

Understanding Pupils' Engagement in Extracurricular Programmes and Contextual Influences in Mbulu Town Council Primary Schools

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Abstract

This study examines patterns of preference and factors influencing primary school pupils' participation in extracurricular activities in Mbulu town council, Tanzania. Guided by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, a mixed-methods approach was employed, involving 68 pupils from four primary schools selected through stratified sampling. Quantitative data were collected using a structured 5-point Likert scale questionnaire, while qualitative insights were obtained through open-ended questions. Descriptive statistics and thematic analysis were used to analyse quantitative and qualitative data, respectively. Findings indicate that pupils participate more in activities that are formally scheduled in the school timetable, well-structured, and supervised. Participation is further shaped by contextual factors, including school facilities, parental support, peer interactions, and the degree of school support for engagement. The study recommends improving infrastructure, ensuring adequate supervision, and integrating extracurricular support into school policies to create motivating, accessible, and inclusive environments that enhance pupils' holistic development.

Keywords: *Influencing factors, extracurricular activities, pupils' participation, primary school*

INTRODUCTION

Pupils' participation in school activities, particularly extracurricular activities, is crucial and influenced by a range of interconnected factors. These include the availability of school resources, supportive school policies, encouragement from teachers and parents, peer influence, pupils' personal interests and motivations, time allocated within the school schedule, and the perceived value or relevance of activities to future goals (Bouchard et al., 2022; Le, 2024). It has been revealed that participation in these activities is often voluntary and varies widely among pupils, with some

actively engaging in multiple activities while others remain unininvolved (Assante & Lisman, 2023; O'Brien et al, 2024). Not only that the levels of participation differ across age groups, genders, school settings, and even between urban and rural areas due to variations in access and support (Lounassalo et al, 2025; Valcke et al, 2023). Nevertheless, the type and frequency of participation may be shaped by pupils' awareness of the opportunities available, the encouragement they receive, and the institutional emphasis placed on such activities (Assante & Lisman, 2023; Goshin et al, 2025). Similarly, Wang et al (2024) further claim that students' participation rates in extracurricular activities are influenced by various factors, including parental support and school environment. Understanding these participation patterns is essential in evaluating how extracurricular programmes contribute to pupils' overall educational experience.

Basically, the role that extracurricular activities play in pupils' welfare should not be overemphasised. Studies indicate that extracurricular activities such as sports, debates, and community services contribute to enhancing students' practical competencies, personal development, and self-confidence (Anjum, 2021; Christison, 2013; Furda & Shuleski, 2019; Phillips et al, 2021). These activities also increase students' academic performance, as well as raising their pass grades (Martínez-Vicente & Valiente-Barroso, 2020; Sari & Esa, 2017). Literature further indicates that participation in such activities inculcates skills like adherence to instructions, persistence, inner drive, goal setting, and problem-solving capabilities that significantly contribute to students' scholastic accomplishments (Neely & Vaquera, 2017; Wormington et al, 2012).

Moreover, extracurricular activities also play a significant role in pupils' holistic development, offering them opportunities to explore interests beyond the academic curriculum. For instance, a study by Fredricks and Eccles (2018) highlighted that students involved in extracurricular activities experience increased school engagement and academic achievement. The study further suggested that participation in such kinds of activities facilitates the acquisition of interpersonal skills and fosters a sense of belonging within the school community. Similarly, Blomfield and Barber (2019) found that students who engage in a diverse range of extracurricular activities tend to report higher levels of self-esteem and social competence, which are essential for their personal development. In a systematic review, Minney (2021) emphasized that after-school programmes significantly contribute to positive youth development, including academic success and

social skills. Similarly, Penjor and Dorji (2022) also reported that students participating in structured extracurricular activities exhibit enhanced academic performance and social relationships, which in turn foster holistic students' development.

