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Barriers and Facilitators to Inclusive Participation in Co-Curricular Activities: A Case Study of Undergraduate Students

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ABSTRACT

This study is dedicated to finding a way to make co-curriculars inclusive by gaining insight into what makes voluntary activities which are extremely helpful in the holistic development of personality, accessible to some students and not others. Using a questionnaire,102 undergrad students were surveyed to see whether the chosen variables: income, disability, familial caretaking and a different ethnic background are related to student participation in co-curricular activities. The data collected was analyzed and indicated that the chosen factors of income and ethnic background have a significant relationship with one's likelihood of participating in co-curricular activities. A section proposes brief solutions based on the results and previous strategies that have been employed. This chapter further discusses the results and proposes solutions based on the findings.

Keywords: Disability, Caretaking, Education, Ethnic Background, Extracurriculars, Holistic development, Inclusive, Income.

INTRODUCTION

Background and Context of the Study

As defined by Merriam-Webster (n.d.), co-curricular activities mean activities that are outside but usually complement the regular curriculum. Making cards for a festival, planting trees on Van-Mahotsav and various other usual art and craft-based activities are examples of co-curricular activities. Most people must have at least some memories of doing a task in school that wasn't a part of the syllabus, the usage of the word in this sense is a little older than those memories and was first used in 1949. Also called extra-curricular activities, extra-academic activities and cultural activities, these tasks are often voluntary and philanthropic in nature. The 19th and 20th centuries saw the rise of public education and development of standardized curricula and a higher emphasis on providing students with spaces to explore their interests which popularized the concept of clubs, community service and even student governments.

Modern times have seen major changes in education and the focus on co-curriculars has only increased. One such change is the use of co-curricular instead of extracurricular activities because these activities are no longer just supplementary or 'extra' but complementary to the academic curriculum and are integrated into the overall educational experience. This shift in terminology may indicate a growing recognition of the value of unconventional ways of learning and experiences in student life. Another defining change of the 21st century would be its focus on inclusiveness and diversity in education as well as other aspects of society. Very new and not well-documented concepts, they can be understood as simply including all types of people and ideas and considering them fairly. In other words, making everyone feel that the world is theirs as well. Now, inclusive education has been a constant discussion for educators and social workers, but it has like other things its fair share of challenges. According to UNICEF's official website, inclusive education is every child in the same classrooms and the same schools; not only children with disabilities but underprivileged and minority language-speaking children. It is known that despite continuous attempts at bridging these gaps and making education more inclusive, the education landscape has not changed to the extent it needs to. The author acknowledges that inclusive education and its various challenges are out of the scope of this paper and

only tries to understand what can be done to make more students partake in co-curricular activities and all that could be stopping them.

This research is dedicated to understanding the challenges in making co-curricular inclusive based on previous research and theories using quantitative methods and proposing potential solutions.

Objectives of the Study

The problem that this paper explores is that most co-curricular activities are participated by only a certain demographic, the reasons could be an inability to participate, lack of interest or some other unknown factor. The main objectives of this study are:

RO1: To determine the demographic that participates in co-curricular activities.

RO2: To establish a relationship with participation in co-curricular activities and the chosen variables which were income, disability, family caretaking and ethnic background.

RO3: To propose solutions based on the responses.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies have been conducted regarding the applicability of blockchain solutions in different fields such as the financial industry. Its characteristics such as openness, incapability of being changed once recorded, and sharing are desirable in financial transactions.

Generative AI, which is also known as generative models, especially GANs, has attracted a lot of interest mainly because Inclusivity in education has been a long-standing issue given the strong efforts at making education accessible to all yet many challenges have deterred a truly inclusive education from happening. The Department of School Education and Literacy of India defines Inclusive education as a teaching-learning environment which is welcoming and supports all learners regardless of learning styles, social status, abilities and disabilities.

