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Non-violence and social integration through extracurricular activities

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Abstract. In the context of modern society, preventing violence and fostering social integration are priorities in youth development. Extracurricular activities represent an effective way to promote non-violence values and facilitate social integration by developing social skills, cooperation, and communication. This article explores the positive impact of extracurricular activities on young people's behavior, contributing to the reduction of aggressive behavior and the increase of tolerance. The study analyzes examples of activities that have proven effective in promoting a culture of peace and social inclusion.

Keywords. non-violence, social integration, extracurricular activities, youth, violence prevention, social inclusion, non-formal education.

1. Introduction

In the context of the rapid evolution of modern society, the issue of youth violence continues to pose a major challenge for educational and social communities. The phenomenon of violence, manifested in various forms, not only affects the personal development of the individuals involved but also the overall social cohesion (Smith & Jones, 2023). In this context, violence prevention and the promotion of social integration become educational imperatives that require innovative and proactive approaches (Postovan, 2015; Calițchii, 2022).

An effective way to address these challenges is the implementation of extracurricular activities with educational and formative roles. Extracurricular activities provide a conducive framework for developing social skills such as effective communication, cooperation, and empathy, thus contributing to the strengthening of interpersonal relationships and the reduction of aggressive behaviors (Brown et al., 2022). Furthermore, they facilitate social inclusion by promoting values such as tolerance, mutual respect, and solidarity (Davis & Clark, 2021).

Through this article, we aim to analyze the positive impact of extracurricular activities on young people's behavior, highlighting both concrete examples of best practices and relevant results obtained from recent empirical studies. Exploring these aspects will contribute to a better understanding of the potential of non-formal education in preventing violence and facilitating social integration (Lungu, 2023; Popov, 2018; Imperial & Madrigal, 2021).

2. Literature review

Specialized literature highlights numerous studies supporting the effectiveness of extracurricular activities in preventing violence and promoting social integration. According to

Smith and Jones (2023), involving young people in extracurricular activities significantly reduces aggressive behaviors, as these activities provide opportunities for developing self-control and managing negative emotions. Another study conducted by Brown et al. (2022) emphasizes that extracurricular educational programs improve communication and collaboration skills, which are essential for preventing interpersonal conflicts (Creangă, 2018).

On the other hand, research by Davis and Clark (2021) focuses on the social integration dimension through extracurricular activities. The authors emphasize that participation in such programs facilitates interaction among young people from different backgrounds, promoting social inclusion and combating discrimination. Similarly, the study by Taylor and Green (2020) highlights those sports, artistic, or community activities contribute to strengthening the sense of belonging and fostering friendships among young people (Pleşca, 2020; Listyaputri et al, 2023).

The specialized literature supports the idea that extracurricular activities are an effective solution for preventing violence and facilitating social integration. However, there are few longitudinal studies tracking the long-term impact of these programs, a gap that requires further exploration in future research (Irimescu, 2018; Glavan, 2021; Taylor & green, 2020).

3. Metodology

The study was conducted on a group of students from the Faculty of Educational Sciences at the "Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad, selected through a simple random sampling method. The sample included 100 second and third-year students involved in various extracurricular activities organized within the university.

The research instruments used were structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, aimed at evaluating students' perceptions of the effectiveness of extracurricular activities in preventing violent behaviors and promoting social integration. The questionnaires included both closed and open-ended questions, while the interviews were conducted individually, providing an in-depth perspective on personal experiences.

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive and analytical statistical methods, focusing on the correlation between participation in extracurricular activities and the perception of non-violence and social integration. For qualitative analysis, interview responses were thematically coded to identify the main narrative patterns.

The extracurricular activities analyzed included participation in scientific circles, debate clubs, recreational activities, and volunteer projects. Each of these activities was selected to provide a diversified perspective on social integration and violence prevention. Scientific circles contributed to the development of cognitive skills and critical thinking, debate clubs fostered structured expression and conflict management, recreational activities promoted teamwork and cooperation, while volunteer projects encouraged empathy and solidarity.

The extracurricular activities conducted in the study were diverse, providing students with multiple opportunities for personal and social development. Each activity was chosen based on its relevance to promoting non-violence and facilitating social integration. Below are the main activities analyzed:

- **Scientific circles:** Scientific circles offered an academic space for developing research skills and critical thinking. Students participated in sessions where they presented their own works, thematic debates, and research methodology workshops. This activity was valued for creating a collaborative environment where ideas were evaluated based on arguments and scientific evidence. This approach helped reduce verbal conflicts by promoting rational and structured discourse.

