

# Parents' perspectives on homework practices in pre-primary school children in Tanzania: a phenomenological analysis

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**Abstract.** This study investigated parents' practices in helping pre-primary school children with homework in Dodoma City, Tanzania. The study was guided by two specific objectives: to investigate the learning opportunities perceived by parents and the perceived challenges. The study involved 23 respondents from 15 families in Dodoma City, Tanzania. A convenience sampling technique was used to obtain families and parents. A phenomenology design was used, and semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain data from the respondents. Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the collected data. The study revealed several learning opportunities among children, such as fostering child-parent relationships, knowing and monitoring children's academic progress, and reinforcing learning and discipline among children. Also, several challenges were revealed from the study findings, including time-consuming, stressful and tedious activities for parents and children. The study concludes that parents' involvement in children's homework is vital for improving child-parent relationships and monitoring children's academic progress. Therefore, the study recommends that teachers provide clear guidance to parents on assisting children with homework. Further, school administrators should encourage parents to participate in their children's education to improve their learning.

**Keywords:** homework · pre-primary education · early childhood education · parental involvement · learning attainment

## 1 Introduction

Early childhood education (ECE) has become a central issue for governments in many countries. Early investment in ECE has been shown to help young children build their competence in all areas of development. The assumption is that returns on investment in young children in early years exceed those of investment in later life because the development of a new skill builds on skills acquired during the early years of schooling [20]. Again, parents, policymakers and researchers consider early childhood education essential for fostering school

readiness and long-term success in life [2]. In that case, investment in ECE is vital for a child's socio-economic and cognitive development. In this study's context, ECE, also termed pre-primary education (PPE), refers to the education of children who have not started primary education. However, schools and homes play a significant role in facilitating the acquisition of PPE among young children [47]. Nevertheless, pre-primary teachers use various school strategies to help children acquire important skills for their learning and development in their early years. Among the strategies used is the provision of homework for children.

## 2 Literature review

### 2.1 The concept of homework

Homework is an obligation given by the teacher to the pupils that has to be done outside school hours and without the participation of the teachers [23]. Providing homework activities to young children is common in many countries, including Tanzania. Available evidence indicates that homework plays a critical role in children's learning and acquisition of knowledge and skills in early years [3, 35, 47]. Homework is provided to young children to serve various purposes. Literature reveals that homework is provided to ensure children are ready for the next lesson, reinforce the concepts that they studied at school, determine if children can transfer new knowledge or skills to a new situation, and foster children's personal development [15, 41]. In addition, homework has been shown to increase the time on task and promote pupils' success [19]. Furthermore, Fox [16] believes that when well designed, well planned and meaningful to children, homework becomes the most effective way of improving learning among children. The homework may vary from one child to another due to the age and learning ability of the child. However, some teachers give homework for the whole class without considering the cognitive ability of a particular child. As a result, some children consider homework as punishment. Since homework is often done at home, parents' involvement in facilitating their children to do homework is crucial.

### 2.2 Parental involvement in homework

Studies have shown that parental involvement in their children's education increases their academic achievement, motivation to learn and behaviours [3, 18, 40]. Besides, Ekinci-Vural [13] and Mercan et al. [27] are of the view that parental involvement in their children's early learning experiences has a pivotal impact on children's development of early literacy, numeracy and socio-emotional skills. Importantly, Wildmon et al. [55] further confirms that parental involvement in PPE has a significant role in children's holistic development compared to a family's socio-economic status, educational level and cultural background. On this basis, parents should be encouraged to participate in various academic activities to successfully acquire early learning skills and the overall development of their

children. Among the types of parental involvement in PPE for their children is learning at home, especially assisting homework activities [14].

It is important to note that preschool children need ongoing parental support to ensure homework completion is obtained [24]. Again, it is well noted that parents possess the capabilities to assist their children with improving the engagement levels of homework completion and with improving levels of achievement on homework [10]. Literature suggests that parental involvement in children's homework contributes to the efficiency of the homework activity, reduces undesirable consequences of heavy homework content and increases parent-child relationships [54]. Through parental involvement in homework, young children receive numerous opportunities to model from their parents' experiences how to deal with homework activities and thus improve their academic skills [4].

