to join any of the extracurricular activities held by the Language Unit, even if they were very interested in. So, it can be said that not all students did not want to participate in ECA due to self performance, but it also resulted from the students' time management. The students who were really interested must spend extra time and effort in catching up with their studies or finishing up their assignments. Some students chose to not participate so that they can focus on their daily tasks.

4.5 Suggestions to Improve Students' Participation in ECA

Research indicates that gamified and interactive methods in educational settings enhance student engagement and intrinsic motivation. A 2024 pre-print study indicated that the combination of leaderboards, points, and gamified components enhanced engagement and satisfaction in a flipped-classroom environment (Arora et al., 2024). A further examination of active learning methodologies supports that informal, game-oriented, and peer-collaborative activities markedly enhance engagement and participation (Alsawaier, 2018). The conclusions of this research were supported by the respondents' answers to the interview:

S1: "Drama club fun when got points and prize."

S5: "I like debate with leaderboard, like challenge with friend."

S8: "English quiz on phone, easy and fun every week."

Injecting casual, playful structure aligns with modern findings on engagement. Gamification transforms mandatory tasks into enjoyable challenges. Introducing points, badges, quick games or quizzes via apps (WhatsApp, Socrative) may motivate consistent participation.

Apart from making the activities more interactive, the respondents also suggested offering more interesting prizes, incentives or certificates. Students want to be recognized for their hard work. Honorary prizes and teacher approval are good reasons for students to compete in English contests outside of school (Pan & Gan, 2019). Making the connection between ECA involvement and language improvement and sharing that information increases motivation and sense of worth (Ngang, 2018). The following excerpts were taken from the interviews:

S2: "The certificate make me feel proud, I showed it to my family."

S6: "Even small reward like voucher make me want to join again."

S9: "They post winners on noticeboard, so I feel motivated to try next time."

Based on the responses from the interviews, the respondents also suggested promoting events

via social media and class channels. Using social media to learn a language informally helps students interact with each other and keep learning outside of class (Barrot, 2021). When events are well-publicized and backed by teachers or friends, students are more likely to show up. Pan and Gan (2019) found that support from teachers, school, and peers and family have a big effect on how ready people are to participate. This suggestion was given by some of the respondents during the interview. The following excerpts were taken from the interviews:

S3: *"When they post on WhatsApp or Insta, I know early and I can plan to join any of the activities."*

S4: *"If th lecturer share in class group, I feel more confident to join."*

S7: *"I saw reels from last event, look fun, so I interested already."*

Additionally, the students recommended scheduling events for more convenient hours. The reason for this is that, in addition to their daily assignments, tests, labs, and workshops, polytechnic students have extremely busy schedules. Students' motivation in participating in the activities is limited since they must carefully plan and organize their time if they truly want to take part in any of the ECAs. These feedbacks were supported by other research carried out by other researchers. For an example, according to Ali et al, time constraints are a primary barrier to participation in ECAs. Interviewees frequently cited academic workload, jobs or language classes as reasons for non-participation (Ali et al., 2023). At DIU, researchers recommended flexible scheduling and time-management support to help students balance academics and ECAs (Hossain & Ahmed, 2021).

Social belonging and peer support have a substantial impact on participation. Self-determination theory underscores that students' engagement is bolstered by the provision of a sense of agency and collaboration (Ryan & Deci, 2020). ECAs that encourage peer-based structures, such as teams or discussion groups, promote sustained engagement and motivation (Zhou, 2022). The following excerpts were taken from the interviews:

S2: *"Working in teams made it less nervous,...when I'm scared... ermm... friends support."*

S6: *"My friend and I signed up together for the public-speaking event peer support got me to attend."*

S8: *"Small buddy groups in English club made me talk more, it felt safe."*

Peer learning structures, such as buddy systems, teams, and group challenges, are particularly beneficial for timid students, as they increase confidence and make participation more appealing.

