

Parents-Teachers' Collaborative Strategies and Challenges in Managing Truancy in Public Primary Schools in Tabora, Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the collaborative strategies used by parents and teachers in managing pupils' truancy in government primary schools in Tanzania and the challenges they faced. The study was conducted in six primary schools in Kaliua district, Tabora region. A mixed-methods research approach with the convergent parallel design was employed. One hundred seventy-four (174) participants were involved, including the District Primary Educational Officer, Ward Educational Officer, parents, and teachers. Data were collected through interviews, questionnaires, and documentary reviews. Qualitative data were analyzed through content analysis, whereas the quantitative data were evaluated descriptively using SPSS version 26 to compute the frequency, mean, and percentages. The findings revealed that communication between parents and teachers, parents and teachers' meetings, classroom attendance, and local government involvement were being used in managing truancy. Besides, it was noted that challenges emerged when using the mentioned strategies. These challenges were mainly on the parents' side. Such challenges including parents' phone numbers being unavailable, parents' nonattendance to school meetings, and unchecked classroom attendance. This study concludes that collaboration between parents and teachers allows them to nurture pupils while they are at home and at school. The study recommends that the government needs to educate parents to ensure effective collaboration with teachers to reduce or eliminate truancy among pupils.

Keywords: collaborative, parent-teacher collaboration, truancy, strategies, challenges.

INTRODUCTION

Collaboration between parents and teachers plays a crucial role in actively managing and nurturing their children's education. It allows parents to work with teachers to accomplish various tasks for supporting children (Chiuri et al., 2020). The collaborative effort enables pupils to acquire knowledge at home, guided by parents, and at school, facilitated by teachers through policies and a designed curriculum (Makyara et al., 2019). The significance of collaboration between parents and teachers is widely acknowledged within global policies and frameworks, including the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the UNESCO Framework for Action. These influential guidelines highlight the importance of fostering strong partnerships between parents and teachers to enhance the quality of education (United Nations, 2015; UNESCO, 2015). Specifically, the SDGs, with Goal 4 focusing on Quality Education, underscore the crucial role of parent-teacher collaboration in ensuring inclusive and equitable education for all children. Moreover, the UNESCO Framework for Action, developed to promote sustainable educational practices, emphasizes active involvement of parents and families in education, recognizing them as vital educational partners and advocates for their participation in decision-making processes.

Tanzania has demonstrated its commitment to parent-teacher collaboration by closely aligning with global policies. Both the country's Education and Training Policy (ETP) of 1995 and 2014 emphasise the importance of fostering active engagement between parents and teachers (United Republic of Tanzania [URT], 1995; 2014). These policies recognise the crucial role of parents and teachers in supporting and enhancing the quality of education. They acknowledge parents' need for active involvement and participation in their children's education. Furthermore, the ETP of 2014 also encourages parents to engage in their children's learning process, provide support at home, and collaborate with teachers and schools. In recognising the essential partnership between parents and teachers, this policy emphasizes creating a friendly learning environment and promotes students' success. The policy highlights the importance of teacher-parent communication and involving parents in decision-making processes related

to their children's education. In collaboration with the Educational Quality Improvement Programme-Tanzania (EQUIP-T), the Tanzanian government has placed considerable emphasis on parent-teacher collaboration (EQUIP-Tanzania, 2014; URT, 2014). Although the ETP in Tanzania has not explicitly mentioned managing truancy within the context of parent-teacher collaboration, it is essential to note that addressing truancy and promoting regular attendance is a significant concern in education systems worldwide, including Tanzania. Based on that, one of the critical objectives of EQUIP-T is to address truancy among pupils through a collaborative partnership. Extensive research has consistently demonstrated that collaboration between parents and teachers yields positive educational outcomes (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). When parents and teachers join forces, they can effectively address various student-related challenges, including truancy. This collaborative approach creates a supportive and conducive environment that empowers children to succeed academically and personally. However, despite the evident benefits, there remains a shortage of research that examines the specific collaborative strategies employed by parents and teachers in managing truancy in Tanzania and the challenges they encounter in implementing these strategies.

