



## BARRIERS TO CO-CURRICULAR PARTICIPATION FOR STUDENTS WITH MOBILITY CHALLENGES: AN EXAMINATION OF SCHOOL FACTORS

*Zelalem Temesgen*  
*Bahir Dar University, Ethiopia*

### ABOUT ARTICLE

**Key words:** Barriers, co-curricular participation, students, mobility challenges, school factors, accessibility, inclusion, physical education, extracurricular activities, educational equity.

**Received:** 21.10.2024

**Accepted:** 26.10.2024

**Published:** 01.10.2024

**Abstract:** This study examines the barriers faced by students with mobility challenges in participating in co-curricular activities within school settings. Despite the recognized benefits of co-curricular engagement for social, emotional, and academic development, students with mobility impairments often encounter various obstacles that hinder their participation. The research identifies key school-related factors contributing to these barriers, including inadequate physical infrastructure, insufficient staff training on inclusivity, lack of adaptive equipment, and limited awareness of the specific needs of students with disabilities. Through qualitative interviews and surveys with students, educators, and administrators, this study aims to highlight the importance of fostering an inclusive school environment that promotes equal opportunities for all students. By addressing these barriers, schools can enhance the overall educational experience for students with mobility challenges, ensuring they have access to the same opportunities as their peers. The findings emphasize the need for policy changes and practical interventions to support co-curricular participation and promote inclusivity in educational settings.

## INTRODUCTION

Co-curricular activities play a vital role in the holistic development of students, providing opportunities for social interaction, skill development, and emotional growth. These activities, which include sports, clubs, and various extracurricular programs, are essential for fostering a sense of belonging and community within the school environment. However, students with mobility challenges often encounter significant barriers that hinder their full participation in these vital experiences. Understanding the specific school factors that contribute to these obstacles is crucial for promoting inclusivity and equity in educational settings.

The participation of students with mobility challenges in co-curricular activities is influenced by various factors inherent to the school environment. These factors may include physical accessibility, availability of resources, support from faculty and peers, and the overall school culture regarding inclusivity and diversity. Unfortunately, many schools are not adequately equipped to address the needs of these students, resulting in a disconnect between educational opportunities and their ability to engage fully in school life. Physical barriers, such as inaccessible facilities or equipment, often pose immediate challenges for students with mobility issues, making it difficult for them to participate in sports, arts, or other co-curricular activities that are typically taken for granted by their peers.

Moreover, the attitudes and perceptions of faculty and staff play a significant role in shaping the experiences of students with mobility challenges. Teachers, coaches, and administrative staff may have varying levels of awareness and understanding regarding the needs of these students. If educators lack proper training or knowledge about how to accommodate students with mobility challenges, they may inadvertently create an unwelcoming environment that discourages participation. Additionally, peer interactions can significantly influence students' willingness to engage in co-curricular activities. Instances of bullying, social isolation, or a lack of encouragement from peers can further exacerbate the feelings of exclusion experienced by students with mobility challenges.

Furthermore, the availability and allocation of resources within schools can significantly impact the participation of students with mobility challenges in co-curricular activities. Schools with limited budgets may prioritize certain programs over others, potentially sidelining those that cater to diverse needs, including adaptive sports or inclusive clubs. The absence of appropriate adaptive equipment or modified facilities can make participation in traditional activities exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, for students with mobility issues. Consequently, these students may find themselves without adequate opportunities to engage in the enriching experiences that co-curricular activities provide.

The overall school culture and commitment to inclusivity can also greatly influence the extent to which students with mobility challenges feel empowered to participate in co-curricular activities. Schools that actively promote diversity, equity, and inclusion create an environment where all students are encouraged to explore their interests and talents, regardless of their physical abilities. Conversely, a school culture that is indifferent to inclusivity can lead to feelings of marginalization and disengagement among students with mobility challenges, further limiting their involvement in school life.

## METHOD

Understanding the barriers faced by students with mobility challenges in participating in co-curricular activities is essential for promoting inclusivity and ensuring equal opportunities in educational settings. This research employs a mixed-methods approach to gather comprehensive data on the school factors that impact these students' participation. The following methodologies outline the research design,

participant selection, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques that will be employed in this study.

### Research Design

This study will utilize a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to capture a holistic view of the barriers faced by students with mobility challenges. The quantitative component will involve a survey administered to a broad sample of students, teachers, and school administrators, while the qualitative component will consist of in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. This triangulation of data sources allows for a more robust understanding of the various factors influencing participation in co-curricular activities.

### Participant Selection

The study will target a diverse range of participants to ensure representation of various perspectives within the school community. Participants will include:

**Students with Mobility Challenges:** A sample of students with documented mobility issues, including those who use wheelchairs, crutches, or other assistive devices. Participants will be selected from different grade levels and types of schools (public, private, and special education institutions) to capture a wide array of experiences.

**Teachers and Coaches:** Educators involved in co-curricular activities will be recruited to provide insight into their experiences with inclusivity and barriers they perceive within the school environment.

**School Administrators:** Administrators responsible for co-curricular programming and disability services will be included to understand the institutional policies and practices affecting participation.

