



# The Impact of English Club Participation on Citizenship Development Among Thaksin University Students: A Study of Online and On-Site Engagement

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## Abstract

English Clubs are widely established in educational institutions, including primary schools, secondary schools, and universities, serving as platforms for language development and personal growth. At Thaksin University in Songkhla, Thailand, the English Club plays a multifaceted role in promoting both academic excellence and active citizenship. This article explores how extracurricular activities - conducted by the TSU English Club in both physical and virtual settings - contribute to students' language proficiency, personal development, and social engagement. Through a range of interactive activities, such as book discussions, cultural exchange programs, and community service initiatives, the English Club fosters communication skills and intercultural understanding. The club also provides opportunities for leadership development, as students organize and participate in events that enhance teamwork, critical thinking, and civic responsibility. Additionally, online platforms have expanded the club's reach, allowing students to engage with international peers and develop digital literacy skills. Beyond language acquisition, the club's initiatives promote active citizenship by encouraging students to contribute to their communities. Activities such as charity events, environmental campaigns, and collaborative projects with international volunteers reinforce the importance of civic responsibility. Moreover, hybrid learning models ensure that students can continuously develop their English proficiency while participating in meaningful social and cultural exchanges. This article highlights the significant role of English Clubs in shaping well-rounded individuals equipped with linguistic competence and a strong sense of social responsibility. By integrating both traditional and digital approaches, the TSU English Club serves as an essential platform for fostering global citizenship and lifelong learning among students.

**Keywords:** English club; English club activities; citizenship; personal growth and social development; onsite and online engagement

## 1. Introduction

Extracurricular activities and lifelong learning have been promoted among students as opportunities to acquire knowledge beyond formal classroom settings. This aligns with Holandyah et al. (2024), who state that extracurricular activities consist of programs that extend beyond the traditional classroom environment, providing participants with opportunities to develop their talents, pursue personal interests, and demonstrate their skills and competencies. In recent years, Thai universities have increasingly emphasized lifelong learning and encouraged students to become global citizens. As a result, universities in Thailand actively support student-led initiatives, including the establishment of clubs that foster both technical (hard) skills and interpersonal (soft) skills. Student clubs can be regarded as platforms for developing leadership, organizational, time management, and citizenship skills. Additionally, they offer students opportunities to independently explore new activities on campus while expanding their social networks.

Typically, Thai students receive only a few hours of English instruction per week, which is insufficient for developing language proficiency. Moreover, in large class settings, only a limited number of students have the opportunity to actively practice speaking English. For those seeking to enhance their fluency and confidence in spoken English, English clubs serve as an effective platform, providing an immersive English-speaking environment that facilitates continuous language practice and interaction. This aligns with Malu K. & Smedley B. (2016) who pointed out that English clubs are structured as communal spaces where individuals gather primarily to enhance their language skills. They provide a safe, supportive, and encouraging environment, allowing participants to engage in immersive English practice for a few hours.

Thaksin University established its English Club in 2017, organizing a range of activities both online and on-site. This article examines the role of English clubs, particularly at Thaksin University, in fostering citizenship by enhancing communication skills, promoting intercultural understanding, encouraging civic engagement, developing critical thinking abilities, and establishing global networks. This aligns with The English club program, combined with creative teaching methods, enhances students' confidence in engaging in English conversations. It provides a platform for students to continuously develop their language skills, encouraging them to become more active in speaking English.

