

THE NEXUS BETWEEN CO-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE: A CASE STUDY OF HIGHER SECONDARY SCHOOLS OF KAMBER, SHAHDADKOT

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ABSTRACT

The co-curricular activities are conceptualized as a crucial aspect of students' collective learning and personal development in developed countries; however, there is a lack of empirical research concerning the contribution of co-curricular activities in achieving academic progress in school settings within developing countries. This research aims at investigating the impact of co-curricular activities on academic performance of secondary school students in the context of rural areas of Pakistan. By employing the quantitative research paradigm, the survey questionnaire was distributed to 500 secondary school students from five randomly selected secondary schools in the district of Kamber, Shahdadkot. The study data were analyzed by correlation and regression techniques with the help of SPSS. The study findings identified that the students' engagement in co-curricular activities could positively contribute to their academic performance. This reflects that the provision of co-curricular activity opportunities appear to be pivotal for improved academic performance of students within secondary school settings.

Keywords: Co-curricular Activities, Academic Performance, Secondary Schools, Students.

INTRODUCTION

The educational institutions are characterized as a hub for mental and physical development of new generations. Although, the school environment is primarily shaped by the academic activities, however, co-curricular activities are also conceptualized as an important aspect of school life (Davalos, Chavez, & Guardiola, 1999). Notably, the aim of education is not confined to the pursuit of academic know-how only, but education also means to boost the personal development of students

through skill development and active participation in co-curricular activities. The basic curriculum of secondary schools mainly emphasis on the development of basic skills, concerning reading, writing, and arithmetic, along with nurturing of visual and social values (Lipscomb, 2007). Similarly, students' development is equally emphasized in the co-curricular activities framework in order to build talented and well-disciplined future generations (Camp, 1990).

Primarily, the school curriculum incorporates a wide array of subjects including arts, science, and technical subjects, moreover, every student is also encouraged to take part in co-curricular activities. In government schools of Pakistan, more emphasis has been placed on co-curricular activities recently, because the government is taking multiple initiatives to offer more opportunities to encourage students' engagement in co-curricular activities (Farooq et al., 2011). This reflects an effort taken for students to become all-rounder by excelling their performances in academic and co-curricular activities. Mainly, in the upper secondary schools, students are evaluated through school's examination, whereas, applications for the admission to pre-university are also assessed on the above examination criteria. However, an added advantage is given to those students who earned good performances in extracurricular activities.

In developed countries, there is a strong emphasis on students' participation in co-curricular activities, but in developing countries, such as Pakistan, there is lack of awareness pertinent to the significance of students' engagement in such activities (Farooq et al., 2011). Thus, in order to gain empirical evidence, it is relevant to know that whether students' engagement in co-curricular activities could benefit them in improving their academic performance or they spend their time in non-academic activities that do not relate to their academic development (Rasberry et al., 2011). Generally, the contributions of co-curricular activities have been stated as boosting various attributes, such as teamwork, target setting, self-confidence, and creative thinking (Rasberry et al., 2011). However, the clear understanding concerning the nexus between co-curricular activities and academic performance is an important area to understand.

Mainly, the educational institutes are responsible for equipping their students with the updated knowledge and required skills which are mandatory to achieve national development. The government secondary

schools in Pakistan are functioning in the area of academics, skill development, and co-curricular activities, but much emphasis is being placed on academic activities, due to its conceptualization as a deciding factor for shaping student's future. Overall, parents, teachers, and all other stakeholders have turned the student's academic performance as the most important criteria to judge the students' achievement in school life. Consequently, less interest is being shown by students towards co-curricular activities, due to the perceptions that non-academic activities would only waste their time and they would lag behind in their academic performance. This situation raises a concern that, although the government is taking multiple initiatives to boost co-curricular activities at the school level, however, there is lack of explicit awareness regarding the potential benefits of co-curricular activities at secondary school level. This reflects that there is a need to provide empirical evidence to investigate that while academic activities enhance students' knowledge and competency, do academic activities also enhance students' academic performance or not? The key objective of this paper was to determine underlying nexus between students' participation in co-curricular activities and their academic performance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The prior literature corroborated that the students' communicative, academic, and self-reliance skills get better when they actively participate in co-curricular activities (Rasberry et al., 2011). There is a common view that the competency building begins at the school level. In this regard, Green (1998), stressed that the basic elements of competency building are mainly embedded in producing such a workforce that is highly competitive and literate to achieve good performance. In the similar vein, Russell et al. (2005), reported that extra-curricular programs in high schools could produce honesty and can stimulate fairness required to discourage unfair means. In another study, Rose (2000), indicated that the consistent academic performance of high school students across the various settings of the United States revealed that students' engagement in co-curricular activities enable them to emerge as model students and minimizes the chances of their involvement in illegal activities.

