

An Investigation into Parental Involvement and Its Influence on Educational Outcomes in Selected Rural Schools of Gwembe District, Zambia

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Abstract: This study examined the role of parents in supporting their children's education and how such involvement affects learners' academic performance. The study focused on various forms of parental engagement, including participation in school activities, communication with teachers, supervision of homework, and provision of learning materials. The study adopted a mixed methods approach and a descriptive survey research design. The target population comprised 222 participants; head teachers, teachers, parents, and pupils from three selected secondary schools in Gwembe District. Quantitative data from the questionnaires were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) whereas the qualitative data from interviews were analysed using thematic analysis. Findings revealed that students whose parents were actively involved in school-related activities demonstrated higher academic achievement and motivation compared to those whose parents were less engaged. Additionally, the study found that socio-economic constraints and low parental literacy levels significantly hindered meaningful participation in children's education. The study concluded that parental involvement plays a crucial role in improving learners' educational outcomes and fostering positive attitudes toward schooling. The study therefore recommended that the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with local community leaders, implement community-based sensitization programs and parent-teacher partnerships to empower parents with the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively support their children's learning despite existing rural challenges.

Keywords: Academic Performance, Educational Outcomes, Parental Involvement, Rural Education and Socio-economic Factors.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Parental involvement in education has increasingly been recognized as a fundamental component of children's academic success and overall development (Zulu & Chanda, 2025). Globally, numerous studies emphasize that when parents play an active role in their children's education by monitoring academic progress, assisting with homework, attending parent-teacher meetings, and fostering a positive learning atmosphere at home students are more likely to perform better both academically and socially (Epstein, 2018; Hornby, 2011). Such engagement contributes not only to improved test scores and higher attendance rates but also to enhanced self-esteem, motivation, and discipline among learners. In Zambia, where educational outcomes are influenced by various social and economic factors, parental involvement remains a key determinant of student achievement (Mulenga & Kabombwe, 2019). However, the extent and form of such involvement vary widely between urban and rural contexts, with rural areas like Gwembe District often facing additional challenges that affect how parents engage in their children's schooling.

Rural schools in Zambia face a range of challenges that can significantly impede effective parental participation in education. These challenges include limited access to educational resources, high poverty levels, low literacy rates among parents, long distances to schools, and inadequate school infrastructure (Moonga & Chinyama, 2021; Chanda et al., 2025). In Gwembe District, many parents engage primarily in subsistence farming, fishing, and other informal economic activities, leaving them with minimal time or energy to devote to school-related responsibilities. Additionally, cultural beliefs and traditional gender roles often assign educational support responsibilities differently between mothers and fathers, with some parents believing that education is solely the responsibility of teachers (Chinyama, 2017). These factors collectively contribute to low levels of parental engagement, which can result in reduced learner motivation, irregular school attendance, poor academic performance, and ultimately, higher dropout rates among pupils (Mumba & Mwansa, 2020).

Despite these challenges, research indicates that parental involvement takes various forms, extending beyond attendance at school meetings. It includes emotional encouragement, provision of learning materials, setting educational expectations, and maintaining communication with teachers (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). In many rural settings, however, the lack of education among parents limits their confidence and ability to support their children's academic endeavors. Parents may be willing to help but are unsure how to engage effectively, particularly when faced with language barriers, limited understanding of the curriculum, or unfamiliarity with modern teaching methods (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Furthermore, schools in rural communities may lack structured programs to actively involve parents or sensitize them on the value of home-based support. As such, understanding the patterns, perceptions, and constraints surrounding parental involvement in Gwembe District is critical to developing practical interventions that strengthen the relationship between schools and communities (Mulenga, 2020).

The significance of this study is further underscored by the broader implications of parental involvement for educational policy and rural development in Zambia. Evidence suggests that when parents actively participate in schooling, not only do student outcomes improve, but the overall school climate and community engagement are positively affected (Epstein, 2018). In rural districts like Gwembe, enhancing parental involvement could serve as a strategy to mitigate educational disparities, promote lifelong learning, and strengthen social cohesion within communities. By examining both the enablers and barriers to parental engagement, this study provides actionable insights for education stakeholders, including policymakers, teachers, and local leaders, to develop targeted interventions that encourage sustained parental participation, ultimately fostering an environment conducive to improved learner achievement and equitable education opportunities (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Mulenga & Kabombwe, 2019).

