**Original Research Article**

**Influence of Parental Perception on Pupils’ Participation in School Extracurricular Activities: A Case of Selected Primary Schools in Mbulu Town Council**

**ABSTRACT**

**Aims:** This study explored the influence of parents’ perceptions on pupils’ participation in extracurricular activities in primary schools.

**Study Design:** Convergent parallel design

**Place and Duration of the Study:** The study was conducted in Mbulu Town Council, Tanzania; and it lasted for the period of twelve months.

**Methodology:** The study adopted a mixed methods approach, whereby quantitative and qualitative data was collected at the same time and analyzed separately. Data were collected through questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions, and documentary reviews. The study involved 132 respondents from four primary schools, utilizing stratified sampling technique in selecting 68 students and 60 parents. While purposive sampling technique was involving adopt 4 chairs of school committees. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistical methods, while qualitative data were analysed using Content Analysis method, where patterns, themes, and trends were identified.

**Results:** Findings revealed that parents recognize the benefits of students’ participation in extracurricular activities, particularly issues related to students’ retention, talent development, and practical skill acquisition. However, the findings discovered that pupils receive limited parental support in terms of facilities, tools, guidance in activity choices, and financial assistance, which limits students’ participation rate in different extracurricular activities.

**Conclusion:** To enhance pupils’ participation, the study recommends that schools should collaborate more actively with parents by establishing communication channels, organizing parents’ education programmes, as well as involving them in decision-making.

**Keywords**: *Parental perception, extracurricular activities, pupils’ participation, primary school*

**1 INTRODUCTION**

Many schools prioritize classroom curriculum to improve students’ grades and overall academic performance, often neglecting the potential of extracurricular activities that develop practical skills (Furda Shuleski, 2019). This approach, while focused on academic excellence, may overlook the importance of a holistic education that fosters creativity, problem-solving, and social skills. Extracurricular activities such as sports, debates, and community service not only enhance students’ practical competencies, but also contribute to their personal development and self-confidence (Anjum, 2021; Christison, 2013; Furda & Shuleski, 2019; Phillips et al, 2021). Striking a balance between academic and non-academic pursuits is therefore essential for producing well-rounded individuals prepared for the challenges of the modern world.

However, despite the proven benefits of extracurricular activities, some students exhibit little interest in them. Research suggests that this disinterest is often influenced by parental attitudes, as some parents perceive these activities as time wasting and unbeneficial (Sari Esa, 2017). Research indicate that parental behaviors play a pivotal role in shaping students’ motivation toward extracurricular activities (Gao et al., 2024). The connection between students’ participation in these activities and their parents’ perceptions underscores the critical importance of parental support. Parents who recognize the value of extracurricular activities are more likely to inspire their children to participate, contributing to their holistic development. Positive parental actions, such as encouragement and active involvement, significantly boost students’ interest and commitment. Conversely, negative attitudes, such as dismissive perceptions or lack of support, can undermine motivation (Eden, Chisom & Adeniyi, 2024; Kovacs, Olah & Pusztai, 2024; Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017).

While in developed countries like Unites States, most parents report their children engage in some form of extracurricular (Pew Research Center, 2015), in developing countries, participation is hindered by a number of challenges, including low parental motivation and a lack of teacher support (Assefa & Sintayehu, 2019; Lara & Saracostti, 2019; Motshusia, Ngobenib & Sepeng, 2024). Moreover, many parents face challenges in effectively supporting their children due to limited awareness or skills to emphasize the long-term value of these activities for their development (Mohamad Sari & Esa, 2017). In Tanzania, while policies advocate for extracurricular activities, the focus remains heavily on formal education, demanding further research on parental attitudes toward these activities (Lazaro Anney, 2016). Since studies conducted overtime have identified that parents’ attitudes towards their children’s participation in extracurricular activities worldwide, seem to have ability to motivate or demotivate children’s participation in these activities; the necessity for conducting a similar study in this area in Tanzania deemed necessary.

