LMS Leadership in Muslim Societies

Vol.1, No.2 (November 2026), 93-120
p-ISSN: 3163-6853 | e-ISSN: 3163-6845
DOI: https://doi.org/10.64929/lms.v1i2.118
https://ejournal.tuah.or.id/index.php/LMS

School Leadership in Malaysia: A Qualitative Exploration of Co-Curricular Management Challenges

| Research Article |

OPEN ACCESS

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Received: 20-09-2026	Accepted: 05-11-2026	Published: 06-11-2026

Abstract. Although co-curricular research identifies recurring management challenges, the distinction between difficulties that remain manageable and those that restrict provision require closer examination. This study explored the challenges reported by school leaders and the arrangements they described in response. A qualitative descriptive design with an exploratory focus was adopted. Five principals and one senior assistant were purposively selected from six urban and suburban schools in Peninsular and East Malaysia: four national secondary schools, one national Islamic secondary school and one integrated fully residential school implementing the Tahfiz Model Ulul Albab (TMUA). Co-curricular provision encompassed clubs and societies, uniform bodies, and sports and games. Relevant material from semi-structured interviews on school management was analysed through data-led coding and theory-informed theme development. Five descriptive themes concerned planning and implementation coordination; financial, material and facility constraints; student participation and competing academic demands; perceived pressure to provide appealing activities; and parental and community support. Accounts link transport availability with scheduling and equipment costs with restricted practical activities, while reporting alternative transport and incremental equipment purchases. Participation concerns ranged from attracting attendance to maintaining classroom learning during competitions. In the single TMUA school, these concerns included formal Qur'anic memorisation. Programme appeal and parental or community support were developed mainly through individual accounts. Uneven interview coverage and leaders' perspectives limited interpretation; student motivation and outcomes were not directly assessed. The study contributes a contextual account of challenges, reported responses and unresolved coordination demands. Proposed scheduling, resource assistance and learning support require evaluation.

Keywords: Co-curricular, School Management, School Leadership, Qualitative Study

INTRODUCTION

Co-curricular management requires school leaders to organising and coordinate activities while accomodating the time, facilities, human resources and financial arrangements required for student development. All secondary school students in Malaysia are required to participate in co-curricular activities. Implementation difficulties can therefore concern both whether an acivity is offered and whether students can take part under workable conditons. Recent studies have examined co-curricular management in an Indonesian madrasah and the

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dual teaching and managerial roles of Malaysian senior assistants for co-curricular affairs. These studies have identified challenges involving limited funding, inadequate facilities, varying levels of coaching expertise and competing teaching and also administrative responsibilities. (Mursalim et al., 2025; Roslan & Mosin, 2025). These findings highlight co-curricular management as an important leadership responsibility that must be understood within its organisational context, as resource shortages alone do not indicate ineffective leadership.

In this article, co-curricular management denotes structured school activities involving clubs and societies, uniformed bodies, and sports and games; competition participation appears within several leaders' accounts. The central issue concerns how school leaders translate educational goals into practical co-curricular programmes that support meaningful student participation within Malaysia's policy and assessment framework. In Malaysian national secondary schools, students are required to participate in three co-curricular components: clubs and society, uniformed units and sports and games (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2024). Each component requires at least 12 meetings annually, with three hours allocated to each meeting, representing a minimum of 36 hours per year for each component (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2017). The activities are scheduled outside regular classroom instructional hours. School leaders must therefore coordinate schedules, staffing and facilities to fulfil these requirements while ensuring that students have meaningful opportunities to participate.

The educational significance of participation provides a rationale for examining these management conditions. Kaspin et al. (2024) reported favourable Malaysian student perceptions of national integration through co-curricular activities conducted during movement restrictions. Internationally, Verner-Filion et al. (2025) identified associations between self-determined motivation for extracurricular activities and favourable school functioning. Such evidence supports attention to the opportunities and experiences provided through activities. It does not, however, establish that the availability of programmes alone ensures access, engagement or positive outcomes.

Malaysian research has examined leadership practices associated with co-curricular provision. Mohd Hamzah & Ayob (2015) surveyed 323 advisory teachers from 12 secondary schools in the Keramat Zone and reported high ratings of principals' planning, organising, leading and controlling roles. More recently, Abdol Latif & Abd Hamid (2026) surveyed 302 teachers from 16 primary schools in Putrajaya and found high perceptions of headteachers' digital leadership practices. These studies provided evidence of perceived management practices within their respective settings. Their reliance on teacher reports and the primary-school context of the latter study, nevertheless limited explanations of secondary school leaders' own experiences of implementation difficulties. Positive assessments of leadership practices did not necessarily indicate the absence of operational constraints.

Qualitative studies have examined co-curricular management across different institutional contexts. Mursalim et al. (2025) explored management and perceived life-skills development in an Indonesian madrasah, reporting resource constraints, inconsistent participation and adaptive management practices. In Malaysia, Roslan and Mosin (2025) examined six educators undertaking co-curricular senior assistant responsibilities in Ranau, Sabah, identifying tensions between managerial duties and classroom teaching. Both studies used interviews, observations and document analysis, but their respective institutional and role-based perspectives leave scope to distinguish barriers to student participation from difficulties maintaining instructional continuity during extensive involvement. The present

study addresses this distinction by comparing six school leaders' accounts of transport, resources, participation and competition-related absence, offering a contextual interpretation of management constraints and their perceived consequences without claiming causal effects on student outcomes.

Co-curricular provision requires school leaders to coordinate resources, staff expertise and opportunities for student participation. Three theoretical perspectives offer complementary ways of understanding these organisational demands. Resource dependence theory directs attention to control over essential resources, reliance on external support and the availability of alternatives (Ozturk, 2021). Distributed leadership highlights how responsibilities and expertise are coordinated across organisational roles, while distinguishing formal task allocation from shared leadership practice (Harris et al., 2022). Self-determination theory draws attention to the distinction between attendance and students' experiences of autonomy, competence and relatedness (Howard et al., 2021). These perspectives provide a conceptual basis for examining management constraints and leaders' interpretations of participation, while recognising that leadership interviews alone cannot establish students' psychological experiences or the effectiveness of management practices.

A distributed leadership perspective complements this focus by locating leadership practice within interactions among people, tasks and organisational circumstances (Spillane et al., 2001). Co-curricular provision involves principals, senior assistants, teachers and other staff whose responsibilities overlap. Assigned roles or committees alone do not establish effective coordination; their practical operation depends on access to expertise, staff availability and working relationships. Read alongside the workload concerns reported by Roslan & Mosin (2025), this perspective supports examining how leaders coordinate several legitimate educational priorities. It also distinguishes leaders' accounts of collaboration from direct observation of collaborative practice.

