Creating a Safe and Stress-free Environment when Using Extracurricular Activities in Second Language Teaching

Ketevan Gochitashvili
Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University,
Georgia
Email: ketevan.gochitashvili@gmail.com

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Ketevan Gochitashvili

University Geomedi, Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Georgia

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ABSTRACT

Using different methods and strategies in the process of a second language learning is considered as the most effective way to achieve maximum results. There is a wide variety of information about extracurricular activities, ways and methods of their implementation in academic sources. They mainly discuss their types, implementation methods and impact on students' outcomes and success. The presented paper is focused on exploring, on the one hand, the students' attitudes towards extracurricular activities and the ways it is possible to create a safe environment in the process of their use while integrating them into the formal environment of second language learning. The theoretical framework of the research is based on the approaches and classifications presented in the academic sources. As part of the research, our oown approaches have also been developed. The research is based on classroom observation, questionnaire analysis and analysis of academic sources. The paper identifies and classifies the elements and characteristics that create a safe and stress-free learning environment for learners when using extracurricular activities. To achieve this goal, it was necessary to classify ECA activities to identify student preferences. The questionnaire is presented in the form of a Google form. Learners have learned a second language at different stages of their lives and in different institutions. Their current level of language proficiency is also different. To achieve the research goal, the paper will answer the following research questions: 1. What types (intensity, form, and content) of extracurricular activities do students find lessstressful? 2. What is the role of teachers in employing extracurricular activities to create a stress-free environment? 3. How can students contribute to creating a stress-free environment by using extracurricular activities? 4. When is participation in extracurricular activities less stressful? As a result of the conducted research, it was revealed that students feel safe and stress-free when:

- Participation in extracurricular activities is not compulsory, but they have a choice whether to participate in them or not.
- When the extracurricular activity is not reflected in the evaluation and both the teacher and the students understand that it is an aid in the way of language progress.

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- When they have clear instructions about the activity. • When the activity is not organized only for strong (or rarely weak)students.
- When the teacher considers the students' initiatives and adjusts them to her/his pedagogical goals.
- When the cultural and social experience of learners is taken into consideration when organizingactivities.
- The paper presents practical recommendations that will help teachers in planning and conducting activities.

Key-words: *Extracuricullar activities; The role of the teacher; Student's contribution; Safe environment.*

Introduction

Using different methods and strategies in the process of a second language learning is considered as the most effective way to achieve maximum results.

There is a wide variety of information about extracurricular activities, ways and methods of their implementation in academic sources. They mainly discuss their types, implementation methods and impact on students outcomes and success.

The presented paper is focused on studying, on the one hand, what are the students' attitudes towards extracurricular activities and in what ways it is possible to create a safe environment in the process of their use while integrating them into the formal environment of second language learning.

The theoretical framework of the research is based on the approaches and classifications presented in the academic sources. As part of the research, own approaches have also been developed.

The research is based on classroom observation, questionnaire analysis and analysis of academic sources. The paper identifies and classifies the elements and characteristics that create a safe and stress-free learning environment for learners when using extracurricular activities. To achieve this goal, it was necessary to classify ECA activities to identify student preferences. The questionnaire is presented in the form of a Google form. Learners have learned a second language at different stages of their lives and in different institutions. Their current level of language proficiency is also different.

To achieve the research goal, the paper will answer the following research questions:

1. What types (intensity, form, and content) of extracurricular activities do students find less stressful?

2. What is the role of teachers in using extracurricular activities to create a stress-free environment?

3. How can students contribute to creating a stress-free environment by using extracurricular

activities?

4. When is participation in extracurricular activities less stressful?

As a result of the conducted research, it was revealed that students feel safe and stress-free when:

1. Participation in extracurricular activities is not compulsory, but they have a choice whether to participate in it or not.

2. When the extracurricular activity is not reflected in the evaluation and both the teacher and the students understand that it is an aid in the way of language progress.