Extant research revealed that students' involvement in co-curricular activities could enhance the chances of their stay in the school and thus increase retention rates (Jayanthi et al. 2014, Hui, 1983). The significance of co-curricular activities in terms of students learning has been discussed

from multiple dimensions (Carter et al., 2016, Lau et al. 2014). In this regard, Davalos et al. (1999), reported the effects of extra-curricular activities concerning students' dropout ratio in the sample of Mexican-American youths. The reported findings support the underlying notion that participation in extra-curricular activities might offer a higher degree of sense of belongingness that might contribute towards achieving a higher degree of retention ration among students (Oliver, 1995; Zill, 1995). Whereas, George (2002), noted that students' engagement in co-curricular activities could exert a positive influence on academic achievement.

Also, a report "The Condition of Education," published by the United States' Department of Education, and National Centre for Education Statistics (1991), found that participation in extracurricular activities might influence academic progress, loyalty towards school, and social inclusion. This reflects that co-curricular activities can offer opportunities for students' development such as better academic performance, improved retention rate, development of social and competency skills, and assistance of youth development and employment (Wong & Leung, 2018). Moreover, Shulruf (2010), in their research reported an association between co-curricular activities and academic performance. Modi, Konstantopoulos, and Hedges (1998), concluded that extraordinary students appear to allocate their time in productive outdoor activities. In the similar vein, Muhoney and Cairns (1997), reported that students' involvement in co-curricular activities could be linked to reduced early dropout proportion among boys' and girls' students.

Moreover, data obtained from University Interscholastic League on Benefits of co-curricular Activities (n.d.) indicated that out of 4,800 high school students, 4368 students who participated in school activities demonstrated leadership and role model attributes to their fellow students. Pertinent to these leadership attributes, students mentioned that participation in school activities provide better chances of gaining self-discipline skills, which cannot be practically taught in a classroom setting. Young (1997), asserted that well-qualified physical education personnel needs to be hired, to enhance the quality of physical education programs in order to strengthen the notion of entire education to the child. Dworkin, Larson and Hansen (2003), in their experimental study, reported that students who participate in co-curricular activities show a higher degree of self-knowledge due to the provision of multiple opportunities of trying new things that help them in developing their self-identity.

Generally, in Pakistani school settings, parents, teachers, and other stakeholders attach high importance to academics due to its key role in shaping a student's future. Consequently, extracurricular activities are not taken seriously. Even though, the government is undertaking multiple initiatives to encourage every student's participation in co-curricular activities; nevertheless, the goal of maximum participation from students' side is yet to be accomplished. There is a general agreement that academics promote students' knowledge and competency (Cassel et al., 2000), but there is little known pertinent to the role of co-curricular activities towards students' academic performance in secondary school settings of Pakistan. This empirical study compares the competency level of both types of students who participate and who do not participate in co-curricular activities. Primarily, this study aimed at examining the underlying relationship between students' participation in co-curricular activities and their academic performance. The research framework of this study is presented below.

Figure 1. The Research Framework



Overall, this study aims to achieve the following research objectives.

1. To identify the relationship between students' participation in co-curricular activities and their academic performance in higher secondary schools of district Kamber, Shahdadkot.
2. To analyze the impact of students' participation in co-curricular activities on the students' academic performance in higher secondary schools of district Kamber, Shahdadkot.

Drawn from the above mentioned research objectives, this research study aim to address the following research questions:

- Q 1. What is the relationship between students' participation in co-curricular activities and their academic performance in higher secondary schools of district Kamber, Shahdadkot?
- Q 2. What is the impact of students' participation in co-curricular

activities on the students' academic performance in higher secondary schools of district Kamber, Shahdadtot?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Keeping in view the explanatory nature of this research, deductive approach was adopted to undertake this study. Primarily this research endeavor focused on explaining the relationship between students' participation in co-curricular activities and their academic performance. By applying quantitative research approach, survey technique was adopted pertinent to collecting data from the respondents through a self-administered questionnaire by the researchers. The questionnaire used in this study was segmented into two parts, namely section A and section B. The section A was comprised of four items, aimed to gain background information of the research participants. Section A includes questions concerning school type, experience, gender, and names of different forms of student bodies. While, the section B of the questionnaire, incorporated twenty-two items concerning competency criteria. The competency criteria include communication competency, cognitive competency, self-managing competency, and academic competency. In order to analyze the data, the competencies mentioned above were treated as independent variables, whereas, students' academic performance was regarded as the dependent variable in the study.

