



## Significance of Co-curricular Activities to be Skilled Manpower: A Case Study on Khulna University

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### Abstract

*Debates on defining quality education in academia are not new. Nevertheless, most scholars stress out the function of quality education to promote skilled manpower. Upliftment of skilled human resources through confirming standard education largely depends on various academic and non-academic activities. Along with other things, several researchers have highlighted the importance of co-curricular activities like debating, singing, volunteering for development affairs and so on which are sometimes also considered non-academic affairs that can exert a strong influence in ensuring quality education. Contrasting with the earlier studies where the importance of co-curricular activities has got priority, this study is designed to explore how involvement in co-curricular activities has helped tertiary-level students to perform better in professional life. To do so, in a qualitative manner, this study purposively selected some alumni from Khulna University, a promising university in southern Bangladesh, who were actively engaged in co-curricular activities at undergraduate and graduate level. Through the in-depth interviews, this study found that some general soft skills like better team management, critical reasoning, public speaking and presentation skills, organizing ability, pressure management in a critical situation, successful leadership skills, and ability to take risks were acquired through co-curricular activities which had assisted the respondents to perform better in the professional arena. Besides, it was also found that better public relations and social networking skills were also other specific expertise that distinguished the respondents from their colleagues. However, the findings of this study may assist policymakers to undertake the necessary steps in adopting successful policy measures.*

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## **Introduction**

Ensuring quality education is a challenging task for most of the countries. And it is quite common that quality education is a mandate for securing sustainable development in any nation. United Nations (UN) targeted 17 goals to be reached for sustainable development by 2030 of which ensuring equal access for all men and women to affordable and quality technical, vocational, and tertiary education including university is one of them (Owen 2017). Along with this, there have been created many other challenges in the field of employment and job. In the recent past, this field has become more challenging and more complicated due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Besides, tremendous advancement in the field of information and technology has created the world in a new way where survival is a big challenge. As the countries of the world have become closer to each other due to the globalization process, it is now possible to collect skilled manpower from anywhere in the world. So, if any country remains backward in creating/making skilled manpower, it cannot keep pace with the rest of the world.

Thus, all countries are now concentrating on developing skills among students through the education process with a view to holding a strong position in the global job market. Scholars have focused on the significance of co-curricular activities (CCA) in developing holistic skills among students. The impact of learning through co-curricular activities serves as the catalyst for education for students' holistic development (Ngee & Fang, 2015). The preliminary findings of the study of Kovalchuk et. al (2017) revealed that curricular and co-curricular activities created differing opportunities for acquiring knowledge, skills, and experiences that engineering graduates had used in their transition to employment. The study also revealed that engineering graduates with a wide range of curricular and co-curricular experiences had an easier and smoother transition process compared to those with limited experience.

The term co-curricular refers to “activities, programs and learning experiences complement in the same way, what students are learning in school– i.e., experiences

that are connected to or mirror the academic curriculum” (Great School Partnership, 2013). Actually, CCAs support curricular activities in many ways. An up-to-date and well-organized curriculum can strengthen the potential of the learners and make them competent to face the challenges ahead. Along with that CCAs exert a significant role in bringing out some skills among learners which facilitate the learning process making the smoother way to employment. At the tertiary level, learners remain in a mature stage. Their psychological stage gets very sophisticated during this period. Complementing students’ academic achievement, college and university graduates are expected to be able to transition into and navigate modern careers successfully and enhance society through service citizenship and respect for diversity (Ahren, 2009). Co-curricular activities enhance learners’ capacity of understanding others and their ability to adapt. They also enhance the learner’s quality of public speaking and level of self-confidence. Through participating in different CCAs, learners get more chances to increase interaction which can contribute to develop their interpersonal relations. Moreover, learners get the spirit of bringing victory for their respective institutions when they take part in any inter-university/college competition. Actually, this is an opportunity to prove oneself as well as one’s own institution. They also get a chance to observe the situation of other institutions through this type of competition.

It is an undeniable fact that nowadays every organization wants the employee to solve multi-dimensional problems. Employers try to gain maximum profit by investing minimum cost. Since a large workforce costs a lot, employers seek manpower having different types of skills so that they can manage everything with a limited workforce. Additionally, to find solutions for multi-faceted problems, employees need to have multiple skills. Besides, companies need to convince the consumer/customer to buy their product or adopt their policy. In this regard, workers who have good communication skills, debating skills, presentation skills, etc., and are regularly exposed to public speaking are preferred by the owners. University graduates who were actively engaged with CCAs are supposed to have these skills mentioned above. The study by Siddiky (2019) argued that the CCAs and ECAs have diverse effects to promote the all-round development of students. The study also found that the undergraduate students of a public university have developed a wide range of personal and social skills including

communication skills, organizing skills, presentation skills, public speaking skills, and analytical skills by taking part in such activities.