As noted earlier, students' participation in extracurricular activities has become increasingly influential. The rate of participation is important because it provides insight into how effectively schools engage students beyond academics. It also highlights gaps in access or inclusiveness. Furthermore, participation rates help educators and policymakers assess the impact of extracurricular programmes on students' holistic development. This is because high rates of participation indicate broad engagement, suggesting that programmes meet students' social, emotional, and developmental needs, whereas low rates may signal barriers that require attention (Kim et al, 2019). Building on this literature, recent studies in developed countries have examined the rates of student participation in extracurricular activities. These studies recognised a large proportion of students who are actively involved in such activities. For instance, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2020) reported that approximately 57% of high school students in the United States participated in at least one extracurricular activity. This level of engagement reflects a broader global trend, with students participating in sports, music, academic clubs, and community service.

Enhancing pupils' participation in extracurricular activities requires a concerted effort from different stakeholders and can involve various strategies. Christenson and Reschly (2019), for instance, advocate the importance of creating supportive environments that foster pupils' engagement in various school activities. One of the effective ways to support children's participation in extracurricular activities is to encourage them to explore a range of available activities. By exposing children to different extracurricular options, you create a room for them to discover their interests and talents. A study by Eccles and Barber (2019) found that students who were encouraged to explore various activities were more likely to find an activity they were passionate about and commit to it. This exploration phase is crucial for children to develop a well-rounded set of skills and interests.

Providing emotional support and encouragement is another essential strategy. According to a study by Grolnick and Slowiakczek (2019), children who receive emotional support from their immediate social environment are

more likely to engage in school activities and exhibit higher levels of self-esteem and resilience. This support can include praising children's efforts, provide constructive feedback, and encourage them to pursue their interests. Similarly, scholars argue that assisting children with financial support is also a critical way to engage them in extracurricular activities, especially for activities that require resources such as sports equipment, musical instruments, or fees for club memberships. A study by NCES (2020), for instance, found that children from higher socioeconomic status households were significantly more likely to participate in extracurricular activities compared to their peers from lower socioeconomic status backgrounds. This highlights the importance of this kind of assistance in enabling children to access and participate in various school activities.

Despite the growing recognition of the benefits associated with extracurricular involvement, such as improved social skills, academic engagement, and holistic development, many schools continue to prioritize academic performance and examination outcomes at the expense of extracurricular programming (Ahmed, Hassan & Saeed, 2024; Hasirumane, Acharya & Pillai, 2023; Mukesh & Rajasekharan, 2022). This trend is particularly pronounced in developing countries, including Tanzania, where education systems are often characterized by limited resources, teacher shortages, overcrowded classrooms, and a strong emphasis on national examinations (Assey & Babyegeya, 2022; MoEST, 2022; Philip, 2022; UNESCO, 2023). Reports from HakiElimu (2017) and Komba and Shukia (2023) have highlighted that many Tanzanian primary schools allocate minimal time, support, or funding for extracurricular programmes, with school timetables and priorities overwhelmingly focused on examinable subjects.

Several studies in Tanzania have examined the role of extracurricular activities in supporting various aspects of students' learning and school participation. For example, Machunde and Ilomo (2022) found that extracurricular involvement in Morogoro served as a motivator for students' academic engagement. While Yintore and Lekule (2022) reported that such activities contributed to student retention in Simiyu. Similarly, Nyaisa (2022) examined challenges in managing extracurricular activities for children with physical developmental needs in Arusha.

Although these studies offer useful insights into the benefits and administrative challenges of extracurricular activities, they do not address

the level of pupils' participation, nor do they examine the determinants that shape engagement. Yet participation levels and the influencing factors remain a concern globally (NCES, 2020; Onwuka, Oladele, & Zuoyu, 2019; Sari & Esa, 2017), suggesting the need for context-specific evidence. Importantly, no empirical study in Tanzania has systematically documented pupils' participation patterns in extracurricular activities, including which pupils participate, how frequently, and what school- or home-based factors influence their engagement.

This gap is even more pronounced in Mbulu town council, a district within the newly established Manyara region that faces persistent educational challenges. Research on extracurricular activities in this area is extremely limited, with only a few studies, such as Nyinyimbe and Jonas (2025), which focused on different aspects. Consequently, little is known about how local conditions, including resource constraints, school environments, and other contextual factors, shape pupils' involvement in extracurricular programmes.

