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Investigating how learners' participation in extracurricular activities contributes to their academic performance

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ABSTRACT

This empirical paper discusses the contribution of learners' participation in extracurricular activities to their academic performance. Learners are having challenges preventing them from engaging in extracurricular activities in township secondary schools in Kutloanong. This paper is framed in institutional theory, which looks at the limitations and restrictions placed on learners by authorities. In this paper, the qualitative interpretivist research paradigm was employed. 6 participants, 3 teachers and 3 learners, were interviewed. Non-probability purposive sampling was used to choose five schools in Kutloanong township from which data were gathered. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with the participants. The literature review findings indicate that learners' participation in extracurricular activities may reduce harmful behaviors such as substance abuse and gang affiliation, foster a sense of belonging and connection to the school community, and be essential for sustaining healthy, balanced lifestyles. The study's findings demonstrate that participation in extracurricular activities enhances learners' physical and mental well-being, provides respite from academic obligations, elevates self-esteem, fosters a sense of community, positively contributes to discipline, improves academic performance, and offers a venue to showcase diverse talents. In light of the findings, the study recommends that schools provide a diverse range of extracurricular activities to accommodate various learner interests. Additionally, ascertain the reasons for club inactivity and promote their rejuvenation to guarantee that learners can engage and have access to the requisite facilities for diverse extracurricular activities. Ultimately, to facilitate extracurricular activities, the management and other school officials must proficiently supervise their expenditures.

Keywords: Extracurricular Activities, Academic Performance, Participation, Secondary Schools.

INTRODUCTION

Extracurricular activities, which give learners ample opportunity to improve their academic performance, develop deep connections, and acquire useful skills, aid the educational process. According to research, this kind of involvement might be positively correlated with educational

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achievement.[1] In agreement, Morris suggests that learners who participate in extracurricular activities can improve their academic performance and behave more appropriately in class.[2] Furthermore, Carraro and Gaudreau add that extracurricular activities teach learners time management and organizational skills, as well as how to cope and build resilience.[3] Denovah and Macaskill claim that involvement in these activities promotes happiness and well-being.[4] Bandala believes that extracurricular activities help learners apply their academic knowledge in the real world and improve classroom education.[5] Extracurricular activities have been found to be essential in assisting learners in developing their skills. In this empirical study, we address how learners' involvement in extracurricular activities improves their academic achievement.

In Kutloanong township secondary schools, there is a problem with a lack of engagement in extracurricular activities, despite strong evidence that after-school activities help young people grow positively in life.[6] The lack of extracurricular activities has been considered a contributing factor in most schools' behavioural and disciplinary issues, drug misuse, teen pregnancy, gangsterism, and subpar academic achievement. Similarly, Lang concurs that one of the main causes of the high rate of violence in secondary township schools is the failure to provide learners with engaging extracurricular activities.[7] Learners and the public, as a result. Even if there is a dearth of these extracurricular activities, the funding for the schools does not give them priority. Some schools only offer a few activities, which may not be enough to accommodate the requirements and interests of various students. In keeping with Fujita, funds intended for extracurricular activities are diverted to other uses.[8] Many school districts are cutting back on or eliminating their band, music, and athletic programs to better fund their academic programs.[9] Prior to the elimination of academic programs that are not essential, school systems must conduct research on the impact these programs have on the achievement of learners.

To gain insight concerning how athletes develop in comparison to non-athletes, numerous studies have been carried out. 1,769 high school students were polled by Steiner et al.[10] The findings showed that athletes had fewer mental health issues than their counterparts who were non-athletes. Using information from the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS), Marsh, Marsh and Kleitman looked at the effects of participating in sports over six years using a nationally representative sample of 12,084 individuals.[11] Athletes exhibited greater levels of self-esteem, higher rates of applying to, enrolling in, and completing university programs, better job autonomy, and stronger social ties than non-athletes, demonstrating the favourable long-term consequences of high school athletics. Although the aforementioned studies have contributed to secondary school learners' participation in extracurricular activities, they did not particularly address the effects of extracurricular activity participation on academic attainment. Taking into account these findings, the study's goal is to stimulate discussions

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[1] Benjamin D. Andrews, "Delayed Enrollment and Student Involvement: Linkages to College Degree Attainment," *The Journal of Higher Education* 89, no. 3 (May 4, 2018): 368–96, https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2017.1390972; Angie L. Miller, Louis M. Rocconi, and Amber D. Dumford, "Focus on the Finish Line: Does High-Impact Practice Participation Influence Career Plans and Early Job Attainment?," *Higher Education* 75, no. 3 (March 19, 2018): 489–506, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-017-0151-z.

