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**The American University in Cairo**  
**School of Global Affairs and Public Policy**

**Policy Evaluation of the role of Extracurricular activities on  
students' Character building and Academic Excellence: A  
Case Study of Cairo's  
Schools**

**A Thesis Submitted to the Public Policy and Administration Department in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of Master of Public Policy**

**Submitted by:**

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**Fall 2022**

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## **List of abbreviations**

ECAs	Extracurricular activities
CV	Curriculum Vitae
UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund
WHO	World Health Organization
CAPMAS	Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics

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## **ABSTRACT**

The Education policies have usually been given the highest priority globally. This research reflects that the Egyptian educational system currently faces a bottleneck in applying its policies due to significant budgetary constraints. This is seen in public schools, unlike international ones. The research compares and contrasts three educational systems (public, community and international) with the purpose of examining the impact of policy processes on education. This thesis aims to explore how far the existence of extracurricular activities, as a component that complements academic education, is capable of supporting students to acquire the 21st century life skills and fulfill some of the gaps. The study analyzes the role of ECAs through the lens of three different types of schools operating in Egypt: public, community and international schools. The thesis included qualitative field research of a total of 13 semi structured interviews and 4 focus groups in three different types of schools. The interviews and focus groups were conducted with school administrators, teachers, students and parents across Egyptian schools to understand perspectives, success stories and the barriers to the implementation of ECAs. The findings of this study highlight the positive relationship between ECAs and students' character building and academic excellence. However, the findings also show the crucial impact of an enabling environment to support the successful implementation of ECAs, which can be the determining factor of its success or failure.

**Keywords:** Extracurricular activities, Education System, Public Schools, Community Schools, Character Building, Academic Excellence, Egypt

# Chapter 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Overview on Extracurricular activities

There have been significant efforts to adjust public policies in the Egyptian educational system to modernize and give space for innovation and interaction. Nevertheless, this thesis highlights the existing gap in the public educational system. This gap is identified through examining the action areas under the fourth goal of the global UN-SDGs, to which Egypt adopts in its 2030 vision. The action areas of Goal 4 sheds light on the necessity of providing learning spaces that address students' skills and behaviors through extra-curricular activities.

In the 19th and early 20th century, education in Egypt mostly followed European approaches and was limited to certain elite sectors of society. However, in 1950, president Gamal Abdel Nasser announced that Education is free for everyone and was considered a basic right and an entitlement to all Egyptian citizens. The curriculum that was implemented was similar to the one provided by the Arab education system, yet it didn't prove its success in the long run (Faksh,1980; El Fieky 2007; OECD 2022). Since then, the Government of Egypt has worked hard to develop the education system and has set it as one of the core strategic priorities of the country. Currently, Egypt has one of the largest education systems in the Middle East and North Africa. It has been in continuous growth since the 1990s. The Education system in Egypt is divided into two stages. The first stage is focused on the schooling phase where the Ministry of Education is responsible for. Whereas, the second stage is focused on higher education where the Ministry of Higher Education holds an authority over (Nooijer et. al, 2015).

The topic of this thesis is mainly focused on pre-university level education. This educational phase in Egypt includes two types of schools. The first type is the “**public schools**” or “**governmental schools**”. The government schools are divided into two categories. The first category is the Arabic Language schools in which the mode of learning is mainly focused on the Arabic language while the second category is “**experimental language schools**” in which it uses languages such as English, German and French as secondary foreign languages in preparatory education. The second type of schools is the “**private schools**” where they are

divided into four categories. The first category is the “**national schools**” where the curriculum is similar to what is provided in the governmental schools however it is slightly different in terms of the level of attention given to every student. The second category is the “**language schools**” in which the curriculum is being taught in English, however French and German are being added as a secondary language. These schools provide better learning facilities in comparison to the other schools so their fees are relatively higher than the ordinary schools. The third category is the “**religious schools**” where these schools are basically religiously oriented schools such as Catholic schools or El Azhar Schools. The Catholic schools adopt the national school curricula whereas El Azhar schools adopt a religious curriculum (Nooijer et. al, 2015). Finally, the fourth category is the “**international schools**” where they offer curricula that belong to different countries like the American, British and French systems (Sakr, 2021).

In addition, another school model was initiated in the past decades. During the 1980s, there was an increase in the fiscal deficits which required the funds for education to decrease. This massive deterioration caused the Egyptian system to search for ideas that can support child education with accepted quality. The Ministry of Education started partnering with community development organizations to implement this program. On top of these organizations, was UNICEF. This partnership resulted in founding the first eleven community schools in rural Upper Egypt. The main purpose of the community schools was to encourage the engagement of the rural communities, avoid dropouts, promote critical thinking and children rights and provide free education for everyone, including girls (Zaalouk, 2004).

The focus of my thesis study is on public, community and international schools. The choice of the three schools was dependent upon the capability of the researcher to get legal approvals to conduct the field work as it is challenging to obtain school access approvals. In Egypt, the total number of schools during the school year 2019/2020 were around 56,600 thousand schools divided into around 47,972 thousand public schools and 8,597 private schools (Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, 2021). On the other hand, according to the CAPMAS report (2022), the number of community schools during the school year 2019/2020 were 4995 schools. While, the number of dropout rates is noticed to be relatively high. The number of students who dropped out of school in 2019 are 90.7 thousand students as per the World Bank

(2022). This is considered a huge decrease if compared with the students' dropout rate in 2011 which was 399 thousand students (World bank, 2022). Also, the Egyptian education system ranked 42nd in the global education report 2020 report, compared to the 51<sup>st</sup> position in the previous year. Although, there is quite progress in dropout rates and the Egyptian ranking in Education, however it is still clear that the Egyptian Education system is facing multiple challenges (Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, 2021).

Shmis et al (2021) reviewed the World Bank report of 2021 stating that countries have put the development of education as one of their main strategic priorities. There is a common understanding that enhancement of educational systems is a key factor in graduating healthy, successful and powerful generations. It is also one of the main factors that can impact the labor market positively and develop businesses worldwide. Shmis et al (2021) mentioned that in order for education to be enhanced, it doesn't only require enhancement in academic education but rather it should include a combination of cognitive, socio-emotional and technical skills. It was also stated that students need to master 21st century skills to succeed in life and work, given the continuous and quick changes.

Extracurricular activities (ECAs) are essential for empowering the young generation to pursue 21st century skills which require both the intra and inter personal skills (World Bank, 2019). According to this report there are a lot of cognitive and non-cognitive impacts behind students' participation in extracurricular activities (World Bank, 2019). It was also stated that although extracurricular activities weren't given much attention on the policy agenda before the millennium; however, there is a growing realization that ECA can be the innovative aspect that will change the current status of traditional education. It is assumed that these activities will result in a major change in the education system where the children are currently taking the "driver seat" in their own learning.

To date, all the data provided about ECA in international contexts states that there is a positive relationship between the participation in ECA and the academic achievement (World Bank, 2019; Wilson, 2009; Tawfik ,2017; Louisa, 2012). However, there are still some challenges that might occur as a result of over-participation of ECAs. According to Fischer, Radisch &

Schüpbach (2014), the concept of extracurricular activities started to be given a wider degree of attention worldwide as of equal importance to the academic components of education in schools at the beginning of the millennium. As an example, “all day school” started to be promoted in Germany. On the other hand, it has also been introduced in Finland under the name “the integrated school day” in which extra-curricular activities were introduced as a part of the normal school day. In England, it was called “extended services” where extracurricular activities were provided trying to build cooperation between schools and families. All the activities in the different countries were not graded and did not adhere to a specific curriculum. In assessing the effectiveness of these activities, Toyokawa and Toyokawa (2002) conducted a study on Japanese students that explained how students’ engagement in extracurricular activities has positively impacted their general life satisfaction and improved their level of academic achievement. In addition, Jane, Cariaga and Molina (2016) have mentioned the positive implication that ECA implementation has had on the personal development of the Philippian students who have taken part in the conducted study. This thesis attempts to build on this line of research to draw out insights on extracurricular activities in Egypt.

On the other hand, there is almost very limited data in regards to the ECA history in Egypt and its impact on students. There are some articles published by different education experts in Egypt, however, they shed light on the practice as a whole. For instance, Hassanien (2011) has traced how Egypt has made several efforts from the period of 1992 to 1995 to include extracurricular activities in the education process. In this article, Hassanien (2011) quoted the Minister of Education in Egypt during the period of 1992 saying that school is not only a place for learning, but it exists for practicing activities. He also added that school and traditional education are not the only channels of children’s growth. He urged the importance of having a playground, lab and a library in each school to encourage students to take part in ECA. According to Hassanien (2011), the implementation of ECA in Egypt has passed through several phases. The first phase started with ignoring the importance of ECA and its impact on education. The second phase was the refusal of implementing ECA from school administrations at the local level. The third phase was the acceptance of ECA implementation (outside the academic syllabus). The fourth phase has been the awareness of the importance of ECA and its impact on students’ character building. Hassanien (2011) believes that in the

current era, ECA is given higher attention; however, the implementers of ECA (school administration and teachers) are not qualified enough to implement ECA in schools.

Academic education solely cannot contribute to building the characters of the coming generation. For that reason, extracurricular activities are clearly defined by Bartkus et al (2012) as a set of activities that are performed by students that are outside the academic education. These activities can include different activities like social, art, sports, drama, music and culture. On the other hand, experiential learning, as Kolb (2014) claims, introduces the notion that people learn through different learning methodologies; and learning cannot take place through one specific way. Experiential learning is a methodology that is focused on providing learning that addresses the four different learning styles; activists, reflectors, theorists and pragmatists.

Experiential learning is usually introduced as one of the learning methodologies in formal academic education but rarely introduced as a main learning methodology in extracurricular activities. Throughout my thesis, I am going to focus on extracurricular activities clarifying how ECAs are a clear representation of experiential learning through addressing the different learning styles, which accordingly guarantees optimum learning for the students. ECA's main objective is to develop a context for students with different learning styles to learn about life, social and occupational skills (Dukart, 2017). This research will show the different arguments around the necessity and effectiveness of extra-curricular activities to improve the educational process in the Egyptian context.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

Education is considered one of the main cornerstones that contribute to the development of countries. It is the main contributor to economic growth and one of the most critical components of any country's human capital (Dukart, 2017). This thesis sheds the light on one of the momentous structural problems lying within the public Egyptian education system that impede the goal of quality education. Education policy scholarship and practice have highlighted the complications of the education sector, especially in the traditional allocation of

resources toward infrastructure, limited and constrained budgetary regulations, and the limited space for innovative policymaking (OECD, 2022).

Education as defined in the World Economic forum's report in (2016) is a set of competencies, skills and characteristics that increases the efficiency and productivity of individuals. Education has three major contributions to the productivity of countries. First it increases the ability of the workforce to carry existing tasks with promptness and efficiency. Second, it facilitates the transfer of knowledge and new information and technologies that are created by others and finally it boosts the creativity of countries to become capable of creating their own technologies and products (World Economic Forum, 2016).

The above reasons raise the importance of providing quality education for children and youth as highlighted by the Sustainable Development Goals, specifically in goal number four which states: "Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all" (Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2022). Students need to be equipped with all the necessary knowledge and skills they need in order to face daily life challenges, contribute to the country's economic growth and take advantage of lifelong learning opportunities. It is also a driver for poverty elimination, fostering social development and achieving economic growth and gender equality (Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2022).

Taking a closer look at Egypt's vision 2030, it is clear that it adopts the sustainable development goals for Education in its own strategy. It points towards Egypt's active role in providing the necessary skills for students to think creatively. This takes place through enabling students on a technical and a technological level with the intention of raising youth who are creative, responsible, and competitive citizens who accept diversity and differences (Egypt Vision 2030, 2016).

Although Egypt has major plans and progress towards achieving the strategic goals for Education, However, the quality of education provided is still low (El Fieky,2007; OECD, 2022; Unicef,2014). According to Eweiss et al (2019), the public education system in Egypt is facing a major crisis. The aspects of this crisis are primarily related to the inadequate and



insufficient teachers, curricula design and tools, insufficient school structures and increased drop-out rates. Eweis et al suggest that this crisis is attributed to the lack of stability in educational policies due to the continuous ministerial changes. Eweis also highlights that the educational policy in Egypt is corrupt as it relies on an emergency administrative framework. Although policies should be responsive to meet any emergency situations, relying on such an approach leaves no room for actual innovation. Moreover, it rather leaves policy makers in a state of continuous recovery and mitigation of upcoming problems.

Furthermore, the academic education is focused on memorization and rote learning. Learning doesn't support students' engagement and doesn't encourage them towards critical thinking. The teaching methodologies are dominated by teachers, in which it is repetitive and requires the literal recall of information. This type of learning doesn't support the growth of the students' cognitive skills (OECD, 2022). Students who mainly learn through rote learning are easily manipulated and more vulnerable to accepting cognitive and thinking fallacies. Rote learning exposes students to have trouble in applying knowledge in an innovative way as it usually forces them to think that there is only one way for doing things. It is also stated that individuals who depend only on rote learning can hardly take responsibility for their own decisions and learning. They are poor problem solvers, incapable decision makers and critical thinkers (Mahmoud and Douara, 2008). In addition to that, according to the World Bank report (2019), traditional schools are slightly capable of equipping students with foundational academic skills however it cannot solely help them excel in life because the current era requires a combination of cognitive and social skills that is required for them to succeed in life and work. It is stated the current academic education cannot solely achieve.

From this background context, there is a clear attention given to improve the quality and variety of ECAs in the public schools in Egypt. However, the dearth of financial and human resources, the large number of students in public schools and the limited number of extracurricular activity teachers in schools have all contributed to obstructing the execution of the ECA plan for public schools (Unicef, 2014).

On another note, in a study done by Singh (2014) and Nicholacss (2020), it was noted that the population between 10 to 18 years are considered generation Z. It is mentioned that it is impossible for Generation Z to only learn through theoretical contexts. Nicholacss (2020) explained that Generation Z requires experiential learning environments where learning should be brain stimulating, challenging and fun. Referring to the above challenges, it is clear that there is a major gap between the policies that Education should achieve and the current status of education. This gap is what this thesis is trying to explore through an assessment of ECAs and their impact on students' learning experience.

## **1.3 Research Questions and objectives**

### **1.3.1 Research Objective**

As a result, the main **aim** of this study is to explore how far the existence of extracurricular activities, as a component that complements academic education, can support students to acquire the 21<sup>st</sup> century life skills and fill-in some of the gaps that currently exist between the policies of Education development and the current challenges in the Education system (as clarified in the problem statement). This study shall try to discover the impact of ECAs through the lens of three different types of schools that exist in Egypt. These schools are public, community and international schools. This thesis will also explain the challenges that currently exist that might obstruct ECA implementation inside schools. The findings of this study shall try to provide new insights to support policy makers in the Education sector to achieve the desired goals for enhancement of the whole educational process.

### **1.3.2 Research Question**

Based on the above objectives of this study, the main research question of this thesis is “How far has the implementation of ECAs played a role in supporting students' character building and academic excellence?”

The study also aims to address the following sub-questions:

- How can students' surrounding environment, which includes parents, teachers and school principals, help in achieving the optimum benefits of ECAs?
- What are the main challenges facing ECA implementation?

- What policy modifications are required for more effective ECA implementation in Egyptian schools?

The research sub questions investigated the diverse environments surrounding students in each type of school (public – community – international) clarifying the different impact it has on ECA implementation and accordingly on the students. This study explained further the role of parents, teachers and students for ECA implementation. It also provided insight on the different types of challenges and means to overcome them.

## 1.4 Structure of the thesis

The thesis aims to explore the impact extracurricular activities have on students' character building and academic excellence through conducting in-depth qualitative research. This study is divided into **seven** chapters as follows. The **first** chapter provides an introduction chapter that covers the problem statement, research objective, research questions and sub questions. The **second** chapter gives an overview about ECA implementation in Egypt. This includes the efforts of the Government of Egypt to enhance ECA implementation in the Egyptian education system. The **third** chapter surveys the literature existing about ECA. This chapter is divided into six main themes: Definition of extracurricular activities, Impact of ECAs on students' character building, Impact of ECAs on academic achievement, Enabling environment for ECA implementation, Major challenges facing the implementation of ECA and Extracurricular activities in Egypt. The **fourth** chapter constructs the theoretical framework which includes the main theories that reinforce the existence of ECAs and also it covers the conceptual framework for the study. The **fifth** chapter explains the research methodology used to conduct this study. It also discusses the sample selected, research design and a note on positionality. The research limitations and ethical considerations are also covered. The **sixth** chapter provides a summary of the analysis of the data and the research findings. The **seventh** chapter concludes the study and provides a summary of the policy recommendations that can impact ECA implementation in Egypt.

# **Chapter 2 Contextual Background on Extracurricular activities in Egypt**

## **2.1 Policy Context of the Egyptian Education system**

The educational system has undergone several policy changes. NCERD (2001) argues that the educational policies from 1990 to 2000 did not reach its expected outcomes. This educational policy was set in coordination with high rank officials, interest groups and political parties. It has been argued that the failure of education during this period was a crisis of quantity over quality. Accordingly, education was said to be in crisis.

It is noteworthy to highlight that from 2007, the professional academy for teachers was established with the objective of assisting the implementation of the national strategic plan to reform the school educational system. Also, with the momentous focus on ICT was made, new educational formats were developed; and a shift towards supporting the quality of education was put in the center of attention of the Ministry of Education and Technical Education.

Whereas the period between 2010-2017 has witnessed a significant shift in the educational policy plan. This period was characterized by a great degree of instability due to the Arab Spring and the Egyptian revolution and its aftermath. Illiteracy rate has reached 40 percent among students aging 15+, meaning 34 million drop-outs (World Bank Report, 2013).

Nevertheless, the educational policy design has seen a positive transformation shift in the year 2019 following the presidential decree that highlighted 2019 as the year of education. A number of initiatives took place to increase technology in public schools; however, with the rise of the pandemic, the implementation of educational policies has taken a downturn due to the negative economic effects it has had on the society. This downturn has affected the ratio of teachers to students, schools infrastructure and curricula update. By extension, budgetary constraints have led policy design and implementation to disregard ECAs.

