

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES FOR DEVELOPING PROFESSIONAL SKILLS IN A LINGUISTIC AND INTERCULTURAL CONTEXT

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Abstract: In an increasingly globalized educational context, extracurricular activities are becoming essential tools for developing students' professional skills. They contribute not only to enriching theoretical knowledge, but also to developing the practical skills needed in a dynamic professional environment. By participating in panel discussions, round tables, workshops, debate clubs, international competitions, exchange programs, etc., students improve their language skills, critical thinking, and adaptability. The linguistic dimension of these activities promotes the improvement of communication skills in various languages, providing students with opportunities to interact with colleagues and professionals from different cultures. At the same time, the intercultural component allows them to develop tolerance, flexibility, and understanding of diversity, which are essential skills in fields such as international business, diplomacy, or global management. The study analyses the impact of extracurricular activities on students' professional training, highlighting their benefits in terms of developing leadership, collaboration and decision-making skills. At the same time, examples of good practices in ASEM that promote multilingual and intercultural education through various extracurricular initiatives are presented. In conclusion, the integration of extracurricular activities into the educational process contributes significantly to the development of professional skills, preparing students for the challenges of a globalized and intercultural work environment.

Keywords: extracurricular activities; non-formal education; professional competences; globalization; multilingualism; interculturality.

JEL Classification: I23, I25, Z18

1 Introduction

In the current context of globalization and internationalization of educational processes, universities are called upon to rethink their objectives and methods of professional training. The focus is gradually shifting from the transmission of theoretical knowledge to the development of transversal skills, which are essential for effective integration into an increasingly globalized labor market. In this sense, extracurricular activities become valuable complementary tools, facilitating the integration of students into culturally and linguistically diverse environments.

This research explores three main areas of analysis: the theoretical and methodological foundations of extracurricular activities, their role in the development of professional skills, and the integration of linguistic and intercultural dimensions into non-formal education. Furthermore, extracurricular activities are investigated from the perspective of their formative value, being considered a catalyst for experiential learning and the development of essential skills such as communication, leadership, collaboration, and adaptability.

The used methodology is based on a qualitative approach, which includes documentary analysis, direct observation, and a case study, with the ASEM as the place of application, an institution actively engaged in promoting extracurricular programs with an international focus.

It is worth noting that the article makes both a theoretical and practical contribution to the evaluation of non-formal and complementary education, providing a useful framework for reflection for teachers, decision-makers, and students in the process of training for integration into a globalized professional environment.

2 Extracurricular Activities (EA) in the Context of Global Education: Theoretical and Methodological Framework

Globalization has forced a profound rethinking of how universities prepare future professionals. In an educational context characterized by increased mobility, accelerated digitization, and frequent intercultural interactions, the focus is shifting from the accumulation of theoretical knowledge to the development of transversal skills essential for adaptability and employability in the globalized labor market. In this sense, extracurricular activities take on strategic importance, providing authentic contexts for experiential learning and contributing to the development of a competitive professional profile. As complementary educational tools, they facilitate the integration of linguistic and intercultural dimensions into student training, responding to the demands of an increasingly internationalized academic and professional environment.

This study aims to investigate the impact of extracurricular activities on the development of students' professional skills, with a particular focus on the integration of multilingual and intercultural dimensions into the non-formal educational process.

The main objective is to analyze how active involvement in such initiatives contributes to the formation of an adaptable, competitive, and internationally oriented professional profile.

To achieve this objective, a qualitative research methodology was adopted, focused on investigating student experiences and the institutional framework provided by the ASEM.

The methodological approach includes:

documentary analysis of the conceptual framework and relevant educational materials;

direct observation of extracurricular activities (workshops, round tables, panel discussions, debates, flash mobs, etc.);

conducting an institutional case study focused on identifying good practices developed through collaboration between the Scientific Library, the Department of Modern Languages, and other ASEM structures.

The theoretical basis of the research is based on the definition and analysis of key concepts essential for understanding the issues addressed.

From an educational and cultural perspective, the process of globalization may be considered as complex and multidimensional, involving integration and interdependence between states, economies, cultures and educational systems on a global scale (Crețu, 2022, p. 24).

In this context, interculturality and extracurricular activities can be defined as forms of non-formal or informal learning, which have been shown to make a significant contribution to the personal, social and professional development of pupils and students (Bocoș & Jucan, 2008, p. 17).

