Challenges and Strategies of Parental Engagement among Secondary School Learners in Sheema District, Uganda

Mugumya Duncans, Adrian R. Mwesigye, and Ahimbisibwe Emmanuel Karoro

AJP

Challenges and Strategies of Parental Engagement among Secondary School Learners in Sheema District, Uganda

Mugumya Duncans[1*], Adrian R. Mwesigye[2], and Ahimbisibwe Emmanuel Karoro[3]

[1]Department of Educational Foundations and Psychology, Mbarara University of Science and Technology

[2]Associate Professor, Mbarara University of Science and Technology

[3]Associate Professor, Department of Education, Uganda Christian University, Bishop Barham University College, Kabale, Uganda.

[*]Corresponding Author's Email:
mugumyaduncans@gmail.com

Abstract

Purpose: The study investigated challenges and strategies of parental engagement (PE) with respect to students' academic performance (SAP) in Sheema District, South Western Uganda.

Methodology: The study employed qualitative approach using interpretative phenomenological approach of data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Participants of the study included purposively selected head teachers, deputy head teachers, directors of studies, chairpersons and treasurers of both Parents Teachers Associations (PTA) and Boards of Governors (BOG) of ten government grant-aided USE schools (GGAUSES) in the District. Using thematic analysis, various themes and sub-themes of PE issues and methods were derived from qualitative data.

Findings: The challenges of parental engagement in learners' academic activities in government grant-aided USE schools in Sheema District generated three themes: Home environment-related challenges (HERC), school environment-related challenges (SERC), and government-related challenges (GRC). Each of these generated several subthemes. The strategies for overcoming the parental engagement challenges included social and economic tactics, leadership and management strategies as well as legislation and regulation.

Recommendation: The study recommend a deliberate move on the part of key stakeholders to enhance parental engagement through abating its challenges be emphasised and that will foster learners' academic performance.

Keywords: *Parental engagement, academic performance, predictor, secondary school*

INTRODUCTION

In today's competitive global setting, students' academic performance (SAP) is an important element of the school's achievement (Azumah et al., 2018). The quality of education in any nation depends upon the shared effort made by different groups in society such as teachers, parents and other education stakeholders (Kavenuke, 2013). The responsibilities of government, foundation bodies and parents in schools in Uganda are well stipulated (Act 13. Education ACT, 2008). The Government of Uganda has recruited qualified teachers and motivated them by increasing their salaries and giving special allowances for those working in hard to reach areas where many GGAUSES are located. The government has also uplifted and equalised head teachers' salaries across all GGAUSES regardless of the class of the school, to motivate the head teachers. Furthermore, it has constructed classrooms, science laboratories, administration blocks and libraries, and provided instructional materials, organised in service trainings and workshops for head teachers and teachers, and provided support supervision to the schools. All these initiatives are ideally intended to result in good academic performance of students.

However, the parents in Sheema District are not forthcoming when it comes to providing of basic needs to their children, paying fees for; accommodation, food, uniforms, medical care, transport, scholastic materials, and others in USE schools or even giving support to their children in learning at home (Mugumya et al., 2022). As a result, GGAUSES have continued contributing a bigger chunk of academic failures in the last three years in Sheema District. From 2015-2017, 182 (4.0%) students failed with grades seven and nine, but no student has failed in other GGAUSES since then. Only 6.9% of the students from USE schools have been able to get first grade compared to 28.6% from government aided none USE schools (UNEB, 2015-2017). The researcher is afraid that SAP will remain or continue to be poorer in GGAUSES if among other things parents do not fully come on board to participate according to the original design of the USE policy. As the result, the goal of increasing the quality of education offered in USE secondary schools will be put in jeopardy, which could have broad consequences for the education of students in USE schools in Uganda and in particular Sheema District.

Parental participation in the education of students inaugurates at home with the parents providing a safe and healthy environment, appropriate learning experiences, support, and a positive attitude about school (Durisic & Bunijevac, 2017). Research repetitively documents the benefits of out-of-school time programs, with the greatest academic gains associated with frequent attendance in longer duration programs with high quality instruction (Oakes, Maier, & Daniel, 2017). Since many students in USE schools are day scholars, such out-of-school time programs need to be at home.

Research shows that children learn best when they receive learning support at home (Crosnoe et al, 2010). Home works that are perceived to be carefully chosen and cognitively stimulating are positively linked with students' attainment (Dettmers, Trautwein, Lüdtke, Kunter & Baumert, 2010). Parents can be an important aid to the teachers by helping their children to progress and bolster their academic success through encouraging them to do their homework and work cooperatively with the teachers when undertaking the weak aspects of their children's academic progress (Oakes, Lipton, Anderson & Stillman, 2015). According to Myers-Young (2018), parents are able to extend learning at home by using activities that support their child's educational goals. Myers-Young further avows that learning at home is just as important as learning at school when parents are involved, in shaping the child behaviour and increasing the child's academic positive outcomes.

A study by Karue and Amukowa (2013) on factors influencing students' academic performance linked components like unfavourable home environments, family backgrounds, lack of reading materials, household tasks at home, poor lighting, physical facilities, bad company, lack of proper space and inadequate learning materials.

Home Learning Environment

Numerous studies have provided pragmatic evidence that the home learning environment is a vital predictor of differences in children's academic and social development (Rose, Lehrl, Ebert, & Weinert, 2018; Tamis-LeMonda, Luo, McFadden, Bandel, & Vallotton, 2019). The study by Chukwudi, (2013) on the effect of home environment on students' academic performance of secondary schools in Nigeria, found out that parents with high educational background tend to motivate their children to have an interest in their academic work which enhances their academic performance in school.

However, to some researchers, there is a need to conduct further studies to explore how to better support children and adolescents who experience low-quality home learning environments at different ages (Lehrl, Evangelou & Sammons, 2020). Research has also revealed that a number of parents/caregivers through illness, disadvantage, absence, employment demands, or lifestyle may lack the capacity to support their children's learning (Mistry, Benner, Biesanz, Clark, & Howes, 2010) and this creates a poor home learning environment.

Learning at home involves reinforcement of activities in the home environment (Epstein, 2011). Parents should provide a suitable learning environment for homework accomplishment to foster self-regulated learning and children's autonomy (Xu, Kushner-Benson, Mudrey-Camino, & Steiner, 2010). Sylvia and others found out that the separation of home learning environment process indicators (like reading books) and structural indicators (like socioeconomic status) in all papers they reviewed takes into account the conclusions of earlier studies that suggest that what you do with your child is more important than who you are (Sylvia, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2010). Children whose homes had greater emphasis on learning opportunities and activities were more intrinsically motivated and thus performed well.

The early home learning environment shows lasting effects up to secondary school, irrespective of the home stimulation provided during the later age phases, and such effects can be identified and separated from institutional effects, if appropriate multilevel models are employed for analysis (Lehrl et al., 2020).According to Mahlangu (2014) parental engagement involves what parents do naturally in the home to socialize with their children, and what schools can do to support parents to be more effective in the home environment. Mahlangu further states that members of the community represent an essential part of the learner's learning environment. The growth of interactions between the community and the school aids learners through the exchange of information and the provision of support services not available within the school (Mahlangu, 2014). Therefore, parental engagement creates a sense of security and comfort to learners. Effective programs that promote stronger learning for adolescents involve making environments in which adolescents feel respected and affirmed, and giving them challenging work on which they are enabled to improve (Dweck, 2017; Yeager & Walton, 2011).

Learning Materials

Ikerionwu (cited by Isola, 2010) referred to learning materials as objects or devices which help the teacher to make a lesson much clearer to the learner. Mbunda (cited by Maganga, 2016) gave among others textbooks, desks, libraries, big charts, wall maps and photographs as

examples of learning materials. According to the findings by Mlozi (2013) who studied the effect of teaching-learning materials and Instructional Language (Kiswahili and English) on SAP on Community and Government Built Secondary Schools in Tanzania, it was discovered that, the existence of teaching-learning materials led to improved SAP.

