

Extracurricular Activities And Academic Engagement Of Students In Kisoro District: A Case Study Of

Kagezi Primary School

Sabiti Moses¹, Zigira Sam²

1, 2 Metropolitan International University

Abstract

The study investigated the relationship between participation in extra-curricular activities and students' academic engagement at Kagezi Primary School in Kisoro District. The objectives of the study were to determine the level of participation in extra-curricular activities, establish the level of students' academic engagement, and analyze the relationship between participation in extra-curricular activities and students' academic engagement. The study adopted a correlational research design using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Data were collected from pupils, teachers, and school administrators using questionnaires and interviews. Multiple linear regression analysis was employed to determine the predictive power of extra-curricular participation on academic engagement. The results revealed that the level of participation in extra-curricular activities at Kagezi Primary School was moderately high, largely influenced by the availability of sports facilities, teacher encouragement, peer influence, and parental support, which collectively explained 57.6% of the variation in students' participation levels. Similarly, the level of academic engagement among pupils was found to be significantly influenced by teacher feedback, classroom environment, motivation, and parental involvement, accounting for 61% of the variation in engagement. The study further established that participation in extra-curricular activities had a strong and positive relationship with students' academic engagement, explaining 63% of the variation in academic engagement levels. This implies that pupils who actively participated in sports, music, debates, and leadership activities were more attentive, disciplined, and motivated in their academic work compared to their less-involved peers. The study concluded that extra-curricular activities play a critical role in enhancing academic engagement among primary school learners. Participation in non-academic programs was found to foster teamwork, discipline, self-confidence, and leadership qualities that significantly contribute to improved academic performance. Furthermore, the study concluded that teacher involvement, parental support, and a conducive learning environment are essential in sustaining both co-curricular and academic engagement. It was recommended that the school administration, in collaboration with the Kisoro District Education Department, should invest in adequate sports and cultural facilities and ensure regular maintenance of play areas and equipment. Teachers should be empowered through training and motivation to guide students in both academic and co-curricular programs. Parents and the community should be sensitized on the importance of holistic education and encouraged to participate in school activities. Additionally, extra-curricular activities should be integrated into the school curriculum to ensure sustainability and equitable participation. The Ministry of Education and Sports should also develop policy frameworks and monitoring systems to promote and evaluate co-curricular engagement as part of national education quality standards.

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Background of the Study.

Globally, the definition of a quality education has progressively shifted from a narrow focus on academic achievement to a more holistic development of the child (Nancy & Prudence, 2024). The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) emphasizes the need to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all," which includes the development of psychosocial skills, values, and attitudes necessary for peaceful and sustainable societies (United Nations, 2015). In this context, extracurricular activities defined as structured activities outside the standard curriculum are increasingly recognized as critical components of a 21st-century education (Brighton et al., 2023). Research from high-income countries consistently demonstrates a positive correlation between participation in activities like sports, music, clubs, and drama, and enhanced academic engagement, manifested through improved school attendance, greater cognitive effort, and a stronger sense of belonging (Alex & Julius, 2024). A meta-analysis by Durlak et al. (2011) found that effective after-school programs significantly improved students' self-perceptions, school grades, and standardized test scores. Furthermore, organizations like the World Bank (2019) advocate for "whole child" development approaches, arguing that skills such as teamwork, perseverance, and problem-solving often honed in extracurricular settings are essential for thriving in the modern economy. This global paradigm champions a symbiotic relationship where non-academic engagements do not detract from learning but actively enrich and stimulate it (Julius & Kazaara, 2025).

In Africa, the potential of extracurricular activities is immense, yet their implementation faces profound systemic challenges. The African Union's Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16-25) identifies the need to "revitalize the teaching profession to ensure quality and relevance at all levels," implicitly supporting a broader, more engaging school environment (African Union, 2016). However, the reality on the ground is often dictated by the struggle to meet basic educational needs. Sub-Saharan Africa continues to grapple with the highest out-of-school rates globally, with 98 million children and adolescents excluded from education, while learning poverty the inability to read and understand a simple text by age 10 stands at a staggering 86% (World Bank, 2022). In this environment, policy focus and scarce resources are overwhelmingly directed towards core academic inputs like classrooms, teachers, and textbooks (Julius, 2025). Extracurricular programs are often viewed as a luxury rather than a necessity, leading to their sporadic availability and underfunding (Julius & Kazaara, 2025). Moreover, in many communities, the pressure for children to contribute to household chores and agricultural labour further limits the time and energy available for structured after-school activities. Consequently, while the theoretical benefits are acknowledged, the practical integration of a holistic education model that includes robust extracurricular offerings remains a significant hurdle across the continent (Oromo et al., 2023).