- Debate clubs: The main objective of debate clubs was to develop argumentation and public speaking skills. Participants were encouraged to approach controversial topics in a regulated environment, respecting different opinions. Thus, students learned to manage opinion conflicts without resorting to aggression, contributing to the consolidation of a culture of constructive dialogue.
- Recreational activities: Through collaboration and team spirit, students developed essential cooperation skills, learning to manage both success and failure constructively. Regular participation in sports activities facilitated the formation of friendships and strengthened the sense of belonging to a group.
- Volunteering projects: Volunteering was organized in collaboration with various local NGOs, aiming to support the community through social, ecological, and educational activities. Students participated in awareness campaigns, mentoring activities with children from vulnerable backgrounds, and ecological actions. This involvement provided opportunities for developing empathy, social responsibility, and solidarity, being perceived as a transformative experience for participants.

The impact of each activity was evaluated using both quantitative (questionnaires) and qualitative (interviews) methods, resulting in a comprehensive picture of the role of these programs in shaping students' character and social behavior.

The questionnaires used were designed to measure students' perceptions of the impact of these activities on personal and social development. The structure of the questionnaires included sections such as demographic data, level of involvement in activities, perceptions of non-violence effects, measurement of social integration, and personal satisfaction. The questions were formulated in a mixed format, including both closed-ended items (on a Likert scale) and open-ended questions to capture detailed opinions.

3.1.1. Structure of the questionnaires. The questionnaires used in the study were carefully designed to assess students' perceptions regarding the impact of extracurricular activities on non-violent behavior and social integration. The structure was devised to ensure the collection of relevant data in both quantitative and qualitative format.

- Demographic Data:

This section included questions about age, gender, year of study, and previous involvement in extracurricular activities. The demographic information allowed for better contextualization of results and understanding of participants' diversity.

- Level of Involvement:

The second section aimed to measure the frequency of participation in extracurricular activities using a five-point Likert scale (1 - very rarely, 5 - very frequently). Additionally, students were asked about the types of activities they participated in and the duration of their involvement.

- Impact on Non-Violence:

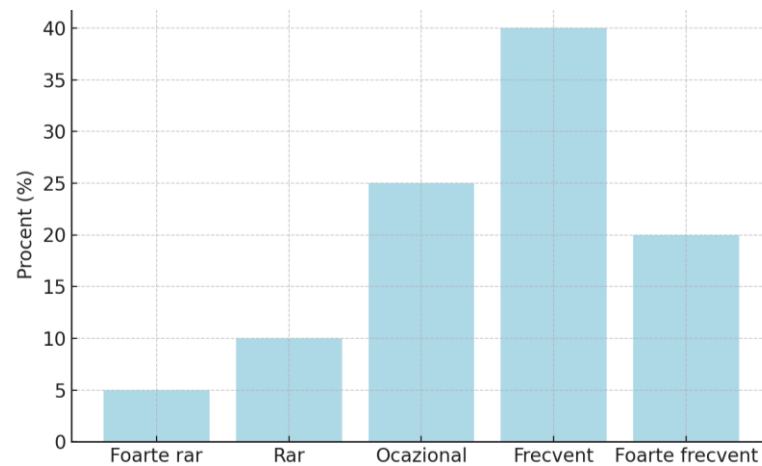
This part of the questionnaire included closed-ended questions (Likert scale) on perceptions of how activities influenced non-violent behavior, collaboration capacity, and conflict management. An example question: "Participating in sports activities improved my ability to collaborate effectively with colleagues."

- Social Integration and Personal Satisfaction:

The final section included questions about social integration experiences following participation in extracurricular activities. Both Likert items and open-ended questions were used to allow the free expression of opinions. An example of an open-ended question was:

"What do you consider to be the most important benefit of participating in extracurricular activities?"

Figure 1. Involvement level in scholar activities



The study's findings indicate that extracurricular activities have a positive impact on students' social integration and non-violent behavior. However, the lack of longitudinal studies to assess the long-term effects of these programs remains a research gap that should be addressed in future studies.

5. Methodology

The analysis of the collected data revealed a significant impact of extracurricular activities on students' perceptions regarding non-violence and social integration. The majority of participants (78%) reported that involvement in extracurricular activities improved their ability to collaborate effectively with peers, while 65% of students considered that these activities contributed to reducing aggressive behaviors in daily interactions.

From the perspective of social integration, 82% of respondents stated that participating in sports or volunteering activities facilitated interaction with students from diverse cultural backgrounds, contributing to the development of intercultural skills. Additionally, debate clubs were perceived by 70% of students as a safe environment for expressing divergent opinions without generating conflicts.

The qualitative analysis of open-ended responses indicated that volunteer projects were considered the most effective type of activity for strengthening solidarity and promoting tolerance. Students repeatedly mentioned that these experiences offered them the opportunity to develop empathy and social responsibility.

On the other hand, only 15% of participants indicated that involvement in extracurricular activities did not have a significant impact on their personal behavior or social skills. This category mainly included students with sporadic or limited participation in such activities.

