



Socio-Economic Factors Contributing to Truancy in Primary School Learners: A Case Study of the Manzini Region, Eswatini

Naboth Mudavanhu Phebeni¹  & Zinhle Nozipho Mamba² 

¹ University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa.

² Midlands State University, Gweru, Zimbabwe.

ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of socio-economic factors in influencing school attendance in the Manzini Region of Eswatini. It further examines the relationship between parental involvement, poverty, parents' or guardians' employment status, and truancy among primary school learners in the region. The study employed a mixed-methods approach and adopted Bronfenbrenner's 1979 Ecological Systems theory, which emphasizes the interaction between individual, family, and societal factors in shaping an individual's behavior. Thematic analysis was used to process the qualitative data, while SPSS was used for the quantitative findings. The study involved five principals, ten teachers, twenty students, and ten parents/guardians. The findings revealed that learners from low-income households, children of unemployed or informally employed parents, and those experiencing limited parental involvement were significantly more likely to engage in truancy. Inadequate access to school resources, peer influence, and family instability also emerged as strong predictors of absenteeism. The study concluded that truancy undermines educational outcomes, contributes to increased dropout rates, and perpetuates the cycle of poverty in families and society. The study challenged policymakers and educators to craft actionable, targeted interventions to mitigate socioeconomic factors that act as barriers to accessing and providing education. This study contributes to scholarship by providing empirical evidence on how socio-economic factors interact to influence truancy within the Eswatini context, where research is limited. It extends the application of Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework to the problem of primary school absenteeism, thereby providing a contextualized understanding of the microsystem (family), mesosystem (school), and exosystem (community) influences on learner attendance.

Correspondence

Naboth Mudavanhu

Phebeni

Email:

nabothphebeni2@gmail.com

Publication History

Received: 18th March, 2025

Accepted: 9th September, 2025

Published online:

11th November, 2025

To Cite this Article:

Phebeni, Naboth Mudavanhu, and Zinhle Nozipho Mamba. "Socio-Economic Factors Contributing to Truancy in Primary School Learners: A Case Study of the Manzini Region, Eswatini." *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences* 6, no. 12 (2025): 2929 - 2942, <https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.20256124>.

Keywords: Truancy, Socio-economic factors, Learning, Learner performance.

INTRODUCTION

Student truancy is a pain for most parents, educators, policymakers, and schools worldwide. Ramberg et al. argue that it involves students deliberately absenting themselves from school without a valid reason.¹ This definition, however, contradicts Virtanen et al., who contend that a lack of a sense of belonging can

¹ Joacim Ramberg et al., "School Effectiveness and Truancy: A Multilevel Study of Upper Secondary Schools in Stockholm," *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth* 24, no. 2 (2019): 185–98.

inhibit students' attendance at school.² The lack of a sense of belonging in a school can have a profound impact on students' mental and psychological well-being, resulting in reduced performance, limited interaction, and impaired decision-making, which may lead to poor choices.

Most educational systems view truancy as a form of social misconduct that requires all school stakeholders to work together, as it has been a long-standing challenge for primary and secondary schools.³ Truancy or school refusal has far-reaching implications that not only affect student learning but also expose them to the danger of engaging in delinquent behaviour involving substance misuse and, in some situations, criminal activities.⁴ The truancy issue has remained an Achilles' heel, raising questions about whether the problem is student-based or related to the education system.⁵

According to research, truancy and absenteeism are worldwide phenomena, and schools in Eswatini are grappling with them. A report by the Ministry of Education and Training 2018 cites socio-economic disparities, the employment status of parents, regressive cultural practices in some communities that prioritize boys over girls attaining education, and a lack of parental involvement. This paper examines the impact of socio-economic factors on truancy in primary schools in the Manzini Region of Eswatini. The following research objectives underlie the study:

1. To identify and analyze the primary socio-economic factors contributing to truancy in primary schools in the Manzini Region.
2. To examine the influence of parental education levels and household income on learner attendance.
3. To evaluate potential interventions that can mitigate socio-economic barriers to regular school attendance.

The study further seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the primary socio-economic factors contributing to truancy in the primary schools in the Manzini Region?
2. How do parental education and household income influence school attendance?
3. What interventions can address socio-economic barriers to school attendance?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Defining and understanding socio-economic barriers to education

Antonoplis views socio-economic factors as latent traits measured by a family's parental level of education, occupational status, and family's household income.⁶ It can also be viewed as a discipline that studies the relationship between economics and social behaviour and how they interact.⁷ Research has shown that several factors, including family size, can influence a family's SES. Nagaraju et al. concluded that larger families are more likely to experience higher poverty levels because they are associated with lower SES than smaller families.⁸ Large families face greater financial challenges due to higher housing, food, and education expenditures. Similarly, Ambika and Krishnamoorthy note that the situation worsens if the family has limited financial resources, as they struggle to meet their basic needs.⁹

A study by Munir et al. concluded that a family's financial stability is critical in shaping students' educational experiences and attainment.¹⁰ Students from higher-SES backgrounds outperformed those

² Tuomo E Virtanen et al., "Student Engagement, Truancy, and Cynicism: A Longitudinal Study from Primary School to Upper Secondary Education," *Learning and Individual Differences* 86 (2021): 101972.

³ Jonathan W. Shute and Bruce S. Cooper, "Understanding In-School Truancy," *Phi Delta Kappan* 96, no. 6 (March 23, 2015): 65–68, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0031721715575303>; Diana Wulandri, "Pengaruh Gaya Asuhan Ibu Bapa Terhadap Ponteng Sekolah," *Conference: Kuala Lumpur International Communication, Education, Language and Social Sciences (KLICELLS 9)* 9 (2018).

⁴ Dirk Baier, "The School as an Influencing Factor of Truancy," *International Journal of Criminology and Sociology* 5 (2016): 191–202.

⁵ Shute and Cooper, "Understanding In-School Truancy."

⁶ Stephen Antonoplis, "Studying Socioeconomic Status: Conceptual Problems and an Alternative Path Forward," *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 18, no. 2 (March 18, 2023): 275–92, <https://doi.org/10.1177/17456916221093615>.

⁷ Simon Niklas Hellmich, "What Is Socioeconomics? An Overview of Theories, Methods, and Themes in the Field," in *Forum for Social Economics*, vol. 46 (Taylor & Francis, 2017), 3–25.

