

# Towards enhancing parental engagement in their children early learning opportunities: Does asset-based approach matter in Tanzanian pre-primary schools?

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore how asset-based approach (ABA) can be used to enhance parental engagement in Tanzanian pre-primary schools. The study was qualitative in nature in which phenomenographical design was adopted. It consisted of six focus group sessions with a total 34 parents. Individual interviews with five pre-primary school teachers, four head teachers and five chair persons of the school committees was conducted in the six selected schools in Nzega district, Tabora region, Tanzania. Transcripts were thematically analysed using simultaneous inductive open coding and deductive coding using TCABA framework as an illustrative lens. The results revealed that the shift towards asset-based approach was felt to offer better opportunities in enhancing parental engagement in children's early learning. However, a significant number participants were unable to provide specific examples of the assets that parents were possessing which could be utilised to support children's learning in pre-primary schools. The results further showed that using asset-based approach was affected or enabled by different factors, which included community perspectives, lack of time time/resources and awareness. The results support the need for intervention programmes that empower parents to effectively utilise their skills, knowledge, and talents that are essential for supporting their children's learning at home and in pre-primary schools.

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## INTRODUCTION

Globally, parental engagement is considered an important tool for supporting children's learning at home and in schools. Studies have shown that parental engagement in children's learning opportunities has positive benefits on children's early language, cognitive and motor development (Gonzalez et al., 2018; Wolf, 2020). Parental engagement in children's early learning opportunities is a multifaceted concept involving a broad range of activities in which parents, caregivers, and family members work with teachers to support children's learning at home and in schools (Kigobe et al., 2021; Rey-Guerra et al., 2022). However, parents' perceptions, lack of volunteering spirit, limited time and lack of school readiness are considered to be the factors for ineffective parental engagement (Bartoli et al., 2022; Kigobe et al., 2021; Shukia & Marobo, 2024).

Similarly, Kambona (2024) indicates that parents are less engaged in their children's early learning opportunities because they feel it is time consuming, stressful and tedious activity. Levickis et al. (2022) point out that these challenges emanate from parents' lack of awareness. The study by Kigobe et al. (2021), however, established that parents are willing to engage in their children's early learning opportunities when they receive guidance from schools and teachers before they are engaged. Thus, Mlilo (2017) suggests that it is important for the government and other educational stakeholders to implement parental engagement initiatives where parents will learn how to partner with teachers.

In Tanzania parental engagement efforts are less convincing. Available evidence shows that parental engagement initiatives have often been need-driven, seeking to change parents' behaviour instead of building their competencies (Oxford Policy Management [OPM], 2020). Kigobe et al. (2018) found that parental engagement efforts were initiated by schools or researchers without the input of parents themselves. Similar results were revealed by Msuya (2019) that most of parents in Tanzania have little to say about their children's education and even some are issued court orders to attend to their children's behavioural challenges (Msuya, 2019). Further, a study by Sobayi (2017) found that parents are still isolated from their children's education and are often considered lacking professional background to support their children's learning, meaning that these parents are described from the deficit perspective that they lack the knowledge and skills to be involved in their children's learning (Rattenborg et al., 2019). Ineffective parental engagement hinders children's learning, which in the long run is likely to negatively affect their socio-emotional, motor, as well as cognitive processes (Rey-Guerra et al., 2022). For example, Oxford Policy Management (2020) final endline report explains that in Tanzania, 91 percent of pupils from standard 1 to 3 scored below the expected level of literacy and numeracy achievement because of different reasons, including inactive parental engagement.

The existing trend indicates that parental engagement initiatives in Tanzania seem to advocate for the deployment of deficit lens as it remains unclear on the evidence of the asset-based approach. Deficiency intervention initiatives promote the perspective that parents are not doing the right things for their children and should be enhanced to change their practices (Stacy et al., 2019). Similarly, Sheridan, Smith, Moorman Kim, Beretvas, and Park (2019) report that the deficit approach ignores assets within the community and promotes the practices and policies that eventually disempower the people they are designed to empower. However, with asset-based approach schools can work with parents by providing them with opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, interests, networks, experiences, leadership abilities, and cultural practices to support their children's learning (Allar et al., 2017). These opportunities in pre-primary schools could take the form of homework supervision, attending parent-teacher meetings, volunteering in the classroom, or talking with the child about school experiences.

