



## A Comparative Study of Extracurricular Activities in Education Systems of Iran, Finland and Malaysia

**Farhad Alipour<sup>1</sup>** (Corresponding author)

**Asad Hejazi<sup>2</sup>**

**Mohamad Ramazani Khanvani<sup>3</sup>**

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: 09 November 2023 Revised: 23 November 2024 Accepted: 15 December 2024 Online: 18 February 2025	This study conducted a comparative analysis of extracurricular activities within the educational systems of Iran, Finland, and Malaysia, using George Bereday's model. The selection of these countries was based on the idea that "different social systems lead to different educational outcomes." To gather primary and secondary data, data was sourced from reputable international database, including UNESCO and the Ministries of Education of the selected countries. Face validity was employed to ensure data accuracy, while intra-subject agreement was used to assess reliability. The findings revealed significant similarities among Finland, Malaysia, and Iran in their objectives, comprehensive student development focus, and diversity of activities offered. However, notable differences were observed regarding the defined roles and training for teachers, the voluntary nature of participation in activities, and the involvement of other organizations and clubs. Malaysia and Finland prioritize educational equity and provide a wide range of free in-school programs. In contrast, various sports, clubs, and artistic programs in those nations are typically available at specific times or in specialized centers outside of school hours. On the other hand, Iran mainly implements its programs during school hours and places less emphasis on program evaluation compared to Malaysia and Finland, where rigorous evaluations are standard practice. Based on these findings, it is recommended that education policymakers focus on enhancing the role of coaches, increasing the flexibility and diversity of programs, providing support for program implementation, and strengthening oversight in the evaluation of extracurricular activities.
<b>KEYWORDS</b> Clubs Diversity of Programs Extracurricular Activities Local Communities Voluntary Participation	

<sup>1</sup> Assistant Prof. Department of Educational Management, Farhangian University, Tehran, Iran, Email: f.alipoor@cfu.ac.ir

<sup>2</sup> Associate Professor, Department of Educational Management Department, Farhangian University, Tehran, Iran, Email: a\_hejazi@cfu.ac.ir

<sup>3</sup> M.A, Department of Educational Management Department, Farhangian University, Tehran, Iran, Email: mohammadrmzani60@gmail.com

## **1. Introduction**

One of the features of modern education worldwide is the special attention to activities that students perform outside the classroom or in school. These activities complement the curriculum and, if properly implemented, create an environment full of flexibility, freedom, and curiosity; which stimulates the child's sense of belonging and interest in educational activities and will be effective in their academic growth. Extracurricular activities provide a platform for learners to pay attention to their interests and talents and take steps towards their growth and development. Educators believe that interest and effort are intertwined with education. Interest leads to attention, and attention results in understanding and learning, so without interest, there is no movement or progress (Christison, 2013). Extracurricular activities are one of the most important programs in the education system of any country, which can be considered a bridge between formal curriculum programs and real learning. Extracurricular activities are an integral part of school educational activities (Kelly, 2004). A review of the literature shows that there is no general and accepted definition for the concept of "extracurricular activities." For example, Rubin et al (2002) argue that extracurricular activities are activities in which students improve their personal and interpersonal skills. Keser et al (2011) define extracurricular activities as part of informal programs including visits to various offices and institutions, exchanges between schools, voluntary tasks, student organizations and clubs, and out-of-school projects. These activities may be held simultaneously with school curriculum programs or after them, inside or outside of schools (p. 812). Other researchers consider extracurricular activities synonymous with "non-academic activities" (Ming Chia, 2005, p. 76) or out-of-class experiences (Nelson et al., 2002). Additionally, most definitions are accompanied by examples. Barnett (2007) states that "schools encourage students to engage in various educational activities such as sports, newspaper and publication preparation, and special groups" (p. 316). However, teachers were not well aware of the role and importance of extracurricular activities until the 19th century. From the 1950s onwards, Western countries first and then other countries began these activities along with the main curriculum to meet the new needs and demands of learners at different educational levels (Kakungulu, 2024). However, like any other transformation, these changes occurred at different speeds in different countries. In some countries, education system managers quickly realized the role of extracurricular activities, while other countries took initial steps slowly (Musapour Miandehi et al., 2019). Numerous research findings show that the implementation of extracurricular activities has very beneficial learning outcomes for students. For example, meaningful student participation (Fredricks & Eccles, 2008); internalization of curriculum concepts, teaching and deepening life

skills, and teaching their application in real and everyday life, enriching the curriculum with an emphasis on local, regional, and global goals (Ghasempour, 2010); increasing students' self-confidence (Sullivan, 2018); inclination and sense of belonging to peer social groups (Teimoornia et al., 2021); accelerating socialization of learners (Achari & Esa, 2017).

