

## ***Leadership Development through Extracurricular Activities in Higher Education***

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### **Abstract**

Leadership is one of the main objectives of higher education and equipping students to become effective and productive citizens in the workplace and in life. Extra-curricular activities offer opportunities for the students to apply the knowledge gained in the classroom and to develop leadership skills such as ethics, communication, resilience, and collaboration. The method of this research is conceptual with a qualitative approach to explore the influence of these co-curriculars on leadership development. Theories related to experiential learning, social relationships, and transformational leadership are used to develop understanding of how these activities contribute to a holistic growth, how they can be barriers to implementation, and how they can be incorporated into leadership programs. It illustrates the possible role of cultural societies, N.C.C. and N.S.S. programmes in the country in building moral leaders in the Indian context.

**Keywords:** - Leadership, Higher Education, Extracurricular Activities, Qualitative Approach, Holistic Growth

### **Introduction**

The tasks that universities and colleges have to perform are twofold. They not only want to educate people but to also make them leaders in their communities, countries, and the world. The leadership here is a process of ongoing self-reflection, growth and application and is not a fixed trait. Students might have the opportunity to gain hands-on experience in extra-curricular activities such as clubs, sports, cultural activities, community service, and creative societies. Students are able to hone their leadership abilities in real-world settings via these chances. The National Education Policy (NEP 2020) places great emphasis on an all-round education.

It stresses the need of schools incorporating extracurriculars within regular class time. Extracurricular activities are not just an added bonus but a requirement to enable individual students to become better leaders, as seen from the performance of the Delhi University, Oxford University and Harvard University, which are well known for their global achievements. The qualitative components of leadership development via extracurricular activities are explored in this research. It underscores the individual's growth and development through participation, the sense of social responsibility, and the enrichment of the institution's cultural diversity.

### **Research Objectives**

- To investigate the ways in which learning experiences outside of the classroom help college students grow as leaders.
- To determine the types of extra-curricular activities where students can develop their leadership best.

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- To gain an understanding of the interaction between the students involved in extra-curricular activities and their overall development.
- This is intended to recommend changes to the extracurricular activities so they can promote leadership development.

## Research Questions

- What value do extracurricular activities, especially leadership positions, add to college students?
- What sorts of clubs and organisations provide the best opportunities for students to develop their leadership abilities?
- What are the implications for students' growth and learning from their involvement in extra-curricular activities?
- How can Schools motivate students to be involved in extra-curricular activities without compromising their educational responsibilities?

## Review of related literature

### Theoretical Underpinnings

- The best way to learn leadership is by being pushed to be proactive, think critically, and adapt strategies for future applications in the real world. Extracurricular activities offer an ideal environment for this kind of learning to take place, enabling students to develop their leadership skills through experience, watching and reflecting. **Experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984).**
- Through involvement in extra-curricular activities, students are more likely to make and form true friendships that are grounded in trust and shared goals. Participating in an extra-curricular activity, whether it's a sport team, club or volunteer organization, teaches children more than just skills in the sport; it teaches them how to connect with healthy adults to serve as a guide to achieving common goals. Leadership is all about inspiring, collaborating and motivating others, and this network of trust and cooperation is the base of all these skills. As per **Putnam's Social Capital Theory (2000)**
- Through leadership in their extracurricular activities students can inspire and empower their classmates. In these situations, students can serve as role models and bring other students together to achieve a common goal. The key to collective action and developing a sense of community and shared purpose is the art of motivating people and coordinating the efforts of a group. The Transformational Leadership Theory is one of the models of leadership that was developed by the **researcher, Salazar (1990).**

### Observational findings

- Students' confidence, communication and problem-solving skills are likely to be enhanced through their participation in extra-curricular activities. This finding further reinforces the idea that participation in

extra-curricular activities is not simply a way for children to pass the time; it is a great opportunity to teach them skills that will help them in their future endeavours (Astin, 1999).

- Participating in sports teaches resilience to individuals, helping them learn to overcome obstacles and setbacks. It also fosters a sense of team spirit, enabling participants to work together and rely on each other for the achievement of common goals (Eime et al., 2013).
- Youniss and Yates (1997) reported that civic involvement is associated with an increase in feelings of compassion, a sense of moral obligation and the presence of characteristics associated with civically engaged leadership.

## **India-centric perspective**

Many colleges in India give a lot of importance to academic achievements. But it is found that extra-curricular activities, such as the NSS (National Services scheme), NCC (National Cadet Corps) and many cultural societies, has proved to be a good method to develop leadership skills. Indeed, the new strategy of education (2020) has given special importance to the role of such extra-curricular activities in promoting a more comprehensive education.

## **Research Methodology**

This study is qualitative and conceptual design which uses various secondary sources. It has a strong background of literature studies and reflective case examples to build its conclusions. The method is conceptually and interpretatively based on scholarly articles, novels, policy papers, and institutional case studies. The study aims to bring together the existing models of leadership development and to conduct a thematic analysis of the related literature, highlighting the relevance and focus on higher education institutions across the globe and in the context of the Indian educational scenario.

## **Case Studies: India-Specific Examples**

- **National Service Scheme (NSS)**

NSS is a government project which was established to motivate the students to participate in various community service activities. Some of these programs include health awareness campaigns, literacy programs, and environmental preservation programs. Students hone their organisational skills, get a more compassionate understanding of others, and mature into contributing members of society as they take part in these initiatives. A large number of NSS volunteers become leaders with a flair for social issues and can mobilise them for social action.