Nonetheless, in Australia, for example, it was noted that parents who were involved in assisting children's mathematics activities supported the development of mathematical skills in their children [32]. A similar experience has been documented in New Zealand, where parents were positively involved in assisting their children's mathematics homework and thus supported the understanding of the mathematical concepts among children [6]. In that sense, parents' involvement in helping their children complete their homework is essential for the overall development of young children. In contrast, some studies reported that parental involvement in children's homework activities contributes to children's stress, anxiety, frustration and lack of motivation towards doing homework activities [8, 42]. However, de Jong et al. [8] and Rousoulioti et al. [42] identified low self-efficacy, socio-economic status and parents' educational level to be the factors for the children's stress and lack of motivation to engage in homework activities their parents. This indicates that the prevalence of parents of preschool children with limited knowledge of how to assist children with homework compromises better learning outcomes.

### **2.3 Parental involvement in preschool children's homework in Tanzania**

In Tanzania, like other countries, homework practice has been common in PPE, especially in private preschools, to ensure children's learning and development. This study was conducted while recognising previous initiatives introduced by the Tanzanian government to ensure parental involvement in their preschool children's education. Among the initiatives was the establishment of the Education and Training Policy of 2014, a 2023 version and pre-primary curriculum of 2023 [49, 51]. The two policy documents emphasise parents' involvement in providing PPE for the development of social skills and the preparation for primary education among children. However, it should be noted that policy documents rarely provide guidelines on how parents may support children's homework activities at home to ensure effective learning.

Studies on parental involvement in preschool children's education in Tanzania primarily focused on the general involvement of parents, such as buying

school materials, curriculum development, attending school meetings and learning, in general, [12, 30, 44]. While parental involvement in homework activities with children has been shown to contribute to overall children's learning and development [4, 54], in Tanzania, little has been documented on how parents are involved in their preschool children's homework activities. The few available studies on homework, such as Mbogo [25, 26] in Tanzania, rarely investigate parents' experience in homework assistance among their preschool children. This study aimed to explore perceived opportunities and challenges experienced by parents in helping their preschool children with their homework. It was expected that the findings would improve how parents support children in doing homework to improve their academic and social skills in the early years of learning, which builds the foundation of learning at higher levels of education. Therefore, the study was guided by two research questions.

#### **2.4 Research questions**

- a. What are the perceived learning opportunities for parents' involvement in supporting their children's homework?
- b. What are the perceived challenges for parents' involvement in supporting their children's homework?

#### **2.5 Contributions of the study**

This study was expected to raise awareness among educational stakeholders such as teachers, parents and educational policymakers on the significance of parental involvement in homework activities for their preschool children. Parents would be informed of the benefits of assisting preschool children with homework. Also, parents could provide appropriate support to their children's homework while addressing the challenges encountered. The study is significant as it would strengthen teacher-parent collaboration to ensure children receive meaningful homework activities to acquire early learning skills. Policymakers would understand the current experiences of parental involvement in homework and devise appropriate guidelines to ensure the effective involvement of parents in homework activities.

#### **2.6 Theoretical framework**

This study was guided by the theory of parental involvement developed by Epstein in 1996 [37]. The theory maintains that parental involvement focuses on parents' interaction and interrelationship with the community in their function to promote children's education [14]. Children always learn through socialising with the immediate agents of socialisation in society: school, family and community. These agents are more important spheres in influencing children's academic achievements. The theory suggests six categories for parents to overlap in preschool academic activities: parenting communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making and collaboration with the community [37]. The

author believes that if preschool teachers and parents work together to implement learning activities through all six involvement categories, it can increase children's academic performance.

The theory recognises the importance of parents' and teachers' shared and interrelated roles and responsibilities in children's education. Epstein further proposes that each school should recognise every child's interest and uniqueness and provide a family-like environment to make the child feel at home. This makes learning a continuous process both at school and at home. The theory also states that parents should play active school roles at home, like helping their children with homework and other school-related activities, promoting their academic achievement. This theory relates to the study in that both the school and family are vital in socialising the child, and both parties share equal responsibilities that overlap in meeting children's preschool educational needs. This study adopted Epstein's theory due to its emphasis on the need for parents to engage in their preschool children's education, especially in homework activities, to improve children's learning and development in general.

