

Original Article

Building Dreams: Lived Experiences of Parents Supporting their Children in Extracurricular Activities

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Abstract

Extracurricular participation can support children's social, emotional, and developmental growth, yet sustained participation often depends on substantial parental support. This phenomenological study examined the lived experiences of parents who support their children's extracurricular activities in Calinan West, Division of Davao City. Ten parents participated in in-depth interviews, and the narratives were analyzed through thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns in challenges, coping strategies, and personal insights. The findings showed three major challenges: time management difficulties, financial constraints, and the strain of balancing family and work responsibilities. Parents addressed these barriers through effective time management, financial adjustments, and reliance on community or family support. The study also found that parental involvement in extracurricular activities strengthened parent-child relationships, generated personal fulfillment and pride, and deepened parents' recognition of extracurricular activities as a key contributor to holistic child development. The findings highlight the complexity of parental involvement and support the need for school, community, and policy interventions that improve affordability, access, and family support mechanisms.

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1. Introduction

Extracurricular activities remain a vital part of children's holistic development because they support social skills, confidence, discipline, teamwork, and identity formation beyond formal classroom instruction. Research has shown that participation in organized activities can contribute positively to developmental outcomes, especially when children receive consistent adult guidance and encouragement (Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; Farb & Matjasko, 2012). In many families, parents provide the practical and emotional foundation that allows children to access and sustain these opportunities.

Parental support for extracurricular activities, however, is rarely simple. It often requires families to manage transportation, fees, equipment, scheduling, and competing household obligations. Studies on family life and caregiving have noted that parents frequently experience time pressure, role overload, and stress when coordinating child-related commitments alongside work and household responsibilities (Cha & Papastefanou, 2020; Offer, 2014). These pressures can be more pronounced in contexts where resources, services, and flexible support systems are limited.

Financial demands also shape children's participation opportunities. Expenses related to activity fees, uniforms, equipment, and travel may accumulate over time and create barriers for families with limited incomes. Scholarship on extracurricular participation and inequality has emphasized that affordability influences who can access and persist in structured activities, which may widen developmental opportunity gaps across socioeconomic groups (Farb & Matjasko, 2012; Lareau, 2011). For many parents, support for extracurriculars therefore involves ongoing financial decision-making and sacrifice.

At the same time, parents often continue to support their children because they perceive meaningful benefits. Prior literature suggests that parental involvement in children's organized activities can strengthen family relationships, increase communication, and create shared experiences that reinforce trust and emotional connection (Crouter et al., 2004; Offer, 2014). Parents may also experience pride and fulfillment as they witness children's growth, effort, and achievement in non-academic settings (Crouter et al., 2004; Fredricks & Eccles, 2006).

In the Philippine context, parental involvement remains an important factor in children's educational and developmental outcomes, yet there is limited qualitative evidence focused specifically on how parents navigate the demands of supporting extracurricular activities in local communities. Existing work often centers on academic support or general parental involvement rather than the lived realities of extracurricular participation, including scheduling burdens, financial strain, and community-based coping strategies (Epstein, 2018; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). This creates a need for context-specific inquiry that foregrounds parents' voices.

This study addressed that gap by examining the lived experiences of parents in Calinan West, Division of Davao City, as they supported their children's extracurricular participation. Specifically, it explored the challenges they encountered, the coping strategies they used, and the insights they developed through these experiences. The findings are intended to inform school leaders, parents, and policymakers who seek to build more supportive and inclusive systems for children's extracurricular engagement.

2. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological design to examine the lived experiences of parents supporting their children's participation in extracurricular activities in Calinan West, Division of Davao City. A phenomenological approach was appropriate because the study aimed to capture the meanings parents assigned to their experiences, including their challenges, coping responses, and personal insights.

The study was guided by a constructivist orientation in which knowledge is understood as grounded in lived experience and shaped by social and contextual conditions. Data were gathered through In-Depth Interviews (IDIs) using a semi-structured interview format, which served as the primary research instrument in the study. The interview format allowed the researcher to ask open-ended questions, follow up on emerging issues, and document rich first-person narratives about time management, financial constraints, family and work balance, and the perceived value of extracurricular participation.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling. The study identified 10 participants out of 17 eligible parents of children enrolled in public elementary schools in Calinan West, Division of Davao City. Inclusion criteria focused on parents of children participating in extracurricular activities and with at least one year of experience supporting such participation. Parents whose children were not involved in extracurricular activities, who were not from the target public elementary school context, or who were no longer actively involved were excluded.

Thematic analysis was used to analyze responses. Consistent with qualitative thematic procedures, the analysis involved close reading of interview narratives, coding recurrent ideas, grouping related codes into themes, reviewing theme coherence, and organizing findings according to the research aims. The study also reported attention to ethical standards, including informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and privacy protections anchored in the Belmont Report principles and the Data Privacy Act of 2012.

