

Investigation of the factors for students' less participation in Extracurricular Activities at 'General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level' in Sri Lanka

Dr. Sarita Verma

Assistant Professor, School of Education, Sharda University, Greater Noida, India

Ms. Amila Rupesinghe

MA Education, Sharda University, Greater Noida, India

Abstract

The education system is considered as an essential part of the superstructure in the society. It can equip individuals with the specialized knowledge and skills they will need to join the workforce. People construct their knowledge and understand the world through experience. Therefore active learning happens in a setting where students feel less intimidated than in a formal classroom. Extracurricular activities have great potential for helping a wide range of learners achieve more desirable and rewarding circumstances for themselves and their communities. Although the Sri Lankan education system has delivered significant results such as high education standards parallel to developed countries, it still requires ongoing improvement in informal education spaces to maintain the quality of education in an extremely dynamic socio-economic background.

Article Received: 18 October 2020, Revised: 3 November 2020, Accepted: 24 December 2020

Introduction

Every school in Sri Lanka offers some extracurricular activities, such as music, academic clubs, and sports. These activities offer students opportunities to shape their personalities through teamwork, responsibility, leadership, physical and mental strength and endurance, and a sense of culture and community. Children in Sri Lanka start school at the age of 5 and are required to stay until the age of 16. Students sit for the General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level (G.C.E. O/L) examination at the end of 11 years of formal education and General Certificate of Education Advanced Level (G.C.E. A/L) examination at the end of 13 years of school education. The G.C.E. O/L examination conducted by the Department of Examination at the end of the final two years of senior secondary school (Grade 10 & 11 - usually ages 15–16) or as external (non-school) candidates. This work explored the reasons for less participation in extracurricular activities of students at the G.C.E. ordinary level. Extracurricular activities

are vital to the overall development of young people, improving their physical, social, and emotional health while teaching them responsibility, discipline, and teamwork. It promotes unity and understanding among students. Participants in such programs are also shown to have improved academic performance on many occasions. Extracurricular activities can also provide healthy alternatives to deviant behavior, such as drug abuse, violence, and crime. Therefore, parents and teachers should take an active interest in encouraging children to participate in extracurricular activities.

It is worth engaging in a study to ascertain the causes behind the decline in the enrolment in extracurricular activities of children at the G.C.E. Ordinary Level. This study focuses on the reasons that account for such decline and proposes ways to overcome the problem.

Explanation of key words

1. Extracurricular Activities

Extracurricular activities are the activities that students participate in, that do not fall into the realm of the regular curriculum of schools. They are found in all levels of our schools. There are many forms of extracurricular activities such as sports, clubs, governance, student newspapers, music, art, dancing, drama, cadet, and scouting. Extracurricular activities are voluntary. Thus, if students do not want to participate in extracurricular activities, they can avoid it. Extracurricular activities change students behaviour, offer better grades, promote them to complete schooling, direct them to become successful adults, and socializethem.

2. G.C.E. O/L examination (Examination of General Certificates in Education for Ordinary Level)

This examination is conducted by the Department of Examination of the Ministry of Education for General Certificate of Education (G.C.E.) qualification in Sri Lanka. This examination is similar to the Cambridge University Ordinary Level qualification. An O-level is a qualification of its right, but more often taken in the prerequisite for the more in-depth and academically rigorous Advanced Level exams. The students usually take it at the end of the final two years of senior secondary school i.e., in grades 10 & 11 of age 15–16. They can take the exams in a preferable medium out of Sinhala, Tamil, and English.

Introduction to the problem

School education in Sri Lanka is compulsory till the age of 16, when students may disengage in favor of an apprenticeship or job. The first five years are spent in primary school. Elementary school students across the island follow a national curriculum that consists of six subjects; first national language, the second national language, English, Mathematics, Religion, and Environment Science. These subjects are taught to children with different activities and plays. Desk work increases each year gradually from grades 1-5, while non-academic activities decrease. At the end of this, there is an optional scholarship examination that may permit a superior school (Gamlaath, S. 2013).