EA are defined as non-formal initiatives, carried out outside the standard curriculum, which make a valuable contribution to the development of transversal skills.

In the same vein, we also mention the term non-formal education, which is an organized learning process, carried out outside the formal system, which aims to develop skills through voluntary, interactive, and practical activities (Murgu, 2016, p. 98).

Professional skills can be defined as the integrated set of knowledge, abilities, and attitudes that enable the effective performance of an activity in a specific field (Manolescu, 2011, p. 23).

The theoretical analysis showed that, in the context of globalization and the accelerated internationalization of education, it is imperative to develop intercultural and transversal skills that cannot be formed solely through the formal curriculum.

3 Extracurricular activities at ASEM – a Tool for Developing Professional Skills

In an academic environment focused on internationalization and adaptation to labor market requirements, the ASEM has built an institutional culture in which EA are actively integrated into the student training process. Within the extended educational process, EA's are valued as strategic tools for personal and professional development.

Extracurricular activities carried out within the ASEM framework have been shown to contribute significantly to the development of students' professional skills, valuing the skills acquired outside the formal curriculum (Manolescu, 2011). Research has demonstrated that these competencies encompass both technical and specialised dimensions, which are unique to a specific professional domain, and essential transversal skills, including communication, leadership, critical thinking, adaptability, and managing cultural diversity (Vasilescu, 2021). The collaboration between SL ASEM, faculties and the Department of Modern Languages has resulted in extracurricular activities that offer students concrete opportunities for linguistic, intercultural and professional development. These activities serve to strengthen students' preparation for the globalised context of the labour market. For example, work ethic, resilience, and autonomy in the learning process.

It is important to note that extracurricular activities are forms of non-formal and informal learning that take place outside the compulsory academic curriculum and play an essential role in students' personal and professional development. In this sense, "extracurricular activities have a multi-directional educational function: formative, cultural, and motivational" (Mihăilă, 2022). They provide authentic contexts for complementary training, supporting the learning process through experience and stimulating the transversal skills required in contemporary society. Therefore, "extracurricular activities offer varied contexts for experiential learning" (Bocoş & Jucan, 2008).

Extracurricular activities can be classified into several categories, depending on their nature and objectives:

Academic and scientific activities, such as conferences, debates, thematic workshops, and interdisciplinary projects;

Socio-cultural activities, which include participation in student clubs, theater groups, festivals, and various artistic events;

Civic and volunteer activities, carried out through involvement in non-governmental organizations, community campaigns, social and environmental projects;

International mobility programs, such as Erasmus+, internships, academic exchanges, and international training courses.

Specialized studies show that extracurricular activities serve multiple functions, contributing significantly to strengthening the educational, social, and professional dimensions of the higher education process. They are recognized as forms of non-formal and informal learning that support personal and professional development in a framework complementary to formal education. It is worth noting that "non-formal education plays an essential complementary role in professional training" (Murgu, 2016).

In the extended educational process, EA can be associated with the following major functions:

the educational function, aimed at deepening and diversifying knowledge;

the formative function, which supports the acquisition of transversal skills, attitudes, and competences;

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the socializing function, which facilitates integration into the academic community and the development of interpersonal relationships;

the recreational function, which contributes to psycho-emotional balance and stress reduction;

the cultural function, through the promotion of local, national, and universal values;

the professional function, associated with preparation for entry into the labor market;

the motivational function, which stimulates active involvement, perseverance, and individual aspirations (Mihăilă, 2022, p. 124).

Within ASEM, extracurricular activities are notable for their thematic and functional diversity, being structured in such a way as to support the comprehensive development of students. These include:

Conferences, round tables, and debates, designed to stimulate critical thinking, argumentative expression, and analytical spirit;

International programs and academic partnerships, such as Erasmus+ and participation in European university networks, which facilitate multicultural collaboration and professional development in an international context;

Internships and volunteer activities in multicultural environments, which offer concrete opportunities to apply knowledge and engage in direct intercultural contact;

Thematic clubs and centers that promote intercultural dialogue, diversity, and language skills development;

Workshops, conferences, and symposiums on economic, social, or environmental topics that encourage initiative, civic responsibility, and strategic thinking;

Literary and artistic events, commemorative events, and awareness campaigns, aimed at cultivating humanistic values and civic awareness;

Creative and interactive activities, such as competitions and flash mobs, which capitalize on students' active involvement, expressiveness, and innovative spirit.

