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THE ROLE OF EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES, STUDENT COMMITMENT, AND TEACHER LEADERSHIP IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOFT SKILLS AT THE UNDERGRADUATE LEVEL

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Abstract:

In education, soft skills play a key role in developing students' personalities and preparing them to face and tackle issues worldwide. This quantitative study was proposed to investigate the development of soft skills through extracurricular activities, student commitment, and teacher leadership at the university level. Convenience sampling was employed, and a closed-ended questionnaire comprising 43 items was administered to undergraduates at public universities in Lahore. All the data were evaluated in SPSS and presented as charts. Results declared that all three factors: extracurricular activities, teacher leadership, and student commitment were crucial in soft skill development. Research highlighted that teacher leadership motivates and encourages students to explore and participate beyond classrooms. Additionally, students' commitment and loyalty to their institute have depicted that they love to take part in activities organized by their institute, as it has enhanced their soft skills. Likewise, all sports and non-sports activities in and outside the organization remarkably develop and elevate students' soft skills. Overall findings suggested that soft skill integration and good leadership strategies should be prioritized in universities to ensure inclusivity and promote activities where students' soft skills can be tested to enhance their commitment to the organization.

Keywords: *Soft Skills, Extracurricular Activities, Teacher leadership, Student Commitment*

Introduction

Soft Skills

As a developing country, Pakistan has continuously struggled with both the quality of education and the incorporation of soft skills (Ahmad, Rehman & Ali, 2014). Consequently, undergraduates are devoid of abilities and soft skills that are crucial to enter the competent world of the 21st century professionally. In contrast, developed nations integrate soft skills into higher education, considering leadership and innovation essential abilities for professional excellence (Rivera, 2017). Kumar et al. (2022) refer to soft skills as the building blocks of forming and maintaining relationships that help people to adjust professionally. Additionally, these skills not only help students in professional development but also direct them to implement their acquired knowledge in a proper and meaningful way (Touloumakos, 2020). Park (2017) referred to them as life skills as they lead students towards success. However, soft skills like communication,



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teamwork, problem-solving, critical thinking, or leadership cannot be recognized easily as individuals acquire them differently (Addis & Cairo, 2017). Noah & Aziz (2020) define soft skills as the type of skills that include personality traits and habits along with social factors and language, which aggregate hard skills of an individual that advance their interaction careers and performance. They are innate abilities that require personal and social interactions (Wang & Lee, 2019). Qizi (2020) referred to them as obligatory “21st-century” skills that define an individual’s success at all stages of life. Soft skills are interdependent (Whiteman et al., 2019), for instance, interpersonal skills like communication, negotiation, cognitive skills, and cooperation, along with emotional skills like conflict and anger management, all of which complement each other (Patricia, 2019).

Soft Skills in Higher Education

Zawawi (2023) emphasizes that soft skill acquisition is one of the leading factors at the undergraduate level that motivates students to stick to activities of their institute. Moreover, these skills not only strengthen self-regulation and problem-solving but also play a significant role in building emotional intelligence that helps individuals to overcome social challenges and maintain educational focus (Feraco et al., 2022; Waters et al., 2019). Another research conducted by Viviers (2018) explained that soft skills like leadership, teamwork, critical thinking, and interpersonal skills have now become a pillar of higher education, making students more competent than ever. Wang et al. (2025) stated that soft skills like adaptability and critical thinking help students to handle academic uncertainties, whereas curiosity and interpersonal skills enhance their cognitive growth. Hence, incorporating soft skills in the higher education sector is essential as it defines institutional and individual success in the 21st century (Wang et al., 2025).

Extracurricular Activities and Their Importance

Extracurricular activities are meaningful activities outside the classroom and institution in which students participate according to their interests (Luo & Asavisanu, 2022). Vos et al. (2018) mentioned them as the learning experiences that complement academics and classroom ventures. ECAs like indoor and outdoor sports, athletic ventures, internships, volunteering and social work, learning different languages, art and literary clubs, workshops, and seminars assist students to enhance and acquire soft skills (Pan et al., 2022). These activities are accessible in and outside the school/college/university, and student participation in them is completely voluntary (Kim, 2022).

Extracurricular activities play a leading role in developing soft skills as they help students to explore and interact with their surroundings, which encourages communication, collaboration, problem-solving, and decision-making (Wachsmuth, Lewis & Gage, 2023). Moreover, different ECAs like sports, art and literary clubs, educational societies, volunteering, and internships all



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provide different experiences to students that develop and enhance their soft skills (Kim, 2022). Research conducted by Wachsmuth, Lewis, and Gage (2023) suggests that excessive interactions in extracurricular activities build social competence in students. Research shows that students who avoid participating in ECA's lack soft skills, such as interpersonal and communication skills, which lead to timid behavior (Szilagyi et al., 2014).