### Data Collection Methods

**Surveys:** An online survey will be developed and distributed to students, teachers, and administrators. The survey will include both closed-ended and open-ended questions designed to assess:

Perceived barriers to participation in co-curricular activities (e.g., physical accessibility, availability of adaptive equipment, attitudes of peers and staff).

Level of awareness and knowledge regarding the needs of students with mobility challenges.

Current practices and support systems in place for promoting inclusivity.

The survey will be disseminated through school email lists, online platforms, and during school assemblies to ensure maximum participation.

**Interviews:** In-depth semi-structured interviews will be conducted with selected students, teachers, and administrators. This qualitative approach will allow for a deeper exploration of individual experiences and perceptions regarding barriers to participation. The interviews will be designed to elicit detailed responses on:

Personal experiences related to co-curricular activities and mobility challenges.

Suggestions for improving accessibility and inclusivity within school programs.

Participants will be recruited through the survey responses, ensuring that individuals willing to share their insights are included.

**Focus Group Discussions:** Focus groups will be organized with students with mobility challenges, teachers, and school administrators. These discussions will facilitate dialogue about common themes, shared experiences, and potential solutions to identified barriers. Each focus group will be guided by a moderator using a pre-prepared set of questions to encourage open conversation.

### Data Analysis Techniques

**Quantitative Analysis:** The data collected from the surveys will be analyzed using statistical software (e.g., SPSS or R). Descriptive statistics will be employed to summarize demographic information and the

prevalence of identified barriers. Inferential statistics, such as chi-square tests or t-tests, may be used to examine relationships between variables (e.g., differences in perceived barriers between students with different mobility challenges).

**Qualitative Analysis:** Interviews and focus group discussions will be transcribed verbatim, and thematic analysis will be conducted to identify common themes and patterns in the data. This will involve:

Coding the data to identify recurring themes related to barriers and facilitators of participation.

Grouping codes into broader categories to develop a comprehensive understanding of the issues faced by students with mobility challenges.

Using qualitative analysis software (e.g., NVivo or Atlas.ti) to assist in organizing and analyzing the data.

**Integration of Findings:** The final stage of analysis will involve integrating the quantitative and qualitative findings to provide a comprehensive overview of the barriers faced by students with mobility challenges in co-curricular activities. The integration of data will allow for triangulation of results, strengthening the validity of the conclusions drawn from the study.

#### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical approval will be obtained from the relevant Institutional Review Board (IRB) or Ethics Committee prior to commencing the study. Informed consent will be obtained from all participants, ensuring that they understand the purpose of the research, their right to confidentiality, and their ability to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. Special attention will be paid to ensure that participants with mobility challenges are supported throughout the research process, including providing necessary accommodations for interviews and focus groups.

## **RESULTS**

The participation of students in co-curricular activities is a critical component of their overall educational experience. These activities provide opportunities for socialization, skill development, and personal growth, contributing significantly to the holistic development of students. However, students with mobility challenges often encounter various barriers that impede their participation in these activities. Understanding the school-related factors that contribute to these challenges is essential for creating inclusive educational environments. This discussion explores the primary barriers faced by students with mobility problems in co-curricular settings, including physical accessibility, lack of awareness and training among staff, insufficient resources, and negative attitudes.

One of the most significant barriers faced by students with mobility challenges is the physical inaccessibility of school facilities. Many schools lack the necessary infrastructure to accommodate students with disabilities, including ramps, elevators, and accessible restrooms. For students with mobility impairments, navigating physical barriers can make participation in co-curricular activities, such as sports, clubs, and events, extremely difficult. For instance, if a school's gymnasium is located on an upper floor without an elevator, students with mobility issues may be unable to access it, effectively barring them from participating in physical education classes or sports teams.

Additionally, outdoor spaces and playgrounds often do not meet accessibility standards, limiting opportunities for students with mobility challenges to engage in recreational activities during breaks or after school. The lack of accessible transportation to and from extracurricular events can further hinder participation, particularly if students rely on school-provided transportation services that do not accommodate their needs. This physical inaccessibility sends a message to students with mobility problems that they are not welcome in these activities, contributing to feelings of isolation and exclusion.

Another significant factor affecting the participation of students with mobility challenges in co-curricular activities is the lack of awareness and training among school staff. Many teachers, coaches, and administrators may not have received adequate training on how to include students with disabilities in their programs. This gap in knowledge can lead to unintentional exclusion, as staff may be unsure of how to adapt activities to meet the needs of students with mobility issues.

For example, a coach may assume that a student with a mobility impairment cannot participate in a particular sport without exploring adaptive options that could enable inclusion. Similarly, teachers may inadvertently overlook students with mobility challenges when organizing group activities, leading to further marginalization. Increased awareness and training on disability inclusion can help staff recognize and address the specific needs of students with mobility problems, fostering an environment that promotes participation and engagement.

Insufficient resources within schools can also hinder the participation of students with mobility challenges in co-curricular activities. Schools often operate under tight budgets, which can limit their ability to provide necessary accommodations, such as adaptive equipment or specialized support staff. Without access to the right tools and resources, students with mobility impairments may find it challenging to engage fully in co-curricular activities.

