

The Impact of Parents Involvement in Pupils' Academic Performance in Public Primary Schools: A Case of Ilala City, Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine the impact of parental involvement on the academic performance of pupils in public primary schools in Ilala Municipality, Dar es Salaam Region, Tanzania. The research utilized a qualitative approach, employing questionnaires and interviews for data collection. The sample size consisted of 230 respondents, including 5 heads of schools, 25 teachers, 180 students, and 10 parents. The data were analyzed and presented narratively. The findings indicated that parents' participation in their children's academic performance was influenced by the parents' educational level, socio-economic status, and cultural practices. The study revealed that parental involvement enhances the likelihood of achieving quality educational reforms, resulting in more productive and responsible members of society. Additionally, active parental participation supports children's mental, ethical, and social development, which are crucial for attaining their life goals. Conversely, children whose parents were less involved in their education exhibited lower academic achievement. The study also highlighted that the impact of parental involvement is sometimes limited by factors such as lack of skills and resources, which hinder parents' ability to support both their children and the schools effectively.

Keywords: Parental involvement, Academic performance, Public primary schools, Educational reform, Socio-economic factors, Cultural practices, Tanzania.

INTRODUCTION

Parental involvement in pupils' academic performance is defined as the extent to which parents participate in their children's education and schooling. Many parents actively engage by communicating with teachers, assisting with homework, and understanding their children's academic strengths and weaknesses (Ryan, 2018). Research indicates that students with involved parents are more likely to achieve higher grades and test scores, enroll in higher-level programs, attend school regularly, develop better social skills, exhibit improved behavior, adapt well to school, and progress to post-secondary education (Hoff et al., 2002).

According to the National Network of Partnership Schools, meaningful parental involvement must be integrated into the school's community programs. The network's framework of six types of parental involvement, developed by Joyce Epstein (2001), is essential to this study. Epstein's model, focusing on parenting, learning at home, communication, decision-making, volunteering, and community collaboration, is significant in analyzing the relationship between schools, families, and communities concerning children's success (Durisic & Bunijevac, 2017; Epstein, 2018). Parents are their children's first and most crucial teachers, expected to support their child's academic journey from preschool onwards (Epstein, 2001).

Studies have shown that children whose parents are involved in their formal education tend to perform better academically. Parents from private primary schools are often more involved than those from public schools,

attending academic events, paying fees, and providing resources such as books and technology, which enhance their children's learning opportunities. In contrast, public school parents may see these as extra expenses, leading to fewer learning opportunities and lower academic performance (Kenya National Examination Council, 2009). A significant performance gap exists between public and private schools in the same area, with public schools typically recording lower mean grades.

Research consistently shows a positive correlation between parental involvement and children's academic achievement (Islam, 2017; Hara & Burke, 1998; Hill & Craft, 2003). Children whose parents actively participate in their education tend to achieve better academic outcomes than those with less involved parents. The impact of parental involvement on academic success has been recognized by scholars and policymakers, who incorporate strategies to enhance parental involvement in educational policy (Hoover & Sandler, 1997; Etor, Ekanem, & Mbon, 2013). Supervision, a primary parenting responsibility, includes ensuring children's basic physical and safety needs are met, such as timely school pickups and supervision of activities outside school hours (Jeong & Acock, 2014). While research demonstrates a positive relationship between parent participation and academic success, the exact mechanisms by which parental involvement impacts academic performance are not fully understood (Hill & Craft, 2003). Berger (2011) emphasizes that children's academic success depends on both schools and parents. Schools should create programs that involve parents and communities, and parents should engage in school events and policy discussions to support their children's academic success (Pesha, 2016). Involved parents are aware of their children's school challenges and interactions within the school community (Ndijue, 2020).

