EDUCATION

Parental Involvement Factors and Learners' Academic Performance in Public Primary Schools in Gairo District, Tanzania

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Published November 2026

Abstract

This study examined factors influencing parental involvement in learners' academic performance in public primary schools in Gairo District, Tanzania. Guided by pragmatism and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, the study employed a mixed-methods approach using a convergent design. Data were collected from 237 participants, comprising 220 parents and guardians, eight academic teachers, eight academic prefects, and one District Education Officer, drawn from eight public primary schools. Questionnaires were analysed using descriptive statistics in SPSS version 28, while interview data were analysed thematically following Braun and Clarke (2006). The findings revealed that parental involvement was influenced by interconnected economic, household, educational, and school-related factors. Work commitments, household income, domestic responsibilities, attitudes towards education, awareness of parental roles, subject knowledge, school communication practices, parental education level, and home-to-school distance were the key factors identified. Qualitative evidence further revealed that communication between schools and parents was largely reactive rather than proactive, and that seasonal farming activities significantly constrained parents' availability for academic support. The study concludes that improving parental involvement requires both stronger parental capacity and more proactive school engagement practices. It recommends flexible communication strategies, context-sensitive parental awareness programmes, and school activities scheduled around local agricultural routines.

Keywords: Parental Involvement; Academic Performance; Public Primary Schools; Ecological Systems Theory; Gairo District; Tanzania

1 Introduction

Education is universally recognised as a fundamental human right and an important driver of social and economic development. It contributes to improved quality of life, poverty reduction, equality, and sustainable development (Edeji, 2024). At the primary school level, learners' academic performance is shaped by a complex interplay of school, household, and community factors. Among these, parental involvement occupies a particularly important position because parents directly influence learning through homework supervision, provision of learning materials, communication with teachers, and participation in school activities (Oranga et al., 2023; Musengamana, 2023).

Globally, evidence consistently shows a positive relationship between parental involvement and learners' academic achievement. Jeynes (2022) found that learners whose parents were actively involved attained better academic outcomes across multiple schooling contexts. Similarly, Bryan et al. (2020) reported that effective communication between schools and families improves learners'

motivation, attendance, and overall development. More recently, meta-analyses by Wang and Wei (2024) and Fatimaningrum et al. (2022) established significant positive relationships between parental involvement and academic performance, underscoring its broad relevance across diverse educational settings.

In Africa, parental involvement is frequently constrained by poverty, low parental literacy, limited educational resources, and competing livelihood activities. Evidence from Ghana demonstrates that parental learning support at home and regular interaction with schools contribute to positive educational outcomes (Dabie and MacKenzie, 2025). In South Africa, parental involvement and communication with schools have similarly been associated with improved literacy and numeracy outcomes (Spaull and Van der Berg, 2020). However, findings across the continent vary considerably because socioeconomic and cultural conditions differ significantly between communities, reminding researchers that parental involvement cannot be understood independently of context.

In East Africa, parental involvement is particularly important because primary education requires sustained collaboration between schools, households, and communities. In Uganda, parents are expected to supervise homework, provide learning materials, communicate with teachers, and participate in school activities, yet agricultural seasons, poverty, educational background, and limited time frequently constrain their involvement. Evidence from Kenya similarly indicates that parental support for pupils' academic work contributes positively to educational outcomes, though structural and economic barriers remain substantial (Kanyoi and Kirimi, 2025).

In Tanzania, parental and community participation is emphasised in educational policies and programmes, including the Primary Education Development Programme and the Education and Training Policy of 2014, revised in 2023. These initiatives promote parental participation in school management, resource mobilisation, and children's learning. Nevertheless, parental involvement remains constrained by poverty, low parental education, competing livelihood activities, and limited awareness of parental responsibilities (Shukia and Marobo, 2024; Mujtaba et al., 2024). Studies in Tanzania confirm that parental involvement contributes positively to learners' academic performance (Masumbuko, 2023; Kija and Mosha, 2024; Julius, 2023; Mulokozi and Boniface, 2025), yet evidence also shows that in some districts, over half of parents provide inadequate academic support (Lazaro, 2023), and that parental education, socioeconomic status, and cultural factors further shape the nature of involvement (Mchia and Mwila, 2024).

