

Towards a Holistic Curriculum: How Significant is Learners' Participation in Co-curricular Activities?

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ABSTRACT The study sought to establish learners' views on the significance of their participation in school co-curricular. A quantitative-cum-qualitative descriptive survey design was followed. Data were solicited from learners in both private and public schools in one educational district in South Africa. A convenient sample of 200 learners participated in the study. A semi-structured questionnaire was used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data were analysed with the aid of the SPSS statistical software package version 21 and presented through a blend of both descriptive and inferential statistics. Qualitative data were analysed using content analysis method and presented through verbatim quotations of the respondents. The study found that learners were agreeable on the importance of participating in co-curricular activities and that skills and values taught in co-curricular activities were as well important for academic success. The study concludes that co-curricular activities were viewed as important components of the curriculum and makes recommendations based on the findings.

INTRODUCTION

Each country has a unique educational system in place (Sabrine et al. 2009). Schools should not solely aim at simply imparting academic content to learners. Co-curricular activities are significant components of the school curriculum. Co-curricular activities are activities that enhance and enrich the regular curriculum during normal school days (Tan and Pope 2007). In this study, school co-curricular activities refer to all school activities both academic and non-academic particularly sports. They are largely voluntary activities that take place outside of the regular compulsory school curriculum with educators and coaches as trainers and/or coordinators. Co-curricular activities are important in that they demonstrate that the participant is helped in developing as a well-rounded person. Beyond its physical and health dimensions, sport contributes to comprehensive and harmonious development and fulfillment of the human being (African Union 2008).

In America, schools offer a wide range of extracurricular activities to appeal to a wide range of students (Sabrine et al. 2009). Stoltzfus (2007) argues that most schools allow a free choice for student involvement in such activities, but many private schools make involvement in one or more co-curricular activities a mandatory requirement for their students; believing that such a man-

date helps to create a more 'well-rounded' student. The World Health Organisation (WHO) (2003) observes that physical activity is not only a good means of increasing the health and well-being of individuals. On a national level, increasing physical activity is an effective way of promoting public health and preventing diseases across the population.

It is a fundamental objective of the education system to nurture an inquiring mind in a fit body and the future emergence on sport elite will depend on the development of a structured approach to sports in school that involves all the stakeholders in education (African Union 2008). The Sport Policy Framework for Africa therefore seeks to ensure that sport be included as an integral part of the school curriculum and that a teaching manual be designed for physical education in schools (African Union 2008). Co-curricular activities can help to enhance formalized learning when measured with defined institutional student learning outcomes (Katie 2010). Therefore, it is imperative that individual schools develop a holistic curriculum that seeks to develop the mental, physical, social and emotional abilities of all children.

Goals and targets on participation in sport and health-enhancing physical activity should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound (SMART) (WHO 2011). For instance, Target 2 of the Welsh strategy's SMART target

formulation states that all children of primary school age will participate in sport and physical activity for at least 60 minutes, five times a week. All primary schools will provide a minimum of 2 hours of curricular based sport and physical activity per week. Target 3 points out that at least 90% of boys and girls of secondary school age will participate in sport and physical activity for 60 minutes, five times a week. All secondary schools will provide a minimum of 2 hours of curricular based and 1 hour of extracurricular sport and physical activity per week (Welsh Assembly Government 2005). Sabrine et al.'s (2009) study found current evidence pointing that private schools such as Cedar Valley Christian School in Iowa include statements about extracurricular activities, for example "Students are strongly encouraged to participate". This seems to contradict the definition of extracurricular activities being voluntary, but can be interpreted as an obligation for all students to participate in an extracurricular activity of their choice. It is clear that the schools promote participation in these activities due to the merits involved.

As each country strives for excellence within its educational system, the South African government is equally concerned about the current state and future needs of the education system with particular reference to learner achievement. The African Union (2008) believes that sport is an essential tool for building strong individuals and vibrant communities and for enhancing collective pride, identity and sense of belonging. Sport is also a valuable tool to initiate social development and improve social cohesion, especially when implemented with young people. With the power to be a major influence on marginalized and under-represented groups and individuals at risk, sport develops self-esteem and helps to overcome personal and social challenges. Through sport people learn values and behaviours that are applied to all aspects of society such as hard work, discipline, the value of fun, teamwork, respect for others, and fair play.