1.2 Statement of the problem

Rural schools in Zambia, particularly in Gwembe District, had long faced challenges of low learner performance and high dropout rates, despite the recognized benefits of parental involvement in education. Factors such as parental illiteracy, limited access to learning resources, and cultural beliefs that did not prioritize formal education had constrained effective engagement (Musonda, 2011). Additionally, parents' involvement is often limited by the demands of subsistence farming and informal labor, leaving little time or capacity to support their children's schooling. While research in other rural districts, such as Kalomo, had shown that parental engagement positively influenced learners' academic outcomes (Simweleba & Serpell, 2020), similar studies focusing on Gwembe District were scarce. This gap in knowledge has hindered the formulation of targeted interventions to enhance parental participation and improve educational outcomes. Consequently, this study investigated the extent, forms, and barriers of parental involvement in Gwembe District to provide evidence-based recommendations for strengthening home school partnerships and fostering improved student achievement.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

- To examine the extent and forms of parental involvement in the education of children in selected rural schools of Gwembe District, Zambia.
- To identify the socio-economic, cultural, and logistical barriers that influence parental participation and its impact on learners' academic performance in the selected schools.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored in Epstein's Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence, which posited that children's learning and development were shaped by the interaction between three primary spheres: family, school, and community (Epstein, 2018). The theory emphasized that effective collaboration and mutual engagement among these spheres positively

influenced students’ academic and social outcomes. In the context of rural schools in Gwembe District, parental involvement represented the family sphere, which interacted with the school environment to support learners’ education. The theory also highlighted the importance of understanding the forms and barriers of parental engagement, suggesting that when parents were actively involved through monitoring homework, attending meetings, or fostering a supportive home environment students experienced higher motivation, improved academic performance, and better overall development (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). By applying this theoretical lens, the study investigated how parental participation in rural settings contributed to educational outcomes and how schools and communities could strengthen these interactions to enhance learning.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is significant as it provides insights into how parents’ engagement in school activities, decision-making, and learning support can enhance students’ academic performance and overall development. The findings can guide school administrators, policymakers, and educational planners in designing strategies to strengthen parent–school partnerships, particularly in rural contexts where resources and support systems may be limited. Additionally, the study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by highlighting the specific ways parental involvement affects student motivation, attendance, and achievement, thereby informing interventions that can improve educational outcomes. It also serves as a reference for future research in similar rural settings, fostering evidence-based practices aimed at enhancing community participation in education

2. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a mixed methods approach and a descriptive survey research design to investigate the influence of parental involvement on educational outcomes in selected rural schools of Gwembe District, Zambia. This design was chosen because it allowed for the collection of detailed information from a large group of respondents to understand their perceptions, behaviors, and experiences regarding parental involvement. The target population comprised head teachers, teachers, parents, and pupils from three selected secondary schools in Gwembe District. These participants were considered directly involved in the education process and capable of providing relevant insights on parental involvement and its impact on students’ educational outcomes. A purposive sampling technique was used to select schools with active parent–teacher associations and varied levels of parental engagement. Within these schools, a stratified random sampling method was employed to select respondents from different groups (teachers, parents, pupils and head teachers), ensuring representation across the different categories. A total of 222 respondents were targeted, this was 10% of the target population 2220. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire for parents, pupils and teachers, and interview guides for head teachers. The questionnaire included both closed-ended and open-ended questions to capture quantitative data on parental involvement frequency, types, and perceived impact on student performance, as well as qualitative insights on challenges and best practices. Interviews provided deeper understanding of school policies and strategies to engage parents. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) to summarize levels of parental involvement and their influence on student outcomes. Qualitative data from interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and insights regarding parental engagement. The study ensured informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study, and anonymity was maintained throughout. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from Rockview University and relevant district education offices.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 The Extent and Forms of Parental Involvement in the Education of Children in Selected Rural Schools of Gwembe District

Table 1: The Extent and Forms of Parental Involvement in the Education of Children

Category	Aspect of Parental Involvement	Percentage (%)	Description
Forms of Involvement	Infrastructural Support	78%	Parents contributed labor, materials, or funds for classrooms, latrines, and water facilities.
	Participation in PCSCs / School Governance	62%	Parents engaged in committees to make decisions about school management and resource allocation.

