Unleashing student potential through co-curricular activities in East Hararghe Secondary Schools, Ethiopia

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Abstract Co-curricular activities are essential for students' overall development, offering valuable life skills, personal interest exploration, and enriching educational experiences. This study aimed at exploring the effect of co-curricular activities on students' holistic development and education quality. Data was gathered from eight supervisors, ten principals, 14 vice-principals, 20 co-curricular coordinators, 109 teachers, and 259 students across ten schools through purposive and stratified random sampling techniques. A questionnaire and interviews were employed for data collection. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were applied for analysis. The results revealed that co-curricular activities in secondary schools are currently deficient in terms of quantity and quality. Issues such as disorganization, structural challenges, limited student participation, and inadequate training contribute to this problem. Consequently, these activities have limited influence on students' overall development and education quality. The study's implications extend beyond the specific Ethiopian region, highlighting the potential of co-curricular activities to unlock students' potential

Keywords: co-curricular activities, holistic development, quality education, secondary school, Ethiopia

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

Co-curricular activities are experiences that complement the formal academic curriculum within educational institutions, organized outside regular classroom hours to enhance overall student development (Jackson & Bridgstock, 2021). They encompass diverse pursuits: Clubs and Organizations (e.g., sports, arts, culture), Sports and Athletics, Arts and Cultural Activities (e.g., music, drama), Debate and Public Speaking (Brown & Davis, 2019), Volunteer and Community Service (Hooshangi, \textit{et al.}, 2022), and Academic Competitions, promoting intellectual growth (Murray, \textit{et al.}, 2020).

Co-curricular activities, as highlighted by Abera and Mekuria (2022), aim for holistic development, encompassing personal, social, intellectual, and physical growth, fostering a sense of community and engagement within educational institutions. They play an integral role in preparing well-rounded individuals for academic success and real-world scenarios, as noted by Olewnik \textit{et al.} (2023).

The current educational system places a high value on learners' holistic development and adaptability. According to Chalageri and Yarriswami (2018), co-curricular activities foster enthusiasm, strength, hopeful thinking, and teamwork, contributing to students' behavioral development. Moreover, these activities enrich students' intellectual domains and widen their overall experiences, as emphasized by Kwon \textit{et al.} (2020).

Outside of the school program, co-curricular activities allow students to express themselves and are sometimes more essential for their emotional and social wellbeing (Michael, 2012). A diverse variety of co-curricular activities are found in schools globally. Some countries have realized the importance of co-curricular activities, and this has enhanced review of their education system to ensure early identification of their students' talents (Dello-iacovo, 2009). This is an enabling condition to facilitate environment for tapping, nurturing and developing the talents from a tender age.

Most of the classical and almost all modern educationists admit that education is not just the memorization of certain facts, figures and texts but it is an all-round development of the students. As a result, emphasis on co-curricular activities alongside the formal curriculum for holistic development of children should be given (Kuhn, 2006). This is because co-curricular activities are part of the general education. So, it is logical to think that co-curricular activities are the integral part of educational systems, opportunities to explore experiences outside of the classroom and a means to augment quality education.
In Ethiopia, co-curricular activities have existed since the start of modern education. The activities were sports and games, school bands, paintings, handicrafts, film shows, meteorological observations, field-related clubs like history, geography, agriculture, art and dramatic clubs, excursions and picnics, welfare activities, debating and discussions, student council activities, boy scouts, and girls' union movement (MoE, 2021). The chief goal of the education and training policies is to cultivate citizens with an all-round education capable of playing a conscious and active role in the economic, social, and political life of the country at various levels. To achieve this goal, it is imperative that the fundamental problems of the educational system are corrected stage-by-stage (MoE, 2023).

Our educational institutions strive to achieve a quality of education confined mostly to the theoretical aspect of the curriculum and take it as a means to an end. Co-curricular activities that support and fill gaps in the normal curriculum are overlooked as policy, strategy, or program for ensuring the overall development of students and as a driver of fostering quality (MoE, 2015). This can be debated by examining the General Education Quality Improvement Package (GEQIP), Education Sector Development Program (ESDP) (I-VI) programs, Education and Training Policy (ETP) and its implementation reports, as well as the education sector reports of the country at national or international proceedings (Zerihun et al., 2012).