Mahoney (2000) also reported an interaction between a number of structured and unstructured (youth recreation centre activities with no regular schedules and little adult supervision) activities. Among boys, involvement in unstructured activities and absence of involvement in structured activities were particularly problematic in terms of their anti-social behaviour. The

study also reported that participants in unstructured activities were characterized by deviant peer relationships, poor parent-child relationships, and low levels of support from their activity leaders. These findings point to close relationships with adults as important influences on delinquent activities among adolescents. The African Union (2008) reckons that the first point of contact and exposure to sports for the average person is at school. Thus it becomes a noble idea to involve learners in all such activities that make them near their potential both academically and otherwise.

Sport development is a national priority, as it promotes active lifestyle, child and youth development, social inclusiveness, employment opportunities, peace and development, and above all a sense of belongingness and national pride (Government of India 2011). The very idea of sport predicates an absence of boundaries. Sporting exchanges between different nations and different ethnic groups at all levels create new opportunities for contact. Within the community of sport, people of different nationalities, ethnic origins, religions, genders or sexual orientation can get to know each other and can learn to understand and respect each other's ideals (Government of Sweden 2008).

Sport brings young persons in contact with each other and serves as a release from tension and stress. It is also an important avenue for academic advancement and an opportunity for social mobility. Sports in schools are instituted through the Ministry of Education with a policy of ensuring that the curricula of all schools include physical education (PE) and that adequate time is provided for the practice of sport. Each school should have a full time PE teacher, and where size does not permit smaller schools should be organized in groups for similar assistance (Government of Jamaica 2011). One of the most notable missions of the (sport) policy is to promote Physical Education, as well as recreational and extra mural school sport activities (Department of Education, South Africa (DoE) 2009).

Nevertheless, one of the departmental observations is to use school sport to turn schools into stable, functional and vibrant institutions of learning and centres of community life, with the principle that all school sport programmes must aim to enrich the curriculum at both General Education and Training and Further Educa-

tion and Training Phases (DoE 2009). Yet, another study revealed that in Botswana although PE was mentioned as a curriculum subject alongside arts and crafts, music and home economics in primary teacher training handbooks (Masogo et al. 1997), sport is no more than free time and free play for children and in most cases it was supervised by ill-prepared and unwilling classroom teachers (Mokgwathi 1998).

Involvement in non-athletic activities enhances a student's sense of identity and self-satisfaction, and strengthens the youth's bonds with school (Hoffmann 2006). For example, athletic participation exposes students to academically oriented peers and enhances students' socialization experiences (McHale et al. 2005). Participation in multi-cultural, co-curricular activity groups might encourage students to develop events that include the need to research global topics related to their group's purpose (Katie 2010).

The people who support the concept of co-curricular activities at school level as a helping tool in the academic attainments of the students envision that these types of activities play an integral role in the wellbeing of learners. Mahoney et al. (2006) assert that on balance, the bulk of research on organized activities has shown positive consequences of participation for academic, educational, social, civic, and physical development. According to Katie (2010), if more professionals were to recognize the academic value of co-curricular activities in enhancing classroom learning, more opportunities could be created to support a thriving student learning experience.

Multiple studies have been conducted into the implications of co-curricular involvement. Outcomes of studies have indicated that involvement in these activities can be beneficial towards the motivation of student, college education, grade levels, personal and interpersonal skills amongst others (Sabrine et al. 2009). Taking cognisance of the fact that schools are the venues where the basics of recreational activity and physical education must be inculcated (African Union 2008), the need to observe that co-curricular activities help in balancing the livelihood of humanity should not be taken for granted.

The benefits of participation in co-curricular activities are positive and long lasting (Neil et al. 1994). Therefore, it is vitally important for schools to be examining the levels of student

satisfaction, since it is these levels that play a large role in student success (Maurer 2007). The development of student social and interpersonal skills may well prove to be as important as the cognitive development of students. During a time when a growing number of people are becoming increasingly concerned about rising drug use, gang and criminal activities and the general decay of our social fabric, the benefits of the co-curricular activities could be one antidote to this situation. The favorable impact of the co-curriculum may be one of the best reasons for the continuation of the nation's small schools (Neil et al. 1994).