⁸ V Nagaraju, N Mani, and S Reddy, "Determinants of the Socio-Economic Status (SES)—Literature Evidence," *Quarterly Journal* 22, no. 4 (2019): 1–23.

⁹ R. Ambika and K. Krishnamoorthy, "Determinant of Socio-Economic Sustainable Development," *Shanlax International Journal of Arts, Science and Humanities* 6, no. 3 (2019): 35–36.

¹⁰ Javeria Munir et al., "The Impact of Socio-Economic Status on Academic Achievement," *Journal of Social Sciences Review* 3, no. 2 (2023): 695–705.

from lower-SES backgrounds due to parents' key role in supporting their education. The study confirmed a direct correlation between a family's SES and students' academic performance. These findings align with Autor et al., who found that boys from disadvantaged families showed more behavioural challenges, struggled with their academic work, and performed poorly compared to girls.¹¹ This finding is also supported by the Human Capital Theory, which explains that students from higher SES tend to receive more support with their education through resources, extra lessons, access to private learning centres, and parental support with homework.

Furthermore, Goings & Boyd and Mosia & Egara identified SES as a critical factor affecting students' success, institutional support, and prior academic attainment.¹² The SES of students provides them with mental and psychological stability to cope with the rigorous educational challenges they face at school. Students with a strong SES are less vulnerable and more resilient to challenges because of their strong support structures. Students with a low SES are more vulnerable and buckle under pressure, affecting their socialisation, interaction, and general decision-making at school and home.¹³ This may influence their decision to attend or not attend school.

Parental Education and School Attendance

There is empirical evidence of a positive correlation between parents' and children's educational attainment.¹⁴ Although this is the case, findings from Omarkhanova et al. indicate that it is not substantial to use correlation only to describe this relationship, as factors such as a conducive home environment, parental support, access to learning resources, and the presence of co-curricular activities are equally important in motivating students to attend school and support their performance.¹⁵ That said, a study by Chowa et al. comparing parents who have been involved in their children's education with those who have not concluded that children are more likely to suffer, be vulnerable, and lack a backbone when their parents are not involved.¹⁶ They must make adult decisions that their absent parents would have made on their behalf. In contrast, active parents instill and reinforce core cultural values in their children, regularly interact with the school, and form strong relationships and partnerships that support their children's education.

Research shows that when parents are highly involved in their children's education, their children achieve greater academic success.¹⁷ Parental involvement ensures that children attend school, exhibit acceptable behaviour, receive adequate support with their homework, and are motivated to engage in all school activities.¹⁸ In contrast, students lack a sense of belonging when their parents are not involved in their education. They lack necessities and a critical home-based support structure to support their learning.¹⁹ The involvement of parents guarantees regular communication between parents and the school, creating a sandwich effect on the child and reinforcing their academic outcomes.

Although the importance of parental involvement cannot be overstated, it is also essential to acknowledge that not all parental involvement yields positive outcomes. Parental involvement has been shown to encourage children's learning by monitoring homework, participating in parent-teacher

¹¹ David Autor et al., "Males at the Tails: How Socioeconomic Status Shapes the Gender Gap," *The Economic Journal* 133, no. 656 (2023): 3136–52.

¹² Ramon B Goings and Brittany Boyd, "The Influence of the Sherman STEM Teacher Scholars Program on Persistence in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics: A Mixed-Methods Study," *Education Sciences* 14, no. 10 (2024): 1076; Moeksi Mosia and Felix O Egara, "Predictors of Student Success in Mathematics: Hierarchical Bayesian Approach," *International Journal of Applied Engineering & Technology* 6, no. 2 (2024): 59–72.

¹³ Qian Liu, Susan Geertshuis, and Rebecca Grainger, "Understanding Academics' Adoption of Learning Technologies: A Systematic Review," *Computers & Education* 151 (July 2020): 103857, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2020.103857>.

¹⁴ W Lim, "Impacts of Parental Involvement and Parents' Level of Education on Student's Academic Accomplishment," *Educ J* 10, no. 1 (2021): 35–39.

¹⁵ A. Omarkhanova et al., "Investigating the Impact of Parental Involvement on Student Academic Achievement," *'Bilim' Scientific and Pedagogical Journal* 109 (2024): 43–52.

¹⁶ Gina Chowa, David Ansong, and Issac Osei-Akoto, "Parental Involvement and Academic Performance in Ghana," 2013.

¹⁷ Mohd Norazmi Nordin et al., "A Review of Studies Related to Parental Involvement in Early Intervention for Children with Special Educational Needs with Visual Impairment," *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 2024, 110–13.

¹⁸ Subadrah Madhawa Nair et al., "The Impact of Parental Involvement in Preschool on Children's Academic Performance," *Journal of Ecohumanism* 3, no. 7 (2024): 3796–3808.

¹⁹ M. Sharma, *Inclusive Education and Parental Involvement: Mainstream School and Integration of Disabled Children* (Laxmi Book Publication, 2024).

meetings, accompanying them to school, and supporting their extracurricular activities.²⁰ However, several studies have found that excessive parental involvement can be detrimental to the school, especially when parents are dissatisfied with the school, hold a negative perception, and are unwilling to support school activities.²¹ These parents shun the school, bringing negative energy and, in turn, fostering delinquent behavior in their children. Instead of children viewing the school as a place of joy where they spend time and build lasting relationships, they do not look forward to going to school, and when they do, their behaviour is poor and hurtful to other students. Kantova suggests that if this behaviour is not managed, students develop a negative attitude toward the school and their learning and may drop out.²²

Family Household Income and Truancy Rates

Several studies have concluded that a household's employment status is the cornerstone of its educational investment. Munir et al. highlight that employed families enjoy greater financial stability, enabling them to invest significantly in their children's education compared to non-employed families.²³ Similarly, a study by Karamba in Somalia, a low-income developing country, revealed that most families rely on informal employment due to high unemployment rates and are unable to invest in their children's education.²⁴ This has led to a decline in the number of students attending school.

