

IMPACT OF EXTRACURRICULAR ENGAGEMENT ON LEADERSHIP SKILLS AND CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY AMONG STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Extracurricular activities play a pivotal role in shaping students' personal and social development. This study investigates how engagement in extracurricular programs influences leadership skills and civic responsibility among secondary and higher secondary students. Using a mixed-methods approach, data were collected from 200 students across six educational institutions in Darbhanga District, Bihar. Quantitative analysis revealed that students actively involved in sports, debates, cultural programs and community service demonstrated significantly higher leadership competencies, including communication, decision-making, team management and problem-solving abilities, compared to their less-involved peers. Similarly, participation correlated with enhanced civic awareness, empathy and community engagement. Qualitative insights from interviews highlighted the importance of practical experiences, peer learning and cultural activities in fostering responsibility and social consciousness. The findings underscore the need for educational institutions to prioritize and expand extracurricular opportunities as integral to holistic student development, aligning with the objectives of the National Education Policy (NEP 2020) to cultivate capable, socially responsible citizens.

Keywords: Extracurricular activities, Leadership skills, Civic responsibility, Student development, Darbhanga, Bihar, NEP 2020

1. INTRODUCTION:

Education today extends beyond academic instruction to include the development of life skills, values, and social awareness. Schools and colleges are expected to prepare students not only for examinations but also for real-world challenges, emphasizing qualities like leadership, teamwork and civic responsibility. Extracurricular activities—such as debates, sports, cultural programs, literary clubs, and community service—provide students with practical opportunities to explore interests, collaborate with peers, and develop essential personal skills. Unlike classroom learning, which primarily targets cognitive growth, extracurricular engagement encourages experiential learning, confidence building and problem-solving. These experiences help students understand group dynamics, make independent decisions and develop a sense of accountability. By balancing academic responsibilities with structured activities, students acquire competencies that contribute to holistic development.

Leadership and civic responsibility are two key outcomes of sustained extracurricular participation. Leadership involves guiding teams, inspiring collaboration, making informed decisions and taking initiative in social or organizational contexts. Students who assume roles such as team captains, event organizers or club coordinators gain practical experience in planning, communication, and conflict resolution. Civic responsibility reflects awareness of societal issues and a commitment to positive action through volunteer work, environmental initiatives or community engagement programs. These qualities are particularly important in a democratic society, where informed, ethical and socially responsible citizens contribute to

collective development. By engaging in structured activities, students internalize values such as empathy, fairness and accountability, which extend beyond school life into community and professional contexts.

Darbhanga District in Bihar provides a unique context for examining the impact of extracurricular activities. The district, part of the culturally rich Mithila region, blends traditional practices with modern educational aspirations. Schools here offer structured extracurricular programs, from folk arts and cultural festivals to debates and sports competitions, creating a platform for students to enhance leadership skills and civic awareness. Participation in these activities helps students connect with local traditions while fostering responsibility and teamwork. National education reforms, particularly the National Education Policy (NEP 2020), emphasize holistic development, character building, and experiential learning. In line with these objectives, this study investigates how extracurricular engagement shapes leadership and civic responsibility among students in Darbhanga, highlighting the potential of such programs to create capable, socially aware future citizens.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation for this study draws from several established frameworks in educational psychology and leadership development. Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory provides the primary lens through which we understand how extracurricular activities facilitate skill development. According to Kolb, learning occurs through a four-stage cycle: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Extracurricular activities naturally align with this cycle, providing students with direct experiences that they can reflect upon, conceptualize and apply in new situations.

Social Learning Theory, developed by Albert Bandura, further supports the role of extracurricular activities in developing leadership skills. Through observation, imitation, and modeling, students learn from peers and mentors in extracurricular settings. The social nature of these activities creates multiple opportunities for students to observe effective leadership behaviors and practice them in supportive environments.