The population of this research endeavor is constituted of all students of higher secondary schools of Kamber, Shahdadtot district. Based on random sampling, the survey questionnaire was distributed to 500 students, randomly selected from five secondary schools of Kamber, Shahdadtot district, who were engaged in academic and co-curricular activities. Out of distributed questionnaires, 450 completed questionnaires were received back from the research participants. This study used a cross-sectional research design, as the data were gathered from the research participants only once. In order to achieve the research objectives, the data were analyzed through a correlation coefficient and regression analysis were conducted. Before data analysis, the reliability of the survey questionnaire was measured through Cronbach Alpha technique. The resulting Cronbach Alpha value was computed at .74 and was found acceptable (Pallant, 2010).

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The data analysis were conducted through SPSS software version 20.0.

Regarding addressing the research question, the correlation coefficient statistical test was employed to determine the direction and strength of the underlying nexus between study variables, investigated in this research.

Table 1. Correlation Coefficients between Academic Performance and Co-curricular Activities

		Academic Performance	Co-Curricular Activities
Pearson Correlation	Academic performance	1.000	.290
	CCA	.290	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	Academic performance	.	.000
	CCA	.000	.

The findings presented in Table 1, reported that participation in co-curricular activities ($r = 0.290$, $p \leq 0.01$) show a positive association with students' academic performance. Moreover, the inferential statistical technique of linear regression was used. Primarily, the linear regression technique was employed to evaluate the characteristics and strength of the relationship between one independent and one dependent variable (Field, 2009). In the context of this research study, students' academic performance was treated as a dependent variable, whereas, students' participation in co-curricular activities was treated as an independent variable. The findings emerged from linear regression tests are summed up in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of Findings Drawn from Linear Regression

Predictors	R Square	F- test Statistics	
		F	Sig.
Participation in co-curricular activities	.084	31.957	.000

a. Dependent Variable = Students' academic performance

b. Predictors (Criterion) = Students' participation in co-curricular activities

The findings emerged from regression test, as reported in Table 2, indicated that students' participation in co-curricular activities could predict 8.4 percent of students' academic performance, as represented by the R square value of 0.084. This reflects that 8.4 percent of the variation in students' academic performance could be elucidated by students' participation in co-curricular activities.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings drawn from this study corroborate that co-curricular activities play a significant role in the academic performance of secondary school students and these activities appear unavoidable for attaining better academic performance that is the primary aim of education. This suggests that there is a need to acknowledge that contemporary notions of academic learning and curriculum are broader than the past. Nowadays, all activities which are offered by any institution, inside or outside the school, are part of the curriculum to enhance students' performance in multiple dimensions. This study also points out that educational institutions are well aware of the importance of co-curricular activities and are undertaking multiple initiatives to encourage students' participation in these activities.

The positive association between students' participation in co-curricular activities and their academic performance reflects that co-curricular activities can promote discipline, collective learning, and self-confidence among the school students and ultimately these attributes could positively contribute towards their academic and social life domains. This study concludes that students' participation in co-curricular activities could positively contribute towards student's academic performance and suggests that there is a need to raise awareness among students concerning the maximum participation in co-curricular activities.

Primarily, co-curricular activities should not be isolated from academic learning, and these activities need to be promoted as a critical aspect of academic performance. Although, the government is taking multiple initiatives to offer various co-curricular activities in schools, however, there is need to increase general awareness that co-curricular activities do not deviate students' attention from academic learning and students' participation in these activities does not decrease students' academic performance. The main contribution of this research is embedded in examining the nexus between students' participation in co-curricular activities and their academic performance in under researched area of rural Sindh, namely secondary schools of Kamber, Shahdadt District. While concluding this study, it is of note that the sample of this study is confined to five secondary schools of Kamber, Shahdadt District only. Therefore, a precautionary approach is needed to generalize these study findings to other settings. Keeping in view this limitation, it is suggested that future research studies should include a larger sample size across different school settings throughout the country.

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