



Assessing the Influence of Extracurricular Activities on Pre-Primary Children's Physical Development: A Case of Meru District Council, Tanzania

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Abstract: *The study assessed the influence of extracurricular activities on pre-primary children's physical development. It intended to identify kinds of extracurricular activities and examine their benefits to children's physical development. The study employed a mixed research approach with a descriptive design and a sample of 65 respondents. The study employed the Child's Development Theory. The study collected data through semi-structured interviews with heads of schools and closed-ended questionnaires with sports teachers and pre-primary teachers. The researcher ran IBM SPSS statistics version 27.1 to compute the collected data. The researcher analyzed data through content analysis and descriptive statistics. The findings revealed that sports are among the famous and everyday extracurricular activities widely used in pre-primary schools. Also, the findings revealed that the benefits of extracurricular activities depend on the length of practice. These benefits include more muscular muscle development, healthy growth of bones, improved coordination balance, and greater ability for physical relaxation. The study recommends that school administrators employ more physical activities to enhance preschool learners' physical development.*

Keywords: *Extracurricular activities, pre-primary school, children's physical development*

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1. Introduction

Extracurricular activities present educational manifestations from the level of non-formal activities. They are comprised of academic, physical, and artistic activities that are generally planned, implemented, and assessed at the level of educational institution individually for each class in addition to the subjects included in the framework curriculum and the school-based curriculum (Jucan & Ungurasn 2023). Pre-primary education allows children to participate in extracurricular activities to enhance their social, cognitive, emotional, and physical

development. The Tanzanian pre-primary curriculum identified creative, expressive, and authentic development as the learning area where children can attend extracurricular activities and improve physical development (URT, 2016). During the pre-primary level, the integral development of pupils is significant because it is one of the main objectives of this educational stage (Gil-Madrona et al., 2021). Extracurricular activities directly influence social, physical, emotional, and cognitive development (Camargos et al., 2016).

Extracurricular activities originated in Europe during the early 19th century to oversee and manage students outside

regular class hours. During that period, extracurricular activities were known as after-class activities (Park & Zhan, 2017). The earliest extracurricular activities encompassed literacy groups at prestigious institutions like Harvard and Yale University, such as debates, fraternities, and sororities. Subsequently, athletic clubs were introduced in American schools (Casinger, 2011). The advancement of extracurricular activities in the United States has positively impacted students' moral and academic growth. Engaging in these activities has been associated with cultivating obedience and punctuality among students.

Additionally, participation in extracurricular activities has been linked to improved academic performance, as seen by greater achievement levels in students' studies (Mahoney, 2014). According to Xu (2017), there has been an increased emphasis on prioritizing students' access to extracurricular activities in China. There has been a growing trend in providing extracurricular special interest classes beyond regular school hours (Xu, 2017). According to Steams and Glennie (2010), extracurricular activities are perceived to be advantageous for students as they provide opportunities for self-expression and self-discovery, foster the development of practical abilities and skills, and facilitate the establishment of relationships with peers and educators.

Extracurricular activities are considered an essential component of the educational system in Nigerian schools. Incorporating optional programs that foster children's engagement in play-based learning and exploration of creative outlets holds the potential to facilitate their future progress. Extracurricular activities extend beyond the fundamental curriculum, allowing children to enhance their cognitive abilities, stimulate physical well-being, and cultivate self-assurance (Mohamed & Osaki, 2022). Furthermore, it is widely recognized that extracurricular activities are crucial in enhancing students' motivation, hence fostering a positive attitude towards education, which is essential for effective learning and academic success (Yintore & Lekule, 2022). Implementing extracurricular activities in pre-primary education necessitates sufficient resources such as well-equipped playing facilities, a suitable and inviting playground, and competent teachers who possess the skills and creativity to design engaging and child-friendly extracurricular activities for pre-primary students. Providing sufficient resources for implementing extracurricular activities promotes the growth and development of children's talents and enhances their potential for skill improvement (Emanuel, 2020).

