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**STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS EXTRACURRICULAR
ACTIVITIES AT THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE DEPARTMENT**

Abstract

The paper investigates students' perceptions and attitudes toward extracurricular activities (ECAs) organized by the English Language and Literature Department at the University of Zenica (UNZE). While ECAs are widely acknowledged for their pedagogical value, their role in higher education contexts within Bosnia and Herzegovina remains heavily underexplored. In that sense, the study aim was to assess the perceived effect of ECAs, such as quizzes, conferences, and competitions, on students' interpersonal, social, and speaking skills, motivation, as well as the practical application of their academic knowledge. Data for this quantitative study was collected through an online questionnaire containing Likert-scale and multiple-choice items, while the respondents included undergraduate students across all four study years. Responses reveal that a majority of students view ECAs positively and show high levels of motivation and willingness to participate in the said activities. In addition, most students recognize that participation in ECAs has enhanced their interpersonal and social skills while many also note improvements in their English speaking skills and increased motivation levels. Hence, study results contribute to discussions on learners' motivation in higher education contexts and offer insights that may inform future institutional strategies concerning the general students' engagement.

Keywords: *extracurricular, English language, motivation, students, University of Zenica*

INTRODUCTION

Extracurricular activities (ECAs) have long been an integral part of the educational landscape in Bosnia and Herzegovina, especially at the primary and secondary school levels, in the form of sports clubs, book clubs, language clubs, and natural sciences clubs. Such activities complement formal education and classes, hone social skills, and help develop individual competences that are not always addressed formally and explicitly. All the aforementioned reasons for incorporating ECAs in education greatly affect motivation of students, not only for their further involvement in ECAs but for learning in general. Despite ECAs prevalence and pedagogical value in earlier stages of education, and at lower educational levels, they remain underrepresented at the university level, especially in the area of the humanities.

In the context of English language learning or studying at university level, specifically the English Language and Literature Department at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Zenica, ECAs have always been present with varying degrees of continuity. Therefore, a deliberate effort was made to intensify and systematize such activities over the past three academic years. Considering that one of the important principles of the higher education policy frameworks is to intensify students' engagement in academic activities, the aim of the implemented ECAs, in addition to complementing formal instruction and classes, was to provide students with non-compulsory opportunities to engage with language and literature beyond classes. A range of extracurricular activities, tailored around curricular content of the study program, was introduced. These ECAs included quizzes, landmark labs, conferences, and literary puzzle contests intended for university students, as well as workshops intended for high school students and led by the university students. Participation in these activities varied, with around thirty student participants per ECA in question. Regardless of the fact that participation in these activities was voluntary and optional with no grading that would influence students' results in specific courses, students showed a high degree of interest in ECAs. Students' feedback during and after ECAs indicated that students who took part in some of the aforementioned activities exhibited more engagement in regular classes and greater willingness to communicate in English, i.e. greater self-determination. These observations suggest that our ECAs may have fostered student motivation and provided students with a stronger sense of academic involvement and achievement. Consequently, the present study was conducted in order to examine students' perceptions and attitudes towards extracurricular

activities at the English Language and Literature Department, at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Zenica.

Within this case study design, and drawing on the theoretical framework of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci and Ryan 2012), the study aims to assess how students perceive ECAs after participating in them, and how motivational factors influence students' participation, as well as how such participation, in turn, influences their study motivation and skill development. Therefore, the focus is on students' motivation in terms of not only the drivers behind the active participation in ECAs but also on the effects of said participation on further academic motivation. In addition, this research paper seeks to contribute to the limited body of literature on the importance of ECAs in higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina and aims to offer insights that could inform future studies aimed at improving institutional practices which target student engagement.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Coming from the Latin word “movere” (“to move”), motivation designates the driving force in human behavior, i.e. what motivates a person to do something. According to Dörnyei and Ushioda (2013), in terms of human behavior, motivation refers to “the choice of a particular action, the persistence with it, the effort expended on it” or “why people decide to do something, how long they are willing to sustain the activity, how hard they are going to pursue it” (3-4). In the context of higher education, motivation plays a key role in shaping students' engagement in their learning process and their interest in it. Motivation often takes an interdisciplinary approach, including psychology, pedagogy, philosophy, and social sciences, all of which have set out to explain the origins and modes of motivation in educational setting(s). There are numerous theoretical models that address motivation in education, e.g. expectancy-value theory, achievement goal theory, social cognitive theory, and self-determination theory (Brophy 2010), all of which observe and examine whether motivation is intrinsic or extrinsic, how students perceive the value and relevance of educational content, how learning and studying contributes to self-development, and whether interest in education is driven by long-term goals such as employment or personal fulfilment. Given the breadth and diversity of these frameworks, a comprehensive discussion of all motivational theories lies beyond the scope of the present study.