As discussions and research on diversity and inclusion in education increase, the focus on co-curricular or supplementary curricula if one goes by contemporary

understanding of these activities has also increased. The advantages of participating in co-curricular activities are well-documented. According to Christison, (2013), ``Students who participate in extracurricular activities have greater levels of academic achievement. Extracurricular activities support student's character development." (p.17). A study at Kingston University aimed to understand participation in co-curricular activities among undergraduate students and found that those who participated in co-curricular activities had higher levels of self-efficacy and were both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated (Mulrooney,2017). According to Dimbe(2021, cited York,2018), Co-curricular activities have an impact on children's psychomotor domain. Scouting, girls' guides, debates, competitions, seminars, various clubs, athletics, and other activities all play an important part in successful learning. "Curricular and co-curricular activities are considered complementary, and they overlap one another in the daily routine of the school. They are generally given credit in some form or another, sponsored by regular staff members, and scheduled, at least in part, on school time and in school facilities. If a space still exists between them, it should be eliminated" taken from Dimbe(2021, cited Kim & Lee, 2016; Kocayigit & Ekinci, 2016; & Kose, 2013). The substitution of the previous work extra-curricular activities with the new phrase co-curricular activities is sufficient evidence that these activities are no longer considered extra. They are supplementary activities to the curriculum activities. Both educational and extracurricular activities are carried out concurrently, Dimbe (2021 cited Sindhu, 2001). In 1992, involvement in extracurricular activities was linked to positive outcomes in these success indicators like regular attendance, academic excellence, and the desire to pursue further education, etc for public high school seniors (O'Brien, Education statistics).

The National Education Policy 2020 also acknowledged the importance of co-curricular activities and stated on page no. 3 of the official documents available on the official website of the government of India, that the curriculum must include basic arts, crafts, games, humanities etc along with science and math and that there must not be any "hard separations between curricular and extracurricular activities." on page no. 5.

The author assumed the challenges that inclusive education faces must also be the challenges that inclusive participation in co-curricular activities faces and found that it was indeed the case but not entirely which will be discussed later on. "For many teachers, extracurricular participation seems to be perceived as something that takes place during leisure time and may seem insignificant when it is compared with academic engagement" (Temesgen,2018). A few other types of research have similar findings, disabled students' lack of interest, and teachers who don't wish to organize the activity are all things that make co-curricular activities exclusive, along with social inequalities of course.

The independent variables decided to test were income, disability, familial caretaking and ethnic background while the

dependent variable was participation in co-curricular activities. To find a relationship between these factors and the dependent variable, a survey of thirteen questions (excluding introductory questions) was sent out to undergraduate students of K.R. Mangalam University and a total of 102 responses were recorded.

METHODOLOGY

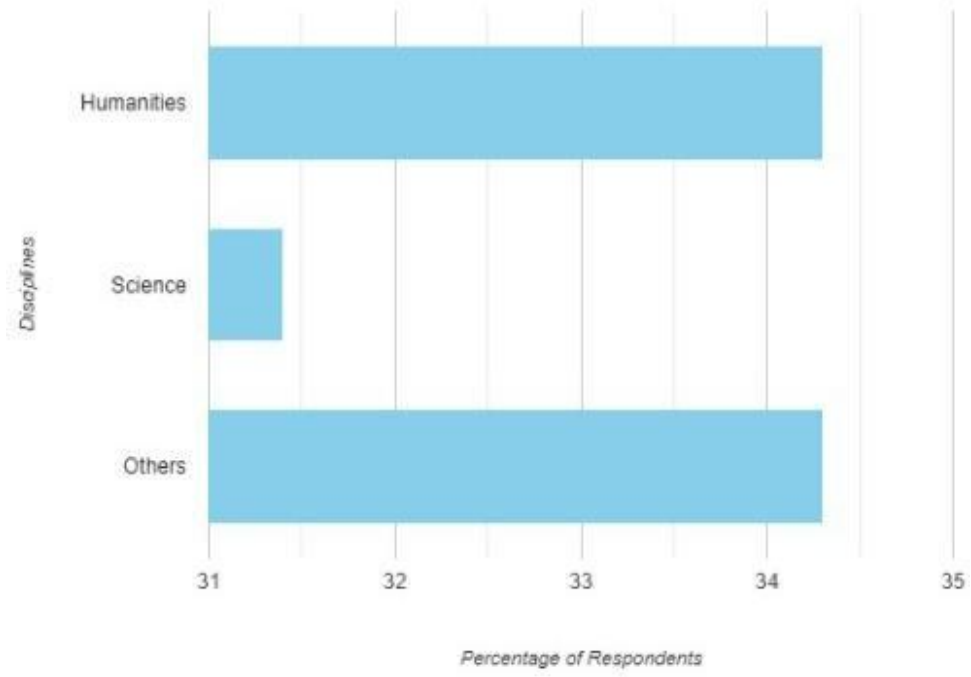
A survey was conducted and distributed among undergraduate students. The collected data was then categorized into two groups: Set A, comprising 48 responses from individuals who had not participated or had marginally participated in co-curricular activities, and Set B, which included 47 responses from individuals who regularly participated in such activities. Incomplete responses were excluded from further analysis. The mean responses to various questions for both sets were calculated and compared to determine the presence or absence of specific variables within the participative and non-participative groups. Subsequently, the data from both sets was recombined to facilitate further statistical analysis. Pearson's correlation coefficient was calculated for the variable of income, and chi-square tests were applied to examine the rest of the categorical variables.