[2] Erin Morris, "Participation in Extracurricular Activities and Academic Achievement: A Comprehensive Review," 2019.

[3] Natasha Carraro and Patrick Gaudreau, "Predicting Physical Activity Outcomes During Episodes of Academic Goal Conflict," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 41, no. 9 (September 14, 2015): 1291–1305, https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167215594121.

[4] Andrew Denovan and Ann Macaskill, "Stress, Resilience and Leisure Coping among University Students: Applying the Broaden-and-Build Theory," *Leisure Studies* 36, no. 6 (2017): 852–65.

[5] Bandala Vani Rao, "The Influence of Extracurricular Activities in the Educational, Academic Outcomes," *International Journal of Applied Research* 8, no. 12 (December 1, 2022): 07–12, https://doi.org/10.22271/allresearch.2022.v8.i12a.10355.

[6] Nancy L Deutsch et al., "Let's Talk after-School: The Promises and Challenges of Positive Youth Development for after-School Research, Policy, and Practice," in *After-School Programs to Promote Positive Youth Development: Integrating Research into Practice and Policy, Volume 1* (Springer, 2017), 45–68.

[7] Chad Lang, "Extracurricular Activities Can Play a Central Role in K-12 Education," *Phi Delta Kappan* 102, no. 8 (2021): 14–19.

[8] Kimiko Fujita, "The Effects of Extracurricular Activities on the Academic Performance of Junior High Students," *Undergraduate Research Journal for the Human Sciences* 5, no. 1 (2006): 1–16.

[9] Kaisa Snellman, Jennifer M Silva, and Robert D Putnam, "Inequity Outside the Classroom: Growing Class Differences in Participation in Extracurricular Activities.," *Voices in Urban Education* 40 (2015): 7–14.

[10] Hans Steiner et al., "Adolescents and Sports: Risk or Benefit?," *Clinical Pediatrics* 39, no. 3 (March 1, 2000): 161–66, https://doi.org/10.1177/000992280003900304.

[11] Herbert W Marsh and Sabina Kleitman, "School Athletic Participation: Mostly Gain with Little Pain," *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology* 25, no. 2 (2003): 205–28.

about how the participation of learners in extracurricular activities impacts their academic achievement. The study seeks to answer the following questions:

- How can involvement in extracurricular activities improve students' academic achievement?
- How can learners' academic performance be enhanced by participation in extracurricular activities?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Activities that are an important part of the learning environment but are not included in the academic curriculum are known as extracurricular activities. Sports, singing, music, debate, dancing, theatre, social services, and more are examples of extracurricular activities.[12] Although more learners in townships participate in extracurricular activities before and after school than in many other countries, only a small percentage of learners in the Lejweleputswa district do so. Extracurricular activities have significantly improved the school environment.[13] One of the numerous benefits of extracurricular activities is the development of well-rounded learners. Engaging in extracurricular activities has multiple advantages for learners.

First, participants in extracurricular activities have the opportunity to develop critical skills, including problem-solving, leadership, teamwork, and time management.[14] Improvements in learners' intellectual, social, and interpersonal growth are often the result of their involvement in extracurricular activities. For instance, when learners work together, they develop their leadership, negotiating, communication, and conflict-resolution abilities. According to Coker et al., they also learn the importance of time management, academic and intellectual competence, critical thinking, and other abilities.[15]

Second, extracurricular activities can provide students with a break from their academic routine as well as an opportunity to unwind and rejuvenate.[16] Engaging in extracurricular activities promotes learners' emotional well-being and helps develop their brains. It also helps them to succeed academically for a long time. Extracurricular activities also reduce disciplinary and behavioural problems. By doing things they enjoy, learners can reduce stress, enhance their mental well-being, and become more motivated to study.

