

## EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AS AN EDUCATIONAL ALTERNATIVE FOR THE TRAINING OF TRANSVERSAL COMPETENCIES\*

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### **Abstract**

*The present study aims to address the importance of extracurricular activities in the training/ development of transversal competencies, approaching the issue in the context of the initial training of future teachers and from the perspective of this dimension of their competency profile. The approach we carried out presents this kind of activities as an alternative to the curricular ones, a complementary choice, intended to support the achievement of the educational goals. The research method used was a group interview, conducted with 12 students during the Psycho-Pedagogical Training Program, level II of advanced studies. The conclusions drawn from the conversation with the 12 participants allowed the identification of some aspects regarding the implications of extracurricular activities in the formation of transversal competencies, regarding the methods of accomplishment, possible themes for reaching this type of activities.*

**Key words:** *Curricular activities; Extracurricular activities; Co-curricular activities; Educational alternative; Transversal competencies.*

### **1. Introduction. Curricular, extracurricular and co-curricular activities**

Any education system is focused on achieving some well-defined educational goals that are regulated through official curriculum documents, in accordance with the social requirements and demands of that particular period. The transversal competencies represent a separate category of educational goals, tangible through the completion of several subjects that students study in school and which, once mastered, later allow students to deal with complex concrete life situations. Achieving these competencies can be reached not only in a curricular context, but also through extracurricular activities.

The main distinction to be made is that between extracurricular and curricular. According to Mogonea (2014), we can consider that, the curricular activities are

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those carried out in the institutional framework (most often in schools), being designed, organized, carried out and evaluated rigorously, and the extracurricular activities are those that are not mandatory anymore, going beyond the scope of the educated individual, but with the goal of completing them, compensating for them.

The concept of extracurricular activities does not have a generally accepted definition in the specialized literature. According to a definition by UNESCO (2021, apud European Commission, 2021, p. 3) they represent "a range of activities organised outside of the regular school day, curriculum or course intended to meet learners' interests".

The authors of the Praxiological Dictionary of Pedagogy (Bocoș, coord. 2016, p. 37) define the extracurricular educational activity as "a component of a system/set of artistic, sports, etc. school activities, which are organized at the level of the educational institutions or outside them (but under their tutelage or through their collaboration with other institutions), carried out in addition to the compulsory curriculum and the curriculum at the school's decision".

The specialized literature uses both the phrase *extracurricular activities* and *co-curricular activities*. Conceptually, a differentiation is made between the two categories of activities, in the sense that co-curricular activities "are an extension of the formal learning experiences in a course or academic program", while extracurricular activities "may be offered or coordinated by a school, but may not be explicitly connected to academic learning" (The Glossary of Education Reform, <https://www.edglossary.org/co-curricular/>).

We also mention the definition that El Haggag, Mezhoudi, Alrawjih (2019, p. 981) give to co-curricular activities which are considered "as learning experiences, events, and/or programs outside the classroom that complement those inside the classroom without having any allowance of grades or specific examinations". The authors also believe that curricular activities are not the same as extracurricular activities.

However, according to The Glossary of Education Reform, we believe that this distinction is extremely unclear in practice, and the terms are often used interchangeably. In addition, extracurricular activities are also curricular activities, but based on different curricular approaches than the mandatory ones (Mogonea, 2014).

In principle, extracurricular activities have the following characteristics (Bartkus, Nemelka, Nemelka, Gardner, 2012, p. 698):

- are outside the classroom or regular curriculum;
- are conducted under the auspices of the school;
- do not provide a grade or academic credit;
- are academic as well as non-academic;
- are voluntary or optional.

Based on these characteristics, the previously cited authors propose the following definition of extracurricular activities: "Extracurricular activities are defined as academic or non-academic activities that are conducted under the auspices of the school but occur outside of normal classroom time and are not part of the

curriculum. Additionally, extracurricular activities do not involve a grade or academic credit and participation is optional on the part of the student". Nawal, Aaishah, Siti, Nur, Nurul (2020, pp. 4-7) believe that the acquisitions obtained within the co-curricular activities help the pupils/ students pass their exams well, but they are also useful in their daily life. Participation in co-curricular activities gives students the opportunity to develop soft-skills such as (Nawal, Aaishah, Siti, Nur, Nurul, 2020, pp. 4-7):

