



“The impact of a volunteering experience in the southern border (Spain and Morocco) on the integral development of university students”

*Ariane Díaz- Iso, PhD.
Dr. Almudena Eizaguirre
Aitor Arbaiza
University of Deusto
Bilbao (Spain)*

Ariane Diaz-Iso

Ariane Diaz-Iso holds a PhD in Education from the University of Deusto and a Master’s degree in Advanced Studies on Language, Communication and its Pathologies from the University of Salamanca. She is a Lecturer at the Teaching and Curricular Development Department of the Faculty of Psychology and Education at the University of Deusto. She lectures on the Bachelor’s degree in Primary Education and the Double Bachelor’s Degree in Physical Activity and Sports Sciences (CAFyD, in Spanish) and Primary Education. Her main research areas include: teaching innovation, skills development, and methodologies linked to humanism and sustainability.

Almudena Eizaguirre

Almudena Eizaguirre is Professor at the University of Deusto and General Director of Deusto Business School Executive Education. Previously, she was Director of the Teaching Innovation Unit at the University of Deusto and Vice-Dean of Strategy and Innovation at the Faculty of Economics and Business Studies. Her main research areas include: teaching innovation, marketing and sustainability, skills development, and methodologies linked to humanism and sustainability.

Aitor Arbaiza Valero

Aitor Arbaiza Valero holds a Bachelor’s degree in Social Education and a Master’s degree in Leisure Management (Culture, Tourism, Sport and Recreation) from the University of Deusto.

He is Coordinator of Deusto Campus Solidarity and Cooperation and a Member of the University's Identity and Mission Committee. He also coordinates the peer group of UNIJES "Social Action, cooperation and volunteering".

Abstract

The Society of Jesus, well aware of the importance of addressing the various social challenges, has established the Universal Apostolic Preferences, which, in addition to working to eradicate poverty, highlight the need to promote educational experiences to help contribute to the comprehensive education of youth. In this regard, the extracurricular sphere has been rediscovered; it goes beyond the classroom and includes sports, cultural, volunteer activities, etc., as a privileged environment to contribute to holistic student development.

This paper describes an extracurricular volunteer experience undertaken by a group of young people from the University of Deusto on the southern border between Spain and Morocco. More specifically, it highlights the value of this volunteering activity to build shared knowledge with other people; to improve the academic and professional performance of university students; to develop personal and social skills that contribute towards their holistic development and assume a greater commitment and responsibility with their own day-to-day actions. In addition, some key elements to consider in Jesuit higher education institutions are also included so that the design and implementation of ECAs achieve the benefits previously mentioned.

Description

Societies today face complex social, political, economic and environmental challenges. These challenges must be addressed from the various social spheres. In this context, Jesuit universities, as institutions immersed in society, are faced with the challenge of focusing education towards comprehensive training, aimed at students' social and personal transformation (Aktas et al., 2015; Kagawa, 2007).

To address these challenges, the United Nations Security Council initiated the process to define the Sustainable Development Goals, which set goals in 17 social and ecological areas until the year 2030 (UNESCO, 2017). Jesuit universities worldwide are also called to contribute to this international agenda. In particular, they have the responsibility of promoting educational practices that provide students with knowledge, values and attitudes that enable them to adopt active citizenship.

Likewise, the Society of Jesus, well aware of the importance of facing the different social challenges, has established the Universal Apostolic Preferences (2019) that will guide the Society's work in the coming years until 2029. These preferences help educational institutions to focus their actions on and for the mission and, in addition to walking with the excluded, call upon them to promote experiences and opportunities (based on solid spiritual and social foundations) that try to contribute to the education of youth and help them build supportive, personal and family relationships.

Based on this concept of education, the extracurricular sphere has been rediscovered as a privileged environment to contribute to holistic student development. We understand holistic development as encompassing the education of the whole person, based on the four fundamental and interdependent dimensions of the "Ledesma-Kolvenbach Paradigm" ("humanitas", "iustitia", "fides" and "utilitas")(Villa Sánchez & Lemke Duque, 2016) . More specifically, the extracurricular sphere is a great opportunity to promote a more competent graduate profile through continually reinventing itself, both professionally, personally and spiritually. Thus, this form of education allows students to develop their personal skills to build individuals open to transcendence, capable of interiorising ideas, learning throughout life, adapting effectively to changing realities, enriching previous learning and complementing what they learned and worked in academia (Bakoban & Aljarallah, 2015; Li, 2017) .