It is necessary to refer to some of the most important findings of previous research on the effects of extracurricular activities and their challenges in various countries, including Iran. Several researchers inside and outside Iran have examined extracurricular activities in the Iranian education system, focusing on its obstacles and challenges at different levels. Findings from research by Pulkkinen & Berden (2017) indicate that Finland has invested in the education and welfare of its citizens and believes that children gain significant learning experiences for their future growth through play, physical activities, nature, music, art and crafts, folklore, and human interaction. Over the past years, Finland has been able to strengthen the cultural identity of its citizens through the development of its educational system structure, and by implementing educational policies and national programs, it has one of the most successful educational systems in the world. On the other hand, findings from research by Ramazani Khanvani and Akbarnejad (2023) show that in terms of goals and content of extracurricular activities, Iran emphasizes general and religious goals, with the environment for implementation being primarily limited to schools and no specific time designated for it. Furthermore, Hosseinikhah (2018) studies indicate that extracurricular activities in Iran, from the perspective of managers in terms of "goals and educational materials," from the perspective of trainers in terms of "learning time," and from the perspective of students in terms of "goals, content, educational materials, learning activities, implementation strategies, evaluation, grouping, time and space," are in an unfavorable condition. Findings of Dibaei Saber et al (2022) also show that extracurricular activities from the perspective of managers in terms of "goals and educational materials," from the perspective of trainers in terms of "learning time," and from the perspective of students in terms of "goals, content, educational materials, learning activities, implementation strategies, evaluation, grouping, time and space," are in an unfavorable condition. The research by Musapour Miandehi et al (2019) on extracurricular activities in teacher training in Australia, Germany, and the United States reveals that the selected countries pay attention to cultural and social goals. The various functions of these activities primarily focus on cultural identity, social cohesion, and professional development. Differences and similarities are observed between the selected countries in terms of scope. Rajabi Niyazabad (2016) indicates that in the field of extracurricular educational activities, Iran's educational system emphasizes general and attitudinal goals, while in Australia, more emphasis is placed on scientific

and skill-based activities. These goals are less addressed in Iran. The content of these programs in Iran is less diverse and mostly emphasizes religious activities. Esmailzadeh et al (2016) state that the main difference between extracurricular activities in Iran and other countries is the lack of a specific time allocated for these activities in schools and lower levels of student and other factors' participation compared to other countries. Samadi et al (2015) show that Malaysia pursues diverse and common goals in the field of extracurricular activities, while Iran emphasizes general and attitudinal goals. The main difference between Iran and Malaysia in implementing programs is that there is no specific time allocated for these activities in schools, and program evaluations in Malaysia are based on student performance and reports. Emamjomeh et al (2013) conducted a comparative study of extracurricular activities in primary education between Iran, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Malaysia. They found that the studied countries pursue diverse and common goals in extracurricular activities, while Iran emphasizes general and attitudinal goals. Keivanfar (2010) believes that extracurricular activities in Iran have a more religious aspect and aim to achieve the ultimate goals of education, such as guidance and growth. Research on the advantages of extracurricular activities shows their positive impact on learners' individual-social skills, increased participation, enhanced self-confidence, growth in emotional, spiritual, and scientific dimensions, reduced dropout rates, and increased student grades (Kazemi, 1999). Since previous studies did not examine the features of extracurricular activities in the selected countries, this research aims to provide a better picture for the design and implementation of extracurricular educational activities for policymakers in Iran's education system.

The main goal of this research is to compare the features of extracurricular activities in Iran with those in Malaysia and Finland in terms of goals, content, implementation, and evaluation. Thus, Malaysia was chosen as a leading Muslim country with political relations and a similar religious and cultural background to Iran, and Finland as a developed country and a pioneer in providing extracurricular activities. The research aims to answer the following questions:

- What are the similarities and differences in the goals of extracurricular activities among the three selected countries?
- What are the similarities and differences in the diversity of extracurricular activities among the three selected countries?
- What are the similarities and differences in the content of extracurricular activities among the three selected countries?
- What are the similarities and differences in the allocated time for extracurricular activities among the three selected countries?

- What are the similarities and differences in the locations where extracurricular activities are held among the three selected countries?
- What are the similarities and differences in the challenges of implementing extracurricular activities among the three selected countries?

## **2. Research Method**

This research is a qualitative and comparative study using the Brody model, which includes four stages: description, interpretation, juxtaposition, and comparison. In this research, extracurricular activities in Iran, Malaysia, and Finland are compared with an analytical-inferential approach. According to the type of research, the information is analyzed qualitatively, and in data analysis, thinking and reasoning, similarities, and differences are emphasized to find key and useful information to provide practical and effective suggestions for the Iranian extracurricular educational system. The statistical population of the research includes educational institutions implementing extracurricular activities in the selected countries and data related to extracurricular activities in the educational systems of Iran, Finland, and Malaysia. The statistical sample includes documents related to extracurricular activities and the sampling method was purposive. The data collection tool was documentary and was collected through library documents, websites, and reputable scientific articles, and international websites such as UNESCO and the Ministry of Education of the selected countries. To increase the credibility of the research, the researchers used original and first-hand documents, and to increase its reliability, self-assessment was used. To answer the research questions, the findings of each section were described, categorized, and compared in the form of tables for ease of understanding. Then, after reviewing and analyzing the data, practical suggestions for the extracurricular field in Iran were presented at the end.

## **3. Findings**

This section includes information on the four stages: description, interpretation, juxtaposition, and comparison. Initially, the extracurricular activities in Iran, Finland, and Malaysia were described. In the second stage, the characteristics and features of extracurricular activities in the selected countries were extracted and stated. In the juxtaposition and comparison stages, the selected countries were compared in terms of extracurricular activity elements in their education systems.

### *A) Description and Interpretation*

#### *Iran*

In Iran, with the approval of the Fundamental Transformation of Education in 2012, extracurricular activities underwent a fundamental review. Policymakers and planners of this institution placed “multi-dimensional education and training” at the forefront of their programs, especially extracurricular activities; this approach seeks to provide students with a comprehensive and balanced education; an education that includes six basic areas: belief; worship and morality; social and political; biological and physical; aesthetic and artistic; scientific and technological; economic and professional (Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution, 2011). However, it must be said; the gap between the intended program and its implementation in schools, the short time for teaching techniques in extracurricular activities, schools’ lack of access to the necessary resources and equipment, training and awareness regarding extracurricular activities, the lack of adequate supervision opportunities, and finally, entrusting extracurricular activities to non-specialists without defining specific tasks for them; have degraded the quality of extracurricular activities.