Drawing recommendations from a Theory of Change for Asset-Based Approaches (TCABA), this study is hinged on the notion that parental engagement intervention initiatives should be organised in a way that they can bring both parents and teachers together within the planning phase, to evaluate and address the proposed approaches to enhance create impact (Mannell et al., 2023). Thus, Islam (2019) argues that parents have access to different information about their children and sharing that information with teachers facilitates the intervention on both sides. For example, parental engagement in home learning opportunities, such as supervision of homework, can be part of interaction with the school if it occurs in response to the recommendations of teachers. However, the vital question is: Do parents able to identify and recognise their existing assets, which include understanding of how they can be exploited, used, and linked to their children's learning?

The government of Tanzania is aware of the importance of parental engagement in children's early learning opportunities. The need for parental engagement in children's learning is well documented in the Tanzania Education Training Policy of 2014 (Revised Edition, 2023), the curriculum and syllabus for pre-

primary education of 2023, and the child development policy of 1996 ). Moreover, the Tanzanian government in collaboration with development partners launched several initiatives to enhance parental engagement in children's learning. Education Quality Improvement Programme in Tanzania (EQUIP-T) and The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) "Tusome Pamoja" interventions form examples of these initiatives. The mentioned programmes focused on capacity building through training and coaching of parents to work with teachers to improve children's learning at schools (Tanzania Teachers Union [TTU] & International Education [IE], 2017). While the government emphasize the need of parental engagement, Uwezo (2017) reports that in Tanzanian public primary schools, 20 percent of parents did not meet teachers to follow up on the academic progress of their children, and over 57 percent visited teachers only once or twice per year.

Inactive parental engagement in children's early learning opportunities highlights the notion that it is solely responsibility of the government for addressing challenges related to pre-school children's learning. While it is not denied that supporting pre-primary education is a major task for the government, Niklas, Cohrssen, and Tayler (2016) argue that parents play a significant role in supporting children's learning in the early years of schooling. In that regard, researchers supporting the adoption of an asset-based approach for enhancing parental engagement suggest that it could help to strengthen parents' networks, empower parents to access and mobilise their resources, and increase control over their children's learning practices (Allar et al., 2017; Garoutte, 2018; Stacy, Gutierrez, & McMillian, 2019). Thus, by employing TCABA, this study will address the existing gap and give better understanding on the use of asset-based approach to enhance parental engagement in children's learning in pre-primary schools in Nzega District of Tanzania. In that context, this study seeks to address the following two (2) research questions:

1. How do parents use the asset-based approach to engage in their children's early learning opportunities at home and in pre-primary schools?
2. What are the participants' views regarding the values and scope of an asset-based approach in promoting parental engagement?

### ***Theory of Change for Asset-Based Approaches (TCABA)***

To show the relevance of asset-based approaches in enhancing parental engagement in their children's early learning opportunities, this study premises arguments within the Theory of Change for Asset-Based Approaches (TCABA) as a theoretical framework. As hinted by Romão et al. (2023), the Theory of Change (ToC) can be seen as a tool to for suggesting solutions for complicated to complex social problems. The theory is hinged on the notion that invention initiatives should be organised in a way that they can bring together key stakeholders within the planning, phase to evaluate and address the proposed approaches to create impact (Mannell et al., 2023). In contrast to sociological theories like Foucault's governmentality or psychological theories of behaviour change (Coryn et al., 2011), ToC as a theory the mechanisms through which an intervention is likely to bring about change in different fields, including health, education, community development, business and social welfare (Jones et al., 2022). ToC highlights a context that embraces the community's shared experiences that inform the expected outcomes and the strategies appropriate for achieving the desired goals.

ToC is regarded as a key component of community focused p initiatives to programme design and evaluation. However, the current use of ToC from literature diverts from the practices origins in the community engagement (Mason & Barnes, 2007). This has limits in terms of ensuring that ToCs are suitable to the programme setting, which may have impact on the success of the intervention (Brand et al., 2019). To address this, the programme evaluators have of recent developed a more comprehensive ToC informed by the context in which the intervention is to be implemented (Eisenbruch, 2018). This approach has advantages

in that it introduces a community perspective into the research process, and ensures that an intervention is viable and locally owned.

