

**Participation of the Ordinary Secondary Schools Examination
Candidates in Extracurricular Activities in Mbeya City Council,
Tanzania**

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Abstract

This article examined the participation of secondary schools examination candidates in extra-curricular activities in Mbeya City Council. The study employed a qualitative approach that involved twenty (20) respondents who were selected based on inclusive criteria through convenience and purposive sampling techniques. Both primary and secondary data were considered. The primary data were obtained through interviews while secondary data were obtained through documentary reviews. The secondary data supplemented the primary data. The findings from the study revealed that extra-curricular activities played a great role as they served the same purpose as classroom activities in the learning process. However, examination candidates were not much considered in taking part in extracurricular activities. This affected the knowledge they obtained throughout school life. Based on the findings, it is recommended that there is a need to involve examination candidates in extra-curricular activities so as to enrich their knowledge in their life.

Keywords: Examination Candidates, Skills, Extracurricular, Practice

1.0 Introduction

Learning is primarily an interactive activity (Astin, 2011), and schools are normally considered places where this takes place largely. They are also places where knowledge is imparted to students through classroom activities and assignments. However, schools are more than this as argued by Seker (2020). The philosophy that learning is primarily an

interactive activity is strongly supported by an American Philosopher (John Dewey that the person who learns by doing learns better. Extra-curricular activities are meant to cement and enhance what students learn in class and develop other necessary skills that cannot easily be acquired just by being in the classroom (Seker, 2020).

Currently, in many countries, extra-curricular activities in education have been given less importance compared to academics. (Meadows, 2019). In Tanzania education leadership at the level of the school, ward, district and region are working under pressure to ensure that schools perform better. In doing so, they are assured of keeping their job positions. Examination candidates are even under more pressure as they resort to cramming past examination questions and answers during extra class hours both in what are termed ‘tuition centres’ and even at home.

The reason as described by Mufanechiya (2012) is that school achievement is being measured by examination performance. On the other hand, Lunenburg (2010) argues that extracurricular activities serve the same goals and functions as the required and elective courses in the curriculum. Moreover, they provide experiences that are not included in formal courses of study. They allow students to apply the knowledge that they have learned in other classes and acquire concepts that are highly required in life.

Indeed, Massoni (2011) argues that providing sufficient time for students to interact during extra-curricular activities under organized programmes will not only reinforce what has been learnt in the class but increase attendance, and performance and accelerate the learning process, recreation, personal development and social inclusion. Further, according to Seker (2020), extra-curricular activities also inculcate in

students' good behaviour self-esteem and positive attitudes without mentioning other positive outcomes such as high grades, productivity, socialization and school completion

The common practice in schools today, as Mufanechiya (2012) revealed is that teachers and students spend too much time focusing on examinations and academic performance. They coach students and engage them in non-stop remedial exercises at the expense of extensive curriculum coverage. In so doing, all other students' activities are brought to a standstill, and all resources, time and efforts are channelled to examinations and examination-related matters.

According to Mambodza (2012), as cited in Mufanechiya (2012), examination time is the most difficult moment for many students as it is a time of psychological pressure and many sleepless nights. Textbooks and syllabi are replaced by piles of past examination papers and marking schemes to prepare students. In Tanzania for example, the practice is that to ensure good performance in final examinations, sports activities, subject clubs, recreation, productive activities and even midterm breaks are denied to examination candidates. This is done on the pretext that they avail the time for examination preparation. Such decisions deny students the right to learn and practice skills that are needed for survival. In the end, students will complete their school time being academically smart but cannot function in the real world due to a lack of possible requisite skills.

As pointed out by Akan and Basar (2013), life-supporting skills like critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and leadership skills can never be developed by students just by listening to teachers' classroom instructions. These skills become part and parcel of the student when

they are initiated, organized and practised outside class hours. The best areas where students can develop and master skills include. It is the purpose of this paper to critically examine the participation of ordinary secondary school examination candidates in extra-curricular activities in Mbeya City Council, Tanzania.

Three specific objectives were formed as follows: (i) to identify ways that schools use to ensure that students exercise and apply skills learnt in the class, (ii) to assess the opportunities given to examination candidates to participate in extra-curricular activities and (iii) to find out the constraints that hinder the carrying out extra-curricular activities in ordinary secondary schools. Aided by these objectives, the required information that facilitated answers to the central question of the study was obtained through materials and methods presented in the next part.

