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The Role of Extracurricular Activities in Developing Students' Soft Skills

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Abstract: *The main issue highlighted in this study is the suboptimal management and implementation of extracurricular activities in schools, resulting in the underutilization of their potential to develop students' soft skills. This study investigates the role of extracurricular activities in developing students' soft skills, which are increasingly recognized as essential competencies for success in the 21st century. Grounded in the understanding that formal education often emphasizes cognitive learning while overlooking interpersonal and intrapersonal competencies, this research explores how extracurricular programs provide meaningful opportunities for holistic development. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation involving teachers, students, and school administrators. The analysis employed Miles and Huberman's interactive model, covering data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal three major insights: first, extracurricular activities act as dynamic platforms for cultivating soft skills such as leadership, teamwork, communication, creativity, and resilience. Second, the implementation of these programs faces significant challenges, including limited resources, imbalanced participation, lack of professional training for facilitators, and time management constraints. Third, the success of extracurricular activities is strongly influenced by the active involvement of schools, teachers, parents, and communities, highlighting the importance of collaboration and strategic integration with real-life social issues. In conclusion, extracurricular activities are not merely complementary but serve as transformative tools for preparing students to face complex demands in academic, professional, and societal domains. The study recommends strengthening institutional support, enhancing teachers' capacity, and fostering school–community partnerships to maximize the impact of extracurricular activities. By doing so, schools can ensure that students emerge as competent, empathetic, and future-ready individuals.*

Keywords: *Extracurricular Activities; Soft Skills; Student Development; Leadership; Teamwork; 21st Century Education*

INTRODUCTION

Education plays a vital role not only in the transfer of knowledge but also in the development of students' character, personality, and life skills (Hanafiah et al., 2024; Saravanakumar, 2020). In today's rapidly changing world, the demands placed on students go beyond academic achievements(Prensky, 2014). They are expected to master essential competencies that enable them to adapt, communicate, and collaborate effectively in various settings(Goldman et al., 2018; Merritt & Kelley, 2018). This broader scope of education highlights the importance of cultivating

soft skills interpersonal abilities such as communication, teamwork, leadership, adaptability, and problem-solving that are indispensable in both academic and professional contexts.

Holistic education emphasizes the development of the whole individual, integrating cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains(Nuraida et al., 2022; Subedi, 2022). In this context, the educational process cannot be confined only to classroom-based learning. Students need opportunities to engage in experiences that help them apply theoretical knowledge, sharpen their creativity, and strengthen their emotional intelligence(Iryhina et al., 2020). Extracurricular activities provide a unique platform for such experiences, enabling students to grow in areas that are often overlooked in traditional teaching and learning practices.

Extracurricular activities, ranging from sports and arts to community service, student organizations, and leadership initiatives, are designed to complement academic instruction while fostering students' non-academic skills (Hayati & Abidin, 2023; Minah & Mardiana, 2026). Participation in extracurricular activities allows students to explore their interests, build self-confidence, and establish meaningful social interactions. More importantly, these activities provide an authentic environment for students to practice soft skills such as decision-making, conflict resolution, and time management, which are difficult to develop through classroom instruction alone.

Despite the recognized importance of extracurricular activities, many schools still perceive them as secondary or supplementary, rather than as integral parts of the learning process. As a result, the management and implementation of extracurricular activities are often less structured, receiving less attention and fewer resources compared to academic programs. In some schools, extracurricular activities are even treated as optional, leading to limited participation among students. This situation reduces the potential of extracurricular programs to contribute significantly to the development of students' soft skills.

Another pressing issue is the inconsistent participation of students in extracurricular programs. While some students are highly engaged and benefit greatly, others are less motivated due to a lack of guidance, inadequate facilities, or the perception that extracurricular activities are unrelated to academic success. Additionally, there is often a mismatch between the types of

extracurricular activities offered by schools and the actual interests or needs of students. This results in underutilization of extracurricular programs as a tool for developing soft skills.

