

การรับรู้ถึงผลกระทบของกิจกรรมนอกหลักสูตรต่อความพร้อมของแฟ้มสะสมผลงาน
และการพัฒนาทักษะทางสังคมในหมู่นักเรียนมัธยมศึกษาตอนปลาย
(ชั้นมัธยมศึกษาปีที่ 4–6) ในเขตกรุงเทพมหานคร

Perceptions of the Impact of Extracurricular Activities on Portfolio Readiness and
Social Skill Development among Senior High School Students
(Senior High School 10–12) in Bangkok

ณิชนันท์ หานกุล¹ และ มีนา กรสุธาธิพิญกุล²

Nitchamon Hankla¹ and Mena Kornsutathitipkul²

โรงเรียนนิวตัน ซิกซ์ ฟอรั่ม¹

โรงเรียนสารสาสน์เอกตรา²

The Newton Sixth Form¹

Sarasas Ektra School²

Corresponding Author E-mail: nenehankla@gmail.com

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บทคัดย่อ

ในระบบการคัดเลือกเข้าศึกษาต่อในระดับอุดมศึกษาของประเทศไทย โดยเฉพาะใน TCAS รอบที่ 1 (รอบแฟ้มสะสมผลงาน) กิจกรรมนอกหลักสูตร (ECAs) ได้กลายเป็นองค์ประกอบที่สำคัญในการแสดงศักยภาพของนักเรียนที่ไม่ใช่แค่ผลการเรียน และมีบทบาทอย่างยิ่งในการเสริมสร้างความพร้อมสำหรับการสมัครเข้าเรียนในมหาวิทยาลัย อย่างไรก็ตาม การวิจัยเกี่ยวกับมุมมองของนักเรียนที่เข้าร่วมกิจกรรมเหล่านี้ยังมีค่อนข้างน้อย การศึกษาครั้งนี้จึงมีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อสำรวจความมุ่งหมาย ประเภทกิจกรรม ประโยชน์ที่นักเรียนรับรู้ และอุปสรรคต่าง ๆ ที่เกี่ยวข้องกับการเข้าร่วม ECAs โดยทำการสำรวจนักเรียนมัธยมศึกษาตอนปลายที่เขตกรุงเทพมหานครจำนวน 249 คน ซึ่งทั้งหมดเคยมีประสบการณ์ในการเข้าร่วมกิจกรรมดังกล่าว ผลการศึกษาพบว่า นักเรียนส่วนใหญ่เข้าร่วมกิจกรรมเพื่อต้องการเสริมแฟ้มสะสมผลงาน (45.38%) และตามความสนใจส่วนตัว (44.17%) โดยกิจกรรมที่พบบ่อย ได้แก่ ชุมชมวิชาการ ศิลปะ และจิตอาสา โดยประโยชน์ที่นักเรียนรับรู้จากการเข้าร่วมกิจกรรมเหล่านี้ส่วนใหญ่ ได้แก่ การนำไปใช้ประกอบแฟ้มสะสมผลงาน (30.96%) การค้นหาตนเองและอาชีพ (25.66%) และการพัฒนาความมั่นใจและทักษะการทำงานเป็นทีม ขณะที่อุปสรรคหลักที่พบ คือ ภาระการเรียนที่หนัก (41.77%) การขาดแรงจูงใจ และการเข้าถึงกิจกรรมที่จำกัด โดยนักเรียนมากกว่า 70% ระบุว่า หากได้รับเวลาหรือการสนับสนุนเพิ่มเติมก็ยินดีที่จะเข้าร่วมกิจกรรมมากขึ้น ผลการศึกษานี้ชี้ให้เห็นว่า ECAs มีบทบาทสำคัญในการพัฒนาทักษะและการเตรียมความพร้อมสำหรับการศึกษาต่อในระดับอุดมศึกษา แต่ก็มีอุปสรรคบางประการที่ควรได้รับ

การแก้ไข เช่น ความเหลื่อมล้ำด้านการเข้าถึงและข้อจำกัดเรื่องเวลา ซึ่งหากได้รับการพัฒนาอย่างเป็นระบบ จะช่วยให้ ECAs สามารถเสริมสร้างศักยภาพของนักเรียนได้อย่างทั่วถึงและยั่งยืนมากยิ่งขึ้น