- leadership, which "is fundamental to the organizational survival and plays the key factors to its success";
- personality development – the co-curricular activities contribute to the development of certain traits such as self-confidence, honesty, adaptation, sociability, sympathetic attitude, social obligation and sense of responsibility;
- communication skill, which "is divided into three elements, namely interpersonal communication skills, intrapersonal communication skills and non-verbal communication skills";
- team skill, which "refers to the ability and willingness of a group of people to work together in a cooperative environment to accomplish a common goal";
- critical thinking and problem-solving skill, which "includes the component skills of analyzing arguments, making inferences using inductive or deductive reasoning, judging or evaluating, and making decisions or solving problems".

There are several types of extracurricular activities (Eccles *et al.*, 2002, apud European Commission, 2021, p. 3):

- prosocial activities (volunteer and community service types of activities);
- performance activities (e.g. school band, drama, dance);
- sports;
- school involvement (e.g. student government, school newspaper);
- academic clubs (e.g. mathematics or chess clubs, science fair or tutoring in academic subjects).

A summary of the different classifications of the types of extracurricular activities is presented in table 1 (Bartkus, Nemelka, Nemelka, Gardner, 2012, p. 697).

**Table 1. Classifications of the types of extracurricular activities**

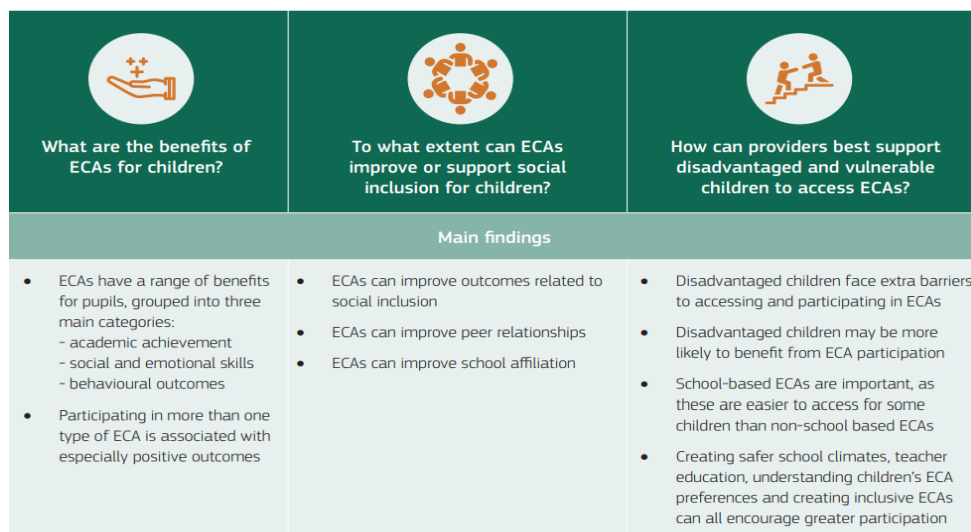
*Source: Bartkus, Nemelka, Nemelka, Gardner, 2012, p. 697*

| <b>Authors</b>                               | <b>Operational Categories</b>   |
|--|---|
| Ahadiat, Nasrollah & Kenneth J. Smith (1994) | Hobbies, participation in sports, marital status, and participation in company-sponsored events.  |
| Barnett (2007)                               | Dance and cheerleading  |
| Brown & Campion (1994)                       | Professional society, Elected office, Varsity athletics captain, Recreational sport, Community activities, College clubs, Social fraternity |
| Campion (1978)                               | Membership/leadership in college clubs or committees or other professional organizations besides a fraternity or sorority                   |

