

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AND INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ENGAGEMENT: AN EXPLORATORY PERSPECTIVE OF SELF-DETERMINATION THEORY

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TNU - International School

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: 06/4/2021 Revised: 07/5/2021 Published: 19/5/2021	Participation in extracurricular activities may satisfy student needs and provide positive impacts on student life, including enhanced engagement towards their school. International students are an important part of International School of Thai Nguyen University. However, the extracurricular activities for international students are still limited. Grounded on Self-determination theory, our study adopts an exploratory approach to investigate the potential relationships of extracurricular activities, need, and engagement among international students. The results indicate that international students are aware of the importance of extracurricular activities in satisfying their needs and should make them more engaged. Therefore, International School should design regular programs of extracurricular activities for international students to help them with enhanced engagement. Future explanatory research could estimate the impacts of extracurricular activities on student need and further on their engagement to higher education institutions.
KEYWORDS Extracurricular activities Student engagement Need Self-determination theory Interview	

HOẠT ĐỘNG NGOẠI KHÓA VÀ SỰ GẮN KẾT CỦA SINH VIÊN QUỐC TẾ: NGHIÊN CỨU KHÁM PHÁ DƯỚI QUAN ĐIỂM CỦA LÝ THUYẾT TỰ QUYẾT

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THÔNG TIN BÀI BÁO	TÓM TẮT
Ngày nhận bài: 06/4/2021 Ngày hoàn thiện: 07/5/2021 Ngày đăng: 19/5/2021	Tham gia các hoạt động ngoại khóa có thể thỏa mãn một số nhu cầu của sinh viên và đem lại những tác động tích cực đối với cuộc sống sinh viên, bao gồm việc tăng cường sự gắn kết với trường học. Sinh viên quốc tế là một phần quan trọng của Khoa Quốc tế - Đại học Thái Nguyên, tuy nhiên, các hoạt động ngoại khóa dành cho sinh viên quốc tế vẫn còn hạn chế. Dựa theo lý thuyết Tự quyết, nghiên cứu này áp dụng phương pháp tiếp cận khám phá nhằm tìm hiểu mối quan hệ của hoạt động ngoại khóa, nhu cầu của sinh viên quốc tế và sự gắn kết của sinh viên quốc tế với nhà trường. Kết quả nghiên cứu chỉ ra rằng sinh viên quốc tế nhận thức được tầm quan trọng của các hoạt động ngoại khóa trong việc đáp ứng nhu cầu của họ và khiến họ gắn kết hơn. Do vậy, Khoa Quốc tế nên thiết kế các chương trình hoạt động ngoại khóa thường xuyên cho sinh viên quốc tế để giúp sinh viên tăng cường sự gắn kết với nhà trường. Trong tương lai, nghiên cứu giải thích có thể ước lượng tác động của các hoạt động ngoại khóa đối với nhu cầu của sinh viên và sự gắn kết của sinh viên với các cơ sở giáo dục đại học.
TỪ KHÓA Hoạt động ngoại khóa Sự gắn kết của sinh viên Nhu cầu Lý thuyết Tự quyết Phỏng vấn	

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1. Introduction

Choosing a prestige and quality university is one of the biggest successes which could bring students a happy life and make them connected and engaged with their school activities. Student engagement is one of the factors to assess and affirm the quality and brand of that university and it has increasingly become a matter for concern in recent years. From that, researchers, educators, and policymakers have increasingly focused on student engagement as the key to addressing problems of low achievement, high levels of student boredom, alienation, and high dropout [1]. Besides, the review by Trowler suggests that the literature sees student engagement as pertaining to the “interaction between the time, effort and other relevant resources invested by both students and their institutions intended to optimize the student experience and enhance the learning outcomes and development of students and the performance, and reputation of the institution” [2]. Moreover, student engagement has an extremely important impact on the quality of college life. It contributes to satisfaction and happiness of student with the school, thereby building a close relationship between the school and students. The more students understand and perceive the values of educational services provided, the more autonomous they are in their pursuit of university-related values and activities as well as contribute to the development of educational institutions. Student engagement researchers have come up with many different definitions. Specially, Axelson et al. [3] call for a definition that encapsulates the multi-dimensional aspects of engagement. Lester [4] acknowledges there is a debate over how to define engagement, either as a single or multi-dimensional concept state. Similarly, Shamsudin et al. [5] have identified three distinct dimensions to the construct, mainly, *cognitive, behavioral and emotional engagement*.