The materials provided highlight that co-curricular activities have been utilized primarily as tools to address specific cross-cutting issues, such as gender, civic and ethical education, and HIV/AIDS, rather than for fostering the comprehensive educational development of students. This diverges from the authentic definition and objectives of co-curricular activities. The main objective of this study was to assess the status of co-curricular activities and their effectiveness in promoting students' holistic development and enhancing the quality of education in secondary schools within the eastern Hararghe zone. While the study focused on this specific region in Ethiopia, the issue it addresses is a global concern across all levels of education. Therefore, the findings have broader implications for policymakers and education stakeholders worldwide.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Modern education faces its most significant challenge in producing well-rounded students excelling in all facets of life, as highlighted by Adebisi (2015). Achieving this goal demands substantial time and effort to revitalize the education system. However, the prevailing curriculum places excessive emphasis on academic subjects, often neglecting the cultivation of practical life skills like creative problem-solving, cooperation, communication, and leadership, as noted by Johnson (2010). This imbalanced approach has resulted in a diminishing interest in science and education overall, as evidenced by reports from the Royal Society (2008) and Kumar (2004.)

Co-curricular activities are widely recognized as vital contributors to practical learning, consequently bolstering the quality of education. Paradoxically, despite their acknowledged importance, numerous schools fail to accord co-curricular activities the attention they merit. This oversight leads to a deficiency in essential components for holistic education and overall student development, as highlighted by Siraj (2011) and Manas & Yadesa (2012).

Moriana et al. (2016) emphasizes the importance of co-curricular activities as a means of facilitating high-quality learning and overall development in students. While traditional classroom education is important, they argue that students can also gain valuable skills and knowledge through participation in co-curricular activities. Therefore, it is important for educators to pay attention to these activities to fully support their students' educational and personal growth.

In a study conducted by Temesgen (2018), titled "School Factors against Co-Curricular Participation of Students with Mobility Problems," the findings revealed several factors hindering the involvement of students with mobility issues in co-curricular activities. These factors included the presence of mobility problems themselves, teachers' misconceptions regarding the advantages of co-curricular engagement for children's personality development, and a lack of interest among students with disabilities in participating in non-academic activities.

The researchers observed that, despite the potential advantages of co-curricular involvement, there is a significant lack of research investigating the influence of these activities on students’ mental, psychological, physical, social, and emotional development within the context of secondary school education. This knowledge gap hinders a comprehensive understanding of the effects of co-curricular activities on educational quality, especially within the East Hararghe Zone in Ethiopia.

To tackle this issue and devise effective solutions, the authors propose the necessity of increased research efforts, time investment, knowledge acquisition, and expertise development. The research endeavors to offer insights into the utilization of co-curricular activities for improving students' educational journeys and personal development within the secondary school environment. In doing so, educators can enhance their ability to support students, ensuring they receive a comprehensive education that equips them for success in their future pursuits. Furthermore, the importance of extending the implications of our findings to practitioners in the field of education cannot be overstated. This audience includes teachers, supervisors, education experts, school leaders, department heads, unit leaders, and co-curricular coordinators, all of whom stand to benefit significantly from the insights provided by our research.

1.3. Research Questions
In order to guide this study, the researchers developed the following basic research questions:

1. To what extent are the various components of co-curricular activities (e.g., clubs, sports teams, community service projects) available and implemented in secondary schools in the East Hararghe Zone?
2. Is there a significant disparity between the stated goals and actual implementation of co-curricular activities in secondary schools?
3. How do students, teachers, and school leaders perceive the importance of co-curricular activities as a driver of quality education in secondary schools?

2. Review of related literature

2.1. Curriculum and Co-curricular activities

The primary aim of education is to instigate positive changes in a child's behavior and personality, shaping them into more desirable individuals. Co-curricular activities play a pivotal role in achieving this goal, serving as sources of enrichment and invigorating the school curriculum. They encompass the cultivation of hobbies, interests, and more, becoming integral components of the school program (Singh, 2017; Tyler, 2013). Ornstein and Hunkins (2009) underscore that the curriculum specifically pertains to the portion of the educational plan directly impacting students' growth. Edward et al. (2013) further categorize curriculum into four types: explicit, implicit, null, and co-curricular, recognizing the diverse facets influencing a student's educational journey.