|                                    |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Chia (2005)                        | Leadership appointments such as Chairperson of students' society or association   |
| Clotfeldler (2001)                 | In addition to activities such as publications, government, and cheerleading, also includes resident advisor, ROTC, and volunteering.   |
| Cole, Rubin, Feild, & Giles (2007) | Member of professional societies, member of college clubs, has held elected offices, member of social fraternity or sorority, volunteered for community activities  |
| Kerr & Colangelo (1988)            | Membership in instrumental music, vocal music, student government, publications, debate, department clubs, drama/theater, religious organizations, ethnic organizations, intramural sports, varsity sports, political organizations, Radio/TV. Fraternity/sorority, special interest groups, service organizations.   |
| Kinicki & Lockwood (1985)          | Number of memberships in social fraternities or sororities, amount of volunteer experience, frequency of participation in college athletics, number of memberships in organizations (excluding social fraternity or sororities), number of offices held in organizations, assessed an interviewee's level of involvement or accomplishment in these activities.   |
| Mahoney, Cairns, & Farmer (2003)   | School-sponsored extracurricular activities   |
| Marsh (1992)                       | Varsity athletic teams, Other athletic teams—in or out of school, Cheerleading, Cheerleaders, pep club, majorettes, Drama/debate, Debating or drama, Music, Band or orchestra, Dance/chorus, Chorus or dance, Hobby clubs, Hobby clubs such as photography, model building, hot rod, electronics, craft, School subject clubs, School subject matter clubs such as science, history, languages, business, art, Vocational education clubs, Vocational education clubs such as Future Homemakers, Teachers, Farmers of America, DECA, FBLA, or VICA, Community youth clubs, Youth organizations in the community such as scouts, Y, Church activities, Church activities including youth groups, Junior achievement, Junior achievement Publications, School newspaper, magazine, yearbook annual, Student government, Student council, student government, political club, Service clubs, Service clubs or other community service activities, Honor societies, Honorary clubs, such as Beta Club or National Honor Society, Fraternity/sorority. |
| Marsh & Kleitman (2002)            | Sports- Baseball or softball, Basketball, Football, Soccer, Swim team, Other team sport, Other individual sport, Team sport, Individual sport, Cheerleading, Pom-pom, Performing arts, Band or orchestra, Drama club, Academic activities, Science fairs, Academic clubs, Academic honors society, Newspaper/yearbook, Student newspaper/yearbook, Student service/government, Student council, Service clubs (AFS, Key Club), Vocational clubs (FTA, FHA, FFA, or other vocational education or professional club), Hobby clubs (photography e.g.)   |

|                                    |  |
|------------------------------------|--|
| McGaha & Fitzpatrick (2010)        | The extracurricular activities assessed in this study were: (a) read papers/magazines; (b) read books; (c) use computer at home; (d) use internet for information; (e) watch TV news; (f) engage in physical fitness; (g) go to public library; (h) attend plays/concerts; (i) engage in organized religion; (j) participate in sports; (k) volunteer at youth center; and (l) participate in political campaign                               |
| Nemanick & Clark (2002)            | Membership/leadership in organizations/clubs   |
| Paguero (2011)                     | Based on the student's involvement with two forms of extracurricular activities offered by the school: academic (i.e., band, orchestra, chorus, or choir; school play or musical; student government; achievement-related honor society; or school yearbook, newspaper, or literary magazine) and interscholastic sports (i.e., baseball, softball, basketball, football, soccer, cheerleading/drill team, or other team or individual sport). |
| Raymond, Carlson, & Hopkins (2006) | Clubs and organizations along with offices held.   |
| Rubin, Bommer, & Baldwin (2002)    | Member of a club, organization, fraternity, sorority, or sports team. Also, if the student was an officer or captain in any of these groups it was mentioned   |

Figure 1 summarizes the benefits of extracurricular activities for children, presented in a study of the European Commission, cited previously (2021, p. 6):



**Figure 1. Advantages of extracurricular activities for children**

*Source: European Commission, 2021, p. 6*

## **2. Transversal skills from the perspective of the possibility of their development in extracurricular activities**

Transversal competencies are a finality of any current educational system, which occupy an important place in the training profile of any graduate. They direct the goals of education towards the holistic development of the personality and are a key factor in the development of other competencies (Tzankov, 2017).

