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# Assessing the Participation of Students with Intellectual Impairment in Extracurricular Activities in Primary Schools in Dar es Salaam City Council in Tanzania

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**Abstract:** This study examined the participation of pupils with mild and moderate intellectual impairment in extracurricular activities in public primary schools within Dar es Salaam City Council. A qualitative approach was employed to identify the types of inclusive extracurricular activities, explore strategies promoting student participation, and assess barriers faced by teachers and administrators. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and document review, and the study was guided by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which highlights the influence of family, policy, and society. Participants included an education officer, school administrators, special needs teachers, and pupils with intellectual impairment, selected through purposive and random sampling to ensure rich information. Thematic analysis of the collected data revealed that, although schools offered diverse extracurricular activities and applied various inclusion strategies, participation among pupils with mild and moderate intellectual impairment remained low due to limited resources, inadequate teacher training, insufficient assistive tools, and persistent social barriers. Strengthening inclusive support systems is essential to ensure extracurricular opportunities effectively meet these students' needs. Key recommendations include enhancing teacher capacity, improving access to assistive resources, adapting school infrastructure, and raising community awareness to promote meaningful and equitable participation in extracurricular activities.

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## INTRODUCTION

Students with intellectual disabilities experience limitations in intellectual functioning, including learning, reasoning, and problem-solving, as well as adaptive behaviors encompassing conceptual, social, and practical skills. These developmental challenges often affect their ability to participate effectively in daily activities, including school-based and extracurricular programs. Extracurricular activities are critical for holistic development, fostering social skills, self-confidence, and opportunities to explore new interests. For students with intellectual disabilities, participation in such activities promotes inclusion, peer interaction, and personal growth, complementing academic learning.

Despite these benefits, international evidence indicates that students with intellectual disabilities face persistent barriers to meaningful engagement in extracurricular programs. Even in well-resourced education systems, challenges such as limited access, insufficient support, and exclusion persist (Wang et al., 2022). Legislative frameworks like the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (USA) and the Equality Act (UK, 2021) advocate for inclusive practices, yet practical obstacles such as inadequate adaptive equipment, limited teacher training, and low expectations continue to hinder participation (Anderson & S, 2023).

In African contexts, inclusive education policies exist, but implementation gaps remain pronounced. In South Africa, for example, only 30% of schools provide adapted sports programs for learners with disabilities (Ngcobo et al., 2023). In East African countries like Kenya, students with special needs rarely engage in extracurricular activities due to insufficient facilities, undertrained personnel, and cultural misconceptions about disability (Mutua et al., 2024).

In Tanzania, most students identified with intellectual impairments in public primary schools exhibit mild to moderate challenges. With appropriate instructional support and inclusive practices, these learners can achieve both academic and life skills. The government has made strides through the Education and Training Policy (2014; revised 2023), establishment of inclusive schools with special needs units, and organization of annual sports competitions for learners with disabilities. However, significant gaps remain in implementing inclusive extracurricular programs. Recent evidence shows that while around 80% of schools have after-school programs, only 20% are accessible to learners with special needs (Komba & Mkumbo, 2023). Persistent challenges include insufficient funding, lack of adaptive resources, inadequate staff training, and societal attitudes toward disability.

There is a notable scarcity of empirical studies in Tanzania examining the participation of students with intellectual impairments in extracurricular activities, particularly those that explore strategies to enhance inclusion. Addressing this knowledge gap is essential for guiding interventions, strengthening school practices, and ensuring equitable learning experiences beyond the classroom.

The present study investigates the participation of students with mild and moderate intellectual impairments in extracurricular activities in selected public primary schools within the Dar es Salaam City Council. It focuses on identifying school-level

practices, strategies that promote inclusion, barriers to participation, and potential solutions involving policy reforms, school initiatives, and community engagement. The study seeks to provide evidence that informs improvements in inclusive practices and supports the holistic development of learners with intellectual disabilities.

### **Research Objective**

To investigate the strategies used by public primary schools to facilitate the participation of students with mild and moderate intellectual impairments in inclusive extracurricular activities.

