# INFLUENCES OF CO-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES IN DEVELOPING SOFT SKILLS AMONG SENIOR SECONDARY STUDENTS

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**INTRODUCTION**

The schools are second only to the family in their contact with and responsibilities for the upbringing and education of children and usually expected to offer learners/ students a core academic curriculum together with other co-curricular activities. The primary role of the schools is provision of a place where future leaders are nurtured across the world (Hoffman, 2006). However, the present formal school systems are generally oriented to academic education and in many countries, education is heavily oriented towards tests and examination (Sedera, 2019). The literature on the soft skills and co-curricular activities on the Sri Lankan education system reveals that there is gap in the studies on the senior secondary students who are in grade 10 & 11. The present study investigated the influence of co-curricular activities on developing soft skills among senior secondary students in selected schools.

The terms co-curricular activities and extracurricular activities are puzzling terms and are synonymous for each other. According to Bhatia (1996) cited from Chalageri Yarriswami (2018) co-curricular activities are defined as the activation undertaken to strengthen the classroom learning as well as other activities both inside and outside the classroom to develop the personality of the child. Soft skills are defined as a group of essential abilities that involved the development of a knowledge base, expertise level and mindset that is increasingly necessary for success in the modern workplace. Most soft skills are related to interpersonal intelligence, on people skills and emotional intelligence. Soft skills include communication, flexibility, leadership, motivation, patience, problem solving abilities teamwork etc. The term participation at its simplest means to become activity involved in something and more specifically refer to it as involvement in a collective decision-making process with a recognizable social and or educational outcome (Davies et al (2006).

Darling et al (2005) presented that the participating in co-curricular activities has been linked to greater school attachment and sense of belonging, better academic achievement, and higher academic aspirations and less risky behaviors such as alcohol and drug use or dropping out of school. Furthermore, contemporary literature argues that participation in co-curricular activities seems to have positive effects on several indicators of academic achievement, namely academic performance, self-concept and school perception. Kariyana et al (2012) highlighted that most educators felt participation in co-curricular activities helped to improve students’ confidence which is vital in their academic pursuit.

# Research Objectives:

* Investigate how the co-curricular activities are implemented among senior secondary students in selected schools.
* Identify the perception of students, teachers and principals related to co-curricular activities used to develop soft skills among senior secondary students.
* Evaluate how participation of co-curricular activities support to develop soft skills among senior secondary students in selected schools.
* Make suggestions to improve soft skills in senior secondary students through participating in co-curricular activities.

# METHODOLOGY

A survey design was used for this study. Three types of data collection methods used in this study were: questionnaire (student, teacher), semi structured interview (principal) and focus group discussion (student) to allow for triangulation. The instruments were developed, piloted and validated through expert and statistics – Cronbachs Alpha.

Entire student population of grade 10 & 11 in Sri-Lanka was 622,565 (Annual School Census, 2018). Two provinces selected (Western and Central) purposively out of nine provinces to represent urban and estate sectors. Two districts were selected (Colombo, Nuwara-Eliya) from each province. Target population 229,493 of the study consisted with total grade 10 & 11 students in western and central provinces. Six schools representing grade 10, 11 students were chosen (40 students from one school) randomly from each selected district. Based on Mogan and Krejcie table (1970) sample of 450 students were selected for the study (grade 10 – 233 students, grade 11 – 217 students). The class teachers of grade 10,11from selected 12 schools were chose as teachers’ sample. All the principals of selected schools were included in the principals’ sample. Five students from each class (grade 10, 11) also selected to conduct focus group discussions. The collected data was analyzed using frequency distribution, cross tabulation and Chi square test.

# RESULTS AND DISCUSSSIONS

The participating in co-curricular activities among senior secondary students seems to be at the lowest level. It was revealed from the study that participating in sports activities and societies are the main co-curricular activities implemented in the selected school.

# Table 1. Summary of participation in co-curricular activities of senior secondary students in the Western and Central Provinces. Sample size = 450.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Co-curricular activities** | **No. participated** | **Percentage** |
| **Participation in Sport** |  |  |
| Athletics | 64 | 14.2 |
| Volley ball | 176 | 39.1 |
| Net ball | 87 | 19.3 |
| Cricket | 143 | 31.8 |
| **Participation in Societies** |  |  |
| Participated number | 24 | 5.3 |
| **Post held in societies** |  |  |
| President | 3 | 0.7 |
| Secretary | 4 | 0.9 |
| Treasure | 2 | 0.4 |
| Member | 15 | 3.3 |
| **Previewed benefit from Co-curricular activities** |  |  |
| Tolerance of losses and gains | 78 | 17.3 |
| Avoiding from Teaching learning process | 6 | 1.3 |
| Conduct Discipline | 166 | 36.9 |
| To become Popular | 123 | 27.3 |

The students mostly participated volleyball, cricket and athletics events in the selected schools (Table 1). Table 1 shows that 24 students participated in societies at school and very few students held the main posts in the societies. It was revealed that majority of students (94.7%) do not participate in any society in the school. All teachers included in the sample have stated that teachers help students in implementing co-curricular activities. Majority of principal’s (83%) opinion was teachers, parent and students have negative attitudes about students taking part in co-curricular activities in grade 10, 11. Most of the teachers (91.6%) prefer to complete the curriculum rather than making their students involve in co-curricular activities. It was also revealed from this study that majority of senior secondary students (Athletics 14.2%, Societies 5.3%) do not actively participate in co-curricular activities, because they have to attend tuition classes for the GCE O/L examination. Study revealed that majority of senior secondary students (95.6%) do not want to stay in school after 1:30 p.m. for any co-curricular activities. The finding of the study revealed that participation in co-curricular activities has been recognized as having number of benefits for students including the development of various competencies, soft skills relevant to their future career success.

# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

The major conclusion of this study was that the senior secondary students of the selected schools have not participated co-curricular activities due to the heavy syllabuses, examination- bound nature and negative attitudes of teachers, parents and students themselves.

The lack of participation in co-curriculum activities led to deprivation of the opportunity in developing soft skills among senior secondary students.

**Recommendations:**

1. School should motivate/encourage the students to participate more in co-curricular activities (sports, societies, field work, field trips, project, and speech, drama debating competitions, exhibitions, scouting, and guiding, different forms of camps to develop soft skills in senior secondary students).
2. Content of the curriculum and examination-bound nature assessment methods of the Sri-Lankan Education Systems should be revisited.
3. Teachers’ role should be transformed and they should be encouraged to design multiple learning methods, co-curricular activities such as student-based learning, learning by doing, co-operative surveys, out of class room activities and environmental events.

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