Figure 2. The Impact of Extracurricular Activities on Non-Violence

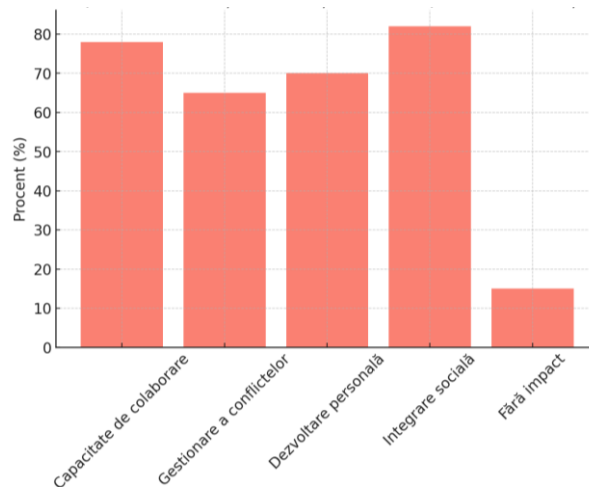
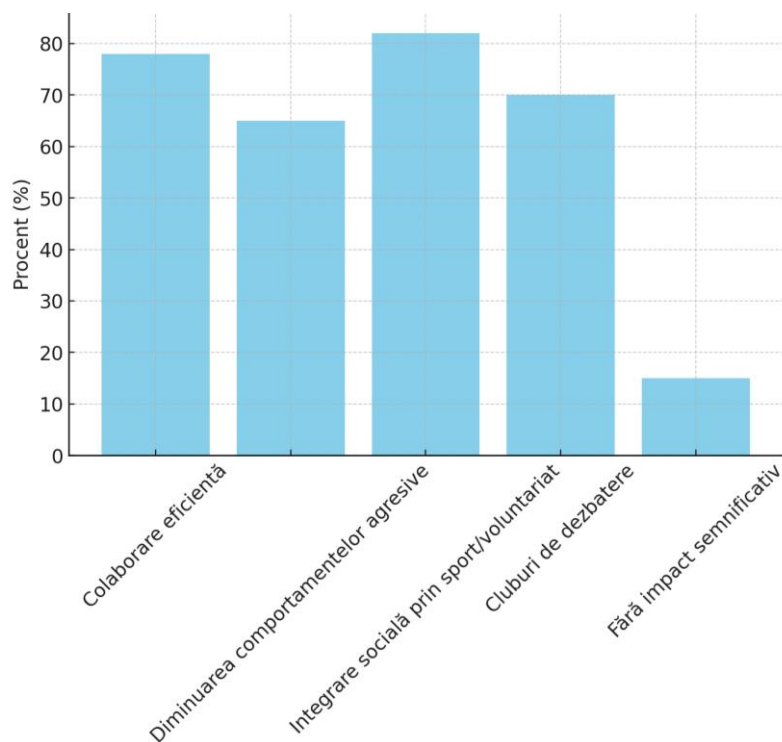


Figure 3. The Impact of Extracurricular Activities on Violent Behaviors among Students



Correlating the quantitative results with the qualitative findings, it can be concluded that extracurricular activities significantly contribute to promoting a culture of non-violence and to the social integration of students. However, the effectiveness of these activities largely depends on the frequency of participation and the degree of active involvement of students in the respective programs.

6. Conclusion

Extracurricular activities represent an effective way to positively influence young people's behavior, contributing to the reduction of aggressive behaviors and promoting the development of social skills such as cooperation, effective communication, and empathy. Through consistent participation in such activities, young people develop the ability to manage conflicts peacefully, learning to respect diversity and contribute to building a culture of peace within their community.

These activities not only support personal development but also facilitate the social integration of participants, bringing together young people from diverse backgrounds. Thus, a safe and inclusive space is created where solidarity and mutual support become fundamental values. Through team sports, cultural activities, or volunteering, young people develop collaboration skills and build positive relationships among peers, reducing the risk of social marginalization.

Non-formal education provided through extracurricular activities thus becomes an essential tool in preventing violent behaviors. Studies show that young people actively involved in such programs are less likely to exhibit aggressive or risky behaviors due to the formation of a positive social identity and the adoption of constructive roles within the community.

Moreover, participation in extracurricular activities contributes to increased self-confidence, the development of social responsibility, and the strengthening of decision-making skills within a collaborative framework. Through active involvement in joint projects, young people learn to be responsible and value teamwork.

In this context, it is crucial to expand access to such activities for all social categories, especially for vulnerable young people. Collaboration between schools, NGOs, and local communities can help develop programs tailored to the diverse needs of young people, thereby strengthening social integration and promoting non-violence.

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