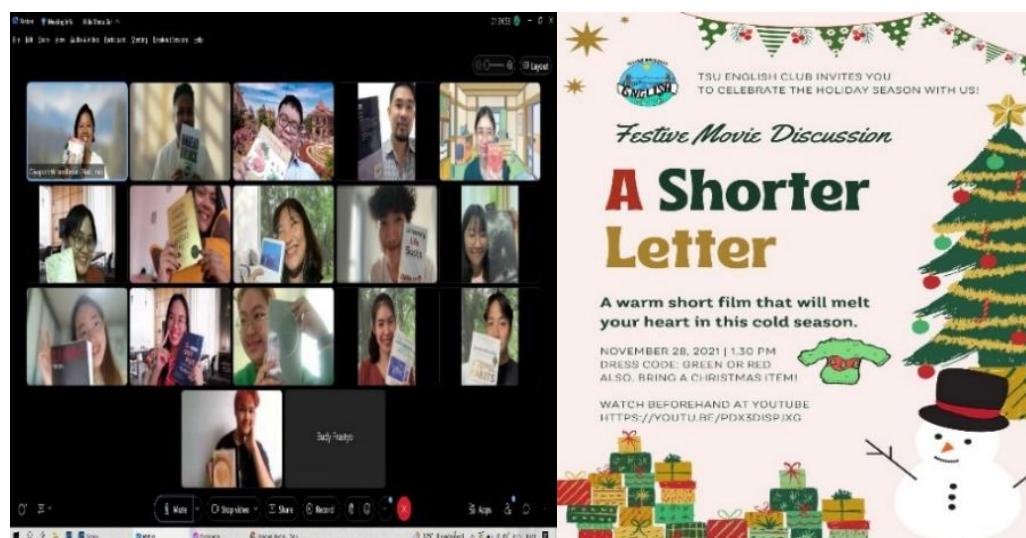
## 2. English Club during COVID-19 Pandemic

During the COVID-19 pandemic, universities across Thailand were temporarily closed; however, the TSU English Club remained active. Recognizing the importance of fostering lifelong learning even during challenging times, the club leaders organized a variety of virtual activities. Although individual students experienced physical isolation, participation in online events provided both the audience and organizers with an opportunity to alleviate stress and feelings of loneliness.

The club offered a diverse range of activities, including online book discussions, virtual short film discussions with international volunteers and students, international cultural exchanges, and collaborations with the international English clubs of Vietnamese universities. In an effort to recruit international students and volunteers, the club successfully attracted participants from various countries, including the United States, the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam, and India. Through these initiatives, both participants and organizers had

the opportunity to establish new international friendships, engage in meaningful discussions, play games, and exchange ideas on selected topics.

To enhance engagement, the club leaders introduced themed discussions. For instance, in January, the book discussion centered on New Year's resolutions and participants' holiday experiences, while in February, the selected film explored themes of love. In August, the discussion focused on the power of a mother's love, aligning with Thailand's Mother's Day, which falls on August 12th. Participants were given the freedom to select books to share and present in discussions, rather than being assigned specific readings. This approach ensured that participants did not feel pressured to complete an entire book before attending the program. A similar strategy was applied to movie discussions, where club leaders selected a short film for participants to watch together, though they also had the option to view it beforehand. This method particularly benefited individuals with weaker English proficiency, as it allowed them to watch the film in advance and again during the session. As a result, they gained greater confidence in expressing their ideas, having developed a stronger understanding of the film's messages.



**Figure 1 & 2:** Pictures of online book discussion and poster of a movie discussion from Facebook Page: TSU English Club

### 3. Benefits of Online English Club Activities

Participating in the aforementioned activities provides numerous benefits, particularly in educational and social contexts. These activities create opportunities for intellectual growth, social interaction, critical thinking, and personal development. Participants reported that they became more receptive to diverse perspectives and cultural viewpoints, which significantly broadened their worldviews. Engaging in friendly discussions encouraged open-mindedness, allowing individuals to consider differing opinions without resorting to immediate judgment. Furthermore, students expressed that they developed greater focus and active listening skills, as the limitations of online platforms often prevented them from clearly seeing the speakers. Online discussions also fostered continuous learning and intellectual curiosity. For instance, when participants recommended inspiring books or films, others were more inclined to seek them out for further exploration. Similarly, engaging in virtual interactions with international

peers required Thai students to communicate in English, helping them overcome their hesitation to converse with foreign speakers, which they often found more challenging in face-to-face interactions.