Morogoro Region provides an important and underexplored context for examining parental involvement, particularly in rural communities where households depend heavily on agriculture. Such livelihood conditions may limit the time and resources parents have available for homework supervision, provision of learning materials, and participation in school activities. Despite this situation, limited research has examined parental involvement and academic performance in rural public primary schools within the region. This gap is especially evident in Gairo District, where the population depends largely on agriculture and where primary school academic performance remains a concern, as reflected in Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) results (PO-RALG, 2023). Although several factors may influence learners' performance, parental involvement is an important household-level factor that warrants systematic investigation.

The present study therefore examined parental involvement factors and learners' academic performance in public primary schools in Gairo District, Tanzania. Specifically, it sought to identify the key factors influencing parental involvement and to understand how those factors shaped learners' academic performance in a predominantly rural and agricultural context. The study was guided by

Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1994) Ecological Systems Theory, which conceptualises child development as the product of ongoing interactions between the child and the multiple nested systems microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem that constitute the child's environment. Within this framework, the home and school are primary microsystems, the home–school relationship constitutes the mesosystem, and broader socioeconomic and policy conditions operate at the exosystem and macrosystem levels. The theory provided an appropriate lens for understanding how parental characteristics, household conditions, and school practices interact to influence learners' academic outcomes.

2 Literature review

Existing studies consistently show that parental involvement is associated with better learners' academic performance, although the nature and strength of this relationship vary depending on the form of involvement and the socioeconomic context. Kwarteng et al. (2022) found that parental education and income were positively related to academic performance, while activities such as providing learning materials, discussing academic progress with teachers, and attending Parent–Teacher Association (PTA) meetings were also associated with better outcomes. This suggests that parental involvement is not a single, uniform activity; rather, different forms of involvement may contribute differently to learners' performance, and their relative importance may shift across socioeconomic contexts.

However, parental involvement does not always produce equivalent academic benefits. Kija and Mosha (2024) found that although parents attended school meetings and communicated with teachers, their involvement had only limited effects on learners' academic success. This finding suggests that the frequency of parental participation may be less important than the quality and consistency of the support provided. It also highlights that parental involvement operates alongside other school-level factors including teaching conditions, availability of learning materials, and classroom environments which independently shape learners' outcomes.

The literature further indicates that different forms of parental involvement carry different levels of influence. Nzuruba (2024) found that parental aspirations and expectations were strongly associated with academic achievement, whereas home-based supervision had a comparatively weaker relationship with performance. This challenges the common assumption that homework supervision represents the most important form of parental involvement. It suggests that encouragement, expectations, and ongoing communication may play an equally important or in some contexts a more important role in shaping learners' academic trajectories.

Parental capacity to become involved is also shaped by socioeconomic and institutional conditions. Njovu (2022) found that parents' education, availability of time, and perceptions of education affected their involvement, while teachers' attitudes could either support or constrain parent–teacher relationships. Msangi (2025) similarly found that school leadership, teacher invitations, and parental self-efficacy encouraged involvement, whereas low parental education, financial difficulties, and limited communication discouraged it. Together, these findings indicate that parental involvement is a shared responsibility between families and schools, rather than a responsibility that rests entirely with parents.

Financial and practical challenges can further restrict parents' participation in children's education. Francis (2024) identified financial difficulties, lack of time, parental responsibilities, limited knowledge of the importance of education, and cultural practices as major barriers to monitoring

pupils' academic progress. This finding is important because it shows that limited involvement should not automatically be interpreted as parental indifference. Some parents may value education highly but lack the time, resources, or contextual knowledge required to provide effective academic support.