## 2.2 Egyptian Educational Policy for ECAs

In 2018, the Egyptian Ministry of Education launched a set of development plans relevant to Egypt's national strategy, which is commonly known as Egypt 's Vision 2030 (Green Policy Platform, 2016). The seventh pillar of the strategy, which is "Education and Training", focuses on "enhancing the quality of education and equipping students to become empowered; to think creatively and critically to become responsible and competitive citizens in the community" (Karkour, 2018). These educational policy reforms are mainly focused on bringing major leaps of change in the education system in Egypt, which accordingly will impact Egypt on both the social and economic aspects (Karkour, 2018). This seventh pillar of the policy clarified that the desired change will be achieved through empowering students technically and technologically with all the needed skills to compete strongly on a global and local level (Green Policy Platform, 2016). Those required educational reforms, known as Education 2.0, have been faced with multiple obstacles related to increased student populations in classrooms, low quality of teaching, outdated curricula and continuous lack of resources (Moustafa, et al, 2022). However, the strategic objectives imply the urgency of improving the quality of K-12 education to be up to the international standards, which will consequently raises Egypt's ranking in Education internationally (Moustafa, et al, 2022).

Under these reforms, the Minister of Education and Technical Education has issued a number of decisions; one of them is decision number (313) which is directly related to the existence of extracurricular activities in schools (East Laws, 2011; East Laws, 2017). This decision is concerned with the enhancement of the basic education stages, including both the elementary and preparatory stages. This decision focused on "Extracurricular activities" as one of the major components that contribute to the development of Education in these two stages. Some of the articles under this decision refer to the urgency of including obligatory and elective extracurricular activities that the student can choose from. The obligatory activities are mainly focused on sports and music, while the elective activities are the library, community service, theater, science activity, and school press. The Ministry of Education stated the necessity of implementing these activities by the school management and the activities teachers. It also

stated that each student has to at least choose one activity from those mentioned above. In addition, the minister mentioned that those activities will not have any written exams; as they are practical activities. Articles (13) and (14) of the same decision state that activity teachers have to do a closing celebration for all students by the end of the school year, in order to present all what they have been practicing during their activity classes. Also, students need to be evaluated at least 15 days before the end of the school year on their performance in the school activities (East Laws, 2011).

## **2.3 Implementation of ECA in Egypt**

Between the academic years 2015-2017, the Egyptian Ministry of Education has exerted extensive efforts in engaging Egyptian students in ECAs. According to a report by Dr. El Helaly El Sherbini (2018) about the programs that were implemented in regards to the Educational reforms between years 2015 and 2017, around 10,157,352 students participated in sports, cultural, social, scientific, and scout activities (El Helaly, 2018).

On a closer look at the executive plan of the ministry of education and technical education for years 2022 – 2026 (Ministry of Education, 2022), there are clear efforts related to the existence and enhancement of the extracurricular activities when compared to previous years 2015-2017. In general, the plan includes all the activities that will be implemented by the Ministry of Education, along with a set of indicators of success (Ministry of Education, 2022). In addition, the section related to ECAs in the executive plan has shown that there is a unit inside the ministry called “*The Activities and Services Sector*” under the central unit for students’ activities. The unit’s mandate is focused on planning, executing, and supporting the implementation of the ECAs inside the Egyptian schools. The section related to this component in the plan is located under the main strategic goal of the government, which is referred to as “Building the Egyptian Citizen”, and focuses on enabling ECAs for every student (Government program, 2022). The executive plan of the ministry of education (2022) focused on a number of activities, which are school radio, press activities, short stories, electronic magazine, poetry, theater, reading, scout’ cultural activities, music, computer, art, and sports Olympics. The

government has set clear indicators to measure the success of the implementation of those activities. These success indicators are focused on increasing the number of students participating in ECAs from one academic year to the other. Moreover, it is clear that one of the indicators of success is the number of competitions and championships that the Egyptian students will participate in over the years. Also, there was a focus in the plan on supporting students with the required materials, tools, instruments and facilities whenever required. Also, the plan includes a clear focus on enabling student unions in schools. Finally, there is a clear focus on summer activities and camps (Ministry of Education, 2022).

Furthermore, after reviewing several articles and announcements issued by the Ministry of Education, in December 2021, the former Minister of Education, Dr. Tarek Shawky as reported by Abdelrahman (2021), mentioned that one the main focuses of the Education reform is the development of the activities and services sector, to be aligned with the Sustainable development goals and Egypt Vision 2030. The minister added that the attention given to those activities can contribute to the character building of Egyptian citizens (Abdelrahman, 2021). ECAs are sought to support students' critical thinking, creativity, responsibility, cooperation, passion, citizenship, and capability to compete on local and international levels (Abdelrahman, 2021). Under this perspective, the minister announced the implementation of an activity called "Olympics" on the African and national levels (Abdelrahman, 2021). The Olympics will include several types of activities like literature, sports, art, science, and tourism. The Olympics will seek to discover hidden talents and will support students to develop them, especially that they will be implemented in several governorates in Egypt, with the focus on rural and unreachable areas (Abdelrahman, 2021). The ultimate goal under this activity is to guarantee the successful implementation of these activities through the efficient usage of resources, infrastructure, facilities, theaters, libraries, labs and sports venues (Ministry of Education, 2022).

Dr. Elham Ahmed, the head of the activities and services sector in the Ministry of Education, while talking about the Olympics, has stated that the Olympics will contribute to the development of a modern methodology, which will be the cornerstone that future of ECAs will

be built on. She also hopes that the activities of the Olympics, which are focused on science, culture, sports, literary, art, theater, music and entrepreneurship would complement the school curricula in achieving the highest standards of success (Zakaria, 2021).

On the other hand, most of the community schools do have ECAs with focus on sports and cultural activities. It is vibrant that the existence of funds from community development organizations have contributed to the existence and accessibility of resources that support the implementation of ECAs ( Zaalouk, 2004).

Most of the private schools do have existing active ECA components that are achieving their goals. This is due to the availability of resources and the fees paid from students' side. Finally, most of the International schools are not related to the Ministry of Education, where students pay very high fees to be enrolled in those schools. Accordingly, ECAs are not considered an extra component, but rather a main component of the academic curriculum that contributes to the students' development ( Khorshed, 2014).



# Chapter 3 Literature Review

This chapter presents the major strands in the literature that dealt with ECA. The first section explores the definition of ECA, the second section investigates the relationship between ECA and students' character building and mental health, while the third section looks into the impact of ECA on academic excellence. Afterwards, the fourth section examines the role of parents, school administration and teachers in implementing ECA. The fifth section outlines some of the major challenges that block the road towards implementing ECAs, and finally, the chapter ends with outlining the research gap that this thesis aims to contribute to.

## 3.1 Definition of Extracurricular activities (ECA)

This section provides the different definitions of ECAs. Some researchers used the term “**Extracurricular activities**”, while others used the term “**Co-curricular activities**” when speaking about students' activities. The difference was explained by Craft (2012) as follows: *Extracurricular activities* are defined as the activities that students participate in after the end of a regular school day (Craft, 2012). On the other hand, *co-curricular activities* are those activities that students participate in during the normal school time (Craft, 2012). According to Kapur (2016), extracurricular activities include: Poetry, Dance and Music, Sports and Games, Dramatics and Theater, Artwork and Craft activities, Computer Skills, Volunteer Work, Foreign Language and Governance Activities.

Some researchers, such as Wilson (2009), found that the participation of students in extracurricular activities has had a direct relationship with students' academic and social behavior. Studies have taken different sides of the debate on the impact of extracurricular activities. Similar to Wilson 's claim, Morrissey (2005) goes further to highlight the five main pillars of extracurricular activities that contribute to youth 's development which consist of: (1) competence in academic, social, and vocational areas, (2) confidence, (3) connection, (4) character, and (5) caring and emotional intelligence. These are also known as the Five Cs of the positive characteristics for youth. Also, others, as Fredricks and Eccles (2003) and Shaffer (2019), have supported the same argument; highlighting that when students acquire the five Cs

through their participation in extracurricular activities, it has a direct positive impact on academic outcomes, including higher grades, improved attendance, active school participation, better behavior and increased engagement in the educational process. Hence, several scholars have emphasized that participation of students in ECA has benefits on both academic excellence and the character building of students.

It is clearly evident that ECAs have a direct impact on Character building and academic achievement. Fredricks and Eccles (2003), Shaffer (2019), Wilson (2009) and Morrissey (2005) have clearly explained that through their research. As we detail in the following sections, this relationship will be clearly identified.

### **3.2 ECA and Students' character building**

As part of the discussion on the impact of ECA on character building, Morrissey (2005) critically examines the talents and potentials of students whose characters were developed as an outcome of ECA. He points out that ECA was able to equip these students with occupational excellence in young adulthood. Along the same line of argument, Tawfik (2017) argues that the participation of students in ECA can equip students with the basic employability skills that are required by every employee. Also, she further explained that students can acquire professional skills, like teamwork, communication skills, and problem-solving skills while, at the same time, gaining some important traits that are required in every job, like commitment, confidence, and flexibility. In addition, Tawfik (2017) established causality between ECA and Curriculum Vitaes (CVs). He argues that ECA activities can be a very good addition to the CVs of students.

In addition, Wilson (2009) argues that students who participate in structured activities are more likely to develop their social characters. This is because they appreciate values like team work, leadership, discipline, and respecting differences. For instance, a student's participation in a speech contest, theater play, and leadership positions can all contribute to raising the student's confidence. Consequently, some researchers, such as Daley and Leahy (2003), believe that students' participation in ECA might be the reason to boost the student's self-confidence.

Daley and Leahy (2003) further explained that ECA can result in physical confidence through their participation in sports activities, as well as social competence, while social confidence occurs as a result of the friendships and the level of socialization and interaction that takes place with others during their participation in ECA. This study gave a realistic insight from the field on the positive impact of extracurricular activities on students because Leahy (2003) realized that when students get engaged into physical activities, social interactions are inevitable and accordingly this encourages students to improve their social skills through continuous practicing during ECA which accordingly boosts their self-confidence. Adding to that, Lewis (2004) has explained that participation in ECA, especially the one that is related to sports activities, have contributed to students' self-discovery and motivation, as well as students' participation in team work activities. Also, Coleman (2006) argued that students' participation in extracurricular activities has a role in helping students to set life goals and become persevering and resilient in achieving them.

Furthermore, since the participation of students in ECA has a direct impact on students' self-perception and improved wellbeing, this gives students the motivation to live better and make the right choices. For instance, some researchers clarified the impact of ECA which directly impacted solving major community challenges. In a study done by (Park, Chiu and Won (2017), they showed that there is a direct relationship between the participation of students in extracurricular activities and aggressive behavior. They mentioned that the aggressive behavior has decreased by time due to the participation of students in ECA. In addition, Linville and Huebner (2005) mentioned that students who participate in ECA are less likely to be engaged in risky behaviors.

### **3.2.1 Extracurricular Activities and Mental Health**

As mentioned in the previous section, Daley and Leahy (2003) mentioned that students' participation in extracurricular activities has a direct relationship between improved mental well-being, self-perception and having reduced stress. It was clear that students who took part in physical activities have positive self-perceptions. It is notable that physical activities helped students to become healthier and to look better physically and this had a direct implication on

their self-confidence and self-perception. Accordingly, it improved their social competencies and interactions with others (Daley & Leahy, 2003).

According to the WHO (2022), it has been found that one out of every six adolescents suffer from mental health problems. In fact, according to Vos, et al. (2020), depression is considered the fourth reason leading to disease for adolescents. It was assured that protecting adolescents from adversity, promoting emotional well-being and raising awareness around mental health care are essential for adolescents' physical and psychological health at this critical age. In addition, Ruggeri, Garcia-Garzon, Maguire, Matz, and Huppert (2020) defined "Positive mental health" to be the capability of the individual to experience positive emotions, joy and satisfaction, while realizing the individual's unique abilities. Also, it is explained that a person with positive mental health is capable of handling normal stresses of life and can become productive and contribute to their surroundings.

Due to the above stated reasons, as suggested by Eccles and Gootman (2002) and Herrman et al. (2005), adolescents will require programs that can foster physical, cognitive, emotional and social growth. In addition, those programs are required to provide a healthy space for adolescents that can promote well-being and mental health. A recent study done by the University of British Columbia in 2020 that involved around 28,712-Grade 7 students from 365 schools explained that adolescents have better mental health when they take part in extracurricular activities, like sports and arts. It also has been found that students who took part in extracurricular activities were less likely to be engaged in any recreational screen-based activities. The study explained that there is a direct relationship between the longer screen time that adolescents spend on their phones and depression and anxiety symptoms. The less time students spent on screen recreational activities, the more their mental health improved.

Along the same line of argument, other studies have been conducted by Bohnert and Garber (2007), Melman et al (2017) and Gottfried (2021); all arguing that the more students participate in extracurricular activities, the less depression symptoms they have. Also, Melman et al (2017) added that the more activities they participate in, the higher anxiety levels students develop due to the busy schedules. Speaking of the type of the activity, Viau and Poulin (2015) have argued that the type of extracurricular activity can have a direct impact on adolescents as they grow towards adulthood. Bartko and Eccles (2003) conducted a study on 918 adolescents;

where they divided extracurricular activities into different categories. They further argued that the more students are included in structured activities, the more they have positive mental health, while the opposite happens to students who do not take part in extracurricular activities. On the other hand, Darling (2005) divided students by their participation in different activities. These activities were sports, leadership activities, clubs, and art performances. This study lasted for three years to measure its long-term impact. Darling (2005) found that students self-reported the same depressive symptoms before and after their participation in extracurricular activities. In another study conducted by Barber et al. (2001), extracurricular activities were divided into four categories. These categories are sports, arts, pro-social activities, and school involvement. It was found that students who participated in sports activities reported the lowest depression rates.

The above section emphasizes the role that extracurricular activities play in improving mental health of students. It is notable that the participation of students in ECAs allows them to use their time in the most beneficial way. It is common for teenagers to face identity problems and low self esteem (Vos, et al. ,2020). The participation of students in ECAs allows them to understand their true value through discovering their hidden potentials and talents. It also improves their physique which boosts their self confidence and consequently impacts their capability to develop connections and relationships with others (Daley & Leahy, 2003). The previous skills support students to lessen the stressful impact that digitalization has on teenagers that causes them to suffer from continuous depression and anxiety (WHO, 2022). ECAs also act as a safe channel for students where they can transform physical and psychological inconvenience in a positive and healthy way. This channel supports students to build their characters and express themselves (Eccles and Gootman, 2002).

### **3.3 ECA and students' academic excellence**

Regarding the impact of ECA on students' academic excellence, Morrissey (2005) stated that academic excellence can happen as a result of students' motivation to participate in extracurricular activities. Morrissey (2005) stated that students might be required to achieve certain grades in order to be eligible for participation in certain activities. Thus, students might

be motivated to do their best academically in order to participate in activities. Other researchers, such as Craft and Craft (2012), explained that participation of students in ECA has had a major significance in decreasing the dropout rates from education. For instance, as stated by one of the teachers in public education in preparatory school, students might be disciplined to attend their classes so that they would be given a chance to participate in the school's sports days.

According to Gardner, Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2008), participation in organized activities at school is directly related to the future occupational aspirations of a student. Also, Ahmad, et al. (2019) argued that students who took part in extracurricular activities usually had better examination results, reduced drop-out rates, and have learnt core skills that are needed for academic development. Also, Sitkowski (2008) reported that there is a link between participation in ECA and character-building skills, like self-efficacy and motivation, which directly impacts academic achievement. This is because, as Bekosmson et. al (2020) argue, academic success is not only based on students' hard work and determination but is also dependent on the child's personal traits and characteristics. Hence, the more the adolescent believes in their capabilities and trust them, the more they are capable of having enough persistence to finish a certain academic success. These findings were based on qualitative research on teachers and educators, who reported that there has been quite an observation in recent years that students who had poor self-efficacy performed very weakly in their academic responsibilities. Bekomson and Ntamu (2019) explained that students, who were suffering from poor self-efficacy, procrastinated and always felt that they were not capable of achieving any academic task. Furthermore, Bekmoson and Mgbani (2019) explained in their research that students who lacked belief in themselves find it very difficult to answer abstract exam questions.

In fact, Bekosmson et al (2020) mentioned that there has always been a growing concern by researchers, educators, counselors and parents about the relationship between self-efficacy and academic achievement. There have been extensive efforts in an attempt to include more lessons, exercises and examinations, with the hope of challenging students to learn more and

believe more in their capabilities. Yet, research has shown almost minimal results out of those trials. Bandura (2000) defined self- efficacy as the belief of the individual's own ability to perform well in different life aspects while staying motivated. Under this aspect, Bur (2012) argues that the existence of extra-curricular activities has supported in creating the environment for the adolescents where they can learn about all the skills required to boost their self-efficacy, which, consequently, will impact their academic performance. Bandura (2000) has raised the attention to the importance of the adolescents' participation in extracurricular activities, which can result in enriching their academic performance. Broh (2002) mentioned that participation in extracurricular activities had a very positive impact on the urgent skills needed for academic excellence, such as focus, perseverance, self-confidence, and character building. In addition, Broh (2002) explained that participation in extracurricular activities supports students to participate in a social community where social interactions and relationships take place. Broh (2002) believed that this is essential because it supports adolescents to lead and become members of groups that are oriented towards academic development as these groups support their members to acquire self-efficacy and improve their academic performance.

In addition, participation of students in extracurricular activities motivates students to stick to school rules which automatically impact students' academic excellence. Mahoney, Cairns, and Farmer (2003) conducted a study showing that students' participation in ECA have led to high educational aspirations for students. However, Coleman (2006) argued that after researching the adolescents' culture, it has been found that students are mostly interested in sports and music and other non-academic talents and skills. He discovered that 70% of the boys would like to be remembered as athletes more than academic brilliant students.