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

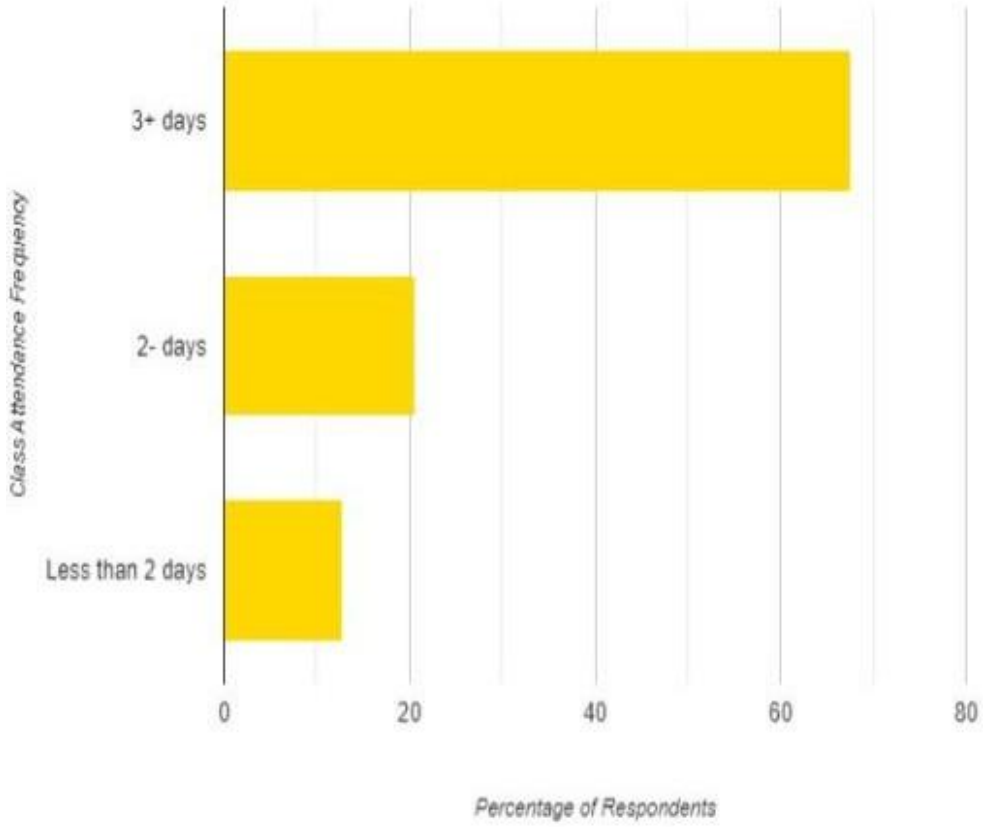
The 102 respondents primarily consisted of undergraduate students from K.R. Mangalam University, with 70% identifying as female and belonging to the 18-20 age group. The majority of respondents were from the fields of humanities (34.3%) and science (31.4%), though students from other disciplines were also represented. According to the data collected, a significant portion of these students demonstrated regular attendance, with 67.6% reporting that they attended classes on three or more days per week, while only 12.7% admitted attending classes fewer than two days per week.