Additionally, the ability to articulate thoughts clearly and respond to different perspectives enhanced participants' speaking and argumentation skills. Their critical thinking abilities were further refined as they analyzed characters and underlying messages in literature and film, deepening their appreciation of diverse narratives and cultural backgrounds.

Beyond academic and cognitive benefits, such discussions played a crucial role in fostering a sense of community and social connection during periods of physical distancing, thereby alleviating feelings of isolation. These activities also encouraged empathy, as participants had the opportunity to share their personal challenges and hardships with supportive peers. Moreover, the informal nature of the discussions provided a relaxed environment for participants to unwind and enjoy shared moments.

From the perspective of accessibility and convenience, online discussions enabled individuals from various locations to participate at their convenience, making the activities more inclusive. Unlike traditional in-person events, online programs eliminated the need for budget allocations to invite guest speakers to the university. Furthermore, scheduling was more flexible, accommodating different time zones by offering sessions during both daytime and evening hours. Notably, online platforms also facilitated greater engagement among introverted students who might have felt reluctant to participate in face-to-face settings. For example, students who were apprehensive about direct social interactions found it easier to express their ideas in a virtual environment.

Overall, online English club activities serve as valuable platforms for intellectual engagement, personal growth, and social interaction, making them beneficial for both students and lifelong learners. Moreover, a hybrid approach could be implemented to complement onsite activities, allowing students to continuously develop their English proficiency and interpersonal skills. Inviting international volunteers to participate in online programs is also highly feasible, as they are generally willing to contribute their time for one or two hours, further enriching the learning experience.

**Table 1:** Examples of Club Activities

Online activities	Onsite activities	Hybrid activities
Book discussion	Physical activities	Book discussion
	(Hiking)	
Short Movie discussion	Community service	Movie discussion
(Inspirational movies)	(Beach cleanups, Teaching kids)	(Christmas Carol, PK, Terminal, A Street Cat Named Bob, The Red Dog, The Dictator, Before the Coffee Gets Cold, Officer Black Belt)
Festival celebrations	Festival celebrations	Festival celebrations
(Halloween, Thanksgiving, Easter)	(Halloween, Christmas)	(Halloween)
Cultural Exchange	Cultural Exchange	Cultural Exchange
(Country presentation)	(Country presentation)	(Country presentation)

In addition, according to Mustofa, Y. (2023), autonomous learning is exercised by joining English club activities and students are encouraged to take responsibility for their own language development. This sense of ownership not only enhances motivation but also helps students develop self-directed learning skills that can be applied across various academic disciplines. By integrating traditional and digital approaches, the TSU English Club provides a hybrid learning model that supports lifelong learning and global citizenship, ensuring that students are well-prepared for both their academic and professional futures.

#### **4. Active global citizenship through community engagement**

According to UNESCO (n.d.), being a global citizen does not require possessing a unique passport or official designation, nor does it necessitate traveling abroad or speaking multiple languages. Rather, it is defined by one's mindset and daily actions. A global citizen is someone who comprehends global issues, appreciates cultural diversity, and collaborates with others to address complex challenges that transcend national boundaries. Citizenship is a fundamental concept in education, encouraging active participation, critical thinking, and social responsibility. Thai universities actively promote citizenship by fostering responsible, engaged, and socially conscious students who contribute meaningfully to society. These initiatives align with Thailand's educational policies, which emphasize moral development, community service, and active participation in societal affairs.

English, as a global language, serves as a crucial tool in promoting effective communication and cross-cultural interactions. English clubs provide an informal yet structured setting where students enhance their language proficiency while interacting with international volunteers and developing essential citizenship skills. For example, some of the most popular activities include hiking, mountain cleanups, waterfall cleanups, and beach cleanups. Engaging in physical activities not only enhances participants' physical well-being but also contributes to their mental health. As they hike through mountains, observe natural landscapes, and immerse themselves in the sounds of birds, they experience relaxation and develop a deeper appreciation for nature. Additionally, interacting with international peers and individuals from various academic disciplines and year levels fosters opportunities for meaningful and spontaneous English communication in an informal, stress-free environment.

