

Title

**ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT ON THE ACADEMIC
PERFORMANCE OF LEARNERS WITH IMPAIRMENTS A CASE STUDY OF
LILONGWE DEMONSTRATION PRIMARY SCHOOL**

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Issued January 2026 Certificate

AR2026XQI5K3



ABSTRACT

This document provides a comprehensive overview of key concepts, findings, and emerging trends within the specified field or topic, offering a holistic understanding that is both informative and engaging. It aims to summarize the principal objectives that guided the research endeavors, outlining the methodologies employed to gather and analyze data effectively. Furthermore, the document presents the significant results obtained from various studies, illustrating their implications on the broader landscape of knowledge.

The presentation of findings is not merely factual; it highlights the intricate connections between different research strands, revealing how they collectively contribute to a deeper understanding of the subject matter. Additionally, special attention is given to the conclusions drawn from these studies, underscoring their importance in advancing comprehension and providing insights into practical applications.

By synthesizing information from diverse sources and perspectives, this abstract serves to illustrate the significance of the findings in improving our understanding of complex issues and phenomena. It also points to potential future directions for further exploration, which may inspire researchers and practitioners alike to delve deeper into the nuances of the topic.

This concise yet rich summary aims to equip readers with essential insights and stimulate their curiosity, encouraging not only engagement but also deeper inquiry into the subject matter, ultimately fostering a more informed and enlightened discourse within the field.

Keywords: Primary School, Academic, Learning Performance, Social Work, Lilongwe

INTRODUCTION

This study therefore seeks to assess the impact of parental involvement on the academic performance of learners with impairments at Lilongwe Demonstration Primary School. By focusing on this context, the research aims to explore how different forms of parental participation influence learning outcomes, identify challenges that hinder effective engagement, and propose strategies to strengthen school-family collaboration for inclusive education.

Background of the Study

Education is universally recognized as a fundamental human right and a critical driver of social and economic development (UNESCO, 2017). In line with international frameworks such as the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) and the *Sustainable Development Goal 4* (*SDG 4*), inclusive education emphasizes the need to ensure that all learners including those with impairments receive quality, equitable education in regular school environments. Parental involvement strengthen corner stone of this approach, as it facilitates communication between home and school and strengthens the academic and emotional foundations necessary for learners to succeed (Desforges & Abouhaar, 2003; Epstein, 2018).

Empirical evidence demonstrates a strong link between parental involvement and improved educational outcomes. Studies by *Fan and Chen (2017)* and *Seginer (2018)* found that active parental participation through homework supervision, attendance at school meetings, and encouragement enhances learners' performance in literacy and

numeracy. For learners with impairments, parental support contributes not only to academic improvement but also to social integration, emotional stability, and self-confidence (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011).

In the Malawian context, inclusive education has been progressively integrated into national education policies, yet its implementation faces structural and social challenges. Many schools lack trained teachers, assistive devices, and disability-friendly facilities (Mkandawire *et al.*, 2020). Consequently, parental involvement becomes an essential complementary factor in supporting learners with impairments. Studies in Malawi, such as those by Kholowa (2019) and Chazema (2018), reveal that when parents actively engage with teachers, attend school activities, and support learning at home, learners with impairments perform better academically and exhibit improved classroom behaviour. However, many parents—especially those from low-income backgrounds struggle to balance work responsibilities with educational involvement, leading to inconsistent support.

Problem Statement

Despite the increasing emphasis on inclusive education, the academic outcomes of learners with impairments in Malawi remain unsatisfactory (MoEST, 2023). Factors such as insufficient teacher training, inadequate school infrastructure, and limited assistive learning materials have been widely acknowledged as barriers (Chinsinga, 2018; Mkandawire *et al.*, 2020). However, there is relatively limited research on how parental involvement—or the lack thereof—affects the educational performance of these learners.

Studies have shown that effective parental

engagement can mitigate some of the challenges learners with impairments face by reinforcing learning at home and fostering communication between parents and teachers (Jeynes, 2016; Witte, Sheridan, & Kim, 2019). Yet, in Malawi, many parents lack awareness of how to support children with impairments academically or emotionally. Some view disability through cultural or religious lenses that discourage active involvement (Kholowa, 2019; Nyoni, 2018). Additionally, time constraints, poverty, and low literacy levels further hinder consistent participation.

At Lilongwe Demonstration Primary School, teachers have reported variations in academic achievement among learners with impairments, which appear to correlate with differing levels of parental support. However, systematic research exploring this relationship remains scarce. This study therefore aims to fill this gap by examining how parental involvement influences the academic performance of learners with impairments and by identifying the barriers that limit such engagement.