คำสำคัญ: กิจกรรมนอกหลักสูตร; แฟ้มสะสมผลงาน; นักเรียนมัธยมไทย; การเข้ามหาวิทยาลัย; การพัฒนา soft skills

Abstract

In Thailand's evolving university admissions system, and particularly in TCAS Round 1 (Portfolio), extracurricular activities (ECAs) have become an increasingly important means of demonstrating students' abilities beyond academic achievement. Despite their growing significance, little research has examined how students perceive the role of ECAs in preparing for university admission and in fostering personal development. A cross-sectional survey of 249 high school students in Bangkok, all of whom had participated in ECAs, was conducted to explore the motivations, types, perceived benefits, and barriers associated with ECA involvement. The results revealed that students were motivated to join ECAs primarily in order to enhance their portfolios (45.38%) and out of personal interest (44.17%). The most common types of ECA were academic clubs, arts, and volunteering. The main perceived benefits of participation included the documentation of skills for portfolios (30.96%), career exploration (25.66%), and improvements in confidence and teamwork. Students nevertheless reported several barriers, notably academic workload (41.77%), low motivation, and limited access to ECA opportunities. Despite these challenges, more than 70% of the students indicated that they would be willing to take part in additional ECAs if they had more time or support. These findings underline the significant role of ECAs in supporting Thai students' academic and personal growth, especially in preparation for competitive university admission. The study suggests that expanding ECA opportunities and integrating them more formally into school systems could help to address the barriers identified and foster more inclusive student development.

Keywords: Extracurricular Activities; Portfolio Readiness; Thai High School Students; University Admission; Soft Skills Development

Introduction

In recent years, Thailand's university admissions system has undergone substantial transformation with the adoption of the Thai University Central Admission System (TCAS). Among its five rounds, TCAS Round 1—commonly known as the “Portfolio Round”—has become a critical pathway

for students seeking entry into competitive programs such as medicine, dentistry, engineering, and business. Unlike traditional admissions that rely heavily on grades and standardized test scores, this round emphasizes holistic competencies and non-academic achievements. As a result, the portfolio has emerged as a key document showcasing students' academic records alongside extracurricular activities (ECAs), leadership experiences, volunteer work, and creative outputs (MUIC, 2021).

Globally, research demonstrates that extracurricular activities contribute significantly to the development of essential soft skills, including teamwork, communication, leadership, and self-confidence (Lunenburg, 2010; Kumari, 2024). For Thai students, ECAs have become more than optional experiences—they are now strategic tools that strengthen portfolio quality and improve admission prospects. For example, academic clubs cultivate critical thinking, the arts encourage creativity and confidence, and volunteering builds empathy and civic responsibility. These outcomes reflect not only individual gains but also broader educational expectations of producing well-rounded graduates.

The importance of ECAs can also be understood through theoretical perspectives on social and developmental learning. Vygotsky's Social Development Theory highlights how learning occurs through interaction within the *Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)*, where guidance and collaboration with peers or mentors enable students to achieve beyond their individual capacity (TeachKloud, 2021; Vygotsky, 1978). Participation in ECAs creates precisely these contexts—group projects, performances, and volunteer initiatives—where social interaction drives skill acquisition. Similarly, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory situates student development within layered environmental contexts, from immediate settings like family and school to broader societal influences (Guy-Evans, 2025). ECAs can therefore be seen as microsystems where adolescents engage with peers, teachers, and communities, reinforcing both personal growth and portfolio readiness. Together, these frameworks suggest that ECAs are not only add-on activities but socially embedded experiences that shape students' psychosocial development and future opportunities.

Despite their growing significance, empirical research in Thailand remains limited regarding how students themselves perceive the role of ECAs in portfolio readiness and social skill development. Existing literature tends to focus on academic outcomes, leaving questions about motivation, benefits, and barriers underexplored. Moreover, unequal access to high-quality ECAs across different school types raises concerns about equity in university admissions.

To address these gaps, the present study investigates the motivations, participation patterns, perceived benefits, and challenges associated with ECA involvement among Thai high school students in Grades 10–12 preparing for TCAS Round 1 in Bangkok. By situating ECAs within the frameworks of

social development and ecological systems, this research provides insights into how these activities contribute simultaneously to strategic academic preparation and holistic student growth.