Figure 1: *Distribution of Respondents by Discipline*



Source: Author’s Compilation

Figure 2: *Class Attendance Frequency of Respondents*



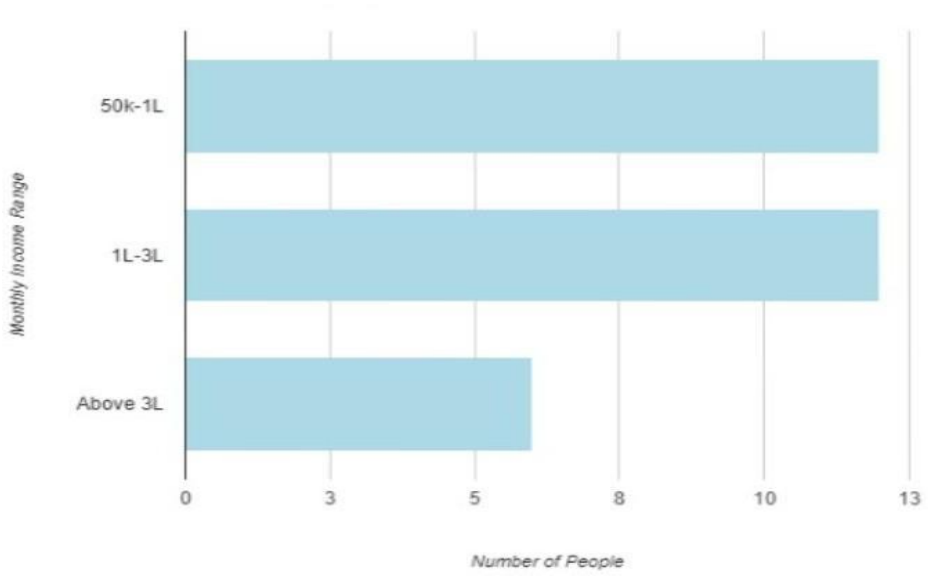
Source: Author's Compilation

By examining these underlying factors, targeted solutions can be developed to improve reliability and optimize network performance about participation patterns. The data analysis revealed that the average mean of respondents with disabilities in Set A (non-participative group) was 27.5, while Set B (participative group) recorded a lower average mean of 20.5. Furthermore, respondents who reported serving as primary caretakers for their families showed a mean value of 18.33 in Set A and 13.33 in Set B.

In terms of family income, most respondents in Set A reported a monthly family income in the range of ₹50,000 to ₹1 lakh, whereas, in Set B, respondents were evenly distributed between ₹50,000 to ₹1 lakh and ₹1 lakh to ₹3 lakh categories, with 12 responses recorded in each. Although there was no substantial difference observed in the means of respondents from different ethnic backgrounds across the two sets, it is important to note that the number of responses from individuals representing diverse states and ethnicities was exceptionally low.

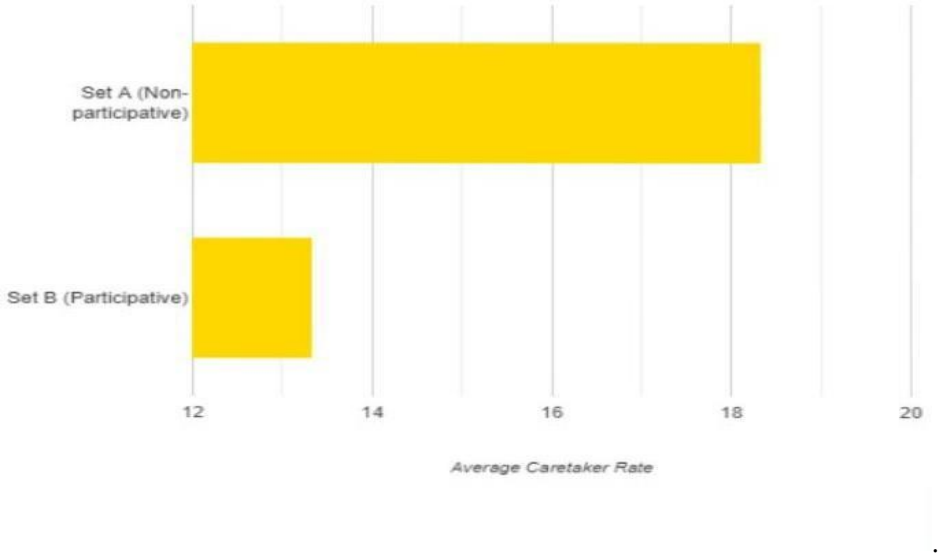
To address the first research question, the data suggests that, on average, individuals who actively participate in co-curricular activities tend to be able-bodied, 18-20-year-old female undergraduate students from the humanities or science streams. These students typically do not bear the responsibility of serving as primary family caretakers and are predominantly located within the Gurgaon or Delhi region. They also tend to come from families with medium to high monthly incomes. This demographic profile offers critical insights into the factors that influence co-curricular participation, laying the groundwork for further research and policy recommendations to enhance engagement in these activities among diverse student populations.

