



The Impact of Extracurricular Activities on EFL Learners' Speaking skills: A Critical Review of Three Empirical Studies

HadilIDRI¹

¹University of Algiers 2 (Algeria)
hadylidri@gmail.com

Sarah GHANI²

²University of Algiers 2 (Algeria)
Saraghani2001@gmail.com

Bahia BENGUEDDA³

³University of Algiers 2(Algeria)
bahia.saichi@univ-alger2.dz

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Abstract

In today's world, EFL teachers and students tend to give more importance to speaking skills compared to the other skills. This may be due to the crucial role of speaking skills not only in educational contexts but also in real-life. In this regard, throughout the centuries, EFL classrooms have attempted to cater students' needs to become proficient speakers of the TL inside and beyond the classroom's walls. However, the importance of engaging in activities outside of the classroom to develop this very productive skill has received little attention. Thus, this secondary research aims to investigate the impact of extracurricular participation on EFL students' speaking skills by reviewing three articles from different geographical contexts, namely, Garita (2013) from Costa Rica, Bahdi (2014) from Algeria and Qolbia et al. (2020) from Indonesia. It attempts to compare and contrast their major findings and tries to relate them with the theoretical background. The findings of the three articles revealed that active participation in ECAs, mainly university clubs, had a positive impact on EFL students' speaking proficiency. Therefore, EFL classrooms may consider raising learners' awareness about the importance of integrating these volunteer activities within their academic journey. Likewise, they may be effective for learners to enhance their speaking skills along with their motivation, self-confidence, and communication skills beyond the formal educational setting.

Keywords: extracurricular activities, language clubs, speaking skills, EFL students, beyond the classroom.

Introduction

In the 21st century, English is among the languages that are mostly used across the globe. This is due to the great increase in the number of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students worldwide. In this regard, the aim of most EFL learners is to become competent speakers of the Target Language (TL) in real-life. However, Speaking is a skill, and as any other skill, it requires practice in different settings. Hereby, the exclusive reliance on classroom instruction might not be sufficient to speak the TL spontaneously in different contexts. This formal instruction is time constrained and limited in terms of natural settings, hence limiting learners' communicative competence to the classroom's context only. Besides, with today's huge advocacy of learners' autonomy, learners are expected to be active agents of their own learning, and to seek opportunities to practice the TL within and beyond the confines of the classroom. Extracurricular activities, therefore, provide the ground for natural language use, student-friendly interactions and interests-based activities.

This secondary research aims to investigate the role of language clubs as an extracurricular activity in enhancing EFL students' speaking skills through a review of three articles from different geographical contexts, namely, Qolbia et al. (2020) from Indonesia, Bahdi (2014) from Algeria and Garita (2013) from Costa Rica.

The first part entails the theoretical background. It attempts to provide an overview on speaking skills and its components, an overview on the concept of ECAs, its integration in EFL settings, the theories behind ECAs, the relationship between ECAs and speaking proficiency as well as some of their drawbacks. Moreover, the second part comprises a review of three empirical studies. It attempts to provide an overview of the studies as well as compare and contrast their findings, and discuss them in relation to the theories and frameworks of the first part.

1. Speaking skills

1.1 Speaking Proficiency in EFL Learning

The shift to the Communicative language Teaching (CLT) approach prioritized speaking skills in EFL classrooms, since learners are expected to conduct meaningful interactions rather than merely focusing on the mastery of the language forms.

Besides, speaking a foreign language is the main goal of an EFL or any other foreign language student. For instance, Lazaraton (2002) states that "the ability to speak a language is synonymous with knowing the language since speech is the most basic means of human communication" (p. 103). Through speaking, students are able to convey their personal feelings, viewpoints, or ideas; inform or ask for clarification, request and engage in conversation in the Target Language (TL); and, thus, display the different functions of language. Similarly, in 1999, Nunan declared that conversing successfully in the target language is the greatest indicator to gauge students' progress in that language. Thus, in order to develop these communication skills, EFL learners may need to seek opportunities to practice their speaking skills in different situational contexts.

Furthermore, according to Lazaraton (2002), speaking a FL is frequently considered the most challenging of the four language skills. Hence, achieving speaking proficiency may necessitate consistent practice and a considerable investment of time. That is, the more the amount of time students spend engaging with the TL, the more fluent and accurate they become. Hereby, being a fundamental skill, speaking is a complex process that involves different components which are elaborated in the next section.

1.2 Components of Speaking Skills

Although speaking in one's mother tongue comes naturally, this may not apply to speaking a foreign language. Hereby, EFL speaking may be more complex as it involves various elements. According to Harris (1969), there are five core components to speaking, namely comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and fluency.