Co-curricular activities, as defined by Chalageri and Yarrisswami (2018), are activities that supplement the formal curriculum and allow students to apply knowledge acquired in formal courses, acquire concepts of democratic life, and gain deeper understanding of complex social issues. These activities can also help students learn, integrate knowledge, and achieve the goals of democratic life (Barbieri, 2009).

According to the Education and Training policy of Ethiopia, co-curricular activities are not explicitly described as an integral part of education and are only referred to as "clubs" that can be used to achieve goals related to cross-cutting issues such as gender, HIV/AIDS, and civic and ethical education (MoE, 2023). While the policy recognizes the importance of co-curricular activities in supplementing and complementing formal education, there is a lack of clear guidelines and manuals to help schools implement these activities effectively. As a result, there may be a need for further research and expertise to develop strategies for integrating co-curricular activities into the education system in a deliberate and meaningful manner.

Overall, the curriculum is a dynamic concept that encompasses both traditional subjects and co-curricular activities that support students' all-round development. As such, it is important to consider both aspects in institutional planning and implementation.

2.2. Impact of co-curricular activities on academic achievement

Co-curricular activities, despite ongoing academic achievement debates, have gained recognition for their positive impact on students' overall development. Marsh and Kleitman (2002) revealed that participation in co-curricular activities is linked to higher grades, increased college enrollment and completion rates, and higher final degree attainment, even when considering other factors (Villalobos et al., 2016). Additionally, Fox and Sease (2019) found that co-curricular involvement enhances both academic and social development. Further studies confirm that athletes tend to achieve higher GPAs compared to non-athletes (Broh, 2002). Moreover, co-curricular activities are positively correlated with interpersonal skills, elevated aspirations, improved attention, critical thinking, and social and personal maturity (Mahoney et al., 2003; Bauer and Liang, 2003).

On the other hand, some studies have found no significant correlation between co-curricular involvement and academic performance. Chambers and Schreiber (2004) suggested that only an academic curriculum would enhance academic performance, while Black (2002) proposed that involvement in student clubs and organizations might even distract students from their regular studies. The research results have been inconclusive, and limitations such as the flawed use of cross-sectional designs and inadequate or non-existent selection control methods could be factors.

Despite these mixed findings, participation in co-curricular activities is widely believed to play a crucial role in students’ academic success and contribute to bachelor’s degree attainment (Huang and Chang, 2004; Tan and Pope, 2007). Students recognize the importance of developing their overall competence by joining co-curricular activities and collaborating with peers to gain hands-on experience (Fung et al., 2007). Recent research by Tahir and Aurangzeb (2021) also found a positive correlation between co-curricular activities and academic performance.

In summary, while the relationship between co-curricular activities and academic achievement remains a topic of debate, these activities have value in their own right for contributing to students’ overall development and preparing them for future success.

2.3. Quality Education and Co-curricular Activities
Despite a growing consensus about the importance of quality, there is much less agreement on what the concept means in practice (UNESCO, 2004). Quality in education is a complex and multidimensional concept (Laurie et al., 2016) that is relative and not easy to define and measure. Many educators agree that quality education must be related to students’ achievement as its basis (Moriana et al., 2016). This includes the nature of the educational experiences that assist the students to produce those outcomes. The concept of quality is linked to how efficiently learning takes place. This is believed to be strongly determined by the teaching and learning styles taking place at the classroom level, teachers’ subject knowledge and pedagogical skills, the availability of textbooks and other learning materials, including the time spent by pupils actually learning their lessons (Zerihun et al., 2012).

Public debates on the quality of education frequently include concerns about a student’s level of achievement, the relevance of learning to the world of employment or the social, cultural, and political worlds occupied by the student (Laurie et al., 2016). Researchers suggest that the concept of educational quality is complex and multidimensional (Laurie et al., 2016) and should take into account the determinant factors that influence student outcomes (Dello-Iacovo, 2009). According to them, the general concept of quality education is made up of three interrelated dimensions: the quality of human and material resources available for teaching, the quality of teaching practices, and the quality of results (Dello-Iacovo, 2009).

