



The Role of Extracurricular Programs in Enhancing Student Experience: A Case Study at FPT University, Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

Enhancing the student experience is a familiar but never old topic. In the research, the author mentions this topic through extracurricular programs and case studies at FPT University, Vietnam. The 45 random students participated in the study by answering the survey and having in-depth discussions with the author. Combined with other research, comparison, and contrast of related contents, the article has analysed the importance of extracurricular programs in strengthening the student experience. At FPT University, there are many extracurricular programs taking place every year. However, within the framework of this research paper, the author focuses on analysing the top six programs that students often attend, including Company Tour, Field Trip Overseas, 48-Hour Movement Program, 7-Day Experience Program, Volunteer Programs, and Kick-Off Meeting. In addition, limitations were also raised, and suggestions for improvement were made, aiming to attract more and more voluntary participation from learners. From there, the education and training work of the universities can properly and fully promote their role in society.

Keywords: Extracurricular programs; Student experience; Study tour

1. Introduction

Since the emergence of universities worldwide, extracurricular programs have become an indispensable part of student life (Lawhorn, 2008). At FPT University, many programs have been and will continue to be organized to enhance the student experience. Since then, many skills and knowledge are equipped for them, contributing to creating fully developed individuals and people of high human resources for the challenging labour market ahead. FPT University students can participate in many extracurricular activities inside and outside the school, which is impossible, not to mention the extracurricular trips. These include Company Tour, Field Trip Overseas, 48-Hour Movement Program, 7-Day Experience Program, Volunteer Programs, Kick-Off Meeting, etc. Besides the purposes mentioned above for these programs, the trips are memorable memories, making up an indispensable part of the student experience in general and valuable for FPT University students in particular. That is why programs are often held by year, semester, or month.

2. Literature Reviews

The importance of the student experience in training and coaching cannot be denied or underestimated. It can be said that it is an indispensable part and should be focused on if a university wants its students to develop fully in an accurate way. Furthermore, this seems to have existed for a long time, for example, mentioned in the study of Haselgrove (1994). Then one of the favourites and necessary ways to cultivate and enhance the experiences for students is to help them have the conditions to develop themselves through extracurricular activities Buckley & Lee (2021). They also argue that extracurricular activities, including clubs, fraternities, and associations, have been a part of higher-level institutions since the beginning. As an inevitable result, according to King et al. (2021), the above activities also have great significance when opening up opportunities for making friends, thereby strengthening social relationships for participants. It is clear that this consequence contributes significantly to the future success of learners, even during their student life. However, Winstone and colleagues, in their 2022 study, also showed that too much participation in extracurricular activities and lack of consideration also bring students specific difficulties, which can be mentioned as follows: come as losing time, distorting the orientation of learning and training from the beginning, quickly falling into games instead of developing experiences, etc. From that, we can see that the above activities also face many challenges. On the same topic, Abueg (2021) also discussed the possible drawbacks of incorporating extracurricular activities into the education and training process. These activities are essential in Vietnam, especially in foreign language teaching (Nguyen, 2019).

3. Methodology

In this study, the author used qualitative and quantitative analysis methods to clarify the role of extracurricular activities in cultivating the experience of FPT University students. Specifically, the author has researched and synthesized information from studies and books with topics related to the content being studied. Parallel to that is a random survey of 45 FPT university students who have participated at least once in five programs being used for research, including Company Tour, Field Trip Overseas, 48-Hour Movement Program, 7-Day Experience Program, Volunteer Programs, and Kick-Off Meeting. This stage is done within two months through some channels such as Messenger, Zalo, and Gmail. Next, the author analyses the obtained results

and compares and contrasts the results of other related studies. The ultimate aim is to suggest suitable solutions to help attract more students to participate in the above programs. From there, many necessary skills will be equipped for students, contributing to the training and coaching of university students in general and FPT students in particular.

4. Research Results and Discussion

The author surveyed and collected the answers of 45 random students who had participated in at least one extracurricular activity in the six listed activities, including Company Tour, Field Trip Overseas, 48 -Hour Movement Program, 7-Day Experience Program, Volunteer Programs, and Kick-Off Meeting. The results for the number of participations are shown in Figure 1 below.

