The Impact of Parental Socio-economic Factors in Determining Students’ Academic Performance in Tanzania: The Case of Selected Public Secondary Schools in Kongwa

**ABSTRACT**

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| --- |
| Notably, the purpose of education is to equip students with necessary knowledge that would prepare them to economically competitive world. The introduction of fee-free education policies in Tanzania has led to a significant influx of community secondary schools and a subsequent increase in student enrolment rates. While this development has made education more accessible, it has also presented new challenges, particularly regarding the role of parents in their children's education. Understanding the impact of parental socio-economic factors on students' academic performance in these community schools is crucial. This study investigated the influence of parents’ academic level and employment status on students' academic performance. Both quantitative and qualitative research approaches were used. The population consisted of teachers, students, and parents from 13 community secondary schools, with a total sample size of 169 respondents. Qualitative data were analysed thematically whereas; quantitative data were analysed using frequencies and percentages. Findings revealed that parents’ academic level had a positive influence on their children’s academic performance, as educated parents were more likely to provide academic support. Additionally, the study found that parents’ employment status significantly impacted students’ academic performance, as employed parents could afford provide basic necessities needed for education purpose. Therefore, the study recommends that there should be worked out background knowledge on students’ parents so that teachers can foster students’ academic progress by providing the best input strategies based on such understanding. |

*Keywords: Socio- economic factors, Academic Performance, Community Schools*

1. **INTRODUCTION**
	1. **Background of the Study**

Academic matters form a cornerstone for every country’s development agenda. Recognising the pivotal role of education, both developed and developing nations are striving to provide quality education to their citizens. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) underscores the importance of compulsory education, aiming to ensure that by 2030, every school-aged child will be literate and numerate [1], [2]. Studies suggest that parental socio-economic status (SES) significantly influences the academic outcomes of their children. For instance, [3] also found that parental SES impacts their involvement in their children’s academic performance. A similar opinion was observed by [4] and [5], found that 59% of parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds in the USA were less involved in their children’s education.

In the African context, [6] conducted a study in Kenya on the relevance of parents’ socio-economic status to students' academic performance. He found that 58% of parents were aware of their educational responsibilities, aligning with Kenya’s National Education Sector Plan (2013-2018) and the Basic Education Act 2013. In Tanzania, [7] examined parental socio-economic factors and involvement in children's education in Ilala district, Dar-es-Salaam. The study revealed that educated, socio-economically advantaged parents, particularly those with university degrees, were more engaged in their children's education and preferred private schools. In contrast, parents with lower educational attainment, comprising 56.7% of the study's respondents, opted for public schools. Similarly, [8] explored the impact of parental income on students’ academic performance in Kinondoni district, Tanzania. He found a correlation between higher parental income and better academic outcomes. This suggests that children from more affluent backgrounds tend to perform better academically compared to those from less stable socio-economic backgrounds.

In Tanzania, despite its fee-free education policy, parents are still required to provide essential academic resources such as exercise books, uniforms, transportation, and lunch [9]. The influx of community secondary schools in Tanzania, coupled with increased enrolment rates resulting from fee-free education policies, has posed a significant challenge regarding parental roles in their children’s schooling [10]. Although the fee-free education policy aims to alleviate the financial burden on parents, research indicates that when parents pay school fees, they are more invested in their children’s education due to their financial contributions [11] Socio-economically advantaged parents are typically more capable of providing these necessities and are more engaged in their children's education than disadvantaged parents [12].

As observed, parental socio-economic factors have a great impact on students’ learning. However, there is limited research focusing specifically on the impact of parental socio-economic factors on students' academic performance in Tanzania’s public secondary schools. Thus, this study seeks to fill this gap by examining how various socio-economic factors, such as parents’ educational background and employment status, influence students' academic performance in the selected public secondary schools. Understanding these relationships is crucial for developing appropriate strategies to support students' academic achievement and maximise the benefits of fee-free education policies.

* 1. **The study objective**

This study was guided by two research objectives:

* + 1. To investigate the relationship between parents’ education level and students’ academic performance.
		2. To examine the relationship between parents’ employment status and students’ academic performance. This study aimed at determining the usefulness of chaining strategy in developing language comprehension ability among deaf pupils in Tanzania.
1. **Literature Review**
	1. **Parents’ Education Level and Students’ Academic Performance**

[13] argue that higher education among parents positively contributes to their children's academic achievement. In their study, they found a large correlation between parents’ education and students’ academic achievement. Similarly, [14] found the outcomes of the regression analysis, with a correlation coefficient (R=.711) indicates a positive link between parents’ education and students’ grade points, at an R-Square value of .505, indicating a predictive nature. They found that 50.5% of the discrepancy in students’ academic achievement was linked to the parents’ education.