Educational institutions in Tanzania provide extracurricular activities as a supplementary component to the standard curriculum. The activities encompass sports,

scouting, drama, athletics, topic clubs, fine arts, field trips, and roots and shoots (Mohamed & Osaki, 2022). Extracurricular activities in school settings provide diverse choices for children to cultivate and enhance their potential abilities. Extracurricular activities in pre-primary schools encompass indoor and outdoor pursuits, sometimes during regular learning hours. Extracurricular activities in pre-primary schools are typically scheduled during various phases of the daily routine. These activities are allocated 25 minutes during the morning circle, 40 minutes in learning corners, 1 hour and 40 minutes in learning hours, 35 minutes in break time, and 10 minutes during the reflection circle (URT, 2016).

Despite the significant impact of extracurricular activities on the development of social, cognitive, emotional, and physical domains, the Tanzanian education system places limited focus on incorporating extracurricular activities within schools. In addition, it has been observed that public schools have limited access to a diverse range of resources, such as sports equipment and the upkeep of sports facilities (Lyoba & Mwila, 2022). Therefore, this study addresses the following research objectives: to identify extracurricular activities contributing to children's physical development and to examine the benefits of extracurricular activities towards children's physical development in pre-primary schools within the Meru District Council.

2. Literature Review

Despite the many geographical regions under consideration, numerous studies have examined the substantial advantages of engaging in extracurricular activities in enhancing kids' overall development. An example of this phenomenon may be observed in the research conducted by Eccles and Fredricks (2010), whereby it was shown that students engage in a diverse range of extracurricular activities beyond the official curriculum. These activities encompass athletics, performing arts, academic pursuits, and volunteer work. Moreover, Martinez et al. (2016) asserted that a significant number of students engage in multiple extracurricular activities. Eccles (2010) incorporated gender as a variable in examining participation rates across various activities. The study's findings indicated that males exhibit a statistically significant inclination towards sports compared to other activities, whereas females tend to engage more frequently in artistic pursuits. Furthermore, Singh (2014) highlighted many extracurricular activities inside school settings, including dances, team sports, performing arts, and academic groups.

On the contrary, numerous studies attempt to demonstrate the benefits of engaging in extracurricular activities for

pupils. For example, the research conducted by Gil-Madrona et al. (2021) demonstrated that children who engage in extracurricular activities experience additional motor advantages beyond physical activities solely within the school setting. Furthermore, Gil-Madrona et al. (2021) assert that participation in extracurricular activities by school-aged children yields significant advantages for their physical, social, emotional, and psychological well-being. Motor stimulation has been found to have a positive impact on the physical development of children. Additionally, motor stimulation can contribute to developing cognitive and affective skills, and this is because motor development is crucial in enhancing perceptual, physical, motor, cognitive, and affective abilities. The study conducted by Gil-Madrona et al. (2021) highlights the fundamental role of motor patterns from early childhood in facilitating the execution of both fundamental and specialized tasks encountered in everyday activities.

Nevertheless, the research by Kamyar (2018) found that extracurricular activities substantially impact students' achievement by fostering the development of their abilities and enhancing their academic foundation. These findings are consistent with the research conducted by Aljarallah (2015), which indicated significant differences in academic performance between children who engage in extracurricular activities and those who do not partake. According to Ruffullah et al. (2017), engaging in extracurricular activities benefits students by improving their self-concept and academic performance while having minimal influence on their conduct.

Additionally, the research conducted by Yintore and Lekule (2022) demonstrated that educational institutions that engage in sports and games observe an increased chance of students developing a tremendous enthusiasm in their academic pursuits. Christison (2013) emphasizes the significance of students' engagement in extracurricular activities, contending that these activities foster the development of adolescents' social skills through establishing a sense of belonging, cultivating a positive network of peers, and forming relationships with supportive adults.