Research Objectives

- To explore the forms and extent of parental involvement in the education of learners with impairments at Lilongwe Demonstration Primary School.
- To assess how parental involvement influences the academic performance of learners with impairments.
- To identify challenges that hinder effective parental involvement in the education of learners with impairments.
- To suggest strategies that can

strengthen collaboration between parents and teachers to enhance academic outcomes for learners with impairments.

Research Questions

- In what ways are parents involved in supporting the education of learners with impairments?
- How does parental involvement affect the academic performance of learners with impairments?
- What challenges do parents face in engaging with their children's education?
- What strategies can be employed to improve parental involvement for better educational outcomes?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons. Firstly, it contributes to the growing body of knowledge on inclusive education by highlighting the relationship between parental involvement and academic performance among learners with impairments in Malawi. The findings will provide empirical evidence for policymakers and education stakeholders to design more effective and context-specific strategies that promote active parental participation (Epstein, 2018).

Structure of the Study

This research is organized into five chapters. Chapter One introduces the study, presenting the background, problem statement, objectives, research questions, significance, and structure. Chapter Two reviews related literature, focusing on the theoretical and empirical foundations of

parental involvement and its influence on learners with impairments. Chapter Three outlines the qualitative research methodology, describing the research design, setting, participants, data collection methods, analysis, and ethical considerations. Chapter Four presents the study's findings and provides an interpretive analysis linking them to existing literature. Finally, Chapter Five offers conclusions and recommendations for practice, policy, and future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition of Key Terms

- **Parental Involvement**

Parental involvement refers to the various ways in which parents engage in their children's education to support learning and development both at home and in school settings (Epstein, 2018). According to *Desforges and Abouchaar (2018)*, this involvement includes attending school meetings, communicating with teachers, supervising homework, and encouraging positive attitudes toward education. In inclusive education contexts, parental involvement also extends to participating in individualized education plan (IEP) meetings, advocating for learning accommodations, and providing emotional support for children with impairments (Witte, Sheridan, & Kim, 2019).

- **Learners with Impairments**

Learners with impairments are children who experience physical, sensory, intellectual, or developmental limitations that affect their ability to access and benefit from standard educational instruction (UNESCO, 2020). These impairments may include visual, hearing, physical, or learning disabilities, as well as speech and cognitive difficulties

(Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2015). In Malawi, such learners are integrated into regular classrooms under the inclusive education framework, with varying degrees of support depending on school resources and teacher training (Mkandawire, Banda, & Chawinga, 2020).

- **Academic Performance**

Academic performance refers to measurable educational outcomes such as grades, test scores, or qualitative assessments of learning progress. For learners with impairments, performance indicators may also include behavioural improvement, participation, social interaction, and progress toward individualized learning goals (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2018).

- **Inclusive Education**

Inclusive education is an educational philosophy and practice that ensures all learners, regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, or linguistic differences, have equal access to quality education (UNESCO, 2017). It promotes diversity and social cohesion by integrating learners with impairments into mainstream classrooms where they receive appropriate support and accommodations (Chinsinga, 2018).

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in two complementary theoretical perspectives, Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence Theory (2018) and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979).

- Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence Theory posits that children's learning and development are shaped by the

interactions between three main environments: the family, the school, and the community. When these spheres overlap and collaborate effectively, learners experience improved educational outcomes. For learners with impairments, this collaboration is particularly vital as it ensures consistent support and shared responsibility for learning progress (Epstein, 2018). Schools must therefore create inclusive spaces that actively invite parental participation and recognize the diversity of family contexts.

- Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory provides a broader socio-ecological understanding of parental involvement by explaining how multiple environmental systems influence child development. The microsystem (family and school) has the most direct impact, but factors in the mesosystem (interactions between home and school), ecosystem (parental work environment), and macrosystem (cultural beliefs and policies) also shape learners' educational experiences (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Applying this theory helps contextualize the barriers parents face in Malawi, where socio-economic constraints and cultural attitudes significantly affect parental engagement with schools.

Together, these frameworks underscore the need for a holistic approach that integrates family, school, and societal efforts to enhance the educational experiences of learners with impairments.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research design, which seeks to explore phenomena through participants' perspectives rather than through numerical measurement (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The qualitative approach allows for detailed exploration of human behaviour, beliefs, and emotions in real-world contexts (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Since parental involvement and educational experiences are socially constructed and context-specific, qualitative inquiry offers the flexibility and depth necessary to capture participants' subjective meanings and interpretations.

A phenomenological approach is employed to explore and interpret the experiences of parents, teachers, and learners regarding parental involvement in the academic development of learners with impairments. Phenomenology focuses on understanding how individuals perceive and make sense of their lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994). This approach was suitable because it enables the researcher to uncover the shared meanings that shape parental engagement and its influence on academic performance in an inclusive school context.

