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The Academic Impact of Extracurricular Activities on Middle School Students

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The Academic Impact of Extracurricular Activities on Middle School Students

by

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The Academic Impact of Extracurricular Activities on Middle School Students

by
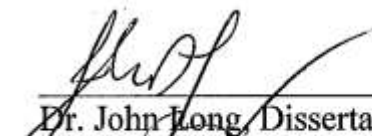
Lauren Jansen

This dissertation has been approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

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Dr. John Long, Dissertation Chair   11.18.16
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Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon

my own scholarly work here at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it

for any other college or university course or degree here or elsewhere.

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Abstract

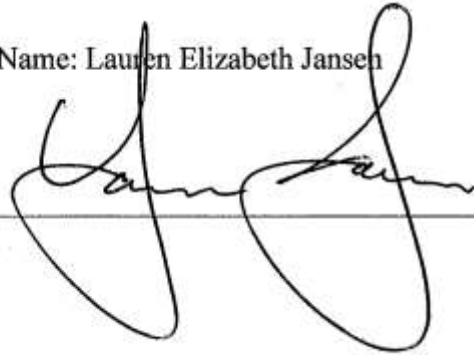This research study examined the academic impact of extracurricular activities on middle school students. This study investigated a possible relationship between the amount of hours that students spent participating in extracurricular activities and their academic achievement, as well as the amount of hours that students spent participating in in-school extracurricular activities and their academic achievement. This study used a combination of quantitative and qualitative data to reach its results. The quantitative data ultimately did not show a statistically significant correlation between the hours that students spent in extracurricular activities in general or in in-school activities and academic achievement. However, there was an upward trend in the data for hours that students spent in extracurricular activities in general and their academic achievement. The qualitative component drew upon the prior research on traits that contribute to the success of middle school students academically, and found a pattern consistent with the evidence of these traits through the results of a survey and interviews. Therefore, the qualitative component showed that through connecting these answers to and relying on the prior research, middle school students most likely benefitted academically from being involved in extracurricular activities, especially in-school activities that met these needs. The researcher also reflected on the study and made several recommendations for future research on the topic, ranging from survey and sampling augmentations to suggestions of sub-topics worthy of further exploration.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher will discuss the reasoning for their choosing of the topic of their research study. This chapter begins with a brief background on the topic of extracurricular activities and academic achievement, including a quick look at the existing body of knowledge on these topics. Following this is a close examination of this knowledgebase, which ultimately led to the study's direction in filling gaps discovered within this existing body of knowledge. This chapter will then explain the development of and rationale for the methodology of this particular study. The ultimate goal of this research was to contribute to this existing body of knowledge by exploring a previously unexamined component of this area of study by studying this topic exclusively at the middle school level. This chapter also discusses how prior studies on similar topics shaped the study's design. This chapter also entails the rationales for conducting this study in a broader sense, its four different hypotheses, and research questions, as well as helpful definitions of various terms used throughout the course of the study. The introductory chapter also briefly describes some of the limitations that may have come into play throughout the course of the study, which may have affected the outcome.

Background

In 2016, students and parents found themselves in an educational dilemma. After having seen the many benefits that having a higher education could provide, parents of the most recent generation of students in 2016, were more motivated than ever to encourage their children to attend college and pursue higher education. They had dreams of their children receiving a post-secondary education that would put their children in a

much better position to have a career than they had experienced. Specifically, an

education with versatility in opportunities for advancement and the potential to ultimately

grant their children financial security.

> This led to students in 2016 having evolved far beyond this notion of simply

getting into, attending, and graduating from college after high school as an option. The

expectation evolved into such that American students would likely go to college or

pursue some other form of higher education to becoming the norm. This led to some

major changes in the goals that parents and students had for a student's post-secondary

education. The goal was no longer for a student to simply get into, attend, and graduate

from college, but the goal was now for a student to strive from a young age to do

anything they could to get into what was considered to be a "good" college. The

reasoning for this was that parents no longer simply wanted their children to get a higher

education, but they wanted them to get a great one. It also became important for students

to strive to be the best and the brightest that they could be from an early age, in an

attempt for them to become competitive in the future and to be able to earn as much

scholarship money as possible, in order to help defer the ever-rising cost of college

tuition.

> There were many different reasons for the evolution of these college goals. One

was the emphasis on published college rankings. Altbach (2012) found that "Students

and their families use rankings to make choices about where to study by determining

what various colleges and universities have to offer in terms of the prestige, value, and

price of their degrees" (p. 26). There were national public university rankings, national

private university rankings, regional public university rankings, regional private

university rankings, rankings of different types of programs at universities across the nation, etc. Again, it was no longer about simply the idea of a student getting into college, attending, and graduating. There was now great emphasis placed on getting into a "good" school, or one of these highly ranked schools, in hopes that a student was going to receive the highest quality of higher education possible. The idea was that in doing this, it would lead to the student being a more competitive prospective employee in the job market post-graduation from a school of this caliber. Reason being, that what separated these "good" schools from other schools, was that their school statistics showed better overall results. These better statistics and results that separated these schools from the rest were higher numbers in areas such as their graduation rate, rate of job placement, and average income earned by students who had graduated from that school and meant a likely promising future for graduates.

Another reason that getting into and attending one of these "good" schools had become an essential component for parents and students was the reality of the rising cost of college tuition. This rising cost of college tuition coupled with the weak state of the economy made parents and students wary about where they would ultimately choose to spend their money on a student's higher education. Essentially they wanted to make sure that they were getting the most "bang for their buck" in terms of a higher education and wanted to be sure that there was a strong chance that this investment would yield great results for the student after graduation. Most parents were willing to spend the money, or convince their students to spend the money in terms of taking out student loans, on their college education if they were convinced that it was a good investment in their child's education and ultimately in their future post-graduation. If parents and students were

going to spend anywhere from thousands to tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands of dollars on a student's higher education, they wanted to make sure that the education that the student received was a good one. They wanted to be sure that it was worth their money, and that this higher education was likely to yield great results for the student as a post-graduate.

Another issue was that the rising cost of college tuition created intense competition among prospective students for scholarship money from an early age to help them pay for their expensive college education. The rising cost of tuition had simply made a quality higher education unaffordable to pay completely during the time that the student was in college for many prospective students and families. The reality was that college tuition also continued to rise almost every year. Even parents of young children at this time could extrapolate and estimate the enormity of what college was going to cost by the time their children graduated high school. Lee and Mueller's (2014) findings "Suggest[ed] that college students, regardless of generation status, believe[d] themselves to be ill equipped to incur student loan debt responsibly" (p. 718). This led to many students trying to find ways to be able to attend college without having to take out student loans or if necessary by taking out as little in student loans as possible. This also led to many parents wishing the same, and trying to help their students however possible to defer this future cost. This motivation led to the intense competition for scholarship money between prospective students. This also led to students starting to think about doing things to make themselves more competitive for scholarship money from a very early age.

The birth of a common theme here among the importance of college rankings, the careful selection of a college, and the great amount of interest in attaining financial aid in the form of scholarships was the same, one of competition. Rodgers's (2005) research found that the main challenge facing colleges and universities at this time was the competition for prospective students (p. 3). Traditional college rivalries previously handled on the athletic level evolved into competition to recruit the best and brightest students from across the country, a desire to create the best programs and departments, and for schools to attain the highest college ranking possible. Colleges did this in an effort to start the cycle all over again with an edge, a desirable college or program ranking that would speak for itself and help attract high quality students. The reason that colleges and universities benefited from this competition between one another because it constantly pushed them to strive to have better academics, higher student retention and graduation rates, and to always be aiming for a higher college ranking, program ranking, etc. Therefore, colleges and universities were continually improving and becoming better by constantly being in competition with one another. While this emergence of competition had been valuable for colleges and universities, this evolution looked much different in terms of what it meant for prospective students.

Parents were now preparing students from a very early age to become the best and the brightest, in hopes that one day their student would be in a great position, both academically and socially, to be a competitive prospective applicant when the time came for their respective student to start applying to colleges and universities. This competitive mindset of parents and students may have had persistent effects on their behavior and school-related choices. This happened starting as early as when these

students were toddlers and parents were evaluating the quality of the pre-school programs

that they could get their student into, which for those unaware, in some cases became a

rigorous process (Henry & Gordon, 2006). Then at the elementary level, many parents

often asked for testing to see if their student would qualify for the district's gifted

program. From the time students were very young, parents were trying to do anything

they could to give their students an edge over the rest of the field.

Still, it did not stop there. Middle schools and high schools offered courses

labeled "Advanced," "Honors," "Accelerated," "Pre-AP," or "AP" for high-achieving

students, and many parents jumped at the chance to get their student into these classes to

give their student a chance at having an academic edge above the rest of their peers. The

idea was that these courses would place students in advanced classes by the time they

were in high school, and these classes would ultimately look more competitive on a

student's high school transcript. They also knew that having their student in these

courses could potentially help the student's GPA by earning them more points than a

regular level course (if the student's school calculated GPA's on a weighted system). In

addition, it could ultimately lead to them being better prepared for their college readiness

assessment (ACT, SAT, etc.), giving them the chance to outscore their peers. They also

knew that through this intense and meticulous planning and preparation in terms of

courses may even lead to a higher class ranking for the student by the time the student

graduated from high school, which was another critical component up for consideration

in college admissions in 2016. Many parents considered the more challenging courses

and larger load of homework assignments a small price to pay in order to for the chance

to achieve these things and to ultimately set the student up to be a more competitive prospective college applicant.

However, this "race to the top" did not only occur with academics. Another common type of scholarship aside from those awarded for academics were those awarded for athletics or for being involved in other extracurricular activities. However, it was worth noting that in terms of potential college scholarships not based on academics, colleges and universities spent significantly more money on athletic scholarships as opposed to other scholarships for other extracurricular activities. Again, colleges and universities only awarded these scholarships to the top percentage of high school athletes from across the country. Therefore, the better athlete, the bigger the scholarship amount awarded, as colleges and universities were willing to spend more money to recruit the very best athletes.

This led to some parents and students being "all in" in terms of trying to prepare their respective student to be as competitive as possible for these athletic scholarships later on down the road. This could mean hundreds of hours each year spent on practices and games and even thousands of dollars spent on athletic lessons from an early age to tens of thousands of dollars spent on a student playing on what have become known as "select" sports teams (Riddle, 2014). Parents did all of this in hopes of providing their student with the training that would give them chance to outshine and one day perform at a higher level than the rest of their peers. This was a growing trend in 2016. It was witnessed taking place across the country and was a sweeping change from previous generations' commitment to student participation in sports. It was on an entirely different level than in previous years. Again, this comes back to the mentality of parents trying to

give their students an edge to be one of the best, in hopes of the student being recruited by a college or university and awarded a scholarship in order to pay for or help pay for an expensive college education.

Whether or not a student could potentially earn a college scholarship by participating in a particular extracurricular activity, sports or otherwise, there were still many research-proven additional benefits to students participating in extracurricular activities in any form. Researchers had previously found that the greatest potential benefit of a student participating in extracurricular activities was that it could result in increased academic achievement for the student (Denault & Poulin, 2009; Fredricks, 2012; Israel, 2013; Knifsend & Graham, 2012; Springer & Diffily, 2012). This benefit was appealing to the parent trying to help their student be as academically successful as possible. There were many other potential benefits to students participating in extracurricular activities as well. Students who participated in extracurricular activities were proven to be more well-rounded who were also more motivated to succeed. These students were also more socially comfortable communicating with peers and adults, and had higher rates of self-confidence.

This was where parents found themselves in a pressing dilemma. Parents had to decide whether they wanted their student to spend their time trying to be high achieving students academically, or whether they wanted their student to spend many hours committed to extracurricular activities, or if they expected their student to be able to balance both successfully. They might opt for investing most available hours in a particular sport hoping for the student to become an elite athlete. This could be especially true if a student struggled academically and hopes of the student obtaining a

college scholarship based on academics did not look as promising. They might also have chosen the focused path of solely difficult academic classes, especially if their student was planning to take multiple AP exams in terms of looking for a more competitive academic edge. Alternatively, perhaps they chose the path of strong academics coupled with multiple extracurricular activities in hopes of a more well-rounded overall student, who ultimately may benefit academically from participation in these extracurricular activities as well.

The reality was that many parents strove for their students to be able to have the best of both worlds and to be successful in both of these areas. For example, the student enrolled in advanced courses to stay focused on high academic achievement while being asked to simultaneously be involved in extracurricular activities and perform at a high level there as well. This study examined whether or not this time spent in extracurricular activities benefited students academically or served as a detriment to their academic success. This study also sought to examine whether or not there was a point of saturation at the middle school level exclusively, in which students benefited academically from participating in extracurricular activities up to a certain amount of hours, after which their academic success declined. Lastly, this study examined and compared the amount of time students spent in in-school and out of school extracurricular activities to see if a relationship existed between hours spent in in-school extracurricular activities and students' academic achievement.

Purpose of the Dissertation

The researcher conducted a mixed-methods study among middle school students in a suburban school district in the Midwest, to investigate a possible relationship

between the amount of hours that middle school students spent in extracurricular

activities and their level of academic achievement. Both the amount of hours that

students spent in in-school activities and out of school activities were examined as well,

in order to further investigate these possible relationships based on the setting of the

extracurricular activities.

The parents of the students completed weekly surveys that were e-mailed to them,

to record the hours that their student spent in extracurricular activities for that week, as

well as how many were in in-school and out of school activities. The researcher analyzed

the hours that an individual student spent in extracurricular activities per week and then

compared them to an individual student's first semester GPA and examined the

relationship between these two variables. Parents also completed a written survey during

the last week of the study reflecting on their experience and their feelings about whether

or not they felt there was a relationship between their student's involvement in

extracurricular activities and their academic achievement. The researcher also conducted

interviews with students and parents to gain their individual perspective on the number of

hours spent in extracurricular activities and academic achievement. The researcher

believed that there was a point of saturation that existed among middle school students

who participated in extracurricular activities and academic achievement; however, the

researcher was unsure about whether or not the setting of the extracurricular activities

was related to students' academic achievement but felt that it was a component worth

investigating because "researchers investigating extracurricular activities ha[d] long been

interested in the relationships between participation in these activities and the social

outcomes, academic achievement, and the educational attainment of adolescents"

(Feldman & Matjasko, 2005, p. 159). The purpose of this study was to investigate a possible relationship between the amount of hours that middle school students spent participating in extracurricular activities and their academic achievement.

Rationale

The art of students balancing their academic studies with their extracurricular activities was a conundrum that the researcher, a public school teacher, had witnessed as a continual struggle with students and parents. Their conflict stemmed from the pressure that they felt for their students to be able to excel in both their academic studies and extracurricular activities simultaneously. There was also the difficulty in deciding how much time students should spend participating in extracurricular activities when there were many positive aspects to gain such as good grades, school engagement, higher academic goals, and positive youth development (Fredricks, 2012; Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; Knifsend & Graham, 2012). There have been multiple research studies further investigating this issue conducted at the high school level, as well as a few studies conducted at the elementary level, and one study that conducted at the elementary and middle school level combined (Denault & Poulin, 2009; Fredricks, 2012; Israel, 2013; Knifsend & Graham, 2012; Springer & Diffily, 2012). These studies researched the relationship possible between the time that students spend in extracurricular activities and their academic achievement. Studies such as Israel's (2013), while conducted at the elementary level, concluded that it was entirely "possible that providing extracurricular activities [was] able to influence student achievement" (p. 104). Another reason to further investigate this topic at the middle school level was that researchers Eder and Parker (1987) found that extracurricular activities were more important in junior high

than in elementary school (p. 201). The gap in current knowledge addressed by this study was that there had been no research conducted exclusively at the middle school level on this topic.

The existing literature alluded to a point of saturation that existed for students at the high school level. Previous research in studies conducted at the high school level showed that up to a certain number of hours, students benefited academically from being involved in extracurricular activities, but once a student reached a certain number of hours, there was a decline in their academic achievement (Cooper, Valentine, Nye, & Lindsay, 1999; Marsh, 1992; Marsh & Kleitman, 2002). The contribution that this research made to the existing literature was that it examined this relationship and possible point of saturation exclusively at the middle school level. This research also further investigated whether or not there was a possible relationship between the setting of extracurricular activities, in-school or out of school, and academic achievement at the middle school level. Research by Cooper et al. in 1999, as well as a study conducted by Marsh and Kleitman in 2002, all previously identified points of saturation and supported this idea.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses guided the study:

H1a: There is a relationship between the number of hours students spend in extracurricular activities and academic achievement, as measured by the mean amount of hours and first semester GPA of middle school students.

