



Effects of Communication Between Parents and Teachers on Educational Progress of Children in Early Childhood Education in Rachuonyo East Sub-County, Homa Bay County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT: The study examined the extent to which formal and informal communication between parents and teachers influences the educational progress of children in Early Childhood Education (ECE). The investigation was guided by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's Parental Involvement Theory, adapted to the Kenyan Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) context. The study employed a qualitative design, in which data were collected during a single phase and the findings were integrated during interpretation. Data were gathered using structured interviews and focus group discussions with teachers and parents, as well as analysis of relevant school documents, including attendance records and meeting minutes. The sample size was determined using the Yamane (1967) formula. Research instruments were prepared in English and the local language to enhance accessibility, with back-translation undertaken to ensure language accuracy. Data was analysed thematically to provide contextual insights. Reliability and validity were enhanced through a pilot study and calculation of Cronbach's alpha for the survey scales. Ethical procedures, including institutional approval, informed consent, confidentiality, and reciprocity, were strictly observed. The findings indicated that both formal and informal communication between parents and teachers play a significant role in supporting children's educational progress in Early Childhood Education (ECE). The study highlighted the need to consider both formal and informal communication when designing interventions aimed at enhancing learner performance.

KEYWORDS: Parent-Teacher Communication, Parental Involvement, Early Childhood Education, Educational Progress, Competency-Based Curriculum, Early Childhood Centres.

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INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education (ECE) forms the structural foundation for lifelong learning, shaping critical cognitive capacities, social-emotional competencies, and behavioral dispositions Xu, Y., et al. (2023). Developmental theories, such as Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory of 1979 and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory of 1978, emphasize that learning begins within the primary microsystem of the home, where parents serve as the initial, most influential facilitators of knowledge and social development.

Internationally, empirical literature underscores parental engagement as a central driver of early learning outcomes. High- and middle-income nations increasingly integrate structured home-school collaboration models into national curricula. Global research demonstrates that active home-based learning routines, regular parent-teacher dialogue, and guided educational activities consistently correlate with enhanced literacy, numeracy, executive functioning, and smooth transitions into primary education (Zhang et al. (2024).

Across Sub-Saharan Africa, early childhood frameworks are progressively acknowledging the critical role of family involvement in achieving educational equity and quality. However, regional implementation faces structural constraints. Issues such as socioeconomic disadvantage, varying levels of parental literacy, and resource scarcity often limit parents' capacity to engage in formal academic activities. Consequently, engagement in many Sub-Saharan contexts leans heavily on informal, moral, and cultural transmission of values rather than structured academic scaffolding at home (Nyamu, C. K. et al 2025)

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In Kenya, the adoption of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) by the Ministry of Education and the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICED, 2015) has institutionalized the expectation of active home-school partnerships. CBC shifts the focus from rote learning to holistic competency development, explicitly designating parents as co-educators responsible for supporting home-based projects, nurturing natural talents, and instilling core values. Despite this policy framework, empirical evidence indicates a gap between curriculum expectations and actual practice. Many Kenyan parents maintain a narrow view of involvement—limiting their role to financial support or administrative school meetings—and often delegate educational responsibility entirely to teachers once formal schooling starts (Obwaka, C. A., & Kimani, C. 2024).

Although existing Kenyan studies have established a relationship between parental involvement, parent-school communication and children's educational outcomes, several gaps remain. First, much of the available Kenyan evidence has examined general parental involvement rather than isolating formal and informal communication as distinct dimensions of parental engagement. Some studies have focused on particular outcomes, such as literacy, while less attention has been given to broader educational progress in ECE, including learning competencies, participation, attendance, social development and general classroom engagement. There is limited evidence specifically from Rachuonyo East Sub-County, Homa Bay County, despite differences in socioeconomic, cultural and educational contexts across Kenyan counties. The proposed study therefore sought to address these gaps by examining how both formal and informal communication between parents and teachers influence the educational progress of ECE learners in Rachuonyo East Sub-County.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was guided by a qualitative research paradigm, which was appropriate for developing an in-depth understanding of parental engagement and its perceived influence on the educational outcomes of early years education learners Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2024). Qualitative research enabled researcher to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, meanings, practices and explanations within their natural contexts. In this study, the approach provided an opportunity to understand how parents and teachers perceive and experience communication, the ways in which parents participate in their children's learning, and the contextual factors that facilitate or constrain such engagement.

