

# Role of Extracurricular Activities in Holistic Student Development.

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**Abstract:** This paper aims to critically discuss the role of extracurricular activities in holistic student development. Extracurricular activities serve as an outlet to vent a student's extra energy. It helps them grow into well-rounded human beings with better health. One of the vital aspects of school life is extracurricular activities that will provide them with the practical knowledge to survive as adults. Unfortunately, most school systems do not value extracurricular activities as much as other exam subjects, because, the curriculum they use is so much exam or result oriented. Extracurricular activities are a fantastic approach to making students' learn beyond the classroom. It includes music, drama, sports, dance, etc., creating diverse relationships and expressing artistic talents. Balancing academic and extracurricular activities will be an essential skill every student must master as they participate in activities outside the classroom. They learn to engage themselves during their free time and manage their schedules efficiently. Managing time is a vital element in everyone's life as it will be helpful in various aspects of life. Academic activities in classrooms and extracurricular activities inside and outside classrooms must not compete with each other, but complete one another to get the best out of the students.

**Keywords:** holistic, extracurricular, curriculum, development, talents, civic responsibility, resilience, management, excellence, professional, creativity, academically, self-discovery

## 2.0 Introduction

In today's dynamic world, education is not confined to the four walls of a classroom or the pages of a textbook. The importance of extra-curricular activities in shaping well-rounded, resilient, and forward-thinking individuals is undeniable. They present the perfect blend of fun and learning, pushing students to explore new territories, accept challenges, and celebrate diversity. Hence, schools, educators, and parents must foster an environment that encourages active participation in these activities.

Education is one of the fundamental pillars of human development but is not limited by what is taught in classrooms. Extracurricular activities play a crucial role in this process, enriching the educational experience and providing a more complete experience. Extracurricular activities are complementary activities to regular classes, carried out outside school hours. They cover a wide range of options, from sports and arts to academic clubs and volunteering. These activities play a vital role in promoting the holistic development of students, offering opportunities for personal and academic growth. They offer students the opportunity to pursue specific interests or develop additional skills in sports, art & craft, music, academic and social clubs, community & religious activities, and many more. Extracurricular activities have a special relevance in providing opportunities for developing skills that go beyond the conventional school curriculum. They play a crucial role in discovering the passions and interests of students, considerably impacting their personal and professional journeys.

Extracurricular activities will allow students to build leadership, self-confidence, and various social skills. It makes the students explore different areas and choose their favorite field of passion. Eventually, it helps them make self-decisions, which is an important criterion for being independent in life. Extracurricular activities are a significant necessity for modern students as they have more exposure to screens. Indulging them in extracurricular activities will help them develop various essential skills required to lead a successful life. Most importantly, having fun with extracurricular activities will teach the students to handle different circumstances and know the world better.

Therefore, all schools, colleges, universities, and community at large, should start to making extra activities compulsory and available as core subject in their curriculum and programmes. Students should be given an opportunity to build a career path on their favourite extracurricular activities. Sports, music, art, to name a few, can be very highly recognized and financially rewarding profession for students who may not be academically high achievers. Excellence in extracurricular activities can give academically low achievers a second chance to cash-in on their hidden talents, passion and interest. All students in schools, colleges and universities, will not be teachers, doctors, lawyers, pilots or other white-collar professionals. The world needs musicians, artists, sportsman/sportswomen, religious/ cultural/political leaders, volunteers, priests, cooks, carpenters, plaster man, farmers, etc. Participation and involvement in extracurricular activities by students at any level, will lay the foundation for their future success and prosperity.

With a holistic emphasis on the growth and development of each student, school curriculums should provide a broad spectrum of extra-curricular activities. This integrative approach ensures that students excel academically and are prepared with the essential life skills and experiences needed for their future endeavours. Global perspectives in education, mental health and wellbeing, data-driven decision-making, and environmental education are all vital components of a holistic and progressive society. Global perspectives in education promote cultural understanding, empathy, and preparedness to address global challenges, ensuring that individuals are well-equipped to navigate an interconnected world. Mental health and wellbeing are fundamental for overall quality of life, emphasizing the importance of addressing mental health challenges, reducing stigma, and fostering supportive communities.