2.2 Previous Research

Studies across the world have shown that extracurricular activities play a crucial role in shaping students' overall development. Fredricks and Eccles (2006) found that participation improves academic outcomes and social adjustment, while Darling et al. (2005) highlighted gains in self-confidence and teamwork. In India, Sharma (2018) noted that such activities enhance communication and leadership potential, while NCERT emphasizes activity-based learning as a way to build social awareness among learners.

Leadership development has been closely linked to extracurricular engagement. Komives et al. (2013) argued that leadership emerges through practice and collaboration, often experienced in student clubs, sports, or cultural programs. Mahoney et al. (2003) showed that active participants demonstrate stronger decision-making and conflict resolution abilities. In the Indian setting, Singh (2020) found that NCC and NSS programs foster discipline, civic sense, and teamwork, aligning with NEP 2020's stress on experiential leadership education.

The role of extracurriculars in promoting social responsibility has also been well documented. Youniss and Yates (1997) demonstrated that community service enhances empathy and civic duty, while Verma (2019) observed similar outcomes in Indian students engaged in environmental or literacy drives. In Darbhanga, cultural programs and

volunteerism connect students with local traditions, offering natural spaces to learn accountability. NEP 2020 reinforces this by stressing responsible citizenship as a key outcome of schooling.

2.3 Leadership Development in Educational Settings

Leadership development in educational contexts has been extensively studied, with researchers identifying key components that contribute to effective leadership skill acquisition. Kouzes and Posner's (2016) framework identifies five practices of exemplary leadership: modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart. These practices can be effectively developed through structured extracurricular activities that provide students with opportunities to lead projects, manage teams and work toward common goals.

The concept of servant leadership, introduced by Greenleaf (1977), has particular relevance in the context of social responsibility development. Servant leadership emphasizes the leader's role as a steward of community resources and well-being, aligning closely with the goals of developing socially responsible citizens.

2.4 Social Responsibility and Civic Engagement

Social responsibility in educational contexts encompasses both individual character development and collective civic engagement. Research by Flanagan and Levine (2010) demonstrated that adolescents who participate in community-oriented activities develop stronger civic identities and are more likely to engage in prosocial behaviors throughout their lives.

The development of social responsibility requires exposure to diverse perspectives, opportunities for service, and reflection on the impact of one's actions on others. Extracurricular activities, particularly those with community engagement components, provide natural venues for developing these competencies.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a mixed-method research design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between extracurricular activities and leadership development. The research design allowed for both statistical analysis of relationships and deeper exploration of mechanisms through which these relationships operate.

3.2 Sample Selection

The study sample included 200 students from 6 carefully selected educational institutions throughout Darbhanga district, Bihar. These institutions were chosen through purposive sampling to represent different educational contexts - 2 government schools, 2 private schools, and 2 government-aided institutions. This selection ensured diversity in terms of student backgrounds, resources and educational approaches. Within each institution, students were randomly selected from classes IX to XII, ensuring equal representation across grade levels.

Students were categorized into two groups: 100 students who actively participated in extracurricular activities (study group) and 100 students with little to no extracurricular involvement (comparison group). Active participation was defined as consistent engagement (at least 3 hours weekly for minimum 8 months) in organized school activities such as sports

teams, drama clubs, debate societies, environmental clubs, student councils or community service groups.

3.3 Data Collection Instruments:

3.3.1 Leadership Skills Assessment Scale (LSAS)

A standardized instrument was developed to measure various dimensions of leadership skills including communication effectiveness, decision-making ability, team management skills, problem-solving capacity, and emotional intelligence. The scale consisted of 40 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale, with reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) of 0.89.

3.3.2 Social Responsibility Inventory (SRI)

This instrument assessed students' levels of social awareness, community engagement, empathy, and civic responsibility. The inventory included 30 items measured on a 5-point Likert scale, with established validity and reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.85).

