



School Leaders Supporting Parental Involvement: A Case of Selected PITA Project Secondary Schools in Meru District

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ABSTRACT: This study examined the role of school leaders in supporting parental involvement to enhance students' academic competencies in PITA Project secondary schools in Meru District, Tanzania. The study was guided by the premise that effective teacher-parent partnerships are essential for improving learners' academic performance and overall school outcomes. A descriptive research design employing both qualitative and quantitative approaches was adopted. Data were collected from three PITA Project secondary schools through questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis. The study involved a total sample of 66 participants, comprising 3 heads of schools, 15 teachers, 36 students, and 12 parents, of whom 9 participated in interviews. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were thematically analyzed to complement and deepen the interpretation of findings. The findings revealed that school leaders employed various strategies to involve parents, including regular parents' meetings, written and verbal communication, engagement through Umoja wa Walimu na Wazazi (UWAWA), and participation in school committees and decision-making processes. The study further found that effective school leader-parent cooperation contributed positively to students' academic competencies by improving attendance, discipline, provision of learning materials, participation in extra classes, and overall academic performance. However, challenges such as low attendance of some parents in meetings, limited parental education, and occasional reluctance to cooperate were identified as barriers to optimal parental involvement. The study concludes that school leadership plays a critical role in fostering meaningful parental involvement, which in turn enhances students' academic competencies. It recommends strengthening sensitization programs for parents, improving communication channels, and enhancing collaboration with community leaders to promote sustained and effective school-parent partnerships in secondary schools.

KEYWORDS: parental involvement, school leadership, PITA project, academic competence.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Quality education is a fundamental human right and a critical foundation for individuals' future success and lifelong wellbeing. Achieving quality education, however, requires collaborative efforts among key stakeholders, particularly teachers, parents, school leaders, and the wider community. Contemporary research increasingly emphasizes that schools cannot effectively promote students' academic achievement without meaningful partnerships between teachers and parents (UNESCO, 2021; OECD, 2023). As a result, the central concern is identifying effective models of teacher-parent partnerships that yield the greatest impact on students' academic performance.

Recent empirical studies demonstrate that strong and sustained teacher-parent partnerships significantly enhance students' academic outcomes, school engagement, and motivation. For instance, Jeynes (2022) found that students whose parents actively collaborate with teachers consistently show higher academic achievement and improved behavioral outcomes. Similarly, Wilder (2023) reported that regular communication and mutual trust between teachers and parents positively predict students' academic success across diverse educational contexts.

Parental involvement manifests in multiple forms, including consistent communication with teachers, volunteering in school activities, supporting learning at home, participating in school decision-making processes, and collaborating with the broader school community. Evidence from recent studies suggests that these forms of involvement contribute to improved homework

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completion, better study habits, and enhanced academic performance among students (Castro et al., 2020; Hill & Tyson, 2021). Effective parental engagement is therefore no longer viewed as optional, but as an essential component of successful schooling. Education is widely recognized as a shared responsibility rather than an isolated task of schools alone. Contemporary literature underscores that academic excellence is best achieved when schools, administrators, parents, and communities work collaboratively toward common educational goals (UNICEF, 2022; OECD, 2023). In the context of 21st-century education, Christenson's partnership framework remains relevant, as recent adaptations emphasize shared accountability between parents and teachers in promoting learners' academic competencies (Kim & Sheridan, 2020).

Global education policy frameworks continue to advocate for stakeholder partnerships in education. The Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) reinforces the need for inclusive and participatory approaches involving families and communities to improve learning outcomes (United Nations, 2023). These international commitments highlight that effective parental involvement is central to improving academic performance and educational quality worldwide.

Despite this global emphasis, evidence from Tanzania suggests that the level of teacher-parent partnership in secondary schools remains relatively low. Recent studies indicate that limited parental awareness, weak communication structures, and inadequate school leadership support hinder effective collaboration between parents and teachers (Mosha & Mahenge, 2021; Mng'ong'o & Komba, 2022). Consequently, students may fail to receive consistent academic support both at school and at home.

In response to this gap, the present study seeks to investigate the extent to which school leaders support parental involvement in enhancing students' academic performance in secondary schools in Meru District. Specifically, the study focuses on secondary schools implementing the PITA project as a case study, with the aim of generating evidence-based insights to strengthen teacher-parent partnerships and improve students' academic outcomes. Participatory and Integrative Teaching Approach (PITA) project is implemented by the Tumaini University Makumira in Meru district secondary schools. The project funded by the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission and Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, aimed support the provision of quality education in secondary schools in Meru district through engaging all stakeholders.