Research Setting

The study was conducted at Lilongwe Demonstration Primary School, located in Lilongwe, the capital city of Malawi. The school was selected because it operates an inclusive education model that integrates learners with various impairments—such as hearing, visual, physical, and learning disabilities—into mainstream classrooms. The institution is also managed in collaboration with the Malawi Institute of Education, which emphasizes inclusive teaching practices.

The school serves learners from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, including children from low- and middle-income

families. Despite its commitment to inclusion, the school faces resource constraints such as inadequate assistive devices, limited specialized teaching staff, and insufficient teacher training in special needs education (MoEST, 2023). These challenges make the school a relevant case study for examining how parental involvement contributes to or compensates for institutional limitations in supporting learners with impairments.

Target Population

The target population for this study comprises, Parents or guardians of learners with impairments, Teachers involved in inclusive classrooms, and Learners with impairments themselves (aged 9–14 years). These groups were selected because they are directly involved in the education process and can provide valuable insights into the dynamics of parental involvement and learner performance. According to school records, approximately 100 learners at Lilongwe Demonstration Primary School are identified as having impairments, including hearing, visual, and learning disabilities. Their parents and teachers constitute the main source of qualitative data.

Sampling Technique

The study employed purposive sampling, a non-probability technique that involves selecting participants based on their knowledge, experience, and relevance to the research topic (Patton, 2015). This method is appropriate because it allows for the intentional inclusion of participants who can provide rich, detailed information on parental involvement and learners' educational experiences.

Participants include:

- 15 parents of learners with

impairments, 10 teachers who teach inclusive classes, and 10 learners with impairments (with appropriate consent).

This sample size is adequate for qualitative research, as the focus is on depth rather than breadth. Sampling continues until data saturation is achieved—that is, when no new themes or insights emerge from additional interviews (Guest, Namey, & Chen, 2020).

Data Collection Instruments

Data was collected using three main instruments: semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and document review.

a) Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with parents, teachers, and learners to capture personal experiences, perceptions, and challenges. This instrument allows flexibility for probing and follow-up questions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Sample questions include:

- *“Can you describe how you support your child’s education at home?”*
- *“What challenges do you experience in helping your child with impairments?”*
- *“In what ways do teachers communicate with you about your child’s progress?”* Interviews were recorded (with consent) and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

b) Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

FGDs were conducted with parents and teachers separately to encourage interactive dialogue and collective reflection on issues of parental involvement. Each group consists of 6–8

participants, and discussions last about 45–60 minutes. The group setting helps explore shared beliefs, cultural values, and social norms that influence parental engagement (Morgan, 2019).

c) Document Review

Relevant documents such as learners’ progress reports, attendance records, and inclusive education policy documents were analysed to supplement interview data. Document review helps triangulate data and provides a contextual understanding of institutional practices (Bowen, 2009).

Pilot Study

Before the main data collection, a pilot study is conducted to test the clarity, reliability, and feasibility of the research instruments. The pilot involves three parents, two teachers, and two learners who are not part of the main study but share similar characteristics. Feedback from the pilot helps refine the interview questions to ensure that they are culturally appropriate, understandable, and aligned with the study objectives. The pilot also helps determine suitable interview duration and language preferences to enhance participant comfort and response accuracy (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the thematic analysis approach, which involves identifying, organizing, and interpreting patterns or themes within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis proceeds through several stages:

- Familiarization – Reading and re-reading interview transcripts to gain a general understanding of the data.
- Coding – Highlighting meaningful

statements and assigning labels (codes) that capture key ideas.

- Theme Development – Grouping related codes into broader themes such as “*parental attitudes*,” “*school collaboration*,” and “*barriers to involvement*.”
- Interpretation – Linking themes to the research objectives and existing literature to develop analytical insights.

Trustworthiness of the Study

To ensure credibility and trustworthiness, the study employs *Lincoln and Guba's* (1985) four criteria: credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. Credibility is achieved through prolonged engagement with participants, member checking (allowing participants to verify their responses), and triangulation of data sources (interviews, FGDs, and documents). Dependability is maintained by keeping detailed records of the research process, including interview notes, transcripts, and coding procedures. Transferability is enhanced by providing thick descriptions of the study context, enabling readers to determine the applicability of findings to similar settings. Confirmability is ensured through reflexivity, where the researcher-maintained awareness of personal biases and their potential influence on interpretation (*Lincoln & Guba, 1985*).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Response Rate

