

# The Influence of Parents' Involvement in Student's Academic Achievement in Community Secondary Schools in Tanzania - A Case of Mbeya City, Tanzania.

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**Abstract:** *The study focused to assess the influence of parents' involvement in on students' academic achievements in community secondary school in Tanzania case of Mbeya city Tanzania. Specifically examined the pattern and extent to which parents' involvement in students' academic achievement. Literatures revealed that students' academic achievement is associated with parental involvement in school matters where the child is studying though there are some barriers that hinder parents' effective involvement in school activities. Both qualitative and quantitative research approaches were used. 475 respondents were included in the study. These include; students, parents, heads of schools, class teachers, and school committee members. Data were through interview schedules, questionnaire and documentary reviews. Collected data were analysed quantitatively using SPSS Version 20, where Pearson product-moment was performed to examine the relationship between parents' involvement in school activities and students academic achievement. Descriptive statistics were employed to analyze the nature and desirability of parents' participation in school activities that improves students' academic performance. Findings revealed that there was a strong and positive relationship between parents involvement in school affairs and students academic achievement. This means that students whose parents were more involved in their education had better chance of improving their academic achievement than whose parents were less involved. The study recommend that school administrators, teachers, and parents should be sensitized on the relationship between parental involvement in school matters and their children's achievement so that they can develop more effective and productive strategies including learning from other successful schools that facilitate parent engagement in their children's education.*

**Keywords** - Influence, parent involvement, academic achievement

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Tanzania, like other countries, considers education as the corner stone of economic and social development. The Tanzania Vision 2025 aims at producing quality educated people who are sufficiently equipped with the requisite knowledge to solve society's problems, meet the challenge of development and attain competitiveness at regional and global levels (Edwards & Alldred, 2000). Thomas and Knezek (2008) argued that the universal potential for each nation's development lies in its human capital. Regardless of the status in the current world economy, the national resources or financial capital available, or world positioning in domains of ideas and innovation, there is a global understanding that nations become and remain strong through effective education systems that benchmark well worldwide. This is what Tanzania is aspiring to achieve.

One of the key aspects to reaching this objective is parents' involvement in their children's education which has been defined as representing different behaviors and practices at home and school. According to Singh, et al. (1995), the involvement includes

parental aspirations, expectations, attitudes, and beliefs. Other aspects include learning activities at home, effective cooperation between teachers and parents, participation in school activities and school conferences.

The goal of education is to see children succeed and mature in the knowledge they have acquired from their teachers (Adeyemo, 2005). However, teachers alone cannot motivate students to succeed; rather parents are the foundational elements to ensure that their children succeed in educational matters (Edwards & Alldred, 2000).

Society expects everyone to be a high achiever. The key criterion to judge one's true potentialities and capabilities is perhaps the academic achievement. This puts great pressure on the minds of the students, their parents and the teachers (Henderson & Berla, 1994). Parents support their children's schooling though not all of them know how to help (Hui-chen Huang & Mason, 2008), or why their involvement is important. Moreover, many parents do not have out-of-school programs for their children (Lindle, 1989), not only because they are not aware of it, but also they lack resources and knowledge on how they should be prepared and implemented (Epstein, et al., 2002).

Parents with less formal education and low income tend to be preoccupied with survival strategies and thus either focus on the family, or time does not permit them to pursue home-school involvement strategies that may improve child's schooling (Sheldon, 2009). Therefore the influence of parents' involvement in their children's academic achievement in Tanzania is very important and needs to be well understood. This article intends to examine the patterns and extent of parents' involvement in school activities and how that may influence students' academic achievement.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The child's first place of contact in the world is the family. However, the child acquires initial education and socialization from other significant persons in the community. Parents are involved in the education of their children who tend to model their attitude and actions (Georgiou, 2007; Berger, 1991)..

There are many opportunities in which parents can play part in their children's schooling. Bauch (1994) provided a comprehensive summary of the levels of parental involvement and showed that parents can be involved at many levels of the school hierarchy. They can be on councils, parent - teacher organizations (PTOs), attend school meetings, parent- teacher conferences (PTCs), and facilitate learning at home. Home activities include supporting student achievement, such as parental schoolwork supervision and discussions about school issues between parents and children.