*Goals:* The spirit governing extracurricular activities in Iran generally targets the dimensions of belief, morality, science and education, culture and art, social, biological, political and economic (Hasani, 2016). Extracurricular activities in Iran have a relatively long history. According to the executive plan of extracurricular activities in Iran, extracurricular activities begin at the beginning of the academic year and continue continuously throughout the academic year.

*Content:* The structure of the education system in Iran is centralized, and the conditions of extracurricular activities are communicated to all schools from the highest levels of the organization. The scope of extracurricular activities also includes: remedial, supplementary, and educational reinforcement courses and educational services such as scientific-cultural, artistic, sports, health activities, and group activities of students.

*Implementation:* Activities begin with the communication of extracurricular activities from the Ministry to schools (centralization of the organizational structure). The provision of extracurricular services in each educational unit is appropriate to the time and place conditions of the school. Students’ participation in the above-program activities is voluntary and optional, and coercion to parents or students is prohibited. Students from neighboring schools that do not have above-program classes can also participate in the classes, subject to the conditions of the regional education department. Participation in the activities has a cost, and the amount is announced by the provincial, city, and regional education councils within the framework of the

economic, social, and cultural requirements of the regions. However, school administrators can, with the approval of other stakeholders, consider a maximum of 30 percent discount or exemption from payment for students who do not have the financial means. Priority in providing human resources to provide above-program services is given to the staff of the implementing school; also, gender relevance, coordination of the academic field, and having desirable performance should be considered in the selection of staff. The selection of the type of above-program activity is made with the proposal of the teachers' council and the approval of the school principal. Issuing licenses to implementing schools and issuing notifications to managers is the responsibility of the director/head of the city/region/district. Also, in the case of semi-face-to-face or non-face-to-face activities of schools, extracurricular activities and the provision of other educational-training services are carried out with the approach of maximum benefiting from the virtual space such as SHAD (Student Education Network) (Faraj Tabar, (2025).

*Evaluation:* Evaluation of extracurricular activities in Iran is carried out in various forms, depending on the type of program. For example, when holding national camps, students are asked to present a report of the camp to the class; or evaluation is carried out at the opening ceremony to encourage and appreciate the best programs, and in cultural/artistic competitions, evaluation is carried out based on the performance of the students, and the best groups and individuals will be encouraged with various prizes. In most activities, the performance of the students is the evaluation criterion (Abrahimi, 2018).

Extracurricular activities have played an important role in the Iranian education system both before and after the 1979 revolution, with distinct differences and developments characterizing each period. Before the revolution, extracurricular activities in Iranian schools were largely influenced by Western educational models and included sports, arts, and various clubs. These programs aimed to provide a comprehensive education, promote physical health, creativity, and social skills among students. Activities such as sports teams, music and drama clubs, and scouting were popular, reflecting cultural openness and greater diversity in educational practices (Chehabi, 2011).

After the 1979 revolution, the Iranian education system underwent significant changes, with a strong emphasis on aligning education with the new cultural and political values of the Islamic Republic. The focus of extracurricular activities shifted toward promoting Islamic values, national identity, and revolutionary ideals. The new government launched the Cultural Revolution to

redesign the education system and ensure that extracurricular programs supported the ideological and moral education of students by Islamic teachings (Razavi, 2009). Government support played a significant role in this transformation, including the organization of seminars, conferences, and symposiums, as well as the expansion of universities and their programs. Extracurricular activities now often included religious studies, Quran recitation competitions, and activities that promoted revolutionary values. This period saw a decline in the diversity of activities that had previously been influenced by Western practices and an increase in activities that focused on religious and moral education (Arjmand, 2017). Despite these changes, the integration of extracurricular activities faced several challenges. Economic constraints, especially during the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s, affected the financing of these programs. Limited resources made it difficult to maintain and expand extracurricular activities, and the success of these programs often depended on the willingness and availability of teachers to lead them. Ensuring adequate training and motivation for teachers remains a significant challenge (Razavi, 2009). However, the post-revolutionary period also presented opportunities to strengthen extracurricular activities. The involvement of the private sector in education provided additional resources, and the use of the media to promote the benefits of such activities helped to raise awareness and encourage participation. Despite economic and logistical challenges, student participation in extracurricular activities steadily increased, contributing to the all-round development. Students benefited from a comprehensive education that included physical, social, and creative development, and studies show that participation in these activities promotes cognitive, social, linguistic, and numeracy skills, as well as enjoyment of learning (Arjmand, 2017). In short, the history of extracurricular activities in the Iranian education system reflects broader social, cultural, and political developments in the country. The shift from Western-influenced programs before the revolution to ideologically aligned activities after it reflects changing priorities in education.

### *Malaysia*

In Malaysia, the purpose of extracurricular activities is to develop the all-round talents of individuals and to educate children who are mentally, spiritually, emotionally and physically balanced and who believe in God. Also, cultivating informed, ethical citizens with moral virtues is another goal of the Malaysian education system. In Malaysia, the goals of extracurricular activities are in line with the goals of education to complement and strengthen students' scientific learning. In addition, the goal of providing extracurricular activities is to cultivate balanced, healthy, and active students.