Category	Aspect of Parental Involvement	Percentage (%)	Description
Academic Involvement	Extracurricular / Community-Based Activities	54%	Parents supervised school events, co-curricular activities, and community learning programs.
	Assisting Children with Homework	28%	Parents helped children with homework or monitored academic progress.
	Perception of Teachers as Primary Educators	65%	Parents considered academic learning the responsibility of teachers.
Barriers to Involvement	Economic Constraints Limiting Academic Support	71%	Parents reported that household work or low income limited their engagement in academic activities.
	Illiteracy / Low Education	68%	Parents lacked skills to assist with academic work.
	Communication Gaps with Schools	59%	Parents received irregular or delayed information about school programs.
Enhancement Strategies	Economic Hardship Affecting Overall Participation	64%	Financial constraints limited provision of learning materials and attendance at school meetings.
	Improved Engagement through Teacher Training	75%	Teachers reported better parental collaboration after engagement-focused training.
	Enhanced Participation via PCSCs / Committees	62%	Parents felt empowered to contribute meaningfully through committees.
	Participation Boosted by Government / Community Support	68%	Parents increased involvement due to PTAs, financial support, and community sensitization.

The study findings revealed that parental involvement in the education of children in rural schools of Gwembe District was largely observed through infrastructural contributions. Parents actively provided labor, materials, and financial assistance for the construction, maintenance, and repair of school facilities, including classrooms, latrines, and water points (Mweembe, 2019). Such contributions were essential in rural contexts where government resources were limited and schools often lacked adequate facilities. By engaging in these activities, parents demonstrated a deep commitment to the education of their children and a recognition of the importance of functional learning environments. This involvement not only address immediate infrastructural needs but also reflects the communal ethos in rural Zambia, where education is considered a shared responsibility among families, local leaders, and school authorities (Kashumba et al., 2025).

Parental involvement extend beyond physical contributions into governance and decision-making through Parent-Community School Committees (PCSCs). These committees enable parents to participate in key school decisions, such as resource allocation, policy implementation, and monitoring school performance (USAID, 2014). By engaging in governance processes, parents were able to influence the prioritization of school projects, identify pressing challenges, and hold school management accountable. This form of involvement reinforce transparency and accountability, while simultaneously fostering a sense of ownership and empowerment among parents, who feel directly responsible for the welfare of the schools and the quality of education provided to their children.

The study further indicated that parents actively participated in extracurricular and community-based activities that indirectly supported both the academic and social development of their children. For example, parents took leading roles in organizing and supervising cultural events, sports competitions, and community learning initiatives, which not only provided children with avenues for skill development but also fostered a sense of responsibility, teamwork, and social cohesion within the community (Banda, 2019; Chansa, 2021). These activities create informal learning environments where children can apply classroom knowledge in practical contexts, enhancing their problem-solving abilities, creativity, and interpersonal skills (Tembo, 2020; Chanda, 2024).

One of the head teachers observed that:

“Such engagement extend the concept of parental involvement beyond conventional material and administrative support, demonstrating that parents could significantly influence children’s holistic development through active participation in social, cultural, and educational activities”.

By contributing time, expertise, and guidance in these areas, parents help strengthen the bonds between schools and the wider community, facilitating environments that are supportive of both learning and character development (Mbewe & Phiri, 2018). Moreover, this active participation reinforced the value of community-centered education, where learning extended beyond the classroom to include mentorship, moral guidance, and opportunities for civic engagement, reflecting the multifaceted nature of parental involvement in rural educational contexts (Zimba, 2017). Collectively, these findings highlighted that parental involvement in rural schools was not limited to financial or logistical contributions but also included governance, social mentorship, and engagement in activities that enriched children's social, cultural, and educational experiences. Such comprehensive involvement demonstrated that effective parental participation could create holistic learning environments, bridging formal education with community and cultural development while promoting overall child well-being.

Despite their extensive contributions to school infrastructure, parental engagement in children's academic activities was relatively limited. Many parents lacked the literacy skills or educational background necessary to provide meaningful academic support, such as assisting with homework, monitoring learning progress, or reinforcing classroom lessons (Simweleba & Serpell, 2020). This limited involvement often resulted in children receiving minimal academic reinforcement at home, which could have negatively impacted their overall learning outcomes. The findings suggested that while parents were willing to support education, structural constraints, including low educational attainment, hindered their ability to contribute effectively to academic development.