The practice of collaboration between parents and teachers in managing truancy in primary school has been adopted in many countries worldwide. Studies have found that parental involvement and engagement in their child's education are associated with reduced truancy rates (Benner et al., 2016; Dotterer & Wehrspann, 2016). Other studies reported that collaboration between parents and teachers showed promise in improving pupils' attendance and reducing truancy (Halilu, 2020; Childs & Grooms, 2018; Lundo, 2017). For instance, research conducted in Nigeria and North America showed that collaboration between parents and teachers effectively combats absenteeism and significantly enhances school attendance (Halilu, 2020; Childs & Grooms, 2018). Similarly, a study conducted in Tanzania revealed that collaboration between parents and teachers positively influenced school discipline and reduced truancy rates (Lundo, 2017). Despite the success of reducing truancy through collaborative efforts between parents and teachers in various countries, the specific strategies

employed in managing truancy in Tanzania, particularly in Tabora, and the challenges parents and teachers encounter in implementing these strategies remain largely unexplored. Therefore, this study aimed to assess the collaborative strategies employed and the challenges parents and teachers face in managing truancy among pupils in public primary schools. This study was guided by the following two research questions:

- i. What strategies do parents and teachers employ in managing pupils' truancy?
- ii. What challenges do parents and teachers encounter when addressing pupils' truancy?

Methodology

The present study was conducted in Kaliua district in Tabora region of Tanzania. Kaliua district is situated in the western part of Tanzania. The district was chosen due to the prevalence of truancy as indicated by educational data. In 2020, the number of truancy dropouts in Kaliua district was 5,238 cases, making it a notable area of focus (URT, 2020). The district ranks in the top position in the region regarding truancy and school dropouts. This study employed a mixed-methods research approach utilising the convergent parallel design to enhance the validity and comprehensiveness of the findings regarding parents' and teachers' collaboration in addressing pupils' truancy. The chosen convergent parallel design facilitated the simultaneous collection of quantitative and qualitative data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), enabling the exploration of collaboration strategies employed by parents and teachers and the challenges they encountered. By analysing the two types of data independently and presenting the results collectively, a more comprehensive understanding of the research questions was achieved (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The study involved 174 participants, consisting of educational administrators, various categories of teachers, and parents. The sample comprised of one district primary educational officer (DPEO), three ward educational officers (WEOs), six head teachers, six discipline teachers, and 76 class teachers. All the teachers involved in the study were chosen from six primary schools. The district primary educational officer, WEOs, and teachers were selected purposefully. Besides, the study also involved 82 parents who were selected

through proportionate quota sampling. Data were collected using three methods namely; semi-structured interviews, questionnaires (comprising closed and open-ended questions) and documentary review. Tools were prepared in English and translated into Swahili, a widely used language in Tanzania. Interviews were used to collect data from DPEO, DEOs, head teachers, and discipline teachers, while questionnaires collected data from class teachers and parents. The reviewed documents included PTC meetings reports/minutes, parent log book, admission book, attendance register/class attendance, student permission book and school calendar. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. The Swahili interview transcriptions were then translated into English to support the findings. Besides, ethical issues adhered to protect participants' privacy, and anonymity was guaranteed.

The research tools were piloted to identify potential issues and made necessary improvements before data collection (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The questionnaire's reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which indicated good consistency and reliability ($\alpha > 0.70$). Member checking was also employed, allowing participants to review and confirm interview data (Birt et al., 2016). Additionally, logical reporting and documentation were implemented to ensure transparency and trustworthiness. These measures aimed to establish the tools' validity, reliability, and trustworthiness, strengthening the credibility and integrity of the study's findings. Both qualitative and quantitative data were analysed in this study. Qualitative data were analysed through content analysis, explicitly employing a conventional qualitative content analysis approach and manifest analysis, following a four-stage process: de-contextualization, re-contextualization, categorization, and compilation (Elo et al., 2014). Quantitative data collected through questionnaires were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26. The analysis encompassed descriptive statistics to calculate means, frequencies, and percentages.

Findings

This section explains the research findings regarding parents-teachers' collaborative strategies employed in managing pupils' truancy and the

challenges they encountered. The identified strategies and challenges have been presented as the primary themes corresponding to each research question.