The Parental knowledge about the contribution of extracurricular activities to pupils' academic achievement is crucial for fostering a supportive environment that enhances learning. Research indicates that participation in extracurricular activities positively influences academic performance by improving grades and developing skills such as goalsetting and time management (Xu, 2017; Burga-Falla et al., 2024). Parental involvement in these activities can further enhance their child's engagement and performance by providing support and encouragement (Benner et al., 2016). Studies show that parental support can increase access to extracurricular activities, although extreme pressure may impede performance. Overall, understanding the benefits of extracurricular activities allows parents to effectively support their children's academic and personal development.

Moreover, parental support is essential for encouraging children’s participation in school activities, including extracurricular activities. This support is displayed in various ways, such as emotional backing, logistical help, and financial assistance. Research consistently shows that parental involvement significantly affects children’s success in school activities (Dorsch et al., 2018). Active participation by parents, including attending events and volunteering, boosts children’s motivation (Hodge & Danish, 2019), and engagement in extracurricular activities (McCormick & Meier, 2020). A meta-analysis by Utami (2022) confirms a strong link between parental support and children’s participation rates. Direct involvement, such as attending meetings and volunteering, correlates with higher extracurricular participation and academic performance (Epstein, 2018). Emotional support raises confidence and motivation in children (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 2019), while financial resources are vital for accessing certain activities (NCES, 2020). Additionally, parents who guide their children in time management help them balance academics with extracurricular activities (Eccles & Barber, 2019).

Studies further have shown that the level and type of parental support significantly influence children’s engagement in school activities, shaping their overall development and academic success. Dearing, McCartney, and Taylor (2018) found that consistent parental encouragement correlates with active participation in extracurricular programmes. Similarly, Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2019) revealed a strong link between parental involvement in these activities and improved academic outcomes. Hill and Tyson (2020) noted that such involvement increases motivation and participation rates, while Fan and Chen (2021) emphasized its role in enhancing children’s self-efficacy.

Parental support manifests in emotional, financial, and logistical forms. Emotional backing fosters confidence and resilience (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 2019), while financial resources enable access to activities requiring specific equipment or fees. Logistical support, such as transportation, is also crucial, as many students face barriers due to lack of transport (Afterschool Alliance, 2018). Hence active parental involvement not only boosts participation but also contributes to social skills development and academic performance (Epstein, 2018).

**1.1 STATEMENT OF RESEARCH PROBLEM**

Literature indicates that parental support significantly enhances children’s engagement in school activities, including extracurricular activities, leading to greater enjoyment and achievement (Metsäpelto & Pulkkinen, 2012). When parents adopt a supportive role, they motivate their children through encouragement and energy transfer. Conversely, when parents act as enforcers, children tend to develop negative attitudes towards these activities due to pressure (Ashbourne & Andres, 2015).

In Tanzania, education policies emphasize the importance of balancing academic and extracurricular activities, particularly at the primary level (URT, 1995; 2015). Despite government efforts to promote this balance, various challenges hinder participation in extracurricular activities (Lazaro & Anney, 2016). These obstacles affect the extent to which pupils engage in school activities (Mohamad, Sari & Esa, 2017; Stewart, 2018). Overall, while parental involvement is crucial for fostering positive attitudes towards extracurricular participation, systemic issues in the education sector continue to limit students’ opportunities for engagement. Thus, given the limited studies in this area, with limited coverage in Tanzanian primary schools, the researchers sought to investigate the influence of parents’ perceptions on primary school pupils’ participation in extracurricular activities, specifically in Mbulu town council. Specifically, the study focused on the following questions: “*What is the level of parents’ knowledge about the contribution of extracurricular activities in pupils’ academic achievement in Mbulu town council primary schools?”* and the second question that this study sought to address was: *What are the Kinds of support that parents provide to their children for different school Activities in Mbulu town council primary schools?*

**2. METHODOLOGY**

This study employed a mixed methods approach, adopting a convergent parallel research design whereby quantitative and qualitative data were collected at the same time and analyzed separately. This design was chosen to effectively integrate the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative data, allowing for a more comprehensive analysis by combining their insights within a single study while addressing the limitations of each approach. Four primary schools that were having common characteristics such as playgrounds, school farms, and other necessary facilities were chosen from ward centres of the four division of Mbulu town council using stratified sampling technique. The same sampling technique was used to select 68 students after dividing them in strata of the grade they are studying, gender and the types of extracurricular activities they prefer. Purposive sampling was used to select 60 parents whom their children study in selected primary schools; as well as four chairpersons of the school committee were also selected based on their responsibilities.