According to Humensky et al., adolescents may face obstacles that make learning difficult, such as problems with their schoolwork, suspension from class, and the inability to advance to the next grade level.[17] In 2003, research by Daley and Leahy examined how physical activity might enhance one's sense of self. The stress caused by strict study habits might be reduced by engaging in physical extracurricular activities. Learners maintain their physical and mental health. Their bodies are also in excellent shape, which gives them more self-confidence and improves their perception of their looks. Additionally, these qualities are absent from people who never exercise.[18]

In a 2003 study, Daley and Leahy selected 126 children between the ages of 8 and 9 who participated in extracurricular physical activities at random. As stated by Daley and Leahy, each of these participants engaged in a physical extracurricular activity sponsored by the school at least once a week, either during lunch or after school.[19] There were sixty-three additional students in the second group who did not participate in any physical activities. Self-perception was higher among those who exercised regularly. Positive self-perception was found to be associated with participating in various forms of physical activity. Additionally, Robinson highlights the correlation between participation in

[12] Shabiha Anjum, "Impact of Extracurricular Activities on Academic Performance of Students at Secondary Level," *International Journal of Applied Guidance and Counseling* 2, no. 2 (2021): 7–14.
[13] Crystal Coker et al., "Perceptions of School Climate: The Role of Extracurricular Activities," 2018.
[14] Anjum, "Impact of Extracurricular Activities on Academic Performance of Students at Secondary Level."
[15] Coker et al., "Perceptions of School Climate: The Role of Extracurricular Activities."
[16] J Kakungulu Samuel, "The Role of Extracurricular Activities in Student Development," *Eurasian Experiment Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 5, no. 2 (2024): 26–30.
[17] Jennifer Humensky et al., "Adolescents with Depressive Symptoms and Their Challenges with Learning in School," *The Journal of School Nursing* 26, no. 5 (2010): 377–92.
[18] Amanda J Daley and Jennifer Leahy, "Self-Perceptions and Participation in Extra-Curricular Physical Activities," *Physical Educator* 60, no. 2 (2003): 13.
[19] Daley and Leahy, "Self-Perceptions and Participation in Extra-Curricular Physical Activities."

extracurricular activities and lower rates of delinquency, a sense of control over one's life, and better-quality racial associations.[20] Extracurricular activities support the development of critical traits such as self-efficacy and responsibility to address school-related delinquency.[21]

Thirdly, learners' involvement in extracurricular activities can reduce their likelihood of engaging in criminal activity and becoming pregnant while still a teenager.[22] One of the main causes of the high rate of violence in secondary township schools, as identified by Nhambura, is the absence of engaging extracurricular activities for students. How extracurricular activities impact violence in these schools is a topic of discussion.[23] Although it is easier to identify violent acts than to come up with solutions, few studies have explicitly examined the relationship between participation in certain extracurricular activities and a decrease in violent conduct.

However, several scholars have examined the relationship between learners' overall involvement in extracurricular activities and their successful academic and behavioural outcomes. For instance, Ajisuksmo found that learners who engaged in pro-social activities and extracurricular activities regularly achieved good academic levels and low rates of risky conduct.[24] Participating in extracurricular activities can help learners to avoid dangerous behaviours, including drug use, gang involvement, and other negative tendencies.[25] Drug abuse is the root cause of the rise in violence among learners in inner cities, and extracurricular activities can assist in lowering this rate.[26]

Fourth, learners who engage in extracurricular activities feel more connected to the community.[27] Engaging in extracurricular activities can provide learners with a feeling of connection and community outside of the classroom. Based on Amand, Girard, and Smith, belonging is a crucial factor that positively influences someone's psychological development.[28] School belonging was found to have a favourable effect on academic performance and school engagement.[29]

Two extracurricular activities that usually include procedures that promote healthy peer relationships and the development of friendships are sports and music.[30] One of the main advantages of participating in sports, bands, and other activities, according to learners, is the opportunity to interact with peers.[31] It's interesting to note that friendships between learners who participate in the same extracurricular activities have a higher chance of enduring than those with peers who do not.[32] This may be due to the frequent participation schedules for structured activities.[33]

Finally, extracurricular activities are essential to maintain balance. A balanced existence can be achieved by striking a healthy balance between work, leisure, and other personal interests. In addition to helping learners maintain an optimal level of productivity, life balance and recreational activities are

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[20] Rebecca S. Robinson, "Purposive Sampling," in *Encyclopedia of Quality of Life and Well-Being Research* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2023), 5645–47, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-17299-1_2337.

[21] Wyatt Brown, Brian G Sellers, and Matthew Caines, "Deciphering the Relationship between Extracurricular Activities and Delinquency among Teenage Youth," *American Journal of Criminal Justice* 48, no. 6 (2023): 1372–93.

