



Parents' Viewpoint on the Outdoor Learning Activities in Pre-primary: The Case of Selected Early Childhood Centres in Morogoro Municipality

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Abstract: Children's out-door learning activities are important for improved child learning through contribution in holistic development and learning, health and well-being and environmental awareness. However, in Morogoro, parents view point and perceptions are still not known with regard to the outdoor activities provided in pre-primary school learning. Hence this study aimed at investigating the parent's view point and perception on out-doors learning activities in pre-primary schools in Morogoro. A total 100 randomly selected parents and 10 purposefully selected teachers composed the sample size. Major results indicated that, 90% of the parents had a positive perception in outdoor learning activities. It was clear those preschool children who participated in outdoor learning activities developed physical skills, cognitive, linguistic, motor, and social-emotional. Also, parents perceived that physical development is vital for children as it lays the foundation for a healthy and active life. Moreover, improvement in learning environment, curriculum, training for teachers, learning facilities and emphasis on exploration with natural materials, dramatic/imaginary play, active physical play, art activities, learning center activities, gardening activities, investigative activities, out-door storytelling and nature/neighbourhood walks, were the suggestion provided by parents. The study recommends improved teaching-learning environments by education providers for enhanced children's learning.

Keywords: Parents' Viewpoint, Outdoor, Learning Activities, Academic Performance

1. Introduction

Early childhood education, either formal or informal is vital for the socio-economic development of a child. Regarding the current situation, society does not participate fully in children's care due to being busy with other socio-economic activities. The absence of social responsibilities leads to motivation for the initiation and development of children's centers in various parts of the country including Morogoro Municipality. Also, the Tanzania Education policy (2014) states that the pre-primary structure will be for 1 year for children 5 years old, and children between 3 years and 4 years can start the class if she or he is ready for school. The same policy states that children below 3 years old will be raised in centers under the Health care policy [24].

In this case, the researcher wants to establish the success

and shortfalls of current childhood schools in providing formal education to the children. In the year 2016, the Tanzania government changed the Tanzania education policy due to the world economic, science, and technology changes. Tanzania as a nation through the official document, education policy, (2014) and URT [24] announced that all Tanzania primary schools to start pre-primary classes despite being a private organization or government they have to get involved in starting pre-primary classes in their primary school structure. Due to these changes every primary school in Tanzania start to implement a pre-primary class, following this order, most schools started offering the program without having qualified and skilled teachers who are supposed to teach in these special classes. The most common name given

to this special class of pupils is 'Darasa la Awali' in Government Primary schools, while in private Primary schools' names like Nursery school, pre-preparatory class, Kindergarten, or Kinder class, and Pre-Primary are commonly used.

The changes shook the life of Tanzanians as the Nation, the lifestyle of Tanzanians, educational structure from pre-primary to primary level, socially, philosophical, economically, psychologically, hygienically, and spiritual too. The challenges interfered with teaching and learning process activities, socially and in school as a program. The changes disturbed the teaching and learning process in a way that parents don't understand why and how these changes occurred.

Outdoor is a setting in which children can interact with nature, including experiencing and exploring the natural world. Furthermore, the outdoors provides children with fresh opportunities to explore and encourages multi-sensory experiences such as sight, hearing, smell, and touch [21]. Also, Wilson [28] claims that children's feelings of love, sensitivity, and empathy for nature grow unconsciously when they are regularly exposed to the natural world. Outdoor learning activities are becoming increasingly popular as a foundation for children's development both socially, psychologically, physically, and mentally. Outdoor play allows children to investigate their surroundings. Researchers have discovered that outdoor play encourages children to speak, express their feelings, and explore and learn about the world around them [3].

Several other studies have stressed the necessity of getting children outside to increase their level of physical exercise [20]. According to studies, adults mistakenly believe that children's physical activity levels are higher than they are [20], and as a result, adults fail to schedule enough physical activities for children [22]. Previous research has elucidated instructors' perspectives on outdoor learning. Teachers, for example, relate the experience of practicing outdoor learning with ideals such as freedom, joy, and independence, according to Waite's research [25]. According to research conducted in the United States of America, teachers agreed that outdoor play was important, yet their actions often prevented children from playing outside [16]. Teachers considered the indoor classroom as the primary location for learning, indicating a lack of awareness of the benefits and educational potential of outdoor play.