Students belonging to deprived, marginalized and socio-economically backward families in the society, usually cannot have enough money for the materials required for learning, hence, they are dependent upon the library and other facilities and fellow students to obtain the textbooks and other materials (Maina, 2010), this limits their learning at home, which affects their academic performance at school. Homes, libraries, museums, camps, and a range of digital environments provide social and material resources for interest-driven learning (Barron & Bell, 2015). A research by Komba, Hizza, and Jonathan (2013) establish that learning materials and libraries are among factors affecting students' academic performance of ward secondary schools in Moshi District and Moshi municipality, Tanzania. These studies are an evidence that learning materials whether at home or at school are strongly linked to students' academic performance.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed interpretative phenomenological approach of collecting, analysing, and interpreting qualitative data. The population of the study was made up of head teachers, deputy head teachers, directors of studies, chairpersons and treasurers of Parents Teachers Associations (PTA) and Boards of Governors (BOG) of the ten GGAUSES in Sheema District. These types of respondents were approached by the researchers because they had the necessary information that could help to achieve the research objectives. Teachers, Head teacher, Deputy Head teacher, DOS, PTA Executive and BOG knew how parents got involved and even what they talked about their children's performance. It should was also noted that, all PTA Executive members (chosen by parents themselves in a PTA's Annual General Meeting (AGM) to represent them) and many members on the BOG of these schools were parents to these schools. Therefore, the researcher was convinced that all these gave sufficient information on influence of Parental engagement on students' performance in these schools. Non-teaching staff were not considered because they had less information concerning this topic since they are never involved in PTA meetings with parents and rarely handle issues concerning students and their parents.

Purposive sampling was used to select the respondents. Data collection was done qualitatively. The researcher used structured and semi-structured interviews to allow flexibility (Bell & Waters, 2014). Semi structured interviews were considered to allow participants express themselves openly and freely, and to delineate the study from their own perceptions, not solely from the viewpoint of the investigator (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017). Interview guides were used to collect data from top management team. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010) the reasons for an interview guide when collecting data include the following; it is the most widely used technique for obtaining qualitative data from participants, it is relatively economical, has the same questions for all participants, can ensure anonymity and can use statements or questions, but in all cases the participant responds to something written for specific purposes. Validity of the instruments was ensured by first giving them to MUST supervisors for proof reading –thus establishing face validity, and then pre-testing them by administering them to few pre-selected respondents who were in the same conditions as those of the sample. Content Validity Index (CVI) was calculated using the formula CVI = n/N, and was found to be greater than 0.7, hence the instrument was valid to be used for the study.

The researcher asked for permissions from the different administrations to meet different respondents in the schools (for students and teachers but some parents were followed up in their villages). Some key informants like members of BOG and PTA executive were first contacted through phone calls (the researcher got their phone numbers from their respective schools) and after talking to them, planned and met them at their convenience. The information from these respondents while meeting with the researcher was recorded by the researcher.

The researchers employed qualitative techniques on the data that was collected using an interview guide. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010:366) "all data must be analysed by repeated assessments of the interview transcript, identifying, coding and categorising the primary patterns in the data. This involved employing methods that are non-quantitative, and aimed towards exploration of social relations, and describe reality as experienced and presented by respondents. Its major purpose is to promote greater understanding of not just the way things are, but also why they are the way they are Amin (2005). Thematic analysis was used whereby different themes and sub-themes will be developed under which the presentation and interpretation will be done. In conducting the study, explanations about its aims were made to the respondents, so as to obtain their informed consent. Secrecy of the respondents was also assured and the data that they provided was treated with utmost discretion. As such, the respondents participated in the study voluntarily and mention of their schools and names avoided.

RESULTS

Challenges of Parental Engagement in Students' Academic Affairs

This study sought to investigate the challenges of parental engagement in students' academic affairs in government grant-aided USE schools in Sheema District. Using thematic content analysis, the in-depth interviews yielded three themes.

Theme 1: Home Environment-Related Challenges (HERC)

The home environment-related challenges were grouped into three subthemes: economic challenges; information, communication, and technology challenges; and parenting challenges. These are further explained below, with verbatim excerpts from the participants.

HERC Subtheme 1: Economic Challenges

The participants revealed that economic challenges grossly undermined parents' influence on their students' academic engagements. Among the notable economic challenges was poverty. Most respondents alluded to the fact that poverty hindered parents from fully partaking in the academic affairs of their children. The prevalence of poverty in Sheema District is so high that it hampers parents' participation in the academic affairs of their children. A home that does not have sufficient income to cater for both the domestic and scholastic needs is a limiting factor in learners' academic performance. This implies that a deliberate effort needs to be made to alleviate the poverty levels within households in Sheema District in order to enhance parents' provision of scholastic requirements to their children.

Another challenge noted to affect parents' engagement in students' academic affairs in the subtheme of home environment-related challenges was corruption. This was manifested in form of depletion of family resources for school requirements which eventually discouraged the parents' cooperation in school engagement. Another aspect of corruption was observed in fraudulent award of bids. Respondent 7 noted that "Conflict of interest [arises when] some parents want to be suppliers to engage on where they can 'eat' from." This tendency discourages many parents from fulfilling their commitments to the school.

Long distance to USE schools from home also posed a challenge to many of the parents to effectively participate in their children's academic activities. Respondent 9 observed that "Many USE schools are far from homes." Respondent 17 similarly noted that "Some teachers commute at [sic] school from very long distances. Such teachers need to be supported with transport. This can only be achieved if parents are engaged." This implies that the compounding of poverty with long distance to school grossly hindered the P in the students' school activities. As argued by Respondent 22, "… looking at some of the reasons why USE was established, e.g., 'to increase access to quality secondary education for economically vulnerable families,' it can be argued that it is partly failing" because of poverty and issues of accessibility and hence learners' success.

HERC Subtheme 2: Information, Communication, and Technology (ICT) Challenges

The participants reported a number of information, communication, and technology challenges that they encountered in their duties of making parental provisions for their school children. These included inadequate sensitization, misperception, misinformation, communication gap, ignorance of the law and policy gaps, low levels of education and gross illiteracy, poor public relations, and lack of time among others.

Inadequate Sensitization

In regard to inadequate sensitization, Respondent 4 noted that there is "No enough sensitization of the role of the parents." Respondent 7 also affirmed that "Ignorance of parents on the requirements and necessity of learning at home" makes the parents to "engage them [the learners] in many activities." There is "Lack of re-orientation of our parents. Some parents lack exposure. Most of the boys [whose parents allowed them to] participate in scouting activities had their morale raised and they performed well. Children acquire critical thinking skills through such exposures," but the parent first needs to be exposed himself or herself, yet according to Respondent 7, "Most of the parents are conservative."

Respondent 8 lamented that "It is rare to find a DEO that has invited some parents for some sensitization." Respondent 22 similarly observed that there was a limited degree of knowledge by the parents in school management. Accordingly, parents did not know that it is their responsibility to be fully involved and engaged in the education system of their children. But everything is left to school administrators and the government.

Misperception

Another pertinent ICT challenge that confronted the parents in delivering their responsibilities was misperception. This is closely connected to inadequate sensitization. Respondent 1 observed that some parents "think that education of their children is all about money. Discipline is not an issue. If they attend the meeting without talking about money (Hahaha *laughs)* they think the meeting was nothing." According to Respondent 2 some parents misunderstood important co-curricular activities such as field trips, noting that "Parents may not see the reason for being in the trip to be academic, for example telling them of studying in a field trip. They think students go for field trips for leisure." This misperception extends to critical aspects of school engagement such as infrastructure development. Parents fail to relate staff motivation strategies like payment of child allowance, PTA allowance, remedial teaching, over time, teachers on duty allowance, and others. Parents get discouraged from contributing to this. They do not see the reason to pay all these allowances on top of monthly salaries towards students' academic performance.

Some parents, according to Respondent 4, withdraw because they think that "the government does it all. The president said 'Education is free'. So they think there is no need for participation." This kind of misperception, as explained by Respondent 4 *(while closing eyes)*, "makes parents not to take education seriously. *(Laughs)* 'Some of us went to school but we are still poor. We know so and so who did not go to school but he has a lot.' Coming to school is optional." Such misperception hinged on wealth or poverty results in parents' withdrawal of efforts in school activities.