2.0 Material and Methods

This study adopted a qualitative research approach with a case study design. The study was conducted in the Mbeya City Council in the Mbeya Region. It involved 4 secondary schools, 2 private secondary schools and 2 public secondary schools. A total of 20 respondents were interviewed, 5 from each school including 4 academic masters, 4 examination class teachers and 12 examination candidates. Since in qualitative research, there is no fixed sample size to be considered, the researcher relied on the conclusion by Lopez and Whitehead (2013) that the sample size in qualitative research should be adequate to achieve data saturation, the richness of data and not too large that it is difficult to undertake in-depth, meaningful analysis.

Moreover, the study adapted non-probability sampling techniques namely convenience and purposive sampling techniques. Data were

collected through interviews and documentary reviews. Thematic data analysis was applied in which the following steps were observed: familiarization of data, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, affirming and naming themes and finally the analysis of the data.

3.0 Findings and Discussion

The findings and discussion of the study are summarized here under:

3.1 Ways to Ensure Students Exercise and Apply Skills Learnt in the Class

This objective intended to establish an understanding of the mechanisms put in place by schools to ensure students practice skills acquired in the class. Exercising what is acquired in the class makes a student more conversant and competent and extracurricular activities manifest this. One respondent shared that:

As a history teacher, it is always my wish and desire that the school approves taking my students at least once a year to various historical sites such as Kaole ruins, Kilwa, Bagamoyo, Ismila, Kalenga and alike. It is there where they can learn by seeing what we teach in the class. The use of charts and models in the classroom is not always enough for students to comprehend learning (Interview with Teacher₁ in School A, 2022).

A Geography teacher also said:

I always wish that my students are taken to the field for them to see and relate what they learn in the class though not always the case. Topics like physical geography, survey, and economic geography are interesting when you learn by seeing. When students see and touch physical objects it brings meaning to some abstracts and ideas

*given in the class (Interview with Teacher₂ in School D,
2022).*

These responses concur with Behrendt and Franklin (2014), who described field trips as beneficial in providing first-hand experience to students, stimulating interest and motivation to learn, adding relevance to learning and interrelationships, strengthening observation and perception skills, and promoting social development. In field trips, students observe natural settings and create relevant meaning to the experience (Behrendt & Franklin, 2014). In this way, they can assimilate and accommodate new understanding and cognition.

The findings also revealed that the practice is slightly different in technical secondary schools. In such schools, curriculum implementation may include technical subjects such as brick work, welding and fabrications, mechanics and other hands-on courses that comprise various field practices. These therefore provide students with time to exercise what was taught in the class as elaborated by one of the teachers:

In our school, we teach basics of technical subjects such as break works, elementary mechanics, welding and fabrications, electronics and computer skills. We are lucky that we have workshops for every technical subject. In the course of study, students are allowed to exercise what was instructed in classes and in practicals under subject teachers and workshop instructors whenever they feel like doing so. We also assign our students to do minor repair work in our school. This practice deepens students understanding (Interview with Teacher₂ in School B, 2022).

These responses comply with John Dewey's theory of experiential learning that schools and classrooms should be representative of real-life situations, allowing children to participate in learning activities interchangeably and flexibly in a variety of social settings (Dewey, 1938). Children need to learn by doing in the classrooms and should solve problems through hands-on approaches. When teachers plan for instruction, student interests should be considered and curricular subjects should also be integrated with an emphasis on project learning. The educational experiences encompass the intellectual, social, emotional, physical, and spiritual growth of the whole child, not just academic growth (Schiro, 2013).

According to Behrendt and Franklin (2014), experiential learning is authentic, first-hand, sensory-based learning. Experiential activities explore touch, listening to, watching, moving things, disassemble and reassembling. Learning consists of grasping an experience and then transforming it into an application or result. It is a methodology in which teachers direct students to a specific experience, and then guide the students through reflection to increase knowledge, develop skills, clarify values, and develop people's capacity to contribute to their communities.

3.2 Importance of Engaging Examination Candidates in Extracurricular Activities

When respondents were asked about the importance of engaging examination candidates in extra-curricular activities, the responses were also interesting. One academic master for instance argued that activities outside the classroom enabled students to put theory into practice and adds value to students' future life even if they fail in final examinations. She added that:

The world is now driven by technical know-how; therefore, there is a need to expose students to the world of competition. Sports and games, music and arts employ youths (Interview with Academic Teacher in School B, 2022).

The use of role-playing in teaching was also cited as one practical aspect of imparting skills to students. In the teaching of Civics, for example, it was asserted that role-playing helps students to demonstrate pure practical Civics. *“It is through Civics club role-play that students exhibit real lawyers and judges running courts activities, and politicians who can convince people to play role in community matters,”* (Interview with Teacher₂ in School D, 2022). Moreover, the respondent pointed out that it is in clubs where students’ talents like singing, doing comedy and alike are identified.