3. Results

3.1 Challenges

Theme 1: Time Management Difficulties

Parents consistently described difficulty coordinating work, household responsibilities, and children's extracurricular schedules, especially when activities required frequent attendance, transport, and routine adjustments. The narratives showed that time pressure often led to personal sacrifices and the reprioritization of parents' own commitments to sustain support for their children. They mentioned:

"Sometimes I feel like there are not enough hours in the day to attend all of my child's activities and still manage household responsibilities." (P1)

"I often have to skip my personal commitments just to be able to support my child in their extracurricular events." (P4)

"It is very hard to manage time because my child has many activities and I also have responsibilities at home." (P6)

"Sometimes, I need to prioritize my child's activities over my personal plans." (P9)

Theme 2: Financial Constraints

Parents reported that fees, uniforms, equipment, and transportation costs created substantial pressure on family finances, especially in households with limited resources. They expressed that extracurricular support often required sacrifices in other household expenses to sustain children's participation. They stated:

"Paying for uniforms, travel, and activity fees adds up quickly, and it is stressful at times." (P1)

"I sometimes have to make sacrifices in other areas just to afford my child's participation in extracurricular programs." (P5)

"The cost of activities is very heavy, especially for uniforms, equipment, and travel." (P7)

"Sometimes, I need to reduce other needs just to support my child's activities." (P10)

Theme 3: Balancing Family and Work Responsibilities

Parents described a persistent struggle to meet work obligations and household duties while remaining consistently present in children's extracurricular activities.

Their accounts reflected fatigue, worry, and emotional strain as parents attempted to fulfill multiple roles at the same time. They verbalized:

“It is exhausting to go straight from work to my child’s practice sessions without a break.” (P3)

“Sometimes I worry that I am neglecting other family responsibilities while trying to support extracurricular activities.” (P6)

“It is very tiring because I go directly from work to my child’s practice.” (P8)

“Sometimes, I worry that I have neglected other family responsibilities while supporting my child’s activities.” (P10)

3.2 Coping Strategies

Theme 1: Effective Time Management

Parents emphasized planning, scheduling, and prioritization as essential strategies for balancing work, household duties, and extracurricular commitments. Their responses showed that structured routines and time-blocking practices helped reduce overlap, improve attendance, and sustain support. They mentioned:

“I make a weekly schedule to balance my work, chores, and my child’s activities.” (P3)

“I have learned to prioritize the most important tasks first so I do not miss my child’s events.” (P5)

“I use time blocking so I can really allocate time for work, home tasks, and my child’s activities.” (P6)

“It is really necessary to make a clear daily plan so tasks and events do not happen at the same time.” (P8)

Theme 2: Financial Adjustments

Parents coped with financial strain by budgeting carefully, setting aside savings for activity expenses, and in some cases taking additional work to cover costs. They expressed that financial planning and personal sacrifice were central to sustaining children’s participation in extracurricular programs. They verbalized:

“I save a portion of my monthly income specifically for extracurricular expenses.” (P1)

“I sometimes take on small side jobs to cover activity fees and uniforms.” (P3)

“I save little by little so there is always money to pay for the needs of the activities.” (P5)

“Sometimes I become stricter with spending so I can reserve money for extracurricular payments.” (P7)

Theme 3: Seeking Community or Family Support

Parents also relied on relatives, fellow parents, and community ties to share transport, supervision, and activity-related responsibilities. This support reduced stress and helped parents remain involved even when work or other responsibilities limited their direct availability. They stated:

“I ask my relatives to accompany my child when I cannot attend the activities due to work.” (P4)

“I rely on fellow parents for carpooling during practices or competitions.” (P6)

“If I am not available, my sibling watches over and accompanies my child to the activity.” (P8)

“I coordinate with other parents so we can help each other in caring for and transporting our children.” (P10)

3.3 Insights

Theme 1: Strengthened Parent-Child Relationships

Parents described extracurricular involvement as a context that created shared experiences, improved communication, and strengthened family bonds. They expressed that participation support became more than a logistical task and evolved into meaningful relational engagement. They mentioned:

“Joining my child in these activities has brought us closer and improved our communication.” (P1)

“I realized that extracurriculars give us more time together outside of school routines.” (P3)

“Our relationship became stronger because we now have shared experiences that are not limited to the home.” (P5)

“I got to know my child’s personality better because of the extracurricular activities.” (P8)

Theme 2: Personal Fulfillment and Pride

Despite the difficulties, parents consistently expressed joy, pride, and emotional fulfillment when they saw their children perform, improve, and enjoy their

activities. These emotional rewards appeared to reinforce parental commitment and justified the sacrifices they made. They verbalized:

“Watching my child perform on stage makes all the sacrifices worthwhile.” (P2)

“I feel proud every time I see my child’s growth through these activities.” (P5)

“Even if it is difficult sometimes, I feel relieved because I see my child happy.” (P6)