Data from students and parents were gathered using structured questionnaires with Likert scale to tick the most appropriate response which the level of support they received and their knowledge of extracurricular contributions to pupils’ academic achievements respectively. The focus group discussions which were moderated by the researchers were conducted with parents together with chairpersons of the school committee. Each category of data was subjected to the relevant data analysis methods. For instance, qualitative data obtained from open-ended questionnaires and focus group discussions were analysed using content analysis method, where data were organised based on themes and narrative. The quantitative data from closed-ended questionnaires was analysed through the descriptive statistics method computed by using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS Version 20) and information has been summarized in tables of frequencies and percentages.

**3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The study explored the influence of parents’ perceptions on pupils’ participation in extracurricular activities within Mbulu Town Council. It aimed to scrutinize parental knowledge about the contribution of extracurricular activities to academic achievement, explore the types of support parents provide, and analyze how this support affects the participation levels of students in different school extracurricular activities. The detail of the findings has been presented hereunder; with evidence from students, parents and the chairperson of the school committee who participated in the study.

**3.1. PARENTAL KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTION OF EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES ON PUPILS’ ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT**

The first research question was to explore the level of parent’s knowledge about the contribution of extracurricular activities on pupils’ academic achievement in Mbulu town council primary schools? The researchers collected responses from sixty (60) parents. The results revealed that majority of the parents who participated in the study had adequate knowledge of the contribution of extracurricular activities on their children’ academic achievement. The details are as presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Parents Knowledge on the Contribution of Extracurricular Activities in Pupils’ Academic Achievement (n=60)**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Statement** | **Agreed****f (%)** | **Undecided****f (%)** | **Disagreed****f (%)** | **Total****%** |
| Influence school attendance  | 44(72%) | 1(03%) | 15(25%) | 60(100%) |
| Improves Grades and Scores  | 39(65%) | 4(07%) | 17(28%) | 60(100%) |
| Distract learning concentration and time | 14(23%) | 3(06%) | 43(71%) | 60(100%) |
| Develop Socio-emotional skills  | 45(75%) | 5(09%) | 10(16%) | 60(100%) |
| Motivates for career growth  | 36(60%) | 16(27%) | 8(13%) | 60(100%) |
| Develop practical skills  | 41(68%) | 6(11%) | 13(21%) | 60(100%) |

The findings in Table 1. above depicts that majority of the parents 45(75%) agreed that extracurricular involvement helps students develop important social-emotional skills like teamwork, communication, and leadership. These skills were viewed as indirectly supporting academic success. Also majority of the parents 44(72%) recognized that extracurricular activities can have positive influence on pupils’ school attendance; majority of the parents 41(68%) agreed that extracurricular activities improves students’ abilities in developing practical skills especially for activities like agricultures, subject clubs and volunteering activities at schools. Many parents 39 (65%) recognized that extracurricular activities can have a positive impact on their children’s grades and test scores especially when they participate in subject clubs. Some parents 14(23%) expressed concerns that extracurricular commitments could be a distraction from schoolwork if not properly balanced. Those parents felt that extracurricular activities were not essential for academic achievement and that students should focus primarily on their studies.

During the focus group discussion, parents and chairperson of the school board were of different opinions regarding their knowledge on the contribution of extracurricular activities on students’ academic achievements. While most parents valued extracurricular activities, a few were skeptical. Many parents acknowledged the positive effects of extracurricular activities on academic performance. Parent **Q** opined that: *“I have seen my child’s grades improve since he started participating in the Mathematics and English club; it really helps him understand the material better than before.”* Other parents perceive extracurricular activities improve students’ attendance especially to activities that motivate them to refresh compared to production activities. Parent **M** perceived that *“My kids were very kind with attending sports, volunteering activities, academic clubs and study tours; they don’t miss school on those days compared to when there is agriculture and scout activities; after lunch, they hesitate going back to school.”* Parents also noted that extracurricular activities foster essential social-emotional and practical skills. One chair of the school board remarked, “*Being part of the soccer team has taught my daughter teamwork and leadership, which I believe are just as important as her grades*.”