Epstein's (2002, 1995, and 1986) work provided the guiding theoretical framework for parental involvement. He has developed a six-part model for parent involvement which is the most cited in parental involvement literature. The six types of involvement include: assisting parents in child-rearing skills, school-parent communication, involving parents in school volunteer opportunities, involving parents in home-based learning, involving parents in school decision making, and involving parents in school- community collaborations.

Parents also participate in school committees, Parent- Teacher Organizations, advisory councils and other groups involved in decision making for the school Osaki (2000) . Parents feel a sense of ownership when they know that they were involved in creating a policy, providing an activity for students, or changing a policy. This is also referred to as parent community activists in independent advocacy group that monitor the school and work for the school improvement. Parents will also develop knowledge of local and state laws and rules that govern the education of their children (Epstein et al., 1997, Epstein, 1995).

The school and parents should establish a two way channel of communication about the child they share (Berger, 1991). A bond of ownership is formed between the parents and the school, whereby parents can become comfortable communicating with the

school. If parents are comfortable with the school's expectations, they will be willing to communicate with their child's teacher (Epstein et al., 1997). Effective communication between school and home is the goal of parental involvement. Parents should be aware of their role in the communication partnership, communicating the needs of their child in a clear manner (Epstein et al., 1997).

The relationship between parental involvement and educational achievement was also examined by Stevenson and Baker (1987) who found that parent involvement has positive correlation to children's academic achievement and, actually, parental involvement mediates almost all the influence of mother's education on the child's school achievement. In line with this Stone (2006) findings showed that sustained home communication is related high grades and lower likelihood of dropout.

Collectively, parent involvement is associated with the following outcomes: it leads to improved academic achievement (Epstein et al., 2002); fosters better student classroom behavior (Fan & Chen, 2001); and fosters great feelings and commitment in supporting school's mission (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Furthermore, it improves school attendance (Epstein et al., 2002; Sheldon & Epstein, 2002); creates a better understanding of roles and relationships between and among the parent-student-school triad (Epstein et al., 2002); improves teacher morale (Berger, 1991); and improves student emotional well-being (Epstein et al., 2002). Particularly, the types of parent involvement and quality of parent involvement affect results for students, parents, and teachers (Epstein, 1995).

However Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) revealed that variability in parental involvement in school activities can be explained by parents' sense of efficacy, role construction and the school's level of invitingness. It may also be related to parents' economic hardship (Grolnick et al., 1997), and educational level (Georgiou & Tourva, 2007).

Several researchers such as Amundson (1998), Becker-Klein (1999), Burns (1993), Henderson (1988), Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler (1995) and McWayne & Owsianik (2004) noted several barriers against parents' involvement. The parents reported various factors that prohibited them to be involved in their children's school activities. These included lack of knowledge and skills about successful collaboration between parents and teachers; lack of time and work responsibilities; teacher resistance; lack of formal education; and poor quality of schools and their management.

According to Henderson (1988), educators worry that untrained parents might interfere with today's teaching techniques, or disrupt the learning environment because many parents believe that they are inadequately skilled in many subject areas and tend to shy away from becoming involved in school related matters. Unfortunately, many educators lack the necessary knowledge and skills to work with parents (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, Burns, 1993). Poor organizational structure that fails to define the roles, power relationships and lack of regular meetings to facilitate exchange of ideas are some of the barriers in communication (MANTEP, 1991). This inability often contributes to less success among students in daily school progress.

Job and family demands, as well as challenges in family structure, leave little free time for many parents to involve themselves in their children's schooling (Sandler et al 2007). According to Burns (1993), the proportion of women in the work force with children below the age of 18 rose from 40% to 65% between 1970 and 1988. This increase of working women in Africa continues to have a significant impact on maintaining communication with school and assisting their children with school work at home.

Work responsibilities are the other barriers to parental involvement. Martinez (2004) found that school personnel were in need to have more parents involved in school activities but they did not have the time to contact parents claiming that their work schedules did not allow them to attend school meetings such as committees, conferences and workshops during the day even if they were interested in helping their school children in a positive way.