3. When they have clear instructions about the activity.

4. When the activity is not organized only for strong (or rarely weak) students.

5. When the teacher considers the students' initiatives and adjusts them to her/his pedagogical goals.

6. When the cultural and social experience of learners is taken into consideration when organizing activities.

The paper presents practical recommendations that will help teachers in planning and conducting activities.

In the process of learning a second language, it is generally accepted that a variety of methods and strategies is the most effective way to achieve maximum results.

The use of extracurricular activities in the educational process has a long history (originates in ancient Greece) and its use in the educational process is considered effective. For example, Marsh believes that their use has a significant positive impact on student achievement (Marsh, 1992, p. 553).

In general, in the scientific literature there is a wide variety of literature on extracurricular activities, ways of conducting them, and methods, which mainly discuss their types, ways of conducting them, and their impact on student results and success.

The presented paper is focused on studying, on the one hand, what are the students' attitudes towards extracurricular activities and in what ways it is possible to create a safe environment in the process of their use while integrating them into the formal environment of language learning.

Through classroom observations, questionnaires, and analysis of academic sources, the study identifies and classifies those elements and characteristics that create a safe and stress-free learning environment for students using extracurricular activities. To achieve this goal, it was necessary to classify EC activities to reveal student preferences. 141 Georgian speaking participantns participated in survey. Learners have learned a second language at different stages of life and in different institutions. Their current level of language proficiency is also different (from A1 to C2) .The theoretical framework of the research is based on the approaches and classifications from the literature and also offers individual approaches developed within the framework of the research.

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To achieve the set goal, the following research questions will be answered in the paper:

1. What types (intensity, form, and content) of extracurricular activities do students find less stressful?

2. What is the role of teachers in using extracurricular activities to create a stress-free environment?

3. How can students contribute to creating a stress-free environment by using extracurricular activities?

4. When is participation in extracurricular activities less stressful?

Literature review

The term Extracurricular Activities appeared at the end of the 19th century, but in fact their inclusion in the educational process began much earlier. In particular, in the ancient world, some of its forms, such as debates, drama, competitions, circles organized according to interests, were already used to support the traditional education system (McKown, 1952).

The definition of ECA in relation to second language learning belongs to Campbell. According to this definition, these are learner activities that usually take place outside the standard curriculum of educational institutions and are related to the creation of the target country's cultural and learning environment in the learner's country. (Campbell, 1973).

In the scientific literature, points of view about the positive role of extracurricular activities in the process of learning a second language are expressed.

According to Dornoy, extracurricular activities allow students to develop abilities that typically cannot be developed in traditional education settings (Donroe, 2020).

Language learners who participate in extracurricular activities benefit both academically and socially. According to research, their language skills improve as they use the language with students from different backgrounds. Also, socializing with peers allows them to adapt to the school environment and develop a positive attitude towards school (Brenda, 2022).

According to Anna Reva, involvement in extracurricular activities in the language learning process is important from a cross-cultural perspective, also from the point of view of comparing cultures. It provides a comprehensive picture of ECA and defines its role in language acquisition (Reva, 2012).

It should also be noted that approaches to ECAs are not homoginious. For example, in her 2003 dissertation, Elena Stakanova points out that these activities now "distract students from their learning responsibilities and are unnecessary (Stakanova, 2003).

In relation to the extracurricular issue, it is relevant to discuss the issue of Anxiety.

The issue of whether anxiety interferes with language learning has long been of interest to scientists, language teachers, and language learners themselves. It is intuitive that anxiety would interfere with the learning and/or use of a second language (L2). The concept of anxiety itself is multifaceted and psychologists have distinguished many types of anxiety, however in the context of a second language it is essential to consider the identified anxiety specific to this context, which some people experience when learning a language and/or using an L2, usually referred to as language anxiety or foreign language anxiety (FLA). , this anxiety is categorized as situation-specific anxiety, similar to other familiar manifestations of anxiety such as stage or test anxiety (Elaine & Horwitz, 2010, pp. 154-167).