All PITA project schools draw children from nearby communities surrounding the schools, which means that the schools were somewhat integrated with these communities. Since children went to school during the day and went back home after school on the same day, the need for regular cooperation between schools and parents is great. Such cooperation could enable teacher parent discussions on how children learn and progress. The PITA baseline study (2018-2020) revealed that 87.5% of the 24 heads of project schools indicated in the questionnaire that student problems were very often or often discussed with parents. Moreover, it was found that parents meeting were organised by school leaders. However, schools that had organised such meetings more frequently (i.e. four or more meetings per year) were only 29% of the 24 project schools. Hence, it would be useful to learn how well these meetings were conducted and what specific student problems were discussed and how successful the meetings were after the PITA project intervention. This study aims to investigate on how school leaders supporting parental involvement in PITA project secondary schools.

It has been noted that, home is the first school for a child where he/she is taught the basic norms and values by the parents before the child leaves for the formal education. Contrary to the opinion that learning and reading begins in school, the first foundation of the child begins at home. Various studies (Epstein, 2018; Kim & Sheridan 2020; Castro et al,2020; Wilder,2023) show that there are effects of parental involvement on students' academic competencies. Parental involvement is expected to provide a good and conducive climate for social, intellectual and emotional development of child. Further, it provides love, security, guidance and care that contribute to good academic performance. However, according to PITA project base line study of 2018/2020 (pg 21-22) the concept of parental involvement remains to be very low in project schools as only 29% of the schools had frequently organised meeting with parents. This raise the question of effectiveness of school- parents cooperation. This study aims to investigate on how school leaders supporting parental involvement.

The main objective of the study is to examine the role of school leaders in managing cooperation between schools and parents to enhance students' academic competencies with focus on PITA project secondary schools in Meru District.

Specific Objectives

- i. To examine the strategies used by school leaders to involve parents in promoting students' academic competencies in PITA project Secondary schools.
- ii. To determine the effects of school leaders - parents cooperation on students' academic competencies in PITA project secondary schools

Literature Review

Parental involvement is widely recognized as a multidimensional construct encompassing parents' engagement in their children is learning both at home and within school settings. Recent literature defines parental involvement as parents' participation in activities that support students' academic development, socio-emotional growth, and educational decision-making (Epstein, 2018; Jeunes, 2022). Such involvement includes communication with teachers, monitoring academic progress, supporting learning at home, attending school meetings, and participating in governance structures.

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Contemporary studies emphasize that effective parental involvement extends beyond physical presence at school to include academic socialization, such as setting educational expectations, fostering motivation, and encouraging positive learning behaviors (Boonk et al., 2018; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2023). In secondary education, parental involvement often declines as students gain independence and academic demands increase, making structured school-led engagement strategies increasingly important (Wilder, 2023).

This study is grounded in Epstein's School–Family–Community Partnership Model, which conceptualizes parental involvement across six domains: parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and community collaboration (Epstein, 2018). Recent applications of the model highlight the central role of school leadership in coordinating these domains to enhance student outcomes (Sheldon & Turner-Vorbeck, 2019).

In addition, Social Capital Theory provides a relevant explanatory framework, emphasizing that trust-based relationships among parents, schools, and teachers facilitate information sharing and shared norms that positively influence students' academic competencies (Coleman, 1988; Boonk et al., 2018). Recent studies reaffirm that school leaders are instrumental in cultivating social capital by promoting inclusive practices and sustained parent–school interactions (Liu & Hallinger, 2022).

School leaders play a pivotal role in shaping school climates that promote parental involvement. Evidence from recent leadership research indicates that principals influence parental engagement by establishing clear communication systems, creating welcoming school environments, and embedding parental involvement into school policies and routines (Leithwood et al., 2020; Bush & Glover, 2023). Empirical studies show that leadership practices such as regular parent forums, collaborative academic review meetings, and transparent communication platforms significantly enhance parental participation and trust, particularly at the secondary school level (Sebastian et al., 2016; Gurr, 2021). Transformational leadership has been identified as especially effective in mobilizing parents by fostering shared goals, collective responsibility, and stakeholder empowerment (Day et al., 2016; Bush, 2020).

Academic competencies encompass students' cognitive skills, learning behaviors, motivation, and attitudes necessary for academic success. Recent meta-analyses confirm that parental involvement positively influences students' academic performance, engagement, discipline, and persistence, especially when involvement focuses on academic expectations and home-based support (Boonk et al., 2018; Jeynes, 2022).

Studies conducted in secondary school contexts demonstrate that parental monitoring, communication with teachers, and encouragement of learning autonomy are strongly associated with improved academic competencies among adolescents (Wilder, 2023; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2023). In sub-Saharan Africa, parental involvement has been linked to improved attendance, learner discipline, and provision of learning resources, though its effectiveness is often moderated by school leadership practices and contextual constraints (Mncube, 2019; URT, 2021).