H2a: There is a relationship between the number of hours students spend in in-school

extracurricular activities and academic achievement, as measured by the mean

amount of hours and first semester GPA of middle school students.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

RQ1. Is there a relationship between the amount of hours students spend in

extracurricular activities and academic achievement at the middle school level?

RQ2. Is there a relationship between the amount of hours students spend in in-school

extracurricular activities and academic achievement at the middle school level?

RQ3. Is there a point of saturation that exists for students in terms of extracurricular

activities and academic achievement at the middle school level?

RQ4. Is there a point of saturation that exists for students in terms of in-school

extracurricular activities and academic achievement at the middle school level?

Limitations

There were many possible limitations within the research study. Perhaps the most

predominant limitations of the study had to do with the relationship of the researcher with

the research site and with the potential parent and student participants. The researcher

was an employee of the school district as a classroom teacher and sponsor of three

different after school activities where and when the study took place. The researcher's

relationship with the participants in the study was that the researcher could have

potentially been the teacher of some of the student participants or have been the sponsor

of an after school activity that the student may have participated in. They may also have

encountered the researcher at some point in some other way throughout the school district

or possibly known the researcher through someone else in the school district. The researcher also may have had a relationship with some of the parent participants by having been their student's current teacher or activity sponsor. The researcher may also have had a previous relationship with some of the parents participating in the study by having had one of their other children as student in the researcher's class or in one of the activities in which the researcher sponsored sometime in the past. The researcher also lived near the community in which the school that they taught at was located, so there was also the possibility that a student or parent participant may know the researcher through a community organization, friend, or relative.

Some other limitations of the study were items such as the variance of students' first semester grades due to their assignment by different teachers across the district and the district's recent adoption of the Common Core curriculum in the subject areas of English and Mathematics. Common Core was a concern of many parents and teachers at this time because it was brand new and being very quickly implemented in schools without much prior testing of how it might impact students academically. Other limitations of this study may have had to do with the nature of the very parents who chose to volunteer to participate in the study. Furthermore, there were also possible limitations to the study in terms of the study's design. The study's sampling methods, survey wording, and small sample size may have been limitations in and of themselves. The type of and frequency with which data was collected and the constraints that this placed on how the data was able to be analyzed may have also both been limitations to the study.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study, the following terms were defined:

Academic Achievement: "The attainment of knowledge, competencies, and higher-level status, as reflected in grades, degrees, and other forms of certification or public acknowledgment" (Collins & O'Brien, 2011, p. 3).

Data Analysis: "Data, facts or numbers that describe something. To analyze data means to make a judgment, synopsis, or conclusion based on the given data. Many times data are organized in a table or graph" (Collins & O'Brien, 2011, p. 128).

Extracurricular Activities: "Student organization pursuits that may be social, athletic, or avocational (e.g., sororities, basketball teams, chess clubs, etc.)" (Collins & O'Brien, 2011, p. 177).

Middle School:

An organizational model that emerged in the late 20th century in response to dissatisfaction with the earlier junior high school model. Renewing the focus on providing an educational program appropriate to the developmental needs of early adolescents, the middle school typically provides a range of organizational arrangements, including team teaching and block scheduling, a comprehensive program of academic, vocational, and guidance counseling, and a professional staff committed to meeting the unique emotional, physical, social, and intellectual needs of early adolescents. Middle schools typically include grades six through eight. (Collins & O'Brien, 2011, p. 292)

Suburban: a "Territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with population less than 100,000" ("Identification of Rural Locales," n.d., para. 20).

Summary

There have been many long-standing assumptions and opinions about the possible relationship between the amount of hours that students spend in extracurricular activities and academic achievement. There are those who claimed that focus deviating from anything other than things academic in nature in any way, shape, or form, negatively impacted a student's academic goals, while others swore that being involved in extracurricular activities benefited students in numerous ways, including academically. Most of these opinions were qualitative in nature, and lacked hard, quantitative data to support these claims. While there were studies previously conducted that spanned across the board in terms of grade level, from elementary up through high school, what the current body of knowledge on the subject lacked was any data conducted exclusively at the middle school level.

This was an imperative component to note, because middle school students are very different from elementary school students and high school students. Developmentally they are at a critical point in adolescence and their brain is functioning much different at previous and future ages. Therefore, someone could not simply look to these other previous studies conducted at the elementary and high school levels, extrapolate their data and findings, and assume that it would also be true for middle school students. Yet, middle school parents had the same desire and need to have this question answered and to know about what middle school students might benefit from or not in terms of participation in extracurricular activities and academic achievement. This

is why there was a great need for a study such as this to be conducted at a time in 2016 when the answer to this question had become more important than ever as parents looked to their children's future.

To investigate this topic and have a well-rounded picture of this possible relationship, gathering and analyzing this data at the middle school level exclusively, was essential. This data could have been a link connecting data already gathered at the elementary and high school levels, or it could show something completely different, negating the previously gathered data at the elementary and high school levels. However, in order to find out, it needed to be researched, studied, and investigated. Either way, the results could prove to be valuable. The researcher was also using this opportunity to delve deeper into the possibility that the relationship between students participating in in-school or out of school activities and their effect on academic achievement might differ, which was another gap in the current body of knowledge. This study sought to help fill both of these gaps in numerous ways and sought to grant a significant contribution to the existing body of knowledge on the subject.

Chapter Two: The Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review contained information on numerous topics all relevant to the topic of the study pertaining to extracurricular activities and academic achievement at the middle school level. Examination of all prior research similar to the topic of study itself and research of the more general topic of extracurricular activities and academics was essential for the contextualization of this study. Closer examination of topics related to the topic of the study aided in developing the study's critical questions and methodology. Researching the adolescent and the role that this phase of development played in affecting the middle school student helped frame the research and raise questions to be addressed. Examining the middle school environment itself, including the transition from elementary to middle school, was essential for a study focused exclusively on middle school students. Lastly, prior research on factors that played into students' grades and what different dynamics might have influenced the academic outcomes of middle school students helped to determine an appropriate scope for the study and what variables needed to be studied and controlled.

Prior Research

This research explored a possible relationship between the amount of hours that students spent in extracurricular activities and their academic achievement. Previous research primarily took place at the high school level, however it also examined a few studies conducted at the elementary and middle school level. This was because the only available studies that existed on this topic at the time of this research study were at the high school and combined middle and elementary levels. While this study solely

researched the possible relationship between these two variables at the middle school level exclusively, these prior studies, while conducted at different levels of schooling, still related to these same subjects and many different factors that this study examined. The consensus among prior research supported "a positive association between extracurricular participation and positive academic outcomes" (Fredricks & Eccles, 2006, p. 132). This included items such as grades, engagement in school and educational goals (Fredricks & Eccles, 2006). This claim reiterated findings that supported the idea that "Adolescents involved in a greater number of activities exhibit[ed] higher academic aspirations and better academic performance, compared to [their] less involved peers" (Knifsend & Graham, 2012, p. 380). Other "prior research support[ed] recommendations for encouraging extracurricular participation as a means to promote positive youth development and academic achievement" (Fredricks, 2012, p. 305). Gilman (2001) found that for students, "two of the more pertinent constructs theoretically linked to life satisfaction [were] social interest and participation in structured extracurricular activities" (p. 751).

Particular benefits of participation in extracurricular activities found in research directly correlated to this study. One example was being able to use a student's participation in extracurricular activities as a predictor of "psychological competencies [which] include[d] interpersonal competence, higher self-esteem, and lower depression" (Fredricks & Eccles, 2006, p. 132). The possibility of being able to use a student's participation in extracurricular activities as a predictor such as this, led the researcher to question whether or not the amount of hours students spent in extracurricular activities could also be a predictor of that same student's academic outcomes.

Another benefit that directly correlated to this study was the finding that "the greater the extent of club participation during the year, the greater the improvement [was] in overall GPA" (Springer & Diffily, 2012, p. 794). The isolation of those two elements and the finding of a direct relationship between them was another reason, in the researcher's opinion, that pointed this study in the direction that it did, and led the study to explore a possible relationship between similar variables. Further findings within the prior research claimed students involved in one or more activities reported more positive attitudes about school, higher aspirations for academic achievement, and better grades than their uninvolved peers (Knifsend & Graham, 2012, p. 380). This was another claim that drove the researcher to design a study that examined the possible relationship between the number of hours a student spent in extracurricular activities and whether or not that amount of hours was related to their academic performance.

Many major findings within the prior research laid the groundwork for this present study. One of these things, that may have played a key role in the findings of this study, was that in 1996 "Gerber reported that school-based extracurricular activities had stronger associations with academic achievement than non-school activities" (Busseri, Rose-Krasnor, Willoughby, & Chalmers, 2006, p. 1314). Schools that offered more after-school activities to students or offered a means of transportation for students, may have also made it easier for students to participate in doing so, and may have produced outcomes that differed from the norm. It was also interesting to note that students who "Participat[ed] in multiple activities [saw] benefi[ts] because each extracurricular context provide[d] affordances for youth development and that involvement in a greater number

of organized structured contexts limit[ed] the time to be involved in risky activities"

(Fredricks & Eccles, 2006, p. 133).

Some other dynamics of this possible relationship was that "there [was] an

increase[ed] awareness that participation in organized activity contexts offer[ed] valuable

opportunities for growth and positive youth development" (Fredricks, 2012, p. 295).

Guest and Schneider (2003) both found that "adolescents' participation in extracurricular

activities [was] often associated with positive behavioral outcomes, implying that such

activities directly shape[d] adolescents' development" (p. 89). There was also reason to

believe that by "having a greater sense of belonging at school, [this] may [have]

promote[d] adolescents' academic motivation, engagement, and achievement" (Knifsend

& Graham, 2012, p. 380). Throughout the researcher's analysis, these qualitative factors

played a crucial role in the results of this study and were noted in the prior research.

Further researching this topic in terms of the outcomes that extracurricular activities had

on students was also important because support for after-school programs and

extracurricular activities has been increasingly tied to whether programs achieve

outcomes that make significant social, physical, and educational differences for

participants (Watts, Witt, & King, 2008, p. 134).

Prior research also suggested that the breadth of activities played a vital role in the

impact that extracurricular activities had on a student in many ways. Previous studies

found that student "involvement in many different types of activities may not have the

same developmental implications as being intensely involved in one or two activities"

(Busseri et al., 2006, p. 1314). Another effect of breadth in terms of measuring

extracurricular activities was that studies found that "breadth of involvement may have

provide[d] opportunities for exploring a broad range of skills, interests, and values, as well as [exposed students] to a variety of people and experiences" (Busseri et al., 2006, p. 1314). Then by having participated in a vast range of extracurricular activities and having gained "this range of knowledge, youth may [have been] better…able to achieve developmental tasks than if their participation experiences had been narrow or constrained" (Busseri et al., 2006, p. 1314).

Concerns also arose that too much involvement in extracurricular activities negatively affected students. This stemmed from findings indicating increases in involvement past a certain threshold had negative consequences for behavior in youth (Fredricks, 2012, p. 295). Though the mechanisms remained unclear, arguments emerged suggesting excessive participation in extracurricular activities may have limited time potentially spent on traditional academic activities (Fredricks & Eccles,2006). While research claimed that there were many benefits to participating in extracurricular activities, some have expressed concern that some youth could be over-scheduled in extracurricular activities and that excessive levels of involvement produced negative academic outcomes (Fredricks, 2012, p. 295). This study examined and helped answer this question in regards to students in the middle school setting.

Still, some studies found that despite the concern of over-scheduling, intense and frequent participation may have allowed for the development and mastery of useful skills (Busseri et al., 2006, p. 1314). Essentially, even though some students spent a significant amount of time participating in extracurricular activities, there was the possibility that as a result "positive outcomes [might have] accrue[d] from structured activity involvement (e.g., skill development, positive experiences, identification with school) [that] may be

more likely with higher intensity, which [brought] repeated exposure, access, and integration" (Busseri et al., 2006, p. 1314). In the researcher's experience, this was a question of whether or not there were long-term effects of this long-term commitment to an activity not negated by this possibility.

The point that this really alluded to was that there may have been a point of saturation. Fredricks and Eccles (2006) found the following:

For example, in two studies, Marsh and colleagues (Marsh, 1992; Marsh & Kleitman, 2002) show[ed] that the relationship between extracurricular participation and indicators of youth development (e.g., time use, psychological adjustment, educational attainment, and educational and occupational aspirations) was initially positive for low to moderate levels of extracurricular involvement, leveled off, and then became slightly negative at high levels of involvement. In contrast, Cooper and his colleagues (1999) found that the amount of time on extracurricular activities was positively associated with achievement test scores, but at the highest levels of participation achievement scores dropped dramatically. (p. 133)

Further research supported this idea that "although there [were] academic benefits to extracurricular participation, there [did] appear to be a point at which greater involvement [was] not associated with increasing benefits" (Fredricks, 2012, p. 304). There were also "studies [that] indicate[d] that while greater extracurricular involvement generally relate[d] to better academic outcomes, there may [have been] a threshold at which higher levels of involvement no longer predict[ed] more positive outcomes" (Knifsend & Graham, 2012, p. 380). This was reiterated in further research that stated

that there was a possibility that "high levels of involvement...may [have been] detrimental to adjustment for certain adolescents" (Knifsend & Graham, 2012, p. 388) and that it was ultimately up to the "parents of adolescents who [were] highly involved [to] ensure that their children [had] enough time to complete their schoolwork." One study suggested that those who "participat[ed] in a moderate number of different types of activities (i.e., two activity domains) may [have been the] most optimal for helping adolescents to [have felt] connected to their school and to [have done] well academically" (Knifsend & Graham, 2012, p. 388). This research study sought to find if there was any truth to this claim of there being a point of saturation exclusively at the middle school level.

Extracurricular Activities and Academics

A significant amount of prior research examined the effects of students participating in extracurricular activities and after school programs. An overwhelming amount of this research pointed to students participating in extracurricular activities and after school programs benefitting from this participation in many forms. However, this study sought to fill an existential need for better-tailored studies into the academic impacts of extracurricular activities. Student participation in extracurricular activities and after school programs "has been positively linked to academic outcomes including higher grades, test scores, school value, school engagement, and educational aspirations" among other things (Fredricks & Eccles, 2008, p. 1030).

Furthermore, there was a relationship found "between school attachment, academic achievement, and extracurricular activity involvement" for students (Howard & Ziomek-Daigle, 2009, p. 39). This idea of a link between school attachment,

extracurricular activities, and academic achievement played a crucial role in the design of this study. This required a purposeful, carefully designed study to gain better understanding of why it was that students benefited academically from participating in extracurricular activities and after school programs. Based on the prior research, the existing relationship between these three things found to be especially true for students transitioning between different phases of schooling at the middle school level. This idea was based on research by Simpkins, Vest, Delgado and Price (2012) who found that "Adolescents who participate in school-based extracurricular activities have higher adjustment than adolescents who do not participate" (p. 332). Based on Scruggs and Mastropieri's (2004) findings that "the transition from middle school to high school can be stressful and overwhelming," examining the existing relationship between these three things was especially pertinent for students transitioning between different phases of schooling to and from the middle school level (p. 130).

Previous research indicated that the reasoning behind this correlation between the two was that when middle school students first transition from elementary school to middle school, they experienced a shift in their relationships with adult mentors at school. The role of adult mentors as teachers at the middle school level were much different from their role at the elementary school level. Students were used to having a close relationship with mostly one adult for the entire school year in elementary school, and it was a big emotional transition to lose that strong connection with one adult. Researchers showed that this caused middle school students to feel less bonded to their teachers when they first transitioned to middle school and overall resulted in them feeling less connected to school.