*Objectives:* The Malaysian education system is decentralized and centralized. The goal of education and training goes beyond the transfer of pure knowledge; this system seeks to cultivate a creative, responsible and committed generation for global progress and development. The goals of Malaysian education emphasize two main goals: creative critical thinking and character formation. Accordingly, to form the student's character, emphasis is placed on extracurricular activities and empowering learners(Lee, 2007).

*Content:* A wide range of extracurricular activities are offered in Malaysian schools in the form of three types of activities: sports, clubs/associations, and uniformed organizations.

*Implementation:* Extracurricular activities in Malaysia are offered after school or on weekends. In Malaysia, a policy of compulsory participation in one activity is implemented. Teachers are expected to guide students to choose and participate in at least one type of activity. In other words, Malaysian students are required to participate in extracurricular activities; however, within the framework of extracurricular activities, students can freely and voluntarily choose at least one activity from three categories of after-school activities based on their interests (Ab Ghani et al., 2020).

*Evaluation:* In Malaysian schools, evaluation of extracurricular activities is fully recognized and pursued seriously. Students' performance in activities is closely evaluated based on factors such as attendance and participation in meetings, level of involvement and success in activities, etc. Students' performance in activities is considered one of the conditions for entering higher education institutions. Education and Training evaluates students' performance based on participation in uniformed organization programs, clubs, associations, sports, and competitions in each academic year. In the evaluation process, activities are assigned a score. The purpose of using standard forms and assigning scores is to avoid injustice in grading and to encourage and motivate students to participate more and create equal opportunities for all students. In the performance report book, students' activities will be kept along with their pictures (Shamsudin et al., 2014).

The Malaysian education system has witnessed significant developments in its extracurricular activities over the years. These activities have aimed to develop all-round, promote social skills, creativity, and physical health alongside academic learning. The aim is to ensure that students become individuals who can contribute positively to society (Ab Ghani et al., 2020). Extracurricular activities in Malaysia have traditionally included sports, arts, and various clubs. Early programs

focused on providing a holistic education, promoting physical health, creativity, and social skills among students. Common activities included sports teams, music and drama clubs, and scouting, which reflected cultural openness and wider diversity in educational practices (Saba, 2023). After gaining independence in 1957, Malaysia began to develop its education system to reflect its national identity and cultural values. Extracurricular activities were recognized as essential components of holistic education. Programs such as uniformed bodies (such as Scouting, Girl Guides, Red Crescent) were promoted to instill discipline, teamwork, and leadership skills in students. In the 1980s, the Malaysian Ministry of Education made a significant move to formally integrate extracurricular activities into the school curriculum. The aim was to ensure that all students participated in these activities and to understand their importance in fostering a balanced education. Schools were mandated to offer a variety of extracurricular activities, from sports and arts to academic clubs and cultural societies (Shamsudin et al., 2014). Government support played a significant role in the expansion and formalization of extracurricular activities. Various policies and initiatives were introduced to encourage student participation. For example, the “1 Student 1 Sport” policy, introduced in 2011, aimed to ensure that every student participated in at least one sporting activity. In addition, initiatives such as the National Service Training Programme (PLKN) were designed to promote patriotism and civic responsibility among the youth (Idris & Bacotang, 2023).

Despite these efforts, the implementation of extracurricular programs faced several challenges. Economic constraints, especially during periods of financial crisis, affected the financing of these activities. Limited resources made it difficult to sustain and expand programs. The success of extracurricular activities often depends on the willingness and availability of teachers to lead them, and ensuring adequate training and motivation for teachers remains a significant challenge (Patle, 2024). Private sector involvement in education has provided additional resources for extracurricular activities. Private sponsorship and participation have helped overcome financing challenges and expand the range of programs available to students. In addition, the use of media to promote the benefits of extracurricular activities, awareness has been raised and participation has been encouraged. The number of students participating in extracurricular activities has been steadily increasing. Students benefit from a holistic education that includes physical, social, and creative development. Studies show that participation in these activities enhances cognitive, social, language, and numeracy skills as well as enjoyment of learning. The integration of extracurricular activities has led to improved student outcomes, including better academic performance and social skills. These activities have helped to preserve and promote Malaysian culture and values, and ensure that students are well-versed in their heritage. Despite the positive results, challenges such

as funding and teacher participation continue to affect the effectiveness of extracurricular programs (Idris & Bacotang, 2023; Patle, 2024). In summary, extracurricular activities in the Malaysian education system have played an important role in creating a comprehensive and inclusive learning environment. Important changes, such as the formal integration of these activities into the curriculum and government policies that promote student participation, have fueled their development.

### *Finland*

The Finnish education system is known for its emphasis on equity, flexibility, and quality of teaching. It focuses on the development of students as individuals and citizens and prioritizes the learning process over content. Key factors for its success include first-class teacher training, long-term policies and a culture of trust. (Ustun & Eryilmaz, 2018). On the other hand, in Finland, according to the Basic Education Act 628/1998, the aim of before and after school activities (extracurricular) is to support the educational work of school and home and to develop the emotional life and moral development of the child. These activities should also promote the well-being and equality of children in society and prevent exclusion and inclusion. Furthermore, these activities should provide children with diverse opportunities to participate in guided and refreshing activities and enable them to relax in a calm environment under the supervision of a competent and suitable person. In Finland, the National Agency for Education sets central objectives (Pulkkinen & Berden, 2017). In contrast to market-oriented reforms, Finland avoids high-stakes testing and external standards and promotes local responsibility in curriculum development. Curriculum reforms in this country aim to address global challenges while fostering student agency and a love of learning. Teachers in this system must be prepared to change their mindset and practices to effectively foster learning and support their students' progress in exploring, thinking, collaborating, creating, and working towards a sustainable future (Halinen, 2016). This holistic approach has led to high performance in international assessments such as PISA and exceptional educational equity (Ustun & Eryilmaz, 2018).