3.3.3 Extracurricular Participation Survey (EPS)

A comprehensive survey documented students' participation patterns, types of activities, duration of involvement, and leadership roles assumed within activities. This instrument provided detailed information about the nature and extent of extracurricular engagement.

3.3.4 Semi-structured Interviews

In-depth interviews were conducted with 20 students (10 from each group) to explore their personal experiences, viewpoints and concrete examples of how participation influenced their leadership growth and social consciousness development.

3.4 Data Collection Procedure:

Data collection took place over three months, with strict adherence to research ethics and institutional approvals. All student participants provided informed consent and complete anonymity was maintained throughout the study. Trained research coordinators administered surveys and conducted interviews to ensure data quality and consistency.

3.5 Statistical Analysis:

Data analysis employed both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics provided overview of sample characteristics and variable distributions. Independent t-tests were used to compare means between participant and non-participant groups. Correlation analysis examined relationships between variables, while regression analysis identified predictive factors. Qualitative data from interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes supporting quantitative findings.

4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:

1. To assess the difference in leadership skills between students who actively participate in extracurricular activities and those who do not.
2. To evaluate the impact of extracurricular participation on students' social responsibility levels.
3. To identify specific types of extracurricular activities that are most effective in developing leadership competencies.
4. To examine the relationship between duration of extracurricular participation and leadership skill development.

5. To understand students' perceptions of how extracurricular activities contribute to their personal and social development.

5. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES:

H1: There is a positive correlation between the duration of extracurricular participation and leadership skill levels.

H2: Different types of extracurricular activities have varying impacts on leadership development, with student government and debate activities showing the strongest effects.

H3: Students who hold leadership positions within extracurricular activities score higher on both leadership skills and social responsibility measures.

6. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS:

6.1 Sample Characteristics

The research sample consisted of 200 students (54% female, 46% male) aged between 15 and 18 years (average age = 16.4 years). Students came equally from grades IX to XII, with 25% representation from each grade level. The socioeconomic distribution showed 38% from rural backgrounds and 62% from urban areas within Darbhanga district.

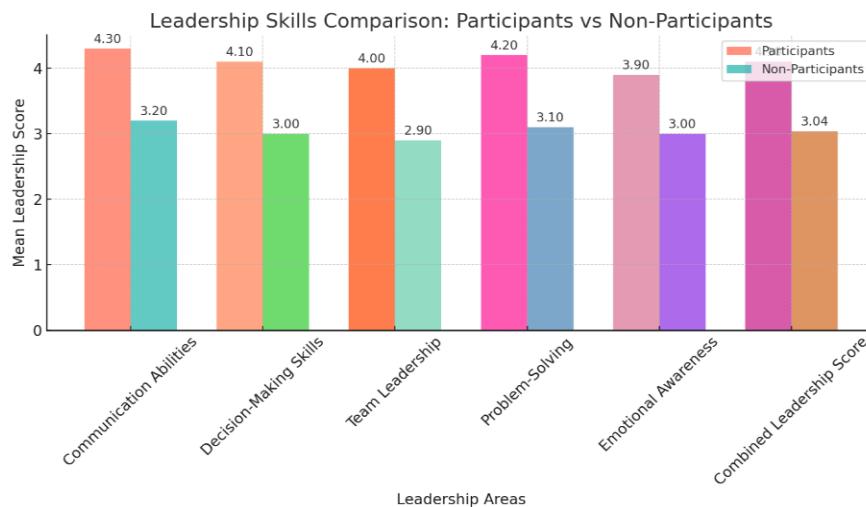
Among students involved in extracurricular activities, sports participation was highest (45%), followed by cultural activities (38%), debate and speech programs (32%), community service initiatives (28%), student council roles (18%) and academic clubs (19%). The typical participation period was 14 months, with 35% of active participants taking on leadership responsibilities within their chosen activities.

