

Extracurricular activities: characteristics and specific practices in preschool education

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Abstract

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This study investigates the characteristics and implementation of extracurricular activities in Romanian preschool education, within the framework of national legislation and educational policy. Recognized for their critical role in fostering children's holistic development, these activities are shaped by legal provisions and operationalized through teacher planning, institutional coordination, and parental engagement. Using a descriptive-comparative methodology, data were collected from preschool educators in both urban and rural settings through surveys and interviews. The research aims to: (a) describe current practices across four thematic areas—frequency, implementation modalities and locations, activity diversity, and stakeholder partnerships; (b) compare these practices between urban and rural environments; and (c) develop unified criteria for planning and implementing extracurricular activities in preschool education. Findings indicate that while extracurricular activities are prevalent across settings, substantial variations exist in frequency, diversity, and implementation approaches, shaped by contextual factors such as educator experience, child age, and institutional resources. The study underscores the need for coherent, developmentally appropriate, and equitable criteria to guide extracurricular programming across Romania's early childhood education system.

1. Introduction

The relevance of the research topic is highlighted by the legislative framework that regulates extracurricular activities. The education legislation in Romania stipulates the right of preschoolers and students to participate in extracurricular educational activities (Law on Pre-University Education No. 198, 2023, Article 29). At the same time, the school legislation documents (OME No. 3189/2021; ROFUIP, 2024) establish clearly defined responsibilities in extracurricular education for teaching staff, school management, and the parents' committee:

- The design, implementation, evaluation, and dissemination of extracurricular activities constitute professional duties of the teaching staff.
- The initiation, coordination, and oversight of extracurricular activities at the institutional level are responsibilities assigned to the coordinator for educational projects and programs (both curricular and extracurricular).
- Providing professional support to novice kindergarten teachers falls within the remit of the Committee for Teacher Training and Career Development.

- The involvement in planning and conducting extracurricular activities, along with ensuring the necessary resources, are responsibilities of the parents' committee.
- The supervision and quality assessment of extracurricular activities lie within the responsibilities of the school principal.

The early years of childhood are widely recognized as a critical period for development, during which foundational skills in cognition, emotion, and social behavior are formed. In this context, the relevance of the present research lies in the proven benefits of extracurricular activities initiated as early as the preschool stage. Numerous studies have demonstrated that such educational interventions contribute meaningfully to the socio-emotional and cognitive development of preschool-aged children (Jucan & Ungurăşan, 2023). Albulescu (2019) emphasizes that the experiences encountered during early childhood are decisive for shaping mental abilities, personality traits, and social conduct, establishing a lifelong foundation for learning and behavior. This perspective reinforces the argument for early, structured engagement in activities that go



beyond traditional curricular content. Moreover, early childhood education grounded in the promotion of values plays a vital role in character formation and the development of emotional intelligence. According to Catalano et al. (2024), this developmental stage involves some of the most significant transformations in a child's life, particularly in terms of socio-emotional maturation. Recognition of values from an early age helps to develop the child's character and form the core of his being (Simion, 2023). In recent years, STEAM-based extracurricular activities have gained increasing attention for their potential to foster creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking from an early age. As highlighted by Țifrea et al. (2024), such activities not only support academic preparedness but also nurture essential life skills, making them a valuable component of holistic preschool education.

Given that the developmental impact of extracurricular involvement is cumulative, with long-term benefits becoming evident as children progress through their educational journey, it becomes imperative to establish structured extracurricular models from the earliest stages of formal education.

2. Theoretical foundation

In the Romanian educational legislative context, extracurricular activities are recognized and regulated as integral components of the educational process. They are typically defined in terms of their organizational structure, intended objectives, and modes of implementation (Pre-University Education Law No. 198/2023, Art. 29; ROFUIP, 2024, Arts. 97, 99). These normative references underscore the importance of extracurricular programs in supporting holistic child development, reinforcing the need for coherent and developmentally appropriate models tailored to the preschool stage.

According to the national education legislation, extracurricular educational activities are characterized by the following features:

- They are intended for preschool children and students enrolled in the national pre-university education system.
- They take place outside regular school hours.
- They are conducted within educational institutional settings, including:
 - a) extracurricular education units such as children's palaces and clubs, school sports clubs, and centers of excellence;
 - b) pre-university educational institutions;

c) public or private organizations specialized in education.

- They are focused on the holistic development of the personality of preschoolers and students.

Within the broader scope of extracurricular education, we also include extracurricular activities organized by pre-university educational institutions (such as kindergartens and schools). In educational policy documents, both the term *extracurricular* - referring to activities conducted outside the school timetable - and the term *co-curricular* - referring to activities carried out beyond the official school curriculum - are used interchangeably or in complementary ways.

