

Promoting Lifelong Wellness Through Campus-Based Recreational Programs: A Study on Student Participation at Colegio De Montalban

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the lived experiences of tertiary students at Colegio de Montalban regarding their participation in campus-based recreational programs and how such experiences contributed to lifelong wellness. It employed a qualitative phenomenological case study design anchored on Astin's Theory of Student Involvement, Tinto's Theory of Social and Academic Integration, and the Student Well-Being Model. Participants were tertiary students who had participated in at least one campus-based recreational program or activity and were selected through purposive sampling until qualitative saturation was reached. Data were gathered through semi-structured, open-ended online qualitative prompts administered through Google Forms and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis framework. The findings revealed that students described

campus recreation through institutionalized extracurricular and physical events, such as intramurals, foundation day activities, fitness exercises, sports tryouts, cultural showcases, and leadership-bonding activities. Participation supported mental decompression, stress mitigation, proactive lifestyle shifts, social capital, and belonging. Peer encouragement and collective support enabled participation, while academic workload, scheduling conflicts, confidence deficits, late announcements, and facility concerns discouraged engagement. Students recommended academic-recreation harmonization and more diversified, inclusive programming. The study concludes that campus-based recreational programs serve as meaningful wellness spaces that support students' physical, psychological, social, and institutional engagement, provided that these programs are inclusive, well-scheduled, and aligned with academic demands.

Keywords: *campus recreation, Colegio de Montalban, lifelong wellness, phenomenological case study, student participation, thematic analysis*

INTRODUCTION

Colleges and universities play an important role in shaping lifelong health and wellness behaviors among students. Campus-based recreational programs are structured leisure, sport, fitness, and wellness activities offered within the institutional environment to provide students with meaningful extracurricular opportunities. Nutsugbodo et al. (2024) described campus-based events as organized activities that create spaces for participation, interaction, and institutional engagement. In higher education, such programs are increasingly viewed not only as leisure activities but also as developmental platforms that strengthen students' physical health, psychological well-being, social relationships, and sense of belonging.

The importance of campus recreation has become more visible as students continue to experience academic pressure, sedentary routines, stress, and difficulty sustaining healthy behaviors. Flaherty Media LLC (2023) emphasized that student-driven recreation programs help build community, encourage social interaction,

promote healthy habits, and support student retention. For many students, recreational spaces are not merely venues for sports participation; they also function as informal support systems where students build friendships, develop confidence, and experience relief from academic demands.

Despite the presence of campus-based wellness activities, many tertiary students still struggle to participate regularly because of academic workload, time constraints, confidence issues, facility limitations, and competing priorities. These barriers suggest the need to understand recreation not only as a program offered by the institution but also as a lived experience shaped by personal, social, and institutional factors. At Colegio de Montalban, campus-based recreational programs include intramurals, foundation day events, fitness activities, sports tryouts, cultural showcases, leadership-bonding activities, and activities introduced through physical education courses. However, the meanings students attach to these activities and how they connect such experiences to lifelong wellness require deeper qualitative inquiry.

This study therefore explored the lived experiences of tertiary students at Colegio de Montalban in relation to campus-based recreational programs. Specifically, it examined how students described available programs, how they perceived the influence of recreation on lifestyle habits and wellness, what factors encouraged or discouraged participation, and what strategies they suggested to enhance sustained engagement in recreation and fitness. By foregrounding students' voices, the study contributes to the development of more responsive, inclusive, and wellness-oriented campus recreation programs.

Literature Review

Student Involvement, Social Integration, and Wellness

This study is anchored on theories that explain student engagement, social belonging, and holistic well-being. Astin's (1984) Theory of Student Involvement emphasizes that students benefit from educational experiences when they invest physical and psychological energy in institutional activities. In the context of campus recreation, involvement is seen through the time, effort, interest, and emotional energy students give to sports, fitness, cultural, and wellness activities.