*Objectives:* The Finnish education system is quite semi-centralised. The main goal of the Finnish curriculum is for students to develop as people and as citizens, with an emphasis on how they learn rather than what they learn. Joy and cheerfulness are important principles in Finnish schools, and teachers strive to provide a happy environment for students at school.

*Content:* In Finland, schools can organize libraries, clubs, and other educational activities as part of basic education (Kauko et al, 2021). In primary schools, parents decide which religion and language, among other languages, should be taught to their students. For those who do not want religious activities, ethics lessons are provided. Activities include goal-oriented and skill-building programs such as group sports, cooking, art and music. There is a strong emphasis on music, sports, and art education, and music is integrated into other subjects. Programs usually revolve around a theme, which may include sports, arts and crafts, choir, band, chess, drama, etc. Programs include breaks, homework, educational activities, and free play indoors or outdoors. School clubs are intended for children in comprehensive school (Grades 1–9) and activities last approximately one hour, usually organized once a week (Pulkkinen & Berden, 2017). Schools generally do not have many extracurricular activities, most of which are offered in organized sports clubs. Basic arts education is offered in music institutes and schools, conservatories, dance institutes and schools, craft schools, and other educational institutions. The state allocates central government transfers to local authorities to cover the costs of organizing morning and afternoon activities. If local authorities organise these activities, they must be organised for a period of 570 or 760 hours during the school year for each child participating in such activities. Activities are organised on weekdays before and after school between 7:00 and 17:00. Participants must be provided with a snack. The qualification requirements for morning and afternoon activity instructors are set out in the Teaching Qualification Decree.

*Implementation:* Given that in this country schools under the supervision of municipalities are well-equipped in terms of facilities, equipment, and sports halls, and students can participate in various sports. In Finland, the above-mentioned activities are taught by supervisors who have (at least) completed an activity coaching course, while school club leaders are primary school teachers with a master's degree. Both after-school activities and school clubs are voluntary. There is a moderate fee for after-school activities, but school clubs are free. All students, regardless of their parents' income level, have equal opportunities to participate (Kauko et al, 2021). Local authorities can provide and purchase before- and after-school activities as listed in the Finnish Basic Education Act. Applications for activities must therefore be determined by the local authorities. Local authorities must provide information about the locations of the activities, their start and end times, and the procedure for applying for activities. Local authorities arrange activities alone or jointly with other local authorities and organisations, or purchase these services from a public or private service provider, or outsource the services to

organisations, associations or neighbourhoods. The activities take place in a school, an early childhood education centre or another suitable location. The organiser of the activities. These activities may be municipal or private service providers. Each child who has access to these activities receives 570 hours or 760 hours per school year at a fixed cost. The cost may be lower or the activities may be free of charge if living conditions require it (Pulkkinen and Berden, 2017). Local authorities can obtain the services by granting a subsidy to a service provider for this purpose. The local authority must ensure that the services are regulated by the law. Activities may be between 7:00 and 17:00 on weekdays. Activity planners must cooperate with the student's family and the service provider. A child participating in these activities has the right to a safe activity environment. A child participating in before- and after-school activities must be given a free snack, and care resulting from an accident that occurs during the activities is free of charge for the child. Criminal records of those working in the morning and afternoon activities should be checked, and sufficient staff should be provided for the format of the programs. The qualifications required for the trainers in the activities should be determined by government decree.

*Evaluation:* Local authorities should evaluate the activities provided or achieved by themselves and participate in external evaluation of the activities. The findings of the evaluations should also be published. The purpose of student evaluation is to guide and encourage learning and to develop the student's ability to self-assess. The student's learning, work and behaviors in the activities should be assessed in different ways (Kauko et al, 2021). Local authorities should provide information about the locations and programs, and how to apply for participation. When admitting children to morning and afternoon activities, the selection criteria should be the same for all. The activities should be evaluated and the results of the evaluation should be made public (Pulkkinen & Berden, 2017). The country's education policies are based on the principle of lifelong learning: that is, individuals can always progress to higher levels of education, regardless of the choices they make in the meantime (Ministry of Education & Culture of Finland, 2014). The National Core Curriculum for Basic Education is the national framework and is used as a basis for developing local curricula. In addition, the National Curriculum includes guidelines for teaching arrangements, learning objectives, and assessment criteria. However, teachers are free to choose their teaching methods, select their textbooks, and develop their assessment methods based on shared learning objectives (Kauko et al, 2021).

The Finnish education system has a rich history of integrating extracurricular activities that has evolved significantly over time. The Finnish education system emphasizes equity, equality, and inclusion. Extracurricular activities are seen as a way to provide a holistic education, promoting social skills, creativity, and physical well-being alongside academic learning. These activities aim to ensure that every student, regardless of their background, has the opportunity to develop their full potential (Harju-Luukkainen, 2023). Teacher-led club activities have been organized since 1947. These activities were initially funded through additional salaries for teachers. Extracurricular activities are included in Finnish school laws, ensuring that schools offer a wide range of activities. In recent years, there has been a shift towards a more child-centered approach, where activities are designed to meet the interests and needs of students. The Finnish education system has faced challenges such as funding, especially during economic recessions such as those that occurred in the early 1990s, which led to reduced funding for extracurricular activities and a significant reduction in after-school programs. The success of extracurricular activities often depends on the willingness and availability of teachers to lead these programs. Furthermore, the organization of extracurricular activities can be fragmented, with variations in the amount and content of activities depending on the budget and available resources (Ahtiainen et al., 2021). Despite these challenges, the number of students participating in extracurricular activities has steadily increased. Students benefit from a comprehensive education that includes physical, social, and creative development. Studies show that participation in extracurricular activities increases cognitive, social, linguistic, and numeracy skills, as well as the enjoyment of learning. (Patle, 2024). Overall, extracurricular activities in the Finnish education system have played an important role in creating a comprehensive and inclusive learning environment.