The poor quality of the school and its management are among the factors which hinder parents from being involved in their children's education. Schools with poor infrastructures and teaching and learning facilities tend to discourage parents' involvement in their children's education.. Herman and Yeh (1980) noted that school managers with no well-articulated parental involvement strategies, poor communication with parents, and poor disbursement of the resources discourage not only the parents but also the whole community to be engaged in the school related activities. Thus, school leadership plays an important role in fostering relationships that lead to generative learning and positive academic outcomes to the children.

The parents' level of education is also found to determine the nature and quality of parent- child and parent- teacher schooling practices (Muller, 1995). Low level of parents' formal education is revealed to limit the quality of parent-child relationship such as helping with homework, amount of time spent on chores, homework, monitoring and awareness of child's school progress. Moreover, it limits the nature and quality of parent- teacher practices such as parent - teacher communication about child's learning and behavior progress (Epstein et al., 2002 and 1997Gonzalez et al 2013). Low level of education is at times associated with less parents' income and learning resources devoted to their child's schooling.

From the Tanzanian context, Osaki (2000) have also explained on the role of parents in their children's education especially when they involve themselves in different school activities. He has explained that parents send their children to school with a purpose. For the children to be able to get the desired education, they must support them and the school in different ways. Parents must in turn be closely informed about, and involved in the running of the school. Osaki (2000) added that the community which has an interest in the school and the kind of products it produces should also be involved in the management of the school.

Moreover, a study by Uemura (2010) on parental involvement in their children's education revealed that education takes place not only in schools but also within families, communities, and society. The author explained that despite various degrees of responsibilities taken by each group, none can be the sole agent to take 100% responsibility for educating children. He added that schools are institutions that can prepare children to contribute to the betterment of the society in which they operate, therefore schools cannot and should not operate as separate entities within a society.

Moreover, Avith (2010) conducted a study on the impact of parental involvement in school activities on the academic achievement of primary school children and revealed that, when parents involve themselves in the school matters of their children such as checking their exercise books, helping them with homework, attending parent-teacher conferences, and discussing with their children about future schooling helped these children to have not only better academic achievement, but also had desirable discipline.

Nevertheless, most of the reviewed studies have concentrated much on the involvement of parents in primary school children and it is therefore true that not much has been researched on the involvement of parents whose children are in public secondary schools. Therefore the influence of parental involvement in school activities to community secondary school students is still mysterious. This is the gap this paper aimed to fill.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

The study was conducted in Mbeya city in Southern Highland of Tanzania. The study employed a case study design in order to seek for detailed information about education issues. It focused on a detailed analysis of individuals' experiences and opinions, aiming at assessing the influence of parents' involvements in school activities on academic performance of their children in community secondary schools in Mbeya city. Gay (1992) postulated that a case study is conducted when in depth information is needed to determine background, environment and characteristics of persons with the problem.

#### **3.1 Population, Sample size and Sampling Procedures**

A total of 475 respondents were involved in the study. Where there were 288 students, 125 class teachers, 6 head of schools from community secondary schools, 50 parents who have their children schooling in selected schools and 6 members of school boards summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1** Sample composition for the Study

Schools	<i>Students</i>		<i>Class Teachers</i>		<i>H/Schools</i>		<i>C/Members</i>		<i>Parents</i>	
	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Femle</i>
1 Uyole	21	25	3	17	1	0	0	1	5	5
2 Pankumbi	23	25	2	12	0	1	1	0	5	5
3 Ihanga	26	24	0	23	1	0	1	0	5	5
4 LEGICO	26	26	4	25	1	0	1	0	5	5
5 Sinde	21	17	0	14	0	1	1	0	5	5
6 Samora	25	29	5	20	0	1	0	1	5	5
Total	142	146	14	111	3	3	4	2	30	30
Percent	49.3	50.7	11.2	88.8	50	50	66.6	33.3	50	50

Purposive sampling was used to select parents, heads of schools, class teachers and school committee members because of their number and position. Simple random sampling procedures were also used to select the sample of 150 students.

### 3.2 Data collection methods

Questionnaires were used to capture respondents' demographic data and relevant information for this study. Furthermore, questionnaires were used to collect information on the influence of parental involvement on students' achievement.