On the other hand, there is another camp of researchers counter-arguing the positive impacts of ECA on academic excellence. For instance, Marsh and Kleitman (2002) and Miller (2009) argue that the participation of ECA has a negative impact on students' academic performance for the participation of ECA could impact students' participation and focus on their academic commitments. Miller (2009) further explained that students who participated in ECA had lower

GPA's; as well as less chances of successful graduation. Also, Wilson (2009) argued that according to Eccles and Barber, the over involvement of students in multiple extra-curricular activities can have a negative impact on students' academic performance. Reeves (2008) also mentioned that over participation of students in extracurricular activities might lead to the loss of the student's focus and concentration on their academics and their over participation in activities might not allow them to focus on the quality and commitment of the activities they are engaged in. This might not only impact students' academics and level of commitment but rather can impact students physically; as it could lead to stress, fatigue and burn out. In addition, Turner (2010) mentioned that students' over involvement in ECA might not give them the chance to focus on their academics, while their obligations to fulfill many academic requirements as well might not allow them to have enough energy to take part in any extra-curricular activity.

At the same time, Thompson (2013) stated that participation in extracurricular activities cannot replace a good degree but they can only reinforce academic achievement. Thompson (2013) mentioned that ECA can sometimes be a motive for students to achieve higher grades, but it can still be a reason for students to consume all their time and take their attention away from their academic life, which will result in very low grades academically. Yet, Reeves, Hinson, and Marchant (2010) argue that participation in these activities is considered a waste of time. They mentioned that students and teachers could have used their time more efficiently if they didn't participate in those extracurricular activities. In addition, their participation and commitment can consume a lot of their private life.

### **3.4 Enabling environment for ECA Implementation**

There are important factors that contribute to the successful implementation of ECAs. These factors have a major role in creating an enabling environment for the students to practice ECAs and have the optimum benefits of their participation. As we detail in the following section, the role of parents, teachers and school administrators will be identified.



### 3.4.1 Extracurricular activities and parents

Another important aspect that researchers tackle while examining ECA is the role of parents. Ashbbourne and Andres (2015) argue that there are three roles that parents play in the life of their children when it comes to their participation in extracurricular activities. These roles are: (a) enforcer, (b) facilitator, and (c) encourager. The role of the parent as an “enforcer” is to make sure that their children are disciplined enough to become engaged in activities that will benefit their future. They push their children to get engaged in useful activities regardless of the children ‘s personal interests. In other words, as Ashbourne and Andres (2015) argue, parents’ authority can force children to participate in those activities if it is seen as essential for their development. However, Anderson et.al (2003) argue that parents who put pressure on their children to practice ECA might end up de-motivating them. Also, Sánchez-Miguel et al (2013) assured that students who are faced with parental pressure are less likely to enjoy practicing ECAs. On the contrary, others, such as Stirrup et al. (2015), argue that parents cannot put so much pressure on their children to participate in ECA because they will make them resist and develop emotional blockage towards their participation.

For the second role of parents that Ashbbourne and Andres (2015) added, which is the “facilitator”, this role helps children to feel that their parents trust them and believe in them. This is mainly because, as Stirrup et al. (2015) explained, parents should facilitate life for their children and help them discover themselves and their potential, which can clearly happen through their children’s participation in ECA. Also, Beiswenger and Grolnick (2010) stated that the support that parents show to their children has a very positive impact on their behavior and motivation. In addition, Anderson et al. (2003) and Hoyle and Leff (1997) clearly stated that although it is important for children to decide on which activities that they are motivated to participate in, it is still essential for parents to have a role in facilitating the process because their children might lack setting clear goals towards the things that they want to achieve or take part in.

For the “encouragers’ role, Ashbbourne and Andres (2015) explained that this role combines the necessity of the parents’ understanding of the needs of their children motivating them and

at the same time facilitating goals towards their children's development and growth. According to Stirrup et al. (2015), sometimes parents encourage their children to take part in activities that remind them of their childhood or family history; simply because it reminds them with happy moments that they lived themselves during their childhood or think it was useful for them.

To conclude the findings of the different studies that linked parents' behavior with the children's motivation, children who have shown more interest, engagement, and motivation to ECAs are more related to parents, who take the supportive roles towards their children's participation. However, children who are more likely to have a negative attitude towards their participation in ECAs are more likely related to the role of their parents as enforcers as parental pressure takes away their interest of participation (Ashbourne, 2013; Ashbourne & Andres, 2015). Along the same line of argument, Xu, et al (2017) mentioned that the more parents are involved in students' life and are concerned about their growth and development, the more they will allow their children to have access to activities. On the other hand, Xu, et al (2017) argued that the pressure of the lack of support that parents might put on their children will also restrict both their participation and involvement in ECA. Therefore, it is of high importance that parents would understand that they have a role in the participation of their children in the ECA. This is because, as Metsäpelto & Pulkkinen (2012) explained, parents' involvement in their children 's ECA has a great impact as they have an essential role in supervising and monitoring those activities and the development of their children. Hansen and Larson (2007) mentioned that in the United States, there is a very strong connection between students' participation in ECA and their future enrollment in a prestigious university that they choose to enroll in. Therefore, Hansen and Larson (2007) explained that both school teachers and parents have an essential role in supporting students to have more access to ECA to ensure its impact on their character and academic development.

Furthermore, Hansen et al. (2003) explained that some ECAs, like music and art, require years of studying, committing and growing. This will be very challenging for students if their parents are resisting or not supporting their children's engagement in ECA. This is because, as Ashbourne and Andres (2015) and Shannon (2006) explained, the participation of students in ECA is dependent on the commitment and support of their parents. This support can come not

only as moral encouragement, but as material support, as well; whereas parents will be supporting their children with any extra expenditure required to take part in ECA, like application fees, instruments, and tools.

### **3.4.2 Extracurricular activities and school administration and teachers**

In addition to the role and importance of parents, Stearns and Glennie (2010, p. 307) argue that one of the important benefits of ECA is the opportunity it creates to establish relationships with teachers. This relationship contributes to the social development of students. Wilson (2009) mentioned that the participation of students in extracurricular activities gives the opportunity of students to acquire a different type of a supportive relationship with an adult, who is their teacher or school principal. This relationship can be in the form of a mentor, role model or a coach. Feldman and Mat Jasko (2005) stated that when children get involved in ECAs, this gives them a chance to know their teachers and coaches better, which opens a channel to a positive and trustworthy relationship outside the children's families. This relationship would have a positive influence on the children's development because it opens a channel for mutual respect and trust. Logan and Scarborough (2008) further mentioned that students need to have the presence of other "adult relationships" in their lives other than their parents and families. It is considered a developmental asset that is very essential for students' growth either in the academic or the personal life.

Also, as Himelfarb, Lac and Baharav (2014) and Stearns and Glennie (2010) explained, extracurricular activities allow teachers to better understand their students as they compare their performance during extracurricular activities with their performance in formal courses. This is important to the extent that some schools organize both the courses, along with the extracurricular activities keeping students' needs in mind to attract them. For instance, Zhang and Chen (2014) Stated that in China, primary students were encouraged to participate in extracurricular activities. However, middle and high school teachers were more supportive to the participation of students in academic courses and were seeing that after school activities were a waste of time. They have also mentioned that ECAs have been recently introduced as an informal curriculum for primary and middle schools.

Xu, et al (2017) have argued that when teachers get closer to students' personal problems and challenges, the teacher can easily guide students to take part in the extracurricular activity that can benefit their development and growth. As an example, if a teacher realized that a student has a problem related to identity, performance and achievement, the teacher can recommend a type of activity that can shift their focus from results into processing their feelings and individual experience. Anderson et al. (2003) have also explained that there is another role for teachers, which is working collaboratively with parents in order to help students make the right choices and avoid any parental pressure that might not be useful for students' performance.

On the other hand, according to Feldman and Matjasko (2005), students' participation in activities gives them an opportunity to have a role model through their teachers which allows genuine interaction, constructive feedback and the opportunity of having a real mentor who supports, coaches and mentors students through the journey of their young adulthood. However, Wilson (2009) showed that the risk of having a poor coach or an activity teacher might cause serious damage to students' growth and development leaving a negative feeling for the student from the whole experience, and might cause high resistance from participation in any future activities. Wilson (2009) further explained that if teachers are not motivated enough to encourage students to take part in those activities, students will quickly lose motivation.

Moreover, Tawfik (2017) has stated that the implementation of these activities does not only impact students but rather impact the staff, as well. The teachers who lead those activities feel proud of themselves due to the support they give to students. This is because supporting the younger generation to achieve their goals impacts the staff and sharpens the purpose of their mission.

### **3.5 Challenges facing the implementation of ECA**

Globally, different scholars have traced and analyzed the major challenges to implementing ECAs in international contexts. According to Wilson (2009), one of the major challenges is that high funding is required to have the right resources, equipment and the activity teachers' employment. Ahmad, et al. (2019) explained the urgency of providing the needed facilities for students to practice extracurricular activities within class schedules and after class hours. As Turner (2010) mentioned, schools usually use the available funds only to pay for the main school priorities, which are related to academic education. This leaves few available financial resources to implement extra-curricular activities.

Turner (2010) also explained that one of the challenges is related to parents' awareness of ECA and its impact on their children. Parents' lack of involvement and awareness of the importance of these activities might be a reason for not giving enough support to their children to take part in these activities. In addition, Turner (2010) explained that some parents with low socioeconomic level might find difficulty in affording some equipment or extra resources to support the continuation of some activities, like musical activities. Some families might have limited income for extra-curricular activities. Another challenge is the injuries that might be caused by participating in severe physical activities, which might lead to long term injuries. This might be too much of a financial risk especially for families that do not have medical insurance.

### **3.6 Extra- curricular activities in Egypt**

The dearth of available literature about extracurricular activities in Egypt confirms the necessity of the implementation of ECAs in the phase of school education. There are a number of researchers who have explored the topic of ECAs through the lens of students' career choices (Tawfik, 2017). It is clear that students who have participated in ECAs during their school education phase, have acquired unique characteristics more than students who didn't practice any ECAs (Hassanien, 2011). These characteristics are currently required by

employers when they start to pursue their careers. When students practice ECAs at a young age, they are given opportunities to practice leadership roles, take responsibilities and as well discover their potential. ECAs provide students with the opportunity of identifying their characteristics through a safe smaller simulation for life (Tawfik, 2017). Students become more resilient and capable of handling real life situations. So, when it is the time for the students to pursue a job, they have already practiced several skills that are required by their employers (Hassanien, 2011). As an example, Students who take part in the school journalism activities in an Egyptian public school have adopted high analytical and presentation skills. The capacity of those students to express their opinions and evaluate experiences has been clearly recognized. This is because “practice” boosts self-confidence and empowers students to speak up their thoughts and talk about their needs (Mahmoud, 2020). In another study implemented by Salah (2020), students in second preparatory in an Egyptian public school who took part in cultural activities were so capable of knowing their rights and responsibilities. They were capable of voicing their needs and spreading awareness about respecting their differences.

On another note, it is essential to validate the essential role that community schools play in the implementation of ECAs in Egypt since the beginning of its establishment. It is notable that community schools view “sports” as an essential component for the students’ physical and psychological development (Zaalouk, 2004). Malak Zaalouk (2004) has explained that students play basketball using recycled materials. This responds to the same idea that it is apparent that in community schools, students make use of every single activity to teach students essential life skills like recycling and reusing materials in different aspects. On another note, community schools give quite good attention to summer activities (Zaalouk, 2004). It is clear that the existence of the community development organizations like UNICEF and Care International have had quite a major role in highlighting the value and importance of ECAs with focus on sports and the cultural activities (Abdel Fatah, 2016). Also, the available funds and donations provided by those community development organizations have facilitated the existence of facilities where students can practice those activities in (Abdel Fatah, 2016). As an example of that, each school has a library, sports field and available rooms for music and art (Zaalouk, 2004). The community school system equips teachers and calls them facilitators to support in

the implementation of those activities. The term “facilitators” emphasizes the role those teachers play as it is more of facilitating the activity/life skill rather than just imposing learning on the students. This learning methodology has proven its success and its impact on the community school students where currently many of them are representing a success story for Egypt inside and outside the country (Zaalouk, 2004).

In another study done by Abdel Fattah (2016) introducing a vibrant concept in community schools about the inclusion of students in school management integrating one of the extracurricular activities which is the “student council” with the school management system. This is to enhance the students’ leadership skills and at the same time create a channel to voice the students’ concerns. This activity increases the engagement inside the school environment. Although its vibrant role is to both the students and the schools, it is noticeable from the study implemented by Amira Abdel Fattah (2016) that the student council is not active and very few students know about it. It is clear that almost minimal funds are allocated to support this activity.

While many studies discuss the impact of extracurricular activities globally; However, few academic research exists to reflect the Egyptian experience when implementing ECAs inside the Egyptian schools. In addition to that, there is a gap in discussing possibilities of creating an enabling environment despite the challenges surrounding students to create a suitable context for ECA implementation.

Thus, this study attempts to fill-in the research gap. It tries to discuss the role of school administration, teachers’ engagement and parents’ perspectives that impact the implementation of ECA. It also provides a case study on three different types of Egyptian schools; public, community and international schools. Finally, it sheds light on the benefits and drawbacks of the implementation of ECAs and possible interventions to support ECAs’ successful implementation in Egypt.

## Chapter 4 Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

This section focuses on some of the theories that reinforce the implementation of extracurricular activities (ECA) in schools. These theories examine how schools, teachers and parents understand the impact of ECAs on students. This is mainly through examining and understanding how ECA provides the suitable context for learning; develops the social and behavioral cognitive abilities of students; and addresses the different learning styles as well. These theories explain the different variables of how when students acquire all the previous elements, they develop personally and academically, which is the crux of the relationship this thesis aims to assess. The selected theories in this thesis are the *Experiential Learning Theory*, the *Social Constructivism Theory* and the *Cognitive Learning Theories*, which are divided into the Social Cognitive Theory and the Cognitive Behavioral Theory. The fourth section explains how these theories are used in congruence, followed by the overall conceptual framework for the study.

### 4.1 Experiential Learning Theory

To begin with, this theory focuses on the idea that learning is a process that takes place when knowledge is transformed into experience (Kolb, 2014). Kolb (2014) argues that individuals don't have only one way of learning things; and that each learner adopts one or more learning styles. Honey and Mumford (2000) introduced these styles as **activists, reflectors, theorists and pragmatists**. **Activists** are those people who like learning through new experiences. They are usually enthusiastic about new experiences and opportunities. Thus, they prefer learning through a fun, engaging experience rather than theoretical lectures or long explanation episodes. For **Reflectors**, they are the type of people who prefer learning from different perspectives. They like to receive different data sources, and think analytically and carefully about learning and concepts before getting into solutions. They like to observe individuals and teams, and then reach conclusions based on their observations and analysis. **Theorists** are the type of learners who like to integrate any reached observations into logical theories. They are



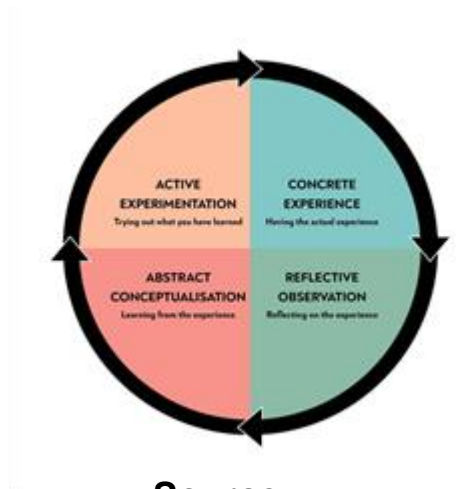
high in rationale, and are highly structured in situations that have clear purpose. Also, they like to use their knowledge and skills in complex situations. Finally, **Pragmatists** are the type of people who like to relate things together. They like learning to be related to practical life. Hence, they lose motivation when there are no clear practical guidelines on how to practically do what is expected to learn. The existence of the experiential learning methodology is mainly to offer a methodology, which can introduce learning in a way that can easily address the four learning styles (Kolb, 2014).

The experiential learning cycle takes place through four stages, as explained in figure 1 and figure 2.

1. **Concrete experience:** In that stage, learners start to get exposed to a certain experience, which allows them to be exposed to a real-life simulation that triggers their minds. This stage is mainly targeting the activists' learning style. (Experience)
2. **Reflective Observation of the new experience:** After the experience takes place, learners take time to reflect in light of the existing knowledge they have. This stage is mainly targeting the reflectors' learning style. (Reflect)
3. **Abstract Conceptualization:** At that stage, learners reach a theory or a concept based on the learning process they have been through. This stage is mainly targeting the theorists' learning style. (Conceptualize)
4. **Active Experimentation:** In this stage, learners start to reach practical guidelines based on the concepts they have grasped during the learning experience on how to implement what they learnt in their everyday life. This is mainly targeting the Pragmatists' learning style. (Test)

Figure 1

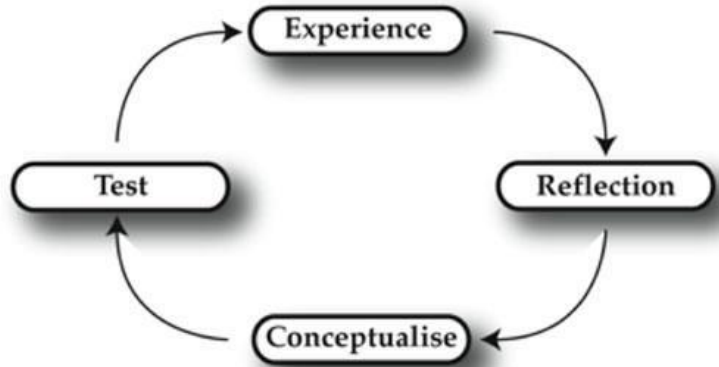
Experiential learning cycle - Sample 1



Source:

Figure 2

Experiential learning cycle - Sample 2



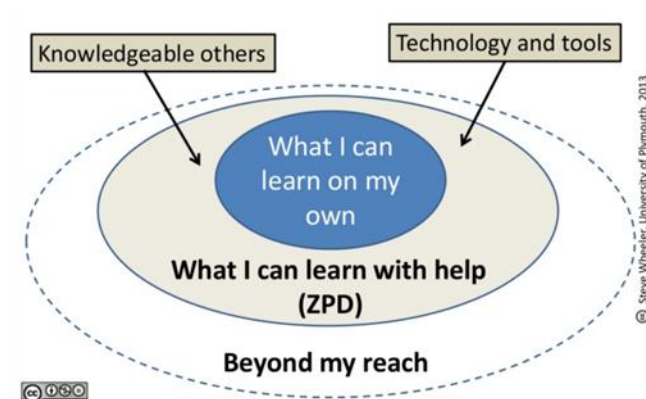
Source: (Kolb,

## 4.2 Social Constructivism Theory

Another theory, which is relevant to the examination of ECA, is the social constructivism theory that was developed by Vygotsky. According to Sheela (2015), Vygotsky's theory emphasizes that learning doesn't take place except in a collaborative nature; for it is not possible to separate learning from its social context. The theory has been presented through different perspectives that relate **knowledge**, **learning** and **motivation** together. Vygotsky argued that language and culture play an essential role in cognitive development, as they highly affect human intellectual development and the way humans experience the world (Liu and Matthews, 2005; Adam, 2017; Akpan et al., 2020). This is because both language and culture are the frameworks through which individuals experience, communicate and understand the reality of life. Under this perspective, the argument is that language and knowledge cannot depend on *solo* learning, yet, on the contrary, they need to be socially constructed. Also, Vygotsky clearly stated that "Knowledge is not simply constructed, it is co-constructed." On the other hand, Vygotsky has differentiated between the "actual" and

“potential” levels of development. He defined the distance between the *actual* development level by an independent learner in problem solving and the *potential* level of development as determined through problem solving under the guidance of adults or in cooperation with peers as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), as clarified in figure 2.1. Furthermore, Vygotsky argued that a good coach/teacher is the one who pushes the learners to be taught under the ZPD and helps learners to stretch beyond their capabilities (Berk, & Winsler, 1995).