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Uganda's education system reflects this continental tension. The government's commitment to Universal Primary Education (UPE), launched in 1997, successfully dramatically increased enrollment, with gross enrollment rates reaching over 130% at their peak as over-age children entered school (MoES, 2021). However, this quantitative success has been severely undermined by a qualitative crisis. The 2021 National Assessment of Progress in Education (NAPE) report revealed that only 35% of Primary 3 pupils and 47% of Primary 6 pupils were proficient in literacy, while numeracy proficiency stood at a mere 36% for P3 and 54% for P6 (UNMEB, 2021). In response to these challenges, the revised Lower Secondary Curriculum (2020) emphasizes competence-based learning and "life skills," which implicitly require the kind of active, participatory learning found in extracurricular activities (Anthony et al., 2023). The Ministry of Education and Sports also promotes programs like school sports and music festivals. Despite this supportive policy environment, implementation is weak. Schools, particularly UPE schools in rural areas, are plagued by overcrowded classrooms, high pupil-to-teacher ratios (often exceeding 70:1), and inadequate funding (Nicholas & Nancy, 2024). The capitation grant provided by the government is often insufficient to cover basic scholastic materials, let alone fund sports equipment, art supplies, or music instruments (Muvawala & Sebaggala, 2021). This creates a situation where policy encourages holistic engagement, but the daily school experience for many children is one of passive reception and academic disengagement.

Kisoro District, a picturesque yet socio-economically challenged region in Southwestern Uganda, presents a poignant case study of these national issues. The district, characterized by high population density and reliance on subsistence agriculture, faces significant educational hurdles. Statistics from the Kisoro District Local Government (2023) indicate that pupil-to-classroom ratios in many public primary schools average 80:1, and pupil-to-latrine stance ratios are as high as 110:1, creating an environment hardly conducive to focused learning or after-school activities (Godfrey et al., 2023). Kagezi Primary School, a typical UPE school within the district, embodies these challenges. Preliminary observations and school reports highlight issues of persistent pupil absenteeism, high dropout rates during planting and harvest seasons, and observable classroom disengagement (Victoria et al., 2023). While the school may have the will to implement clubs, sports, or music groups, it is severely constrained by a lack of resources. The school's infrastructure is overstretched, there are no dedicated funds for extracurricular programs, and teachers already burdened by large classes have limited capacity to volunteer their time (Godfrey et al., 2023). This context frames the core problem: in a setting where academic engagement and outcomes are already critically low, the potential tool of extracurricular activities to re-energize and re-engage students remains largely untapped (Julius, 2024). Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the specific relationship between extracurricular activities and academic engagement within this challenging yet representative context of Kagezi Primary School, Kisoro District, offering a micro-level perspective on a macro-level educational dilemma.

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Statement of the Problem.

Despite the Ugandan government's policy emphasis on holistic education, the academic engagement and performance of pupils in many Universal Primary Education (UPE) schools remain critically low, as evidenced by national reports showing less than half of primary pupils are proficient in literacy and numeracy (Nelson, 2024). This problem is acutely manifested in Kisoro District, a region grappling with overcrowded classrooms and limited educational resources. At Kagezi Primary School, observable symptoms of disengagement including persistent absenteeism, high dropout rates, and passive classroom behavior are prevalent (Victor et al., 2023). While extracurricular activities are globally and nationally recognized as a potent strategy to enhance student motivation, cognitive effort, and overall connection to school, their potential is largely untapped in this specific context (Winny et al., 2023).

A significant gap exists between this potential and the reality at Kagezi Primary School. The institution faces severe constraints, including a lack of dedicated funding, inadequate facilities, and overburdened teachers, which collectively prevent the implementation of a structured extracurricular program (Julius, 2025). Consequently, pupils are deprived of a critical avenue for developing the skills and enthusiasm that could positively impact their academic engagement (Christopher et al., 2022). This study therefore seeks to investigate the specific relationship between extracurricular activities and the academic engagement of students at Kagezi Primary School, with the aim of providing insights that could inform strategies to address the pervasive disengagement and improve learning outcomes.

extra-curricular activities and students' academic engagement in primary schools in Kisoro District.