While in Tanzania, children's outdoor learning activities are practiced at the school level as an order from the government, little has been done to ascertain the parents' perception and viewpoint on this kind of education system provided to their children. Most of the research on outdoor education has focused on studying the effects of outdoor activities on young people [4, 7, 9, 10, 29]. Undertaking this study is vital for enhanced parents' participation in children's learning and hence fostering their development. This study therefore aims to explore parents' viewpoint and perception on the outdoor learning activities in pre-primary schools.

2. The Theoretical and Analytical Framework

This study has a theoretical background from Maria Montessori who reported that, if adults put children in a well-prepared environment and gently watch over the activity of the children, children will discover what they need for their development at an appropriate time by themselves and absorb it into their minds and body. The critical elements for the growth of children are the environment, teaching materials, and adults who watch over them. Instead of adults teaching children unilaterally and giving them some kind of ability, the emphasis is on providing an environment in which children can learn by themselves and making sure that children have some object to concentrate on as well as time and place to concentrate on it for themselves.

The Maria Montessori theory is directly related to this work and can therefore help to explain this work in the sense that, all critical elements needed for effective learning by children which are environment, teaching materials, and adults who watch over them are all what are needed in Tanzanian pre-primary schools. Therefore, the perception of parents based on these learning environments is still not known, and therefore a need to understand.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design

Research design is the arrangement of conditions for the collection and analysis of data in a manner that aims to combine relevance to the research purpose with economy in the procedure [13]. It is a detailed plan of work to be done to achieve the research objectives [6]. This study used a case study research design in paying intensive attention to a particular entity that pre-primary schools unlike other research designs such as survey and action design i.e., it's a more cost-efficient method compared to other research designs since it focuses to be on a single unit, and the study was conducted in one-time point.

3.2. Description of the Study Area

This study was conducted in the Morogoro region, specifically data were collected in Morogoro municipality. The criteria for selecting Morogoro Municipality was the availability of active pre-primary schools. Morogoro municipality is one of the six districts of the Morogoro region in Tanzania, it covers 260 square kilometres and has a total population of more than 315,866 people where the male being 151,700 and females 164,166 [23]. Its geographical location coordinates are 6° 49' 20" south, and 37° 40' 0" East. This study was conducted specifically conducted in ten (10) pre-primary schools (namely; Mount font Primary school, Unitas Primary school, Modula Primary school, Holy cross Primary school, Ndetembia Matemu Primary school, Brigit Primary school, Kaloleni Primary school, Kilakala Primary school, Mchikichini Primary school, Mwembesongo

Primary school). These schools were purposefully selected because of its activeness in provision of pre-primary school learning.

3.3. Population of the Study

The population of this study were all parents and pre-primary school teachers in Morogoro Municipality, however based on the nature of the activity and spread of these parents, it was difficult to find their exactly total number to constitute a population, hence necessitating the use of both purposeful and random sampling techniques.

3.4. Sample Size and Sampling Technique

In this study, purposeful sampling technique was used to

select 10 schools based on their reachability and activeness in provision of pre-primary school out-door learning. The schools were namely; The Mount font Primary school, Mafisa Primary school, Modula Primary school, Holy cross Primary school, Area five Primary school, Brigit Primary school, Kaloleni Primary school, Kilakala Primary school, Mchikichini Primary school and Mwembesongo Primary school. From each school, one (1) teacher was randomly selected to constitute a sample size of 10 pre-primary school teachers. Also, ten (10) parents were randomly selected around each school and make a total of 110 respondents from whom data were collected. Therefore, the total sample size of this study was 110. Table 1 presents the population distribution.

Table 1. Sample Category and Size.

Name of School(s)	No. of Parents (a)	No. of Teachers (b)	Total (c)=(a)+(b)
Mount Font Primary School	10	1	11
Area five Primary School	10	1	11
Modula Primary School	10	1	11
Holy Cross Primary School	10	1	11
Mfisa Primary School	10	1	11
Brigit Primary School	10	1	11
Kaloleni Primary School	10	1	11
Kilakala Primary School	10	1	11
Mchikichini Primary School	10	1	11
Mwembesongo Primary School	10	1	11
Total	100	10	110

Source: Temu (2021).