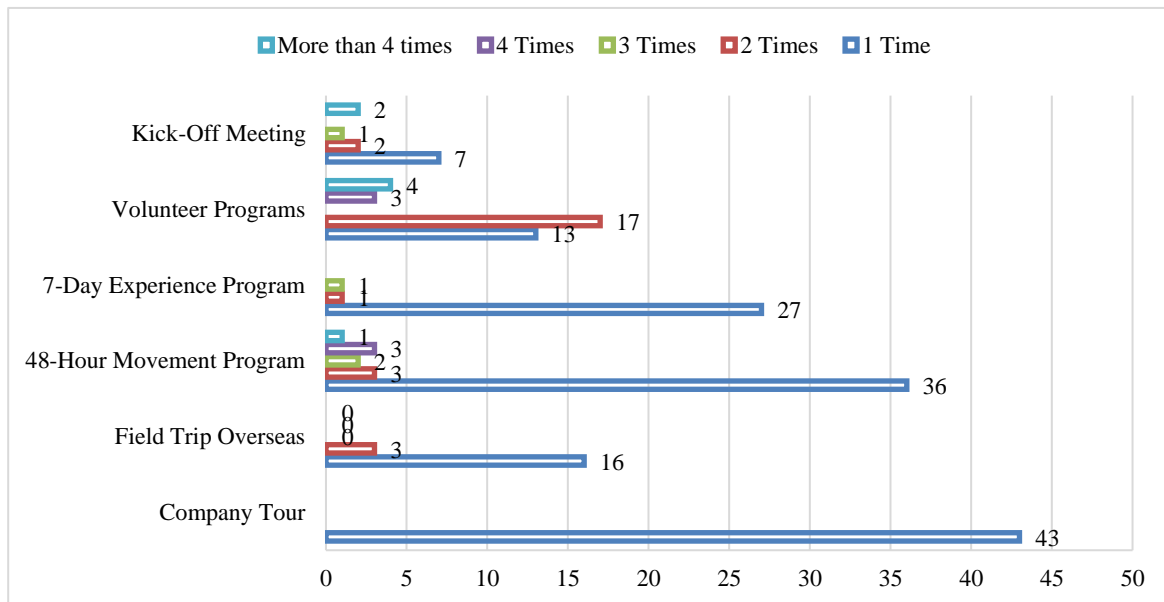


Figure 1. Number of times participating in extracurricular programs of FPT University students

Preliminary results show that, in general, the students participating in the survey have actively participated in the school's extracurricular activities. Specifically, when they are in the mood to participate, they are willing and active to be present in not one, two but possibly four programs. The figure above shows this through programs like Volunteer Programs, 48 -Hour Movement Program, and Kick-Off Meeting.

Going into more detail, Company Tour is a program that only students participate in once, but the proportion is exceptionally high, with 43 students participating, accounting for 95.56%. This number can be explained because most university students have to participate in an internship program at an enterprise, and of course, visiting and studying at such a company helps many students. They will have a more realistic and intuitive view of the real working environment. In addition, it helps increase the passion and enthusiasm they will commit to in the future. However, for this program, no student participates more than once because, at FPT University, students only have one compulsory internship trip in the 6th semester out of a total of 9 semesters.

In second place is the 48-Hour Movement Program, with 36 choices, equivalent to 80%. In addition, there are still nine more students who have participated in this program more than once. This number, to some extent, reflects the program's great attraction to many students. The program's purpose is to bring new experiences and bring students to explore wild and exciting lands. Moreover, the trip will help students develop skills in study and life, improve creative thinking, and create a playground for students to participate, exchange, learn and have fun together. The Personal Development Department (PDP), FPT University, developed the program. Because the program takes place three times a year, students are free to register or apply to participate according to their wishes. In this study, when exchanging details with students who have attended the program more than once, the author received a lot of sincere and meaningful shares. The benefits can be mentioned that the program has helped them have new, meaningful, and memorable experiences. Besides, programs bring students the most memorable in student life; "48h" helped them to be themselves, "48h" helped them make many new friends in school, learn good things from each other, etc. Thus, the research has given us insights into the role and attraction of the program to a large number of FPT students.