The World Declaration on Education for All noted that the poor quality of education needed to be improved and recommended that education be made both universally available and more relevant (UNESCO, 2000). The definition of good quality education goes beyond the intrinsic and instrumental goals of education (World Bank, 2005). It seeks to identify unambiguously the important attributes or qualities of education that can better ensure that those goals are actually met (UNESCO, 2004). Two key elements characterize such approaches: cognitive development and education’s role in encouraging learners’ creative and emotional development, in supporting the objectives of peace, citizenship, and security, in promoting equality, and in passing global and local cultural values down to future generations (Xiao and Luo, 2009). Co-curricular activities play a crucial role in the all-round development of children, enhancing and enriching the curriculum during normal school days (Tan and Pope, 2007). The quality of co-curricular activities has its own impact on the quality of education (Barbieri, 2009).

3. Research design and methodology

The researchers employed a comprehensive mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative data analysis methodologies. To ensure a representative sample, a variety of sampling techniques were utilized.

For the selection of participants, purposive sampling was employed to choose eight supervisors, ten principals, and 14 vice-principals, ensuring a diverse range of perspectives within the leadership strata. Additionally, a combination of simple random sampling, stratified random sampling, and systematic random sampling techniques was utilized to select participants from different roles within the schools. Accordingly, from a pool of 46 government secondary schools, a stratified random sampling technique was utilized to select ten schools based on their geographical distribution. Within these schools, 259 students out of 459, 109 teachers out of 328, and 20 co-curricular coordinators out of 70 were chosen using systematic random sampling, ensuring a fair representation across these groups.

By employing a mix of purposive and random sampling techniques, the study aimed to capture a diverse range of perspectives from various stakeholders within the educational system. The researchers used a questionnaire (with both closed-ended and open-ended items), interviews, and document analysis to collect data from the selected participants. They pre-tested the questionnaire on a small sample of participants and established its reliability using Chrombach alpha. They also checked the validity of the questionnaire by consulting with experts and modifying unclear items.

To supplement the data collection, the researchers conducted interviews with supervisors and school principals to gain insights into co-curricular activities, including their advantages and challenges. Additionally, they conducted an examination of various documents, including school club records, non-club activities, and plans, meeting schedules, reports, and files. This document analysis served to validate the data collected through questionnaires and interviews.

The collected data underwent quantitative analysis employing statistical techniques such as mean, standard deviation, one-way ANOVA, and Chi-Square tests. Qualitative data were meticulously handled through recording, transcription, and coding processes, followed by a discussion of the interpreted results. The researchers employed a rigorous and comprehensive approach to both data collection and analysis, ensuring the reliability and validity of their findings.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. The Status of Implementation of Co-curricular Activities (Availability of Co-curricular Activities in the Schools)

In secondary schools, co-curricular activities can be structured in diverse ways. These activities can be categorized into five groups: academic, athletic, artistic, recreational, and social service. Additionally, they can be further categorized into club and non-club activities. Both types of activities are believed to play a vital role in the holistic development of students and contribute to enhancing the quality of education.
4.1.1. Clubs available in the schools

Table 1, which was based on data collected from a sample of secondary schools, provides important information on the types of clubs available and the extent to which co-curricular activities were implemented as planned. According to the study, it was expected that each school should have at least fourteen functioning clubs. However, the reality was different as most of the sample secondary schools did not have this number of clubs. Among the clubs that were available in most secondary schools were environmental protection, anti-HIV/AIDS, Red Cross, and sports clubs. Conversely, the clubs that were not available in most secondary schools were tourism, vocational, tax and revenue, and mini-media clubs. The presence of clubs in the secondary education system is crucial in measuring their contribution to curricular activities and quality education. As indicated in Table 1, the presence of clubs in almost 50% of the secondary schools equals only six out of the expected fourteen clubs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Types of clubs</th>
<th>Expected number of clubs in ten selected secondary schools</th>
<th>Existing clubs in ten selected secondary schools</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Environmental protection club</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Library club</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Civic and ethical education club</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Girls club</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Anti HIV/AIDS club</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Red cross club</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Sport club</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Mini media club</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Science and Technology club</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Charity club</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Tourism club</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Vocational club</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Language club</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Tax and revenue club</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 displays the results of the chi-square analysis, which reveals a notable disparity between expectations and real-world practices, ultimately leading to the rejection of the hypothesis of equal probability. The analysis consistently highlights a divergence between the intended and actual execution of co-curricular activities in secondary schools. In essence, there exists a substantial gap between the initial plans and the practical implementation in the discussed secondary schools, underscoring the disconnect between aspirations and the actual outcomes. This result is consistent with the findings obtained by Temesgen in 2018.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.N</th>
<th>Expectation (E)</th>
<th>Observation (O)</th>
<th>O-E</th>
<th>(O-E)^2</th>
<th>(O-E)^2/E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-5</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-6</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-7</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-8</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-8</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-9</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-8</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N.B: Chi-Square (\(\chi^2\)) is equal to 52, and the critical values for \(\chi^2\) with a degree of freedom of 13 at 0.05 and 0.01 levels, respectively, are 22.36 and 27.69. This means that Chi-square is significant both at 95% and 99.9% level of confidence.