Empirical evidence consistently highlights a positive relationship between school leadership, parental involvement, and student outcomes. Studies indicate that principals' leadership practices indirectly affect student achievement by strengthening parent–school partnerships and teacher collaboration (Sebastian et al., 2016; Auerbach & Collier, 2018). However, recent reviews note that many studies remain descriptive and provide limited insight into leadership strategies that sustain meaningful parental involvement in secondary schools (Liu & Hallinger, 2022).

In Tanzania, existing studies largely focus on primary education, with limited empirical work examining leadership-supported parental involvement in secondary schools, particularly within project-based interventions such as the PITA Project. Moreover, while baseline studies report the presence of parental engagement structures, little is known about the quality, consistency, and leadership-driven mechanisms that translate parental involvement into improved academic competencies. This study addresses these gaps by examining how school leaders support parental involvement and how such support enhances students' academic competencies in PITA Project secondary schools.

2. METHODS

This study employed a descriptive research design within a mixed-methods research approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative paradigms to generate comprehensive, in-depth, and reliable findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The mixed-methods approach was considered appropriate because it enabled the collection of numerical data to describe patterns and trends, while also providing rich qualitative information that explained participants' experiences and perceptions regarding the PITA Project interventions. The study was conducted in three (3) PITA Project secondary schools, which were selected through simple random sampling by assigning numbers to all thirty-four (34) schools and randomly drawing three numbers to ensure fairness and equal representation, as all PITA Project schools had received similar training and support. The target population included heads of schools, teachers, parents, and students, as these groups were directly involved in the implementation and outcomes of the PITA Project initiatives.

A total sample size of 66 respondents was involved, comprising three (3) heads of schools, 15 teachers, 12 parents, and 36 students. Heads of schools and parents were selected purposively due to their leadership and parental roles, which provided

critical insights into school-home collaboration, while teachers and students were selected using appropriate sampling techniques to ensure adequate representation.

Data were collected using a combination of documentary review, in-depth interviews, and structured questionnaires. Documentary review focused on relevant school records, policy documents, and PITA Project reports to provide background information and contextual understanding. In-depth interviews were conducted with heads of schools and parents to obtain detailed qualitative data on leadership strategies and parental involvement. Structured questionnaires were administered to teachers and students to collect quantitative data on practices, perceptions, and academic competencies.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research instruments, the tools were subjected to expert review and pilot testing prior to the main data collection. Necessary revisions were made based on feedback and pilot results. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques such as frequencies, percentages, and mean scores, while qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, whereby key themes and patterns were identified and interpreted. The integration of findings from both data sets enabled triangulation, thereby enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the study findings.

3. FINDINGS

Introduction

This section presents and interprets the findings obtained from the field. The chapter starts with return rate of instruments to justify the adequacy of the collected data to proceed with analysis followed by demographic information of respondents' and finally, a deep presentation and interpretation of the findings according to the research objectives.

Response Rate of Instruments

The study expected a sample size of 66 participants, which included 3 heads of school, 12 parents, 15 teachers and 36 students. The researcher also expected to conduct document analysis to all three schools, the researcher did not manage to get a 100 percent return rate for all categories of respondents due to different factors. The return rate of instruments obtained in the current study has been presented in table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Response Rate of Instruments

Instrument	Expected	Collected	%
Interview guide for heads of school	3	3	100
Interview guide for parents	12	9	75
Questionnaire for teachers	15	15	100
Questionnaire for students	36	36	100
Document Analysis	3	3	100

According to data in table 4.1, the response rate for document analysis guide, interview guide and questionnaire for teachers and students were 100%. This implies that the researchers managed to analyse all the 3 public primary intended documents, interview all 3 heads of school, collected filled questionnaires from all the 15 expected teachers and all the 36 expected students. For the case of parents, the researcher managed to interview 9 out of the 12 expected parents which is equal to 75%. The turn up of parents did not reach 100% due to not showing up of the 3 invited parents. Despite that the return rate for some instruments not reaching 100%, the obtained rates still allowed data analysis as supported by Baruch and Holtom (2008) who recommended a minimum of 52.7% for further analysis. Therefore, the obtained response rates in all the categories of instruments allowed the researcher to proceed with data analysis.

Demographic Information of Respondents

Demographic information sought in this study-included gender, education level and working experience of the respondents in their respective positions. Table 4.2 presents the demographic information of the heads of school, parents, teachers and students.