Lastly, based on the interviews carried out to find out how to improve students' participation in ECAs, it can be said that most of the respondents also suggested offering co-curricular marks or portfolio credit so that the students would be more motivated to join any activities organized by the Language Unit. By offering this, the weaker students would be more motivated to join since they want to improve their overall marks. The following excerpts were taken from the interviews:

S4: *"If it can be include in transcript, so I will feel more motivated to join."*

S7: *"...got cert and co-curricular mark, not just for fun, also it can help my future."*

Based on the interview responses, it can be said that ECAs are transformed from extracurricular interests into meaningful academic and career-building activities through formal recognition, such as marks, transcript entries, or portfolio credit. By incorporating ECA achievements into formal academic records and prospective career profiles, this change significantly improves outcomes and enhances student motivation (Jackson & Rowe, 2022; Cortellazzo et al., 2021).

5. CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate that students at Ungku Omar Polytechnic are moderately motivated to engage in English extracurricular activities (ECAs), particularly when these activities are interactive, enjoyable, and provide opportunities to enhance communication skills and develop confidence. Qualitative interviews underscore students' preference for social and engaging formats such as drama and podcasting, while quantitative data demonstrate a strong consensus regarding the motivational value of pleasurable, non-academic English activities. Furthermore, students proposed that participation could be enhanced by scheduling activities at more convenient times and offering co-curricular marks to facilitate their demanding academic schedules. In general, the development of engaging, flexible, and rewarding ECAs is essential for increasing student engagement and motivation.

These research findings have substantial implications for Malaysian polytechnics, particularly in the context of improving student engagement and English language proficiency through well-organized extracurricular activities (ECAs). The results emphasize the importance of activities that are enjoyable, peer-involved, and confidence-building for students, as they can be used to improve communication skills and encourage participation. The study underscores the necessity of creating ECAs that are socially engaging, flexible, and in accordance with the academic responsibilities of students, particularly in polytechnic departments and Language Units. Incentives, such as co-curricular marks or portfolio credit, can be implemented to enhance participation, particularly among students who are academically underprivileged. The results can be used to inform policy decisions regarding the allocation of resources, scheduling, and support mechanisms for language development programs at the institutional level. Future research could investigate the effectiveness of various activity formats across various polytechnic campuses in Malaysia, as well as the long-term influence of ECA participation on students' academic performance and employability. In addition, it is possible to conduct comparisons between various student categories in terms of their departments and semesters.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to extend deepest gratitude to Ungku Omar Polytechnic for providing the support, to the Research Innovation and Commercialization Unit (UPIK) for their essential support in coordinating and facilitating research efforts, to our Head Of Department, whose leadership and guidance helped shape this work. We also appreciate the contributions of the language expert, whose meticulous editing and linguistic expertise ensured clarity and academic rigor. Special thanks to our Course Leader for her vital support and collaboration during key phases of the project; and the Learning Unit (LU) lecturers, whose support enriched both understanding and practice throughout this research.

REFERENCES

- Ahsan, M., Ashger, T., Hussain, Z. (2020). The Effects of Shyness and Lack of Confidence as Psychological Barriers on EFL Learners' Speaking Skills: A Case Study of South Punjab.
- Ali, N., Rahman, N. A., & Roslan, S. (2023). Barriers to student participation in extracurricular activities: A Malaysian case study. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 12(1), 103–117.
- Arora, V., Mulla, S., & Bhutani, A. (2024). Enhancing engagement through gamification in flipped classrooms.
- Astin, A. W. (1984). Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher education. *Journal of College Student Development*, 25(4), 297–308.
- Barrot, J. S. (2021). Social media as a language learning environment: A meta-analysis. *Language Learning & Technology*, 25(1), 245–258.
- Boiko, A. (2024). Interactive extracurricular activities for improving foreign language communicative competence of students of secondary and out-of-school education. *Theoretical and Methodical Problems of Children and Youth Education*, 28(1), 43–52.
- Cheng, X., & Dewaele, J.-M. (2024). Young learners' well-being and emotions: examining enjoyment and boredom in the foreign language classroom. *Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*. Advance online publication.
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior*. Springer.
- Fang, X., & Tang, Y. (2021). Examining the association between peer support and English enjoyment in Chinese university students: the mediating role of regulatory emotional self-efficacy. *Frontiers in Psychology*.
- Gala, R., Shukla, E., Kamble, N., Vijayaraghavan, R., & Patel, D. (2021). *Blockchain-based approach to foster student engagement on campus*. arXiv.
- Guerrero, C., & Jaume-i-Capó, A. (2024). *Use of social networks to motivate computer-engineering students to participate in self-assessment activities*.
- Hettiarachchilage, K., & Haldolaarachchige, N. (2024). Enhance students' learning outcomes by redesigning individual learning activities into group activities for introductory level physics courses.