Poverty is a significant factor influencing the amount a family invests in education. The effects of poverty can have both short-term and long-term implications for children's education. Students coming from poor or poverty-stricken backgrounds are already grappling with educational disadvantages before they even attend school.²⁵ When they eventually attend school, they are three steps behind their counterparts from affluent families. Their physical health, mental and psychological astuteness, and emotional development are not in a good place, which does not support them in engaging and excelling in their education.²⁶ Parents often become emotionally and psychologically affected when they fail to fulfill their expected responsibility of sending their children to school, which impacts their parenting and ability to make informed choices for themselves and their children.²⁷

Students must not forgo the formative years of their education, as these years help shape and develop their attitudes and perceptions.²⁸ When household income prevents them from attending school, they miss important stages in their socialization process, which expose them to a different environment, allow them to share experiences with students from diverse backgrounds, and help them coexist in a school environment as their second home.²⁹ Attending school allows them to develop and sharpen their thinking skills, foster collaboration, communication, and respect, and, above all, help them work within boundaries that require them to respect themselves, their peers, teachers, school leaders, and other stakeholders associated with the school. This helps to shape their worldview and eradicate any preconceived ideas or misconceptions they might have due to a lack of exposure.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Bronfenbrenner's 1979 Ecological Systems Theory underpinned this study and was instrumental in identifying and understanding the numerous socio-economic factors influencing truancy in primary schools in the Manzini Region in Eswatini. The theory was relevant because it encompasses key factors

²⁰ Nicoleta Paun, "The Parental Impact on Education: Understanding the Correlation between the Parental Involvement and Academic Results," *Acta Educationis Generalis* 14, no. 2 (2024): 16–26.

²¹ Paun, "The Parental Impact on Education: Understanding the Correlation between the Parental Involvement and Academic Results."

²² Klara Kantova, "Parental Involvement and Education Outcomes of Their Children," *Applied Economics* 56, no. 48 (2024): 5683–98.

²³ Munir et al., "The Impact of Socio-Economic Status on Academic Achievement."

²⁴ Wendy Karamba and Isabelle Salcher, "Socioeconomic Impacts of COVID-19 on Households in Somalia: Results from Round 1 of the Somali High-Frequency Phone Survey," 2021.

²⁵ Edward M Sosu et al., "Socioeconomic Status and School Absenteeism: A Systematic Review and Narrative Synthesis," *Review of Education* 9, no. 3 (2021): e3291.

²⁶ Sosu et al., "Socioeconomic Status and School Absenteeism: A Systematic Review and Narrative Synthesis."

²⁷ April S Masarik and Rand D Conger, "Stress and Child Development: A Review of the Family Stress Model," *Current Opinion in Psychology* 13 (February 2017): 85–90, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2016.05.008>.

²⁸ Jean-Louis Denis, Nancy Côté, and Maggie Hébert, "Manifestations of Collegiality Within Universities: Delocalisation and Structural Hybridity as Governance Forms and Practices," in *Revitalizing Collegiality: Restoring Faculty Authority in Universities*, (Emerald Publishing Limited, 2023), 137–56, <https://doi.org/10.1108/S0733-558X2023000087006>.

²⁹ Denis, Côté, and Hébert, "Manifestations of Collegiality Within Universities: Delocalisation and Structural Hybridity as Governance Forms and Practices."

that influence children's development and their ability to attend and excel in school. Family dynamics characterised by parental involvement, open communication, and trust can significantly impact a child's interactions, socialisation, and school attendance. On the other hand, the economic hardships families face, the nature of the school environment, its rules, regulations, and educational policies, and the link between the school and the home are all critical factors in children's decision-making about whether to attend a school. The application of Bronfenbrenner's 1979 Ecological Systems Theory helped the researcher understand the interactions between these systems and how they can influence truancy in schools. Furthermore, parents, schools, and policymakers can use data from these interactions to develop intentional, targeted intervention strategies to overcome the socioeconomic barriers that hinder students' attendance at school. Given the challenges posed by truancy worldwide, all stakeholders need actionable strategies to increase the likelihood that children attend school.

METHODOLOGY

Design of the study

A mixed-methods approach was used for this study because it blends numerical analysis with an in-depth understanding of how and why truancy occurs. This gave the study a well-rounded understanding of school truancy patterns. The study falls under the pragmatic research design. The researcher chose this approach as it supports and values both objective and subjective data, aligning well with the mixed-methods approach.³⁰ In addition, the pragmatic research design through the mixed method approach also aligns with the use of Bronfenbrenner's 1979 Ecological Systems Theory, which seeks to understand the interaction between the family and society, which can be understood through objective quantitative measurement; on the other hand, an understanding of the contextual relationship can be extracted through qualitative findings.

Sampling

The study employed the Random Stratified sampling methodology, which allows the researcher to subdivide the population into distinct subgroups and then randomly select participants from each group, as stipulated by Bendt.³¹ This approach enabled the researcher to categorize participants into four groups: principals, teachers, parents, and students, ensuring that each group's perspectives were represented.³² The categorisation of participants ensured that all subgroups were equally represented, thereby increasing the validity of the findings, as data were collected from a comprehensive sample that shared varied views on truancy. Furthermore, Soriano & Sumayo reiterate that the technique allows for a detailed examination of the different subgroups to obtain their unique experiences, minimising the biases that may arise if the sample were all grouped and interviewed together.³³

The final study sample consisted of forty-five (45) participants: five (5) principals, ten (10) teachers, twenty (20) students, and ten (10) parents/guardians. Of these, the qualitative strand drew on in-depth interviews with the principals, teachers, and parents/guardians (n = 25). In contrast, the quantitative strand was based on survey responses from the twenty (20) students. The sample size was guided by Cresswell's recommendations for qualitative and quantitative designs, ensuring that data were collected from relevant stakeholders.³⁴ This approach aimed to answer the research questions and to provide targeted interventions to address truancy in primary schools in the Manzini Region of Eswatini. This sample size was considered sufficient, as it enabled data saturation in the qualitative strand. It ensured adequate representativeness in the quantitative strand, thereby strengthening the reliability and validity of the findings.

³⁰ Mohamed Elgeddawy and Mahmoud Abouraia, "Pragmatism as a Research Paradigm," *European Conference on Research Methodology for Business and Management Studies* 23, no. 1 (June 26, 2024): 71–74, <https://doi.org/10.34190/ecrm.23.1.2444>.

³¹ A. Bendt, "Understanding Stratified Random Sampling in Research," *Research Methods Online*, 2020, <https://www.researchmethodsonline.com/stratified-random-sampling>.

³² Rufai Iliyasu and Ilker Etikan, "Comparison of Quota Sampling and Stratified Random Sampling," *Biom. Biostat. Int. J. Rev* 10, no. 1 (2021): 24–27.