Among a number of approaches, we chose to rely on self-determination theory (SDT) in examining student motivation for ECAs. Developed by the end of the twentieth century by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan who coauthored *Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination in Human Behavior* (1985), self-determination theory represents a framework for studying human motivation as a force that emerges or disappears depending on the social context. According to Deci and Ryan (2012), environment and social interaction help satisfy three basic psychological needs “competence, autonomy, and relatedness” (68). As a consequence, when these needs are met, human beings develop feelings of accomplishment and motivation that comes from the inside, i.e. intrinsic. Over the years, Deci and Ryan expanded their work (2000, 2012, 2017) adding more categories and six correlated mini-theories to the wider framework of SDT:

1. Cognitive Evaluation Theory engages with autonomy and feelings of self-fulfillment associated with doing something for its inherent value.
2. Organismic Integration Theory observes motivation as a scale which ranges from intrinsic to extrinsic motivation and how extrinsically motivated behavior might be internalized and might become autonomous. In other words, externally motivated actions become adopted as autonomous behaviors.
3. Casualty Orientations Theory places its focus on differences between motivation that is intrinsic (autonomous), extrinsic (reward or control), and unmotivated as a result of competence-related insecurity.
4. Basic Psychological Needs Theory regards the above-mentioned autonomy, competence, and relatedness as essential elements of one’s well-being. If only one out of the three elements is disrupted in social interactions and contexts, a human being experiences emotional dysregulation and a decline of motivation with it.
5. Goal Contents Theory finds the content of the goals to be the major determinant of motivation, i.e. some goals lead to self-fulfillment and an increase in motivation and some lead to dissatisfaction.
6. Relationships Motivation Theory argues that quality relationships satisfy all three needs (relatedness, autonomy, and competence), thus boosting motivation (Ryan & Deci 2017: 123-293; Reeve 2018: 20-24).

Overall, SDT provides a framework for understanding how educational context, in this case extracurricular activities, can enhance various types of motivation. ECAs implemented at

English Language and Literature Department can be envisioned as environments where all six mini-theories are applicable since ECAs supply students with opportunities to engage with peers, to further their interests, to develop a sense of belonging and achievement based on external factors. Therefore, the results of the current study can be interpreted through the lens of SDT especially in terms of students' basic psychological needs and relationships motivation. In that sense, by exploring students' motivation drivers and the perceived impact of ECAs on their skills development, it is possible to gain a better insight into the intricate relationship between relatedness, autonomy and competence.

As the study focus is on the various ECAs, it is important to note that, although the concept of extracurricular activities is difficult to define with precision (Greenbank 2015), they generally share certain foundational characteristics. Primarily, ECAs are understood to be activities that differ in range, are entirely separate from the formal curriculum, and simultaneously represent a context for developing skills (Sullivan 2018). This definition closely corresponds to the activities organized by the English Language and Literature Department which are the focus of the present study. Furthermore, these organized activities align with the principles of Self-Determination Theory, delving deeper into the ways in which motivation reflects students' attitudes and choices, and, ultimately, even their results in educational settings (Greenbank 2015). Indeed, the link between the participation in ECAs and their numerous potential positive outcomes has been of scholarly interest for a considerable period of time (Sullivan 2018). However, it is important to note that most of the existing studies have not examined ECAs within the higher education context (Griffiths et al. 2021) but rather at the high-school level. For instance, Sullivan (2018) identified numerous benefits stemming from participation in ECAs, including, but not limited to, positive impact on academic, social and communication, as well as personal development skills (89).

With regard to earlier studies on ECAs in higher education contexts, research studies by Thompson et al. (2013) and Greenbank (2015) are of particular importance as they represent some of the notable examples highlighting students' positive attitudes towards their participation in ECAs, which was found to result in various benefits such as higher employability and development of life-long skills. More recently, Chapman et al. (2023) have highlighted the importance and role of different types of motivation (extrinsic, intrinsic, social and pro-social) and have noted a differentiation between the motivation of early-year and final-year university students. Nevertheless, although a plethora of previous research consistently highlights the positive effects

of ECAs on student development, the focus of such research has rarely been on the higher education English-medium contexts, particularly in the Balkan region and, more specifically, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

METHODOLOGY

The research study was conducted at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Zenica, using a questionnaire intended to explore students' perceptions of ECAs. Even though the focus was on the ECAs organized within the English Language and Literature Department, the actual participants included students of various departments, that is, all the students taking any of the general English language courses. A total of sixteen undergraduate students participated in the research study. The questionnaire was distributed online via Google Forms and it consisted of three sections. The first section focused on the information about the participants (study year, gender, frequency of ECA participation). The second section included several Likert-scale questions, rated from one to five, about the students' perceptions of ECAs and the effect of ECAs on the students' English language skill development. The final section included multiple choice questions about the primary and secondary motivation factors for participating in ECAs. The results were summarized using percentages and mean values, and presented in tabular form, in order to identify any notable trends in students' perceptions of ECAs. The small sample size is the main study limitation and further research with larger sample sizes could prove beneficial to the investigations into the impact of ECAs on academic and professional development.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first part of the questionnaire focused on the respondents' demographic data. Table 1 below indicates the study year and gender distribution of the survey respondents (N=16).