Involvement in these activities allows adolescents to broaden their social networks and develop new peer relations; practice their social, physical, interpersonal, and intellectual skills; learn how to communicate effectively; and learn vital social norms (Adler and Adler 1998). Yet there is a diverse set of school activities in which students may participate, and particular activities may have distinct effects on various outcomes (Hoffmann 2006).

Studies suggest that involvement in a host of co-curricular activities diminishes involvement in delinquent behaviors such as violence and theft, although findings are inconsistent (Hoffmann and Xu 2002). McBride et al. (1995) found a consistent negative relationship, with adolescents involved in non-athletic activities less likely to engage in alcohol use. Other studies found that the use of alcohol and smoking tobacco is higher among athletic participants than among other adolescents (Eccles and Barber 1999; Eccles et al. 2003).

Crosnoe (2002) highlights that empirical studies indicate that smoking and cocaine use are lower among athletes than among the general school population. Preston and Hammond's (2002) study revealed that regarding co-curricular participation as part of further education, independence of thought and problem solving skills are identified as outcomes. These contribute to both economic and non-economic areas of life, illustrating that there are inter-connections between economic and non-economic outcomes of learning.

The study by Daniyal et al. (2011) also established that the involvement in co-curricular activities shows positive impact on the student performance in their studies. However, Fredricks (2006) argues that there are also studies that

highlight the negative effects of co-curricular activities. Both positive and negative effects of participation are dependent on factors such as the nature of the activity and the background of the student involved. Several studies have shown that some athletic activities can coincide with increased alcohol use. In particular, unstructured activities have been seen mostly associated with behavioural problems in youths. Sabrine et al. (2009) argue that the undesirable social norms remain undefined, but it is evident that the effect of participating in unsupervised and disorganised activities can be negative.

The increased attendance associated with participation in extracurricular activities highlights the notion of motivation experienced by those students who participate in activities. Fredricks (2006) contends that studies comparing students who only attend academic requirements in school and those who also participate in extracurricular activities highlight that youths in school reported low intrinsic motivation, difficulty concentrating, and high rates of boredom, whereas youths in structured voluntary activities had high intrinsic motivation and reported that concentration was easier and that they experienced high challenge. Intrinsic motivation can thus be seen to increase for students who participate in extracurricular activities (Sabrine et al. 2009). It is against this background that the present study sought to establish learners' views on the significance of their participation in co-curricular activities on academic performance.

Statement of the Problem

There are numerous benefits of participation in co-curricular activities yet there are views that students' participation in co-curricular activities is a waste of time and that students should invest their time and efforts in pursuing the core curriculum. The present study sought to establish learners' views on the significance of their participation in co-curricular activities.

Research Objectives

The study sought to answer the following research objectives.

1. To establish learners' attitudes towards participation in co-curricular activities.
2. To establish learners' views on the significance of their participation in co-curricular activities.

Theoretical Framework

This study is informed by the holistic approaches to the curriculum development. A holistic curriculum, according to Miller (2007), thrives on three critical elements namely balance, inclusion and connection. In drawing the importance of completeness and supportiveness in nature, Boldt (1999: 27) states that;

All things have arisen mutually and mutually supportive, in the sense they require one another as a condition for their existence. The man requires the woman; the woman, the man; the night requires the day; the day, the night; the good, the bad; the bad the good and so on.

This issue of balance, inclusion and connection is also important in the curriculum. A curriculum that emphasizes one aspect at the expense of another lacks balance and if skills, values and attitude developed in learners do not feed into all aspects of the other the connection and inclusion is lost. A child develops as a complete being hence the importance of emphasizing on a holistic approach to curriculum where co-curricular activities are treated as a significant element of the curriculum and not as an appendage of the curriculum. Miller (2007) further argues that a true education comes through the training of bodily organs and intelligent use of bodily organs ensures a faster way of developing the intellect. It is against this theoretical framework that this study is conceptualized and interpretation of results based.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive survey design that employed both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Tashakkori and Teddlie (2008: 22) explain mixed method studies as;

Studies that are products of the pragmatist paradigm and that combine qualitative and quantitative approaches within different phases of the research process.

