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Enhancing Student Learning Through Parental Participation in School Meetings: A Case Study of Secondary Schools in Kinondoni Municipality, Tanzania

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Abstract: This study investigates the role of parental participation in school meetings in enhancing student learning in secondary schools in Kinondoni Municipality, Tanzania. The research aims to assess the level of parental involvement in school meetings, examine the impact of such participation on students' learning, and identify strategies to improve engagement for better academic outcomes. A mixed-methods approach with a descriptive case study design was employed. The study involved 96 participants including one District Secondary Education Officer (DSEO), one Ward Education Officer (WEO), four secondary school heads, 26 teachers, 32 parents, and 32 students from four secondary schools in the municipality. Data were collected through structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and documentary reviews. The findings revealed that parental participation in school meetings varied across schools, with some schools showing higher engagement due to effective communication strategies. Increased participation was linked to improved academic performance and greater collaboration between parents and teachers. Barriers to participation, such as time constraints and lack of awareness, were identified. The study recommends improving communication with parents, offering flexible meeting times, and implementing policies to encourage greater involvement.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is universally acknowledged as a key driver of socioeconomic development and individual empowerment. However, the success of education is not solely dependent on schools and teachers but is also significantly influenced by parental involvement (Epstein, 2009; Kraft & Dougherty, 2013). Research has consistently shown that when parents actively engage in their children's education, students exhibit higher academic achievement, improved behavior, and better social adaptation (Fan & Williams, 2016; Lemmer, 2012). Among the various modes of parental involvement, participation in school meetings represents a critical avenue through which parents can collaborate with educators to enhance student learning outcomes (Henderson & Mapp, 2012). School meetings serve as an institutionalized mechanism for fostering communication between parents and teachers, allowing for the exchange of information, joint decision-making, and reinforcement of academic expectations (Bergman, 2016).

Several theoretical frameworks underline the importance of parental involvement in education. Epstein's (1995) Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence posits that students' academic and social development is best supported when schools, families, and communities collaborate effectively. The theory suggests that parental involvement in school activities, including meetings, strengthens the interconnectedness between these spheres, thereby fostering a more supportive learning environment. Similarly, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) emphasizes the role of the family as a microsystem that directly influences a child's cognitive and social development. In this view, parental engagement in school meetings creates an interactive educational ecosystem in which students benefit from continuous support at both home and school.

From a systemic perspective, Bertalanffy's General Systems Theory (2008) argues that schools function as interdependent systems in which various stakeholders—students, parents, teachers, and administrators—must interact cohesively for optimal outcomes. The absence of parental participation disrupts this system, leading to potential inefficiencies in school governance, academic performance monitoring, and discipline management (Sheldon, 2007). These theoretical foundations provide a scholarly basis for examining the impact of parental participation in school meetings on student learning outcomes.

Empirical studies conducted in various educational settings reinforce the significance of parental involvement in school activities. Research in the United States suggests that regular parental engagement in school meetings leads to better student attendance, higher motivation, and improved academic performance (Jeynes, 2015). In a study conducted in Los Angeles, Bergman (2016) found that simple interventions, such as text-message reminders to parents about school activities, resulted in improved student performance and reduced absenteeism. Similarly, Kraft and Rogers (2015) demonstrated that sending brief academic updates to parents enhanced student accountability and reduced the summer school dropout rate by nearly 50%.

In the African context, studies have highlighted the effectiveness of parental involvement in school meetings as a means of improving educational outcomes. A study conducted in South Africa by Lemmer (2018) found that structured parent-teacher meetings in elementary schools led to improved literacy and numeracy skills among students. The study emphasized that when parents actively participated in discussions about curriculum, learning strategies, and student progress, children performed significantly better in standardized assessments. Likewise, a study in Zimbabwe by Mutasa (2013) found that parental attendance at school meetings was strongly correlated with students' examination preparedness and overall academic performance.