[22] Clifton B Thames, *Exploring the Impact of Extracurricular Activities on Adolescent Development: A Study of Students Attending Schools in Poverty and Non-Poverty Areas* (Mississippi State University, 2023).

[23] Michael Nhambura, "Handling of Violent Behaviour of Learners in Secondary Schools: A Case Study of Vryburg Cluster in North-West Province" (North-West University (South Africa)., 2020).

[24] Clara R P Ajisuksmo, "Why Some Adolescents Engage in Risk-Taking Behavior," *International Journal of Educational Psychology* 10, no. 2 (2021): 143–71.

[25] Nhambura, "Handling of Violent Behaviour of Learners in Secondary Schools: A Case Study of Vryburg Cluster in North-West Province."

[26] Ajisuksmo, "Why Some Adolescents Engage in Risk-Taking Behavior."

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[28] Jerome St-Amand, Stéphanie Girard, and Jonathan Smith, "Sense of Belonging at School: Defining Attributes, Determinants, and Sustaining Strategies," *IAFOR Journal of Education* 5, no. 2 (September 1, 2017), https://doi.org/10.22492/ije.5.2.05.

[29] Jacquelynne S Eccles and Robert W Roeser, "School and Community Influences on Human Development," in *Developmental Science* (Psychology Press, 2015), 645–728.

[30] Christian Berger et al., "Adolescent Peer Processes in Extracurricular Activities: Identifying Developmental Opportunities," *Children and Youth Services Review* 118 (2020): 105457.

[31] A. Temel, O. Çalı, and R. Yıldız, "Opinions of Students Participating in Band Activities Regarding School Belonging," *J Hist Sch* 70 (2024): 1544-1568; .

[32] Temel, Çalı, and Yıldız, "Opinions of Students Participating in Band Activities Regarding School Belonging."

[33] Jennifer A. Fredricks and Sandra D. Simpkins, "Organized Out-of-School Activities and Peer Relationships: Theoretical Perspectives and Previous Research," *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development* 2013, no. 140 (June 2013): 1–17, https://doi.org/10.1002/cad.20034.

strong predictors of academic achievement in developing teenagers.[34] Burrows and McCormack believe that learners' total life balance may be significantly impacted by their extracurricular activities.[35]

By taking a break from their academic endeavours, learners can interact with others, release pent-up energy, and enjoy themselves. Further research is necessary to establish the notion that extracurricular activities do generate this balance, but it is possible that they do. This balance is vital for development and optimal academic success. According to Amand et al., engagement may boost learners' self-esteem regarding their physical and potentially social identities.[36] Social competency has a significant impact on a learner's identity, and many of them stress the value of socialization and friendships in their life. A study by Wachsmuth, Lewis, and Gage reveals that learners who participate in extracurricular activities are frequently better equipped to make friends, connect with others, and hone their social skills.[37] Additionally, participation might be interpreted as a sign of self-affirmation and maturity. Furthermore, Norman highlights that participants seem to have a strong feeling of duty and commitment.[38] Based on this, people who participate in extracurricular physical activities are believed to have a more favourable self-perception than those who do not.[39]

Ribeiro et al. have demonstrated the benefits of students participating in extracurricular activities and their impact on academic performance.[40] Children who engaged in extracurricular activities demonstrated greater levels of academic accomplishment, better grades, more positive self-concepts, and higher test scores, according to Amand et al.[41] Furthermore, it has been found that children who participate have lower rates of drug and alcohol use, delinquent behaviour, inappropriate behaviour, and leaving school.[42]

Engaging in activities allows learners to cultivate important skills, such as collaboration or leadership, that may prove advantageous in the future. People who participate in extracurricular activities are more likely to quickly be able to establish friends, adjust to a new setting, and show leadership when they continue their education. Learners are less inclined to engage in risky behaviours when they participate in activities. As Amand et al. demonstrated, learners who engage in pro-social activities between the hours of 2 and 8 p.m. have a lower likelihood of committing crimes or being victims of them.[43]

Participation in extracurricular activities can be interpreted as self-affirming behaviour and a sign of maturity. Participating learners have many obligations and are highly dedicated. In this sense, it is evident that those who participate in extracurricular physical activity are more self-aware than those who do not.[44] Many people say that friendship and socialization play important roles in their lives, and social skills are an important part of a learner's identity. After-school activities usually give learners additional opportunities to socialize, make friends, and develop social trust.