Researchers, such as Fredricks and Eccles (2005), have found that "extracurricular involvement increases students' identification with school and that academic benefits result from this increased identification," supporting this as a mechanism to improve students' connectedness to school during this transition was through participation in extracurricular activities (p. 516). According to researchers "participation in extracurricular activities has been shown to have an effect on academic achievement and school connectedness" for students (Howard & Ziomek-Daigle, 2009, p. 40). Uvaas and McKevitt's (2013) study also found that students who participated in extracurricular activities "reported significantly greater school connectedness, more extracurricular involvement, and higher grades" (p. 74). Another significant finding was that "participation in middle school clubs was related to positive academic adjustment in both the middle and high school years" (Fredricks & Eccles, 2006, p. 1040). Therefore, not only did students greatly benefit from this participation in extracurricular activities and after school programs during this initial transition at the middle school level, but their participation set a lasting precedent for years to come.

The proposed reasoning behind this was that by participating in extracurricular activities and after school programs, students had the chance to build stronger relationships with adult mentors that were reminiscent of the previous roles of their adult mentors in elementary school. The prior research "reveal[ed] that the relationship between children and after-school program staff exert[ed] an especially strong influence on developmental outcomes" (Fischer & Thies, 2014, p. 1789). This was because through extracurricular activities and after school programs, students had the opportunity

to spend more one on one time with these adult mentors in these extracurricular activities and to build these relationships.

To further explain this through an example, students' "grades improve[d] not because of what kids [were] learning in the video club, but because the video club [was] making them enjoy school more, so they show[ed] up more often, [found] a circle of like-minded friends, and [became] more engaged in school" (Kronholz, 2012, p. 11). By students having built these relationships with adult mentors in school and therefore the students' overall connectedness to school increasing, it also increased their motivation to be at school and to participate in school when they were there. This link between "motivation and school connectedness [we]re assumed to mediate the effects of extracurricular participation on academic achievement" for students (Fischer & Thies, 2014, p. 1788). This study's strong qualitative component was included to provide greater insight into the mechanisms and particular workings of these relationships.

Previous studies showed that "participation in middle school clubs was positively related to academic adjustment" for a number of other reasons as well as the academic ones that have been previously mentioned (Fredricks & Eccles, 2008, p. 1039). Researchers have also found other "values of participation in after-school...programs, such as building a sense of community [and] improved school attendance" which ultimately resulted in "better academic performance" for students overall (Ebie, 2005, p. 2). The agreement among the previous researchers was resounding. They credibly and confidently claimed that "there [was] a solid relationship between academic achievement and participation in extracurricular activities" for students (Howard & Ziomek-Daigle, 2009, p. 42).

The research has also supported that even if a student spent only short period participating in an extracurricular activity, that it could still have these very lasting, positive effects on them. One study in particular that examined this showed that after just "one-year [of] engagement in academic clubs was associated with better academic attainments…better reading, writing, and arithmetic skills, and, to a certain extent, with lower levels of internalizing problems, compared to nonparticipation" (Metsäpelto & Pulkkinen, 2012, p. 179). The amount of time that a student spent participating in extracurricular activities in general showed to have these effects for students. Whether it was a large amount of time spent in one or more extracurricular activities, or a much shorter amount of time spent involved in, again, one or more extracurricular activities. As the discourse on the correlation lacked definitive conclusions, this study hoped to investigate the intricacies in any relationship between extracurricular activities and academic performance.

Researchers showed that not only students who participated over a long period in the same activity benefitted, but also that those students who "participat[ed] in multiple extracurricular activities was related to the academic achievement and school connectedness of middle school children" (Howard & Ziomek-Daigle, 2009, p. 40). This negated the idea that breadth itself played an important role and reiterated that the greater the amount of actual time spent by students in extracurricular activities in general, the more the students benefited. Another interesting note was that students who participated in particular types of extracurricular activities saw certain levels of academic gains.

The first was that students who "participat[ed] in school extracurricular contexts [was] shown to be more strongly related to academic outcomes than participating in out

of school activities" (Fredricks & Eccles, 2008, p. 1030). This again could correlate back to individual student's sense of school connectedness. Akos' (2006) research found that "students in extracurricular activities may enhance their connectedness with school, which may lead to positive academic and psychosocial outcomes" (p. 1). If students were involved in a school activity, this may have led to them having felt more connected to the school as a whole and ultimately, as a result, have performed better academically in the school setting.

Which specific extracurricular activities students chose to take part in also had activity-specific gains for students academically. There were different categories into which school-based extracurricular activities fell. The most common categories listed as "three main types of school-based activities [that] include[d] sports, performing arts, and academic clubs" (Schaefer, Simpkins, Vest, & Price, 2011, p. 332). Researchers showed that students' "participation in academic clubs was associated with higher academic attainments and lower internalizing problems compared to non-participation, and performing arts was related to higher academic working skills" (Metsäpelto & Pulkkinen, 2012, p. 174). Edwards, Kanters, and Bocarro (2011) also found that sports in particular were "seen as an important socialization mechanism: a means to better prepare kids for real world experience, to keep minority youth involved in school, as a means of social mobility, and for fostering school spirit" (p. 603).

Another noteworthy point from the previous research found that students' "participation in the arts may [have] contribute[d] to (academic) performance by stimulating motivational and attitudinal changes in students that could then spill over into academic studies" (Metsäpelto & Pulkkinen, 2012, p. 174). For example, these things

may have come to fruition in the form of things such as having "support[ed] the development of self-confidence, perseverance and bonding and provid[ed] opportunities for stress reduction or by [having] support[ed] the development of cognitive structures needed in academics (e.g., critical, divergent, or independent thinking, and problem solving)" (Metsäpelto & Pulkkinen, 2012, p. 179). Kort-Butler (2012) reiterated this claim by arguing that "extracurricular activities play[ed] [a role] in promoting personal and social competence, character, and confidence in one's self and abilities" for students (p. 13). Armour and Sandford (2013) also argued that extracurricular activities had the power to "facilitate young people's positive development and contribute to a social inclusion agenda" (p. 87). This growth in confidence may also ultimately contribute to a student's self-efficacy, as Christensen and Knezek's (2015) study found that students "in [their] study were generally positive" and students felt like they had the "ability to make an impact" (p. 785). Lubans, Morgan, and McCormick (2011) also found that student participation in "activit[ies] was associated with a number of...sociological and psychological factors including...attitudes, self-efficacy, goal orientation/motivation...and friend support in adolescents" (p. 239).

After having examined the prior research of the effects of students participating in extracurricular activities and its possible correlation with student's academic achievement, "it [was] clear that extracurricular activities ha[d] real learning benefits for students" (Claudia, 2014, p. 1147). While the researcher extensively examined the academic benefits of students participating in extracurricular activities, there were still many more factors to consider. Students who took part in extracurricular activities experienced benefits in several different areas. Prior research showed that

"extracurricular participation promote[d] the development of social, physical, and intellectual skills" (Fischer & Thies, 2014, p. 1788). This study incorporated the findings of various previous research and identified areas of potential benefit outside of academic performance to be studied qualitatively.

The Adolescent

Another important part of the literature that was integral to examine was previous research centered on the middle school student in the stage of adolescent development. As the researcher attempted to study the adolescent and their development on even a small scale, this was found to be an arduous task as this was a multi-faceted and complex web. Adolescence was broadly known as "a developmental period characterized by numerous biological, cognitive, and social transitions" (Kingery, Erdley, & Marshall, 2011, p. 216). However, what took place throughout different phases of this period of adolescent development varied greatly. The earliest phase of this period of adolescence was characterized as "a time of rapid growth and change during which these 10 to 15-year-olds form[ed] their adult personalities, dispositions, values, and attitudes" (Bhukhanwala, 2014, p. 3). As early adolescents navigated their way through this particularly tumultuous period of their lives it was also worthy to note that "early adolescence represent[ed] a particularly vulnerable period of development during which young people [we]re susceptible to establishing lifelong behavior patterns" (Mann, Kristjansson, Sigfusdottir, & Smith, 2014, p. 1). This reiterated the importance of this stage of development and the patterns of thinking and behavior that the middle school student forms during this period of adolescence. While all of these aforementioned things were worth noting and prevalent especially in early adolescence, other important

changes occurred later in and throughout adolescence that also had a significant impact on the development of the adolescent.

This period after early adolescence and on, was characterized by its intense "Growth [which] include[ed] the physical growth related to puberty as well as a range of psychosocial changes associated with developing an increasingly refined identity; discovering individual talents, interests, and skills; forming meaningful peer and intimate relationships; and taking responsibility" (Mann et al., 2014, p. 2). This process of students essentially attempting to determine their own identity also led "young adolescents [to] grapple with a host of changes that may [have] influence[d] how they perceive[d] themselves" while also dealing with "rapid physical and emotional development, the transition to new school environments, and the onset of adolescence" (Parker, 2010, p. 1). Madjar and Cohen-Malayev's (2016) study "provide[d] further support for the notion that the middle school transition might co-occur with other major developmental changes" (p. 283). Mann et al.'s (2014) research further revealed that:

> The sensitive and personal nature of the changes associated with early adolescence, combined with the increasing importance of peer relationships, often contributes to an amplified sense of self-consciousness and insecurity that promotes increased social and emotional vulnerability among middle grades students. (p. 2)

The understanding of this social component that Mann et al. (2014) referenced in terms of the adolescent and middle school student were crucial. This change was already in and of itself a significant emotional transition for the adolescent, yet still the spatial transition endured of having "moved from elementary to middle school [was also] a time

of great transition for many early adolescents" (Ryan, Shim, & Makara, 2013, p.

1375). The reason was that these "changes that young adolescents encounter[ed] upon

entering middle school [were] often inconsistent with their developmental characteristics,

which include[d] a need for autonomy, heightened self-consciousness, advancing

cognitive abilities, and close relationships with peers" (Kingery et al., 2011, p. 216). The

stage-environment fit theory stated that adolescents "are likely to experience adjustment

difficulties when a particular environment does not meet their psychological needs"

(Kingery et al., 2011, p. 216). Ryan et al. (2013) best summed up what middle school

adolescents experienced as they transitioned into this new setting in various ways:

> The transition to middle school involves great change and new demands.
> Students must find their way around a larger building and are on a more rigid time
> schedule. Students shift from being the oldest in elementary school to the
> youngest in middle school. Social networks are disrupted and students need to
> make new friends in a larger social setting. Further, students must coordinate the
> varied styles and demands of multiple teachers as they rotate about different
> teachers throughout the day. These changes in school context are often at odds
> with the cognitive, physical and social changes of early adolescence that make
> supportive peer and teacher relationships especially important at this stage of life.
> (p. 1372)

The consensus of the researchers was that "starting middle school [was] a

critically important experience during early adolescence" (Buehler, Fletcher, Johnston, &

Weymouth, 2015, p. 55). In terms of the middle school student's experience, "Peer

acceptance, number of friendships, and friendship quality [were] related dimensions of

early adolescents' peer experience that [made] unique contributions to psychological and school adjustment, both concurrently and across the middle school transition" (Kingery et al., 2011, p. 238). While it was noted that the transition that students make from elementary school to middle school was significant, as well as the change in their social relationships, it was found that the two were possibly intertwined and that "peer relationships may be especially important during the transition from elementary to middle school" (Bellmore, 2011, p. 282). The transition that adolescents make during "the middle grades years represent[ed] a particularly challenging time for young adolescents. Fresh from the nurturing elementary environment, young adolescents often [found] themselves navigating new relationships and making sense of the changing school norms associated with middle grades schools" (Parker, 2010, p. 1).

It was resounding that during this transition to middle school and school "environmental changes, young adolescents [were] also in the midst of dramatic physical and psychological growth" (Parker, 2010, p. 1). The question then became one of how could middle schools best support adolescents through these various, critical periods of transition. The National Middle School Association suggested the creation of a safe, inviting, and supportive environment as being crucial to the success of middle school students (Bhukhanwala, 2014, p. 6). Another idea that emerged from the research was the idea that in order to best "prepare students for the transition to middle school, it may be particularly important to focus intervention efforts on those children with low peer acceptance to increase their social support network" (Kingery et al., 2011, p. 215). This further reiterated the connected importance of the transitional piece and the social component of the adolescent. Bhukhanwala (2014) further argued that after-school

programs could help create such an environment by providing middle school students

with personal attention from adults, a positive peer group, activities that could hold their

interests, opportunities that promote student engagement in learning, and tools to improve

their academic performance and promote healthy development (p. 6). Denault and Poulin

(2009) also found that "participation in organized activities [was] linked to a constellation

of positive outcomes in adolescence" (p. 1199). All the above factors found to have

influenced and impacted the adolescent directed this study, in turn, to address the

corresponding questions and examine their relevance to the relationship between

extracurricular activities and academic performance in middle school students.

The Middle School Effect

Another important part of the existing body of literature that the researcher

examined was a more in depth look at the middle school transition and its effect on

middle school students. Middle school was characterized as a transitional period of

grades between elementary school and high school, ranging anywhere from fifth to ninth

grade. This physical transition for students, away from their elementary setting for the

first time and moving towards a very independent high school one, coupled with their

aforementioned adolescent changes and experiences, signaled to the researcher that this

examination of the middle school setting itself was vital to understanding and designing

this study. Middle school students also yearned for this independence that was on the

horizon. Bernstein (2002) found that middle school students "want to be independent,

and they seek activities they are interested in" (p. 146). This first phase of this transition

was perhaps the most impactful, as "this transition usually involve[d] moving from a

small elementary school with self-contained classrooms and close relationships with

teachers to a larger, more impersonal environment" (Kingery et al., 2011, p. 216). Due to adolescents already being in a vulnerable state developmentally, this transition from elementary school for the first time and on to middle school was viewed as an incredibly stressful and trying experience for them. As these students were faced with these very drastic changes in their school environment, these "students also face[d] novel daily challenges such as meeting new peers, using locker and hall passes, changing for gym class, and adjusting to a schedule that [did] not include recess" (Kingery et al., 2011, p. 216).

The combination of this change in physical setting and adolescent changes experienced by the middle school student were especially hard on students because "based on this theorized mismatch between adolescents' needs and the characteristics of the middle school environment, one might expect students to experience adjustment difficulties across the middle school transition" (Kingery et al., 2011, p. 216). A pattern that emerged from the research was that one component that was imperative in helping to ease this middle school transition for the adolescent was school belongingness. It was resounding that in order "for students to be successful in school, they need[ed] to feel belonged, accepted, valued, and adequate of having the skills and the inner resources to succeed" (Mensah & Atta, 2015, p. 21). From the research emerged another pillar to student success throughout this transition. This was that "school social context is critical to student learning and wellbeing" (Kim, Schwartz, Cappella, & Seidman, 2014, p. 4). The stress of this experience for the adolescent transitioning to middle school was best summed up by Ryan et al. (2013):

When students move to middle school they move to a larger school, join a social

scene in which they are the youngest members, and have different peers across

class periods. Students' social networks are disrupted and they are unlikely to be

with their elementary school friends as often during the course of the day at

middle school. Such changes are theorized to be stressful for children. (p. 1374)

Ryan et al.'s summation helped the researcher to gain a better understanding of what

exactly middle school students are experiencing during this transition and to gain a

different perspective.

Another predictor of middle school student success was when these students felt

supported by the adults, usually their teachers, in their school. The research showed that

it was beneficial for "young adolescents…to know that someone other than their peers

would provide support system for them" (Mensah & Atta, 2015, p. 21). This was

especially crucial, because with the instability of their social relationships at this age,

having a more reliable source of support helped students to have stability throughout this

transition. The impact of "this transition, which include[d] changes in everything from

the size and organizational structure of schools to the quality

of…relationships…[brought] declines across a broad array of academic areas, including

GPAs, school attendance, and self-perceptions" (Bellmore, 2011, p. 282). These findings

of the impact that the transition to middle school had on students was resounding. Kim et

al. (2014) also found similar outcomes on the topic of the middle school transition such

as "that students moving from elementary to middle grade schools suffer[ed] a sharp drop

in academic achievement, experience[d] an increase in school absences" (p. 2).

