

Laidlaw Scholars – Extracurricular School Programme

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| Title | Designing for Impact: Optimising Extra-curricular Content for Educational Transformation (Academic, Social, Emotional) in Oxfordshire. |
| Group | Albee Wilson, Anna Sharp, Benjamin Berman, George Ke, Matilda Stephen |
| Aim | The purpose of this research is to evaluate how distinct thematic extra-curricular activities (in sports, the arts, and academic-themed clubs) contribute, through different mechanisms, to improvements in pupils' academic, social, and emotional educational outcomes. |
| SDGs | By examining the improvements in educational outcomes across distinct thematic extra-curricular activities (ECAs), this research aims to support the optimisation of ECAs to address the achievement gap exacerbated by unequal access – particularly in underfunded state schools. This aligns with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4: <i>Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all</i> , especially subgoal 4.5 , which calls for the elimination of discrimination in education. Furthermore, analysing the casual mechanisms through which ECAs influence pupil development, this research also contributes indirectly to SDG 8.6 , which supports the development of a global youth employment strategy to improve job prospects for school leavers. |

Research Question:

In what ways do different types of extra-curricular activities (in sports, arts, and academic-themed clubs) influence pupils' cognitive development, social bonding, wellbeing, and self-regulation, and how might these be optimised to improve educational outcomes (academic, social, emotional)?

Objectives:

- 1) **Establish stakeholder engagement and data collection pathways** by acquiring a contact database of Oxfordshire schools through the SDG Lab by Week 1, and distributing a stakeholder survey to educators, parents, and programme providers by Wednesday of Week 2.
- 2) **Collect and analyse qualitative data** by conducting semi-structured interviews with at least 10 teachers by the end of Week 3, and by completing thematic analysis of survey and interview responses using interdisciplinary theoretical frameworks by Week 4.
- 3) **Synthesize and communicate findings** by creating data visualisations of educational outcome patterns by Week 5, and by producing an academic article evaluating the benefits of at least three thematic ECA types (sports, arts, academic clubs) in relation to academic and social wellbeing by the end of the research period.

Rationale:

- 1) **Context:** A wide body of literature suggest that student participants in ECAs benefit from higher academic achievement and social well-being than non-participants. Psychological and sociological theories argue that a transfer effect, where students apply skills gained from ECAs to another generalised domain, explains this correlation (Bradley & Conway, 2016; Eizadirad et al., 2022; Ishiguro et al., 2023). Similarly, neurological arguments suggest that ECAs stimulate the areas of the brain responsible for cognitive, emotional, and behavioural engagement, by building soft skills, social relationships that foster a sense of belonging, and intrinsic motivation (Beck & Malley, 1998;

Feraco et al., 2023; Gorski, 2021; Korpershoek et al., 2020; O'Donnell et al., 2024, Hallam, 2010)

- 2) **Gap:** There is a lack of existing literature that differentiates ECAs in terms of their separate effect on the academic, social, and emotional engagement of participants. Much of the literature involves the findings of one specific localised case study of one activity. Less attention is paid to how different combinations of ECAs might interact to produce complementary effects or diminish potential benefits (see Marsh & Kleitman, 2002; Shulruf, 2010)
- 3) **Significance:** Ofsted (2019) implies an expectation for schools to provide a range of 'well-balanced' co-curricular activities. Yet, current literature suggests that participants with high socio-economic status are disproportionately represented in ECA participation (Bering and Schulz 2024). While increased financial access to resources is one factor that explains this, the concept of cultural capital is also considered a huge influencer on ECA selection (Ashbourne & Andres, 2015), resulting in a disparity where students from middle-class backgrounds are overrepresented in certain ECAs due to parental perceptions around their value.
- 4) **Our contribution:** Developmental compensation theory suggests that lower socio-economic status students benefit more from ECAs than those with higher socio-economic status (O'Donnell et al., 2024). Our research into the different strengths of different ECA types aims to increase parental awareness of their distinct benefits, especially among state-school students, which strives to encourage greater ECA participation in order to help reduce educational inequality.

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Stakeholder Mapping:

| Stakeholder | Relevance | Engagement | Output |
|------------------------------|--|------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Teachers involved in ECAs | Affected group/Decision-makers/Experts | Survey/Interview | Answers/Interview |
| 2. Headteachers | Decision-makers/Experts | Survey/Interview | Answers/Interview |
| 3. Parents | Affected group | Survey | Answers |
| 4. External ECA Providers | Implementation partners/Experts | Survey/Interview | Answers/Interview |

Research Methods:

This research adopts a qualitative approach, including a targeted literature review and mixed qualitative data collection methods.

We will begin with a literature review to identify theoretical frameworks and existing evidence on how various types of ECAs (particularly in sports, the arts, and academic clubs) contribute to educational outcomes such as cognitive development, social bonding, and emotional wellbeing.

To generate primary data, we will conduct semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, including headteachers, teachers, and external ECA providers, to explore their lived experiences of designing and delivering ECA provision. These interviews will focus on how specific ECAs are perceived to influence pupil development, and whether certain benefits are more strongly associated with particular activity types. They will also offer insight into the strategic planning and contextual factors that shape ECA provision.

To broaden the scope and diversity of perspectives, we will distribute surveys to headteachers, teachers involved in ECAs, and parents, aimed at understanding wider perceptions of the impact on pupils' educational outcomes. This multi-perspective approach is key to highlighting both institutional and community views.

Time Management:

Gantt chart outlining our research timeline: [Book.xlsx](#)