Parents-Teachers' Collaborative Strategies Employed in Managing Pupils' Truancy

Overall, the findings of this study revealed that parents and teachers were utilising four main strategies through their collaborative efforts to manage truancy among pupils. These strategies included fostering communication between parents and teachers, conducting meetings between parents and teachers, implementing classroom attendance measures and involving local government leaders. Table 1 indicates rated responses from teachers, providing an overview of the collaborative strategies employed in managing truancy within schools.

Table 1: Collaborative Strategies used by Teachers in Managing Truancy (N=76)

Statements	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)
I use class attendance to find truant pupils and collaborate with their parents to control them	76 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)
I share class attendance data with a parent through established channels to improve the ability of PTC to curb truancy	58 (76.3%)	18 (23.7%)
I communicate with parents of pupils through letters, phones, and school announcements to pupils.	65 (85.5%)	11 (14.5%)
I meet with parents through scheduled PTC meetings to discuss how to manage truancy of their children	51 (67.1%)	25 (32.9%)
I involve local government authorities in finding the whereabouts and assisting in returning the child to school	48 (62.2%)	28 (36.8%)
I involve local government to ensure parents comply with orders to monitor attendance of children at school	43 (56.6%)	33 (43.4%)

Source: Field Data (June, 2022)

Based on the data presented in Table 1, the data indicate that more than 50% of the class teachers employed all four strategies for managing truancy. Classroom attendance was the most frequently used strategy, as all class teachers in the visited schools consistently utilised them. This widespread adoption of attendance records may be attributed to by their mandatory nature within the educational system. In contrast, sharing attendance reports with parents was the least collaborative strategy between teachers and parents in managing truancy among pupils in the studied schools. It was also found that over 85% of the class teachers communicated with parents to address truancy.

However, the involvement of the local government was the least utilised strategy of collaboration between teachers and parents. The local government being the least collaborative strategy used, had two implications. One other collaborative strategies were relatively effective because a few cases of truancy needed the involvement of local government leadership to deal with them. Two teachers sought collaboration with local government leadership for a few cases of pupils' truancy of which other strategies failed and become particularly critical. Similarly, the data in Table 2 indicate the ranking of parents' responses on the four strategies of teacher-parent collaboration in managing truancy among pupils in primary schools. The parents' responses indicate that most parents were communicating with teachers through letters and phone calls followed by face-to-face meetings to discuss and sort out things related to truancy of pupils. Furthermore, about three thirds of the parents' responses indicated that the local government involvement was seen as an effective strategy for addressing chronic or persistent cases of truancy among pupils in schools in their areas of jurisdiction.

Table 2: Collaborative Strategies used by Parents in Managing Truancy (N=82)

Statements	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)
I communicate with teachers through phones, and letters concerning the management of children's truancy	68 (82.9%)	14 (17.1%)
Meeting with teachers at different times and discussing different issues concerning child's progress led to easy truancy management.	57 (69.5%)	25 (30.5%)
I attend meetings organised by the school to discuss school-related issues, including truancy.	48 (58.5%)	34 (41.5%)
The local government is involved in managing truancy in school and it is one of the final steps taken for resolving chronic cases	52 (63.4%)	30 (36.6%)
The local government has been using its authority to curb truancy in school, including holding parents responsible	51 (62.2%)	31 (37.8%)

Source: Field Data (June, 2022)

Detailed explanations of the strategies employed in managing truancy among pupils are provided in the subsequent sections.

Communication between Parents and Teachers

Communication between parents and teachers was found to have been facilitated through various channels, including mobile phones, school announcements, parental invitations sent through letters and school examination reports. The school examination reports included a designated section where parents could sign and give explanations to indicate their receipt of the report and satisfaction with the results. Once completed, the signed section was returned to the respective class teacher through the child. The study revealed that communication between parents and teachers was vital in sharing valuable information about pupils. With technological advancements, such as smartphones, cooperation between parents and teachers significantly improved. One example was an establishment of a

WhatsApp group where information on truancy was shared. Through this platform, parents received updates on their children's attendance, including specific names of pupils and days missed. This direct and instant communication allowed parents to address truancy actively. During the interview session, a head teacher from School A acknowledged the importance of communication between parents and teachers in managing truancy. This head teacher had these to say:

With smartphones, the cooperation between parents and teachers has improved. Parents and teachers have established a WhatsApp group where information about truancy is also posted; it is where parents get information and know the number of days or how irregularly some pupils attend school. Even the actual names of pupils and days missed are shown through WhatsApp messages. Parents of truant pupils and others respond; some give more details or give advice or share their experiences or tactics to best deal with the situation.