³³ Joy Lynne Soriano and Gideon Sumayo, "Parents as Teachers in Modular Distance Learning: Relationship of Parenting Style and the English Academic Performance," *TRANS-KATA: Journal of Language, Literature, Culture, and Education* 4, no. 2 (2024): 102–16.

³⁴ Zoe Morrison et al., "National Evaluation of the Benefits and Risks of Greater Structuring and Coding of the Electronic Health Record: Exploratory Qualitative Investigation," *Journal of the American Medical Informatics Association* 21, no. 3 (2014): 492–500.

Data Collection Methods

The researcher used structured questionnaires because they provide a consistent framework that supports uniformity and standardisation in collecting data from parents, principals, and teachers. They are also an efficient way to gather data across multiple participants, and their standardized nature makes analysis easy.³⁵ Focus group discussions were conducted with students to gather their insights and perspectives through open discussions, aiming to formulate an opinion on truancy.³⁶ The researcher employed this approach to gather nuanced, detailed information from teachers, thereby gaining a deeper understanding of truancy that may be difficult to capture with other methods.³⁷

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), which effectively manages large datasets and presents results in graphical displays to illustrate different variables.³⁸ SPSS can also perform sophisticated statistical analysis and identify patterns and trends in the data, addressing the different aspects raised by the research questions. In addition, Rahman and Mukhtadir highlight SPSS's ability to perform precise calculations, minimizing human error and enhancing the reliability of the research.³⁹ The qualitative data were analyzed using interpretive thematic analysis (ITA), as it can deconstruct large datasets into meaningful concepts based on patterns and trends. The researcher refined, coded, and indexed data until a clear thematic map emerged.⁴⁰ A discussion was held with experts to address data inconsistencies and reach common ground.

Ethical Considerations

After the Amadi University College Ethics Committee approved the study, permission was sought from the Eswatini Ministry of Education and Training and from the primary school gatekeepers in Manzini District. The engagement of potential participants followed. The researcher spoke to principals of schools where the study would be conducted and contacted some parents and students to seek their permission and consent to participate. Participants were all informed of their rights to participate in the study and that their privacy would be upheld. The researcher followed Denscombe’s steps, taking into account ethical considerations and participants' rights and privacy.⁴¹

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the quantitative findings and the study's qualitative results.

Table 1: Parental Responses on Socio-Economic Factors Influencing Truancy (N=10 Parents)

Socio-Economic Factor	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
Low household income affects attendance	60	30	10	0	0
Lack of parental education influences truancy	50	40	10	0	0
Children miss school due to financial constraints	70	20	10	0	0
Parents’ unemployment influences truancy	80	10	10	0	0

³⁵ D. Kuphanga, “ Questionnaires in Research: Their Role, Advantages, and Main Aspects,” *Advanced Online Publication*, 2024.

³⁶ Hom Bahadur Basnet, “FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION: A TOOL FOR QUALITATIVE INQUIRY,” *Researcher: A Research Journal of Culture and Society* 3, no. 3 (October 31, 2018): 81–88, <https://doi.org/10.3126/researcher.v3i3.21553>.

³⁷ Simon K S Cheung et al., “Shaping the Future Learning Environments with Smart Elements: Challenges and Opportunities,” *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education* 18, no. 1 (2021): 16.

³⁸ Lokesh Jasrai, *Data Analysis Using SPSS* (Sage, 2020).

³⁹ Arifa Rahman and Md Golam Mukhtadir, “SPSS: An Imperative Quantitative Data Analysis Tool for Social Science Research,” *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science* 5, no. 10 (2021): 300–302.

⁴⁰ Muhammad Naeem et al., “A Step-by-Step Process of Thematic Analysis to Develop a Conceptual Model in Qualitative Research,” *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 22 (2023): 16094069231205789.

⁴¹ M. Denscombe, *Good Research Guide: Research Methods for Small-Scale Social Research*, 7th ed. (Open Univ. Press., 2021).

Table 1 above shows that 8 (90%) of parents agreed that financial constraints, including low income and unemployment, contribute to truancy. The results align with Munir et al. (2023), who highlight that families with financial stability are more prepared to invest in their children's education than those without. Additionally, a study by Klein et al. (2020) revealed a strong correlation between household income and truancy. Research on parental education appears to support the study's findings, with 8 (90%) respondents agreeing that parental education influences truancy. Barone and Ruggera argue that parental education has proven to be a critical predictor of children's educational growth.⁴² Affluent families, in addition to sending their children to school, can also provide them with the educational resources and support they need. It is fair to conclude that children from low-income families are constrained by their financial resources, which influence their educational decisions.

Table 2: Principals and Teachers' views on causes of Truancy (N=5 Principals, 10 Teachers)

Cause of Truancy	Principals Agree (%)	Teachers Agree (%)
Poverty limits students' ability to attend school	80	90
Lack of parental involvement contributes to absenteeism	60	70
School fees and transport costs are barriers to school attendance	70	80
Peer influence and lack of motivation influence truancy	60	80

Table 2 above shows that principals and teachers highlighted poverty (80%–90%) and school costs (70%–80%) as key barriers to truancy in their schools. Several studies have confirmed poverty as a critical factor influencing school truancy. A study by Sosu et al. concluded that poor parents struggle to send their children to school, especially in low-income countries with high unemployment rates, where families often face difficulties in finding sufficient food to survive.⁴³ Although education is considered a merit good, it is not always a priority for them. The percentage of parents who agree that poverty affects truancy is worrying and has not been helped by the Eswatini Education system, which is only free for the first four years of primary education, after which the parents must pay.

The above statistic is compounded by 3 (60%) of principals and 7 (70%) of teachers agreeing that low parental involvement is a factor that influences truancy. In comparison, 3 (60%) of the principals and 8 (60%) of the teachers cited peer influence and a lack of student motivation as secondary factors. The results above align with the literature. Abbas et al. argue that when parents are involved in their children's education, they have a positive influence on them.⁴⁴ Children are motivated to attend school, model positive behavior, and look forward to engaging in school activities. The opposite of this, however, is also true. Paun highlights that when parents have a poor relationship and say nothing positive about the school, the negative energy transfers to their children.⁴⁵ The findings are also supported by Abdullah, Salim, and Arip, whose study found that peer influence is a significant factor in school truancy.⁴⁶

Qualitative Findings

Three key findings emerged from the study: poverty and truancy, parental level of education, and parents' employment status. The researcher will use excerpts from focus group discussions with the teachers and students. Teachers will be presented as (T), and students as (ST).