Table 1. Respondents' distribution - study year and gender.

Study year	# of respondents	Gender	# of respondents
First	2	Male	3
Second	8		
Third	1	Female	13
Fourth	5		

According to the obtained data, almost half of the respondents (N = 7) participated in five or more ECAs, and exactly half of them participated in two to five ECAs. This aligns with the later results on students' willingness to participate in any future ECAs meaning that these types of activities reflect high levels of students' motivation. It is important to note that the distribution of respondents in terms of study year and gender classification, reflects more general trends, such as lower overall number of male students at the Faculty of Philosophy.

The second part of the study, focusing on Likert-scale questions on perceived impact of ECAs, is presented in Table 2, shown below. These findings can be interpreted through the aforementioned SDT as they relate to students' interpersonal/social skills (relatedness), speaking skills and practical application of knowledge (competence), increased academic motivation and willingness to participate in future ECAs (autonomy).

Table 2. Perceived Impact of Extracurricular Activities on Student Learning and Engagement.

Perceived impact of ECAs	M	SD	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
ECAs improved interpersonal/social skills	3.88	0.81	0%	0%	37.5%	37.5%	25%
ECAs improved speaking skills	4.00	0.89	0%	6.3%	18.8%	43.8%	31.3%
ECAs enabled practical application of knowledge	4.00	1.10	6.3%	0%	18.8%	37.5%	37.5%
ECAs increased academic motivation	3.88	1.31	6.3%	12.5%	12.5%	25%	43.8%
Willingness to participate in future ECAs	4.63	0.72	0%	0%	12.5%	12.5%	75%

Note. M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation. Response scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree.

The results reveal that students seem to regard ECAs' impact on their skills development rather positively with the majority of students recognizing multiple benefits stemming from their

participation in ECAs. The most significant improvement seems to be in students' speaking skills and practical application of their knowledge ($M = 4$, $SD = 0.89$; $M = 4$, $SD = 1.1$). In terms of speaking skills, over a third of respondents (43.8%) *agree*, while nearly a third (31.9%) *strongly agree* that ECAs have a positive impact on their speaking skills. Similarly, students seem to show positive perceptions towards the impact of ECAs on practical application of knowledge, with an equal number of respondents who *agree* (37.5%) and *strongly agree* (37.5%) with this statement. Improved interpersonal and social skills, along with the increased academic motivation, follow closely ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 0.81$; $M = 3.88$, $SD = 1.31$). Notably, almost half of the respondents (43.8%) *strongly agree* that ECAs have a positive impact on their motivation. Overall, the results suggest that surveyed students largely recognize the benefits and positive impact of ECAs on their skills development. In fact, this is further reinforced by the highest mean score recorded for students' willingness to participate in future ECAs ($M = 4.63$, $SD = 0.72$), with as many as 75% of respondents who *strongly agree* with this statement. Consequently, over half of the respondents *strongly agree* that there should be more ECAs (56.3%), while a third of them *agree* (37.5%), with only one respondent feeling *neutral* (6.3%) about it. Therefore, ECAs seem to contribute positively to the satisfaction of the three basic needs: relatedness, competence and autonomy, as outlined in SDT.

Interestingly, as Table 3 below indicates, students express high levels of intrinsic motivation, that is, listing their personal interest and enthusiasm for the organized ECAs as the primary motivational factor (43.8%) with the desire to improve their skills appearing in second place (31.3%).

Table 3. Primary and Secondary Motivation Factors for Participation in ECAs.

Motivation factor	Primary motivation	Secondary motivation
Being interested in the activities themselves	43.8%	18.8%
Socializing with colleagues	0%	50.0%
Improving specific skills (e.g. speaking)	31.3%	0%
Leaving a good first impression	0%	18.8%
Getting extra points or higher grades	18.8%	12.5%
Experiencing something new	6.3%	0%

In terms of secondary motivation, socializing ranks the highest with exactly half of the respondents marking it as their main secondary motivational factor (50%). The incentive of recognition, i.e. leaving a good impression, ranks second as an additional motivational factor (18.8%). Yet again, the interest in the activities ranks highly (18.8%), reinforcing the importance of intrinsic motivation. Increased academic achievement, in the form of higher grades, ranks third, as a primary, and fourth as a secondary motivational factor (18.8% and 12.5%, respectively). Understandably, with repeated participation in the organized ECAs, the novelty factor ranks lower, appearing fourth among primary motivational factors (6.3%). These results seem to align with Organismic Integration theory of SDT, as they highlight the interplay between intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors and indicate the possible internalization of extrinsic motivation.