According to Barack (2019), there is a belief that socio-emotional learning can be further developed and enhanced through club activities. This extension of learning opportunities during club time is seen as a means to expand and strengthen several skills, including empathy and communication, self-confidence, self-regulation, and social competence. Metsapelto and Pulkkinen (2014) state that extracurricular and planned activities offer children diverse experiences. It facilitates enhanced interaction among students and between students and adults inside the school setting. In light of

the existing literature reviews, numerous studies have demonstrated the notable significance of extracurricular activities to academic achievement, behavioural development, and socio-emotional attainment. However, only a limited number of these studies have addressed the association between extracurricular activities and the physical development of children in Meru pre-primary schools.

2.1 Child Development Theory

According to Fredrick Froebel, play is the highest form of human development throughout childhood since it gives children the freedom to express themselves (Froebel, 1887). When children actively participate in play, Froebel argues, they are developing their knowledge of the world. The idea that people worldwide may learn a lot by just playing in nature and enjoying themselves has spread like wildfire. According to Froebel, many essential factors in a child's development are physical health, cognitive abilities, emotional stability, social relationships, spiritual qualities, and environmental influences (Froebel, 1887). Since the idea highlights the need for children's direct participation in extracurricular activities like playing games, running, jumping, and rolling over to enhance their overall physical, emotional, cognitive, and social development, it is pertinent to the study.

3. Methodology

The researcher used a descriptive analysis approach in this study since this design seeks to comprehensively gather data to describe a particular occurrence, situation, or population. The primary objective of the design was to address inquiries about the research problem, encompassing the aspects of what, when, where, and how (Creswell, 2018). Unstructured interviews were conducted with Heads of schools selected based on their high literacy level and extensive experience managing extracurricular activities in pre-primary schools. Furthermore, the researchers administered closed-ended questionnaires to both sports and pre-primary teachers. Using closed-ended questionnaires was advantageous for the researcher regarding time efficiency and acquiring quantitative data (Ali, 2021).

The study purposively selected a sample of 5 heads of schools, five sports teachers, and 55 pre-primary teachers. The selection criteria for research participants included their skills and knowledge in early childhood education, specifically in managing extracurricular activities. The acquired data was subjected to content and descriptive analysis. The researcher used IMB SPSS version 27.1 to streamline the analysis and interpretation of the data. The methodology employed in this study involved the computation of frequencies, percentages, means, and

standard deviation. These statistical measures were presented in tabular form and then interpreted and described.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Kinds of Extracurricular Activities in Pre-primary Schools

The statistical analysis shown in Table 1 indicates the mean Response of teachers about the types of extracurricular activities implemented in pre-primary schools. The interpretation of teachers' mean scale can be described as follows:

4.00-3.50 Strongly agree with the statement

3.49-2.50 Agreeing with the statement

2.49-1.50 Disagreeing with statement

1.49-1.00 Strongly disagreeing with statement

The mean score of teachers' responses for various extracurricular activities is 3.21. According to the scale interpretation, this falls within the range of 3.49-2.50, indicating that teachers strongly agree with the listed extracurricular activities. The extracurricular activities listed, such as clapping hands, throwing a ball, jumping, drawing, running, kicking a ball, catching a ball, walking in a straight line, making a straight line, holding hands in a circle, shaking hands, and raising hands, received a high mean score of 3.21. This score indicates that teachers strongly agree with the perceived value of these activities. However, certain activities, such as sweeping, sharpening pencils, and holding a fashion show, were found to have a lower mean score of 3.21. According to the scale interpretation, these activities fall within the range of 2.49-1.50, indicating that teachers tend to disagree with these listed activities.