The significance of extracurricular activities lies in providing a holistic approach to education, where students learn not just from textbooks but also from experiences, interactions, and practical application of skills. These activities enable students to develop critical life skills, enhance social interaction, nurture creativity, and foster a sense of identity and belonging.

Extracurricular activities are fertile ground for personal growth. They offer students opportunities to discover their passions and talents, build self-confidence, and develop a strong sense of identity. Through these activities, students can push their boundaries and explore new horizons. For example, a shy student might discover a hidden talent for public speaking by joining a debate club, ultimately gaining confidence in their communication skills. Interacting with peers in extracurricular settings allows students to develop crucial social skills. They learn to work as part of a team, resolve conflicts, and communicate effectively. These experiences are invaluable for their personal and professional lives. In a sports team, for instance, students learn about collaboration, camaraderie, and the importance of supporting one another.

Balancing academics with extracurricular commitments requires effective time management and organizational skills. Students must learn to prioritize tasks, set goals, and manage their schedules efficiently. These skills are transferable to their academic work and future careers. Engaging in extracurricular activities provides students with a healthy outlet for stress and helps improve their overall well-being. These activities allow them to unwind, relax, and focus on something they are passionate about, which can alleviate academic pressure.

Extracurricular activities often bring together students from diverse backgrounds and interests. This diversity fosters inclusivity, broadens students' perspectives, and promotes tolerance and understanding. Students learn to appreciate and respect different viewpoints, contributing to a more inclusive society. Extracurricular activities inspire a love for learning that extends beyond the classroom. When students engage in activities they are passionate about, they are more likely to continue exploring those interests throughout their lives. This thirst for knowledge contributes to lifelong learning.

Simple activities like 'Scouting', 'Girl Guides', 'St John', 'Cubs', 'Gardening', 'Sports' were very prominent extracurricular in past education systems which produced great students, leaders, administrators and teachers to name a few. I had the privilege to be a Boy Scout and a member of the St John Club while in primary school for 8 years. It taught me so many life-long and life-saving skills that are still so relevant to me even till today. School systems everywhere should bring these noble activities back for students in today's classrooms. These simple activities have great potential to solve most of the discipline problems that students have in schools. I understand, that students nowadays have so many rights and privileges bestowed on them, rights and privileges must come with sense of responsibility. These simple extracurricular activities will help in instilling sense of responsibility in students. The sense of responsibility is disappearing in students in this modern age.

We fail to realize that movement and structure are crucial to students' learning abilities? Physical activity increases blood flow and oxygen to the brain, improving memory and the ability to learn (and retain) information. The part of the brain that processes movement is the same part of the brain that processes learning. So, when one activates his or her body through exercise, they kickstart their brain! This can have a direct connection to success in school. Students who engage in daily physical activity show better classroom performance and have a more positive attitude toward school than those who don't.

Students can be encouraged and trained to incorporate movement into their routine by engaging in many types of extracurricular activities and movement methods. Even mild exercise for a few minutes can make a difference. Extracurriculars also provide structure, helping students with executive function challenges to stay on task and regulate their behaviour. The structure and discipline extracurriculars provide help students practice those skills daily or weekly. Even if they're not the ones dictating the structure, the organization and the accountability extracurriculars provide help students to begin developing those skills on their own. These activities foster incredibly valuable life skills that can positively impact students' performance in the classroom as well.

