

Title

**ASSESSING THE ABSENCE OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT ON CHILDREN'S
ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN LILONGWE AREA 25 KALAMBO PRIMARY SCHOOL**

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Abstract

This study assessed the impact of the absence of parental involvement on the academic performance of learners at Kalambo Primary School in Lilongwe Area 25. Recognizing the critical role of parental engagement in educational success, the study focused on understanding the current levels of involvement, the link to academic outcomes, and the barriers hindering participation. Guided by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, the research employed a qualitative, descriptive design. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 30 purposively sampled participants, including students, parents/guardians, teachers, and school administrators. The findings revealed that parental involvement at the school is predominantly reactive, crisisdriven, and limited to the provision of basic needs. A strong positive link was established between active parental support and students' academic motivation, resilience, and performance. Conversely, the absence of such involvement was clearly associated with learning gaps, behavioral problems, and higher dropout risk. Key barriers identified include socioeconomic pressures (poverty, work schedules), psychological factors (shame, low confidence), logistical challenges (poor communication, distance), and cultural beliefs. The study concludes that the lack of meaningful parental partnership is a systemic issue undermining student success and school effectiveness. Recommendations include developing a formal parental engagement policy, implementing inclusive multi-channel communication strategies, offering flexible participation opportunities, and fostering a more welcoming school climate to build sustainable home-school collaborations.

Keywords: Parental Involvement, Academic Performance, Home-School

Partnership, Barriers to Engagement, Qualitative Study, Malawi.

INTRODUCTION

Parental involvement is universally recognized as a cornerstone of a child's academic achievement, influencing motivation, attendance, and learning outcomes. Global research consistently affirms this link, yet in many socioeconomically challenged communities, active parental participation remains low. In Malawi, factors such as parental illiteracy, poverty, and demanding work schedules often limit the capacity of families to engage with their children's education. This study focuses on Kalambo Primary School in Lilongwe's Area 25, a setting where reported low parental involvement is believed to contribute to sub-optimal academic performance. By examining the nature, impact, and underlying causes of this absence, the research seeks to provide actionable insights for strengthening the home-school connection and improving educational outcomes for learners.

Background of the Study

Research underscores the transformative power of parental involvement in education. Metaanalyses, such as that by *Fan and Chen (2021)*, confirm a significant positive correlation with student achievement. In the Malawian context, challenges are pronounced. Data indicates that a majority of parents have only primary-level education, limiting their ability to support learning at home (*National Statistical Office, 2023*). Urban pressures in areas like Lilongwe's Area 25 force many parents into long or informal working hours, further reducing availability for school activities. Previous studies in similar Malawian settings, like that by *Chirwa and Naidoo*

(2020), found low attendance at school meetings linked to a 35% pass rate gap between children of involved and non-involved parents. At Kalambo Primary School, with over 1,200 students, academic performance has historically trailed the national average, with school administration citing limited parental support as a key contributing factor. This study, therefore, aims to critically assess this dynamic to inform context-specific strategies for improvement.

Problem Statement

Despite robust evidence that parental involvement enhances children's academic progress, engagement at Kalambo Primary School remains critically low. This absence is linked to poorer student grades, decreased motivation, higher absenteeism, and an increased risk of early school dropout. The problem is exacerbated by a complex interplay of barriers, including widespread parental illiteracy, pervasive poverty, demanding and inflexible work commitments, and ineffective school-to-home communication. Consequently, the potential for productive collaboration between parents and educators is largely unmet, hindering student development and perpetuating cycles of underachievement. There is a pressing need to investigate the specific manifestations, causes, and effects of this lack of involvement at Kalambo to develop effective, culturally relevant interventions.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Main Objective

- To assess the impact of the absence of parental involvement on children's academic performance at Kalambo Primary School in Lilongwe Area

25.

Specific Objectives

- To assess the present state of parental involvement at Kalambo Primary School.
- To investigate the link between parental involvement and students' academic success.
- To identify barriers that prevent parents from fully participating in their children's education.
- To examine challenges faced by the school due to limited parental involvement.
- To recommend strategies that can enhance parental engagement in students' education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by *Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory* (1979), which posits that a child's development is influenced by multiple interconnected environmental systems. The microsystem (home and school) is directly weakened when parents are absent. The mesosystem, representing the critical connection between home and school, becomes fragile without active partnership. Exosystem factors like parental work demands and community poverty indirectly create barriers to involvement, while the macrosystem (cultural norms, societal values) shapes attitudes towards education and parental roles. This framework provides a holistic lens to analyze the multifaceted nature of the problem at Kalambo.