⁴² Carlo Barone and Lucia Ruggera, "Educational Equalization Stalled? Trends in Inequality of Educational Opportunity between 1930 and 1980 across 26 European Nations," *European Societies* 20, no. 1 (2018): 1–25.

⁴³ Sosu et al., "Socioeconomic Status and School Absenteeism: A Systematic Review and Narrative Synthesis."

⁴⁴ S Khan et al., "Effect of Jigsaw Strategy on Academic Achievement and Motivation of Science Students: Evidence from Classroom Intervention," *Kurdish Studies* 12, no. 1 (2024): 3455–62.

⁴⁵ Paun, "The Parental Impact on Education: Understanding the Correlation between the Parental Involvement and Academic Results."

⁴⁶ Muhammad Azmi Abdullah, Syed Sofian Syed Salim, and Mohamed Arip, "Factors That Influenced the Problem of Truancy among Secondary School Students," *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences* 8, no. 3 (2018): 363–73.

Poverty and Truancy

Teachers and students unanimously agreed on the impact of poverty and truancy. There were, however, some variations depending on household income. The results indicate that truancy resulting from poverty is higher in low-income households compared to high-income households. **T1, T2, T4, T8, and T10** confirmed that truancy had become increasingly challenging in their schools. They said:

We struggle to get consistent attendance from our students. Some even miss a whole school term. Most of our students come from low-income families that are struggling to survive, let alone send children to school in an adverse economic environment.

Several studies have concluded that students from low-income families face several challenges in school, including hunger. Kamanda highlights that students from low-income families do not drop out of school because of their parents' inability to pay, but they have also been found to drop out of free education schools because of hunger.⁴⁷ A study in Ghana by Ampofo et al. found that children's recurrent truancy is closely linked to poverty at home.⁴⁸ Similarly, a study by Naven et al. in Kenya concluded that poverty is a significant barrier to children's access to primary education.⁴⁹ The study highlighted the challenges that parents in marginalized communities face in trying to enroll their children in school.

The teachers' views above concur with the findings from focus group discussions with the students. **ST1, ST3, ST6, ST8, ST15, ST19, and ST20** confirmed that they struggle to attend school, concentrate, and excel due to their challenges at home. In their words:

The school is very far from home, and we must wake up early to be on time. Sometimes we need to complete our home chores before going to school. Working a long distance and spending the day on an empty stomach is difficult. Our parents cannot afford the extras required at school when they struggle to provide a complete school uniform. Sometimes it feels better to stay at home than look miserable at school.

Although painful, the sentiments expressed by students in focus groups are a reality for some schools. These findings align with the literature. Harmey and Moss highlight how, in some cultural backgrounds, students are used as a source of labor to work in the fields to support their families.⁵⁰ If they are lucky, they may go to school, but girls are more disadvantaged than boys. In the same vein, Gee notes that the rates of chronic absenteeism are high in students with adverse backgrounds compared to those from affluent families.⁵¹

Parental level of education

The findings confirmed that parental education is associated with truancy in schools. The researcher noted that parents with educational backgrounds see the value of education and strive to send their children to school, whereas those without educational backgrounds do not. Students **ST1, ST4, T6, and ST8, S11, S14, S15, and S19** who gave their views said:

Our family has minimal educational history. Our parents completed primary education and worked as subsistence farmers for their entire lives. When we raise the challenges we face at school, they refer to their educational level. The discussions are challenging. The situation improved only when teachers from the school visited our homes to address the increased absenteeism.

⁴⁷ Mamusu Kamanda, "Does Community Poverty Reduce Children's School Attendance More at Primary Education than at Secondary Education? Evidence from Post-Conflict Sierra Leone," *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education* 46, no. 3 (2016): 435–56.

⁴⁸ Eric T Ampofo, Kingsley Opoku, and Michael Opoku-Manu, "Truancy as Predictor of Poor Academic Performance among Junior High School Students in Ashanti Mampong Municipality of Ghana," *European Journal of Education and Pedagogy* 3, no. 2 (2022): 70–78.

⁴⁹ Lynn Naven et al., "The Influence of Poverty on Children's School Experiences: Pupils' Perspectives," *Journal of Poverty and Social Justice* 27, no. 3 (2019): 313–31.

⁵⁰ Sinéad Harmey and Gemma Moss, "Learning Disruption or Learning Loss: Using Evidence from Unplanned Closures to Inform Returning to School after COVID-19," *Educational Review* 75, no. 4 (2023): 637–56.

⁵¹ Kevin A Gee, "Minding the Gaps in Absenteeism: Disparities in Absenteeism by Race/Ethnicity, Poverty and Disability," *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk (JESPAR)* 23, no. 1–2 (2018): 204–8.

Kanungo et al. conducted a scoping review of 17 articles on the impact of parental education and involvement on children's education.⁵² The study revealed that parental education and involvement positively influence children's critical thinking, problem-solving, and independent decision-making. Similarly, a study in Malta by Kethineni et al. found that parents without an educational background are more likely to contribute to truancy and delinquent behavior among their children.⁵³

Several teachers who responded to the effects of parental education on their students' education concurred with most views raised above. **T1, T3, T4, T7, T9, and T10** had this to say:

Several parents do not participate in teacher-parent meetings to discuss their children's progress. Parents with an educational background support their children and are willing to work closely with the school. Students whose parents are involved in their education are keen to do well and repay them. Some parents even volunteer their services to the school, while others are part of the PTA.

The findings are consistent with those of Seidu et al., who argue that a lack of parental supervision leaves children vulnerable to peer pressure, as they lack a protective shield to help them establish boundaries and avoid risky behaviors that can lead to school absenteeism.⁵⁴ Similarly, Alonso-Tapia et al. concluded that parents' educational level affects students' performance.⁵⁵ Parents who excel in school make time to monitor their children's progress and respond to school feedback, whereas those with less educational experience do not.