Tinto's (1975, 1993) Theory of Social and Academic Integration further explains that students' continued engagement with an institution is shaped by their sense of belonging and participation in institutional life. Recreational programs serve as informal spaces where students meet peers, form relationships, develop support systems, and experience inclusion. Through this lens, participation in campus recreation is not limited to physical activity but also involves social connection and institutional attachment.

The Student Well-Being Model provides a holistic lens for examining the wellness effects of campus recreation. In this study, well-being was viewed as a multidimensional experience involving physical, psychological, emotional, social, and intellectual dimensions. This framework allowed the study to examine how students personally define wellness and how recreational involvement shapes stress management, lifestyle habits, self-confidence, and social relationships.

Physical, Psychological, and Outdoor Wellness Benefits

Campus recreation supports students' physical wellness by providing opportunities to develop movement-based habits during the college years. Scroggs et al. (2025) emphasized the need to promote physical activity among college-aged students because this period is critical in establishing health behaviors that may persist across adulthood. Similarly, Kirby et al. (2024) found that peer-led campus recreation programs improved students' perceived well-being, energy, enjoyment, and competence, showing that structured recreational participation can support holistic wellness outcomes.

Psychological wellness is also strengthened through recreation. Anderson et al. (2022) found that campus recreation participation was linked with better student health and well-being during the COVID-19 context, while Karakullukcu et al. (2025) reported that enjoyment in physical activity was associated with mental well-being among university students. These findings support the idea that recreation provides students with opportunities for stress relief, emotional regulation, and coping.

Outdoor and nature-based recreation further expands the wellness value of campus activities. Puhakka (2021) found that university students experienced perceived well-being effects from outdoor recreation, including emotional restoration, social connection, and relief from academic stress. This suggests that campus recreation programs should be diverse, offering both indoor and outdoor opportunities that respond to different student interests and wellness needs.

Social Belonging, Retention, and Institutional Outcomes

Recreational programs help build social belonging and campus community. Granholm (2025) emphasized the institutional impact of campus recreation in strengthening engagement and student connection. Miller and Croft (2022) likewise found that university recreation centers influenced students' return and retention during the COVID-19 period, highlighting the role of recreation facilities as meaningful spaces for connection and institutional commitment.

The relationship between campus recreation and academic persistence is also supported in the literature. Zegre et al. (2020) found that campus recreation facility use was related to retention among first-time undergraduate students. This shows that recreation is not separate from the academic mission of higher education; rather, it can support student persistence by strengthening institutional attachment, wellness, and engagement.

In the Philippine context, Campoamor-Olegario et al. (2025) reported that physical activity and health behaviors predicted well-being among Filipino tertiary students beyond the pandemic. Their findings reinforce the relevance of wellness promotion in local higher education settings and provide support for examining campus-based recreation as a practical strategy for improving Filipino students' physical and psychological well-being.

Synthesis and Conceptual Framework

The reviewed literature shows that campus-based recreational programs promote lifelong wellness by integrating physical activity, stress reduction, peer connection, institutional belonging, and academic persistence. Across international and local studies, campus recreation has been associated with improved physical health, mental well-being, social engagement, and retention. However, less attention has been given to how students themselves make meaning of these experiences within a specific institutional context.

The conceptual framework of the study positions campus-based recreational programs as the institutional context where student participation occurs. Student participation is treated as a lived experience grounded in Astin's involvement theory and shaped by encouraging and discouraging factors consistent with Tinto's social integration perspective. Through these experiences, students develop dimensions of wellness that may influence lifelong wellness orientations and sustained recreation habits.

