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## EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES IN THE BROADER PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT: REFLECTIONS FROM YOUTH IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Mathias Mkude<sup>a,\*</sup>

Christian Mubofu<sup>b,\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Tengeru Institute of Community Development, Arusha, Tanzania.

<sup>b</sup> The Mwalimu Nyerere Memorial Academy, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

### KEYWORDS

Extracurricular activities, Leadership, Good academic performance, Sexual reproductive health

### ABSTRACT

This study examined extracurricular activities in the broader personal development: Reflections from Youth in Public Secondary Schools. Specifically, the study examined the contribution of extracurricular in the areas of leadership, sexual reproductive health, and good academic performance in public secondary schools in Muheza and Korogwe districts in Tanga region, Tanzania. The study was qualitative which adopted the interpretive paradigm. Data were collected through focused group discussions from 160 secondary school students who experienced extracurricular activities in their school environment. Grounded theory methodology was used to analyze the data collected. The study findings revealed that extracurricular contribute to leadership as it builds youth with leadership skills, teach youth to volunteer, and inform youth that leadership is about having agenda. Additionally, the study exposed that extracurricular activities are important in educating the youth on sexual reproductive health as they learn about their bodies, hygiene at puberty age, being unastonished by the biological changes but also extracurricular help youth to manage risk sexual behavior. With regards to good academic performance, the study revealed that extracurricular are for academic benefits, as it aspires to academic discussion and has minimized students' truancy. The study concludes that Extracurricular influences secondary school youth's development as it exposes them to environments translating into real situations affecting their wellbeing. Through extracurricular students can explore their environment, encouraging innovations and building creativity with very minimal resources. Additionally, extracurricular activities have proved to have a positive behavior outcome such as academic performance in the school-age stage and occupational status and income in adulthood. The study suggests that the government should translate extracurricular activities from documents to actions and give equal weight to both classroom and non-classroom activities. The extracurricular activities balance the existing gap between soft and hard skills. That extracurricular helps youth to address challenges they face in their daily life. Extracurricular found to be of interest to students because it all connected to people's character and it is widely applicable to most areas. While hard skills help an individual to enter a job market, soft skills guarantee job opportunities and further career growth.

### Introduction

The extracurricular activities have currently gained attention in an academic setting as it is considered to be a solution to youth vice behaviors as well as building youth self-efficacy. According to Martin & Bonesto-Tuggu (2020), extracurricular activities refer to diverse activities that intend to broaden the educational experiences and endeavors, which happen to take place beyond normal school hours. Moreover, Metsäpelto & Pulkkinen (2014) expanded the definition of extracurricular by referring to adult-supervised activities that are unrelated to the primary curriculum which allows youth to develop specific skills and knowledge while taking place outside of school hours. Extracurricular activities are mainly envisioned to meet learners' interests in the school setting while allowing the learners to be more engaged in their school and community. It further provides learners with an opportunity of developing essential soft skills and promotes their well-being. Bartkus, Nemeika, Nemeika, & Gardner (2012) established that extracurricular activities include athletics, sport, voluntary work, photography, drama, and music which are also regarded as co-curricular

activities. In Europe, extracurricular activities gained more attention in educational policy and practice around the 2000s. For instance in Germany, extracurricular started in 2003 and included all-day schools across the country. Similarly, around the same time, Finland introduced extracurricular activities by integrating them into school programs to decrease the number of time children spend unsupervised (Fischer, Radisch, & Schüpbach, 2014). Similar changes have taken place in Switzerland in which education adjustments have occurred in the past few decades to introduce extracurricular in the education system. All of the extracurricular activities do not obey the primary curriculum and their performances are not classified (Martin & Bonesto-Tuggu, 2020)

In Rwanda, extracurricular activities were introduced as part of educational reforms from knowledge-based to competency-based (Bonaventure & Marie, 2020). The reforms helped to introduce Rwandan heritage and culture in which subject curriculums were prepared to reflect extracurricular activities like arts, music, dance, drama, club and debate, sports and games, and religious activities. The educational reforms in Rwanda aimed at developing students to be

### \* Corresponding author

E-mail: [matimkude@gmail.com](mailto:matimkude@gmail.com), [mathias.mkude@ticd.ac.tz](mailto:mathias.mkude@ticd.ac.tz) (Mathias Mkude).

E-mail: [christian.mubofu@mnma.ac.tz](mailto:christian.mubofu@mnma.ac.tz) (Christian Mubofu).