### **3 Methodological considerations**

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

This study used a qualitative approach to collect data from parents on their experiences in assisting their preschool children with homework activities. The qualitative approach involves discovering and describing participants' experiences in their own context by using in-depth interviews [28]. In this regard, the qualitative approach was significant in obtaining parents' views on learning opportunities and challenges in assisting preschool children with homework. In addition, the study employed a phenomenological design to explore parents' learning opportunities and challenges in assisting pre-primary school children in doing their homework. Specifically, a transcendental phenomenological design was used to describe parents' experiences assisting their children in doing their homework. Transcendental phenomenology describes participants' experiences of the phenomena under investigation while bracketing the researcher's assumptions on the phenomenon under investigation [29]. Transcendental phenomenology was appropriate to this study as it supported the researcher in describing parents' opportunities and challenges in assisting children's homework [39].

#### **3.2 Study area, sample and sampling methods**

This study was conducted in Dodoma, a city in the Dodoma region of Tanzania. Dodoma City is one of the seven districts constituting the Dodoma region. Dodoma city was selected because it has many (56) private pre-primary schools compared to other districts in the region [52]. The assumption was that many parents would have children in these schools. Thus, it was necessary to explore their experiences assisting their children with homework, as private schools often

provide homework compared to public pre-primary schools. Parents participating in this study were conveniently sampled to share their experiences assisting children with homework. The convenience sampling technique was deemed necessary in this study as it helped the study to obtain parents who were available and willing to respond to the interview questions [48]. In this regard, the study obtained 23 parents who participated. Parents' demographic characteristics are provided in table 1.

### **3.3 Data collection procedures**

The study employed semi-structured interviews to collect data from parents regarding their views on opportunities and challenges in assisting children with homework. This study deemed a semi-structured interview with open-ended questions necessary because it is a standard data collection method in qualitative studies; thus, it helped the researcher obtain first-hand information directly from parents [57]. Practically, in-depth person-to-person interviews in the form of conversations were conducted. The interview sessions were conducted at the parents' premises at their convenience. The interview sessions took 20 to 30 minutes per parent. Data were recorded in the field notebooks and audiotape recorders during the interview sessions to facilitate transcription during analysis.

### **3.4 Ethical considerations**

The ethical issues associated with human subjects research were considered in this study. Before the data collection process commenced, informed consent was obtained from each parent involved in the study. Thus, no parent was forced to participate in the study. This was possible after the researcher explained the study's purpose and how parents would participate. Moreover, parents were assured about the confidentiality of the information and that the data they gave would be reported without disclosing the participants who provided them. Anonymity was ensured by assigning letters to the informants instead of their names.

### **3.5 Data analysis procedures**

The data recorded in the field notebooks and audio tape recorder from parents were subjected to thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was employed in this study because it is a standard data analysis method in qualitative studies, which makes the findings credible due to its openness and flexibility [7]. Specifically, the data analysis process started with the transcription of the recorded data, and then the translation process from Swahili, the language used in data collection, to English was conducted. The researcher completed the translation process, and later, verification was done by the translation experts. After that, the next step was to read and reread each transcript to make sense of the data through the coding process. In this step, inter-coder reliability was conducted whereby

two independent coders coded the same transcripts to maintain consistency and transparency of the coding process and ensure the reliability of the codes [38]. The inter-coder reliability value was 0.88, indicating a very good agreement between the coders. Further, similar codes developed by the two coders were merged to develop themes and categories for report writing.

## 4 Results

This section presents the study’s results conducted in Dodoma City, Tanzania. The study had two objectives: to investigate the learning opportunities in supporting children’s homework as perceived by parents and the perceived challenges. Before presenting the findings, the demographic information of the informants is presented in table 1 below.