Students expecting to sit for their final examinations were also requested to give their views on this area. The responses were however not different from what was given by the teachers. Mostly, the candidates were of the view that participating in extracurricular activities enabled students to develop hidden skills and group working spirit. *“It also provided an opportunity to learn from others, but also to relax from the heavy academic timetable of the whole week”* (Interview with Student₃ in School A, 2022).

These responses given by teachers and students showed that they were very much aware that extra-curricular activities helped students to practice what was learnt in the class and so facilitated and comprehended learning. This concurs with the concept of a school as a multi-functional centre (Astin 2011). In such an environment, students learning interest is awakened as argued by Annu and Sunita (2015).

3.3 Challenges Facing Schools in Carrying out Extracurricular Activities in Ordinary Secondary Schools for Examinations Candidates

This section sought to establish the reasons that hinder the participation of the ordinary secondary school examination candidates in participating in extracurricular activities. The respondents gave several reasons that can be summarized into four as follows here-under:

3.3.1 Over-emphasis on examination performance

In sampled schools, this meant spending time and energy on academic content in readiness for the final examination at the expense of non-examinable matters. Falling in examination means tarnishing the image of the school the result of which could be loss of jobs for the teachers, especially in non-state schools. In responding to this an examination class teacher argued that if a student did not participate in sports or leadership in lower forms, it was of no use doing it as an examination candidate. Still, they can engage in sports after completing their secondary studies. He said:

I am very scared if I encourage candidates to take leadership responsibilities will spend much of their time thinking about it and not their studies which are the reasons for them to be in school (Interview with Teacher₁ in School A, 2022).

The length of the content to be taught and the related long time required to cover it also came out vividly during the discussions as pointed out by one of the respondents: Students have to cover the subject syllabus, revise various topics that were taught in the previous classes. As a teacher, I have to dedicate my time to assisting students on how to solve various examination questions by going through worked examination papers (Interview with Teacher₁ in School D, 2022).

The respondent pointed out that she was supposed to prepare students psychologically by helping them to overcome examination fears, and conducting different subject tests and other examinations at ward and district levels to make students get used to examination pressure. *“If a student fails, I will be accountable”* (Interview with Teacher₂ in School C, 2022). Students’ responses depicted that being an examination candidate, preparation for the examination was the most precious thing one can ever imagine. Candidates were expected to make use of the available time to rectify past mistakes and this was only possible through dedicating every moment to academic issues. A student was noted saying:

Our school motto contributes to creating a burden to students as it says ‘capture the day’. Time is strictly dedicated to attending classes, remedial classes and practice for science subjects. No time for any unnecessary activities. As a student, I am focusing on examinations as I need to prepare myself physically, psychologically and mentally before sitting for examinations (Interview with Student₁ in School B, 2022).

These responses concur with the findings by Mufanechiya (2012), who stated that examinations determine what students need to learn, hence narrowing down the teaching and learning process to possible examination topics at the expense of the vast knowledge forms that students need to explore and master for life long. This, in turn, deprives in-depth coverage of subject content and students are denied the opportunity to integrate the learned concepts into life experiences and realities. Teachers are stressed by the demands of the school administrators, parents, and pupils which create tension between pedagogical and ethical decisions; either teachers practice what they are

supposed to teach as real learning is, or to be enslaved by teaching to the test for students to pass examinations (Onaiba, 2015).

Moreover, these responses revealed that the candidate's prime role was to do well in examinations. Taking part in extracurricular activities was a wastage of time and resources. This is contrary to Massoni (2011) who contends that by participating in extracurricular activities students learn lessons in leadership, teamwork, organization, analytical thinking, problem-solving, and time management, learn to settle many tasks at once and discover talents. Tahir, Hassan and Othman (2014), describe participating in extracurricular activities plays a great role in the holistic development of a child as the cognitive, social, physical, emotional, linguistic, spiritual and moral development of a child. These activities offer great opportunities for students to grow well with moral aspects, social interaction, ability to control their emotions and they become active members of society.

3.3.2 Limited time

It was also observed that in the visited schools' extracurricular activities were conducted twice a week. The commonly observed modality was that one day was for subject clubs, ESR, and debates and the other day was for sports and games. It was also noted that the set time was normally in the evening starting from 3:30 pm to 4:30 pm. This timing was meant to be after the regular academic timetable. In actual practice, the time was not conducive for students especially day scholars to participate as they were to later walk a long distance back home. This meant late arriving home and at the same time while tired. A candidate complemented that:

I sometimes fail to participate in extracurricular activities because they are conducted at late hours. After that, I have

to look for a means of transport to go home. Sometimes I may not have eaten anything. It is quite possible to find only those who stay nearby the school attending or those who are interested (Interview with Student₂ in School D, 2022).