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<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1401-4588>



<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8860-5033>



independent and acquire lifelong learning habits; appropriate skills and knowledge; and applications to real-life situations (Ngendahayo & Askill-Williams, 2016). It is unquestionably planned to change from knowledge and skills acquisition to knowledge creation and application (Bonaventure & Marie, 2020). Extracurricular provide room for the achievement of the new education goals.

In Tanzania, the Curriculum for ordinary level secondary education policy of 2007 set the foundation of extracurricular activities in the school environment. The introduction of extracurricular meant to provide students with a diversity of possibilities in finding educational pathways that suit student' preferences and abilities (URT, 2007). Extracurricular activities included games and sports, subject clubs, and cultural activities. Additionally, peer education programs, environmental education, gender, life skills, and HIV/ AIDS Clubs were also considered to be part of extracurricular activities. Despite the introduction of extracurricular activities in the school environment by the Tanzanian government, schools are still giving more priority to technical skills than imparting soft skills and performance attributes to students (Chaitanya, 2018; Fong, 2019). This is probably because the existing job market needs candidates with relevant technical knowledge, good language, and attitudinal skills, something which adds pressure on secondary schools to emphasize technical skills. However, the existing gap between technical skills and soft skills in secondary schools has been verified to limit students' competencies in dealing with their environment. This study, therefore, examined the extracurricular activities in the broader personal development with specific reference to youth in public secondary schools in Tanzania.

### Methodology

This study was conducted in Muheza and Korogwe districts in Tanga region. Tanga region was selected because it is one among the eleven regions of Tanzania mainland recorded to have more than 200 government secondary schools (URT, 2018). It is also one of the top five regions of Tanzania that enrolled more than one hundred thousand (100,000) students in government schools from form one to form six in 2019 (URT, 2019). Muheza and Korogwe districts were selected to represent the rural and peri-urban locations. Twenty (23) public secondary schools from the two districts were selected for inclusion in this study. The study adopted a qualitative research approach and was broadly situated in the interpretive paradigm. A qualitative approach was suitable in this study because the study aimed at exploring the worldview and experience of the secondary school students on the contribution of the extracurricular in the areas of leadership, sexual reproductive health, and good academic performance. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select students who have experienced extracurricular activities in their schools' settings. 15 Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were conducted in the collection of primary data. 160 secondary school students were involved and gender balance was taken into consideration. Generally, girls (91) and boys (69) were involved in FGDs conducted in this study. The FGDs were informed by pre-designed questions extracting students' experiences on leadership, reproductive health, and academic performance. Grounded theory methodology was used to analyze the collected data in which patterns of ideas were inductively developed (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

### Results And Discussions

Findings of this study are organized and discussed as per the study themes which are leadership, sexual reproductive health, and good academic performance.

#### Contribution of the Extracurricular on Leadership

**Extracurricular build youth leadership skills:** Through extracurricular, secondary school youth have been able to learn about leadership, internalize qualities of leadership, and exercise leadership. Secondary school students who are frequently taking part in extracurricular activities have been motivated to compete for leadership positions in the school. Moreover, the majority of the leaders in school

government are boys and girls who are actively engaged in extracurricular activities

*"When you see stories about young leaders, you learn that they have confidence, therefore, that helped me to gain the confidence of standing before people and asking my fellow students to vote for me for the position of head girl".*

Jenkins (2011) argues that extracurricular activities contribute massively to building leadership skills for the young generation, similar to the findings of this study. The involvement of secondary school youth in extracurricular activities influences them to step into leadership roles. This study revealed that extracurricular activities provide a platform for secondary school youth to learn about self-management, conflict resolution, communication, emotional intelligence, something similar revealed when explaining the difference between hard and soft skills and their impact (Laker & Powell, 2011). Since leadership can be learned, structured extracurricular activities help young people are exploring their strengths and learn how they can make a difference as also proposed by Hancock, Dyk, & Jones (2012)

**Leadership is about having an agenda:** extracurricular activities help secondary school students to know that being a leader goes hand in hand with having an agenda to deal with for the majority. Extracurricular activities have provided a platform for secondary school youth to identify pressing issues affecting society and thus motivated them to lead others in solving them. Although some of the extracurricular participants have used the knowledge to lead their fellow students, some build a big picture that when they get older they will step into leadership roles to solve problems affecting the community.