Employment Status of Parents

The findings revealed a correlation between parents' employment status and truancy. Parents with higher incomes were more likely to invest in their children's education and provide support than those with lower incomes. When interviewed, some teachers revealed that affluent parents support their children and exert control over their behaviour. This is what they had to say:

T1, T3, T4, T6, T7, and T9; we struggle with some students due to a lack of parental support, even for basic things the school considers mandatory for all students. Parents with a high employment status are responsive to supporting their children in areas that we cannot afford as a school, such as extra reading textbooks and photocopying. The struggles of low-employment-status parents are sometimes evident in their children.

Belmonte et al. found that parents' occupational status has a direct effect on their children's education.⁵⁶ Their findings suggest that students whose parents hold high-ranking jobs perform better academically than their counterparts whose parents hold low-ranking jobs or are unemployed. Zhang et al. reviewed 38 studies and found that parents with high-income jobs value education and work hard to create positive pathways for their children.⁵⁷ In contrast, jobless parents or those with low-income jobs struggle to support their children, which diminishes their chances of achieving success. Berloffa et al. suggest that in the USA, students benefit from having one parent with a collar job or a professional occupation, as this helps children with their pathways.⁵⁸

⁵² Pallavi Kanungo, Seemita Mohanty, and Apparao Thamminaina, "Exploring the Forms of Parental Involvement for Truancy Control: A Scoping Review Analysis with Stakeholder Consultation," *Cambridge Journal of Education* 54, no. 3 (2024): 377–96.

⁵³ Sesha Kethineni et al., "PROTOCOL: Effectiveness of Parent-engagement Programs to Reduce Truancy and Juvenile Delinquency: A Systematic Review," *Campbell Systematic Reviews* 17, no. 3 (2021): e1189.

⁵⁴ Abdul-Aziz Seidu et al., "Sexual and Reproductive Health Education and Its Association with Ever Use of Contraception: A Cross-Sectional Study among Women in Urban Slums, Accra," *Reproductive Health* 19, no. 1 (2022): 7.

⁵⁵ Mirtha del Prado-Morales et al., "Parental Involvement and Family Motivational Climate as Perceived by Children: A Cross-Cultural Study," *Psicología Educativa. Revista de Los Psicólogos de La Educación* 26, no. 2 (2020): 121–28.

⁵⁶ M^a Luisa Belmonte, José Santiago Álvarez, and M^a Ángeles Hernández-Prados, "Rendimiento Académico Percibido En Función de La Ocupación Laboral de Los Padres," *Revista Complutense de Educación* 33, no. 2 (2022): 279.

⁵⁷ Tong Zhang et al., "Applied Model of E-Learning in the Framework of Education for Sustainable Development," *Sustainability* 12, no. 16 (August 10, 2020): 6420, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12166420>.

⁵⁸ Gabriella Berloffa, Eleonora Matteazzi, and Paola Villa, "The Influence Of Parental Employment Status On Children's Labor Outcomes. Does The Gender Of Parents And Children Matter," *Journal of Research in Gender Studies* 7, no. 2 (2017).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above findings, the study recommends three approaches that can be adapted to reduce truancy. School stakeholders, educational planners, and policymakers must consider policy-level interventions that can subsidize school-related expenses for families and incentivize children to attend school. Secondly, community-based programs featuring influential speakers and workshops can help raise awareness of the value of education, motivating children to stay in school and pursue their educational goals. This can be done by implementing strategies that strengthen community support networks for needy families. Finally, schools must strengthen their monitoring systems so that truant children do not fall through the cracks. Consolidating the already successful meal program, currently run in most schools, and making it mandatory nationwide can alleviate financial pressure on families.

CONCLUSION

The implications of truancy have been felt nationwide, as many students have dropped out of school or failed to start primary education for different reasons. Although the government's move, facilitated by the Ministry of Education and Training, has reduced the burden on parents, it has not completely eradicated the problem. Several schools in rural areas continue to struggle with inadequate infrastructure, limited learning resources, and a shortage of qualified teachers. The problem is exacerbated by the late disbursement of government grants and parents' inability to procure additional books and stationery to support their children's education. In some urban schools, truancy is influenced by the top-up fees some schools charge to cover overhead costs, including water, electricity, and other expenses. The study thus concludes that socio-economic challenges significantly contribute to truancy in primary schools in the Manzini Region in Eswatini. A multi-stakeholder approach involving the government, schools, and communities is the panacea to mitigating the challenges that socio-economic barriers continue to pose for children.

Disclosure statement

The authors reported no potential conflict of interest.

Funding

This work was not supported by any funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of Midlands State University, Gweru, Zimbabwe. The Midlands State University and the Eswatini Ministry of Education and Training have approved and granted the necessary clearance for its conduct.

Declaration

The authors declare that they did not utilize Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the writing of this paper. They used Grammarly and Quillbot to revise grammar and correct sentence structure.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abdullah, Muhammad Azmi, Syed Sofian Syed Salim, and Mohamed Arip. "Factors That Influenced the Problem of Truancy among Secondary School Students." *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences* 8, no. 3 (2018): 363–73.
- Ambika, R., and K. Krishnamoorthy. "Determinant of Socio-Economic Sustainable Development." *Shanlax International Journal of Arts, Science and Humanities* 6, no. 3 (2019): 35–36.
- Ampofo, Eric T, Kingsley Opoku, and Michael Opoku-Manu. "Truancy as Predictor of Poor Academic Performance among Junior High School Students in Ashanti Mampong Municipality of Ghana." *European Journal of Education and Pedagogy* 3, no. 2 (2022): 70–78.
- Antonoplis, Stephen. "Studying Socioeconomic Status: Conceptual Problems and an Alternative Path Forward." *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 18, no. 2 (March 18, 2023): 275–92. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17456916221093615>.
- Autor, David, David Figlio, Krzysztof Karbownik, Jeffrey Roth, and Melanie Wasserman. "Males at the