Extracurricular activities

Extracurricular activities (also known as ECAs) are activities that complement curricular education and are carried out on a voluntary basis, outside of school hours, which contribute to students' personal, spiritual, professional and social development. Some of the most common activities include spiritual, volunteer, cultural, artistic, sports activities and the student associations (Díaz-Iso et al., 2020a) .

In order to understand the origin and development of this form of training, it is necessary to go back to the 80s, when Pascarella (1980) and Astin (1894) pointed out that becoming involved in the university community improved student performance at university. Based on these findings, a line of action emerged that advocates the usefulness of extracurricular training to get students involved in the university community.

Early in 2000, the academia argued that extracurricular training mainly resulted in enhanced professional development and greater employability. At that time, research such as that conducted by Belikova (2002) referred to ECAs as voluntary activities in which students participated in their leisure time, and there was a general tendency to define them by type.

Between 2010 and 2015, there was increasing evidence linking ECAs with functions such as improving the environment in which we live, the academic performance or well-being of participants. Thus, authors like Thompson et al. (2013) and Bakoban y Aljarallah (2015) started to define ECAs as activities that result in benefits for the community and serve to put into practice the knowledge learned in the classroom.

As of 2016, the potential that ECAs have to foster spaces of trust that promote students' interaction and integration with their peers, with people of other cultures, religions and ideologies, with the academic or services staff (Díaz-Iso et al., 2020b; Girbés-Peco et al., 2018). Also, as shown by Bubnys (2019), ECAs are considered to promote reflective processes that help students to assimilate, understand, exchange and analyse different viewpoints to be able to understand how other people see the world and, on the other hand, to better understand themselves, their needs and problems, their personal strengths and limitations.

Therefore, in recent years, opportunities in the extracurricular sphere are increasingly being valued as a way to expand or explore new interests in students. These can help them to feel better, enhance their self-confidence and be more motivated to integrate new knowledge and skills, while at the same time can be useful to improve their professional development and the learning acquired in the curricular field (Díaz-Iso et al., 2019).

Type of experience

This paper describes an extracurricular activity that young people from the University of Deusto carried out in Tangier for 10 days. It should be noted that this experience is offered by the Deusto Campus Unit at the University of Deusto. This Unit is in charge of managing and offering extracurricular activities on the Bilbao and San Sebastian Campuses, and consists of four areas: faith, solidarity, sports and culture. This particular experience is part of the solidarity area.

During the extracurricular volunteer experience, students participate in three different social projects:

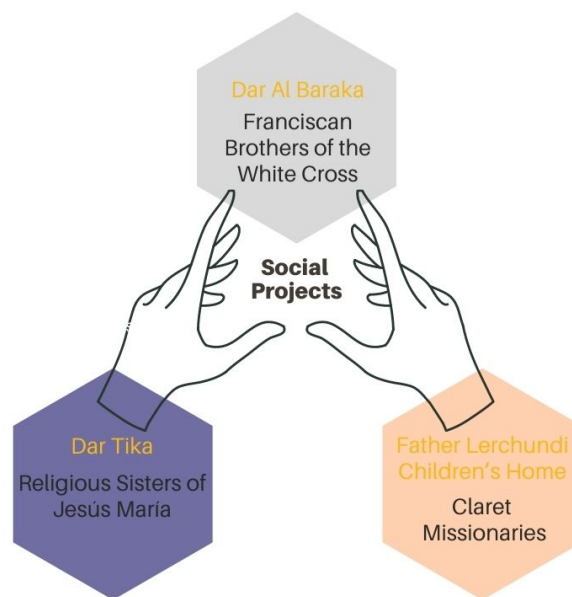


Figure 1. Social projects in which students participate in the extracurricular volunteer experience. Compiled by authors.