The priority of students for the 7-Day Experience Program is the third rank, with 27/45 students choosing, accounting for 60%. The 7-Day Experience Program can be considered a "specialty" of FPT University. Through the program, students have valuable experiences when transforming into farmers, workers, or any other job position that is often very foreign to them. From there, students learn many exciting things about life and new professions that the trip brings. Thus, right after graduation, students are not only equipped with specialized knowledge but also firm with many valuable experiences during their student life. These experiences contribute to student life with many meaningful experiences. Thus, it is clear that with these purposes, FPT students actively participate in the program not only once but also more. In this study, also two students participated two or three times. Thus, the question is why such a meaningful program but not many students actively participate as often as the 48-Hour Movement Program above.

The answer to the above question can be answered based on the hesitation of the program participants themselves. According to the direction from the school, this experiential program helps students leave their regular residence and comfort zone to experience a more deprived, arduous, and challenging life. In addition, students also experience farm work or other manual jobs that students have never done daily. This causes them difficulties, fatigue, and discouragement; since then, they are no longer interested in participating in the program. Many FPT University students are still living with their families, receiving complete care from their parents, but coming to the program, they have to leave that comfort and happiness temporarily. This reason must also be a big one why the decision to participate in the 7-Day Experience program was postponed or cancelled.

Next, we find that the three programs, Field Trip Overseas, Volunteer Programs, and Kick-Off Meeting, all have relatively little student participation, less than 50%. Reasons for this can include several reasons such as cost, passion, student position, etc. For Field Trip Overseas programs, students have to pay as little as \$200 for the program to Cambodia, \$500 for the program to go to Japan, and even \$2,000 for the program to the USA. Thus, this is not a reasonable fee for most Vietnamese students. On the other hand, when leaving Vietnam, coming to a faraway country, despite the university's administrative supervision, it is impossible to erase the worries of the family, even the students themselves, even though they want to join the program. The potential hazards are a big challenge for students. Meanwhile, the student experience targeted by FPT University is also associated with a very high degree of internationalization. Therefore, those experiences are not only confined to the country but also the world.

The survey results show that only 12/45 students participated in one or more Kick-Off Meetings. It is explained that although these trips also significantly enhance the university students' experiences, especially in leadership, not many students are involved. The reason is that they are only for the executive committees of groups and clubs in the school. Among them, excellent students are also participating in many different positions; therefore, they have participated in the program many times and even participated more than four times (2/45 students). Thus, regardless of the number or number of students participating in these programs needs to be further organized and improved because it is undeniably essential and urgent to equip leadership for young leaders right from university students (Rubens et al., 2018).

Finally, we discuss Volunteer Programs and their current issues. They are not usually for most young people, who have not had much experience, and have little empathy and forgiveness. However, in this study, up to 33/45 students surveyed had participated in one or more such volunteer programs. Discussing with students in detail, the author received some surprising answers, and the following Figure 2 shows the great benefits of participating in the program that most students have chosen.