Several research show a strong correlation between participation in extracurricular activities and academic success. Students who engage in after-school clubs or sports tend to have better academic results. However, the benefits extend long beyond grades and test scores; extracurriculars build interpersonal skills and promote positive relationships with peers *and* adults. The beauty of this is

that it doesn't matter what extracurricular it is, as long as they are involved. Whether it's athletics, band, theatre, visual arts, volunteering, etc., these activities contribute to student's personal growth and academic achievements. Extracurricular activities like sports, art & craft, music, dance, to name a few, can get students in well established, high performing schools and universities. It can also help poor students to get scholarships to attend reputable schools and universities which will help the students to make a career in it and prosper in life.

Extracurricular activities are often the salvation of "bad" kids. Students who feel lost, alienated, tempted and angry can find their way through participation in sports, music, drama, academic teams and so on. They can find their special talents and use it to gain respect, recognition and acceptance. Students can find like-minded souls; perhaps a new and more salutary peer group. They can find dedicated, interested faculty members who can keep them aimed in the right direction. Students can find opportunities for college scholarships. Keeping pet at home by students could act as an extracurricular activity for them.

Keep a dog, cat or even caring a pot plant can contribute in enhancing skills and knowledge that will make a holistic development of students from a very young age. Skills like love for animals, plants and the environment as whole will make the students good citizens who will show empathy, compassion, love, care and to all. But due to circumstances beyond their control, most students do not get such opportunities. Factors like space, time, money, and academic pressures deprive students of this activity. Many parents around the globe are struggling to meet their family's basic needs, so keeping pets at home is simply unthinkable. Spending some time away from books with their pets, plants, or just walking in the garden can give so much to the relieve to the students. Such activities, not only relieves the academic pressure in students, but help in cultivating life-long skills like caring, loving, sharing and appreciating God created environment.

Waisele Serevi, a world known rugby player from Fiji was not very good in his education but made a name for himself and his country through an extracurricular activity which was sports. He is known all over the world for his extra ordinary skills in rugby, both in sevens and fifteen format. Recently, he was in India, helping in the growth of rugby in India. There are millions of students like Waisele Serevi, all over the world, who were not very high achievers academically, but have made a very lucrative career out of an extracurricular activity of their choice. Another example could be the Bollywood film star Akshay Kumar, who was a 10<sup>th</sup> grade fail student. But his passion in sports made him so disciplined in life, and today he is one of the highest taxpayers in India. His passion in sports brought him into movies which in return brought fame, name and wealth. It proves that fact that even if students are not doing very well academically, their passion and participation can complement their shortfall. Famous cricketer, Virat Kohli is another living example. His passion and dedication in extracurricular activities, gave him name and fame, made him the greatest cricketer of all time. His discipline is his weapon.

Today, every parent's dream is to see their children excel in academic activities in schools, colleges and universities. Parents expect their children to get high marks and very good grades in whatever subjects the children do in school. It is a very simple logic. What the parents themselves, could do or achieve, they want their own children to achieve at any cost and fulfil their dream. Every individual is different and have different interests, dreams and ambitions in life. A doctor's child should not be expected to a doctor also. What is wrong if he or she chooses to become a musician or a chef. In the present era there is no major difference between a white collar or a trade/skills jobs, as long as it provides food on the table for the family. No job is good or bad, but the intention must be honest and correct. Parents must realize that if they have five children, all of them will not excel in academic activities, because they all are individuals and different. Their individual interests, talents, and abilities should be identified and nurtured with love and care. Most high achievers in academic activities get highly paid jobs that have expiry dates (retirement age), but low achievers get into trade or skill base jobs like plumbing, carpentering, mechanics, musicians, artists where they work and earn till their last breadth.