Four years of the middle school follow to complete the compulsory education phase. The academic subjects in the curriculum are pre-determined with little or no choice allowed. In the junior secondary level of schooling between grades 6 and 9, students undergo coursework in the first language, English, a second national language, mathematics, religion, history, science and technology, health and physical education, practical and technical skills, social studies, life competencies and aesthetic studies (dancing, music or drawing as per student's choice). Progression is based on exams at the end of each school year.

The senior secondary level is between grades 10 and 11. According to the Ministry of Education, the curriculum consists of six core subjects and three optional subjects. First language, second language, math, science, history, and religion are compulsory subjects. Optional subjects are civics, art, dancing, drama, oriental music, western music, literature, commerce, agriculture, information communication technology(I.C.T.), media, etc. (Little, A. W. 2011).

Grade 11 culminates in the award of the General Certificate of Education, Ordinary level (G.C.E. O-Level). Students who pass their exams in their first language, mathematics, and three other subjects at higher or the same level of credit can proceed to the G.C.E., Advanced level stage. The percentage of students who pass the O/L examination and move on to A/L is about sixty (MoE, 2013). The rest of the students are directed to vocational education or into the labor market. But after 2018 under the 'Program for Guaranteed Thirteen Years of Education to provide Education for All' allow all children to enroll to vocational stream after the G.C.E. O/L including those children who will not achieve higher academic performance at G.C.E. O/L (MoE, 2018).

Students at G.C.E. A-Level study for two years, and the examination selects for entry into tertiary education. Students can choose to study in science, commerce, arts, or technology streams, and elect three similar subjects. The final A-Level examinations cover these stream-related subjects, an English language exam, and a general paper (Liyanage, K.I.M. 2014)

We must well academically; thus, knowledge is one's greatest possession. However, that does not mean the extra-curriculars take a back seat. Understanding of

these advantages of extra-curricular activities bring to the children, and a trend can be observed of many parents enthusiastically introducing their children to some extracurricular activity early in their lives. However, it is also seen that the level of enthusiasm shown initially, gradually fades away, and only a handful continue steadfastly in the engage actively in extracurricular activities towards the latter stages of childhood. It is heartening to see young children who have shined brilliantly in artistic activities, sports activities, etc. falling by the wayside later on. This trend is observed mainly in children who study for G.C.E. O/L examination in Sri Lankan schools.

Unfortunately, this is a stage where participation in extracurricular activities can tremendously benefit a child's holistic development. Extracurricular activities play a vital role in the overall development of one's personality. Its importance in holistic development, i.e., physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual development of a child, cannot be overstated. It balances one's thinking and fashions one's attitudes. The importance of extracurricular activities in grooming a person's personality is such that it is hard to think of any successful personality in any part of the world who does not have to his credit, high accomplishment in extracurricular activities.

As far as the psychological aspect is concerned, children in this stage pass through a very impressionable stage in their lives. Things that they experience firmly take root in their minds and unconsciously form many of their lifelong habits and attitudes. What one has to be wary of is that this can happen either way, good or bad. While good experiences and exposures will help in the formation of good attitudes and habits, bad ones will similarly contribute to the wrong results.

It is in the above set that one should view the matter. Considering the matter in this context, I have thought it appropriate to engage in a study to ascertain the causes behind the decline in children's extracurricular activities in the G. C. E. O/L stage in Sri Lankan schools.

Objectives of the study

The research objectives of the researcher are as follows;

1. Finding out what extracurricular activities are available in school for G.C.E. O/L students.
2. Investigating the participation in extracurricular activities of G.C.E. O/L students.
3. Finding out the reasons for less participation in extracurricular activities of G.C.E. O/L students.

The Rationale of the Study

Extracurricular activities reduce the behavior problems of children. They learn to show discipline and routines specially through drills, sports practices, dancing, scouting, and cadetting. They have a responsibility to perform those tasks correctly, whether it is basketball or football plays, dance routines, cadets, or scouting. When students perform these things correctly, they are rewarded for their excellent behavior, and they take pride in their accomplishments. It shapes their personality to be self-respected, self-esteemed, and self-confidence. As the education world states, participation in school activities, especially athletics, leads to higher self-esteem and enhances status among peers (Brown, M.D., 2000). Children usually show behavioral changes during adolescence, between twelve and seventeen years old (Howie et al. 2010, 120).