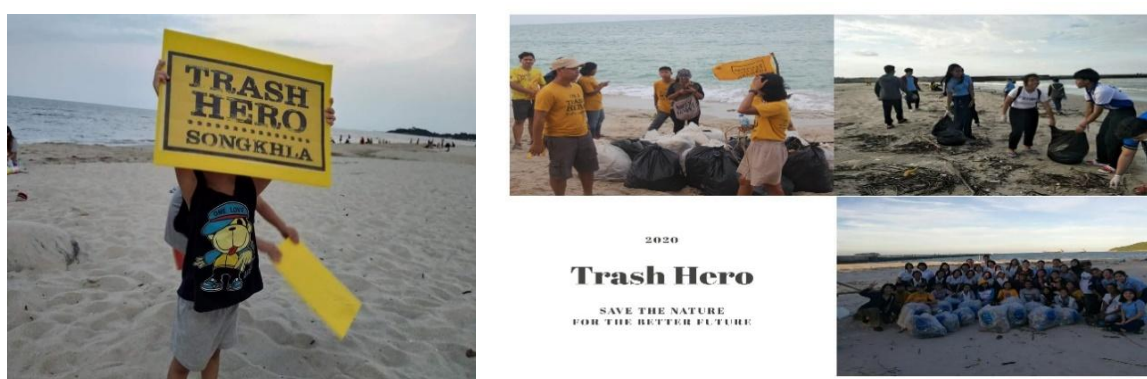
According to the Summary of the Environmental Quality Assessment of Tourist Beaches ("Starred Beaches") in Songkhla Province, 2020, waste accumulation was recorded on Samila Beach and in the area behind the beach, averaging 0.8 and 0.4 kilograms per 100 square meters, respectively. The waste found included metal, plastic bottles, straws, plastic cups, foam, hazardous waste, fabric, rubber, leather, cigarette butts, and ropes. While much of this waste resulted from tourism activities, some debris was carried ashore by ocean currents. To raise awareness of pollution, marine conservation, and sustainable practices, the English Club has provided students with opportunities to participate in beach cleanup initiatives. These activities not only allow students to explore local beaches with international peers and friends from different disciplines but also cultivate a strong sense of civic responsibility by promoting environmental stewardship, community engagement, and social awareness.

To further encourage collaboration and teamwork, the club has also partnered with Trash Hero Songkhla, a non-governmental organization dedicated to sustainable, community-based projects that focus on waste removal and long-term behavioral change to reduce future waste. Through this collaboration, students gain firsthand experience of how non-profit organizations actively work to protect marine ecosystems. Engaging in these activities fosters



a deeper understanding of individuals' societal roles and the long-term environmental impact of human actions.

Participants reported that they became more responsible tourists by adopting sustainable behaviors such as avoiding littering and keeping tourist destinations clean. This collective effort empowers individuals to take an active role in environmental conservation and instills a sense of duty to contribute positively to the community. Furthermore, these experiences inspire students to initiate and participate in other community service projects, such as temple and mountain cleanups. Engaging in such initiative's nurtures leadership skills, as students begin to take the initiative in organizing and promoting environmental conservation efforts, including beach cleanup projects as part of their class assignments. Ultimately, these activities highlight the power of collective action in driving meaningful environmental change.



**Figure 3 & 4:** Pictures of beach cleanups partnered with Trash Hero Songkhla from Facebook Page: TSU English Club

Citizenship encompasses active engagement within the community. English clubs can incorporate service-learning projects to cultivate civic responsibility, such as organizing English teaching programs for underprivileged children, thereby promoting social equity. Each year, club members visit a local orphanage, where they engage with children through play, reading activities, and instruction in English and other subjects. These initiatives aim to foster a love for learning among the children and support their academic development, helping them bridge educational gaps and better integrate into regular classroom settings.