As a parent, I, also had similar thoughts but then I realized that it was wrong. My son was average in education achievements in primary and secondary schools. He was very sports oriented and interested child, and spent most of his time outside playing sports. I could not convince him to concentrate in school subjects like mathematics, English, economics, accounting or computer studies. He tried to please me, but could not get good marks or grades. After discussing with him, I decided to enrol him in a college instead of an university. At the college he enrolled in a Diploma in Education programme, majoring in education and PEMAC (Physical Education, Music, Art & Craft). He was very happy and successfully graduated after two years and joined the teaching profession. Actually, my dream was to make him a school teacher. Which I eventually achieved, but through my son's chosen path. Since then he has upgraded his qualification from diploma to a degree in Sports Science at the University of the South Pacific in Fiji. Today he is the Head of Department in PEMAC in a large. well known secondary school and he is enjoying his work. Similarly, my daughter who had lot of interest in reading and writing stories, completed her Bachelor's and Master's degree in Education and Language/ literature, and at present is the Head of Language/Literature department in a large secondary school in Fiji.

We have to recognize that for many students, the highlight of their day lies outside the classroom. While this may seem like an interference in some capacity, participation in extracurricular activities can actually give students an increased sense of purpose

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and belonging. They become more motivated in the classroom by developing friendships, increasing their regard for school, and strengthening their engagement across the board. Extracurricular activities foster communication, leadership, and responsibility. Not only can this greatly contribute to the development of discipline and accountability in students, but it can also help them gain confidence in their skills and find their worth beyond academic performance.

But the culprit is the school systems and the curriculum they teach in schools in many countries. It is very exam oriented and success and failure is measured in terms of grades and marks. The students are labelled as pass or fail. There is very little scope for extracurricular activities in the school curriculums in most countries. Parents have a similar mindset. To most parents, extracurricular activities are distractions to student's academic performance. Growing up as a student, I had the same experience. My parents were very much against extracurricular activities like sports. I got punished several times for my participation in such activities. To most parents, extracurricular activities was just a waste of time that could be used for studying. This type of mindset needs to change now.

Well in the traditional societies, 30-50 years back, there were lot of physical activities for young and old. Activities like working on farms, cutting grass with knives, chopping firewood, walking long distance to shops, schools and work, and many more, were the extracurricular activities of that era. Today, students are living in a concrete jungle, where physical activities are very limited. Students are forced to stay indoors most times, either at home or school. The rapid increasing population has put lot of pressure on space. Families are forced to live in small, congested spaces for survival, in most urban areas. Developments in transport, communication, health, education, and other areas have brought so much comfort to doorsteps.

Improvements in socio-economic status of families around the world has have offered so much luxury in everyday living. Technology, internet, electricity, mobile phones, computers, has made so comfortable and easy. We have almost everything at our fingertips now. Online shopping, online learning, work from home, communicating with families and friends all around the world on mobile phones, has reduced our engagement in physical activities drastically. We are forced to live in cage, in isolation and alone, due to increasing crime rate, drugs, rape cases, and ethical violence in many countries. Students are also forced to stay at home, just study and go to schools. Parents either pick and drop or students travel on bus. Recreational parks are hardly available in most over populated urban areas. Students are treated like animals in cages in a circus. The behaviour and health conditions of animals in a circus is very different from that of animals in the wild. Depriving students' opportunities of participating in extracurricular activities, inside and outside school will make them like the animals in a circus. The students will just follow orders and not feel confident to make decisions on their own, and will fail to showcase their hidden talents and make rewarding living out of it.

### 3.0 Some benefits of Extracurricular Activities in Holistic Student Development

*There are many benefits of extracurricular activities in holistic student development.*

1. **Personal Development:** Extra-curricular activities develop soft skills such as leadership, teamwork, communication, problem-solving, and time management.
2. **Self-Discovery:** They provide a platform for students to explore their interests, helping them identify their passions and potential career paths.
3. **Improved Academic Performance:** Studies suggest a positive correlation between participation in these activities and academic achievement, mainly due to enhanced skills like time management and discipline.
4. **Health and Wellness:** Physical activities help maintain physical health, while others, like art or music, can contribute to mental well-being.
5. **Life Skills:** They provide real-world experiences that help students develop practical skills and abilities to serve them in the future.
6. **Networking and Socializing:** They offer opportunities to connect with peers, teachers, and professionals in the field, expanding a student's network.
7. **Increased Self-Esteem:** Success and achievements in these activities can boost self-esteem and confidence.
8. **Civic Responsibility:** Activities such as volunteering or community service foster a sense of civic responsibility and global awareness.

