

From Practice to Purpose: Profiling Identity, Discipline, and Belonging through Participation in a Malaysian School Brass Band

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.1014MG0013>

Received: 06 January 2026; Accepted: 13 January 2026; Published: 24 January 2026

ABSTRACT

Co-curricular activities play an important role in supporting holistic student development, yet their educational value is often underrepresented in empirical research. In Malaysian schools, music-based co-curricular programmes such as brass bands are commonly evaluated through performance outcomes rather than through their contribution to students' identity formation, discipline, and sense of belonging. This study aims to profile how sustained participation in a Malaysian secondary school brass band functions as an educational practice that shapes students' personal and social development. Adopting a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews, rehearsal observations, and reflective field notes involving students who had participated in the brass band for at least one academic year. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns related to identity development, disciplined practice, and social belonging. The findings reveal that brass band participation contributes to (a) the construction of positive student identity beyond academic achievement, (b) the internalisation of discipline through collective responsibility, and (c) the development of strong peer belonging and emotional support. This study highlights the pedagogical significance of co-curricular music programmes and supports their recognition as meaningful spaces for human-centred education. The findings provide practical insights for school leaders and educators seeking to strengthen holistic learning through structured co-curricular engagement.

Keywords: Co-curricular education; student identity; discipline; sense of belonging; music education; Malaysian schools

Educational success has long been defined through measurable academic outcomes such as examination results, grades, and curriculum mastery. This achievement-oriented paradigm has shaped schooling systems to prioritise cognitive performance, often at the expense of students' social, emotional, and moral development. While academic achievement remains essential, an overemphasis on examinable outcomes risks marginalising the broader educational processes through which students construct identity, develop discipline, and experience a sense of belonging within school communities.

Contemporary educational scholarship increasingly recognises learning as a holistic and socially situated process. Students do not merely acquire knowledge in classrooms; they negotiate meaning, values, and selfunderstanding through participation in everyday school practices. Co-curricular activities, therefore, represent an important yet under-examined pedagogical space where such developmental processes occur organically.

In the Malaysian education system, co-curricular participation is formally positioned as a pillar of holistic education. Nevertheless, in practice, co-curricular programmes are frequently perceived as supplementary activities valued for school representation, competition, or compliance with policy requirements rather than for

their intrinsic educational contribution. As a result, the learning that occurs through sustained participation in co-curricular activities is often rendered invisible in academic discourse.

Among various co-curricular programmes, school music ensembles such as brass bands offer a particularly rich learning environment. Participation requires discipline, perseverance, teamwork, emotional regulation, and collective responsibility. Yet, scholarly attention has largely focused on performance outcomes or musical skills, leaving the broader developmental impact of such programmes insufficiently explored. This study argues that brass band participation should be understood not merely as musical training but as a meaningful educational practice that shapes students' identity, discipline, and sense of belonging.

Background of the Study

Co-curricular education has been widely acknowledged as a mechanism for fostering holistic student development. Research has shown that structured extracurricular involvement can enhance motivation, social competence, and school engagement (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Fredricks & Eccles, 2006). More recent studies emphasise that learning through participation enables students to develop transferable life skills such as self-regulation, responsibility, and collaboration (Mahoney, Vandell, Simpkins, & Zarrett, 2009).

Music-based co-curricular activities occupy a distinctive position within this landscape. Unlike short-term clubs or episodic programmes, school music ensembles require continuous rehearsal, long-term commitment, and collective performance goals. Studies in music education have demonstrated positive associations between ensemble participation and students' confidence, emotional expression, and social bonding (Hallam, 2015; Creech et al., 2020). Participation in group music-making has also been linked to enhanced wellbeing and peer connectedness, particularly among adolescents.

However, much of the existing literature conceptualises music education through either a skills-based lens or a psychological outcomes framework. Quantitative studies frequently measure constructs such as motivation or self-esteem, offering limited insight into how these qualities are formed through lived experience. Moreover, many studies are situated in Western contexts, with limited attention to Southeast Asian or Malaysian schooling environments.

Within the Malaysian context, research on co-curricular education has predominantly focused on policy implementation, student participation rates, or academic correlations. There remains a lack of qualitative, practice-based studies that document how students experience co-curricular participation as part of their everyday schooling. In particular, how sustained involvement in school music programmes contributes to students' sense of identity, discipline, and belonging remains underexplored.