On the same, [15] found that parents’ educational level on students’ academic achievements were stronger (r = .15) than other factors such as family background on students’ academic performance (r = .09). Additionally, [5] posit that parents’ level of education is directly proportional to their undertaking of academic matters of their children with seriousness. In their provision, they reveal that learned parents are often keen on matters of their children's school and would go ahead and consult teachers and school administrators on the same. The very contention is shared with [16], whose study revealed that there is a strong determination of educated parents to see their children perform comparatively much better than they did, academically. The findings further stress that parents who had no defined profession were comparatively less concerned with their children’s academic welfare [16]. The arguments are similar to [17], who holds that the higher the parents’ academic level, the better the students’ performance, indicating the academic status of parents as a vital factor that affects the academic performance of students. However, it is argued here that the impact of parental education varies depending on socio-economic factors.

While extensive literature highlights the positive relationship between parents' academic levels and students' academic performance, limited research has been conducted in the context of rural or low-income communities, where parental education levels tend to be lower. This study aimed to bridge this gap by examining the extent to which parents' academic levels impact students' academic success in community secondary schools.

* 1. **Parents’ Employment Status and Students’ Academic Performance**

Literature reveals that there is a strong link between parents’ employment status and students’ academic performance. When parents are employed, they are often able to provide their children with the necessary resources, such as books, stationery, and school uniforms, to succeed in school [18], [19]. Additionally, employed parents may be able to afford private tutoring or after-school programmes, which can further support their children's academic development. Furthermore, employed parents may be able to provide a stable and supportive home environment, which can positively impact their children's emotional well-being and motivation to learn [20]. However, it is important to note that the relationship between parental employment and student achievement is complex and can be influenced by various factors, including the quality of the parent-child relationship, the availability of quality education, and the overall socioeconomic context of their children [21].

Again, [22] write that parents of low income and unreliable cash flow report average results of their children as compared to parents with stable and reliable employment. The very concern is evident with [23], who established that employed parents share social class that push them to respond to the academic needs of their children.

* 1. **Theoretical Framework**

The study was guided by Social Capital Theory (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) and Epstein’s Model. Social Capital Theory stems from Classical Theory, which was developed by Karl Marx between the periods of 1933-1995. According to Marxist provision, economic potential defines society. In this sense, individuals with strong social network ties are comparatively better adjusted than those with weak social network ties [21]. Theory enables a person to exert power on the group; he adds that, in order to gain from the society, certain individuals must provide efforts to acquire social capital by achieving positions of power and status and by developing goodwill [24]. Social capital is important in using social connections and social relations in achieving goals, these goals are not only limited to individuals but are extended to social groups, organizations and even communities [25].

On the other end, Epstein’s theory was developed by Dr. Joyce Epstein, an American scholar in early 1990s [26]. The model was developed in order to address the roles of parents in relation to their contribution towards academic success of their children [27]. The framework was devised on findings that were made from several studies in trying to understand the most effective factors when it comes to children’s education [28]. The model outlines six key types of involvement: parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and community collaboration. The model highlights how both parents’ employment conditions and their education levels affect their ability to engage in their children’s education. The study adopted Epstein’s Model to examine how variations in both employment status and academic level shape parental involvement and, consequently, students' academic performances, particularly in community secondary schools where socio-economic constraints poses additional challenges.

**Conceptual Framework**

**Figure 1 Conceptual Framework Diagram**



Source: The researchers’ conceptualisation (2024)

Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between parents' socio-economic status and their children's academic performance, focusing on two main independent variables: parents' academic level and employment status. Parents' level of education influences their understanding of school-related activities and their engagement in their children's education. Formally employed parents typically earn incomes based on their professional qualifications. These parents are presumed to value education and actively participate in their children's learning, contributing to positive academic outcomes. In contrast, non-formal employed parents often rely on irregular income sources rather than fixed salaries. These parents are concerned with their children’s education such that they offer both moral and monetary support which can affect their involvement in children’s education.