Students' participation depends partly on access to equipment and transport. Tandon et al. (2021) found that less affluent students in the United States reported lower sports participation and more barriers related to cost, transport and feeling unwelcome. Owen et al. (2022) similarly identified socioeconomic differences in organised sport participation in high-income countries. These findings suggest that equipment and travel costs may restrict participation when families must meet these expenses. This explanation may be relevant to Malaysian co-curricular activities with similar requirements, but cannot be applied equally to all clubs, societies and uniformed bodies. In the present study, school leaders reported difficulties obtaining participation items and arranging transport. These accounts indicate perceived access barriers, but do not establish that students from lower-income families participated less, because household expenditure, students' perspectives and participation by income were not examined.

The relationship between participation and educational outcomes also varies across contexts. O'Donnell et al. (2024) followed 3,850 Australian adolescents over four years and found that extracurricular participation predicted subsequent school belonging, which was associated with reductions in depressed mood. The reported relationships were particularly beneficial among adolescents from disadvantaged communities, despite their lower participation. Conversely, Palou et al. (2024), analysing 5,397 secondary school students in three European cities, found that the relationship between participation and socioeconomic differences varied across settings and outcomes. These observational findings indicate the potential value of participation while cautioning against assuming equivalent benefits for all students or attributing outcomes to participation alone.

Understanding participation requires attention to both access and students' experiences. Verner-Filion et al. (2025) found associations between self-determined motivation for extracurricular activities, academic motivation, psychological need satisfaction and school adjustment among 886 high-school students across four countries. However, their cross-sectional design did not establish causal relationships. Self-determination theory offers a perspective for considering autonomy, competence and relatedness, alongside the distinction between different forms of motivation (Howard et al., 2021). In this article, these concepts provide possible interpretive considerations rather than evidence of students' psychological experiences. Interviews with school leaders reveal their perceptions of programme appeal and participation, but cannot establish students' reasons for attending or withdrawing

Previous qualitative studies have examined extracurricular management in an Indonesian madrasah (Mursalim et al., 2025) and educators' combined managerial and teaching responsibilities in Malaysia (Roslan & Mosin, 2025). Building on these studies, the present inquiry examines the challenges school leaders face in organising and delivering co-curricular activities, focusing on when reported difficulties remain manageable and when they restrict provision or create competing educational demands. Through comparison of six leaders' accounts, the study considers scheduling, funding, facilities, transport, student participation and external support, including concerns about missed lessons during competitions. Its contribution is a context-specific clarification of how resource shortages differ from practical barriers to participation and how participation itself can create additional coordination demands. The analysis recognises that similar difficulties may have different implications across participants' accounts and does not establish the effectiveness of reported arrangements or their effects on student outcomes.

Accordingly, this study pursued two objectives: to identify the challenges secondary school leaders reported in managing co-curricular activities and to examine the arrangements they described in response, including their perceived limitations. Two research questions guided the inquiry: (1) What challenges did school leaders report in managing co-curricular activities? (2) What arrangements did leaders describe for addressing these challenges and what limitations or competing demands did they identify?. The first question maps the reported challenges, while the second examines how participants described managing difficulties during planning and implementation. A qualitative descriptive and exploratory approach supports a contextual examination of these accounts. The individual leader, represented through their interview account, constitutes the unit of analysis. Comparisons across the five principals and one senior assistant consider their respective responsibilities without assuming equivalent roles or experiences. Relationships explicitly explained by participants are distinguished from interpretations developed by the researchers through comparison across accounts. The study contributes an understanding of reported management challenges and responses that may inform school planning and professional support, within the limits of leaders' perspectives.

METHOD

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive design with an exploratory focus to examine secondary school leaders' experiences of managing co-curricular activities. The descriptive orientation sought to provide a clear account of participants' reported challenges, responses and perceived limitations, while remaining close to the meanings expressed in their interviews (Doyle et al., 2020). The exploratory focus allowed differences across participants' experiences to be examined without testing a predetermined explanatory model. Thematic analysis was selected to identify patterns across individual accounts while retaining differences in the circumstances and arrangements described. This analytical purpose centred on leaders' experiences rather than a detailed investigation of a particular school as a bounded case. Each leader's interview account served as the unit of analysis, with comparisons considering differences in participants' responsibilities. Interpretation extended beyond summarising statements to comparing reported difficulties and responses; however, relationships explicitly explained by participants were distinguished from connections developed by the researchers. This distinction supports consistency between the research questions, analytical approach and claims made from the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

The descriptive orientation supported an account that remained closely connected to participants' explanations while allowing interpretation of patterns across their accounts. Sandelowski (2000) described qualitative description as an approach suited to producing comprehensive accounts of phenomena using language that remained close to participants' experiences. This orientation was relevant to the present study because its purpose was to develop a contextual understanding of management challenges from the perspectives of those involved in school leadership.

The interviews originally explored school leaders' experiences across several areas of school management, including co-curricular activities. This article focuses on the co-curricular material to examine participants' reported challenges, management responses and perceived limitations. Interpretation is limited to leaders' accounts, with their explanations distinguished from connections developed by the researchers across participants' experiences.

Sampling and Participants

Purposive sampling was used to select secondary school leaders whose responsibilities and professional experience were relevant to examining school management challenges, including co-curricular management. Selection focused on leaders involved in administering and managing secondary schools who could discuss their experiences through interview. This approach prioritised participants' relevance to the research questions rather than statistical representativeness, consistent with methodological guidance on purposeful selection and coherence between sampling decisions and research aims (Ahmad & Wilkins, 2025; Campbell et al., 2020). Geographical proximity to the researcher also influenced access. The sample therefore reflected purposeful selection within accessible locations rather than a systematic attempt to represent every type of Malaysian secondary school.

The researcher identified and contacted potential participants directly, followed by formal invitation letters. Seven leaders were invited, six participated and one did not respond. Recruitment did not involve professional networks or institutional gatekeepers, and the researcher had no prior personal acquaintance with the participants. Nevertheless, participation depended on leaders' availability and willingness to discuss management

experiences. The recruitment process could therefore have excluded perspectives from leaders who were less available or more reluctant to discuss institutional difficulties. The absence of a prior relationship also did not eliminate the possibility of socially desirable accounts.

Each participant represented a different secondary school, providing six distinct institutional settings. Three schools were in Peninsular Malaysia, and three in East Malaysia particularly in Borneo Island. Four were National Secondary Schools, one was a National Islamic Secondary School, and one was an Integrated Fully Residential School implementing the Tahfiz Model Ulul Albab. Three schools were urban and three were suburban. These characteristics describe the achieved sample and are not presented as evidence of maximum-variation sampling. School types and geographical characteristics are reported in aggregate to reduce the possibility of identifying participants through distinctive combinations of contextual information.