1. **The Dar Al Baraka project of Casa Nazaret** is a foster home that provides assistance to 10 people with intellectual and /or physical disabilities to people who do not have family assistance or resources to live on their own.
2. **The Dar Tika project** is a reception centre that incorporates medical, psychological and social monitoring of girls aged 11 to 14 years without a family, who have ended

up living on the street and/or have suffered abuse and attacks, and are therefore at serious risk of social exclusion.

3. **The Padre Lerchundi project** is a day centre for children aged 6 to 16 years, enrolled in a Moroccan public school, where they go outside their class hours. There they eat, play and receive school support, since their parents cannot take care of them due to precarious family situations. Hence, this centre prevents them from falling prey to criminal networks or developing bad habits on the street.

The students worked primarily on the Dar Al Baraka project at Casa Nazaret. They were in charge of offering accompaniment in day-to-day activities to people with disabilities living in the centre. The aim of the accompaniment was to help them establish a daily routine to be more autonomous in their everyday activities such as eating, dressing, walking, etc. Furthermore, every morning, a small group of students had the opportunity to give school support and accompaniment during their leisure time in the Father Lerchundi project. All the participants were also able to visit the Dar Tika project for one whole morning and learn about the main lines of action of the project. Finally, the participants learned about the situation on the southern border of Ceuta, where they had the opportunity to visit the fence and learn about the harsh reality experienced by people who want to emigrate in search of better living conditions.

The entire volunteer group shared the housework throughout the week, and at the end of each day, the students carried out an Ignatian examination of conscience led by the instructor. In these encounters, the students, through interaction with their fellow students and mutual help, recalled how the day had gone, shared different knowledge, reflections and feelings experienced during the day with the aim of enriching their experience and learning.

Context of the experience

Students from the University of Deusto (Spain) carried out this international short-term volunteering experience in Tangier (Morocco).

The University of Deusto is a Jesuit institution founded in 1886 by the Society of Jesus. The ownership of the university institution where students pursue their undergraduate studies is a social, non-profit initiative, so students are charged moderate tuition fees. This means that the students' socio-economic background is mostly middle class and, to a lesser extent, upper-middle class. However, a very significant number of students also study with financial aid from the university and other external organisations, which are processed by the university.

It should also be noted that, according to the 2019 Human Development Report carried out by the United Nations Development Programme (Conceição, 2019) Spain, with an HDI of 0.893, is positioned as the 26th most developed country in the Human Development Index; while Morocco (HDI = 0.676), where they live the volunteer experience, ranks 121st. This extracurricular volunteering activity aims to provide students with a group experience in a developing country, and offer them the opportunity to experience a culture other than their own and become acquainted with the reality of immigration on the other side of the border.

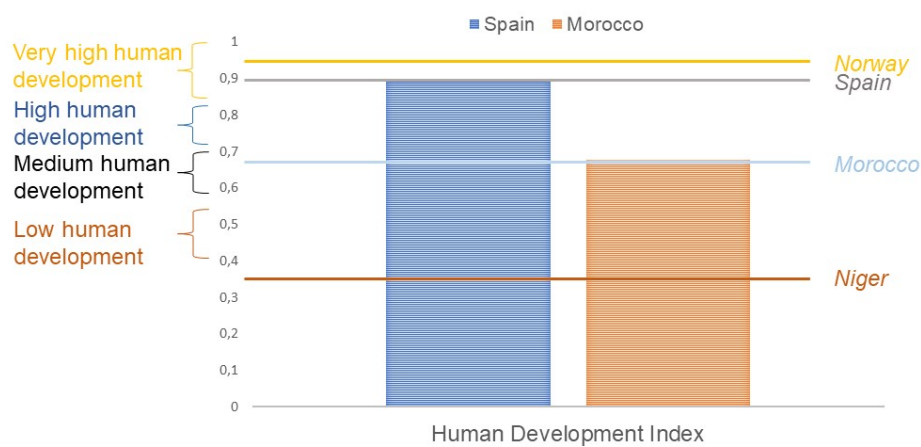


Figure 2. Score obtained in each country according to the Development Report published in 2019. Adapted from Díaz-Iso et al. (2020b).