SL ASEM plays a central role in organizing EA, acting as a hub for active learning. By collaborating with ASEM' faculties and departments, especially with DLM, it contributes to stimulating intercultural dialogue and promoting awareness of universal values, thus strengthening a dynamic and inclusive academic community.

The active involvement of students in extracurricular activities contributes to shaping a balanced and complex professional profile, providing relevant contexts for practical learning and personal reflection. By participating in such initiatives, students develop essential skills such as project management, teamwork, effective communication, and decision-making. In addition, interaction with intercultural environments fosters empathy, cognitive flexibility, and openness to diversity.

These experiences contribute to increased self-confidence and employability, as well as sustainable personal development. In this sense, "extracurricular initiatives offer students opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge in real-life contexts" (Simion, 2019).

It is important to note that the active participation of ASEM students in extracurricular activities has a significant impact on the development of key skills necessary for employability in the current labor market context. Thus, these activities contribute to the formation of the following essential skills:

Leadership and initiative, strengthened through involvement in project coordination and implementation;

Planning, decision-making, and problem-solving, developed through participation in applied workshops, simulations, team management, and event organization, as well as through taking on responsibilities;

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Critical thinking and contextual analysis skills, stimulated through thematic debates and collective reflection on global challenges;

Personal autonomy and self-directed learning, cultivated through voluntary involvement in various initiatives and through individual reflection processes;

Multilingual communication and effective collaboration, developed through clubs, workshops, academic mobility programs, and international interactions;

Intercultural adaptability, strengthened through participation in international projects, collaboration in multicultural teams, and exposure to a variety of perspectives;

Negotiation and time management skills, acquired through extracurricular experiences involving setting priorities, efficient allocation of time resources, coordination of tasks and deadlines, as well as adjusting objectives according to context, available resources, and the dynamics of the teams involved.

To strengthen professional skills and create an active academic community, ASEM, through the SL ASEM and in collaboration with faculties and departments, carries out a series of extracurricular activities considered relevant examples of good practice. As D. Rusu (2023, p. 105) points out, "the integration of extracurricular activities into university life requires collaboration between the library, faculties, and departments, providing students with real contexts for applying their knowledge."

In this context, the following particularly significant events can be highlighted:

The National Campaign "Let's Read Aloud Together", which promotes reading through collective activities;

"NEXT Generation" Reading Club a space dedicated to literary exploration and personal development;

Mihai Eminescu's birthday (January 15), celebrating the values of national literature;

National Reading Day (February 14), with initiatives aimed at encouraging reading;

International Francophonie Day (March 20), focused on promoting linguistic and cultural diversity;

Europe Day (May 9), highlighting European cohesion;

European Day of Languages (September 26), dedicated to celebrating multilingualism;

International Students' Day (November 17), recognizing the active involvement of young people;

International Human Rights Day (December 10), with the aim of raising awareness of universal values.

It should be noted that these initiatives contribute to creating a dynamic educational environment that stimulates the development of essential skills and promotes intercultural dialogue. Faced with the increasingly complex challenges of the labor market, ASEM values extracurricular activities as key tools for developing students' transversal and technical skills.

Transversal skills are increasingly valued by employers in the current labor market context. As Vasilescu (2021) points out, "transversal skills are becoming essential in an education anchored in globalized realities."

To support the development of these skills, the SL ASEM, in collaboration with faculties and departments, organizes a wide range of extracurricular activities focused on developing essential skills such as communication, teamwork, critical thinking, time management, adaptability, leadership, and negotiation.

Among the most successful initiatives dedicated to the development of transversal skills within ASEM are:

Literary Club "Reading means living", now in its seventh edition this academic year;

National Campaign "Reading Aloud" – 2024 edition, inspired by the journalism of Mihai Eminescu;

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Cultural activities organized to celebrate Europe Day, International Francophonie Day, National Reading Day, and other similar events.

Technical skills, also known as "hard skills," represent specific knowledge and abilities that are indispensable in the exercise of specialized professions. Extracurricular activities complement theoretical training, facilitating the improvement of these skills, connecting students to innovations in the field, and increasing employment opportunities in a competitive professional environment.