- **National Cadet Corps (NCC)**

The National Honour Society (NCS) has a military style training which encourages discipline, patriotism and leadership qualities. Important life skills, such as resilience, teamwork, and crisis management, may be taught to students via this. The NCC cadets are placed in important leadership positions from time to time, for example, in

the service of the nation and in the event of disaster. In doing so, they demonstrate the power of structured involvement in extra-curricular activities in shaping individuals into capable leaders who are also morally-straight and willing to serve their communities and nation.

- **Arts, Heritage and Community Engagement**

Cultural organisations at universities such as Banaras Hindu University, Delhi University and all others are the backbone of the campus. It isn't only a place where people go to get together; these groups are classrooms in which students learn how to plan festivals, research, negotiate and work so closely with instructors. Students learn valuable lessons in leadership and appreciation of diversity in these interactive cultural activities. Leaders in today's multicultural and internationally linked society should possess the qualities of openness and tolerance, which these groups firmly believe in.

- **Student Leadership and University Unions**

Student unions in Indian Institutions are vital spaces for representation, lobbying, bargaining and so on. Students become active members of a democratic process in their school when they join one of these unions. Student union leadership opportunities can offer skills to student graduates to launch into the political world or social action after graduation. This is just one of the strong connections between the development of university extracurriculars and the development of future leaders who can take on wider social responsibilities.

## Findings

- **Cultivating Leadership Abilities:** Extracurriculars are a great opportunity to develop important people skills: Building Leadership Capacity. As part of these activities participants are naturally encouraged to communicate well, collaborate effectively as a team, make thoughtful decisions and deal well with conflict. Through extracurricular activities, children learn through experience in these key areas that will help build self-confidence and competence to carry them into their futures.
- **Varieties of Engagements:** Engaging in activities like as debate, student government, athletics, and cultural groups may be a tremendous way to develop yourself. The clubs provide a broad range of other activities for students to participate in, enabling them to become well-rounded individuals. For example, students in debating societies become adept at critical thinking and express their views clearly; they acquire the ability to back their opinions with arguments, while taking others' opinions into account. Student governing groups give students a practical experience in democracy and leadership by allowing them to lead, manage college resources and carry out some initiatives to improve the college experience. Through athletics, children develop the skills to be resilient, self-controlled, and effective team players. Along with assembling people through shared cultural experiences, cultural clubs also offer a means through which members of the cultures can express themselves through creativity. Inspiring pupils to have a diverse range of talents that go beyond only academics is the goal of these multi-dimensional activities.

- **Comprehensive Development:** Participation in extra-curricular activities helps students acquire essential life skills such as self-esteem, resilience and empathy. The meetings have a positive impact on the pupils' academic life and their personal development.
- **Role of the Institution:** Engaging in activities like as debate, student government, athletics, and cultural groups may be a tremendous way to develop yourself. The clubs provide a broad range of other activities for students to participate in, enabling them to become well-rounded individuals. For example, students in debating societies become adept at critical thinking and express their views clearly; they acquire the ability to back their opinions with arguments, while taking others' opinions into account. Student governing groups give students a practical experience in democracy and leadership by allowing them to lead, manage college resources and carry out some initiatives to improve the college experience. Through athletics, children develop the skills to be resilient, self-controlled, and effective team players. Along with assembling people through shared cultural experiences, cultural clubs also offer a means through which members of the cultures can express themselves through creativity. Inspiring pupils to have a diverse range of talents that go beyond only academics is the goal of these multi-dimensional activities.
- **Obstacles and Hurdles:** Ensuring everyone is welcome, balancing school work and extra-curricular activities and working out how to allocate resources effectively to the greatest degree of success are all challenges that are pressing. It is a challenge in today's schools to balance a full load of extracurricular activities with challenging coursework. Students are sometimes required to choose their study with other interests and activities such as sports, clubs or other activities that help them in their overall development. First and foremost is to make a place where everyone feels welcomed. Making the most important thing in creating a supportive learning environment is to make every child, regardless of his or her socioeconomic status or physical ability, feel included and appreciated. If these issues are considered, learning can be a better, more equitable and inclusive experience for all learners in the school and university environments.

## Recommendations

- Embed robust mentoring elements throughout extra-curricular initiatives with leadership development as their goal.
- Give official recognition to active participation, e.g. credits or prizes.
- Balance extracurricular activities and school work.
- Welcome and support multiple extra-curricular activities for an inclusive society.
- As much as possible, integrate out-of-class leadership programs into existing leadership programs.

## Conclusion

Ultimately, this study report concludes that extracurricular activities are crucial in developing children into strong leaders of the future. In it, the author makes the case that students get the practical skills necessary for success in the workplace and in life as active, responsible citizens via participation in extracurricular activities. This may be possible if schools put in place and follow guidelines which incorporate out-of-classroom experiences into leadership development programs, the report says. They do everything they can to ensure that pupils leave school informed and equipped to take responsibility for their own education and for life. To restate: Being a good leader is not the same as being a good scholar. It's about building transferable skills, being proactive and self-initiating – skills that graduates can bring to work.

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