Cognitive engagement is divided into two components: psychological and cognitive. The psychological component encompasses motivational goals and self-regulated learning as it relates to investment, thoughtfulness, and willingness to put in the effort to comprehend complex ideas and master difficult skills. The cognitive component involves self-regulated learning, metacognition, application of learning strategies, and “being strategic” in thinking and studying.

Behavioral engagement consists of students’ involvement in academic and social activities. Three main categories of behavioral engagement include positive conduct, involvement in learning, and participation in school related activities. Positive conduct includes following class rules. Involvement in learning and academic tasks includes student behaviors related to concentration, attention, persistence, effort, asking questions, and contributing to class discussions. Participation in school-related activities includes athletics or school government.

Emotional engagement is comprised of students’ attitudes, interests, and values particularly related to positive or negative interactions with faculty, staff, students, academics, or the institution.

Nowadays, colleges are looking for ways to promote student success and help students gain the most from their higher education experience through extracurricular activities. Extracurricular activities are found at all levels of school system. The terms extracurricular activities, co-curricular activities, and non-classroom activities have all been used interchangeably to mean experiences and activities such as debate, athletics, music, drama, school publications, student council, school clubs, contests, and various social events [6]. This multitude of experience forms a third curriculum—paralleling the required and the elective curriculums, and is well integrated into the daily school program. Rahman and Hundal [7] suggests that active participation in extracurricular activities creates positive changes for students such as increased self-confidence and student connection with home and school. Some of the accumulated evidence suggests that student participation in extracurricular activities is indicative of competencies and skills that are relevant to the development of a successful business career. For instance, Rubin et al. [8] surveyed CEOs from large U.S. industrial corporations and found that they had considerably

higher involvement in extracurricular activities during their college years than did other students. Roulin and Bangerter [9] found that business students who participated in extracurricular activities demonstrated higher interpersonal competency skills. Similarly, Bartkus et al. [10] surveyed recruiters and found that business student participation in extracurricular activities was viewed as an effective way to instill leadership and interpersonal skills. They found that accounting student participation in extracurricular activities was associated with the number of initial interviews obtained by graduating seniors [10]. Overall, the literature has verified that the extracurricular activities have important impacts on student life.

Self-Determination theory was used as theoretical foundation to develop the research framework. Self-Determination theory is an approach to human motivation and personality that uses traditional empirical methods while employing an organismic metatheory that highlights the importance of humans' evolved inner resources for personality development and behavioral self-regulation [11]. This theory can be applied in social contexts that support or inhibit an individual's growth, through the satisfaction of basic psychological needs including competence, involvement, and autonomy. As an international higher education institution, International School of Thai Nguyen University (ISTNU) attracts a lot of international students to pursue their education in the school. Currently, ISTNU have 112 international students, accounting for 27.5% of their total students (Report on ISTNU Student Affairs in academic year 2019-2020) [12]. However, extracurricular activities for international students at Thai Nguyen University of International School are limited in quantity; the quality is not yet highly effective; clubs for international students have not been designed much. Therefore, research improving the effectiveness of extracurricular activities to international student engagement is important. Such research could give solutions to improve the efficiency of extracurricular activities for international student at Thai Nguyen University of International School.

We use self-determination theory to guide model development in this study. Self-determination theory incorporates three major needs, i.e., needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, motivating us to these three needs in attempt to explain the formation of student engagement.

The remainder of the current paper is organized as follows. First, research method is shown. Second, the results are presented and discussed. Finally, conclusions are presented.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research framework

Figure 1 presents the framework of the research. In the study, the researchers attempt to connect extracurricular activities, three basic needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and student engagement to explore the relationships among them. Specifically, the researchers try to explore how the participation in types of extracurricular activities can satisfy students' needs, and how the need satisfaction motivate students' engagement. Moreover, the research framework in Figure 1 indicates the research process, from research motivation, review of the pertinent literature, generation of research model, collection of data (secondary and primary ones, quantitative and qualitative ones), data analysis, findings and implications.