Figure 3: *Distribution of Monthly Income in Set B*



Source: Author's Compilation

Figure 4: *Average Caretaker Rate in Different Sets*



Source: Author's Compilation

Income Analysis

To see if these findings are valid to the data collected, the author calculated Pearson's correlation coefficient for the variable of income. The data was not treated separately for the next section of analysis. Below is the data collected in a table format, through the survey, this was not a required question and thus people who were comfortable sharing their monthly family income answered it and a total of 68 responses were recorded.

Table 1: *Income Range and Participation Data*

Income Range	*Participated*	*Did Not Participate*	*Total*
Below 50K	5	6	11
50K-1L	12	15	27
1L-3L (and above)	16	14	30
Total	*33*	*35*	*68*

Source: Author's Compilation

$$r = \frac{n(\sum xy) - (\sum x)(\sum y)}{\sqrt{[n\sum x^2 - (\sum x)^2][n\sum y^2 - (\sum y)^2]}}$$

… eq. (1)

Putting the values of table 1 in eq(1) we get the Pearson's correlation coefficient.

The r or Spearman's coefficient was approximately r = 0.892, which indicates a strong positive correlation between income range and participation status which means that there is a tendency for individuals with a higher income range to participate more compared with those who have a lower one. The result was in line with what has been found in previous research; the correlation might have been even stronger if the sample size were greater.

Disability

Disability is another factor that could be a potential barrier to student participation, looking at the lack of infrastructure and awareness for disabled people. Despite efforts at making students with disabilities participate, the level of participation was low due to a lack of resources as well as teachers who knew how to cater to the different needs of such students (Castellary-López,2023). Another study found something similar, participation in extracurriculars for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities was valued by special educators and parents but still, very few students participated. (M. Argon, 2017).

To find a relationship between disability and participation in co-curricular so to decide whether this documented gap was relevant to this data, the author performed a chi-square test. The survey included mental health issues, PCOS and other hormonal disorders along with physical impairments, injuries and intellectual disabilities.

Table 2: *Disability Status and Participation*

Disability Status	*Participated*	*Did not Participate*	*Total*
Disabled	5	10	15
Not disabled	42	38	80
Total	47	48	95

Source: Author's Compilation

The chi-square (X^2) statistic is then used to find the p-value. The p-value is equal to one minus the area under the curve corresponding to the chi-square test statistic. A p-value equal to or less than .05 means the relationship between the variables is statistically significant.

Null hypothesis: There is no relationship between disability and participation in co-curricular activities.

The chi statistic, $X^2(1, N=95)= 1.856$, p= .173 (approx).

Since the p-value is greater than the significance level (.05), the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. This result may have been due to a small sample size and inappropriate sampling which means the survey simply did not reach more disabled students who could've given the necessary data, rather than there being no relationship between the two variables.

Ethnic Background

As Hamm and Brown cite, "Although adolescents in ethnically diverse school settings still tend to befriend peers from their ethnic background (Hamm, 2000; Joyner & Kao, 2000; Quillian & Campbell, 2003; Way & Chen, 2000)".

This statement might also imply that students would participate more if they saw people like them participating in extracurricular activities. Co-curricular activities are ideal to foster better multiethnic friendships in school goers, However, the author could not find many studies that explored if ethnicity played a role in participation. Some researchers found lesser participation and 'connection' from non-white students but not in the Indian context.

There are many students from the northeastern part of India in the university who are not very familiar with Hindi- the language spoken commonly. There are also students from other states and from Haryana itself who are not as familiar with English.