Table 4.2: Demographic Information of Respondents

Demographic information	Category of respondents			
	HoS	Parents	Teachers	Students
Gender	Male/Boys	3 (100)	4	9
	Female/ Girls	-	5	18
Education Level	Diploma	--	-	2
	Degree	3	-	13
	Form IV	-	5	-
	Form III	-	-	36

	STD VII	-	4	-	-
Working Experience	0 – 10	-	9	-	-
	11– 20	3	2	-	-
	21 – 30	-	1	-	-

Gender of respondents

Table 4.2 show that 3 (100%) of the heads of school were males. For the parents 4 (44 %) of them were males while the number of females was 5 (56 %). The data also show that 9 (60%) of the teachers were males while 6 (40%) were females. For the students, there were 18 (50%) boys and 18 (50%) girls

Education Level of Participants

Table 4.2 show that 3 (100%) of the heads of school were degree holders. For the case of parents, 5 (60%) of them were form four leavers while 4 (40%) were standard seven leavers. The data also show that 13 (87%) of teachers were degree holders while 2 (13%) had a diploma. For students all 36 students (100%) were form three. Researchers chose this class as they have indepth information on parental involvement in school activities due to their long stay at school compared to form one and form two students.

Teaching Experience

Table 4.2 show that 3(100%) of the heads of school had experience of 11-20 years. For the case of teachers 9 (60%) of them had experience of 0-10 years, 4 (27%) had experience of 11-20 years and 2 (13%) had experience of 21-30. This implies that majority of teachers' experience of 0-10 years in their current position. This high level of experience of 0-10 years, may be due current the new teachers employment

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The deep presentation, discussion and interpretation of the findings from the collected data were arranged according to the research objectives

To identify the ways used by school leaders to involve parents in promoting students' academic competences in PITA project Secondary schools

The first research objective aimed at finding out the ways used by school leaders to involve parents in promoting students' academic competencies in PITA project Secondary schools. To answer this researcher, developed questionnaire items for students and teachers while interview sessions were conducted to the heads of school and parents.

Questionnaire Items for Students

Researchers developed questionnaire items for students which aimed to find out ways which are used by school leaders to invite parents to attend school activities/ events as follow:

1. Does teachers send you to your parent?

This aim to find out if teachers communicate with parents, Table 4.3 present participants responses

Table: 4.3 - Does teachers send you to your parent

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	36	100
No	-	-
Total	36	100

The finding revealed that 36 (100%) of respondents agreed that teachers send them to their parents. This is the evidence that teachers communicate with parents.

2. Which means do they use?

This item aimed to find out the ways, which are used by school leaders to communicate with parents, Table 4.4 show respond from students

Table: 4.4. Means used by School leaders

Means	Frequency	Percentage
Written letters	29	81
Verbal messages	7	19
Total	36	100

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Data show that 29 (81%) of the respondent said school leaders use written message as a means of communication with parents, while 7 (19%) of the respondents said the teachers use verbal message as a means of communication with their parents. This is the evidence that teachers communicate with parents mainly through written messages.

3. Which school activities/ events do parents attend?

This questionnaire item focused on activities/events attended by parents in school, Table 4.5 present the responses from participants

Table: 4.5. Parents attend school activities and events

Activity	Frequency
Parents Meeting	29
Sports Day	4
Academic Day	22
Graduation Day	25

The findings revealed that parents mainly attend parents meeting (29) followed by graduation day (25), academic day (22) and rarely parents attends on sports day (4). This is the evidence that parents are attending school activities.

4. Choose the level of teachers- parents' engagement in your school under the following Likert scale: 1= Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3= Agree, 4= Strongly Agree.

Table: 4.6. Level of Teachers- Parents engagement

Statement	1	2	3	4
Teachers discuss with my parents on my academic progress			10	26
Teachers sensitize parents on my school attendance		8	28	
Teachers sensitize parents on school contributions			7	29
Teachers sensitize parents on the importance of education	1		11	24
Teachers engage parents in decision making meetings	3		6	27
Teachers provide school financial reports to parents			18	18
Parents willingly attends various school activities	2		18	16
There is strong teachers- parents relationship in the school	3		15	18

The findings show that a large number of respondents strongly agreed that teachers discuss students' academic progress with parents (26) and sensitize parents on students school attendance (28) and school contributions (29), suggesting that communication between teachers and parents on core school matters is well established. Similarly, most respondents agreed or strongly agreed that teachers sensitize parents on the importance of education, with only a minimal level of disagreement, reflecting shared awareness of education's value. Engagement in decision-making meetings also recorded high agreement levels, indicating parents' inclusion in school governance processes. However, the provision of school financial reports showed a more balanced distribution between Agree (18) and Strongly Agree (18), implying room for strengthening transparency. Parental willingness to attend school activities and the existence of strong teacher-parent relationships were also rated positively, though with a small number of disagreements, suggesting that while engagement is generally strong, targeted efforts could further enhance participation and collaboration. Overall, the data demonstrate a positive and supportive teacher-parent engagement environment in the school.