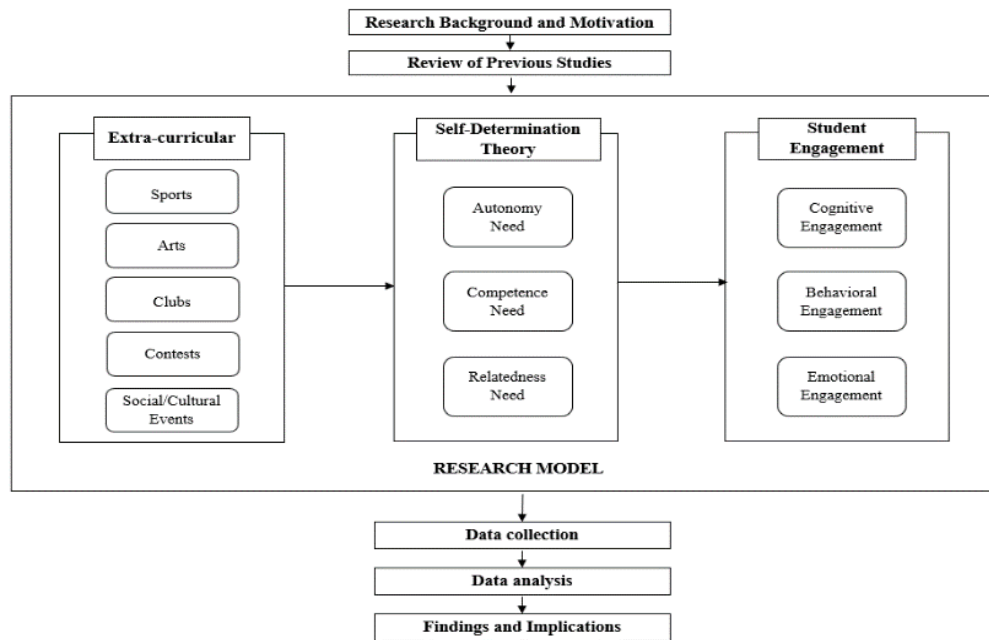


Figure 1. Research Framework

2.2. Data Collection

2.2.1. Secondary Data

The researchers collected secondary information of extracurricular activities implementation at Thai Nguyen University of International School from 2011 to 2020. Secondary information is collected from annual reports of Thai Nguyen University of International School, information posted on websites, research results of previous related research projects.

2.2.2. Primary Data

Descriptive data about level of engagement was gathered from questionnaires distributed to international students of International School. Totally, there are currently 112 international students in International School who are studying in the programs of International Business, Business Administration, Accounting and Finance, and Environmental Management and Sustainability. The international students come from East Timor, Laos, Philippines, Cambodia, Nigeria, Myanmar, and Gana. The questionnaires were designed to ask students about their level of engagement, in terms of Cognitive engagement, Behavioral engagement, and Emotional engagement. 100 questionnaires were conveniently distributed to the students, 88 valid responses were returned, negating a return rate of 88%.

Qualitative data: Semi-structure interviews were conducted to obtain the in-depth understanding and insights about extracurricular activities, students' needs, and student engagement. Semi-structure Interview is a tool for collection in-depth data which is widely used in fields of social science [13]. Such approach helps to gain knowledge and stories of interviewees which should be useful for exploratory understanding about research issues. Our research conducted individual semi-structure interviews with purposive sampling of students (local and international students), members of Board of Director (Dean and Vice Dean), heads of Academic Department, Student Affairs Department, International Affairs Department, leaders of Student Association, Youth Union, teachers and graduates of ISTNU. Totally, 47 interviews were conducted and recorded after the purpose of the interview was briefed and the inform consents were obtained from the interviewees. Such approach ensures the ethical aspects of our study and

should avoid associated biases. The collected data were transcribed, decoded and analyzed using thematic analysis, which is widely recognized and employed in the literature.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Survey of International Students

Table 1 shows the profile of international students who were asked about their level of engagement. 53.4% out of them are female and 56.6% are male. The nationalities of the international students are East Timor, Laos, Nigeria, Philippines, Myanmar, Cambodia, and Gana.