### *B) Juxtaposition*

Based on the research questions, the findings related to the four domains of objectives, content, implementation, and evaluation of activities in the selected countries are categorized and presented in the following table.

Table 1: Juxtaposition of Goals, Content, Implementation, and Evaluation of Extracurricular Educational Activities in Selected Countries

Dimensions	Finland	Malaysia	Iran
<b>Goals</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expanding free and quality education</li> <li>• Promoting civilization and moving towards equality at all levels of society</li> <li>• Providing diverse opportunities and all-round development</li> <li>• Developing humanity and responsible ethics</li> <li>• Providing knowledge and life skills</li> <li>• Supporting lifelong learning and education</li> <li>• Supporting children's development and affirming their needs and abilities</li> <li>• Reducing unemployment through providing quality education</li> <li>• Creating a peaceful, happy and enjoyable environment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To raise a balanced, healthy and active human being</li> <li>▪ To strengthen faith in God and perform religious ceremonies</li> <li>▪ To create diverse opportunities for learning and all-round growth</li> <li>▪ To expand real-life experiences</li> <li>▪ To develop individual and social identity</li> <li>▪ To promote a culture of travel and racial integration among ethnic groups</li> <li>▪ To encourage coexistence and solidarity</li> <li>▪ To be aware of the social, cultural and patriotic traditions of other ethnic groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Focus on religious education and Iranian/Islamic culture and civilization</li> <li>○ Promote social/political values</li> <li>○ Develop social/political identity</li> <li>○ Create opportunities for the development of individual and social skills</li> <li>○ Create an atmosphere of love, joy, and happiness</li> <li>○ Expand areas for all-round growth</li> <li>○ Develop participation and interactions inside and outside the school</li> <li>○ Enrich and enhance the quality of the curriculum and leisure time</li> </ul>
<b>Content</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diverse activities based on social/cultural situations</li> <li>• Diverse programs based on social/cultural situations</li> <li>• Situation-based curriculum-</li> <li>• Partnership of curricula and social realities</li> <li>• Integration of learning with social realities</li> <li>• Localization of curriculum based on regions</li> <li>• Special attention to sports, club and art programs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diverse activities based on religious/social/cultural topics</li> <li>• Diverse programs based on social/cultural situations</li> <li>• Integrated curricula</li> <li>• Participation of programs in social realities</li> <li>• Special attention to sports, club and artistic programs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diverse activities based on religious/social/cultural topics</li> <li>• Programs based on political/social/cultural situations</li> <li>• Integrated curricula</li> <li>• Special attention to ideological and religious programs</li> </ul>
<b>Implementation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decentralized implementation of programs</li> <li>• Free implementation of in-school activities</li> <li>• Training of activity coaching courses for teachers</li> <li>• Assessment of program trainers' qualifications</li> <li>• Definition of specific participatory roles for teachers and parents</li> <li>• Participation is completely voluntary</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Centralization in program implementation</li> <li>▪ Cost of programs considering the conditions</li> <li>▪ Implementation of programs after school or on weekends</li> <li>▪ Mandatory participation in at least one program based on interests</li> <li>▪ Implementation inside or outside of school</li> <li>▪ Defined role of teachers and administrators in</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Centralization in program implementation</li> <li>○ Costliness of programs considering the conditions</li> <li>○ Relevance of gender, educational field of instructors for program implementation</li> <li>○ Use of cyberspace in specific circumstances</li> <li>○ Voluntary / mandatory participation of students in programs</li> <li>○ Individual / group</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organization of programs at local levels alone or in partnership with other authorities and organizations</li> <li>• Implementation of programs in a school or other specialized educational center</li> </ul>	<p>program implementation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Encouragement and guidance of parents</li> <li>▪ Constructive cooperation of other organizations with schools and schools with other schools in the world</li> </ul>	<p>activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Implementation of programs within schools and mainly with time overlap with the curriculum</li> <li>○ Lack of defined role and low participation of teachers in implementation</li> <li>○ Lack of training for teachers regarding programs</li> <li>○ Low participation of parents and local organizations in the implementation process</li> </ul>
<b>Evaluation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluation of activities by local authorities and dissemination of results</li> <li>• Evaluation in various forms</li> <li>• Evaluation of student learning, work and behavior throughout the programs</li> <li>• Equality of all students in the assessment criteria</li> <li>• Assessment with the aim of guiding and encouraging learning and developing the ability for self-assessment</li> <li>• Assessment criteria for programs based on national curriculum guidelines</li> <li>• Freedom of action for teachers in their teaching and assessment methods based on common learning objectives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Formal and accurate evaluation in various forms based on attendance, level of involvement, success, etc.</li> <li>▪ Conducting an assessment of student performance in activities in each academic year</li> <li>▪ Assigning a score to student performance</li> <li>▪ Preparing a special form for each activity and recording a performance report along with relevant images</li> <li>Formal and accurate evaluation in various forms based on attendance, level of involvement, success, etc.</li> <li>▪ Conducting an assessment of student performance in activities in each academic year</li> <li>▪ Assigning a score to student performance</li> <li>▪ Preparing a special form for each activity and recording a performance report along with relevant images</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Evaluation of programs in various forms</li> <li>○ Evaluation by writing reports in camps and field visits or in the form of performance on special forms</li> <li>○ Further evaluation in a descriptive manner and preparing educational archiving forms without assigning grades</li> <li>○ Evaluation of managers and trainers through work reports sent to the regions</li> <li>○ Evaluations aimed at identifying weaknesses and strengths, discovering talent and appreciation</li> <li>○ In some cases, activities end without evaluation</li> </ul>