This emphasis on community engagement with ToC development complements the move within the literature towards the Theory of Change for Asset-Based Approaches (TCABA) (Astbury et al., 2021; Rippon & South, 2017). TCABA seek to invert this dynamic by actively subsuming the perspectives of marginalised groups into the development of theories and practices (Ghate, 2018). Based on this study, ToC relates with the asset-based approaches as it was used to bring parents and teachers together during planning for parental engagement intervention. Different perspectives within the social context of parental engagement practices were given to allow deep understanding of the concept. The TCABA model outlines four essential iterative stages for incorporating asset-based approaches into the local context (Astbury et al., 2021), that is, reframing towards assets, recognising existing assets (mapping assets), mobilising assets, and engaging in co-production.

## METHODS

### ***Research approach and Research design***

In this qualitative study, phenomenographical design was used to explore the participants' perceptions on asset-based approach to parental engagement. This research design was deemed appropriate since it allowed the researchers to collect information on different ways in which parents experience and engage in their children's early learning opportunities at home and in schools (Han & Ellis, 2019). The design helped the researchers in acquiring participants' knowledge and experiences on how an asset-based approach could be used to enhance parental engagement in children's early learning opportunities. As such, Dabengwa, Young and Ngulube (2023) argue that phenomenography explores the process of sense making within a specific context.

### ***Participants***

The participants were head teachers, pre-primary school teachers, parents of pre-primary school children and chair persons of the school committees in Nzega district, Tanzania. Nzega district was selected as the study area because of having, among other things, inactive parental engagement practices in children's early learning at home and in schools. The Uwezo (2019) assessment in 56 districts in Tanzania Mainland indicates the lowest level (32 percent) of parental engagement in children's learning activities compared to Iringa urban counterparts (87 percent). Moreover, the choice of Nzega district was based on the fact that it was one of the districts involved in EQUIP-T outreach, where issues of parental engagement were among the components of the programme intervention. Thus, it was expected that study participants would have informed opinions on how an asset-based approach could be used to support parental engagement in pre-primary schools.

Three sampling techniques were used: convenience sampling, simple random sampling and purposive sampling. First, by using convenience sampling, six pre-primary schools were approached in April 2021 and asked to recruit participants for interview. These schools are located in both Nzega District Council and Nzega Town Council, and are a sample of 186 pre-primary schools in this district. After the head teachers had agreed that the schools could be part of the study, the researcher randomly selected 8 parents of the pre-primary school children whose names appear in the 2021 registration book to take part in focus group discussions. Pre-primary school teachers provided mobile numbers of the selected parents to the researcher who dialled to request them to be part of the study. The parents were residing near the school. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 5 pre-primary school teachers, 4 head teachers and 5 chair persons of the school committees. They were recruited through purposive sampling.

### **Data collection**

In total, 14 individual interviews and six focus group discussions were conducted. The interview schedules were developed based on the four stages of the TCABA to explore participants' feelings and perceptions about parents being perceived as assets or resources that could be used to support their children's learning (Nyumba et al., 2018). During individual interviews, prompts and probes were used to elicit rich information from participants (Guest et al. 2017) regarding what parents' assets could be used, to what extent, and how could these assets be enriched to improve children's learning in pre-primary schools (see Table 1). The researchers and the assistant researcher led face-to-face focus group discussions with an average of eight participants in each session. To stimulate discussion, two focus groups were heterogeneous, involving pre-primary school teachers and parents of pre-primary school children. The remaining four focus group discussions exclusively engaged with parents of pre-primary school children to facilitate a safe environment for discussion. The interviews were conducted on school premises and lasted for 45 minutes on average. During the conversation, information was audio-recorded for analysis. The discussions were held in Kiswahili, which is the language that all parents are fluent in.