In Tanzania, parental involvement in education has been formally recognized since the country's independence in 1961. The Education and Training Policy (ETP) of 1962 mandated parental participation in school governance, infrastructure development, and academic monitoring (URT, 2002). The Secondary Education Development Program (SEDP II, 2010–2015) further reinforced the role of parental engagement in strengthening school management and academic performance. Despite these policy efforts, empirical evidence suggests that parental participation in school meetings remains inconsistent. Many parents fail to attend due to economic constraints, work obligations, or a lack of awareness about the importance of such meetings (Shija, 2017). In some cases, school authorities have resorted to punitive measures, such as fines and penalties, to enforce attendance (Mpiluka, 2014).

Statement of the Problem

Despite the well-documented benefits of parental engagement in school meetings, participation rates remain suboptimal in many Tanzanian secondary schools. This is particularly evident in Kinondoni Municipality, an urban area where economic pressures, social dynamics, and educational disparities contribute to varying levels of parental involvement. While some parents actively engage in school affairs, others remain disengaged, leading to gaps in student support and academic monitoring. The consequences of this disengagement manifest in poor student performance, increased disciplinary issues, and weakened school-community relations.

Given the critical role that parental participation in school meetings plays in enhancing student learning, it is imperative to understand the factors influencing attendance, the impact of such engagement on student outcomes, and the strategies that can be employed to improve parental involvement. This study seeks to address these gaps by providing an empirical analysis of parental participation in school meetings and its effect on student learning outcomes in Kinondoni Municipality.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the role of parental participation in school meetings, this study is guided by the following objectives:
2. To assess the level of parental participation in school meetings in secondary schools in Kinondoni Municipality.

3. To examine the impact of parental engagement in school meetings on students' learning processes.
4. To identify strategies to enhance parental participation in school meetings for improved student academic performance.

METHOD

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach and a descriptive case study design to examine the role of parental participation in school meetings in enhancing students' learning outcomes in Kinondoni Municipality. The study targeted key education stakeholders, including education officers, school heads, teachers, parents, and students, who are directly involved in the learning process. A total of 96 participants were selected using a combination of purposive and convenience sampling techniques. Purposive sampling was used to select one District Secondary Education Officer (DSEO), one Ward Education Officer (WEO), and four heads of secondary schools, as they possess critical insights into school policies and parental involvement strategies. Convenience sampling was applied to select 26 teachers, 32 parents, and 32 students from four secondary schools in the municipality, ensuring accessibility and representation of different perspectives. The sample size was determined based on feasibility, ensuring diversity of opinions while maintaining manageability for in-depth analysis.

Data collection involved a triangulation of methods, including structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and documentary reviews. Questionnaires were distributed to teachers, parents, and students to gather quantitative data on parental meeting attendance, perceptions of school meetings, and the perceived impact on student learning. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with school heads, education officers, and selected parents to obtain qualitative insights on challenges, motivations, and experiences regarding parental participation. Additionally, documentary reviews of school attendance records, student performance reports, and policy documents were conducted to corroborate primary data. The data analysis process involved descriptive and inferential statistical methods using SPSS for quantitative data, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically using pattern coding and content analysis techniques. Reliability and validity were ensured through Cronbach's Alpha testing, triangulation, and member checking to verify data accuracy and consistency.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Extent of parent's participation in school meetings in enhancing learning process.

Data from the field indicate that there is a significant variation in parental involvement across the schools studied. The percentage of parents attending parent-teacher conferences ranged from 45% to 68% across the different institutions. In School A, 45% of parents attended, whereas School B had a slightly higher attendance rate at 52%. School C recorded the highest parental involvement at 68%, which could be attributed to their intensive communication strategies, including regular newsletters and

interactive workshops. The study also found that schools with active parent support groups, such as School C, reported better student outcomes in terms of academic performance and overall school engagement. Furthermore, parents' involvement in home-based activities like homework assistance was more prevalent in schools where communication between teachers and parents was consistent and facilitated through regular updates and feedback.