### 3.3 Interview Schedule

In depth interviews were conducted to parents, school committee members and heads of schools. Also class teachers were interviewed to provide overall information regarding the involvement of parents in seeking their children school progress reports and information, parents were interviewed to get in depth information regarding their levels of education, occupations, and involvement in different school activities, committee members were interviewed because they are have much information on school policies and how the school is organized.

### 3.4 Documentary Review

Documentary review entails gathering information from recorded documents (Guba and Lincoln, 1985). Data on academic achievement were collected from schools' record of pupil's scores on terminal and annual examinations in five core subjects, namely Mathematics, English, Kiswahili, Biology, and Civics as indicated in the specified form. Also, the researcher consulted school documents concerning reports on parent –school conferences, students' academic reports sent to parents, school calendar and policy, and letters on teachers – parents' communication.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The maximum score that one was expected to get in parent involvement scale was 40, implying that if one scored 4 points in each item, one could get 4 points times 10 items, making a total of 40 scores. The minimum score expected was thus 10, implying that if one scored 1 point in each item in the scale, one could get 1 point times 10 items, making a total of 10 points. This means that the higher one scored in the PIS, the higher the frequency of involvement in education of the child.

**Table 2:** Parents' Involvement in their Children's Education (N=288)

Item No.	Statement	Rating				Total	%	Ranks
		SA	A	D	SD			
		1	2	3	4			
1	My parents ask me about homework regularly	628	345	26	3	1002	86.98	6
2	My parents help me with homework regularly	492	309	76	24	901	78.21	8
3	My parents discuss with me about my school day	400	390	82	17	889	77.17	9
4	My parents talk to me about my future schooling	864	168	26	3	1061	92.10	4
5	I talk with my parents about my teachers often	464	303	86	28	881	76.48	10
6	My parents provide time to study at home	932	120	16	7	1075	93.32	3
7	My parents check my exercise books regularly	360	495	48	9	912	79.16	7
8	My parents encourage me to study at home	924	144	14	2	1084	94.09	2
9	My parents provide me with learning materials	752	276	14	1	1043	90.54	5
10	My parents think that I will join Advanced level education	1020	84	4	3	1111	96.44	1
	Weighting factor	4	3	2	1	-	-	-

**Key:** SA= Strongly Agree; A= Agree; D= Disagree; SD= Strongly Disagree

According to the students' responses, most of the parents aspire and expect their children to join advanced level education. This was their first concern. It was followed by the extent to which parents were encouraging their children to work harder in school. The third concern of the parents was to provide their children with time to study at home, while talking to a child about schooling was the fourth parents concern.

Most of them agreed with the statement that their parents involved in their education by asking about homework regularly, checking their exercise books, and helping them with homework. These were parents' sixth, seventh and eight concerns respectively. The ninth concern was parents' discussion with their children about their school day. Apparently, parents talked about the teachers of their children not as frequently as that was ranked tenth. The overall picture is that, children feel that their parents are greatly involved in their school matters.

The Parent Provision Scale (PPS) scores were obtained by adding all frequencies for all items in the scale (Table 3). The maximum points one was expected to get was 50, implying that if one obtained 5 frequencies in each item one could get 5 points times 10 items, making a total of 50 points. The minimum points one was expected to get was zero, implying that if one scored zero in each item in the scale, one could get zero points times 10 items, making a total of zero points. This means that the higher one scored in the PPS, the higher the frequency of parent involvement in that student's education.

**Table 3:** Parents Provision of Key School Items (N=288)

Item No.	Statement	Number of Times Provided						Total	%	Ranks
		0	1	2	3	4	5			
1	Bought me exercise books	0	2	20	36	84	1210	1352	93.89	1
2	Bought me pen	0	8	40	81	112	1015	1256	87.22	3
3	Bought me text books	0	13	52	180	376	330	951	66.04	6
4	Provided me money for lunch	0	10	16	75	192	970	1263	87.70	2
5	Provided me money for transport	0	34	88	168	252	305	847	58.82	9
6	Gave me a letter to school	0	32	76	96	168	520	892	61.94	8
7	Bought me school uniform	0	15	38	60	180	835	1128	78.33	4
8	Gave me money for emergence	0	12	26	123	120	620	901	62.56	7
9	Bought me mathematical set	0	31	50	63	44	50	238	16.53	10
10	Bought me shoes	0	16	52	108	132	710	1018	70.69	5
Average Score		0.0	17.30	45.80	99.00	166.00	656.50	-	-	-