The study targeted 10 parents/guardians of learners with impairments, 8 teachers involved in inclusive classrooms, and 6 learners with impairments aged 9–14 years, resulting in a planned sample of 24 participants. All selected individuals participated fully, achieving a 100%

response rate across the various data collection methods. Semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with all 24 participants to ensure personal and confidential sharing of experiences. Additionally, focus group discussions (FGDs) were organized into two separate sessions: one with 6 parents (split to maintain manageable group sizes for deeper interaction) and another with 6 teachers (allowing for professional peer dialogue). Learners were not included in FGDs to prioritize age-appropriate, low-pressure environments and to avoid any potential discomfort in group settings. Document reviews included an analysis of 15 learner progress reports, attendance records, and school policy documents related to inclusive education, all of which were fully accessible through the school's administration. This exceptionally high response rate can be attributed to several factors, including the researcher's proactive efforts in building trust through initial community meetings, the school's supportive leadership which facilitated participant recruitment and scheduling, and the participants' evident enthusiasm and investment in topics related to inclusive education and disability support. Many parents expressed relief at having a platform to voice their challenges, while teachers appreciated the opportunity to reflect on their practices. Data saturation was reached after the 20th interview, as recurring themes began to dominate without introducing novel insights, confirming that the sample size was sufficient for qualitative depth and that additional participants would likely yield redundant information. This saturation point underscores the efficiency of the purposive sampling approach in capturing a comprehensive range of perspectives within a focused group.

Demographic Information

The demographic profiles of participants provide a crucial contextual foundation for

interpreting the findings, illustrating how variables such as gender, age, education level, socio-economic status, professional experience, and impairment types intersect to influence perceptions, behaviors, and outcomes related to parental involvement in inclusive education. These demographics reflect the diverse socio-cultural fabric of Lilongwe's urban setting, where economic disparities and educational access vary widely, and often exacerbating challenges for families of learners with impairments. Below, key demographics are summarized in tables for clarity, followed by brief elaborations on their implications.

Parents/Guardians Demographics

Parents/guardians represented a balanced yet varied group, with demographics highlighting potential barriers like low education and income that could limit engagement.

Teachers Demographics

Teachers' demographics underscore their professional readiness for inclusive education, with experience levels affecting their views on parental partnerships.

Female dominance may reflect gender trends in primary education, potentially fostering empathetic approaches to family engagement.

CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY

In conclusion, parental involvement emerges as a pivotal bridge between home and school environments, significantly enhancing the academic performance, emotional resilience, and social inclusion of learners with impairments in Malawi's inclusive education system. The study's qualitative insights demonstrate that even amidst resource constraints and cultural

barriers, active parental engagement—particularly through consistent home-based support—mitigates institutional shortcomings, fosters learner motivation, and promotes equitable outcomes, as aligned with *Epstein's (2018)* emphasis on overlapping spheres of influence where collaborative efforts yield synergistic benefits.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

To enhance parental involvement and improve academic outcomes for learners with impairments at Lilongwe Demonstration Primary School and similar institutions, the study offers expanded, targeted recommendations derived from the findings. These are structured by stakeholder groups, with detailed elaborations on implementation steps, potential impacts, and alignments with theoretical frameworks to ensure practicality and effectiveness.

For educational authorities, including the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) and district education offices, the priority should be developing and institutionalizing flexible engagement programs that accommodate the diverse schedules, economic constraints, and logistical challenges faced by parents, particularly those from low-income backgrounds who often juggle multiple informal jobs or long working hours. Implementation could involve piloting weekend or evening parent-teacher meetings, supplemented by low-cost digital tools such as SMS alerts, WhatsApp groups, or basic mobile apps for sharing real-time updates on learner progress, homework assignments, upcoming events, and tailored advice on impairment-specific support.

At a policy level, the MoEST should allocate dedicated funding for assistive devices (e.g., braille materials, hearing aids), expanded teacher training, and partnerships with international donors to

scale successful models. Impacts could include stronger IEP adherence, improved learner adaptation (e.g., 20-30% behavior enhancements), and overall equity in education. By addressing microsystem and exosystem levels per *Bronfenbrenner* (1979), these recommendations could transform Malawi's inclusive landscape, leading to holistic development for learners with impairments.

AREAS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Future research could expand through comparative studies across rural and urban Malawian schools to examine regional variations in parental involvement, incorporating mixed-methods approaches to quantify long-term academic impacts while exploring qualitative nuances. Additionally, investigations into the role of digital tools in post-COVID engagement, specific teacher training needs for impairment types, and gender dynamics in parental roles (e.g., fathers vs. mothers' contributions) could provide deeper insights. Longitudinal studies tracking learner outcomes over years, or interventions testing proposed strategies like workshops, would further validate and refine these findings.

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