Research has consistently shown that parental involvement plays a critical role in shaping students' academic outcomes. Langat (2014) found that in Kenyan primary schools, increased parental involvement significantly impacted student performance, supporting the idea that when parents actively participate in their children's education, students tend to achieve better results. This is further supported by Jeynes (2007), who in his meta-analysis highlighted that parental involvement was strongly correlated with improved academic achievement, particularly in urban secondary schools. Similarly, Harris and Goodall (2008) observed that schools with stronger school-family connections saw a significant improvement in student performance, with parents' engagement contributing to higher attendance, motivation, and overall academic success. Lemmer (2018) also discussed how the quality of parent-teacher interactions, such as parent-teacher conferences, can positively influence both students' academic performance and their emotional well-being. The study suggested that when these interactions are structured and meaningful, they create a more supportive educational environment. Furthermore, Hayes (2011) indicated that parental involvement in both school activities and home learning has direct effects on students' academic outcomes, especially in high school settings. These findings support the results of our study, where active parent participation, particularly in conferences and school events, was linked with higher academic performance and a more supportive learning atmosphere. This shows that the benefits of strong school-family connections are well-documented across diverse educational contexts.

The findings are also consistent with the theoretical frameworks provided by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and Epstein's Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence. Bronfenbrenner (1979) suggested that a child's development is influenced by interactions between various layers of their environment, such as family, school, and community. Our study's findings reflect this theory, where stronger connections between parents and schools (proximal environment) positively affect students' academic development. Epstein's (1995) model further supports these findings by illustrating that when families, schools, and communities collaborate, the child benefits from increased support, leading to better outcomes. The higher levels of parental involvement seen in School C, where family-school connections were particularly strong, demonstrate the effectiveness of this overlapping sphere of influence. The integration of parental support at school events directly affects student performance, reinforcing the importance of a well-coordinated effort between the family, school, and community.

Implications for the practice of education in the country suggest that fostering stronger parent-school partnerships is crucial for improving student outcomes. Schools

should prioritize the creation of more inclusive and accessible platforms for parental involvement, such as regular parent-teacher conferences, workshops, and communication channels like newsletters and digital platforms. Additionally, teacher training programs should emphasize the importance of engaging parents and how to facilitate effective communication with them. As seen in the study, schools that actively involved parents in the educational process saw improved academic performance and a more positive school environment. Policy initiatives that promote parent-school collaborations, especially in rural or underprivileged areas, could have far-reaching effects on student achievement and well-being.

How parental participation in school meetings impacts student learning processes in Public secondary schools in Kinondoni Municipality

Study objective number two aimed to examine how parental participation in school meetings impacts student learning processes in secondary schools in Kinondoni Municipality. In response to the questionnaires and interviews, the following findings emerged: Eight teachers from one school, representing 30.7%, reported that through school meetings, students' academic performance at Maendeleo Secondary School had improved due to effective collaboration between teachers and parents. This collaborative effort creates an environment where both the teachers and students actively engage in academic matters. In this scenario, parents or guardians act as facilitators in the home environment, ensuring that students remain engaged and serious about their studies. This aligns with previous research which emphasizes the positive impact of teacher-parent collaboration on student outcomes (Lasky, 2015; Kraft & Rogers, 2015). Parental involvement plays a critical role in reinforcing the learning environment, not just within the school but also at home (Harris & Goodall, 2008), allowing students to receive support and encouragement from both sides.

Additionally, school meetings enhance accountability and parental involvement in students' academic matters. These meetings provide an opportunity for teachers to share experiences and discuss the roles and responsibilities of parents/guardians in addressing both academic and social issues that students face. The findings in this study echo those of Lemmer (2019), who noted that such interactions help parents understand the complexities of the academic challenges their children face. Teachers can use these platforms to clarify expectations and responsibilities, offering parents a chance to actively engage in their children's academic journey. It was noted by respondents that parents are not only responsible for providing food and clothing, but also for monitoring and addressing the academic and behavioral needs of their children, both within and outside the school setting. This holistic approach to parental involvement has been demonstrated to enhance both academic performance and social adjustment (Jeynes, 2007; Letsholo, 2016).