These linguistic and cultural barriers could be a factor in the lack of participation.

So to find a relationship between ethnic background and participation in co-curricular, a chi-square test was performed again.

Table 3: *Participation Based on Ethnic Background*

Ethnic background	*Participated*	*Did not participate*	*Total*
Different	5	20	25
Not different	42	28	70
Total	47	48	95

Source: Author's Compilation

Null hypothesis: There is no relationship between ethnic backgrounds and participating in co-curricular activities.

$X^2(1, N=95)= 11.7908$, $p= .00595$ (approx) Which is less than the significance level (.05). This means that we can reject the null hypothesis. The relationship between one's ethnic background and participation in co-curricular activities is statistically significant.

The p-value could've been even lower had the sample size been greater and the 'different ethnic background' been defined and made clearer to the respondents. It is to be noted that a chi-square test does not establish a correlation and does not deny it either.

Caretaking for Family

Research directly exploring the specific relationship between caretaking and participation in co-curricular activities is very limited. However, it is a general concept that caretaking and co-curricular activities have a symbiotic relationship with each other, helping in the holistic development of the individual. Naturally, caretaking for a family member is time-consuming and exhaustive and hence can be the reason for reduced participation for a certain group of people. The author could not find a piece of work that directly explored this problem. To find a relationship between being a caretaker and participation, a chi-square test was performed again.

Table 4: *Participation Based on Caretaker Status*

Caretaker	*Participated*	*Did not participate*	*Total*
Yes	14	17	31
No	33	31	64
Total	47	48	95

Source: Author's Compilation

Null hypothesis: There is no relationship between familial caretaking and participation.

$X^2(1, N=95)= .3423$, $p= .55$ (approx)

The p-value is greater than the significance level and thus is insufficient to reject the null hypothesis. This result might be explained by the fact that Indian families are collectivistic and bigger and thus become a source of financial as well as emotional support thus, the students even when they must take on caregiving roles, it is not as impactful in both academic and co-curricular performance. But it is important to note that even in such a small sample size and young undergrad students, 32% of people are caretakers for their family in some way and most institutions do not have that in mind. It is then a great possibility that with a greater or older sample size, the p-value could be statistically significant.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The paper established that only two dependent variables had a relationship with participation in co-curricular activities. It was found that there was a weak negative correlation between income and participation, alongside a statistically significant relationship between different ethnic backgrounds and participation. Notably, the most frequent responses to the question, "Why do you not participate in co-curricular activities?" included, "I become anxious" and "We have classes during the activities," followed by "The activities are uninteresting." This trend is consistent with prior studies, where similar reasons were cited as significant deterrents to student participation.

Schools often face numerous challenges, including staff shortages and infrastructure limitations, which contribute to a limited range of co-curricular programs. The predominant focus on academic achievement, coupled with a tendency to replicate activities from other institutions, has hindered the variety and uniqueness of co-curricular offerings. Participation and interest in such activities have also been stifled by factors such as financial constraints, an increased focus on academic responsibilities, time pressures, and a general perception of low value associated with these activities. Other significant barriers include the

remote location of schools and the denial of opportunities for students. Furthermore, requirements for uniforms and materials have deterred students from engaging in co-curricular activities (Dimbie, 2021). Despite these challenges being frequently mentioned in various contexts, they have not been extensively studied in existing literature.

To enhance inclusivity in co-curricular activities, a multifaceted approach must be considered. Reducing the competitive nature of co-curricular programs is critical. A significant number of students (42) reported anxiety as a major barrier to participation, linked to feelings of discomfort and self-consciousness in competitive settings. Social anxiety, which often begins during early adolescence around the age of 13, combined with introversion—an established personality trait—further exacerbates these feelings. To address this, activities should be designed with a reduced emphasis on competition and social interaction. By fostering less pressure-intensive environments, schools can encourage students prone to anxiety or introversion to participate more comfortably.

The provision of a diverse range of activity options is also essential for fostering broad participation. Educational institutions should extend their co-curricular offerings beyond traditional choices to include artistic, cultural, and niche activities that appeal to varied interests, talents, and cultural backgrounds. By expanding these options, schools can encourage a wider range of students with different preferences and abilities to engage, thereby creating a more inclusive environment.