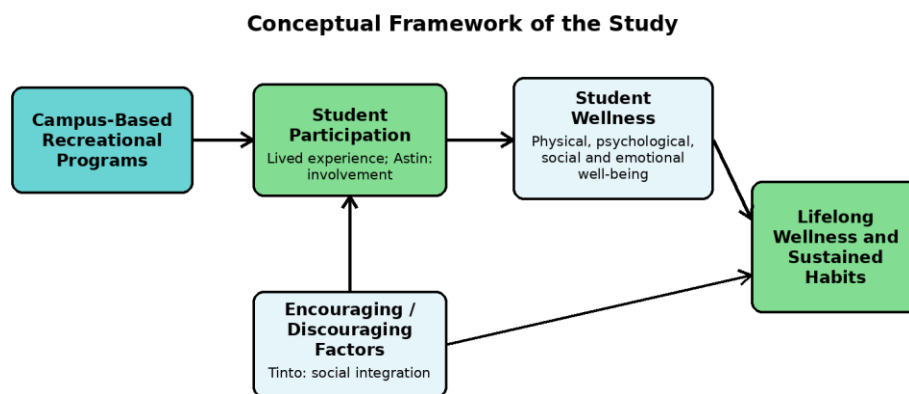


Figure 1. *Conceptual Framework of the Study*

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological case study design. The qualitative approach was appropriate because the study sought to understand students' lived experiences, perceptions, and meanings rather than to measure variables or test hypotheses. Phenomenology was used to capture the essence of students' experiences of participation in campus-based recreational programs, while the case study perspective bounded the inquiry within Colegio de Montalban as the institutional context.

Research Locale

The study was conducted at Colegio de Montalban. The institution served as the bounded case because the research focused on the campus-based recreational programs available to its tertiary students and on how students experienced these programs in relation to wellness, social integration, and sustained recreation habits.

Participants and Sampling Technique

The participants were tertiary students currently enrolled at Colegio de Montalban who had participated in at least one campus-based recreational program or activity. Purposive sampling was used to select participants who had direct experience with the phenomenon under investigation. The number of participants was guided by data saturation, or the point at which no new themes or insights emerged from the textual responses.

Research Instrument

A semi-structured interview and focus group discussion guide was developed by the researchers based on the research questions and theoretical framework. The guide used open-ended questions that encouraged students to describe the recreational programs available to them, explain how participation influenced their lifestyle and wellness, identify factors that encouraged or discouraged participation, and suggest strategies for enhancing lifelong recreation and fitness engagement.

Data Gathering Procedure

After securing institutional approval, the researchers conducted participant recruitment and data gathering through a digital platform. A structured online qualitative survey was administered through Google Forms and shared through official student organization communication streams, departmental channels, and student leader group chats. The landing page presented informed consent information, including the purpose of the study, scope of participation, and data privacy protocols. Participants were required to acknowledge consent before answering the open-ended questions. The form allowed responses in English, Filipino, or Taglish to encourage authentic expression.

Data Analysis

The typed qualitative responses were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. The researchers familiarized themselves with the data through repeated reading, generated initial codes line by line, grouped related codes into potential themes, reviewed and refined themes against the dataset, defined and named the final themes, and mapped these themes with the theoretical framework of the study. The analysis emphasized descriptive phenomenological interpretation of students' lived experiences.

Trustworthiness and Rigor

Trustworthiness was established using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria. Credibility was supported through unrestricted open-ended text fields and peer debriefing of the emerging codebook and themes. Transferability was addressed by providing contextual description of Colegio de Montalban, inclusion criteria, and the qualitative survey prompts. Dependability was maintained through an audit trail of raw Google Forms data, coding records, and theme development. Confirmability was supported through reflexivity and by grounding the final themes directly in participants' written responses.

Ethical Consideration

The study observed ethical standards for research involving human participants. Formal permission was obtained before data gathering. Participants were informed of the purpose, risks, benefits, voluntary nature of participation, and right to withdraw. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained by removing identifiers and assigning pseudonyms where necessary. Digital data were stored in password-protected storage accessible only to the researchers and were intended for deletion after the academic verification period.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results are organized according to the research questions of the study. The thematic analysis generated major themes that describe how students experienced campus-based recreation, how participation influenced their wellness, what factors shaped participation, and what strategies students recommended for strengthening lifelong engagement in recreation and fitness.