9. **Resilience:** They provide opportunities to face challenges, handle failure, learn from mistakes, and develop resilience.
10. **Improved Social Skills:** Extra-curricular activities allow students to interact with like-minded peers, fostering friendships and improving social skills.
11. **Creativity and Innovation:** Art, drama, swimming, or robotics activities stimulate creative thinking and innovation.
12. **Cultural Awareness:** Participating in diverse activities expose students to different cultures and ideas, fostering a sense of cultural sensitivity and understanding.
13. **Career Preparation:** Engaging in various activities can equip you with practical experience and valuable skills beneficial for specific careers and can also help in university preparation.
14. **Leadership Experience:** Activities like student council or team sports often provide opportunities to take on leadership roles, teaching students about responsibility, decision-making, and people management.

While the benefits of extra-curricular activities are manifold, it's crucial to strike a balance between them and academic commitments. This balance ensures that while developing various skills and exploring diverse interests, your academics do not suffer.

#### 4.0 Striking Balance Between Academic and Extra curricula Activities in Holistic Student Development

- **Time Management:** Create a schedule that includes time for homework, study, extra-curricular activities, and relaxation. This will help ensure that none of these aspects are neglected.
- **Set Priorities:** Understand what's important to you. If there are critical academic goals you need to meet, you may have to allocate more time to your studies during certain periods.
- **Avoid Overcommitment:** Signing up for multiple activities is tempting, but this can lead to stress and burnout. Choose a few activities that truly interest you and dedicate your time and effort to them.
- **Seek Guidance:** If you struggle balancing academics and extra-curricular activities, don't hesitate to seek help. Teachers, school counsellors, and parents can provide valuable advice and support.
- **Maintain Flexibility:** Be prepared to make adjustments as needed. There will be times when you may need to focus more on either academics or extra-curricular activities.

The key to a rewarding and enriching school experience is to balance academic pursuits with the enjoyment and personal growth that come from participation in extra-curricular activities. Striking this balance allows you to experience and appreciate your education's diverse facets fully. Research of past have shown that those who participate in out-of-school activities often have higher grade point averages, a decrease in absenteeism, and an increased connectedness to the school. Students who are over-scheduled in too many activities find that the benefits of participating in out-of-school activities may actually decrease. The challenge is to strike a right balance between academic activities and extracurricular commitments.

#### 5.0 Conclusion

Extracurricular activities are not mere hobbies or pastimes for students. They are integral components of holistic education. They contribute to personal growth, social development, and the acquisition of essential life skills. Extracurricular activities also help in the cognitive, mental, physical and social development of students. I have heard teachers say **"all work and no play make Jack a dull boy"**. It simply means that without time off from work, a person becomes both bored and boring. Some say that play is important for growth and understanding the environment. Others say that play should be a personal recipe for enjoyment. It is so relevant and meaningful in today's fast evolving environment.

Students of all ages, gender, socio-economic backgrounds, and geographical locations, need to be prepared mentally, physically, spiritually, and holistically to face the unknown and unpredictable challenges of the future. The future is unknown and unpredictable, because no one has seen the future. Students, teachers and parents should have learnt a lot from the effects of COVID pandemic. Lot of parents lost their jobs due to lockdowns, border closures. In such case, parents had to resort to other

activities to put food on the table and support their families. Students were also forced to do so many activities like farming, selling vegetables or food, or join workforce to supplement the family income.