The findings further depicted those adjustments in the time table were only possible during sports and games competitions conducted at the school level, district level, regional level and national level. These competitions were noted to be conducted once a year. It was in these competitions that different teams were recruited and the selected participants were sent for camps, while the rest proceeded with classes. These findings are inconsistent with the findings by Mubanga (2011) who reported that extracurricular activities in schools are allocated three days on average. Schools find it difficult to consider incorporating some of the extracurricular activities in the main school time table to enhance participation levels.

3.3.3 Lack of trained extra-curricular activities' coordinators

It was observed that in the visited schools they lacked trained or interested persons to take charge of extracurricular activities. The role of the extracurricular coordinator is to oversee all extracurricular activities namely; organizing, scouting, supervising, monitoring, recommending and recording. According to Reeves (2008), as long as the advisor is devoted and flexible, students will undoubtedly benefit from their participation in extracurricular activities. An academic teacher said: It is difficult to have trained personnel who can take responsibility of extracurricular activities, especially sports and games. I only appoint teachers without considering their interests in the field. Moreover, few teachers who volunteer are discouraged by the time allocated which is

normally in the evening. They have other commitments to carry out after school hours (Interview with Teacher₁ in School C, 2022).

3.3.4 Insufficient funds

Inadequate funds to run extracurricular activities were observed as another challenge facing the implementation of extracurricular activities. It was found that public secondary schools in particular depended on funds from the central government through fee grants. Most of the teachers and academic teachers shared that, funds allocated to manage extracurricular activities were not enough. An academic teacher said:

Challenges are inevitable especially for our public secondary schools as we depend on government grants that are; specifically directed to particular activities and so cannot be diverted in any how and are given on a month basis. The amount of money given is not enough because the cost of extracurricular activities facilities and transport are very high and we cannot appeal to parents to pay for these. We will soon be summoned for explanations (Interview with Teacher₂ in School D, 2022).

A study by Wilson (2009) described that conducting extracurricular activities, especially field trips and sports activities was very costly. It needs a huge budget to pay for coaches, maintain sports fields and purchase sports gear. The situation is difficult because schools were faced with budgetary constraints which led to poor implementation of extracurricular activities. Similarly, Moran (2017) added that the United States of America's financial constraints were observed as a big problem in implementing extracurricular activities. The government did not allocate enough budget for extracurricular activities.

Behrendt and Franklin (2014) comprehended that to save money and time from preparation and travelling, some teachers choose to simply use the school computers and other visual and audial electronic devices and take digital field trips. Options are plentiful and students no doubt learn from the digital experience, but students only experience what the media thinks is important, and the students do not encounter a multidimensional activity in which all their senses are fully involved.

Generally, the findings implied that most ordinary secondary schools faced numerous challenges in the implementation of extracurricular activities. Respondents agreed that over-emphasizing examinations, limited time, lack of trained extracurricular coordinator and insufficient funds were the clear drawbacks to extracurricular activities. This shows that extracurricular activities were not well achieved hence limiting the holistic development of students, especially examination candidates.

4.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings it is concluded that overemphasis on performance and lack of time, deprived the right of ordinary secondary schools examination candidates to participate in extracurricular activities. Examination candidates had no time to exercise and apply skills that were intended to be mastered by students and that were useful to students' lifelong. This was affected by schools' strategies that were all geared toward good examination performances at the end of the ordinary secondary education circle. Given opportunities and encouraged to participate in extracurricular activities, students would have developed skills like analytical and critical thinking, problem-solving, time management, leadership skills, team work and other potential aspects of life like; self-esteem, self-respect and self-confidence which are likely to

be useful to every individual in dealing with personal responsibilities and ones' career, community or national undertakings and in life long.

Therefore, plans and programmes need to be in place to nurture students to express and discover skills and talents, especially the examination candidates. This can be done by allocating time for examinations candidates to participate in different extracurricular activities. For example, through school governance, students who prove to be good leaders should be enrolled later in leadership schools (*Shule ya uongozi*). In subject clubs, such as civics, through role play, outstanding practising lawyers and politicians can be encouraged to develop their talents through visiting various court sessions, and parliament or connecting them to reputable public figures of their career for mentorship. School administrators should consider setting aside enough funds for extracurricular activities that will include buying sports gear, and materials, motivating or employing extracurricular coordinators and finance field trips, and site or industrial visits for students.

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