The participants comprised five principals and one senior assistant. School Leader 1 was the senior assistant, while School Leaders 2–6 were principals. Two participants were male and four were female. Two reported between 11 and 20 years of total service, while four reported more than 20 years. These service histories were considered separately from the reported leadership tenures presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Participant Characteristics

Participant Characteristic	Category	Number	Percentage
Gender	Male	2	33.33
	Female	4	66.67
Position	Principal	5	83.33
	Senior assistant	1	16.67
Length of service	11–20 years	2	33.33
	More than 20 years	4	66.67
Leadership Tenure	0-3 years	5	83.33
	More than 3 years	1	16.67

The recent appointment of some participants as principals did not indicate that they were new to the education profession. They had accumulated professional experience before assuming their current positions, providing a background from which to discuss school management challenges. Their inclusion was therefore based on the relevance of their responsibilities and accumulated experience rather than a minimum period as principal. However, previous professional experience was not treated as equivalent to extended familiarity with the school currently led. Accounts from recently appointed principals require particular care when distinguishing their assessment of existing circumstances from arrangements they had personally established or observed over time.

Principals and the senior assistant were included within the same inquiry because all held school management responsibilities. Their accounts provided perspectives from different positions, without assuming equivalent authority, duties or access to information. The individual leader's interview account constituted the unit of analysis. With only one senior assistant, the sample did not support systematic comparisons between leadership-role groups. Themes represented concerns identified within the available accounts, and an issue raised by one participant was not assumed to be shared by all participants.

The rationale for six participants rested on their relevance to the inquiry and the analytical use of their accounts, rather than a universal numerical recommendation.

Qualitative sample adequacy requires a study-specific assessment of the information available and the claims being made (Vasileiou et al., 2018). Malterud et al. (2016) information-power framework informed consideration of five dimensions: study aim, sample specificity, theoretical background, dialogue quality and analytical strategy. The article had a defined focus on co-curricular management, although its questions encompassed several organisational challenges. Participants' leadership responsibilities and substantial service experience provided relevant perspectives, while differences in position, tenure and school circumstances required cautious comparison. The theoretical perspectives offered resources for interpretation but did not independently establish sample sufficiency.

Interviews lasted between 45 and 80 minutes and explored school management challenges through open-ended questions, with follow-up questions guided by participants' responses. This duration covered the overall interview rather than co-curricular discussion alone. The relevance of the material was therefore assessed through the substance of participants' accounts rather than interview length alone. All six transcripts were read in full to identify co-curricular material for thematic analysis. The accounts provided concrete examples and contrasts, including transport difficulties in some settings and manageable arrangements in another. However, coverage varied across issues, with creativity and parental or community support developed mainly through individual participants' accounts. These contributions were interpreted as case-specific experiences rather than evidence of concerns shared throughout the sample.

Recruitment concluded after six interviews with the researcher's judgement that the sample was adequate for the qualitative inquiry. This decision is not presented as a demonstrated saturation threshold. Considering the breadth and uneven coverage of the material, the sample supports an exploratory examination of selected leaders' reported challenges and responses. It does not establish comprehensive coverage of co-curricular management experiences across Malaysian secondary schools or their communities.

Research Instrument

A semi-structured interview protocol was used to explore school leaders' experiences of challenges in administering and managing secondary schools. The protocol provided a common structure while allowing participants to identify issues relevant to their responsibilities and school circumstances. Follow-up questions were guided by participants' responses to clarify the challenges described, the arrangements used to address them and their perceived limitations. This flexibility supported detailed exploration of participants' experiences without assuming equivalent discussion of every issue across interviews, consistent with DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019) guidance on semi-structured interviewing. Interviews lasted between 45 and 80 minutes, covering school management challenges broadly. This article focused specifically on material concerning co-curricular management.

Administrative permission to conduct the research was obtained from the Educational Planning and Research Division, Ministry of Education Malaysia. Potential participants were contacted directly and subsequently provided with formal invitation letters. Before each interview, the researcher explained the study's purpose and objectives and obtained verbal consent to participate. Participants were informed that they could decline to answer questions or withdraw from the interview. Permission to record the discussion was also requested.

Confidentiality in reporting was maintained by removing direct identifying details and using the labels School Leader 1 to School Leader 6. Participants were informed that their

names and those of their schools would not be disclosed. Their descriptions of colleagues, students, parents and institutional circumstances were interpreted as leadership perspectives rather than independently verified accounts of those groups or conditions.

The researcher had no prior personal acquaintance with the participants. Nevertheless, the absence of an existing relationship did not eliminate the potential influence of the researcher's assumptions, the interview interaction or participants' concerns about professional reputation. Olmos-Vega et al. (2023) emphasise that reflexivity involves examining how researchers' positions and assumptions influence knowledge production. Accordingly, participants' accounts were interpreted in relation to their individual experiences and school circumstances. Explanations stated directly by participants were distinguished from interpretations developed by the researcher when comparing their accounts.

Research Interview Protocol

The interview protocol comprised three sections covering opening procedures, substantive questions and closing questions. Its structure reflected the need-analysis phase of the broader doctoral study, which explored leadership models, school management challenges and strategies. This article focused specifically on the interview material concerning co-curricular management. Table 2 summarises the protocol as three opening components, eight substantive question groups and two closing questions.

Table 2. Structure of the interview protocol

Section	Component	Content	Number of items
A	Opening items	Greetings: background concerning current position, service experience and professional involvement; explanation of the research and participation arrangements	3
B	Main interview items	Views on leadership and existing models; the need for a future-oriented leadership model; challenges and strategies across school management domains including co-curricular management	8
C	Closing items	Expectations for the proposed leadership model and an invitation to provide additional comments	2
		Total	13

The protocol was developed with reference to relevant literature and reviewed by two lecturers from the Faculty of Education, Universiti of Malaya. Pilot interviews involved two participants who were separated from the six main-study participants. The protocol was refined before the main interviews. The revised version expanded questions concerning existing leadership models and introduced explicit domain prompts covering curriculum, student affairs, co-curricular activities, leadership, organisation and community. These development stages are consistent with guidance emphasising literature-informed preparation, feedback and pilot testing in interview protocol development (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Kallio et al., 2016). A common core guide accommodated both principals and the senior assistant, with scope for questions to be adapted to their responsibilities.

The questions concerning challenges and strategies explicitly included co-curricular management as a domain. Material describing co-curricular difficulties informed the article's first research question, while accounts of responses, limitations and competing demands informed the second. Statements proposing possible strategies were distinguished from descriptions of arrangements already implemented.

Co-curricular management and community were explicitly named in the written prompts, whereas financial constraints, facilities, attendance and creativity were not listed as separate core questions. The five reported themes therefore should not be interpreted as five predetermined interview questions or as concerns necessarily introduced without prompting. Their development reflected analysis of the relevant accounts, with attention to the distinction between domains specified in the guide and the challenges participants described.

Data Analysis

The interview material was analysed by the researcher using a descriptive thematic approach organised around Braun and Clarke (2006) six phases. All six transcripts were read in full to identify material concerning co-curricular management. Initial coding was predominantly inductive, with descriptive labels developed through engagement with participants' accounts. Coding initially focused on explicit statements about challenges, their circumstances, reported responses and perceived limitations. This orientation supported a contextual account that remained close to participants' experiences while allowing comparison across interviews (Doyle et al., 2020).