Research conducted by Fakhretdinova, Osipov, and Dulalaeva (2020) shows that extracurricular activities play an important role in developing students' soft skills, such as communication, collaboration, leadership, responsibility, and interpersonal abilities through learning experiences outside the classroom(Fakhretdinova et al., 2020). Research conducted by Shcheglova (2019) shows that student involvement in extracurricular activities significantly helps the development of soft skills, such as communication, leadership, teamwork, and interpersonal abilities(Shcheglova, 2019). Research conducted by Munadi et al. (2021) shows that extracurricular activities in higher education play an effective role in developing students' soft skills, especially in the aspects of leadership, communication, cooperation, responsibility, and social abilitie(Munadi et al., 2021). Research conducted by Vi (2026) shows that a conducive learning environment and participation in extracurricular activities have a positive and significant effect on the development of students' soft skills, especially communication, teamwork, critical thinking, and time management(Vi, 2026).

Although many studies confirm the positive impact of extracurricular activities on soft skills development, there is still a lack of research that comprehensively explores the specific mechanisms through which extracurricular activities contribute to soft skills formation. Most studies focus only on certain types of activities, such as sports or student organizations, without providing a broader analysis that integrates various types of extracurricular programs. Furthermore, few studies investigate the challenges faced by schools in optimizing extracurricular activities, particularly in diverse educational environments. This creates a research gap that calls for deeper exploration.

Based on the problems and gaps identified above, this study aims to analyze the role of extracurricular activities in developing students' soft skills. Specifically, it seeks to examine how extracurricular activities are designed and implemented, how they influence students' social and emotional growth, and what challenges and opportunities arise in maximizing their potential. By doing so, this research is expected to provide valuable insights for educators, school administrators, and policymakers in strengthening the role of extracurricular programs as an

essential part of holistic education that fosters both academic excellence and life skills development.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of how extracurricular activities contribute to the development of students' soft skills (Nurfajriani et al., 2024). The qualitative case study method is appropriate because it enables researchers to explore the phenomenon within its natural context while capturing the complexity of students' experiences, perceptions, and interactions in extracurricular settings. The selected research site was a secondary school that provides a variety of extracurricular programs, including sports, arts, student organizations, and community service, with diverse student participation levels. The participants included school principals, extracurricular coaches, teachers, and students who were directly involved in extracurricular activities, chosen purposively to ensure that the data represented multiple perspectives.

Data were collected through three primary techniques: in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis(Hayati & Abidin, 2023; Moleong, 2017). Interviews were conducted with school principals and extracurricular coaches to gather insights on policies, strategies, and challenges in implementing extracurricular activities. Teachers and students were also interviewed to capture their experiences, perceptions, and reflections on the role of extracurricular activities in developing soft skills. Participant observation was carried out by attending and observing extracurricular sessions such as sports practice, student meetings, and cultural activities to identify the dynamics of interaction and skill development in real situations. In addition, documents such as school policies, extracurricular program designs, activity reports, and student achievements were analyzed to triangulate the data obtained from interviews and observations.

The data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which consists of three interconnected stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction involved selecting, categorizing, and simplifying the raw information collected in the field to focus on relevant aspects of the research objectives. The reduced data were then presented in a structured narrative form to facilitate analysis and interpretation. Finally, conclusions were drawn by

identifying patterns, relationships, and meanings from the data, which were continuously verified throughout the research process to ensure validity. This iterative analysis allowed the researcher to refine interpretations and develop a comprehensive understanding of the role of extracurricular activities in fostering students' soft skills.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the study employed triangulation of sources, techniques, and time. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing the perspectives of principals, teachers, and students. Technique triangulation was carried out by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and document analysis. Time triangulation was ensured by conducting data collection on different occasions to confirm consistency. The research procedure consisted of four stages: preparation (including proposal drafting, securing permissions, and identifying participants), data collection (interviews, observations, and documentation), data analysis (applying Miles and Huberman's model), and reporting (presenting findings and discussions). With this systematic method, the study is expected to produce valid, reliable, and in-depth insights into the contribution of extracurricular activities to the development of students' soft skills(Darmalaksana, 2020).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Extracurricular Activities as a Platform for Soft Skills Development