Some parents expressed worries about extracurricular activities that commitment distracts learning concentration and time. Parent **F** mentioned, “*I worry that if my son is too involved in sports, he will not have enough time for his homework, and that balance is crucial for success.”* Another parent **J** commented *“I don’t think activities outside of school are necessary for academic success; focusing on studies should come first.”* One chair of the school board also pointed out the influence of socioeconomic status as parents from different backgrounds showed varying levels of understanding. A high-achieving parent noted, *“We prioritize extracurricular activities because we see how they complement academics, but I know not everyone has the same resources to support their child's participation.”*

From these findings, it is evident that most parents recognize the positive impact of extracurricular activities on their children’s academic performance, linking participation to improved grades, school attendance, and essential life skills. Parents believe these activities enhance social-emotional skills and practical development, indirectly supporting academic success. However, awareness of these benefits varies significantly with socioeconomic status, revealing a gap in understanding and access. This aligns with the European Commission (2021), which found that extracurricular activities like debate clubs and language clubs are associated with better academic outcomes. Both academic-related activities (Coulangeon, 2018; Neely & Vaquera, 2017) and non-academic pursuits (Metsapelto & Pulkkinen, 2012) contribute to higher grades and adaptive behaviors. Despite the general appreciation for extracurricular involvement, some parents expressed concerns about potential interference with academic responsibilities, particularly among parents of lower-achieving students. Research by Fredricks and Eccles (2010); and Fredricks (2012) suggests that excessive participation may detract from study focus. Those concerns call for schools to provide clear information to parents about the benefits of extracurricular activities, emphasizing their role in academic success. Implementing regular feedback mechanisms to gauge parental perceptions and knowledge, allowing schools to address gaps and improve engagement strategies.

**3.2 THE KINDS OF SUPPORT THAT PARENTS PROVIDE TO THEIR CHILDREN FOR DIFFERENT SCHOOL ACTIVITIES**

The second question was to explore the kinds of support that parents provide to their children influence their participation in different extracurricular activities in Mbulu town council primary schools. Responses from students were recorded in frequencies and percentages, which were summarized in Table 2. below:

**Table 2. Supports Parents Provide for Pupils to Participate in extracurricular activities (n=68)**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Statement** | **Agreed****f (%)** | **Undecided****f (%)** | **Disagreed****f (%)** | **Total****%** |
| Financial support  | 27(40%) | 5(07%) | 36(53%) | 68(100%) |
| Facilities and tools  | 26(38%) | 1(06%) | 38(56%) | 68(100%) |
| Guidance and encouragement  | 51(75%) | 6(09%) | 11(16%) | 68(100%) |
| Choice of extracurricular activity to participate  | 24(35%) | 7(11%) | 37(54%) | 68(100%) |
| Home practice of extracurricular activities  | 44(65%) | 2(03%) | 22(32%) | 68(100%) |

The findings of the current study in Table 2. show that majority, 51(75%) and 44(65%) of the pupils reported that they receive guidance and encouragement; and home practice of extracurricular activities support from their parents respectively, and to the other hand majority of the pupils 38(56%), 37(54%) and 36(53%) reported that they disagreed receiving facilities and tools, choice of the extracurricular activities and financial support respectively from their parents. The findings indicated that pupils receive fewer facilities and tools support, less support on the type of extracurricular activities to choose and less financial support from their parents.