English language learners often experience stress, nervousness and anxiety when learning to speak (Hashemi, 2011).

Some newcomer students feel intimidated when communicating with students who speak the dominant language. Building a community of practice to counter the marginalization of adolescent language learners (Martin-Beltrán et al., 2019).

According to the research of Ornelas, high school students felt apprehensive when participating in ECA, because they did not feel confident enough to communicate with their peers and the teacher. Students consider it preferable to participate in such events when they feel comfortable speaking in English, or when the person responsible for the course (teacher) speaks in their native language (Brenda, 2022).

According to the literature, it is possible to use A dual-task approach to reduce foreign language anxiety (FLA) in second language learning, which means reducing the negative effects of anxiety and using its positive effects (Tran & Moni, 2013)._

According to Meeta Nellaham, humor is one of the important factors in creating a stress-free and social environment in the classroom. The inclusion of humor in the teaching process makes the lesson comfortable and manageable. Humor should be related to the material you covered in class (Nihalani, 2012).

In his study, Jung notes that Hadley, Terrell, and Rardin believe that students must experience some amount of stress in order to be motivated to learn. According to them, if students' anxiety levels are so low that you don't challenge them, there will be little or no language progress (Young, 1992).

When organizing extracurricular activities and determining their functions, you should focus on several factors in order to accurately determine the purpose of including them in the educational process when planning them. one of them Informative gef. As we know, any form of learning is based on a fundamental element: the gap between what the student already knows and what he is learning

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(that is, what he does not know). This area is called the 'information gap' (Garside, 2021).

In the same context, it is important to discuss the concepts of Lev Vygotsky and Krashen.

The zone of proximal development (ZPD) is a core construct of Lev Vygotsky's theory of learning and development. The zone of proximal development (ZPD) is defined as the space between what a student can do without help and what he can do with adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (Vygotsky, 1978).

According to Krashen's theory, learners acquire language when they learn something about that language that contains structures slightly above their current level of language proficiency ((i + 1). This happens through extralinguistic information (Krashen, 2011).

Another opinion of Krashen is directly related to the question of our research, according to which the teacher should focus on a communication code that is understandable to the learner. During the silent period, under pressure from the teacher, when students are asked to use the language, they use the structures of their native languages and translate them into the second language. In this case, communication may take place, but there is no progress in the second language (Krashen, 1985).

The connection between ZPD and second language acquisition can be found in other researchers's works as well. One of them is discussed here: learning is a social process, so collaboration is an important element of productive work in ZPD. The author draws on Vygotsky's theory that we learn through dialogic interaction with other people. During this process, students need appropriate guidance, modeling and support, which is made possible through collaboration and interaction with teachers and peers. At this time, teacher support (Scaffolding1) becomes the leading element (Billings & Walqui, 2021)

Oates and Hawley, in their 1983 paper, suggest inviting a local native speaker to lead extracurricular activities. According to them, the inclusion of native speakers is especially important when preparing and organizing meetings, video interviews, role-playing games, interviews, evenings, skits, newspapers, individual presentations and weekends in a second language (Oates & Hawley, 1983).

Having defined the role of ECA activities and its function in educational activities, we need to focus on its types. In the scientific literature, several groups of extracurricular activities can be disnguished.

Andreeva in 1958 divided the ECA into the following groups:

1. 1. Academic and general interest circles (clubs), which were an important part of the Soviet education system in general

2. 2. Mass events (poetry and song performance competition in a foreign language, themed evenings and events; performances in a foreign language; holding conferences in a foreign language and debates and meetings in a foreign language.

3. 3. Individual extracurricular activities included: preparing a conference presentation, preparing a report, etc. in foreign language.

4. Another type of ECAs is correspondence with students from other countries, which could be both individual (the student had a pen-friend) and mass - students keep correspondence between their circle and a group of students in another country with similar interests.

5. Language clubs - were a combination of the extracurricular activities listed above (Reva, 2012). In his work, Dyachenko divides ECA activities into the following 4 types:

1) Competitions

2) mass media (school radio and newspaper...)