- Holandyah, M., Marzulina, L., Erlina, D., & Angreini, N. (2024). Unveiling the benefits of English-speaking club: Insights from students at one higher education institution. *Esteem Journal of English Education Study Programme (EJEE)*, 7(1).
- Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal*, 70(2), 125–132.
- Ismail, H. N., Abdul Rahman, F., & Ahmad, A. R. (2018). Factors influencing students' participation in co-curricular activities: A case of a public university in Malaysia. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 8(2), 478–487.
- Jackson, D., & Rowe, A. (2022). Impact of work-integrated learning and co-curricular activities on graduate labour force outcomes. *Studies in Higher Education*, 48(3), 490–506.
- Kardiansyah, M. Y., & Qodriani, L. U. (2018). *English extracurricular and its role to improve students' English speaking ability*. RETORIKA: Jurnal Ilmu Bahasa, 4(1), 60–69.
- Le, H. V. (2024). Factors impeding university students' participation in English extracurricular activities: Time constraints and personal obstacles. *Heliyon*, 10(5), e27332.
- Ngang, T. K. (2018). Teachers' attitudes towards the use of extracurricular activities in enhancing students' speaking skills. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 7(4), 308–319.
- Nguyen, N. T. T. (2024). Implementing extracurricular activities in English teaching to enhance communication skills for students at Tan Trao University. *European Journal of Contemporary Education and E-Learning*, 2(3). [https://doi.org/10.59324/ejceel.2024.2\(3\).16](https://doi.org/10.59324/ejceel.2024.2(3).16)
- Noor, N. M., Wahid, S., & Nor, N. F. M. (2020). Barriers to ESL students' participation in co-curricular language activities. *Journal of Language and Communication*, 7(2), 142–153.
- Pan, G., & Gan, Y. (2019). Extracurricular activity participation and motivation in English language contests: A Chinese university perspective. *International Journal of Social Science and Economic Research*, 4(6), 4070–4086.
- Rhur, K. K., Dy, R., Soeuy, V., Soe, S. K. L., Guirguis, J. M., & Sundaresan, A. (2024). The effect of student motivation to interactive activities. *11th International Scholars Conference*, 11(4), 1046–1059.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2020). *Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation from a self-determination*

theory perspective: Definitions, theory, practices, and future directions. Contemporary Educational Psychology, 61, 101860.

- Sedorsov, D. V., & Kuleshova, M. A. (2019). Professional interest development of vocational technical institution students during extracurricular activities. *European Proceedings of Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 59, 142–150.
- Winston, R. B., Jr., & Massaro, A. V. (1987). *Extracurricular Involvement Inventory (EII)*: An instrument for assessing intensity of student involvement. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 28, 169–175.
- Yung, Y. K. (2022). *Investigating the enhancement of student engagement through extracurricular activities: A four-year longitudinal study.* In *2022 10th International Conference on Information and Education Technology*. IEEE.
- Zhou, M. (2022). Fostering peer support to enhance language learning motivation. *Language Teaching Research*, 26(5), 655–673.