### **Data analysis**

Focus group and semi-structured interviews were videotaped, transcribed verbatim, and then translated into English. Data were analysed thematically by using a hybrid approach of inductive open coding and deductive coding based on a set of the pre-existing codes from the TCABA framework. This method of interpretation enabled the theoretical framework to be used while also permitting other themes to arise from the data (Gioia et al., 2013). The coding frame was continuously developed during semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions for the purpose of reviewing interpretation and minimising bias (Ogunbayo et al., 2015). Differences in interpretation were handled by examining the data and discussing the coding until agreement was reached. Several subthemes were identified and which particularly focused on how parents perceived an asset-based approach to parental engagement in their children's learning opportunities. There were no new extensive themes that were identified beyond those outlined in the TCABA.

**Table 1:** The four steps of the TCABA approach and associated interview questions

<b>ToC model Step</b>	<b>Interview questions</b>
Step 1: Reframing towards assets	What does the term asset-based approach mean? Can you define asset-based approach in terms of parental engagement in their children's learning? Can you give any examples? Do you think ABA is widely understood within the parents' community?
Step 2: Mapping assets	What roles do you think parents could play in supporting their children's learning? What resources, skills or abilities would you employ to support your children's learning? What resources, skills or abilities do you mostly use?
Step 3: Mobilising assets	What would be needed to be in place for parents to employ asset-based approach in supporting their children's learning at home and in schools? What might be the barriers/challenges to parental engagement?
Step 4: Co-production	How should schools enhance the intended outcomes of this asset-based approach to parental engagement? How should it be?

**Source:** Adapted from (Rippon & South, 2017)

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The study results are presented in four stages of the TCABA: first, reframing towards assets, second, asset mapping, third, asset mobilisation, and four, co-production.

### **Step 1: Reframing towards asset**

At the beginning of the inquiry cycle, participants were asked to describe the extent to which they understood the concept of asset-based approach. This task initially seemed to be more challenging for the parents than teachers, and a great amount of time was needed to better understand the concept. Finally, parents and teachers indicated consistency regarding the concept of asset-based approach. For instance, during semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, participants described the asset-based approach as a community-driven initiative aimed at recognising and building upon the existing strengths and capabilities. Based on this understanding, one parent commented:

“Asset-based approach involves collaborating with community members in a unique way that aims to identify and enhance the strengths of individuals, families, and communities to support their own development” (FGD5-P2).

In line with parent 2’s argument, one chair persons of the school committee related parental engagement with the asset-based approach:

Asset-based approach involves working with teachers to support children’s learning by recognising and utilizing the strengths of the community and individual parents in supporting children’s learning (INT10-CP2).

Parental engagement was viewed as a shared responsibility between parents and teachers. Teachers shared ideas and agreed that adopting an asset-based approach necessitates a clear sharing of responsibilities between key parties. However, there was a fear that if an approach was not carefully reframed, it could potentially clash with the existing professional requirements. In this regard, one teacher commented:

“A big challenge tends to be the community’s perspective to the teaching profession. There is a need of moving away from this mind-set that teaching is the responsibility of educated and professionally qualified people only. This perspective disempowers parents to engage effectively in their children’s learning. So, it is that mind-set which says parental engagement is a way of pleasing the child. Our role is to help parents access the opportunities around them, and to think that parental engagement is much broader than paying school contributions, thus helping with transport, or buying school uniforms” (INT1-T1).

Parents also conceptualized asset-based approach at the level of working with their peer parents. At this point, they described parental engagement as opportunities that parents could use to establish and maintain a good relationship with their peer parents, teachers, and children. However, in the real practice, it was reported that there was no effective communication between parents themselves in supporting children’s learning. For example, during focus group discussion it was found that parents had no causal discussion with their peer parents on the issues related to their children’s learning:

I always meet with my fellow parents in different places, including recreational areas and occasions such as meetings, but we had never met for discussing matters that affect our children’s learning. We have never done that! (FGD6-P2).