Another important element of the student's transition to middle school were the

social changes that occurred. These jarring social changes took place because the middle

school was "much larger and the student population [was] more heterogeneous. The

middle school context also present[ed] new social challenges for students. These

include[d] maintaining friendships with peers from elementary school [and] forming new

friendships with other students" (Bellmore, 2011, p. 282). This also greatly impacted the

adolescent and middle school student because "once students transition[ed] into middle

school, they encounter[ed] a new, stronger emphasis on status hierarchies within their

peer groups and, as such, the role of peers may [have been] even more important at this

age" (Bellmore, 2011, p. 283). Peer rejection was also found to have negatively impacted

their academic functioning not only immediately after the transition to middle school

(usually in sixth or seventh grade), but also over the middle school years from sixth

through eighth grades (Bellmore, 2011, p. 282). This was likely linked to adolescents'

predisposition to having difficulty navigating relationships with their peers and it placed

them under a great amount of stress. These findings demonstrated that these social

relationships, or lack thereof, had a lasting impact on middle school students. This was

not only at the beginning of this transition from elementary school to sixth grade, but

throughout all of middle school. One study "found that sixth graders who were not

involved in any reciprocal friendships had lower academic achievement, higher levels of

depression, and lower self-worth than did students who were involved in mutual

friendships" (Kingery et al., 2011, p. 219).

Due to the vulnerability of adolescents in a multitude of areas, something as

simple as a lack of solid social relationships had a much greater impact on middle school

students. The research showed that "behavior problems increased in students who had

less stable friendships with students who had behavioral difficulties at school" (Kingery

et al., 2011, p. 220). Studies also showed the opposite side, that "the sociability and

leadership of students who had high-quality sixth-grade friendships that were stable

across the transition increased following the transition to junior high school" (Kingery et

al., 2011, p. 220). With the significant impact that these social relationships had on

middle school students it became apparent that "youth who ha[d]…support to modify

their social standing [were] better able to negotiate the stressors present in their new

school settings and to maximize their opportunities for academic success" (Bellmore,

2011, p. 293). Therefore, it became a priority in the field of education to determine the

best ways to meet the social needs of these middle school students. Those "in the field of

education continue[d] to discuss…the best way to meet the educational needs of middle

level students. Direct[ed] efforts to creating a learning environment that [was] based on

the knowledge about middle level students…[was] crucial" (Mensah & Atta, 2015, p.

30). The research demonstrated the need to support middle school students in this way.

The possible effects of students who navigated this social sphere without support were

detrimental. These social skills and the ability of students to be able to form these

relationships directly related to their academic success. Studies showed that "students

who [we]re accepted by their peers receive[d] emotional support that facilitate[d]

engagement in the classroom, experience[d] a greater sense of belonging at school, and

ha[d] many opportunities to practice social skills necessary for success in the classroom"

(Kingery et al., 2011, p. 232).

The Grade Factor

This possible social disconnect was one of the many elements affected by students' transition to middle school. While the social aspect showed to have the ability to impact students' grades both positively and negatively, in the absence of the social reasoning, middle school students' academics still suffered from the transition. A pattern emerged from the research showing an "overall decline in G.P.A. [that] was due to changes at the transition and across the first year in middle school" (Ryan et al., 2013, p. 1372). This demonstrated the academic effects of students transitioning to middle school. In terms of school connectedness having played a factor as well, the research found that "youths' positive perceptions of school experiences at this time point are associated with higher grades" (Buehler et al., 2015, p. 55). This was further reiterated by findings "youth were more engaged in their educational experiences when they perceived a positive learning climate at school and support and care from their teachers" (Buehler et al., 2015, p. 72). The findings were resounding that academics were most definitely impacted by this transition for middle school students.

Therefore, it was of great importance to identify which components of the middle school experience had the ability to impact students' academics. The first component was school belongingness yielding positive experiences for students. It was found that "youth perceptions that students' needs [were] primary and that their school [was] providing students with a good education were associated with feelings of belongingness and enjoyment, as well as motivation for learning and achievement" (Buehler et al., 2015, p. 73). This was also found to be the case by another researcher who found that "young adolescents' perceptions of their educational…contexts may impact their academic

achievement, academic competence, motivation, attitude, and peer relations in powerful ways" (Parker, 2010, p. 10). Again, the impact of the social element during middle school should not be underestimated. One study "revealed that peer rejection preceded lower GPAs within 4th grade and across the transition from elementary to middle school" (Bellmore, 2011, p. 282). Another study found that "students who are unable to successfully navigate this social world might be expected to experience even greater declines in GPA during the middle school years than are experienced by most students" (Bellmore, 2011, p. 282). Therefore, again it was critical to recognize a direct link that might contribute to students' negative academic performance.

With this study based around activities and academic success, the researcher also examined the impact of homework on students' grades. There was found to be "a positive relationship between the time allocated for the homework and academic success" (Deveci & Onder, 2015, p. 540). The research also "indicated that a possible reason for having [had] more negative thoughts towards homework assignments in higher grades than in lower ones [could] be associated with non-school activities" (Deveci & Onder, 2015, p. 549). Deveci and Onder (2015) best described in summation an undeniable pattern that emerged from the work of multiple researchers in regards to how students were spending their time outside of school and their academic success:

> One of the research results showed that the students who spent less time watching TV, videos or playing computer games during a week had a more positive behavior and attitude towards homework practices than those who spent more time on these out-of-school activities. In their studies, Searls, Mead and Ward (1985) concluded that students who watch TV for some time do not do their

homework assignments. Anderson (1986) also found similar results. The reasons

for the difference in the behavior dimension findings can be that the students who

spend time watching TV and playing computer games cannot use their

psychomotor skills enough during the homework period. (p. 550)

These findings were of interest to the researcher and raise a poignant question

about the type of activity that students participated in and how it might have affected

them on a more significant level.

Summary

Through examining these components of the existing body of knowledge on the

topic, looking at prior research, and more closely at the individual topics of

extracurricular activities and academics, the adolescent, the effect of middle school, and

the different factors that contribute to grades, the researcher was able to gain a clear

picture on the topic. The researcher's findings ultimately showed that there was an

existing gap in the body of knowledge with there not having been a study conducted

exclusively at the middle school level at the time this study took place. The researcher

also found resonant themes across studying these various topics that when examining the

middle school student in particular, due to the adolescent factor, that school

belongingness, social stability and support from teachers and other adults in the school

setting, all played into a student's academic success.

The significance of the researcher having found these universal themes within the

research was two-fold. First, this told the researcher that while this particular study

sought to examine a possible relationship between hours spent in extracurricular activities

and academics, there were several other factors that could have been at play. These

factors may have contributed positively or negatively, depending on the situation, to a

student's academic success. Second, this point of finding these universal themes was

also of great significance to the researcher, because in-school activities in particular,

which was a component examined in this study, contain all three of these determined

elements. However, this topic still warranted further investigation. Some researchers,

such as Savić, Mitić, and Stojiljković, (2013) argued that it was "a well-known the fact

that there [was] a need for activities which would take place outside the school" (p. 240).

In-school activities helped students to improve social relationships with their peers and to

grow their relationships with the adult mentors who oversaw these programs within the

school setting. These relationships then had the possibility to transcend into the school

setting, in terms of the student having built these previous relationships with these peers

and adult mentors in these in-school activities, and this connection may have continued in

the school setting. Depending on the activity, some of these in-school activities also may

have given students a sense of ownership or pride over their contribution to their school,

or them representing their school, through participating in their in-school extracurricular

activity. In doing this, students would most likely have been an increase in school

belongingness, the final identified pillar of student success at the middle school level. To

have identified all of the things that seemingly built academic success at the middle

school level was of great importance considered by the researcher when evaluating the

results of the study.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter outlines the intricate methodology of the study. It describes the type of setting in which the study took place and well as the population from which the participants came from and for whom the data was collected. This chapter also discusses how and why the researcher designed and developed the study. It also explains how the researcher carried out the study with in-depth explanations as to why the researcher chose the methods, questions, and designed the components the way that she did. This chapter contains an intricate look and essential insight into the development and carrying out of the study itself. These are all vital components to understand as the researcher carefully and calculatedly conducted the study.

The Research Site

The research site was a public school district located in suburban Midwest Missouri. Within this school district, there were four different middle schools. Each of these middle schools had students that were enrolled in sixth through eighth grade. The total number of students enrolled at all four middle schools combined was approximately 4,500 students. From this pool of students, parents of these students were volunteering themselves and their respective students to be participants in this study. These parents volunteered themselves to complete a weekly survey logging the number of hours that their student spent in in-school and out of school activities for that particular week. Eleven parents volunteered for themselves and their students to participate, and data reflected 10 of those parents in this study. It was this random sample of 10 students whose parents volunteered for the study, whose hours spent in in-school, out of school,

extracurricular activities and semester GPA's were evaluated in this study over the course of one school semester.

Developing the Intervention

The researcher was uniquely qualified to conduct this particular study. The researcher held a Bachelor's degree in Middle School Education and had an extensive amount of coursework on adolescents. This made the researcher knowledgeable on the enigma that is the middle school student and particularly interested in pursuing the research of this topic. The researcher had also worked as a middle school teacher in a public middle school for the last five years, having taught multiple grades during this time. This furthered the researcher's interest and knowledge base on middle school aged children by having this experience working with different middle school aged children and piqued the researcher's interest on how things around them such as their participation in extracurricular activities possibly influenced middle school students' academic achievement.

The researcher also held a Master's degree in Educational Technology, which was helpful in developing the technological components of data gathering for this study. The researcher's expertise in this area made them able to fully utilize the most efficient available software applications to the fullest to collect, analyze, and protect the data for this study. The researcher also sponsored three different in-school after school programs at the middle school level for the last five years while she was teaching. This also gave the researcher the unique perspective of being able to ask poignant questions when it came to determining what exactly needed to be analyzed in terms of student participation in extracurricular activities and academic achievement for the research study.

The main reason that the researcher developed this particular intervention was because there were several other studies that the researcher had read that were very similar in nature. Therefore, the researcher designed the study to reflect the similarities between the most effective components of the models of these other studies. The way that the researcher was able to determine which components were most effective and which to emulate for this study, was through the conclusions and reflections of the previous researchers who had conducted similar studies. These studies that the researcher was referring to, were also seeking to examine a possible relationship between the amount of time that students spent in extracurricular activities and the students' academic achievement. Most of these studies involved somehow logging the amount of hours that students spent in some type of an extracurricular activity or activities over a set period. These studies then compared these hours to the students' level of academic achievement.

One of the studies in particular had more closely examined the specific type of activity that the students had been involved. The researcher of that study noted at the end that if she could go back and conduct the study again, one change that she would have made was that she would have focused more on the hours in general that students spent in extracurricular activities instead of just focusing on the specific element of trying to find a relationship between the type of activity and academic achievement. This comment directly contributed to why the researcher decided to design the study the way that it was designed and why it was predominantly focused on the number of hours spent in activities in general first and foremost, before it more closely examined within those general hours, how many hours had been spent in in-school or out of school activities.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The data for this mixed-methods study had components that were quantitative as well as components that were qualitative in nature. One of the quantitative components was the data that was being taken on the number of hours that a parent logged his or her student spending participating in extracurricular activities, and more specifically the number of hours spent in in-school and out of school activities, every week for the length of a school semester (beginning at 12:00 AM on Monday and ending at on 11:59 PM on Sunday). The school semester consisted of 18 weeks. Data was taken for every week of these 18 weeks of the first semester of school to get a complete picture of the participants' level of activity and how it affected them for the length of the semester. This data was being collected by the researcher sending out a weekly survey using Google Forms that asked for their name and then contained the following two questions: "How many hours did the student spend participating in extracurricular activities this week?" and "How many hours did the student spend participating in in-school extracurricular activities this week?"

The researcher protected the identities of the students by keeping all sensitive information in a password protected Google account. This was imperative since it contained private student information such as first and last names of students and their first semester academic GPA's. The researcher did not use any identifying information about the students in the study except to know which number of hours in extracurricular activities and in-school extracurricular activities correlated with which first semester GPA's. The researcher also used this password protected Google account as the primary means of collecting data and due to the software's ability to keep this information private.

It also had great benefit to the researcher in that it kept information organized. Another reason that the researcher chose to use this platform was due to its ease of participants being able to fill the surveys out quickly and efficiently to help ensure accuracy.

The researcher chose to use these questions of "How many hours did the student spend participating in extracurricular activities this week?" and "How many hours did the student spend participating in in-school extracurricular activities this week?" because they allowed the researcher to collect the number of hours that students spent in extracurricular activities and in-school extracurricular activities over a week's time. The survey only contained these questions to appeal to the participants of the study. When respective participants asked about their level of participation required for the study the researcher was able to say "Despite a few more questions in the first and last survey, the weekly surveys throughout the semester will only be two questions once a week." The researcher also chose to have the survey contain these two short questions to keep the survey short and to the point. The researcher did not want to overwhelm or confuse the participants, so the researcher made the choice to keep things simple to help obtain the most accurate information. Furthermore, the researcher also made it clear from the beginning that if at any point the participants had any questions or needed any clarification during the study that they could easily contact the researcher via numerous different methods.

These questions followed with a blank space where parents manually entered the number of hours. The researcher designed the form to form accept only a numerical value as a response. The researcher chose this survey method due to previous experience using various survey gathering material in the past. In the researcher's experience

Google Forms was not only the easiest for the researcher to use to design the surveys, it was also the easiest for the participants to be able to access. It was also the easiest for the researcher to gather information from participants at no cost to the researcher to be able to use the software. Google Forms also helped the researcher keep the information gathered from the participants in the study secure and confidential by requiring a Google sign-in.

Another quantitative component of this study was the data that taken on the GPAs of the students participating in the study. The students' GPAs were obtained, with permission from the school district and all of the parents participating in the study, from the school district's grade database after the conclusion of the first semester of the school year. The researcher intentionally waited to obtain these first semester grades well enough into the second semester of school that the final first semester grades for the students had been recorded and any incorrectly reported grades had the opportunity to be corrected. The identities of the parents filling out the weekly surveys and the students whose GPA's were obtained remained confidential and were only known to the researcher for purposes of keeping track of who had answered their surveys for the week. This was important because the researcher sent out reminder e-mails to parents who had not completed their surveys during the week. This helped the researcher to be sure to get data from parents about their students' hours spent in extracurricular activities every week even if a parent forgot to fill out a survey the first time it was sent. This helped the researcher to be able to have a full 16 weeks' worth of data for each participant.

Aside from this purpose, the parents and students' identities were only used for the purposes of the researcher to be able to assign the corresponding first semester GPA

to the correct student whose number of hours participating in extracurricular activities and in-school extracurricular activities had already been logged by their parents throughout the first semester, which correlated with their GPA. This allowed the researcher to be able to investigate a possible relationship between the students' GPAs and the number of hours that a particular student spent in extracurricular activities in general. It also allowed the researcher to be able to investigate a possible relationship between the number of hours that a student specifically spent in in-school extracurricular activities as well.

The researcher analyzed the data by calculating the average number of hours per week that those individual students spent in extracurricular activities and more specifically in in-school extracurricular activities over the course of the 18 weeks of the school semester. Once the average number of hours that those students spent in extracurricular activities had been calculated for every student, then that average was analyzed against the student's first semester GPA. The researcher then analyzed the data to determine whether there was any type of correlation between the number of hours that students spent in extracurricular activities, and in-school extracurricular activities, and academic achievement for the first semester of the school year. The researcher also tested whether or not this correlation is one that is significant enough to make a claim regarding the outcome of the relationship between extracurricular activities and academic achievement.

The outcome had numerous possibilities. The outcome could have been a positive correlation, showing that there had been a relationship and that students benefited academically from a certain number of hours spent in extracurricular activities

in general or in-school extracurricular activities in particular. The outcome could also have been a negative correlation, having shown that there was a relationship and that students' academic achievement was negatively impacted from participating in a certain number of hours spent in extracurricular activities in general or in-school extracurricular activities in particular.

Another outcome could have been that in analyzing all of the data that there was a point of saturation that emerges and could be identified for students exclusively at the middle school level. This point of saturation would have shown that students benefit academically from participating in a certain number of hours of extracurricular activities or in-school extracurricular activities, but that at a certain point, or at a certain number of hours or participation in extracurricular or in-school extracurricular activities, participation started to negatively impact students academically. The researcher believed that there was a possibility that this point of saturation could have emerged from the data gathered in the study, because in previous similar studies at conducted at the high school level, points of saturation had emerged from those studies' data.