Cultural beliefs and societal expectations significantly influenced the extent and nature of parental involvement in children's education. In many rural communities, education is predominantly seen as the responsibility of teachers, while parents are traditionally expected to provide only material or moral support (Ou & Reynolds, 2008; Lareau, 2011). This perception often discourages parents from actively participating in academic activities at home, such as assisting with homework, discussing school lessons, or monitoring academic progress (Patall et al., 2008). Consequently, many parents assume a passive role in their children's education, believing that intervening in academic matters could be inappropriate or disrespectful within their cultural context (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). The study further indicated that these cultural norms and societal expectations limited parental engagement, which negatively affected learners' academic performance and motivation. Children whose parents are minimally involved in school-related activities are more likely to struggle with completing assignments, understanding lessons, and developing effective study habits (Wilder, 2014). The lack of engagement reinforces a cycle in which academic support at home is undervalued, sustaining the notion that education is the sole responsibility of teachers rather than a shared commitment between home and school (Fan, 2001; Chanda & Madoda, 2024).

Economic constraints compounded the limited parental involvement in academic activities. Many parents relied on subsistence farming or casual labor to meet household needs, leaving them with insufficient time and energy to engage in educational support (Simweleba & Serpell, 2020). Additionally, parents often lacked the financial resources to provide textbooks, stationery, or other learning materials that could have facilitated academic engagement. These findings highlighted the interconnectedness of economic hardship, limited literacy, and constrained academic support, emphasizing the need for interventions that targeted both social and financial barriers to parental involvement in rural education.

Illiteracy and low levels of formal education among parents emerged as a primary barrier to effective engagement in children's education. Parents who could not read or write found it challenging to guide their children in academic tasks, monitor progress, or understand school curricula, limiting their capacity to participate meaningfully (Mweembe, 2019). This situation left teachers as the primary agents of learning support, often creating a disconnection between home and school environments. It underscored the need for educational programs targeting parental literacy and skill-building to enhance academic involvement.

Communication gaps between schools and parents further impeded involvement. Many parents reported that they did not receive regular updates on children's academic performance, school policies, or participation requirements (Simweleba & Serpell, 2020). This lack of information made it difficult for parents to engage in collaborative efforts with teachers or to monitor their children's learning effectively. Strengthening communication through regular parent-teacher meetings, newsletters, or community engagement forums was critical in ensuring that parents could contribute meaningfully to educational processes and outcomes.

Economic hardship also limited parental engagement in school-related activities. Parents with constrained financial resources were often unable to provide essential learning materials, participate in school programs, or attend meetings due to competing survival priorities (Chansa, 2021). The study highlighted that financial pressures not only affected material support but also time and energy available for engagement in children's learning. Addressing these economic barriers required targeted interventions such as subsidized educational resources, community support programs, and government initiatives to alleviate poverty-related constraints.

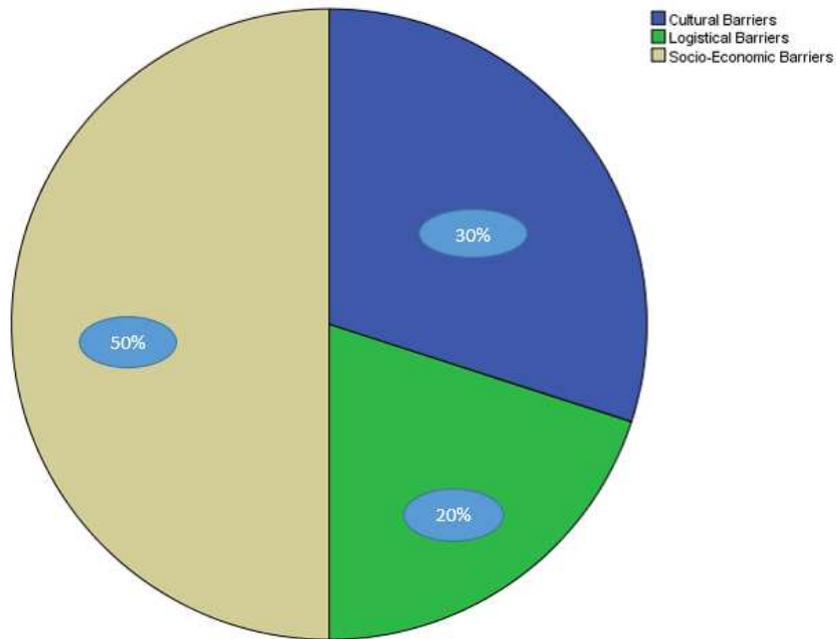
Teacher training programs that emphasized parental engagement were identified as a crucial strategy for enhancing meaningful involvement in children's education. Such programs equipped educators with practical skills in home-school collaboration, effective communication, and relationship building, enabling them to foster partnerships that encouraged parents to participate actively in both academic and non-academic activities (Epstein, 2018; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2019). Teachers trained in these approaches were able to implement structured parent-teacher interactions, workshops, and feedback systems that motivated caregivers to support learning at home and in the community (Fan & Chen, 2020; Hill & Tyson, 2009).