Related codes were examined together during theme development. At this stage, resource dependence theory, distributed leadership and self-determination theory informed interpretation. The analysis therefore combined data-led initial coding with theory-informed theme development. Resource dependence theory directed attention to access to resources and external assistance; distributed leadership supported consideration of coordination and staff involvement; and self-determination theory provided a cautious perspective on leaders' interpretations of programme appeal and participation. These concepts were not treated as directly measured constructs. For example, staff assistance did not by itself establish distributed leadership and reported attendance did not establish students' motivational states.

The five themes were developed as descriptive analytical categories organising related management concerns and their reported contexts. Theme development considered similarities and differences between accounts, the circumstances surrounding each concern and its relevance to the research questions. The categories were not presented as an explanatory model demonstrating causal relationships among constraints. Their interpretation also distinguished concerns described across several accounts from experiences developed mainly through individual participants' accounts. This explicit definition of the analytical purpose addresses the distinction between descriptive topic organisation and shared-meaning themes discussed by Braun and Clarke (2024) in Table 3.

Table 3. Phases of thematic analysis and their application

No.	Phase	Example
1.	Familiarisation with the data.	The researcher read all six transcripts in full to understand individual accounts and identify material relevant to co-curricular management.
2.	Development of initial codes.	Descriptive codes were developed from participants' explicit accounts of difficulties, circumstances, reported responses and perceived limitations.
3.	Development of candidate themes.	Related codes were grouped and compared. Resource dependence theory, distributed leadership and self-determination theory informed interpretation during this stage.
4.	Review of candidate themes.	Categories were considered against supporting material and differences between accounts. During revision, transport arrangements and contrasting participation concerns were examined to qualify broad interpretations.
5.	Definition and naming of themes.	Five descriptive categories were defined according to their management focus, contextual boundaries and contribution to the research questions. Participant-specific concerns were distinguished from those described across accounts.
6.	Development of the analytical account.	Findings were presented through analytical narrative and supporting quotations, distinguishing reported challenges, responses and limitations from researcher interpretations.

The analysis was undertaken by one researcher without collaborative coding or critical dialogue with another analyst. No separate analytical memos, formal codebook or reflexive journal were maintained. Intercoder agreement was not calculated because there was no second coder. Consequently, the account does not claim independent coding verification or a contemporaneous memo-based audit trail. Analytical transparency rests on the description of the procedures, the connection between quotations and interpretations and the worked examples developed during manuscript revision.

During revision, contrasting accounts were compared to qualify the interpretation of the themes. School Leader 3 described transport as manageable because a van remained available despite the school bus having broken down, whereas School Leader 6 described transport difficulties and the use of teachers' vehicles. This comparison qualified the interpretation that vehicle limitations necessarily created equivalent barriers across schools. Similarly, School Leader 1's concern about attracting participation differed from School Leader 2's concern about students missing lessons while participating extensively. These accounts represented different management circumstances and were not treated as interchangeable evidence of a single participation problem. Table 4 illustrates how selected extracts informed descriptive codes and interpretations during manuscript revision.

Table 4. Worked Analytical Examples Developed During Manuscript Revision

Interview extract	Descriptive code	Analytical interpretation	Theme placement
"…for transport, we use teachers' vehicles because we do not have an official school vehicle." [School Leader 6:231–234]	Use of teachers' vehicles when an official vehicle is unavailable	The participant describes an arrangement addressing transport limitations. The extract does not establish whether the arrangement was effective or sustainable. Staff assistance alone also does not demonstrate distributed leadership.	Planning and implementation coordination, with contextual relevance to material constraints.
"…our bus has actually broken down, but we have a van. So, taking students out is not a problem for us. I go along myself, and when teachers are asked to take students out, they are willing to help…" [School Leader 3:296–300]	Transport considered manageable through an available van and staff assistance	The participant reports that an alternative vehicle remained available despite the bus breakdown. This account qualifies the interpretation that vehicle problems necessarily restrict participation and provides a contrast with School Leader 6's reported transport difficulties.	Planning and implementation coordination, retaining the distinction between reported difficulties and manageable arrangements.

Movement between the analytical phases allowed interpretations to be reconsidered in relation to the available material. Analytical importance was assessed through the relevance, significance and context of participants' statements rather than frequency alone. The findings distinguish participants' explicit explanations from connections developed by the researcher and retain the limits of accounts concentrated within individual interviews. Researcher judgement remained central to this process, and the absence of collaborative scrutiny and separate reflexive records limits the documentation available for examining how assumptions influenced interpretation.

RESULT

The findings are presented through five descriptive themes concerning co-curricular management: planning and implementation coordination; financial, material and facility constraints; student participation and competing academic demands; perceived pressure to provide appealing activities; and parental and community support. These themes organise different management concerns without assuming that all participants experienced equivalent difficulties. In the extracts presented, the first three themes draw on more than one participant, while creativity and parental or community support are developed primarily through the accounts of School Leaders 1 and 6 respectively.

All quotations correspond to passages in the original interview transcripts. Extracts are attributed using the labels School Leader 1 to School Leader 6, followed by the relevant transcript lines. Lines were numbered consecutively within each individual transcript. The extracts illustrate concerns relevant to the research questions, provide contextual detail and show differences between participants' experiences. The accompanying narrative

distinguishes reported experiences and practices from possible arrangements and separates participants' explicit explanations from interpretations developed by the researcher.

Table 5 summarises the interpretation of each theme and identifies the sources of illustrative quotations. These identifiers refer to the extracts presented rather than all participants who may have discussed an issue. They therefore do not establish the prevalence or relative importance of a theme.

Table 5. Themes in school leaders' accounts of co-curricular management challenges

Theme	Bounded Interpretation	Supporting Participants
Planning and implementation coordination	Participants described different requirements for coordinating space, schedules and transport. School Leader 3 provided a contrasting account in which an available van and staff assistance made transport manageable.	School Leader 1 School Leader 3 School Leader 4 School Leader 6
Financial, material, and facility constraints	Participants reported funding limitations, equipment costs, facility problems and expenses associated with competitions. Some accounts described adjustments to provision or efforts to obtain additional resources.	School Leader 4 School Leader 5 School Leader 6
Student participation and competing academic demands	School Leader 1 described perceived limited interest, while School Leader 2 described missed lessons during extensive participation. School Leader 3 contributed contextual evidence concerning representation, progression and programme emphasis. These accounts do not describe an identical participation problem.	School Leader 1 School Leader 2 School Leader 3
Perceived Pressure to Provide Appealing Activities	School Leader 1 identified creativity and programme appeal as management expectations. This case-specific account does not establish a shared lack of creative capacity or demonstrate that appealing activities increased attendance.	School Leader 1
Parental and community support	School Leader 6 described difficulties in families providing participation items and perceived differences in parent–teacher association resources. This case-specific account does not establish parental unwillingness or a participation gradient by household income.	School Leader 6

Table 6 makes variation within the reported evidence more explicit. It distinguishes extracts describing concerns, a contrasting account of manageable arrangements and contextual material relevant to a theme. An empty entry indicates that no relevant extract is presented in this display; it does not establish that the participant had not experienced or discussed the issue.