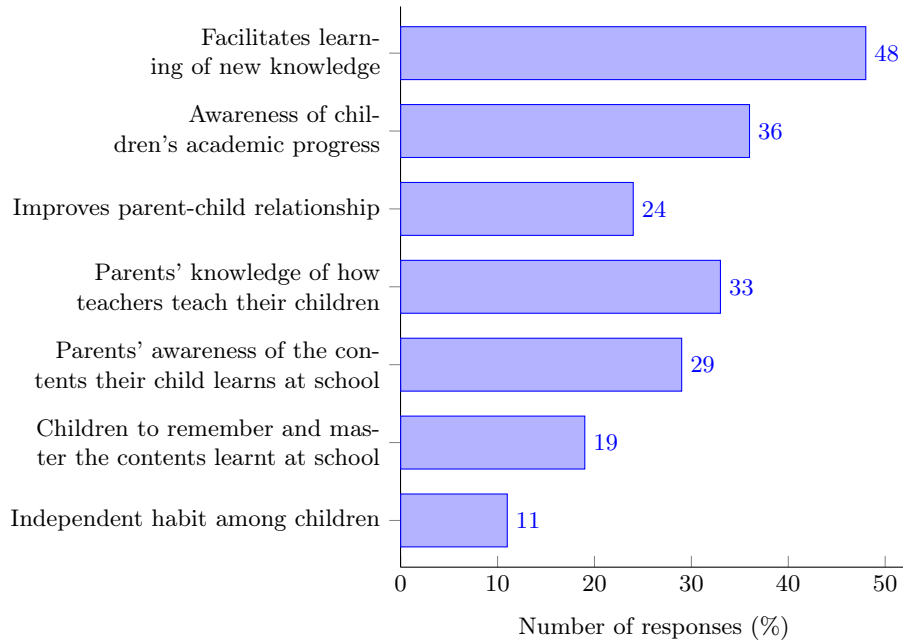
**Table 1.** Parents’ demographic characteristics (field data, 2024).

<b>Educational level</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
Secondary education	–	6	6
Bachelor degree	7	6	13
Master’s degree	3	1	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>23</b>

Data in table 1 reveal that the number of female parents participating in the study was bigger than that of male parents. This conveys that female parents are more flexible and willing to participate in the study than male parents. This could be associated with the assumption that female parents participate more in assisting children in doing homework than male parents. However, the focus of this study was not to find out whether male or female parents participate more in assisting with homework; instead, it was necessary to find out gender participation for a better interpretation of the findings. Regarding the educational level, parents with bachelor’s degrees outnumbered those with other levels of education, such as secondary education and a master’s degree. This implies that most parents involved in the study possessed a higher level of education in a way that they could be in a position to assist their children in doing their homework. Further findings regarding parents’ experiences supporting their pre-primary school children doing homework are presented by reflecting on the research questions.

### 4.1 The learning opportunities for parents in supporting children with homework

This objective sought to investigate potential learning experiences for parents helping their preschool children with homework. The data analysis shows that parents had shared and diverse learning opportunities in supporting children



**Fig. 1.** Parents' learning opportunities in supporting their children's homework (field data, 2024).

with their homework. Figure 1 presents responses from interviewed parents on the learning opportunities gained in assisting children with their homework.

Data generated using face-to-face, in-depth interviews with parents indicate diverse perspectives among participants regarding the opportunities to support children's homework. Specifically, the analysis revealed that most parents believed that assisting children's homework made them learn new knowledge. Parents expressed that when they assisted their children in doing homework, they acquired new knowledge and skills unfamiliar to them. On this, one parent responded:

I learned various concepts that I did not know previously. Nowadays, our children are learning things that we have not learned. For example, how they learn letters differs from what we used to. They pronounce them by their sound, like 'a' they pronounce it /a/ while we pronounce it /ei/. (Parent X, 2024)

The quote above indicates that when parents assist their children with homework, they acquire new knowledge regarding the homework content. This implies that the involvement of parents during homework with their children improves parents' knowledge and skills. Therefore, parents would be in a good position to assist their children with homework assigned at school to improve children's learning and development.



Regarding awareness of children's academic progress, the responding parents expressed that they knew their children's academic progress by assisting them with homework. Parents believed that by assisting children in answering different questions, they could know whether children understood what was being taught in school each day. About this, one parent was quoted as saying the following:

Assisting my child with her homework helps me monitor her academic progress. This is because I use this time to cross-check the previous and current exercises. There, I observed whether there was an improvement compared to the previous exercises regarding scores and handwriting. Now, I know whether my child's handwriting/scores have improved or not. (Parent Z, 2024)

The quote above indicates that helping children do their homework simplifies and influences parents to know their children's academic progress. This implies that for parents, doing homework together with their children helps to know if a child has understood/ mastered what was taught in previous lessons. Also, through this, it is easy for parents to assess their children's daily academic progress, whether positive or negative, so they can take proper action to promote their children's academic achievements.