In addition, teacher training programs provided strategies for engaging parents with low literacy levels or limited prior educational experience. Techniques such as the use of visual aids, storytelling, community meetings, and culturally sensitive communication helped reduce parental apprehension and built confidence, allowing them to contribute meaningfully to their children's education (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Kim & Hill, 2015). These strategies ensured inclusivity, enabling all parents, regardless of their educational background, to participate in activities such as homework support, school governance, and literacy or numeracy initiatives (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005; Fan & Chen, 2020). Overall, teacher training that emphasize parental engagement strengthen home-school partnerships and enhance the overall learning environment (Lufupa et al., 2024). Educators became facilitators of parental involvement, empowering caregivers to take active roles in their children's academic and social development while promoting strong community-school linkages (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2019; Epstein, 2018). By preparing teachers to engage parents effectively, such programs contributed to holistic student development and the creation of supportive educational ecosystems in diverse contexts (Hill & Tyson, 2009; Kim & Hill, 2015).

Strengthening governance structures such as PCSCs further enhanced parental participation. Active involvement in these committees allowed parents to influence decision-making, school resource allocation, and program oversight (USAID, 2014). The presence of formalized structures ensured that parental contributions were recognized, organized, and sustained, while fostering a sense of responsibility and ownership over school initiatives. Through these structures, parents were able to provide both strategic input and practical support, bridging the gap between home and school. Government policies and community-based interventions played a pivotal role in supporting active parental involvement. Policies that formally recognized parents' roles through Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs), provided financial support for low-income families, and promoted community sensitization programs created an enabling environment for sustained engagement (Banda, 2019). These strategies addressed both social and economic barriers, fostering comprehensive parental involvement across infrastructure, governance, and academic activities, which ultimately contributed to improved educational outcomes for learners.

3.2 The Socio-Economic, Cultural and Logistical Barriers that Influence Parental Participation and its Impact on Learners' Academic Performance

The study findings showed that parental participation in education is widely recognized as a critical factor influencing learners' academic success. However, various barriers can hinder parents from actively engaging in school activities, monitoring academic progress, or supporting learning at home. Understanding these barriers—whether socio-economic, cultural, or logistical—is essential for identifying strategies that can enhance parental involvement and improve learners' academic outcomes in the selected schools. The study found three major barriers that influence parental participation and showed how these barriers impact on learner's academic performance. The socio-economic barriers were recorded highest at 50%, cultural barriers recorded 30% and logistical barriers recorded 20%. Figure1 below summarised these findings;



Parental income and employment status are significant socio-economic factors that influence parental participation in children’s education, which in turn affects learners’ academic performance. Parents with stable and adequate incomes are better positioned to provide essential learning resources such as textbooks, stationery, and access to private tutoring, all of which can enhance children’s learning experiences and academic outcomes (Duncan, 2011). Higher-income parents are also more likely to engage in school-related activities, including parent-teacher meetings, school committees, and extracurricular programs, which foster stronger home-school collaboration and positively influence learner performance (Chanda et al., 2024). One of the parents explained that:

“Limited financial resources can reduce parents’ ability to participate in school activities, provide learning materials, or attend meetings due to work obligations. Low-income parents may prioritize earning a living over academic involvement, affecting learners’ academic performance”.