1. **methodology**
	1. **Research Paradigm**

This study adopted a pragmatic research paradigm as the philosophical foundation. This philosophy allows a combination of both positivism and interpretivism. This approach was necessary to support a mixed-methods strategy and descriptive research design, enabling the empirical testing of the relationship between parental roles and academic performance while interpreting contextual nuances, thus aligning the methodology with the study’s objectives and enhancing its analytical depth.

* 1. **Study Population, Sample and Data Collection**

This study targeted parents of Form Two and Form Four students, as well as headmasters, academic masters, classroom teachers, and students from selected public secondary schools in Kongwa District. According to [29], the district hosts 26 public secondary schools with 335 teachers and 14,740 students. To ensure a representative sample, the research employed a mixed sampling approach, integrating both probability and non-probability techniques. Probability sampling, grounded in the principle of equal selection opportunity, utilised simple random sampling to select student respondents: numbers 1 to 10 were written on paper slips; students picked the number 10 were chosen, ensuring unbiased inclusion. Conversely, non-probability sampling was employed through purposive sampling to select classroom teachers, school heads, and academic masters based on their roles, while snowball sampling identified parents through students who provided contacts, and scheduled appointments.

n = N/(1+N(〖e)〗^2 )

335 / (1+335(0.05) 2) = 335 / (1+335(0.0025)) = 182.3

n = (335) / (1+0.8375) = 335 / 1.8375 = 182.3

Therefore, the total sample size will be 182

Therefore, a total of 182 respondents from 13 schools participated in the study, comprising 46 teachers, 78 students and 45 parents. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with heads of schools and parents, while students completed questionnaires using a five-point Likert scale.

* 1. **Data Analysis Procedures**

Data were analysed quantitatively, by first all of subjecting the results to descriptive analysis thereafter laying ground for multiple regression analysis. The regression formula therefore was

Y= B0+ B1X1 + B2X2……+ e

Whereby;

Y= dependent variable which is academic performance

B0 = the intercept

B1= Coefficient 1

B2= Coefficient 2

X1 = Academic level of parents

X2 = Employment status of parents

e= Error term

1. **results and discussion**
	1. **Demographic Characteristics of Respondents**

Demographic information for parents that participated in the study include gender, age, education level, marital status, number of children in secondary education and employment status. For teachers, data included age, gender and working experience, while for students, it includes gender and examination class. Results are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Demographic Information of Respondents**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Demographic Information** | **Frequency** | **Percentage**  |
| **Parents** | **Gender** | Male | 20 | 44.4% |
| Female | 25 | 55.5% |
| **Marital status**  | Single  | 9 | 20% |
| Married  | 36 | 80% |
| **Age**  | 21- 30 years | 3 | 6.7% |
| 31-40 years | 9 | 20% |
| 41- 50 years | 18 | 40% |
| 51 years and above  | 15 | 33.3% |
| **Number of children attending sec school**  | One  | 33 | 73.3% |
| Two and five  | 10 | 22.2% |
| More than five  | 2 | 4.4% |
| **Level of education**  | Non formal education | 2 | 4.4% |
|  | Primary education | 14 | 31.1% |
| Secondary education | 23 | 51.1% |
| Diploma education  | 5 | 11.1% |
| Undergraduate/graduate education  | 1 | 2.2% |
| **Economic engagements**  | Formal employment  | 11 | 24.5% |
| Non formal employment  | 34 | 75.5% |
| **Teachers**  | **Gender**  | Male  | 19 | 41.3% |
| Female  | 27 | 58.6% |
| **Age**  | 21 and 30 | 8 | 17.7% |
| 31 and 40 | 18 | 40% |
| 41 and 50 | 17 | 37.7% |
| 51 and above  | 2 | 4.4% |
| **Working experience**  | Less than five years | 22 | 32.8% |
| Between five and ten years | 28 | 41.7% |
| More than ten years  | 17 | 25.3% |
| **Students**  | **Gender**  | Male  | 39 | 50% |
| Female  | 39 | 50% |
| **Class**  | Form two | 39 | 50% |
| Form four  | 39 | 50% |

Table 1 shows demographic trends, indicating that most parents were married females aged 41–50 years, with secondary level education, non-formal employment, and one child in secondary school. These characteristics suggest potential influences on parental involvement in education. The table also shows a higher proportion of female teachers, primarily aged 31–40 years, with 5–10 years of experience, underscoring their potential in parent-teacher interactions and students’ academic performances. Additionally, students’ demographics, categorised by gender and examination class provide a basis for assessing the relationship between parental