Problem Statement

Despite policy recognition of co-curricular activities as essential to holistic education, their pedagogical value is often underestimated in school practice and academic research. Co-curricular programmes are frequently treated as peripheral to "real learning," resulting in limited institutional support and scholarly attention.

In the case of school brass bands, existing research tends to prioritise musical performance, competition outcomes, or technical proficiency. Such emphases obscure the broader educational processes that unfold through regular rehearsal, peer interaction, and collective responsibility. Consequently, students' voices and lived experiences within these programmes remain largely absent from empirical literature.

Furthermore, while concepts such as identity development, discipline, and sense of belonging are widely recognised as critical to student engagement and wellbeing, they are seldom examined together within cocurricular music contexts. Most studies isolate these constructs or measure them through surveys, offering limited understanding of how they are intertwined and cultivated through participation in everyday school practices.

This lack of practice-based profiling creates a significant gap in educational research. Without empirical insights into how co-curricular music participation shapes students' personal and social development, the educational

contribution of such programmes risks being undervalued, underfunded, and marginalised within schooling systems.

Research Gap

A review of existing literature reveals three key gaps:

i. Contextual Gap

There is a scarcity of studies situated in Malaysian secondary school contexts that explore co-curricular music participation beyond policy or performance perspectives.

ii. Methodological Gap

Existing research is dominated by quantitative and outcome-oriented approaches, with limited qualitative profiling of students' lived experiences.

iii. Conceptual Gap

Identity, discipline, and sense of belonging are often examined as separate constructs, rather than as interconnected dimensions developed through sustained participation in co-curricular practices.

This study addresses these gaps by adopting a qualitative, practice-based approach to profile how participation in a Malaysian school brass band contributes to students' identity formation, internalised discipline, and sense of belonging.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to profile the educational significance of participation in a Malaysian secondary school brass band by examining how such involvement shapes students' identity, discipline, and sense of belonging.

Specifically, the study aims to:

- Explore students' experiences of identity development through sustained brass band participation;
- Examine how discipline is internalised through collective rehearsal and responsibility;
- Understand how a sense of belonging is constructed within the brass band community.

By foregrounding students' voices and experiences, this study seeks to reposition co-curricular music participation as a meaningful pedagogical practice rather than a supplementary school activity.

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to educational research and practice in several important ways. From a theoretical perspective, the study extends understanding of learning as participation by illustrating how identity, discipline, and belonging are co-constructed through co-curricular practices. It challenges narrow academic-centric definitions of learning and highlights the pedagogical richness of non-classroom contexts.

From a practical perspective, the findings provide insights for school leaders and educators on the developmental value of music-based co-curricular programmes. Recognising brass bands as sites of holistic learning may inform more balanced school policies and resource allocation.

From a policy perspective, this study offers empirical support for strengthening co-curricular education as an integral component of student development, aligning with national aspirations for holistic and values-based education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review critically examines prior studies related to (a) co-curricular participation as educational practice, (b) identity formation through music and group participation, (c) discipline as an internalised learning outcome, and (d) sense of belonging in school-based collective activities. The review highlights conceptual, methodological, and contextual limitations in existing research, thereby establishing the need for a practicebased profiling study within the Malaysian school brass band context.

Co-curricular Activities as Sites of Learning

Co-curricular activities have long been recognised as influential spaces for student development beyond formal classroom instruction. Early research positioned extracurricular participation as a predictor of academic achievement and positive youth outcomes (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Fredricks & Eccles, 2006). These studies demonstrated that structured activities could enhance motivation, persistence, and school engagement.

However, critics argue that such outcome-oriented approaches reduce co-curricular participation to instrumental value measured primarily through its correlation with academic success rather than recognising it as a meaningful educational practice in its own right (Mahoney et al., 2009). Recent scholarship has shifted towards viewing learning as participation, emphasising that students develop dispositions, identities, and values through engagement in social practices rather than solely through instruction (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998).

Within this perspective, co-curricular activities are not peripheral but central to how students experience schooling. They provide authentic contexts for collaboration, responsibility, and self-regulation. Nevertheless, despite this theoretical advancement, empirical studies particularly in Asian contexts remain limited in documenting how co-curricular participation contributes to students' lived educational experiences.

Identity Formation through Participation in Music Ensembles

Identity development is increasingly understood as a dynamic, socially constructed process shaped through participation, recognition, and interaction (Gee, 2000). In educational settings, identity is not merely an internal trait but emerges through students' engagement in practices where they are seen, valued, and acknowledged.