Table 6. Coverage and Variation in the Reported Interview Extracts

Participant	Coordination	Resources and Facilities	Participation and Academic Demands	Perceived Pressure	Parental/ Community Support
School Leader 1	R	R*	R	R	—
School Leader 2	—	—	R	—	—
School Leader 3	V	C	C	—	—
School Leader 4	R	R	—	—	—
School Leader 5	—	R	—	—	—
School Leader 6	R	R	—	—	R

Note. R = an extract reports a concern relevant to the category; V = a contrasting account describes manageable arrangements; C = contextual material relevant to the category without supporting its full interpretation; = no relevant extract is presented in this display. R indicates a brief mention. Column headings abbreviate the themes listed in Table 5. The markers describe the extracts presented, not completely coded coverage, response frequency or the prevalence of experiences*

Some relationships between concerns were explicitly described within individual accounts. School Leader 4 linked a perceived limited PCG allocation with equipment shortages and the need to seek additional support for competition participation. School Leader 6 connected expensive equipment with activities being restricted to theoretical instruction. These participants' explanations differ from comparisons developed across accounts, such as contrasting School Leader 3's manageable transport arrangements with School Leader 6's transport difficulties. The latter represents the researcher's interpretation of variation between participants.

The distinction between reported practice and possible action is also retained. School Leader 4 identified hiring a van and a school bus as a possible arrangement when larger groups were involved. This statement does not confirm that the vehicles had been hired. Similarly, leaders' expectations about programme appeal are distinguished from evidence that an activity increased attendance. The following thematic accounts preserve these differences when examining reported challenges, responses and limitations.

Planning and Implementation Coordination

Planning co-curricular activities involved reconciling programme objectives with the practical conditions under which activities could take place. Participants described constraints associated with space, scheduling, and transport. These accounts indicated that implementation depended on coordination across several organisational requirements.

School Leader 1 described the difficulty of planning activities in a crowded school, where limited space complicated the organisation of student participation:

> "…the challenge is planning co-curricular activities for students in a crowded school. We have difficulties allocating space because we do not have places for the students to carry out their activities. There are also challenges concerning funding, programme direction, and achieving our objectives for student attendance... (School Leader 1:295–300)".

This account connected planning with both physical capacity and programme purpose. Limited space affected the arrangements that could be made, while concerns about attendance and programme direction required leaders to consider whether those

arrangements would achieve the intended objectives. Planning therefore involved bringing together available facilities, financial resources and expectations for participation.

School Leader 3 reported that the school bus had broken down but explained that a van remained available for transporting students to activities outside school. The participants consequently regarded transport as manageable. Personal involvement and teachers' willingness to assist with taking students to activities were also highlighted:

> "…our bus has actually broken down, but we have a van. So, taking students out is not a problem for us. I go along myself, and when teachers are asked to take students out, they are willing to help… (School Leader 3: 296–300)".

This account suggests that the availability of an alternative vehicle helped maintain transport provision despite the bus breakdown. The participant's involvement and teachers' reported willingness to assist also indicate staff support for off-site participation. The account demonstrates that a vehicle breakdown was not necessarily experienced as an unresolved transport barrier. Nevertheless, it does not establish whether the available arrangements could accommodate all activities or remain sufficient over time.

School Leader 4 described coordinating co-curricular activities around the end of classroom lessons and the departure of the final bus. The account included a break, gate closure and a deadline for completing activities. The participant presented these arrangements as following the school's standard operating procedure:

> "…we conduct the co-curricular activities according to the standard operating procedure. We start after classes finish at 1.20 p.m. The students have a break, and we close the gate so that they do not leave. We must finish before 4.00 p.m. because the last bus … is at 4.30 p.m... (School Leader 4:236–241)".

The account suggests that the final bus departure established a practical boundary for scheduling activities. It also indicates that coordination involved arrangements affecting when students could leave school. However, the reference to a standard operating procedure does not independently confirm formal authorisation or explain how student welfare was addressed. The extract provides no details about supervision during the break, parental communication or arrangements for students needing to leave earlier. Interpretation is therefore limited to the reported scheduling practice, while questions about supervision, departure and differing student needs remain unresolved. The quotation alone does not establish either that the arrangement was safe and equitable or that it constituted a policy violation.

School Leader 6 similarly identified after-school transport as an implementation challenge:

> "…one problem with co-curricular activities is that they take place after school. Once school hours have ended, we sometimes face difficulties in managing the vehicles and transport arrangements… (School Leader 6:197–201)".

School Leader 6 further explained that the school depended on teachers' vehicles:

> "…for transport, we use teachers' vehicles because we do not have an official school vehicle… (School Leader 6:231–234)".

Together, these accounts positioned transport as a recurring coordination issue. School Leader 4 emphasised the need to organise activities around an existing bus service, whereas School Leader 6 described dependence on vehicles made available by teachers. Both accounts

demonstrated how the feasibility of participation was connected to arrangements beyond the activity itself.

Financial, Material, and Facility Constraints

Financial constraints affected several aspects of co-curricular provision, including equipment purchases, participation in competitions and student incentives. Participants also distinguished between having facilities and having facilities that could be used effectively.

School Leader 4 identified cost as a challenge in obtaining equipment and supporting competition participation. The participant referred to PCG and associated the perceived limited allocation with the school's enrolment of just over 400 students. PCG is an established category of Malaysian school financial assistance:

> "…one of our issues is cost. The school has just over 400 students. … Our PCG allocation is small because much of it is based on the number of students. With around 400 students, the amount we receive is limited. Equipment is insufficient, and when we want to send students to competitions, we must seek support from various sources… (School Leader 4:251–258)".

The participant associated a perceived limited allocation with equipment shortages and the need for additional support. This reflects the leader's perspective rather than a verified assessment of the school's finances. The extract does not identify the PCG component, spending conditions or supplementary funding available, leaving unclear whether the difficulty concerned resource amounts, accessibility or governance. Seeking support indicates an effort to obtain resources but does not confirm that assistance was received. The account therefore does not establish that enrolment-based funding alone caused the difficulty or that a larger allocation would resolve it.

School Leader 5 highlighted the costs associated with participation beyond the school:

> "…when students go out to compete at higher levels, this involves the cost of transport, food, and getting around while they are away... (School Leader 5:250–252)".

This statement showed that participation involved several connected expenses. Opportunities to compete at higher levels require schools to consider the total cost of enabling students to attend, including travel and subsistence. Financial limitations also affected the activities that schools could offer. School Leader 6 explained that expensive equipment could restrict practical participation even when an allocation was received:

> "…even when we receive the full allocation, there are still things we must purchase ourselves. Some equipment is expensive, so for those activities, we can only cover the theory… (School Leader 6:254–257)".