The findings reveal that extracurricular activities serve as an effective platform for nurturing soft skills among students, primarily because they provide experiential learning opportunities beyond the classroom. Unlike formal lessons that are often structured and cognitively oriented, extracurricular activities create flexible spaces where students can practice communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and time management in real-life contexts. For instance, students involved in sports teams demonstrated significant improvement in leadership skills, conflict resolution, and decision-making under pressure, while those engaged in cultural and artistic activities developed creativity, self-expression, and empathy(Begum et al., 2025). This illustrates that extracurricular activities function as laboratories of life where essential competencies are cultivated naturally.

One of the significant observations is that extracurricular programs create collaborative environments that demand students to work in groups and negotiate roles. In student

organizations such as debate clubs or scout groups, participants must coordinate responsibilities, share ideas, and resolve disagreements, all of which enhance interpersonal communication and negotiation skills(Hidayah et al., 2022). Through this process, students learn to listen actively, articulate their thoughts clearly, and respect the opinions of others, skills that are often overlooked in formal classroom instruction. As teachers and coaches noted, the structured collaboration in extracurricular programs significantly contributes to the students' ability to function effectively in teams, a critical skill required in both academic and professional settings.

Moreover, extracurricular activities provide contexts where students are confronted with challenges that require problem-solving and resilience. For example, during sports tournaments or cultural performances, unexpected obstacles such as technical difficulties, disagreements, or time constraints often arise. These moments push students to think creatively, adapt quickly, and manage stress productively. Teachers observed that students who were actively engaged in extracurricular activities displayed greater self-confidence and perseverance in facing difficulties, as compared to those who were not. This suggests that the problem-solving experiences gained in extracurricular programs equip students with the resilience and adaptability necessary to navigate the uncertainties of modern life.

The development of leadership skills also emerged as a prominent finding in this study. Student leaders, such as those who chaired organizations or served as team captains, were observed to demonstrate increased initiative, responsibility, and decision-making capacity(Kiersch & Peters, 2017). Leading a group required them to coordinate members, plan activities, manage conflicts, and ensure collective goals were met. These responsibilities enhanced their capacity to influence peers, build trust, and inspire collaboration, which are foundational elements of effective leadership. Teachers emphasized that leadership competencies gained in extracurricular contexts often translated into improved academic performance and greater confidence in public speaking or classroom discussions.

In summary, extracurricular activities are proven to be powerful vehicles for developing a broad range of soft skills that are essential for holistic student development. They provide authentic contexts where communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and leadership

can be practiced and internalized. The findings support the notion that education should not be confined to academic instruction but must also encompass opportunities for personal and social growth. By embedding extracurricular programs as integral components of the school system, students are better prepared to face the challenges of higher education, the labor market, and the globalized society where soft skills are increasingly valued.

2. Challenges in Implementing Extracurricular Programs

Despite the proven benefits of extracurricular activities, the study identified several challenges that hinder their optimal implementation(McCabe et al., 2020). One of the most pressing issues is the lack of adequate resources, including funding, facilities, and trained coaches or mentors. Schools often prioritize academic programs due to curriculum demands and budget limitations, leaving extracurricular activities underfunded or marginalized. As a result, many programs operate with minimal support, which limits the diversity and quality of activities offered to students. Teachers noted that without proper financial and institutional backing, it becomes difficult to sustain activities that require equipment, materials, or transportation for competitions.