Conversely, parents with low or irregular incomes often face financial constraints that limit their ability to participate actively in their children’s education. These constraints may prevent them from purchasing necessary educational materials or attending school functions, thereby restricting their engagement and support for learning at home (Schildberg-Hörisch, 2016). Employment status further shapes parental involvement; parents engaged in long or irregular work hours may have limited time and energy to assist with homework, monitor academic progress, or communicate with teachers, which reduces the quality of support children receive. In some cases, the stress and fatigue associated with demanding employment can negatively impact parents’ ability to maintain consistent involvement in education. Research shows that these socio-economic barriers contribute to persistent achievement gaps, with children from lower-income or unstable employment households often performing worse academically due to reduced guidance, supervision, and encouragement at home (Dahl, 2012).

The education level of parents emerged as a critical socio-economic barrier influencing parental participation and, consequently, learners’ academic performance in the selected schools. Parents with higher levels of education were more likely to understand the value of schooling, engage actively in their children’s learning, assist with homework, and communicate effectively with teachers, thereby fostering a supportive home learning environment (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). Conversely, parents with limited formal education often faced challenges in guiding their children academically, interpreting school expectations, or attending school activities, which led to lower levels of involvement and reduced academic support at home (Fan & Chen, 2001). This gap in educational attainment among parents often translated into disparities in learners’ performance, as children from households with poorly educated parents tended to struggle with foundational skills and exhibited lower motivation and achievement compared to their peers. Studies have shown that initiatives aimed at increasing parental literacy and providing workshops on educational engagement can help mitigate these

barriers, promoting better learning outcomes for students (Hill & Tyson, 2009). Thus, parental education levels directly shaped the degree and quality of parental participation, ultimately influencing the academic success of learners in the selected schools.

Time constraints resulting from economic pressures were identified as a significant socio-economic barrier that influenced parental participation in learners' education. Many parents in the selected schools were engaged in multiple income-generating activities or long working hours to sustain their households, leaving them with limited time to attend school meetings, assist with homework, or participate in other educational activities. This lack of availability often led to reduced supervision of learners' academic progress and limited engagement in school-based programs, which, in turn, negatively affected learners' performance (Hill & Tyson, 2009). Research has shown that when parents are unable to allocate sufficient time to their children's education due to economic demands, children often exhibit lower motivation, incomplete assignments, and decreased academic achievement (Jeynes, 2012). Consequently, the interplay between economic pressures and time limitations underscores the need for schools to design flexible engagement strategies, such as evening or weekend parent sessions, to accommodate working parents and mitigate the adverse impact on learner outcomes. This barrier highlights that socio-economic conditions directly influence the level and quality of parental involvement, which is crucial for enhancing educational performance.

Perceptions of parental roles significantly shaped parental participation in the educational processes of learners, often acting as a cultural barrier that influenced academic outcomes in the selected schools. In many communities, parents perceived their primary responsibility as providing material support, such as school fees, uniforms, and other basic needs, while leaving the intellectual and instructional aspects of education entirely to teachers (Chansa, 2021). This traditional viewpoint limited parents' involvement in activities such as helping with homework, monitoring progress, or engaging in school-based programs, which are critical for reinforcing learning at home. Such perceptions were often reinforced by societal norms and long-standing cultural beliefs that education was the exclusive domain of schools, with parental input regarded as supplementary or unnecessary. Consequently, learners in households where parents maintained this passive role tended to experience lower academic motivation, less personalized support, and diminished performance compared to peers whose parents actively engaged in educational activities (Simweleba & Serpell, 2020). These dynamics underscored the need for sensitization programs and community awareness initiatives to reshape parental perceptions, encouraging more active participation in both the academic and developmental aspects of their children's education.

Additionally, gender roles and societal expectations significantly influenced parental participation in the education of children in the selected schools. In many communities, traditional norms assigned specific responsibilities to mothers and fathers, often limiting mothers to domestic duties while fathers were seen as the primary breadwinners (Chirwa, 2022). This division of labor constrained the time and resources available for both parents to engage actively in school-related activities, such as attending parent-teacher meetings or assisting with homework. Furthermore, these cultural expectations sometimes reinforced the belief that education was a secondary priority for girls compared to boys, resulting in uneven support for children's learning based on gender (Tembo, 2021). Such dynamics not only restricted parental involvement but also negatively affected learners' academic performance, as inconsistent guidance and encouragement from parents reduced motivation and engagement in school activities. Addressing these gendered perceptions through sensitization programs and community education was thus essential for promoting equitable parental involvement and improving educational outcomes for all learners.