Comprehension entails comprehending and initiating communication in various authentic contexts. This feature is crucial since it enables the listener to understand and interpret the speech and hence respond appropriately. Students may focus on understanding spoken language to respond appropriately.

Vocabulary involves the use of appropriate lexis to communicate effectively. This aspect is the key element to language proficiency (Richards & Ranandya, 2002). Wilkins (1972) stated, "without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed" (p.110-111). That is, vocabulary is the basis of communication. Hence, students may enrich their vocabulary repertoire to communicate effectively.

Grammar involves the correct use of structures to form new and error-free utterances. Although speech may be conveyed with minimum knowledge of grammar, the message may sound obscure to the listener. In this case, it may cause communication issues. Therefore, a good mastery of the grammatical structures may result in the production of accurate speech.

Pronunciation involves a clear articulation of speech sounds with the correct use of stress, rhythm, intonation and pitch. This component plays a vital role in achieving mutual speech intelligibility since any kind of mispronunciation can cause misunderstanding. Thus, students may focus on how to clearly articulate the speech to ensure comprehension.

Fluency involves speaking clearly with few pauses and discourse fillers while relating meaning and context. In this regard, Harris (1969) defined fluency as the ability to make the speech flow easily. In fact, most EFL students aim to achieve native-like fluency, because a fast and accurate speech delivery is a sign of language proficiency. Hence, students may learn how to speak clearly, correctly and fluently.

2. Overview on Extracurricular Activities (ECAs)

2.1 ECAs and Academic achievements

It is worth noting that these "out-of-class experiences" (Nelson et al. 2002, p. 278) are voluntary activities in which students willingly engage and do not receive grades nor academic credit for (Holloway, 2000). Yet, they are often considered complimentary to the curriculum objectives and vision. Tenhouse (2003) expands on this view by stating that extracurricular activities are good opportunities for students to discover and develop their

skills, thus, they help them to achieve their curricular goals. Hereby, one might say that ECAs enhance students' learning experiences beyond the confines of the classroom by refining and improving their skills and behaviors; therefore, complementing the objectives of the academic curriculum.

Many researchers have hypothesized that there is a linear relationship between academic achievement and participating in extracurricular experiences, marked by an increase in students' academic achievement. Thus, several studies investigated the relationship between ECA's and students' academic performance in terms of grade point average (GPA); for instance, McCarthy's study proved that students who participate in academic extracurricular activities report a higher GPA than noninvolved students or the ones who participated in other types of out-of-campus extracurricular activities (McCarthy, 2000). This, therefore, indicates that university-based extracurricular activities are more beneficial in enhancing students' academic achievement.

In this regard, scholars such as Mahoney and Cairns (2000) observed that ECAs help reduce dropout rates among certain categories of students. Different factors, such as fostering learners' motivation to improve academically, might be responsible for this impact.

Thus, it was concluded that ECAs are just as necessary in developing students intellectual and social skills as the regular classes (Marsh, et al. 2002). Hereby, they were adopted in different fields and EFL teaching and learning is no exception.

2.2 The integration of ECAs in EFL settings

Extracurricular activities have always been a crucial component of language learning and teaching methodology. However, because they support the student-centered approach, in which the learners' requirements and interests determine the learning process, there is currently a growing interest in these activities (Kelly et al., 2004, as cited in Yunus, 2016). Besides, by being active members in ECAs, learners develop a sense of autonomy in which they are self-directed and responsible for their own learning process.

3. Language Exposure

Addressing the importance of language learning beyond the classroom, Lightbown and Spada (2003) assert that the natural acquisition of a foreign language occurs in environments other than the classroom. This emphasizes the value of language learning alternatives that are not part of the traditional curriculum for acquiring natural language use. Similarly, according to Lariviere (2016), English language learners need more than just academic exposure to language for acquisition to occur; they also need a suitable environment to develop their communicative language through social contexts. This suggests that engaging in interactions in informal settings, such as language clubs, is also beneficial for practicing the natural use of the TL.

Moreover, McDonough (1979) states that through these activities, the "L2 learner is not just acquiring new syntax and vocabulary, but also *acquiring the ability to operate* [emphasis added] in the new language" (para.10). Thus, due to EC participation, learners not only acquire the abstract aspect of language but also the functional one; hence, they spontaneously use the TL to conduct successful conversations in different situations.