3.5. Data Type and Collection

Primary data was collected through a pre-prepared structured questionnaire given to 100 parents while a checklist was used to collect information from 10 teachers, all based on the objectives of the study. Furthermore, data from key informants i.e., education office and head teachers were collected by using a pre-prepared checklist that guided the process. Secondary data were collected from different sources such as the internet, research reports, books, and the library.

3.6. Data Analysis

Collected data were cleaned, coded and punched into SPSS version 20 software for analysis. In this study, both quantitative and qualitative data analysis were conducted. Quantitative data analysis that involved measuring of numerical values from which descriptions like frequencies and percentages were made. Qualitative data analysis aimed at summarizing data were analyzed by using a thematic analysis approach.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Response Rate

The researcher distributed and administered a total of 100

questionnaires to parents in Morogoro municipality. Overall, 100 questionnaires were received which represented a response rate of 100% implying that a researcher obtained the required information on the parents' viewpoint on the outdoor learning activities in enhancing students' academic performance in pre-primary. Moreover, the researcher interviewed 10 teachers as key informants for the study. The results indicated a very good response rate because according to Mugenda [18] a response rate of above 50% is allowed for analysis, a response rate of 60% is good and a response rate of 70% and over is very good.

4.2. Parents' Perception of Outdoor Learning Activities

In assessing the parents' viewpoint on the outdoor learning activities in enhancing students' academic performance, the first specific objective of this study examined the parents' perception of outdoor learning activities in Morogoro municipality. This implies that parents with a positive perception of the benefits of outdoor learning activities are more likely to be supportive in ensuring that their children participate in outdoor play. Therefore, the study sought to establish the parental perceptions of outdoor learning activities because it is a significant aspect in supporting children's opportunity to engage in them. The study findings would benefit both pre-primary schools/centers and parents in correspondence with students' academic performance. In this study, parents were asked whether they have children

who undertake outdoor learning activities and how they perceive the importance of outdoor learning activities. Respondents were required to answer by indicating the degree of improvements they know and/or perceive.

With regards to the number of children participating in outdoor activities, the study sought to establish the distribution of parents with children undertaking outdoor

learning activities because outdoor activities are an important part of children's lives as they are instrumental in promoting children's wellbeing and development [5]. The researcher aimed at examining parental feelings which were associated with the research question about exploring parents' perspectives on outdoor activities. Table 2 presents the study results.

Table 2. Parents with children undertaking outdoor learning activities.

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	99	99.0%	99.0%	99.0%
No	1	1.0%	1.0%	100.0%
Total	100	100.0%	100.0%	

Source: Field Study, 2022.

From Table 2, the study findings show that 99 parents accounted for 99% had children undertaking outdoor learning activities while 1 (1%) parents don't have children taking outdoor play. The study result reveals that a researcher obtained the relevant information on the impact of outdoor learning activities from the right respondents (parents). However, the inclusion of the parent with no children in this study was to establish the general perception of the parents towards outdoor play. The same information was presented using a pie chart as shown in Figure 1 below.



Source: Field Study, 2022

Figure 1. Parents with Children Undertaking Outdoor Learning Activities.

Therefore, in assessing the impacts of outdoor learning activities it was important to consider the role of parents having a decisive role in children's possibilities to engage in a variety of activities both at home and at school contexts.

Moreover, the study sought to know parents' perceptions towards learning activities in Morogoro municipality because identifying parental perceptions of outdoor activities is a significant aspect of supporting children's opportunity to engage in them. Generally, it was found that the majority of the respondents had a positive perception about 90 parents accounted to 90% indicated that outdoor learning activities are very important for the children's development followed by 8 (8%) parents who indicated it is moderately important while only 2 (2%) parents who have a negative perception that outdoor learning doesn't have an impact on children academic development. About the perception, parents were required to answer by indicating the degree of improvements they know and/or perceive whether they strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Neutral (N), Disagree (D), or Strongly Disagree (SD). Table 3 presents the study results.