Further analysis of the findings revealed that parents' involvement in assisting children's homework improved the parent-child relationship. Parents explained that when they assisted children in doing homework, they created a positive relationship as both parents and children had the opportunity to share various issues regarding their welfare. In doing so, their relationship increased; one parent further explained it:

When I assist my child with homework, my child uses that time to tell me various stories about school, his best friends, and around home. I also use that time to encourage him to behave at school and at home. So, we are having a conversation that strengthens our relationship. (Parent Y, 2024)

The quote above states that parents' involvement in doing homework with their children is vital for forming strong relationships among them. This implies that, through homework, parents would understand their children's needs, interests, friends, likes, and other things. Knowing this would help parents know how to develop their children academically.

While most parents concentrated on the learning opportunities mentioned above, other parents (19%) believed that supporting children with homework increased their ability to remember and master the contents easily. According to some of the interviewed parents, helping their children with homework made it easier for them to remember and master the content learnt. This was expressed by parent X, who was quoted as saying:

You know what? Most of the time, my child comes with homework, and I discover that the tasks are based on what he learned at school on that

particular day. So, the homework given is just to make him exercise more of what he learned at school. Thus to me, I think that is good as I can see my child mastering the contents (Parent X, 2024)

The quotation above implies that doing homework together (parent and child) increases children's ability to remember and master the subject content. When parents ask their children questions about what was taught in school or a previous lesson, it helps them remember and explain it.

However, it was found that parents rarely pinpoint the increase in independent study habits among children as among the learning opportunities in supporting them with their homework. Although parents lowly prioritised this, its importance to children's learning cannot be understated. Parents clarified that assigning homework helps children cultivate independent study habits. They claimed that it was sometimes good to assign children homework, particularly on weekends or holidays, to keep them busy and focused on their homework. About this, one parent expressed:

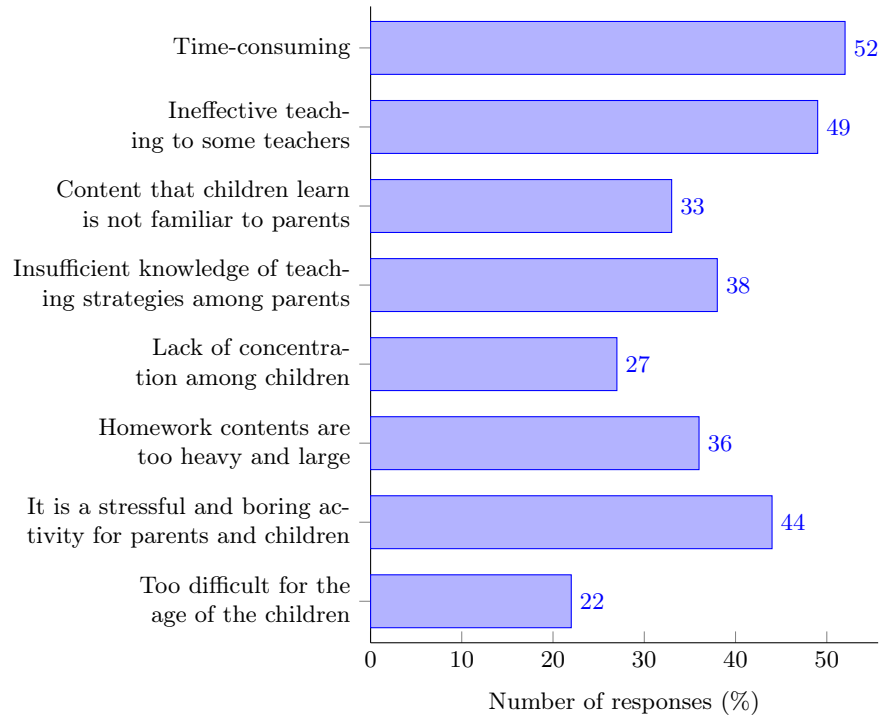
I watch my child in her room every evening as she works attentively on her homework. She closes the door and does not want anyone to bother her unless she needs help, which is when you might hear her call for help. This is good, in my opinion, because she is learning how to learn on her own. (Parent Z, 2024)

Parent Z's statement highlights the importance of homework activities in facilitating independent learning. This implies that children learn how to concentrate and discover various concepts and skills independently through homework. These skills are essential for children as they improve their motivation and confidence.