In her recent study about the effectiveness of ECA's on EFL learners in Turkey, Hüsna (2017) affirms that "it is significant to evaluate the effectiveness of extracurricular activities as an alternative way of teaching English and implement them into the field of foreign language education in Turkey" (p. 3). She argued that relying solely on classroom instruction is not enough to develop students' language proficiency.

In summary, it can be assumed that extracurricular activities positively influence learners' development since they not only contribute to the academic success but also build effective communication skills.

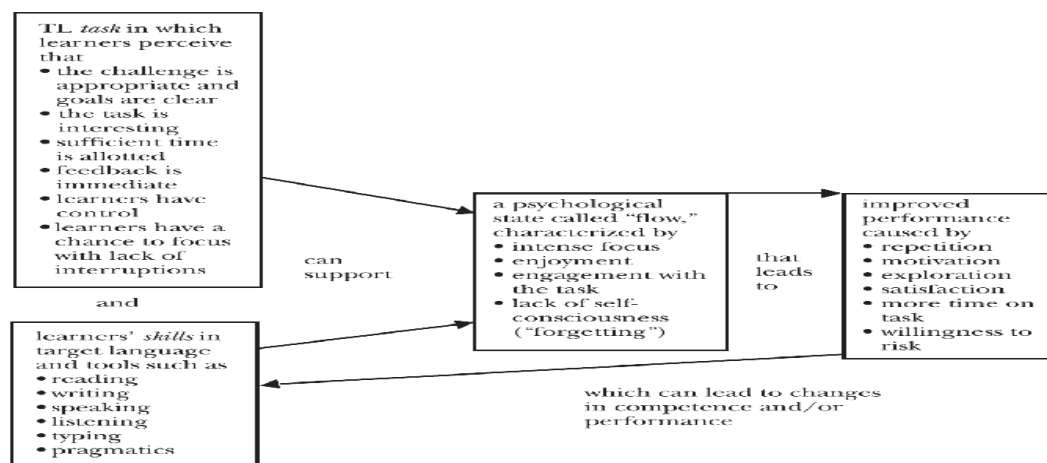
3.1 English Speaking Clubs and Speaking Proficiency

According to Afia (2018), the English Club is a student-run organization that organizes various social and cultural events (as cited in Cahyani, 2020, p. 18). In other words, it is a group or association of people with the same goals or interests (Marinova et al., 2000). Thus, clubs might entail a group of students with similar goals and interests who meet regularly and take part in common activities. For EFL learners, a club is a place to use English in a relaxed atmosphere and organize events that contribute in some way to the goal of enhancing TL acquisition.

As stated by Zulhermindra (2018), an English Club is a place for language learners to use English in a casual setting. This allows students to speak English spontaneously and casually rather than developing a strict set of English language rules. Furthermore, it aims at helping the students develop a positive attitude towards the English language and become familiar with interacting in the TL (Shrum and Glisan, 2000). For instance, learners have the chance to speak freely in discussions, presentations, and interactive dialogues. Moreover, during this ECA, students encounter a wide variety of vocabulary that is not typically utilized within the limits of the classroom (Thornbury, 2005, p. 96). Hence, it allows them to enrich their vocabulary while engaging in fun-activities.

Additionally, some theoretical frameworks and theories support the positive influence of EC participation, asserting its crucial role in enriching learners' academic journeys; thus, one must explore them.

Figure 01



1. An Overview of Empirical Studies

This section offers a brief overview of the three articles that examine the relationship between involvement in Extracurricular activities and the oral proficiency of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students.

The First article to be analyzed is entitled “The impact of extracurricular activities on students’ academic proficiency.

This research was conducted by Miloud Bahdi in 2014 in an attempt to investigate the effect of extracurricular activities on third-year undergraduate LMD students of English at Ouargla University. This subject population was selected after tracking the students’ academic background and based on the criteria of having a minimum extracurricular participation experience of two years. The study outlines an array of extracurricular activities offered for students at Ouargla University and investigates the attitudes of students and instructors regarding the perceived impact of these activities on students’ academic oral performance.

The second article (article B) is conducted by Marina Qolbia, Maulidiyah, and Wahyuniati at the University of Sunan Ampel Surabaya, Indonesia. The paper is entitled “Improving Speaking Skill Through Speaking Club Viewed from Students’ Perceptions.” It was published online on May 1st, 2020, by Atlantis Press.

The last article (article C) is conducted by both Cinthya Olivares Garita, an English instructor and one of the developers of the National University (CI-UNA) programs, and Verónica Brenes Sanchez, who is a linguist and a teacher at the same university. This paper is entitled “Speaking Clubs: An Alternative to Strengthen EFL Learners’ Oral Production.” It was published online in 2013 by the National University (CI-UNA), Costa Rica.