“It brings great joy and pride to watch my child enjoy and improve.” (P9)

Theme 3: Value of Extracurriculars in Holistic Development

Parents recognized extracurricular activities as important contributors to discipline, confidence, teamwork, and social growth, not only academic improvement. Their responses reflected a broad understanding of child development in which extracurricular participation complements classroom learning. They stated:

“Extracurriculars teach my child values that cannot always be learned inside the classroom.” (P2)

“These activities build confidence and teamwork skills that are important for their future.” (P3)

“My child learned to be disciplined and to manage time.” (P5)

“Extracurriculars are a big help in developing my child’s self-confidence and abilities.” (P7)

4. Discussion

The findings show that parental support for extracurricular activities is a multidimensional responsibility that combines time coordination, financial management, and role balancing. Parents in this study did not describe support as a single act of attendance or encouragement. Instead, they described a continuing process of planning, sacrificing, and adapting to sustain their children’s participation. This aligns with work that frames parental involvement in extracurricular engagement as an ongoing family strategy shaped by competing obligations and resource limitations (Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; Lareau, 2011).

Time management emerged as a central challenge and coping mechanism, which suggests that scheduling capacity is both a barrier and a resource. Parents reported stress when activities overlapped with work and household duties, but they also described using weekly plans, prioritization, and time-blocking to cope. This pattern supports literature showing that family time pressure can strain well-being while structured routines and proactive planning improve parents’ ability to manage

multiple demands (Cha & Papastefanou, 2020; Offer, 2014). The result also indicates that interventions that support practical scheduling, such as early activity calendars and coordinated school communication, may directly improve parental engagement.

Financial constraints also played a strong role in shaping parental experiences. Parents described recurring costs related to uniforms, travel, and fees, and they reported reducing other household spending or finding additional income sources to sustain participation. These narratives reflect broader scholarship that extracurricular opportunities are often unevenly accessible because participation depends on household resources and the ability to absorb repeated costs (Farb & Matjasko, 2012; Lareau, 2011). In this study, financial coping was not passive. Parents used budgeting, saving, and frugality as intentional strategies, which demonstrates agency but also highlights structural affordability concerns.

The theme on balancing family and work responsibilities suggests that extracurricular support is embedded in wider role strain. Parents described fatigue and concern about neglecting other family duties while trying to remain present for activities. Similar patterns have been documented in research on role overload and parental stress, where work, caregiving, and household responsibilities compete for limited time and energy (Offer, 2014; Bianchi & Milkie, 2010). The present findings extend this understanding by showing how extracurricular commitments intensify these tensions in everyday family life.

The coping strategy of seeking community or family support is particularly important because it shows that parental involvement is socially distributed rather than purely individual. Parents relied on siblings, relatives, and fellow parents for accompaniment, transport, and shared supervision. This supports studies that emphasize the importance of social support networks in sustaining family responsibilities and reducing stress in child-related engagements (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000). In practical terms, schools and activity organizers can strengthen this support by facilitating parent networks, communication groups, and collaborative transport arrangements.

The findings on strengthened parent-child relationships and personal fulfillment also highlight the relational and emotional rewards of extracurricular support. Parents reported closer communication, shared experiences, and deeper knowledge of their children's personalities. They also expressed pride and fulfillment when children performed, improved, or enjoyed their activities. These results are consistent with literature showing that active parental involvement can enhance parent-child connection and provide emotional rewards that reinforce continued engagement (Crouter et al., 2004; Fredricks & Eccles, 2006).

Parents' recognition of extracurricular activities as contributors to holistic development is another key insight. They identified benefits related to discipline, confidence, teamwork, and values that extend beyond classroom learning. This view aligns with scholarship that positions extracurricular participation as an important developmental context for social-emotional and life-skill formation (Farb & Matjasko, 2012; Fredricks & Eccles, 2006). The finding suggests that parental support may

increase when schools clearly communicate the broader developmental value of extracurricular programs, not only their performance outcomes.

Taken together, the results support the study's theoretical framing that parental involvement is shaped by environmental context, motivation, and perceived capability. Parents' experiences reflected ecological constraints such as work demands and limited resources, motivational commitment to children's growth, and adaptive self-efficacy expressed through planning, budgeting, and network-building. Future studies may examine how these processes vary by income level, school support systems, and type of extracurricular activity in order to identify more targeted interventions for families.

5. Conclusion

Parents in this study experienced extracurricular support as a demanding but meaningful part of family life. They faced major challenges in time management, financial capacity, and balancing work and family responsibilities, yet they responded through planning, financial adjustments, and support-seeking from family and community networks. Their experiences also revealed important positive outcomes, including stronger parent-child relationships, personal fulfillment and pride, and a deeper understanding of extracurricular activities as a source of holistic child development. These findings support the need for affordable programs, coordinated scheduling, and stronger school-community support systems that enable parents to sustain meaningful involvement in their children's extracurricular participation.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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