In rural Tanzanian settings specifically, agricultural calendars impose seasonal constraints on parental availability that are rarely captured in urban-focused studies. During planting and harvesting seasons, parents may spend extended hours in the fields, leaving limited time for homework supervision, school meetings, or communication with teachers. This structural dimension of parental involvement has received limited attention in the existing literature and represents an important contextual gap that the present study addresses.

Taken together, the reviewed studies show that parental involvement is influenced by socioeconomic status, parental education, availability of time, communication with teachers, home-based support, school participation, and parents' attitudes towards education. The findings also reveal, however, that the contribution of these factors varies across contexts. Critically, most existing studies have focused on Ghana, Zambia, and urban areas of Tanzania, with limited evidence from rural public primary schools. This creates a contextual gap concerning how specific parental involvement factors influence learners' academic performance in rural settings such as Gairo District. In particular, limited evidence exists on the contribution of homework supervision, provision of learning materials, communication with teachers, monitoring of learning activities, and participation in school activities in this context. The present study therefore addresses this gap by systematically examining how parental involvement factors influence learners' academic performance in public primary schools in Gairo District, Tanzania.

2.1 Theoretical framework

The study was anchored in Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1994) Ecological Systems Theory, which provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how multiple nested environmental systems interact to shape child development and educational outcomes. The theory identifies four interacting systems: the microsystem (immediate environments such as the home and school), the mesosystem (relationships between microsystems, such as the home–school relationship), the exosystem (broader social structures that indirectly affect the child, such as parental employment), and the macrosystem (cultural and policy contexts).

This framework is particularly well suited for studying parental involvement because it recognises that the child's academic performance is shaped not only by what happens inside the classroom but also by the quality and frequency of interactions within and between home and school. When parents are engaged with teachers and school activities, the mesosystem is strengthened, creating complementary and reinforcing influences on the child's learning. Conversely, when household poverty, agricultural obligations, or limited parental education weaken this connection, the child's academic support system is correspondingly reduced. Ecological Systems Theory thus helps to explain why parental involvement is not a straightforward individual behaviour but a contextually embedded practice shaped by household, community, and structural conditions.

3 Methodology

The study was guided by a pragmatic philosophy and employed a mixed-methods approach, allowing quantitative and qualitative evidence to be used together to develop a more complete understanding

of how parental involvement influences learners' academic performance. Pragmatism was adopted because it permits the researcher to select methods that best answer the research questions rather than committing to a single epistemological position (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2023). This flexibility was important given that the study sought both measurable data on the extent of parental involvement and contextual explanations of stakeholders' experiences.

3.1 Research approach

The mixed-methods approach was adopted because the study required both quantitative evidence on the extent of parental involvement and its relationship with learners' academic performance, and qualitative explanations of the experiences and perceptions of key stakeholders. Quantitative data enabled measurement of the prevalence of specific factors, while qualitative data provided contextual depth and explanatory insight. This approach is consistent with the convergent design described by Creswell and Plano Clark (2023), in which both strands are collected concurrently and integrated during interpretation.

3.2 Research design

A convergent research design was employed to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between parental involvement and learners' academic performance (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2023). Quantitative and qualitative data were collected during the same phase and analysed separately before being merged during interpretation. This design enabled the study to compare and complement descriptive statistical findings with participants' views, thereby providing a richer and more nuanced account of how parental involvement relates to learners' academic performance in public primary schools.

3.3 Study area

The study was conducted in Gairo District, Morogoro Region, Tanzania, focusing on eight public primary schools. Gairo is predominantly rural, with most households dependent on subsistence agriculture and small-scale economic activities. The district was selected because of documented concerns regarding primary school academic performance. According to PO-RALG (2023), Gairo District recorded a PSLE pass rate of 45%, compared with the national rate of 57%. The relatively low performance, combined with the district's predominantly rural agricultural setting, made Gairo a contextually appropriate and theoretically relevant site for examining the factors associated with parental involvement and learners' academic performance. These socioeconomic conditions reflect patterns observed across rural East Africa, where agricultural livelihoods impose structural constraints on parental engagement with schooling.