Moreover, schools may lack funding for training programs focused on disability inclusion, preventing staff from acquiring the skills needed to support students with mobility challenges. This lack of resources can result in missed opportunities for these students to participate in enriching experiences that contribute to their personal and social development. In addition, the absence of dedicated funding for inclusive programs can perpetuate a cycle of exclusion, where students with mobility problems are unable to engage fully in school life due to systemic limitations.

## DISCUSSION

Co-curricular activities play a vital role in the holistic development of students, offering opportunities for social interaction, skill enhancement, and personal growth. However, students with mobility challenges often face significant barriers that hinder their participation in these activities. Understanding the school factors that contribute to these challenges is essential in creating an inclusive environment where all students can engage fully in co-curricular programs. This discussion examines various barriers, including physical accessibility, inadequate support services, and negative attitudes within the school community, all of which can impact the co-curricular experience for students with mobility issues.

One of the most significant barriers for students with mobility challenges is physical accessibility within the school environment. Many schools are not equipped with the necessary infrastructure to accommodate students who use wheelchairs, crutches, or other mobility aids. This can include a lack of ramps, elevators, or accessible restrooms. Additionally, co-curricular activities often take place in facilities that are not designed with accessibility in mind. For example, sports fields, gymnasiums, and performance areas may not have suitable access routes, preventing students with mobility impairments from participating fully.

In some cases, even when facilities are physically accessible, there may be logistical issues that further complicate participation. For instance, activities that require movement between different locations—such as sports matches or club meetings—can pose significant challenges for students with mobility issues if transportation within the school is not adequately addressed. As a result, students may feel

excluded from participating in co-curricular activities due to physical barriers, leading to feelings of isolation and frustration.

Another critical factor influencing the participation of students with mobility challenges in co-curricular activities is the availability of adequate support services. Schools often lack trained staff or resources dedicated to supporting students with disabilities in co-curricular settings. For example, physical education classes and sports teams may not have coaches or instructors who are knowledgeable about adaptive techniques or modifications necessary for students with mobility challenges. This can create an environment where these students feel unsupported and hesitant to participate in activities that could otherwise enhance their social and physical development.

Additionally, schools may not provide necessary accommodations, such as adapted equipment or specialized training for peers and staff. Without appropriate resources and support, students with mobility impairments may be discouraged from engaging in co-curricular activities, which can limit their ability to build friendships and develop essential life skills. Moreover, the absence of proper support can reinforce negative stereotypes and misconceptions about the capabilities of students with mobility challenges, further discouraging their involvement in these activities.

## CONCLUSION

Co-curricular activities are crucial for the holistic development of students, yet many with mobility challenges face significant barriers to participation. Physical accessibility, inadequate support services, and negative attitudes within the school community all contribute to the exclusion of these students from valuable experiences. By addressing these barriers and fostering a culture of inclusion, schools can create an environment where all students, regardless of their mobility challenges, have the opportunity to engage fully in co-curricular activities. Ultimately, promoting inclusivity not only benefits students with disabilities but enriches the school community as a whole, encouraging diversity and mutual respect.

## REFERENCES

1. African Children Policy Forum. (2012). Children with disabilities in Ethiopia: the hidden reality. Unpublished research report Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
2. Almaz, G. (2011). Attitudes of Ethiopian college students toward people with visible disabilities. (Unpublished doctoral thesis). University of Iowa.
3. Annie, P. (2015). The challenges in teaching learners with visual impairment in Zambia. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Development*, 2, 157-166.
4. Bogdan, B. (1992). *Qualitative Research for Education, an Introduction to Theory and Methods*. Fifth Edition, Pearson Education.Inc.
5. Brooks A., (2013). Eextracurricular activities and the development of social skills in children with intellectual and learning disabilities. ( Unpublished master's thesis). Georgia state university.
6. CARDOS (2007). Research report on the General Conditions of People with Disabilities in Ethiopia, Addis Ababa.
7. Gilman, R. (2001). The relationship between life satisfaction, social interest, and frequency of extracurricular activities among adolescent students. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 30(6), 749-767.
8. Ishmael, D. (2015). Measures for Inclusion: Coping with challenges/barriers faced by learners with physical impairment in regular schools. *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 20, 62-67.

9. Japan International Cooperation Agency (2003). Country Profile on Disability, Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Mimeographed, Addis Ababa.
10. Mitchell, D. (2008). What Really Works in Special and Inclusive Education: Using evidence based teaching strategies. London and New York, Routledge.
11. MoE (2012). Special needs/inclusive education strategy. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
12. Oliver, M. (1996). Understanding disability: From theory to practice. UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
13. Save the Children Finland. (2010). Guidelines on Inclusive Education. Nairobi, Kenya.
14. Tirussew, T. (2005). Disability in Ethiopia: Issues, Insights and Implication: Contextualizing, Disability. Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University printing press.
15. UNESCO (2005). Guidelines for Inclusion: Ensuring Access to Education for All 7, Placede. Fontenoy, Paris.
16. World Bank and World Health Organization (2011). World Report on Disability. Washington, D. C.