Children learn to make their own decisions between this age and learn to control their behavior. This age period is a crucial time for students to be in extracurricular activities because they are under supervision, guidance, and they are engaged and enriched learning experiences. It helps them to resist unsafe behaviors such as drug and alcohol use, gang involvement, and criminal activities. Higher grades and positive attitudes towards school is the other effect that extracurricular activities have on students. Self-esteem can be a predictor of academic performance. Students that do not like school will not do as well as the students that do like school because they are not motivated to succeed. If students do not like to attend school, it may be because they do not feel as the school environment is joyfully and satisfied. Participation in extracurricular activities helps students to create a positive and voluntary connection to their school. According to a study of USDE, the students who participate in extracurricular activities are three times more likely to have a grade point average of a 3.0 or higher than students who do not participate in any extracurricular activities. Students that participate in extracurricular

activities also show positive changes in their self-confidence, teacher perception, and greater confidence. Furthermore, young people learn about the importance of fundamental values such as honesty, teamwork, fair play, respect for themselves and others, adherence to rules, etc. Therefore, extracurricular activities increase students' connection to the school and raise their self-esteem and positive social natures.

Nevertheless, children in the age category under review are on the threshold of a crucial stage in their education to determine their destiny. They focus on the General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level (G. C. E. O/L) examination, which every student wants to get through with success. The existing system of education in the country has carved out the mindset in many students to believe that they should devote all their time for preparation for the exam to the exclusion of all other activities. They are not prepared to do anything except studying books. They feel that any time they would spend on extracurricular activities would be a waste of time. These were common sentiments expressed by many students interviewed by me in the course of the present exercise. They also expressed the view that it is only through education that they can achieve what they want in life, that is, a secure career, and those extracurricular activities would not help them achieve that goal. Surprisingly, it was only a handful of students that took a different view. They believed that participation in such activities improves their performance in studies and maintains a sound mental and physical balance. Therefore, improving the involvement of grade 10 and 11 students; a suitable method would be interesting and useful to students; parents, teachers, and finally, to the entire society.

Methodology of the Study

The methodology followed in gathering, analyzing, and presenting the material in this work comprised online research, surveys conducted among students in the category in question through questionnaires and oral interviews, and personal observation during work in the field of education.

First of all, the researcher carefully observed the results of those students who participated in extracurricular activities in the selected two schools

in the G. C. E. O/L years of the last five years and observed that most of the students' achievement was very high when compared with those students who do not participate in. The questionnaire and the interview were conducted as the screening observations from 100 students, 40 parents and 10 teachers in the both schools.

Limitation of the study

The questionnaire was designed for students who do not participate in any extracurricular activities to ascertain the primary cause. The survey was conducted among 100 students at one national (government) school and one private school.

The questionnaire was designed for students who participate in extracurricular activities and also do well in their studies to ascertain how they manage to cope with both successfully at the same time. A total of 50 students from each school, as referred to above, was selected for this purpose.

The questionnaire was made to gather further details on some of the reasons given by students explaining their inability to participate in extracurricular activities in the first questionnaire referred to above. Several students were further interviewed orally for this purpose.

Based on these findings arrived at using the above methods, I ascertained some of the major causes and reasons that account for the lesser level of participation in extracurricular activities of children in the age category under review.

Objective of the study in detail

Objectives of the study are the following;

- 1. To find out what are the extracurricular activities in the school for GCE O/L students.**

The first objective was allocated for identification of the extracurricular activities for GCE O/L students in the two schools. The primary purpose of this research objective was to identify what are the extracurricular activities in two schools and how many students have

selected an activity among hundred students in grades 10 and 11 and their attitude about the extracurricular activities.

The researcher prepared the questionnaire to investigate what are the extracurricular activities in school and the attitude of the teachers toward them.

2. To investigate the participation in extracurricular activities of G.C.E. Ordinary Level students.

The researcher has made a questionnaire to identify the students who have or haven't selected any activity and ascertained what their attitudes about activities were. Structured questions and open-ended questions were being made to answer as a questionnaire from the selected students in Grades 10, 11, in two schools.