In Tanzania, the educational system follows a 2-7-4-2-3+ model: two years of pre-primary, seven years of primary, four years of secondary (Ordinary Level), two years of secondary (Advanced Level), and a minimum of three years of university education (URT, 2018). Primary education objectives include developing reading, writing, communication skills, ethical and moral values, creativity, and problem-solving abilities (PO-RALG, 2022; TIE, 2019). This study aims to determine how parental involvement impacts pupils' academic performance in public primary schools and how to enhance this involvement. Primary education in Tanzania is mandated by the Education Act No. 25 of 1978 (amended in 2022) and the Education and Training Policy of 2014, which emphasize science and technology. It aligns with the National Strategy for Economic and Poverty Reduction and international declarations like the Sustainable Development Goals of 2015, focusing on providing quality education for all and gender mainstreaming. This study specifically aims to describe parents' involvement in their children's primary school performance and establish the influence of parents' education level as a socio-economic factor affecting pupils' academic outcomes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Parental involvement in pupils' academic performance has been widely recognized as a critical factor in their academic success (Columbo, 1995). This involvement is prioritized by stakeholders, including families, the community, educational leaders, and government officials. Effective parental engagement within the school community, encompassing interactions with faculty, staff, and administration, is considered vital for pupils' academic achievement (Braun & Clerks, 2006). Thus, parents have a fundamental duty to improve their children's academic outcomes through active involvement in their education.

According to Epstein (2001), parental involvement significantly influences children's academic accomplishments and is highly beneficial for their overall development. Families serve as the first educational support system for children, making parents' involvement crucial for fostering a conducive environment for academic potential and self-esteem. Parents should engage in their children's lives both at home and in school, participating in extracurricular activities and school events. Ballantine (1999) emphasized that parental interactions within the school community enhance and motivate pupils' academic achievement.

The home environment provides flexibility in scheduling, opportunities for parents and children to spend time together, and a relaxed setting. Home activities should be interesting and meaningful rather than trivial tasks. Teachers and parents should understand their distinct roles: parents should support their children's learning at home, while teachers focus on instruction at school (Jeong & Acock, 2004; Pesha, 2016). Effective home

activities include setting rules, encouraging reading over television watching, and engaging in educational discussions.

A positive school culture further enhances the role of parental involvement in student success (Macharia, 2014). Key characteristics of a positive school culture include effective educational leadership, reciprocal communication among parents, students, teachers, and administrators, and promoting academic excellence through interactive programs. Such a culture fosters an environment that supports parental involvement, encouraging friendly, collaborative interactions, constructive feedback, and cooperation between parents and the school (Zedan, 2011). Consequently, involved parents provide the support, encouragement, motivation, and assistance necessary for their children's academic success (Clarke, 2007).

A study by Kayombo (2011) titled "Participation of Parents in the Administration of Students in Integral Education" found that parents in Dar es Salaam struggled with insufficient time to engage with their children after school hours. The study reported that 32.1% of students never had the opportunity to discuss educational matters with their parents, while 75.2% never saw their teachers at major family and school events. This highlights the need for increased parental engagement in children's learning activities at home.

In Tanzania, the responsibility for children's enrollment and academic performance is primarily placed on the government. However, collaboration among different stakeholders, especially parents, is crucial for academic achievement (Swap, 1993). Parental involvement begins at home, where they provide a safe and healthy environment, support learning processes, and maintain a positive attitude about school (Epstein, 2001). Parents are partners with teachers, contributing to the physical, academic, and social development of children (PO-RALG, 2022). Schools should foster a collaborative community where parents' opinions, beliefs, and ideas are valued and utilized for academic success (Donald et al., 2002).