Table 1. Profile of international students in the survey

Variable	Category	Number	Percentage
Gender	Female	47	53.4%
	Male	41	56.6%
Country of Nationality	East Timor	41	46.6%
	Laos	16	18.2%
	Nigeria	9	10.2%
	Philippines	8	9.1%
	Myanmar	7	8.0%
	Cambodia	5	5.7%
	Gana	2	2.2%

Source: Calculated by Authors

Table 2. Level of student engagement

Student Engagement	Level of engagement					Total
	strongly not engage	not engage	neutral	engage	strongly engage	
Cognitive	3.2%	15.8%	48.6%	23.5%	8.9%	100%
Behavioral	3.4%	13.2%	52.4%	21.2%	9.8%	100%
Emotional	2.4%	14.2%	44.3%	30.4%	8.7%	100%

Source: Calculated by Authors

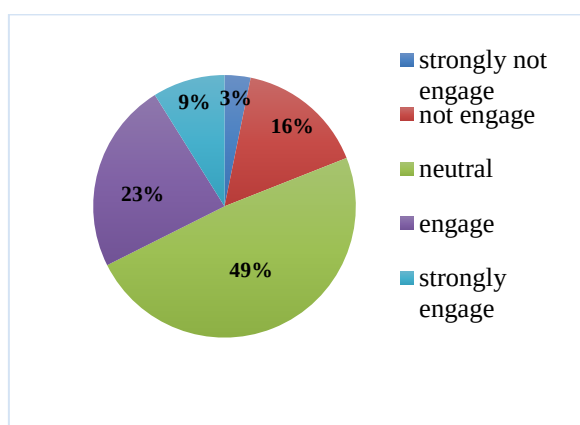


Figure 2. Level of students' cognitive engagement

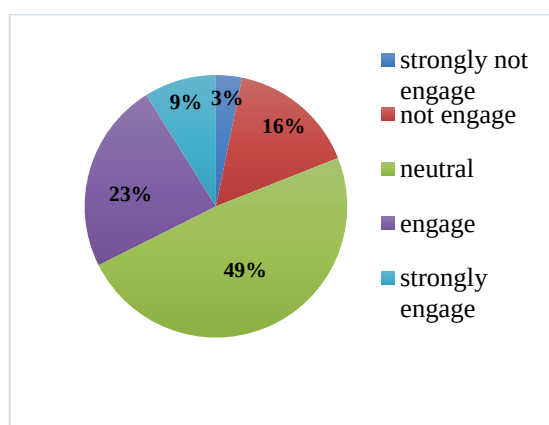


Figure 3. Level of students' cognitive engagement

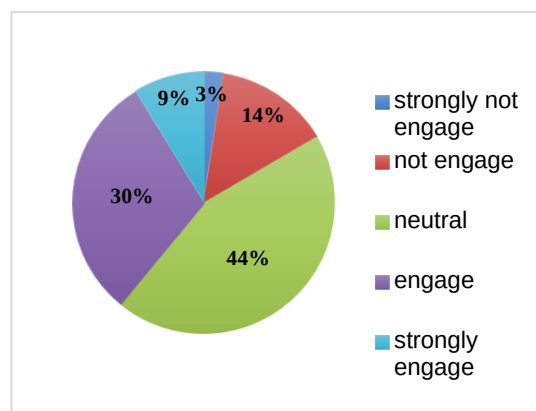


Figure 4. Level of students' emotional engagement

Table 2 and Figure 2, 3, 4 indicate the level of student engagement which is calculated according to the results of the survey. In summary, most of international students feel neutrally engaged with ISTNU with an average of 48.7%, while only 24.7% and 9.3% among them feel engaged and strongly engaged respectively, furthermore 14.3% and 3.0% among them feel not engaged and strongly not engaged. These figures reflex the level of engagement of international students, which are not very high, indicating a need for solutions to enhance such engagement.