**Figure 3: Vygotsky - Zone of**



**Source: (McLeod, 2018)**

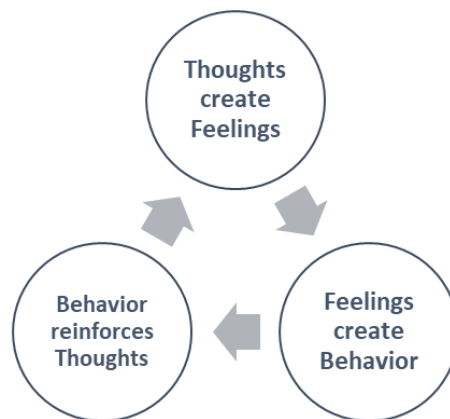
### 4.3 Cognitive Learning Theories

The third theory to examine in this thesis is the Cognitive Learning Theory. It explains how both internal and external factors can impact an individual 's mental processes to enhance learning. Individuals face problems in concentration because they have problems in mental processing. These processes include attention, observation and retrieval from long term memory. This theory has been developed over time to include *Social Cognitive Theory* and *Cognitive Behavioral Theory*. Bandura (1989), who created the *Social Cognitive Theory*, stated that this theory is mainly dependent on observational learning, which is the process of

learning about others' desirable and undesirable behaviors through observation. This can also apply to students' peers, as well as their teachers, supervisors or coaches who we call "role models". On the other hand, Aaron Beck (1963, as cited in Holas, 2009) developed the *Cognitive Behavioral* theory, which refers to the mental processes, such as thoughts and interpretations of life events. This theory explains how the thoughts, behaviors and feelings of a person interact with each other; and those thoughts affect how individuals feel, which leads to particular emotions. And then, these emotions create behavior responses, which enforce thoughts, as illustrated in Figure 4.

In fact, cognitive learning theories have multiple benefits such as they enhance learning, boost confidence, improve problem-solving skills, improve comprehension and help learners to learn new things faster.

**Figure 4: Cognitive Behavioral Theory**



**Source (Aeron Beck, 1963)**

## 4.4 Integration of Theories

This section is divided into two sub-sections. The first subsection shows how the above examined three theories are integrated during the implementation of the ECAs; focusing on the relationship between the ECA and experiential learning. Then, this relation is further examined through providing a practical example to students participating in a football class. In the second subsection, the difference between structured and unstructured is outlined, and an example for a structured ECA is provided for better understanding.

### 4.4.1 ECA and Learning

The implementation of ECAs is one of the ideal representations of the **experiential learning theory**; whereas through experiential learning, the learners are exposed to a simulation for a situation or a challenge that represents something that happens in real life. This happens when a student, for instance, participates in a sports game, art class, student council leadership position, or any other sort of activity. During any of these activities, the brain is stimulated to learn technical skill (directly) and life skill(s) (indirectly), based on the situation and the context of the activity. The direct participation of students in the ECA is addressing the activists' learning style (Kolb, 2014). On the other hand, some students, whose learning style is a “reflector”, start to observe and reflect on what happened during the activity. This happens either through self-reflection or group reflection. Based on the **social constructivism theory**, students grow, develop and their learning is stretched when they are in a group or when challenged by their mentors/role models, which in this case represent their activity teachers. The **Social Cognitive Theory** states that learning is mainly dependent on observing the desirable and undesirable behaviors of others. Accordingly, this kind of stretch happens as a result of observing and exchanging knowledge and experiences with others. The existence of others during a learning process helps an individual to grow beyond their limited dimensions and explore beyond the circle of their own knowledge and experience. Afterwards, students whose learning style is a “theorist” reach a theory in mind related to the discussed topic. Finally, students whose learning style is a “pragmatist” reach the optimum of their learning

through transforming the holistic experience into practical steps, which they can later apply in real life.

The following section provides a practical example of some school students who are participating in a football class to show how the different learning styles are impacted when the ECA is implemented.

**Practical Example: “Students participating in a football class as an extracurricular activity”:**

*Direct Learning:*

When students participate in a football class, the main objective is that they would learn technical skills that would help them become good football players.

*Indirect Learning:*

Indirect learning takes place in the process when students are exposed to playing with other players who are different from each other, and when they are required to plan a game while respecting certain rules and guidelines, or even when they get angry at a coach for unfair results. Here, students indirectly start to acquire life skills through participation in the football game. Some of these life skills are team work, leadership skills, anger management, communication skills, respecting diversity, strategic thinking, and problem solving, among others (i.e. the acquired skills differ depending on what the situation exposes students to). The benefit of the simulation is that it triggers the different learning styles, while taking into consideration that one person can have one or more of the learning styles, as shown below:

a) The activist will enjoy the activity and will automatically grasp the life skills through the experience itself.

***“Today I enjoyed the game very much. We were an excellent Team.” - Says an activist***

b) The reflector will learn through self-reflection and intentional/unintentional group discussions around the game.

*“Today, I felt so bad when no one respected my opinion. I feel we cannot be a good team.” - Says a reflector.*

*“Today, when Ahmed respected Samer during the game, I learnt that respect is a core value in teamwork.” - Says a reflector.*

c) The Theorist will learn through reaching a theory as a result of all the observations they have.

*“Good Communication is the main cornerstone of a dynamic team.” - Says a theorist.*

d) The pragmatist will grasp the learning through reaching practical guidelines (applied in real life) on what to do after the activity.

*“After today’s game, I learnt so much about teamwork. I have learnt that back in school, I had this big conflict with my class project team because I didn’t know how to respect the differences of others. I think I need to 1) learn how to communicate better, 2) respect the differences of others, 3) understand my strengths and weaknesses, and 4) become humble enough to build on others’ talents.” - Says a pragmatist.*

#### **4.4.2. Experiential Learning Cycle: Structured versus unstructured ECA**

Following the school example, as one of the most important learning institutions, it has been found that several schools that implement ECAs usually apply the above experiential learning cycle in a non-structured way. During and after the implementation of the ECAs, students’ minds are stimulated and automatically the learning is grasped according to everyone’s learning style. On the other hand, some schools apply it in a structured way; meaning that the design of the ECA itself is meant to tackle a specific life skill besides the technical skill. In other words, the implementation of the activity is followed by a structured discussion among students and the teacher around what happened in the activity, and then students start to reflect on it while reaching a certain theory/conclusion to the experience they were exposed to. Finally, the conversation ends with practical questions on how to apply the learnt concepts when they go back home or in their practical life. The continuous implementation of structured

experiential learning cycle while implementing ECAs leads the brain to be self-trained to grasp the learning, based on whatever experience students are exposed to. Also, in that sense, everyone feels included because all learning styles are addressed. Based on the **Cognitive Learning** theory, the whole process that takes place (either unstructured or structured) during and after the ECA supports students to acquire behavior change towards a certain life skill through triggering a person's thoughts and feelings during the simulation. This is the stage where learning and change take place.

Below is an example to a structured ECA:

**Example: Structured Experiential Learning Football class:**

Class: Learning Teamwork through a football skill

Technical Skill: Passing the ball in a Football game

Life Skill: Team work

The coach starts to implement a normal football exercise on ball passing. The game is followed by a reflection discussion among the team members, which tackles the following questions:

1. What did you feel today? What is your most take away lesson out of today's activity?
2. What was your most challenging moment as a team member?
3. How far do you think a talented team member can do the role of the whole team?
4. What did you feel when a teammate supported you when you were attacked by an opponent?
5. How will you apply the lessons you learnt today when you are back home working among different teams?

Then the coach concludes the session with a wrap up conclusion, as follows:

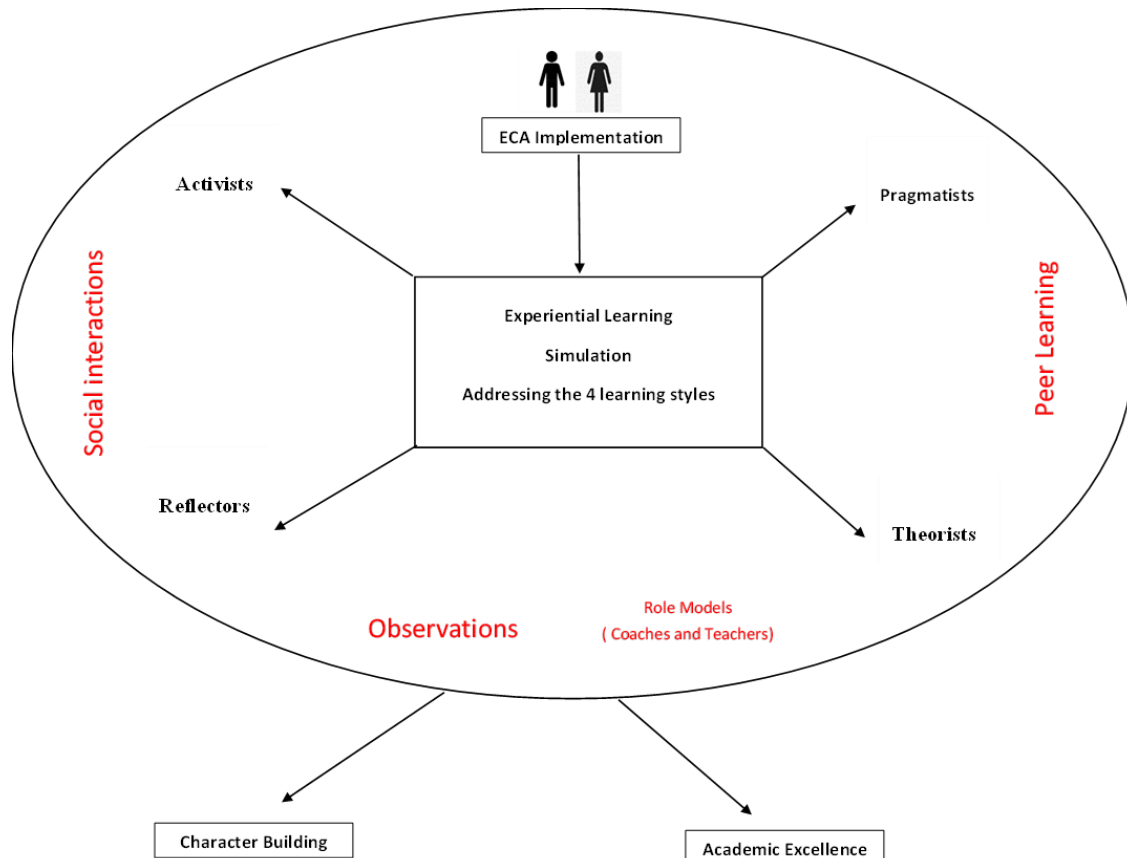
*“Passing is a skill to help you eventually score a goal or even defend your goal. Playing together is a key point when playing a team sport. Passing is a key skill that needs team members to coordinate and play together. This is the same back in your life; you cannot win everything alone. You need others, and others need you”.*



## 4.5 Conceptual Framework

ECA's implementation serves as a simulation to diverse technical and life skills via experiential learning. This technique simulates the four learning styles discussed above (i.e., activists, reflector, theorists and pragmatists). Additionally, figure 5.1 reflects the impact of experiential learning on students in specific, and the general public at large; specifically, through ECA. In light of this, individuals come to socially interact together, leading to a higher level of learning. In other words, peer-to-peer learning is established, along with dynamically providing a chance for reinforcing the lessons learnt through a hands-on-experience. Also, coaches and activity teachers come to be role models, instead of instructors aiming to teach and nurture the growth of students. Hence, as this process takes place, it positively impacts both: the individual's character building, and by extension, their academic excellence.

**Figure 5: Conceptual framework**



**Source:** Author's iteration based on: Kolb, D. A. (2014) *Experiential Learning Theory*, Vygotsky 's social constructivism theory as explained by Sheela (2015), Aaron Beck's *Cognitive Behavioral* theory as explained by (Holas, P., 2009) and Bandura's *Social Cognitive Theory (1989)*.

# Chapter 5 Research Methodology

This chapter focuses on the rationale behind the use of the qualitative methodology. That includes the selection of the sample and the type of approaches used to reach the acquired findings. In this chapter, there are some insights about the occupation of the researcher and its impact on the research design and sample selection. Also, this section includes insights about the ethical considerations that were followed during the interviewing process. Finally, this chapter ends with a section that explains the research limitations that the researcher had while conducting this research.

## 5.1 Qualitative Research Design and Methodology

The aim of the study is to assess the impact of extracurricular activities on students' character building and academic excellence. The qualitative approach is used in conducting this research. Qualitative research is well known for seeking depth especially when trying to find answers focused on human experiences (Ambert et al., 1995). The rationale behind the researcher's choice of using qualitative methodology is that the research paradigm is "interpretivist" in which all of it is dependent on the facts that it is emerging from the human experience and social contexts inside the field. Accordingly, the type of reasoning that the results are dependent on is "inductive" in which the process that the researcher will follow starts with a general idea then data will be collected from the field followed by building hypotheses and accordingly gather more data, categorize results and then regenerate the process. The reason behind choosing the qualitative methodology is that it allows the researcher to investigate and explore actual life examples based on real experiences from the field. It allows the researcher to choose the suitable context for extracting the needed data while being able to trace complexities, relationships and informal links. The qualitative strategies that I will be using are ethnographic semi-structured in-depth interviews and focus groups based on the main issues discussed in the literature review and content analysis. These issues are the impact of ECA on students' character building and academic excellence, the role of parents and teachers that result into effective implementation of ECA and the major challenges facing the

implementation of ECA. The in-depth interviews will focus on the individual lived experiences while the content analysis strategy will be focused on the interactions among the different conducted interviews, events, the analysis behind the different wordings, languages and communication.

### **5.1.1 Note on Positionality**

I am currently leading the Community Transformation department in one of the organizations focused on empowering Education in Egypt. My job has given me the opportunity to have quite a close relationship with the education ecosystem in Egypt. In addition, this exposed me to observe the different types of schools and interact with students, teachers and principles from several backgrounds. I have always been passionate about introducing new creative and innovative methodologies into the educational process. Throughout the field work, I have realized that the component related to “extracurricular activities” in schools does have a powerful impact and can truly complement the gaps that result from the academic education. However, it is given minimal attention despite its existence as an important resource for empowering the Education system. I wanted to build my field experience on academic research to give more depth and evidence to the field observations. Moreover, I would like my field observations as well to give the study ‘s findings perspective and a different approach so that both angles complement each other.

### **5.1.2 Sample Selection and Interviews**

I have conducted a total of 13 semi structured interviews and 4 focus groups in three different types of schools. These schools are International, public and community schools. The international schools are schools where usually the level of education is high in comparison to other schools. The public schools are mainly administered by the Ministry of Education and provide Education at minimal fees to allow access for everyone. The community schools are schools established in rural areas in Egypt providing education to older students who were deprived from the educational services at younger age. The three schools were located in Cairo. The sample included teachers, school principals, parents and students. The criteria of

selection were dependent on providing a mix between teachers who teach extracurricular activities (Art, Sports, Theater and Music) in schools while other teachers teach other academic subjects to be able to measure the impact from different perspectives. Teachers should have spent at least two years inside the school. Also, the school principals/ administration departments were the ones supervising the schools that these teachers teach in. The focus groups were to include different samples of students who belong to the adolescents age group (10 – 19 years old). Some students should have the experience of taking part in ECA while others shouldn't. Lastly, the interviews with parents were focused on some parents who have their children participating in ECA while they might have other children that didn't practice ECA. The comparative analysis approach was used when analyzing the findings of the quantitative data. Qualitative Comparative analysis is a suitable approach for addressing the role of context in multiple interferences (Hanckel, B. et al., 2021). This allowed the researcher to constantly compare unfolded data and narratives between the three different types of schools that vary in different social and economic factors. In addition, this approach compares the findings between the interviewees themselves as well. One of the main reasons for interviewing the different stakeholders is to guarantee the triangulation approach in which different viewpoints are probed to answer the research question to guarantee the validity of the information stated and to get the points of view of multiple perspectives. This can support in validating the data reached by the end of the research. The table below explains the number of interviews and focus groups conducted for the multiple samples in each type of school.