Student Commitment

Woznyj et al. (2019) and Suharto et al. (2020) defined commitment as a psychological state in which a person has a profound relationship with their job/work, which ultimately determines whether they continue the task. Fahmi (2020) and Sunarsi (2020) defined student commitment as their engagement, attitude, and enjoyment in a specific ECA of their choice. Commitment also refers to an individual's loyalty towards their organization and its activities (Cahyono & Fahmi, 2020). Sunarsi and Rohaeni et al. (2020) mentioned commitment as an individual's behavior, attitude, loyalty, and engagement towards their organization.

Role of Student Commitment in the Development of Soft Skills:

According to different research, students who are committed to extracurricular activities have a number of soft skills developed to achieve their personal and professional goals. It is noted that students who are fully committed and engaged in ECA's are likely to have positive impact on their academics, personal and professional development due to soft skills like time and stress management, good communication and interpersonal skills and teamwork skills (Andrews, 2018; Miller et al., 2018; Denovan & Macaskill, 2017; Ito et al., 2017, 2019). Literature suggests that undergraduates who are committed to extracurricular activities develop advanced soft skills that help them acquire cross-cultural knowledge that allows them to interact and build healthy peer relationships with people from diverse cultural backgrounds (King, McQuarrie & Brigham, 2020). Hence, student commitment to extracurricular activities allows them to develop essential soft skills to survive global challenges (Fu, 2018). According to the NFHS report of 2015, high levels of self-discipline, confidence, critical thinking, and problem-solving, along with good communication and teamwork skills, were observed in the students who were committed to extracurricular activities.

Teacher Leadership and Its Importance in the Development of Soft Skills

Teacher leadership is a term that is widely used in the educational context; however, it doesn't have a particular definition (Sebastian et al., 2017). The perception of teacher leadership is ambiguous, but according to international literature, there are many definitions (Liu, 2021). Literature suggests that teacher leadership is used interchangeably for formal and informal teachers who adopt diverse teaching methods and leadership styles to refine student learning and to promote professional development in their students and colleagues (Wenner & Campbell, 2017; Oppi, Eisenschmidt, & Stingu, 2020). Wenner and Campbell (2017) further stated that



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teacher leadership is beyond the classroom and plays a key role in developing learning and professional development in students and holding the organization together. Research also suggests that teacher leadership directly influences students' soft skill development by sharing and encouraging new ideas and resources, and by practicing diverse methodologies that enhance their soft skills (Nicholson et al., 2017). Emphasizing the importance of teacher leadership, Mansir (2021) in their research stated that teacher leaders must have a good and dominant personality in order to lead their students and promote necessary soft skills in formal settings. Moreover, a teacher leader not only acts as a teacher but is also a facilitator, director, manager, organizer, and a guide that shapes students' soft skills like communication, creativity, teamwork, critical thinking, and problem-solving (Mansir, 2019).

Teachers play a pivotal role in quality education and student motivation and involvement in extracurricular activities by adopting and implementing different leadership styles, which directly affect the organizational progress (Chen, 2017). Research conducted by Sokol, Gozdek, and Figurska (2015) outlined that teacher leadership influences the level of student commitment and interest in and outside the classroom by creating a productive environment that encourages critical thinking, innovation, and confidence in students, helping them to develop soft skills and motivating them to learn more.

The primary focus of this research is to explore the role of three areas: extracurricular activities, student commitment, and teacher leadership in soft skill development. The study uncovered valuable insights by obtaining quantitative data from undergraduate students at public universities in Lahore.

Research Objectives

The present study seeks to:

- determine students' commitment at the undergraduate level
- uncover undergraduates' perspectives on the role of extracurricular activities in soft skill development.
- analyze the viewpoint of undergraduates of public universities about the role of teacher leadership in promoting soft skills.
- recognize the different extracurricular activities that nurture soft skill development

Methodology

The study used a quantitative approach widely used by researchers to gather, investigate, and interpret numerical data to answer research inquiries (Herwanis et al., 2025). A cross-sectional survey design was employed to gather substantial information about individuals' and groups' ideas and concepts (Mills, 2021). A closed-ended questionnaire was administered to 350 undergraduates using convenience sampling to gather quantitative data. Student commitment



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was assessed through 8 items of Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ), a standardized tool developed by Mowday, Steers & Porter (1979) whereas teacher leadership was assessed by using 7 items from Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) (Kouzes & Posner, 1995). However, the role of extracurricular activities in soft skill development was measured through 28 close-ended items administered by the researcher. All the data was analyzed using SPSS and presented in the form of charts.