Accessibility must be a core consideration for promoting inclusivity. This includes both physical and financial aspects. Institutions need to ensure that co-curricular activities are accessible to all students, regardless of financial capacity or physical ability. Providing resources such as transportation, necessary equipment, and accommodations for students with disabilities is crucial. Additionally, addressing financial barriers through measures such as scholarships or free participation can ensure that students from all backgrounds have the opportunity to engage in co-curricular life.

Recognizing the demanding schedules that students often face, schools should consider flexible participation options to accommodate diverse commitments. Offering activities at various times, providing alternative formats such as online or hybrid options, and coordinating activities to fit around students' academic and personal schedules can help reduce the pressure of competing obligations. This flexibility promotes inclusivity by allowing more students to participate without feeling overwhelmed.

Integrating co-curricular activities into the formal curriculum could significantly elevate the importance of these programs. This integration might involve awarding academic credit for participation or weaving co-curricular experiences into coursework. Such strategies emphasize the value of these activities and ensure that all students are encouraged to participate. By treating co-curricular engagement as an essential part of the educational experience, schools can promote a culture that supports holistic development.

Raising awareness through targeted campaigns is also fundamental for fostering inclusivity. Students need to be informed about the range of co-curricular activities available to them and motivated to explore activities beyond their usual interests. Highlighting success stories of students from diverse backgrounds can inspire participation and help potential participants feel more confident in their involvement. Awareness campaigns should also provide clear information on how students can get involved, which may reduce any initial hesitation or uncertainty.

Sensitizing teachers and students to diversity is crucial for genuine inclusivity. Educators and student leaders must be aware of the cultural, religious, caste, and linguistic diversity present among students. Furthermore, understanding how various disabilities affect participation is essential. Since teachers, coaches, and student leaders often facilitate these activities, their awareness and sensitivity to the challenges faced by diverse student groups are necessary for fostering a supportive environment. Training programs aimed at equipping facilitators with the knowledge to accommodate unique needs can help create a welcoming and inclusive space for all students.

Finally, co-curricular activities should be designed to cater to different personality types and learning styles. Students with introverted personalities may prefer individual or reflective activities, while extroverted students might enjoy group settings. Similarly, activities should incorporate various learning preferences, such as experiential, visual, or auditory approaches. By considering the diverse personality traits and learning styles of students, schools can foster an environment that makes participation more appealing and comfortable for all.

In conclusion, promoting inclusivity in co-curricular activities requires a comprehensive approach. By reducing the competitive nature of activities, offering a diverse range of options, ensuring accessibility, providing flexible participation opportunities, and integrating these activities into the curriculum, educational institutions can create a more supportive and inclusive environment. Raising awareness about available activities and sensitizing faculty and students to the needs of their peers can help remove participation barriers. These concerted efforts will lead to a richer and more inclusive co-curricular experience for students.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

While the current study highlighted significant relationships between income, ethnic background, and participation in co-curricular activities, several vital factors remain underexplored and merit further investigation. Future research should build upon these findings by examining the intricate ways in which psychological and personality-related aspects—such as different personality traits and social anxiety—intersect with socioeconomic factors to influence students' participation in co-curricular activities.

One promising direction for future research is to delve into the role that personality traits and social anxiety play in student engagement in co-curricular programs. Introverted students, for example, may face heightened discomfort in group activities or competitive environments, which may discourage them from participating. Social anxiety, which is particularly common in adolescents, may further inhibit students' willingness to join co-curricular activities. Investigating how these psychological factors interact with social and economic conditions could provide a more nuanced understanding of barriers to participation. Moreover, studies assessing the effectiveness of co-curricular programs specifically designed to support students who are introverted or prone to social anxiety could offer practical insights for improving participation rates.

In addition to personality traits, the impact of caretaking responsibilities and ethnic background on co-curricular participation deserves further examination. Previous research has shown that socioeconomic factors influence participation; however, understanding how life circumstances such as caregiving duties interact with ethnic background to impact student engagement could provide deeper insights. For instance, students from minority ethnic backgrounds may face additional challenges, including cultural expectations, language barriers, and financial constraints, that could hinder their participation. Similarly, students who serve as primary caregivers for family members may struggle to find time for co-curricular involvement. Future empirical studies that investigate these intersections can offer more comprehensive insights into the multi-faceted influences on participation and help educational institutions develop better support mechanisms.