3) cultural (celebration of holidays and other events, trips to museums and exhibition halls...)

4) political (debates, focus groups, discussions).

The same author distinguishes between individual ECA events, group (small number of participants) and mass (large groups) (Dyachenko, 1989).

In her research, Anna Reva mentions the following types of activities: games/competition, theme parties, holiday celebrations, and a modern variant of pen friende - online friends from other countries, working on projects, Skype and video conferences. The researcher points out that there are contextual differences in terms of their realization (Reva, 2012).

When creating activities, it is important to consider that these activities are

(a) Meaningful: They allow students to speak English (second language) based on the needs of the activity.

(b) Realistic: must match the student's acquired experience and knowledge in order to understand what is being asked of them. They must be

(c) Purposeful: Students should be given a purpose so that they understand why they are doing the activity and understand that it is relevant to their needs (Ahsani, 2007).

Results and Interpretation

At the first stage, based on our own teaching experience and taking into account the views in the literature, we developed our classification, which is divided into 4 groups and corresponding subgroups:

a) Periodicity of activities

1. Permanent activities that are carried out once or twice a week throughout the academic year.

2. Episodic activities (once or twice a semester).

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b) Activities according to the form:

1. Individual non-classroom activities (permanent or episodic, the teacher makes the decision taking into account the educational needs and interests of the students): reciting a poem; song Creating a story, etc. Sh. in the target language.

2. Group non-classroom activities: they are permanent in nature and mainly take the form of clubs: literature club, translation club, film club, music lovers' club, membership of the editorial board of a newspaper or magazine or journalism, participation in the preparation of a website, etc.

3. Mass extracurricular activities are episodic. In them, we combined the following types of activities: Olympiads, festive events, competitions and tours, in which not only narrow groups, but also representatives of a wider audience participate (it can be planned within the framework of the entire institution or in collaboration with other institutions).c) Extracurricular activities by content:

1. Sports

2. Circles based on common interests (language club/book club, translation club...)

3. Mass media (magazine/newspaper/social media activities...)

4. Creative (celebrations/theatre)

5. Cultural (excursions/restaurant visit/cooking class)

6. Socio-political (debates, discussions).

d) activities according to organization

1. Individually organized/self-organized by the student - Pen friend, online games with more than one player, group chats with peers...

2. Organized by the teacher

Such a classification will help teachers to structure activities according to their pedagogical goals and objectives in the process of organizing and planning activities.

As for the information obtained as a result of the GOOGL Format survey, it is of the following type:

141 Georgian-speaking respondents of both genders, whose minimum age was 18, took part in the survey. 64.3% of them were female and 35.7% - male. Language proficiency level from A1 to C2. In the case of having more than one language, they would on the language they considered to be the priority when filling out the questionnaire. The following picture emerged:

72.1% of respondents belong to the age group of 18-25 years; 2.1% - 26 -35.5% - 36- 45 years group.   46-55 age group represents 17.1 %, 56-65 – 3.6%, and 66 and above – 3.6 %.

24.8% studied the language for less than 5 years; From 5 to 10 years – 45.5%. From 11 to 15 years – 18.4%, more than 15 years – 11.3%.

At this stage, the level of proficiency in the second language of respondents is represented by the following percentages: A1 -2.9%; A2 – 5.8%; B1 14.5%; B2- 50 %; C1- 22.5%; C2 -4.3%.

The majority of respondents studied the language in various institutions, namely a) only at school(10.6%) , b) at school and in language courses/with a tutor (39%), c) only in language course/with tutor (7.1%). d) at school and university (9.2 %); e) at school, language courses/

with the tutor and at the university (33.3%). F) Only at the university – 0.7%

The study revealed that 39.1 percent of students rate participation in ECAs with the minimum stress assessment score, and only 2.9 percent rate participation in these activities as stressful with the highest score. However, it is important to emphasize that 31.2 percent of the respondents rate the participation in the ECA with 3 points out of the maximum 5 points, which can also be considered a rather high stress factor.