### **Literature Review**

The study is guided by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (EST), which provides a framework for understanding how various environmental factors, including family, policy, and societal influences, shape the participation of students in extracurricular activities. Bronfenbrenner (1979) posits that a child's development is influenced not solely by individual characteristics but by the interaction of multiple interrelated systems, namely the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. Each of these layers contributes to shaping a child's experiences, and their dynamic interactions affect how learners engage with school life, including extracurricular programs (Tudge et al., 2009). For students with intellectual impairments, this framework is particularly relevant as it allows exploration of how school environments, family involvement, community attitudes, and broader policy contexts either facilitate or hinder participation in extracurricular activities within public primary schools in the Dar es Salaam City Council.

Evidence from this study emphasizes the need for stronger implementation of inclusive education policies in Tanzania, especially within extracurricular settings where learners with mild and moderate intellectual impairments continue to face barriers. Despite the establishment of guiding documents such as the Education and Training Policy (2014; revised 2023) and the Persons with Disabilities Act (2010), practical application at the school level remains weak. Investment from the Ministry of Education and local authorities is necessary to support inclusive extracurricular programs, enhance teacher professional development, and ensure equitable access for all learners. At the school level, head teachers and educators are encouraged to design flexible and adaptive activities, build teacher capacity in inclusive pedagogy, and collaborate with parents and communities to reduce stigma and create supportive environments. Providing necessary materials, differentiated supervision, and extending learning through after-school programs are critical for promoting the holistic development of students with intellectual impairments. Further research, particularly longitudinal studies and investigations in rural and technology-supported contexts, can deepen understanding of inclusion and inform practical strategies for translating national policies into effective school-level practices.

Empirical studies underscore the importance of teacher training, program adaptation, peer support, and institutional readiness in promoting inclusion.

International research demonstrates that peer support programs reduce social isolation and increase participation among students with intellectual disabilities (Carter et al., 2012). Targeted teacher training enables facilitators to modify extracurricular activities to accommodate diverse abilities, while parental involvement and flexible program structures sustain engagement. In Mainland China, Liu et al. (2022) found that children with intellectual impairments participated more in life skills and after-school programs than in social or volunteer activities, with participation influenced by disability severity and environmental support. This finding highlights the role of context-specific factors, contrasting highly structured systems with low-resource environments such as those in Tanzania. In South Africa, Engelbrecht and Green (2007) reported that stigma, insufficient staff training, and limited resources restricted participation, although schools that invested in professional development and a whole-school inclusion approach saw greater engagement in sports, arts, and cultural activities. Similarly, in Kenya, Mugo et al. (2010) observed that adapted extracurricular activities increased involvement among learners with intellectual impairments, but peer stigma and low parental engagement reduced participation. These studies collectively highlight the importance of teacher sensitization, peer awareness, and community involvement in fostering inclusion, all of which are relevant for Tanzanian schools.

Locally, Machogu (2014) noted that teachers' understanding and implementation of inclusive education in Tanzania varied, with those trained in special needs education demonstrating stronger capacity to support learners during extracurricular activities. Anselimus (2023) found that assistive technologies improved participation among students with visual impairments, although limitations such as cost and lack of training hindered their effective use. These insights point to systemic challenges, particularly in resource availability and teacher preparedness, which similarly affect students with intellectual impairments. Despite these contributions, Tanzanian research largely emphasizes barriers to participation rather than providing empirical evidence on the strategies used by schools to promote inclusion. Little is known about how government primary schools operationalize inclusive practices, how teachers and administrators perceive these strategies, or how such approaches affect the participation of learners with mild and moderate intellectual impairments. Addressing this gap, the present study explores the strategies employed in selected public primary schools in Dar es Salaam, assesses their effectiveness, and identifies opportunities for improving the inclusion of students with intellectual impairments in extracurricular activities.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study employed a qualitative research approach to investigate the participation of pupils with mild and moderate intellectual disabilities in extracurricular activities.