The distinction between theoretical coverage and practical activity was significant. School Leader 6's account indicated that the presence of a programme or an allocation did not necessarily mean that students could experience the intended practical component. Equipment shortages could therefore affect the nature of the learning opportunities available. The condition of existing facilities presented a further challenge. School Leader 4 described subsidence affecting the usability of sports courts:

> "…the problem now is that the courts at the back have experienced subsidence. One can be used, but the other cannot. The construction is not sound; the materials are of poor quality. Whenever it rains, water collects there. The area looks attractive and spacious, but it is a pity… (School Leader 4:262–267)".

This account distinguished the appearance and size of a facility from its practical usability. School Leader 4 attributed the problem to construction quality and described water accumulation during rainfall. From the participant's perspective, the available infrastructure could not be fully incorporated into co-curricular provision.

School Leader 5 likewise differentiated between smaller equipment purchases and problems involving the playing field:

> "…we can still buy equipment, such as balls, a little at a time. The football field is a problem because the soil in this area is quite thick… (School Leader 5:265–267)".

The statement suggested that some material needs could be addressed incrementally, whereas difficulties associated with the field presented a different management problem. The reference to thick soil reflected the participant's description of the site condition. Financial constraints also influenced the use of incentives. School Leader 5 described hesitation about introducing rewards for competition achievements:

> "…I think the main co-curricular problem is money. Incentives for students have also not been very successful; we have only managed a little. These would be incentives for becoming champions or runners-up. I am reluctant to introduce them because they involve quite a lot of money… (School Leader 5:279–283)"

Here, financial capacity shaped to the extent to which the leader felt able to provide recognition through material incentives. Across these accounts, resource constraints affected the reach of participation, the practical content of activities, the usability of facilities and the provision of rewards.

Student Participation and Competing Academic Demands

Student participation presented different challenges across the accounts. School Leader 1 described limited interest and attendance, whereas School Leader 2 discussed the difficulty of accommodating extensive participation without interrupting academic learning. These perspectives indicated that effective management required attention to both encouraging participation and regulating its demands.

School Leader 1 associated students' limited interest with their intended educational pathways:

> "…many of my students prefer to go to private colleges. For them, attendance in co-curricular activities is not important. Whatever programmes we organise, they show little interest in attending. That was one of the issues identified in our analysis... (School Leader 1:305–309)".

School Leader 1 interpreted low participation in relation to the value students attached to co-curricular involvement within their plans. In this account, organising programmes did not automatically generate attendance. The management challenge concerned students' perceptions of the relevance of participation.

School Leader 2 represented an Integrated Fully Residential School implementing the Tahfiz Model Ulul Albab (TMUA). Within TMUA, Qur'anic memorisation forms part of formal educational provision alongside academic subjects. The participant expressed a commitment

to academic achievement, hafazan achievement and active co-curricular participation, while identifying missed classroom instruction during competitions as a coordination concern:

> "…our students want to take part in everything, and our teachers want to participate in everything. This creates some conflict with academic achievement. When students take part in everything, they miss classes because they are competing elsewhere. The challenge is how to maintain excellent academic achievement and excellent hafazan achievement while allowing them to remain active in co-curricular activities… (School Leader 2:183–189)".

The TMUA setting gives this account a specific institutional context: the leader sought to coordinate competition participation with academic learning and formal Qur'anic memorisation commitments. The participant explicitly identified missed classes, but the reference to academic achievement expresses a concern about maintaining standards rather than demonstrating a measured decline in attainment.

School Leader 2 further explained that accompanying teachers could not necessarily provide the subject support students required:

> "…when students go out, they miss some classroom learning, even though they may study independently while they are away. The accompanying teacher is not necessarily a chemistry teacher, for example. Students may have chemistry, physics, biology, and other subjects, but the teacher accompanying them cannot necessarily help with those lessons… (School Leader 2:199–204)".

This account highlighted the difference between accompanying students and supporting continuity in subject learning. The presence of a teacher during an external activity did not guarantee access to the subject expertise needed to address missed lessons.

School Leader 3 described students' co-curricular involvement primarily in terms of representing the school. The participant acknowledged that progression to higher levels had not yet been achieved and expressed a commitment to continue pursuing this aspiration. Religious activities were identified as the main emphasis of the provision described:

> "…my students' participation is mainly about representing [the school]. So far, I have not been able to take them to a higher level, but I will continue trying. In my case, we focus more on religious activities… (School Leader 3: 267–271)".

This account suggests a distinction between students' current involvement and the participants' aspirations for further progression. The emphasis on religious activities provides contextual information about the opportunities prioritised in this account. However, the participant did not specify the factors limiting progression or explain how programme priorities were determined. The excerpt therefore supports an interpretation of perceived limits to progression and a stated programme emphasis, rather than a conclusion that religious activities constrained other co-curricular opportunities.

Taken together, the accounts illustrated different participation-related management concerns. School Leader 1 emphasised difficulty securing attendance, while School Leader 2 described challenges coordinating active participation with academic learning and formal hafazan commitments. School Leader 3 described participation mainly in terms of school representation, expressed aspirations for progression to higher levels and identified religious activities as a programme emphasis. The theme therefore encompassed leaders' concerns about encouraging participation, supporting progression and coordinating involvement with educational priorities. These accounts reflected distinct school circumstances rather than a participation problem shared equally across participants.

Perceived Pressure to Provide Appealing Activities

This theme captures School Leader 1's perception that co-curricular activities should be creative, innovative and sufficiently appealing to encourage attendance. It concerns expectations surrounding programme design and delivery, including an attendance-related performance expectation. The evidence is grounded in this participant's account and does not establish a shared deficit in teachers' competence or demonstrate that programme appeals for increased participation.

School Leader 1 identified encouraging creativity and innovation among teachers and students as a management challenge. The emphasis was on how participants conducted co-curricular activities:

> "…another challenge is how to encourage teachers and students to be more creative and innovative when carrying out co-curricular activities... (School Leader 1:318–320)".

The statement suggests that the leader regarded creativity and innovation as desirable features of activity delivery that required encouragement. However, it does not specify which activities needed improvement, what changes were introduced or what prevented teachers and students from developing new approaches. Within this theme, the account supports a perceived programme-design expectation rather than a demonstrated lack of creative ability or commitment.

School Leader 1 also connected the attractiveness of activities with an expectation to encourage attendance. Reference to a key performance indicator positioned with the programme appeal as a management responsibility:

> "…their challenge is considerable because they must make sure their activities are attractive enough to encourage more students to attend school. That is their key performance indicator… (School Leader 1:333–336)".

Within School Leader 1 indicates perceived pressure to make activities appealing in response to an attendance-related expectation. The finding therefore concerns the leader's expectation of programme appeal, rather than a verified relationship between innovation and attendance. This case-specific concern differs from School Leader 2's account of extensive participation, highlighting different management circumstances rather than a common motivational problem across schools.

The evidence for this theme was concentrated in School Leader 1's account. It indicated perceived pressure to make co-curricular activities creative. The account highlights a programme-design concern, without demonstrating weaknesses in teachers' competence or confirming that attractive activities improved attendance.

Parental and community support

School Leader 6's account highlighted how co-curricular participation was connected to resources available within families and the wider community. The challenges described concerned parents' ability to provide necessary items and differences in the support available through parent–teacher associations.