From the first interview, the researcher explored the likes and dislikes of a hundred students in grades 10 and 11.

3. Find out reasons for less participation in extracurricular activities by G.C.E. Ordinary Level students.

In this objective, the researcher investigated reasons for the less participation in extracurricular activities through questionnaires and the attitudes of teachers and parents towards reasons for the less participation in. General attitudes of respondents on the questionnaire were made to investigate the attitudes of hundred students of grades 10 and 11, ten teachers, and forty parents from both the schools.

Sample used for the Study

Category	Number
Schools	02 (1 National and 1 Private)
Class Teachers	10 (05 from each school)
Parents	40 (10 from each school)
Grade 11 students	50 (25 from each school)
Grade 10 students	50 (25 from each school)
Total	150

Instruments of Data Gathering

Instruments of data gathering play a major role in an academic research. Therefore, this sub heading discusses about the instruments used in data collection.

- Questionnaires
- Interviews
- Term test marks
- Documents

Each objective has separate data collection instruments.

	Objective 1	Objective 2	Objective 3
Data collection instruments	1.Interviews 2. Questionnaire 3.Observations	1.Interviews 2.Questionnaire	1.Interviews 2.Questionnaire

Methods of Data Analysis

1. Graphs
2. Tables
3. Percentages
4. Fractions

Data was presented and analyzed by using the above methods.

Conclusion and suggestions

According to the results of the research, Extracurricular activities are found in all levels in both schools in many different forms. They are sports, clubs, debate, drama, dancing, music, scouting, girl guides, school publications, student council, and other social events. Comparing both schools, the private school emphasized extracurricular activities more than the national school and the availability of activities higher in the private school. Active participation in extracurricular activities in two schools can explain as follows.

- Only 40 % of students studying in grade 10 of the national school have actively participated in extracurricular activities;
- 60% of the students studying in grade 10 of the national school were not interested in any extracurricular activities;
- Only 20% of students studying in grade 11 of the national school have actively participated in extracurricular activities;
- 80% of the students studying in grade 11 of the national school were not interested in any extracurricular activities;
- Only 65% of students studying in grade 10 of the private school actively participated in extracurricular activities;
- 35% of the students studying in grade 10 of the private school were not interested in any extracurricular activities;
- Only 40% of students studying in grade 11 of the private school have actively participated in extracurricular activities;
- 60% of the students studying in grade 11 of the private school were not interested in any extracurricular activities;

The above results show that a significant number of students studying in G.C.E. O/L grades in the national school and the private school questioned are not interested in engaging actively in any extracurricular activity. The predominant reasons for this trend can be summarized as follows;

- Competition for the G.C.E. Ordinary Level Examination
- Attending private tuition classes in the evening
- Busy schedules of parents
- Lack of finance and other resources
- Attitudes of students and their parents.

In this research, I tried to prove that formal and curricular based education is not the single solution path for life, in a Sri Lankan perspective. Extracurricular activities can become even more beneficial in the career path, self-development, and success. Although informal education is a good and useful thing, formal still have to be the main component of the educational system in Sri Lanka. Critics of the education system in Sri Lanka, including parents and students, state that it is too competitive and rigid, unlike education systems in other societies in developed countries.

Schools and other institutions still have to stay in the central place with all these rules and strict requirements. Nevertheless, it has to be added more informal extracurricular activities into formal education. Extracurricular activities provide students with a new outlook on learning and make them more attentive.

While education imparts knowledge in a vast area of topics as chosen by an individual, extracurricular activities, among other things, help in the development of physical and mental endurance, develops self-confidence, and improves concentration factors, which are essential for the overall development of a child's personality. Extracurricular activities are particularly important and beneficial to children in the age category of 15-16 years who, by such time, would be studying for the G.C.E. Ordinary Level Examination in the grade 10 and 11 as that is the time they pass through a critical stage of physical and mental development in their lives. Participation in sports and extracurricular activities at this stage is, therefore, essential. Unfortunately, as illustrated above, there is a

substantial drop in the participation in such activities of children of that age category, which is an alarming trend. Although the reasons for this situation are numerous, its ill effects on children's overall development are the same.