### **Step 2: Mapping assets**

This requires identifying and recognising existing parents' assets, which include understanding of how they can be exploited, used, and linked to their children's development. Participants typically conceptualised 'assets' as existing resources or capacities within individuals, organisations, or communities that could be used to support their children's learning. Overall, the results revealed that parents would like to support their children's learning through a variety of means, including providing educational supplies, supporting with homework, participating in school events, regular communication with teachers and volunteering in classroom-related activities. When asked, which activities were more accessible, affordable and connected to the majority of parents, a variety of activities were listed, including supporting with homework, parent-teacher communication and keeping eye on children's school attendance. Additionally, parent-child relations and the use of natural environment were included. In relation to this, one participant during focus group discussion, recommended that parents could easily expand their social capital by sharing information with teachers, fellow parents, and children. However, most of them failed on how to make it. On this, during individual interview, one teacher said:

"Parents can share information with teachers, children, and fellow parents about matters that affect their children's learning. However, many of them do not do so. For instance, some parents are often in bad relations with their children and thus feel uncomfortable to communicate" (*INT4-T4*).

Moreover, research results suggest that many parents who participated in the asset mapping process overlooked some of their own assets. It is evident that only fewer parents were aware of various assets, such as family size, home learning environment, natural environment, and their own skills and talents, which could be used to help their children learn. On this note, one parent commented.

Sometimes, we don't know about the assets that we have in our communities, but we have people in our community with different skills, knowledge, and talents. For example, we have unemployed teachers; they are at home; they are assets; and they are parents in this school (*FGD3-P4*).

Another parent said:

By doing participating in this discussion, I noticed that there are a lot of activities parents can do to support their children's learning at home and in schools (*FGD3-P2*).

The potential to develop and build upon good relationship between parents, teachers and children was noted. It was noted that improved communication between parties and inclusion in asset mapping initiatives was seen as fundamental to the development of a reciprocal and dynamic awareness within the school community. It was judged that this would support more effective parental engagement in children's learning. Parental engagement in home learning opportunities was also seen to provide a tangible opportunity for parents to act as assets within their children. Parents were found to occupy a special position in terms of talking with their children about school experiences, counting with them, followed by reading, and slightly above half, helping their children with instructional materials. Parents gave the following responses when asked about the skills or capabilities they wished to share with their children.

"I am more interested in guiding children on how to count and talking with them about school experiences. These are the two activities I mostly do when I am at home with my children. I also help them prepare teaching aids because I have been an artisan for 5 years, and this is the activity I love most" (*FGD6-P1*).

Parents's volunteering spirits, including in-classroom activities, was seen as another chance to enhance parental engagement in children's early learning opportunities. Parent-volunteers were considered as an

integral part of asset-based approach because they served as a conduit through which other parents might be inspired, equipped, and supported to participate in their children's early learning opportunities. In this regard, one teacher reported:

"Schools are supposed help parents identify and use their talents in teaching children. Some parents are endowed with singing, drawing, and crafting talents. Once upon a time in our school, there was a woman singer who was generally using about 20 minutes to sing for children a song on numbers and syllables every time she came to pick her child. The children loved her and they could not go home before that woman sang for them. Such talents need to be developed because they may be of great help in our communities" (FGD1-T1).

### **Step 3: Mobilising parents' assets**

In this study, mobilising assets was seen to be a process of putting the identified assets to work by enabling active connections and networks between parents, teachers, and the child. The participants revealed that there were various factors which enabled using of parents' assets to improve children's learning. Regarding this aspect, the results are presented by detailing the participants' perceived enabling factors within the school context. These are parents' engagement in decision making and strengthening school home communication.

#### *Parents' engagement in decision making*

Participants expressed their view that parents should be engaged in decision making about their children's education as they are the first teachers when it comes to the learning process. It was contended that their participation in the school decision making process empowered them to become valuable assets to their children's learning process. The evidence supporting these assertions aligns with the suggestions made by participants in this study, indicating that parents possess unique capacities, skills, and talents that should be promoted by engaging them in decision-making processes. Such avenues for engagement may include, volunteering opportunities, parents' workshops and trainings, homework supervision, parents input survey or parent-teacher meetings. The following quotations indicate and highlight how parents can be involved in decisions regarding their children's education:

At the beginning of each term, it is important to facilitate parent-teacher discussions regarding their children's learning. Here in our school, parents are empowered to nominate representatives to serve on school committees. This collaborative approach guarantees active parental engagement in decisions related to their children's learning" (FGD5-P2).