School Leader 6 explained that some families could not provide the items required for their children's participation:

> "…sometimes parents cannot provide the necessary items for their children. When they cannot provide them, the children come to school wearing only T-shirts. To participate at international, state, district, or school level, they need those items… (School Leader 6:212–217)".

The account indicated that participation could require resources beyond those supplied directly by the school. For some students, obtaining the necessary clothing or equipment presented a practical difficulty. The management issue therefore included the extent to which students could meet the material requirements associated with activities.

School Leader 6 also described differences in the support available through parent–teacher associations:

> "…some parent–teacher associations are very strong and supportive, but others are influenced by their local environment and location. For example, there may be fewer people from the corporate sector or with higher levels of education. The way those associations operate may differ from those in communities with greater resources... (School Leader 6:238–245)".

School Leader 6 interpreted these differences in relation to the resources and connections available within the surrounding community. The account suggested that schools could not necessarily draw on equivalent levels of external assistance. The support available through a parent–teacher association was understood as connected to its local circumstances.

Read alongside the account of families' difficulties in providing necessary items, this theme highlighted the importance of practical capacity. Participation's efforts to support participation operated within a wider setting in which households and community organisations had differing resources. External support could assist with co-curricular provision, but the capacity to provide that support varied.

Across the five themes, the accounts presented co-curricular management as the coordination of educational intentions with the conditions required for participation. Space and transport-shaped implementation; funding and facilities affected the activities available; students' priorities and academic commitments influenced involvement; and programme appeal and community resources affected the support that could be mobilised.

The themes also intersected. Transport involved both scheduling and expenditure, while equipment needs connected school funding with family resources. Attendance concerns were related to students' perceived priorities and the attractiveness of activities. These relationships suggested that the challenges described by school leaders were experienced through connected decisions about access, resources, programme quality, and continuity of learning.

DISCUSSION

This study explored the challenges of secondary school co-curricular management from the perspectives of five principals and one senior assistant. The findings suggested that effective management depended on the interaction between organisational arrangements, available resources, students' educational needs and support from families and communities. School leaders' accounts showed how difficulties in one area could influence other aspects of provision. Financial limitations affected transport and practical activities, transport availability constrained scheduling and competition commitments created challenges in maintaining

academic continuity. The significance of these findings lay in explaining how leaders encountered and negotiated these interconnected demands.

The accounts of School Leader 1, School Leader 4 and School Leader 6 illustrated the relationship between planning and the practical conditions enabling participation. Limited space, activity schedules and transport arrangements influenced what schools could implement. These concerns were consistent with Andermo et al. (2025), whose qualitative study of additional physical activity in Swedish secondary schools identified scheduling, facilities, management support and funded teacher time as important implementation conditions. Although the institutional context differed, both studies suggested that programme intentions needed to be supported by workable organisational arrangements. The present findings added a specific explanation of how transport availability could establish boundaries around activity timetables and students' opportunities to participate.

School Leader 6's description of using teachers' vehicles further demonstrated the importance of informal support. Such arrangements indicated staff responsiveness to students' needs, while suggesting that programme continuity could depend on individual availability. This raised a management question about the reliability of the arrangements supporting participation. Leaders could plan an activity and secure student interest, yet implementation could remain uncertain if transport or other essential support was unavailable. Coordination therefore involved assessing the feasibility of activities alongside their intended educational value.

These operational difficulties were closely connected to financial and material constraints. School Leader 4 described limitations involving equipment and facilities, while School Leader 6 explained that equipment shortages could restrict activities to theoretical instruction. These accounts suggested that resources influenced both the availability of activities and the learning experiences provided within them. Resource dependence theory offered a useful perspective for interpreting this relationship. Hillman et al. (2009) explained how organisations depended on external resources and developed relationships to manage uncertainty. Applied to the present findings, this perspective helped explain leaders' efforts to obtain assistance beyond their formal allocations. This interpretation did not imply that resource dependence theory had been tested in the study.

The findings also indicated that resource constraints required differentiated responses. Equipment shortages, transport expenses and facility deterioration affected provision in different ways. Funding a competition might enable a particular group of students to participate without improving the equipment available for routine activities. Similarly, possessing a sports facility did not guarantee its usability, as illustrated by School Leader 4's account of a court that could not be used. These distinctions suggested that resource planning is needed to consider the purpose, condition and accessibility of resources alongside their availability.

The relationship between participation and academic responsibilities introduced another dimension to these management challenges. School Leader 2 expressed concern about students missing lessons while participating in competitions and about accompanying teachers' capacity to provide subject-specific assistance. These concerns partly converged with Fredricks (2012), whose longitudinal study identified generally positive associations between extracurricular participation and academic outcomes, alongside nonlinear patterns suggesting difficulties at higher levels of participation breadth and intensity. This evidence supported a qualified interpretation: participation could provide educational benefits while creating challenges under conditions.

However, Mahoney and Vest (2012) found that greater organised activity participation during adolescence predicted several positive outcomes in young adulthood and was unrelated to negative adjustment after relevant controls. This contrasting evidence helped clarify the contribution of the present study. The leaders' accounts concerned immediate scheduling and learning-support difficulties, whereas Mahoney and Vest examined longer-term developmental outcomes. These findings could therefore coexist. The present study highlighted circumstances in which participation required stronger academic coordination; it did not establish that co-curricular involvement caused lower achievement.

Participation difficulties also varied within the leaders' accounts. School Leader 2 discussed extensive involvement, whereas School Leader 1 described challenges in attracting students and questioned the value some students attached to activities. This variation suggested that management responses needed to consider both participation opportunities and students' reasons for becoming involved. Verner-Filion et al. (2025) found that autonomous motivation for extracurricular activities was associated with more favourable school functioning through relationships involving academic motivation and psychological need satisfaction. Although their cross-sectional study did not establish causality, it supported examining whether students experienced activities as personally meaningful. In the present study, explanations of students' motivations remained leaders' interpretations and would require further investigation with students themselves.

This distinction between access and motivation was particularly relevant to School Leader 5's concern about financial support for rewards. Funding could serve different functions: transport and required equipment could enable participation, while prizes were intended to encourage involvement or recognise achievement. Howard et al. (2021) found that intrinsic motivation and personally valued educational goals were associated with favourable outcomes, whereas externally regulated motivation was not associated with performance or persistence. Their findings did not establish that school prizes were ineffective. They nevertheless suggested that additional rewards alone should not be assumed to generate sustained engagement. Leaders' decisions about incentives could therefore be considered alongside students' interests, perceived competence and understanding of an activity's purpose.