One of the qualitative components of this study was that there was a survey sent out during the final week with open-ended answer questions for parents to answer. These questions were the following: "How do you feel that extracurricular activities has impacted your student this semester?", "How do you feel that extracurricular activities has impacted your student in terms of academics for this semester?", and "Do you feel that your student has been impacted differently by in-school extracurricular activities this semester as opposed to out of school activities?". The researcher chose these questions because it allowed the parents to be able to give their opinions via their perspective. The

researcher felt that this was an especially poignant opportunity because the parents had also been the ones filling out the surveys each week, so if they were not already, for the previous semester they had been paying especially close attention to their child's involvement in in-school extracurricular activities and extracurricular activities in general.

The researcher chose the first question of "How do you feel that extracurricular activities has impacted your student this semester?" to gain parents' opinions on the many possible effects of their students being involved in extracurricular activities and in-school extracurricular activities. This question was intentionally developed to be more open ended then the following question so that parents could list possible effects such as social, emotional, behavioral effects, etc. The next question, "How do you feel that extracurricular activities has impacted your student in terms of academics for this semester?" had the opposite intention. With this question, the researcher wanted the parents to hone in on academic effects specifically. This was crucial to the study since its nature is its investigation into a possible relationship between the hours students spend in extracurricular activities and in-school extracurricular activities and students' academics. Since these were the variables being measured, the researcher wanted to also get the opinion of whether or not the parents thought that it made an impact and whether or not it actually did, to see if the parents' opinions aligned with the data from the research study or not.

The final question that the researcher asked in the final survey "Do you feel that your student has been impacted differently by in-school extracurricular activities this semester as opposed to out of school activities?" served the same purpose. Since this was

the other component of the study that the researcher was investigating, again the researcher wanted to see if the opinions of the parents matched the results of the data or not. The researcher hoped that after the second question being about academics that the answers to this question received would also be mostly regarding academics, but the researcher did not want to limit the participants from being able to cite any differences that they noticed, so the question was not worded to constrain the participants' answers to only academic differences.

Underneath each of these questions there was a box where the parent could type a response to each of these questions at whatever length they chose. The results of these questions helped the researcher to gain perspective on how parents felt that their students' participation in extracurricular activities affected their students over the course of the first semester of the school year. The researcher believed that providing parents these questions in this familiar format and giving them an opportunity to answer in this way was essential, since not every parent participant was able to come in and do an interview in-person.

Another qualitative component of this research study was the conducting of in-person parent and student interviews. Of the student participants in this study, the researcher asked the parents of the students at the beginning when signing up to participate in the study, if they would be willing to come in and complete an in-person interview with the researcher at the beginning of the following semester regarding the study and if they would also be willing to let their student come in and complete an in-person interview with the researcher at the beginning of the following semester regarding the study. The reason for interviewing them at this particular time was that their

student's final grades for the previous semester were finalized in the grade book by this point, and the researcher believed that it was important that the parents and students knew the final outcome of the previous semester's grades before they were asked to share their thoughts and opinions on how they thought that their student's grades may or may not have been impacted by their student's participation in extracurricular activities and in-school extracurricular activities.

From the parents who volunteered, the researcher asked all of these parents to interview in-person. By interviewing parents in-person versus the sending out of the survey, the hope was that the researcher had the opportunity to receive more in-depth and thorough answers on the topic than those that may have been submitted through the final survey of the Google Form. This also provided the only opportunity that the researcher had to interview the students involved with the study, and to gain their insight and perspective on the topic and how they felt about it. Before this point in the study, the students had been uninvolved since their parents were the ones filling out the surveys each week.

The final qualitative component was the conducting of in-person student interviews. Of the 10 student participants in this study, the researcher asked the parents of the students at the beginning when signing up to participate in the study, if they would be willing to bring their student in to complete an in-person interview with the researcher at the beginning of the following semester regarding the study. The reason for interviewing the students at this time is that their final grades for the previous semester will have been finalized and the researcher believed that it was important that they know that outcome before sharing their thoughts on how they think that their grades may or

may not have been impacted by their participation in extracurricular activities and in-school extracurricular activities.

  From the parents who volunteered for their student to be interviewed, the researcher asked all of the students to complete in-person interviews. By interviewing students in-person, the researcher hoped to gain the unique perspective of the participant. By interviewing students without their parents present, the researcher also hoped to gain honest insight as to the thoughts of the participants regarding their participation levels in extracurricular activities and their academic achievement. The researcher reserved a meeting room at a public library that was easily accessible to the population of interviewees to conduct the interviews. The researcher scheduled a block of time on a weekday and a weekend day where parents and students who have volunteered to participate in in-person interview could drop in and complete their approximately 15 minute interviews with the researcher. The researcher also let any prospective parent or student participants who were unable to come in for interviews during those allotted times, conduct phone interviews with the researcher at the parents and students' convenience.

  The data for this study was gathered using the following methods. Once the researcher had collected all of the parent and student participation permission forms, the researcher then created a document in Google Sheets to organize the information. The researcher organized only essential information in this document such as the name of the parent participating and their corresponding student, and the parent's e-mail address, which were used as the primary means of communication through the sending of the weekly surveys.

The next thing that the researcher did was create the weekly surveys using Google Forms. The goal of the researcher in creating these Google Forms was the same as the forming of the questions for them. The researcher wanted the ability to access, read, and fill out these forms to be easy, simple, and to the point for the ease of the participant filling them out each week. The researcher then set up the results of each survey to be poured into a new Google Forms document. This way the researcher could keep all of the data organized and in one document. This allowed for running the numbers and quantitative analysis much easier for the researcher and allowed for a much more accurate result.

The researcher also asked for the parent's name, student's name, and e-mail in order to be able to keep the data organized and to be able to correlate any patterns that emerged within analysis of both the quantitative and qualitative components of data. While this was all very sensitive information, the researcher was comfortable having this information poured into the master Google Sheet containing all of the data. This was because the Google account was password protected and only seen by the researcher. The data for the qualitative components of the study were both alike and different from the aforementioned methods. The qualitative component that used the same survey format in the final survey had its data collected the same way as the qualitative components, where using Google Forms and Google Sheets, the answers poured into one document.

The researcher then used a Microsoft Excel Statistics Calculator built by Dr. Kevin Winslow, a professor of Graduate Level Statistics at Lindenwood University, to analyze the data. The calculator allowed the researcher to take the information from the

Google Form and place it into the calculator for analysis. Dr. Winslow assisted the researcher in running the data for a simulation of fake data to ensure that once the researcher gathered the actual data, the researcher would be well prepared to analyze the data in the calculator.

For the interview component, the researcher used an iPhone application called Interviewy. This application allowed the researcher to record audio all of the conducted interviews on a cell phone, then go back, and access them later. The reason that the researcher chose to use this application in particular was because it allowed the interviewer to denote part of the answer that they wanted to go back and review later by simply pressing a button in the application and holding it down during an interview. The researcher had heard about the potential of this application and its ability to keep interruptions from happening during an interview, but to help with highlighting specific parts of the interview, during its conception.

The researcher then imported the audio files into the same password protected Google Drive account with the other data and immediately deleted the audio files of the interviews off the application. The researcher then transcribed all of the interviews conducted with parents and students by typing them into a Google Document, which was also housed in the password protected Google Drive. The researcher also coded the interviews to look for patterns that emerged between the opinions of the parents, students, and the outcome of the data. The researcher acknowledged that these could be patterns of the data supporting the opinions of parents and students, or vice versa, depending on the outcome.

The researcher then analyzed this data by using quantitative statistical methods to test the data for a correlation between the amount of hours students spent in extracurricular activities and GPA, and between the amount of hours students spent in in-school extracurricular activities and GPA. The qualitative components of the data obtained via the final survey questions and in-person interviews were also coded and analyzed to see if any patterns emerged regarding a possible relationship between these two variables. The researcher then cross-referenced this data with the quantitative results, which gave the researcher a well-rounded picture of the results. These types of data analysis were chosen as the most effective methods based on the previous graduate courses and data analysis completed by the researcher.

The results of this analysis told the researcher whether or not there was a positive correlation, negative correlation, or no correlation at all between the number of hours that students spent in extracurricular activities and their academic achievement (measured by GPA in this study), and between the amount of hours students spent in in-school extracurricular activities and GPA. The results of this analysis also told the researcher whether there was a point of saturation that existed for students participating in extracurricular activities and in-school extracurricular activities exclusively at the middle school level.

Participants

The students who were participating in this study were enrolled at one of the four middle schools in a suburban Missouri school district. This meant that the participants were currently a student in the sixth, seventh, or eighth grade and that their ages ranged from 10-15 years old. The typical student age for a middle school student in this school

district was 11-14 years old, but some students may have been advanced and ahead a year in school, therefore they would have only been 10-years-old. Some students also may have been held back a year, meaning that they could have been as old as 15-years-old. Both male and female students were part of this study. The income level of families of the students in this school district may have been anywhere from lower-middle class, middle class, up to upper-middle class. The average income level of the families of these students was middle-class. Students of all ethnicities were invited to take part in this study.

One way that this population differed compared to other student populations that the researcher had read about on this topic, is that the pool of candidates in this study was much larger. One reason for this was that the school district in which this study takes place is one of the largest in the regional area. This was of great benefit to the researcher, in that the sample of students used for this study became much more random when it was a sample being taken from a large pool of candidates. The participants for this study were recruited via the beginning of the year newsletters that each middle school sent out. Parents were presented with a brief description of the study and given an e-mail to contact the researcher if they would like to participate. The researcher had previously obtained permission from the school district's superintendent to conduct the study in the school district.

Summary

The qualifications of the researcher led to the development of this study as an in-depth and poignant examination of how middle school students were impacted by factors outside of their school-day environment. In the case of this study in particular, how a

student's participation in extracurricular activities or in-school extracurricular activities or both, impact their academic achievement. The researcher used methods that had been used in previous studies on the same topic as well as proven methods in the field of educational research to develop a study that would effectively examine this correlation and analyze the data to draw conclusions about middle school students in particular since a study performed exclusively on middle school students has never been done.

The researcher carefully developed the study being certain to ensure the privacy of the participants involved by having password protected all of the data collected and kept the data safe in a Google account. This allowed the researcher to keep all of the information in one safe location, that would be accessible from any location if necessary and greatly aided in the ease of conducting the study. The meticulously formed survey, interview questions, and Google Forms, allowed the researcher to easily collect the most essential data to the study and to analyze it with great ease. The analysis of data using the custom-built calculator that tailored to analyzing this particular data demonstrated the ability of the researcher to use the resources available amply to obtain the most accurate result.

Chapter Four: Results

Introduction

These results reflect a study that took place throughout middle schools in the same school district over the course of the school year. The quantitative data of hours that students spent in extracurricular activities and in-school extracurricular activities was gathered over the course of the first semester of the school year, while the qualitative components of the study, the survey and interview components, were conducted afterwards. The data represented students throughout the school district at different grade levels and at varying levels of participation in extracurricular and in-school extracurricular activities. The mixed-methods design of this study proved to be an effective method to help the researcher gain a clearer more well-rounded picture of the results. This also helped the researcher to answer the research questions for this study.

Quantitative Results

Null Hypothesis 1:

H1o: There is no relationship between the number of hours students spend in extracurricular activities and academic achievement, as measured by the mean amount of hours and first semester GPA of middle school students.

Null Hypothesis 2:

H2o: There is no relationship between the number of hours students spend in in-school extracurricular activities and academic achievement, as measured by the mean amount of hours and first semester GPA of middle school students.

The quantitative data for this study was gathered in two parts. The first part was the number of hours that each of the individual students in the study spent in

extracurricular and in-school extracurricular activities. This data was collected over the course of the 18 weeks of the first semester of the school year. These weekly amounts of hours in extracurricular activities and in-school extracurricular activities were logged each week by the parent of the student for each week of the entire semester via a Google Form survey. These hours spent per week were then averaged by the 18-week length of the semester by the researcher in order to calculate an average number of hours spent in extracurricular activities and in-school extracurricular activities for each individual middle school student during the course of the first semester of the school year.

The second part of the quantitative component of the study was when the researcher requested the final first semester grades for each student. Students' first semester grades were measured in terms of GPA for general comparison. What resulted from the compiling of both of these areas of quantitative data is found in Table 1.

It was also important to recognize that there was not a need for a "total" column when the above data was being analyzed for this study, because the column labeled "Average of Hours Spent in Extracurricular Activities for First Semester" already reflected the total number of hours that students spent in extracurricular activities. Whereas, the column labeled "Average of Hours Spent in In-School Extracurricular Activities for First Semester" referenced how many of those total amount hours from the previous column took place specifically in in-school extracurricular activities over the course of the first semester of the school year.

Table 1

Hours Spent in Extracurricular Activities vs. GPA

Student	Average of Hours Spent in Extracurricular Activities for First Semester	Average of Hours Spent in In-School Extracurricular Activities for First Semester	Student GPA for First Semester
Student #1	5.556	3	4.0
Student #2	7.556	1.056	4.0
Student #3	3.111	1.389	3.917
Student #4	4.222	2.611	3.25
Student #5	2.278	0.944	3.6
Student #6	12.667	3.333	4.0
Student #7	8.111	2.278	4.0
Student #8	3.611	0.111	3.667
Student #9	8.889	2.722	3.58
Student #10	8.444	1	3.667

The researcher used the same statistical procedure to test both whether or not there was a relationship between the amount of hours that students spent in extracurricular activities and GPA, and whether or not there was a relationship between the amount of hours that students spent in in-school extracurricular activities and GPA. The statistical procedure that the researcher used to test both of these variables was the test of correlation. The researcher used a confidence interval alpha value of .05 when running this statistical procedure with the respective data. The researcher used a statistics

calculator designed by Dr. Kevin Winslow, professor of Graduate Level Statistics at

Lindenwood University to analyze the data from the study. The researcher was confident

that this was the best method to analyze the data. This was because the researcher had

previously run a mock set of data similar to the data collected for this research study

using this same calculator and had the data input procedures and outcomes checked by

Dr. Winslow to ensure that the researcher was using the calculator and analyzing the data

correctly.

The researcher first tested to see if there was a correlation between the average

amount of hours that students spent in extracurricular activities and their academic

achievement measured in terms of GPA. This was what resulted from the analysis of the

data:

Figure 1. Hours spent in extracurricular activities vs. GPA.

The *p*-value of the above data was equal to 0.2760. Due to the fact that the *p*-value was greater than the confidence interval alpha value of .05, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis. Therefore the results of this analysis ultimately revealed that the students' total hours in extracurricular activities and first semester GPA were not correlated, *r*(8) = 0.382, p = 0.2760.