Interview Responses from the Heads of School

Researchers' conducted interview sessions with heads of schools on the following items

Management of school leaders - parents' cooperation

Respondents expressed positive views regarding the level of cooperation between teachers and parents in the school. One respondent noted: 'we have good cooperation with parents through formal structures such as Umoja wa Walimu na Wazazi (UAWA) and the school committee, parents are actively involved in various school matter' (Interview- Head of School B). According to this view, these platforms provide opportunities for dialogue, collective decision-making, and shared responsibility, which strengthen the relationship between the school and the community. The respondent further explained that parents support school operations by contributing financially, for example by paying money for students' food, which helps to improve learners' welfare and supports smooth school functioning.

Another respondent echoed similar sentiments, highlighting that the involvement of parents through UAWA and the school committee has enhanced trust and collaboration between teachers and parents. This respondent pointed out that regular meetings and sensitization sessions encourage parents to understand school needs and willingly participate in addressing them. As a result,

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parents not only contribute resources such as funds for meals but also show commitment to students' attendance, discipline, and academic progress. Overall, these voices from respondents illustrate that structured cooperation mechanisms play a significant role in promoting effective teacher-parent engagement in the school.

Respondents explained that parents are engaged mainly through structured decision-making processes and regular meetings organized by the school. One respondent stated, *"Decision making on students' matters is done jointly, and the school management meets with parents twice a year according to the school calendar and also during emergency issues,"* (Interview HoS-school A) indicating that formal meetings are a key strategy for parental involvement. In response to these strategies, most parents were reported to be cooperative and supportive. Another respondent noted, *"Parents contribute positively by allowing their children, especially Form II candidates, to attend 'KAMBI' for extra classes, and they also provide manual labor during the construction of school buildings such as classrooms and laboratories,"* (Interview HoS- school B) demonstrating practical and financial support for learning. However, respondents also acknowledged that a few parents respond poorly due to low levels of education or the perception that school activities are a government responsibility and a waste of time. Overall, the responses suggest that while parental engagement strategies are largely effective, a small proportion of parents remain less involved.

Responses of the Parents' Interview

Parents reported that school leaders actively involve them in issues related to their children through various forums and communication channels. One parent explained, *"We are involved through meetings on matters related to students such as scholastic materials, meals at school, and extra classes,"* (Interview with parent-3) showing that schools regularly engage parents on both academic and welfare issues. Another parent emphasized the value of this involvement by stating, *"It is very essential because it promotes students' academic performance and discipline,"* (Interview with parent-6) highlighting the perceived benefits of collaboration between home and school. Additionally, a parent noted, *"We are sensitized on the provision of scholastic materials like dictionaries and encouraged to make follow-up on our children's academic progress,"* (Interview with parent-8) indicating that school leaders guide parents on how to support learning at home. Overall, these responses suggest that parental involvement facilitated by school leadership plays a crucial role in supporting learners' academic success.

Parents reported being actively involved in issues related to their children's learning activities through regular communication and collaboration with teachers and the school administration. Many parents indicated that they attend school meetings, participate in *Umoja wa Walimu na Wazazi (UAWA)* and school committee sessions, and follow up on their children's academic progress by discussing performance, attendance, and behavior with teachers. Others explained that they support learning at home by monitoring homework, ensuring regular school attendance, and providing basic learning materials. Through these engagements, parents are able to understand curriculum expectations and jointly address learning challenges affecting their children.

Respondents also highlighted several benefits of communicating with teachers. Regular communication helps parents to receive timely information about their children's academic strengths, weaknesses, and overall development, enabling early intervention where necessary. Parents noted that such communication strengthens mutual trust, promotes shared responsibility in supporting learners, and improves students' motivation and discipline. Additionally, effective parent-teacher communication was reported to enhance academic performance, as learners feel supported both at home and at school. Overall, respondents viewed communication with teachers as essential for improving the quality of learning and ensuring positive educational outcomes for their children.