Overall, the results seem to suggest that ECAs function as a bridge between theoretical knowledge and its practical application. This is of particular relevance for EFL contexts, at different levels of formal education, as the opportunities for authentic language are very important. From a Self-Determination Theory perspective, the responses align with the autonomy, competence and relatedness criteria. The students voluntarily take part in these activities and tend to be highly intrinsically motivated, thereby showing their autonomy. At the same time, they report positive effects on ECAs on their skills development, enhancing their competence. Finally, relatedness is fostered through the social component, as recognized by the students. The presence of all three elements within the context of ECAs confirms them to be multidimensional motivational environments, with a notable portion of respondents consequently expressing a willingness to participate in future ECAs. In other words, ECAs seem to contribute to the satisfaction of autonomy, competence and relatedness, leading to the internalization of motivation in line with SDT.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that ECAs at the English Language and Literature Department, at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Zenica, according to students' perceptions and attitudes, play an appreciable role in enhancing student motivation, skill development in English-language learning, as well as in academic engagement. Analysis of students' motivation through the lens of Self-Determination Theory indicates that the obtained results seem to suggest that ECAs effectively and positively cater to students' psychological needs for autonomy,

competence, and relatedness, further fostering intrinsic motivation. Our respondents reported that personal interest in ECAs' content was the primary catalyst of their participation, while social interaction and academic recognition were stated as secondary motivators. In addition, students recognized the positive impact of ECAs, particularly on the development of speaking skills and practical application of knowledge, as well as improved interpersonal and social skills, along with the increased academic motivation. The results obtained from the questionnaire suggest that students perceive ECAs as multifaceted environments that aid both personal and academic growth. Therefore, on the basis of the analysis of students' perceptions and attitudes towards extracurricular activities, it can be concluded that ECAs seem to represent and provide a bridge between theoretical knowledge and practical application of that knowledge, which is of high importance in EFL contexts. This study emphasizes the value of using, expanding, and even systematizing ECAs at tertiary educational level since they not only enhance students' learning experiences but also promote lifelong skills. Its additional importance lies in the fact that it treats otherwise largely unaddressed questions about the role of ECAs at tertiary educational level, and thereby adds to this important area of study. Future research with larger sample sizes is recommended to further corroborate these findings and thereby explore the broader impact of ECAs in higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina and abroad.

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PERCEPCIJE I STAVOVI STUDENATA O VANNASTAVNIM AKTIVNOSTIMA NA ODSJEKU ZA ENGLISKI JEZIK I KNJIŽEVNOST

Sažetak

Rad istražuje percepcije i stavove studenata o vannastavnim aktivnostima koje organizuje Odsjek za engleski jezik i književnost na Univerzitetu u Zenici (UNZE). Iako su vannastavne aktivnosti općenito prepoznate po svojoj pedagoškoj vrijednosti, njihova uloga u kontekstu visokog obrazovanja u Bosni i Hercegovini i dalje je u velikoj mjeri nedovoljno istražena. U tom smislu, cilj istraživanja bio je procijeniti uočeni utjecaj vannastavnih aktivnosti, kao što su kvizovi, konferencije i takmičenja, na interpersonalne, društvene i govorne vještine studenata, njihovu motivaciju, kao i na praktičnu primjenu akademskog znanja. Podaci za ovo kvantitativno istraživanje prikupljeni su putem online upitnika koji je sadržavao pitanja Likertovog tipa i pitanja višestrukog izbora, a ispitanici su bili studenti dodiplomskog studija sve četiri godine studija. Rezultati pokazuju da većina studenata ima pozitivan stav prema vannastavnim aktivnostima te iskazuje visok nivo motivacije i spremnosti za učešće u navedenim aktivnostima. Osim toga, većina studenata prepoznaje da je učešće u vannastavnim aktivnostima unaprijedilo njihove interpersonalne i društvene vještine, dok mnogi ističu i poboljšanje govornih vještina na engleskom jeziku, kao i povećanje nivoa motivacije. Stoga, rezultati istraživanja doprinose diskusiji o motivaciji studenata u kontekstu visokog obrazovanja te nude uvide koji mogu poslužiti kao osnova za buduće institucionalne strategije u vezi s općim učešćem i angažmanom studenata.

Ključne riječi: vannastavne aktivnosti, engleski jezik, motivacija, studenti, Univerzitet u Zenici