Table 1: Teachers' Responses on the Kind of Extracurricular Activities in Pre-Primary Schools

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
Catching ball	3.4800	.50990
Kicking ball	3.4800	.58595
Running	3.6000	.50000
Drawing	3.6000	.50000
Jumping	3.6000	.50000
Throwing ball	3.4000	.57735
Clapping hands	3.5200	.58595
Sweeping	2.4000	1.11803
Putting dust in a dustbin	3.1200	.88129
Walking in a straight line	3.6000	.50000
Colouring	3.3200	.69041
Mixing colours	3.2000	.76376
Sharpening pencil	2.2000	1.22474
Painting	2.8000	.95743
Making a straight line	3.4800	.65320
Holding hands in a circle	3.6800	.47610
Taking turns during communication	2.9600	.93452
Raising hands	3.5200	.50990
Shaking hands	3.6000	.50000
Sit in a circle	3.1600	.68799
Cooperative stand	3.0800	.81240
Holding a fashion show	2.0800	.95394
Total	3.21	.861

Source: Field Data, 2022

Moreover, the researcher used semi-structured interviews with heads of schools and sports teachers, and their responses are presented as follows;

In pre-primary classes, children mainly participate in athletics, which includes various activities such as throwing balls, kicking balls,

jumping, running and others. They prefer outdoor activities because it allows them to interact with their peers from other streams. Again, extracurricular activities such as drawing, colouring, and writing are conducted in the classroom (interview with Head of School A, Meru District Council, 28th February 2022)

Another participant added that;

'Many children prefer to play hide and seek, running, jumping, and playing within a circle. In my school, it seems there is some division in terms of performed activities; there are some activities, such as playing football, which male children mostly likely perform, while other activities, such as rede, are mainly performed by female students. Despite the differences, both activities improve the physical abilities of children (Interview with sports teacher in school A in Meru district Council, 28th February 2022).

Pre-primary education is the foundation for the future child's development and the overall physical, social, emotional and cognitive domain; each child needs to engage in extracurricular activities in pre-primary settings. The findings show that sports are among the everyday extracurricular activities used in pre-primary settings, and the findings relate to the study done by Mohamed and Osaki (2022), who found that extracurricular activities include sports, scouting, drama, athletics, the fine arts, and field excursions. Similarly, Singh (2014) highlighted some extracurricular activities likely to be performed in school contexts, such as dances, team sports, performing arts, and academic groups. In addition, the result revealed that some activities are gender-based, as was also observed in Eccless and Fredricks (2010) study, which uses gender as a variable to examine participation rates across various activities. Their findings demonstrate that boys prefer to participate in sports compared to other activities, whereas females tend to engage more frequently in artistic pursuits.

The play theory of Friedrich Froebel is consistent with the findings of the study, which emphasize the significance of children's movement. Froebel places importance on physical activity in infant development. Finger games,

songs, dance, and object movement are essential to Froebel's method. The theory emphasizes the importance of play interaction for children's physical, emotional, cognitive, and social development. Therefore, research revealed that sports are the most prevalent extracurricular activity in pre-primary schools. Children participate in numerous sports activities to enhance their physical development. These activities include but are not limited to running, jumping, throwing, and kicking balls. Most children prefer to participate in activities that align with their interests, and they sometimes participate in activities with adequate resources, such as football.

4.2 Benefits of Extracurricular Activities to Child's Physical Development

This part sought to discover teachers' perceptions of the benefits of extracurricular activities to child's physical development. Descriptive statistics was run to obtain the mean perceptions of teachers' responses. The scale interpretation of the mean in this question is as follows;

- 4.00 - 3.50 strongly agreeing with the statement
- 3.49 -2.50 agreeing with the statement
- 2.49 -1.50 disagreeing with the statement
- 1.49 -1.00 strongly disagreeing with the statement

The statistical analysis presented in Table 2 shows the sum of teachers' perceptions on the benefits of extracurricular activities to a child's physical development, improved coordination balance, greater ability for physical relaxation, achievement and maintenance of a healthy weight, improved muscle development and allowing appropriate pencil movement range under the mean score of 3.23, which is according to the scale of interpretation; ranges between 3.49 -2.50 that teachers agreed with the listed benefits of extracurricular activities to child's physical development. For items such as the ability to cross the midline, consistency rolling over and consistency using one hand for task performance range below the mean score of 3.23, which, according to the score interpretation, teachers agree with the identified benefits.