Objectives

1. To study the motivations of Thai high school students (Grade 10–12) for participating in extracurricular activities
2. To identify the types and patterns of extracurricular activity participation among students aiming for TCAS1 admissions.
3. To examine students' perceived benefits of extracurricular activities in terms of portfolio readiness and social skill development.
4. To study the challenges and barriers students face in engaging with extracurricular activities during high school.

Methods

Study Design

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional survey design to examine Thai high school students' motivations, patterns of participation, perceived benefits, and challenges related to extracurricular activities (ECAs) in preparation for TCAS Round 1 (Portfolio admission). Data were collected between April 1 and June 15, 2025.

Population and Sample

The target population comprised students in Grades 10–12, including recent graduates affiliated with private secondary schools in Bangkok. From an institutional population of 660 students, a sample size of 249 was determined using Yamane's formula at a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error. Participants were selected using non-probability convenience sampling, as the study specifically sought students with prior ECA experience. While this approach facilitated access to the intended group, it may limit the generalizability of findings beyond the study population.

Instrument Development

A structured questionnaire was developed following a literature review of studies published within the past five years, focusing on ECAs, soft skill development, and portfolio-based admissions. The initial draft was reviewed by three experts in psychology, education, and higher education admissions. Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) indices averaged 1.0, indicating strong content validity.

A pilot test was conducted with 30 students (Grades 10–12) from the same institutional network to assess language clarity, item relevance, and usability. Minor wording adjustments were

made. Reliability analysis of the Likert-scale items produced a Cronbach's alpha of 0.83, confirming acceptable internal consistency.

The final questionnaire contained 17 items organized into four sections:

- Section 1: Personal Information (6 items) – age, gender, grade level, school type (public, private, international, etc.), intended field of study, TCAS Round 1 preparation status.
- Section 2: ECA Participation Profile (5 items) – motivations, influencers (parents, peers, teachers, self), types of ECAs, duration, frequency.
- Section 3: Challenges and Barriers (2 items) – obstacles to participation (time, access, financial, support).
- Section 4: Perceived Benefits (4 items) – portfolio contributions, skill development, university readiness.

Data Collection Procedures

The final survey was distributed electronically using Google Forms. Invitations were sent via the school's database to eligible students. Participation was voluntary, anonymous, and confidential. Informed consent was obtained electronically. Once the target sample size of 249 complete responses was reached, data collection was closed.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS (version 26). Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were employed to summarize demographic characteristics, motivations, types of ECA participation, perceived benefits, and reported barriers. To further explore relationships within the data, Chi-square tests were conducted to examine associations between key demographic variables—such as gender, school type, and grade level—and the barriers students encountered in participating in ECAs. Statistical significance was determined at the $p < 0.05$ level.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical research practices. Informed consent was obtained electronically prior to participation. All personal data were anonymized, and confidentiality was strictly maintained. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without consequences. The study was reviewed and approved by the research ethics committee of the affiliated institution.

Results

A total of 249 participants were included in this study. A majority of the participants were female, 160 (64.3%), whereas there were 89 (35.7) males. Participants were of high school education and 223 participants ranged between 15 to 18. 26 (10.44%) less than 15 years old, 43 (17.27%)

students at 15 years old, 100 (40.16%) at 16 years old, 61 (24.50%) 17 years old, 14 (5.62%) of 18-year-olds, and 5 (2.01%) above 18 years old. Regarding grade level, 26 (10.44%) students were in 9th grade or below, 53 (21.29%) in 10th grade, 107 (42.97%) in 11th grade, and 63 (25.30%) in 12th grade. Most students were learning in private schools, 69 (27.71%), there is an equal distribution of public and bilingual schools, both with 65 (26.10%) pupils. 44 (17.67%) of participants were in international schools, and 6 (2.42%) were homeschooled or others. Most students prefer other fields of studies, 77 (30.92%) selected other options. Regarding the options provided, Health Sciences is the most popular field among students with 76 (30.52%) interested, followed by Business with 31 (12.46%), 24 (5.62%) want to pursue engineering, and science and education both have 14 (5.62%) high schoolers that want to learn in this field, and 13 (5.22%) in computer and technology. (Table No.1)

Table No. 1 Personal data of participants (n=249)