Kumar & Selvaraju (2014) observed that students' participation in CCAs had a positive effect on their personal development taking into account seven dimensions involving appearance, verbal mannerisms, gesticulation, mental alertness, stability of thoughts, leadership skills, and self-confidence. Likewise, some scholars had focused on some other benefits of co-curricular participation including self-efficacy, satisfaction, and improvement of academic performance (Danial et. al., 2012). Additionally, Brandfone (2018) claimed that students who participated in CCAs in college were more likely to gain skills required by employers necessary for job success. Similarly, Siddiky (2019) observed that there was relation between students' participation in CCAs and their knowledge acquisition, language skill development, sense of social responsibility development, and extroversion development and thereby would contribute to their socialization, personality formation, and civic development. He also suggested that soft skills are pivotal not only for the all-round development of the students but also for attaining Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), ensuring quality education, and generating a skilled workforce.

At present, it is difficult to survive as the fittest candidate in the volatile job market. So job-seekers need to concentrate on multi-dimensional skill development instead of one dimension. The study by Qizi (2020) discussed the significance of soft skill development in the higher education system. It has analysed to what extent soft skill development was reflected in the curriculum and syllabus of higher education in Uzbekistan. However, at the tertiary level, students involved in co-curricular activities have more chance to be more potential to match with the requirements of the employers. Co-curricular activities can help students in their holistic development which are reflected in their professional life. Many scholars have emphasized the importance of CCAs but no scholar explored how CCAs reflect professional life. To mitigate the gap the present study has been designed. However, along with curricular programs, co-curricular activities contribute a lot to promoting quality education, developing soft skills, increasing self-confidence, and so on.

## **Objective**

The present study has been designed to explore how co-curricular activities can help graduates to perform better in their professional life who took part in them at the tertiary level education. The researchers' aim is to understand the reflection of co-curricular involvement in working place of the graduates. In fact, the purpose of the study is to explore whether there is any relation between co-curricular involvement and the skill development of graduates.

## **Methodology**

In a qualitative manner, the researchers have selected Khulna University, a leading Public University in southern Bangladesh as the study area. To meet the objective, with the help of a non-structured checklist the data have been collected from twenty-five alumni students who have been purposively selected. They have been chosen from six disciplines respectively English, Bangla, Economics, Sociology, Mathematics, and Physics and now working in different professional sectors including teaching, banking, bureaucracy, NGO sector, and entrepreneurship. As a unit of analysis, the researcher has followed at least three years of professional experience, as these may help the respondents to examine their professional life. Respondents took part in the study willingly for their self-interest. No one was forced to participate. For ethical considerations, the identity of the respondents of the case study, like name and personal detail had been unrevealed.

Data were collected from January-February'2022. Each of the respondents was asked to share their experience regarding the importance of CCAs in academic life and later each respondent was interviewed face-to-face which was pre-scheduled. Along with the checklist and a recorder, the primary investigator and note-taker collected the data. Though the checklist has been prepared in English, the conversation during data collection went on in Bangla to gather information more specifically through the spontaneous answers of the respondents.

Though the qualitative data was accumulated in the local language, the transcription has been prepared in English. After the transcription, the principal investigator categorized the responses and identified the quotes relevant to the research objective. The whole

quotes have been presented in this study under three sub-titles according to the research objective. Saturated codes have been separated and exceptional codes along with mostly mentioned quotations have been included in the findings section to conclude.

## **Findings**

The findings of the study have been organized under three sub-themes concerning the objective of the study which includes developing spoken and communication skill, leadership quality and organizing skills, and efficiency to face challenges and management skills.

### ***Developing Speaking and Communication Skills***

The study found that the alumni of Khulna University who were involved in different co-curricular activities during their tertiary level have developed their speaking and communication skills through participating in co-curricular activities. It is now easier for them to handle different types of communication in their professional life. The following statements have revealed that spoken and communication skills which were developed through co-curricular activities are now helping them in their service sector.

**Case 02-** I was involved in a movie club at my university named ‘Club 35 Millimeters’ of which I was the president. Now I am in a senior position in my job. Since I was the president of the movie club, it is now easier for me to do teamwork, team management, communication, leading, etc. The work of my club was very liberal and creative. (Shamim Rahman Khan[1], 32 years, Male, NGO sector).

**Case 11-** During graduation, I was involved in co-curricular activities. I was involved in the NDF, Blood Donation Club, poetry recitation, and presentation too. I think this kind of activity has impacted my service sector. They have built my communication skill. As a result, the service of public relations, group work, etc. in the organization has become easier for me. It helps me to know many people from different corners of society, moving the identity forward and to make something done by someone (Niloy Kumar Das, 27 years, Male, Banking sector).