While the current study has addressed income and ethnic background, future research should focus on quantifying other specific barriers to participation. Factors such as lack of interest, tight academic schedules, and various disabilities—both visible and hidden—require further exploration. Empirical research using surveys and data analysis could yield targeted strategies for overcoming these obstacles. For instance, studies could investigate how these barriers differ across demographics and evaluate whether alternative solutions, like flexible or hybrid participation options, help alleviate time constraints experienced by students with heavy academic or personal responsibilities.

The long-term effects of co-curricular involvement on student development is another area that requires more in-depth investigation. While many studies have focused on short-term outcomes, longitudinal research could reveal how participation impacts students' academic success, personal growth, and mental health over time. Such studies could follow students to determine whether early participation in inclusive co-curricular programs contributes to sustained academic achievement, stronger social skills, and overall well-being, particularly for those facing socio-economic or psychological challenges.

Furthermore, it would be valuable for future research to examine how institutional policies and practices around co-curricular programs can be restructured to enhance inclusivity. Understanding how different program structures—whether voluntary or compulsory, competitive or non-competitive—affect diverse student groups, particularly those underrepresented in such activities, would be insightful. Additionally, assessing the success of various inclusivity measures, such as incorporating co-curricular activities into the curriculum, offering financial aid, or providing a range of options that cater to diverse interests, would enable institutions to develop more evidence-based strategies for fostering inclusivity.

Applying an intersectional approach to the study of co-curricular participation is also crucial for future research. Students have complex, intersecting identities that influence their experiences in educational settings. Exploring how multiple factors—such as gender, socio-economic status, ethnicity, personality traits, and mental health—interact to affect co-curricular engagement could yield a more holistic understanding of the barriers that students encounter. This approach would be particularly beneficial for identifying doubly disadvantaged students, such as those from low-income backgrounds who also experience social anxiety, and developing tailored solutions that meet their unique needs.

In conclusion, while this study has provided valuable insights into the socio-economic influences on co-curricular participation, further research is needed to explore the psychological and personality-related dimensions of student engagement. Investigating personality types, social anxiety, caretaking roles, and specific disabilities, and how these elements intersect with ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds, will provide a more thorough understanding of the barriers students face. Such research can inform the development of more inclusive and supportive co-curricular programs, ensuring that all students have the opportunity to thrive.

CONCLUSION

This research aimed to find what would make co-curricular activities more inclusive and accessible to people with varying

needs. From increasing the academic performance, and self-efficacy of students to making them more career-ready; co-curricular activities have established themselves as more than just extra activities that are optional and are also great places to foster multicultural friendships. But despite their well-known value, only a few people participate voluntarily. Social inequalities have been deterring inclusive education and the author assumed similar challenges must be making it difficult for students to participate in these supplementary activities. Previous research and analysis of the data collected by the author are consistent with the finding that low income is correlated with low participation. However, Pearson's coefficient indicated a very weak correlation which might have been due to a small sample size. The second variable that the author successfully proved was related to participation in co-curricular activities was a different ethnic background. Even for a small sample size the chi-square statistic indicated a statistically significant relationship between the variables which the author has observed personally as well. This chapter could not establish a relationship between familial caretaking and disability with participation in co-curricular activities, which can be attributed to a small sample size, possible confusion of respondents as to what constitutes disability, caretaking etc and inappropriate sampling. It is in the author's opinion, a more likely possibility that the survey simply did not reach people with disability and familial responsibility rather than there being no relationship between the said factor and student participation because there is a noticeable difference in the means of set A and B, indicating that there are more disabled and caretaking people in the non-participative set. The analysis also revealed that more reasons for non-participation may be lack of interest, social anxiety and a busy timetable but whether they have more influence on participation than the variables tested cannot be said. There is certainly more to this story than just social inequality that needs more digging. The author concludes by acknowledging the various limitations of this chapter that caused it to not fully fulfil its objectives and hopes that despite the flaws this paper added something valuable to the process of making co-curricular activities more inclusive.

ETHICAL DECLARATION

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