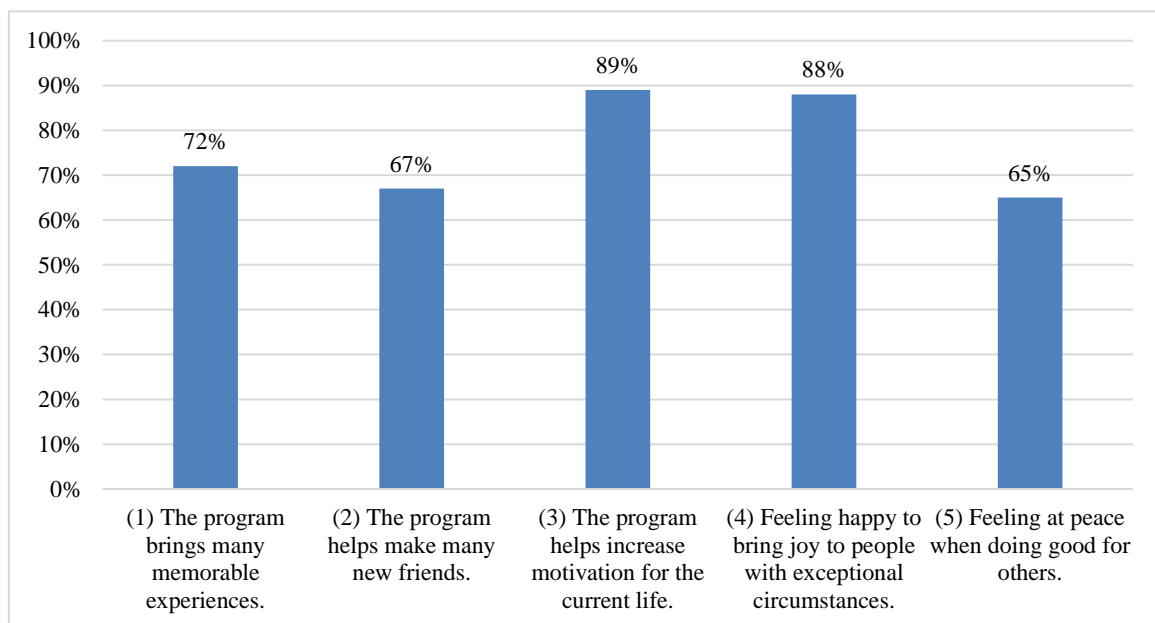


Figure 2. The percentage of students choosing the benefits of participating in Volunteer Programs.

The figure above shows that the highest percentages are (3) The program helps increase motivation for the current life - 89% and (4) Feeling happy to bring joy to people with exceptional circumstances - 88%. According to Duffy et al. (2019), today, young people face many mental health problems, and one of the biggest problems is dissatisfaction with their current life. Young people live in boredom and lack motivation; Since then, they have lived loosely and lacked self-control. Then, community-oriented extracurricular activities have more or less helped them change their perspective on life and motivate themselves to study and work. That is why student life becomes fuller and more meaningful. Besides, as mentioned above, many young people are still very altruistic. Therefore, when participating in charity programs, they not only bring joy to those who are helped, but that joy also comes to themselves. "Peace" also follows, although this must be a concept, a life orientation unfamiliar to young people. Because of that, only 65% of respondents agree with this benefit - (5) Feeling at peace when doing good for others.

The top two chosen by many students when participating in the program are (1) The program brings many memorable experiences - 72% and (2) The program helps make many new friends - 67%. Students have various opportunities to make friends and expand relationships, which is an opportunity for them to strengthen that. This is not only good for current student life but also their future career ahead. Furthermore, unique and unforgettable memories will appear in participating in these activities, making the student experience more affluent and authentic.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

Thus, extracurricular activities play a significant role in developing students' spiritual life, thereby diversifying student life experiences. However, the problem now is that the school and related departments need to make a large number of students understand the importance of it so that they can overcome the challenges of participating in the program. In this study, the author proposes some solutions as follows.

First, universities need to strengthen propaganda and introduce it so that students can get information and understand the benefits of the programs. As usual, this work belongs to only one specific school department. Should we adjust this task to a part that each school teacher has to be in charge of? Because they are the closest to the students and deeply understand the students they are teaching. In many cases, the simple sharing and encouragement of the lecturer have a much greater meaning than ordinary communication messages.

Next, the school must cooperate with the family in orientation and encourage students to participate because most of the extracurricular activities mentioned above involve moving out of school, even staying overnight and staying away for a certain period. Thus, the family's support and belief in the school significantly promote and facilitate students. That facilitation includes expenses that students need for the trip. In particular, various fees are needed for the way the program goes abroad.

The following proposal is for the school's administrative team, the department in charge of learning content. Should this assessment of student participation in extracurricular activities also be included as a part of university graduation requirements? The answer, of course, depends on the different contexts of the schools. However, this is also an equally effective solution, especially for students who are passive, lazy to participate in activities, and always need a little motivation or some compulsion to get out of their comfort zone. Of course, which programs are required, the evaluation criteria, and the number of programs to participate in depending on the deep discussion and discussion of the universities.

In each activity students participate in; the organizers also need to include an essential part. That part is getting participants ready to return the next time, which requires innovation across each program, even if it is the same genre. Moreover, it is necessary to make participants willing to introduce the program to other students, thereby contributing to spreading its attractiveness and usefulness. In particular, the program to receive applications by the group is also an effective solution in this case.

Last but not least, for some programs where students need to pay many expenses, the school's support for these amounts will greatly motivate students. Of course, these supports may only be available to deserving students, such as students with high GPAs, students from disadvantaged backgrounds, outstanding movement students, etc. At the macro and longer-term scale, schools also need to develop specific policies and announce them to all learners.

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