*"Societies have many problems and I know that to be a leader is to solve problems. In our groups, I am a leader. I asked for votes and promised to solve students' problems.... when I complete studies I want to be a member of parliament"*

The findings of this study revealed that extracurricular activities shape students' current and future mindsets for leadership. The argument is supported by (Shaffer, 2019), arguing that a student's future mindset is one of the greater achievements of extracurricular activities. Those, the successful mindset for secondary students are instilled in them through their involvement in extracurricular activities. The study revealed that students learn time management skills and creativity as the way to improve people's lives and the ability to concentrate in development. Hancock, Dyk, & Jones (2012) argue that extracurricular help young leaders to learn internal skills for handling pressure, learning when to take risks, and taking responsibility for individual performance, something similar to the findings of this study. Shaffer, (2019) argues that extracurricular give students leadership experiences more than what they can be taught by a book or in a classroom.

**Extracurricular teach youth to volunteer:** Extracurricular activities teach secondary school youth that volunteerism is a vital prerequisite for good leaders. Therefore, secondary school youth who are engaging in extracurricular activities are taking a leading role in volunteering themselves in their school and community activities. That extracurricular allows secondary school youth to experience community challenges and participate in addressing community problems.

*"We did the task of cleaning the village hospital and creating a washing infrastructure to be used by people after using a toilet. All these were motivated by extracurricular activities"*

Marks & Jones, (2016) argue that despite the decline of both interest and participation in volunteerism, high schools have demonstrated the rise of volunteerism among students caused by their involvement in extracurricular activities. The same spirit has been revealed by the findings of this study in which secondary school youth are volunteering in both school and community activities. Young people revealed that they opt to volunteer because matters to themselves and others. The same findings were revealed by Dickinson, et. al (2020) who argued that youth tend to volunteer as they find to be more meaningful in their lives.

Marks & Jones (2016) support the findings of this study that youth tend to volunteer themselves in community services because they care about others and that caring supersedes other factors such as personal interest, group norms, and social benefits.

#### **Contribution of the Extracurricular on Sexual Reproductive Health**

**Learn about their bodies:** Through extracurricular activities, secondary school youth have been able to learn and internalize biological changes which take place in their bodies. The changes that take place in their body are their first experience but they have been able to manage the pressure as they are equipped with relevant and enough information obtained from extracurricular activities. Moreover, the information about their biological changes obtained from the extracurricular activities was something that needed to be offered by their parents, something that has rarely occurred. Parents consider talking to their children especially girls about their biological changes as taboos. Therefore extracurricular play a parental role by openly exposing young people to information about biological changes for boys and girls.

*“My parents never took time to explain to me about puberty, but through discussing in our clubs, I have realized that there are so many types of pads which I can use and with very low cost”*

Godswill (2012) investigated youth sexuality and reproductive health in Nigeria and found that; youth are exposed to a sexual risk environment in absence of extracurricular activities. The study resonates with the finding of this study that before joining into extracurricular activities, secondary school youth were vulnerable to risky sexual behavior because of the limited understanding of their bodies. Extracurricular activities have helped youth to know their body perfectly so that they can avoid being ruined by short-term pleasure. Extracurricular teach young people knowledge and skills of critical issues related to sexuality, including puberty and the reproductive anatomy, emotional aspects of maturation, the value of abstinence, and alternative methods of contraception. Modecki, Barber & Eccles (2014) support the argument that extracurricular play a vital role in youth's biological awareness.

#### **Secondary school youth are not astonished by the biological changes:**

Extracurricular activities especially the ones focusing on reproductive health and rights have enlightened youth understanding about puberty. Through weekly extracurricular engagement, secondary school youth have been able to learn that puberty is a natural phenomenon that takes place in every human being. Additionally, secondary school youth knows that puberty processes vary between boys and girls and sometimes within the same sex. The extracurricular activities have enabled both girls and boys to come into the common understanding that menstruation is healthy for both boys and girls have got a role to play in promoting menstruation hygiene.

*“That changes occur in your body is something normal, that everyone must experience it and it will happen to everyone's body, is something MUST and is there, it must be there in the process of growing up”*

Hastuti, et al (2018) demonstrated the usefulness of extracurricular for secondary school youth in mastering their body changes. While the author used the reproductive health promotion model school-based with an extracurricular approach of reproductive health, it was revealed that extracurricular help secondary school youth to experience self-development and fight against social, physical, sexual violence, and prevent themselves from sexually transmitted infections. The study revealed the same findings with this study because through extracurricular, secondary school youth understand their bodies better. Gold-Watts, et.al (2020) argue that although biological changes are shaped by gender norms, extracurricular activities help students to understand their bodies which in turn allow them to develop coping mechanisms in addressing biological challenges.