Moreover, one head teacher suggested that parents needed to be involved in making the decision about their children's learning rather than simply following instructions from teachers. The head teacher felt that it was important for schools to establish clear structures that would be used to offer a strong connection to parents in making decision about their children's learning.

Parental engagement should centre on parent-teacher collaboration in every decision concerning children's education. By establishing clear structures, we can jointly determine the best ways to support these children. This collaborative approach is a fundamental aspect for effective parenting (HoT1).

#### *Strengthened home-school connections*

Regular communication among parents, teachers, and children was perceived as a resource on which the participants would draw towards enhancing children's learning. Participants insisted that this could help



them build relationships and foster academic networking within and outside their schools. With a particular focus on this, one teacher reported:

"In our school, we have adapted asset-based approach that consider children as important assets. For stance, within my classroom, children consistently demonstrate a commitment to assist each other, based on their level of understanding. Additionally, our teachers serve as influential leaders, thus strengthening the connection between parents, children, and the school" (FGD2-T1).

However, majority of parents reported that communication between the parents and teachers was more frequently on children's needs than for positive or routine subjects. It was reported that parent-teacher communication tended to focus more on child challenges rather than positive feedback. On this, one parent said:

It is a great challenge when a child does not like school. Today, it is the first time for me to meet a teacher. My two elder children, one in grade two and the other in grade four, love school and have never bothered me except the younger one who is in early grade. I don't know what his problem is; he simply doesn't like school, and this is what necessitates me to be closer to his teacher in order to find ways of helping him (FGD2-P5).

#### **Step 4: Co-production**

In terms of generating additional opportunities for the adoption of asset-based practices, parents' assets were seen as a potential way of enabling them to become more engaged in their children's learning. The participants highlighted that parents' assets could be easily tapped into by enhancing their asset-based capacities, which encompass developing skills and knowledge, thus increasing self-confidence, and developing social capital. For example, one HoT stated:

Many parents and care-takers are not aware of a variety of opportunities and practices you have mentioned here. Perhaps, parents are not effectively engaged in their children's learning because they are not empowered to do so or let us say because they do not know (HoT1).

Moreover, there was a clear commitment among parents and teachers to support school initiatives in enhancing parental engagement practices. Due to this situation, it was suggested that the community voice should be used in shaping those initiatives for future improvement of parental engagement practices. On this, one parent said: *"We should be trying to employ local resources when designing and implementing these parental engagement interventions"* (FGD6-P2).

However, one of the participants expressed her opinions on the threat that local autonomy might cause in the public sector when using asset-based approach. She cautioned on the possibility of parents' disruption of school programmes instead of being an important part of community empowerment. On this matter, one she commented: *"We should know the limits of parental engagement. If we are not careful, there will be interference between our roles with those of the parents in the future"* (FGD1-P5).

#### **Discussion**

This qualitative study used the TCABA as a theoretical underpinning to explore how the asset-based approach may be used to encourage parental participation in their children's early learning opportunities. The results contribute to the school community and parental engagement literature by qualitatively highlighting the extent to which asset-based approaches have been understood and implemented to improve children's early learning. Opportunities for using an asset-based strategy to increase parental engagement have also been reiterated. There was evidence of an increasing movement toward asset-based

thinking and values among parent participants, who often conceptualised asset-based approaches as collaborating with teachers to assist their children's education. The results reported in this research imply that an asset-based approach can generate sustained change in terms of parents' confidence to participate in their children's learning opportunities. At the individual level, participants considered asset-based approach as the adoption of parent-centred and strength-based initiative to support children's learning.

This view is supported by the asset-based theory which holds that community's development and empowerment occur from the inside out, utilising the individual's and community's existing assets, resources, and abilities (Shah et al., 2018). Writing about enhancing parental engagement, Scott et al. (2020) stress that parents are important resources and that their support is essential in a variety of ways that are related to the enhancement of children's cognitive, motor, and socio-cultural processes. This reflects the work of Coryn et al., (2011) who address the importance of shifting the community's thinking from a need-based to an asset-based viewpoint. However, the study's results show that this transformation in attitude is a core habit and process that may be promoted by an asset-based approach to parental participation. Importantly, in response to the study's objective of improving understanding of the use of asset-based approaches to enhance parental engagement, it was discovered that the proposed changes were associated with the developing people's competencies in the form of skills, knowledge, and relationship-building. This suggests that enhancing parents' capacity to use their own assets has the potential to increase parental engagement in their children's early learning opportunities at school and in pre-primary schools.