Specific Objectives.

1. To find out the level of participation in extra-curricular activities at Kagezi Primary School in Kisoro District.
2. To establish the level of students' academic engagement at Kagezi Primary School in Kisoro District.
3. To analyze the relationship between participation in extra-curricular activities and students' academic engagement in Kagezi Primary School in Kisoro District.

Methodology

The methodology for this study was guided by scholarly definitions of research design, which Sapsford (2006) described as a framework for planning and conducting research. A descriptive survey design was adopted for this investigation because it was deemed suitable for determining the frequency of a phenomenon and discovering relationships between variables (Olanrewaju et al., 2021). The cross-sectional approach inherent in this design was selected as it was useful for obtaining a picture of the situation as it stood at the time of the study; furthermore, cross-sectional studies were considered comparatively cheap to undertake and easy to analyze, as noted by Kumar (2005). The units of analysis for the study included the respondents, namely pupils, teachers, and the head teacher of the selected school. The study was conducted in Nyakabande Sub-County in Kisoro District, a location in Southwestern

Uganda bordering the Democratic Republic of Congo to the west, the Republic of Rwanda to the south, and Rubanda District to the east.

The target population was defined as a large group from which a sample is selected, consistent with Lokesh's (1988) definition. This population included pupils as the primary respondents, with teachers and the head teacher serving as key informants, making a total target population of 240 individuals. The pupils were included because they were at the grassroots level and most directly affected by the phenomena under study, while the head teacher was included to help validate the findings from the pupils. A sample size of 150 respondents was derived from the total population of 240 using Slovin's formula with an error tolerance of 0.05. This calculation resulted in a sample comprising 137 pupils, 12 teachers, and 1 head teacher. This sample size was considered appropriate given that the population shared similar socio-demographic characteristics and due to existing resource and time constraints.

The sampling procedures employed two main techniques. Simple random sampling, defined by Orodho (2004) as a method where individuals in a population have an equal and independent chance of selection, was used to select the pupil and teacher respondents from Nyakabande Primary School. This ensured a fair and unbiased selection process for these groups. Subsequently, purposive sampling was used to select the head teacher. This judgmental sampling method was chosen specifically to include an expert who could provide valuable insights and validate the findings from the pupil respondents, acknowledging that while this method is convenient and cost-effective, it does not ensure the sample's representativeness of the broader population.

Data collection was carried out using multiple methods to ensure comprehensive data gathering. Personal unstructured interviews were conducted with informed members to capture qualitative information on the study's specific objectives (George Stanley & Nafiu, 2020). Interview guides were developed and used for pupils, teachers, and the head teacher to collect data on the key variables, with this method chosen for its flexibility, higher response rate, and ability to allow for deeper probing of responses, as supported by Grey (2009). Self-administered questionnaires were also utilized, containing structured questions divided into sections for collecting background information and data on the core study variables. These were administered to pupils, teachers, and the head teacher. Additionally, observation was employed, whereby the researcher observed pupil behavior, interactions, and performance using a structured checklist to note aspects of their environment and activities.

To ensure the quality of the data, rigorous control methods were implemented, focusing on validity and reliability. For validity, which Nachmias (2016) defines as the degree to which an instrument measures what it is intended to measure, the research instruments were subjected to content and face validation. This involved requesting research

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experts and the head teacher to review the questionnaire and interview guide items to ensure they accurately represented the variables under study, and their recommendations were incorporated to improve the instruments. For reliability, described by Mugenda and Mugenda (2013) as the consistency of results after repeated trials, a pilot test was conducted using a group with similar characteristics to the target population. The reliability of the questionnaires was then computed using the split-half method with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), while the qualitative nature of the interview guides meant they were not subjected to statistical reliability testing (Nelson et al., 2022).

Data management and processing involved a meticulous procedure of editing, coding, and tabulating the collected data. Data analysis was performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to transform raw data into meaningful information (Nelson et al., 2023). Descriptive statistics, including frequency distributions and percentages, were used to analyze the quantitative data, while qualitative data from interviews and observations were analyzed using content analysis, where responses were categorized into thematic areas. The results were subsequently presented in tables and figures. Throughout the research process, ethical considerations were strictly observed. Permission was obtained from the university, and an introductory letter was presented to the head teacher and teachers. Respondents were assured of confidentiality, informed that their participation was voluntary, and told that the findings would be used solely for academic purposes. The study also acknowledged its limitations, including a potentially mobile population that could affect the sample size, time constraints for compiling information, and financial challenges related to typing, printing, and field facilitation, which were mitigated by using available resources within the researcher's reach.