Table 1. *Thematic Matrix of Students' Lived Experiences in Campus-Based Recreation*

Research question	Emergent themes	Theoretical anchor	Illustrative statement	Interpretive meaning
Descriptions and awareness of programs	Institutionalized extracurricular and physical events; digital and curricular communication channels	Astin's Theory of Student Involvement	Students described intramurals, foundation day activities, sports competitions, fitness activities, and student council announcements.	Campus recreation was experienced as a visible institutional space for physical and psychological engagement.
Lifestyle and wellness perceptions	Mental decompression and stress mitigation; proactive lifestyle shifts and social capital	Student Well-Being Model	Students noted that dancing, sports, camps, and recreational activities helped them manage stress and develop social and communication skills.	Recreation supported physical wellness, emotional release, peer connection, and student confidence.
Factors affecting participation	Peer enablers and collective support; structural constraints and confidence deficits	Tinto's Social Integration Theory	Students identified friends as strong motivators but cited schoolwork, scheduling, late announcements, heat, and lack of confidence as barriers.	Participation depended on social support and on institutional conditions that either enabled or limited engagement.
Suggested strategies for sustained wellness	Academic-recreation harmonization; diversified and inclusive programming	Integrated framework	Students recommended better scheduling, lighter academic demands during recreation weeks, and more inclusive activities beyond competitive sports.	Wellness programs should promote balance, accessibility, and long-term recreation habits.

Descriptions and Awareness of Campus-Based Recreational Programs

Students described campus-based recreation at Colegio de Montalban as a combination of high-profile institutional events, student organization activities, physical education-related activities, and interest-based opportunities. The annual Intramurals, Foundation Day activities, sports tryouts, basketball, volleyball, badminton, chess, Zumba, aero-hop, singing contests, musical plays, and SSG or SSLG bonding workshops formed the visible structure of campus recreation. These descriptions show that recreation was not limited to athletic competition but included cultural, fitness, leadership, and community-building activities.

Students' awareness of these programs depended heavily on digital and curricular channels. The official Colegio de Montalban Facebook page, department student council announcements, and mayor's group chats served as primary information networks. Physical education classes such as PATHFIT also introduced recreational practices through routine activities and DIY exercise materials. This finding supports Astin's (1984) view that involvement depends on the opportunities and channels through which students become connected to institutional experiences.

The students' narratives imply that program visibility is important in building participation. When recreational activities are communicated clearly and regularly, students are more likely to recognize them as part of campus life. However, when announcements are late or fragmented, participation becomes dependent on peer networks and informal communication. Thus, institutional communication directly affects the extent to which students can become meaningfully involved.

Influence of Recreation on Lifestyle Habits and Wellness

The students perceived recreation as a form of mental decompression and stress mitigation. Dancing, playing sports, joining camps, and participating in campus activities gave students a temporary escape from academic pressure, deadlines, and lesson-planning demands. Several students described recreation as a way to clear the mind, express emotions, and restore energy. This aligns with Anderson et al. (2022) and Karakullukcu et al. (2025), who linked campus recreation participation with health, well-being, and mental wellness.

Participation also encouraged proactive lifestyle shifts. Students reported that recreation moved them away from purely sedentary academic routines and helped them become more mindful of flexibility, cardio training, fitness, and health. These results support Scroggs et al. (2025), who emphasized the importance of promoting physical activity during college years, and Kirby et al. (2024), who found that peer-led recreation programs can improve well-being and perceived competence.

Recreation also produced social capital. Students explained that recreational activities allowed them to meet peers from different departments, break out of introverted patterns, build camaraderie, and develop communication skills. These experiences reflect the social dimension of wellness and support Tinto's (1975, 1993) view that informal social contexts contribute to institutional belonging and continued engagement.

Encouraging and Discouraging Factors in Participation

Peer encouragement emerged as a strong enabler of participation. Students described friends and classmates as important sources of motivation because they encouraged participation, provided emotional support, and made activities less intimidating. Collective cheering, school spirit, and visible campus support increased confidence and helped students feel part of a community. This reinforces the role of social integration in encouraging student engagement.