3.4 Target population

The target population comprised 817 participants drawn from eight selected public primary schools in Gairo District. It included 800 parents and guardians, eight academic teachers, eight academic prefects, and one District Education Officer (DEO). These groups were selected because they could provide complementary perspectives on parental involvement and learners' academic performance. Parents and guardians offered information about learning support at home; teachers and academic prefects contributed school-based perspectives on parental participation; and the DEO provided a broader district-level view of parental involvement trends and educational policy implementation.

3.5 Sample size and sampling techniques

3.5.1 Sample size

The sample comprised 240 parents and guardians, representing 30% of the 800 parents and guardians in the target population, consistent with the recommendation of Blumberg et al. (2014). In addition, all eight academic teachers, eight academic prefects, and one DEO were included, giving a total target sample of 257 participants. Although 240 parents and guardians were targeted, 220 completed and returned the questionnaires, yielding a response rate of 91.7%. This high response rate provided sufficient data for the quantitative analysis and reduced the likelihood of substantial non-response bias. All 17 participants selected for qualitative interviews participated, giving a combined total of 237 participants.

3.5.2 Sampling techniques

Simple random sampling was used to select the 240 parents and guardians. Lists of eligible parents and guardians were obtained from the eight selected schools, and each parent was assigned a unique number. The required participants were then selected randomly, ensuring that each eligible parent had an equal chance of inclusion and thereby reducing selection bias. Purposive sampling was used to select academic teachers, academic prefects, and the DEO because these participants possessed specific knowledge relevant to parental involvement and learners' academic performance. Since their numbers were small and manageable, all eligible members of these groups were included in the study, consistent with the principle of saturation in qualitative research.

3.6 Data collection methods

Primary data were collected using questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Questionnaires were administered to parents and guardians because they provided standardised and measurable data on parental involvement across the sample. The questionnaire employed a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree, covering ten statements related to key parental involvement factors. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with academic teachers, academic prefects, and the DEO because these participants could provide detailed experiential accounts and contextual explanations that quantitative data alone could not capture. These two methods complemented each other, with questionnaire data providing breadth and interview data providing depth.

The instruments were prepared in English and translated into Kiswahili because Kiswahili is the principal language of communication in Tanzania and helped respondents understand the questions clearly. Interviews were conducted in English or Kiswahili according to participants' preferences. The researcher translated the instruments into Kiswahili and cross-checked them against the English versions to maintain consistency. Kiswahili interviews were first transcribed in Kiswahili and then translated into English. The translated transcripts were compared with the original transcripts to verify that the intended meaning was preserved. With participants' informed consent, interviews were audio-recorded and supported by written notes.

3.7 Data analysis

Quantitative data were coded, entered, and analysed using SPSS version 28. Frequencies and percentages were used to summarise respondents' characteristics and describe the extent of parental involvement. The quantitative findings were presented in tables to make patterns in the data transparent and accessible. Mean scores were computed for each item to facilitate comparative interpretation of factors across the sample.

Qualitative data from the interviews were analysed thematically following the six-phase approach proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The researcher first familiarised herself with the interview data through repeated reading, then generated initial codes, grouped related codes into candidate themes, reviewed and refined the themes to ensure internal coherence, assigned final theme names, and presented the findings through narrative explanations supported by relevant participant quotations. This approach allowed the study to generate contextually grounded interpretations of participants' experiences.

The quantitative and qualitative findings were then integrated during interpretation. This integration followed a merging approach (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2023), in which the two sets of findings were considered together to identify areas of convergence, complementarity, and elaboration. Integration enabled the study to explain patterns in the statistical findings through the lens of participants' contextual experiences, thereby providing a more complete account of the factors influencing parental involvement.