Respondent 5 reiterated these misperceptions, "Some parents have a feeling that once fees is paid, the remaining work is for the teachers, not knowing that coming to school is also important." According to Respondent 6, "There is a serious mentality [among] both educated and uneducated that the government should provide everything. A child can lack many crucial items like books and pens, but some parents do not feel shy to tell his/her child that education is free." Respondent 6 further noted that "[There is too much] I do not care attitude. Some parents after paying fees and buying scholastic materials do not care anymore, they feel it is enough. They feel that the remaining work is for teachers." Respondent 7 explained that, "Government aided is misconstrued or misinterpreted and mistaken for government ownership. People call children, the presidents' children '*Abaana ba Museveni*' [in Runyankole]. Respondent 8 similarly noted that "Parents believe that children belong to Museveni. They reach the extent of failing to provide necessities to their children. To a girl child, it becomes worse." The foregoing misperceptions undermine the schools' initiatives for parental engagement in school activities, especially where the parents need to participate in the children's academic affairs. In this case, all stakeholders need to strategize on how to clear the misperceptions negatively influencing parental participation in education.

Misinformation

Whereas some parents would probably strive to engage vigorously in their children's academic affairs, there is also a lot of misinformation they face from various key players. According to Respondent 22, "Parents take their children to be Museveni's children (*Abaana ba Museveni* [Runyankole]). Politicians brainwash parents that they just need to send the child to school." Respondent 1 similarly noted that "Leaders speak against head teachers being serious on parents who do not participate. Politicians speak as if the government pays all the money needed yet the government pays. That is a misconception." In a similar response, Respondent 9 observed that "Government leadership – some say 'children's rights' but they are not explained well." Such interference at political level misinforms the parents to take a low profile in engagement in school activities. Respondent 22 further informed that "I am chairman BoG, I was surprised to see the RDC taking children to head teacher without fees, yet parents had agreed [not to send the children to school without fees]." In such a case, parents relegate the primary role to government to the detriment of the students. Yet the reality on the ground is that government aid to the schools is minimal. As noted by Respondent 22, "If the government was paying for all the meals, the children would freely go to school."

Communication gap

The participants also identified communication gap as one of the key challenges preventing parents from engaging effectively in their children's academic affairs. Respondent 1 observed that "Some parents do not try to communicate and know with teachers what is happening with the academic activities of their children. They just stop on giving money." Similarly, Respondent 15 noted that **"**Parents may be having the contacts of teachers and administrators but may not have money to call them. And therefore, they may not know that parents have their numbers." On the other hand, "Some leaders do not involve parents, do not tell them the truth,

parents continue thinking that the school is okay when actually things are not okay" (Respondent 1). According to Respondent 5 "Parents are only called to discuss indiscipline of learners." Respondent 20 similarly noted that "Communication of parents with their children is very limited in USE school [which] discourages parental engagement since travelling to school all the time needs a lot of time and money. In my school mobile phones are not allowed. But as IT goes on, students have been allowed to bring tablets." Respondent 1 noted that "The lie on enrollment, etc., this hinders participation. Some administrators fail to speak the truth in order to do fraudulent acts." All in all, the communication gap contributed to parents' failure to engage effectively in students' academic affairs.

Ignorance of the law and policy gaps

Ignorance of the law and policy gaps were identified as a challenge to parental engagement in students' academic issues. Respondent 4 stated that "Parents are not aware of certain policies/standards/regulations the government put in place." Respondent 7 similarly noted that "The misunderstanding/misinterpretation of the parents on the policy on payments [is a cause of their minimal participation in students' academic affairs]. This is further reiterated by Respondent 1, "Parents do not know about the policy or even Education Act which show that parents are supposed to participate in their children's education. Policies are a bit clear but parents do not know." Respondent 2 argued that the cause of the parents' ignorance of the law was the manner of instituting the legislation, in which parents as stakeholders were not consulted and did not participate in its formation. They therefore do not understand properly their role in the policy. They believe that USE is a totally free education. The children are called 'government children'. Schools are called 'government schools', the teachers are called 'government teachers', parents do not see the reason to participate.

Other gaps in policy include legislations that seemingly promote immorality. Respondent 3 observes that "'Pregnant children going for school' policy: Parents think that such policies encourage children to be more undisciplined. They see participation wastage of time." Coupled with low levels of education and illiteracy of some parents, Respondent 3 argues that "Misinterpretation of laws and rights by children and parents [is likely] a potential cause of low levels of engagement in academic affairs.' Another gap identified by Respondent 22 is lack of legislation on parents' role in school engagement: "I believe there is a lack of a direct policy compelling the parental engagement in the school management or activities and this affects students' academic performance."

Illiteracy and low level of education

Illiteracy and low level of education were identified by a number of participants as a challenge bewildering some parents in attending to their children's academic affairs. Respondent 1 noted that "Some parents are not educated, not informed, do not know the value of education, [and therefore] do not mind. If you look at those who do not participate are non-educated. Respondent 3 observed that "with low education levels, some parents fear to interact with teachers and school administrators in school." As argued by Respondent 4, when "most of the parents are not educated, this means they cannot help their children at home, they cannot be well versed of what is happening at school [coupled with] not knowing the policies at school." Respondent 5 acknowledges that "Parents' engagement is contributed by level of education in the society." "Parents who have low levels of education "*Eby'okushoma tibakubyetegyereza"*. Such parents do not trust their education levels to be engaged in their children's learning" (Respondent 6). Poor public relations

Poor public relations between the school and society was seen as another cause of low levels of parental engagement in students' academic affairs. In this regard, Respondent 1 noted that "Parents lack ownership, even neighbours and community withdraw and start ill talking about their school. Children who escape are just encouraged by neighbours who do not care." All this points to the need for sensitising parents through strong information, communication and technology platforms to gain the necessary education on their roles as key stakeholders of the schools.

HERC Subtheme 3: Parenting Challenges

A number of challenges related to parenting roles were identified as hindrances to the parents' effective engagement in students' academic affairs. These included poor parenting styles or ineffective parenting, lack of time for academic affairs, poor home environment, family challenges, lack of moral authority, and poor competition among the parents. These are separately explained below.

Poor parenting skills/ineffective parenting

Many participants lamented the high prevalence of poor and ineffective parenting skills among the parents in Sheema District. Respondent 1, for instance, noted that

"Some parents do not mind the discipline of their children. They pass on the responsibility to the teachers. You hear a parent telling a child after doing wrong "*Ninyija kukugamba owa teacher nanka*" [Literary meaning, I will tell your teacher about your indiscipline.] Parents have left the work of disciplining their children to teachers. Eventually, the children tend to look at teachers as punishers which makes them to fear them. Now children fear teachers than they fear parents. The fear of teachers makes children to hate the lessons of the teacher. They tend to look at the teachers as bad and parents as dears. How can you stop me from doing something that my dad does not stop me. At home children say have funny hair but at school they are told it is bad.

Modernity [is another challenge]. Maids have been given the parental role. Right from the start, the maids start with the kids and it becomes very difficult for the parent to intervene at secondary school level. Class works are made by maids. Vehicles pick children at young ages, so parents are put at a distance in a young age.

Respondent 2 also observed that day scholars are not given time by parents, they are fully involved in home chores which take all their time. Parents and even students do not think that home learning is necessary for students' academic performance. [Meanwhile] boarding schools have created a rift between parents and schools. Parents have neglected their responsibility, the reason many girls got pregnant during lockdown.

Respondent 3 identified single parenting as one of the major parenting challenges, noting that "Step parents who extend less love to the children, lack of educated role models" hampers parental engagement in children's academic affairs. Respondent 5 similarly observed that "Parents usually concentrate on the welfare only; they believe that paying [school fees] at bursar's place is the enough." According to Respondent 6, "Parents seem to be engaged more in girls' schools than in boys' schools. Mothers are more engaged than fathers. The reason is because the mother [*smiles*] has a strong attachment." These poor and ineffective parenting skills are a hindrance to parents' active engagement in students' academic affairs.

Lack of time

According to a number of participants, parents' lack of time for their children amounted to a grave challenge in engaging with students' academic affairs. Respondent 5 observed that "Parents are strained with looking for income. They come home late when tired. They have no time to be engaged in their children's home learning.' The use of social media was also noted by Respondent 5 as another source of hindrance to parental engagement in students' academic affairs.

Social media has seriously affected parents' engagement in their children's learning at home. A lot of time is now given to WhatApp, TikTok, Facebook, to mention but a few. Parents no longer attend to their children's learning activities like attending to or helping them with their homework, support supervision of their study time at home, helping them with their phones and laptops for their research, and others.