The findings further noted that community beliefs and traditions in Zambia significantly influence parental participation in education, often acting as cultural barriers that impact learners' academic performance. In many rural areas, traditional practices and cultural norms shape how parents perceive their roles in education. For instance, in Kalomo District, Southern Province, an intervention aimed at enhancing parental involvement in homework revealed that many parents were initially disengaged due to cultural perceptions that education was solely the responsibility of teachers (Simweleba, 2020). Similarly, in the Zimba District, family literacy practices were found to be influenced by cultural norms, with some parents unaware of the importance of their involvement in their children's education (Chansa-Kabali, 2023). Additionally, cultural ceremonies and traditional obligations often take precedence over school participation, further reducing opportunities for parents to engage with their children's learning. Addressing these barriers requires community sensitization and awareness programs that highlight the importance of parental involvement, challenge restrictive traditions, and encourage supportive practices for all children's education.

The study results also revealed that distance to schools is a significant logistical barrier that influences parental participation and, consequently, learners' academic performance in the selected schools. In many rural and peri-urban communities, schools are often located far from students' homes, making it difficult for parents to engage regularly in school-related activities such as parent-teacher meetings, academic monitoring, and participation in school events (Mulkeen, 2010). Some pupils noted that:

"Parents living far from school may find attending meetings or supporting school activities physically challenging, especially in rural areas with limited transport".

The long distances can be exacerbated by poor transportation infrastructure, high transport costs, or unsafe routes, which limit parents' physical ability to support their children's education effectively (UNICEF, 2015). As a result, parental involvement is reduced, and children may not receive the necessary guidance and encouragement at home to complement their learning in school. Studies have shown that limited parental engagement due to distance is associated with lower academic achievement, absenteeism, and decreased motivation among learners, highlighting the critical role of accessibility in promoting effective home-school collaboration (Gustafsson, 2014). Addressing this barrier requires interventions such as community-based schools, improved transport options, and initiatives to facilitate parental participation despite geographical constraints.

Transport and infrastructure limitations present significant logistical barriers that affect parental participation and, consequently, learners' academic performance in the selected schools. In many rural and peri-urban areas, poor road networks, long distances, and inadequate transport services make it difficult for parents to attend school meetings, monitor academic progress, or engage in extracurricular activities. Parents who rely on walking or infrequent public transport often find it challenging to visit schools regularly, especially during adverse weather conditions when roads become impassable (Mukuka, 2020). Furthermore, the lack of reliable transport infrastructure not only discourages parental involvement but also affects learners' punctuality and attendance, as some children travel long distances to school without adequate support from parents (Banda & Njobvu, 2021). This limited parental engagement reduces opportunities for home-school collaboration, weakening the link between families and educators that is essential for enhancing student learning outcomes. Improved transport systems and school accessibility, therefore, play a critical role in fostering sustained parental involvement and improving educational performance in under-resourced communities.

Moreover, school scheduling and communication gaps present significant logistical barriers that influence parental participation and, consequently, learners' academic performance in the selected schools. One of the parents expressed that:

"Many schools schedule meetings, academic consultations, and school events during working hours, making it difficult for employed or self-employed parents to attend and engage in their children's education".

In addition, inadequate communication channels between schools and parents often result in parents being unaware of important academic updates, events, or performance issues. The absence of effective communication platforms such as digital messaging systems, newsletters, or parent-teacher forums creates a disconnection that limits parental involvement in decision-making and learning support (Epstein, 2018). Furthermore, some schools rely heavily on learners to relay information to parents, which often leads to miscommunication or information loss (Mosha, 2020). These scheduling and communication challenges reduce the frequency and quality of interactions between parents and teachers, thereby hindering collaborative efforts aimed at improving student outcomes. Studies have shown that when schools adopt flexible meeting schedules and maintain open, consistent communication, parental engagement increases, leading to better academic motivation and performance among learners (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011).