Extracurricular activity participants, in the opinion of Ribeiro et al., receive higher grades, perform better on standardized tests, are more educated, attend more classes regularly, and have more positive self-images.[45] Participants also had lower rates of drug and alcohol use, school dropout,

[34] Berger et al., "Adolescent Peer Processes in Extracurricular Activities: Identifying Developmental Opportunities."
[35] Lisette Burrows and Jaleh McCormack, "School Culture Meets Sport," *European Physical Education Review* 17, no. 3 (October 7, 2011): 301–12, https://doi.org/10.1177/1356336X11416732.
[36] St-Amand, Girard, and Smith, "Sense of Belonging at School: Defining Attributes, Determinants, and Sustaining Strategies."
[37] Sean T Wachsmuth, Timothy J Lewis, and Nicholas A Gage, "Exploring Extracurricular Activity Participation, School Engagement, and Social Competence for Students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders," *Behavioral Disorders* 48, no. 4 (2023): 255–68.
[38] Zoncita D Norman, "Understanding the Effect of Multicultural School Clubs' Extracurricular Activities Participation and Servant Leading Experiences on Students' Servant Leadership and Cultural Competency & Sensitivity," *Available at SSRN 4425476*, 2023.
[39] Fredricks and Simpkins, "Organized Out-of-School Activities and Peer Relationships: Theoretical Perspectives and Previous Research."
[40] Norberto Ribeiro et al., "The Impact of Extracurricular Activities on University Students' Academic Success and Employability," *European Journal of Higher Education* 14, no. 3 (2024): 389–409.
[41] St-Amand, Girard, and Smith, "Sense of Belonging at School: Defining Attributes, Determinants, and Sustaining Strategies."
[42] Nhambura, "Handling of Violent Behaviour of Learners in Secondary Schools: A Case Study of Vryburg Cluster in North-West Province."
[43] St-Amand, Girard, and Smith, "Sense of Belonging at School: Defining Attributes, Determinants, and Sustaining Strategies."
[44] Fredricks and Simpkins, "Organized Out-of-School Activities and Peer Relationships: Theoretical Perspectives and Previous Research."
[45] Ribeiro et al., "The Impact of Extracurricular Activities on University Students' Academic Success and Employability."

inappropriate public behaviour, and criminal activity, according to Nhambura.[46] Sports participation can provide learners with special learning opportunities that enhance their social perceptions.

Higher academic standards may help athletes do better in the classroom.[47] If learners are unable to identify with groups or are associated with criminal social groups, they are more likely to suffer from negative outcomes, including substance abuse, behavioural problems, suicide, or dropping out of school.[48]

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study used an institutional framework to investigate how involvement in extracurricular activities affects learners' academic achievement. The basis of institutional theory is an examination of the relationships between organizations.[49] The theoretical framework for researching the relationship between participation in extracurricular activities and academic achievement is provided by institutional theory. It also examines how some organizations restrict and constrain other groups. This idea must be applied to involvement in extracurricular activities in the educational setting by transforming school sports departments into separate organizations that are within the purview of particular schools and school districts. The administrators of extracurricular activities are expected to engage with the learners who participate in those activities.

Following the development of the theory, theorists focused their unique modification on the validity of the organization rather than just its existence.[50] Pursuant to the theory of institutionalism, there is a connection between an institution's behavior and the institution overall. This idea holds that there is a connection between a learner's success and extracurricular activities. It is predicated on the notion that these initiatives may have either beneficial or detrimental effects on learner progress and that specific schools and school districts must oversee them.[51] The institutional theory is pertinent to this study since it investigated the constraints and limitations imposed by authority on learners.

METHODOLOGY

Because the researcher investigated the effects of extracurricular activity engagement on learners' academic achievement, this study is interpretative. Interpretative methods were used because the researcher was committed to the notion that social issues should be explored "through the eyes of the participants rather than the researcher".[52] In this investigation, a qualitative technique was used. The research method that is most suitable for the enquiry during the research process is the outcome of the researcher's choices and activities within the qualitative design when the qualitative approach is employed.[53] It was necessary to implement a phenomenological strategy to identify the core of participants' human experiences with development.[54]

In this study six participants were used in total, consisting of teachers and learners from Kutloanong township secondary schools in the Lejweleputswa District, were used in this study. Six people—three teachers and three learners—from the chosen secondary schools made up the study's sample. In this investigation, purposeful selection was employed. Since qualitative research seeks to

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[46] Nhambura, "Handling of Violent Behaviour of Learners in Secondary Schools: A Case Study of Vryburg Cluster in North-West Province."