The study employed a thematic qualitative approach to analyse data generated through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with parents and early years education teachers. Thematic analysis involves the systematic identification, organisation, analysis and interpretation of recurring patterns of meaning, referred to as themes, within a qualitative dataset. The approach is appropriate for this study because it will enable the researcher to move beyond the description of individual responses and identify broader patterns in participants' experiences, perceptions and practices concerning parental engagement. Recent methodological literature identifies thematic analysis as a widely used and theoretically flexible approach for analysing qualitative data across different research contexts (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Andreadou & Chatzifotiou, 2023).

The study was carried out in sampled public early childhood centers in Rachuonyo East sub county which is one of the eight sub counties in Homa Bay county in Kenya. According to the Homa Bay County Statistical Abstract (CSA), (2024), Rachuonyo East sub-county has a total of 135 pre- primary centers out of which 93 are attached to the public primary schools. The total number of potential participants in these categories is large, making a census impractical. Therefore, a sampling strategy was needed to select a subset of respondents from this population.

A sample size of 93 Early Childhood Education centres was selected given the relatively small population size ($N = 93$). A census approach was adopted whereby all ECE centres were to be included in the study to ensure comprehensive coverage and eliminate sampling bias.

generalized to the entire population of schools. A sample size of 400 parents was sampled for participation in this study. The sample size was determined using the Yamane (1967) formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)}$$

$$n = \frac{3699}{1 + 3699(0.05)^2}$$

- Total Enrolment in ECD = 3699
- Margin of Error= 5%
- Confidence Level = 95%
- With a population size of 3,699 and a margin of error of 5% ($e = 0.05$), the calculated sample size was 362 respondents.
 - 10% buffer for non-response final sample = $362 + (362 \times 0.1) = 398$. Rounded off to 400 participants.

A multi-stage sampling technique was then used to select participants, combining purposive, saturated, and simple random sampling methods as appropriate for each subgroup

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To address the research objective, the study utilized multiple data collection methods, thereby triangulating information from different sources to enhance the validity of findings (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtler, 2010). The primary data collection methods included semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and document analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Although the parents-maintained contact with teachers, their preferred and accessible communication channels differed among them. These communication channels included: WhatsApp groups, SMS, telephone calls, school diaries, meetings, letters and, in some cases, messages relayed through the child or another parent as was reported by the sub county coordinator.

R: the headteacher or class teacher created a WhatsApp group for parents if in case you have any issue you communicate through that (PARENT 001),

However, the parent also explained that when mobile data were unavailable, communication could occur through a neighbour who belonged to the WhatsApp group. The parent further described receiving information through the school diary, meetings and the child's older sibling.

you find maybe the child is sick at school and I am unreachable, and maybe there is a parent who is my neighbor and is in the WhatsApp group, and maybe I didn't get data to open the app, he or she will come and tell me that my son is experiencing this and this, go to school and pick him up. Another one is the diary or the school meetings; you find in some cases they call for meetings that I have to attend so that whatever they want to share to the parents I will get it. Also his elder brother is in the same school and the teacher might send him to me in case he or she has a problem about this or that and he delivers the message. (PARENT 001).

Additionally some parents and teachers used both WhatsApp and the school diary as important communication channels
I find it a lot easier to use WhatsApp (Teacher 001)

R: my son has a diary so like when he comes from school, the diary is being [unclear] every day, and I sign it...there could also be a reminder about a message that the teacher was trying to communicate. (PARENT 002)

The findings indicated that both formal and informal communication between parents and teachers play a significant role in supporting children's educational progress in Early Childhood Education (ECE). Parents consistently reported receiving information from schools through formal channels such as newsletters, written notes, notices, flyers, and school messages. In addition, informal communication occurred through verbal updates, messages delivered by children, and direct conversations between parents and teachers.