Throughout the academic year, every teacher - regardless of the educational level at which they work - plans and carries out the following categories of educational/instructional activities:

- a. Educational/instructional activities included in the school curriculum, which are scheduled during regular school hours.
- b. Educational activities conducted within the "Different School Week" (Săptămâna altfel) and "Green Week" (Săptămâna verde) programs, each lasting five consecutive working days. These are also scheduled within the school timetable.
- c. Extracurricular/extracurricular activities, which are carried out outside regular school hours.

In the *Curriculum for Early Childhood Education* (2019), the official curricular document implemented across all kindergartens in Romania, two specific references are made regarding extracurricular educational activities:

- They are included under the category of personal development activities.
- They are to be planned and carried out monthly, involving the participation of parents and other educational partners from the community.

To summarize, extracurricular/co-curricular activities organized by pre-university educational institutions exhibit the following characteristics:

- They are implemented throughout the entire pre-university education cycle, beginning in early childhood.
- They are conducted outside the formal school timetable.

- They may take place either within the school premises or in external environments.
- The range of extracurricular educational activities is diverse and non-formal in nature, including events such as celebrations, visits, exhibitions, workshops, hands-on activities, festivals, field trips, and school camps.
- They address content areas, themes, and behavioral domains that contribute both to the development of competencies outlined in the national curriculum and to the acquisition of new skills.

They are carried out in partnership with parents and various community institutions.

3. Research methodology

The aim of this research is to analyze extracurricular education practices specific to preschool education.

The research objectives are as follows:

Objective 1: To describe extracurricular education practices in preschool education across four thematic areas:

- a. frequency of extracurricular activities.
- b. manner and location of implementation.
- c. diversity of extracurricular activities.
- d. partnerships involved in conducting extracurricular activities.

Objective 2: To compare the extracurricular education practices specific to preschool education in urban and rural settings.

Objective 3: To establish unified criteria for the planning and implementation of extracurricular activities at the preschool education level.

This is a descriptive-comparative study. The primary data collection method employed was the survey method. Among the tools specific to this method, an online questionnaire was selected. The questionnaire included a total of 12 questions: 2 demographic/identification items and 10 content-based items corresponding to the thematic areas under investigation. In addition to the survey, interviews and informal discussions were conducted with preschool educators to obtain further clarifications and insights. For data interpretation, both statistical analyses using the PSPP software and thematic analysis were applied.

A total of 123 preschool teachers working in urban areas and 114 preschool teachers working in rural areas responded to the survey. Among these, 42.3% have professional experience of up to 5 years, 21.2% fall within the 5-10 years' experience range, and 36.5% have more than 10 years of professional experience.

4. Results

Thematic Area: *Frequency of Extracurricular Activities*

According to the *Curriculum for Early Childhood Education* (2019), extracurricular activities are recommended to be planned and conducted monthly. At the beginning of the school year, each preschool teacher is required to prepare a monthly plan for extracurricular activities, totaling ten activities per year.

In urban areas, most teachers (56.1%) report conducting activities monthly, in alignment with curriculum recommendations. A small percentage of teachers in both environments conduct only two activities per school year, with this practice being more common in urban settings (12.2%) than in rural ones (7.9%).

Table 1

Frequency of Extracurricular Activities by Educational Environment

No.	Frequency	Urban (%)	Rural (%)
1	Monthly	56.1	47.4
2	Once per learning module	31.7	44.7
3	Twice per school year	12.2	7.9

However, the actual practice often diverges from these planning guidelines.

The data reveal that the number of extracurricular activities conducted per year varies depending on the age of preschool children. The frequency of extracurricular activities increases with the age of the children. In the level group (3-year-olds), between 2 and 5 extracurricular activities are typically held per year; for the level group (5-year-olds) and the level group (6-year-olds), the frequency increases to between 5 and 10 activities per school year.

Additionally, the frequency of extracurricular activities also correlates with the professional experience of the teachers. Teachers with less experience (up to 5 years) report organizing fewer extracurricular activities, with the frequency being 2 activities per year. Teachers with over 5 years of

experience report organizing up to 5 extracurricular activities per year.

The study also revealed environmental differences between urban and rural settings, with urban educators more frequently adhering to monthly activity schedules, while rural teachers often organize activities less frequently, typically aligned with learning modules.

Thematic Area: *Location and Manner of Implementation of Extracurricular Activities*

According to school legislation (ROFUIP, 2024), a defining feature of extracurricular activities is that they are conducted outside the regular school schedule.