Within ASEM, the following EAs are relevant examples of good practices for the development of technical skills:

Campaign to combat human trafficking;

International Student Day;

Human Rights Day;

Panel discussions on legal, social, and other topics;

"NEXT Generation" club and reading workshops.

Extracurricular activities have been shown to contribute to the development of transversal and specialised skills. These activities offer students professional training opportunities and access to innovations, as well as the chance to diversify their educational portfolio.

4. The multilingual and intercultural dimension of extracurricular activities

Extracurricular activities have a significant formative role, preparing students adaptable and competitive in the global labor market. Their multilingual and intercultural dimension develops essential skills for communication and collaboration in international contexts, through activities carried out in French, English and German and through active learning experiences, direct interaction and critical reflection on one's own culture (Huber & Reynolds, 2014).

The reflective dimension plays a fundamental role in developing intercultural competence because it allows students to analyze their own cultural perspectives and develop their capacity for experiential learning. According to UNESCO (2013, p. 6), "intercultural competence is the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with people from other cultures, involving a set of specific knowledge, attitudes, and skills."

Participation in multilingual clubs, international workshops, or thematic campaigns stimulates introspection, thus facilitating the development of a mature intercultural awareness based on empathy and continuous learning.

The development of intercultural and multilingual skills within ASEM is also supported by relevant international educational partnerships, facilitated by the AUF-Moldova National Office. As part of the project "Development of Sciences in French in the Republic of Moldova" (Développement des sciences en français en République de Moldavie).

The international internships carried out at ASEM by Safae Omrani and Justin Dăcu, supported by AUF-Moldova, highlight the institution's commitment to promoting multilingual and intercultural competences. The objective is realised through a variety of means, including events, clubs, training programmes and international partnerships. These provide students with active and reflective learning contexts. In essence, ASEM's extracurricular activities are congruent with European strategies concerning the internationalisation of higher education and the cultivation of intercultural and linguistic competencies.

In this regard, it is important to emphasize that intercultural education must be promoted through institutional policies and international collaborations (Byram & Wagner, 2018).

Activities such as Erasmus+ programs, language clubs, participation in international student networks, or multilingual cultural events concretely reflect these objectives, providing real opportunities to apply European principles.

5 Conclusions

The study *Extracurricular Activities for Development Professional Skills in a Multilingual and Intercultural Approach* highlighted the essential role of extracurricular activities in higher education, in the context of globalization and the need to develop adaptable, transversal, and intercultural professional skills.

The analysis of the theoretical framework, correlated with ASEM's institutional experience and with examples of good practices, highlights the significant role of extracurricular activities in the development of students' linguistic and personal skills, contributing to the configuration of a professional profile oriented towards innovation, collaboration and intercultural dialogue.

Extracurricular activities can be regarded as a complementary educational framework that facilitates the development of skills in demand on the labour market. The integration of multilingual and intercultural dimensions in these activities has a significant formative value, preparing students for multicultural contexts and professions with an international outlook.

Teachers and librarians play an important role in coordinating these initiatives, transforming them into authentic and reflective educational experiences, aimed at developing personal and professional skills.

The ASEM Scientific Library and the Department of Modern Languages are establishing themselves as central actors in promoting European values, multilingual reading, intercultural dialogue and active learning.

Nevertheless, the integration of multilingual and intercultural dimensions in extracurricular activities continues to pose challenges. The key challenges identified pertain to the students' limited confidence in foreign language proficiency, the inconsistent level of engagement influenced by faculty profiles and year of study, and the absence of an institutional framework dedicated to the facilitation of intercultural initiatives.

In light of these circumstances, it becomes essential for institutions of higher education to incorporate extracurricular activities within their institutional development strategies and student training plans. Concurrently, there is a necessity to enhance the training of teaching staff in the domain of intercultural education, whilst also extending collaborative relationships with European institutions.

The promotion of intercultural dialogue has been demonstrated to contribute to the development of multilingual skills, the strengthening of students' personal and professional skills, and the preparation of students to function effectively in diverse international contexts. International cooperation, and learning in multilingual contexts, extracurricular activities carried out within ASEM contribute significantly to the formation of a professional profile characterized by openness, empathy, and adaptability. At the same time, these valuable initiatives build bridges between cultures, fields, and generations, strengthening a dynamic, inclusive academic community focused on excellence in education.

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