#### D) Comparisons

The juxtaposition stage includes: preparing the information from the previous stage on the subject under study for comparative analysis, to create a framework for comparison and juxtaposition of similarities and differences of information. In the comparison stage, the research problem is examined and compared with attention to details in the field of similarities and

differences and answering the research questions (Bereday, 1964). In this way, by juxtaposing the information related to the above-mentioned activities in the education of Iran, Finland and Malaysia, the similarities and differences have been separately identified, classified and compared (Table 2).

Table 2: Comparison of extracurricular educational activities in Iran, Finland and Malaysia

Features of extracurricular educational activities	Iran	Malaysia	Finland
Comprehensive development	√	√	√
Diversity in program goals	√	√	√
Diversity in activities	√	√	√
Diversity in Program Implementation Environments	√	√	√
Gaining experiences and developing real-life skills	√	√	√
Defined role in activities for teachers	×	√	√
Activity coaching training for teachers	×	√	√
Constructive participation of other organizations, associations, and clubs	×	√	√
Free provision of most in-school activities	×	×	√
Parental participation in activities	×	√	√
Voluntary participation in organized activities	×	×	√
Amount of focus in the structure of activities	√	√	√

The comparative analysis of extracurricular activities in the educational systems of Iran, Finland, and Malaysia shows significant similarities and differences in their approaches and educational priorities. As shown in the table, all three countries emphasize comprehensive growth. Finland, with its focus on play, physical activities, nature, music, and arts, strives to provide holistic education. Malaysia also emphasizes the balanced development of talents and training of mentally, emotionally, and physically balanced children. Iran aims for comprehensive and balanced education for students in six fundamental areas. Regarding the diversity of program objectives, all three countries have similar approaches. Finland aims to enhance cultural identity and comprehensive development of children. Malaysia seeks to balance various aspects of growth and pursues similar goals. Iran considers multiple dimensions, including religious, ethical, scientific, cultural, artistic, social, biological, political, and economic aspects. In terms of activity diversity, Finland and Malaysia offer a wide range of sports, clubs, and artistic activities to students. Iran implements activities like remedial, supplementary, educational reinforcement, and nurturing services.

However, the diversity of activities in Iran is less, and they are mostly limited to religious and ideological programs. Regarding diversity in execution environments, all three countries have various environments for extracurricular activities. Finland and Malaysia utilize schools, clubs, and cultural and artistic centers. In Iran, activities are generally held in schools, with limited use of other environments. This analysis offers insights into the strengths and areas for improvement in the extracurricular activities of these countries, providing a framework for policymakers to enhance their educational systems. Finland and Malaysia focus more on gaining real-life experiences and skill development. These countries provide programs that help students acquire practical skills and real-life experiences. In Iran, this aspect is less emphasized, and the programs are mainly limited to theoretical and religious subjects.

In Finland, teachers play a key role in designing, implementing, and evaluating programs, with more freedom and authority. In Iran, teachers do not have a specific role in the programs, and their implementation, guidance, and evaluation are assigned to extracurricular instructors. In Malaysia, teachers also do not have an active role in the programs. Training for teachers is provided in all three countries. Finland grants teachers more freedom and authority in designing, implementing, and evaluating programs. Iran and Malaysia also provide necessary training for teachers but grant them less autonomy. In Finland, the involvement of organizations, associations, and clubs is very prominent. Parents, local authorities, municipalities, and other social organizations play a more active role in organizing programs. In Malaysia, the involvement of parents and social organizations is also more prominent. However, in Iran, the role of parents and social organizations in extracurricular activities is minimal. Offering free activities within schools is very common in Finland and Malaysia. In Finland, most activities are provided for free, and even a meal is offered to students. In Iran, in-school programs are offered at a cost, with discounts available for low-income students. Voluntary participation in activities is common in Finland. Students participate voluntarily in various activities, and this participation is considered part of the educational culture. In Malaysia and Iran, voluntary participation is not as common, and programs are mostly organized. The focus and coordination in the structure of activities are higher in Finland. Activities are executed in a centralized and well-planned manner. In Iran and Malaysia, programs are organized, but the level of focus and coordination in Finland is higher. In summary, all three countries recognize the importance of extracurricular activities in the comprehensive growth of students but have different approaches and emphases. Finland, with its focus on practical and experiential activities and extensive teacher support, has created one of the most successful educational systems in the world. Malaysia, with its emphasis on creating balance between various