3.8 Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the relevant institutional authority before data collection commenced. All participants provided informed consent prior to their participation. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Confidentiality was maintained by ensuring that individual responses could not be linked to named participants in the analysis or reporting. Data were stored securely and accessed only by the research team.

4 Results

This section presents the findings on factors influencing parental involvement in learners' academic performance in public primary schools in Gairo District. The findings are based on questionnaire responses from 220 parents and guardians and qualitative interviews with eight academic teachers, eight academic prefects, and the DEO. The quantitative findings are presented using frequencies and percentages, while the qualitative findings provide contextual explanations of the patterns observed.

Table 1. Parental involvement factors and learners' academic performance (n = 220).

Statements	SD f (%)	D f (%)	N f (%)	A f (%)	SA f (%)	Total
Parents' level of education influences their ability to support learners' academic activities	18 (8.2)	29 (13.2)	31 (14.1)	79 (35.9)	63 (28.6)	220 (100.0)
Parents' income level influences their ability to provide learning materials	12 (5.5)	24 (10.9)	22 (10.0)	81 (36.8)	81 (36.8)	220 (100.0)
Parents' work commitments limit their involvement in learners' academic activities	14 (6.4)	21 (9.5)	19 (8.6)	83 (37.7)	83 (37.7)	220 (100.0)
Parents' knowledge of school subjects affects their ability to assist learners with homework	17 (7.7)	25 (11.4)	27 (12.3)	78 (35.5)	73 (33.2)	220 (100.0)
Distance between home and school affects communication between parents and teachers	20 (9.1)	31 (14.1)	28 (12.7)	76 (34.5)	65 (29.5)	220 (100.0)
Household responsibilities limit the time parents can devote to learners' studies	11 (5.0)	25 (11.4)	24 (10.9)	79 (35.9)	81 (36.8)	220 (100.0)

Statements	SD f (%)	D f (%)	N f (%)	A f (%)	SA f (%)	Total
Parents' attitudes towards education influence their involvement in learners' academic activities	13 (5.9)	22 (10.0)	26 (11.8)	82 (37.3)	77 (35.0)	220 (100.0)
Availability of learning materials at home influences the effectiveness of parental support	15 (6.8)	24 (10.9)	25 (11.4)	78 (35.5)	78 (35.5)	220 (100.0)
School communication practices influence parents' ability to support learners	16 (7.3)	27 (12.3)	29 (13.2)	77 (35.0)	71 (32.3)	220 (100.0)
Parents' awareness of their role in education influences their contribution to learners' academic performance	14 (6.4)	23 (10.5)	24 (10.9)	80 (36.4)	79 (35.9)	220 (100.0)

Note: f = frequency, % = percentage; SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, N = Neutral, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree.

Source: Field data (2026).

The findings presented in Table 1 indicate that parental involvement in learners' academic performance is shaped by several interconnected educational, economic, household, and school-related factors. Based on the proportion of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with each statement, the factors were ranked from the most to the least frequently reported as follows: parents' work commitments (75.4%), parents' income level (73.6%), household responsibilities (72.7%), parents' attitudes towards education (72.3%), parents' awareness of their educational role (72.3%), availability of learning materials at home (70.9%), knowledge of school subjects (68.7%), school communication practices (67.3%), parents' level of education (64.5%), and distance between home and school (64.0%). These findings reveal that economic and occupational constraints were the most prominent barriers to parental involvement, while physical distance from school was the least frequently cited factor.