Objectives and methodology

The extracurricular volunteer activity was designed to meet several objectives. On the one hand, three learning objectives for university students:

- Participate in social projects with socially vulnerable groups such as people with intellectual and/or physical disabilities, mental illnesses, immigrants, pregnant women abandoned by their families, minors and children at risk of social exclusion, in a different cultural context from their own.
- Reflect and feel responsible for the inclusion of vulnerable people, from the perspectives and procedures of their academic discipline.
- Enjoy a group experience in a developing country, with students from different university degrees.

On the other hand, the aim of this Deusto Campus solidarity area is to:

- Promote a profile of students aware of the social challenges facing the world today.
- Foster spaces of trust to enhance students' interaction and integration with their peers, with people from other cultures, religions and ideologies, with academic and services staff, etc.
- Give students the opportunity to create close ties with the community.
- Promote personal attitudes among students that allow to progress towards fairer, more humane and sustainable societies.

Regarding the methodology, it should be noted that this volunteering practice consists of four main phases:

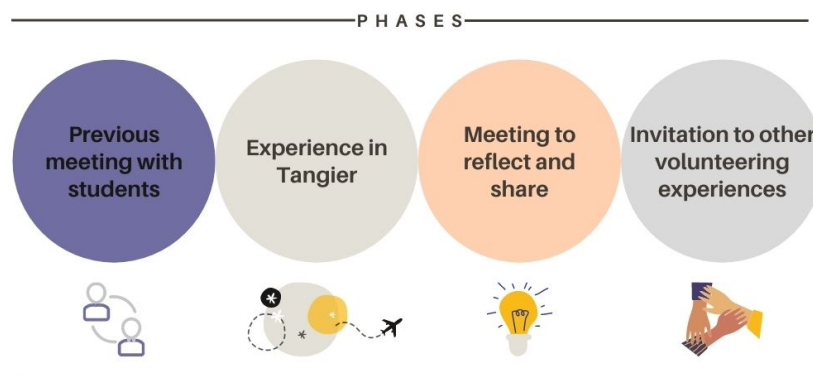


Figure 3. Main phases of the volunteering experience. Compiled by authors.

As shown in figure 3, prior to the extracurricular experience, a meeting is held with participants to present the different social projects. Afterwards, the young people live a 10-day experience accompanied by an instructor. After the volunteer activity, and knowing the reality of the border, a group meeting is held to collect the lived experience. In addition, for those people who feel called, they will be able to continue collaborating in other associations and projects on a voluntary basis.

Results obtained

The benefits listed below are based on two studies (Díaz-Iso et al., 2019, 2020b) conducted by researchers from the University of Deusto. Open in-depth interviews were used for data collection in the research. A total of 46 interviews (23 pre-interviews and 23 post-interviews) were undertaken with the 23 students who took part in the extracurricular volunteer experience in 2019.

In the interviews conducted with the students, six different benefits were pointed out (figure 4). The four benefits identified in the interviews before living the experience refer to psychological well-being, professional development, professional and academic experience and more extensive university experience.

In the interviews conducted with the students after living the experience, they also mentioned two further benefits: understanding of socio-cultural realities and attitude towards social transformation.



Figure 4: Benefits perceived by students participating in the ECA. Compiled by authors.

Before and after participating in the experience, students perceive that interacting with other students and with people at risk of social exclusion can help them improve both their academic and professional performance. Thus, on the one hand, they consider that it can serve to complement the theoretical knowledge they have acquired throughout the degree and give them a more practical and social perspective. On the other hand, they believe that it can help them gain professional experience and develop skills such as cooperation, communication and initiative, which may enhance future professional performance.

In this regard, as one participant said, “with this kind of volunteer experience you acquire knowledge that you have worked on theoretically, but until you put it into practice, you don’t really internalise it” (participant 22). Another pointed out “I think it helps to interact with different students from different degrees, above all, and create a spirit of doing things within the university” (participant 4).

