

The Effect of Extra-curricular Activities on Students' Studies

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Abstract

The present paper is aimed at answering what and how extra-curricular activities (club/ circle activities and part-time jobs) occupy students' time after their classes and what effect, if any, they have on the learners' life. The hypothesis was that all three: studying, circle and part-time work have influence on students, and due to these activities students are lacking in time to study.

I have found that after-university time is used mainly for club activities and part-time work, and studying does not play a significant role in students' after-class free time. Extra-curricular activities occupy a considerable amount of learners' free time, and as a result they do not have enough time to study. Nonetheless, they report that they should put more effort and time into their studies. However, it is not only a question of time: many of the participants have reported that they dislike studying. Extra-curricular activities are claimed to be interesting which seems to be a crucial reason for participation. Similar to classes, they have great influence on students' lives and help learners prepare for their future working lives.

Introduction

Studying, participating in a school club and doing a part-time job, are each demanding in their own right, never mind doing them all. This often means that students cannot take part in all three with equal enthusiasm and productivity. Chiba (2012) found out that extra-curricular activities were in a trade-off relationship with studying among education major students at Bunkyo University.

After-class club activities have a long history in Japanese education system. In contrast with British and American standards, where circles prepare the selected participants for tournaments, in Japan, these circles are aimed at character building and are available to all (Nakazawa, 2014). Furthermore, in some of the high schools it is compulsory to join, however, nowadays, it is less common (Cave, 2004).

Club activities provide a place where students can relax in an informal environment, acquire the social and moral norms that are essential for their later careers, and undergo common hardship as a means of personal improvement (Cave, 2004). In addition, those whose academic results are not outstanding might find the circle the place where they can achieve great results.

Senpai-kohai relationship (i.e. the hierarchical relationship and the associated specific behavioural norms between the seniors and juniors) is idiosyncratic in Japanese society (Nakane, 1973). In the classroom, where students study together with their peers, there is no opportunity to experience and acquire such rules and manners. Club activities, however, build on the seniors teaching the juniors. Seniors perform the activity, demonstrate what to do and juniors, after careful observation, imitate the seniors' movements. This pattern is repeated until the juniors have fully managed to perform the activity. To improve in the club activity students need to make long term commitment to extensive practice which may be physically demanding. Yet, it is quite rare to give up the activity, as students believe that the effort they put into practice will result in better achievements (Cave, 2004). Consequently, circles have a huge influence on Japanese adolescents' life. After graduating from high school, many are keen on continuing the activity by joining the university's circle.

Students put a similar amount of effort into part-time jobs (Cullen & Mulvey, 2012). The main motivation is undoubtedly their need for money. On the other hand, according to Cullen and Mulvey (2012), many of them are more satisfied with their part-time jobs than their studies. Knowing this, one may not be surprised that their working hours often exceed that of studying.

Just like at club activities, there is a lot to learn about social norms at part-time work, such as following the boss's order and all the rules are necessary, which they cannot experience elsewhere. On the basis of which it may be claimed that they gain a lot from their part-time work experiences. Miho (2013) revealed in a survey carried out among 517 first year students at a private university in Japan that working part time – apart from earning money – made students acquire new skills, and the more committed they were to work the more they benefited.

Research background

As an average, both first and second year students have ten to thirteen 90-minute classes a week (Rishuno tebiki, 2014), which means two to three classes per day. A rough estimation was made on the basis of the answers of 15 first year and 10 second year students to see how much time students have left for studying and extra-curricular activities. In this calculation a day was considered with three classes, school commute, sleep at night, eating, preparation before leaving home in the morning and before going to bed at night. Table 1 may give us a clearer picture of students' time management.

Table 1. Time management of students

Category	Time (hours)
Sleeping	8
Classes and breaks in between	5.5
School commute	2.5
Eating, getting ready in the morning and before going to bed	2
Total	18
Time left for after-class activities	6

According to this rough estimation, learners have approximately six hours a day for after-class activities. However, the situation is more complicated than what it seems. Some days, they may have four or even five classes and on other days no classes at all. A day with no classes is the right time for extended hours of part-time work to earn the necessary amount of money to cover the tuition fee or the daily expenses. Weekends regularly fall into this pattern also. As a result, for many, there is not a single day of the week to take a proper rest. Tiredness gradually accumulates, so besides sleeping on the train, students may also take a nap during the lessons.