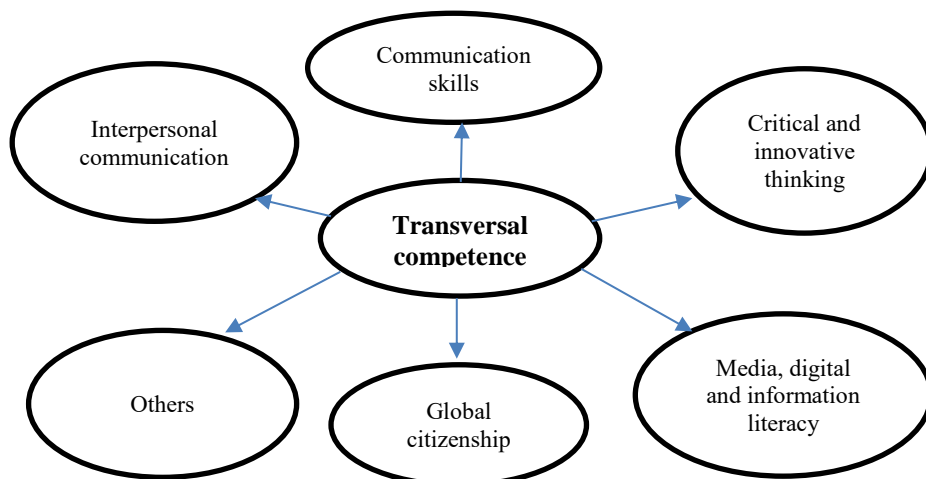
Transversal competencies are "essential skills, values, and attitudes that contribute to the learners' holistic development by making them capable of adapting according to the needs and changing demands in different situations and conditions" (Devika *et al.*, 2020, p. 350).

Langa considers transversal competencies as "skills that go beyond a certain area and strengthen professional competence" (2015, p. 329).

Transversal competencies are described by UNESCO, being organized into 5 domains (UNESCO, 2015, apud Craşovan, 2016, p. 175):

- critical and innovative thinking (creativity, entrepreneurship, resourcefulness, application skills, reflective thinking, reasoned decision-making);
- interpersonal skills (communication skills, organizational skills, teamwork, collaboration, sociability, collegiality, empathy, compassion);
- intrapersonal skills (self-discipline, the ability to learn independently, flexibility and adaptability, self-awareness, perseverance, self-motivation, compassion, integrity, risk-taking, self-respect);
- global citizenship (awareness, tolerance, openness, responsibility, respect for diversity, ethical understanding, intercultural understanding, ability to resolve conflicts, democratic participation, conflict resolution, respect for the environment, rationale identity, sense of belonging);
- media and information literacy (the ability to locate and access information through ICT, media, libraries and archives, to express and communicate ideas through ICT, use media and ICT to participate in democratic process, ability to analyze and evaluate media content).

Figure 2 (Nurilloevna, 2023, p. 330) summarizes the categories of transversal competencies.



**Figure 2. Categories of transversal competencies**

*Source: Nurilloevna, 2023, p. 330*

According to the Assessment and Teaching of 21st century skills, the key competencies of the 21st century are grouped into four categories, shown in figure no. 3:



**Figure 3. ATC21s (Assessment and Teaching of 21st century skills)**

*Source: <https://resources.ats2020.eu/resource-details/LITR/ATC21s>*

Considered from the perspective of the constructivist theory, transversal competencies involve the fact that (Ivanov, 2004, apud Tzankov, 2017, pp. 140-141):

- students should be encouraged to ask questions, make hypotheses and check their correctness;

- students' ideas and experience should be challenged to induce an inner cognitive conflict or hesitation;
- students' mistakes should be seen as positive opportunities for provoking thinking and understanding;
- the environment should provide sufficient opportunities for dialogue, activity and reflection

From the teacher's perspective, they are meant to:

- engage the students in acquiring experience which contradicts their prior concepts and knowledge;
- allow for students' answers, initiatives and interests to determine the course of the class;
- encourage questions, reasoning and discussion;
- use cognitive terminology of the type "classify", "analyze", "design" when setting tasks;
- stimulate and accept students' autonomy and initiative without losing control of the situation;
- use raw data and primary sources, along with the didactic (interactive, adapted) materials;
- stimulate the use of alternative sources of information;
- encourage students to look for a cause-and-effect explanation of situations and to predict their outcome;
- stimulate self-analysis, argumentation and development (change) of opinions and ideas;
- stimulate learning outside the classroom and the school and help students identify with the problems they solve.

### **3. Research Methodology**

The investigation we proposed aimed to know the students' opinion regarding the role of extracurricular activities in the training/development of transversal competencies.

We started from the premise that extracurricular activities represent an effective alternative for training transversal competencies, as they can be considered complementary to the curricular ones.

The research carried out was of an ascertainable type, during which the interview method was used, organized online, through Google Meet, with 12 students who were in the course of their Psycho-Pedagogical Training Program Level 1.