Despite Tanzania's commitment to global educational targets such as the Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development Goals, many parents are unaware of their role in their children's education (URT, 2014; PO-RALG, 2022). This study aims to determine the impact of parental involvement on pupils' academic achievement in public primary schools in Ilala Municipality, Dar es Salaam Region, Tanzania. The research will explore how parents' participation in academic activities influences their children's performance and the relationship between parental involvement and academic success.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a qualitative research approach, using a case study design to explore the impact of parental involvement on pupils' academic performance in public primary schools in Ilala Municipality, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The research focused on how parents' education level, socioeconomic status, cultural practices, and roles influence academic outcomes. Five public primary schools were selected from Ilala, Ukonga, and Kariakoo wards using purposive and random sampling techniques to choose participants. The sample size consisted of 230 respondents, including 5 heads of schools, 25 teachers, 180 students, and 10 parents. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions and analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. This approach provided a comprehensive understanding of the factors affecting parental involvement and its impact on academic performance.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The parent's involvement in the performance of their children

The study explored the impact of parental involvement on pupils' academic performance in public primary schools, utilizing Epstein's (2003) six types of parental involvement framework. The findings revealed significant parental engagement in school meetings and development activities, including decision-making, governance, and advocacy through school councils and committees. This involvement facilitated better communication between families and schools, enhancing information exchange and mutual understanding, as suggested by Epstein (2001). The participation of parents in school meetings, even through representatives,

indicates a collaborative approach to school governance and decision-making, which is crucial for creating a supportive academic environment.

Parental provision of school supplies was identified as a crucial aspect of support, with most parents ensuring their children had necessary materials despite some challenges related to costs. This finding aligns with Epstein's (2001) assertion that parental involvement includes ensuring children have the materials they need for learning. The ability of parents to provide these supplies is often influenced by their socioeconomic status, which was a focus of the study. This provision directly impacts students' ability to participate fully in educational activities, thereby enhancing their academic performance. However, the financial burden on parents, particularly in a context where education is purportedly fee-free, highlights the need for additional support mechanisms to ensure all students have equal access to necessary resources.

Communication between parents and teachers was found to be robust, with parents maintaining regular contact through phone calls and school visits to monitor their children's progress. This two-way communication channel is critical, as highlighted by Epstein (2001), who noted that effective communication between school and home supports students' academic progress. Regular interactions allow for timely interventions and collaborative problem-solving, ensuring that any academic or behavioral issues are addressed promptly. This communication is essential for building a partnership between parents and teachers, which Clarke (2007) identified as a key factor in supporting student success. The study's findings emphasize the importance of structured communication channels that facilitate regular and meaningful exchanges between parents and educators.

Additionally, parents were actively involved in their children's homework and other academic activities at home, providing direct support and clarifying difficult concepts. Epstein (2003) highlighted that learning at home, including homework and curriculum-related activities, is a crucial aspect of parental involvement. This engagement helps reinforce school learning and creates a supportive learning environment at home. Ballantine (1999) and Sapungan et al. (2014) both noted that parental involvement in home-based educational activities supports children in acquiring mental, ethical, and social development, which are essential for their overall academic achievement. The study found that such involvement not only aids in immediate academic tasks but also instills a sense of discipline and responsibility in students, contributing to their long-term academic success.

The results suggest that schools should encourage and facilitate diverse forms of parental engagement, recognizing its critical role in students' academic success. For educational practice in Tanzania, this implies a need for policies and initiatives that foster active parental involvement, support parents in overcoming barriers to involvement, and promote collaborative partnerships between schools and families to improve educational outcomes. Such initiatives could include parent education programs, enhanced communication strategies, and financial support mechanisms to alleviate the burden on parents, ensuring that all children have the opportunity to succeed academically.

Parents' socio-economic factors that determine academic performance.

The findings indicated that parents with high economic status were more actively involved in the implementation of school projects in public primary schools. These parents were more likely to contribute resources and participate in school activities, enhancing the educational environment and supporting school projects. This aligns with Hoover (1997), who found that parents with higher educational attainment and income are more likely to attend school conferences, volunteer, and support school events, thereby enriching their children's learning experiences. The greater availability of resources and time among higher economic status parents allows them to engage more fully in school-related activities, positively impacting their children's academic achievement (Hoover, 1997).