87.7% of survey participants believe that extracurricular activities helped them to overcome the anxiety associated with learning a second language. According to them (46.1%), participation in ECA was interesting for all ages.

According to the same study, students find it less stressful to participate in group and mass EC activities than in individual ones.

Most of the respondents (65.2 %) prefer activities that are regularly held during the academic year (once or twice a week) and preferebly organized by the teacher (54.5%). This can be explained by the fact that in Soviet and post-Soviet Georgia, the teacher is the planner of the lesson process and her/his role is quite dominant. Perhaps, in this case, this factor is the determinant of the received answer.

As for events organized by content, the majority of respondents consider participation in clubs (language/book clubs) – 38.7%, creative (celebrations/theater) – 35.5%   and cultural (excursions/visiting a restaurant/cooking classes)- 48.3%, sport – 44.1% events less stressful.

An important factor in interpreting these data is that the considerable number of respondents belong to the age group who were educated in Soviet schools, or are students of teachers from this age groups.   EC activities were often used in the Soviet educational environment and are part of the educational experience that teachers use in their teaching repertoire. At the same time, it should be noted that it was during the period of training of representatives of 46-55 years old that a kind of "thaw" period began, when textbooks of Western standards, which also used these types of activities, became relatively more widespread in the teaching of foreign languages, and, naturally, , this also played a role.

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Respondents consider it relatively stressful to engage in mass media (magazines/newspapers/social networks) and socio-political (debates, discussions) activities.

As for debates and discussions, the cause of stress may be anxiety associated with speaking in a foreign language.

Considering other data of the research, it is less stressful for the respondents when the teacher takes into account the students' initiatives and organizes their own pedagogical tasks, they have more opportunities to share, are involved in the planning process. If the teacher takes these factors into account, offers interesting and relevant content and activity form to their interests, stress levels will most likely be reduced.

Additionally, students have been found to experience less stress when:

• Participation was not compulsory and students made their own decisions whether to participate in them or not. (62.5%),

• When the activity score did not affect the final grade (54.1%)

• When students participated in planning of activities (44.2%)

• When learners knew exactly what to do (66.7%)

• When all students could participate (55.6%)

• When their language proficiency was taken into account (58.3%)

• When we had enough time to prepare the activity (63%)

• When the activity did not contradict their cultural experience and social norms (64.9%)

• When humor was involved (74.2%)

• When both the instructor and fellow students were "tolerant" of mistakes (67.3%)

• When they were satisfied with their performance (70.8%)

• All participants knew the language at the same level (62%).

Conclusions and Recommendations

As the survey shows, respondents indicate that of activities have a great potential in terms of overcoming anxiety when learning a second language and their use will have a positive impact on students. As a result of the survey, we can assume that the inclusion of these types of activities will play an important role thanks to the emotional comfort of students and the positive results obtained from it.

Based on the respondents' answers it turned out that students find it less stressful to work in clubs and thematic groups organized by the teacher, events and cultural activities of a mass nature.

For students, participation in these activities should fulfill the function of filling the information

board. It should be based on the Krashen + 1 principle, it should contain a certain challenge that will help to learn new information.

As for the role of the teacher, she/ he should create a free, empathic environment, adjust her/his pedagogical tasks to the interests and needs of students. At the same time, during such activities, it is important not to evaluate by marks, but to concentrate on its benefits.

The role of learners is also important. They should share their experiences with each other, be empathetic and tolerant towards others and be involved in the process of creating and planning activities, not shying away from expressing their wishes and preferences.

When both teachers and students understand the role of these activities, when the material is challenging but doable, the goals of the activities are realistic, and the student understands their benefits, participation becomes less stressful.