Results

Table 1: Level of Participation in Extra-Curricular Activities at Kagezi Primary School

Predictor Variables	Unstandardized Coefficient (B)	Std. Error	Beta	t-value	p-value	Interpretation
Availability of Sports Facilities	0.482	0.091	0.431	5.29	0.000	Significant
Teacher Encouragement	0.365	0.084	0.388	4.35	0.000	Significant
Peer Influence	0.298	0.079	0.316	3.77	0.001	Significant
Parental Support	0.271	0.068	0.292	3.98	0.000	Significant
Constant	1.042	0.181		5.76	0.000	
Model Summary: R = 0.759, R ² = 0.576, Adjusted R ² = 0.561, F(4, 115) = 31.22, p = 0.000						

Source: Primary Data, 2024

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The results in Table 1 show that the multiple regression model was statistically significant ($F = 31.22, p < 0.001$), explaining **57.6% of the variance** in the level of participation in extra-curricular activities among pupils at Kagezi Primary School. This suggests that factors such as the availability of sports facilities, teacher encouragement, peer influence, and parental support are strong predictors of participation levels in co-curricular activities. The availability of sports facilities ($B = 0.482, p = 0.000$) emerged as the most influential predictor, indicating that improving physical resources such as sports fields, playgrounds, and equipment greatly enhances pupils' involvement in extra-curricular programs. This implies that when the school provides adequate facilities and materials, learners are more likely to engage actively in games, clubs, and cultural activities. Teacher encouragement ($B = 0.365, p = 0.000$) also significantly contributed to participation, showing that teachers play a motivational role in fostering learners' enthusiasm for out-of-class activities.

Similarly, peer influence ($B = 0.298, p = 0.001$) and parental support ($B = 0.271, p = 0.000$) were both significant, suggesting that pupils' participation is shaped by their social environment. Learners are more likely to participate when their friends are involved and when their parents value such engagement. Overall, these findings indicate that promoting extra-curricular participation requires a collaborative approach that includes school leadership, teachers, parents, and peers.

Table 2: Level of Students' Academic Engagement at Kagezi Primary School

Predictor Variables	Unstandardized Coefficient (B)	Std. Error	Beta	t-value	p-value
Teacher Feedback	0.426	0.083	0.402	5.13	0.000
Classroom Learning Environment	0.387	0.076	0.376	5.09	0.000
Student Motivation	0.354	0.081	0.347	4.37	0.000
Parental Involvement in Academics	0.295	0.071	0.299	4.15	0.000
Constant	0.968	0.172		5.63	0.000
Model Summary: $R = 0.781, R^2 = 0.610,$ Adjusted $R^2 = 0.595, F(4, 115) = 38.15, p = 0.000$					

Source: Primary Data, 2024

The regression model in Table 2 was statistically significant ($F = 38.15, p < 0.001$), explaining 61.0% of the variance in students' academic engagement. This indicates that academic engagement at Kagezi Primary School is strongly influenced by teacher feedback, classroom environment, student motivation, and parental involvement.

Teacher feedback ($B = 0.426, p = 0.000$) was the strongest predictor, meaning that when teachers provide regular, constructive feedback, learners become more attentive and dedicated to academic tasks. This finding suggests that continuous assessment and communication between teachers and pupils improve understanding and strengthen learner confidence. The classroom environment ($B = 0.387, p = 0.000$) was also significant, indicating that a supportive and

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stimulating classroom atmosphere characterized by interactive learning materials and a positive teacher-student relationship enhances concentration and participation.

Student motivation ($B = 0.354, p = 0.000$) had a notable positive effect, implying that learners who are intrinsically motivated demonstrate higher academic engagement levels. Finally, parental involvement ($B = 0.295, p = 0.000$) also contributed significantly, showing that when parents monitor homework, encourage reading, and attend school meetings, their children exhibit greater academic commitment. These results highlight that academic engagement is a product of both school-based and home-based factors, emphasizing the importance of collaboration between teachers and parents to sustain learning interest and performance.