The people interviewed also agreed that offering this type of experience, which allows to interact with peers and people living in different socio-cultural contexts, has enriched their university experience. It has also helped them to reflect on their own actions and privileges and develop a positive attitude towards other people. This, in turn, is linked to obtaining higher levels of well-being to enhance confidence or self-esteem. One student, for example,

said “although logically you are going to have hard times, personally I think it makes you feel better, you feel more self-fulfilled; it makes you feel that you cooperate, that you are involved, it makes you feel good” (participant 15).

The interviews carried out also reveal the possibility offered by this volunteering activity to understand other social realities and different mindsets, while at the same time it allows to reflect on one’s own values. Similarly, this experience has helped them to become aware of other sociocultural realities and reflect on possible ways to contribute to society. This involves developing ongoing, quality interactions with close people such as family and friends, and continuing to participate in volunteering with other associations.

Furthermore, it should be noted that before the experience, students believed that volunteering could be useful for their personal development, while after living an experience full of interactions, their focus is no longer on personal aspects and opens up to other global and social realities. One student, for example, says after the experience “I want to smile at life and help people and even if things don’t work out, I’ll keep going; if I succeed, I’ll be glad about it; If my friend manages to get what she wants, I’ll be glad for her. If she can’t, I’ll help her ” (participant 19).

Reflections from experience

Regarding the reflections drawn by students from their participation in the volunteering activity, there are six main thematic areas: reflections on the volunteer work performed, the experience lived on the border, the work carried out in the different projects, the possible organisational changes, personal and social, the range of social realities observed and the personal meaning of the experience (figure 5).



Figure 5: topics on which students reflect after living the volunteer experience. Compiled by authors.

This activity allows students to reflect on their own attitudes, actions and changes that they could carry out in their daily lives. In this way, after having experienced a disruptive situation, students have been able to examine their self-perception in relation to what they believe, who they think they are, and about how they can undertake or continue to build a more sustainable society for everyone.

Finally, it should therefore be noted that participation in this activity has a positive impact on students' holistic education, promoting not only their personal development, but also moving towards a more sustainable social development.

Lessons learned

Regarding the lessons learned, students perceive that participating in the different social projects, accompanied by a group and an instructor has allowed them to develop their reflective skills.

On the one hand, the volunteers point out that actual on-site fieldwork, participating in various social projects, has helped them become aware of different social realities and appreciate their own privileges. On the other hand, they value the experience as a very positive opportunity to create spaces where it is possible to reflect as a group, and each person can contribute different perspectives, thoughts or ideologies. The interaction between equals has allowed the student group to carry out a process of mutual knowledge construction that has enriched both their own reflection and the experience. They also point out that the role played by the instructor is very useful when it comes to generating a safe space of support and trust that will invite reflection. Specifically, they report that the instructor, through the Ignatian examination of conscience he prepared every day, has managed to motivate them to reflect, better understand the situations they were experiencing, resolve doubts and clarify ideas by creating a climate of trust and freedom.

Finally, the extracurricular experience is not only based on the 10 days lived in Tangier, but also on the before and after meetings, where they can share and reflect on the lessons learned.

Therefore, this good practice shows us that it is possible to move towards a responsible, quality higher education system that provides people with comprehensive training. This training goes beyond academic results and focuses on the range of skills that are necessary to form more humane persons, who know how to coexist in this diverse, constantly changing world.

This paper is a step forward on the road to implementing effective and quality interventions in Jesuit institutions, which may provide students with tools to better grasp the meaning of who they are and where they heading. It is nothing less than a good practice that aims to shed light on the process of forming fairer, more sustainable people and societies.

Opportunities for improvement

Here are some key elements to consider for the design and implementation of ECAs to achieve the benefits discussed above.

Academic staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Raise awareness and inform academic staff about the positive impact that ECAs have on educational outcomes and student life. ● Assess the participation of academic staff in ECAs, supporting students and/or instructors. ● Provide activities that are perceived as relevant by academic staff.
Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Encourage students to participate in ECAs. ● Assess student participation in ECAs.
Managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Offer a wide range of high quality, structured ECAs that pay attention to students' opinion and interests. ● Adapt ECAs to the educational institution itself, to the programme types, the specialist fields and students' characteristics, including their cultural and social backgrounds. ● Offer activities that produce positive feelings, which are perceived as relevant by students and provide a sense of connection with other people. ● Carry out regular satisfaction surveys on the ECAs offered by the institution.
Institution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Invest the necessary funds to enable a wide range of ECAs, and have a coordinating unit for ECA activities in the institution. ● Disseminate the benefits and usefulness of participating in ECAs. ● Review the policies for the recognition and promotion of academic staff. ● Review student training programmes and design ECAs that complement academic training.