To address these gaps, the present study offers a context-specific analysis of pupils' participation in extracurricular activities within Mbulu Town Council and examines the factors influencing their involvement. Specifically, it (i) assesses current participation levels, and (ii) identifies the key determinants of engagement within resource-constrained Tanzanian primary schools that have not been previously explored. By doing so, the study generates locally grounded empirical evidence. It extends the literature beyond merely confirming international trends and offers practical insights for policy formulation and school-level interventions aimed at strengthening holistic education. Specifically, the study was guided by the following research questions:

- i) What are the patterns of pupils' participation in extracurricular activities in Mbulu town council primary schools?
- ii) What factors influence pupils' participation in extracurricular activities in Mbulu town council primary schools?

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979), which explains human behaviour as the result of continuous interactions between children and their surrounding environments. The theory assumes that children's development is shaped by multiple, interconnected environmental systems rather than by individual characteristics alone. It further posits that children's behaviours do not

develop in isolation but emerge from interactions between personal attributes and contextual forces. These forces operate across different ecological levels, including the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem, each exerting direct or indirect influence on children's experiences and opportunities.

The study draws primarily on assumptions related to the microsystem and mesosystem, as these are most relevant to pupils' participation in extracurricular activities. The microsystem emphasises children's immediate environments, particularly the school, teachers, peers, and family. This level is central to the study, as pupils' engagement in extracurricular activities occurs mainly within the school setting and is influenced by school organisation, teacher supervision, peer interaction, and parental support. The mesosystem focuses on the relationships between these immediate settings, especially home-school connections, which may reinforce or constrain pupils' participation through shared expectations and support structures.

Overall, Ecological Systems Theory provides a suitable framework for examining pupils' participation in extracurricular activities by foregrounding the role of contextual and institutional influences. The theory guides the study to focus on how school-based structures, social relationships, and supportive conditions shape participation patterns, rather than viewing engagement as a result of personal choice alone. By adopting this framework, the study is positioned to analyse pupils' participation as a product of organised school environments and social interactions within a specific educational context.

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in Mbulu town council, located in Manyara region in northeastern Tanzania. The study area was selected because, as a newly established region, Manyara continues to experience several educational challenges. Given national concerns regarding pupils' participation in extracurricular activities, the researcher anticipated similar issues within this context. Four schools, each drawn from one of the four wards, were purposively selected based on the availability of extracurricular facilities such as playgrounds, school farms, and other spaces used for ward-level competitions. A total of 68 pupils participated in the study. Stratified sampling was employed to ensure representation across the wards, taking into account grade level, gender, and the types of extracurricular activities in which pupils were involved.

The study employed a mixed-methods approach, adopting a convergent parallel research design in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected during the same phase and analysed independently before integration (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). A single questionnaire comprising both closed- and open-ended items was used to collect data, within two weeks. The closed-ended items applied a 5-point Likert scale to capture pupils' levels of agreement with statements related to participation, motivation, and influencing factors. The open-ended items enabled pupils to elaborate on their experiences, perceptions, and challenges. To ensure validity and reliability, the instrument was pilot-tested in two primary schools with characteristics similar to those in the study sample, but these schools were excluded from the main study.

In line with the convergent parallel design, both strands of data were given equal weight. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics through the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 20, with results presented in tables of means and standard deviations. Qualitative data from the open-ended responses were analysed using thematic analysis, through which recurring views were identified and organised into meaningful sub-themes. Integration occurred during interpretation by comparing numerical patterns with narrative themes to identify areas of convergence, where both strands supported similar conclusions, and divergence, where differences emerged. This process enhanced the overall interpretation by allowing qualitative insights to clarify or expand on quantitative findings.

Although the sample size is relatively small, it was considered adequate for an exploratory study aimed at generating indicative insights rather than statistically generalisable estimates. Given the purposive selection of schools and the modest sample size, the findings should be interpreted as reflective of the participating schools rather than generalisable to all primary schools in Mbulu town council or Tanzania. Nonetheless, the results provide valuable contextual understanding that may inform future, larger-scale studies on pupils' participation in extracurricular activities.