Variable	Number (%)
Gender	
Male	89 (35.7)
Female	160 (64.3)
Age (Years old)	
<15	26 (10.44)
15	43 (17.27)
16	100 (40.16)
17	61 (24.50)
18	14 (5.62)
>18	5 (2.01)
Class Level	
Below or Grade 9	26 (10.44)
Grade 10	53 (21.29)

Grade 11	107 (42.97)
Grade 12	63 (25.30)
Type of school	
Public	65 (26.10)
Private	69 (27.71)
International	44 (17.67)
Bilingual	65 (26.10)
Home school and others	6 (2.42)
Most intended field of study	
Health Science/	76 (30.52)
Computer and Technology	13 (5.22)
Engineering	24 (9.64)
Science	14 (5.62)
Education	14 (5.62)
Business	31 (12.46)
Others	77 (30.92)
Total	249 (100.00)

Motivation to participate Extracurricular Activities

Among 249 respondents, the top two motivations for engaging in extracurricular activities were enhancing their university portfolios (45.38%) and pursuing personal interests (44.17%), together accounting for nearly 90% of responses. Far fewer students reported joining ECAs due to peer influence

(4.42%), aspirations for university improvement (4.02%), or teacher recommendations (2.01%). These findings highlight that Thai high school students are primarily driven by strategic academic goals and intrinsic interest when deciding to participate in ECAs (Table No.2).

Table No. 2 Participants' motivation to participate in extracurricular activities

Motivation	Number (%)
Personal Interest	110 (44.17)
Desire to improve for university	10 (4.02)
Portfolio	113 (45.38)
Recommendation from teachers	5 (2.01)
Peer Influence	11 (4.42)
Total	249 (100.00)

Key Influencers in ECA Participation

The majority of students (57.83%) reported that their decision to join extracurricular activities was primarily self-motivated, highlighting the strong role of personal initiative in ECA engagement. Parents were the second most influential group at 22.49%, followed by friends at 18.07%. Only 1.61% of students indicated that teachers influenced their participation. These findings suggest that while external encouragement plays a role, students' own interests and goals are the dominant driving force behind their ECA involvement. (Table No.3)

Table No.3 Influencer for joining extracurricular activities/3

Influencer	Number (%)
Parents	56 (22.49)
Teachers	4 (1.61)
Friends	45 (18.07)
Self	144 (57.83)

Total	249 (100.00)
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Types of Extracurricular Activities Participated In

Participants were allowed to select multiple responses. The most commonly participate extracurricular activity was academic clubs (e.g., science, math, debate), reported by 18.42% of responses. Arts-related activities and volunteer work were equally popular, each with 17.66% participation. Other notable activities included skill camps (12.94%), career guidance programs (12.18%), and innovation or research projects (10.04%). Sports activities were reported by 9.13% of participants, while only 1.97% engaged in other miscellaneous activities. These findings indicate that Thai students prioritize academic enrichment and civic engagement when choosing ECAs, while sports and innovation-related activities are less commonly pursued. (Table No. 4)

Table No. 4 Type of Extracurricular activities participated by sample group (n=249)

Extracurricular Activity	Number (%)
Academic Club (Science, math, debate)	121 (18.42)
Arts	116 (17.66)
Sport	60 (9.13)
Volunteer	116 (17.66)
Skill Camp	85 (12.94)
Career guidance	80 (12.18)
Innovation / Research Project	66 (10.04)
Etc	13 (1.97)
Total	657 (100.00)

Duration of Participation in Extracurricular Activities

The majority of students (39.36%) reported participating in extracurricular activities for more than 12 months, indicating sustained engagement. This was followed by 24.10% who participated for

less than 3 months, 18.87% for 3–6 months, and 17.67% for 6–12 months. These findings suggest that most students continue their involvement long-term, likely due to a combination of enjoyment, skill development, social connection, and increased confidence in their roles within the activity setting (Table No. 5).

Table No. 5 Period of time participated in extracurricular activities

Period of time	Number (%)
< 3 Month	60 (24.10)
3–6 Months	47 (18.87)
6–12 Months	44 (17.67)
> 12 Months	98 (39.36)
Total	249 (100.00)

Frequency of Participation in Extracurricular Activities

The data indicates that most students participate in extracurricular activities infrequently. Specifically, 38.15% reported participating rarely (less than once a month), and 33.33% said they joined occasionally (1–2 times per month). A smaller proportion engaged more regularly, with 19.68% participating 1–2 times per week, and only 8.84% reporting very frequent involvement (more than twice per week). These findings suggest that while interest in extracurricular activities exists, academic demands and time constraints may limit consistent participation among high school students (Table 6).