During the focus group discussion, parents and chairperson of the school board were of different opinions regarding the kind of support they provide for their children to engage in various extracurricular activities. Parent **E** had this to say: *“What I make sure of is my children have uniforms and exercise books; they can do the other activities in the school depending on the facilities available.”* The of the majority of parents is that they are comfortable when their children practice extracurricular activities at home like farming at home garden, playing sports and games with their peers at home as they are under the care of parents and any relative as reported by parent **N** that: *“Let the children study more at school, and when they are at home, they can comfortably play with their friends and weed the garden under our supervision.”*

Some parents were of the perception that extracurricular activities have no benefit for their children than school benefits as parent **Z** reported that; *“I know pupils take hoes from home to farm school farms, and yet we have to contribute to the food they have to take in school.”*

Parent **H** also cemented that: *“When pupils concentrate on school extracurricular activities like agriculture, music, sports and games, they lose concentration to studies, and they think of playing every time which may result to failure in studies.”* Some chairmen of the school committee opined that they insisted parents several times on supporting their children to engage in different school extracurricular activities for the career prospect of their children as well as they can practice those activities at home as reported by chairman **G**: *“Currently, the rate of educated people is increasing, and they are unemployed; when our children are well supported to practice extracurricular activities of their wish they may their career and employ themselves in those activities or cultivate their talents.”* Chairman **T** depicted the conflicting interests between teachers and parents about the teachers' role in supervising school extracurricular activities and what parents perceive as he reported that: *“Most parents here are reluctant to contribute funds to purchase even sport shoes and gumboots for theirbecause they believe those activities benefit teachers and schools; while it’s not true.”* *Concurrently Chairman* ***J*** *reported that:* *“Parents sometimes are not supportive because when their kids get any challenge on the practice of those activities, for example, last year pupils got an accident when they attended sports competition at district level the injured children were abandoned by parents. This poses a serious challenge as parents restrict their to practice in some school extracurricular activities.”*

Summary of Major Findings Discussion of Findings

These findings reveal a complex landscape of parental support for children’s participation in extracurricular activities at primary schools. While many parents acknowledge the benefits of these activities for their children’s development, various challenges hinder their involvement. Parents typically engage in support forms such as attending events, providing transportation, and encouraging participation, which aligns with Dorsch et al. (2018), who noted that active parental involvement in their children’s school activities enhances children’s engagement and fosters positive attitudes toward education. Emotional encouragement is crucial, as parents strive to motivate their children to pursue their interests. However, barriers such as misconceptions about the benefits of extracurricular activities can limit parental support. Many parents mistakenly believe these activities primarily benefit schools and teachers rather than their children (Torregrosa et al., 2017). Additionally, concerns about potential risks associated with extracurricular activities can further diminish parental support. Parental guidance significantly influences children’s choices in extracurricular activities, with varying perceptions affecting participation rates (Reverter et al., 2013). While support is crucial, extreme pressure from parents may hinder students’ autonomy and enjoyment in exploring new interests.

The study findings suggest that while parents understand the value of extracurricular activities for their children, various hurdles, including financial limitations and time constraints, hinder their ability to provide support. Schools can play an essential role in facilitating parental involvement by improving communication and offering resources to assist families. Addressing these challenges is essential for fostering a supportive environment that encourages children to engage in extracurricular activities.

**4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study findings highlight that parental involvement is crucial in shaping children’s educational experiences, especially in extracurricular activities. Active support from parents enhances participation, allowing them to gain diverse learning experiences and essential skills like teamwork and leadership. However, when parental support is low, particularly in providing necessary resources and choices, students face barriers that limit their exploration of interests outside the classroom. This lack of involvement not only restricts skill development and social interaction but also hinders the growth of vital life skills. The findings highlight the importance of encouraging greater parental engagement in extracurricular activities to foster holistic development and academic success in primary school students. The study recommends a multifaceted approach to increase participation in school extracurricular activities, focusing on collaboration among schools, parents, and community stakeholders. Strengthening partnerships is essential to enrich opportunities for students and enhance their engagement. To foster greater parental involvement, strategies such as parent education programmes, regular communication between teachers and families, and inclusive engagement methods should be implemented. By recognizing and actively promoting parental support, primary schools can create a more inspiring environment that encourages holistic student development. Additionally, empowering families through open communication and providing resources will enhance their role in supporting their children’s growth. Overall, effective collaboration is crucial for ensuring that all students have access to diverse extracurricular opportunities.

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