The present study collected both qualitative and quantitative data with the view to fully understand phenomenon under study. Borg and Gall (1989) observe that descriptive studies are aimed at finding out "what is," so survey methods are frequently used to collect descriptive

data. The present study sought to establish learners' views on the effect of participation in co-curricular activities on academic performance hence the choice of a survey design in which such views would be solicited from a number of participants and also adequately explained.

The Sample

A convenient sample of 200 learners participated in the study. A convenient sample, according to Trochim and Donnelly (2006), is a non-probability sampling technique in which units are selected based on easy access or availability. The disadvantage of convenience sampling is that the sample may not be representative of the population and results are not generalisable. The purpose of the study was not to generalise but to seek understanding.

Instruments

The study employed a semi-structured questionnaire to collect quantitative data and comments by participants on the open-ended questions on the questionnaire provided qualitative data. Comments on responses provided a rich layer of information which could not be gathered through a highly structured questionnaire.

Reliability and Validity

The main statistical measure to determine reliability of the questionnaire was the use of Chronbach's alpha coefficient. A pilot study was used to ensure validity of the questionnaire.

Data Analysis

Data collected was coded and analysed through a blend of both descriptive and inferential statistics. Quantitative data were analysed with the aid of the SPSS statistical software package version 21 and presented through a blend of both descriptive and inferential statistics. Qualitative data were analysed using content analysis method and presented through verbatim quotations of the respondents.

Ethical Considerations

Permission to administer questionnaires for research purposes was sought from the school

principals in which the study was conducted. Respondents were informed of privacy and confidentiality.

RESULTS

Biographic Variables of Learners

Table 1 shows the biographic variables of learners who participated in the study. Data shown reveals that information was sought from a nearly gender-balanced and diverse group of learners, as both male and female learners were represented. Learners were also drawn from the different phases, which were the intermediate, senior and Further Education and Training (FET). Respondents to the questionnaire had previous experience of school-based co-curricular activities while others were still participating hence data were solicited from participants with experience in co-curricular activities involvement.

Table 1: Biographical variables for learners

<i>Biographical variables for learners (N=200)</i>	<i>Variable description</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Gender</i>	Male	84	42
	Female	116	58
<i>Age Group</i>	10 - 12	34	17
	13 - 15	100	50
	16 - 18	62	31
	Over 18	4	2
	5	6	3
<i>Grade Level</i>	6	20	10
	7	14	7
	8	16	8
	9	58	29
	10	30	15
	11	40	20
	12	16	8
<i>School Type</i>	Junior School (Primary)	40	20
	High School	160	80
	School		
<i>Previous Participation in School Co-Curricular Activity(ies)</i>	Yes	150	75
	No	50	25
<i>Current Participation in School Co-Curricular Activity(ies)</i>	Yes	110	55
	No	90	45
<i>Ever Repeated a Grade</i>	Yes	34	17
	No	166	83

Learners' Views on Participation in Co-curricular Activities

Figure 1 shows learners views on participation in co-curricular activities. Figure 1 shows