School Leader 1's emphasis on creativity and innovation extended this concern to the design of activities. Under the theme Perceived Pressure to Provide Appealing Activities, this account is interpreted as a perceived expectation to make programmes attractive in response to attendance-related performance expectations. The evidence was specific to School Leader 1 and did not establish a general weakness in teachers' creativity or commitment. Engaging provision required attention to what students experienced during participation. Durlak et al. (2010) found that after-school programmes designed to develop personal and social skills produced benefits across several outcomes, with sequenced, active, focused and explicit practices moderating several programme effects. This evidence supported combining appealing activities with purposeful learning opportunities. However, those intervention findings do not demonstrate that the activities described in the present interviews incorporated these practices or produced similar benefits. The present findings also showed why implementation capacity mattered: when equipment shortages restricted practical involvement, teachers could face difficulties translating creative ideas into meaningful experiences. This connection represents the researchers' interpretation across different participants' accounts; School Leader 1 did not explicitly link programme appeal to equipment shortages or describe concrete programme redesign.

Evaluating these experiences requires a broader understanding of participation. Bohnert et al. (2010) distinguished between breadth, intensity, duration or consistency and engagement in organised activities. Their review suggested that attendance figures alone could conceal important differences in students' experiences. This was relevant to School Leader 1's aspiration to use attractive activities to encourage school attendance. Nevertheless, the expression "attend school" did not clearly distinguish general school attendance from attendance at co-curricular sessions. Neither form of attendance, by itself, establishes sustained interest or autonomous motivation. However, Kremer et al. (2015) reported small, non-significant average effects on school attendance in their meta-analysis of after-school programmes for at-risk young people. Although school attendance differed from attendance at co-curricular sessions, this evidence indicated that anticipated benefits needed to be evaluated. Programme success could therefore be assessed through sustained involvement, meaningful engagement and students' experiences alongside attendance. School Leader 2's account of extensive participation further indicates that attracting participants was not a uniform concern across the schools. Seeking student feedback and examining transport, costs and scheduling before attributing attendance difficulties to programme appeal are therefore proposed management considerations, rather than approaches evaluated in this study.

The conditions supporting participation also extended beyond school boundaries. School Leader 6's accounts of difficulties purchasing required items and variations in parent–teacher association support suggested that household and community resources shaped opportunities. Owen et al. (2022) similarly identified socioeconomic disparities in organised sport participation among children and adolescents in high-income countries. However, they did not find the same significant pattern for leisure-time unstructured physical activity. This distinction supported an interpretation centred on the costs and requirements of organised participation, rather than assuming that students from financially constrained households were less interested in activities.

The present findings also cautioned against interpreting limited financial contributions as limited parental commitment. Families could support their children's involvement while being unable to afford the associated expenses. Differences in community contributions could similarly reflect unequal access to financial resources and professional networks. Consequently, external fundraising could potentially produce uneven opportunities when school communities differed in their capacity to aid. This possibility was an implication of the accounts rather than a measured difference between schools. It nevertheless supported considering students' needs when allocating assistance and developing partnerships.

Taken together, the accounts identified reported obstacles and selected adaptations in organising co-curricular activities. Using teachers' vehicles was a reported response to transport limitations, but its effectiveness and sustainability were not established. Attendance concerns also allow competing explanations, including programme appeal, financial barriers and transport schedules. Similarly, equipment and facility difficulties may involve funding levels, spending restrictions or maintenance needs; the interviews did not establish the relative contribution of these factors. Resource dependence theory directs attention to who controls necessary resources and what alternatives are available, offering an interpretive perspective on how reliance on staff-owned vehicles or outside assistance may constrain leaders' choices(Ozturk, 2021). Such dependence cannot be established from shortages alone, and the accounts provide limited evidence about how support was negotiated or sustained. Coordinated transport and support for missed lessons are therefore practical implications

proposed by the researchers, rather than interventions evaluated in this study. The contribution lies in clarifying reported management concerns and possible explanations, without establishing students' motivation, improved outcomes or a validated model of interacting constraints.

Several practical implications followed. Activity schedules could be coordinated with transport availability, competition commitments and arrangements for missed lessons. Resource reviews could distinguish routine participation costs from equipment and maintenance needs. Student feedback could inform programme design, while assistance with required items could reduce financial barriers. These proposed responses arose from the findings, but their effectiveness would require evaluation.

These findings should be interpreted within the scope of interviews that explored school management challenges broadly. The depth of co-curricular discussion depended on participants' responses and subsequent probing, resulting in uneven coverage across the six accounts. An issue's absence from an interview therefore does not establish that the participant did not experience it. The evidence was also limited to leaders' perspectives and did not directly represent students' motivations or teachers' and parents' experiences. Reported practices and their consequences were not independently established through the interviews, while comparisons supported contextual interpretations rather than causal explanations. Concerns illustrated by individual participants should consequently remain case specific. Within these boundaries, the accounts suggested that resource shortages did not invariably prevent participation when alternative arrangements were available, while arrangements enabling participation did not necessarily ensure continuity of classroom learning.

Future research should evaluate specific leadership responses using evidence beyond additional interviews. Revised timetables could be examined through attendance records, transport availability and student feedback. Assistance with required participation items could be assessed by documenting eligibility, recipients and subsequent participation, while arrangements for missed lessons could be examined through records of missed instruction and learning support. These are possible research designs rather than interventions validated by the present study, and their feasibility would depend on school authority, funding and external support. In schools with formal TMUA programmes, further inquiry could directly investigate how leaders interpret institutional expectations and prioritise religious learning, academic instruction and co-curricular opportunities. Such research could clarify whether arrangements provide equitable, sustainable participation while supporting continuity of learning.

CONCLUSION

This study examined co-curricular management through interviews with five secondary school principals and one senior assistant. Its contribution is a contextual distinction between reported challenges, arrangements described in response and concerns that remained unresolved. Some relationships were explicitly articulated by participants: School Leader 4 linked perceived funding limitations with equipment shortages and efforts to obtain additional support, while School Leader 2 connected competition-related absences with concerns about maintaining academic and hafazan learning. Through comparison across accounts, the researchers further distinguished resource shortages from practical barriers to participation and arrangements enabling participation from support for continuity of learning. These distinctions generate two propositions for further investigation: resource shortages

may remain manageable where suitable alternatives are available and arrangements that enable participation may leave missed instruction unresolved. Both propositions require examination through observations, school records and the perspectives of students, teachers and parents. The interviews did not establish students' motivation, changes in achievement or the effectiveness of proposed management responses. The study therefore offers a bounded account of leadership challenges and reported responses, whose feasibility, equity and sustainability require evaluation within school contexts.

The findings connect implementation conditions with organisational dependence on resources and relationships. They also locate concerns about extensive participation within immediate coordination and learning-support demands, complementing differing evidence on longer-term educational outcomes. Attention to autonomous motivation and purposeful activity experiences supports examining the quality of engagement alongside attendance. Anticipated attendance benefits require evaluation, while household and community resources warrant consideration when assessing equitable access.

The practical implications concern coordinated scheduling, assistance with participation costs, resource allocation according to need, engaging activity design and arrangements for missed learning. These proposals arise from leaders' accounts and require evaluation in practice. Research incorporating students, teachers and parents, together with observations and school records, could examine how these management responses influence participation and continuity of learning across different school contexts**.**

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