Interviews, observations, and document analysis were used to generate in-depth information. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the City SNEO, head teachers, and teachers to gather views on school policies, funding, teacher experience, parental involvement, and perceptions of inclusion. Observations were made during

playground sessions, sports, environmental activities, and daily routines using a checklist to record pupil participation, teacher support, and peer interactions. Relevant documents such as attendance registers, activity schedules, and policy circulars were reviewed to validate the findings and provide institutional context. These methods enabled a comprehensive understanding of actual practices and the extent of inclusion in the selected schools.

Participants included an education officer, school administrators, special needs teachers, and pupils with intellectual impairment, selected through purposive and random sampling to ensure rich information.

Thematic analysis of the collected data revealed that, although schools offered diverse extracurricular activities and applied various inclusion strategies, participation among pupils with mild and moderate intellectual impairment remained low due to limited resources, inadequate teacher training, insufficient assistive tools, and persistent social barriers.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Findings

This chapter presents the findings of the study according to the research objective: to examine the strategies used by public primary schools to enhance the participation of pupils with mild and moderate intellectual impairments in extracurricular activities. Data are presented based on the themes that emerged from interviews, observations, and document reviews.

#### 1. Policy-Guided Inclusion Practices

Interviews with the City SNEO, head teachers, and teachers revealed that schools rely on the Education Policy (2023), the 2014 Special Needs Education Guidelines, and the Persons with Disabilities Act (2010) to organize inclusive extracurricular activities. These policies guide schools in identifying learners with disabilities, preparing activity timetables, and integrating all pupils into daily routines. One official emphasized that;

*“Policies give direction for planning and ensure that every child is involved in the daily programs.”* (Interview SNEO, July 2025)

#### 2. Document Review Findings

Analysis of registers, timetables, and policy circulars showed that schools keep structured records of learners with disabilities and scheduled routines aimed at ensuring participation. These documents confirmed administrative commitment to inclusion.

Policy frameworks operate at the macrosystem level (Bronfenbrenner’s ecological system Theory, 1979), influencing school structures and promoting consistent participation. However, effectiveness depends on how well schools interpret and implement these policies.

### 3. School-Based Inclusive Practices

Teachers and head teachers reported several deliberate strategies to foster inclusion, such as mixed-group routines involving gardening, cleaning, music, and dance. These activities help pupils with and without impairments learn together and build social relationships.

Schools also participate in collaboration networks where special needs teachers share teaching strategies and discuss challenges. One teacher explained:

*“When teachers collaborate and share experiences, it becomes easier to engage learners with intellectual impairments.”* (Teacher in School B, August 2025)

Observations during playground sessions, sports, and practical tasks revealed active participation by pupils with intellectual impairments, Teachers providing individualized instructions and assistance, Frequent peer support, and Lower participation in activities requiring complex rules

The observation checklist indicated that participation was strongest in simple, hands-on tasks, while activities needing detailed instructions offered fewer opportunities.

### 4. Document Review Findings

Activity schedules and class lists showed regular routines intended for all pupils. However, none of the schools had documentation showing formal teacher training on inclusive extracurricular activities.

School-based strategies reflect the microsystem, where daily interactions shape pupil experiences. Teacher collaboration networks operate at the exosystem level. The absence of structured training remains a key limitation to effective inclusion.

### 5. Home and Community Support Strategies

Teachers reported that inclusion extends beyond the school. Schools conduct home visits, assign practical tasks to be practiced at home, and engage communities through meetings and sensitization programs.

*“Home visits help us understand how the child lives and how we can support learning both at school and home.”* (interview, Head Teacher School A, August 2025)

Pupils who practiced tasks at home (e.g., sweeping or watering) performed them more confidently at school, indicating continuity between environments.

### 6. Document Review Findings

Minutes from community meetings confirmed ongoing collaboration with parents and local committees. These strategies represent the mesosystem, where home and school interactions reinforce inclusive participation. Findings show that successful participation of pupils with intellectual impairments requires coordinated strategies

across multiple ecological levels. Policies set direction, school routines facilitate daily engagement, and home-community partnerships strengthen continuity. A major gap is the lack of documented teacher training, which limits the full implementation of inclusive extracurricular activities.