[47] Agustín J García, Carlton J Fong, and Yvette M Regalado, "Motivational, Identity-Based, and Self-Regulatory Factors Associated with Academic Achievement of US Collegiate Student-Athletes: A Meta-Analytic Investigation," *Educational Psychology Review* 35, no. 1 (2023): 14.

[48] Fredricks and Simpkins, "Organized Out-of-School Activities and Peer Relationships: Theoretical Perspectives and Previous Research."

[49] David Risi et al., "Institutional Theory-based Research on Corporate Social Responsibility: Bringing Values Back In," *International Journal of Management Reviews* 25, no. 1 (2023): 3–23.

[50] Paul J DiMaggio and Walter W Powell, "The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields," *American Sociological Review* 48, no. 2 (1983): 147–60.

[51] Douglas B Reeves, "The Learning Leader/the Extracurricular Advantage," *Learning* 66, no. 1 (2008): 86–87.

[52] Sheitu Abu, "Assessing the Role of Consultants in Enhancing Value for Money in Infrastructural Projects in Selected Regions in Ghana" (University of Education Winneba, 2022).

[53] A Devlin, *The Research Experience* (Sage, 2018).

[54] R Burke Johnson and Larry B Christensen, *Educational Research: Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Approaches* (Sage publications, 2024).

provide in-depth accounts of the experiences and behaviours of certain groups, sampling approaches are typically not random. This method was used in the research because the researcher wanted to identify secondary schools in a township where a higher proportion of learners did not participate in extracurricular activities.

Semi-structured interviews were suitable for this study because they allowed participants to freely express their thoughts on any topic raised during the inquiry in an intelligible and straightforward way. According to Bogdan and Biklen, semi-structured interviews allow the interviewer to look at the respondents' feelings regarding the relationship between extracurricular activities and students' academic achievement in township secondary schools, as well as how they express their thoughts.[55] The researcher conducted in-person interviews with the subjects. Additionally, the researcher employed an interview Protocol to conduct the in-person interviews. Consistent with Brinkmann and Kvale, the interviewer facilitated the discussion but did not solicit feedback on themes.[56] The interviewer conducted in-depth interviews with each participant at a school for about thirty minutes. Data for this study were collected over 8 weeks.

The researcher contacted participants to build rapport and set up appointments after receiving ethical approval from the Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FRIC) of Central University of Technology. The researcher gave a thorough explanation of the study's objectives, methods, and instruments during these sessions. A complete consent form explaining the purpose of the study, the interview process, and the recording techniques was given to the participants. This ensured that before data was collected, the participants were well-informed and capable of giving their informed consent.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The research investigated the impact of secondary school learners' involvement in extracurricular activities on their academic performance. This section presents data that answer the interview question related to the study's principal inquiry under the theme: the importance of extracurricular activities' involvement in academic achievement. The benefits of extracurricular activities are discussed subsequently.

Provides Respite from Academics

The participants asserted that extracurricular activities are essential for learners, as they require respite from academic pursuits.[57]

When asked about the importance of extracurricular activities, L1 said:

"I think they are important; I think we cannot always focus on books, and every time on books. When we come to school, we will be bored because we don't have free time; at least on Wednesdays it's sports day, and there should be a hype of activities. I think many people, many children who drop out of school do so because the focus is mainly on books, and there is no time to go and enjoy sports on Wednesdays or have certain activities on Friday."

In agreement with what L1 said, T3 had this to say,

"*If they are focusing only on academics, they are going to struggle to focus because their bodies will be tired."*

The participants' remarks make it clear that extracurricular activities are important because they allow learners to take a break from their studies. For this reason, Anjum contends that both academic and extracurricular activities are equally important.[58] The lack of extracurricular activities is criticized by learners as making school boring, and many drop out since the school only stresses books and no

[55] R. C Bogdan and S. K Biklen, *Qualitative Research in Education: An Introduction to Theory and Methods (3rd Ed.)*, Allyn & Bacon (MA: Needham Heights , 2018).

[56] S Brinkmann and S Kvale, *InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research (3rd Ed.)* (Los Angeles CA: SAGE, 2015).