However, in preschool education, this principle is only partially reflected in practice. In most cases, extracurricular activities are organized both outside and during the official preschool schedule. This hybrid approach appears to accommodate the developmental needs of young children and the logistical constraints specific to early childhood education settings.

Table 2

Location/Mode of Implementation of Extracurricular Activities

No.	Location/Mode of Implementation	Kindergartens (%)
1	Both during and outside the regular schedule	92.4
2	Only outside the regular schedule	7.6

According to the data, 92% of preschool teachers report organizing extracurricular activities both *during* and *outside* the regular school schedule. This practice is likely a result of the extended operational hours of kindergartens. On the other hand, 7.6% of teachers who reported conducting activities only outside the regular schedule are primarily from rural areas, specifically from kindergartens with a standard 5-hour activity program.

Table 3

Location of Extracurricular Activities by Educational Environment

No.	Frequency	Urban (%)	Rural (%)
1	Equally within the kindergarten and outside	68.3	63.2
2	Primarily within the kindergarten	24.4	2.6
3	Primarily outside the kindergarten	7.3	34.2

In accordance with legislation (ROFUIP, 2024), extracurricular educational activities can be held either within the educational institution or externally. Over half of the teachers surveyed organize extracurricular

activities equally within the kindergarten and outside its premises, indicating a balanced approach to utilizing both institutional and external environments for such activities.

Most educators in both environments report organizing activities equally inside and outside kindergarten: 68.3% in urban areas and 63.2% in rural areas. However, urban educators are more inclined to organize activities primarily within the kindergarten (24.4%) compared to their rural counterparts (2.6%). Conversely, 34.2% of rural educators report conducting extracurricular activities primarily outside the kindergarten premises, as opposed to only 7.3% of urban teachers. This variation may reflect differences in institutional infrastructure, access to community spaces, or logistical constraints in rural settings.

According to legislation, extracurricular educational activities can be conducted at both the group level and the kindergarten/institution level (ROFUIP, 2024).

Table 4

Location of Extracurricular Activities at the Group vs. Kindergarten Level

No.	Frequency	Urban (%)	Rural (%)
1	Equally at the group level and the kindergarten level	53.7	31.6
2	Primarily at the group level	22.7	39.5
3	Primarily at the entire kindergarten level	24.4	28.9

The data show that urban educators are more likely to organize extracurricular activities equally at both the group level and the kindergarten level (53.7%), compared to their rural counterparts (31.6%). In contrast, rural educators are more likely to focus on conducting activities primarily at the group level (39.5%), whereas urban educators tend to organize such activities at the group level less frequently (22.7%). Both urban and rural teachers report conducting extracurricular activities at the entire kindergarten level to a similar extent, with 24.4% of urban teachers and 28.9% of rural teachers indicating this mode of organization.

Thematic Area: *Range of Extracurricular Activities*

At the preschool level, the range of extracurricular activities is diverse, encompassing cultural, social, artistic, practical, health-related, environmental, sports, moral/civic, recreational, and scientific

domains. The most implemented extracurricular activities include Kindergarten festivity (celebrations), visits to religious institutions, drawing exhibitions, creative art projects, and hands-on activities such as object-making, cooking workshops, and gardening. Conversely, scientific activities, such as curiosity workshops or themed sessions using encyclopedic materials, as well as field trips and nature hikes, are reported less frequently.

Table 5*Range of Extracurricular Activities*

No.	Domain	Types of Extracurricular Activities	Urban (%)	Rural (%)
1	Cultural	Kindergarten festivity (celebrations)	96.2	97.4
2	Social	Visits to religious institutions (churches)	65.9	62.2
3	Artistic	Drawing exhibitions, creative plastic arts	58.5	62.2
4	Practical	Crafting objects/decorations, cooking workshops, gardening	64.2	49.1
5	Health-related	Visits to medical offices, workshops on healthy eating	62.7	44.7
6	Environmental	Environmental Protection activities	62.7	43.9
7	Cultural	Theater, film, music, performances	64.2	35.8
8	Sports	Physical activities, promoting movement, sports contests	52.9	41.2
9	Social	Volunteering activities	51.2	34.2
10	Moral/Civic	Visits to public institutions	58.5	28.9
11	Recreational	Excursions, hikes	43.9	41.2
12	Cultural	Literature, literary sessions, library visits	49.1	21.1
13	Scientific	Curiosity workshops, encyclopedic activities	35.8	9.4

The table shows a broad range of extracurricular activities across both urban and rural preschools. Cultural activities, particularly kindergarten festivity (celebrations), dominate, with nearly all educators in both environments (96.2% in urban areas, 97.4% in rural areas). Activities focusing on social and artistic domains also rank highly, with urban and rural schools alike emphasizing visits to religious institutions, drawing exhibitions, and creative arts. Practical activities such as crafting and gardening are popular, with urban preschools slightly more likely to offer these (64.2%) compared to their rural counterparts (49.1%). Similarly, health-related activities (such as visits to medical offices and workshops on healthy

eating) and environmental activities are more prevalent in urban preschools, reflecting perhaps better access to resources and health professionals.