2. Findings of the Three Articles

This section aims to compare and contrast the major findings from the selected studies. All the articles discussed in this research suggested that active participation in English language clubs will eventually impact the overall speaking proficiency of EFL learners. While conducted in different geographical contexts, analyzing these studies might enhance our understanding of the impact of these “beyond-the-classroom” experiences on EFL learners’ speaking skills, as well as the factors attributing to this impact.

First, consistent findings were reported across the three studies. For instance, all three studies concur that active participation in clubs had a positive impact on students speaking skills development. That is, all students under investigation recognized the benefits of clubs as an extracurricular activity in improving their language acquisition and oral proficiency specifically. This effect was observed via the various sub components of speaking proficiency. For instance, both Bahdi’s and Qolbia et al.’s studies found a strong correlation between club membership and students’ speaking fluency, vocabulary growth, and communication skills, yet both indicate minimal impact on grammar knowledge. On the other

hand, Garita and Sanchez's study did not mention students' perceptions toward these sub components.

Further consistencies were found in the factors contributing to this influence, as it was primarily attributed to the fundamental nature underlying the clubs' atmosphere. The latter was found to be a key factor across all three studies. For example, the students' sample across the 3 studies seems to enjoy what was referred to as a "non-threatening" and "enjoyable" environment where they practice their speaking skills without fear of making mistakes, which Cinthya and Veronica referred to as "without pressure of failing."

Moreover, the increase in self-confidence and motivation that students stem from their active participation in clubs was found to be a significant contributing factor to the enhancement of their speaking skills as well as their engagement in group discussions.

However, some inconsistencies were found concerning the effects of the club's participation on some of the components of speaking proficiency among the three studies. For instance, Qolbia et al.'s study was the only to mention that club speaking activities reduce misunderstandings during interaction and help exchanging relevant ideas. Besides, both Bahdi's and Garita's studies indicate that classroom instruction is not sufficient to develop learners speaking proficiency, while Qolbia et al.'s did not. Furthermore, Bahdi's study was the only one to address the issues learners encounter with ECA participation; his findings revealed that the lack of time to organize and attend ECA is the major problem learners find with these activities.

3. Discussion of The Findings

To start with, findings across the three articles revealed an improvement in learners' speaking skills, motivation, and confidence. For instance, learners in Bahdi's (2014) study reported statements such as "we can discuss some points in seminars," "we can publicly defend our research topic," and "we can take part in debates and respect oral language features such as prosody, turn-taking, and specific vocabulary." That is, Bahdi's (2014) conclusion is that learners, due to their active involvement in ECAs, can participate in a group discussion without problems.

These findings, therefore, are consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivism theory. Extracurricular activities provided students with an opportunity to build knowledge through social interaction with peers, which is consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) idea that learning is a social process of interaction. For instance, during ECA's participation, students organize meetings, discuss projects, debate ideas, and provide feedback regarding each other's performance.

Moreover, the oral language features mentioned above, such as prosody, turn-taking, and using the appropriate vocabulary, are skills that are likely to be observed and acquired during interaction. Thus, this aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) claim that learners acquire expertise through frequent interaction with an expert or, in this case, a more advanced peer.

Furthermore, the aforementioned findings are also consistent with Astin Involvement Theory (1984), which relates the learner's progress to the amount of time and effort they spend in

students' organizations and interacting with faculty members and other peers. That is, clubs frequently organize events that involve teachers, administration staff, and even faculty heads. This provides learners with the opportunity to operate in different contexts, delivering communication skills, critical thinking skills, and problem-solving skills. Thus, one can argue that Astin's theory emphasizes the importance of seeking authentic and meaningful educational experiences beyond regular classroom instruction.

Moreover, the student-friendly atmosphere underlying the clubs' environment was established as a motivational factor for EFL learners to practice their skills. For instance, Qolbia et al.'s findings revealed that 27.3% strongly agree and 72.7% agree that clubs' environments are indeed enjoyable. Similarly, Bahdi's findings revealed that 88.09% of the learners who are members of language clubs expressed interest in further involvement in language-related ECAs and language classes. Hence, he established EC participation as a stimulant for learners' motivation. This, therefore, is in line with the Flow Theory (1975), which asserts that learners, when fully immersed in an activity that they enjoy and find compatible with their interests and abilities, strive to achieve higher performance in their skills. Thus, one can deduce that clubs are a good ground for learners who are enthusiastic to practice the TL in meaningful contexts because they provide activities that align with their interests and increase their motivation.