[57] Hranush Ginosyan, Victoria Tuzlukova, and Fayaz Ahmed, "An Investigation into the Role of Extracurricular Activities in Supporting and Enhancing Students' Academic Performance in Tertiary Foundation Programs in Oman.," *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 10, no. 12 (2020): 1528–35.

[58] Anjum, "Impact of Extracurricular Activities on Academic Performance of Students at Secondary Level."

other activities, which is too much for them to bear. Learners need a platform to interact with others and showcase their abilities because even teachers believe that learners become tired and lose focus. Learners can participate in a variety of extracurricular activities if schools offer engaging activities. As the comments clearly show, learners who are overburdened by books also need extracurricular activities because reading books by themselves will not make them clever. Education and extracurricular activities must complement one another to guarantee a learner's overall growth.

Promotes Physical and Mental Well-being

Most participants think that learners' mental and physical health benefits from participating in extracurricular activities.L2 expressed the importance of extracurricular activities by saying, "*Yes, they are important because the more you participate in extracurricular activities, the more you improve your mental health."* The learner also added that *"Playing sports is very important because it's part of exercising and a person needs to exercise for their physical fitness. To avoid sicknesses, diabetes and all that stuff."* T2 further explained that participating in extracurricular activities helps learners relieve academic stress and relax their minds.

In addition, T3 said, *"The brain needs to be exercised",* and supported the statement by saying that *"but the exercises that they have in their sports help them to refresh their mind."* In agreement with other participants, T3 said: *"You relax, Ma'am; it helps to relax. You even forget a lot of things, like stress, which helps with that. When you return, your mind is refreshed, and you can study and do other things. When you take a break, just exercise; I think it helps to relax so that we are able to focus on our schoolwork*." In support of other comments L3 mentioned, *"I normally play chess because I believe that it helps me relax and have that thing that can make me, that can actually make my mind work in a perfect way that can solve any problems that I may be encountering in my academic work."*

Participants' comments reinforce these claims by highlighting the vital role extracurricular activities have in learners' physical and mental health. Learners take care of their physical and emotional well-being. They also have a healthy body, which improves their sense of attractiveness and raises their self-esteem. According to the participants, learners who engage in extracurricular activities may be less prone to become sick because they will be exercising and maintaining their physical fitness. Participation in extracurricular activities is essential because it keeps learners reenergized and prepared to face the demands of the classroom.

Enhances Self-confidence

The response of the participants suggests that involvement in extracurricular activities boosts learners' self-esteem. Self-confidence is more likely to grow among learners who participate in extracurricular activities, especially those that involve self-expression. L1 had this to say about enhanced self-confidence: "*It boosts their confidence; they become people who can face other people, they are no longer shy and are no longer discouraged by what people say about them. They are people who are fully confident and do not care who says what; they just mind their own business*." L2 concurred by saying, *"They would really help a lot because when you are debating, you are standing in front of people. So, it will also help our learners to be bold and firm, you understand? Also, speaking without fear reduces stage fright. For us to go to universities, for us to go far in life, we need to have the audacity to stand in front of many people and talk."*

The participants are adamant that extracurricular activities and learners' self-confidence are positively correlated. In accordance with the findings of the participants. Additionally, participants think that learners' capacity to achieve in life will be significantly impacted by the increased self-confidence they have obtained while engaged in extracurricular activities.

Provides a Sense of Belonging

As stated by participants, participating in extracurricular activities is more important because it can help learners feel like they belong. This is what T1 said,

"They are very, very, very important. You know, there's a saying that says, " All work, no play makes John a dull boy. So now, what happens is, if these learners are busy engaging in their schoolwork, and

they don't get a platform where they can socialise, showcase their talent, then, in the end, it's going to render education boring and not appealing. So, we want to dodge the bullet and give them, you know, a sense of belonging, where they can also play, enjoy the different sporting codes, and so forth."

To add to what T1 and L1 expressed, frustration and commented, *"I think if we don't take part in those activities, we end up in the streets doing things that are not good."*

Based on the participants' views, extracurricular activities provide learners with a sense of belonging and allow them to genuinely enjoy attending school. They are convinced that learners who are denied access to extracurricular activities ultimately lack a sense of belonging and are forced to partake in unhealthy behaviours.