- Tails: How Socioeconomic Status Shapes the Gender Gap.” *The Economic Journal* 133, no. 656 (2023): 3136–52.
- Baier, Dirk. “The School as an Influencing Factor of Truancy.” *International Journal of Criminology and Sociology* 5 (2016): 191–202.
- Barone, Carlo, and Lucia Ruggera. “Educational Equalization Stalled? Trends in Inequality of Educational Opportunity between 1930 and 1980 across 26 European Nations.” *European Societies* 20, no. 1 (2018): 1–25.
- Basnet, Hom Bahadur. “Focus Group Discussion: A Tool for Qualitative Inquiry.” *Researcher: A Research Journal of Culture and Society* 3, no. 3 (October 31, 2018): 81–88. <https://doi.org/10.3126/researcher.v3i3.21553>.
- Belmonte, M^a Luisa, José Santiago Álvarez, and M^a Ángeles Hernández-Prados. “Rendimiento Académico Percibido En Función de La Ocupación Laboral de Los Padres.” *Revista Complutense de Educación* 33, no. 2 (2022): 279.
- Bendt, A. “Understanding Stratified Random Sampling in Research.” *Research Methods Online*, 2020. <https://www.researchmethodsonline.com/stratified-random-sampling>.
- Berloffa, Gabriella, Eleonora Matteazzi, and Paola Villa. “The Influence Of Parental Employment Status On Children’s Labor Outcomes. Does The Gender Of Parents And Children Matter.” *Journal of Research in Gender Studies* 7, no. 2 (2017).
- Cheung, Simon K S, Lam For Kwok, Kongkiti Phusavat, and Harrison Hao Yang. “Shaping the Future Learning Environments with Smart Elements: Challenges and Opportunities.” *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education* 18, no. 1 (2021): 16.
- Chowa, Gina, David Ansong, and Issac Osei-Akoto. “Parental Involvement and Academic Performance in Ghana,” 2013.
- Denis, Jean-Louis, Nancy Côté, and Maggie Hébert. “Manifestations of Collegiality Within Universities: Delocalisation and Structural Hybridity as Governance Forms and Practices.” In *Revitalizing Collegiality: Restoring Faculty Authority in Universities*, 137–56. Emerald Publishing Limited, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1108/S0733-558X20230000087006>.
- Denscombe, M. *Good Research Guide: Research Methods for Small-Scale Social Research*. 7th ed. Open Univ. Press., 2021.
- Elgeddawy, Mohamed, and Mahmoud Abourai. “Pragmatism as a Research Paradigm.” *European Conference on Research Methodology for Business and Management Studies* 23, no. 1 (June 26, 2024): 71–74. <https://doi.org/10.34190/ecrm.23.1.2444>.
- Gee, Kevin A. “Minding the Gaps in Absenteeism: Disparities in Absenteeism by Race/Ethnicity, Poverty and Disability.” *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk (JESPAR)* 23, no. 1–2 (2018): 204–8.
- Goings, Ramon B, and Brittany Boyd. “The Influence of the Sherman STEM Teacher Scholars Program on Persistence in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics: A Mixed-Methods Study.” *Education Sciences* 14, no. 10 (2024): 1076.
- Harmey, Sinéad, and Gemma Moss. “Learning Disruption or Learning Loss: Using Evidence from Unplanned Closures to Inform Returning to School after COVID-19.” *Educational Review* 75, no. 4 (2023): 637–56.
- Hellmich, Simon Niklas. “What Is Socioeconomics? An Overview of Theories, Methods, and Themes in the Field.” In *Forum for Social Economics*, 46:3–25. Taylor & Francis, 2017.
- Iliyasu, Rufai, and Ilker Etikan. “Comparison of Quota Sampling and Stratified Random Sampling.” *Biom. Biostat. Int. J. Rev* 10, no. 1 (2021): 24–27.
- Jasrai, Lokesh. *Data Analysis Using SPSS*. Sage, 2020.
- Kamanda, Mamusu. “Does Community Poverty Reduce Children’s School Attendance More at Primary Education than at Secondary Education? Evidence from Post-Conflict Sierra Leone.” *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education* 46, no. 3 (2016): 435–56.
- Kantova, Klara. “Parental Involvement and Education Outcomes of Their Children.” *Applied Economics* 56, no. 48 (2024): 5683–98.
- Kanungo, Pallavi, Seemita Mohanty, and Apparao Thamminaina. “Exploring the Forms of Parental Involvement for Truancy Control: A Scoping Review Analysis with Stakeholder Consultation.”

- Cambridge Journal of Education* 54, no. 3 (2024): 377–96.
- Karamba, Wendy, and Isabelle Salcher. “Socioeconomic Impacts of COVID-19 on Households in Somalia: Results from Round 1 of the Somali High-Frequency Phone Survey,” 2021.
- Kethineni, Sessa, Susan Frazier-Kouassi, Yuki Shigemoto, Wesley Jennings, Stephanie M Cardwell, Alex R Piquero, Kimberly Gay, and Dayanand Sundaravadivelu. “PROTOCOL: Effectiveness of Parent-engagement Programs to Reduce Truancy and Juvenile Delinquency: A Systematic Review.” *Campbell Systematic Reviews* 17, no. 3 (2021): e1189.
- Khan, S, S Ullah, M M Abbas, M Khatoon, M S Malik, and S Noreen. “Effect of Jigsaw Strategy on Academic Achievement and Motivation of Science Students: Evidence from Classroom Intervention.” *Kurdish Studies* 12, no. 1 (2024): 3455–62.
- Kuphanga, D. “Questionnaires in Research: Their Role, Advantages, and Main Aspects.” *Advanced Online Publication*, 2024.
- Lim, W. “Impacts of Parental Involvement and Parents’ Level of Education on Student’s Academic Accomplishment.” *Educ J* 10, no. 1 (2021): 35–39.
- Liu, Qian, Susan Geertshuis, and Rebecca Grainger. “Understanding Academics’ Adoption of Learning Technologies: A Systematic Review.” *Computers & Education* 151 (July 2020): 103857. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2020.103857>.
- Masarik, April S, and Rand D Conger. “Stress and Child Development: A Review of the Family Stress Model.” *Current Opinion in Psychology* 13 (February 2017): 85–90. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2016.05.008>.
- Morrison, Zoe, Bernard Fernando, Dipak Kalra, Kathrin Cresswell, and Aziz Sheikh. “National Evaluation of the Benefits and Risks of Greater Structuring and Coding of the Electronic Health Record: Exploratory Qualitative Investigation.” *Journal of the American Medical Informatics Association* 21, no. 3 (2014): 492–500.
- Mosia, Moeksi, and Felix O Egara. “Predictors of Student Success in Mathematics: Hierarchical Bayesian Approach.” *International Journal of Applied Engineering & Technology* 6, no. 2 (2024): 59–72.
- Munir, Javeria, Mehreen Faiza, Bakht Jamal, Sana Daud, and Khurshed Iqbal. “The Impact of Socio-Economic Status on Academic Achievement.” *Journal of Social Sciences Review* 3, no. 2 (2023): 695–705.
- Naeem, Muhammad, Wilson Ozuem, Kerry Howell, and Silvia Ranfagni. “A Step-by-Step Process of Thematic Analysis to Develop a Conceptual Model in Qualitative Research.” *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 22 (2023): 16094069231205789.
- Nagaraju, V, N Mani, and S Reddy. “Determinants of the Socio-Economic Status (SES)–Literature Evidence.” *Quarterly Journal* 22, no. 4 (2019): 1–23.
- Nair, Subadrah Madhawa, W Wider, D Bo, G K S Singh, and M Siddique. “The Impact of Parental Involvement in Preschool on Children’s Academic Performance.” *Journal of Ecohumanism* 3, no. 7 (2024): 3796–3808.
- Naven, Lynn, James Egan, Edward M Sosu, and Sara Spencer. “The Influence of Poverty on Children’s School Experiences: Pupils’ Perspectives.” *Journal of Poverty and Social Justice* 27, no. 3 (2019): 313–31.
- Nordin, Mohd Norazmi, Lo Wen Huey, Helvinder Kaur, and Mohd Saleh Abbas. “A Review of Studies Related to Parental Involvement in Early Intervention for Children with Special Educational Needs with Visual Impairment.” *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 2024, 110–13.
- Omarkhanova, A., A. Sugiralina, N. Yesbergen, and I. Adikhanov. “Investigating the Impact of Parental Involvement on Student Academic Achievement.” *‘Bilim’ Scientific and Pedagogical Journal* 109 (2024): 43–52.
- Paun, Nicoleta. “The Parental Impact on Education: Understanding the Correlation between the Parental Involvement and Academic Results.” *Acta Educationis Generalis* 14, no. 2 (2024): 16–26.
- Prado-Morales, Mirtha del, Cecilia Simón-Rueda, Aldo Aguirre-Camacho, and Jesús Alonso-Tapia. “Parental Involvement and Family Motivational Climate as Perceived by Children: A Cross-Cultural Study.” *Psicología Educativa. Revista de Los Psicólogos de La Educación* 26, no. 2