The researcher then tested to see if there was a correlation between the average number of hours that students spent in in-school extracurricular activities and their academic achievement measured in terms of GPA. This was what resulted from the analysis of the data:
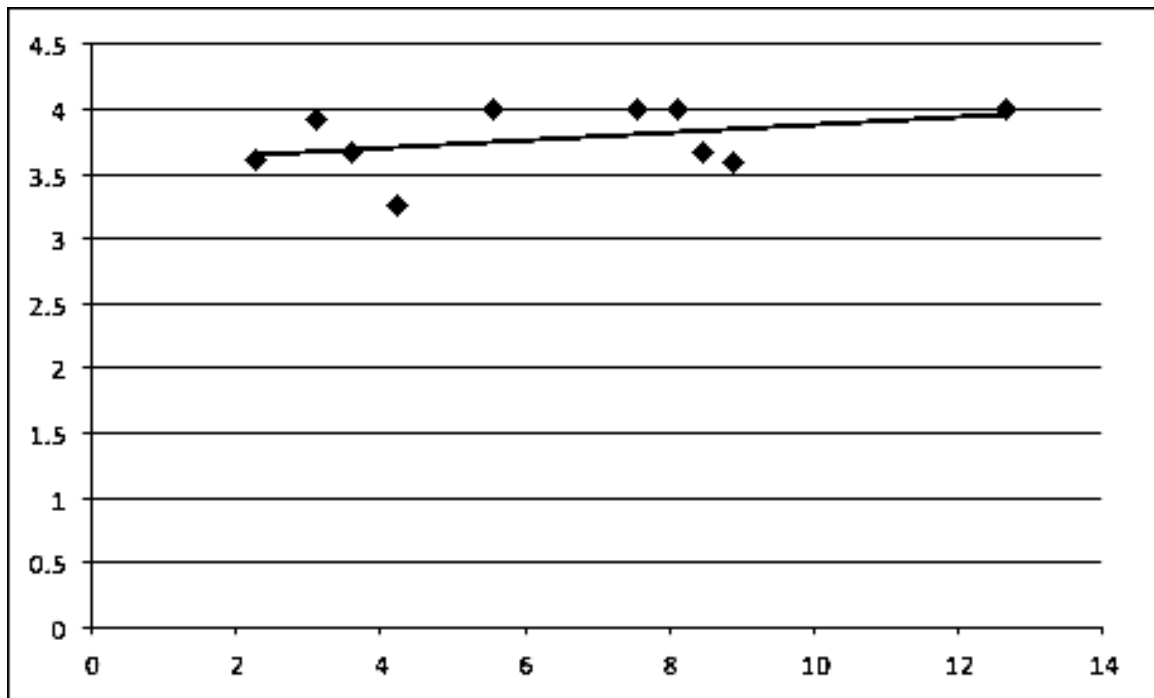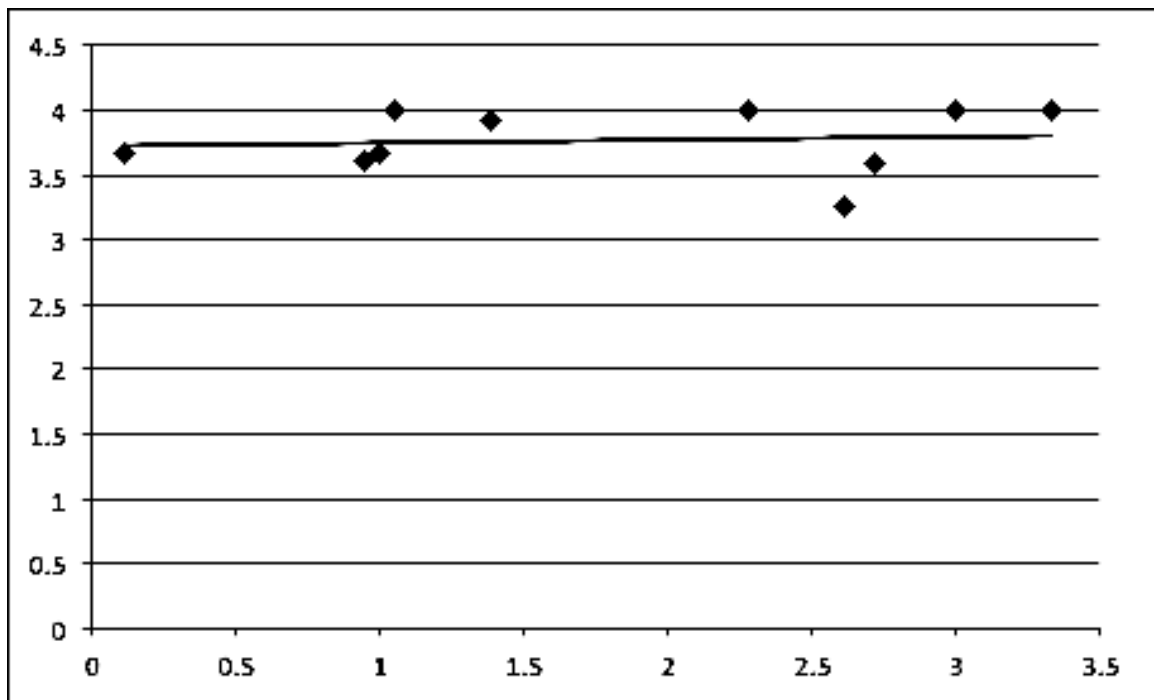

Figure 2. Hours spent in in-school extracurricular activities vs. GPA.

The *p*-value of the above data was equal to 0.7287. Due to the fact that the *p*-value was greater than the confidence interval alpha value of .05, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis. Therefore the results of this analysis ultimately revealed that

the students' total hours in in-school extracurricular activities and first semester GPA

were also not correlated, $r(8) = 0.126$, p = 0.7287.

These tests of correlation led the researcher to conclude that there was no

statistical correlation between the number of hours that students spent participating in

extracurricular activities in general and their GPA, as well as in regards to the number of

hours that students spent participating in in-school activities specifically and their GPA.

The implications of these tests were the realization that based solely on this quantitative

analysis of these 10 individual middle school students, participating in extracurricular

activities did not positively or negatively affect their academic performance to a

measurable point. Since there was no statistical correlation between the number of hours

that students spent participating in extracurricular activities in general and their GPA, or

the number of hours that students spent participating in in-school activities specifically

and their GPA, there was also not a point of saturation that emerged from either test of

correlation.

While neither one of the correlations were statistically significant, it was

interesting to note that there was less of a correlation between the amount of hours that

students spent participating in in-school activities and GPA than between the amount of

hours students spent participating extracurricular activities in general and GPA. There

seemed to be a stronger correlation between the amount of hours students spent

participating in extracurricular activities in general and GPA. This trend may suggest

that perhaps while there was no statistical significance between students spending time in

in-school activities and their effect on their grades, students were more positively

impacted by participating in extracurricular activities in general than in in-school activities specifically.

Qualitative Results

Research Question One: General Correlation

Is there a relationship between the amount of hours students spend in extracurricular activities and academic achievement at the middle school level?

Research Question Two: In-School Correlation

Is there a relationship between the amount of hours students spend in in-school extracurricular activities and academic achievement at the middle school level?

Research Question Three: General Point of Saturation

Is there a point of saturation that exists for students in terms of extracurricular activities and academic achievement at the middle school level?

Research Question Four: In-School Point of Saturation

Is there a point of saturation that exists for students in terms of in-school extracurricular activities and academic achievement at the middle school level?

The qualitative data for this study was gathered in two parts. The first part was a Google Form survey sent by the researcher following the gathering of 18 weeks of quantitative data on the number of hours that middle school students spent participating in extracurricular activities and in in-school extracurricular activities over the course of the first semester of the school year. The survey contained three questions with boxes below for the parents of the students to use to answer the questions. The researcher hoped that this would encourage parents to elaborate and give detailed responses to the questions.

The researcher also decided to complete a second part of the qualitative component of the study and conduct interviews. The rationale behind this was the same as the deliberate choice of giving parents a box to fill in with their answers on the surveys. That was that the researcher's hope in conducting interviews was that the participants would feel more comfortable in this setting and would give more in-depth answers than when they had been previously asked questions on the Google Forms survey. This did turn out to be the case as the researcher conducted interviews with five student/parent participant pairs that resulted in the researcher gaining a clearer picture as to how students were affected by their participation in extracurricular activities in a variety of ways.

Survey results. The survey that the researcher sent out to parents following the conclusion of the gathering of the 18 weeks of quantitative data contained three questions. From two of the questions asked, emerged an interesting pattern that can be seen in the results in Table 2.

The two questions that these results derived from were "How do you feel that extracurricular activities has impacted your student this semester? and "How do you feel that extracurricular activities has impacted your student in terms of academics for this semester?" The researcher then compared the nature of the parent participants' answers and categorized them as "Positive" or "Negative" in nature, or if there was not a distinct pattern, the researcher chose to label these answers as "Neither." Also seen in the result, was that two of the pool of ten parent participants chose not to participate in the final survey.

Table 2

Parents' Opinion on Student Impact

Parent's Opinion	How The Student Was Impacted by Participation in Extracurricular Activities	How The Student's Academics Were Impacted by Participation in Extracurricular Activities
Parent #1	N/A	N/A
Parent #2	Positive	Positive
Parent #3	Neither	Neither
Parent #4	Negative	Negative
Parent #5	Neither	Neither
Parent #6	Positive	Positive
Parent #7	N/A	N/A
Parent #8	Positive	Positive
Parent #9	Negative	Neither
Parent #10	Positive	Positive

The stark similarity between the parent participants' answers to these two questions was incredibly obvious to the researcher. Aside from one parent answering "Negative" to the first question and "Neither" to the second question, it was worth noting that the opinions of each participant on the two topics were identical. The generalization that could be made from this pattern of answering these two different fairly open-ended questions, was that the attitude that parents had towards their students participating in extracurricular activities was likely the same attitude that they had towards how their

students' participation in those extracurricular activities impacted their students'

academics.

There were several possible reasons for the emergence of this pattern. One

possibility was that parents viewed how their student's participation in extracurricular

activities impacted their student's grades as the driving force behind how they felt about

the impact of their participation in extracurricular activities in general. Another

possibility was that students may have tended to be impacted in general by their

participation in extracurricular activities the same way that they were impacted

academically. This may have suggested that perhaps the impact that participating in

extracurricular activities had on students in general and in terms of academics, was not so

dissimilar from one another.

It is also important to remember that how these students were impacted by their

activities were based on the opinion of their parents. This may not have actually reflected

how students felt that they were impacted by their participation in extracurricular

activities. The opinion of their parents may also not have been in line with how they

actually performed academically over the course of the first semester of the school year.

Parents may have had differing levels of what they considered to be "good grades" for

their student.

Student and parent interviews. The other part of the qualitative component of

the study was the conducting of interviews. The researcher asked all of the participants if

they would be willing to volunteer to participate in in-person interviews. All of the

participants in the study answered "Yes" for them and for their respective student. Yet

when the researcher attempted to schedule interviews with the participants, only five

pairs of student/parent participants ended up following through and participating in the interviews. Two of these student/parent pairs' interviews were conducted in person at a meeting room in a public library, while three of these student/parent pairs preferred to conduct their interviews via phone.

The intent of the researcher in conducting interviews in addition to the survey questions was that the researcher hoped that participants would elaborate more on questions regarding the topic of participation in extracurricular activities and their impact on students. What resulted from the conducting of the Google Forms survey, phone interviews and in-person interviews confirmed this to be true. The closer to "in-person" the interview was, the longer were the average length of answers that resulted. The average length of answers that were given between these three mediums were shortest on the surveys, longer on the phone interviews and the longest for the in-person interviews.

Another advantage of the researcher conducting the phone and in-person interviews was that this gave the researcher the opportunity to speak to the student participants and to gain their perspective. The researcher felt that this was key because this was the first time during the study that the opinion of the student participants had been gathered. When interviewing the student and parent pairs, the researcher interviewed each participant separately. The researcher did this intentionally, with the hope that they would be able to gain more honest answers from each participant without the other around.

There were four common themes emerged from the collection of this qualitative data. These themes were that some parents felt that their student gained time management skills, social skills, and positive character traits by participating in

extracurricular activities. Some parents also felt that their student had been over-scheduled with the number of hours that their student had spent in extracurricular activities. The researcher felt that it would be beneficial to compare the opinions of these hindrances and gains side-by-side.

Therefore, listed in the table below, were these four most common themes that emerged from the surveys, as well as from the interviews and the opinions of the parent and student participants on those topics. It was important to note that again, that one parent participant declined to participate in either part of the qualitative component of the study. The other parent who had previously not participated in the survey, did complete an interview, so their opinion was seen in this second table. Also of note, there were only five student opinions gained of the ten students who participated in the study. These students' opinions were listed alongside their parents' in Table 3, for comparative purposes.

There were several patterns that emerged from the above qualitative data. One of the patterns that emerged was that most students and parents were in agreement that students gained time management skills from being involved in extracurricular activities. The only participants who did not share this view was a student/parent pair whose student had a very low amount of hours spent in extracurricular activities each week. Therefore, it was most likely that this opinion was not a result of feeling that the student had not gained time management skills, but that the student simply did not spend enough hours in extracurricular activities for there to be an issue of the student having to manage their time effectively.

Table 3

Parent and Student Opinions and Their Qualitative Patterns

Parent/Student Opinions	Student Gained Time-Management Skills	Student Gained Positive Character Traits	Student Had Positive Social Gains	Student Was Over-Scheduled With Activities
Parent #1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Parent #2	X	X	X	
Student #2	X	X	X	X
Parent #3	X	X	X	X
Student #3	X	X	X	
Parent #4	X			X
Parent #5	X			
Parent #6	X		X	X
Parent #7	X	X		X
Student #7	X		X	X
Parent #8	X	X	X	
Student #8	X		X	X
Parent #9		X	X	
Student #9		X	X	
Parent #10	X			

Another pattern that emerged was that more than half of the students and parents who were surveyed and interviewed believed that the student benefitted in terms of character development and in terms of gaining social skills. It was also worth noting that of the parents and students who did not feel that students had gained these things, there were no student/parent pairs that were in agreement that this was true. The researcher believed that this was significant that even when a parent or student felt these gains had not been made, the other one thought they had. The power of perspective may have played an important role.

What were perhaps the two most significant patterns that emerged from the data were both in regards to the over-scheduling of extracurricular activities. The first pattern was that exactly half of those surveyed/interviewed felt that the student was over-scheduled in extracurricular activities. To the researcher this reiterated the entire premise of the study, that parents and students struggle with their student being involved, not involved enough, too involved, etc. It was an interesting statistic that half felt that the student was not too involved and half of them felt that they were. This demonstrated the reality of this struggle.

Still what was the most striking result to emerge from this set of data was that there was not one parent or student who felt that the student did not benefit from the activities in some way, regardless if they felt that they were over-scheduled. To the researcher this raised an interesting point. Even though half of the parents or students felt over-scheduled in extracurricular activities, still all of them felt that they had gained one or more benefits from being involved in extracurricular activities. What this showed was that even when students are perhaps over-scheduled, the reason that they continue to

participate in those activities is the student or their parents feel that the detriment of being over-scheduled is worth the other skills that the student gained.

Some other significant points to emerge from the conducting of surveys and interviews was that several students and parents noted that one of the major tradeoffs to spending time in extracurricular activities was that it meant less time for homework. One parent put it simply "No matter what a student participates in, it will negatively impact their learning to some degree. Activities take up a considerable amount of time. That takes away from homework time." Another parent who had answered that he/she felt that he/she had over-scheduled the student in terms of extracurricular activities this year described how "Activities take up a considerable amount of time. That takes away from homework time, which leads to a frustrated student. [My student] feels stressed each day trying to get everything done."

Another point that parents and students mentioned was that being involved in extracurricular activities was a means to helping keeping students away from their electronic devices such as their computers, iPads, cell phones and video games. One parent cited that "when the kids are off-school they just sit around with their tablet or device and that's it." And that she instead "like[d] her [student] getting out and experiencing new things." Another parent echoed the same reasoning saying that extracurricular "activities tend to be more for things like socialization and keeping her [student] busy instead of just watching YouTube." A third parent felt that extracurricular activities were "good for her [student]. Otherwise [her student] would be playing video games all day."

There were also some positive comments that parents made regarding student participation in in-school extracurricular activities. One positive aspect that some parents and students also mentioned about being involved in in-school extracurricular activities was that parents felt that this participation helped their students to feel more connected to their school. One parent stated that her student's participation on the school's Student Council committee made her student feel that she "[was] doing something important for the school" and that when she did things like make posters "she could see the fruit of her work. It was her poster" on the wall in her school. Another parent cited that due to the student's involvement in in-school extracurricular activities was that it improved the relationship with her student's teachers and that this transcended into the classroom. The parent felt that her student "was able to build relationships with the sponsors and other students, so when academic help was needed, [my student] wasn't afraid to ask them" for help.

Ultimately, both of these parts of the qualitative component of the study revealed that parents and students agreed for the most part that students gained skills from their participation in extracurricular activities. This was imperative to note in the study because these were things that could not necessarily have been measured in the quantitative component of the study. They also cited some serious concerns about how they felt students were negatively impacted by their participation in extracurricular activities. Yet in the end, no parent or student cited any of the concerns as enough reason to not continue having his or her student participate in the extracurricular activity. These findings supported the idea that parents and students struggle to find a happy medium in

balancing the right amount of extracurricular activities, but usually defer to over-participation instead of less.

Summary

The quantitative and qualitative components of this study combined, gave meaningful insight into the topic of student participation in extracurricular activities and how it impacted their academics. Each component revealed something different. The quantitative component showed that despite the opinions of people, the data showed that there was no statistically significant correlation between extracurricular activities and academic achievement or in-school activities and academic achievement. This meant that there was not a correlation that was positive, negative, or a point of saturation that emerged from this set of quantitative data. It was also important to keep in mind that this research study only contained 10 participants. According to Fraenkel (2009), the "recommended minimum number of subjects is...50 for a correlational study" (p. 104). Therefore, even if the test of correlation had revealed some kind of statistically significant correlation, the study would still need to be conducted with a larger pool of participants before those results could be generalized.