Generally, parents perceived learning opportunities as supporting their children, as shown in their homework. Most parents expressed that assisting children in doing homework increased their knowledge about the content they were taught and the methods teachers used to teach their children. Also, it was noted that parents were taking this chance to help their children as a learning opportunity for new things since the contents keep changing day by day. Moreover, the relationship between parents and their children increased, and parents became aware of their children's academic progress.

#### **4.2 Perceived challenge for parents' involvement in supporting children do their homework**

Data collected for this objective were analysed to explore the perceived challenges for parents' involvement in assisting children with homework. The analysis of the findings reveals that parents cited different constraints they were experiencing in supporting their children with homework. Figure 2 summarises parents' responses on the challenges they were experiencing in supporting their children with homework.



**Fig. 2.** Parents experienced challenges supporting their children's homework (field data, 2024).

Analysis of the data collected from the interviews conducted with parents revealed that the most frequently mentioned challenge was that it was time-consuming when it came to helping their children do their homework activities. Participants agreed that assisting with children's homework was time-consuming as making their children understand specific content took a long time. They expressed that assisting children's homework took too long as they needed to motivate them and explain the concepts with examples for them to understand clearly. Reacting to this, one of the parents revealed the following:

I spend much time assisting with my child's homework. You may find you start assisting her, but a few seconds later, she wants to play something. So, I needed to wait until she finished her play, and then we proceeded with the homework exercise. In the end, I found that I spent almost two hours on homework exercises. That is too much for me, given the many activities I must do apart from helping my child. (Parent Y, 2024)

The statement given by parent Y highlights that parents were spending extended time assisting their children with homework. This implies that the homework exercise affected parents' engagement in other activities required for the

family's welfare. Thus, they were seen as engaging in it as a time-consuming activity.

Besides, the parents who participated in the study reported that assisting children in doing their homework was a stressful and tedious activity even for children. Parents explained that some children were afraid to be taught by their parents just because they were not teachers. Consequently, parents also felt it was tedious helping their children accomplish some homework tasks because of their many daily duties at work and home. This was confirmed by one parent who said the following:

Assisting children with their homework is indeed very exhausting. Sometimes, you assist the child, but she does not believe in your assistance. At the end of the day, you become frustrated and choose to let her go on her own. Sometimes, after a tiring day at work, you come home and find your child's homework waiting for you. (Parent M, 2024)

Moreover, the results based on the data collected from parents show that insufficient knowledge of teaching strategies among parents was among the prominent challenges some parents encountered when helping their children do their homework. It was revealed that parents believed that teaching children was not an easy task that everyone could do; instead, it was a professional activity that someone needed skills to do effectively. Therefore, to effectively assist children in doing their homework, one needs to have some basic teaching strategies used in teaching early children. Some parents, especially those with a low level of education, reported failing to help their children do homework at home effectively. They would just give them directions on how to do such homework. For instance, some parents found helping children do homework about reading literacy without having the knowledge of teaching preschool children difficult because they did not have skills that would make them do that correctly. This was noted when parent Y explained the following:

You know, these teachers of young children have the skills to teach them. For example, I am a secondary school teacher but do not know the techniques to teach a young child. That is why we often end up arguing with the children; we know nothing of the methodology required to teach them. These things really require expertise. (Parent Y, 2024)

The assertion by Parent Y regarding parents' lack of professional skills indicates that parents were aware that teaching young children was a professional endeavour that required someone with pedagogical knowledge and skills.

Similarly, the findings pinpointed that homework contents were too heavy and oversized for children. Parents explained that some homework activities given to their children were too heavy and oversized for them. Taking examples from mathematics/science subjects' homework, some parents were not educated at all, so they did not have any understanding of some subject content. This ignorance proved to be a real challenge to them when children brought such homework, and they failed to understand the subject matter, thus failing to

help them with their homework. However, this was not a problem for educated parents because they comprehensively understood academic issues. This was revealed when parent X expressed the following:

To be honest, these days, children get really difficult homework. The questions exceed their age level. When you start assisting him, you both struggle to find the answers. This is especially because we are unfamiliar with the subjects they are studying. As you watch the child struggle, you cannot help but feel sorry for him. (Parent X, 2024)

The quote above implies that homework given to children was inappropriate for their age. As a result, they, with their parents, were spending too much time finding answers for the given tasks. In contrast, children whose parents were educated were being assisted in doing their homework, thus highlighting the need to have some basic knowledge for parents.