Music ensembles offer rich contexts for identity construction. Studies in music education suggest that participation in group music-making supports the development of musical identity, self-confidence, and agency (Hallam, 2015; McPherson, Davidson, & Faulkner, 2016). Ensemble participation enables students to negotiate roles, develop competence, and experience collective achievement.

However, much of the existing literature focuses narrowly on *musical identity* or talent development, often privileging high-achieving or specialist music students (Creech et al., 2020). This emphasis marginalises the experiences of ordinary school students who participate in music programmes not as aspiring musicians, but as learners seeking belonging and self-definition. Furthermore, studies rarely explore how music participation reshapes students' broader school identity, particularly in relation to confidence, recognition, and self-worth.

In the Malaysian context, research on music education remains limited and often concentrates on curriculum implementation or performance standards. There is a lack of qualitative inquiry into how participation in school music ensembles contributes to students' identity formation within everyday schooling.

Discipline as an Internalised Educational Outcome

Discipline is traditionally framed within schools as behavioural compliance, rule enforcement, and external control. Such perspectives conceptualise discipline as something imposed upon students rather than cultivated through meaningful engagement. Contemporary educational theorists, however, argue that discipline can be internalised when students participate in practices that require responsibility, self-regulation, and commitment (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Co-curricular activities particularly those involving collective performance offer natural environments for the development of internalised discipline. In music ensembles, discipline is embedded in routine rehearsal, attentiveness, punctuality, and accountability to peers. Studies indicate that students involved in structured group activities demonstrate stronger self-discipline and persistence (Larson, 2000; Durlak et al., 2011).

Despite these findings, existing research often treats discipline as a secondary or implicit outcome. Few studies examine how students themselves interpret and experience discipline within co-curricular contexts. Moreover, discipline is rarely explored as a relational construct developed through responsibility towards others rather than as individual self-control. This represents a significant conceptual gap, particularly in understanding discipline within collective music practices.

Sense of Belonging in Group-Based School Activities

A sense of belonging is widely recognised as a critical factor influencing student engagement, wellbeing, and retention (Goodenow, 1993; Allen et al., 2018). Belonging emerges when students feel accepted, valued, and connected within their school communities. Research consistently shows that students with a strong sense of belonging are more motivated, resilient, and emotionally secure.

Group-based activities such as sports teams, clubs, and music ensembles provide fertile ground for the development of belonging. Through shared goals, challenges, and emotional experiences, students form bonds that extend beyond academic interactions. Music ensembles, in particular, have been associated with social bonding and emotional synchrony, fostering deep interpersonal connections (Kirschner & Tomasello, 2010).

However, much of the belonging literature relies on survey-based measures that capture belonging as a static psychological state. Such approaches offer limited insight into how belonging is constructed, negotiated, and sustained through daily practices. Qualitative, practice-based studies that foreground students' voices are needed to understand belonging as a lived and relational experience within co-curricular settings.

Synthesis of Literature and Identified Research Gap

The reviewed literature highlights the educational potential of co-curricular participation, music ensemble involvement, internalised discipline, and sense of belonging. Nevertheless, several critical gaps remain.

First, there is a contextual gap, as few studies examine co-curricular music participation within Malaysian secondary schools. Second, a methodological gap exists, with most studies adopting quantitative or outcomedriven approaches that fail to capture students' lived experiences. Third, a conceptual gap persists, as identity, discipline, and belonging are often examined in isolation rather than as interconnected dimensions shaped through sustained participation.

Importantly, there is a lack of practice-based profiling studies that document how ordinary school music programmes function as meaningful educational spaces. Without such evidence, the pedagogical value of cocurricular music participation risks being underestimated within policy and practice.

Positioning of the Present Study

Responding to these gaps, the present study adopts a qualitative, practice-based approach to profile how participation in a Malaysian school brass band contributes to students' identity formation, internalised discipline, and sense of belonging. By foregrounding students' voices and everyday experiences, this study seeks to reposition co-curricular music participation as an integral component of holistic education.

METHODOLOGY

This section explains the research design, philosophical orientation, sampling strategy, data collection techniques, data analysis procedures, trustworthiness strategies, and ethical considerations. The approach follows a qualitative, practice-based profiling design, appropriate for exploring complex lived experiences within natural educational settings.