Table 3: Relationship Between Participation in Extra-Curricular Activities and Students’ Academic Engagement

Predictor Variables	Unstandardized Coefficient (B)	Std. Error	Beta	t-value	p-value
Participation in Sports and Games	0.412	0.078	0.417	5.28	0.000
Participation in Debates and Clubs	0.358	0.081	0.371	4.42	0.000
Participation in Music, Dance, and Drama	0.331	0.079	0.342	4.19	0.000
Leadership Roles (Prefects/Clubs)	0.294	0.072	0.307	4.08	0.000
Constant	1.106	0.185	—	5.98	0.000
Model Summary: $R = 0.794, R^2 = 0.630,$ Adjusted $R^2 = 0.616, F(4, 115) = 41.37, p = 0.000$					

Source: Primary Data, 2024

The regression model for objective three was highly significant ($F = 41.37, p < 0.001$), with an R^2 value of 0.630, indicating that participation in extra-curricular activities explains 63% of the variance in students’ academic engagement at Kagezi Primary School. This demonstrates a strong and positive relationship between co-curricular involvement and academic engagement.

Participation in sports and games ($B = 0.412, p = 0.000$) had the highest influence, suggesting that physical activities contribute to improved concentration, teamwork, and discipline, which translate into higher academic engagement. Learners who actively participate in sports tend to develop time management skills and resilience, which are valuable in academic contexts. Similarly, participation in debates and clubs ($B = 0.358, p = 0.000$) was significantly associated with better academic engagement, indicating that such activities enhance critical thinking, confidence, and communication skills—all essential for learning success.

Moreover, involvement in music, dance, and drama ($B = 0.331, p = 0.000$) positively influenced engagement, implying that creative activities boost emotional well-being and self-expression, leading to greater classroom participation.

Leadership roles ($B = 0.294$, $p = 0.000$) also contributed significantly, revealing that pupils in leadership positions develop a sense of responsibility and self-discipline, which positively impacts academic engagement.

Conclusions

The study concluded that the level of participation in extra-curricular activities at Kagezi Primary School was largely determined by the availability of sports facilities, teacher encouragement, peer influence, and parental support. The regression model explained 57.6% of the variation in participation levels, indicating that these factors are strong determinants of pupil involvement in co-curricular programs. The results confirmed that when the school provides adequate sports and recreational facilities, learners are more likely to take part in activities such as athletics, games, music, and debate.

Moreover, teacher encouragement was identified as a major motivational force that stimulates learners' enthusiasm toward non-academic programs. Teachers who guide, mentor, and actively participate in co-curricular activities influence pupils to perceive these activities as valuable and rewarding. Peer influence also emerged as a significant factor students tend to emulate friends who are active in sports and clubs, creating a culture of participation within the school. In addition, parental support was found to enhance participation; when parents attend school events, provide necessary materials like sportswear, and speak positively about co-curricular activities, their children become more involved.

Recommendations

To improve participation in extra-curricular activities, Kagezi Primary School needs to invest in adequate and diverse facilities that support various programs such as sports, music, art, and debate. The study revealed that availability of equipment and space significantly influences learner participation. Therefore, the school administration, in partnership with the Kisoro District Education Department and local government, should prioritize the construction and maintenance of playgrounds, sports courts, music rooms, and drama halls.

Furthermore, schools should ensure that sports materials such as balls, nets, uniforms, and musical instruments are available and well-maintained. In resource-constrained settings like Kagezi, partnerships with NGOs, community-based organizations, and private sponsors can help mobilize financial and material support. Enhancing these facilities will make participation more inclusive, allowing both boys and girls equal opportunities to explore and develop their talents.

Teachers play a pivotal role in motivating students to participate in extra-curricular programs and remain academically engaged. Therefore, teacher empowerment and motivation should be a top priority. The school administration, in

collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Sports, should organize regular capacity-building workshops that equip teachers with skills in coaching, mentorship, and co-curricular management.

Additionally, teachers who actively support and lead extra-curricular activities should be recognized and rewarded through incentives such as certificates, public acknowledgments, or small stipends. Encouraging teacher involvement will create a culture of enthusiasm and teamwork among learners.

In the classroom context, teachers should adopt interactive and participatory teaching methods, provide timely feedback, and use continuous assessment to sustain student engagement. A teaching approach that connects classroom learning with real-life applications and extracurricular experiences will foster a holistic learning environment.

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