**Case 24-** During my graduation, I was involved in various co-curricular activities like Debate Club, BNCC, Journalism, president of Noyaik, etc. Involvement in all these co-

curricular activities has benefited me by growing communication skills, interpersonal communication, team management, giving a formal speech, behavior manner, etc. Co-Curricular activities help a lot in my service life. In addition, in my job test, the viva board always took all these co-curricular activities positively. I didn't put in any extra effort for the viva-voce. All of these co-curricular activities help to adapt to new environments, new situations, and new people. In all these cases I think I have done better than others. Moreover, in this job, I have got the facility to work in mass communication, public hearing, interviews, etc. (Mahobubur Rahman Khan, 34, Male, Bureaucratic sector).

**Case 10-** During my graduation I was involved in various co-curricular activities like Debate Club, BNCC, essay writing, etc. which has strengthened my skill of communication. Suppose something has to be presented to a higher authority, it has to be presented logically. I can do all this in a beautiful way by sending a short message. Because these are things I have learnt through various co-curricular activities in my academic life (Aminur Rahman, 39, Male, Entrepreneurship).

### ***Building Leadership Quality and Organizing Skill***

Leadership quality and organizing skills help a person to be successful and do everything in a smoother way in his/her professional life. The present study has found that the respondents of the study are performing in their professional sectors in a better way since they have taken part in co-curricular activities in their tertiary academic life. Through involving in those activities they have built leadership quality and organizing skills which are impacting positively on their professional life.

**Case 05-** Debating clubs are established while studying at university. I have been involved in debating since the beginning of the Debating Club. Besides, I was directly involved in sports, television programmers, fresher orientation, seminar arrangement, student movement, etc. Involvement in all these co-curricular activities has given me many benefits on how to manage an event, how organize, grow communication skills, guest management, giving a formal speech, behavior manner, etc. (Dr. Md. Robiul, 42, Male, Teaching).

**Case 12-** Due to involvement in co-curricular activities I can easily take the responsibilities to organize and manage my college's annual sports program and another functional program. (Aminuzzaman Palash, 30, Male, Teaching).

**Case 01-** We used to do a lot of activities like managing blood for the people, arranging accommodation and food for the admission candidates, helping the poor people with food, and also with clothes/apparel during winter, etc. Even when I had BDT 5 in my pocket, spending BDT 4 for the people wouldn't hurt me, rather I could feel satisfaction. These helped me a lot (Nabiul Islam, 39, Male, NGO sector).

**Case 08-** I was engaged with 'Prothom Alo Bondhu Sabha' of Khulna University, and became literary editor and vice president of the organization. Definitely, it has reflection on my present job. What I have to do now is to lead my students. When I stand in front of the students for conducting the class, then I am the leader, and with those co-curricular activities, I learnt leadership skills. My previous experiences working here, especially in the case of developing public speaking, social interaction matters a lot now. (Abul Hasnat, 35, Male, Teaching).

### ***Efficiency to Face Challenges and Management Skill***

In any working place, employees are expected to have efficiency to face challenges and manage any situation. The study has found that the respondents are utilizing their skills in their working sector which were developed through co-curricular activities. They have the efficiency to face the various challenges of the job sectors and to manage different situations successfully.

**Case 06-** In spite of my little interest during my graduation, I was not engaged in any non-academic activities, but attended many programs. I also did private tuition. I think attending those programs and tuition has cut my inner inertia and increased my confidence level, power of public communication & motivation which is helping in my job sector (Kobita Roy, 30, Female, Banking sector).

**Case 14-** I was associated with Girls Guide, Rover Scout, and Ranger troops. Definitely, I am having a lot of reflection because when I was doing the girls' guide, it was such a team that was always ready for managing any kind of emergency. We rushed to so



many places for providing medical support. So, what I learnt from those activities was how to manage all the work, keep oneself cool in serious conditions, handle pressure management, and leadership. (Begum Sultana, 41, Female, Entrepreneurship ).

**Case 09-** I am obviously feeling the impact of co-curricular activities. I learned leadership skills, to cope with challenging environment (Tapos Kumer, 35, Male, Banking sector).

**Case 19-** Involvement in all co-curricular activities has given me many benefits on how to manage and organize an event to develop communication skills, guest management, give a formal speech, behavior manner, etc. Co-curricular activities help a lot in my service life. (Sarower Khan Raju, 36, Male, Teaching ).