FINDINGS

This section presents the findings of the study, which examined the patterns and determinants of pupils' participation in extracurricular activities in primary schools within Mbulu town council. The presentation first describes the participants' demographic characteristics and then explains the findings

derived from both quantitative and qualitative analyses. The findings are organised according to the analytical procedures applied, and the interpretation provided focuses solely on explaining the results emerging from the data.

Respondents' Demographic Information

Presenting respondents' demographic information, such as age, gender, and class level, among others, in research is crucial. It provides readers with a clear understanding of respondents who participated in the study, providing the context in which the findings might be applicable. In this regard, Table 1 summarises participants' demographic information.

Table 1
Respondents' Demographic Information (n=68)

Demographic Variable	Code	Category	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Gender	1	Male	28	41	41
	2	Female	40	59	100
Age	1	8-10 Years	20	30	30
	2	11-13 Years	45	66	96
	3	14-16 Years	03	4	100
	4	Above 17	0	0	100
Class Level	1	STD III	09	13	13
	2	STD IV	13	19	32
	3	STD V	19	28	60
	4	STD VI	27	40	100

Source: Field Data, 2024

The findings revealed that more than half 40 (59%) of the pupils who participated in the study were female. These findings indicate that boys and girls often exhibit distinct preferences, reflecting some gender disparities among research participants. This is in line with several previous studies that indicate that female students often show greater willingness to participate in school-based surveys and educational studies, particularly in the context of primary education (Ajlouni et al, 2022; Stenberg, Sundgren & Bostedt, 2025; Turhan, 2022). The findings also revealed that all the pupils 68(100%), who participated in the study were above seven (7) years of age, which is a reasonable age for pupils to choose and provide their views on the programmes to participate in schools, including extracurricular activities. The findings further revealed that 46(68%) of the pupils who participated in the study were in standards five and six, showing that they are mature

enough to provide reasons and make choices in different extracurricular activities to participate in school.

Overall, the demographic profile shows that the study involved pupils of appropriate age, gender representation, and class levels relevant to the study objectives. The majority of respondents were within the 11-13 years' age range and in upper primary classes, ensuring that participants were capable of understanding the study questions and expressing informed views. The gender distribution also reflects meaningful participation from both boys and girls. Collectively, these characteristics provide a suitable background for interpreting the findings presented in the subsequent sections.

Pupils' Participation Patterns and Preferences in School Extracurricular Activities

This subsection presents the findings related to the first research question, which sought to examine pupils' participation patterns and preferences in extracurricular activities in primary schools within Mbulu town council. Given the descriptive nature of this objective, data were collected using a structured questionnaire with closed-ended statements measured on a five-point Likert scale. The responses were later re-classified into a three-point scale. The analysis relied on descriptive statistics, specifically means and standard deviations, to summarise pupils' reported levels of participation in various extracurricular activities. The findings highlight the activities in which pupils are most actively involved and provide insights that may help schools enhance learner motivation, promote social interaction, and support holistic development. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics for Pupils' Participation in School Extracurricular Activities

Extracurricular Activity	Mean	Standard Deviation
Religious programmes	2.94	0.24
Agriculture programmes	2.88	0.44
Sports and games	2.81	0.52
Academic clubs	2.72	0.59
Music and dancing	2.29	0.88
Scout activities	2.25	0.88
Student government	2.16	0.87
Volunteering activities	1.96	0.87

Key: 1 = Disagreed, 2 = Undecided, 3 = Agreed

Source: Field Data (2024)

The results presented in Table 2 show clear variations in pupils' participation across different extracurricular activities in the selected primary schools. The mean scores indicate that pupils generally agree that they participate in most of the activities listed, although the level of engagement differs by activity type. These variations suggest that certain activities may be more appealing or accessible to pupils, reflecting differences in interest, opportunity, or school support.

Religious programmes recorded the highest participation ($M = 2.94$, $SD = 0.24$), which may indicate that these activities are central to pupils' school experiences or are culturally valued within the learning environment. Agriculture programmes ($M = 2.88$, $SD = 0.44$) and sports and games ($M = 2.81$, $SD = 0.52$) also ranked highly, suggesting strong involvement in activities that are practical, physical, or part of regular school routines. Academic clubs ($M = 2.72$, $SD = 0.59$) attracted considerable participation as well, which could reflect pupils' interest in activities that support academic learning and collaborative exploration.