dimensions of growth and active participation of parents and social organizations, has a comprehensive and balanced approach. Iran, with its focus on religious and ethical objectives and financial and organizational limitations, needs to benefit from the successful experiences of other countries and improve the quality of extracurricular activities. This comparison reflects cultural and structural differences in the educational approaches of each country and can help improve educational programs and enhance the quality of education in Iran.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This study aimed to increase awareness and benefit from the experiences of Malaysia and Finland in the field of extracurricular activities to provide practical suggestions for improving this area of educational activities in Iran. The review and analysis of the findings from the extracurricular activities of the selected countries led to the identification and extraction of 12 features (Table 5). Extracurricular activities play an important role in the educational systems of different countries. This comparative study examined the features of these activities in Iran, Finland, and Malaysia. In Iran, extracurricular activities were fundamentally revised with the adoption of the Fundamental Transformation Document in Education in 2012. The approach of "multi-faceted education" aimed at comprehensive and balanced education of students in six fundamental areas was considered. The objectives of these activities in Iran mainly cover religious, ethical, scientific, cultural, artistic, social, biological, political, and economic dimensions. The content of extracurricular activities in Iran includes remedial, supplementary, educational reinforcement, and nurturing services. The implementation of these activities is centralized and communicated from the ministry to schools. Student participation is voluntary, and related costs are considered with discounts available for low-income students. In Finland, the focus is on comprehensive child development through play, physical activity, nature, music, arts, and human interaction. This country has strengthened its citizens' cultural identity through the development of its educational system structure and created one of the most successful educational systems in the world. Malaysia also emphasizes comprehensive talent development and training of mentally, emotionally, and physically balanced children. The goal of educating informed and ethical citizens is another objective of Malaysia's educational system.

Comparing these three countries shows that all three emphasize the comprehensive growth of students but have different approaches and emphases. Iran focuses more on religious and ethical dimensions, while Finland emphasizes experiential and practical learning. Malaysia seeks to create a balance between various dimensions of growth. Challenges in Iran include the gap

between intended programs and their implementation, time limitations, lack of resources and equipment, and insufficient expertise of implementers. To improve the situation of extracurricular activities in Iran, the successful experiences of Finland and Malaysia can be utilized. This can include increasing flexibility in implementation, allocating specific times for these activities, and providing specialized training to instructors. In conclusion, this comparative study shows that despite cultural and structural differences, all three countries recognize the importance of extracurricular activities in the comprehensive growth of students. Utilizing successful experiences and adapting them to local conditions can help improve the quality of these activities in Iran.

The findings of this research also showed that in Iran, with an emphasis on religious objectives, promoting Islamic culture and transmitting the values of the Islamic Revolution to students, programs are generally diverse in terms of religious and revolutionary values. In Iran, the emphasis is on developing individual and social identity, shared Iranian-Islamic identity, while in Malaysia the focus is on developing Islamic-international identity, and in Finland, the focus is on social-international identity. The content of programs implemented in Iran has low diversity and is mostly related to religious and ideological programs. However, in Malaysia and Finland, a wide range of sports, clubs, and artistic activities are available according to students' interests. In the implementation of programs, the selected countries charge fees considering conditions, but in Finland, all in-school programs are provided for free with specific requirements such as offering a meal. In Malaysia and Finland, extracurricular activities are implemented as in-school programs at specific times, outside official teaching hours, and mainly on weekends, or programs are offered in specialized centers and clubs. However, in Iran, due to the lack of necessary infrastructure, programs are generally implemented in schools and during official teaching hours.

Considering the importance of the role of teachers in the success and achievement of program objectives and the possibility of integrating formal and informal programs, Malaysia and Finland provide special training to teachers in the field of extracurricular activities. In addition, in Finland, teachers are granted more freedom and authority in designing, implementing, and evaluating programs. In Iran, no specific training is provided to teachers in the field of extracurricular activities in the teacher training curriculum, and practically, teachers do not have a specific role in the programs. The implementation, guidance, and evaluation of programs according to the determined objectives are generally assigned to extracurricular instructors. This issue has become a barrier to integrating formal and informal programs in Iran. There are similarities in the selection criteria for activity instructors among the selected countries, but Iran emphasizes gender suitability. Additionally, in Iran, the role of parents and local authorities, and the participation of

social organizations are very minimal. However, in Malaysia, these roles are more prominent, and particularly in Finland, due to its decentralized structure, parents of students, local authorities, municipalities, and other social organizations play a more active role in organizing programs. The selected countries provide a wide range of extracurricular activities for students to choose from, considering their ethnic, religious, and linguistic characteristics. The most important finding of this research in the comparison stage was that Finland's educational system pays special attention to extracurricular activities as an effective tool for strengthening the cultural identity of its citizens. This has influenced the objectives, content, implementation, and evaluation of extracurricular activities. While in Malaysia extracurricular activities pursue common and diverse objectives, in Iran, the focus is on general and attitudinal objectives. Based on the findings of the present study, the following strategies are suggested for the field of extracurricular activities in Iran:

- Diversifying and adjusting the objectives and content of programs according to students' interests to achieve higher goals and comprehensive growth of learners.
- Considering the cultural context and background of different regions to arrange various objectives, content, implementation methods, and evaluations.
- Providing training courses and assigning specific roles and responsibilities to teachers to design, implement, and evaluate programs within the framework of shared objectives.
- Providing special support and offering a meal to participants during the programs.
- Voluntary participation, quality enhancement of activities, and offering all in-school programs for free.
- Holding in-school programs at specific, precise times, outside teaching hours such as afternoons or weekends.
- Creating and expanding necessary infrastructures such as clubs and specialized educational centers in sports, arts, etc., and utilizing these capacities to offer out-of-school programs.
- Providing real experiences, discovering, and guiding various talents in sports, arts, etc., and supporting their shining and pride in various domestic and international arenas.
- Moving towards decentralization and granting more authority to schools, teachers, parents, and social organizations to participate at various program levels and support their innovative and creative activities.

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