According to Respondent 6, time factor affects most of the parents; especially the working class – they do not find time for their children. Even day students find students still at work. The non-working class spend most of their time either in their local plantations if the family is lucky or a lot of time is spent in bars. [*Raises his voice and changes face]* It is surprising that we have people in our communities who can be at the bar by 7:00 am in the morning, and by 10:00am, some parents are already drunk. We even have area with names that relate with what they do there like; *Akacwampare* – place where men come with trousers, they sit and drink until their trouser form holes at the buttocks, *Bakazi bagawe* – place where men come to and drink themselves [*sic*], if a woman see a husband in this place, she should not have hope that any coin will remain for the family and children, *Bagimpe* – where men go to drink and spend on women, Bagarame – where men go and drink with women and then sleep with those women at bars.

Respondent 9 observed that another area in which parents don't afford students time is diverting them to other activities: "Parents engage children in home based activities *[smiles]*. Parents produce from agriculture. Children are not given time at home to concentrate on work and end up performing poorly." During the interview, Respondent 9 further noted that "Parents do not have time for children. Others neglect their children intentionally because they are involved in drinking, wasting time, etc. Majority [of parents] come to school on visiting days or AGM." In this case, lack of time refers to both overcommitment in other non-academic activities and under-commitment in academic activities.

Poor home environment

The interviewees expressed concern with parenting in terms of the home environments which did not support academic engagement. Respondent 1 voiced that "Environment can make a parent not participate. You find a parent in Omuzigo (small house in slams). The parent can never have where to see the homework with children. The bedroom is the sitting room." Respondent 6 observed another home environment-related challenge to be involvement of the students in home chores without due regard for academic engagement. "Many parents prefer their children to go to their farms and do other family work other than reading at home. During lockdown, some schools sent study materials in homes but still many parents used to say 'this is an opportunity for me to take this child in the farm.'"

Another home environment-related challenge is the loss of sense of belonging. In explaining this, Respondent 5 alluded to the fact that "Formerly, a child used to belong to the whole society [*Omwaana taba w'omwe* – a Runyanole Rukiga proverb that means that a child does not belong to an individual]. People in the community now tend to mind their business. Neighbours can

no longer mind what the children from the other house are doing. Individualism took over communalism." In the absence of the biological parent, then a child does not bear allegiance to anyone else because of the sense of unrelatedness. This is coupled with lack of role models in some home environments. For instance, Respondent 8 noted that "When you fail to find a graduate in a whole village," then it becomes a great challenge for parents to make reference to a formidable example for their children's academic motivation. As further noted by Respondent 8, "some parents do not value education, they tend to concentrate learners in agriculture, etc. *[smiles]* For example, how many parents have televisions at home? Some do not even have a radio." In such cases, home environment is a limiting factor in multidimensional ways in the engagement of parents in their children's academic affairs.

Family challenges

Family challenges were cited as one of the critical home environment-related challenges that hindered parents from effective engagement in their children's academic affairs. According to Respondent 5, "Family breakdowns [cause] fathers [to] think it is the work of mothers and thus children are left unattended to." Respondent 16 noted that **"**Many learners have been stressed because of different challenges in homes like child abuse, early pregnancies from sometimes relatives, to mention but a few. This makes them hate their homes and themselves do not encourage parents to come to school."

According to Respondent 9, polygamous families play a [significant] role in parents' inability to effectively engage in students' academic activities. Some parents have less time for some of their children. For example, if a father is not in a good relationship with the mother, Banyakole say, say… [Pauses a bit and laughs, researcher encourages her to be free] *Embabazi z'omwaana ziruga aha eibeere rya nyiina* [compassion for children stems from the motehr's breasts]. Fathers usually show little or no mercy to children whose mothers are not staying in the house or are not in good terms with them. Fathers transfer anger between them and their wives to the children. Orphanage also – child headed homes [where] the parent is the child [also poses another challenge].

Lack of moral authority among parents

It was also noted by a number of participants that lack of moral authority among parents played a key role in hampering parents from engaging effectively in students' academic affairs. As observed by Respondent 1, "[When] a child sees what the parent is doing e.g., sexual immorality, such a parent lacks moral authority to talk to the child." In conformity, Respondent 13 noted that "Children do not do what parents tell them, children do what parents do". Respondent 21 gave the following narrative to back up the lack of moral authority among parents:

In my school, I got cases – ten cases – of pregnancy in one term. Five of them were impregnated by relatives. One of them was impregnated by the father. I tried to reach the father and talk to him. The father said 'I separated with the mother of this girl who was very beautiful, but when I look at this girl, the picture of the mother comes to my mind. And we stay two in the house.'

In such cases, the parents and guardians cannot easily claim authority over the children in matters of discipline and morality. Hence their participation in the children's academic affairs is grossly hindered.

Poor competition

Unhealthy competition among parents and schools was also noted as one of the challenges hindering parental engagement in students' academic affairs. In the matter of unhealthy

competition among schools, Respondent 7 observed that as follows: Competition from private schools [which] provide bursaries for good learners leaving dull ones in USE schools. Parents therefore, tend to engage/interest themselves in schools where good performing children go. For example, some parents can decide not to pay fees planning to take the child to another school in the coming term.

Respondent 1: Competition of parents (Okushonda akotakumira). Some parents move in a band wagon. A parent fails at an early age (Aba Rukyepe – out of place) that fall in grade. A number of school environment-related challenges were identified and grouped into two subthemes: leadership challenges and information, communication, and technology (ICT) challenges. The ICT challenges are a cross-cutting subtheme, already explained in Theme 1, but aspects of ICT directly related to school environment are teased under Theme 2. The school environment-related challenges are explained below, picking verbatim quotations from the participants.

SERC Subtheme 1: Leadership challenges

Under this subtheme, the participants raised a number of challenges including administration gaps, poor academic performance of the students, poor infrastructure in government grant-aided USE schools, indiscipline and strikes in the schools, and lack of patriotism spirit. Details of each category of challenges are given below.

Administration gaps

Many participants were concerned that the state of administration in the USE schools was too ineffective to enhance parents' engagement in students' academic affairs. To Respondent 8, "Not all administrators are administrators *[smiles]*. We have seen many head teachers who get many debts because of indebtedness." Respondent 19 similarly noted that **"**Not everyone who has gone to school has studied how to run a school." Respond 5 noted that "Administrators somehow do not involve parents, there are no seminars and workshops to build capacity." Responded 8 similarly lamented, "If the administration fails to invite parents eeeh! What can they do?" as observed by Respondent 7, "What is most common in our schools is Visiting Day (V.D), it is a day that parents get engaged in most. V.D is a mood booster for students. Very few schools hold open days, science exhibitions, etc.

Respondent 8 noted that "Sometimes demands from administration for money from parents hinders parental engagement. It brings discord." To Respondent 7, "[there are] management [school administration] aspects that bring grudges between management and teachers. How you handle the parents will take them away and reduce the publicity of the school." A similar observation was made by Respondent 10 who testified that

I went to one of the schools for supervision, I found the head teacher had told teachers to separate children into groups. One with those of uniform and the other with those without uniform. I was hurt in the heart. I provided money for some students to buy uniforms. I told the head teacher and the teacher that that was wrong. Such a thing leads to poor academic performance of learners. Those in a group of learners without uniform feel bad (psychological torture). They feel rejected. They are laughed at and never be attentive to this teacher who put them aside.

Respondent 14 opined that **"**Comments from the system that makes reports in some schools tend to be general and parents do not respect them seriously. A comment is just generated for everyone." In addition, Respondent 18 voiced that **"**Presence of teachers is the most challenging in the Ugandan system. Teachers are paid but do not work for the work paid for. This discourages parental engagement because parents feel cheated." This resonated very

closely with the observation of Respondent 20 "Even in big schools, it is very difficult to engage all the teachers in school 24/7."

Another challenge was the procurement process, which Respondent 8 noted to be "very rigid. Many schools pay a lot through procurement system and that cost goes back to the parent." This is coupled with little or no accountability as noted by Respondent 19, "For poor performing schools, head teachers are not asked and therefore, they also do not ask teachers. The Ugandan child ends up suffering."

Poor academic performance of USE schools

Poor academic performance of government grant-aided USE schools was noted to discourage parents from engaging in students' academic affairs. Respondent 3 noted that "Many USE schools perform poorly compared to government schools. This discourages parents from participating. And even more," Respondent 3 added, "school leavers after failing have nowhere to go and that discourages parents."

