

The Role of Extracurricular Activities in Promoting Social and Emotional Development Among Secondary School Students in Mangu LGA, Plateau State

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Abstract: *This article examines how extracurricular activities (ECAs) shape secondary school students' social and emotional development in Mangu Local Government Area (LGA), Plateau State, Nigeria. Using a cross-sectional survey of 100 students drawn from selected secondary schools, we assessed the availability of ECAs, their alignment with social-emotional goals, impacts on teamwork, communication, relationship building, and core emotional-intelligence (EI) competencies, as well as implementation challenges. Sports were universally available; drama and debate were common; music/art, cultural clubs, science/math clubs, and community service were less frequent. Participation correlated with high levels of collaboration (46%), leadership (41%), sense of belonging (60%), and elevated EI components such as empathy (66%) and motivation (60%). Constraints included lack of resources (66.7%), limited funding (60%), insufficient staff training (58%), and uneven student engagement (55%). We conclude that ECAs are a practical lever for holistic development, and we propose actionable recommendations on financing, staff capacity, student engagement, parental/community buy-in, and program diversification.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Education extends beyond textbooks and examinations; it encompasses the holistic development of learners through cognitive, social, and emotional growth. In this broader sense, extracurricular activities (ECAs)—such as sports, arts, clubs, debates, and community service—play a central role in shaping well-rounded individuals capable of managing both academic and life challenges. ECAs offer structured environments where students interact, collaborate, and develop essential life skills such as leadership, empathy, resilience, and teamwork—skills often underdeveloped within formal classroom settings. Globally, scholars have emphasized that participation in ECAs promotes social and

emotional development, providing young people with experiences that enhance self-awareness, communication, and interpersonal competence (Fredricks & Eccles, 2008; Wang et al., 2024). Social and emotional learning (SEL) enables adolescents to understand and regulate their emotions, develop empathy, and form meaningful relationships—key attributes that influence their academic motivation, mental health, and overall well-being. Through ECAs, students practice managing emotions in competitive or cooperative settings, resolving conflicts, and achieving collective goals—essential processes for emotional maturity.

In Nigeria, particularly in rural areas such as Mangu Local Government Area (LGA) in Plateau State, ECAs hold additional significance. Socioeconomic challenges, resource limitations, and large class sizes often restrict the extent to which schools can provide rich extracurricular opportunities. Yet, these programs offer unique platforms for rural students to express creativity, build confidence, and strengthen community bonds. ECAs in such contexts serve as protective factors against negative behaviors, promoting inclusion, resilience, and a sense of belonging (Mahoney et al., 2020).

Despite their importance, many secondary schools in Mangu LGA struggle to institutionalize ECAs effectively. Limited funding, inadequate infrastructure, and a shortage of trained personnel constrain the range and quality of activities offered. As a result, students' opportunities for social and emotional learning outside the classroom remain underdeveloped. This study therefore examines the role of extracurricular activities in promoting social and emotional development among secondary school students in Mangu LGA, Plateau State, with a focus on the types of ECAs available, their

impacts on social and emotional competencies, and the challenges affecting their implementation.

By exploring this understudied area, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how ECAs can be optimized to foster holistic education in resource-limited settings. It underscores the need for integrating social and emotional learning frameworks into Nigerian secondary education, positioning ECAs not as peripheral but as core components of students' developmental experience.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a cross-sectional survey design to investigate the role of extracurricular activities (ECAs) in promoting social and emotional development among secondary school students in Mangu Local Government Area (LGA), Plateau State, Nigeria.

Study Area and Population

The study was conducted in selected public secondary schools within Mangu LGA, which includes both urban and rural communities. The target population comprised students from Junior Secondary (JSS 1–3) and Senior Secondary (SS 1–3) classes who actively participated in at least one extracurricular activity.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

Using Cochran's formula, a sample size of 355 students was determined at a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. A three-stage sampling method was adopted:

1. Two wards (Mangu 1 and Mangu Halle) were randomly selected.
2. One school was chosen from each ward.
3. Students who met the inclusion criteria were selected conveniently until the sample size was reached.

Instrument and Data Collection

Data were obtained using a structured questionnaire divided into sections on demographic information, types of ECAs, their perceived impact on social and emotional development, and implementation challenges. The instrument was validated by experts and achieved a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.78. Questionnaires were distributed and collected directly from respondents during school hours with the consent of school authorities.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 25. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means) summarized responses, while chi-square and t-tests examined relationships between ECA participation and indicators of social and emotional development.