According to the students' responses, most parents were providing their children with key school items. Students were provided with exercise books as it was ranked first with 1352 (93.89%) of the total scores. Moreover, students reported that their parents were providing them time for studying at home, as it was ranked second with 1263 (87.70%) of the total scores. This was followed by



students who reported that their parents were buying them pen which ranked third with 1256 (87.22%) total scores. It seems that, parents were less frequently giving their children letters to school as it was ranked tenth with 238 (16.53%) total scores. The overall picture is that students believe that their parents are greatly involved in their school matters as they were providing them with key school items.

The overall findings revealed that there was a strong and positive relationship between parents involvement in school affairs and students academic achievement. This means that students whose parents were more involved in their education ad better chance of improving their academic achievement than whose parents were less involved.

The findings revealed that parents' involvement at home, especially parents asking their children about homework regularly, and helping them with homework had some significant relationship with students' academic achievement. These findings are in line with Ho Sui-chu and Willims (1996) who found that, the involvement at home, especially parents discussing school work and helping their children to plan their programs, had a strong impact on school outcomes. The findings were also congruent with Hunderson and Mapp (2002) who found that academically engaging parents improved children's academic achievement, and had a substantial impact on the other key outcomes such as learning behaviour. Perhaps, it may imply that parents' efforts may manifest interest, respect, and obedience towards child's schooling. However, parents level of education and available resources such as time and learning materials may affect the quality of parents' efforts.

Moreover, Cooper et al. (2001) found that parents' interest in homework facilitated student interest, which in turn enhanced students 'motivation to complete homework assignments, using self-directed, and self-management style. This suggests that, teachers may consider designing effective interactive homework that calls upon parents to engage, and in that parents may regard themselves as the key players in their children's education.

One of the head of school interviewed on whether parents who involved themselves in their children's educational matters made difference, argued that:

*"...when parents are actively involved in supporting their children's education, these children evidenced higher grades and test scores, better school attendance and more homework completion, more positive attitudes and behaviour, and higher graduation rates. In addition, when parents are involved in school activities it improves my teachers' morale..." (Pankumbi secondary school, 19 June 2020)*

Henderson and Berla (1994) supports this view that children who interact with their parents on school matters had high completion rates of their homework, better grades and test scores, and more self-directed behaviour. It seems that when the parent monitor homework, encourage participation in extracurricular activities, active in parent-teacher conferences, and help children develop plans for their future; children are more likely to respond and do well in school (Cotton & Wikelund (2005). This suggests that parents may be important in sending the signal that education matters and school work are not forms of drudgery but ticket to a better life.

Parents' provision of key school items also had a positive and significant relationship with students' academic achievement. Parents who were providing learning materials such as exercise books, text books and pens, and providing time for studying at home seemed to be most appreciated and this may have some impact on students' school outcomes. This was consistent with Epstein (1995) findings that the most basic involvement of parents in their children's schooling is the provision of basic needs, monitoring of school activities, and providing home environments that were learner friendly.

There was low percentage of parents giving their children letters to school. This concurs with Fisher's (1995) findings that the majority of parents trust the school to meet the needs of the children, but will contact a school if a problem arises, or when



necessary. On the other hand, it could reflect the perceived level of expertise and literacy of most parents. Perhaps, teachers were more impressed by face to face communication with parents as they may obtain much information concerning school progress.

It is important to note that about three quarters of children were provided with money for lunch. However, is not easy to believe on the statistics reported as some students might feel shame to expose their families' economic hardship on papers. Nevertheless, the results suggest that school lunch is extremely important since a hungry child cannot learn better. Parents are owed for this in order to improve students' educational outcomes. Probably, the variation seen from one child to another might be caused by parents' low income and lack of commitment (Georgiou & Tourva, 2007). Hoover-Dempsey (1997) ably capped it by asserting that parents have a primary responsibility on their children's educational outcomes, including their nutrition.