Use of drugs, truancy, criminal activities, racial and religious tensions, bullying are some undesirable activities that students are getting into all around the globe on a daily basis. Mass shooting incidents in United States by young students is alarming and frightening. These could be due to depression, mental breakdowns, loneliness, bullying, physical and social abuse and isolation to name a few. This is where extracurricular activities in which students can participate and make better, productive and rewarding use of their time and energy. When students have a lot of free time and space, they can become easy targets for undesirable activities. Students are too young and immature to make wise decision on their own, so adult guidance and supervision is needed on a regular basis. It is quite sad and disturbing to admit that drug is becoming a real problem in our schools in Fiji. Primary school students are found to be involved in transporting drugs for their own parents or relatives. While I was writing this article, it was reported by Fiji Police news that two students were arrested with other adults in possession of drugs on their school premises (FBC News, 16/11/2024) A concerted effort is needed from everyone in the fight against drug, before it gets out of hand.

Students can be taught so many soft skills through their engagement in extracurricular activities. Soft skills are personal attributes that help people interact well with others and are important to students. Skills and attributes like Empathy, Confidence, Compassionate, Honesty, Caring and Sharing, Collaboration, Kindness, Communication, Teamwork, Problem-solving, Time management, Leadership, Adaptability, Creativity, Emotional intelligence, Flexibility, and Goal-setting. Networking, Enthusiasm, Professionalism, Critical thinking, Customer service, Interpersonal skills, Work ethic, Curiosity, and Open-mindedness. These skills and attributes is difficult to teach in normal classroom teaching, where most times, emphasis is on completion of the curriculum and passing exams with good grades. We can not expect teachers to do everything for the students. Parents and policy makers need to take more active role in promoting extracurricular activities in the lives of students at all levels.

Soft skills are building blocks students can use to lay a strong foundation for their career path and future. It doesn't matter which order they choose to strengthen them, or if they choose to strengthen one over another. All that matters is that student will be able to strengthen their soft skills as much as they strengthen the hard skills needed to get the job and excel in their career and life in future. These soft skills speak loudly about who students are as a person and why they will prosper in future. Extracurricular activities can play a crucial role in students' education, offering valuable opportunities for skill development, personal growth, and preparation for the future. By effectively integrating a wide variety of options into the school environment, schools have the power to significantly enrich their students' educational experience.

A practical and efficient balance between academic and extracurricular activities is essential for a student's life. It teaches them concepts that go beyond the classroom's four walls. In a learner-centric classroom, extracurricular activities are crucial to get a successful educational experience and life-long learning. Extracurricular activities which vary from participating in physical education to learning music, cultivate important life skills that a student can use for the rest of his or her life and become a better, well equipped, adaptive and multi-skilled global citizen.

Students are under pressure to do better in this highly competitive society, therefore it is imperative to strike the right balance and become adept at time management. Maintaining an outstanding balance between academics and extra-curricular can help to shape one's personality and transforms skills into abilities.

By providing students with opportunities to explore their interests and passions beyond the classroom. We at the University of Fiji, empower our students to become well-rounded individuals who are prepared for the challenges and opportunities of the future. A holistic education, which combines academic learning with extracurricular engagement, equips students with the tools they need to excel in all aspects of life. As educators and parents, we should encourage and support our students in their extracurricular pursuits, recognizing the profound impact these activities can have on their overall development.

As parents, teachers and policy makers need to encourage our students to participate in extracurricular activities even if they are not enjoying it initially. It is our sole responsibility to support them and make them realize their importance. Permitting students to do whatever interests them will help them choose a career in the future and succeed effectively with sufficient exposure, Therefore, extracurricular activities and academic go hand in hand and help young minds become better citizens in the future. Lets us make an effort to identifying the hidden talents and interests in our students through their participation in extracurricular activities which will bring success and happiness in their lives in future.

Lastly, I would like to plead to all students, parents, teachers and policy makers to take time out and watch two great Hindi movies, *Tare Zameen Pe* and *3 Idiots*. These two movies say a lot about the important role of extracurricular activities play in holistic student development. I have learnt a lot a holistic student development from these great movies. Actually, it should be available to every parent, teacher and student all over the globe. Policy makers and curriculum developers can use it as a guide in designing future curriculums and education policies.

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