In contrast, relatively lower participation was observed in music and dancing ($M = 2.29$, $SD = 0.88$) and scout activities ($M = 2.25$, $SD = 0.88$), which might indicate weaker engagement in activities that require specialised interest, skills, or access to specific materials and equipment. Student government ($M = 2.16$, $SD = 0.87$) and volunteering activities ($M = 1.96$, $SD = 0.87$) recorded the lowest participation levels, possibly reflecting that leadership-oriented or service-related activities are less widely preferred among pupils.

The findings indicate that pupils' participation in extracurricular activities is uneven, with stronger engagement observed in activities that are routinely embedded in school life and daily schedules. Practical and physically oriented activities, alongside academically supportive clubs, tend to attract higher participation than leadership- or service-based programmes. Activities that require specialised resources or greater personal initiative show comparatively lower engagement. This pattern may reflect the influence of factors such as accessibility, routine integration, and perceived relevance within the school context on pupils' participation preferences.

Factors Influencing Pupils' Participation in Extracurricular Activities

Another focus of this study was to explore the key factors influencing pupils' participation in extracurricular activities within the Mbulu town council. The

purpose was to gain a comprehensive understanding of the underlying conditions and circumstances shaping pupils' willingness and ability to engage in such activities. Such understanding is essential for designing strategies that enhance inclusive and meaningful participation in school-based extracurricular programmes at the primary level. To explore these factors, pupils rated various statements related to their participation, and their additional comments offered further insights into their experiences. The results are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3:
Influencing Factors for Participation in Different Extracurricular Activities

Extracurricular Activity	Mean	Standard Deviation
School environment and facilities	2.78	0.56
Activities scheduled in the school timetable	2.89	0.54
Teachers' guidance, supervision, and support	2.73	0.64
Parents' guidance and support	2.26	0.67
Peer influence	2.69	0.61
Self-choice	1.94	0.82
Potential benefits of the activity	2.08	0.79

Key: 1 = Disagreed, 2 = Undecided, 3 = Agreed

Source: Field Data (2024)

The findings summarised in Table 3 indicate that pupils' participation in extracurricular activities is shaped by a combination of school-related, social, and personal factors. The mean influence scores ranged from low to moderate, indicating that while these factors may affect participation, their impact appears to vary across different domains.

Among the influencing factors, activities scheduled within the school timetable ($M = 2.89$, $SD = 0.54$) and the school environment and facilities ($M = 2.78$, $SD = 0.56$) recorded relatively higher mean scores. These closely related factors indicate that when extracurricular activities are formally integrated into the school programme and supported by adequate facilities and a conducive environment, pupils are more likely to participate. This finding underscores the importance of institutional support and school organisation in promoting engagement in extracurricular activities.

A second cluster of factors with comparable mean scores includes teachers' guidance, supervision, and support ($M = 2.73$, $SD = 0.64$) and peer influence ($M = 2.69$, $SD = 0.61$). These results suggest that social interactions within the school setting significantly shape pupils' participation decisions. Teacher

involvement appears to provide structure, encouragement, and supervision, while peers play a motivating role through companionship and shared interest, reinforcing participation through social belonging.

In contrast, parents' guidance and support recorded a lower but still moderate influence ($M = 2.26$, $SD = 0.67$). This suggests that while parental encouragement matters, its impact may be less direct compared to influences within the school environment, possibly due to the school-based nature of most extracurricular activities. Personal factors showed the lowest levels of influence. Perceived potential benefits of the activity ($M = 2.08$, $SD = 0.79$) and self-choice ($M = 1.94$, $SD = 0.82$) scored comparatively lower, indicating that pupils are less likely to participate in extracurricular activities based on individual interest or perceived long-term benefits alone. This implies that participation is driven more by external structures and social conditions than by autonomous decision-making.