Parents' work commitments ranked first, with 166 respondents (75.4%) agreeing or strongly agreeing that work commitments reduced the time available for learners' academic activities. This finding is particularly relevant in a predominantly rural, agricultural setting where many parents depend on farming and other seasonal livelihood activities. Academic Teacher D provided a practical illustration of this challenge:

"If you call a meeting, perhaps thirty out of one hundred and fifty come, and these are mostly the same parents each time. The rest do not attend because they are in the fields, or because they believe that schooling is the teacher's work, not theirs." (Academic Teacher D, Interview, 2026)

This response suggests that work commitments may restrict parents' availability for school meetings and direct supervision of learners' academic activities. It also indicates that limited involvement may result not only from competing economic responsibilities but also from entrenched perceptions about the respective roles of parents and teachers in children's education. Such perceptions may require targeted awareness-raising before structural interventions can be effective.

Parents' income level ranked second, with 162 respondents (73.6%) agreeing or strongly agreeing that income influences their ability to provide learning materials. This finding indicates that household economic circumstances significantly determine parents' capacity to purchase books, stationery, and other materials required for effective learning at home. Financial limitations may therefore prevent parents from translating their willingness to support their children's education into concrete, day-to-day assistance. This is consistent with Dew et al. (2017) and Kwarteng et al. (2022),

who linked household income to differences in educational opportunity and parental support capacity.

Household responsibilities ranked third, with 160 respondents (72.7%) agreeing or strongly agreeing that domestic responsibilities limit the time parents devote to learners' studies. This suggests that parents must balance educational responsibilities with domestic and economic demands, often competing simultaneously. As a consequence, activities such as monitoring homework, attending school meetings, and communicating with teachers may receive diminished attention when household responsibilities are particularly demanding, as may occur during peak agricultural seasons.

Parents' attitudes towards education and their awareness of their educational role jointly ranked fourth, each reported by 159 respondents (72.3%). Regarding attitudes, the findings suggest that positive orientations towards education may encourage parents to take a more active role in their children's learning, while the belief that education is primarily the responsibility of teachers may reduce parental participation. This interpretation is consistent with Academic Teacher D's observation that some parents regard schooling as the teacher's responsibility. The finding highlights the importance of engaging parents not only as providers of resources but also as educational partners who recognise and accept their responsibilities in the home learning environment.

Similarly, parents' awareness of their educational role was reported by 159 respondents (72.3%). The qualitative evidence suggests that awareness involves recognising that parental responsibility extends beyond sending children to school and encompasses monitoring homework, communicating with teachers, attending school meetings, and responding to learners' academic difficulties. The relatively high percentage indicates that parents' understanding of the breadth of their educational responsibilities is an important condition for effective and sustained involvement.

The availability of learning materials at home ranked fifth, with 156 respondents (70.9%) agreeing or strongly agreeing that access to learning materials influences the effectiveness of parental support. This finding indicates that effective parental involvement depends not only on parents' willingness but also on their ability to provide an appropriate learning environment. Without adequate materials including exercise books, pens, textbooks, and adequate lighting parents' good intentions cannot translate into practical academic support.

Parents' knowledge of school subjects ranked sixth, with 151 respondents (68.7%) agreeing or strongly agreeing that subject knowledge affects their ability to assist learners with homework. The finding suggests that parents may be willing to support their children academically but may lack sufficient subject knowledge to provide direct assistance with school tasks. Academic Teacher A illustrated this distinction clearly:

"Most of our parents tell their children to go to school and study hard, but when you ask the children whether anyone checks their homework, they say no. The parent will say, 'I told you to study,' but actually opening the exercise book and checking what was written is a different thing altogether." (Academic Teacher A, Interview, 2026)

This response points to an important distinction between general parental encouragement and direct academic engagement. Parents may demonstrate genuine support for education in terms of attitudes and aspirations without possessing the subject knowledge or confidence needed for day-to-day academic assistance. Programmes that build parental capacity to engage meaningfully with their children's schoolwork may therefore be more effective than those that simply emphasise the importance of involvement.