4.1.2. Non-club activities in the schools

Non-club activities in co-curricular programs encompass a diverse array of extracurricular pursuits outside of formal club affiliations within schools. These activities, which range from sports teams and academic competitions to performing arts groups, community service projects, and leadership programs, provide students with opportunities for skill development,
social interaction, and personal growth. Unlike clubs, non-club activities often feature more flexible structures and participation options, allowing students to explore various interests and engage with their peers and communities in meaningful ways. These pursuits play a vital role in promoting holistic education by fostering teamwork, creativity, responsibility, and civic engagement among students.

A review of documents pertaining to co-curricular activities in secondary schools revealed that the existing non-club options were inadequate to cater to the needs of a sizable student population and to promote holistic development. While certain student organizations such as student parliament and 1-5 group networking existed, their structure and implementation varied from one school to another. Nevertheless, some school supervisors reported that these organizations had a positive influence on academic achievement, student behavior, and overall performance. Educators also perceived co-curricular participation as a means to enhance students' social networks and as a platform for student-led teaching initiatives, as documented by Iwu et al. (2018). However, further research is essential to gain a deeper understanding of the functioning of these student groups and their impact on the quality of education.

4.2. Co-curricular Activities in Promoting Holistic Development of Students

Table 3 presents the results of an ANOVA analysis and mean values for item 1, which investigates the respondents' views on the overall purpose co-curricular activities. The analysis shows that all three groups of respondents, students, teachers, and leaders, did not support the idea that academic achievement is the sole goal of education. It is widely accepted that the aim of education is not only to produce high exam scores but also to promote holistic development, behavioral change and quality education.

In terms of the role of co-curricular activities in filling the gap left by the formal curriculum to produce creative students, the grand mean value of the respondents was 4.29, which is higher than the average mean value. The ANOVA analysis also showed that there was no significant difference among respondents. These results suggest that co-curricular activities are encouraged to complement formal teaching and learning and to bridge the gap in producing creative students. According to Tan and Pope (2007), co-curricular activities are activities that promote student growth and make the regular curriculum more adaptable to the needs of learners.

The results of item 3 in Table 3 indicate that the mean values of students, teachers, and leaders were 4.91, 4.90, and 4.61, respectively, with a grand mean of 4.87, which is significantly higher than the average mean value. The one-way ANOVA analysis reveals a significant difference among the groups of respondents (p<0.05). Students and teachers rated the issue more positively, agreeing that co-curricular activities attract students to school and reduce dropout rates. Despite some variation in responses, all respondents agreed that co-curricular activities have the potential to attract students and reduce absenteeism. Broh (2002) supports this, stating that student involvement in co-curricular activities is strongly associated with improved attendance and behavior, which ultimately contributes to the quality of education.

The grand mean values of item 4, 5, and 6 in Table 3 were 4.95, 4.88, and 4.86, respectively, indicating strong agreement among respondents that co-curricular activities develop students' personalities, promote democratization, and nurture positive traits such as enthusiasm and team spirit. One-way ANOVA results revealed that there was no significant difference in mean values between the three groups of respondents for these items. Therefore, it can be concluded that co-curricular activities facilitate the development of various domains of the mind and personality, including intellectual, emotional, social, moral, and aesthetic development. Ahmad (2011) has identified numerous values of co-curricular activities, including educational, psychological, social, civic, physical, recreational, and cultural values, among others.