## **Discussion**

The findings of this study align closely with the literature on inclusive education and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, illustrating how multiple environmental levels interact to influence the participation of pupils with mild and moderate intellectual impairments in extracurricular activities. At the policy level, schools rely on the Education Policy (2023), the 2014 Special Needs Education Guidelines, and the Persons with Disabilities Act (2010) to structure inclusive programs. This confirms the role of the macrosystem in providing overarching frameworks that guide schools in identifying learners with disabilities, scheduling activities, and integrating all pupils into daily routines. Similar to Engelbrecht and Green (2007) and Mugo et al. (2010), these findings show that national policies establish a foundation for inclusion but their effectiveness is contingent upon school-level interpretation and implementation.

School-based practices reflect the microsystem, where daily interactions between teachers, peers, and learners directly shape participation. Strategies such as mixed-group routines, collaborative tasks in music, gardening, or cleaning, and peer support networks were observed to facilitate inclusion. These practices resonate with international findings from Carter et al. (2012) and Liu et al. (2022), which highlight the importance of flexible program adaptation, peer engagement, and teacher collaboration in fostering meaningful participation. The study also observed that pupils with intellectual impairments engaged more successfully in simple, hands-on activities than in those requiring complex instructions, underscoring the need for differentiated strategies to match learners' abilities, a point also emphasized in Machogu (2014) regarding teacher competence and adaptive pedagogy.

Home and community engagement, situated within the mesosystem, further supports inclusive participation by reinforcing school-based activities. Home visits, practice tasks, and community sensitization programs strengthened continuity and enhanced learners' confidence, consistent with Bronfenbrenner's notion that development is shaped by interactions across interconnected systems. This finding aligns with global studies highlighting parental involvement as a critical enabler of participation (Carter et al., 2012; Mugo et al., 2010).

A key limitation identified is the absence of formal teacher training on inclusive extracurricular activities, which constrains the full realization of policy intentions. This echoes prior research in Tanzania and across Africa, where inadequate teacher preparation, limited resources, and inconsistent implementation hinder effective inclusion (Machogu, 2014; Anselimus, 2023; Ngcobo et al., 2023). The findings illustrate that effective participation of pupils with intellectual impairments emerges from coordinated strategies spanning policy frameworks, school routines, teacher

collaboration, and home-community partnerships, with targeted teacher training as a critical missing component.

## CONCLUSION

The participation of pupils with mild and moderate intellectual impairments in extracurricular activities is shaped by a combination of policy guidance, school-level initiatives, and home-community support. Policies such as the Education Policy (2023), the Special Needs Education Guidelines (2014), and the Persons with Disabilities Act (2010) provide a clear framework for inclusive practices, ensuring that schools have direction in planning and organizing activities that accommodate all learners. School-based strategies, including mixed-group routines, collaborative tasks, peer support, and teacher networks, foster daily engagement and promote social interaction among learners with and without impairments. Activities that are hands-on and simple to follow elicit higher participation, while tasks with complex instructions require additional adaptation and scaffolding. Engagement is further strengthened when schools coordinate with parents and communities, through home visits, community sensitization, and reinforcement of tasks practiced at home, creating continuity between learning environments.

Despite these successes, gaps remain, particularly the absence of formal teacher training on inclusive extracurricular activities, which limits the consistent application of policy and pedagogical strategies. Without structured professional development, the full potential of inclusion is constrained, affecting the depth and quality of learners' participation. Additionally, resource limitations, infrastructural constraints, and varying levels of community awareness continue to pose challenges for meaningful engagement.

Moving forward, improving participation requires a multi-layered approach. Strengthening teacher capacity through targeted training programs equips educators with the skills to adapt activities to diverse abilities. Schools should continue fostering collaborative practices among teachers and encourage peer support mechanisms that integrate learners with intellectual impairments. Home and community engagement strategies must be expanded to reinforce inclusion beyond school walls. Policy implementation needs closer monitoring to ensure alignment between intended frameworks and practical school-level action, and resources should be allocated to support adaptive materials and inclusive infrastructures. By addressing these interlinked areas, schools can provide more equitable, engaging, and meaningful extracurricular experiences, promoting the holistic development of learners with intellectual impairments.

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