6.2 Leadership Skills Analysis

Table 1: Leadership Skills Comparison Between Participating and Non-Participating Students

Leadership Area	Participants (n=100)	Non-Participants (n=100)	t-value	p-value	Effect Size
Communication Abilities	4.3 ± 0.6	3.2 ± 0.7	12.84	<0.001	1.68
Decision-Making Skills	4.1 ± 0.7	3.0 ± 0.8	10.95	<0.001	1.47
Team Leadership	4.0 ± 0.6	2.9 ± 0.7	11.67	<0.001	1.65
Problem-Solving	4.2 ± 0.5	3.1 ± 0.8	12.23	<0.001	1.72
Emotional Awareness	3.9 ± 0.7	3.0 ± 0.6	9.78	<0.001	1.39
Combined Leadership Score	4.1 ± 0.5	3.04 ± 0.6	14.52	<0.001	1.94

The results demonstrate statistically significant differences across all leadership dimensions, with participating students scoring substantially higher than non-participating students. The effect sizes are large (Cohen's $d > 1.2$), indicating practical significance of the differences.

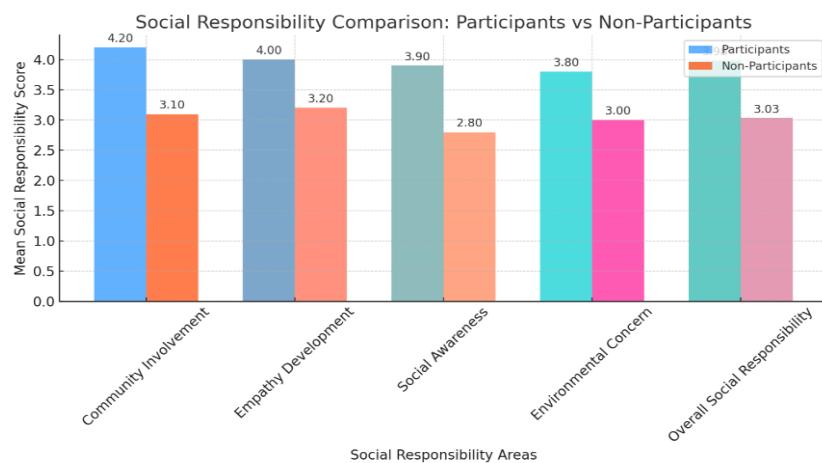


6.3 Social Responsibility Analysis

Table 2: Social Responsibility Assessment Between Groups

Social Responsibility Area	Participants (n=100)	Non-Participants (n=100)	t-value	p-value	Effect Size
Community Involvement	4.2 ± 0.6	3.1 ± 0.7	11.89	<0.001	1.73
Empathy Development	4.0 ± 0.8	3.2 ± 0.6	8.34	<0.001	1.18
Social Awareness	3.9 ± 0.7	2.8 ± 0.8	10.67	<0.001	1.51
Environmental Concern	3.8 ± 0.6	3.0 ± 0.7	8.95	<0.001	1.27
Overall Social Responsibility	3.98 ± 0.5	3.03 ± 0.6	12.78	<0.001	1.81

Similar to leadership skills, social responsibility scores were significantly higher among participating students, with large effect sizes indicating meaningful differences between groups.