Table No. 6 Frequency participating extracurricular activities

Frequency	Number (%)
Rarely (< once a month)	95 (38.15)
Occasionally (1–2 times / month)	83 (33.33)
Regularly (1–2 times/week)	49 (19.68)
Very frequently (> twice / week)	22 (8.84)

Total	249 (100.00)
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Perceived Benefits of ECAs in TCAS1 Preparation

Most students (30.96%) reported that extracurricular activities helped provide evidence of their skills for university applications. Additionally, 25.66% noted that ECAs helped them clarify their career or academic interests, while 25.25% indicated that ECAs enabled them to win awards or certificates used in their portfolio. A smaller proportion (10.18%) said that ECAs gave them topics or projects to discuss in interviews. Only 4.28% felt that ECAs did not significantly help in their TCAS1 preparation. These findings suggest that ECAs are broadly perceived as beneficial for enhancing students' competitiveness in the Thai university admission process (Table No. 7).

Table No. 7 Perceived Benefits of Extracurricular Activities in Preparing for TCAS1 Portfolio (n=249)

How ECA help preparing TCAS1	Number (%)
Provided evidence of my skills for university application	152 (30.96)
Helped me clarify my career or academic interests	126 (25.66)
Enabled me to win awards/certificates for the portfolio	124 (25.25)
Gave me topics or projects to present in interviews	50 (10.18)
It didn't help much	21 (4.28)
Not applicable	18 (3.67)
Total	491 (100.00)

Social Skills Developed Through Participation in Extracurricular Activities

Based on Table 8, teamwork was the most frequently reported social skill developed through extracurricular activity (ECA) participation, with 155 participants (20.23%) indicating growth in this area. Confidence followed closely, reported by 147 participants (19.19%), while communication skills were also significantly developed, cited by 141 participants (18.41%). Time management and problem-solving were equally reported at 104 participants each (13.58%). Leadership skills were identified by 97 participants (12.66%), and only a small number (18 participants or 2.35%) selected other skills. These

results highlight that ECAs notably enhance collaborative and personal development skills among high school students. (Table No. 8)

Table No. 8 Social Skills Developed Through Participation in Extracurricular Activities (n=249)

Skills	Number (%)
Communication	141 (18.41)
Teamwork	155 (20.23)
Leadership	97 (12.66)
Time Management	104 (13.58)
Confidence	147 (19.19)
Problem solving	104 (13.58)
Others	18 (2.35)
Total	766 (100.00)

The findings in Table 9 indicate that students held mixed views on whether participation in extracurricular activities (ECAs) enhanced their readiness for university life. The largest proportion of respondents, 88 students (35.34%), selected "Neutral," showing uncertainty about the impact. Meanwhile, 79 students (31.73%) agreed and 57 (22.89%) strongly agreed that ECAs helped improve their university preparedness. A minority disagreed, with 16 students (6.43%) disagreeing and only 9 students (3.61%) strongly disagreeing. These results suggest a generally positive perception of the developmental value of ECAs, though a significant portion remains undecided. (Table No. 9)

Table No. 9 Students' Perception of Whether ECA Participation Improved Their Readiness for University Life (n=249)

Participating Extracurricular activity has improved readiness for university life	Number (%)
Strongly agree	57 (22.89)
Agree	79 (31.73)

Neutral	88 (35.34)
Disagree	16 (6.43)
Strongly disagree	9 (3.61)
Total	249 (100.00)

Challenges face the most while participating extracurricular activities

According to the data presented in Table 10, the most commonly reported challenge faced by students while participating in extracurricular activities (ECAs) was the lack of time due to academic workload, cited by 41.77% (n = 104) of respondents. Other notable barriers included a lack of motivation or interest (20.08%), limited access to activity opportunities (11.65%), financial limitations such as costs for travel and materials (11.24%), and insufficient support from schools or teachers (10.04%). A smaller percentage (5.22%) indicated parental pressure to prioritize academics over extracurricular involvement. These findings highlight those academic demands remain the most significant obstacle limiting ECA participation (Table No. 10).