Population and method

The survey was conducted among 136 students, 85 of whom are in first and 51 are in second year at the International Studies Centre of Meisei University, Tokyo.

The data were collected between 16. - 26. September, 2014. A pilot study was carried out in July, 2014 with the participation of 17 first and 14 second year students. However, as the summer holiday started it was impossible to continue the survey then. Therefore, some of the questions were redesigned (i.e. instead of asking what they will do in the holiday, asking what they did) and the survey was conducted in September.

In order to find out how and what activity is pursued after the classes end, a questionnaire was utilized. All of the items were translated into Japanese to ensure participants' full understanding. The questionnaire had three main sections: studies, circle activities and part-time job. Each section contained similar questions to make comparison possible (see Appendix). There were questions to find out whether the above activities have any influence on the respondents and then to find out the nature of that effect. Participants were asked how they evaluate the amount of time they spend on the activity and how they think they can benefit from that activity in the future. Finally, they were asked whether they would be interested in connecting extra-curricular activities to language learning.

Findings

Students appear to be very active after classes. Among the 136 respondents, 71 have a circle activity, 103 work part time, 51 have both a circle activity and a part-time job and 12 have no extra-curricular activities. Table 2 summarizes participation in extra-curricular activities in percentages.

Table 2. Participation in extra-curricular activities (%)

Year	Circle	Part-time job	Both	Neither
First	56	68	36	0.11
Second	45	88	39	0.03
Total	52	75	37	0.08

Among the language learning motivations (Dörnyei, 2010), both intrinsic factors (i.e. doing something for pleasure) such as making foreign friends, interest

in the target language and culture; and instrumental factors (i.e. related to possible practical or pragmatic benefits) such as travelling, and tests can be found. In terms of part-time job, instrumental motivation (i.e. money) scored the highest, and in case of club activities intrinsic motivation is the most frequent (continuing the activity from high-school, following/ making friends).

The influence of these activities on the students is also diverse. Learners feel that they profit a lot from the classes as they acquire new skills and improve their language proficiency. At the club activities, besides improving in the activity of the circle, they report to be learning social skills and the importance of making effort. Finally, while working part time, they can experience what it is like to work, how to take responsibility and deal with problems.

Of those who have a part-time job, 70% stated that they spent more time on it than on studying and only 10% claimed to study more. The result was similar in the case of circle activities, with merely 11% studying more. This was supported by the rest of the data, according to which 114 respondents study less than an hour a day after the classes. As opposed to this, the time they spent on extra-curricular activities may go up to 30 hours a week. Consequently, there is not much formal studying occurring after the classes finish. Among the 12 people who have no extra-curricular activities, 5 people (41%) said that they studied more than an hour a day, which is longer than the average of all of the respondents (merely 16% of the total number of participants study more than an hour a day).

In answer to the question about what they did during the summer holiday to improve in their studies and various activities, the answers depicted the same pattern. Most people indicated simply listening to English songs (74%) or watching films in English (47%) – other learning strategies scored below 30% – to improve in their language proficiency. On the contrary, in terms of circles, 78% reported extensive practice and going to training camps with the members. In terms of part-time work, learning by doing was the most frequent (81%) answer.

All respondents agreed that the amount of time and effort they spend on their extra-curricular activities is enough to achieve their goals. As opposed to this, only 14 people (10%) claimed this about their study related objectives, half of whom

participate in extra-curricular activities. Among those who have no after-class activities, no more than one person claimed to be studying enough.

The most frequent reason for not spending enough time on studying was that the extra-curricular activities are more fun than studying. Results indicate that most of the respondents do not like studying (43%) or do not have enough time for it (46%). The same pattern is discernible in the group who do not have any extra-curricular activities. Among those who both participate in a club and work part time, not having enough time scored second behind disliking studying. In addition, first year students also pointed out that they do not know how to or what to study.

Finally, 60% of the population expressed their interest in doing extra-curricular activities where they could improve their English. The reason for this is that they feel if they had the opportunity to use English in real communication, and not only in the classroom, they could improve much faster and it would be fun to use English. The reasons against were more varied such as “it would be tiring” and “I’m not confident enough”.