**Table 1: Number of Interviews and Focus groups conducted**

School Type	In-depth Interviews			Focus groups
	Teachers	Parents	School administration	Students
Public School	3	1	0	1
International School	3	1	1	2
Community School	2	1	1	1
Sub Totals:	8	3	2	4
<b>Totals:</b>	<b>13 in-depth interviews</b>			<b>4 focus groups</b>

**Source: Author**

Due to my work in the Education field, I was able to have access to multiple schools through my network of NGOs and education specialists. The interviews were mainly conducted in the

schools. Each interview was conducted for around 30 mins and each focus group was conducted around 45 mins. The interviews and focus groups were documented through note-taking. The interviews with the teachers, school principal and the parents will be mainly focused on the impact they see of extracurricular activities on students' academic excellence, character building, mental health and its relationship with community building in terms of solving major community challenges like violence and bullying. The questions will also focus on how ECA can impact the future career aspirations of students in terms of employability skills and better career choices. In addition, it will also focus on how they see the role of the different stakeholders in the school in facilitating the successful implementation of ECA. The focus groups with students will be focused on their experience with ECA and how far it impacted their academic excellence and character building. Also, its target is to get the experience of other students who didn't take part in ECA and to get an opinion about the impact of that on them trying to get an insight on their interest/lack of interest in participation. The main objective of the focus group is to try to collect real stories from the field on the research topic. The interview guides with the different interview questions for each cohort are detailed in Appendix 1.

## **5.2 Ethical Considerations**

The main ethical principles considered in this research is confidentiality and anonymity where all the information provided is confidential. None of the original names of the interviewees is shared during note taking or in the main research. Confidentiality was agreed and communicated with interviewees at all the interview stages starting from data collection, storage and analysis. In addition, some interviewees requested not to document any information written during the interview and this was instantly followed. In addition, a written consent form was distributed among the sample that was interviewed prior to the interview. The consent form has a clear description of the interview purpose along with the detailed questions that will be asked during the interview. Any participant had the right to refuse or withdraw at any point of time during the interview. The interviewee will be informed that the interview will be documented through note-taking and the results of the interviews will not be

shared except with the researcher and the researcher 's supervisor. On the other hand, because the focus group discussions will be targeting students, a different consent form was sent to the parents of students prior to the interview with three days to give a chance to parents to ask all the questions they need regarding the participation of their children in the interview. The consent will include as well details of the interview questions that will be asked to students. Parents had the right to refuse the participation of their children at any point of time.

### **5.3 Research Limitations**

This research has several limitations. The first limitation is the role of the researcher in this qualitative study. The researcher being the primary instrument of data collection and analysis might make the research study a bit selective which reflects the subjective nature of the qualitative method. In addition, the second limitation is that the results of the interviews are based on the fact that the research participants are willing to cooperate and be honest in the answers they provide. If the research participants weren't answering the truth, this might limit the analysis reached through this study. In order to avoid this challenge, the researcher conducted the field work through trusted non-governmental organizations and education specialists who are well trusted by the public and get acquainted with schools whom the researcher has a previous relationship with. The third limitation is that the research was conducted only in public, community and international schools because the researcher couldn't obtain legal approvals to enter the schools except in the schools mentioned in this research study. This is also because it is challenging to obtain school entry approvals in Egypt.

## **Chapter 6 Data Analysis and Fieldwork Findings**

The conducted interviews and field visits gave a very insightful view on the implementation of extracurricular activities in Egypt. The interviews targeted three types of schools: International, Public and Community schools in Egypt; and the researcher was able to visit all schools and spend time conducting observational research, as well. Throughout the data collection, interviewees explained the impact ECAs have on the education system. This also includes the value ECA adds to students on both: the personal and academic development. The interviews provided different points of views of the different target groups that were either impacted or affected from the implementation of ECAs in Egypt. The primary data collected was clustered into *four* main themes. The first section gives an overview on the three different types of schools in which the interviews were conducted, which are International, Public and Community schools and the status of ECA activities in each. The second theme explains the challenges that Education is currently facing, with the focus on the challenges that can be addressed through the implementation of ECAs in schools. It also sheds light on the reasons that make extracurricular activities one of the primary drivers of the improvement and the development of Education. The third theme explains the impact that ECAs have on students' character building and academic excellence, and also sheds light on the challenges that ECA implementation is facing. Finally, the fourth theme clarifies the role of the environment surrounding students, which is considered a main enabler for ECA implementation. This includes the role of school administration, teachers and parents.

### **6.1 Defining the status of educational policy in Egypt**



The notion of policy making requires a prior understanding of the essence of the roots of policies. Pildes (1991) argues that policies determine matters of public sphere through embarking on courses of actions that serves the collective interests of the society. He identifies that in order for policies to be operationalized, policy design should meet, according to Schneider Deleon & Ingram (2007), seven elements: first, defining target population; second, identifying policy objectives; third, building foundations and rationales for policy decisions; fourth, clear rubrics and instructions; fifth, gains and drains expected to result from a certain policy; sixth, implementation structure and seventh, tools through which policies are implemented.

It is of importance to highlight the stages of policy cycle that rest upon agenda setting, policy formulation, policy implementation and evaluation. The four stages find the best practices for which problems can be solved. This works through identifying the roots of the problem, planning for combating or initiating change and directly addressing it in the policy implementation phase which would go through a process of monitoring and evaluation. Through the monitoring and evaluation compartment, policies should adhere to the initial problem identification.

Accordingly, it has been clear that the public educational system has faced bottlenecks mainly in the policy implementation phase. These bottlenecks were demonstrated in outdated curricula, low salaries and high drop-out rates. This is due to the budgetary constraints that the Ministry of Education has been facing through the previous decades ( Fayed 2019; Zaalouk 2004). On another note, the international schools did not suffer in their implementation to ECA's frameworks since they are not constricted with Egyptian state policies.

## **6.2 How Egyptian Schools implement ECA**

This section gives an overview on the three different types of schools that the interviews were conducted in. Also, the findings explain the different structures of schools and how each has a different perspective on the implementation of ECAs.

### 6.1.1 Public Schools

Public schools are mainly schools that are administered by the Ministry of Education. The annual fees per student is EGP 160. This provides access to the incapable students to have access to education with minimal fees; . Due to the lack of existing places available for Education in a certain city, one school can serve as a school in the morning shift, and then another school in the evening shift. This makes the school day very short to be able to accommodate the timing of both schools. In addition, the capacity of the classroom is 60 or more students, which makes it difficult for teachers to control the class.

Also, there is minor attention given to ECA in the public school that the interviews were conducted in. It is observed that there might be an existing music and art teacher, and sometimes a part time sports teacher. However, they are not seen as important in school. This is clear in terms of financial and human resources available for the ECA component. Teachers mentioned that they receive minimal support from the Ministry of Education and from the school administration to implement ECA. The budgets provided are either put for school infrastructure or anything that is required within the academic framework. This is reflected in many aspects.

Moreover, ECA teachers don't follow a certain curriculum and they lack training and supervision. They seem to still be passionate and believe in what they are doing even though they receive minimal support. They volunteer to keep ECA implemented inside schools even with very basic resources; just because they believe in what they are doing. Also, teachers' financial capabilities are minimal but they strive to keep up their existence in the school. However, students still do not see their impact and perceive whatever they do as not very interesting or addressing their needs. In addition to that, the average salary for public school teachers is EGP 4000 per month. This is considered a very challenging income in comparison to the current inflation and the basic needs of the teachers.

*"I don't feel we are important." (Seham, Music Teacher, Public School, April 2022)*

On the other hand, one of the academic teachers in the public school mentioned that they consider the activities classes as a burden so they really want to cancel them altogether. This is because there are no activities' teachers available; so instead, they give those classes to the

academic subjects' teachers, which really frustrates them. Thus, they prefer to cancel these activities instead.

*“There is no hope in hiring new activities teachers to cover the big number of students. It frustrates us that we have to be in charge of these lessons instead of having a break.” (Essam, Arabic Teacher, Public School, April 2022)*

*“Whenever we have a competition or tournament... it is usually canceled. The school gives minor attention to sports.” (Student 4, Public school, April 2022)*

Students' financial standard is below low. Their main objective in life is earning money to support their families. Also, parents' educational level is very minimal, which makes it very difficult for them to understand the importance of their kids' education. For instance one public school teacher explained:

*“Students don't come to learn, especially in the evening batch, they aren't attentive in classes. We live in a craft environment where all students already work; they come to school to rest from their work, paying no attention to classes. They don't get support from their parents, that, even when called to resolve a conflict, Parents don't want to listen or support.” (Essam, Arabic Teacher, Public School, April 2022)*

These factors explain that the educational experience is not only limited to the confines of the schools, but is deeply affected by the surrounding environment as well.

### **6.1.3 International Schools**

An international school is a school that provides education within an international environment that adopts one of the well-known established recognized curricula worldwide. In International schools, the level of academic education is usually very high in comparison to other types of schools. This explains the very high fees paid by the students which is an average of EGP 100,000. Teachers are very competent and well qualified. Teachers are compensated well. The average salaries of teachers working in international schools is around EGP 25,000 to EGP 35,000. In the International school that we conducted the interviews in, Cairo American College, ECA is seen as a primary and essential component of education. There are multiple “obligatory” extracurricular activities that are given to students within the academic schedule, like sports; music, art, and drama. In addition, students have after school activities, which are

around two hours after the core school hours. The activities provided during this time include sports, dancing, origami art, swimming, coding, community service, jogging, art, theater, music, yearbook, robotics, and library, among others.

It is clear that extracurricular activities are not structured, which means that students practice the ECA without a specific focus on a certain curriculum or a set of structured skills to grasp. Also, students do not have a structured facilitation process after the implementation of the ECA.

In international schools, some teachers were hired with the expertise of the required ECA class. Also, sometimes the academic teachers take the lead or even school principal volunteers to lead students after school activities. It is also very positive that school administration opens the call for some parents, if they would like to lead one of the ECA classes or even initiate an activity of their interest. This encouraged the buy-in of the parents and kept them involved in the whole process.

In addition, it was clear that the ECA teachers were well qualified and required little specific training in order to improve the quality of ECA that they provide. It is clear as well that the Ministry of Education does not have a clear authority on this international school so there was no clear role identified for the impact of the Ministry of Education on the ECA implemented by the school. Some parents don't send their kids to participate in the school 's ECA because they live far away from the school. So, they prefer to send them to practice ECA in clubs/ centers that are closer to their homes rather than take part in the after-school activities which will consume time and effort. When asked about the major facilities they lack, they said the campus is very good and equipped with the most modern facilities; however, they might need a baseball field that is made especially for baseball.

Students come from similar high economic standards and family backgrounds, which has a direct impact on the school culture. In addition, it is normal to find different nationalities in international schools. One of the findings is that different communities are welcomed to start ECA activities after school; adopting one of the nationalities that exist inside the school. For instance, this school has a Korean club, in which they teach the Korean language, traditions and activities, which is initially started by the Korean parents and students inside the school.

International schools try to bring hometown activities to the international students. This gives a sense of belonging to the international students, and at the same time provides a sense of diversity and respecting differences for other students.

### **6.1.2 Community Schools**

Community schools are schools with special nature that exist in the Egyptian community. They provide educational services to remote and rural areas in Egypt that are deprived of educational services. A community school 's main aim is to eliminate the phenomenon of students who drop out of Education. This school also accepts admission of older students who could not be admitted to the normal schools but still want to return to Education. These schools result from the cooperation between the Ministry of Education and the different community development organizations. Students pay an average of EGP 160 as school fees which is almost the same fees for public schools. However, teachers provide a better level of education as the number of students per class is around 35 students. ECAs are a very important component inside the community school. There are Art and Sports sessions during the school schedule. In addition, they have multiple summer activities where they encourage students to take part in. They also have summer camps, dancing, folklore and theater.

On the other hand, education in community schools is in many ways dependent on ECAs. According to one of the Arabic Teachers that was interviewed, she said that what makes her Arabic classes unique is the way she mixes between Art, Teamwork and Arabic classes. Also, Nagwa, who was teaching History before Arabic, has transformed all the history classes into drama classes, where students used drama and music in understanding history.

*“Those history classes are never forgotten by students and History classes are not boring for them anymore.” (Nagwa, Arabic Teacher, Community School, April 2022)*

Based on the above, it is obvious that drama is no more seen as an extracurricular activity but rather a co curricular activity to support the main curricula teachers in enhancing the educational process.

The impact of ECAs on students is usually measured by providing pre and post assessments on a regular basis. Students' parents come from very underprivileged communities and receive

minimal educational opportunities. It is clear as well that the community school teachers support parents through providing regular awareness sessions to them. This is to help them become aligned with the change that the teachers are trying to do to their children. There is a general observation that teachers of community schools have a very high sense of ownership and are very passionate about what they are doing at school. This is clear in the relationship they have with students and in the way they teach or deliver ECAs, as well. All the major funds are provided through donors to the community development organization. The Ministry does not have a role in fundraising; however, it provides an ECA class called “Arkan”, which means “Corners” in English. This class is a non-academic class focused on experiential activities. They learn leadership skills, presentation skills and public speaking. Several school staff teachers concurred with this idea:

*“I think the ministry started to give quite good attention to the importance of ECA”, (Naema, School Principal, Community School, April 2022).*

*“Our students leave here then go to public schools. They suffer a lot because all the ECAs, quality of education and teachers’ relationship with them is out of comparison to what they receive in this community school.” (Omar, Sports Teacher, Community School, April 2022)*

The interviews revealed that community schools have been approached differently and the importance of ECAs is recognized within the school structure.

## **6.2 ECA and Education Challenges**

### **6.2.1 Education Challenges**

This section is focused on some of the existing education challenges in Egypt and how ECA is seen as a potential solution to solving some of these major challenges. These challenges are grouped into: quality of education and the lack of resources, discussed as follows.

One of the main challenges of Education in Egypt is that academic education provides learning that addresses only one learning style. It is mostly based on theory and reciting. As explained

by Kolb (2014), individuals don't have one way of learning things, and that each learner adopts one or more learning styles. Honey and Mumford (2000) introduced these styles as **activists, reflectors, theorists and pragmatists**. The current generation no longer needs one type of education that fits all, and instead they need a learning environment that is safe, creative, addresses the different learning styles of students that is not solely dependent on theory and at the same time supports students to think critically.

Ashley is a Middle school teacher and responsible for students with difficulties in learning in an international school. She uses different innovative tools and methodologies to be able to support those students. She emphasized the importance of the existence of a learning environment that tackles the broad differences and learning difficulties for students.

*“We have to develop a learning environment that supports the vulnerability and differences in students, this will really transform education. I am always trying to figure out how to design learning spaces and environments that support all students.” (Ashley, MS teacher, Intl school, April 2022)*

The majority of the interviewees hinted to the negative impact Digitalization currently has on the younger generation. Students spend long hours looking into their mobile phones and iPads. Digitalization has become an obsession for young people. It had shortened their attention span to the minimum, impacted their social interaction, communication skills with others and impacted them physically and psychologically as well.

A recent study done by the University of British Columbia 2020 that involved around 28,712-Grade 7 students from 365 schools explained that there is a direct relationship between the longer screen time that adolescents spend on their phones and the existence of depression and anxiety symptoms. The less time students spent on screen recreational activities, the more their mental health improved. Marianne, who is responsible for the principal office for middle and high school students, referred to the severity of this challenge that she experiences with students herself through her everyday encounter with them and the complaints of their parents.

*“One of the main challenges that students face during students' academic education is their limited attention span. This generation has been exposed a lot to screens on their mobile*

*phones and iPads which impacted their concentration a lot. Students get bored so quickly and lose interest so fast. This raised the attention to the importance of creating creative tools that would attract students' attention.” (Marianne, Administration office, Intl school, April 2022)*

In public schools, students suffer because they have to work to support their family financially. They struggle at this very young age to be committed to working instead of studying. This makes ECA considered as luxury or very secondary. The dropout rates in public schools are very high. The reasons behind that are students who have financial obligations towards their families but at the same time nothing motivates them to be part of the Education system with the pressure they are facing in their personal lives. One of the teachers I met in a public school was saying sadly that students do not have any motive to be part of Education. She stated that although this school graduates film makers, engineers, lawyers and people who have a promising future, this is not considered the majority of the cases she meets in class every day.

*“Students' ultimate reason for wanting to graduate from school is to get their driving license to be able to drive Tuk-Tuks and bring money to their families.” (Teacher, Public school, April 2022)*

In community schools, the major challenge is related to parents who come from very underprivileged backgrounds and aren't capable of building up on the learning process that takes place at school. This Community school, though existing in a very underprivileged area; however, does not suffer from the lack of funds like public schools because of the existence of donations and funds to support the school.

### **6.2.2 Emerging Need for Extracurricular activities**

Although there are major differences between the variant types of schools, most of the interviewees mentioned that Extra-curricular activities are no longer seen as extra activities that are not mandatory. Teachers raised the importance of the existence of “extracurricular activities” in the education system as a major complement to academic education. It was mentioned that academia can no longer survive alone, and it cannot give students the required skills and knowledge solely. They also mentioned that ECAs can be one of the crucial solutions to the discussed challenges in section 2.1. On the contrary, some teachers mentioned that extracurricular activities now have higher importance than academic education. Morrissey



(2005) explained the importance of ECA implementation through highlighting ECAs' contribution to five main pillars of youth 's development: (1) competence in academic, social, and vocational areas; (2) confidence; (3) connection; (4) character; and (5) caring and emotional intelligence. In addition, Bohnert and Garber (2007) have argued that students who didn't participate in any extracurricular activities have shown more depressive symptoms than students who did not.

In International schools, ECA is seen as an essential component of the whole Education process. In each place in the school, you can easily observe announcements about ECAs. The year book in the school does not talk about anything academically related, but all pictures reflect what is being done in ECAs throughout the school year.

*“I consider Extracurricular activities essential 100%. I know that many teachers and parents value academia more than ECA but for me I don't see schools achieving their objectives without the existence of ECA.” (Ashley, MS teacher, Intl school, April 2022)*

*“Kids always have a chance to shine. It is okay if they cannot shine in a math class ... they can shine on the basketball court.” (Teacher, Intl School, April 2022)*

On the other hand, in public schools, students take learning and education very lightly because the education provided to students is neither addressing the current needs nor attracting students' attention. Seham, who is a music teacher in one of the preparatory public schools, says that if academic education is taken so lightly like this, then ECA is perceived by students as nothing to give attention to. She also mentioned that usually girls are more interested than boys.

