

Examining the Role of Parental Involvement in Enhancing Academic Outcomes in Junior Schools in Kibra Sub-County, Kenya

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Abstract

Parental involvement is widely acknowledged as a critical determinant of learners' academic achievement, yet its effectiveness in resource-constrained urban contexts remains underexplored. This study examined the influence of parental engagement on academic performance, attendance, and social-emotional development in junior secondary schools in Kibra sub-county, Nairobi. Guided by Epstein's parental involvement framework, the study employed a convergent mixed-methods design. A stratified sample of 480 respondents, including learners, parents, teachers, and head teachers, participated through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS Version 28, and qualitative responses were thematically examined. The findings revealed that home-based support, regular communication with teachers, and active participation in school activities significantly improved learner outcomes. However, barriers such as financial hardship, limited parental education, and work-related time constraints reduced the consistency of parental involvement. The study recommends the adoption of flexible engagement programmes, use of digital communication tools, and parental capacity-building initiatives to strengthen home-school partnerships. These findings provide evidence-based insights for policymakers and educators seeking to enhance academic outcomes in disadvantaged communities.

Keywords: parental involvement, academic performance, home-school partnership, educational barriers, Kibra

Accepted 10/9/2025

Published 22/10/2025

INTRODUCTION

Globally, research demonstrates that strong home-school partnerships enhance both academic achievement and socio-emotional wellbeing. Parental involvement has been consistently associated with improved learner outcomes, including higher test scores, reduced dropout rates, and better student motivation (Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2012). Foundational frameworks such as Epstein's (1995) overlapping spheres theory and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1997) parental involvement model emphasise the diverse pathways through which families support learning—ranging from parenting and communication to volunteering and participation in school decision-making. These frameworks provide an important

lens for understanding how parents influence educational trajectories.

In African contexts, socio-economic realities often constrain parental participation. Munje and Mncube (2018) highlight how poverty, time poverty, and limited parental education reduce the ability of families in low-income urban areas to engage fully in their children's schooling. Similarly, Kojo (2024) illustrates the role of community-based approaches in fostering collective responsibility for education, while Kidenya (2024) shows that parental involvement in homework support and school meetings contributes significantly to learner achievement in Tanzanian schools.

Kenya presents a similar paradox. While studies confirm the benefits of parental involvement, urban informal settlements such as Kibra pose distinct challenges. High poverty levels, informal employment, and low literacy rates often limit effective engagement. Yet Kibra also presents a unique opportunity to examine how parental involvement strategies can help overcome systemic barriers to learning. Research from more resourced parts of the country overshadows the limited empirical evidence on how parents in densely populated, resource-constrained urban settlements navigate these challenges.

This study therefore addresses an important gap by examining the role of parental involvement in enhancing academic outcomes in junior schools in Kibra Sub-County. By situating findings within Kibra's distinctive socio-economic environment and employing a mixed-methods design, the study contributes new insights into how home-school partnerships can be strengthened in disadvantaged urban contexts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Parental involvement has long been recognised as a central factor influencing learners' achievement. Fan and Chen's (2001) meta-analysis established that parental engagement is positively associated with academic performance across multiple contexts, while Jeynes (2012) confirmed these benefits in urban settings, where students from disadvantaged backgrounds particularly benefit from sustained parental support. These findings underscore the significance of home-school partnerships as a global phenomenon, applicable to both developed and developing contexts.

Theoretically, Epstein's (1995) overlapping spheres of influence framework provides a foundational lens, arguing that the intersection of family, school, and community contexts is vital for learner development. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1997) parental involvement model further explains the psychological motivations behind parental engagement, including parental beliefs about their role, sense of efficacy, and perceptions of invitations from schools. Together, these frameworks emphasise that both structural (such as school policies) and psychosocial (such as parental self-efficacy) determine the extent and quality of involvement.

Recent scholarship has expanded these models to highlight cultural and socio-economic variations. For example, Hornby and Lafaele (2011) note that barriers such as parental employment demands, cultural attitudes towards education, and school communication practices influence the level of engagement. Similarly, Wilder (2014) emphasises that type of involvement—whether home-based (e.g., assisting with homework) or school-based (e.g., attending meetings)—affects outcomes differently, suggesting the need for context-sensitive approaches. These perspectives provide a critical backdrop for understanding the African experience.

In Africa, structural inequalities and socio-economic constraints present persistent barriers. Munje and Mncube (2018) discovered that in South Africa, poverty and insufficient parental literacy hindered engagement, despite teachers acknowledging its significance. At the same time, community-driven approaches have been shown to mitigate these challenges. For example, Okeke (2014) showed that when parents worked together in Nigerian schools, it made it easier to keep track of students' attendance and made teachers more responsible. These findings suggest that while individual parents may struggle, collective approaches can enhance involvement in low-resource environments.

Kenyan and East African scholarship provides additional insights. Kidenya (2024) discovered that parental participation in homework assistance and school meetings markedly enhanced student performance in Tanzania, whereas Kojo (2024) emphasised the efficacy of community-based engagement strategies in improving early childhood education outcomes. Within Kenya, however, there remains limited research specifically focused on urban informal settlements such as Kibra, where poverty, informal employment, and low literacy intersect to restrict parental involvement. This issue creates a gap in both empirical evidence and theoretical application, as few studies critically examine how global frameworks translate into these settings.

Overall, the literature reveals consensus on the positive role of parental involvement but also underscores the importance of contextualising strategies within specific socio-economic environments. By integrating established theoretical frameworks with the lived realities of parents in Kibra, this study contributes to bridging the gap between global models and local practice. It advances scholarship by demonstrating how parental engagement can be adapted to overcome systemic barriers in resource-constrained urban communities.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a convergent mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of parental involvement. Kibra Subcounty was purposefully selected due to its socio-economic diversity and persistent educational challenges, which make it a representative case for urban informal settlements.