Empirical Evidence

Literature confirms that active parental involvement leads to higher academic achievement, better attendance, and improved social-emotional skills (Boonk *et al.*, 2018; Sharma, 2024). However, barriers are significant, especially in low-income contexts. Studies highlight socioeconomic constraints (Wong & Hughes, 2024), parents' own negative school experiences and feelings of inadequacy (Frontiers, 2025), and non-inclusive school communication practices (Goodall & Montgomery, 2024) as major impediments. For schools, the consequences include overburdened teachers, increased behavioral management issues, and a weakened sense of community (Hill & Tyson, 2009; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). Effective strategies center on building trusting relationships, using culturally responsive and flexible communication, and empowering parents with knowledge and skills (Epstein *et al.*, 2019; Hill & Mapp, 2020).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed a qualitative research approach with a descriptive design to gain in-depth insights into participants' experiences and perceptions.

The research was conducted at Kalambo Primary School in Lilongwe Area 25. The target population included students (Standards 6-8), their parents/guardians, teachers, and school administrators.

A purposive sampling technique was used to select 30 participants: 10 students, 12 parents/guardians, 6 teachers, and 2 administrators.

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews using an interview guide, allowing for focused yet flexible

conversations.

A pilot study was conducted to refine the instruments.

Thematic analysis was used to identify, analyze, and report patterns within the qualitative data.

Strict ethical considerations were observed, including informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation, with approval from relevant authorities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Profile of Participants

The study achieved a 100% response rate (n=30). The student sample was balanced by gender and represented a mix of high, average, and low academic achievers from Standards 6-8. The parent/guardian group was predominantly female (67.7%), with educational levels ranging from no formal schooling to tertiary education, engaged in various informal and formal occupations. Teachers and administrators had varied years of experience, providing a comprehensive perspective.

Presentation of Findings

• Current State of Parental Involvement:

Findings revealed a reactive, crisis-driven model of involvement. Parents primarily engaged only when summoned by the school for disciplinary or academic problems. Support was largely defined as providing basic material needs (fees, uniforms, pens), with little emphasis on academic support like homework help. The primary school communication method—written notes sent with students—was found to be ineffective, often getting lost or excluding parents with low literacy.

- **Link to Academic Success:**

A clear dichotomy emerged. Students who felt parental interest exhibited higher motivation, confidence, and perseverance. Teachers observed these students had better resilience and task completion. In stark contrast, students lacking parental support showed significant learning gaps, frequent absenteeism, incomplete homework, and behavioral issues. They were often described as withdrawn or anxious, and were identified as being at a higher risk of dropping out.

- **Barriers to Parental Participation:**

Barriers were multi-layered:

- **Socioeconomic:** "Time poverty" due to demanding, inflexible work schedules in informal economies made school attendance a direct threat to family subsistence.
- **Psychological:** Parents with limited education expressed shame and feelings of inadequacy, fearing embarrassment in the school environment.
- **Logistical:** Challenges included transportation costs, distance, and a lack of advance notice for school events.
- **Cultural:** Traditional gender roles (e.g., viewing schools as a mother's domain) and a cultural belief that education is solely the teacher's responsibility limited participation.

- **Challenges for the School:**

The school faced significant institutional strain:

- **Teacher Overload:** Teachers compensated for absent home support, leading to burnout and reduced time for quality instruction.
- **Academic and Behavioral Management:** Increased time was spent managing crises (absenteeism, disruptions) rather than on proactive teaching.
- **Weak School Community:** Low parental turnout at events eroded the sense of shared purpose and collective efficacy vital for a positive school climate.

Recommended Strategies:

Participants proposed actionable solutions:

- **Inclusive Communication:** Adopt a multi-channel approach (e.g., WhatsApp groups, SMS, community boards, voice messages) to move beyond literacy-dependent notes.
- **Flexible Participation:** Offer meetings at varied times, value non-academic contributions (e.g., gardening, storytelling), and integrate parent skills into school activities.
- **Parent Training & Support:** Implement practical programs like literacy classes or workshops on how to support learning at home, boosting confidence and skills.
- **Welcoming School Climate:** Systematically build relational trust through positive first contacts, respectful greetings, and transforming the school into a community-friendly space.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the absence of meaningful parental involvement at

Kalambo Primary School is a systemic issue with profound negative consequences for student achievement and school effectiveness. The home-school relationship is currently transactional rather than collaborative. While barriers are deeply rooted in socioeconomic and cultural realities, purposeful, context-sensitive strategies can bridge the gap.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Develop a Formal Parental Engagement Policy: The school administration should create a written policy in collaboration with parents, outlining clear expectations, communication protocols, and shared roles.
- Revamp Communication Systems: Immediately replace sole reliance on written notes with a blended system using technology (SMS, WhatsApp) and community-based channels (local announcements, notice boards at markets) to ensure all parents are reached.
- Design Flexible Engagement Opportunities: Schedule important meetings on weekends or evenings, create diverse volunteer roles, and host informal community-building events to value all forms of parent contribution.
- Foster a Relational School Culture: Train staff on building trust with families from all backgrounds. Leadership must model a welcoming, appreciative, and partnership-oriented ethos to make the school a community hub.

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