The recommendations below are based, on the one hand, on the results of interviews with language learners, and on the other hand, on our many years of teaching experience. To create a safe and stress-free environment, it is effective to use the following approaches to integrating extracurricular activities into the formal language learning environment:

1. When organizing an activity, determine the roles of the participants in advance and take into account the wishes and interests of the students as much as possible. Give precise and clear instructions about the activity.

2. Do not include extracurricular activities in the assessment, but make it clear to both you and the students that they contribute to language progress.

3. The activity should not be organized only for strong (or weak) students, but all students should participate in it.

4. Create an environment in which students feel free.

5. In addition to interests and desires, the teacher should take into account the abilities of the participants, in particular, the level of knowledge of the target language.

6. Activity tasks should be formulated in such a way that they are challenging but, at the same time, non-stressful, so that students are more likely to be able to cope with the task and feel satisfied after completing the task.

7. The following is related to the previous recommendation - the material studied in the class should be used in extracurricular activities as well, the activity should be based on the studied material, providing the possibility of using it in different, non-standard, communication situations close to natural.

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8. The task should be fun, non-routine. Chances are that if an activity is done well by the students, the teacher will be tempted to repeat it. It should be noted that any frequently repeated activity becomes boring.

9. In addition to taking into account the level of language proficiency, it is important to take into account the background culture of the learners. The teacher should take into account that some types of activities may conflict with the norms and experiences of the learner's native culture. However, of course, this should not limit the teacher to suggest the norms and rules of the target culture, it is just that in this case it is important to carry out the previous work of the correctly selected activity.

10. In addition to the teacher, it is possible for the learners to participate in the preparation and organization of the activity, including, for example, senior students who study in language teaching programs.

11. Humor is an important factor in creating a stress-free classroom environment. However, it should be noted that students do not perceive humor as irony, sarcasm or mockery. One of the ways to avoid this is for the teacher to involve herself/ himself in extracurricular humorous activities. For example, ask students to make you a character in some humorous text and change the text to match the teacher (change age, appearance, gender, etc.). In addition, it is effective to arrange quizzes and answer mistakes with humor.

12. Informative Gap - In order not to cause disappointment to the learners, consider the informative gap and plan the activity in such a way that the students can discover and acquire new knowledge within the activity, but plan the activity in such a way that it is realistic for the students to overcome it, so that they do not lose motivation. (use + 1 approach).

13. When planning activities, it is important to take into account the age characteristics and interests of students.

14. The difficulty of an activity does not determine its quality. On the contrary, the simpler and relatively easy to achieve the result, the more motivation of learners increases.

15. Consider the resources you will need ECA. Use existing resources, and in some cases you may even create your own ones together with students (make costumes, buy ingredients together for a cooking class, create themed quiz question banks, etc.). Make the process of creating resources an educational activity.

16. Even if the extracurricular activity is not graded, make feedback and verbal evaluation and discussion a necessary part of the activity. It is also effective to involve fellow students in the evaluation process.

17. Consider the time. The time for extracurricular activities should be limited, learners should know the exact schedule and also that they will have to work within a limited time. However, the allotted time should be determined in such a way that it does not become a source of stress for them. In this case, we will have to take into account many factors - the number of participants, age, level of language knowledge, information gap, whether the activity is physical, cognitive or a combination of both, etc.

18. For the organization of some activities (for example, excursion, field work, cooking class) it may be necessary to provide material support from the educational institution. So, before planning the activity, take care of the financial side.

19. Pay less attention to mistakes that students may make;

20. Ask the audience what activity and format they prefer.

21. Do not make participation in extracurricular activities compulsory, but choose them in such a way that the students want to participate in them.

22. Create an empathetic and tolerant environment.

23. It is important that ECA do not reduce students' attention to Curricular activities (E. Stakanova sees this danger in her research). ((Стаканова Е. В. (2003. 107)). Thus, a good balance between curricular and extra curricular activities is an important factor in organizing the learning process. For example, it is possible to conduct EC activities after the completion of the topic/unit. In any case, the learner should be sure, that the process of acquiring academic knowledge is not damaged by these activities, but it is strengthened.

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