#### 4.1 The Relationship between Parents' Involvement in School Activities and Student's Academic Achievement

The first objective for the present study had set to examine if parents' involvement in school activities may relate to students' academic achievement. This objective was in line with the assumption that, there is a relationship between the pattern and the level of parents' involvement in school related activities and academic achievement of the students. The relationship was explored by using Pearson Product Moment Correlation and the results are as in Table 4.

**Table 4:** The relationship between Parents' Involvement and Academic Achievement (N=288)

Variables	1	2
3		
1. Parents' involvement in school activities	-	
2. Parents' provision of the key school items	.662**	-
3. Academic achievement	.766**	.733**
-		

Note. \*\* $p < .01$

The findings suggest that there was an existence of a positive and significant relationship between parental involvement in school matters of their children and academic achievement ( $r = .766$ ,  $p < .01$ ). In addition, parents' provision of key school items and academic achievement were related ( $r = .733$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Similarly, the findings reported positive relationship ( $r = .662$ ,  $p < .01$ ) between parents involvement and parents provision of key school items.

#### 4.2 Parents' Opinions

Data collected from the field revealed that some parents are agreeing that their involvement in school matters has a strong effect on their children's performance. Thus, on one hand they are of opinion that schools should find strong measures to make parents involved in different school activities. Some parents have suggested that the school administration and the government should create measures to make a meaningful connection between parents and schools so that there can be good communication from both sides. On the other hand, they are insisting that regardless of their sex, occupation, level of education, culture, and economic status all parents should take responsibility of involving themselves in school activities for their children's good achievement. During the interview one of the parent was noted saying;

*"...our level of education, occupation, culture, sex, or economic level should not hinder us from following up on our children's school matters because it is our responsibility to take care of their school matters. Therefore we should cooperate with their teachers effectively..." (Interview with parent 19<sup>th</sup> June, 2020). School Committee Members Opinions.*

Most school committee members were of the view that both parents and teachers have a shared responsibility of following up student's progress and therefore should cooperate effectively in making sure that students are achieving successfully in both academic and behavioural aspects. Moreover, school administrators together with their teachers should develop effective strategies and measures to make parents be part of their children's learning and progress.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

In view of the foregoing analysis, it is concluded that most administrators in community secondary schools do involve parents in different school activities through various ways. These include sending them report forms which indicate their children's academic and behavioural development, having parent-teacher school conferences and involving them in other matters that concern their children academic and behavioural development. On the other side, it was revealed that some parents were not participating fully in different school activities as they are challenged by work and family responsibilities, poor administrative policies, family conflicts and infrastructures, and parent's level of education. Despite the perceived challenges that are said to hinder parents from being effectively involved in different school matters of their children parents should be aware that they are a crucial part of their children's academic achievement therefore they have to concentrate on their children school matters. However, it is necessary to note that parental involvement in school activities is not the only predictor of student's academic achievement.

## **6. RECOMMENDATIONS**

On the basis of research findings and conclusions drawn in the preceding sections, the following recommendations are made:

### **6.1 Recommendations for Actions**

- School administrators, teachers, and parents should be sensitized on the relationship between parental involvement in school matters and their children's achievement so that they can develop more effective and productive strategies including learning from other successful schools that facilitate parent engagement in their children's education.
- Practitioners and school administrators should determine effective, desirable and regular forms of parent-school communications that facilitate student's learning progress.
- Parents and teachers should both be aware that they have a shared responsibility of facilitating students' learning progress, and thus everyone should consider his/her responsibilities.

### **6.2 Recommendations for Further Research**

- The study was limited to Mbeya City because of being located at the centre of Mbeya region where there are many schools with people of different cultures. Therefore, it is recommended that other studies should be extended to other districts so as to examine the level of parental involvement in school activities and its influence on student's academic achievement. This is because many researches related to parental involvement in school matters have been conducted in urban areas and big cities.
- Further research may be conducted to find out the correlation, if any, between parental attitudes towards involving in school matters of their children schooling and their level of education and poverty in Tanzania.

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