On the other hand, scientific activities (such as curiosity workshops or activities based on encyclopedias) and recreational activities like excursions and hikes are less common, especially in rural areas. The scientific domain in particular sees low participation, especially in rural areas (9.4%), suggesting a potential area for growth and resource development.

Overall, the data reflects a diverse approach to extracurricular activities across both urban and rural settings, although access to some types of activities varies. It's clear that urban preschool educators engage in a broader range of extracurricular activities, especially in terms of visits to various cultural and educational institutions.

Thematic Area: Partnership in Organizing and Carrying Out Extracurricular Activities

The *Curriculum for Early Childhood Education* (2019) recommends that extracurricular activities be carried out in partnership with parents and community institutions.

Over 60% of parents are appropriately involved, and 32% are highly involved. In urban areas, parents tend to be more involved in extracurricular activities, possibly due to better access to community resources and greater engagement in the school environment.

Table 6*Parents' Level of Involvement*

No.	Level of Involvement	Urban (%)	Rural (%)
1.	To a very large extent	38.1	26.3
2.	To an appropriate extent	54.8	65.8
3.	To a very small extent	7.1	7.9

The community and institutional partnerships play a vital role in organizing extracurricular activities, though the level of involvement from institutions like clubs or businesses is lower. In both environments, religious institutions stand out as key partners. Educators from both environments report strong partnerships with religious institutions, other educational institutions, and cultural establishments like theaters and libraries.

Most extracurricular activities are initiated by the educators (87.8% urban, 94.7% rural). Kindergartens and schools in the urban environment have a significantly higher level of initiative (61%) compared

to rural areas (21.1%). Parent and community involvement in the initiation of activities is notably lower, particularly in rural settings.

Table 7

Partnerships with Institutions

No.	Institutions	Partnerships (%)
1.	Church	62.7
2.	Other educational institutions	51
3.	Theater/cultural centers	51
4.	Library	47.1
5.	Public administrative institutions	47.1
6.	Medical offices	47.1
7.	NGOs, foundations	29.4
8.	Museums, art galleries	21.6
9.	Social/community centers	13.7
10.	Children's palaces and clubs	15.7
11.	Economic agents	15.7
12.	Sports clubs, sports bases	11.8
13.	Zoos, botanical gardens	11.8
14.	National parks	5.9

Table 8

Initiative in Organizing Extracurricular Activities

No.	Organizing Extracurricular Activities	Urban (%)	Rural (%)
1.	At the initiative of the educator	87.8	94.7
2.	At the initiative of the kindergarten/school institution	61	21.1
3.	At the initiative of the parents	19.5	21.1
4.	At the initiative of community institutions	12.2	5.3

The high degree of educator initiative may reflect the responsibilities placed on educators to design and execute extracurricular programming within the constraints of their curriculum. The higher level of initiative in urban kindergartens suggests more resources and support systems in place that encourage independent activity planning. In contrast, rural kindergartens may rely more heavily on educator-driven activities due to limited external support.

5. Discussions

These findings underline the need for the development of unified criteria for planning and conducting extracurricular activities, adaptable to different teaching contexts, age of age of children, and levels of educator experience.

The areas for planning extracurricular education target the following aspects:

- the frequency of extracurricular activities.
- the manner and location of implementation.
- the range of activities.
- the range of partnerships.

The criteria used to design these areas of extracurricular education include:

- the age-specific characteristics of preschool children.
- Development objectives appropriate for the preschool stage.
- the institutional development plan of the educational institution.

Principle 1: Extracurricular activities have a positive impact on the development of preschoolers' personalities when they are carried out in alignment with their age-specific characteristics, in a gradual manner - by increasing frequency, expanding the locations and modes of implementation, and broadening the range of activities and partnerships.

Frequency refers to the number of activities conducted throughout the school year, as well as their continuity and regularity.

Principle 2: Extracurricular activities positively influence the personality development of preschoolers when they are implemented consistently and continuously, at regular intervals.

Principle 3: Extracurricular activities benefit preschoolers' personality development when they are aligned with age-specific developmental objectives.