The study findings also recorded that reduced academic monitoring by parents has a significant impact on learners' academic performance, often resulting in diminished motivation, weak study habits, and inconsistent school attendance. When parents fail to supervise homework, track academic progress, or communicate regularly with teachers, learners are more likely to experience academic challenges and reduced achievement. Studies in Zambia have shown that when parents actively monitor their children's schoolwork and provide home-based support, learners perform better in literacy and numeracy subjects (Simweleba & Serpell, 2020). Similarly, a study conducted in Ghana revealed that limited parental involvement in monitoring students' progress contributed to poor performance among Senior High School learners (Ayimbila et al., 2022). Research from Rwanda also confirmed that consistent parental monitoring was strongly associated with improved student

outcomes and higher motivation levels (Umurerwa & Mugiraneza, 2021). These findings collectively indicate that reduced academic monitoring deprives learners of essential academic and emotional support, leading to lower educational attainment in the selected schools.

Additionally, low motivation and encouragement from parents significantly influence learners' academic performance, particularly in contexts where parental involvement is limited. One of the teachers noted that:

“When parents fail to provide consistent motivation, emotional support, or recognition of effort, learners often experience reduced self-esteem and academic drive, leading to poor classroom engagement and achievement”.

Research in African contexts shows that students whose parents demonstrate active encouragement through praising effort, attending school meetings, and discussing academic goals tend to exhibit stronger intrinsic motivation and higher academic performance (Okeke, 2014; Nyarko, 2011). Conversely, in households where parents show minimal interest in school activities or provide limited academic guidance, learners often perceive education as a low priority, which negatively affects their commitment to learning (Mensah & Kuranchie, 2013). In Zambian schools, the lack of motivational support is often linked to parents' low educational backgrounds and limited understanding of their role in fostering academic enthusiasm among children (Kapinga, 2014). Therefore, promoting parental encouragement through community awareness and school-based sensitization programs can enhance learners' academic outcomes by reinforcing the value of persistence, goal setting, and academic excellence.

Moreover, a disconnection between home and school represents a significant barrier to effective parental participation and has a profound impact on learners' academic performance. When there is limited communication or collaboration between parents and teachers, important information about a child's progress, challenges, and needs often fails to be shared, resulting in missed opportunities for early intervention and support (Mweru, 2017). This disconnection can stem from various factors such as lack of trust, poor communication channels, or differing expectations between parents and educators regarding their respective roles in a child's education (Epstein, 2018). In rural and low-resource settings, the problem is often worsened by limited access to school meetings, language barriers, and parents' limited understanding of school systems or curricula (Nyarko, 2019). Consequently, learners may experience inconsistent support at home, reduced motivation, and lower academic achievement due to the absence of a cohesive learning environment. Strengthening the partnership between home and school through regular communication, parental engagement programs, and inclusive school policies is therefore crucial in bridging this gap and fostering improved educational outcomes (Kimu & Steyn, 2013).

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study established that parental involvement was a critical determinant of learners' academic performance and overall educational experience. The research demonstrated that active engagement by parents through monitoring academic progress, supporting learning at home, attending school activities, and fostering motivation positively influenced students' achievement and school participation. However, socio-economic challenges, cultural beliefs, low parental literacy, and logistical barriers such as distance to schools limited consistent parental engagement, undermining its potential benefits. The study concluded that enhancing parental involvement through targeted community sensitization, effective communication channels between schools and parents, and supportive policies could significantly improve educational outcomes in rural contexts. Ultimately, fostering strong partnerships among parents, teachers, and communities was essential for sustainable academic development and equitable learning opportunities for all students in Gwembe District.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are actions that should be taken on the basis of the findings of this study;

1. Enhance Community Sensitization and Awareness Programs:

- Schools and local authorities should organize regular community workshops and campaigns to educate parents on the importance of their involvement in children's education.

2. Improve Communication and Collaboration Between Schools and Parents:

- Schools should establish effective and consistent communication channels, such as parent-teacher meetings, mobile notifications, and community liaison officers, to ensure that parents are well-informed about their children's academic progress and school activities.

3. Develop Policies and Support Mechanisms to Reduce Barriers to Parental Involvement:

- Government and school authorities should implement policies that address socio-economic and logistical challenges, such as providing transport support, flexible meeting schedules, and literacy programs for parents.

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