The factors that contribute to this problem were analysed above together with proposals to overcome them. What is essential, however, in implementing those proposals is a sound appreciation of the importance of the issue and the earnestness in which those concerned in finding the solutions would set out in their task.

It was demonstrated above that it is very much within every child's ability to manage both education and extracurricular activities together successfully. The advantages brought about by the well-groomed personalities built up by such children as compared with others were also highlighted. It would be unfortunate and unfair; therefore, to stand by and watch other children losing a fantastic opportunity of similarly grooming their lives as well. It only happens through sheer ignorance. It is the authorities' responsibility, regardless of the authorities concerned, all institutions concerned in the education of such children, to step in and take adequate measures to prevent such unfortunate destiny befall the youth of this country.

We should take the initiation to change this situation individually as well as groups and hope that this goal will soon be achieved.

References

- Brown, M. D. (2000). Science or soccer? -- how important are extracurricular activities? Retrieved February 13, 2011, from Education World website: <http://www.educationworld.com/curr/.shtml>
- Casinger, J. (2011). College extracurricular activities: the history of activities [Article Directory].
- Cosden, M., Morrison, G., Gutierrez, L., & Brown, M. (2004). The effects of homework programs and after-school activities on school success. *Theory into Practice*, v43, n3(0040- 5841), 220-226.
- D'Souza, J. & Moore, T.D. (2017). Education in Sri Lanka. *World Education News and Reviews*. World Education Services. Retrieved March 4, 2019 from: <https://wenr.wes.org/2017/08/education-in-sri-lanka>
- Finn, J.D. (1993). *School engagement and students at risk*. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.
- Gamlath, S. (2013) "'Freeing' free education in Sri Lanka", *Asian Education and Development Studies*, Volume 2(1):34-52
- Girod, M., Martineau, J., & Zhao, Y. (2005). After school computer clubhouses and at risk teens. *American Secondary Education*, v32 n3, 63-76. Retrieved from
- Holloway, J. H. (2002). Extracurricular activities and student motivation. Retrieved February 13, 2011, from ASCD website: <http://www.ascd.org/leadership/ExtracurricularActivities-and-Student-Motivation.aspx>
- Howie, L. D., Lukacs, S. L., Pastor, P. N., Reuben, C. A., & Mendola, P. (2010). Participation in activities outside of school hours in relation to problem behavior and social skills in middle childhood. *School Health*, v80n3, p119-125. doi:10.1111/1746- 1561.2009.00475.
- Karweit, Nancy and Hansell, Steve. (1983). "School Organization and Friendship Selection," in *Friends in School*, ed. Joyce Epstein and Nancy Karweit, New York: Academic Press.
- Kleese, Edward J. and D'Onofrio, Jan A. (1994). *Student Activities for Students At Risk*. Reston, VA: National Association of Secondary School Principals.
- Lamborn, S.D., Brown, B.B., Mounts, N.S., & Steinberg, L. (1992). Putting School in perspective: The influence of family, peers, extracurricular participation, and part-time work on academic engagement. Chapter 6 in *Student engagement and achievement in American secondary schools*.
- Little, A. W. (2011) Education policy reform in Sri Lanka: the double-edged sword of political will, *Journal of Education Policy*, Volume 26(4): 499-512

Liyanage, K. I.M. (2014) Education system of Sri Lanka: Strengths and weaknesses. Retrieved March4, 2019 from:http://www.ide.go.jp/library/Japanese/Publish/Download/Report/2013/pdf/C02_ch7.pdf

Lunnenburg, F. C. (2010). Extracurricular Activities. Schooling, v1,n1, p1-4.

Miller Sadker, D., & Zittleman, K. (2010). The extra curriculum. In Teachers, schools, and society (9th ed., pp. 189-190).

Ministry of Education. (2017). School Censes Report 2017. Ministry of Education, Battaramulla, Sri Lanka.

Ministry of Education.(2018). Annual Performance Report 2017.Policy Planning and Performance Review Division, Ministry of Education, Battaramulla, Sri Lanka.