**Case 13-** Management skills come from co-curricular activities, I developed all the skills from my co-curricular activities in university (Mesbah Uddin, Male, 43, Bureaucratic sector).

[1] Pseudonym been used throughout the paper.

**Case 07-** During graduation, I used to write for a magazine called *Campus*. Besides, I was not involved in any other co-curricular activities. But it would have been better if I were involved with other co-curricular activities (Tamanna Rahman, 45, Female, Bureaucratic sector).

## **Discussion**

The impact of learning through co-curricular activities serves as the catalyst for education for students' holistic development (Ngee & Fang, 2015). From this perspective, this study is designed to critically examine the significance of co-curricular activities (CCA) for becoming skilled manpower among sample students of Khulna University, Bangladesh. In this study, respondents opined that they improved their presentation skills, speaking skills, communication skills, and more since they had attended CCAs during their student life. They also consider that they were performing in a better way in their working place which was the result of being with co-curricular activities. The findings of this study, which support the study of Siddiky (2019), have shown that through participating in co-curricular activities, the alumni of Khulna University have built speaking and communication skill that has been positively impacting on

their working life. The findings of this study also revealed that along with curricular activities, engagement in CCA has a strong influence on developing different skills among the students which help them in their professional life. Kovalchuk (2017) revealed that involvement in CCA helped engineering graduates in their transition to employment. Consistent with that, the present study found that leadership quality and organizational skills were developed in the respondents during co-curricular activities which are now reflected in their professional lives. They can organize and lead various events smoothly.

Several studies in the last few years — Brandphone (2018), Kumar and Selvaraju (2014), Anwar Ahmed (2016), Ngee & Fang (2015), Ahren (2009), and Daniyal et. al (2012) — highlighted that CCAs had a strong influence on personal development including leadership qualities, self-confidence, conflict management and creativity, responsibility, teamwork, developing a positive personality, spirituality, attitude, as well as reducing guilt and respecting values. In the long run, these qualities help in building skilled manpower and a disciplined generation. Indeed, the findings of this study have revealed that different types of co-curricular activities help participants differently. Alumni working now in different sectors have to organize many events, give presentations, deal with different situations, and face challenges concerning different issues. Since they were involved with CCAs, they are now more comfortable in dealing with these processes. Skills developed through co-curricular activities are now accelerating the way to solving various problems and dealing with various situations.

Moreover, this research shows that among alumni who did not participate in co-curricular activities, their perception of the importance of co-curricular activities was very positive. They thought that the skills they acquired from engaging in CCAs along with academic studies had made them able to face the challenges and lead in their current workplace. However, since this study focused on the general opinions of the participants rather than presenting an in-depth situation, the researchers feel as T Mehmood et. al (2012) that the differences in quality and skills among the participants might be due to their home environment, organizational environment, or having these qualities in their parents and the participants may have acquired from them. In this situation, a comparative study

may be more appropriate to develop effective policy guidelines. Due to the time and knowledge constraints of the researchers, the significance of CCAs in building skilled manpower has only been briefly examined in a specific university. Therefore, future research on this topic should be expanded.

## **Conclusion**

In the current era of globalization, it is essential to develop skilled manpower to survive in global competition as well as to achieve sustainable development goals. In this case, along with academic studies, co-curricular activities play a vital role in making a student competent. At the tertiary level, co-curricular activities can contribute a lot to developing multidimensional skills among the graduates that help them to become a skilled workforce. According to scholars, co-curricular activities can have a powerful effect on strengthening a student's intrinsic qualities. In line with this concept, the present study was designed to explore the relationship between participation in co-curricular activities and becoming a competent workforce. It has been found that professionals working in different sectors have emphasized CCAs and have been encouraged to be involved with them. Actually, along with curricular programs co-curricular activities can exert a strong influence in developing speaking and communication skill, leadership quality and organizing skills, efficiency to face challenges, management skills, and strengthening other inner qualities of a learner.

Moreover, due to rapid changes in political, economic, social, and cultural aspects worldwide, the nature of the job market is changing rapidly. In this case, it has been more and more difficult for job seekers to survive as the most qualified candidates. It is also very difficult to successfully handle various situations without having the necessary skills. And these skills can be acquired more or less through co-curricular activities. Therefore, the researchers recommend that policymakers take necessary steps to improve the skills of the youth by emphasizing CCAs in the tertiary education sector. In this case, their quality could be developed by ensuring the participation of every student in CCA by making co-curricular activities compulsory in the curriculum of all universities instead of making them voluntary in the university. Overall, the significance of CCAs in creating skilled manpower has only been briefly examined in a

particular university of a region so to reach a proper conclusion a detailed exploration of more different universities in different regions is needed so that the knowledge of this study can help young scholars.

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