Ensures Discipline

Participants argue that helping learners develop and maintain discipline requires them to participate in extracurricular activities. When asked if participation in extracurricular activities plays a vital role in learners' behaviour, L3 noted, *"It does. It does because in sports, actually, in sports, the lesson, the most important lesson in sports has to be discipline. You have to be disciplined. You have to listen to your coach because he's the one giving you instructions. So, if you're not having that mentor as your guide, you're not being guided, which means you can be loose. So, it does have an impact on how they behave around school." Participant L2 continue to say that "we have to be disciplined when we are on the ground practising. We must listen to the coaches."*

Participants stated that participation in extramural activities significantly contributes to the learner's discipline, as these activities require adherence to discipline and compliance with the coach's directions. Extracurricular activities have significantly improved the learning environment in schools.

Enhances Academic Success

Participants maintain that because extracurricular activities enhance academic success, they are essential. It is widely acknowledged that learners who participate in extracurricular activities achieve better academic results. Regarding the performance comparison between individuals who participate in extracurricular activities and those who do not, T1 commented, "*You can even check their academic performance. They are performing better than those who are not active.*" Some participants believe that those who participate in extracurricular activities excel in their curriculum activities. Furthermore, T3 had this to say, "*We really encounter problems with behavioural issues, but you will find that learners who are participating in sports are always, always performing in the classroom. They are always performing better than those who are not participating."*

Participants argued that because extracurricular activities improve learners' academic performance, they are crucial. Wiggins agrees with the participants in saying that participation in voluntary extracurricular activities improves academic achievement.[59] Participants say that when comparing the two groups of learners, those who engage in extracurricular activities do better academically than those who do not. The participants' belief that extracurricular activities improve their long-term academic success is supported by Seow and Pan, who also find that participation may reduce harmful behaviours.[60] Extracurricular activity participants are more likely to succeed than non-participants because they have fewer behavioural problems.

Talent discovery

Teachers and learners concur that extracurricular activities are essential for assisting learners in discovering their interests and talents. The participants also asserted that academically challenged learners should have the opportunity to demonstrate their unique talents. In line with the above statement, L1 had this to say about participation in extracurricular activities, *"I think to others it is*

[59] Bradley E Wiggins, "An Overview and Study on the Use of Games, Simulations, and Gamification in Higher Education," *International Journal of Game-Based Learning (IJGBL)* 6, no. 1 (2016): 18–29.

[60] Poh-Sun Seow and Gary Pan, "A Literature Review of the Impact of Extracurricular Activities Participation on Students' Academic Performance," *Journal of Education for Business* 89, no. 7 (2014): 361–66.

important because we are different as people; I might be good in academics, and the other one is good in sports. It might be that sports will open certain doors for them in life."

In addition, T1 said, *"So, if we have limited sporting codes, it therefore keeps our learners, or maybe let me say, it does not allow them holistically a platform whereby they can showcase their different, unique talents."*

The perspectives of the participants indicate that they believe that extracurricular activities provide learners with a platform to showcase their abilities. Owing to the participants' perspectives, academically challenged learners may excel in extracurricular activities and therefore thrive in life. Consistent with the findings, Bradley and Conway assert that extracurricular activities provide an excellent environment for learners to develop and apply their skills.[61]

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study advocates for schools to offer a diverse array of extracurricular sports beyond soccer and netball to cater to various learner interests. Schools must identify the reasons for clubs' inactivity and facilitate their revitalization to ensure learners have the opportunity to participate. Schools must ensure they have the facilities and resources necessary to provide various extracurricular activities. A sound financial plan should be in place for principals and other school authorities to support extracurricular programs and activities. This will ensure that learners and teachers have the resources they need to initiate and sustain extracurricular activities. Furthermore, the Department of Basic Education should ensure that schools from low socioeconomic backgrounds receive more funds and assets to improve extracurricular activities.

CONCLUSION

In accordance with the reviewed research, participation in extracurricular activities is highly necessary because they are essential and improve learners' academic performance. Based on the findings of this study, participation in extracurricular activities improved learners' physical and mental health, allowed them to take a break from their studies, boosted their confidence, gave them a sense of belonging, helped them contribute to their discipline, improved their academic performance, and gave them a platform to display their various talents. Although the researcher has shown that participating in extracurricular activities benefits learners in a variety of ways, many schools continue to struggle to fund extracurricular programs. Owing to the research, extracurricular activities should be supported by careful financial planning.

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