Poor infrastructure in USE schools

The participants also mentioned poor infrastructure as a hindrance to parental engagement in government grant-aided USE schools in Sheema District. According to Respondent 22,

Poor infrastructure [is a challenge]. I have seen some USE schools with very poor housing facilities. The classes are almost collapsing, inadequate teaching space, teachers have inadequate or no accommodation facilities and all this affects a conducive adolescents' learning and development. Even if parents were to be involved, there is what they can't manage that needs government intervention.

Indiscipline and strikes

Indiscipline, as it were, was also noted as a deterrent to effective parental engagement in students' academic affairs. Respondent 3 noted that "uncertainties [sic] that affect education institutions for example fires in schools, [and] strikes make parents discouraged in school affairs." Unfortunately, some parents were noted to be advertently or inadvertently fueling indiscipline in schools. Respondent 19, for instance, noted that "Drugs in schools is [sic] becoming a very big challenge. Parents seem not to be concerned about what their children pack for school." According to Respondent 21. "Indiscipline" was a major cause of lack of PE in students' academic affairs, noting that

"There is a lot of hooliganism in school. Behaviors of children [such as] theft, possession of mobile phones, students fighting teachers, escapism, high level of absenteeism, many cases of pregnancy, etc. … all these cases are not for school."

Respondent 17 similarly observed that "Some parents themselves give students unauthorised materials as they come to school." Respondent 20 also named drugs as a challenge to parental engagement in learners' academic affairs:

I recently found out that students are using almost all edibles, including chapattis, to bring drugs in school, and yet they come with their parents. In my school, we got 10 girls involved in drugs. It was too shocking for us. We had taken girls for granted that they do not use drugs. … You see, from lockdown students came with a lot of indiscipline.

Part of the indiscipline that hindered parents' effective participation in children's academic affairs was attributable to the covid-19 pandemic. As noted by Respondent 17, "Some students are suicidal. They say they are stressed from home. They harm themselves like on their bodies,

printing tattoos on their skins with funny drawings, et cetera." Respondent 21 also made a similar observation, "Most of the students came back to school two years older than they were supposed to be in the class they are in." Such cases of indiscipline act against parents' zeal to engage favourably in students' academic affairs.

Lack of patriotism spirit

It was noted by many participants that there is a general decadence in community spirit. For example, Respondent 6 observed that there is "no more voluntary work from parents because of the [negative] attitude." Respondent 5 similarly made the following observation:

Parents from the community used to volunteer and donate as individuals their personal property like land, *this land was donated by someone*.   School structures were put by native Muslims but this is no longer there. The spirit of individuals giving to community projects like schools is minimal. After lockdown, many girls were found to have been impregnated in their communities and yet they were in their homes. It is an indication that parents now care less.

Respondent 7 noted that "At governance levels, some parents feel that if they have not been nominated on management bodies, they cannot participate. People of the area always want to participate by way of management." These challenges retard the progress of student engagement in academic affairs.

SERC Subtheme 2: Information, Communication, and Technology Challenges

The participants lamented the gross under-preparedness of schools in information and communication technologies which undermined the smooth communication between the schools and parents. Because most schools relied on passing information to parents through children, many times this information was noted to reach the parents in distorted versions, and sometimes not reaching them at all. This is because the children would either tamper with the information, or lose the letters along the way home, or deliberately destroy, or refuse to deliver the information if it concerned their discipline. In such cases, parental engagement in children's academic affairs would be highly compromised since the parents would not get informed about the demands made on them by the schools.

Theme 3: Challenges related to Government (CRG)

The participants observed a number of challenges related to the government which hampered parental engagement in children's academic affairs. These included financing challenges which resulted in poor infrastructure and poor competition among schools due to egocentric political tokenism; and ICT challenges which caused communication gap, lack of sensitization, and misinterpretation of the government policy on USE. Other serious challenges attributed to the government included negative political influence and arbitrary interference of government through policy formulation. These are further explained below with detailed verbatim quotes.

Political influence

Most of the participants complained of the fact that USE is politicised. Some leaders were noted to manipulate the USE schools for political gains by claiming that education is free. This sort of interference was noted to push back parents from engaging in academic activities. Some parents were further noted to lose interest in taking their children to USE schools because of the claim that USE is free.

Arbitrary interference of government through policy formulation

A number of participants reported that the government exercised arbitrary interference through policy formulation. Respondent 19 was dismayed by the fact that "Decision and policy makers are just about sending directives when actually these policies cannot be implemented in the school." Respondent 7 observed that these policies often come "as draconian, so dampening parental engagement. BoG where PTA are represented were told not to be a signatory for the funds." In such a case, the cases of embezzlement of funds are bound to rise given that the checks and balances provided by the BoGs and PTA members are removed. Therefore, parents lose trust in the system and decide not to engage adequately in the children's academic affairs. Still related to funds, Respondent 7 noted that "The USE policy would be good, but the policy implementation is not realistic, it became counterproductive. You say a child should not be sent home for fees but you say a child should use only 47,000=! There are schools where the government has never done any construction. The parents say [hits the desk] 'that cannot work in this school'."

Respondent 9 lamented that with the USE policy, "Children are no longer under control of the community like in the past. *Omwaana taba w'omwe* [Runyankole for *a child is not for one*]. Your uncle could punish you as a child but now things have changed. The law is good but not properly explained to people." This shows, in the words of Respondent 17 that "There is a conflict between government and schools" on implementation of the policy.

Strategies to Enhance Parental Engagement in Students' Academic Affairs

The participants proffered a number of strategic interventions that could enhance parental engagement in students' academic affairs. These are categorised into three themes: Social and economic strategies, leadership and management strategies, and legislation and regulation.

Theme 1: Social and economic strategies

A number of social and economic strategies were given by the participants. Respondent 5 had this to say:

As an administration, we have not given up on engaging parents and people from our community. We are now using WhatsApp to mobilise parents, community members, political leaders, religious leaders, and others to raise funds to put a girls' dormitory at the school. We want to support girl child education especially after seeing what our girls went through during the period of the lockdown. We want to encourage girls to be in the boarding section to reduce their chances of being vulnerable as they go to and fro their homes. … and so we want to support the girl child by engaging parents to build them a boarding facility.

In the same vein, Respondent 20 reported that "We decided to attach every 20 girls to a teacher to make a family." Through such strategies, it was hoped that the school would make a stronger connection to the parents to jointly cater for the psychosocial needs of the learners. In effect, the student should then be able to concentrate on their academic activities and perform with excellence. Other participants offered the following strategies:

Respondent 8: "Communicate – write to them [parents] circulars, invite them in meetings, workshops, etc. 50% to 60% can read, 40% cannot read. This stops them from not participating.

Respond 1: "Thanksgiving in their churches that help raise money for improving school infrastructure, staff welfare, etc."

Respondent 2: "Sensitize Local Councils (LCs) to participate. Sensitize foundation bodies to put sanctions. Give employment. When educated students become idle in the village, parents get discouraged from participating in their children's AP."

Respondent 3: "Schools should have counselling programs, meetings, etc. Many parents only go to schools when they are just invited for the indiscipline of their children. There is a big gap between parents and schools."

Respondent 4: When you know the teacher and you are a friend already, you can easily help the child. But when you do not know the teacher, that gap can affect your students' academic performance. [It is important to] have a library, a computer, a television (there are some Television programs that can teach). Provide internet and network for those who may want to go digital. Phones should not be allowed because they can cause problems, some kids will go for pornography, and children can access a lot of filth on phones. Phone use also tampers with the schedules of chores at home. Children need to do some work at home. The Internet is the way to go (post modernity), so government and school administrators just need to be sensitised.

Respondent 5: "Foundation bodies have direct connection to parents, they need to continue mobilising, sensitising, and educating in weekly religious prayer meetings and services. Government should sensitize through government programs. Reduce poverty levels by providing income generating projects".

Respondent 6: "Worship places usually have many parents and people from the community. Topics like on proper parenting should be included in the topics in religious services/fellowships."

Respondent 7: "Improving income base of the parents. I am yet to understand the Parish Model whether it will do something."

Respondent 8: "Religious leaders should always encourage them to have self-help projects, if they can get support to change economically. Change of mindset by parents using say religious leaders, etc."