Table 1. Key elements to consider for the design and implementation of ECAs. Adapted from Díaz-Iso et al., (2020a).

Bibliographical references

- Aktas, C. B., Whelan, R., Stoffer, H., Todd, E., & Kern, C. L. (2015). Developing a university-wide course on sustainability: A critical evaluation of planning and implementation. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, *106*(1), 216–221.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2014.11.037>
- Astin, A. W. (1894). Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher education. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, *25*(4), 297–308. <https://bit.ly/2O8N0re>
- Bakoban, R. A., & Aljarallah, S. A. (2015). Extracurricular activities and their effect on the student's grade point average: Statistical study. *Educational Research and Reviews*, *10*(20), 2737–2744. <https://doi.org/10.5897/err2015.2436>.
- Belikova, L. F. (2002). Students' attitudes toward extracurricular activity in an institution of higher learning. *RUSSIAN EDUCATION AND SOCIETY*, *44*(2), 73–85.
<https://doi.org/10.2753/RES1060-9393440273>
- Bubnys, R. (2019). A journey of self-reflection in students' perception of practice and roles in the profession. *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, *11*(1). <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11010194>
- Conceição, P. (2019). *Human Development Report 2019. Beyond income, beyond averages, beyond today: Inequalities in human development in the 21st century*.
<https://bit.ly/3deGPvS>
- Díaz-Iso, A., Eizaguirre, A., & García-Olalla, A. (2019). Extracurricular Activities in Higher Education and the Promotion of Reflective Learning for Sustainability. *Sustainability*, *11*(17), 4521. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11174521>
- Díaz-Iso, A., Eizaguirre, A., & García-Olalla, A. (2020a). A systematic review of the concept of extracurricular activity in higher education. *Educacion XX1*, *23*(2), 307–335.
<https://doi.org/10.5944/educxx1.25765>
- Díaz-Iso, A., Eizaguirre, A., & García-Olalla, A. (2020b). Understanding the role of social interactions in the development of an extracurricular university volunteer activity in a developing country. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*,

17(12), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17124422>

Girbés-Peco, S., Renta-Davids, A. I., De Botton, L., & Álvarez-Cifuentes, P. (2018). The Montserrat's neighbourhood dream: involving Moroccan residents in a school-based community development process in urban Spain. *Social and Cultural Geography*, 21(5), 674–696. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2018.1509112>

Jesuits. (n.d.). *Preferencias Apostólicas Universales*. Retrieved January 29, 2021, from <https://www.jesuits.global/es/uap/introduccion/>

Kagawa, F. (2007). Dissonance in students' perceptions of sustainable development and sustainability: Implications for curriculum change. *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, 8(3), 317–338. <https://doi.org/10.1108/14676370710817174>

Li, Z. (2017). Citizenship education 'goes global': Extra-curricular learning in an overseas campus of a British civic university. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 36(6), 662–678. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2017.1375565>

Pascarella, E. T. (1980). Student-Faculty informal contact and college outcomes. *Review of Educational Research*, 50(4), 545–595. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1170295>

Thompson, L. J., Clark, G., Walker, M., & Whyatt, J. D. (2013). "It's just like an extra string to your bow": Exploring higher education students' perceptions and experiences of extracurricular activity and employability. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 14(2), 135–147. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1469787413481129>

UNESCO. (2017). *Education for Sustainable Development Goals: Learning Objectives*. <https://bit.ly/38EnOIY>

Villa Sánchez, A., & Lemke Duque, C. A. (2016). The «Ledesma-Kolvenbach paradigm»: Origin and realization at university level [El «paradigma ledesma-kolvenbach»: Origen y concreción en el ámbito universitario]. *Arbor*, 192(782). <https://doi.org/10.3989/arbor.2016.782n6003>