Additionally, the findings from in-depth interviews with parents indicated a lack of concentration among children as another challenge they were experiencing when it came to assisting their children with homework. Parents reported that children tended to lose concentration when assisted in doing homework because of their relationship with their parents. They explained that since parents were not teachers, some children took it easy, thus not listening carefully when being assisted compared to when their teachers taught them at school. They clarified that, compared to when they received instructions from their teachers at school, some children were not taking their parents very seriously when receiving assistance from them because these parents were not teachers. In connection to this, one parent was quoted as saying:

My child frequently loses focus when I help him with his homework. If you help him, you might notice that he starts playing with his toys hardly three minutes after you have started the lesson. Thus, you should hold off doing his homework until he feels like sustaining interest again. (Parent Y, 2024)

The study findings generally indicate that assisting children with homework has greater benefits for parents and children. As the participants reported, this is because assisting children with homework improves child-parent attachment and relationships. This relationship is important for children in developing cognitive, emotional, and social skills that are important for their growth and learning.

## 5 Discussion

### 5.1 Perceived learning opportunities in supporting children with homework

The findings indicate that parental participation in assisting children with homework is crucial for enhancing good relationships with children. Through homework, parents are likely to develop a deeper understanding of their children's

strengths and weaknesses in the sense that they can support them to meet their learning needs. Similar to what the parents in this study reported, Wang [54] also found that parental involvement in homework activities improved children's acquisition of early knowledge and parent-child partnership. More findings indicate that parental involvement in homework significantly impacts an increased parent-child interaction [1, 45]. This indicates that parents can develop a sense of self-motivation and responsibility through homework.

As the study established, parental engagement in homework activities increases children's mastering of the content, making parents understand their children's academic progress. Parents who assisted their children with homework activities could know their children's academic progress. Similar to the finding of this study, Mwanja et al. [33] and Chophel and Choeda [4] maintain that parental involvement in children's education through participating in school activities and other home-based learning, like homework, contributes to holistic learning outcomes. With such participation, it is likely that parents will be able to identify and understand the child's potential and perhaps can be strengthened. Notably, higher parents' engagement in their children's homework can serve as an avenue for both collaborating and achieving intended learning outcomes, which in turn improve academic performance [1, 3, 18, 22, 34, 47]. Other researchers have also reported that parents' involvement in homework can foster children's autonomy, good habits and emotional encouragement to struggling learners [5, 26, 55].

## 5.2 Perceived challenges in supporting children with homework

In addition to the learning opportunities, the study's participants revealed some challenges they were experiencing in assisting preschool children with their homework. It was reported that some parents were inadequately paying close attention to their children's homework. They felt that close homework supervision would compromise their children's ability to think independently. Similar findings have been reported in other countries such as Kenya and Ghana that parents were not fully involved in children's academic activities and rarely assisted their children with homework, which in turn negatively affected children's academic performance [17, 31, 53]. It should be noted that a lack of good relationships between children and parents in homework supervision may create a hostile environment, which may lead to poor learning achievement, stress, anxiety and negative attitudes towards schoolwork. Thus, it makes sense to note that parents are responsible for building trust among children during homework supervision to enhance the relationship with their children, thus promoting their well-being in general.

The findings also highlighted that insufficient knowledge of teaching strategies among parents was compromising their ability to supervise homework. This created an impression that some parents were misleading their children, which might result in inadequate learning attainment. It should be noted that when parents lack adequate understanding of the homework expectations, they may struggle to assist the child, which may cause some frustrations for both. In other similar studies, it has been reported that parents' involvement in their children's homework was minimal due to several factors such as limited knowledge,