Conclusion and implications

As mentioned in the Introduction, students feel they profit from their extra-curricular activities in a different way from their classes. Each of the three – studies, circles and part-time work – puts learners in a different social environment, with different requirements and behavioural norms, which accounts for varied reasons for participation and dissimilar effects on the individuals. Consequently, the motivation to join and pursue them are also diverse.

Classes are associated with gaining formal knowledge. Respondents of the survey believe they can learn a lot from their teachers and classmates and that the knowledge they acquire will be applicable in their future work. Yet, most students study less than an hour after classes, which, as they report, is insufficient to achieve their study related objectives.

Circles are connected with making friends and having fun not only with their peers but also with their seniors and juniors. It is the seniors’ responsibility to

advise the juniors. To ensure their improvement, the club members regularly practice until late in the evening and go to training camps. In this environment the members acquire Japanese idiosyncratic social skills which they will need to employ in their future work.

Part-time work, although, friendships are essential there too, is most closely related to earning money. My students claim, money plays a crucial role of their lives, not only because they might need to pay for the tuition or the daily expenses, but also because it is needed to be able to go out with their friends. Also, as many part-time workplaces do not allow more than a certain amount of time off from work, students can experience the hardship of working life.

It has been proven that extra-curricular activities have great influence on learners (e.g. Cave 2004, Chiba 2012, Cullen & Mulvey 2012), however, further research is needed to discover whether they influence their academic achievement. For instance, a study in Spain (Moriani et al. 2006) showed that extra-curricular activities had positive effect on the students' academic performance.

We have seen that extra-curricular activities account for almost all of the free-time of the participants. However, the reason for them not studying more does not seem to be clearly originated from lack of time. It has been seen that even those who have no extra-curricular activities do not spend much more time studying, and those who have both club and a part-time job do not study much less than the average. Negative attitude to studying seems to be the most crucial factor.

Negative attitude to studying might come from their previous negative experiences. In Japan, to be able to get admitted to university, children need to study hard, go to cram school, and take examinations in several subjects (Hughes, Krug and Vye, 2011). As a result, they might begin to develop negative attitude to learning in general. To alter this inclination, teachers of all subjects could emphasise the rationale of what is done in class as well as implement cooperative and collaborative tasks to improve learner engagement. If such techniques are employed, students may transform their views on studying as being an individual hardship to a more positive, social – perhaps even fun – activity.

Interviews could help teachers define what changes, if any, they might need

in their teaching and how they could enhance students' motivation. I believe that if teachers are able to create a positive, supportive classroom environment it contributes to a more positive attitude to studying on the students' part.

This survey, as the first part of my research has justified my hypothesis that extra-curricular activities are time-consuming and play a crucial role in students' life; therefore, teachers cannot ignore them. Rather, teachers could consider how to rely on these activities, how to transfer the skills to the classroom which they acquire through them and how to encourage learners to connect them to studying (e.g. by doing English language related part-time job) as a great number of the participants (60%) have expressed their interest in such an opportunity.

Last, but not least, hardly any second year student in this study reported that they do not know what or how to study. This might reflect the success of the Learner autonomy course at the university, where they are taught how they can become autonomous, and how to set and achieve their study related objectives. To justify this hypothesis, further investigation is needed.

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Appendix

Questionnaire

このアンケートは明星大学国際教育センターのバトコー・アグネシュ客員講師の研究に使われます。研究の目的は本学部の1年生が英語学習するモチベーションは何なのか、サークル活動が英語学習にどのような影響があるのかを知るためです。

This questionnaire was compiled by Agnes Patko, a guest lecturer at the International Studies Centre, Meisei University, to find out what motivates first year students of our department to study English and if the students' extra-curricular circle activities have influence on their English studies.

このアンケートは任意で、匿名です。成績には関係ありません。回答に正解・不正解はありません。好きな答えを書いてください。アンケートについて質問や問題がある場合はメールをしてください【メールアドレス: agnes.patko@meisei-u.ac.jp】。ご協力ありがとうございます。

Answering this questionnaire is voluntary and anonymous, and it does not affect your grades in any way. There is no right or wrong answer. I am interested in your opinion. If you have any questions or problems related to this questionnaire, please contact me by sending an e-mail to agnes.patko@meisei-u.ac.jp. Thank you very much for your help.