Five respondents, representing 19.25%, emphasized that these meetings are beneficial for students, not only academically but also socially. They noted that after

attending meetings, parents are better informed about their children's situations and can take appropriate actions accordingly. This finding supports the work of Gestwicki (2015), who pointed out that when parents are well-informed, they are more likely to offer appropriate support for their children's holistic development. Moreover, this involvement helps create a stronger connection between school and home, contributing to a more supportive learning environment (Henderson & Mapp, 2012).

However, a recurring issue is the lack of parental involvement in some schools, which has been linked to student misbehavior and violations of school rules. Teachers from Boko Secondary School, in particular, highlighted this concern. Four respondents (15.38%) noted that a failure by parents to attend school meetings often results in disciplinary problems, as students are not held accountable for their behavior at home. Teachers expressed frustration with having to manage behavioral issues alone, especially given the large class sizes. This resonates with findings from Langat (2014), who indicated that the absence of parental engagement can leave students without the necessary emotional or academic guidance to address school-related problems. Additionally, Kgaffe (2017) pointed out that when parents are not involved, students may lack the social and emotional support needed to navigate challenges both in and outside of school.

Furthermore, parental participation in school meetings allows parents to gain a deeper understanding of their children's academic strengths and weaknesses. Given that many parents have limited knowledge of educational processes, such interactions with teachers offer valuable insights. According to Lawson (2003), one of the significant challenges facing many parents is the lack of understanding regarding teaching methodologies and the educational system, which impedes their ability to effectively support their children's learning. This improved understanding enables parents to intervene more effectively, positively impacting their children's academic success. As noted by Kraft and Rogers (2015), parents who are better informed about school processes are more likely to intervene in a way that benefits their children's learning. The positive relationship between parental involvement and student achievement has been extensively supported by research (Henderson & Mapp, 2012; Harris & Goodall, 2008), highlighting that such involvement strengthens the learning environment for students.

The findings of this study can be interpreted through the lens of two prominent educational theories: Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory and Epstein's (1995) Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence. According to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, the development of a child is influenced by multiple layers of environmental contexts that interact with each other. These layers include the microsystem (immediate environments such as family and school), the mesosystem (interactions between different settings like home and school), and other systems that encompass the child's broader environment. The study results suggest that parental involvement in school meetings enhances the mesosystem by facilitating stronger interactions between parents and teachers. When parents engage actively in these meetings, they reinforce the relationship between home and school, providing a cohesive support system for the student's academic and social development. This dynamic aligns

with Bronfenbrenner's framework, where the child's immediate environment (school and home) interacts to influence their development, and highlights the importance of a supportive, interconnected ecosystem for students' success.

Additionally, Epstein's (1995) Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence posits that children's development is most effective when the spheres of influence from family, school, and community intersect and collaborate. The results of this study clearly align with Epstein's theory, particularly the dimensions of "communicating" and "learning at home." Parental involvement in school meetings enhances communication between parents and teachers, providing parents with crucial insights into their child's academic progress and behavioral needs. This interaction helps parents understand the expectations of the school and enables them to create a conducive learning environment at home. By fostering a shared understanding of the child's needs and progress, the spheres of influence of both the school and the family overlap, which, according to Epstein, positively impacts student outcomes. Furthermore, the involvement of parents in these meetings ensures that the school and family are not working in isolation but are actively collaborating to support the child's development in both academic and social spheres.