Another significant change associated with the asset-based approach is that the model allows parents from various backgrounds to form relationships that 'bridged' their differences and to value each other, share knowledge, and support each other when needed (Rippon & South, 2017). This can be considered as an example of establishing social capital, which can promote parental engagement by parents supporting each other so that they can feel cared for (Chen et al., 2018). In the same vein, Deng (2019) comments that the accumulation of social capital may motivate parents to invest in their children's early learning and support the efforts to realise the school's vision. However, Mandarakas (2014) argues that teachers often overlook the positive relations that exist between parents, which can be one of the most important opportunities for enhancing children's cognitive, social, and motor development. From Mandaraka's argument, it seems possible that teachers can work as a bridge to enhance parents supporting each other and create warm learning environment for their children. However, according to Walker and Legg (2018), teachers need assistance and professional preparation to promote parental engagement. For instance, teachers might discover in a college course that they must understand family history, parents' aspirations for their children, and various methods of communicating with parents (Epstein, 2018). This suggest that the success of parental engagement in policy and practice, will depend on how teachers are prepared to partner with parents.

A successful parental engagement is crucial for Tanzania to align with its commitments to various international and global frameworks to ensuring the rights of all people, including children. It may for example, enable the country to abide with the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 which urges states to ensure that all children have equal access to quality early childhood development, care, and pre-primary education by 2030 (UN, 1989). The Education Act of 1978 the Education and Training Policy of 1995; the Child Development Policy of 1996; and the Education and Training Policy of 2014 and its 2023 version are all explicit instruments on the need for guaranteeing the provision of education to children. Parental engagement is stressed in these policy documents (URT 1995 & URT, 2014). The Intervention suggested in this paper is highly critical for linking policy and practice in the country effective regarding parental engagement.

It is evident from this study that the success of parental engagement will depend on the nature of the intervention initiative. These results are consistent with other studies suggesting that intervention initiative should acknowledged and celebrated the available parents' assets along with sharing new opportunities can

help to improve parent-engagement (Couch & Kalainoff, 2024; Ramatea & Khanare, 2021). It was therefore considered important for schools go beyond merely implementing parental engagement programmes organised by external organisations, as these may not necessarily be tailored to meet the needs of the school and community (Agdal et al. 2019). It is thus plausible that these externally sourced trainings may not address specific needs of parents in their engagement in their children's early learning opportunities. This is consistent with Stacy, et al. (2019) findings which revealed that parental engagement initiatives should facilitate a dialogue and the exchange of experiences prior to, during, and after programme implementation (Stacy, et al., 2019). The results further revealed that intervention initiative that is friendly and participatory to parents increases their motivation and volunteering spirit. This study demonstrates the need for the education authorities and policy makers to consider comprehensive use of the asset-based approach in implementing parental engagement initiatives.

This study was conducted in public schools in Nzega district, Tabora region, Tanzania, thus making it difficult to apply the findings in different contexts. In that regard, a further study could be done that may involve several schools, both public and private primary schools, to assess the effectiveness of the asset-based approach. This would give a comparative conclusion on the suitability of asset-based approach in enhancing parental engagement in different contexts.

## CONCLUSION

Many parental engagement initiatives operate under the assumption that parents lack necessary knowledge and skills to support their children's learning. This study provides encouraging evidence on the effectiveness of asset-based approach in enhancing parental engagement in children's early learning opportunities. The strategies recommended in this study illustrate the hidden assets that parents possess. It also highlights the significance that context plays in the use of the skills that were always present but not utilised by the school community. Recognising and honouring parents' strengths, along with sharing learning opportunities, can help to develop relationships and trust between home and school. This suggests that it is high time for the government of Tanzania to introduce a policy on parental engagement that will be informative to parents and enable them to use their knowledge, skills, gifts, and other local resources to support their children's learning and development.

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