Conversely, the study also revealed that parents with lower economic status, particularly those in urban areas, were involved in school development activities, although to a lesser extent. Despite facing numerous barriers such as non-flexible work schedules, lack of resources, and stress from living in disadvantaged neighborhoods, these parents showed a willingness to participate in their children's education. Ascher (1988) similarly noted

that low-income urban parents are eager to be involved in their children's education but often encounter significant obstacles. This observation is further supported by Hill and Taylor (2004), who asserted that parents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds face more barriers to involvement, including limited financial resources and increased stress. The challenges faced by these parents can lead to their contributions being undervalued or overlooked, despite their genuine efforts to support their children's academic success (Ascher, 1988; Hill & Taylor, 2004).

The study further highlighted that parents with high economic status were more effective in monitoring and supporting their children's learning. These parents often had the means to send their children to better schools and supplementary tuition programs, providing a more enriched educational environment. Hill and Taylor (2004) emphasized that parents from higher socioeconomic backgrounds have more stable employment and flexible schedules, allowing them to advocate for their children and participate actively in school activities. LaRocque et al. (2011) also noted that higher-income parents are more likely to be engaged in their children's education due to their access to resources and stable employment. This contrasts with parents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who struggle to find time and resources to engage with their children's education, leading to their perceived lower involvement (Hill & Taylor, 2004; LaRocque et al., 2011).

These findings underscore the disparities in parental involvement based on economic status and highlight the need for educational policies that address these inequities. Schools and educational authorities in Tanzania should consider strategies to support parents from lower economic backgrounds, such as flexible meeting times, providing additional resources, and creating inclusive school environments that value all parents' contributions. By doing so, schools can help level the playing field and ensure that all children, regardless of their parents' economic status, receive the support they need to succeed academically. As Ballantine (1999) suggested, educational and occupational aspirations are shaped by the ways in which parents manage their children's activities, time, and learning environments, further underscoring the importance of addressing economic disparities in parental involvement.

The findings emphasize the significant role of economic status in shaping parental involvement in education. Parents with higher economic status are more engaged in school activities and better equipped to support their children's learning, while parents with lower economic status face substantial barriers to involvement. Addressing these disparities through targeted policies and inclusive practices is crucial for improving educational outcomes for all children in Tanzania. By recognizing and mitigating the challenges faced by lower-income parents, educational authorities can create a more equitable and supportive learning environment for all students (Stanikzai, 2013).

Parents' level of education as a socio-economic factor that greatly influences the academic performance of pupils.

The study found that parents with higher education levels were more actively involved in their children's primary education, significantly contributing to better academic performance among these pupils. According to Epstein (2001), parental involvement in education encompasses various activities, including volunteering time, assisting with homework, and engaging in school governance. The findings support this, revealing that educated parents frequently participate in school meetings, decision-making processes, and support school activities, thereby creating a robust support system for their children's academic endeavors.

Parents with higher education levels were found to engage more deeply in their children's academic lives. One teacher from School B observed that such parents are more likely to be involved in both their children's development and school support, participating actively in decision-making and governance. This aligns with Carnoy's (2004) assertion that parents play a critical role in establishing supportive learning environments. Educated parents' involvement often extends beyond mere attendance at school meetings to more substantive contributions, such as volunteering and providing additional resources, which enhances the overall educational experience for their children.

Communication between parents and teachers was also found to be more prevalent among educated parents, facilitating a two-way exchange that benefits student performance. This finding echoes Epstein's (2001)

recommendation for effective school-family communication. Parents with higher education levels tend to maintain regular contact with teachers, discuss their children's progress, and address any academic challenges promptly. This proactive approach ensures that any issues are quickly identified and resolved, thereby supporting continuous academic improvement.

The study also highlighted the impact of parental involvement at home, particularly in assisting with homework and creating a conducive learning environment. Parents with higher education levels often dedicate time to help their children with assignments, reinforcing the learning that takes place in school. This home support is crucial for academic success, as noted by Joyce Epstein (2003), who emphasized that learning at home is an integral part of parental involvement. The hands-on approach of educated parents in monitoring and supporting homework completion ensures that their children stay on track with their studies and develop a disciplined approach to their education.