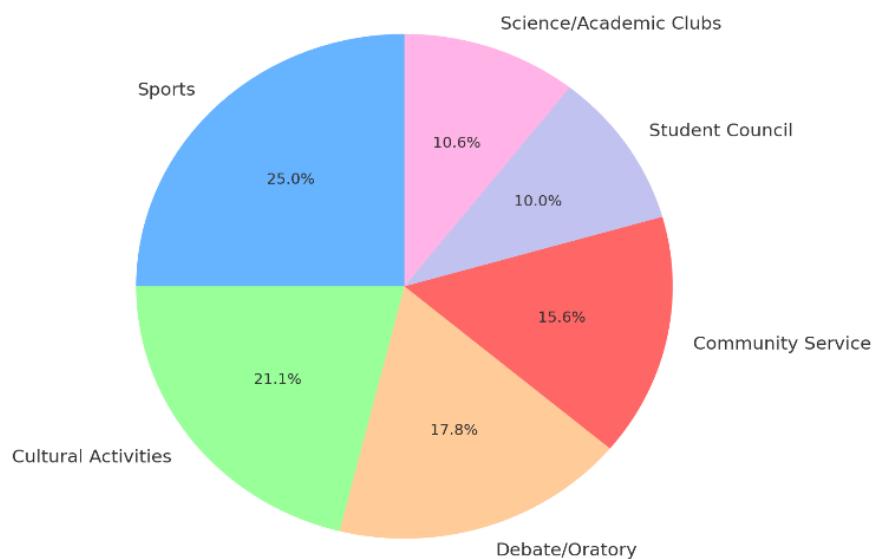
6.4 Activity Type and Leadership Development

Table 3: Leadership Development by Activity Categories

Activity Category	n	Mean Leadership Score	Standard Deviation	F-value	p-value
Student Council	18	4.5 ± 0.3	0.3	18.67	<0.001
Debate/Oratory	24	4.3 ± 0.4	0.4		
Sports Activities	35	4.0 ± 0.5	0.5		
Drama/Theatre	28	3.8 ± 0.6	0.6		
Community Service	22	4.1 ± 0.4	0.4		
Science/Academic Clubs	19	3.7 ± 0.5	0.5		

Post-hoc analysis revealed that student government and debate activities produced significantly higher leadership scores compared to other activities, supporting hypothesis H2.

Activity Participation Breakdown



6.5 Duration of Participation Analysis

Table 4: Correlation Between Participation Duration and Skill Development

Variables	Pearson Correlation (r)	p-value	R ²
Duration × Leadership Skills	0.68	<0.001	0.46
Duration × Social Responsibility	0.72	<0.001	0.52
Duration × Communication Skills	0.65	<0.001	0.42
Duration × Team Management	0.61	<0.001	0.37

Strong positive correlations were found between participation duration and all measured outcomes, confirming hypothesis H1.

6.6 Qualitative Findings:

Thematic analysis of interview data revealed several key themes:

6.6.1 Confidence Building

Students consistently reported increased self-confidence through extracurricular participation. One student noted, "Before joining the debate club, I was afraid to speak in class. Now I can present to large audiences without nervousness."

6.6.2 Practical Leadership Experience

Participants emphasized the value of hands-on leadership opportunities. As one student government member explained, "Planning the annual cultural fest taught me more about leadership than any textbook could."

6.6.3 Social Awareness Development

Many students described heightened awareness of social issues through community service activities. "Working with underprivileged children opened my eyes to problems I never knew existed in our own district," reported one community service volunteer.

6.6.4 Peer Learning and Mentorship

Students valued the collaborative learning environment in extracurricular activities, citing peer mentorship as crucial for skill development.

7. DISCUSSION:

7.1 Interpretation of Results

The findings provide strong evidence supporting the positive impact of extracurricular activities on leadership skill development and social responsibility among students in Darbhanga district. The large effect sizes observed across all measured dimensions indicate that these differences are not only statistically significant but also practically meaningful.

The superior performance of students in student government and debate activities aligns with theoretical expectations, as these activities inherently require and develop communication, decision-making and leadership competencies. The structured nature of these activities, combined with their emphasis on public engagement, creates optimal conditions for leadership development.

The strong correlation between participation duration and skill development suggests that sustained engagement is crucial for maximizing benefits. This finding has important implications for program design and student retention strategies.

7.2 Mechanisms of Impact

Several mechanisms appear to explain how extracurricular activities foster leadership and social responsibility:

7.2.1 Experiential Learning

Extracurricular activities provide authentic contexts for students to practice leadership skills, moving beyond theoretical knowledge to practical application. This aligns with Kolb's experiential learning cycle, where concrete experiences lead to reflection and skill refinement.