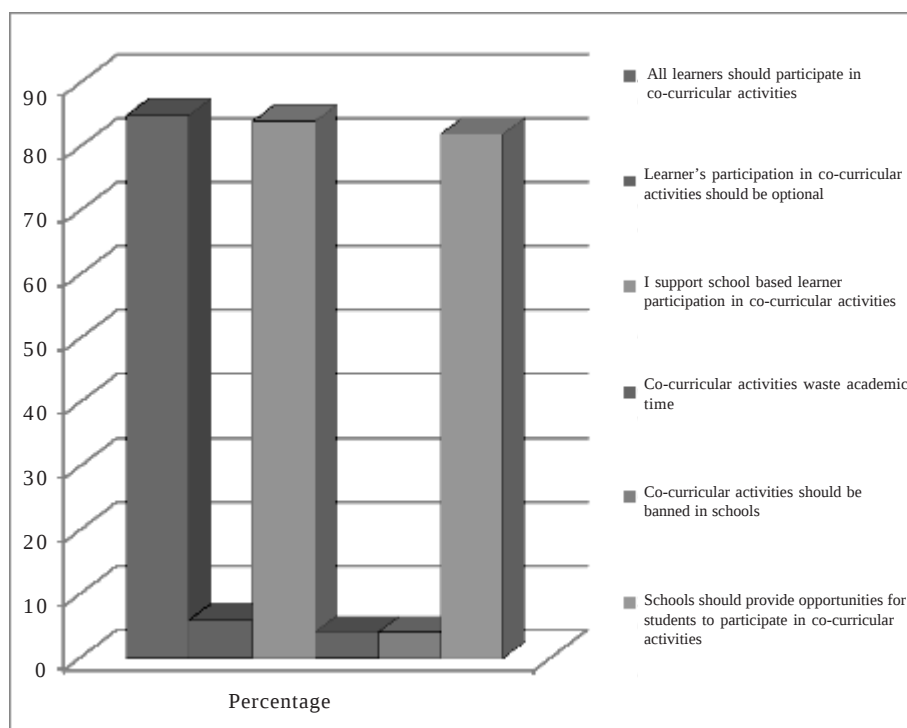


Fig. 1. Learners' views on participation in co-curricular activities

that the majority of the respondents held the view that all learners should participate in co-curricular activities, supported school-based learner participation in co-curricular activities and also held the view that schools should provide opportunities for students to participate in co-curricular activities. Very few respondents indicated that learners' participation in co-curricular activities should be optional and that participation in such activities was a waste of time. This shows that respondents were agreeable on the importance of learners' participation in co-curriculum activities.

Learners' Perceptions of the Impact of Their Participation in Co-curricular Activities in Schools

Table 2 shows learners' perceptions of the impact of their participation in co-curricular activities. The majority of the respondents confirmed that learners' participation in co-curricular activities was motivational, reduced time for delinquent behavior, helped build learners' confidence and developed learners' positive atti-

tude towards school. What could be gleaned from the results in Table 2 is a compelling case that learners' participation in co-curricular activities was important as it resulted in tremendous benefits. Views by the majority respondents that learners' involvement in co-curricular activities improved their discipline and socialization further underlines the importance of learners' involvement in such activities.

Learners' Suggestions on the Implementation of Co-curricular Activities

The following is a documentation of suggestions aired by the learners who responded to the open-ended part of the questionnaire. The respondents' views are divided into two categories: Attitudes and Impacts, and are expressed as per each respondent.

Attitudes

Participation in extracurricular activities is good for my mind, body and soul. I should seriously participate in extracurricular activi-

Table 2: Learners' perceptions of the significance of their participation in co-curricular activities in schools

<i>Impact Statement</i>	<i>SA</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>%</i>
Co-curricular activities help to motivate learners	84	42	72	36	30	15	12	6	2	1
The activities occupy and/or reduce time for delinquent behavior such as drug abuse, drinking etc	110	55	40	20	30	15	10	5	10	5
Help in confidence building	84	42	88	44	10	5	10	5	8	4
Learners develop a positive perception of the school	90	45	78	39	22	11	8	4	4	2
Help to build resilience (endurance)	64	32	94	47	32	16	10	5	2	1
Assist to develop a positive attitude towards school work	82	41	58	29	38	19	18	9	4	2
Good for mental development	100	50	72	36	18	9	6	3	4	2
Sports develop physical fitness (health lifestyle)	140	70	48	24	10	5	2	1	0	0
In most cases, positions held in co-curricular activities help to give learners specific self-concepts and/or higher self esteem	78	39	74	37	36	18	6	3	4	2
Help to instill discipline	84	42	82	41	28	14	4	2	4	2
They help to improve socialization (through coaches, peer groups, etc)	82	41	78	39	26	13	4	2	10	5
They help to instill community spirit	60	30	68	34	46	23	16	8	8	4
The activities might lead to future income if talent is developed	122	61	60	30	8	4	8	4	4	2
Help to reduce school drop-outs	84	42	58	29	24	12	16	8	16	9
Extra-curricular activities create conditions necessary to improve learners' academic performance	70	35	60	30	38	19	22	11	10	5

ties because it relaxes my mind and makes it easier for me to study to make some progress.