Respondent 9: "Church – foundation body messages [should be] taken to church – priests also [should] come at school for such programs. Parents should be encouraged to be engaged and try to provide more of the necessities to their children."

Respondent 19: Government should encourage sharing [consultation and dialogue] with heads of institutions. Strategies such as during the fight against HIV/AIDS should be used. When AIDS was very rampant, the government came up with programs to address the problem. It worked. There is a Music Dance Drama (MDD) group I usually invite to my school. It is called 'Drugs Apana', such groups can be sensitized. The government should find a way for both students and parents.

Respondent 22: "The parents should also provide financial and material support to the school as their role requires them to act accordingly."

Theme 2: Management and Leadership Strategies

A number of strategies pertaining to educational and civil leadership and management were also suggested to enhance the parents' engagement in learners' academic affairs. These, if implemented, were thought to step up the learners' academic performance. The strategies are reported as suggested by every participant.

Respond 1: "Form functional associations of old boys, old girls, such that they be their role models. Sensitising parents on their parental role by religious, foundation bodies, government, school days, and class meetings involving parents."

Respondent 2: "Government should intervene by always calling parents and educating them. Sensitization on some of the issues for example new innovations, policies, etc. Subsidise on scholastic materials like uniforms, books, textbooks, et cetera."

Respondent 3: "Head teachers and teachers should love parents and be able to listen to individual challenges. PTA meetings should be emphasised. Some resolutions in meetings are not friendly to all parents. There should be means of listening to the minority."

Respondent 4: Administrators should think of how they can involve parents in, for example organising a football match between parents *(laughs)* say parents from this side to this side or see their children play. Women who are not learned can teach young girls to peel and other life skills like arranging tables, and others. Parents should be familiar with their children. You can use such activities to approach them. Such can help develop the child holistically.

Parents who have gone to school and are educated can be offered parts of the curriculum and facilitate the learning at home. It is a matter of collaborating at school. There is a possibility of attending classes on zoom from home if parents facilitate them. Parents can facilitate teachers (on a common agreement) to help slow learners. Encourage parents to buy textbooks from which the children can learn

Respondent 5: Increase mobilisation strategies and sensitization, organise class meetings and joint counselling. We recently visited all the mosques in Sheema District and even churches trying to sensitise religious leaders the role of the parent.

Respondent 5: We sent circulars, used phone calls, and sent messages, all in local languages. We also used day students to send messages to parents and the community. Increase mobilisation strategies and sensitization, organise class meetings and joint counselling. We recently visited all the mosques in Sheema District and even churches trying to sensitise religious leaders the role of the parent. We sent circulars, used phone calls, and sent messages, all in local languages. We also used day students to send messages to parents and the community.

Respondent 6: Sensitising – School administrators should always organise meetings in various forms, like in PTA meetings, and invite different speakers to interest them in the academic affairs of their children. Time should be set apart for this. Let me tell you this [while pushing the chair in front as if he felt being far from me], whenever I have a PTA AGM in this school, we have always organised a guest speaker. Such speakers are always given a topic. For example, Science students who ask for say dissection kit sets, parents are given knowledge of the importance of such items and they end up paying for them. In one of the parents' meetings, I mentioned that; those with children in this school should take it as a business, always check whether you are making profit, sales, like any other business. Remember, if you do not check on your business, you make losses. Parents should be sensitised to stop calling their children Museveni's children. Getting someone to assist you does not mean that you completely stop your responsibility.

Invite parents for class meetings. For us here, we make parents sign commitment forms with their children. We have academic days in which parents meet the schools' academic committee to discuss the academics of their children. In such academic meetings, parents are sensitised on material that can help their children to improve their academic performance.

Respondent 7: "Sensitization campaigns [be organised]. It is important to put V.Ds [visiting days] for parents to be invited in schools and see. Customer care [should be emphasised]; recently, I was in PTA meeting and the parent said 'The head teacher here is very rude.'"

Respondent 8: Proper sensitization to all stakeholders including parents, government officials, religious leaders, politicians, etc. Empowerment of politicians be supported say at Districts to be facilitated financially to do sensitization. Schools should always invite parents for meetings, workshops, using facilitators, etc. On assemblies, the administration can always speak to the students. They can move and tell their parents.

Respondent 9: Need for sensitization. Parents should be engaged in school leadership. Have more seminars for parents in liaison with the school. Career days [should be organised]. Inviting parents in school programs. Best mode of communication with parents is teachers having phones. Parenting – a group of children can be assigned to a teacher (teacher parents) to follow the child in class, behaviours, outside class, these teachers can follow up.

Respondent 10: School administrators should not always ask parents money, they should give them a chance to use any materials they have to engage in the learning of their children, especially at school. At our school, we asked parents for physical food in order to support the school games and it worked. Parents brought enough for the whole sports day. Students got a special meal even when we did not have money after COVID-19 lockdown. As parents were giving food, we told them about the schools' sports day and many of them attended. Let us stop thinking about parents' support in terms of money only.

Also, there was a time we had a school conference. The head teacher was given a budget which he complained was big for the school. He suggested that we do it internally (without inviting other schools) which students refuted. We were almost going towards a strike because students said they had been going to other schools and therefore, it was time for those schools to come to their school. Students asked the head teacher why other schools have money but not him. Finally, the school chaplain suggested that we engage parents in the surrounding churches the next Sunday. The feedback was amazing. Parents gave all the food (bananas, millet, potatoes, beans, greens, pumpkins, green paper, etc) that was enough to feed all the visitors. The head teacher was left with a small budget which the school facilitated. We kept peace in the school because of engaging parents.

Respondent 18: "Regular counselling to students is needed. Schools should have structures that attract teachers and students. [While touching the mouth and his face looking changed], "You look at a latrine or staffroom and you wonder whether such should be used by a graduate."

Respondent 19: "Students [should] be checked on arrival. There is also a need for impromptu checks. Parents should be engaged in such checks."

Respondent 21: Method of aerobics. Our counselling team advised that most of the indiscipline comes through stress. This has helped our students to do activities with the opposite sex. Since we started that indiscipline has reduced.

We pay our teachers' allowances in time, offer them food, listen to them, and pay child allowances in time, we sometimes reallocate funds to staff welfare and postpone capital development, and we engage PTA, BoG and parents to increase staff welfare. There is a need for enough infrastructure; some schools in Uganda do double shifts because of failure to have enough structures. That could also be another option.

Respondent 22: The PTA and BOG as bodies representing parents, staff, and other stakeholders should be made very functional and meet regularly to plan for the school's development, engage parents in planning and budgeting, and provide accountability, communication, etc.

Parents should be encouraged to always take part in their children's education, and schools should put in place activities that can attract parents to get more accountable, involved, and ownership. Conduct regular PTA and other meetings with parents to keep them engaged in what schools are doing.

Theme 3: Legislation and Regulation through Acts, Policies and Guidelines

Participants enumerated a number of legal and regulatory strategies to enhance parental engagement in learners' academic affairs. These include the following as given by different participants.

Respondent 1: "Have policies interpreted in different local languages, for easy interpretation by parents."

Respondent 2: There should be enforcement like asking why children are not in school. Some rich parents have not taken their children to school. Vocationalization of education [be implemented] to strengthen skills such that parents may appreciate the role of education in the homes for example carpentry and joinery, brick laying, tailoring, and others. When a child does work at home, a parent is motivated to participate in the ongoing academic activity.

Respondent 3: "Government should increase money (capitation grant) to reach current needs."

Respondent 4: Government [needs] to run seminars to sensitise the parents through workshops and symposiums. Parents should not only come for visiting days. The education should be extended to parents. In our time, parents could go to school and make bricks. One who cannot make money, can provide labour at school.

Respondent 6: "Government officials should use gatherings to sensitise parents, for example, nowadays RDCs are sending warnings of those in school. Government should put regulations on drinking."

Respondent 7: Formation of policy should be arbitrary. Recently, a letter on segregation of roles. PTA which is a financial contribution body. That letter brought chaos. Government does not seem to recognize the administrative bodies in Foundation Bodies (FBs) by facilitation. I wish the government brought on board Education Secretaries (ESs) for different FBs. Parents find it easier to go to FBs than they do to the government. For example, there is a school in Sheema. There is a group which is saying please come, we are badly off. FBs can use the education office through church services, funerals, to reach parents.