Another significant challenge lies in the imbalance of student participation. While some students are highly enthusiastic and actively involved, others tend to disengage due to lack of interest, time constraints, or academic pressures. This imbalance creates a situation where only a subset of students fully benefits from soft skills development, while others miss out(Hurrell, 2016). Teachers expressed concern that high-achieving students often feel discouraged from joining extracurricular activities due to the perception that they will compromise academic performance. Conversely, students who lack self-confidence or motivation may feel intimidated to participate, resulting in unequal opportunities for skill enhancement across the student body.

The findings also highlight the challenge of inadequate teacher or coach preparation in facilitating extracurricular activities effectively. Many coaches or advisors are appointed based on availability rather than expertise, leading to situations where programs are not professionally managed(Rubin & Huml, 2022). This often reduces the quality of student experiences and limits the potential for skill development. For instance, some teachers

admitted they lacked training in leadership development or conflict management, which restricted their ability to mentor students effectively. Without proper professional development, extracurricular programs risk becoming routine activities rather than transformative experiences that genuinely nurture students' competencies.

Time management emerged as another key obstacle, both for students and schools. With demanding academic schedules and examination requirements, allocating sufficient time for extracurricular activities becomes a challenge(Patimah & Suherman, 2025). Students often struggle to balance academics, extracurricular commitments, and personal responsibilities, leading to burnout or decreased engagement in either domain. Teachers pointed out that extracurricular activities are sometimes treated as optional add-ons rather than essential components of holistic education, further exacerbating the problem. The lack of structured integration between academics and extracurriculars often diminishes the perceived value of the latter.

In conclusion, while extracurricular activities hold immense potential for fostering soft skills, their implementation faces systemic and practical challenges. Resource constraints, unequal participation, inadequate preparation of facilitators, and time management issues all hinder the effective realization of extracurricular goals. Addressing these barriers requires comprehensive institutional support, including financial investment, professional training, and policy frameworks that elevate the status of extracurriculars as integral parts of education. Without such efforts, the benefits of extracurricular activities will remain unevenly distributed and underutilized, limiting their impact on students' overall development.

3. The Role of Schools and Communities in Strengthening Extracurricular Impact

The findings emphasize that the role of schools is pivotal in ensuring that extracurricular activities effectively contribute to the development of soft skills. Schools that integrate extracurricular programs into their vision and mission demonstrate stronger results in nurturing well-rounded students. Principals who prioritize extracurriculars in school policies and allocate resources strategically create a supportive environment where students feel encouraged to participate(Jhonshon et al., 2024). For instance, schools that recognized extracurricular achievements in report cards or graduation criteria successfully motivated

students to engage more actively. This integration signals to students and parents that extracurricular involvement is not secondary but essential for holistic education.

In addition to school-level initiatives, teacher and coach involvement plays a critical role in guiding students through extracurricular activities. Teachers who act as mentors rather than supervisors create a nurturing environment that fosters growth, confidence, and responsibility(Squires, 2019). Students reported feeling more motivated when their teachers not only facilitated activities but also provided constructive feedback, encouragement, and emotional support. Furthermore, when teachers collaborated across disciplines to design extracurricular programs such as integrating science clubs with environmental community projects students experienced a deeper connection between academic knowledge and real-world applications, thereby enhancing both their hard and soft skills.

The community also plays a vital role in strengthening the impact of extracurricular activities. Partnerships with local organizations, universities, and professional associations broaden the scope and quality of activities available to students. For example, collaborations with local sports clubs, cultural institutions, or NGOs allow students to experience authentic contexts of leadership, social responsibility, and civic engagement. Parents' involvement is equally significant, as their encouragement and support often determine the level of student participation. Schools that engaged parents through workshops or joint projects observed greater student commitment and success in extracurricular endeavors.

Another crucial finding is that extracurricular activities are most impactful when they are aligned with real-life challenges and social issues. Programs that encourage students to address environmental concerns, social inequalities, or community needs foster empathy, civic responsibility, and problem-solving skills. For instance, community service projects not only provided students with opportunities to collaborate but also instilled values of compassion and accountability. Teachers observed that students who engaged in such socially relevant extracurriculars developed stronger ethical awareness and a sense of agency to contribute positively to society. This demonstrates that extracurricular activities can be powerful vehicles for character education when strategically designed.