Table 2: Teachers' Response to the Benefits of ECA to Children's Physical Development

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
Improve health growth of bones	3.4000	1.04083
Improved coordination balance	3.2400	.96954
Greater ability for physical relaxation	3.2800	.89069
Improve muscles development	3.2800	.97980
Allowing appropriate pencil movement	3.2400	.92556
Ability to cross the midline	3.1200	.97125
Consistency using one hand for task performance	3.0400	.88882
Consistency rolling over	3.1200	.72572
Achieve and maintain a healthy weight	3.3600	.90738
Total	3.23	.922

Source: Field Data, 2022

Moreover, the researcher used semi-structured interviews with heads of schools and sports teachers, and their responses are presented as follows;

"Concerning extracurricular activities, preschool children benefited enough since they can perform various activities, and they can control their muscle movement in writing, running, and drawing." also, muscle development is the only important issue to children's physical development; thus, it is through extracurricular activities that children can use their muscles effectively in performing various activities" (interview with Head of School A, Meru District Council, 28th February 2022).

On the other hand, another participant expressed that *"Speaking of the benefits of extracurricular activities to a child's physical development, the ability to develop stronger bones, the ability to interact with others during play, and the ability to group items are among them. Ummmm.h With extracurricular activities, children can cut and divide objects in numbers using their hands. For example, children may cut pieces of paper and group them into numbers"* (Interview with sports teacher in school A in Meru district Council, 28th Feb 2022)

Therefore, it seems to suggest that extracurricular activities help children be more active in and outside the classroom. Extracurricular activities enable children to control their muscles through catching, throwing, kicking a ball, jumping, running, and scouting. Again, extracurricular activities help children maintain their body immunity by actively engaging in manipulative activities, which helps children develop stronger bones.

Interestingly, extracurricular activities help children discover and develop their talents, such as drawing, singing, painting, jumping, running, playing football, and engaging in drama. Therefore, these activities are helpful to children as they play a crucial role in their physical development.

Moreover, the findings from this study concurred with the study done by Gil-Madrona et al. (2021), which revealed that extracurricular activities improve motor development skills to children as when they participate in organized extracurricular activities, it helps them improve their body movement such as running, jumping and skipping and improve object control skills such as throwing, catching and kicking objects. Around the age of five, children begin to participate in organized extracurricular activities. When children participate in extracurricular activities, it provides them with multiple benefits. The study done by Brennam (2023) revealed that children who exercise regularly in extracurricular activities are at a reduces the likelihood of various illnesses, including depression, high cholesterol, hypertension, osteoporosis, metabolic syndrome, and obesity. Extracurricular activities improve children's sleep and help them receive related health benefits, and it is essential to choose suitable physical activities for each child. Extracurricular activities are crucial in moulding a child's comprehensive growth, providing excellent possibilities beyond academics. Participating in extracurricular activities like athletics, dancing, and martial arts fosters physical fitness, instils discipline, and cultivates teamwork skills. These activities aid kids in preserving their healthy lifestyles, coping with stress, and enhancing concentration both within and outside the school premises.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The findings indicated that involvement in extracurricular activities positively impacted the physical development of children within the context of school environments. The study results indicate numerous extracurricular activities that contribute to the physical development of children. Among these activities, sports emerged as a popular and everyday activity. Sports encompass a range of physical movements, such as running, jumping, kicking balls, throwing balls, and various others. Extracurricular activities strongly correlate with the physical development of pre-primary children, particularly to muscle growth.

5.2 Recommendations

Firstly, The study recommends that pre-primary teachers efficiently manage their time to monitor extracurricular activities. Secondly, the study recommends that pre-primary teachers and sports teachers enhance their creativity while organizing extracurricular activities rather than solely relying on sports as the primary means to promote children's physical development. Lastly, the study recommends that further research should be conducted to explore the relationship between children's physical growth and academic performance.

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