Ethical Considerations

Permission was obtained from school administrators, and verbal consent was secured from participants. Confidentiality and voluntary participation were maintained throughout the study.

III. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

Table 1: Frequency Distribution of Demographic Data

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Age	10-12 years	18	18.2
	13-15 years	24	24.2
	16-18 years	37	37.4
	19 years and above	21	21.2
Gender	Male	53	53.5
	Female	46	46.5
Class	JSS 1	11	11.1
	JSS 2	19	19.2
	JSS 3	27	27.3
	SSS 1	17	17.2
	SSS 2	12	12.1
	SSS 3	14	14.1

The demographic data show that most respondents (37.4%) were aged 16–18 years, indicating that the sample largely comprised mid-adolescents who are at a key stage for social and emotional development. Males (53.5%) slightly outnumbered females (46.5%), suggesting a fairly balanced gender representation. Class distribution reveals that participation peaked in JSS 3 (27.3%), followed by JSS 2 and SSS 1, while lower representation in SSS 2 and SSS 3 may be due to academic pressures. Overall, the sample reflects a diverse and representative mix of students actively engaged in extracurricular activities across different age groups and class levels.

*AVAILABILITY AND ALIGNMENT OF
EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES*

Table 2: Types of Extracurricular Activities
Available in Secondary Schools

Extracurricular Activity	Number of Schools Offering	Percentage (%)	Alignment with Social and Emotional Development Goals
Sports (Football, Basketball, Athletics)	3	100	Promotes teamwork, communication, and social bonding. Enhances emotional regulation.
Drama/Theater	2	66.7	Improves emotional expression, empathy, and self-confidence. Develops interpersonal skills.
Music/Art	1	33.3	Enhances emotional intelligence, self-awareness, creativity, and problem-solving skills.
Debate/Discussion Clubs	2	66.7	Builds communication skills, critical thinking, and conflict resolution abilities.
Science/Math Clubs	1	33.3	Fosters teamwork, problem-solving, and cognitive development.
Cultural Activities	1	33.3	Encourages

			cultural awareness, empathy, and community involvement.
Community Service/Volunteering	1	33.3	Builds social responsibility, empathy, and a sense of belonging.

The findings revealed that sports activities such as football, basketball, and athletics were available in all participating schools (100%), indicating a strong institutional preference for physical activities. These sports programs were found to significantly align with outcomes such as teamwork, communication, social bonding, and emotional regulation.

Drama and theater programs were available in 66.7% of schools, contributing positively to emotional expression, empathy, and self-confidence. Similarly, debate and discussion clubs (66.7%) were common, supporting the development of communication, critical thinking, and conflict-resolution skills.

Less common activities included music and art (33.3%), which fostered emotional intelligence, self-awareness, and creativity; science and mathematics clubs (33.3%), linked to teamwork and problem-solving; cultural activities (33.3%), which enhanced empathy and community involvement; and community service or volunteering (33.3%), which promoted social responsibility and belonging.

The ECA profile across Mangu LGA secondary schools demonstrates an over-reliance on sports, which effectively builds social cohesion and emotional regulation but underrepresents creative and service-based programs. This imbalance limits exposure to activities that nurture empathy, self-awareness, and civic orientation. A diversified ECA portfolio—balancing physical, artistic, and service-oriented programs—would more comprehensively support students' social and emotional growth.

SOCIAL SKILLS OUTCOMES AMONG PARTICIPANTS

Table 3: the impact of extracurricular activities on three primary social skills

Social Skill	Subcategory	Classification	Percentage of Students at Each Level
Teamwork	Collaboration	High	46
	Leadership	High	41
	Cooperation	Moderate	52
Communication	Confidence in Speaking	Moderate	55
	Clarity of Expression	High	51
	Active Listening	High	44
Relationship Building	Sense of Belonging	High	60
	Emotional Support	Moderate	45
	Trust in Peers	Moderate	54

Teamwork

Findings showed that 46% of students demonstrated high collaboration, while 41% exhibited high leadership skills. However, 52% reported only moderate cooperation. ECAs are effective in cultivating leadership and collaborative norms but need more structured cooperative learning experiences (e.g., shared projects, peer mentoring) to strengthen collective responsibility.