To describe the outcome of school leaders - parents' cooperation on students' academic competencies in PITA project secondary schools

The second research objective focused on point out the outcome of school leaders - parents' cooperation on students' academic competencies in PITA project secondary schools

Questionnaire for Teachers

Researchers developed questionnaire items for teachers, which aimed to find out ways used by school leaders to involve parents in promoting students' academic competencies in PITA project Secondary schools

1. Which school activities do parents attend?

This item aimed to find out schools' activities which are attended by parents Table 4.7 show teachers response

Table: 4.7. Parents attend school activities/ events

Statement	A	SA	N	D	SD
Parents participate in school activities e.g meetings	10	3		2	
Parents feels welcome to school	9	4	2		
Parents make follow up of their children academic progress	8	1		5	1
Teachers are willing to discuss with parents on pupils academic progress	8	5		2	
Teachers discuss with parents on pupils academic progress	10	1	2	1	1
I communicate with parents on pupils academic progress	10	3		1	1

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The data in the table present respondents' views on different aspects of parent-teacher interaction using a five-point Likert scale. Results show that a large proportion of respondents agreed (10) or strongly agreed (3) that parents participate in school activities such as meetings, with only a few expressing disagreement (2). Similarly, most respondents indicated that parents feel welcome at school, as reflected by high agreement (9) and strong agreement (4), although a small number were neutral (2). With regard to parents' follow-up on their children's academic progress, agreement was moderate (8), while some respondents disagreed (5) or strongly disagreed (1), suggesting variations in parental commitment. The findings further indicate that teachers are generally willing to discuss pupils' academic progress with parents, as shown by agreement (8) and strong agreement (5), with minimal disagreement (2). Likewise, most respondents agreed that teachers actually discuss pupils' academic progress with parents (10), though a few responses fell under neutrality (2), disagreement (1), and strong disagreement (1). Finally, communication by respondents themselves with parents on pupils' academic progress was rated positively, with the majority agreeing (10) or strongly agreeing (3), and very few indicating disagreement. Overall, the data demonstrate a generally positive pattern of parental involvement and teacher-parent communication, despite some areas showing room for improvement.

Challenges: Teachers' responses

Teachers identified several challenges that arise from inadequate parental involvement in students' academic progress. A commonly mentioned challenge was increased truancy among students, as the absence of parental follow-up reduces accountability for regular school attendance. Teachers also noted a general lack of seriousness in studies, which often translates into poor academic performance when learners do not receive encouragement or supervision at home. Moral decay among students was another concern, attributed to weak guidance and limited collaboration between home and school. Furthermore, teachers pointed out that many parents lack information about their children's academic performance as well as about the school environment and activities. This information gap also affects teachers, who remain unaware of students' home-related challenges, making it difficult to provide appropriate academic or psychosocial support. As a result, parents are unable to effectively monitor or support their children's learning activities at home.

In response, teachers proposed several strategies to promote parental involvement in the school. They suggested that ward and village leaders should play a more active role in encouraging parents to participate in their children's academic activities, as community leadership can influence attitudes and commitment. Teachers also emphasized the need to educate parents on the importance of their involvement in supporting learning, particularly through sensitization programs. Strengthening cooperation between parents and teachers through frequent meetings focused on students' academic progress was highlighted as essential. In addition, teachers recommended effective communication among parents, teachers, and students to ensure timely and clear information sharing. The creation of an academic committee comprising both parents and teachers was also proposed to enhance regular academic follow-up and shared responsibility for students' learning outcomes.

Challenges: Heads of Schools Responses

Respondents indicated that strong cooperation between school leaders and parents has positively influenced students' academic competencies in the school. Through this collaboration, parents support the provision of essential scholastic materials and contribute to student meal programs, which enhance learners' concentration and participation in class. Regular meetings between school leaders and parents also enable discussions on academic progress, discipline, hostel management, and feeding programs, allowing joint development of strategies to support learners. As one respondent explained, *"When school leaders and parents work together, students are provided with learning materials and meals, and their academic progress improves because parents follow up and support the strategies agreed at school."*

Despite these benefits, respondents highlighted several challenges that hinder effective cooperation between school leaders and parents. Poor attendance at meetings was frequently mentioned, as it affects collective decision-making on key academic issues. Low levels of parental education were also reported to limit parents' understanding of school matters, while overprotectiveness toward children sometimes prevents objective handling of academic or disciplinary concerns. In some cases, parents were described as showing limited cooperation by failing to contribute as agreed or reacting negatively when reminded by teachers. One respondent noted, *"Some parents do not attend meetings or fail to honor their contributions, and when teachers follow them up, they overreact instead of cooperating"* (Interview HoS- School C). Additionally, respondents reported that some parents conceal sensitive issues such as pregnancy, choosing to resolve them privately rather than involving the school.