(2020): 121–28.

- Rahman, Arifa, and Md Golam Muktadir. "SPSS: An Imperative Quantitative Data Analysis Tool for Social Science Research." *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science* 5, no. 10 (2021): 300–302.
- Ramberg, Joacim, Sara Brolin Låftman, Emma Fransson, and Bitte Modin. "School Effectiveness and Truancy: A Multilevel Study of Upper Secondary Schools in Stockholm." *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth* 24, no. 2 (2019): 185–98.
- Seidu, Abdul-Aziz, Edward Kwabena Ameyaw, Bright Opoku Ahinkorah, Leonard Baatiema, Samuel Dery, Augustine Ankomah, and John Kuumuori Ganle. "Sexual and Reproductive Health Education and Its Association with Ever Use of Contraception: A Cross-Sectional Study among Women in Urban Slums, Accra." *Reproductive Health* 19, no. 1 (2022): 7.
- Sharma, M. *Inclusive Education and Parental Involvement: Mainstream School and Integration of Disabled Children*. Laxmi Book Publication, 2024.
- Shute, Jonathan W., and Bruce S. Cooper. "Understanding In-School Truancy." *Phi Delta Kappan* 96, no. 6 (March 23, 2015): 65–68. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0031721715575303>.
- Soriano, Joy Lynne, and Gideon Sumayo. "Parents as Teachers in Modular Distance Learning: Relationship of Parenting Style and the English Academic Performance." *TRANS-KATA: Journal of Language, Literature, Culture, and Education* 4, no. 2 (2024): 102–16.
- Sosu, Edward M, Shadrach Dare, Claire Goodfellow, and Markus Klein. "Socioeconomic Status and School Absenteeism: A Systematic Review and Narrative Synthesis." *Review of Education* 9, no. 3 (2021): e3291.
- Virtanen, Tuomo E, Eija Räikkönen, Maaike C Engels, Kati Vasalampi, and M-K Lerkkanen. "Student Engagement, Truancy, and Cynicism: A Longitudinal Study from Primary School to Upper Secondary Education." *Learning and Individual Differences* 86 (2021): 101972.
- Wulandri, Diana. "Pengaruh Gaya Asuhan Ibu Bapa Terhadap Ponteng Sekolah." *Conference: Kuala Lumpur International Communication, Education, Language and Social Sciences (KLICELLS 9)* 9 (2018).
- Zhang, Tong, Zaffar A. Shaikh, Alexei V. Yumashev, and Monika Chład. "Applied Model of E-Learning in the Framework of Education for Sustainable Development." *Sustainability* 12, no. 16 (August 10, 2020): 6420. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12166420>.

ABOUT AUTHORS

Naboth Phebeni is a Ph.D. Candidate in Leadership and Educational Management at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. His research focuses on educational leadership, organizational development, inclusive education, and data-driven decision-making. He lectures at CECOS College, London (Birmingham Campus), in the Department of Education and Training, where he delivers Level 7 modules and mentors postgraduate students. Before joining higher education, Phebeni gained extensive experience in school leadership and management. His roles as Director of Sport and Head of Physical Education in Eswatini and Zimbabwe, and as a Senior Lecturer at Amadi University College, have equipped him with a wealth of knowledge and expertise. He has also served as a Senior Lecturer at Amadi University College, teaching leadership, management, and research-oriented modules. Phebeni's work is a testament to his commitment to advancing effective and inclusive educational leadership practices. His integration of practical leadership experience with scholarly inquiry has led to significant contributions in this field, instilling confidence in his peers and students alike.

Zinhle Nozipho Mamba is a dedicated educator and holds a Master's degree in Educational Measurement, Assessment, and Evaluation from Bindura University of Science Education, Zimbabwe. Her research interests are centered on developing practical educational evaluation and assessment strategies that foster student engagement and achievement. She is committed to leveraging educational technology and promoting inclusive education to ensure every student's success. Zinhle is a teacher passionate about improving effective teaching and learning processes and creating inclusive and supportive learning environments for students, drawing on her extensive experience as a teacher. Her vast classroom expertise has equipped her with valuable insights into learners' diverse needs and the ability to bridge the gap

between theory and practice. She ensures that all learners receive the necessary academic support to strive academically and personally.