**Puberty needs hygiene:** Extracurricular activities have not only managed to teach secondary school youth about the process but also it has provided youth with the requirements for puberty. Youth knows that puberty needs cleanest for both girls and boys. Through extracurricular,

girls have learned the alternative ways for maintaining cleanest during menstruation through making local sanitary pads while boys are aware of the frequent need for taking birth and shaving to avoid bad smelling *“Through extracurricular, I realized that there are so many ways of staying clean and also I noticed that there was a school which was producing pads, so they wrote a checklist required to make pads”*

Van Hung, et al (2019) argue that extracurricular allow students to understand the health practices when they experience puberty. The same arguments were revealed by students in this study that secondary school youth maintain hygiene during puberty. Fialkov, et.al (2021) argue that extracurricular does not only help youth to understand the health practices but also it provides girls with the right information, building their psychology as well as making them feel comfortable when they are in period.

#### **Extracurricular help youth to manage risk sexual behavior:**

Extracurricular help secondary school youth to be aware of the risk that can be resulted from entertaining emotions taking them into risk sexual behavior. Through extracurricular activities, secondary school youth have developed appropriate mechanisms of controlling risk sexual behavior such as engaging in sports and working on challenging academic activities. Moreover, secondary school youths' are driven to take care of themselves by knowing the negative repercussion of engaging in early and unsafe sex that, they opt to abstain from sex until they finish their studies.

*“During puberty, there are certain sexual feelings that you experience, so how you can handle it because you know is not of any importance for now... it indeed happens but we learn all this through extracurricular activities. we can also advise our fellows to stop engaging in sex while they are students”*

Similar to the findings of this study, previous studies revealed a positive relationship between extracurricular activities with the increasing ability of youth to manage risk sexual behavior. Van Hung, et. al (2019) argue that the understanding of sexually transmitted diseases among secondary school youth in Vietnam significantly increased from 34.5% to at least 90% after attending extra-curricular activities on reproductive health. Similarly, Hassan, et al. (2016) argue that unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortion, sexual coercion resulting in sexually transmitted infections including HIV and AIDS in Nigeria were solved through extracurricular activities in school settings.

#### **Contribution of the Extracurricular on Good Academic Performance**

**Extracurricular activities are also for academic benefits:** Through organized extracurricular activities, secondary school youths' get the opportunity to interact with different publications and magazines. The content of these documents are resonating with academic content but in a simplified and contextualized manner. Additionally, the extracurricular activities are conducted in Swahili, the language understood to every youth and hence active participation and internalization. Similarly, extracurricular activities expose secondary school youth to academic competition through essay and poem write-up as well as the debate as a means of demonstrating activeness in extracurricular activities.

*“There are questions which need you to think and others are related to our subjects, for example in Fema magazine there are questions which make me think, I mean which expand my understanding are the questions on filling the gaps”*

Enachescu (2019) investigated several countries and came up with findings that there is a close relationship between student involvement in extracurricular activities and improved attention, behavior, and academic performance. Enachescu's (2019) study is supported by the findings of this study as it revealed that students engaging in extracurricular activities perform better in their academics. Shaffer (2019) supports the findings of this study that extracurricular activities contribute to students' academic performances as they help them to achieve higher grades compared to students who are not engaging in extracurricular

activities. Similarly (Chengula, 2015) argues that extracurricular make students perform better academically.

**Extracurricular aspire academic discussion:** Extracurricular play a vital role in building positive relationships between secondary school youth and their teachers. Therefore positive relationships emerging from extracurricular help students to be comfortable within themselves as well as able to face teachers when they need help. Through extracurricular activities, youth are capable of brainstorming and developing a sense of being an active member in a group by contributing when the discussion is underway.