Moreover, the study found that educated parents are more likely to volunteer and contribute to school improvement initiatives. Teachers and parents from various schools reported that those with higher education levels often take on leadership roles in school committees and boards, using their knowledge and experience to influence positive changes. This active participation in school governance not only benefits their own children but also contributes to the overall school environment, fostering a culture of collaboration and excellence.

In contrast, the study observed that parents with lower education levels were less involved in school activities and decision-making processes. Teachers reported that these parents often did not engage with teachers or participate in school meetings as frequently. However, it was noted that when such parents did get involved, their contributions were also valuable and appreciated. This underscores the importance of encouraging all parents, regardless of their education level, to participate in their children's education. As Stanikzai (2013) and Ballantine (1999) suggested, parental involvement is crucial for providing a supportive learning environment and shaping children's educational aspirations.

The study reinforces the critical role of parental involvement in enhancing pupils' academic performance. It highlights the need for schools to foster an inclusive environment that encourages all parents to participate in their children's education. Policies and initiatives that promote parental engagement, regardless of educational background, can significantly contribute to improving educational outcomes. In Tanzania, this implies implementing strategies that support and educate parents about the importance of their involvement, ensuring that all children have the opportunity to succeed academically.

CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND IMPLICATION OF THE STUDY

Conclusion

The study revealed significant disparities in parental involvement based on economic status, highlighting that parents with higher economic status are more actively engaged in their children's education. These parents contribute more resources, participate more frequently in school activities, and support their children's learning both at home and at school, thereby positively impacting their academic performance. Conversely, parents with lower economic status face numerous barriers to involvement, including inflexible work schedules, limited financial resources, and increased stress, which hinder their ability to engage in their children's education to the same extent.

The findings underscore the critical role of parental involvement in enhancing pupils' academic performance. Active engagement from parents, particularly those with higher education and economic status, contributes significantly to creating a supportive learning environment and fostering academic success. However, the barriers faced by lower-income parents need to be addressed to ensure equitable educational opportunities for all children.

Recommendations

To enhance parental involvement and address the disparities identified in this study, several strategies should be implemented. Schools should offer flexible scheduling for meetings and activities to accommodate parents with non-flexible work schedules, including evening or weekend meetings and the use of virtual platforms for

remote participation. Providing additional resources and financial support to families with lower economic status, such as subsidized school supplies, uniforms, and supplementary tuition programs, is crucial to alleviate the burden of educational expenses. Parent education programs are essential to inform parents about the importance of their involvement and to provide strategies for supporting learning at home, effective communication with teachers, and participation in school governance. Creating an inclusive school culture that values and encourages contributions from all parents, regardless of economic status, is vital; schools should actively seek input from parents of diverse backgrounds and ensure their voices are heard in decision-making processes. Additionally, developing partnerships with community organizations can provide further support and resources to families, addressing broader socioeconomic challenges that affect parental involvement and student success.

Implication of the findings

The findings of this study have significant implications for educational practice in Tanzania. Educational policies must be designed to address the economic disparities impacting parental involvement, creating frameworks that support equitable access to resources and opportunities for all students. Teacher training programs should focus on equipping educators with the skills to engage effectively with parents from diverse economic backgrounds, fostering inclusive communication and collaboration. School leaders should prioritize creating environments that encourage and facilitate parental involvement, recognizing and addressing the unique challenges faced by lower-income parents. Regular monitoring and evaluation of parental involvement initiatives are necessary to assess their effectiveness and identify areas for improvement, ensuring that efforts to enhance parental engagement and student outcomes are data-driven. Further research is needed to explore the specific barriers faced by lower-income parents and to develop targeted interventions. Advocacy efforts should focus on raising awareness about the importance of parental involvement and securing funding to support relevant programs. By addressing these issues, Tanzania can create a more equitable and supportive educational environment, ensuring that all children have the opportunity to succeed academically.

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