It is clear that co-curricular activities have positive impacts on students' academic, social, and emotional development. The findings from the study, which revealed that students involved in different clubs score better in other subjects, forecast their future occupations, and are more sociable and disciplined, support previous research that found co-curricular participation to be positively related to student academic performance (Villalobos, et al., 2016).

While the magnitude of the relationship between co-curricular participation and academic outcomes may depend on the type of co-curricular activity, the benefits of engagement and active participation in learning are widely recognized by educators and policy makers. As Mahoney (2000) found, students who participated in one or more co-curricular activities had lower rates of early dropout and criminal activity, regardless of individual characteristics. Therefore, it is important to recognize the value of co-curricular activities in enriching students' academic, social, and emotional development. Encouraging and providing opportunities for students to participate in co-curricular activities can contribute to a more holistic and well-rounded education experience.

These findings are consistent with previous research that has demonstrated the positive impact of co-curricular activities on students' academic and personal development. For example, studies have found that participation in co-curricular activities can enhance students' critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making skills (Kuh et al., 2008; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Additionally, co-curricular activities can help students to develop their social and emotional competencies, including communication, teamwork, and leadership (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Fredricks & Eccles, 2008). These skills are not only important for success in school, but also for success in the workforce and in life more broadly. Therefore, it
is important for schools to provide opportunities for students to engage in a variety of co-curricular activities that can support their academic, social, and emotional growth.

Table 3 Responses on co-curricular activities in promoting holistic development of students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.N</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Students Mean</th>
<th>Teachers Mean</th>
<th>Leaders Mean</th>
<th>Grand Mean</th>
<th>F-value</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>The overall goals of education is academic achievement</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>CCAs fill the gap of the formal curriculum to create creative students</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>4.80</td>
<td>4.77</td>
<td>4.77</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>CCAs attract students to the school and decrease dropout rate</td>
<td>4.91</td>
<td>4.90</td>
<td>4.61</td>
<td>4.87</td>
<td>8.95</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>CCAs can develop a personality of students among their peers</td>
<td>4.93</td>
<td>4.99</td>
<td>4.98</td>
<td>4.95</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>CCAs can develop democratization since it is voluntary</td>
<td>4.91</td>
<td>4.85</td>
<td>4.77</td>
<td>4.88</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>The goal of education is to develop students mentally, physically, socially and psychologically</td>
<td>4.82</td>
<td>4.90</td>
<td>4.93</td>
<td>4.86</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Students participated in different clubs, also score better in other subjects</td>
<td>4.97</td>
<td>4.91</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>4.91</td>
<td>43.76</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>CCAs initiate the students to forecast their future occupation</td>
<td>4.88</td>
<td>4.51</td>
<td>4.73</td>
<td>4.76</td>
<td>13.96</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Students involve in CCAs activities are sociable and disciplined than others</td>
<td>4.93</td>
<td>4.77</td>
<td>4.95</td>
<td>4.89</td>
<td>6.72</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>CCAs increase students all round knowledge</td>
<td>4.85</td>
<td>4.87</td>
<td>4.93</td>
<td>4.86</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>0.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>CCAs helps to develop students on real-world skills such as creative problem solving, cooperation, communication, and leadership</td>
<td>4.97</td>
<td>4.98</td>
<td>4.98</td>
<td>4.97</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>CCAs can promote the active learning process</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>4.95</td>
<td>4.97</td>
<td>4.94</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>CCAs can build positive culture of excellence in the schools</td>
<td>4.93</td>
<td>4.94</td>
<td>4.98</td>
<td>4.93</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 depicts that an overwhelming majority of respondents believe in the significance of co-curricular activities for maintaining the quality of education. Only 14.1% of students indicated that co-curricular activities are of low importance. On the other hand, all teachers and leaders recognized the importance of co-curricular activities. In response to an open-ended question, students expressed interest in participating in co-curricular activities but cited various reasons, mainly related to the lack of time and the priority given to classroom learning, as impediments to active involvement. This sentiment reflects a common misconception among students regarding the value of co-curricular activities in the classroom. In this regard, a school principal was interviewed and responded that:

“Co-curricular activities are very important for education, especially in keeping quality learning by building a positive school culture and improving the open microclimate in the school. They build a collaborative approach among students, teachers, and leaders of the school. Make students feel free to learn and develop their own self-exploration.”
In order to sustain the rapid growth trajectory of our country, it is essential that students possess a well-rounded education, including highly creative skills in addition to academic knowledge. Focusing solely on academic achievement fails to produce the skilled workforce required for future growth and transformation. Therefore, educational institutions must prioritize the development of students’ social skills, life skills, and computational skills. Despite the government’s efforts to improve the quality of education, the current conditions in most schools across Ethiopia are worrisome, with high rates of dropout and repetition, decreased interest in science and practical subjects as a whole, and an increasing discipline problem. Multiple studies (UNESCO, 2004; World Bank, 2005; Zerihun, et al., 2012; Siraj, 2011) have highlighted the poor quality of education in Ethiopia, spanning from primary to higher education. It is challenging to isolate classroom activities from the all-rounded development of students, as 80% of a student’s time is spent outside the classroom. Therefore, it is not possible to ensure quality education without including co-curricular activities.

Table 4 The extent to which co-curricular activities are important for quality education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alternatives for an item</th>
<th>Respondents category</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very low importance</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low importance</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate importance</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>35.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High importance</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>35.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very high importance</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>4.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Conclusions and implications

According to a study, the presence of clubs in secondary schools can be beneficial for students’ all-round development, providing opportunities for social and skills development, new knowledge acquisition, and exploration of personal interests. However, it’s crucial to note that not all schools have equal capacities to run clubs. The study found that only 50% of secondary schools (6 out of 14) have minimum required clubs, highlighting the importance of promoting co-curricular activities in schools. Despite the cravings for co-curricular activities, there is a significant gap between aspirations and reality, suggesting a discrepancy in implementation. To ensure equity, it’s important that club activities align with school policies and values, and that all students have equal opportunities to participate.

The study also highlights the potential benefits of co-curricular activities for students, including improved mental and physical health, as well as the development of essential skills such as public speaking, leadership, teamwork, communication, social interaction, and networking. Active participation in co-curricular activities can help students gain confidence, focus, interaction, extrovertism, and social skills that are crucial for personal and social development.

Respondents acknowledged the valuable role of co-curricular activities in fostering personal and social skills, such as communication, organization, presentation, public speaking, and analytical abilities. These activities have the potential to enhance the quality of education by inspiring students to discover and cultivate their talents, ultimately contributing to the development of entrepreneurial skills and increasing employability rates. However, a review of documents related to co-curricular activities in secondary schools highlighted deficiencies in the existing non-club options, which were insufficient to meet the needs of a significant student population and promote holistic development. While certain student organizations like the student parliament and 1-5 group networking existed, their structures and implementations varied across schools.

Students have shown interest in engaging in co-curricular activities; however, they have cited several reasons, primarily centered around time constraints and the perceived prioritization of classroom learning, as barriers to active participation. This sentiment underscores a prevalent misconception among students regarding the significance of co-curricular activities within the educational framework.

The demand for co-curricular activities remains high, yet many secondary schools struggle to organize them regularly due to the constraints of a packed semester schedule merely on academic works. To cultivate a culture of excellence, schools should integrate all co-curricular activities into their programs, aligning them with various local, national, and international events to avoid disrupting the academic calendar. Additionally, schools must establish feasible plans and implement follow-up measures to ensure the successful execution of co-curricular activities.

Co-curricular activity coordinators should play a role in raising awareness and providing training to students, while the Ministry of Education of Ethiopia should conduct further investigations and analyses to incorporate co-curricular activities as an integral component of quality education. In summary, although this study focused on the eastern region of Ethiopia, its findings carry broader implications for enhancing the state of co-curricular activities in secondary schools worldwide.

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Ethical considerations
I confirm that I have obtained all the consent required by the applicable law to publish any personal details or images of the patients, research subjects, or other individuals used. I agree to provide the Multidisciplinary Science Journal with consent or evidence that such consent has been obtained if requested.

Conflict of interest
The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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