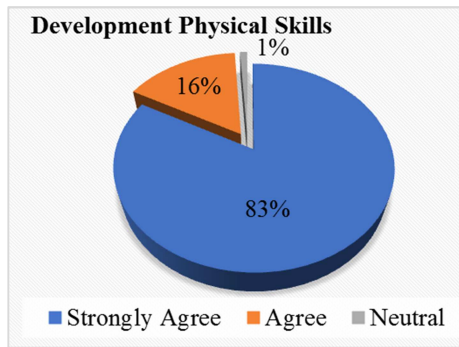
Table 3. Parents' Perceptions towards Outdoor Learning Activities.

Statement(s)	SA		A		N		D		SD	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Development physical skills	83	83.0%	16	16.0%	1	1.0%	0	0	0	0
Cognitive development	76	76.0%	22	22.0%	2	2.0%	0	0	0	0
Linguistic development	77	77.0%	16	16.0%	7	7.0%	0	0	0	0
Motor and social emotional development	79	79.0%	16	16.0%	4	4.0%	1	1.0%	0	0

Source: Field Study, 2022.

Development Physical Skills; the study findings revealed that the majority of the respondents 83 parents accounted for 83% strongly agreed that outdoor learning activities have a positive impact on children/pupils specifically in physical skills development followed by 16 (16%) parents who agreed to some extent with the statement while 1 (1%) parent was neutral. The study results imply that parents have a positive perception of outdoor learning activities because it is an important part of children's lives and

instrumental in promoting children's wellbeing and development. The study result is in line with the findings of various related studies [5, 17, 1, 2, 8, 11, 14, 26] which found that providing children with opportunities for outdoor activities enables them to increase physical movements and competence. Moreover, physical development was found in this study to be vital for children and it lays the foundation for a healthy and active life. The information is presented in Figure 2 below.



Source: Field Study, 2022

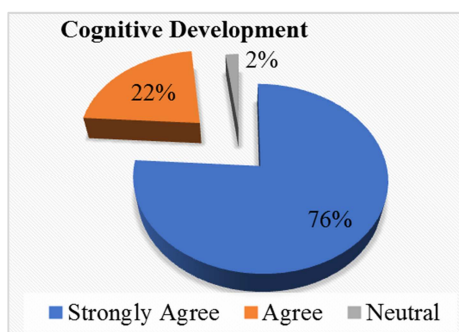
Figure 2. Development Physical Skills (n=100).

Therefore, from Figure 2 above the study results revealed that outdoor learning activities contribute to the quality of life, psychological health, and the ability to meet physical work demands. The study concluded that outdoor learning activities can serve as a vehicle for helping children to develop the knowledge, behavioral skills, and confidence needed to adopt and maintain a physically active lifestyle.

Furthermore, in supporting the study findings during the interview RS-1 claimed that;

...my child attends this school for three years, and I am aware of they aim to conduct outdoor activities frequently. Especially, our teacher takes children outside when the weather is good and if there is an opportunity to do so. They are having an outdoor play and they enjoy it.

Cognitive Development; the study findings revealed that the majority of the respondents 76 parents comprising 76% strongly agreed that outdoor learning activities have a positive impact on cognitive development followed by 22 parents comprising 22% who agreed to some extent while 2 (2%) parents were neutral. The study results imply that the proximity and daily exposure to natural settings increase children's ability to focus and enhance cognitive abilities. The study results are presented in Figure 3 below.



Source: Field Study, 2022

Figure 3. Cognitive Development (n=100).

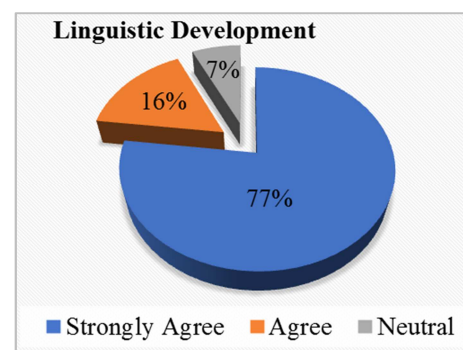
The study result from the Figure 3 above is consistent with the study findings of various related studies [27, 15, 30, 12] affirmed that outdoor learning activities improve cognitive skills such as naming, classification, and recalling information which are skills grouped under the first domain

of Bloom's Taxonomy.