* 1. **Parents’ Education Level and Students’ Academic Performance**

Descriptive statistics were used in the analysis of this study to obtain frequencies and percentages. Findings are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: Parents' Education Levels**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Frequency** | **Percent** |
| Undergraduate/graduate | 1 | 2.2 |
| Diploma | 5 | 11.1 |
| Certificate | 23 | 51.1 |
| Primary  | 14 | 31.1 |
| Non-formal education  | 2 | 4.4 |
| **Total**  | **45** | **100** |

As indicated in Table 2, many parent respondents 23(51.1%) had a certificate of secondary education, whereas only 1(2.2%) was a graduate/undergraduate. If you take those with primary and those with secondary education together, they make a total of 37(82%). This suggests that the majority of parents in Kongwa area have basic education. Therefore, it is imperative to understand how their social background is influential in their children’s education.

To explore the influence of parental education on student academic performance, a bivariate correlation analysis was conducted. This analysis aimed to determine whether there is a statistically significant relationship between the education level of parents and the academic performance of their children. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3: Bivariate Correlation Analysis to Determine the Relationship between Parents Academic Level and Students’ Academic Performance**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | **Parents academic level**  | **Students’ performance** |
| **Parents academic level** | Pearson correlation sig (2-tailed) N | 145 | .941.00045 |
| **Students’ performance**  | Pearson correlation sig. (2-tailed) N | .941.00045 | 145 |

Table 3 shows that there was a strong and statistically significant relationship between parents’ education level and their children’s academic performance, as indicated by the correlation coefficient (r=.941, p=.000). These findings confirm that higher parental education levels are positively associated with better academic performance among students. Based on these results, the null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that parents with higher levels of education are more likely to support their children effectively in academic matters, thereby contributing to improved student outcomes.

In addition to the statistical analysis, the finding was also backed up by data from interviews. For instance, during the interview, one head of school stated:

I've observed a strong correlation between parental academic level and students’ academic performance. When parents take an active interest in their child's education, it significantly boosts their motivation and performance. (Head of School DW).

Another head of school remarked:

High academic level of parents can manifest in various ways, such as attending parent-teacher conferences, helping with homework, and creating a supportive learning environment at home. I've seen first-hand how these efforts translate into higher grades, improved test scores, and increased engagement in the classroom. (Head of School HX)

When asked about the role of parents in supporting their children's education, another head of school shared:

Yes, we have a good parent involvement program designed to foster a strong partnership between parents and teachers. Key components of our program include closet contact between teachers, learners as well as parents in addressing challenges faced by learners (Head of School GG)

Parents were also asked about their academic background, to establish the link between their background and students’ academic performance. One parent noted:

While my formal education may not have been extensive, I've always placed a strong emphasis on education and learning. I've instilled a love of reading and curiosity in my child from a young age. We often discuss current events, solve puzzles, and engage in stimulating conversations. I believe that by creating a positive and supportive learning environment at home, I've contributed to my child's academic success. (Parent RR).

The findings provided herewith resonate with available literature, supporting the relationship between parents’ education level and students’ academic performance. For instance, empirical evidence from the study reveals a correlation coefficient (r=.941, p=.000), indicating a positive correlation. This finding aligns with [13], who posit that educated parents are likely to influence their children’s academic outcomes. Additionally, the findings revealed that educated parents instilled a reading culture in their children. This finding links with [15] assertion that parents’ education levels have a direct effect on students’ school performance. More so, the findings provide that there is a connection between contact placed on learners by their educated parents, compared to little emphasis from learners with less educated parents. This finding correlates with [14], whose arguments are based on financial details, characterised by parents’ academic level and ultimately, students’ academic achievements.

* 1. **Parents’ Employment Status and Students’ Academic Performance**

The study also explored the relationship between parents' employment status and the academic performance of their children, examining how different employment conditions may influence the support provided to students in their educational journey. Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4: Employment Status of Parents**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Frequency**  | **Percentage**  | **Mean**  | **SD** |
| Formal employment  | 11 | 24.5 | 1.64 | 0.48 |
| Informal employment  | 34 | 75.5 | 1.44 | 0.50 |

Table 4 presents the employment status of parents in relation to students’ academic performance. The results indicate that a majority of parents (75.5%) were engaged in informal employment, while only 24.5% held formal employment. Although the mean scores for both groups are relatively close, students with formally employed parents reported a slightly higher mean academic performance (M = 1.64, SD = 0.48) compared to those whose parents were in informal sector (M = 1.44, SD = 0.50). This suggests a potential link between formal parental employment and improved academic performance, possibly due to greater financial stability or structured home environments.