*“Boys are negligent and may make fun of the teacher and the ECA content she presents; they are not interested to learn.” (Seham, Music Teacher, Public School, April 2022)*

On the other hand, another teacher mentioned that despite the very low quality of education provided to students to the extent that sometimes they are in middle school and cannot read or write, they can find themselves discovering their talents.

*“Some students cannot read and write till this moment but they can draw and paint well.”  
(Hanna, Art Teacher, Public School, April 2022)*

Also, during one of the focus groups with a number of students from public schools, they said that they want to play sports inside schools and that it makes a big difference to their daily routine. They mentioned that despite the lack of a football field, a coach to train them; and even the basic resources, they insist on organizing their own football training.

*“We like sports. We want to play sports but we don’t have any Sports classes. We play on our own in empty classes.” (Students. Public School, April 2022)*

In the community school, the case was different than both the International and the public schools. They take ECA as a component that is not separated from academic education. They see it integrative inside their academic curricula and as a major component for enhancing education for students.

*“I see that ECAs are not only essential but primary for Education. I no more like to call it*

*“Extra” – I want to call it “Education that is dependent on ECAs like Education that is dependent on Arts.” (Nagwa, Arabic Teacher, Community School, April 2022)*

*“Students wait for the sports classes like no other class. It is their way out to get out all the negative energy.” (Omar, Sports Teacher, Community School, April 2022)*

These quotations show how both school staff and students are aware of the importance of implementing ECAs in the education system.

### **6.3 The role of ECAs**

Morrissey (2005) highlights that the five main pillars of extracurricular activities that contribute to youth’s development are: (1) competence in academic, social, and vocational areas; (2) confidence; (3) connection; (4) character; and (5) caring and emotional intelligence. These are also known as the Five Cs of positive characteristics for youth. In this section, the findings will show the impact that Extracurricular activities have on students' both character building and academic excellence. It is worth mentioning how almost all research participants-

students, teachers or representatives from school administration- have highlighted the positive impact of ECAs.

### **6.3.1 The role of extracurricular activities in building the students' characters**

ECA and self-perception is one of the main elements that come up in the literature and what most people wanted to talk about. All across the three schools, it was very clear that Students' participation in ECAs have supported them to discover their inner selves, improve their self-perception and explore their potential and skills. It was also clear that it contributed to developing their major social skills through enhancing their connection with others. The findings in this section give evidence to ECA's impact on students' mental health, well-being and self-awareness. ECAs improved students' creativity, conceptual thinking and critical thinking. A further finding as well showed that ECAs have supported students to get rid of some challenging behaviors that adolescents suffer from, like "violence" and "bullying".

Almost in every interview, sport was one of the favorite activities that students like. When students speak about sports, they say it helps them to improve physically. Yet, it is also apparent how they see its impact on them psychologically as well. In addition, lots of students hinted at their capability to work better in teams and respect the differences of others when they started to take part in sports practices.

*"I am a student in middle school. I like playing volleyball. Sports have literally changed my life. It had a huge impact on me physically. I also improved as a person. I can easily now play in a team. (Student 1, Intl School, April 2022)*

*"Sports have helped me relieve my stress and negative energy. Sports has helped me to discipline myself whether sometimes I feel like doing it or not." (Student 4, Intl School, April 2022)*

In the public school, it was clear that sports supported students to get over the violent behaviors that they might be suffering from. This finding assures the study done by Park, Chiu, and Won (2017) where they clarified that there is a direct relationship between the participation of students in extracurricular activities and aggressive behavior. They mentioned that the aggressive behavior has decreased by time due to the participation of students in ECA.

Many students in the public school explained that they face a lot of stress in their lives, and they really need a place where they can get rid of all the negative energy. This was so much related to what was explained in section 2.1 that students at a very young age are exposed to a large amount of pressure and stress for handling the responsibility of working and studying at the same time due to the financial pressure. This resulted in struggling with violent behaviors.

According to some of the school staff, sports and football help students fight against the violent behavior and community, as shown in the below quotes:

*“Our community is so violent. Boys need to play football to get out all the violent behaviors and negative energy they have.” - (Hanaa, Music Teacher, Public School, April 2022)*

*“We are trying as much as we can to support students through the ECAs we provide to move against the violent culture they are already raised in. We are trying to fight violence.” - (Naema, School Principal, Community School, April 2022)*

Some of students also feel the difference after participating in sports, as described below:

*“My home is very stressful. I want to play football to relieve some of the stress and negative energy.” - (Student 2, Public school, April 2022)*

In addition, Tawfik (2017) argued that students’ participation in those activities provide students with special skills like professional skills, leadership, time management, and flexibility. During the interviews, some students explained that some other activities like Student council have impacted their leadership skills. It was clear that students who took part in this activity were able to make better decisions, solve problems in a more critical manner and understand how to express their opinions while respecting others, as well.

*“I am a very active member in the student council. My participation in the student council has impacted my character very much. I can now say my opinions boldly and I feel it is my right to express whatever I believe in with freedom.” (Student 3, Intl School, April 2022)*

On the other hand, Vygotsky’s social constructivism theory emphasizes that learning does not happen except in a collaborative nature. Vygotsky argued that it is not possible to separate learning from its social context. This was clear when many students hinted on how ECAs have helped them improve their social and communication skills. It was clear that ECAs provided

context; where students can develop friendships and connections with others. The relationships they developed either with their teachers or colleagues have a clear impact on students' characters and social skills. One of the students explained that she used to come from a school that has no ECAs. She said that she could barely make any friendships and she used to be very lonely. When she came to the school where ECA existed, she started to feel that she is more confident in making new connections, and she started to be more comfortable about speaking about herself confidently without fearing that people won't accept her.

*"I just came to this school. I barely knew anyone. However, since I participated in ECA, I was able to make many new friends and adapt quickly to the school environment." (Student 7, Intl School, April 2022)*

In addition, it was clear that students with learning difficulties suffered more than other students when it comes to making friendships and connections. A math teacher specialized in dealing with students who suffer from learning difficulties said the following:

*"ECA supports students to develop connections with their peers. When they practice sports, they need to learn to work in teams and as well they develop a relationship with their coaches outside the classroom which helps students to express their fears and challenges. This gives them confidence to express themselves." (Ashley, MS teacher, Intl School, April 2022)*

*"I can see that students who don't participate in ECA are students who struggle more socially than others." (Meghan, Middle School Teacher & Librarian, Intl School, April 2022)*

It was also apparent that teachers have a similar opinion to students when discussing the impact of ECAs. Omar, who is a sports teacher in a community school, explained that in some schools, they consider kids who are moving a lot to be misbehaved. He said that he does not see it like this, yet that students need to release their energy in something. Sometimes students come with so much violent behavior but when they do their football class, they are calmer and capable of focusing on their studies.

Participation in ECA contributed to discovering major issues and challenges to students' characters and behaviors that were not clear inside the classroom context. This pushed the teachers (both the ECA teachers and the academic teachers) to collaboratively work on what they discovered to help students improve.

*"A lot of times, an ECA teacher realizes a certain behavior or a character issue of a student during his/her participation in ECA that was never clear inside the classroom. ECA teachers*

*directly inform the principal about it so they could collaboratively work on solving this issue.” (Marianne, Administration office, Intl school, April 2022)*

Omar added that sometimes the teachers of the academic classes come to him because they need him to coordinate with them to improve the behavior of students or focus on a certain life skill/behavior that students need to acquire so he builds the sports lesson based on that.

*“Sports classes are focused on life skills. They learn cooperation, teamwork and leadership skills.” (Omar, Sports Teacher, Community School, April 2022)*

Daley and Leahy (2003) mentioned that students’ participation in extracurricular activities has a direct relationship between improved mental well-being, self- perception and having reduced stress. Also, Bohnert and Garber (2007) reported that students who did not participate in any extracurricular activities have shown more depressive symptoms than students who did. During the interviews, it was notable that ECA has impacted students’ self-awareness and their mental health and wellbeing. The researcher was able to spot students saying words like “anxiety controlled”, “boundaries”, “respecting feelings.”, and “release stress.” This is clear evidence of ECA’s impact on students’ psychological awareness. When this observation was shared with Nagwa, who is an Arabic teacher in the community school, she explained that every day in the morning lines, they have an exercise called “El Nemou el Tafooly” which in English means “Interactive Growth” activity. In this exercise, students learn how to identify their feelings and thoughts. She explained that this activity has supported the kids to express them-selves better, and at the same time respect others’ feelings, as described by some of the school staff below:

*“The activity of “Interactive Growth” is applied through the classes not only during the morning lines. The application is done all through the school culture. Everyone has to respect it.” (Naema, School principal, Community School, April 2022)*

*“ECAs have had a very big impact on students’ character that I am sure is not coming from their parents. Each child knows their rights and responsibilities well. They know how to refuse when there is something they don’t like. Students learn how to respect and express their feelings. I can see it has a very big impact on their characters.” (Nagwa, Arabic Teacher, Community School, April 2022)*

This positive impact is noticed by students themselves, as shown below:

*“When I was young, I was so curious ... I like to know everything about everyone. ECA has impacted me to learn about my boundaries and self-respect.” (Student 4, Community School, April 2022)*

*“Now we started to instead of becoming violent during our conflict with our peers, we waited and talked instead of just fighting.” (Student 3, Community School, April 2022)*

On the other hand, there are many stories in the field that showed how ECAs contributed to major transformation in students’ characters. Some students were very difficult to teach or be supported until they started to explore and love themselves through their participation in ECA. ECA has helped many students to discover themselves. Naema, the community school principal, tells a story of one of students who used to have very bad behavior. He was not disciplined until, by coincidence, they knew that he had a very good voice. They started to build on this discovery. He started to lead school concerts. He felt very unique and valuable with all the support and encouragement of his peers and teachers. Afterwards, all teachers felt a great change in his behavior and attitude. Naema mentioned that this story was a great learning lesson. She said that students need to be seen, need to show their talents and feel they are important.

*“After years of suffering from his behavior, this boy ‘s participation in the music class has literally changed his life tremendously.” (Naema, School Principal, Community School, April 2022)*

Another story was told by the Art teacher about a student who was suffering from problems in self-confidence. She mentioned that every time he draws something, he just cuts it off and then the Art teacher would use this chance to continue to speak to him about his strengths. Gradually, the student started to improve and reflect back to his teacher. She could realize a major change happening in his character and personality. It is clear to me how ECA can open a channel for teachers to speak to students regarding their challenges and strengths. On the other hand, the findings shed light on how Art has its own way of influencing students’ creativity and conceptual thinking.

*“My participation in Art classes has supported me to understand my emotions and express them in a creative way. I love creativity very much.” (Student 2, Intl School, April 2022)*

It is also apparent that similar to ECA's impact on students' violent behaviors, if there are any, it can definitely impact some other challenges like "bullying", which is a famous phenomenon among adolescents and in schools nowadays. Marianne, who is the one responsible for the administration office in an international school, mentioned a story of a group of girls where they faced lots of conflicts and problems together. They were having a hard time bullying each other. The school counselor has decided to let them join each other in an activity after school that was very dependent on board games, but focused on teaching core values. The girls resisted the activity at the beginning, yet later on, they started to learn things about each other and understand the differences that each character has, which is the main reason behind their conflicts. Marianne mentioned that after playing the activity several times with quite a deep reflection from their counselor each time, the girls have become on good terms. Also, they started to bring more girls to join this activity because they say it is fun to learn that we are different, not enemies.

*"I have to say that extracurricular activities create a culture for students to grow and develop away from the classroom. They see themselves progressing in different life skills. At this point growth happens." (Marianne, Administration office, Intl School, April 2022)*

On a final note, there were considerable discussions around the existence of community service as an important component for ECA. Some teachers explained that they could realize that students became less self-centered and their scope of thinking and views about life has become different when they started to serve and give back to other people who are less privileged or in need. A number of teachers raised the urge of including community service as an essential activity inside the schools.

*"Students need to acquire 21st century skills to make them ready for the market. These skills can no more be gained through only solving math equations. They need to be confident in themselves. They need to do community service because it helps them to be exposed to "other" people. When they understand the needs of people around them, they develop emotionally and personally. They become givers instead of being only self – centered and focused on their needs. They no longer have limited horizons but see the world through a different lens that academia alone cannot provide." (Ashley, MS teacher, Intl school, April 2022)*



### **6.3.2 The role extracurricular activities has on students' academic excellence**

The results in this section discuss the major role ECAs have on students' academic excellence and future occupational opportunities. It was clear in both the International and the community school. On the contrary, with the lack of ECA in the public school and the poor quality of education, it was not easy to measure the impact.

However, throughout the researcher's work with other public schools, an assignment was given to organize sports activities on a weekly basis to students. This school suffered from a high dropout rate. The school principal and the teachers suffered a lot that even students who came to school were never focused on what was provided, and it took them so much time and effort to let them stay disciplined in the school. Morrisey (2005) explained that students might be motivated to do their best academically; in order to participate in activities. This was clear in this public school. As soon as the sports activities started to be implemented, everyone realized there is a big difference. Students started to stay disciplined in classes because they know that if they were not disciplined enough, they would not be able to attend the sports activities.

On the other hand, lots of students informed others who stopped attending school previously with the activities happening. Gradually, in this school year, the school had a clear decrease in dropout rates. As Craft and Craft (2012) explained, participation of students in ECA has had a major significance in decreasing the dropout rates from education. On the other hand, this story was clear in mind when the situation was seen in the public school that the researcher visited through this study. The school principal was shouting loudly for students to enter classes. Students during focus groups showed lack of interest in Education and when asked about the impact of ECA on their academic education and their motivation to attend school, a student said the following:

*"If there was a PE teacher, we would definitely be so encouraged to come to school. Some other schools beside us have football classes but we don't." (Student 1, Public School, April 2022)*

And one of the school teachers also added:

*“The school principal is very good and supportive but he frightens students. He is always shouting so that students become more disciplined.” (Seham, Music Teacher, April 2022)*

On the contrary, although community schools whose primary objective is that they receive students who already lost their chance to be part of a public school because they dropped out of school and their age is already older to get enrolled, Nagwa, a community school teacher, mentions that ECA has contributed to diminishing the drop out problem.

*“ECAs have motivated students to stay in Education. This contributed a lot to reducing the dropout rates. Students like and want to go to school.” (Nagwa, Arabic Teacher, Community School, April 2022)*

Broh (2002) mentioned that participation in extracurricular activities had a very positive impact on the urgent skills needed for academic excellence such as focus, perseverance, self-confidence and character building. It is clearly evident that the existence and implementation of ECA in schools has a direct impact on the interest and motivation of students in Academic Education. The need is clearer in public schools than the other schools because with the low quality of education provided for students, they need a higher level of motivation to fill the gap and support their growth. On the other hand, in the international school, it was clear that ECA equipped students with the skills they lack that weakened their excellence in their academic courses. For example, Marianne (school administration, Intl school) says that some students who were struggling with Math classes were sometimes sent to participate in Lego, which is an after-school activity. Their participation increases students' concentration and confidence in solving complex problems. When they return back to class, students are more confident about their capabilities to solve problems or at least they critically think how to solve it instead of impatiently losing interest in trying.

*“Debating, Coding and Sports like improve my cognitive skills. I feel like bringing those skills with me later on inside the classroom.” (Student 7, Intl School, April 2022)*

Ashley, who is a math teacher to students with learning difficulties, is so passionate in supporting students to grow academically and personally, despite the learning difficulties they are facing. She said that students with learning difficulties who practiced ECA beside their main studies have shown remarkable progress and development in their academic education compared to students who never practice any ECA. She clarified that although her students

suffer from learning difficulties, she has seen them growing in self-awareness, self-advocacy, self-efficacy and self-management, which are core skills required for academic excellence.

*“I have seen my students who practice ECA, especially sports, develop a less anxious attitude towards whatever difficulties they are facing. I have seen them more agile in developing proper strategies to stay perseverant in whatever they are trying to learn.” (Ashley, MS teacher, Intl School, April 2022)*

On the other side, Students assured the previous findings through stressing on how their cognitive skills improved when they practiced ECAs beside their academic studies.

*“My participation in ECA has made me have a more relaxed brain. I am more capable of thinking clearly and concentrating better in my studies. I can’t imagine life only studying.” (Student 6, Intl School, April 2022)*

*“Participation in ECA motivates me to get my homework done.” (Student 3, Intl School, April 2022)*

It is clear that the findings had minimal quotations from public school students because they did not understand the researcher’s question. It was hard for them to understand the relationship between ECA and their academic education since they have no ECA organized inside their school. Eslam, who is an Arabic teacher in the public school, said that he cannot refer to that in their school; however, he can say the difference he feels in his daughter because she is enrolled in a private school that organizes ECA.

*“Although I don’t see this clearly in our school, I can see it in my daughter ‘s school. Activities can help students to focus on their study and get more motivated to get enrolled in academics.” (Essam, Arabic Teacher, Public school, April 2022)*

On a different note, Tawfik (2017) states that these activities are not only life skills that students acquire but rather it supports them in their university and career life. Some students take part in ECA because they improve their opportunities to get enrolled in famous universities; and accordingly improve their occupational excellence; as it is a very important factor in the CVs of candidates. Employers are looking into ECAs as a major indication for success as equal as academic excellence. Thus, students strive to have it included in their CVs. Meghan who is a middle school teacher has explained that one of the students she has been teaching was focused so much on academia and never participated in any ECA. This girl

suddenly took part in the basketball activity. When Meghan asked about the sudden participation of basketball, she mentioned that it was only for her college application.

### **Community Schools' Innovative Approach: Academia based on ECA**

It was surprising for me that although the existence of the community school was in a very underprivileged area with the existence of limited resources, they introduced a concept that, in the researcher's view point, can foster education and get students' full focus in their academic education. They are using ECA to build their academic classes. There are classes separate for ECA like sports but still academic teachers join efforts with ECA teachers in order to build their classes, based on the interesting talents for students like Art, Theater, sports and music. Nagwa, who is an Arabic teacher, when asked about the impact of ECA on students, she instantly referred to the way they mix between ECA and academia where if students are involved in a Drama play, and at the same time, they want to learn proper Arabic language rules, they do not do the two things solely, but they mix between them. She said that this has impacted students' interest in academia so much and developed their talents, as well.