At the same time, participation was limited by structural and personal barriers. Students identified academic workload, project deadlines, major requirements, late announcements, schedule conflicts, heat, poor ventilation, and limited confidence as discouraging factors. These barriers show that wellness participation is shaped by institutional decisions and by personal readiness. Even when students value recreation, they may choose academic tasks over wellness when schedules conflict or when participation carries social anxiety.

This finding is important because it shows that low participation should not be interpreted simply as lack of interest. Students may be willing to join but are constrained by time, workload, inadequate facilities, or confidence deficits. The institution therefore has a role in designing conditions that make wellness participation more accessible and less burdensome.

Suggested Strategies for Lifelong Recreation and Fitness Engagement

Students recommended academic-recreation harmonization as a major strategy. They suggested that recreational activities should be scheduled in advance and synchronized with academic calendars. They also recommended that major assignments, examinations, and heavy academic requirements be avoided during designated recreation weeks. This recommendation highlights the need to treat recreation as part of holistic education rather than as an optional activity competing with academic success.

Students also recommended diversified and inclusive programming. They noted that recreation should not focus exclusively on intense or competitive sports because not all students are athletes or extroverted participants. Suggested activities included mind games, board games, chess, creative art workshops, wellness clubs, and mental health seminars. This broader approach aligns with Puhakka's (2021) finding that diverse recreation environments can support restoration and well-being.

These recommendations imply that lifelong wellness can be strengthened when institutions teach students that rest, recreation, and movement are legitimate parts of productivity. As Zegre et al. (2020) and Miller and Croft (2022) suggested, campus recreation may support retention and continued institutional engagement. In the local context, Campoamor-Olegario et al. (2025) also showed that health behaviors are related to the well-being of Filipino tertiary students. Thus, campus recreation at Colegio de Montalban can become a meaningful institutional strategy for promoting wellness beyond college.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that campus-based recreational programs at Colegio de Montalban are meaningful wellness spaces that support students' physical, psychological, emotional, and social development. Students described these programs as institutional activities that include sports, fitness, cultural, leadership, and curricular recreation opportunities. Their awareness of such programs was shaped largely by digital announcements, student leader communication networks, and physical education courses.

Participation in campus recreation contributed to mental decompression, stress mitigation, healthier routines, social connection, confidence-building, and a stronger sense of belonging. However, student participation was shaped by both enabling and limiting factors. Peer support and collective school spirit encouraged engagement, while academic workload, scheduling conflicts, late announcements, facility concerns, and confidence deficits discouraged participation.

The study contributes to the understanding of campus recreation as a lived experience rather than merely an activity listing or facility service. Its findings show that lifelong wellness can be promoted when recreational programs are inclusive, visible, well-timed, and connected to students' academic realities. Campus recreation becomes most meaningful when it is treated as part of holistic student development.

Recommendation

Colegio de Montalban should harmonize academic and recreational calendars so that students can participate in wellness activities without feeling that they are sacrificing academic requirements. Recreational weeks, intramurals, fitness events, and wellness programs should be scheduled in advance and coordinated with faculty members to avoid major examinations and heavy deadlines during these periods.

The institution should diversify campus recreation by offering activities beyond competitive sports. Inclusive programs such as board games, chess, creative arts, dance, casual fitness sessions, wellness talks, outdoor recreation, mental health seminars, and peer-led wellness clubs may encourage participation among introverted students, non-athletes, and students with different interests and abilities.

Student leaders, physical education faculty, and institutional administrators should strengthen program promotion through official digital channels, department announcements, and student group chats. Announcements should be timely, clear, and accessible. The school may also improve facilities, ventilation, and activity spaces to address physical barriers that discourage participation.

Future researchers may conduct similar studies using in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, or mixed methods to capture broader student experiences. Comparative studies across higher education institutions may also be conducted to determine how different campus recreation models shape student wellness, belonging, retention, and lifelong fitness habits.

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