The relationship between parents’ employment status and students’ academic performance was examined using a bivariate correlation analysis, as presented in Table 5.

**Table 5: Bivariate Correlation Analysis to Determine the Relationship between Employment Status of Parents and Students’ Academic Performance**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | **Parents employment status** | **Student’ performance** |
| **Parents employment status**  | Pearson correlation sig (2-tailed) N | 145 | .940.00045 |
| **Students performance**  | Pearson correlation sig. (2-tailed) N | .940.00045 | 145 |

Table 5 shows the results of a bivariate correlation analysis between parents’ employment status and students’ academic performance. The findings reveal a strong and statistically significant positive correlation (r = .940, p < .001). This indicates that higher or more stable parental employment is closely associated with better academic performance among students. The strength of the correlation suggests that employment status is a key factor influencing educational performance.

In addition to the statistical analysis, the study employed interviews to gather qualitative insights into how parents’ employment status influences students’ academic performance. When asked about the role of financial resources, one head of school noted:

Parents with stable employment often have greater financial resources, which can provide children with access to educational materials, tutoring, extracurricular activities, and quality childcare. These resources can positively impact academic achievement. (Head of School MH).

Another head of school highlighted the effects of financial instability:

Conversely, financial instability due to unemployment or informal employment can create stress and limit access to these resources, potentially affecting academic performance. (Head of School RW).

When discussing time and availability, parents emphasised the influence of work schedules on parental engagement. One parent stated:

Parents' work schedules can influence the amount of time they have to engage with their children's education. Parents with flexible schedules may have more opportunities to assist with homework, attend school events, and provide educational support. (Parent ER)*.*

Another parent added:

Long or unpredictable work hours can limit parental involvement, potentially affecting a child's academic progress. However, it is important to note that ‘quality time’ is very important, not just the quantity of time. (Parent CC).

From the findings, it is apparent that there is a connection between parents’ employment status and students’ academic performance. This is evidenced by the findings, which reveal a strong and statistically significant positive correlation (r = .940, p < .001). Such a finding corresponds with the reviewed literatures, which prove the very notion. Example, [30] posit that there is no correlation in the academic performance between students whose parents are employed and those whose parents are not employed.

Also, the findings suggest that employed parents are financially stable. This finding aligns with various empirical studies. Such literature includes [18], who argues that employed parents have access to cash flow, therefore, can afford the basics such as books, stationery, for which add value to students learning. On the same, the findings have noted that parents' work schedules can influence the amount of time they have to engage with their children's education. This also corresponds with [19] views, who holds that employed parents may be able to afford private tutoring or after-school programmes, which can further support their children's academic performance. A similar perspective was observed by [23], who argued that employed parents, often sharing a similar social class, are more likely to actively address their children's academic needs. [22] cement this idea by arguing that children of parents with low and unstable incomes tend to have average academic results when compared to children whose parents have stable employment.

1. **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study was guided by two research objectives: (1) to investigate the relationship between parents’ education level and students’ academic performance, and (2) to examine the relationship between parents’ employment status and students’ academic performance. This study concludes that there is a strong relationship between parents’ education levels, employment status and students’ academic performance. Higher parental education level and stable employment were linked to better academic performance. Qualitative insights further highlight the advantages of financial stability, availability of educational support, and active parental engagement. Importantly, the data suggest that beyond academic qualifications, factors such as time availability, emotional support, and financial resources often shaped by employment conditions play a critical role in shaping educational performance. These findings underscore the need for policies and school level interventions that encourage parental involvement across socioeconomic backgrounds to foster equitable student achievement.

The study findings revealed that educated parents tend to be more concerned with their children’s education, which is instrumental for these children’s education. Therefore, the study recommends that education policymakers should prioritize educational equity by providing additional resources to students with limited parental support.

Also, the study has established that parents who are employed were economically better and would tend to provide both moral and monetary support for their children, and this would eventually lead to positive academic performance of these children. Thus, the study recommends that policy makers should expand access to social safety nets and welfare programs to alleviate financial burdens on families and enable them to invest in their children's education. Lastly, the study recommends that teachers should create a supportive and inclusive classroom environment where all students feel valued and respected.

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