Respondent 17: "Need for counselling services policy in schools."

Respondent 18: "Taxes for schools should be thought about by the government."

Respondent 19: **"**The government should find a way of empowering head teachers such that those teachers can respect them as their immediate supervisors. Government should make head teachers accountable on performance in all schools."

Respondent 20: "The head teachers are field soldiers, they need to be involved and consulted in decision making, policy formulation, etc."

Respondent 22: "A policy from the government that compels parents to be involved in their children's education and discipline measures should be put in place where possible. There should also be timely disbursement of funds from the government to schools so that parents

are seeing some developments at their schools. This will encourage them to take part in school activities."

DISCUSSION

Challenges of Parental Engagement in Students' Academic Affairs

The challenges of parental engagement in students' academic affairs in government grant-aided USE schools in Sheema District were derived using thematic content analysis of the in depth interviews. Three themes, each with a couple of subthemes, were realised. These include home environment-related challenges, school environment-related challenges, and challenges related to the government. The home environment-related challenges had three subthemes: economic challenges; information, communication, and technology challenges; and parenting challenges. The school environment-related challenges had two subthemes: leadership challenges and information, communication, and technology (ICT) challenges. The challenges related to the government included financing challenges, ICT challenges, negative political influence, and arbitrary interference of government through policy formulation.

As observed by Đurišić and Bunijevac (2017), it should be noted that not all parents have equal capacities for full engagement in all activities and not all schools are interested and able adequately to support parental engagement in them. Given that the traditional education system does not provide for a systematised parental participation, only parents with issues to address at school are the ones who provide some form of engagement. Odama and Esati's (2017) study indicates that there are possible barriers to parental engagement including teacher and staff attitudes toward parental engagement, family/cultural beliefs, fathers' educational level, irregular work schedules, and lack of knowledge on the part of fathers of how to become involved. Today's parents often face a lot of distractions and demands of daily life including low-income, inflexible work hours, and language barriers. These bar parents from full participation in school activities or participate in the schooling of their children on a regular basis. In some cases, cultural norms, insufficient financial resources, and lack of educational attainment add to barriers to parental involvement in school activities. This therefore calls on the school management to undertake deliberate moves to motivate parents to contribute to their children's academic progress, both at home and at school.

Many parents were not very successful in school themselves and so suffer from low self-esteem. They feel incompetent and lack the knowledge and confidence to help their children in academic activities. In this regard, school administrators and teachers must take the initiative to involve parents in an effort to assist the educational achievement of students. Unfortunately, some school administrators and teachers do not understand the importance of engaging parents, while others lack the knowledge of how to engage parents in learners' academic affairs, which further complicates the dynamics of parental engagement.

The political bottlenecks negatively colour the already existing challenging atmosphere of compromised parental engagement. Political statements and policies that imply withdrawal of responsibility, for instance, in terms of fee payment and material provision in universal secondary schools undermine the efforts to promote parental engagement in learners' academic activities. This is particularly unhealthy when parents are of low socioeconomic status and low education (Jeynes, 2007). Nevertheless, the findings of this study indicate that parental engagement in learners' academic programmes bears positive fruits in the learners' academic performance, and so any challenges associated with parental engagement need to be addressed so as to reap the benefits of parental engagement. It is therefore worth investing efforts to increase parental engagement in children's education.

Strategies to Enhance Parental Engagement in Students' Academic Affairs

Three themes of strategies were suggested to enhance parental engagement in learners' academic activities. These include social and economic strategies, leadership and management strategies, and legislation and regulation. The strategies are likely to work well when implemented holistically. In line with Jeynes' (2007) findings citing Swap (1993), there is a need for a structured programmatic approach to inculcating parental engagement in schools, which calls for the employment of empirical models such as the protective model, transmission model, and curriculum enrichment model. However, some of the models are deficient in achieving the desired effectiveness and level of parental engagement.

In the protective model, the school should be protected from interference by parents and vice versa. In certain core responsibilities such as teaching and learning, the school administrators and teachers should have the freedom to do what is expected of them with little if any interference from parents. Parents likewise need to be accorded the freedom to freely interact with their children in academic matters so as to supply the correct requirements. The protective model is deficient, viewing parental engagement as unnecessary and as potentially interfering with the education of children. The model should best apply for the political entities such as the foundation bodies and government policies, which unfortunately have direct entry into the schools and dictate, sometimes negatively, the course of academic activities within schools.

In the transmission model, teachers are essential, while parents provide support (Swap, 1993). This technique recognizes the importance of parental involvement in a child's development while maintaining control and intervention decision-making. The ability to effectively assist parents and the aptitude to develop solid professional connections are two additional talents that teachers adopting this method should possess. The primary flaw in this approach is the notion that all parents should and can serve as resources (Swap, 1993). This paradigm's unreasonable expectations of parents in terms of domestic tasks may cause them tremendous stress.

The purpose of the curriculum-enrichment model is to broaden the academic content taught in schools by soliciting participation from parents (Swap, 1993). This idea is based on the belief that parents have important expertise to give, and that contact between parents and teachers will improve the educational goals and curriculum at the school. The primary emphasis of this form of parental participation is placed on the academic program and the teaching that takes place at the child's school. The most significant drawback of utilising this tactic is that teachers are expected to tolerate a great deal of interference from parents over the contents of their lessons and the methods by which they are delivered. There are various situations in which the teacher might interpret this as a threat.

Hornby (2011) recommends three more parental participation models in children's educational endeavours. These are the expert, the consumer, and the partnership models. Under the expert model, teachers are viewed as experts in all aspects of child development and education, whereas parents' opinions are accorded less importance. Parents' primary responsibility is to get updates and guidance on their children's growth from teachers. Under the consumer model, teachers function as advisors, but parents make the ultimate decisions. Parents are ultimately responsible for decision-making, although teachers can assist in educating them about their options. In this approach, parents are regarded as subject matter experts, and teachers are supposed to defer to their judgement. When parents have a say in how their children are cared for, they are more likely to be pleased with the outcomes, gain confidence in their own parenting skills, and rely less on outside support. In the partnership model, teachers are considered as education experts, while parents are viewed as children experts. Teachers and

parents collaborate to offer children the greatest education possible by leveraging one another's skills. True parent-teacher relationships require mutual respect, a commitment to a variety of activities, and shared planning and decision-making duties. Adopting solutions to solve the issues of parental involvement in their children's education is best achieved through a partnership approach.

Turnbull et al. (2011) summed up the basis of good collaborations between parents and school personnel in seven principles. Trust is a crucial element of an effective partnership. The teacher must maintain trustworthy, confidential, open, and truthful connections with parents. In addition, the connection must be based on reciprocal respect, which includes regard for the opinions and dignity of others. Parents should be convinced of the ability of professionals who work with their children professionally. Effective partnerships require two-way communication that facilitates the sharing of information and ideas among all stakeholders. Equally important is the need to protect children, which is accomplished through early detection of problems, their resolution, the design of appropriate strategies, and the dissemination of information about child safety.

Odama and Ezati (2017) recognized parent-teacher communication as one of the most influential elements on the academic success of pupils in central Uganda. It was noticed that parents who connected their children with teachers to aid them in their weak areas were more involved, and the academic performance of their children eventually improved. The researchers also stressed the importance of parents attending school-organized meetings, such as "Class day" and "House" Meetings, during which their children's performance is discussed and a road forward is planned. To encourage parental involvement, especially among fathers, schools must tailor these events to the interests of fathers. Epstein (2009) suggested assigning some parents the role of parental engagement coordinators as a means of encouraging more parents to participate in a range of school activities. These coordinators can hold workshops for parents to inform them about the curriculum and remind them that they are their child's most important teacher.

Naite (2021) similarly notes that parents are one of the most significant factors in the development of the children. This is due to the authority and skill they have to shape and develop their children into motivated, inspired and lenient people with their explicit involvement in the process of learning activities. Contrarily, parents without involvement in their children's education process are merely considered to demotivate and demoralize their children through negligence. This, in turn, has a negative effect on their achievements. This therefore calls on the school authorities and government to embrace the strategy proposed by Wilder (2014): train parents to teach their children.