Results

Frequency Table

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
SA A N D SD

Sr	ITEMS	SA	%	A	%	N	%	D	%	SD	%
1	Active listening	70	20%	182	52%	35	10%	45	13%	18	5%
2	Fostering soft skills	35	10%	227	65%	35	10%	35	10%	18	5%
3	Exploring creativity	56	16%	217	62%	31	9%	21	6%	25	7%
4	Constructive feedback	63	18%	213	61%	35	10%	21	6%	18	5%
5	Exhibiting skills	49	14%	213	61%	28	8%	38	11%	22	6%
6	Fostering new skills	67	19%	213	61%	35	10%	17	5%	18	5%
7	Empowering clarity	52	15%	238	68%	21	6%	18	5%	21	6%
8	Joy of participation	98	28%	182	52%	35	10%	21	6%	14	4%



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9	Institute's problems as my problems.	70	20%	210	60%	24	7%	18	5%	28	8%
10	Strong bonds	52	15%	213	61%	35	10%	31	9%	19	5%
11	Value the association	84	24%	210	60%	24	7%	11	3%	21	6%
12	Loyalty to institute's club	88	25%	196	56%	35	10%	21	6%	10	3%
13	Inspired participation	70	20%	224	64%	24	7%	25	7%	7	2%
14	Dedicated contribution	77	22%	217	62%	28	8%	17	5%	11	3%
15	Pride in prestige	82	23%	224	64%	24	7%	17	5%	3	1%
16	Teamwork skills enhancing through participation	101	29%	186	53%	35	10%	21	6%	7	2%
17	ECA's foster flexibility in roles	49	14%	241	69%	31	9%	21	6%	8	2%
18	Unified goals	75	21%	220	63%	31	9%	21	6%	3	1%
19	Shared responsibilities	78	22%	217	62%	31	9%	17	5%	7	2%



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20	Cultivating respect	70	20%	220	63%	31	9%	17	5%	12	3%
21	Embracing diversity	84	24%	210	60%	24	7%	17	5%	15	4%
22	Commitment development	81	23%	210	60%	35	10%	17	5%	7	2%
23	Identifying challenges	112	32%	182	52%	31	9%	18	5%	7	2%
24	Ability to analyze	77	22%	196	56%	35	10%	31	9%	11	3%
25	Innovation ignited	129	37%	176	50%	24	7%	14	4%	7	2%
26	Ability to handle challenges	85	24%	206	59%	35	10%	17	5%	7	2%
27	Rational judgments	74	21%	224	64%	28	8%	21	6%	3	1%
28	ECA's foster concentration	75	21%	220	63%	31	9%	17	5%	7	2%
29	Accountable for fulfillment	70	20%	220	63%	35	10%	14	4%	11	3%
30	Personal accountability	77	22%	220	63%	31	9%	19	5%	3	1%



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31	Work within deadlines	105	30%	192	55%	24	7%	21	6%	8	2%
32	Empowering accountability	175	50%	125	36%	28	8%	14	4%	8	2%
33	Building social networks	91	26%	210	60%	24	7%	14	4%	11	3%
34	Maintaining positivity	94	27%	210	60%	28	8%	7	2%	11	3%
35	Effective interaction	98	28%	206	59%	21	6%	10	3%	15	4%
36	Enhanced interpersonal skills	80	23%	203	58%	35	10%	21	6%	11	3%
37	Communication mastery	94	27%	207	59%	28	8%	14	4%	7	2%
38	Articulate expressions	91	26%	210	60%	28	8%	14	4%	7	2%
39	Confident communication	94	27%	203	58%	31	9%	14	4%	8	2%
40	Voice amplified	73	21%	210	60%	35	10%	21	6%	11	3%
41	Written communication	123	35%	182	52%	28	8%	14	4%	3	1%



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42	Mutual consensus	77	22%	213	61%	31	9%	21	6%	8	2%
43	Body language proficiency	129	37%	168	48%	35	10%	7	2%	11	3%

Table 4.1: A systematic representation of frequencies and percentages of 43 responses administered on a Likert scale.

