

From Screen Time to Skill Time: Exploring the Impact of Extracurricular Activities on Children's Mobile Use

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Abstract

Excessive mobile use among young children has become a pressing concern for parents, educators, and policymakers worldwide. While mobile devices offer educational opportunities, their overuse is associated with physical, psychological, and social challenges. This conceptual paper explores the potential of extracurricular activities as a strategy to reduce children's reliance on mobile devices. Drawing from psychological, sociological, and educational perspectives, it highlights how sports, arts, music, debate clubs, and community engagement can act as constructive substitutes for screen time. The study reviews existing literature, emphasizing Indian and global research, and proposes a framework to understand how structured non-digital engagement channels children's energy productively. Findings suggest that extracurricular activities enhance creativity, improve physical health, build social skills, and contribute to holistic development, thereby reducing the likelihood of mobile dependency. The paper concludes with recommendations for parents, schools, and policymakers to institutionalize extracurricular programs as preventive strategies against excessive mobile use.

Keywords: Mobile use, extracurricular activities, children, screen time, holistic development

Introduction

The rapid proliferation of digital technology has transformed children's daily lives, making mobile phones an integral part of their routine. Studies show that Indian children spend an average of 3–4 hours daily on mobile devices, with urban children reporting even higher usage (IAMAI, 2021). While mobile phones offer educational apps and interactive learning opportunities, the overuse of screens has been linked to health issues, poor academic performance, decreased physical activity, and weakened social relationships (Kaur & Kaur, 2020). Parents and educators are increasingly concerned about how to manage this digital overexposure in ways that promote healthy growth and learning. One promising approach is engaging children in extracurricular activities that provide meaningful alternatives to mobile use.

Review of Literature

A substantial body of research highlights the negative effects of excessive screen time. According to Twenge and Campbell (2018), higher screen use among adolescents is associated with lower psychological well-being, including sleep disturbances and reduced life satisfaction. Kaur and Kaur (2020) observed similar findings in the Indian context, where excessive device use among children led to

increased irritability, academic decline, and health-related issues. More recent studies emphasize that structured extracurricular activities can serve as effective buffers against such outcomes. Garg and Chauhan (2021) noted that children involved in regular sports and arts programs demonstrated better focus and reduced dependency on mobile phones. Similarly, Sharma (2022) emphasized that creative pursuits such as music and painting channelize children's energy, thereby preventing digital overuse.

Conceptual Framework

This paper adopts a behavioral substitution perspective, which suggests that when children are provided with structured, engaging, and rewarding non-digital alternatives, their reliance on mobile devices diminishes. The framework integrates three perspectives:

1. **Developmental Psychology:** Children's need for stimulation can be satisfied through physical play, creativity, and exploration rather than digital entertainment.
2. **Social Learning Theory:** By observing peers in sports or arts, children are motivated to participate, reducing time spent on screens.
3. **Sociocultural Approach:** In the Indian context, extracurricular activities foster community involvement, reinforcing cultural values while limiting device dependency.

Discussion

Extracurricular activities play a critical role in addressing mobile overuse through multiple pathways:

1. **Physical Development:** Sports and outdoor activities not only improve children's health but also occupy time that would otherwise be spent on mobile phones. Programs like football clubs and yoga classes in Indian schools demonstrate how physical engagement reduces device reliance.
2. **Creative Development:** Activities such as painting, music, and drama stimulate imagination, providing intrinsic satisfaction that discourages mobile use. Sharma (2022) found that children involved in creative hobbies reported lower daily screen hours compared to non-participants.
3. **Social Development:** Group-based activities such as debate, theater, and scouting enhance communication and collaboration skills. These activities replace the need for digital interaction with face-to-face bonding, thus reducing mobile addiction.
4. **Psychological Well-being:** Extracurricular engagement boosts self-esteem and resilience. By offering children a sense of achievement, these activities reduce dependence on the instant gratification of mobile apps or games.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Parents should actively encourage children to participate in extracurricular activities and limit unsupervised mobile use.
2. Schools must integrate structured extracurricular programs into the curriculum, making them mandatory for holistic learning.
3. Policymakers should promote community-level initiatives that provide safe spaces for extracurricular engagement.
4. Balanced technology policies should be adopted, where controlled mobile use for education is encouraged alongside physical and creative activities.

Conclusion

Excessive mobile use among children poses significant developmental challenges. Extracurricular activities provide a viable and effective alternative by channeling children's energy into productive, creative, and socially enriching engagements. The conceptual analysis demonstrates that such activities not only reduce screen dependency but also enhance overall well-being. For sustainable impact, a collaborative approach involving parents, schools, and policymakers is essential. As India moves toward a more digitalized future, embedding extracurricular programs within children's lives may serve as a preventive strategy against the negative consequences of digital overexposure.

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