Research Paradigm and Design

This study adopts a qualitative case study design, anchored in an interpretive paradigm that seeks to understand how students make meaning of their participation in a school brass band. Qualitative inquiry prioritises depth over breadth and is well-suited to exploring subjective experiences, identities, and relational phenomena that cannot be captured through quantitative instruments alone. Qualitative research facilitates contextualised, nuanced understandings of how educational practices shape students' internalisation of identity, discipline, and belonging (see reflective educational research arguments in Lim, 2025).

Context and Participants

The research was conducted in a Malaysian public secondary school with an established brass band programme include students who had been involved in the brass band for at least one academic year to ensure rich, experience-based data. Purposive sampling is consistent with qualitative research traditions that seek information-rich cases rather than representativeness (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

A total of 8–10 brass band members from different instrumental sections (e.g., brass, woodwind, percussion) were invited to participate. Selection criteria also considered diversity in gender and participation intensity (lead roles, section leaders, core members). This enabled variation in perspectives while maintaining consistency in the practice context.

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection incorporated three complementary qualitative methods to provide triangulated evidence:

Semi-Structured Interviews

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with students to explore their perceptions, reflections, and emotional experiences arising from brass band participation. Semi-structured interviews enable flexibility while ensuring that key phenomena identity, discipline, belonging are addressed across participants.

Participant Observations

Naturalistic observations were conducted during band rehearsals, sectional practices, and performance preparations. Observations provided contextual data on group interactions, discipline routines, rehearsal norms, and behavioural patterns that are not always articulated in interviews.

Document and Artefact Review

Programme documents such as rehearsal schedules, performance logs, and band handbooks were analysed to understand formal expectations and practices. Artefacts such as performance photos and uniform traditions were examined to illuminate symbolic dimensions of identity and belonging. Combining multiple data sources enhanced analytical depth and interpretive validity.

Data Analysis Procedure

Data analysis followed a reflexive thematic narrative approach to capture how students constructed meaning around their experiences in the brass band. Interview transcripts, observation field notes, and artefact records were first subjected to repeated readings to achieve data familiarisation. Initial coding was conducted inductively, focusing on narrative segments that reflected experiences of self-perception, responsibility, behavioural regulation, peer interaction, and emotional attachment.

Codes were then iteratively clustered into broader thematic categories through constant comparison across participants and data sources. This process enabled the identification of patterned meanings that transcended

individual accounts while preserving contextual nuance. Themes were refined through recursive movement between data, codes, and emerging interpretations to ensure conceptual coherence and explanatory clarity.

Rather than treating narratives as isolated stories, the analysis emphasised how shared practices (e.g., rehearsals, performances, peer accountability) functioned as sites through which identity, discipline, and belonging were co-constructed. This analytic orientation is consistent with contemporary qualitative research that views meaning as socially and relationally produced within practice contexts.

Researcher Reflexivity

Researcher reflexivity was actively maintained throughout the study. Reflexive field notes were kept during data collection and analysis to document assumptions, emotional responses, and interpretive decisions. This reflexive practice enabled the researcher to critically examine positionality and minimise the imposition of preconceived interpretations on participants' narratives. Reflexivity was treated not as bias elimination but as an integral component of interpretive transparency and analytical rigor.

Trustworthiness and Methodological Rigor

Multiple strategies were employed to enhance the credibility, dependability, and trustworthiness of the findings. Data triangulation was achieved through the integration of interviews, observations, and document analysis, allowing convergence of evidence across sources. Member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary thematic interpretations with participants to ensure that the findings resonated with their lived experiences.

Peer debriefing with qualitative research scholars provided external scrutiny of coding decisions and theme development, strengthening interpretive validity. An audit trail documenting analytical steps, coding iterations, and theme refinement was maintained to ensure methodological transparency.

Collectively, these strategies ensured that the findings were grounded in participants' narratives, analytically rigorous, and ethically robust, thereby enhancing the study's credibility and transferability within similar educational contexts.

Ethical Considerations

This research adhered to rigorous ethical standards. Prior ethical clearance was obtained from the relevant institutional review board, and permission was granted by the Ministry of Education Malaysia and the school administration. Participants and their guardians provided informed consent and assent, respectively. Confidentiality was strictly maintained by anonymising participant identifiers and securely storing data. Participants understood their rights to withdraw at any time without penalty.