Besides, it is important to relate the aforementioned findings to the intrinsic motivation concept proposed by the "Flow theory" (1975). Since learners do not expect academic recognition in the form of grades for their participation in EC, it can be assumed that the motivation observed in the three articles is rather an intrinsic motivation that learners receive from being active members. This motivation can stem from completing projects, solving problems, delivering skills, or being an effective member within a community, all of which contribute to autonomous learning. Thus, this intrinsically rewarding experience is what motivates learners to further engage in these activities.

The three articles revealed increased motivation, self-confidence, and a low anxiety level identified as "the ability of learners to speak freely" and "without fear of making mistakes." Krashen's explanation of the affective filter incorporates these same emotional factors. Hence, the idea that club interactions develop these positive emotions and reduce anxiety is consistent with the Krashen Affective Filters Hypothesis (1985), in that when negative emotions are low, acquisition happens.

Additionally, both Bahdi's (2014) and Qolbia et al.'s (2020) findings identified a significant influence on learners' speaking fluency as one of the main components of the speaking skill. These findings coincide with the Communicative Language approach in that clubs provide EFL learners with many opportunities to practice the TL in meaningful contexts that classroom instruction cannot cover.

This is also consistent with Nation's (2007) idea that fluency-based activities enable learners to express themselves more freely and naturally without fear of making mistakes. In this context, learners may benefit from the trial-free nature of ECAs, which enables them to practice their oral skills without focusing on mistakes. Besides, both the above-mentioned studies revealed a slight influence on grammar acquisition, which implies that within clubs,

learners are encouraged to converse without strict adherence to grammatical rules, thereby fulfilling the primary goal of the CLT approach.

Nevertheless, with regards to the CLT approach, Garita (2013) did not indicate any related findings. In other words, her findings did not state any progress in students' speaking fluency or communication skills.

Lastly, it is worth mentioning that Bahdi's (2014) study revealed findings concerning the major issues learners encounter with EC participation. 66% of the participants recognized time constraints as the primary issue. Thus, it can be deduced that active participation in ECAs requires learners to develop time management skills. Hence, one might say that this is partially in line with the concerns of the "over-scheduling hypothesis," which stresses that learners should maintain a balance between EC involvement and academic goals.

In brief, Garita (2013), Bahdi (2014), and Qolbia et al.'s (2020) findings are consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivism theory, the flow theory Astin involvement theory and Krashen affective filter hypothesis (1985) Furthermore, the Communicative Language Approach aligns with the findings of Bahdi's (2021) and Qolbia et al. (2020). However, Garita's (2013) article has not provided any related findings.

Conclusion

To conclude, this work is secondary research that attempts to investigate the impact of Extracurricular activities on the speaking skill of EFL learners through a review of three empirical studies. In fact, the concept of "Beyond the classroom activities" has existed and has been recognized for its value since the ancient cultures. However, the emergence of ECAs in education was not easily embraced by educators until the debate over their academic benefits was established in favor for students' involvement. ECAs were integrated within different disciplines. Nevertheless, its implementation in EFL coincides with the spread of the Student-centered approach. Additionally, extracurricular participation is supported by Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivism theory, Astin involvement theory, the flow theory and the CLT approach to language teaching and learning.

Moreover, Language Clubs are known as a common type of ECAs in EFL context. It allows learners to speak the language spontaneously in an error-free environment leading to an increase self-confidence and motivation to further practice the TL. Hence, Clubs membership should be encouraged in the EFL learning process.

Furthermore, Bahdi (2014), Qolbia et.al, (2020) and Garita (2013) conducted studies in different geographical contexts. Hence, the articles shared some similarities and differences concerning the findings. In this regard, Miloud (2014), Qolbia et.al, (2020) and Garita (2013) indicated the large effect of Clubs on students' speaking skills in reference to the speaking components. Yet, Garita's (2013) study did not share findings in related to the components. Still, one can say that all the findings were in line with Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivism theory, Astin involvement theory the Flow theory and Krashen affective filter hypothesis; However, only Bahdi's and Qolbia et.al 's findings match with the CLT approach.

Overall, the findings of the three studies established a positive influence of ECAs on EFL learners' speaking skills. Therefore, in order to promote learners' autonomy through EC participation, perhaps learners need to be first educated about the value of these activities. Since they are known to complement the academic curriculum goals as viewed through this secondary research, one might argue that the curriculum itself needs to introduce this concept to first-year LMD students to direct their enthusiasm toward the volunteering and collaboration spirit, which would eventually enhance their overall communicative skills and other crucial positive emotions such as self-confidence and motivation.

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