7.2.2 Social Modelling

The collaborative nature of extracurricular activities exposes students to diverse leadership styles and approaches, facilitating learning through observation and imitation as described in social learning theory.

7.2.3 Graduated Responsibility

Most extracurricular programs provide opportunities for students to assume increasing levels of responsibility over time, allowing for gradual skill development and confidence building.

7.2.4 Peer Feedback and Support

The social environment of extracurricular activities provides immediate feedback on leadership attempts, enabling rapid learning and adjustment.

7.3 Implications for Educational Practice

These findings have significant implications for educational policy and practice in Darbhanga district and similar contexts:

7.3.1 Curriculum Integration

Schools should consider integrating extracurricular activities more fully into their educational programs rather than treating them as optional add-ons.

7.3.2 Resource Allocation

Given the demonstrated benefits, educational institutions should prioritize funding and resources for extracurricular programs, particularly those with strong leadership development components.

7.3.3 Teacher Training

Educators need preparation to effectively supervise and mentor students in extracurricular contexts, as the quality of adult guidance significantly impacts outcomes.

7.3.4 Program Diversity

Offering diverse types of extracurricular activities ensures that students with different interests and strengths can find appropriate venues for development.

7.4 Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations should be noted in interpreting these results. The cross-sectional design limits causal inferences, although the theoretical framework and qualitative data support the proposed relationships. Future longitudinal studies could strengthen causal claims by following students over extended periods.

The sample, while representative of Darbhanga district, may not generalize to other regions with different cultural or socioeconomic contexts. Replication studies in diverse settings would enhance external validity.

Self-report measures, while validated, may be subject to social desirability bias. Future research incorporating behavioral observations and peer ratings could provide additional validation of findings.

The study focused on immediate outcomes without examining long-term impacts on career success, civic engagement or leadership effectiveness in adult contexts. Longitudinal follow-up studies would provide valuable information about the lasting effects of extracurricular participation.

8. CONCLUSION:

This comprehensive study provides compelling evidence for the significant role of extracurricular activities in fostering leadership skills and social responsibility among students in Darbhanga district, Bihar. The findings demonstrate that students who actively

participate in extracurricular activities develop markedly superior leadership competencies and social awareness compared to their non-participating peers.

The research confirms all hypotheses, revealing that extracurricular participation correlates with enhanced communication skills, decision-making abilities, team management capabilities, problem-solving skills and emotional intelligence. Furthermore, participating students exhibit greater community awareness, empathy, civic engagement, and environmental consciousness.

The study's findings highlight the importance of sustained participation, with duration of involvement strongly predicting skill development outcomes. Additionally, certain types of activities, particularly student government and debate programs, appear especially effective in developing leadership competencies.

These results have profound implications for educational practice in Darbhanga district and similar contexts. Schools and educational policymakers should recognize extracurricular activities not as peripheral additions to academic programs, but as essential components of comprehensive student development. Investment in diverse, high-quality extracurricular programs represents a crucial strategy for preparing students to become effective leaders and socially responsible citizens.

The mechanisms identified through this research – experiential learning, social modeling, graduated responsibility and peer support – provide a framework for designing and implementing effective extracurricular programs. By understanding how these activities foster development, educators can maximize their impact and ensure all students have opportunities to develop critical leadership and social responsibility skills.

Moving forward, educational institutions in Darbhanga district and beyond should prioritize the expansion and enhancement of extracurricular offerings, provide adequate resources and training for program supervisors, and create systems to track and evaluate program effectiveness. The investment in extracurricular activities represents an investment in the future leadership capacity and social fabric of our communities.

The findings of this study contribute to the growing body of evidence supporting the value of holistic educational approaches that extend beyond traditional academic instruction. As we prepare students for an increasingly complex and interconnected world, the development of leadership skills and social responsibility through extracurricular activities emerges as both a practical necessity and a moral imperative.

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