I wish girls soccer can be introduced at my school so that I can help my school shine.

Can we please have a swimming pool in our school, it is a very interesting sport especially when you have done it in other schools.

Schools should become far more serious about sports and its development in South Africa.

Teachers should also be seriously involved in extra activities and there should be more choices for learners.

The schools should offer enough time for these activities.

Impacts

For children who like sports, and don't school, they will be convinced by sports to go to school.

It helps you to discover your talent which you can utilize to pursue your career.

I want to put emphasis on physical fitness, because a healthy mind has to be in a healthy body, so sports do help one to be physically fit which will also help in their academics.

Learning how to communicate with other learners as a team and by that it is much easier to understand winning as a team and build the nation as well.

Sports help me to become famous outside the classroom and learn to respect the elders.

They make learners forget about school work and have fun.

Sports help build the ability to work not as an individual but as a team.

DISCUSSION

The study found that the majority of the learners who responded to the questionnaire indicated that all learners should participate in co-curricular activities. Respondents also revealed their perceptions on the importance of co-curricular activities in schools and how learners should take them seriously. Such findings are consistent with observation by Tan and Pope (2007) who make a submission that schools should not only concentrate on offering academic studies but should also offer co-curricular activities of which are equally important. Such views also further show the need for a holistic curriculum that seeks to train the mind, body and soul and assist learners to realise mind-body-soul unity (Holdstock 1991 cited in Hendricks 2004). Education that focuses on training the mind only will deprive learners of training in other aspects of their human development.

The study also found that respondents to the questionnaire were agreeable to the fact that schools should provide opportunities for learn-

ers to participate in co-curricular activities. Such a finding confirms revelations by Sabrine et al. (2009) that in the United States of America schools offered different co-curricular activities, some of which were mandatory for learners to participate in. However, Stoltzfus (2007) observes that in some schools students had a choice to participate in co-curricular activities or not to. Of importance is the realisation that schools take learners' participation in co-curricular activities seriously.

On the impact of co-curricular activities, the study found that learners agreed that co-curricular activities help to motivate learners. Similar views are raised by Hoffmann (2006) who states that through participation in co-curricular activities students develop an enhanced sense of identity and self-satisfaction. What is clear is that there are some qualities developed in learners through their participation in co-curricular activities that help them in their academic life as well. Motivated learners have greater commitment to their studies and their chances of success are very high.

The study further established from the respondents to the questionnaire that co-curricular activities occupy learners and divert their attention from vices such as drug and substance abuse and other immoral activities. Similar findings were established in a study by Hoffmann and Xu (2002) which concluded that students' involvement in co-curricular activities minimised their chances of being involved in cases of juvenile delinquency. Such positive impact of students participation in co-curricular activities is applauded as dealing with issues of juvenile delinquency is a real challenge in modern societies.

The study further established from the respondents that through participation in co-curricular activities, students develop several positive qualities such as endurance, positive attitudes and sense of discipline. Such findings affirm Maurer's (2007) views that co-curricular activities assist students to develop important social and interpersonal skills that assist them in life at school and life after school. The importance of students' participation in co-curricular activities can, therefore, not be overemphasised.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that learner participation in co-curricular activities is positively viewed by the learners themselves. The participants felt

that learners should all participate in co-curricular activities and they should be supported. It is further concluded that students' involvement in co-curricular activities was viewed as beneficial as it had ripple effects on academic achievement through its impartation of skills and values necessary in students' academic pursuits.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the findings the study makes the following recommendations:

- a) It should be a Curriculum Policy requirement that schools make it compulsory that learners participate in at least one co-curricular activity.
- b) The Curriculum Policy should explicitly make schools be aware that co-curricular activities are important elements of the curriculum and should not be treated as extra activities.
- c) Resources should be made available so that learners' participation in co-curricular activities is made more meaningful.
- d) Schools should offer a variety of co-curricular activities so that given the benefits of such activities learners are able to choose activities that they are interested in.
- e) Learners who excel in co-curricular activities should be given the same recognition as those who excel in other school activities particularly academics.

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