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In summary, the combined efforts of schools, teachers, and communities are essential for maximizing the impact of extracurricular activities on soft skills development. Schools must institutionalize extracurriculars as part of their educational framework, teachers must act as dedicated mentors, and communities must provide collaborative spaces for authentic engagement. When these stakeholders work in synergy, extracurricular programs transcend recreational purposes and become transformative experiences that shape students into competent, empathetic, and socially responsible individuals. Ultimately, the findings suggest that sustainable collaboration between schools and communities is the key to embedding extracurricular activities as integral pathways for holistic student development.

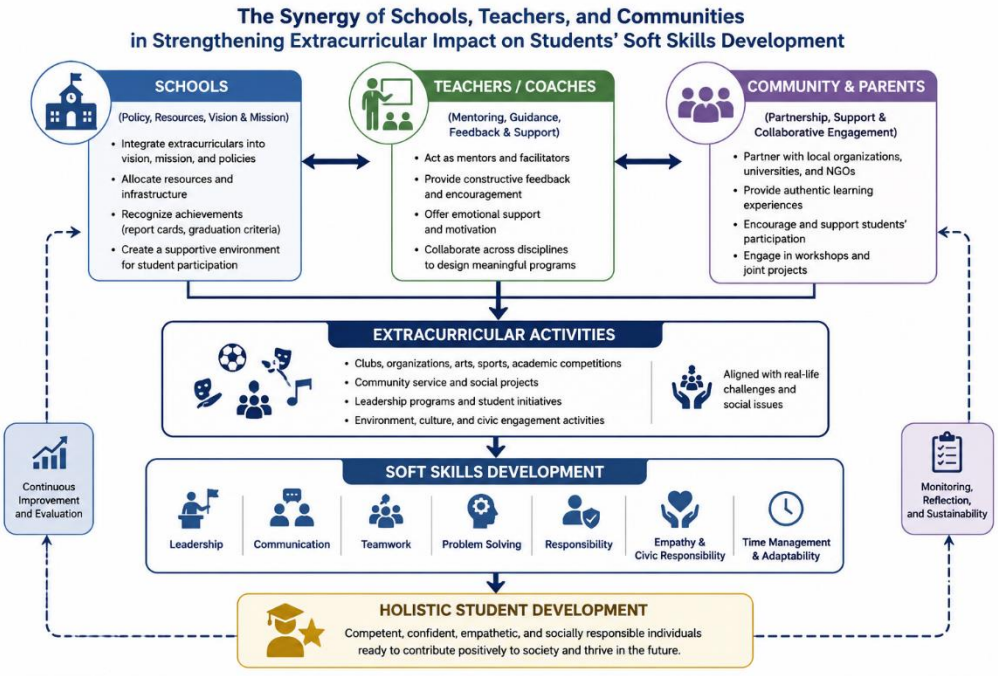


Figure 1 synergy School, Tecaher and Communities

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that extracurricular activities play a vital role in fostering soft skills among students, including communication, teamwork, leadership, creativity, problem-solving, and resilience. These activities provide authentic contexts for experiential learning that cannot be fully realized in traditional classroom settings. However, the study also reveals that the implementation of extracurricular programs is challenged by

resource limitations, unequal student participation, lack of adequately trained facilitators, and time constraints. To overcome these issues, it is recommended that schools institutionalize extracurricular activities as integral components of education, provide continuous training for teachers and coaches, and allocate sufficient financial and infrastructural support. Moreover, collaboration with parents, communities, and external organizations should be strengthened to enhance the scope, relevance, and sustainability of extracurricular initiatives. By embedding extracurricular programs into the holistic education framework, schools can prepare students not only to excel academically but also to thrive in social, professional, and civic life, ultimately shaping them into responsible, adaptable, and future-ready citizens.

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