The findings underscore the importance of strengthening the relationship between home and school, particularly through structured opportunities for communication such as school meetings. Schools should consider creating more intentional spaces for parents to engage with teachers and school staff, thus ensuring that the spheres of influence from both domains—home and school—continue to overlap and support one another (Epstein, 1995). This collaboration can lead to enhanced academic performance, improved student behavior, and a stronger sense of accountability from both students and parents (Harris & Goodall, 2008). Additionally, schools should explore strategies to increase parental attendance at meetings, perhaps by addressing barriers to participation or providing more flexible meeting times. This would further ensure that all parents, regardless of their background or circumstances, can contribute to the educational process and positively influence their child's academic trajectory.

Measures to be taken to influence parents' participation in school meetings

The study observed that to improve parent-teacher meeting practices, school management should regularly appraise the effectiveness of their parent-teacher conferences by obtaining parent and learners' opinions on their practices. It was further suggested that school should provide teachers with guidelines to enhance parent-teacher conferences by holding regular professional development focused on home-school communication.

Among the strategy is to use Government Act where necessary like neighboring country Zimbabwe. It was reported that the most popular form of parental involvement is participation in schoolwork and attendance at meetings. This practice can be traced back to the early 1990s when the government made parental involvement mandatory through the Act of Parliament (1987). Statutory instruments 87 of 1992 for

nongovernmental schools and 70 of 1993 for government schools were put in force. From such a particular Act, parents were seen to become involved by attending meetings and seeking children's performance consultations (Mutassa, 2013).

Also, measure to be taken to facilitate good attendance in parent meeting is provide education on important of meeting. This means that if the parents understand what is required to do or have wide knowledge about their roles and responsibility to their children in school, it becomes easier for the school management team to accomplish the education goal. A teacher from Boko secondary school said;

"..education should be provided to all parents about importance of attending school meeting....they need to know meeting is a suitable way of receiving feedback of their children academic progress.."

Some parents responded that it was not their role to deal with the truancy behaviour of their children because children left home daily early in the morning to go to school. The study suggested that teachers and educational leaders such as Regional Education Officers (REO"s) and District Education Officers (DEO"s) should inform parents through meetings in different ways to help students, encourage, care for them and like so that they can always become active academically.

Additionally, school management teams should involve other organizations, such as ward education offices and district offices, in facilitating some strategies regarding academic matters in secondary school. One parent living near Kondo Secondary said that;

"..many parents have no tendency to participate in school meetings. Therefore, the head of the school should invite an education officer in one of the meetings.... many parents attended meeting because of the presence of Education Officer.."

Regarding parental involvement in school programs, Von Burtalanffy (1968), in his theory, believes that the interrelationship between different organizations or other systems is a mechanism of growth and change. Therefore, through these findings, the point to taken into consideration, is to think about religious leaders especially in churches and mosques. The best advice to them is to ensure that all worshippers are being preached about love for their children.

The study suggested that the government should be strictly to charge penalties and fines to parents. Roles of the parent to their children are voluntary, so when it happens contrary to what it expected, school management should react very seriously accordingly. Respondents suggested that the government should strictly charge penalties and fines to parents who do not fulfill responsibilities to their children, especially in academic matters, including attending school meetings. The study also observed weaknesses in that area, as one of the Form IV students suggested:

“Fines and punishment should be applied to force the parent’s attend the school meeting and know student’s academic matters.”

Also, another measure is to use power as a way to emphasize that parents provide for all academic needs of their students, including attending meetings. In 2021 Kinondoni Municipal leaders were introduced to a special form to discipline truancy in all public secondary schools, and it worked well. This finding is similar to that of Jaynes (2007), who found that parents take an active role in the educational encounters and procedures of their children. He suggested reinforcement in a way that parents feel responsible for becoming involved in school programs, especially meetings. Hence, the matter here is just to associate with other government organs to support the academic mission in secondary school.