*“Being in the club (extracurricular) is a good thing as we are all used to each other... not shame and everyone talk. We are all active and if you don't talk about it either you are sick or you have a problem. Something we must learn as a group and help. Therefore we are free to each other even our teachers because we go to them for subjects”*

Poteat, et. al (2019) study revealed that extracurricular activities in schools are a very important platform for meaningful and sustainable discussions of cultural and sociopolitical issues. As such, the findings of this study were found to be similar to those revealed by Poteat, et. al (2019). The findings of this study demonstrated ways in which extracurricular activities facilitate not only issues affecting the society but also building confidence and brainstorming ability to youth as proposed by Godfrey & Grayman (2014). The function of extracurricular activities is increasingly important as it unpacks the necessity for youth to internalize their environment and take ownership of the things which not only come to their examination but also affect their daily life.

Extracurricular activities have minimized students' truancy. Extracurricular activities have made students love school and therefore avoid unnecessary truancy. Extracurricular activities have changed secondary school students' minds on the way they view schools. Instead of viewing school as a place of punishment because of the classroom punishment, the minds of youth have shifted to see school as a place of enjoying, interacting, and learning things they love most. Extracurricular has also shaped students to build a sense of urgency in making sure that they bring back to school their fellows who ran away from school by creating a school as a bad place.

*“We met our friend who use to avoid coming to school and go to town...We shared with him about the activities we are doing include music dancing and acting... he is here with us now, attending even classroom sessions”*

Extracurricular activities minimize truancy among engaged students. The findings of this study are supported by Shaffer (2019). A study conducted by Shaffer (2019) in the USA revealed that extracurricular activities influence students' attendance rates. Extra activities such as music education and other talent-related activities motivate students to never miss school. This is similar to the findings of this study in which extracurricular activities such as music, modeling, and acting attract many students not to miss school. Additionally, a study conducted by Chengula (2015) in Songea revealed that extracurricular activities are vital in retaining students in secondary school, something supported by the findings of this study.

**Extracurricular has improved girls' academic performance:** Extracurricular has provided an opportunity for girls to discuss menstruation freely and openly. Through deeper and open discussion, girls have been able to treat menstruation not as something private and for shame but as something manageable and known. Therefore girls are attending school even when they are in the menstruation period. This situation has contributed to the improvement of girls' academics as they are no longer missing classes every month but attending classes even when they are in period.

*“Now I don't miss class every month. I know when I am going to be in period and I prepare in advance. It is hard even to know am in a period because I perform my duty as normal”*

The findings of this study revealed that girls perform better academically after being engaged in extracurricular activities. Extracurricular activities not only help girls to attend schools through managing menstruation but it educates girls on sex education like matters about girls' harassment, early pregnancy, and other harmful practices as suggested by Chengula (2015). Balague, et. al (2020) argues that girls' academic performance improves as they engage in extracurricular activities the same as the findings of this study. While Balague, et. Al (2020) argue that in early adolescence extracurricular help girls to achieve academic performance with better parental education, in late adolescence extracurricular help girls to achieve academic performance without not participating in collective sports but by paying attention to parental education. The finding of this study did not classify the level of girls' engagement in extracurricular activities but findings revealed that apart from performing better in education, extracurricular help girls to manage biological pressure resulting from puberty as the same as proposed by Hassan, et al. (2016).

### Conclusion

The term extracurricular activities involve different non-classroom activities such as debate, athletics, music, drama, school publications, student council, school clubs, contests, and various social events (Lunenburg, 2010). Extracurricular activities have proved to be vital for students' socio-emotional and psychological development (Bonaventure & Marie, 2020; Chengula, 2015 & Laker & Powell, 2011). Extracurricular influences secondary school youth's development as it exposes them to environments translating real situations affecting their wellbeing. Through extracurricular students can explore their environment, encouraging innovations and building creativity with very minimal resources. Additionally, extracurricular activities have proved to have a positive behavior outcome such as academic performance in the school-age stage and occupational status and income in adulthood (Guest & Schneider, 2003).

### Recommendations

- I. The government should translate extracurricular activities from documents to actions and give equal weight to both classroom and non-classroom activities. The extracurricular activities balance the existing gap between soft and hard skills. That extracurricular helps youth to address challenges they face in their daily life. Extracurricular found to be of interest to students because it all connected to people's character and it is widely applicable to most areas. While hard skills help an individual to enter a job market, soft skills guarantee job opportunities and further career growth.
- II. All secondary school students need to embrace extracurricular activities as an opportunity to grow. Extracurricular provide secondary school youth with the experience that they never get from the classroom. For students, extracurricular should be something resonating with their strengths and interests as it will help them in the future. Students need to treat extracurricular as something building their future and that they should treat activities with expected respect.

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