The quote above indicates how advancement in technology and communication (smart phones and WhatsApp) has enhanced collaboration between parents and teachers, hence helps in addressing truancy among pupils. The insights given by a discipline teacher from School D during the interview session are worth noting. This discipline teacher shed further light on the topic, offering his perspective and experiences:

Teachers communicate with parents in fulfilling their custodial responsibilities in preventing pupils' truancy. Teachers immediately contact parents through phone calls, letters, or physical visits when they notice that some pupils are absent from classes. In such cases, teachers request that respective parents come to school for discussions concerning their children's attendance.

The above quote specifies that teachers immediately reported and asked parents to meet and discuss with them about pupils' truancy. Teachers physically visited some pupils' homes for unreachable parents or those who did not show up after receiving calls.

Parents-Teachers' Meetings

Parents and teachers employed scheduled meetings as another effective strategy for managing truancy. During parent-teacher meetings, WEO and local government leaders were invited. The study found that in most schools, parents and teachers used quarterly meetings to address truancy-related issues. However, there were no timetables for quarterly meetings in other schools, but the truancy issue was discussed in other meetings as one of the agenda. These meetings were typically conducted at the school premises, often in the afternoon. During these gatherings, teachers would share crucial information regarding the truancy situation within the school and engage in discussions with parents on how to address it. This finding was also noted during interviews with a discipline teacher from School C. The discipline teacher commented:

Parents and teachers hold meetings to discuss truancy among pupils. These meetings allow both parties to educate one another on the importance of collaboration in addressing truancy issues. During the meetings, teachers explain the importance of the parents' participation in preventing truancy, while most parents insist on sharing information if their children miss school.

The above quote suggests that meetings between parents and teachers help to deal with pupils' truancy. The meetings create a platform where parents and teachers can exchange knowledge and insights, emphasise the significance of working together to address truancy-related challenges. Similarly, during the interview session, the head teacher of School F gave valuable insights on the parent-teacher meeting. The head teacher noted:

Parents are invited to attend school meetings where they discuss with teachers the impact of truancy on pupils' academic performance. During discussions, we collectively agree on effective measures to control truancy and subsequently, put the agreed-upon strategies into action. Examples of the things that teachers discuss and agree with parents to deal with pupils who miss classes include making conversations with children to identify the underlying reasons for their absence and advising them on

the importance of attending school. Besides, pupils may be assigned specific tasks, such as cleaning the school grounds by cutting grass. Furthermore, if a child continuously fails to attend school for five consecutive days without information, teachers may report the case to the parent(s) who in turn may report it to the local government leaders' office for further intervention and support.

The above quote infers that in parent-teacher meetings for managing truancy, the conversation usually involves two main aspects. One, reasons or circumstances that lead to the respective pupils' truancy and two, the learning/academic and legal implications for truancy.

Classroom Attendances

Based on the findings, classroom attendance record was mentioned as the third strategy used by parents and teachers in the management of truancy in schools. Teachers collected daily attendance data of pupils in the classroom. Discipline teachers shared the names of absentees with parents through WhatsApp groups after collecting all the names from class teachers. Teachers then tracked pupils individually and collaborate with their parents to ensure that they attend school regularly. The review of the thirty-six (36) class attendance sheets (out of 65 class attendances) in the studied schools revealed that teachers noted present and absent pupils on the daily basis. On this aspect, the WEO from ward B noted:

Other strategies that teachers use include keeping accurate records of the pupils by calling their names out daily using the attendance book. Parents are aware that if a child is absent from school for more than five days is considered an offense. parents are encouraged to check their children's exercise books on the daily basis (upon their return home). It is emphasized that parents should check the date for each exercise and ensure that it is marked. If a child's exercises remain unmarked for more than three consecutive days, parents are advised to call the teacher via phone.