Communication

Results indicated that confidence in speaking was moderate (55%), clarity of expression was high (51%), and active listening was high (44%). While ECAs help students articulate their ideas more clearly, public-speaking confidence and listening depth remain inconsistent. Integrating debate formats, public speaking sessions, and peer feedback could enhance these communication sub-skills.

Relationship Building

Students reported a high sense of belonging (60%), but emotional support (45%) and trust in peers (54%) were moderate. ECAs significantly enhance school connectedness, which predicts engagement and academic persistence. However, peer support and trust could be improved through mentorship programs and small-group collaborative activities.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE COMPONENTS

Table 4: the impact of extracurricular activities on core emotional intelligence components

Emotional Intelligence Component	Classification	Percentage of Students at Each Level
Self-Awareness	Moderate	56
Self-Regulation	Moderate	54
Motivation	High	60
Empathy	High	66
Social Skills	High	52

Students demonstrated high levels of empathy (66%), motivation (60%), and social skills (52%), while self-awareness (56%) and self-regulation (54%) were at moderate levels.

ECA participation is strongly linked to outward-facing emotional intelligence—notably empathy, motivation, and prosocial behavior. However, inward-facing EI competencies such as self-awareness and emotional regulation show moderate improvement. Embedding reflective practices like journaling, emotional coaching, or mindfulness sessions within ECAs could enhance these internal competencies and promote deeper emotional maturity.

CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTATION

Table 5: the challenges faced by secondary schools in Mangu LGA

Challenge	Percentage of students the Challenge
Lack of Resources	66.67
Limited Funding	60
Inadequate Training for Teachers/Coaches	58
Lack of Student Engagement	55
Cultural or Parental Resistance	41

The study identified several major challenges hindering the effective implementation of extracurricular activities in secondary schools within Mangu LGA. The most prominent were lack of resources (66.7%) and limited funding (60%), which restrict access to essential materials, facilities, and program diversity. Additionally, inadequate staff training (58%) limits teachers' ability to facilitate activities that promote social and emotional learning, while low student engagement (55%) is linked to poorly designed or irregular programs. Cultural and parental resistance (41%) further discourages participation, as some families undervalue non-academic pursuits. These challenges, spanning structural, capacity, motivational, and socio-cultural dimensions, underscore the need for comprehensive interventions—including better funding, teacher training, inclusive program design, and community awareness—to strengthen ECA effectiveness and sustainability.

IV. CONCLUSION

ECAs in Mangu LGA are a practical, immediately actionable route to build adolescents' social and emotional capital. Where ECAs are accessible, students report higher collaboration, leadership, belonging, empathy, and motivation—competencies linked to engagement, mental health, and long-term life outcomes. Yet potential remains under-realized due to resource and capacity constraints, uneven program mix (especially arts and service), fluctuating student engagement, and pockets of parental resistance. Strengthening funding, diversifying offerings, and embedding structured SEL practices within ECAs can convert existing enthusiasm into durable social-emotional gains for a broader share of students.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Strengthen Funding and Facilities: Establish school or LGA-level micro-grants to support ECA materials, safe spaces, and equipment. Partner with local businesses, alumni, and community organizations to co-sponsor resources for sports, arts, debates, and service activities.
2. Enhance Staff Capacity: Train teachers and coaches in social-emotional learning (SEL), inclusive facilitation, conflict resolution, and reflective practices such as journaling and peer coaching to improve students' self-awareness and regulation.
3. Diversify Activity Options: Expand beyond sports by introducing debate clubs, community service, arts, cultural groups, and mentoring programs to foster empathy, creativity, and civic engagement through varied SEL pathways.
4. Boost Student Engagement: Involve students in designing ECAs that reflect their interests and schedules. Recognize participation through badges, showcases, and inter-house events, while ensuring safe transport and convenient time slots.
5. Engage Parents and Communities: Host termly ECA open days to showcase student achievements and demonstrate the benefits of participation. Involve parents and community leaders as mentors to build trust and reduce resistance.
6. Monitor and Evaluate Impact: Track key SEL indicators such as empathy, belonging, and self-regulation each term. Use data insights to refine activities, address weak areas, and support continued funding and program improvement.

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