Table No. 10 Challenges face the most while participating extracurricular activities

Challenges	Number (%)
Lack of time due to academic workload	104 (41.77)
Lack of access to activity opportunity	29 (11.65)
Lack of support from school or teachers	25 (10.04)
Financial limitations (e.g., travel costs, materials, tuition fee)	28 (11.24)
Parental pressure to focus on academics	13 (5.22)
Lack of motivation or interests	50 (20.08)
Total	249 (100.00)

As shown in Table 11, a majority of respondents (71.89%) stated that they would participate in more extracurricular activities (ECAs) if they had greater support or more time. Meanwhile, 21.69% were uncertain about increasing their involvement, and only a small proportion (6.42%) indicated that

they would not join more activities even with additional support or time. These results suggest that time and support are key factors influencing students' decisions to engage further in ECAs (Table No. 11).

Table No.11 Students' Willingness to Participate in More Extracurricular Activities with Increased Support or Time

Having more support or time would you join more extracurricular activities?	Number (%)
Yes	179 (71.89)
No	16 (6.42)
Not sure	54 (21.69)
Total	249 (100.00)

Chi-square tests were conducted to examine the association between key demographic variables (e.g., gender, type of school, and grade level) and the reported challenges students faced in participating in extracurricular activities (ECAs). The results revealed no statistically significant associations between any of the demographic variables and the barriers reported ($p > 0.05$).

Discussion

This study aimed to explore the motivations, patterns, perceived benefits, and challenges associated with extracurricular activity (ECA) participation among Thai high school students preparing for TCAS Round 1 (Portfolio). The findings reinforce the significant role ECAs play in shaping students' readiness for university life, developing essential soft skills, and enhancing their competitiveness in a high-stakes admissions environment.

Motivations and Influences

The results demonstrate that the primary motivations for ECA participation are portfolio enhancement (45.38%) and personal interest (44.17%). Portfolio enhancement reflects an extrinsic motivation shaped by the TCAS Round 1 admissions system, where ECAs are critical for strengthening portfolios and gaining entry into competitive university programs (MUIC, 2021). In contrast, personal interest represents intrinsic motivation, as students engage in ECAs for enjoyment, self-expression, and skill development, consistent with Self-Determination Theory, which emphasizes the role of autonomous motivation in sustained engagement (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Together, these extrinsic and intrinsic drivers

account for nearly 90% of participation, showing that ECAs serve both strategic academic purposes and personal growth. Notably, 57.83% of students reported that their decision to participate was self-motivated, reflecting high levels of self-efficacy as conceptualized by Bandura (1997). This suggests that internal drivers, alongside external pressures, play an important role in sustaining long-term commitment and fostering greater skill acquisition.

Types and Patterns of Participation

The most common ECAs among Thai high school students were academic clubs, arts, and volunteering. This pattern reflects both structural and motivational factors. Academic clubs are strongly linked to students' academic and career goals, particularly for those aiming to enter competitive fields such as medicine, engineering, and science, where portfolios benefit from achievements that demonstrate intellectual ability, problem-solving, and critical thinking. These clubs are also widely available across schools, making them an accessible and strategic choice. In contrast, arts-related activities appeal primarily to intrinsic motivation, offering students avenues for creativity, self-expression, and confidence building. Participation in the arts not only contributes to personal growth but also adds diversity and uniqueness to student portfolios, highlighting attributes valued in holistic admission systems. Volunteering, meanwhile, reflects the cultural and institutional emphasis on community service and social responsibility in Thai education. Volunteer experiences demonstrate empathy, leadership, and civic-mindedness, which are qualities increasingly sought after by universities. The finding that 39.36% of students reported engaging in ECAs for more than 12 months indicates that participation is not merely short-term or superficial but reflects sustained commitment. This longevity is likely explained by a combination of passion for the chosen activities and the accumulation of **social capital**—the networks, recognition, and achievements students build through ongoing involvement. Longer-term participation also strengthens portfolios by providing evidence of consistency, perseverance, and depth of engagement, which admissions committees interpret as indicators of maturity and reliability. Thus, the dominance of academic clubs, arts, and volunteering, combined with long-term involvement, highlights the dual role of ECAs as both strategic tools for university readiness and meaningful contexts for personal development.