The interview guide included 5 questions, which aimed to find out the participants' opinion regarding the importance of extracurricular activities, the ways to implement them, regarding the types of transversal competencies they can develop or the topics that can be proposed for the realization of this type of activities.



#### 4. Results and discussions

Next, we are presenting, in summary, the answers of the subjects to the questions asked, which sought to outline a perspective regarding the extent to which extracurricular activities can contribute to the development of transversal competencies, the concrete possibilities of achievement, the advantages of such types of activities.

Here are the questions that were included in the interview guide:

1. What types of extracurricular activities could you do with the students?
2. Mention possible topics for carrying out extracurricular activities!
3. What titles would you give these activities?
4. What advantages do you think would this type of organized activities have with the students?
5. What transversal competencies do you think extracurricular activities develop in students?

The interviewed students mentioned several important categories of extracurricular activities that they could carry out with the students: visits, trips, school camps, celebrations, contests, literary circles or workshops, dramatizations, performances, debate activities, training, personal development activities, counseling. The proposed activity categories are related to the majors studied by the students who were interviewed.

As there can be seen from the interview guide, two of the questions asked to the students sought to mention a possible topic of interest for carrying out an extracurricular activity with the students and its title. Table 2 mentions some of these.

**Table 2. Topics and possible titles of extracurricular activities**

| <b>Activity topic</b>   | <b>Activity title</b>   |
|---|---|
| The influence of drugs and addiction among students                 | Be above the influence! Say NO to drugs!                          |
| The importance of reading in the education and training of students | Halt in the world of reading                                      |
| Promoting a healthy lifestyle                                       | Health - the most valuable asset                                  |
| The personal and vocational development of high school students     | Step by step through adolescence                                  |
| Communication and public speaking                                   | I get involved, I want to be heard!                               |
| Developing motivation for literature, through film and games        | Reality and fiction in literature, film and video games           |
| Developing emotional intelligence                                   | Emotions in action: developing empathy and emotional intelligence |
| Creating a positive attitude towards poetry                         | Poetry - food for the soul  |
| The role of theater in educating students                           | Literature through theater and film                               |
| Developing creativity through drama                                 | Dressed as a dramatist  |
| Developing the competence of understanding literary texts           | Literature through the eyes of students                           |
| Developing the artistic skills                                      | Literary and musical folklore                                     |

The students participating in the interview mentioned a number of advantages of this kind of activities. One of the advantages can be derived from the exemplification of transversal competencies that these activities form in students. We are selecting some of these, which were frequently found in the subjects' answers: personal and emotional development, development of motivation for learning, interest in different scientific or artistic fields, development of special skills, a correct attitude towards learning, towards the intellectual activity, of scientific knowledge, fighting stress, violence, bullying.

Students mentioned another advantage of extracurricular activities, the fact that they allow addressing interdisciplinary problems, located on the border of several disciplines, which could be more difficult to achieve within curricular activities. One of the most important advantages of these activities, mentioned by the majority of the students, was the freedom of the teachers to identify topics of interest to the students, to integrate their preferences into these activities, so that the students get happily involved in and not perceive them as obligatory activities.

## **5. Conclusions**

Transversal competencies represent a category of essential purposes for any education system, because they can be capitalized by those who internalize them in contexts that are not only related to school ones, but especially to the extracurricular ones, to those that life entails daily. We support the importance of their training also by the fact that the professional, everyday situations that a graduate will later face require a global, holistic approach, not a narrow one, limited to a single field or a single discipline.

It is indisputable that the formation of these competencies can be achieved through curricular activities, mainly carried out in school, but also outside it. We believe, however, that extracurricular activities have a special role, which, due to their specificity, can more easily enter the area of students' preferences.

The study carried out demonstrates the usefulness of these activities and lists possible ways of accomplishing them, from the perspective of the students during their initial psycho-pedagogical training. The interview conducted with a group of 12 students made it possible to highlight the advantages of this type of activity in the development of transversal competencies, which the students also exemplified. The topics proposed by them can become possible topics for extracurricular activity projects, which they could implement later, from the perspective of the teacher. The Romanian education system recognizes the importance of these activities in shaping the training profile of its graduates in numerous contexts, one of the arguments being the introduction, not long ago, in the structure of the school year, of two weeks named "The Alternative Education Week" and "The Green Week", both intended for the organization of activities that are "different" than the school, curricular ones.

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