I. Studies

Which year are you in? 何年生ですか。* **What is your gender? 性別**

- ・ first year 1年生
- ・ second year 2年生
- ・ male 男性
- ・ female 女性

How much time do you usually spend studying after classes? 普段、授業以外は一日どれぐらい勉強しますか。*

- ・ less than an hour 1時間以下
- ・ between one and two hours 1時間以上2時間以下
- ・ more than two hours 2時間以上

How did you study English during the summer holiday? 夏休み中、どうやって英語を勉強しましたか。*

いくつか選んでください

- ・ learning new vocabulary 新しい単語を学ぶ
- ・ Listening to music 洋楽を聞く
- ・ watching TV or movie in English 英語でテレビや映画を見る
- ・ speaking to someone in English 英語で会話をする

- reading a book (NOT the textbook) 英語で小説などを読む
- reading the textbook 教科書を読む
- doing activities online インターネットで学習する
- practicing grammar 文法を勉強する
- writing a letter/ diary/ e-mail in English 手紙や日記やメールを書く
- Other:

What is your motivation to study English? 英語学習へのモチベーションは何ですか。*
いくつでも選んでください

- a. I need it to find a job 就職活動に必要
- b. I want to make foreign friends 外国人の友達を作りたい
- c. I want to travel 旅行のため
- d. I'm interested in foreign cultures and countries 異文化に関心がある
- e. I have foreign friends 外国人の友達がいる
- f. I want to become an English teacher 英語の先生になりたい
- g. I want to move abroad in the future 将来、外国に住みたい
- h. I want to take a test (e.g. TOEIC, TOEFL) 試験 (TOEIC, TOEFL など) を受けたい
- i. My parents want me to study English 両親の命令
- Other:

Do you think your classes, teachers and classmates have a great influence on you? 先生、授業、クラスメートはあなたに大きな影響を与えていると思いますか。*

- Yes
- No

What influence do teachers, classmates and classes have on you? 先生・クラス・授業はどんな影響ですか。*
いくつでも選んでください

- I have little free time because I have too many classes 授業が多いため自由時間が少ない
- I learn a lot from my teachers and classmates 先生やクラスメートからたくさん学べる
- I can get help from my classmates クラスメートが助けてくれる
- The classroom atmosphere is good so my motivation is high 授業の雰囲気がいいのでモチベーションが上がる
- The classroom atmosphere is not good so I lost motivation 授業の雰囲気が悪いのでやる気をなくした
- I enjoy studying 勉強するのが好きになった
- I made new friends 友達ができた
- I have to spend a lot of money on books and materials 教科書などにたくさんのお金を使う必要

- □ Other:

Do you think the amount of time you study English is enough to achieve your goal? 目標を達成するのに今英語学習に費やしている時間は十分だと思えますか。*

- ○ Yes,
- ○ No, I should study harder もっと頑張るべきだと思う

Why don't you study harder? なぜもっと積極的に勉強しないのですか。
いくつでも選んでください

- □ I don't like studying 勉強が好きじゃない
- □ I don't have enough time. 時間がない
- □ I'm not interested in English. 英語に興味がない
- □ There's no punishment if I don't study 勉強しなくても怒られない
- □ I'm too tired. 疲れているから
- □ I don't like the teacher. 先生が好きじゃない
- □ I don't know what / how to study. 勉強の方法がわからない
- □ Other:

II.Club/ circle activities 部活・サークル活動

Are you a member of any circles at the university or outside? 大学内もしくは学外でサークル活動および部活に所属していますか。*

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

What circle? どんなサークルですか。.....

•

Why did you join that circle? なぜそのサークルに入りましたか。

- □ a. my friends joined too 友達が入っていた
- □ b. I wanted to continue the activity I did in high school 高校生の時から続いていた
- □ c. I wanted to make friends 友達を作りたい
- □ d. I wanted to try something new 何か新しいことをしたかった
- □ Other:

How often do you have circle activity? サークル活動の頻度はどれぐらいですか。

•

Do you think the circle activity has a great influence on you? サークル活動はあなたに大きな影響を与えていると思えますか。

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

In what way? どのような影響ですか。

- □ a. I have little free time because of the circle 自由時間が減った
- □ b. I don't have enough time to study for my classes 授業のための勉強時間が

十分ではない

- c. It changed my life style (e.g. I do more exercises, I go to bed later than before, I go out more often) 私のライフスタイルを変えた。例、より運動するようになった、遅く寝るようになった、より外で遊ぶようになった
- d. I made more friends 友達が増えた
- Other:

Have you learnt anything new in / because of your circle? サークル活動で何か新しいことを学びましたか。

- Yes
- No

If yes, what? どんなことですか。

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What did you do during the summer holiday to improve in the activity you do in your circle? あなたが所属するサークルの活動を向上するために夏休み中にどんなことをしましたか。

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Do you think the amount of time you practice is enough to achieve your goal? サークル活動をよりよくするために十分な努力をしていると思いますか。

- Yes
- No

If not, why don't you practice harder? なぜ努力しないのですか。

いくつか選んでください

- I don't have time 時間が無い
- I'm not interested in it. 興味がない
- I don't know what / how to do it. どうすればいいかわからない
- There's no punishment if I don't improve やらなくても怒られない
- I'm too tired. 疲れている
- I don't have enough money 十分なお金がない
- Other:

Do you think you spend more time practicing your circle activity than studying? 勉強よりサークル活動に時間を費やしていると思いますか。

- Yes, I practice the circle activity more はい、サークル活動により積極的です
- No, I study more いいえ、勉強の方が大事です
- Same amount of time 両方とも同じぐらいです

If yes, why is that so? なぜですか。

いくつか選んでください

- The circle activity is more fun than studying. サークルのほうが楽しい
- It's more useful for my future. 将来も役に立つ
- I have more friends there than in class. サークルのほうが友達が多い

- Other:

Would you join a circle where you could improve your English? (eg. A circle where there are foreigners, or related to foreign countries or cultures) 英語が上達できるサークルがあったら入りますか。例、外国人が多い、外国や文化が学べる

- Yes
- No

Why? なぜですか。

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III.Part-time Job

Do you have a part-time job? アルバイトをしていますか。

- Yes
- No

How often and how long do you work a week? 週に何時間働きますか。

•

Why do you work part time? なぜアルバイトをしますか。

いくつかでも選んでください

- I need money. お金のため
- I want to do something in my free time. 暇なとき何かをしたいから
- My friends also work part time. 友達もアルバイトをするから
- My parents want me to. 家族の命令
- I can get work experience during my studies. 勉強しながら仕事の経験ができるから
- Other:

Does your part-time job have great influence on you? アルバイトはあなたに大きな影響を与えていると思いますか。

- Yes
- No

In what way? どんな影響ですか。

いくつかでも選んでください

- I have little free time because of my part-time job 自由時間が少ない
- I don't have enough time to study 勉強する時間がない
- It changed my life style (e.g. I go to bed later) 生活習慣が変わった【例、寝る時間が遅くなった】
- I made more friends 友達が増えた
- Other:

Have you learnt anything new in / because of your part-time job? アルバイトで何か新しいことを学びましたか。

- Yes

- No

If yes, what? どんなことを学びましたか。

•

What did you do during the summer holiday to improve in your part-time job? あなたが所属するアルバイトを向上するために夏休み中にどんなことをしましたか。

•

Do you think you spend more time on your part-time job than on studying? 勉強よりアルバイトにより時間を費やしていますか。

- Yes, I work more はい、アルバイトの方が多いです
- No, I study more than work いいえ、勉強の方が多いです
- Same amount of time 同じくらいです

Why is that so? なぜですか。

いくつでも選んでください

- The part-time job is more fun than studying アルバイトの方が勉強より楽しい
- I can't be absent from my part-time job アルバイト先が休ませてくれない
- It's more useful for my future アルバイトの方が将来役立つ
- I have more friends there than at university アルバイトの方が友達が多い
- I'm no longer interested in my major 今専攻している学課に興味がなくなった
- Other:

If you have a circle activity and a part-time job, which do you spend the most time on?

サークルとアルバイトを両方している人はどれに一番時間を費やしていますか。

- circle サークル
- part-time job アルバイト
- studying 勉強

If you have a circle activity and a part-time job, which do you spend the second most time on? サークルとアルバイトを両方している人は2番目に時間を費やしているのはどれですか。

- circle サークル
- part-time job アルバイト
- studying 勉強

Would you do a part-time job where you could improve your English? (eg. A part-time job where there are foreigners, or related to foreign countries or cultures) 英語が上達できるアルバイトがあったら入りますか。例、外国人の客が多い

- Yes
- No

Why? •

Thank you very much for your cooperation! ご協力ありがとうございました。