At the preschool level, general objectives are structured around three fundamental areas of development and learning (Prodan, 2021):

- Social interaction: developing the ability to interact with adults and other children.
- Identity/self: helping each child discover their own identity, recognize their abilities and passions.
- Cognition/knowledge: supporting the child in acquiring knowledge and developing skills.

Principle 4: Extracurricular activity is a component of the institutional development plan; therefore, good practices must be cultivated from the preschool education level onward.

6. Conclusions

Grounded in the national legislative framework and supported by contemporary educational theory,

the study research provides a detailed analysis of the characteristics and specific practices of extracurricular activities in Romanian preschool education.

The findings demonstrate that extracurricular activities are widely implemented across both urban and rural preschool settings, though their frequency, diversity, and method of implementation vary significantly depending on the educational environment, the experience of educators, the age of children, and the resources available. Also, the findings suggest that while there is a significant alignment with legislative recommendations, the implementation of extracurricular activities remains highly variable across different settings.

Key conclusions include:

- **Widespread Implementation:** In the Romanian educational legislative context, extracurricular activities are recognized and regulated as integral components of the educational process. All preschool teachers plan and carry out extracurricular activities.
- **Frequency and Implementation:** This research highlights significant variations in the planning and implementation of extracurricular activities in preschool education, influenced by children's age, teachers' professional experience, and the institutional context (urban vs. rural). While national curriculum guidelines recommend monthly extracurricular activities, actual practice shows considerable diversity, particularly in rural settings and among less experienced educators.
- **The age of children:** The most important criterion for planning extracurricular activities is the age of children. The frequency of extracurricular activities increases with the age of the children. In the level group (3-year-olds), between 2 and 5 extracurricular activities are typically held per year; for the level group (5-year-olds) and the level group (6-year-olds), the frequency increases to between 5 and 10 activities per school year.
- **Educator Experience Matters:** The study confirms that more experienced teachers and those working with older preschoolers tend to conduct extracurricular activities more regularly and in more varied formats.
- **Implementation Patterns:** One of the key findings is that extracurricular activities are generally organized both during and outside regular school hours, with the distinction becoming particularly pronounced in rural settings, where activities are more likely to occur exclusively outside of regular hours due to the limited program duration. Urban areas, in contrast, offer greater flexibility, with activities often integrated into the extended hours of preschool programs.
- **Location:** Most educators in both environments report organizing activities equally inside and outside kindergarten. Urban educators favor in-kindergarten activities more than rural teachers, who more often utilize external locations.
- **Diverse Activity Types:** A broad array of extracurricular domains is covered, with cultural, social, and artistic activities being the most prevalent. Urban kindergartens demonstrate a more diverse and frequent implementation of activities, particularly in practical, health-related domains. However, scientific and environmental activities are less common, particularly in rural kindergartens.
- **Educator-Led Initiative:** The organization of these activities is predominantly driven by educators, especially in rural areas. Urban kindergartens show a higher level of institutional initiative, suggesting more structured planning and support systems.
- **Partnership and Community Involvement:** Educators remain the primary initiators of extracurricular activities, especially in rural areas. Parent involvement is generally appropriate, but stronger in urban settings. Partnerships with community institutions - especially religious organizations - are common across both environments, though collaboration with broader cultural, educational, and recreational institutions is more developed in urban areas.
- **Urban vs. Rural Disparities:** The data illustrates clear differences in how extracurricular activities are organized and executed in urban versus rural preschool environments. Urban educators more consistently adhere to monthly schedules, while rural teachers tend to follow less frequent, module-based plans. Urban preschools tend to offer a broader, more frequent, and more diverse range of extracurricular activities compared to rural ones. Urban preschools tend to have more diverse and integrated programming, whereas rural preschools focus more on outdoor activities and community engagement. Urban settings benefit from greater access to institutional and community resources, while rural settings often face logistical and infrastructural constraints. Urban educators tend to

engage in a broader spectrum of activities and partnerships, benefiting from greater access to cultural institutions, parents' involvement, and logistical support. Rural educators face more constraints, often relying solely on their own initiative and fewer external partnerships. The parental and institutional involvement in organizing these activities is higher in urban areas, although educators remain the key figures in driving extracurricular education in both environments.

Need for Unified Criteria: The study supports the need for establishing unified criteria for planning and conducting extracurricular activities at the preschool level, ensuring consistency, developmental appropriateness, and equitable access across diverse educational contexts. Targeted strategies are needed to enhance the quality and accessibility of these activities, especially in rural areas, through better resource allocation, institutional support, professional development, and stronger community partnerships.

Authors note:

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