The target population included 2,000 Grade Seven learners, 200 parents or guardians, 250 teachers, and 50 head teachers. Using a 20% sample ratio, the study selected 480 respondents comprising 400 learners, 20 parents, 50 teachers, and 10 head teachers. Stratified random sampling ensured representation across public, private, and religious junior schools. Although the learner sample was robust, the small number of parents surveyed limits the breadth of parental perspectives, which is acknowledged as a methodological limitation.

Data collection tools included structured question-

naires for learners and teachers and semi-structured interviews for head teachers and parents. The instruments were pre-tested in Kasarani sub-county, with Cronbach's alpha ranging from 0.76 to 0.87, indicating acceptable reliability. Content validity was established through expert review. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS Version 28, employing descriptive statistics and correlation analyses, while qualitative data were subjected to thematic analysis. Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Eldoret, NACOSTI, and local authorities. Informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation were strictly observed.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study confirm that parental involvement significantly enhances learners' academic performance, attendance, and socio-emotional wellbeing in Kibra's junior schools. These results are consistent with recent African studies that continue to demonstrate the centrality of home-school partnerships in learner achievement. For instance, research in Ilala City, Tanzania, revealed that parental education level, socio-economic status, and cultural practices were strong predictors of involvement, which in turn shaped academic and psychosocial outcomes (Magembe, 2024). Similar results have been reported in Nigeria, where parental participation in learners' academic activities was positively associated with improved performance among secondary school students (Abubakar, 2024).

Our findings also resonate with evidence from intervention studies. Akindipe (2025) showed that targeted parental involvement programmes in Nigeria not only improved learners' academic achievement in mathematics but also enhanced self-efficacy, suggesting that structured forms of engagement are particularly impactful. This supports the quantitative patterns in our data, which indicated that practices such as homework monitoring, provision of learning materials, and parental encouragement yielded the highest mean scores and were most consistently associated with improved learner outcomes.

Despite these benefits, the study also highlights enduring barriers to effective parental participation in education. In South Africa, Ndwandwe (2023) reported that parents and teachers recognised the importance of involvement but pointed to financial constraints, time poverty, and weak school-parent communication as limiting factors. Our data from Kibra mirror these challenges, with parents citing irregular working hours and limited literacy as key obstacles to attending school meetings and supporting homework effectively. These findings underline the argument that socio-economic context strongly conditions the nature and extent of parental involvement.

Contextual variation is further highlighted by recent research in rural South Africa, where parents'

engagement was hindered by long distances to schools and inadequate resources (Mabasa, 2025). While Kibra is an urban settlement, its households face what may be termed "resource poverty" rather than geographic distance, as families struggle with limited access to learning materials, overcrowded living conditions, and competing livelihood pressures. This parallel suggests that, although urban and rural contexts differ, they both present unique structural constraints that require context-specific policy responses.

The findings collectively indicate that parental involvement in Kibra possesses transformative potential, yet it cannot be comprehended apart from the contexts of poverty, informal employment, and limited literacy. Like recent studies across Africa, our results suggest that parental support remains a decisive factor in learner achievement, yet it is most effective when schools provide flexible opportunities for engagement, build parental capacity through training, and reduce structural barriers to participation (Akindipe, 2025; Abubakar, 2024; Ndwandwe, 2023). By situating these insights in the context of Kibra, this study contributes to the growing body of literature that calls for adaptive, locally relevant strategies for strengthening home-school partnerships in disadvantaged communities.

CONCLUSION

This study has shown that parental involvement remains a decisive factor in shaping academic performance, attendance, and socio-emotional wellbeing in Kibra's junior schools. Consistent with recent African scholarship, the findings reveal that home-based support, such as homework monitoring and encouragement, exerts stronger effects on learner outcomes than school-based activities, which are often constrained by poverty and irregular working hours (Magembe, 2024; Abubakar, 2024). While the positive impact of parental participation is clear, barriers linked to low literacy, economic hardship, and limited time persist, echoing findings from South Africa and Nigeria that socio-economic conditions critically mediate the extent and nature of engagement (Ndwandwe, 2023; Mabasa, 2025).

This study contributes to the growing body of literature calling for context-sensitive approaches to parental involvement. Rather than viewing engagement as a uniform construct, the results demonstrate the need to adapt strategies to the realities of urban informal settlements, where households face unique challenges. By situating the findings within Kibra's socio-economic environment, the research demonstrates that effective parental involvement is possible even in resource-constrained contexts, provided schools and policymakers actively address structural barriers.

Recommendations

1. **Flexible communication strategies:** Schools should

use SMS platforms, digital apps, and community forums more often to get in touch with parents who don't work regular hours. Studies have shown that improved communication increases parental participation even in disadvantaged contexts (Ndwandwe, 2023).

2. **Capacity-building programmes for parents:** Training workshops can equip parents with skills to support homework and foster positive study habits. Akindipe (2025) demonstrated that structured parental involvement interventions significantly improved learners' self-efficacy and academic performance in mathematics.

3. **Policy support for inclusive engagement:** Education authorities should integrate parental empowerment initiatives into competency-based curriculum implementation, ensuring that involvement is institutionalised rather than left to individual schools.

4. **Collaborative community initiatives:** Partnerships with NGOs and local organisations can provide socio-economic support to families, thereby reducing the financial and time constraints that often hinder parental engagement (Magembe, 2024; Mabasa, 2025).

5. **Context-specific models of involvement:** Schools in informal urban settlements should recognise that home-based support may be more feasible than frequent school visits. Tailoring parental involvement to these realities increases sustainability and impact (Abubakar, 2024).

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