The data suggests that effective communication facilitates parental awareness of children's academic activities, enables monitoring of progress, and creates opportunities for parents to support learning at home. However, the effectiveness of communication varies according to accessibility, clarity of messages, and parents' capacity to engage with the information received.

Formal Communication as a Tool for Educational Support

Formal communication mechanisms were identified as essential in informing parents about school activities, learning requirements, and their children's educational progress. Parents who regularly received written notes, newsletters, and school updates demonstrated greater awareness of what was happening in school and were therefore better positioned to provide support at home.

One parent noted:

"The note in the exercise book is fast because I see it immediately when checking the book." (Parent A)

Similarly, the teachers acknowledged sending newsletters and school notices that helped inform parents about educational matters.

"The school sends newsletters and notices to update us." (teacher D)

Interestingly broader range of communication methods, including, messages, letters and child-mediated communication were also found to be among one of the communications channels.

R: So, about information, I can get it through phone calls from the teacher, also through sending the children to the take information to school, I can also receive it through messages, I can also get it through writing a letter to the teacher so that the teacher can read (PARENT 003).

However, child mediated communication faced a limitation.

there are some learners who can forget to relay the information to the teacher some also may forget or may give information which they were not given by the parent in a different way (PARENT 003)

The importance of ordinary SMS because of the cost of internet data was pointed out.

Then two I prefer messages not WhatsApp, messages app, because sometimes I do lack money to buy data and I have okoa [airtime debt] maybe we use the messages (PARENT 004).

These findings suggest that formal communication strengthens the home-school connection by providing parents with information necessary to reinforce learning activities outside the classroom. When parents understand school expectations, they are better able to encourage participation, monitor assignments, and support educational development.

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Informal Communication Enhances Parent Involvement

Beyond formal communication channels, parents reported receiving information through less structured interactions, including phone messages, discussions with teachers, and information relayed through their children. Such informal communication appears to foster continuous engagement and allows parents to respond more quickly to issues affecting their children's learning.

As one parent explained:

"I receive communication through messages on my phone and through the child." (Parent B)

Informal communication may be particularly important in ECE settings where young children require close collaboration between teachers and families. Frequent interactions help parents understand children's strengths, challenges, and developmental needs, thereby supporting timely intervention when difficulties arise.

Communication Challenges and Their Impact on Educational Progress

Despite recognising the importance of communication, parents identified several barriers that reduced its effectiveness. These barriers included limited access to mobile devices, electricity challenges, language difficulties, and lengthy written communications. For example:

"Sometimes my phone is off because there is no power to charge it." (Parent B)

"Sometimes I do not understand the language used." (Parent E)

"The newsletters are too long and I do not always finish reading them." (Parent D)

These challenges may reduce parents' access to important educational information, thereby limiting their ability to support learning activities at home. When communication is infrequent, inaccessible, or difficult to understand, opportunities for collaboration between teachers and parents are weakened, potentially affecting children's academic progress.

Communication and Parental Engagement in Learning

The study further found that communication influences the extent to which parents participate in their children's learning. Parents who received information and guidance from schools were more likely to attempt homework supervision, monitor educational activities, and provide encouragement to their children.

However, communication alone was not sufficient to guarantee involvement. Time constraints, work responsibilities, and limited confidence in supporting academic work affected parents' capacity to act on information received from teachers.

For instance:

"I do not always have time to sit with them." (Parent E)

"I don't even understand the tasks sometimes." (Parent B)

These findings indicate that while communication creates opportunities for involvement, its impact on educational progress depends on whether parents possess adequate time, resources, and understanding to support their children's learning.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study sought to examine the extent to which formal and informal communication between parents and teachers influences the educational progress of children in Early Childhood Education (ECE). From the above discussions, it is evident that communication contributes to educational progress through several pathways:

1. Improved parental awareness of school expectations and learning activities.
2. Enhanced homework and learning support at home.
3. Early identification of learning challenges through parent-teacher collaboration.
4. Increased emotional support and encouragement for children.
5. Greater consistency between school and home learning environments.

Where communication was effective and accessible, parents appeared better equipped to guide and support their children. Conversely, communication barriers often reduced parental participation and weakened the link between home and school.

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