*“The mix between ECA and Academia in one class has helped so much in developing students. I think it made us address the needs and the skills required for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.” (Nagwa, Arabic Teacher, Community School, April 2022)*

*“It is clear that Academic excellence is very clear with the presence of ECAs. We can see everyday progress in students' academic degrees. We find that lessons that are based on ECAs are never forgotten in comparison to normal lessons. (Nagwa, Arabic Teacher, Community School, April 2022)*

academic excellence and impacted their grades. Some students belonged to different schools with no ECAs before joining the community school, and they could realize their academic development with their enrollment in the community school.

Some of students said:

*“I was in a different public school before joining this community school. I was not good at all. My academic performance was very low. I didn't even know how to read and write. When I entered this school, I started to be different academically. I felt so motivated to work harder on my academics. I feel I can think better. The schools I was in didn't have any ECAs. We lacked motivation and interest in Education.” (Student 3, Community School, April 2022)*

*“I think ECA has had a very big impact on my studies.” (Student 4, Community school, April 2022)*

*“When our teachers mix between ECA and academic classes, we feel so motivated and interested more than the normal class. We like our English teacher when he uses activities to explain hard terms.” (Student 1, Community School, April 2022)*

The above clearly illustrates that ECA supports the enhancement of the students’ cognitive skills which are integral of the development process to the students’ academic excellence.

### **6.3 Challenges of ECA Implementation**

Although the positive impact of ECA implementation was clearly explained in the previous sections, findings of the interviews have shown some multiple challenges that can cause a negative impact on students. Also, students who tend to participate in multiple activities at the same time, their focus shifts from the quality of the activities that they get engaged in, and their participation in ECA turns to become a set of stressful activities. Students sometimes participate in ECA as a result of peer or parents’ pressure, which makes them participate in activities that are of interest to their peers or parents more than interest to them. Also, the over participation in ECA has caused mental pressure and physical fatigue to students, which makes them incapable of concentrating in their academic and personal interests. Many students mentioned that when balance and time management are not maintained and students participate in multiple activities at the same time, they can no longer enjoy what they are doing which causes physical and psychological stress.

Based on the interviews with some school staff, they talked about their experiences with students who have signed for ECA; where some of them were able to benefit from the activities, while other have got drained in their busy schedules and got stressed out, as described below:

*“We encourage students to focus on their own interests when they sign up for their preferred ECA. Over the years, I have seen students who managed to have proper time management and made the best use of everything they took part in. I also see students who take part in everything but get the least benefit. It is both the school and the parents’ role to encourage and empower students to make the right decisions regarding prioritization and time management.” (Marianne, Administration office, Intl school, April 2022)*

This was not only the belief of school staff. However, some students also were well aware of how sometimes ECAs are stressful, although important as shown below:

*“ECA has a mostly positive impact on me; however, it sometimes stresses me out especially when I am overbooked. ECA fills the daily schedule really fast especially when I have a lot of homework to be done. I can barely have some free time.” (Student 5, Intl school, April 2022)*

*“I had a very important test that I didn’t study for at all because I had to participate in volleyball practice. I believe that if I managed my time better, that wouldn’t have happened.” (Student 1, Intl School, April 2022)*

*“The only negative impact that ECA has on me is that I get tired sometimes. I spend three hours already after school in the activities where sometimes I fall asleep while doing my assignment when I am back at home.” (Student 7, Intl School, April 2022).*

It is obvious that if students didn’t acquire proper time management skills, this will cause students to be challenged in sustaining their participation in ECAs.

## **6.4 ECAs and an Enabling Education Environment**

The below findings and analysis give evidence for the importance of having an environment that supports the successful implementation of ECAs. This section summarizes the findings regarding the role of school administration, teachers and parents.

### **6.4.1 ECA and School administration**

It was clear that the level of support provided is different from one type of school to the other. Ahmad, et al. (2019) explained the urgency of providing the needed facilities for students to practice extracurricular activities within class schedule and after class hours. In both the international and community schools, it was clearly evident that the school administration provides quite good attention to the design and implementation of ECAs. There is continuous evaluation and assessment for the implemented activities. The administration reacts responsively and promptly to the teachers’ requests and recommendations for improvement. The administration, as well, provides the required budget, proper facilities and resources whenever needed. Teachers report that there is a clear assigned school budget since the beginning of each school year. In the International school, the level of support was not only in

terms of resources but rather the school principal himself was leading one of the ECA clubs in the school. He has always been supportive to students and would always refer to the importance of ECA in the regular school newsletter and in his normal announcements. This made the teachers follow his vision as well, and give the same level of attention to the implementation of ECAs.

Below are some of the sayings of school staff that prove the above findings:

*“The school principal is very supportive of the implementation of ECA inside the school. The principal himself has a major club that he is leading and facilitating for students.” (Meghan, Middle School Teacher & Librarian, Intl School, April 2022)*

*“If you check the year book of the school, it is clear that 90% of the pictures and memories are related to the ECA. This highlights how school administration is very persistent about having ECA as an equal component in importance to ECA.” (Marianne, Administration office, Intl School, April 2022)*

*“We are provided all the facilities needed. We requested a football pitch and materials. The school administration supported all requests and provided all the needed resources.” (Omar, Sports Teacher, Community School, April 2022)*

And not only staff members, but also it is important to look at the matter from students’ perspective; as it is important to have them feeling the positive impact and the school efforts in implementing ECAs, as well. Below is a quote from one of students in the international school where the interview was conducted:

*“Our school campus is great. It has all the required school facilities. Teachers as well are very well trained.” (Student 1, Intl School, April 2022)*

In addition, one of the things that show the extensive support of schools to the implementation of ECAs is that they do not stress students to do any extra homework after school hours. This reduces stress on students, and at the same time gives them enough time to take part in ECA.

Also, this encourages parents to support their children to implement ECA without being so pressured with academics. As some of the teachers stated:

*“We do not provide extra assignments to students after school. It is very important for us that we do not overload students and give them space to take part in ECA. This usually encourages parents to support students for their participation.” (Meghan, Middle School Teacher & Librarian, Intl School, April 2022)*

*“In middle school, we do not assign homework to students; we want to give them more time to take part in ECA. We currently have around 210 middle school students. We have around 150 students signing up for multiple ECA activities which in point of view is considered a majority.” (Meghan, Middle School Teacher & Librarian, Intl School, April 2022)*

Also, one of the remarkable findings related to the school’s support is the way they engage the parents as well to take part in the implementation of ECAs. One of the teachers explained that they consider the after-school activities a place; where parents come together and feel they belong to one community. This created a sense of support and ownership for the parents to what the school is originally trying to do regarding ECA implementation. In addition, sometimes the school allows parents to lead some of the ECA clubs. The participation of parents with students in extracurricular activities impacts family bonds and connections and as well has a role in aligning the parents with what the teachers and the school administration are trying to achieve.

*“We have a parent who leads the flag football club.” (Meghan, Middle School Teacher & Librarian, Intl School, April 2022)*

*“After school activities support us to become one community. I myself bring my husband and kids to the school. School is becoming a friendly space for all the family.” (Meghan, Middle School Teacher & Librarian, Intl School, April 2022)*

*It is obvious how parents’ engagement in the implementation of ECAs has a positive role on the students’ active participation in ECAs.*

On the other hand, Turner (2010) mentioned that schools usually use the available funds only to pay for the main school priorities, which are related to academic education. This leaves few available financial resources to implement extra-curricular activities. This was clear in public schools. ECA is given minimal attention in terms of both resources and budgets. It was clear that the school principal does not think of ECAs as one of his main priorities because he thinks



that priority should be given to enhancing the quality of academic education or at least repairing any problem within the infrastructure of the school. Activity teachers mentioned that they do not have any resources to work with, like materials and instruments. They also explained that they do not even have a room to practice their classes in. Some teachers mentioned that there are not enough human resources available to conduct the ECA class. They say that although it exists in the normal class schedule, but due to the non-existence of teachers, this causes the academic teachers to take these classes instead of having free time, which makes them want to encourage canceling ECA classes, as stated by some of the teachers below:

*“We are not provided any facilities or budgets to make ECA come to life. My daughter is in another private school. She is truly supported by the school and in addition, she is usually asked to bring some materials for Art for example. Parents of Public schools cannot afford to buy anything extra for their kids. They can barely pay the fees for the school.” (Hanna, Art Teacher, Public School, April 2022)*

*“We need an Art and Music room and some materials instead of doing our classes in the corridor.” (Seham, Music Teacher, Public school, April 2022)*

Students also are somehow disappointed from the lack of resources that would enable the implementation of ECA, as stated by one of students:

*“The pitch needs proper renovation. We usually stumble and fall because it is not good for playing. This happens even when we try to organize football tournaments on our own.” (Student 3, Public school, April 2022)*

It was also clear in the public school that even if teachers try to support students on a voluntary basis, there is no special recognition or support from the school. They say it would have made a lot of difference if students felt encouraged or appreciated from the school.

*“When we organize a festival or an art exhibition, students get so interested but they expect any sort of recognition from the school like a certificate or a small gift or even juice and sandwiches but this doesn’t happen which de-motivates students because there is very little appreciation to their efforts.” (Hanaa, Art Teacher, Public school, April 2022)*

*This clearly explains that the school administration has a positive role in supporting students to become motivated and feel appreciated.*

#### **6.4.2 ECA and Teachers**

Wilson (2009) highlighted that the participation of students in extracurricular activities gives the opportunity of students to acquire a different type of a supportive relationship with an adult, who is their teacher or school principal. This relationship can be in the form of a mentor, role model or a coach. The results of the interviews have shown the essential role that teachers play; in order to support, encourage, and empower students to get the optimum benefit of ECA. However, one of the important findings that was repeated throughout the interviews at the different schools and the target groups is the way students see their teachers through ECA. Some words like “coach”, “mentor” and “role model” were heard repeatedly by students when asked about how they see their teachers who are conducting their ECA activities. In international schools, multiple students referred indirectly to the fact that they look up to their teachers for guidance and emotional support.

It was clear that one of the major challenges for students in international schools is that they are coming from broken families where they miss the role of their father/mother. Also, it was clear that lots of the parents are busy working and not providing much quality time to spend with their children. However, in the community school, the case is different. Their parents are not aware of the importance of educating their children and are not capable of coping with their needs. All this has resulted in students seeking someone who can make up for the absence of their parents.

ECAs have provided the suitable context for students and their teachers to support them personally and emotionally in whatever they are going through. It was significantly clear how teachers are passionate about what they are doing and able to realize the value and importance of their role. This was clear in the statements made by some of the teachers:

*“The relationship between the ECA coach/teacher and students has helped many students to express themselves, find someone they can trust with their personnel problems, have a role model and find alternatives to relationships they are lacking in their life especially students coming from broken families.” (Meghan, Middle School Teacher & Librarian, Intl School, April 2022)*

*“Students need someone to understand them and give them the right attention. They are going to succeed and grow in all levels if they feel that they are just important.” (Nagwa, Arabic Teacher, Community School, April 2022)*

Feldman and Matjasko (2005) mentioned that when children get involved in ECAs, this gives them a chance to know their teachers and coaches better. This opens a channel to positive and trustworthy relationships outside the children 's direct families. This relationship has a positive influence on the children 's development because it opens a channel for mutual respect and trust. During the interviews, it was clear how teachers use this opportunity as well to speak to students about their strengths, challenges and help them with any difficulties they are having in their character. It was also remarkable how many students referred to the real stories that the teachers say about themselves from which students learn. Students highlighted how they get so impacted when their teachers talk about their own struggles and how they were able to get over it. This has all contributed to a very strong connection that gave teachers authority to challenge and empower students. The importance of teachers to students is clear in the below statements made by some of the interviewed students:

*“My coach is one of the big sources of encouragement and motivation in life.” (Student 12, Intl School, April 2022)*

*“Our coaches genuinely care about what we feel.” (Student 1, Intl School, April 2022)*

In the public school, findings have shown that teachers were very demotivated and students as well do not feel that their teachers can understand what they are going through or need. The researcher thinks that the major issue is related to the lack of resources in which the teachers are challenged through, and can hardly provide the required or even acceptable level of ECA implementation. This is viewed by students as lack of care and attention to their needs, as shown below:

*“Music and Art Teachers don't feel our needs. They are not good or qualified. We make fun of them because they are usually not prepared. If we ever explained what we really need, we would be told to mind our own business. They say that we are not going to be the ones to tell them what they should be doing.” (Student 1 and 3, Public School, April 2022)*

It is obvious that the scarcity of resources and the lack of ECA teachers' competence can easily be understood and reflected on the students' behavior and character.

## **Teachers' Training**

One of the highlights of the thesis' observations is the quality of teachers across the three schools; whereas it was quite recognizable in the Community and International schools that

teachers were always motivated and passionate to support students, as clearly quoted previously by multiple students. One of the main reasons behind that is the continuous training provided to maintain, equip and continuously develop the teachers' performance. In the International school, teachers are provided any training they might need in order to develop their skills and become capable of providing better ECA classes. On the other hand, in the community school, teachers have a coach who trains them on how to integrate ECA inside the academic curriculum. They continuously receive training programs especially during summer to prepare for the school year.

*“If any teacher thinks that they need a certain kind of training to develop their skills in order to provide a better ECA, it is so welcomed by the principle” (Marianne, Administration office, Intl school, April 2022)*

*“We are being trained on how to integrate Art classes inside the main academic classes. We have an Art coach who gives us regular sessions and coaching sessions on how to create this integration inside the classroom.” (Nagwa, Arabic Teacher, Community School, April 2022)*

Finally, public school teachers are not given any attention with regards to training and development. As previously mentioned, they already think they are not important and that they are looked to as of secondary importance inside the school, as shown in the below statement:

*“We are not important ...” (Seham, Music Teacher, Public school, April 2022)*

### **6.4.3 ECA and Parents**

Ashbbourne and Andres (2015) highlighted that one of the main roles that parents play is the role of “**encouragers**”, which mixes between parents as understanding the needs and motivations of their children, and at the same time facilitating goals towards their children's development and growth. The interviews implemented and the findings have shown that parents' support is a main cornerstone in supporting their children towards the implementation of ECAs. Parents' roles varied from providing financial and moral support to providing students with the balance needed between academic achievement and enrollment in ECAs to get the maximum benefit. It was clear that the parents interviewed from the international school have given so much value to the existence of ECAs. They see it as a priority, and they

even strictly discipline their children to attend their ECA classes, even if they are tired or have academic assignments to finish. They also recognize the impact ECAs have on their children's character. One of the parents of students of an international school explained that since her daughter started to take part in the drama class, she started to feel that her personality has changed. She thinks that she started to gain confidence and courage in herself.

*“My daughter has participated in drama classes since a very young age. I believe that her participation has had a major impact on my daughter's character. She has gained confidence, perseverance and courage. I am sure that drama has changed the personality of my daughter tremendously and without it I wouldn't think she would be where she is standing right now. It has been life changing for her.” (Parent, Intl School, April 2022)*

Students also feel it when their parents support them:

*“My parents support me a lot to participate in ECA. They have provided all the needed equipment for me to practice sports. I used to be a very lazy person. They keep encouraging me and motivating me by buying whatever I need so I don't become lazy again.” (Student 9, Intl School, April 2022)*

Also, another parent clarified that she has seen her kids growing in their social skills since the participation of her kids in ECAs.

*“My boys have participated in sports, mainly football and basketball. I have seen them growing socially a lot. Their communication skills have improved and I can see their leadership skills and capability to work in teams have developed a lot.”*

On another note, one of the parents highlighted the importance of balance she is trying to create. She cares so much about supporting her children not to be overloaded with activities. She says that this increases students' anxiety and stress rather than supports them to grasp the needed skills out of their participation.

*“It is important for me not to overload my kids with many activities.” (Parent, International School, parent, April 2022)*

Yet, other students referred to how their parents are strictly disciplining them to attend their ECAs.

*“My parents tell me that participation in ECA is more important than my grades.” (Student 11, Intl School, April 2022)*

*“My mum has encouraged me a lot to take part in ECA. She is a strong supporter of activities. She believes it is not good for me to only study or focus on my academics.” (Student 8, Intl School, April 2022)*

In addition, parents are well aware of the impact ECAs have on their children academically. They can recognize well how ECA has had a big influence on their children ‘s academic excellence.

*“My daughter is always having straight As in her high school grades. I believe her participation in ECA has given her motive to do her best academically as well.” (Parent, Intl School, April 2022)*

On a final note, related to international schools, it was clear that parents are well educated. They are aware and supportive of their children because they themselves have been brought up to value ECAs or they come from families that support activities, like sports and music. Accordingly, they encourage their children to be like them in the future. Stirrup et al. (2015) explained that sometimes parents encourage their children to participate in activities that they participated in during their childhood because it reminded them with happy moments that they lived themselves during their childhood or think it was useful for them.

*“I come from a very athletic family. They see sports as essential as anything else in life. When I started taking part in sports, as per their usual support and encouragement, I became very confident in myself.” (Student 15, Intl School, April 2022)*

*“My dad plays basketball. He encourages me a lot to play it as well.” (Student 5, Intl School, April 2022).*

The interviews have shown that the case is different when it comes to the community school. As previously clarified, the parents of students in the community school come from very underprivileged areas. They are either illiterate or received very basic education. Parents resist the participation of their children in ECA because they either do not understand the use of ECAs or even fear the participation of their children especially girls in activities, like sports. They think that girls cannot play sports as this is against the culture and social norms. However, it was clear that the role of teachers has been so influential in providing awareness to parents on the importance and necessity of ECA implementation. Teachers provide regular meetings to explain what they do and the importance of it.

*“At the beginning of my employment period in the school, I thought that I would be connected to the parents so they complement what I am doing inside the school. The school administration told me to forget about that. I need to focus on working alone with very minimal support from the parents’ side.” (Nagwa, Arabic Teacher, Community School, April 2022)*

On the other hand, the sports coach has invited parents to attend the classes to understand what is happening during these classes. He mentioned that parents started to trust him, and gradually, they would agree to send their daughters to the football field.