According to Đurišić and Bunijevac (2017), parental participation must be incorporated into a bigger strategy of complementary support for learning and development, which is coordinated and supported by the combined effort of all stakeholders. In addition, parental involvement should be viewed as an ongoing process that evolves throughout a child's and adolescent's school years, with a particular emphasis on the key transition periods between grades. Consequently, teachers who are not naturally adept at connecting with parents and establishing rapport will have the opportunity to acquire these skills. This reorientation of educational leadership and management seeks to empower school administrators and educators with the information and resources necessary to effectively involve parents in the education of their children. As noted by Jeynes (2007), parental involvement programmes are effective in enhancing the participation of parents in the academic activities of their children, which reciprocally boosts the academic performance of the children.

CONCLUSION

The study has indicated a number of hindrances to parental engagement in learners' academic activities, including home-based challenges, school-based challenges, and challenges attributed to the government. These challenges limit the effectiveness of parental engagement and consequently impact negatively on the academic activities of the learners. A number of generalised and specific strategies have been posited by the stakeholders to abate these challenges. It is therefore important that policies regarding parental engagement in learners' academic activities are formulated and implemented on the basis of these strategies in favour of promoting learners' academic performance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order for parents to feel at ease getting involved in their children's education, educators must undergo a professional reorientation based on the partnership model. Regular academic meetings should be held all through the school year to keep parents informed about their children's progress and to keep them engaged with the school. Schools also need to offer professional development for both teachers and parents to strengthen their collaboration and make it easier for them to collaborate. Teachers, principals, and educational policymakers should develop initiatives that encourage parental participation in their children's formal and informal learning environments. Parents should be aware of the significance of making school visits to their children. Developing this practice allows parents to keep a closer eye on their kids' schoolwork, which in turn improves their communication with their kids' teachers and fosters a more positive school experience for everyone involved.

REFERENCES

Amin, M. E. (2005). *Social Science Research: Conception, Methodology and Analysis*. University of Yaounde I, BP 755 Yaounde Cameroon and Makerere University.

Hornby, G. (2011). *Parental involvement in childhood education: Building effective school family partnerships*. Springer Science & Business Media. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4419-8379-4

Jeynes, W. H. (2007). The relationship between parental involvement and urban secondary school student academic achievement: A meta-analysis. *Urban Education*, *42*(1), 82-110.

Azumah, F. D., Samuel, K., & Onzaberigu, N. J. (2018). Effects of family structure on the academic performance of children: a case study of Ayeduase R/C Junior High School in the Kumasi Metropolis, Ghana, *International Journal of Social Science Studies*. 6 (10) (2018) 11e22, https://doi.org/10.11114/ijsss.v6i10.3643.

Bell, J., Waters, S., & Ebooks Corporation. (2014). Doing your research project: A guide for first-time researchers (Sixth ed.). Maidenhead, Berkshire: Open University Press.

Chukwudi, O. C. (2013). Academic Performance of Secondary School Students-The effects of Home Environment. Ibadan: Double Gist Publishers.

Crosnoe, R., Leventhal, T., Wirth, R. J., Pierce, K. M., Pianta, R. C., & NICHD Early Child Care Research Network. (2010). Family socioeconomic status and consistent environmental stimulation in early childhood. Child development, 81(3), 972-87.

Dettmers, S., Trautwein, U., Lüdtke, O., Kunter, M., & Baumert, J. (2010). Homework works, if homework quality is high: using multilevel modeling to predict the development of achievement in mathematics. *J. Educ. Psychol.* 102, 467–482. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0018453

Durisic, M., & Bunijevac, M. (2017). Parental Involvement as an Important Factor for Successful Education. CEPS Journal, 7(3), 137–153.

Dweck, C. S. (2017). Mindset (2nd ed.). New York: Brown, Little Book Group.

Education Act 13 (Pre-Primary, Primary and Post-Primary) Act 2008.

Epstein, J. L. (2011). *School, family, and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools* (2nd ed.). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Hancock, D. R. & Algozzine, B. (2017). Doing case study research: A practical guide for beginning researchers. New York: Teachers' College Press.

Isola, O. M. (2010). Effects of Standardized and Improvised Instructional Materials Students' Academic Achievements in Secondary School Physics. M. Ed Thesis, University of Ibadan, Ibadan.

Kavenuke, P. (2013). What is it that keeps good teachers in the teaching profession: A reflection on teacher retention? SAVAP International, 4(1): 165-175.

Karue, N. & Amukowa, W. (2013). Analysis of factors that lead to poor performance in Kenya Certificate of Secondary examination in Embu District in Kenya. *The International Journal of Social Sciences,* 13 (1), pp. 1 – 125

Komba, C.K., Hizza, E.L., & Jonathan,W.T.Y. (2013). Factors Influencing Academic Performance of Ward Secondary Schools: A Case of Selected Schools in Moshi Municipality and Moshi District. MUCCoBS Working Paper Series.

Lehrl, S., Evangelou, M., & Sammons, P. (2020). The home learning environment and its role in shaping children's educational development, School Effectiveness and School Improvement. *An International Journal of Research, Policy and Practice* 31:1, 1-6, https://doi.org/10.1080/09243453.2020.1693487

Mahlangu, V.P. (2014), *The changing landscape in the conditions of service for teachers in South Africa*, Journal of Social Science, vol. 36, no. 1, pp. 69-178.

Maina, M. J. (2010). Strategies Employed by Secondary School Principals to Improve Academic Performance in Embu West District. Kenyatta University. Retrieved April 25, 2018 from http://irlibrary.ku.ac.ke/bitstream/handle/123456789/930/ Mwaura%2C%20James%20Maina.pdf? Sequence=3.

Maganga, J. H. (2016). Factors Affecting Students' Academic Performance: A Case of Public Secondary Schools in Ilala District, Dar es Salaam. Master's thesis, The Open University of Tanzania.

McMillan, J.H., & Schumacher, S. (2010). Research in Education, Evidence-based research, Pearson, Boston.

Mistry, R. S., Benner, A. D., Biesanz, J. C., Clark, S. L., & Howes, C. (2010). Family and social risk, and parental investments during the early childhood years as predictors of low-income children's school readiness outcomes. Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 25(4), 432–449. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2010.01.002

Mlozi, M. K. (2013). "Factors Influencing Students' Academic Performance in Community and Government Built Secondary Schools in Tanzania": *International Journal of Science and Technology,* Vol. 2 (2), 1-13.

Mugumya, D., Basheka, B., Mwesigye, R. A., Atibuni, D. Z., Aduwo, R. J., & Ahimbisibwe, E. K. (2022). Parents' involvement and students' academic performance in Ryakasinga centre for higher Education-Sheema District, Uganda. *International Journal of Educational Administration and Policy Studies*, *14*(2), 79-86.

Myers-Young, S. (2018). "Understanding Parental Involvement". Integrated Studies. 178. Center for Adult and Regional Education. Murray State University. https://digitalcommons.murraystate.edu/bis437/178.

Oakes, J., Lipton, M., Anderson, L., & Stillman, J. (2015). *Teaching to change the world.* Routledge.

Oakes, J., Maier, A., & Daniel, J. (2017). Community schools: An evidence-based strategy for equitable school improvement. Boulder, CO: National Education Policy Center and Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.

Odama, S., & Ezati, B. A. (2017). Parents' contributions towards education process and variations in school performance indices (SPI) in Uganda certificate of education (UCE) examinations in central and northern Uganda. Journal of Education & Social Policy, 4(2), 80-96.

Rose, E., Lehrl, S., Ebert, S., & Weinert, S. (2018). Long-term relations between children's language, the home literacy environment, and socio-emotional development from ages 3 to 8. Early Education and Development, 29(3), 342–356. https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2017.1409096

Tamis-LeMonda, C. S., Luo, R., McFadden, K. E., Bandel, E. T., & Vallotton, C. (2019). Early home learning environment predicts children's 5th grade academic skills. Applied Developmental Science, 23(2), 153–169. https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2017.1345634

Xu, M., Kushner-Benson, S., Mudrey-Camino, R., & Steiner, R. (2010). The relationship between parental involvement, self-regulated learning, and reading achievement of fifth graders: a path analysis using the ECLS-K database. *Soc. Psychol. Educ.* 13, 237–269. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-009-9104-4

Yeager, D. S., & Walton, G. M. (2011). Social-psychological interventions in education: They're not magic. Review of Educational Research, *81*(2), 267–301.