The quote shows that teachers and parents collaborate in managing truancy through attendance sheets.

Involvement of Local Government Leaders

This study found that local government leaders (ward executive officer, village executive officer, village chairperson and councillors) were involved in addressing chronic truancy cases. The local government leaders enforced bylaws set by parents and teachers in managing truancy. During meeting, the local government leaders observed what the parents and teachers were discussing. On this aspect, a discipline teacher from school C commented:

The local government leaders usually attend all the meetings held in schools. When parents and teachers have their meetings, they involve the ward executive officer, village executive officer, village chairman, and councillors. During the meeting, the local leaders are observant and they do so to oversee if the bylaws that were enacted to prevent truancy are effective.

The statement suggests that local government leaders usually attend meetings in schools. The purpose of involving these government leaders is to ensure accountability in the implementation of the bylaws that have been enacted to prevent truancy. The presence of local government leaders at the meetings indicate that truancy prevention is considered significant within the community, and the involvement of these leaders underscores the commitment to address the issue effectively.

Challenges facing Parents and Teachers in Managing Pupils Truancy

The findings in this aspect revealed that challenges faced parents and teachers in managing truancy among pupils are mainly a result of the strategies they used in their collaboration. The main challenges that this study found were unavailability of the parents' phone numbers, parents' reluctance to attend scheduled meetings and unchecked classroom attendance.

Unavailability of the Phone Numbers

It was found that some of the parents were not available on the phone number they provide to the school for communication purposes. This

affected the parent–teacher efforts in addressing pupils' truancy. Regarding this situation, the discipline teacher of school C had this to say:

Sometimes teachers try to call parents whose children miss school, but they are either unavailable or do not pick calls. Sometimes they don't call back, even if they find a missed calls, for hours or even for a day. Other parents completely don't call back or not reachable even through WhatsApp. So, it becomes a challenge to cooperate with such parents in dealing with their children's truancy.

The quote above indicates a potential communication barrier between teachers and parents, thus hindering collaborative efforts to tackle truancy effectively. The delayed response from parents may result in a prolonged absence of communication and delay in addressing the underlying issues contributing to their children's truancy. It also emphasizes the need for alternative means of communication or strategies to find unreachable parents through phone calls, such as using emails, text messages, or giving letters through their children to ensure effective collaboration in dealing with truancy.

Parents' Reluctance to Attend Scheduled Meetings

This study found that parents' reluctance to participate in scheduled meetings was another significant challenge. The analysis of eight (8) reviewed meeting reports/minutes documents revealed that not all parents actively attended meeting sessions. This observation is based on the data presented in Table 2. The data indicate that only 48 out of 82 parents (58.5%) were present during the parent-teacher meetings. Although the attendance rate of parents exceeded a half, a considerable portion (34 parents, 41.5%) remained absent. Consequently, this situation hindered effective implementation of the discussed strategy. Parents who did not attend these meetings were unaware of the discussed issues, thus resulted in limited involvement in addressing pupils' truancy issues.

Unchecked Classroom Attendances

Despite the positive intention behind utilising classroom attendance to address truancy, this approach had its limitations. A review of thirty-six (36)

school attendances revealed that some teachers neglected to monitor pupils' attendance for consecutive periods of two to three days. When interviewed about this matter, these class teachers justified their actions by explaining that the heads of the schools occasionally assigned additional responsibilities, which resulted in their inability to track pupils' attendance effectively. Unfortunately, the unchecked classroom attendance undermined the significance of maintaining accurate attendance records for truancy control; thus, hindered identification of absentees on those days. In support of the teachers' responses of not monitoring pupils' attendances, one of the class teachers from school B had this to say:

I didn't take attendance in my class for two consecutive days, because the head teacher assigned me the responsibility of assessing the reading skills of Standard I pupils. Given the task's tight deadline, I concentrated my efforts to ensure I met it as per the head teacher's instructions. Unfortunately, this assignment caused me to overlook taking attendance for the pupils.