*“I never ask girls to get out of the field but I usually let them in the field to watch the sports class happening because their parents asked them not to take part. Once they get interested, they start to help me convince their parents that sports don’t do any harm and it is monitored in a very respectable environment that doesn’t harm the culture and traditions.” (Omar, Sports Coach, Community School, April 2022)*

Despite the lack of awareness that parents have regarding the importance of ECA, when they see that the characters of their children are transformed, they start to recognize ECA ‘s importance and start to support their children with the minimum resources they have. This was clear while speaking to some parents, whose kids have already spent a couple of years in the school, and they started to see the difference in their characters. It was clear that parents started to maintain trust in the school system and culture. So, they follow whatever instructions they receive. Here is some of what the parents said about ECA importance and impacts on their children, who are enrolled in a community school:

*“I can see the impact of ECA on my kids’ attitudes and interest to complete their studies.” (Parent, Community School, April 2022)*

*“My kid was a very fearful kid. He is now a very open kid. He likes to talk to people and is interested in communicating and expressing himself. He developed so much in cooperation with others.” (Parent, Community School, April 2022)*

It was also clear that despite the high level of influence and support those teachers have, students still wanted their parents’ support. It was evident that the simplest act from their parents’ side has pushed and encouraged them a lot.

*“My parents support me to draw and paint. My father got me a paint sketch to practice even after school.” (Student 4, Community School, April 2022)*

On the other hand, Xu, et al (2017) argued that the pressure of the lack of support that parents might put on the children will also restrict both their participation and involvement in ECA. It

was clear that there was no clear support from the parents' side regarding the implementation of ECAs in the public school, even after school hours, since there were no activities implemented. It was clear that parents lack knowledge and awareness as well of the vitality of those activities.

A parent in the community school who has another child in a public school when asked about the difference between her children in the public school and her daughter in the community school, she clarified that she could realize the difference between the characters of her children and their academic level. Despite her simple education and level of awareness, she was able to realize the difference between her children.

*“My other daughter is in another public school. They have no ECAs. She hates going to school. I can see the difference between my sons and my daughter. My daughter doesn't know how to speak or express herself like my sons. In addition, although my daughter is older than my two sons, they are more developed academically than she is. I think that the main reason is the way this school operates in a different way.” (Parent, Community School, April 2022)*

Finally, it was clear that the broad range of education challenges differs from one type of school to the other where challenges in the international school were more related to advancing the quality of learning provided to students and the digitalization era that has replaced all human interaction. However, in public schools, it was clear that the lack of financial resources is the main factor behind all other challenges. This was reflected in many aspects like the low economic level of students who are required to work, instead of going to school to support their parents. This is in addition to the lack of existing resources, facilities and even teachers inside the schools.



# Chapter 7 Conclusion and Recommendations

## 7.1 Concluding Remarks

This research is focused on the impact of ECAs through the lens of three types of schools, as a means of understanding how ECAs are implemented, the challenges faced, and the role of the surrounding educational environment. The section details the research findings in the three types of schools and provides a final set of recommendations for policymakers and those engaged in the improvement of educational services in Egypt.

First, Public schools are governmental schools in which they are fully administered by the Ministry of Education. They suffer from several challenges like increased number of students which might include an average of 60 students per class, extreme poverty, scarcity of facilities, lack of financial and human resources, incompetence of teachers and the low compensation provided for teachers which is around EGP 4000 per month. This is one of the most pressing issues faced by teachers in public schools and demotivates them to perform better in public schools. Also, the annual school fees per student is average of EGP 160 pounds which makes education accessible for everyone but on the other hand, doesn't help in providing proper quality education. ECAs are rarely implemented in public schools. There is a music and art teacher however they are not provided any support to be able to conduct their classes. The basic resources like a room or required tools don't exist. It is mostly dependent on a voluntary basis. ECA teachers feel inferior and less. ECAs are not considered essential because the available resources are barely sufficient for academic education. Students' financial standard is below low. Most students have jobs beside their education to be able to support their families financially. This makes their participation more challenging. Violence and Bullying are clear in public schools. Students have latent energy originating from their difficult circumstances, violence and poverty. Students in deep need to participate in ECA especially sports. They wish to have a place where they can get out their negative energy through a healthy channel.

Second, community schools investigated in this study are the schools that exist in rural and underprivileged areas to provide opportunities for students who are interested to be educated, however, they cannot be enrolled in normal schools because their age is older than normal. The existence of community schools supports the elimination of the dropout rate phenomenon. ECAs do exist in Community schools. The Ministry of Education monitors and supports the existence of Community schools however ECAs are considered active and enabled because the financial resources are dependent on funds from Community development organizations not from the Ministry resources. Teachers are active and have a high sense of ownership. This is also because community school teachers are rewarded financially well in comparison to public school teachers. Also, the class capacity is around 35 students which allows the teachers to provide quality education. They believe that this is not just a job that they are doing but rather a purpose and a calling that they strive to achieve. School administration and Teachers support the implementation of ECAs. The school fees are almost EGP 150 pounds. The school fees is almost the same as the public schools. The major challenge in this school is not the type of education they receive but rather their low socioeconomic level which makes students 'parents barely able to follow through with what their children are given inside the school. Many of the students' parents are illiterate so they can barely help or support those students to maintain the level of education they receive in their schools. The norms and beliefs sometimes obstruct the participation of girls in ECAs especially related to sports. Teachers play an essential role in convincing and explaining to students' parents the transformation that is happening to their children.

Third, concerning international schools, the level of Education is very high. Most of the International schools in Egypt are not monitored by the Ministry of Education. In International schools, the social and economic level of students are usually very high and accordingly the level of Education received is remarkable. This also explains the high fees of the international schools which is around EGP 100,000 per year while the teachers' salaries range between EGP 25,000 and EGP 35,000. ECAs in International schools are not considered extra or optional but are seen as an essential component that complements academic education. There are a big variety of ECAs in the schools during and after the academic schedule. There are no challenges related to the implementation of ECAs. School administration supports the implementation of

ECAs in which sometimes the school principal him/herself leads the implementation of ECA clubs. ECAs are sometimes implemented by activity teachers and other times implemented by ECA teachers specialized in subjects like Art and sports. Teachers are very well trained and have a strong rapport with students. Parents do have an important role. Beside their support and understanding of ECA 's importance to students, they as well participate and take lead in coordinating ECA. In addition, they believe so much in the value and importance of ECA so they encourage their children to be committed and disciplined.

Throughout the field visits, it was clear to me that Education suffers from multiple challenges depending on the broad differences between the different types of schools. On top of these challenges is the existence of the digitalization era. This challenge is common between all types of students no matter how high or low their economic and social standard. Students spend hours on their mobile phones watching videos, playing games or using different social media platforms. This impacted students psychologically, socially and physically. Students have a minimum attention span which makes learning through reciting and theory as the only way to enhance students' character and academic development impossible. Students need attractive tools, methodologies and context where their different learning styles should be tackled.

As part of the extensive literature reviews, it was clear that learners adopt one or more of the following learning styles: activists, reflectors, theorists and pragmatists (Kolb, 2014). Activists learn through being exposed to new experiences; reflectors learn through analytical thinking; theorists integrate observations into learning theories; while pragmatists are the ones who relate learning to practical life. Most of the teachers concurred that the existence of ECAs has made learning possible for all types of students' learning styles. ECA simulates life through the experiential learning cycle where students learn with their peers and teachers in a social context. Students acknowledge that through art, sports, theater, drama, scouting and many other activities, they get to practice, train, challenge, experience and even fail in learning and understanding life skills. Accordingly, through ECAs Students believe that it gives them a chance to discover and believe in themselves. Students realized that their participation in ECAs has given them evidence and motivation that they are capable of enhancing their talents and

skills and not only that but also gave them channels and tools to master those talents. Students mentioned that ECAs have given them hope and vision to witness that discipline, persistence and consistency can end up with growth and development. Almost all teachers believed that ECAs add up to students' character building and improved self-image. Some teachers explained that students who seem difficult to be dealt with become different when they take part in ECAs. Students become more tolerant and teachable. In addition, The field work revealed that ECAs provide students with the possibility to enhance their social skills. The study found that the existence of students among others who share the same interests while still being different supports students to improve both their communication skills and their tolerance to diversity. Some school administrators have shed light on the way ECAs allow students to resolve conflicts, find solutions for problems and develop their critical thinking. In addition, it was clear during the fieldwork that ECAs enable students to practice responsibility and leadership at a young age. Students mentioned several times that they learnt how to become effective team players while respecting their peers' different roles. Some students also mentioned that ECAs gave them space to express their latent emotions and thoughts in a positive context. Also, one of the highlights of the study is that ECAs supported in reducing the dropout rates. ECAs become a motivating factor for students to attend school and as well provide them indirectly with the needed skills to grow academically.

In addition, one revelation from the fieldwork was in the approach adopted by the community school. They introduced a different perspective to ECA where ECA and academic education are not separate. Academic teachers build their classes in coordination with the ECA teacher which makes their classes alive and interesting. Students have shown interest and can hardly forget what they have been taught during those classes.

However, the research results discussed that one of the prerequisites of achieving the optimum benefits of ECA is the existence of a supportive enabling environment. This environment needs multiple factors to support students to effectively take part in ECAs. The first factor is related to the support given by the school administration. As addressed in the findings, when the school shows support for ECA implementation, it provides proper facilities, suitable teachers and coaches to lead ECAs, and a budget for implementation and maintenance. In addition,

school administration creates balance for students between academic education and ECAs to facilitate students' participation. The second factor supporting the implementation of ECAs is Teachers. The role of the teacher is more than just the implementer of the ECA but through the implementation of ECAs, teachers become mentors and role models for students, as it was repeatedly mentioned in the study. Students at the adolescent age need to have other adult relationships in their lives that they can look up to. This relationship helps students to have an open channel for mutual respect and trust. Students become motivated to work on their challenges while developing their strengths through the support, empowerment and encouragement of their teachers. There are no sufficient specialized teachers that are available to conduct ECAs inside the schools. On the other side, the available teachers need to be well trained to technically and personally facilitate the process to students and achieve the maximum benefits for them. The last factor is related to students' parents. The existence of supportive parents towards the implementation of ECAs is essential. Supportive parents are considered a major cornerstone for students' development. Parents provide both financial and moral support, and as mentioned by the students themselves, can make or break the students' relationship to ECAs and the educational process in general.

In addition, the research discussed how ECA implementation has many positive outcomes but it has its own challenges as well. Students' participation in ECAs need to be balanced to avoid students becoming overwhelmed through becoming physically and mentally pressured. The role of parents, teachers and school administration is essential in empowering students to acquire proper time management and balance for the successful implementation of ECAs.

Finally, it was clear from the study that ECAs can no longer be considered as "extra", but it is of essential value that cannot be substituted. It is of high importance to address the challenges that obstruct its implementation for the irreplaceable value that ECA adds to students on both aspects- character building and academic excellence.

## 7.2 Policy Recommendations

Based on my extensive experience in the field and the results of this research, the following recommendations will tackle how the implementation of ECAs could be better improved, especially for public schools that have the most lack of support.

1. **Activating the MoE's Activities and Services Unit:** The Ministry of Education would give more authority and value to the activities and services unit. As previously explained, this unit is the one responsible for implementing the ECAs in all the schools related to the Ministry of Education. I suggest that it would have a well-known mandate that is effective and not superficial. According to Egypt's education spending for the year 2020, it is mentioned that only 12.6% of the state budget is dedicated to the education sector with a very minimal increase of less than 1% in the last four consecutive years. This increase is not sufficient to cover the general expenses of the main primary needs of education. Hence, I advocate for allocating sufficient budget for education in general and to ECAs in specific.. In addition, there would be a clear monitoring and evaluation process that can assess the impact of ECAs on students while monitoring schools who don't implement ECA programs in schools.

2. **Scaling up the Community Schools' approach- Academic Curricula based on ECA:** Finally, I propose to consider the concept that the community school studied in this research adopts. This concept is seeing the academic education not separated from ECA. On the contrary, it is suggested that both the academic subjects' teacher and the ECA teacher would creatively design the academic lessons collaboratively using the different ECAs.

3. **Tailored ECA Curricula:** ECAs in schools need to be built based on a proper life skills curriculum where ECA teachers would learn how to use this curriculum while still tailor the lessons according to the different needs of students and available resources in the school.

4. **Implementing Structured ECA approaches:** I propose that ECA teachers would be trained to implement ECA through a structured facilitation process. This means that each ECA class will be used to tackle a comprehensive life and technical skill. Then, students would analyze and reflect together on the process. Students would conclude the discussion with

theory and practical steps that they can take in their personal and academic life after the ECA class ends.

5. **Establishing an ECA Center in each school:** I suggest having an ECA center in each school coordinated by ECA teachers where they provide assessments and coaching sessions for students to support them discover themselves and their interests. Students would then be directed to the ECA that can be suitable for them. It would be of great value if each number of students would be coached by an ECA teacher to continuously monitor students' progress and provide guidance whenever needed. For public schools, I suggest the existence of a central ECA center in each governorate. It could be funded by community development organizations while properly marketed for among public school students.

6. **Improving ECA Teachers' role:** ECA teachers have a big influence on students. I recommend providing proper training technically and as well personally. In addition, they need to be trained on using the experiential learning methodology, facilitation techniques and the different characteristics of the learning styles and age of students that they are teaching. Teachers need to acquire basic coaching and mentoring skills for the role that ECA imposes on them in this area.

7. **Enhancing parents' involvement:** The role of parents is important for the successful implementation of ECA. It is vital to conduct awareness sessions for parents related to parenting. In addition, it would be helpful to include guidance about their role in ECA and how they can facilitate the process to their children complementing what the school does. It is advised that parents take part in competitions, festivals and exhibitions to witness by themselves the impact ECA has on their children. It would be a great addition if parents were encouraged to volunteer to lead any of the ECA clubs inside the school.

8. **Bringing the Private Sector on board:** One of the major challenges of public schools is lack of financial resources that support the implementation of ECAs. I suggest that the Ministry of Education would conduct a mapping exercise to all the schools in the different governorates of Egypt who suffer from extreme poverty. Each school should be sponsored by one or more of the private sector corporations existing in the governorate that the school exists in as part of their CSR program. The ministry can provide in return some facilities for the

sponsoring corporation which will encourage more private sector corporations to participate in this initiative.

9. **Engaging International and Local Development Agencies:** Those agencies provide huge funds to Egypt. As an example, in 2019, Egypt has received an amount of 1709 USD million in which 43% was dedicated to the social empowerment component. Education is an integral part of the social empowerment funds ( OECD, 2022). It is clear through reviewing different education policies in Egypt specifically related to donor funded projects, that the amount of funds dedicated to ECAs is minimal in comparison to academic education. Accordingly, my suggestion is allocating funds related to those budgets to improve the quality of ECAs in public schools. In addition, these agencies in partnership with the Ministry of Education would design the ECA curricula and provide training for ECA teachers by consulting local and international experts.

10. **Broadening the role of International Schools:** The international schools have extensive experience and credentials when it comes to the implementation of ECAs. I suggest that each international school would provide support to one public school in the same area. This role could be as part of the school 's community service programs where they provide basic training and coaching to the public ECA teachers while providing any extra kits and tools they have to support the public school.

To wrap up, after conducting this research study and through the extensive experiences shared during the field work, I firmly believe that ECAs can have a real impact on some of the major challenges facing the Education sector nowadays. I also believe that if we have a smart plan and strong advocates to lead ECAs inside schools; We will witness real transformation in the coming generations. **I HAVE HOPE ...**



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# Appendix 1

## Interview Questions: Teachers and school principals

- Question 1: Please tell me more about yourself and the nature of your work. Explain the relationship between your work and the development of education.
- Question 2: In your point of view, what are the current challenges that students face during their Education period?
- Question 3: How do you define “extra- curricular” activities?
- Question 4: From your experience in the field, how do you define life skills? Why do you think life skills are important for students at this stage of life?
- Question 5: How do you think the characters of students should be developed other than academia?
- Question 6: How do you define academic excellence? Is it directly related to scores? If no? What else is considered academic excellence in your point of view?
- Question 7: How do you see extracurricular activities contributing to the academic excellence of students?
- Question 8: How do you see extracurricular activities contributing to the character building of students?
- Question 9: Does the presence of extracurricular activities in schools help in solving major community issues or not? If yes, can you give a real example from the field?
- Question 10: What are the challenges that prevent the implementation of the extra-curricular activities in schools?
- Question 11: How do you see the Ministry of Education supporting the implementation of extracurricular activities to be implemented in schools?
- Question 12: How do you see the role of teachers and principals in the implementation of extra-curricular activities?
- Question 13: What kind of training do you think is essential to help teachers and principals implement the extracurricular activities properly in schools?
- Question 14: Do you have any more comments you would like to add regarding the impact of extra- curricular activities?

## Focus Group Questions: Students

- Question 1: Please explain which grade you are in.
- Question 2: What is the subject you like? Why?
- Question 3: What do you think about the tools used in Education? How does it contribute to your development?
- Question 4: Can you identify what is the meaning of “extracurricular activities”?
- Question 5: Is your school concerned with the implementation of “extracurricular activities”? if yes: Can you give examples?
- Question 6: If no: How do you see this impacting you?
- Question 7: What are the extra-curricular activities that you wish existed in the school? Why?
- Question 8: Do you have any other friends that take part in any extracurricular activities at their schools? How far this is impacting them in your point of view?
- Question 9: How far do you think the presence of extracurricular activities in the school can actually impact your academic excellence?
- Question 10: What areas do you think the presence of extracurricular activities can help in character development?

## Interview Questions: Parents

- Question 1: What do you think the meaning of “extracurricular activities”?
- Question 2: Does the school you send your kids to provide extracurricular activities?
- Question 3: Do you allow your kids to take part in the extra-curricular activities that exist in their schools?
- Question 4: if yes: How do you see the impact of “extracurricular activities” on your kids?
- Question 5: If No: How far do you think this is essential to the development of your kids? a. Academically      b. Personally (character building)
- Question 6: If your school doesn’t provide extracurricular activities, do you encourage your kids to take part in extracurricular activities even outside school? If not, why? If yes, how do you see this impacting your kids’ development?
- Question 7: If the school provides extracurricular activities to students, what could be some possible challenges for the parents that don't allow them to send their kids? How can these challenges be solved in your point of view?