Overall, the findings suggest that pupils' participation in extracurricular activities is largely shaped by school organisation, availability of facilities, and social support systems, rather than personal initiative. This highlights the critical role of schools in creating enabling environments and structured opportunities that encourage active pupil engagement.

These statistical results were further supported by pupils' qualitative responses, which provided deeper insights into how various contextual and social factors shaped their participation in extracurricular activities. Pupils frequently linked their participation to the way extracurricular activities were organised and enforced within schools. Many explained that activities were formally scheduled on the school timetable and closely supervised by teachers, which strongly influenced attendance. For example, pupil **Y** from school **B** explained that "*...pupils must attend religious clubs, sports and games, and agriculture activities in the school farms as indicated on the timetable, and responsible teachers provide close supervision...*". In some cases, participation was motivated by fear of punishment rather than personal interest. Pupil **P** from school **A** noted that "*...there is severe punishment from supervisory teachers for pupils who are found not attending sports and games, religious sessions, and agriculture activities; sometimes our parents are even called in to witness the punishment...*". These accounts suggest that institutional enforcement and monitoring play a central role in shaping pupils' participation, particularly in compulsory activities.

The availability of facilities and resources also emerged as a key factor influencing participation. Where facilities were adequate, pupils felt encouraged to engage more actively. For instance, pupil **M** from school **C** noted that “*...the majority of us engage in sports and games because we have plenty of playgrounds that support football, netball, basketball, and volleyball...*”. Conversely, limited resources constrained participation in certain activities. Confirming this, pupil **K** from the same school remarked that “*...we don't have enough music instruments, so most days we just sing without drums or any musical instruments, causing some pupils lose interest...*”. Similarly, the demanding nature of some activities discouraged pupils' participation. For example, pupil **Q** from school **D** explained that “*...sometimes the agriculture work is too much, especially when we are told to dig large portions...*”. As a result, some pupils become less motivated to participate when activities lack adequate resources or are perceived as too demanding.

Issues of inclusiveness further shaped pupils' participation experiences. Several pupils described situations that limited equal access to extracurricular activities. Gender-related barriers were highlighted by pupil **N** from school **A**, who explained that “*girls in our school cannot participate in football and volleyball because there is only one playground, which is mainly used by boys.*” This suggests that limited facilities may unintentionally disadvantage girls' participation in sports. Concerns were also raised regarding learners with disabilities. Pupil **F** from school **D** noted that “*the facilities for learners with disabilities to participate in activities such as sports, games, music, and dancing are not available in this school,*” indicating that inadequate infrastructure restricts inclusive participation. Feelings of exclusion were also evident in leadership-related activities. For example, pupil **H** from school **B** observed that “*only confident pupils or those who are close to teachers are chosen for student government,*” suggesting that selection practices may marginalise less outspoken pupils.

However, participation was not always driven by obligation or supervision. Some pupils described enjoyment and social interaction as key motivating factors, particularly in sports and games. This was illustrated by pupil **G** from school **D**, who stated that “*...I like playing netball because it is fun and I get time to be with my friends. Even if the teacher is not around, we still go to the field after classes...*”. Such accounts indicate that intrinsic motivation and peer relationships also encourage participation, sometimes independently of formal school control.

Overall, these findings suggest that pupils' participation in extracurricular activities is largely influenced by school-related factors such as the environment, facilities, and scheduled activities, as well as social support from teachers and peers. Personal factors, including self-choice and perceived benefits, appear to have less influence. Pupils' accounts also highlight differences in experiences, showing that participation is shaped not only by availability and supervision but also by enjoyment, fairness, and support within the school context.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The findings of this study reveal that pupils' participation in extracurricular activities is shaped by a complex interplay of organizational, environmental, and interpersonal factors within the school setting. Pupils' accounts from different schools indicate that the rate of participation in preferred activities largely depends on how well activities are structured, integrated into the school timetable, and supervised by responsible teachers. This observation aligns with Prianto (2016) in Indonesia, who found that students are more likely to engage in activities that are formally organized and adequately supervised, compared to those receiving less institutional emphasis. Similarly, Carter-Thuillier et al. (2023), in Spain and Chile, reported that structured and well-coordinated sports programmes are more effective in sustaining student participation and fostering inclusion. Likewise, Mohamed and Osaki (2022) in Tanzania observed that poorly organized and minimally supervised extracurricular activities in secondary schools led to low participation and limited developmental benefits.