School communication practices ranked seventh, with 148 respondents (67.3%) agreeing or strongly agreeing that communication practices affect parental support. The qualitative findings elaborated this result. Academic Teacher C explained:

"Communication between the school and parents does take place in this school, although not to the maximum extent. When a child experiences challenges, the parent comes to the school to report the issue. Likewise, the school communicates with parents whenever there is a problem, such as poor academic performance or disciplinary issues that require parental attention." (Academic Teacher C, Interview, 2026)

This response indicates that communication tends to be reactive rather than proactive, initiated primarily when problems arise rather than as a routine mechanism for sharing progress and building partnership. The District Education Officer reinforced this observation:

"In schools where teachers and parents communicate regularly, even informally, such as during community interactions, children tend to perform better academically. Where communication is lacking, each side works independently, and ultimately it is the child who suffers." (District Education Officer, Interview, 2026)

This finding underlines the importance of regular, structured communication in linking parental support with school-based learning. Schools that communicate proactively with parents, sharing academic progress alongside challenges, appear better placed to mobilise parental involvement and sustain it over time.

Parents' level of education ranked ninth, with 142 respondents (64.5%) agreeing or strongly agreeing that parental education influences the ability to support learners' academic activities. Although this was not the highest-ranked factor, it remained relevant because nearly two-thirds of respondents associated parental education with the capacity to assist with homework and monitor academic progress. The finding suggests that parents' educational backgrounds may affect their confidence and competence in providing academic assistance. Its comparatively lower percentage, however, indicates that in this context, economic and occupational constraints were more influential than parental education as barriers to involvement.

Finally, the distance between home and school ranked tenth and was the least frequently reported factor, with 141 respondents (64.0%) agreeing or strongly agreeing that it affects communication between parents and teachers. The qualitative evidence further indicated that communication between parents and schools does occur, albeit mainly in response to academic or disciplinary difficulties. Although physical distance may create a barrier to regular in-person interaction, it appears to have a comparatively lower constraining effect on parental involvement in this context than economic, occupational, and attitudinal factors.

5 Discussion of findings

The findings align with Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1994) Ecological Systems Theory by demonstrating that parents' socioeconomic conditions operate at multiple system levels to shape the learning opportunities available to learners. At the exosystem level, parental employment conditions and agricultural livelihoods constrain the time and energy available for involvement. Limited household income affects parents' ability to provide learning materials and create conducive home learning environments, thereby influencing learners' academic experiences and outcomes through the microsystem. This finding is consistent with Dew et al. (2017), who found that parents from higher

socioeconomic groups had greater access to educational resources, and with Kwarteng et al. (2022), who linked parental education and income with better educational opportunities and academic outcomes.

The findings further demonstrate that parents' occupations and household responsibilities shape their involvement through the exosystem and microsystem dimensions of Ecological Systems Theory. Demanding work schedules, domestic responsibilities, and limited time reduce parents' ability to supervise schoolwork and support learning activities. This is consistent with Njovu (2022), who found that demanding parental occupations hindered effective educational support, and with Francis (2024) and Msangi (2025), who similarly identified time constraints and socioeconomic responsibilities as prominent barriers to parental involvement. The agricultural context of Gairo District adds a seasonal dimension to this pattern that merits attention in programme planning.

The findings also confirm the microsystem dimension of Ecological Systems Theory by showing that parents' education, subject knowledge, attitudes, and aspirations directly shape interactions with learners within the home environment. Kwarteng et al. (2022) found that parental education was associated with learners' academic outcomes, while Nzuruba (2024) reported that parental education, aspirations, and expectations influenced the extent and quality of parental involvement. These findings collectively suggest that the characteristics and beliefs of parents can either strengthen or limit the support learners receive at home. Importantly, the present study shows that limited subject knowledge may coexist with positive educational attitudes, underscoring the need for capacity-building programmes that equip parents with practical tools for academic support.