Figure 1

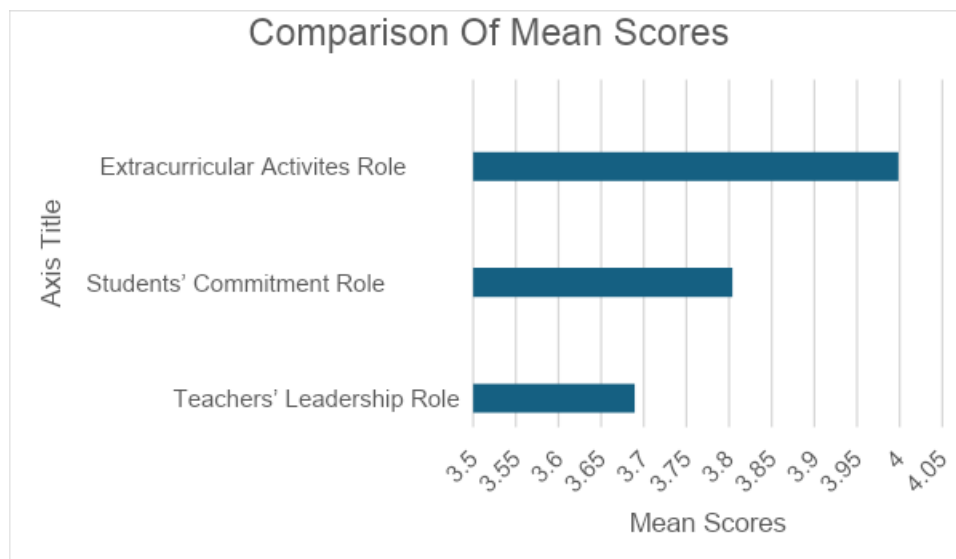


Figure 1 demonstrates the mean scores of ECA's, student commitment, and teacher leadership dominating extracurricular activities with the highest mean value (M=4), followed by student commitment (M=3.8), and then finally teacher leadership (3.68).



Figure 2

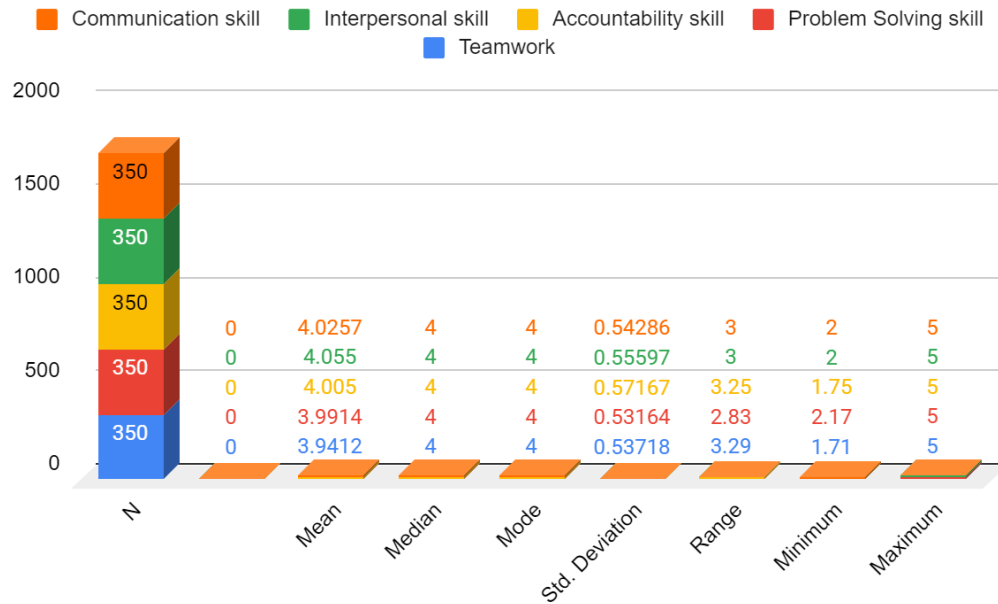


Figure 2 displays the mean scores of five soft skills. Interpersonal skills dominated the score (min= 2.0, max= 5.0) with M= 4.05, communication skills (min= 2.0, max= 5.0) with M= 4.02, accountability skills (min= 1.75, max= 5.0) with M=4.00, problem solving skills (min= 2.17, max= 5.0) with M=3.99 and finally teamwork skills (min= 1.71, max= 5.0) with M=3.94.

Discussion

The present research answered four research questions at the undergraduate level to inquire into the role of ECAs, students' commitment, and teacher leadership in soft skill development. The first question was how much student commitment plays its role in soft skill development in order to grasp students' ideas on their willingness to learn and advance their skills. The research findings depicted the highest levels of undergraduate commitment to soft skill development as they are proud of their organization. They indicated loyalty and revealed that they are always ready to contribute to their organization. Similar findings were found in the research conducted by Zhai (2023) in which students from different Chinese universities demonstrated their commitment and loyalty to their institution due to their dynamic environment and the opportunities they provide in and outside the classroom, which helped them to enhance their soft skills. Another research conducted by Suranta and Rahmawati (2024) in an Indonesian University revealed that the majority of undergraduates expressed their commitment, loyalty,



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satisfaction, and readiness to contribute to their institute because of its image and the opportunities it provides.