Furthermore, in supporting the study findings during the interview RS-2 declared that;

... I think my son is kind of examining more and is noticing more. His sense of wonder has been developing ... Certainly, there is cognitive development. I suppose so. I mean if he sees leaves, bugs, etc., he asks questions to understand. He learns always.

Linguistic Development; the study findings revealed that the majority of the respondents 77 parents accounted for 77% strongly agreed that outdoor learning activities have a positive impact on linguistic development followed by 16 (16%) parents who agreed with the statement to some extent while 7 (7%) parents were neutral. The study result indicates that parents had a positive perception of outdoor play as it has a greater contribution to children's linguistic development than indoor play. In the quest for the play that contributed to the development of language skills, Ojuondo [19] found that types of play, availability of play materials and the role of the teacher during play, and school policy on the play as elements of play influences language skill development. The study results are presented in Figure 4 below.



Source: Field Study, 2022

Figure 4. Linguistic Development (n=100).

Also, in supporting the study findings during the interview T-1 declared that;

... children who were exposed to different types of play like calculating, creative, dramatic, and physical plays with play materials achieved higher scores because the children acquired listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills during interaction with teachers who played active roles to instruct and directing play than those who were not exposed to any form of plays.

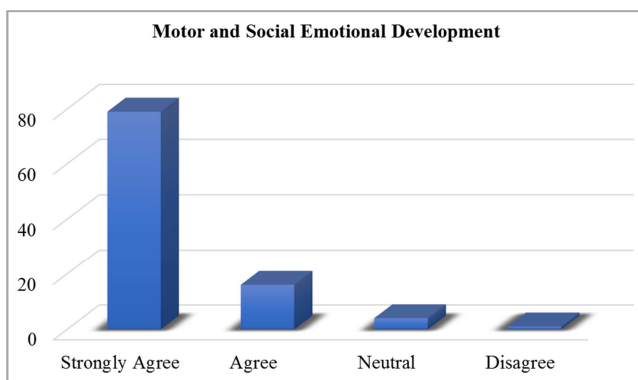
The evidence from the school teacher was supported by RS-3 who claimed that;

... Communicative skills are enhanced during children's play together. As I said, cognitive development is more prominent because of lots of visual stimuli, and different stimuli around him. Also, it is about language development since having various noises. He learns more from nature.

Motor and Social-Emotional Development; the study findings revealed that the majority of the respondents 79 parents comprising 79% strongly agreed that outdoor learning activities have positive impacts on the motor and social-

emotional development of the children followed by 16 (16%) parents who agreed with the statement to some extent while 4 (4%) parents were neutral and 1 (1%) parent disagreed with the statement. The study results imply that parents are aware that the availability of play materials influences children's social skills development in Morogoro municipality. The study results are presented in Figure 5 below.

With this regard to the parents' perception, effective outdoor activities aimed at supporting children's development physically, emotionally, and socially by providing them with opportunities that foster understanding of their surroundings. Overall, participating parents emphasized general developmental aspects of outdoor activities, hence the study found that parents were aware of the positive impact of outdoor activities on children.



Source: Field Study, 2022

Figure 5. Motor and Social-Emotional Development (n=100).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the study findings, it is concluded that outdoor learning activities contribute to the physical skills, cognitive, linguistic, motor, and social-emotional development of preschool children. The study recommended that outdoor activities given in a framework of a program should be increased in preschool years as it is perceived important. Moreover, school environment should be improved to accommodate exploration with natural materials, dramatic/imaginary play, active physical play, art activities, learning center activities, gardening activities, investigative activities, out-door storytelling and nature/neighbourhood walks. Also, teachers should be informed about outdoor education through pre-and in-service teacher training programs and outdoor education should also be incorporated into teacher education curricula.

6. Area for Further Research

The study results have prompted the need for further research to explore the effects of outdoor activities on other aspects of children's development. The following areas should be investigated: -

- a) Effects of outdoor activities on the social development of children.

- b) Effects of outdoor activities on cognitive development of children.
- c) Effects of outdoor activities on emotional development.

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