The qualitative parts of the study revealed that despite there being no statistical significance between student participation in extracurricular activities and academics or in-school extracurricular activities and academics, that there were still significant impacts of student participation in these activities. Almost all of the parent participants' opinion on how their student's participation in extracurricular activities affected their grades shared that same opinion on how extracurricular activities impacted their student in general. Most of these impacts were viewed as positive by parents and students, while

some of these impacts were viewed as negative. There was a consensus that students being involved in extracurricular activities resulted in students learning how to manage time effectively. More than half of the participants saw character development and social gains from student participation. Opinions were split on the topic of whether or not an individual student was over-scheduled in their extracurricular activities. These qualitative gains gave insight to the topic that would have otherwise gone unnoticed with a solely quantitative component.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Reflection

Introduction

Looking back over the course of this research study, there are several noteworthy findings. The first is that while the quantitative component did not find a statistically significant correlation or a point of saturation, there is an interesting pattern that emerged in regards to the topic of study. This pattern might reiterate similar findings to be true for students at the middle school level that had previously been cited in the prior research as being true for the high school and elementary and middle school combined level. Another finding of this study, in regards to the qualitative component, is that by connecting the previous research with the findings of this study, the researcher ultimately found a connection between middle school student participation in extracurricular activities and academics.

Triangulation of Results

The quantitative results of this study found that there was not any kind of statistically significant correlation between the number of hours that students spend in extracurricular activities and their academic achievement or in in-school activities and their academic achievement at the middle school level. The results also showed that there was not a point of saturation that emerged at the middle school level. The quantitative results of the study did not reflect what the prior research on the topic found. The prior research found a positive correlation between the number of hours that students spent in extracurricular activities and their academic achievement and a point of saturation (Denault & Poulin, 2009; Fredricks, 2012; Israel, 2013; Knifsend & Graham,

2012; Springer & Diffily, 2012). These studies were all conducted at the high school level, with one at the elementary and middle school level combined.

It is most likely that the reasoning for these results, which are inconsistent with the previous findings at different academic levels, was the result of the study having such a small pool of participants. If the study had data for more than 10 participants, it is possible that a different pattern consistent with the prior research may have emerged. The likelihood of this result was most noticeable in that there was an upward trend in the data. While this trend was not enough to be statistically significant, it showed that there seems to be a general trend of a higher GPA with the more hours that students spend in extracurricular activities. Again, this trend suggested that with a larger pool of data, a positive correlation consistent with the prior research may have emerged at the middle school level as well.

While the quantitative results were not consistent with the findings of the prior research, the qualitative results did contain patterns that reflected what prior research on the topic at different grade levels has found. The prior research's findings were that students are more successful academically when they feel that they belong to their school, when they have a positive, stable social network, and when they have the opportunity to build relationships with their teachers and other adult mentors in the school setting (Busseri et al., 2006; Ebie, 2005; Fischer & Thies, 2014; Fredricks, 2012; Howard & Ziomek-Daigle, 2009; Kim et al., 2014; Kingery et al., 2011; Knifsend & Graham, 2012; Kronholz, 2012; Mensah & Atta, 2015). The findings of this study conducted at the middle school level were consistent with this prior research, such as Covay and Carbonaro's (2010) study showing that "EAs contribute to student achievement indirectly

by enhancing students' noncognitive skills, which produces greater gains in students'

learning" (p. 22).

Parents and students repeatedly expressed through surveys and interviews that

they felt that students benefitted socially from making friends through participation in

their activities. Parents also cited that in regards to in-school activities, students felt a

greater sense of connectedness and belongingness to their school through their

participation in these activities. Parents and students also mentioned that students

benefitted from participating in in-school activities in terms of students being able to

build relationships with teachers and other adults in the school as mentors, and that these

relationships transcended the student's participation in the extracurricular activity and

were also evident in the classroom. Parents felt that the building of these relationships

helped students to feel more comfortable asking these teachers and adult mentors for help

at school when they needed it. Again, these three things were consistent with the

previous research of how participation in extracurricular activities directly contributes to

the academic success of students (Denault & Poulin, 2009; Fredricks, 2012; Israel, 2013;

Knifsend & Graham, 2012; Springer & Diffily, 2012).

Another interesting pattern that emerged from the qualitative data was that half of

the parents and students voiced that they felt the student was over-scheduled. This

demonstrated the reality of the struggle that parents and students face when trying to

juggle the amount of time that students should be spending participating in

extracurricular activities. Also, of these parents and students who felt that the student

was over-scheduled, they still cited gains, most of them more than one, that the student

had from participating in extracurricular activities. This showed that while parents and

students may even recognize that the student is over-scheduled, they feel that it is worth it for the student to gain these skills.

Ultimately, the results of this study contributed greatly to the existing body of knowledge on the topic. The previously unexplored realm of investigating these issues at the middle school level was something that needed to be investigated. While the quantitative component showed nothing statistically significant, most likely due to the small pool of participants, it did show a general upward trend in hours spent in extracurricular activities resulting in higher levels of academic achievement. Meaning that there is the possibility that with a larger pool of participants, a statistically significant correlation might emerge. It was through the qualitative component that the researcher was able to prove that we know to be true about adolescents and their developmental needs and how extracurricular activities contribute to meeting these needs. Then how this participation in extracurricular activities circles back to ultimately affect student academic achievement.

While the quantitative component was unable to directly correlate student participation in extracurricular activities and academic achievement, the qualitative component was able to in a more roundabout way. The prior research had shown that the three things that lead to academic success for middle school students were school belongingness, a stable social network and relationships built with teacher and adult mentors at school (Busseri et al., 2006; Ebie, 2005; Fischer & Thies, 2014; Fredricks, 2012; Howard & Ziomek-Daigle, 2009; Kim et al., 2014; Kingery et al., 2011; Knifsend & Graham, 2012; Kronholz, 2012; Mensah & Atta, 2015). The results of this study echoed, through the responses of a survey and interviews with students and parents, that

these three areas of need were being met by student participation in extracurricular activities. Therefore, extracurricular activities contribute to the academic success of middle school students by meeting these three key areas of need.

Limitations

There were several other possible limitations to the research study that were of concern to the researcher when considering the results. These possible limitations are all things to consider when conducting further research on this topic and might help future researchers to make changes when conducting a study similar to this one. One possible limitation of this study was the assigning of the students' first semester grades by the students' different teachers across the district. The researcher understood that there was a certain level of subjectivity when it came to individual courses and that the grades that were assigned to students by their respective teachers, and that they would not be completely consistent across the district.

For example, there could have been two teachers within the same district, or even two teachers within the same school and grade level that could have been teaching the same class two different ways. They could also have chosen how an individual student's grade for that same class is made up two different ways in terms of what they decided put in the grade book and how they chose to weight the grade percentages. In this particular school district, there was not a uniform requirement for how much different grade components are weighted. This created the opportunity for there to be inconsistency between how different teachers were grading students across the district and could have limited interpreting the results of the study.

The district in which the researcher conducted the research had adopted the Common Core curriculum in the subject areas of English and Mathematics and in its other subjects, it also maintained and updated a district curriculum. Teachers were required to teach to their respective courses according to this district curriculum and these standards. These were the basis for which every teacher in the district taught and assessed their students. The researcher ultimately trusted the judgment of the certified teachers in this school district and the district's common curriculum standards and trusted that students' grades were being awarded based on their knowledge of the same general content across the district.

Another possible limitation of this study was the parents who chose to volunteer to participate in it. The parents that the researcher spoke to were the parents who voluntarily read their school's newsletter, signed up to be a part of the study, filled out all of the necessary paperwork, filled out a survey every week for a semester, and possibly volunteered to be interviewed or to bring their student in to be interviewed. Therefore, in having done these things, these parents already showed a vested interest in their students' school life. Not every parent of students in the district chose to do this, so there may have been a limitation in terms of the type of parent that participated in the study. These parents who went the extra mile to do all of these things and participated in the study, may also have been the type of parents who were willing to go above and beyond to help their students to be successful in balancing their extracurricular activities and their academics.

They may have been the kind of parents who played a very active role and were heavily involved in the everyday activities of their student's life, from extracurricular

activities to academics. This may have been marked by something as simple as the survey being used in the study. The parents that participated in the study knew from the beginning that a survey would be sent out every week and what exact information they would need to gather to fill out the surveys. Therefore, theoretically, since the parents who volunteered to participate had the diligence and dedication to respond to these surveys every week, this mark of responsibility may have very well been a trait that they also expected of their children.

This was also true for the voluntary interview component of the study. There may have been a similar limitation in the parents and students who were interviewed. This was because these interviews took place on a volunteer basis. So again, the parents that showed the helpfulness, diligence and follow through to volunteer, schedule a time, and then actually brought their student to and participated in the interview, may be a limitation in that some parents who did not go to these lengths' perspectives and opinions were not be recorded.

Another limitation to this study was the possibility of not getting the survey back from the students' parents every week and therefore needing to throw that participant's and student's data out of the research study. It was vital to the comparison component of this study that the number of hours being averaged were from the same sample size of 18 weeks for each student. For example, to have one student's overall average have been five hours in extracurricular activities over 18 weeks, while another student's overall average was five hours over four weeks, would not have been a fair comparison. There would have needed to be a larger sample size for the second student, for the researcher to be able to get a good idea of the student's true average and to be able to have compared it

to the first student. One limitation that having a study that spanned over 16 weeks presented was that the parents who completed the survey needed to respond to the surveys every week. The reality was that life happens, and that some weeks there might have been extenuating circumstances that prevented the participant from filling out the survey one of these 16 weeks. It could have been anything from simply forgetting, to having had a busy week, to an unexpected family emergency. The unfortunate result is that these participants' incomplete data and their respective student's incomplete data needed to be thrown out of the study.

In order to be able to compare the data of one student to the other students in the study, it needed to be the exact same amount of data. In the case of this particular study, this meant that the data regarding the number of hours needed to be taken over the same number of weeks for each participant in the study. Even though the data that was being compared between students was ultimately an average of the number of hours spent in extracurricular activities every week for each student, it would still not have been statistically correct to compare one student's 16-week average with another student's 14-week average and so on. The reason being, was that there very well could have been a number of hours in those other two weeks for the 14-week student, that would have severely altered their 14-week average.

For example, the researcher had no way of knowing whether or not those two particular weeks that would be unaccounted for could have been a number of hours significant enough to alter the participant's average. The researcher sought to remedy the possible limitation of participants forgetting to fill out their weekly survey each week by sending the participant a reminder e-mail towards the end of the week that they had not

yet filled out their survey for the week before, if the researcher did not receive their survey from the prior week. This was a good way to remedy the problem of a parent who simply forgot to fill out the survey, because there was a strong likelihood that the participant could still recall the events of their respective student from the prior week and was still be able to submit accurate data. This helped researcher to obtain the full 16 weeks of data necessary for the participant's data to be counted in the study for each participant.

Another possible limitation was only doing comparisons of the data on the averages of the final numbers of hours and the final grades of the students. After having had the parents log the number of hours that their respective student spent participating in extracurricular activities and in-school and out of school activities through the surveys every week, this study compared the averages of those final number of hours combined, and for each respective category, that had been accumulated over 16 weeks, with their final semester grade point averages. The limitation to this was that an individual student's level of involvement in extracurricular activities may have varied greatly throughout the course of the semester, and those particular patterns were unable to be measured and further examined.

For example, there may have been a pattern that would have emerged between those weekly hours students spent in extracurricular activities and the students' grades if the grades had been monitored on a weekly basis as well. For example, a student involved in the school musical may have seen their grades suffer as they may have had less time to dedicate to their studies as the show performance got closer and the rehearsals became longer in length. Then the researcher might have seen that pattern of a

negative relationship between many hours being spent in extracurricular activities and poor academics might end when the musical ends. Then there might have been a positive relationship between the student spending less hours in extracurricular activities and academic achievement.

The reason the researcher could not collect and compare this weekly data for grades as the researcher could for the hours in extracurricular activities was because weekly data in terms of students' grades was simply not a reliable source to use in terms of the academic component. There were a couple of different reasons as to why this was true. The first reason was that a student's grades could change throughout the course of the semester if students were allowed to go back and do things such as retest. The second reason was that it would likely have taken the student's teachers more time than the timeframe of one week allows to have updated grades from the assignments and assessments that had been given for that week in the computer.

Therefore, if the researcher or the parents of the students whose data was being collected were to pull their student's grades every week from the student's portal and a teacher's online grade book, their student's grade for that week would not have always been, and more often would not have been, a true reflection of their current performance in that particular class. Therefore, the researcher was not able to use this academic data to be able to make a correlation between the hours spent in activities that week and the student's grades for that week.

Another aspect of the study to take into consideration is that the only time that the research study heard the opinions of students was during the interview component. Since during these interviews the researcher was able to gain a unique perspective into how

students are positively and negatively impacted by their participation in extracurricular

activities, perhaps also sending the Google Forms survey out to students would have been

beneficial. Since the pattern regarding parents was that eight of them returned the survey

and only five interviewed, perhaps more students would have responded to the survey,

even if they were unable to complete an interview. While the survey answers were

significantly shorter than the phone and in-person interview answers were, there still may

have been something of significance that a student may have mentioned if given the

opportunity to answer in a survey.

Students also may have been more receptive to the idea of answering a Google

Forms survey than participating in an in-person interview. This might have been true

since most current middle school students are very comfortable using electronic mediums

(texting, e-mail, etc.). Furthermore, in the researcher's opinion, this is an age when not

all middle school students are comfortable speaking to adults. Not only does the

researcher know this to be true from being a middle school teacher herself, but also from

the interviews conducted. Some of the students who were interviewed over the phone

and in-person were very shy and gave short answers. This was not because they did not

have anything to say, but rather because they did not feel completely comfortable

speaking to an adult that they had never met before. Also, this could be due to shyness

and nervousness because as the interviews progressed, students seemed more comfortable

giving longer answers towards the end of the interview.

It is also important to again recognize that only half of the student participants

were interviewed because the study was already dealing with a very small participant

pool, which led to only five students having a voice in how they felt they were impacted

by their participation in extracurricular activities. Only having the opinion of five students in the study as opposed to nine parents meant that students' voices were not heard equal to those of parents. Also, there may have been valuable information in the opinions of those five other student participants who went unheard.

Another aspect that may have affected the research study was the fact that data that was only taken over the course of the first semester of the school year. A study that would have covered the length of the entire school year might have provided a more well-rounded picture as to how middle students, as well as their academics, may have been impacted by their participation in extracurricular activities. One way that examining only one semester of the school year's worth of data may have hindered the results of the study was by how these results were reflected in terms of the students' first semester GPA.

Furthermore, how students' grades were reflected solely in their first semester GPA may have been a hindrance to the results of the study. This could be true because the difficulty level in middle school courses can sometimes vary from one semester to another. In the researcher's experience, having taught four different courses at the middle school level, this has sometimes been the case. For example, when the researcher taught Algebra 1 to eighth graders, the second semester of the course was usually significantly more difficult for students than the first semester coursework. If something like this did occur for any of the participants in this study and their respective courses, meaning if the student perhaps experienced an easier first semester set of courses, then this may have led the first semester GPA's of the students in this study to not be a true representation of their academic ability while participating in extracurricular activities.

Having monitored data over a longer period of time, either over the entire school year or even perhaps over the entire length of middle school, would have given a clearer picture as to how a student's academic achievement many have been impacted by their participation in extracurricular activities.

Something else worth considering is that these were not a uniform set of students. They were not all the same age, in the same grade, and they did not all have the same threshold in terms of what they could handle in regards to their academics. These types of factors will vary from student to student. Even if they had all been the same age, different students can handle different loads of academic coursework despite what grade they are in. For example, one student could be a very organized, studious, and responsible sixth grader, while another student might be an eighth grader, but perhaps he or she is unorganized, irresponsible, and unmotivated. While the eighth grader would be assumed naturally more mature because of his or her age, depending on his or her personality and what it is being compared to, this may not always be the case. The reality is that while students' personalities may have come into play in terms of what they could handle academically, it would be very difficult to find a set of students that had many of these traits in common for comparison. Therefore, again, the wider the pool of participants, the more likely these personalities would be offset.