The second question was proposed to explore students' perception of the role of ECAs in soft skill development. Findings revealed that undergraduates admitted that extracurricular activities have remarkably influenced their soft skills. The research targeted five specific soft skills: teamwork, problem-solving, accountability, interpersonal, and communication skills. Considering teamwork skills, findings of the research revealed that students who were involved in ECA were able to accept cultural differences and divergent ideologies of their team members, which helped them to cooperate and work smartly. Similar trends were observed in the research conducted by Muhlisa and Hakima's (2023) in which they revealed that students actively involved in extracurricular explore and accept different ideologies and cultures as they interact with their team members that nurture their minds, advances their teamwork skills, build acceptance and upgrade their knowledge.

In terms of problem-solving skills, results showed that undergraduates involved in extracurricular activities are likely to ponder creative ideas and innovative solutions. Consistent findings were revealed in Matraeva et al.'s (2020) research in which students who were involved in different sports, workshops, coaching, seminars, conferences, and research activities were likely to have creative and practical ideas.

Research found that the majority of students involved in extracurricular activities feel more accountable for their actions, which has enhanced their accountability skills more than those who do not take part in them. Ainsworth (2021) in his research found similar trends where students involved in different extracurricular activities and co-curricular activities had very advanced accountability skills as they take full responsibility for their actions and feel themselves accountable to their teachers, fellows, as well as their team members.

With reference to interpersonal skills, our research declared that undergrads involved in ECA have had good and positive connections, along with the advanced skill to mingle and communicate with people from different backgrounds. Results resonate with the findings of Abid & Samuel's (2022), where it was declared that interpersonal skills are one of those skills that advance students' careers and professional lives. They further explained that these skills are usually developed when students are involved in different types of activities outside the classroom (extracurricular and co-curricular activities) that act as a medium for them to interact and collaborate with people from different cultures and backgrounds.

Lastly, considering communication skills, our results suggest that undergraduates who actively take part in extracurricular activities are likely to have strong verbal, written, and visual communication. The results corroborate with research conducted by Hakimah and Surabaya (2023), in which it was found that activities like workshops, seminar participation, science and



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literary clubs, and project-based activities excessively enhance students' verbal and written communication.

The third question of our research was to investigate the perception of undergraduates about the role teacher leadership plays in soft skill development. The results divulged that students consider teacher leadership an important factor that contributes to their soft skill development. The majority of undergrads shared that a teacher who clearly states class objectives provides clear guidance and feedback, actively listens to students' problems, allows students to share and present their ideas, motivates them to think critically, improves their communication skills, and empowers them to seek more opportunities outside the classroom, which consequently advances their soft skills. Findings resonate with Kilag et al. (2024) research, where they suggested that teacher leaders not only inspire their fellow teachers but also seek different opportunities to lead and empower their students, test and enhance their soft skills (especially problem-solving, critical thinking, and communication) that make them feel valued and seen.

The last question was to contemplate different extracurricular activities that contribute to particular soft skill development. Results revealed that the majority of undergraduate students in Pakistan are involved in particular extracurricular activities like volunteering, internships, social media platforms, and sports. Prior research at regarding extracurricular activities and soft skills at undergraduate level in a Chinese university conducted by Luo & Asavisanu (2022) highlighted that students who participate particularly in different art and literary clubs, sports, social media activities, internships and volunteer activities notably develop and enhance critical thinking, problem-solving, develop leadership skills and interpersonal skills ultimately contributing to holistic development of students.

Conclusion

The primary purpose of this quantitative research was to explore the contribution of extracurricular activities, teacher leadership, and student commitment in the development of soft skills in undergraduate students. Students believed that most of their soft skills were developed through their active participation in ECA's, i.e., teamwork, leadership, interpersonal and communication skills, and creative abilities. Likewise, students consider teacher leadership a notable factor that not only empowers them but also significantly influences their behaviors and attitudes, helping them gain confidence and communicate their ideas. Furthermore, student commitment proved to be an ignition factor, making them proud of their institute and helping them maintain positive relations with their organization and contribute their competence to it. Despite these results, our education system still faces significant challenges in addressing individual student needs and interests and in incorporating leadership styles, especially at the undergraduate level, that transform traditional teaching and empower students to think beyond the box, ultimately encouraging the development of soft skills.



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