The measures proposed in this study to enhance parental participation in school meetings align with key elements of Epstein's (1995) Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence and Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory. Epstein's theory emphasizes the importance of creating a partnership between parents, schools, and communities to foster the academic success of students. The study's recommendation to regularly appraise the effectiveness of parent-teacher conferences and involve local education officers resonates with this theory, as it underscores the need for continuous dialogue and collaboration between all parties involved in the child's development. By involving parents in the school's activities and informing them about their roles and responsibilities, schools effectively strengthen the overlap between the home and school environments, which is crucial for promoting student success (Epstein, 1995). Additionally, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory highlights the importance of interconnections between various systems, such as family, school, and community. The suggestion to involve other organizations, such as local education offices and religious leaders, reflects Bronfenbrenner's idea that these systems influence each other and, when aligned, can provide a comprehensive support network for the child (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The study's findings also emphasize the importance of creating a supportive environment where parental involvement is not only encouraged but also facilitated through education and policy. As evidenced by the example of Zimbabwe, where parental involvement became mandatory through a government act (Mutassa, 2013), formalizing the role of parents through legal structures can be a powerful tool for ensuring their participation in school meetings. This strategy not only aligns with Epstein's idea of policy-driven engagement but also reflects the broader ecological environment influencing students' academic outcomes. The introduction of fines or penalties for non-compliance can serve as a form of external motivation, helping to reinforce the importance of parental involvement in educational activities. However, such measures should be implemented with sensitivity, considering the broader socio-economic context of the parents.

Furthermore, the study suggests that education about the importance of attending school meetings is a key factor in improving parental participation. This aligns with Epstein's framework, where parent education is considered an essential component in strengthening the relationship between home and school. Educating parents about their role in supporting their children's education can bridge gaps in understanding, thus making them more likely to engage in school activities (Epstein, 1995). Similarly, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory highlights the importance of providing support across multiple layers of the child's environment. By educating parents about the significance of their involvement, schools can strengthen the microsystem (family) and mesosystem (interaction between family and school), which are key to improving the child's educational experience.

CONCLUSION

Parental participation in school meetings is critical for fostering positive academic outcomes for students. The study highlights the significant impact of active parent engagement, particularly in the areas of student performance and overall school involvement. When parents actively participate in school activities, such as attending parent-teacher conferences or engaging in school events, it creates a supportive environment that positively influences students' academic success. Schools that prioritized communication and created avenues for parent involvement, such as regular newsletters, workshops, and active parent support groups, reported higher levels of parental engagement and improved academic performance. However, inconsistencies in attendance and varying levels of parental involvement across schools suggest that there are barriers that need to be addressed to ensure greater participation.

The theoretical frameworks of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and Epstein's Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence offer a comprehensive perspective on the findings, emphasizing the importance of interconnected support systems between home, school, and community. When these spheres overlap and collaborate, students benefit from a well-rounded support system that enhances their educational experience. The study affirms that fostering stronger school-family connections is crucial for improving student outcomes and creating an environment where both students and parents feel supported.

To improve parental involvement, schools must adopt several key strategies. First, creating more inclusive and accessible platforms for parent engagement, such as regular meetings, workshops, and digital communication tools, is essential. These platforms ensure that parents from diverse backgrounds and schedules can participate in their children's education. Additionally, teacher training programs should emphasize the importance of building effective communication skills with parents, equipping teachers with the tools to engage parents more meaningfully. Policy initiatives should also support parent-school collaborations, possibly through mandatory or incentivized parental involvement, which could be modeled after initiatives in other countries like Zimbabwe. At the same time, it's important to address socio-economic factors that may hinder

participation by offering flexible meeting schedules or providing transportation assistance.

Moreover, schools should educate parents about the significance of their involvement in the learning process. By fostering a greater understanding of their role in supporting academic progress, parents are more likely to actively participate in school events. Collaboration with local organizations, including district education offices and community leaders, is another important measure that can promote parental involvement. These partnerships strengthen the overall support system for students and help bridge any gaps between school and community. Finally, regular evaluations of parent-teacher conferences and feedback mechanisms are necessary to ensure that these interactions are productive and aligned with the needs of the families. Schools should seek input from both parents and students to continuously improve their engagement strategies.

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