inadequate time, poor and late communication [8, 9, 42]. A descriptive study conducted in Ghana indicated that parents had confused their children with different teaching techniques in the sense that they were using teaching homework instructional strategies that were different from those used in the classroom by teachers [17]. As a result, about 60% of the parents complained about the new subject matter and modern ways of responding to subjects like mathematics questions compared to their days at school [17]. Again, some parents felt limited engagement in their children's homework due to repetitive, lengthy, tedious, overloaded content, which sometimes generated frustration, discouragement, and emotional reactions such as crying, abandonment, anxiety, and sleep deprivation [36]. Although the current study did not explore teachers' perspectives about homework, other research indicates a lack of a general standard for setting homework, and most teachers lack professional development for homework planning [46]. This indicates that there could be a mismatch between what teachers know and plan for children and parents' knowledge about what is given to children. This mismatch may lead to variations in developing a proper understanding of key concepts and essential skills in their learning, which detrimentally may hinder their overall learning progress.

The current study also indicated that parents felt time limitations in helping children with homework due to their work commitments, economic activities and household obligations. In such a situation, it is difficult for parents to provide adequate guidance for their children's homework, which may affect their children's learning attainment. Lack of parental support may also lead to poor home-school relationships as teachers may consider it negligence. Other studies point out lack of awareness, busy schedules, poverty, low self-efficacy and limited parental care as some of the factors that compromise their ability to engage in their children's homework [4, 11, 56]. Likewise, Ujudi [50] found that most parents had poor parental involvement in academic matters of their children due to poor parental awareness concerning academic issues, poor parental attitude and some cultural backgrounds.

Despite parents' enthusiasm to engage in their children's homework, they opposed their engagement in their children's homework as it compromised the family life [43]. These findings convey that homework may increase learning inequalities as children from families with low levels of education may not benefit fully from parents' support. Children from disadvantaged families may also face extreme challenges as they are usually marginalised. It has been reported that children from low socio-economic families, where the parents have a low level of education or are illiterate, experience greater marginalisation in getting access to learning [12, 44]. Children from marginalised families may have limited exposure to learning opportunities and support from families, which in turn may contribute to low aspirations about the potential provided by education. It makes sense to conclude that poor support from parents through homework can contribute to unequal access to learning opportunities, which can contribute to the intergeneration of the poverty cycle.

## 6 Conclusion and recommendations

The findings about parents' perspectives on opportunities and drawbacks of homework among pre-primary school children have revealed a number of insights. First, parents appear to appreciate the role of homework in strengthening child-parent relationships and reinforcing learning and discipline. More significantly, parents acknowledge that homework is pivotal in helping them know the best ways to monitor their children's academic progress and behavioural changes or discipline. Moreover, homework activities for preschool children have been shown to improve mastering the subject contents. Despite these opportunities, parents also felt that children's right to play might be hindered by excessive homework. Furthermore, parents' economic activities and limited appropriate knowledge and skills inevitably affect their engagement in helping children with homework. Parents were reporting several indicators that homework pressure among children was likely to lead to excessive stress and anxiety among children. Thus, providing clear guidance to parents on what to do, considering the mismatch between what they know and the homework requirement, is of equal importance for the effectiveness of the homework activities.

Based on the findings reported by this study, the following recommendations are made: Given that parents reported that homework improves parent-child positive relationships and children's overall learning, educational policymakers should devise a clear guideline on how parents should engage in homework for their children with them. Moreover, the study recommends that the school administration, through parent-teacher meetings, should emphasise parents losing their children, helping them with homework and following up on all issues concerning school matters. This will help them be active in their children's academic issues, thus strengthening relationships with their children and bringing more openness and holistic behaviour among them.

## 7 Study limitations

This study was limited to pre-primary schools in urban areas whose findings are difficult to generalise to all parents in Tanzania, including those from rural areas. In that regard, another study should be conducted involving parents from rural areas to paint a general picture of their involvement in homework activities. Also, further investigation should focus on comparing parents' activities/job and their involvement in homework activities by covering large samples since the current study does not, even though it served the purpose of the study. Nevertheless, this study rarely addressed teachers' perspectives on homework practices among preschool children. Therefore, another study should focus on teachers to strengthen teacher-parent collaboration and promote effective homework practices. Lastly, the current study did not critically analyse the cultural factors that may significantly enhance attitudes and practices towards homework. Thus, its findings may not be generalisable to other contexts with different characteristics.



Again, further ethnographic research may be carried out to provide a deeper understanding of cultural issues' influence on the implementation of homework in various contexts.

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