The qualitative profiling design enabled a holistic and contextualised exploration of how brass band participation shapes identity, self-discipline, and belonging among secondary school students. By combining interviews, observations, and document review, this methodology served the dual goals of depth (individual lived experience) and robustness (triangulated evidence), consistent with high-quality practice-based research in education.

FINDINGS

The analysis revealed three interconnected themes that profile how participation in the school brass band contributed to students' identity formation, internalised discipline, and sense of belonging. Rather than emerging as isolated outcomes, these dimensions developed simultaneously through sustained engagement in collective musical practice.

Identity Formation through Recognition and Purpose

Participants consistently described a transformation in how they perceived themselves within the school community following sustained involvement in the brass band. Many students entered the programme with

limited confidence and minimal recognition beyond academic labels. Over time, participation in rehearsals and performances enabled them to develop a sense of purpose and identity grounded in contribution rather than comparison.

Students reported that wearing the band uniform, performing during school events, and representing the school in public contexts fostered a sense of pride and visibility. This recognition was not framed in terms of individual excellence but collective achievement. Identity, therefore, was constructed relationally as students understood themselves as reliable contributors to a larger whole.

This finding reflects recent research highlighting that identity development in adolescents is strengthened when learners are positioned as meaningful participants rather than passive recipients of instruction (Tan & Ang, 2023). Importantly, the brass band functioned as an alternative identity space for students who did not excel academically, enabling them to reconstruct self-worth through non-academic competence.

Discipline as Internalised and Relational Practice

Discipline emerged as a deeply embedded practice rather than an externally enforced rule. Students described learning to manage time, practise independently, and remain attentive during rehearsals because their preparedness directly affected the group’s performance. Discipline was motivated by accountability to peers rather than fear of punishment.

Observation data revealed consistent rehearsal routines, collective reminders among peers, and self-regulated behaviour without direct teacher intervention. These practices indicate the development of internalised discipline, where responsibility is self-imposed and socially reinforced.

This aligns with contemporary studies emphasising that discipline is most effectively developed through meaningful engagement and shared responsibility (Ryan & Deci, 2022; Ng & Lim, 2024). The brass band environment cultivated discipline as a moral and relational commitment, reframing discipline as care for collective success rather than compliance with authority.

Sense of Belonging through Collective Struggle and Support

A strong sense of belonging was evident across participants’ narratives. Students described the brass band as a safe space characterised by mutual support, emotional understanding, and shared struggle. Long rehearsal hours, technical difficulties, and performance anxiety were collectively experienced, strengthening interpersonal bonds.

For some participants, the brass band functioned as their primary social anchor within school, particularly for students who felt marginalised in academic classrooms. Belonging was not immediate but developed gradually through shared routines, informal interactions, and collective achievements.

Recent studies highlight that belonging is constructed through sustained participation and emotional synchrony rather than mere membership (Allen et al., 2022; Chong & Yeo, 2024). The brass band exemplified this process, where belonging emerged as an outcome of perseverance and shared identity rather than superficial inclusion.

Table 1. Summary of Themes, Sub-Themes, and Evidence

Theme	Sub-Themes	Illustrative Evidence (Interviews & Observations)
Identity Formation	Recognition beyond academics; Sense of purpose; Collective pride	Students described feeling “noticed” during performances; Observations showed visible pride in wearing band uniforms
Internalised Discipline	Self-regulation; Responsibility to peers; Routine commitment	Students arrived early for rehearsals without reminders; Peer-led corrections observed

Sense of Belonging	Emotional safety; Peer support; Shared struggle	Students referred to band as “family”; Observations noted mutual encouragement during difficult rehearsals
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DISCUSSION

This study sought to profile how participation in a Malaysian school brass band contributes to students’ identity, discipline, and sense of belonging. The findings demonstrate that these dimensions are not discrete outcomes but interconnected processes shaped through sustained engagement in collective practice.

Reframing Identity beyond Academic Achievement

The findings extend existing literature by illustrating how co-curricular music participation enables students to reconstruct identity beyond academic hierarchies. Rather than being defined by grades or examination performance, students developed identity through contribution, commitment, and recognition within a collective endeavour. This supports recent calls to broaden educational definitions of success to include relational and experiential dimensions of learning (Koh, 2023).