Moreover, the results indicate that participation in extracurricular activities is not solely driven by individual interest or ability but is strongly shaped by the broader contextual conditions in which pupils learn and grow. Consistent with Gorski (2021) and Ozodova (2025), a supportive school climate, characterized by safety, inclusiveness, supervision, and accessible spaces, significantly enhances student engagement. Their findings stress that schools investing in extracurricular infrastructure and promoting active staff involvement create conditions where pupils feel motivated and included. Similarly, the findings underscore the critical role of parents and educators in influencing participation. This aligns with Utami (2022), who observed that consistent guidance and encouragement from parents and teachers foster engagement in school-based activities, including extracurricular programmes.

Peer relationships also emerged as a crucial influence on participation, supporting findings by Bouchard et al. (2022), who reported that peer influence motivates students to engage in school activities. Pupils enjoy socializing with friends and are encouraged to join various clubs and sports. Fujiyama et al. (2021) similarly noted that peer interactions can act as either motivators or deterrents within extracurricular settings, depending on their quality and nature.

The study findings further indicate that personal factors such as self-choice and perceived benefits have relatively low influence on participation. This suggests that pupils are more likely to engage in activities due to structured schedules, supervision, and social encouragement rather than individual preference. Assante and Lişman (2023), for instance, reported that students' engagement is stronger in socially and institutionally mediated participation contexts than in activities driven solely by personal choice. This implies that intrinsic interest and perceived benefits have limited effects on participation when school-based structures and peer influences are dominant. It highlights that external factors outweigh personal preferences in shaping pupils' involvement in extracurricular programmes.

These findings can also be interpreted through Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, particularly the microsystem and mesosystem. The microsystem, encompassing children's immediate environments such as the school, teachers, peers, and family, directly shapes pupils' participation. The study's results indicate that school-related factors, scheduled activities, teacher supervision, and availability of facilities significantly influence engagement. Pupils' qualitative accounts further illustrate that activities embedded in the timetable and closely monitored by teachers enhance participation, while inadequate resources or demanding tasks reduce involvement. This aligns with the theory's emphasis on the microsystem as the primary context where children interact and experience developmental influences.

The mesosystem, representing the interconnections between immediate settings, also explains participation patterns. For instance, parental support and home-school relationships, although less influential than school-based factors, still affect pupils' willingness to engage in activities. Peer interactions reinforce participation, as pupils are motivated by companionship and shared interests. These findings demonstrate that engagement emerges not only from the school environment itself but also

from the interplay between different social contexts within pupils' daily lives, consistent with the mesosystem concept of interconnected microsystems.

In light of these connections, the study findings support the theory's core assumption that children's behaviours are socially embedded and shaped by multiple, interacting contextual forces. Pupils' participation is influenced more strongly by structured factors within the school microsystem and by social relationships within the mesosystem than by individual choice or perceived benefits. This underscores the importance of understanding the social and organizational environments in which children operate and confirms that participation is a product of dynamic interactions between the child and their immediate and interconnected settings.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined pupils' participation patterns in extracurricular activities and the factors influencing their engagement within Mbulu Town Council. The findings show that pupils are more likely to participate in activities that are formally scheduled and well-supervised, while those lacking structure or oversight attract lower involvement. Participation is further shaped by contextual factors such as the school environment, availability of facilities, parental support, and the extent to which schools provide support for pupils to engage in these activities.

Based on these findings, schools and education stakeholders should create enabling environments for extracurricular engagement. This includes improving infrastructure, ensuring safety, providing adequate supervision, and promoting inclusive programmes that cater to diverse pupil interests. Strengthening partnerships with parents and the wider community can also enhance awareness of the developmental benefits of these activities. At the policy level, extracurricular programming should be integrated into school development plans and inspection frameworks to ensure it is recognized as a core component of holistic education rather than an optional add-on.

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