To address these challenges, respondents described various efforts undertaken to strengthen cooperation between school leaders and parents. Schools have intensified sensitization programs to encourage parents' participation in school activities and emphasize shared responsibility for students' academic success. Village leaders have also been engaged to mobilize parents and reinforce accountability within the community. Furthermore, schools provide education to parents on the importance of parental involvement in enhancing academic competencies. As one respondent stated, *"We sensitize parents and work with village leaders to help them understand that their involvement is essential for improving their children's academic competencies"* (Interview HoS- school B).

Parent Responses to Interviews

Respondents indicated that a strong parent-teacher relationship plays a significant role in promoting children's learning activities in the school. Through regular communication, parents and teachers are able to discuss challenges related to children's academic progress and agree on appropriate support strategies. This collaboration has enabled the provision of extra lessons for struggling learners and sufficient time for completing homework, particularly for students staying in hostels. As a result, respondents reported improvements in academic performance and an increased passing rate. One respondent stated, "*When parents and teachers work closely, we can discuss academic challenges, arrange extra lessons, and this has helped to increase students' passing rate and overall performance*" (Interview with parent-4).

However, respondents also highlighted challenges faced in communicating with school leaders. A major concern was that some parents do not attend parents' meetings, which limits information sharing and collective decision-making. In addition, failure by some parents to contribute to their children's meals at school was reported to negatively affect students' concentration and participation in learning activities. As one respondent explained, "*Communication becomes difficult because some parents do not attend meetings and do not contribute to the school meal program for their children*" (Interview with parent-9). These challenges weaken the effectiveness of collaboration between parents and school leadership.

To improve parental involvement, respondents emphasized the need for sustained efforts and commitment from school leadership. Parents should be continuously educated on the importance of participating in school activities, including contributing to essential needs such as school meals. Respondents also stressed the importance of regular meetings by the school board and committees to ensure follow-up on agreed issues. One respondent noted, "*We should not give up; parents need education on the importance of their involvement, and the school board must meet regularly so that decisions can be implemented and progress can be made*" (Interview with parent-8).

Document Analysis

The document analysis revealed that the schools maintained varying levels of record-keeping regarding parent engagement and students' academic progress. All three schools kept well-documented minutes of parent meetings, highlighting discussed agendas and agreed issues, such as contributions for students' meals. However, in one school, low parent attendance was noted, which affected the implementation of decisions made during these meetings. Academic progress records were generally well maintained across all schools, with complete academic committee meeting minutes, copies of students' progressive report forms, and parents' signatures on collected report forms, indicating systematic follow-up on students' performance. Regarding Parents' Day reports, two schools had comprehensive documentation managed by *Umoja wa Walimu na Wazazi (UAWA)* class representatives, while one school had few copies and several were missing, reflecting gaps in record management. Similarly, parent visit logbooks were available and well-kept in two schools, with parents signing upon visits, but the logbook was absent in one school, showing inconsistency in monitoring parental engagement. Overall, the documents indicate that while schools generally maintain proper records of parent involvement and student progress, some gaps in attendance tracking and documentation suggest areas for improvement.

4. DISCUSSIONS

This section discusses the findings obtained from the field. The discussion links the results with the relevant literature to provide a deeper understanding of parental involvement in promoting students' academic competencies in PITA project secondary schools. The section is organized according to the research objectives and includes analysis of demographic characteristics, parent-teacher engagement, challenges, and strategies to enhance cooperation.

Response Rate of Instruments

The study achieved a response rate of 100% for head of schools, teachers, students, and document analysis, while parental interviews had a 75% response rate. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), a response rate above 70% or higher is considered very good and strong for meaningful analysis, implying that the collected data were adequate for interpretation. The slightly lower parental response may have been influenced by individual availability, yet the data still reflected a reliable view of parental involvement in the schools.

Demographic Information of Respondents

The analysis of respondents' demographics indicated that male head of schools (100%) and a balanced gender distribution among students (50% boys, 50% girls) participated in the study. Most teachers (87%) held a degree, suggesting a relatively high level of professional qualification, which is important in facilitating effective parent engagement (Epstein, 2018). The majority of parents (60%) had completed Form IV education, which may influence their understanding of academic expectations and participation in school activities. Regarding work experience, most teachers had 0–10 years of experience, reflecting recent recruitment trends, which may affect the consistency and depth of engagement with parents and students.