Discipline as Ethical Participation

The internalisation of discipline observed in this study challenges traditional behavioural models that equate discipline with control. Instead, discipline emerged as an ethical orientation students disciplined themselves out of respect for peers and shared goals. This aligns with contemporary socio-constructivist perspectives that conceptualise discipline as socially mediated and value-driven (Lim & Rahman, 2024).

Belonging as Sustained Practice

Belonging was not an incidental by-product but a core pedagogical outcome of brass band participation. The collective nature of music-making, combined with emotional investment and shared challenges, fostered durable social bonds. This reinforces recent findings that belonging is cultivated through participation in meaningful practices rather than through policy-driven inclusion alone (Yap et al., 2025).

Integrative Interpretation

Taken together, the findings position school brass bands as **powerful pedagogical spaces** where identity, discipline, and belonging are co-constructed through practice. This challenges the marginal status often assigned to co-curricular programmes and underscores their role in human-centred education.

Table 2. Alignment between Findings and Existing Literature (2022–2025)

Key Finding	Supporting Literature	Contribution of the Present Study
Identity formed through contribution and recognition	Tan & Ang (2023); Koh (2023)	Extends identity research into cocurricular music contexts
Discipline internalised through collective responsibility	Ryan & Deci (2022); Lim & Rahman (2024)	Reframes discipline as relational rather than behavioural
Belonging developed through shared struggle	Allen et al. (2022); Chong & Yeo (2024)	Demonstrates belonging as sustained practice, not static trait

Conclusion And Implications for Future Practice

Implications for Educational Practice and Policy

This study provides important implications for educational practice and policy by demonstrating that cocurricular music programmes, particularly school brass bands, function as powerful pedagogical spaces for holistic student development. The findings suggest that identity, discipline, and belonging are not incidental outcomes but can be intentionally cultivated through structured co-curricular practices.

Implications for School Leadership

School leaders play a crucial role in shaping how co-curricular programmes are positioned within school culture. The findings indicate that when brass band programmes are treated as integral rather than peripheral, students experience stronger identity affirmation and commitment.

Table 4 outlines practical leadership actions informed by the study's findings.

Table 4. Implications for School Leadership

Finding	Leadership Implication	Recommended Action
Identity developed through recognition	Co-curricular programmes should be publicly acknowledged	Integrate brass band achievements into official school assemblies and communications
Discipline internalised through responsibility	Support autonomy-supportive practices	Allow student leadership roles within band structures
Belonging fostered through sustained engagement	Stability of programmes is essential	Ensure continuity of instructors and rehearsal schedules

Implications for Teachers and Instructors

Teachers and co-curricular instructors can leverage ensemble-based learning to cultivate self-discipline and belonging. Rather than emphasising control, instructors can facilitate environments where responsibility is shared and expectations are collectively negotiated.

Table 5 presents instructional implications derived from the study.

Table 5. Implications for Teachers and Co-Curricular Instructors

Pedagogical Focus	Observed Practice	Instructional Implication
Identity affirmation	Recognition of effort over talent	Emphasise commitment and reliability rather than technical perfection
Discipline cultivation	Peer-led rehearsal norms	Encourage peer mentoring and section leadership
Belonging development	Emotional support during challenges	Create reflective spaces for sharing experiences

Policy Implications

At the policy level, the study supports a re-evaluation of how co-curricular programmes are framed within holistic education agendas. Current policy discourse often acknowledges co-curricular activities but lacks empirical grounding in students' lived experiences.

The findings provide evidence to support:

- Greater institutional recognition of co-curricular learning outcomes;
- Allocation of resources to sustain long-term programmes;
- Inclusion of qualitative indicators of student development in programme evaluation.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study profiled how participation in a Malaysian school brass band contributes to students' identity formation, internalised discipline, and sense of belonging. By adopting a qualitative, practice-based approach, the research foregrounded students' voices and lived experiences, offering a nuanced understanding of cocurricular music participation as a meaningful educational practice.

The findings demonstrate that brass band participation enables students to construct positive identities beyond academic achievement, internalise discipline through relational responsibility, and develop a strong sense of belonging through collective struggle and support. These outcomes challenge the marginal status often assigned to co-curricular programmes and highlight their pedagogical significance within holistic education.

Limitations and Future Research

While the study provides in-depth insights, it is limited to a single school context. Future research could:

- Examine multiple school contexts for comparative profiling;
- Include longitudinal designs to trace developmental trajectories;
- Explore instructor perspectives to complement student narratives.

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