Another item that may have impacted students' opinions on their activities was the fact that these opinions were only based on the first half of the school year. Opinions on participating in these activities and how they impacted the students' academics may have changed over the course of the entire year. For example, perhaps a student really loved being involved in an activity at first and the level of commitment was easy to

handle. Then as the year progressed, perhaps he or she became more involved and that began to have a negative impact on the student's grades, or maybe the student simply did not like participating in the activity anymore and that changed the impact that the activity had on the student.

Also worth consideration, is that the students participating in this study likely started out on different initial academic levels. Again, this was not a uniform group of students in any way aside from them all being middle school students in the same school district. This meant that one of these students may have historically maintained a 4.0 GPA, while another student may have usually obtained a 2.5 GPA. Therefore, both students ending with a 3.75 GPA for the semester was not what it appeared to be. It was a decrease in achievement for the 4.0 GPA student, and a massive gain for the 2.5 GPA student. Without knowing each student's prior GPA, these details would go unnoticed.

This would be difficult to measure solely in terms of gains instead of GPA though, since a 4.0 GPA student making a 4.0 GPA again would look as if they gained nothing, when the reality is their GPA does not have anywhere to go but down. Perhaps the answer is to measure both overall GPA and the gains of each student for some more insight. The researcher would like to further look into other ways that research studies have used to measure academic achievement, that take into consideration students' previous academics. This could ultimately provide some deeper insight into how academic achievement is affected.

Another avenue that may be worth exploring is that all of the qualitative data was opinion. It was based on either the perspective of the student or the parent. Sometimes one perspective or opinion does not tell the entire story. Sometimes someone's

perception is skewed. For example, a parent with the best intentions of wanting their child to be successful in a particular activity, may have a bias towards feeling like no matter what their child should be committed to and participating in that activity. On the student end, a student may be incredibly passionate about a particular activity. This could lead them to have the same kind of blinders on in terms of not realizing that they have overcommitted to an activity or be able to clearly see their participation's impact on their academics because they are so absorbed in it.

That being said, it might be beneficial to talk to multiple people who are involved in the life of the student and who know them well to gain a clearer picture as to how a student's academics are impacted by their participation. This would mean surveying and interviewing the student, parents, teachers, coaches, club sponsors, etc. Perhaps setting an amount of contact hours that someone has with the student, and using that as a gauge to determine who else to survey and interview would be beneficial. There are also likely other more in-depth qualitative surveying instruments on similar topics that could be considered for future use.

Another aspect to take into consideration is that since the results of the qualitative component of this study were consistent with the prior research on what key elements help middle school students to be successful, students gaining these elements from participating in extracurricular activities may be essential to there being a positive impact on a student's academics. It may not be enough for a student to merely be a participant in order to see these gains. If it is known from the prior research that it is key for a middle school student to gain a sense of school belongingness, a stable social network and grow positive relationships with adult mentors within their program, what if a student does not

gain any of these things from participating in a certain activity? It can be assumed from what the previous research stated and the results of this study that students would not experience the same kind of impact than if they had experienced at least one of those gains.

For example, this leads one to ask the question, if a middle school student spends a season playing a sport, but does not make any friends, does not get along with the coach, and did not feel any pride playing for the school's team, did he or she gain anything in terms of their academics? This definitely might be a question worth asking and something worth examining in possible future studies since the previous research said that these three elements contribute to these academic gains for middle school students. One way of examining this in future studies might be to use a qualitative instrument to measure if students felt that they had gained any of these three elements and then comparing those results with their academics. This could be a way of continuing to examine this relationship between these three elements and academic achievement for middle school students.

This also leads the researcher to reconsider using the number of hours that students participated in extracurricular activities instead of an instrument such as this. The reason that the researcher did not think to do so, was none of the other similar studies that the researcher found had used anything such as this. However, in hindsight, it seems as if merely examining a number of hours may not have helped to paint the clearest picture of middle school students' academics are impacted by their participation in extracurricular activities. The probable reasoning for other studies not containing other elements of examination such as these is that these three elements are in reference to the

stage of adolescence in particular. While this stage of development extends beyond the middle school level, this is where this stage of development is the most prevalent.

One of the most important points to consider in regards to the results of this study were the lack of negative outcomes. There was a lack of negative outcomes in terms of academics for any student involved in the study, as well as a very small amount of negative aspects mentioned about the extracurricular activities in the survey and interviews. The only negative comment that seemed to emerge with any regularity was the feeling that some parents and students had of their students being over-scheduled in their extracurricular activities.

The reason that these negative views and outcomes were underrepresented, had to do with the design of the study itself. The study relied on students having negative academic outcomes to prove that their over or lack of participation in extracurricular activities had an impact on a student's academics. Yet, what if as previously mentioned, these 10 particular students were all relatively good students? Then regardless of their time spent participating in extracurricular activities, this impact would not be seen. Or the impact would not be dramatic enough to look statistically significant.

Another element of this idea to consider, is that another reason that there were no negative quantitative effects seen in the results is because perhaps when parents felt that their student's participation in extracurricular activities started to negatively impact their academics, they took action. For example, it would not be uncommon for a parent to notice that their student was over-scheduled in extracurricular activities, see a sudden drop in their grades (perhaps a bad test score), and then demand that the student make a

change in his or her current schedule of extracurricular commitments until there was an improvement in grades seen.

This occurrence would make it incredibly difficult for a research study to monitor accurately the effects of hours spent in extracurricular activities and academic achievement. While it was already discussed why it would be too difficult to monitor the progress of grades week by week, perhaps monitoring students' grades at various grading periods throughout the semester (quarter, mid-point, etc.) would be beneficial to monitor these trends.

In terms of the qualitative component, it might also be beneficial to design leading questions that have parents and students think about the negative effects to participation in these extracurricular activities if they felt that there are any. Most parents and students strayed away from citing any negative effects of the student's participation in extracurricular activities when asked what they thought about the impact of extracurricular activities in general. The reason for this could be that they truly did not feel that there were many negative impacts. To be sure that this is the case, future research studies may want to come right out and ask a question like "What are some negative impacts of your student participating in extracurricular activities that you see, if any?" This gives the participant the opportunity to either cite any negative impacts that they think participating in extracurricular activities has on their student, or clarify that they do not think there are any.

By changing the design of the study in these ways, future studies might be able to see negative effects better in the future. Being knowledgeable about these negative effects might help to paint a clearer picture of the many different factors that play into

student participation in extracurricular activities and how it impacts their academic achievement.

Recommendations for Future Research

The first recommendation for future research is that future studies find some way to be able to pre-identify student participants with similar academic backgrounds and previous backgrounds of participating in extracurricular activities. Then, instead of solely using the data from a pool of completely random candidates, the researcher would also examine the data for the candidates that have these particular set of traits in common. By also taking data on this particular group of students who are at the same place academically and in terms of what they have been involved in in terms of extracurricular activities, the researcher would be able to better measure any academic gains or losses due to a student's increased participation in extracurricular activities.

That being said, this data would be easiest to measure this from a pool of participants who have room to grow in terms of their GPA and in terms of their participation in extracurricular activities. It would be difficult to measure whether or not a student gained academically and if so how much, by examining students who already have a perfect GPA and no room for improvement in this area. Whereas, examining students who have an average GPA, and who have not previously participated in many extracurricular activities, the research would truly be able to examine the academic impact of this change.

The recommendation would be that the researcher obtain a pool of candidates and take data for all of those candidates. Then from this pool of candidates, the researcher sends out a general questionnaire requesting basic information, and use this opportunity

to ask the participant about topics such as the student's previous semester GPA's for the last school year, as well as their previous involvement in extracurricular activities. Then once data has been taken for all of the students in the study, the researcher would use this previously acquired data to single out a set of students and investigate this further. I would recommend this because previous studies such as Darling, Caldwell, and Smith's (2005) showed that "adolescents who participated in ECAs reported higher grades, more positive attitudes towards school, and higher academic aspirations once demographic characteristics and prior adjustment were controlled" (p. 51).

A second recommendation is that future research on the topic look at a longer period of time, a larger pool of candidates, and examine some different components of extracurricular activities impacting student GPA. It would also be of great benefit to future researchers to be more purposeful in measuring qualitative components as well as quantitative ones. Following these recommendations will lead to a better research study.

Any future research similar to this study would benefit from taking data over a longer period. There are many different factors that can come into play when attempting to measure student academic progress. When only measuring this academic progress over a short period of time, such as one semester of the school year, aspects such as an easier set of courses that semester, or perhaps a semester of topics in a subject that the student really struggled with, might not lead to gaining a clear picture when interpreting the results. The longer the researcher is able to take data for, the better.

It would be most ideal to take data over all three years of the students being in middle school. Then students are starting on a relatively level playing field by having never taken courses at the middle school level or had the chance to participate in middle

school activities before. Then this also removes any differences in age and grade level that may occur when taking data on random middle school students in general, because with this data being taken over the course of all three years, these factors will be the same for each participant. While it is not always realistic to be able to conduct a three-year study and to be able to find participants who are willing to do participate in a study for three years, the researcher's recommendation would be to at the very least try and conduct a year-long study.

Another possible benefit to similar future research studies would be to have a larger pool of participants. Similar to recommending of a longer length of time of the study, the more participants in the study, the more representative the results. This provides breadth to cover a wide range of students that would give a clearer picture as to how the academics of middle school students are impacted by their participation in extracurricular activities.

One downfall of this study was that it contained such a small pool of participants. This only gave the researcher insight into a very small representation of middle school students and the opinions of them and of their parents in the respective school district. Considering the upward trend of the quantitative results of extracurricular activity participation and academic achievement, there is a chance, that with a larger pool of candidates, a statistically significant relationship may emerge. The researcher asked for volunteers across the entire school district, but had trouble obtaining more than 10 participants using the volunteer method. In the future, the researcher should offer some kind of incentive to parents completing the surveys each week and participating.

Perhaps, if it was a funded study, the study could pay participants a small amount for completing the surveys each week and having participants complete an interview.

Another recommendation to future similar research studies would be to examine different qualitative components impacting GPA. This was something that the researcher stumbled upon in this study, in terms of seeing a consistency between the pattern of results in from the surveys and the prior research, but it was not something that the researcher went directly looking for. In the future, the researcher would recommend that researchers be intentional in further investigating and measuring these qualitative components as well as quantitative ones.

The third recommendation for future research is that the significance of participation in in-school activities continue examination since the findings of this study in line with the prior research showed that in-school activities in particular have the capability to promote school belongingness and allow students to build relationships with adult mentors. Also in terms of the social network component, perhaps making friends in an in-school extracurricular activity and then having those friends in class at school as well might prove to be important when considering the impact of student participation in extracurricular activities on the student's academics.

Also, the researcher recommends investigating this topic of in-school participation in extracurricular activities further because the results of the study showed that consistent with prior research, school belongingness, building relationships with adults within the school setting and making friends, all positively impacted students (Busseri et al., 2006; Ebie, 2005; Fischer & Thies, 2014; Fredricks, 2012; Howard & Ziomek-Daigle, 2009; Kim et al., 2014; Kingery et al., 2011; Knifsend & Graham, 2012;

Kronholz, 2012; Mensah & Atta, 2015). The social component is not necessarily as relevant to in-school activities in particular because students have the opportunity to make friends in out of school extracurricular activities just as well as they do in in-school activities.

One part of this social element that the researcher would recommend examining further would be whether students felt like they had more friends at school as a result of participating in in-school extracurricular activities. Since a student having a positive, stable social network at school has shown in prior research to benefit students academically, the researcher would recommend taking these findings one step further and investigating whether or not participation in in-school activities might be a part of this result (Busseri et al., 2006; Ebie, 2005; Fischer & Thies, 2014; Fredricks, 2012; Howard & Ziomek-Daigle, 2009; Kim et al., 2014; Kingery et al., 2011; Knifsend & Graham, 2012; Kronholz, 2012; Mensah & Atta, 2015).

Another element worth further investigating is the potential significance of participating in in-school activities possibly being more beneficial in terms of academics. This researcher believes that this might be true since school belongingness is another research-proven trait that has shown to lead to positive effects on students' academics. The researcher recommends further investigating the link between student participation in in-school extracurricular activities and whether it results in a student's sense of school belongingness more than out of school activities. One might assume that this would be the case since the activities are taking place in school instead of out of school, but there may not be any statistical correlation either way. This is why due to the results of this study showing that pattern emerging of students citing feeling a greater sense of school

belongingness from participating in in-school extracurricular activities and the potential

for their academic impact the researcher recommends researching this topic further.

The researcher also recommends that future research on the potential importance

of students building relationships with adult mentors through in-school activities as

opposed to out of school activities. Students most likely gain from building relationships

with mentors in any capacity, though the previous research cites building relationships

with in-school adult mentors in particular as teachers as contributing to students'

academic success. It would be beneficial for future research studies to investigate further

whether students feel as if they are building these relationships with adult mentors in their

school through their participation in in-school extracurricular activities.

A final recommendation is to investigate the idea of the results of an activity that

is a "triple threat" in that in contains all three of these mentioned pillars of school

belongingness, a stable social network, and building relationships with adult in-school

mentors. The researcher recommends possibly monitoring student participation in

activities such as these that contain all three elements, in comparison to activities that

have less than all three of these elements. Since the previous research cited all three as

contributing to the academic success of middle school students, this would be worth

investigating (Busseri et al., 2006; Ebie, 2005; Fischer & Thies, 2014; Fredricks, 2012;

Howard & Ziomek-Daigle, 2009; Kim et al., 2014; Kingery et al., 2011; Knifsend &

Graham, 2012; Kronholz, 2012; Mensah & Atta, 2015). Also comparing activities that

have all three to some that only have one or two, to those that have none, would help the

researcher to gain a clearer picture on the topic.

Conclusion

The researcher chose to study this topic for two reasons. The first was that, as a middle school teacher, she has an incredible level of interest as to what most benefits middle school students. The researcher has spent an ample amount of time throughout her undergraduate and graduate coursework, as well as in her free time, learning as much as she possibly can about how she can best give her middle school students every opportunity to reach their personal and academic potential. The researcher has seen first-hand things that she has previously read and studied in my academic and personal research come to life in her classroom, and was eager to have the opportunity as a researcher to make a contribution to this body of knowledge.

The second reason is that what the researcher is equally as passionate about is middle school student participation in extracurricular activities. The researcher herself was a student who carried a heavy schedule of activities for as far back as she can remember and all throughout her school career. She personally felt that she benefitted greatly from this in numerous ways, but she was also not naïve enough to think that just because this was the case for her, that this might be the case for everyone. Also, from the perspective of being a middle school teacher who has sponsored three different extracurricular activities at the middle school level, there were some students who the researcher would see benefit greatly from participation in these extracurricular activities, while other really seemed to struggle to not let it negatively impact their grades. This piqued the researcher's interest in wanting to study the combination of these topics of extracurricular activities and academic achievement at the middle school level and conduct her research study on these topics. The researcher wanted to contribute

something of note to the existing literature, raise some interesting questions, and ultimately hoped to not only make a difference for her own students, but for middle school students everywhere.

This study ultimately did not find a statistically significant relationship between the hours that middle school students spent participating in extracurricular activities and academic achievement or in-school extracurricular activities and academic achievement. The study also did not find a point of saturation that emerged from the data for extracurricular activities in general or in-school extracurricular activities. This was most likely because the pool of participants that there were to take data on was very small, at only 10 participants. Though the study did find a pattern of answers that emerged from the qualitative component of the study that showed that three of the gains that parents and students cited of students gaining a sense of school belongingness, a stable social network and building relationships with adult mentors in school, from participating in extracurricular activities, were consistent with the prior research that said that these factors resulted in positive academic gains for students at the middle school level.

These findings are of note to the field of instructional leadership, and more specifically to higher education, because these are important things to know in middle school education programs, such as the one that the researcher graduated from, when educating teachers in how to best instruct middle school students, and help them navigate this conundrum of balancing their academics while also participating in the right amount of extracurricular activities.

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