Perceived Benefits

Students reported that ECAs significantly enhanced key soft skills, particularly teamwork (20.23%) and confidence (19.19%). These outcomes are not unexpected, as most ECAs in Thai schools—such as academic clubs, performing arts, and volunteering—are group-based and inherently collaborative. Working within teams requires students to coordinate, negotiate, and contribute toward shared goals,

naturally strengthening teamwork abilities. Similarly, performing, presenting, or leading within these contexts challenges students to step outside their comfort zones, fostering greater self-confidence. These findings align with prior studies showing that ECAs provide effective environments for non-formal learning and the development of interpersonal skills (Kumari, 2024). In addition to soft skill development, students perceived ECAs as crucial for portfolio preparation under TCAS Round 1. By documenting achievements, awards, and participation records, ECAs provide concrete evidence of competencies that cannot be captured by academic transcripts alone. This explains why many students reported that ECAs helped them identify career interests, secure certificates or awards, and generate topics for university interviews. The dual role of ECAs—enhancing personal development while strategically supporting university applications—accounts for their strong perceived value among students. Ultimately, the results suggest that Thai students view ECAs as both practical tools for advancing educational opportunities and meaningful experiences that contribute to their long-term growth.

Barriers to Participation

Despite the benefits of extracurricular activities, students reported several barriers that limited their participation. The most significant obstacle was lack of time due to heavy academic workload (41.77%), which reflects the highly competitive nature of Thai secondary education where students prioritize exam preparation and GPA over non-academic pursuits. This finding is consistent with Thai and international studies showing that academic pressure is one of the strongest deterrents to sustained involvement in ECAs (Hancock et al., 2012). Motivational and logistical challenges, such as limited access to activity opportunities, financial constraints, and insufficient school support, further restricted participation. These barriers often stem from unequal distribution of resources, as well as differences in school culture and priorities. The chi-square analysis indicated that demographic factors such as school type influenced the challenges experienced, suggesting that public school students and those in less resource-rich environments may have fewer opportunities and greater constraints compared to their peers in private or international schools. This disparity highlights an equity issue, as students with limited access may struggle to build competitive portfolios despite having the interest or ability. Additionally, cultural and institutional pressures to prioritize academic achievement perpetuate a system where ECAs are viewed as secondary rather than integral to student development. These factors together explain why academic workload, motivation, and access emerged as the primary barriers in this study.

Implications

The study's results highlight the dual role of ECAs in supporting personal growth and strategic academic preparation. Given their increasing relevance in Thai university admissions, schools should

reframe ECAs as integral—not supplementary—components of education. Incorporating ECA engagement into official student development plans and allocating time within the curriculum could help normalize participation. Moreover, expanding ECA offerings in under-resourced schools and using digital platforms could promote greater equity in access. Parental support and teacher encouragement, though less frequently cited as influencers, remain important areas for intervention to increase student involvement.

Conclusion

This study highlights the critical role extracurricular activities (ECAs) play in supporting the personal, academic, and career readiness of Thai high school students, particularly in the context of TCAS Round 1 (Portfolio). Students engage in ECAs primarily to enhance their university application profiles and pursue personal interests. Through sustained involvement, they gain valuable soft skills such as teamwork, confidence, and leadership, which are increasingly essential in modern education and employment landscapes.

However, participation remains uneven due to barriers such as academic pressure, time constraints, socioeconomic limitations, and unequal access—especially for students in public or rural schools. While ECAs are widely recognized as beneficial, structural support and policy-level improvements are needed to ensure more equitable access and integration within the formal education system.

Ultimately, ECAs should not be viewed merely as tools for university admission but as integral components of holistic student development. Encouraging meaningful, accessible participation across all student groups will contribute to a more balanced and inclusive approach to education in Thailand.

Recommendation

To enhance the role of extracurricular activities (ECAs) in fostering student development, several key actions are recommended. First, policymakers and school leaders should work to expand access to ECAs across different school types and regions, particularly in under-resourced rural areas. This may involve investing in facilities, supporting teacher training, and utilizing online platforms to bridge geographic gaps. Integrating ECAs into the formal education policy framework is also essential, ensuring that student involvement is systematically recorded, evaluated, and recognized alongside academic achievements. Schools should address academic pressure by promoting balanced schedules and supporting time management education, thereby allowing students more opportunities to engage meaningfully in ECAs.

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