3.2. Interviews with ISTNU international students, directors, leaders, teachers, and graduates

Table 3. Profile of Interviewees

Interviewees	Number	Percentage
International Students	25	53.2%
Board of Director members	2	4.3%
Heads/leaders	5	10.6%
Teachers	8	17.0%
International Graduates	7	14.9%
Total	47	100%

Source: Calculated by Authors

Table 3 shows the demographics of the interviewees. Totally, there are 47 interviewees who participated in the interviews. The interviewees are ISTNU international students (53.2%), ISTNU Board of Director members (4.3%), ISTNU Heads/leaders of the offices/department (10.6%), ISTNU Teachers (17%), and ISTNU international graduates (14.9%).

3.2.1. Extracurricular activities, needs, and engagement

Almost interviewed students (around 96%) expressed that extracurricular activities are important and should help to satisfy their needs. In particular, all types of extracurricular (sports, arts, clubs, contests, social-cultural events) should fulfill students relatedness.

"...As an international student, I usually feel bored and lonely as I stay away from home. However, I feel connected more with my mates when we take part in extracurricular together"

"...I like to participate in extracurricular activities as I can meet and work with my mates (international or local ones), we can learn from each other, especially learn about Vietnamese and local culture..."

Some extracurricular activities such as contests and sports help students to feel competent about themselves, satisfying their need for competence.

"...when I have chance to take part in a contest, I feel confident about myself and can find ways to make others recognize my competence..."

"...sports help me feel more valued and confident, maybe I am not very good at studying, at least I can play football or badminton well..."

Arts and clubs make international students feel their freedom to do what they like and have passion towards, which should represent their autonomy need satisfaction.

"...I love to sing and dance, when I practice singing and dancing for school performance, I feel I can freely follow my passion and be what I want..."

Almost all students indicated that they feel more engaged in school life if their needs are satisfied.

"...I think that if I can be myself at school and be well accepted/recognized, I would feel emotionally attached with my school..."

"...I not an excellent student, in fact sometimes I feel bad about my academic performance, however, I still love to stay in school as I can feel happy when I take part in extracurricular activities such as sports or social events..."

International Graduates also emphasize importance of extracurricular activities.

"...study was sometimes stressful and sometimes I feel lonely when far away from home, however, I need to find balance by taking part in extracurricular activities, which helped me to take-back my feel of competence and freedom, then I could be back to my study and survive..."

"... Frankly speaking, I feel emotional connected with my school as I could feel relaxed and really recognized when I joined school clubs or have social events with my mates..."

3.2.2. Strategic plan for extracurricular activities

The members of BOD and Head/leaders of school departments emphasize extracurricular activities in building a friendly school environment.

"...we understand that extracurricular activities are critical for a comprehensive and friendly school environment, especially for international students..."

"...international students are cross-cultural ones so we ask the Department of International Affairs to collaborate with Department of Student Affairs, Student Association, and Youth Union to design and organize extracurricular activities for them, and certainly involve the participation of local students..."

3.2.3. Recommendations for extracurricular activities

When interviewed about extracurricular activities, teachers of International School agreed on the critical role of such activities in the comprehensive development of students and specifically international students, and should enhance the engagement of international students to their school. However, teachers also emphasized the balance between academic activities and extracurricular activities.

"...I recommend that extracurricular should be designed as suitable for the academic schedule of students, which should not significantly invade the class-time..."

Leaders of Student Association and Youth Union mentioned information technology as effective support for extracurricular activities.

"... IT platforms are mostly in Vietnamese, so it is quite difficult for international students to use, we need to ask local students to support them..."

"...international students want to be recognized for their contribution, thus we design and grant them the certificates for their participation and contribution, international students love the certificates and become more engaged..."

"...in fact, the extracurricular activities for international students in our school are still limited in social and cultural events, and clubs such as English club ..."

International students suggested that there should be more extracurricular activities for international students in International School, not only the extracurricular activities on special occasions such as Tet holidays, Halloween, Christmas, but the extracurricular activities for international students should be regular, so they can participate more and become more engaged in their school life.

4. Conclusion

This study adopts an exploratory approach to evaluate the level of engagement of international students in ISTNU and provides qualitative insights about how extracurricular activities can fulfill their needs, which further supports the formation of their engagement. ISTNU should design more regular extracurricular activities for international students, with various types of sports, arts, clubs, contests and social/cultural events and research for international students. Future explanatory works could further verify the links among participation in extracurricular activities, the need satisfaction of students, and the formation of student engagement.

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