Likewise, another teacher from school D informed that:

Sometime, there are situations where taking attendance of the pupils is not possible due to other responsibilities that have been assigned to you. For instance, two weeks ago, I was unable to mark the attendance of my pupils because the head of the school assigned me the responsibility of collecting examination papers from a neighboring school. When I left, I anticipated returning on time to mark the attendance of the pupils in my class. However, the head teacher of that school was absent, which necessitated me to wait until he returns. Consequently, I couldn't return on time, resulting in my inability to take attendance.

These quotes from the teachers indicate that each class teacher has the responsibility of monitoring pupils' attendance in their respective assigned classes. If a class teacher is assigned other duties, it is their responsibility to ensure that attendance is either checked by themselves or delegated to another teacher.

Discussions

This section of the paper discusses the study's findings aligned with the study questions. The study examined collaborative strategies employed by parents and teachers and the challenges faced them in managing truancy among pupils in public primary schools. The study highlighted four key strategies: classroom attendance, parent-teacher communication, meetings, and involvement of local government leaders. The findings also shed light on the challenges faced by parents and teachers during their collaboration, such as unavailability of parents' phone numbers, parents' reluctance to attend scheduled meetings and unchecked classroom attendance. The importance of classroom attendance records as a critical strategy aligns with previous research. Sekiwu et al. (2020) conducted a similar study in Uganda and found that maintaining accurate attendance records was vital for identifying patterns of truancy. The findings are also in connection with Mills et al. (2019), who conducted a study in Australia and found that monitoring student attendance data was thought to be crucial for raising attendance.

This consistency in findings suggests that classroom attendance records are a foundational tool for managing truancy across different educational contexts. Moreover, parent-teacher communication emerged as another critical strategy in addressing truancy. Parents and teachers were communicating through letters, phone calls and WhatsApp groups to address the truancy issue. The WhatsApp group was helpful as information about truancy was shared with parents quickly. This finding is consistent with research conducted by Doğan (2019), who underlined WhatsApp group's importance in helping teachers solve students' problems more quickly. However, the same study also found that WhatsApp groups had a negative impact because, among other issues, parents were trying to solve every problem via WhatsApp; as a result, they were reluctant to have face-to-face communication with teachers. Scheduled meetings involving parents, teachers, and local government leaders were identified as a valuable strategy. In Tanzania, leaders and community members who have authority in wards and villages have the task to monitor and collaborate with schools and parents to ensure that pupils attend school instead of roaming about in

the streets or being in activities that are not related to studies (URT, 2016). This is in connection with Ada et al. (2019), who revealed that local leaders in Nigeria were involved in meetings where school administrators spelled out bylaws and procedures which could be communicative to all and serve as references when dealing with truants. In the same line, Halilu (2020) (in Nigeria) pointed out that court alternatives and law enforcement are among the strategies for reducing truancy among secondary school students. However, it is essential to note that the challenges identified in the present study are not unique and have been observed in previous researches. For instance, a study by Islam et al. (2016) from remote communities highlighted a gradual decline in parental presence in meetings. In the current study, parents were reluctant to attend scheduled meetings. Also, this study found that parents were not reachable through phones. These challenges can hinder effective collaboration between parents and teachers in addressing truancy.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study concludes that communication between parents and teachers, meetings between parents and teachers, classroom attendance and the engagement of local government leaders have all been valuable strategies in managing truancy. Nevertheless, unavailable parent's phone number, low attendance rates at school meetings among parents and unchecked classroom attendance were the challenges in managing pupils' truancy. Despite the identified challenges, the collaborative strategies between parents and teachers remain significant in addressing truancy among the pupils. Recognizing the used strategies and addressing the challenges to their implementation is crucial in reducing truancy rates and improving pupils' attendance. Based on the findings, it is recommended that the government, in collaboration with other stakeholders, prioritise providing education to parents and teachers. Raising awareness about the importance of collaboration and equipping them with the necessary skills may effectively reduce or even eliminate truancy among pupils. Additionally, efforts should be made to address the specific challenges identified such as unavailability of parents' phone numbers registered at school and low attendance in school meetings, by exploring alternative communication methods and facilitating convenient scheduling options.

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Acknowledgements

We would like to convey our deepest gratitude to the participants for agreeing to participate in this study; it would not have been possible without their willingness.

Conflict of Interest

There are no conflicts of interest that the authors can identify with this particular paper.