## **5. English Club and its Promoting Intercultural Understanding and Global Citizenship**

In a globalized world, cultural awareness is a key component of responsible citizenship. The English club facilitate exposure to diverse cultures through books, films and cross-cultural presentation and activities where students interact with peers from different background incorporating empathy and respect among audience. This aligns with Chuntong B. (2024), said the content of Global Citizenship Education (GCED) should foster an awareness of coexisting as global citizens within diverse cultures. It should emphasize the importance of cultural diversity, global understanding, empathy, and peacebuilding to promote inclusion. Additionally, GCED should cultivate international ethics, critical thinking, awareness of global issues, and knowledge of sustainable development.

Celebrations are also actively promoted to bring joy to participants and attract new members to the club. Halloween and Christmas celebrations are among the English Club's most significant annual events at Thaksin University. In particular, senior club members and international volunteers visit four to five designated classrooms and offices to perform Christmas carols, offering a festive surprise to students on Christmas Day. Similarly, on Halloween night, participants dressed as ghosts walk around campus engaging in a 'trick-or-treat' activity, distributing candies to students studying in public areas. These initiatives foster a sense of community while promoting cultural exchange and engagement among students.

A key initiative within these events is the buddy program, which invites international volunteers to participate in various activities, including country presentations, campus tours, guided visits to Songkhla Old Town, and beach cleanup projects. This program is conducted in collaboration with the Volunteer Spirit Association of Thailand (VSA Thailand), a non-governmental organization that coordinates international voluntary projects for individuals from diverse cultural, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds.

It is undeniable that successful program implementation relies on strong collaboration with local and global organizations, as their support strengthens the overall impact of these initiatives. The TSU English Club benefits from partnerships with organizations such as *VSA Thailand*, which facilitates the participation of international volunteers in the buddy program. These volunteers, who engage in both short-term and long-term projects in Songkhla, have the opportunity to connect with local university students, explore regional tourist attractions such as Songkhla Old Town and Samila Beach, and feel a sense of community while being away from home. Conversely, Thai participants benefit by having an international buddy with whom they can practice English and, in some cases, a third language when interacting with non-native English-speaking volunteers.

Additionally, the club collaborates with the Thailand Campus Crusade for Christ (Thailand CCC), which sends international Christian students abroad as missionaries during their university holidays. The club invites both native and non-native English speakers to share their cultures and organize events such as Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter celebrations on campus. These activities attract participants who are eager to explore diverse cultures, not only from Western countries but also from places like Hong Kong, Singapore, and New Zealand. Moreover, the club encourages the participation of non-English majors and students seeking to improve their English proficiency for career advancement. Such initiatives serve as valuable resources for hybrid cultural exchange programs, fostering cross-cultural learning and engagement.

Through a variety of activities - including cultural exchange games, country presentations, shared meals, language instruction, tours, and community service - both international and local participants develop a deeper appreciation and respect for different cultures. This cross-cultural engagement fosters mutual understanding and enriches participants' linguistic, social, and intercultural communication skills.

Overall, the activities of the TSU English Club, such as teaching underprivileged children, can be regarded as contributing to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4: Quality Education, by providing children with the opportunity to acquire knowledge from club volunteers. Similarly, beach cleanup initiatives align with SDG 14: Life Below Water, by promoting the conservation of marine environments. Additionally, SDG 17: Partnership for the Goals is fulfilled through collaborative activities between local and international students.



**Figure 5-7:** Pictures of a country presentation from Indonesian students and Songkla Old Town exploration from Facebook Page: TSU English Club

## 6. Conclusion

The TSU English Club at Thaksin University serves as more than just a language-learning platform; it plays a crucial role in fostering citizenship development, intercultural understanding, and community engagement among students. Through a combination of on-site and online activities, the club enhances students' English proficiency, critical thinking, leadership, and civic responsibility. Key initiatives include book discussions, cultural exchanges, environmental cleanups, and volunteer teaching, all of which contribute to students' personal growth and social awareness. More importantly, the club's collaboration with international volunteers and NGOs expands students' global networks and promotes the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Quality Education (SDG 4), Life Below Water (SDG 14), and Partnerships for the Goals (SDG 17).

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