Teachers' Engagement with Parents

The study found that teachers actively communicate with parents regarding students' academic progress. All students (100%) reported that teachers send information to parents, primarily through written messages (81%). This demonstrates a structured approach to communication, in line with Epstein's (2018) framework, which emphasizes the importance of regular home-school communication to promote academic achievement. Parents attended meetings, academic days, and graduation events, although sports day participation was limited. Teachers' sensitization of parents on school attendance, contributions, and the importance of education recorded high levels of agreement, suggesting a generally effective engagement strategy (Mosha, & Mahenge, 2021). Structured cooperation mechanisms, such as Umoja wa Walimu na Wazazi (UWAWA) and school committees, were identified as key platforms for involving parents in school management and decision-making. As one head of school said: "*We have good cooperation with parents through formal structures such as UWAWA and the school committee; parents are actively involved in various school matters*". These findings align with previous studies indicating that organized forums for parent engagement enhance trust, transparency, and shared responsibility for students' learning outcomes (Jeynes, 2022).

Outcomes of School Leaders–Parents Cooperation

The study revealed that parental involvement positively affects students' academic competencies. Teachers reported that parents contribute financially, allow children to attend extra classes ("KAMBI"), and support school infrastructure development. Parents also participate in follow-up on academic progress, monitoring homework, and ensuring regular attendance. One parent stated, "*We are involved through meetings on matters related to students such as scholastic materials, meals at school, and extra classes, demonstrating active parental engagement*". These practices support earlier findings that parental involvement improves students' performance, motivation, and discipline (Mng'ong'o, & Komba, 2022).

Challenges of Parental Involvement

Despite the positive engagement, several challenges were highlighted. Teachers identified truancy, lack of seriousness in studies, poor academic performance, and moral decay as consequences of inadequate parental involvement. Other barriers included low parental education, overprotectiveness, and reluctance to attend meetings or contribute as agreed. One head of school noted: "*Some parents do not attend meetings or fail to honor their contributions, and when teachers follow them up, they overreact instead of cooperating.*" These challenges are consistent with international studies showing that socioeconomic factors, parental knowledge, and attitudes significantly influence parental engagement in education (Liu, & Hallinger, 2022).

Strategies to Enhance Cooperation

The study found that schools implement several strategies to strengthen parental engagement, including sensitization programs, involvement of village leaders, creation of academic committees, and regular meetings between parents and teachers. One respondent stated, "We sensitize parents and work with village leaders to help them understand that their involvement is essential for improving their children's academic competencies." This aligns with literature emphasizing the role of community mobilization and parental education in enhancing cooperation between schools and families (Gurr, 2021; Epstein, 2018).

Document Analysis

Document analysis confirmed that schools maintain systematic records of parental involvement. Parent meeting minutes, academic progress reports, Parents' Day reports, and visit logbooks were generally well kept, although gaps were observed in one school with missing documentation and low attendance. This suggests that while formal mechanisms exist to support parental involvement, effective monitoring and follow-up remain critical areas for improvement (Mosha, & Mahenge, 2021).

5. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that school leaders employ structured and effective approaches to engage parents in supporting students' academic competencies, resulting in improved academic performance, provision of scholastic materials, and enhanced student welfare. Despite these positive outcomes, challenges such as low parental attendance, limited educational background among some parents, and occasional non-cooperation constrain the full potential of parent–school collaboration, highlighting the need for continued sensitization, community involvement, and regular structured meetings.

The study was conducted in three (3) PITA Project secondary schools, which were selected through simple random sampling by assigning numbers to all thirty-four (34) schools and randomly selecting three to ensure fairness and equal representation, given that all schools had received similar training and support. While the findings provide valuable insights into the project's implementation and outcomes, the small number of schools limits the generalizability of the results. This limitation was addressed by employing random selection, which reduced selection bias, and by using multiple data collection methods, which enhanced credibility through triangulation. The study also emphasized analytical depth over broad generalization, allowing for a detailed understanding of the PITA Project within the selected contexts.

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Consequently, although the results should be interpreted with caution, they offer useful indicative evidence that highlights the critical role of collaborative partnerships between school leaders and parents in enhancing student learning outcomes and informs stakeholders, practitioners, and future large-scale implementations of the PITA Project.

Recommendation to PITA Project

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that the PITA Project strengthen parents' involvement in students' academic matters as a core strategy for improving learning outcomes. The project should integrate parents into academic support initiatives through regular capacity-building workshops that equip them with skills to monitor learners' progress, support homework, and foster positive study habits at home. In addition, the establishment of structured and consistent school-parent communication mechanisms, including academic progress meetings and digital communication platforms, would enhance timely information sharing and joint problem solving. The PITA Project should also promote active participation of parents through strengthened Parent-Teacher Associations with a clear focus on academic planning and monitoring, while sensitizing communities on the importance of supportive home learning environments. Furthermore, incorporating parental involvement indicators into the project's monitoring and evaluation framework would enable systematic assessment of parents' contributions to students' academic performance. Overall, enhanced collaboration between parents, schools, and project implementers is essential for the sustainability and effectiveness of the PITA Project.

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