The finding that school communication practices were reactive rather than proactive supports the mesosystem dimension of Ecological Systems Theory, which emphasises the quality of linkages between the home and school. Effective communication with teachers, participation in school meetings, and discussions about learners' progress strengthen the mesosystem and create more coherent and reinforcing influences on learners' academic development. This is consistent with Msangi (2025), who found that school communication and teacher invitations were associated with greater parental involvement, and with Kwarteng et al. (2022) and Kija and Mosha (2024), who reported that communication between parents and teachers was associated with learners' educational outcomes.

The reactive pattern of communication identified in this study represents a structural weakness in the home–school relationship that may limit the extent to which schools can mobilise parental support as a resource for improving learner performance. When communication is confined to problem episodes, parents are positioned as respondents to crises rather than active partners in learning. The District Education Officer's testimony that children in schools with regular communication performed better academically provides important support for reorienting school communication from a reactive to a proactive model.

The finding that parental attitudes towards education were associated with involvement is consistent with the broader literature on parental motivational beliefs. When parents perceive education as primarily the teacher's responsibility, the home–school partnership is weakened, and children may receive reinforcing messages about effort and study only within the school microsystem. Strengthening parental role identity — that is, parents' sense of themselves as active educational partners — may therefore be as important as addressing practical barriers such as income and time constraints.

6 Conclusion and recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

The study concludes that parental involvement in learners' academic performance is influenced by interconnected educational, economic, occupational, household, and school-related factors. Parents' education, income, subject knowledge, attitudes, and awareness of their educational roles shape their ability and willingness to support learners at home. At the same time, work commitments, household responsibilities, limited learning resources, and distance from school constrain effective involvement. Within the Ecological Systems Theory framework, these findings demonstrate that the quality of parental involvement is determined not by a single factor but by the interaction of household characteristics, community conditions, and school practices across multiple system levels.

The study further concludes that strengthening parental involvement requires attention to both the capacity of parents and the environment in which they support learning. The reactive nature of school–parent communication represents a structural gap that limits the extent to which schools can leverage parental involvement as a resource for improving learner performance. Improving parental involvement therefore requires stronger and more proactive home–school communication, targeted parental awareness and capacity programmes, and practical strategies that address the socioeconomic and occupational circumstances that constrain many parents' participation.

6.2 Recommendations

- Schools should strengthen parental education and awareness programmes. Parents should be regularly guided on practical ways of supporting learners at home, including checking homework, monitoring academic progress, establishing study routines, and maintaining communication with teachers. Such programmes should use simple, practical, and locally contextualised approaches for example, drawing on existing community structures such as village meetings and farmer groups to disseminate information in accessible formats.
- Schools should reorient their communication with parents from a reactive to a proactive model. Rather than contacting parents only when problems arise, teachers and school leaders should provide regular information about learners' academic progress, achievements, and areas requiring additional support. Meetings, individual consultations, telephone communication, and community engagement channels can help establish continuous cooperation between parents and teachers, in line with the mesosystem strengthening envisioned by Ecological Systems Theory.
- Education authorities should take account of the socioeconomic and occupational circumstances of parents when promoting parental involvement. Schools should organise meetings and other engagement activities at times that accommodate parents' work and household responsibilities, including agricultural calendars. Flexible and locally appropriate engagement strategies may substantially improve participation among parents who are unable to attend activities during conventional school hours.
- Parents should be supported and encouraged to take greater responsibility for learners' education beyond sending children to school. Parents should be enabled to monitor schoolwork, provide available learning materials, encourage regular study, and maintain communication with teachers within the limits of their circumstances. Concurrently, schools should recognise the economic and educational challenges facing many families and provide appropriate guidance and support, rather than relying exclusively on parental contributions.

- Future research should examine the specific effects of seasonal agricultural patterns on parental involvement in rural Tanzanian primary schools. Longitudinal studies tracking changes in parental involvement and learner performance across planting, growing, and harvesting seasons would provide evidence to inform context-sensitive policy interventions. Such research would also contribute to the broader regional literature on parental involvement in sub-Saharan Africa.

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