



Indonesian Journal of Multidisciplinary Research



Journal homepage: <http://ejournal.upi.edu/index.php/IJOMR/>

Factors Influencing Student Engagement in Urban and Rural Secondary Schools: A Mixed-Methods Study

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ABSTRACT

Student engagement is a critical determinant of academic achievement and holistic development. This study examines the factors influencing student engagement in secondary schools across urban and rural contexts in Tanzania, focusing on disparities and improvement strategies. Employing a mixed-methods design, data were collected from 12 schools in Dar es Salaam, Morogoro, and Dodoma, involving 360 students, 48 teachers, and 24 parents. Quantitative surveys measured behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement, while interviews and observations provided contextual insights. Findings indicate that teacher quality, learning environment, socio-economic background, access to resources, and parental involvement significantly shape engagement. Urban schools demonstrated higher emotional and cognitive engagement, largely due to better infrastructure, qualified teachers, and richer extracurricular opportunities. Recommendations include targeted policy interventions, enhanced teacher training, equity-based resource allocation, and stronger school–community partnerships. The study aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 4, offering actionable guidance for bridging the urban–rural engagement gap in Tanzanian secondary education.

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Submitted/Received 15 May 2025

First Revised 23 Jun 2025

Accepted 10 Aug 2025

First Available online 11 Aug 2025

Publication Date 01 Sep 2025

Keyword:

Educational outcomes,
Rural-urban disparity,
Secondary education,
Student engagement,
Tanzania.

1. INTRODUCTION

Student engagement is widely recognized as a key indicator of academic success and overall student development. In educational contexts, engagement refers to the extent to which students are involved in academic activities, motivated to learn, and emotionally connected to their school environment (Fredricks *et al.*, 2004). High levels of student engagement have been associated with improved learning outcomes, lower dropout rates, and enhanced psychosocial development (Appleton *et al.*, 2008). Despite its significance, many education systems, particularly in low- and middle-income countries such as Tanzania, continue to face challenges in promoting and sustaining student engagement.

Tanzania's education sector has undergone substantial reforms aimed at expanding access to education and improving quality. Notable initiatives include the implementation of the Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP) and the Secondary Education Development Programme (SEDP), which aimed to enhance infrastructure, increase enrollment, and improve teacher recruitment and training (Mkumbo, 2012). While these efforts have contributed to increased access, concerns remain regarding disparities in quality and student engagement across different geographic and socio-economic contexts. Urban schools often benefit from better infrastructure, more qualified teachers, and greater access to learning resources compared to their rural counterparts (Tandika & Komba, 2013).

Understanding the factors that influence student engagement is critical to developing effective educational policies and practices. In the Tanzanian context, factors such as teacher-student relationships, parental involvement, availability of teaching and learning resources, socio-economic status, and school leadership are believed to play a significant role in shaping student engagement (Mkumbo, 2012). However, empirical studies examining how these factors operate in different settings (particularly the urban-rural divide) remain limited.

Moreover, the global shift toward inclusive and equitable quality education, as emphasized by Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), highlights the need for evidence-based approaches to addressing educational disparities and promoting student engagement for all learners. As such, this study is both timely and essential for informing policy and practice in Tanzania's secondary education sector.

This study is anchored in Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979), which offers a comprehensive lens for analyzing the multiple environmental systems that influence a student's development and engagement. According to this theory, individual behavior is shaped by interactions within nested systems-microsystem (e.g., school, family), mesosystem (interactions between systems), exosystem (external environments affecting development), and macrosystem (cultural values and policies). This theoretical framework allows for a holistic examination of the contextual factors impacting student engagement in urban and rural secondary schools.

The main purpose of this study is to explore the factors that influence student engagement in secondary schools in both urban and rural areas of Tanzania. The research aims to identify the specific elements within school and community environments that promote or hinder engagement and to provide comparative insights that can inform targeted interventions.

Research questions are in the following:

- (i) What are the key factors influencing student engagement in secondary schools in Tanzania?
- (ii) How do these factors differ between urban and rural school settings?
- (iii) What strategies can be implemented to enhance student engagement across diverse school environments?

This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on student engagement by focusing on a developing country context where educational inequities persist. The findings are expected to provide actionable insights for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders in Tanzania and similar settings. By examining both urban and rural schools, the study seeks to highlight the unique challenges and opportunities present in different environments, thereby supporting efforts to build a more inclusive and effective education system.

Furthermore, the study aligns with Tanzania's national education priorities as outlined in the Education and Training Policy (ETP) of 2014 and Vision 2025, which emphasize equitable access, quality education, and the development of human capital for national development. Insights from this study may also be used to strengthen teacher training programs, improve school-community partnerships, and inform resource allocation strategies that enhance student engagement.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Conceptualizing Student Engagement

Student engagement is a multidimensional construct that has gained prominence in education research over the past two decades. Some researcher ([Fredricks et al., 2004](#)) identify three interrelated dimensions of engagement: behavioral, emotional, and cognitive. Behavioral engagement involves participation in academic, social, and extracurricular activities. Emotional engagement refers to students' affective reactions in the classroom, such as interest, boredom, happiness, sadness, and anxiety. Cognitive engagement is associated with investment in learning, self-regulation, and a desire to go beyond the requirements of schooling. These dimensions are not mutually exclusive and often interact to influence students' educational experiences and outcomes.

Engagement is increasingly seen as a dynamic, context-dependent process that is affected by multiple factors, including teaching quality, peer relationships, parental involvement, and school culture ([Sinclair et al., 2003](#); [Zepke & Leach, 2010](#)). It is also influenced by students' beliefs about their abilities and the relevance of school to their future goals. The concept has moved beyond mere attendance and compliance to encompass deeper involvement and meaningful learning.

2.2. Global Perspectives on Student Engagement

Research across diverse educational contexts indicates that student engagement is strongly influenced by the quality of the learning environment. In developed countries, studies have shown that smaller class sizes, individualized instruction, and supportive teacher-student relationships are associated with higher levels of engagement. In contrast, in many developing countries, structural challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, limited teaching resources, and low teacher motivation often inhibit meaningful student engagement (<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000379875>).

Some study in higher education contexts highlighted the importance of active learning strategies and institutional support in promoting engagement. Similarly, Christenson, Reschly, and Wylie in 2012 argued that engagement must be addressed at both the individual and systemic levels to foster inclusive and equitable education. These insights underscore the need to view student engagement not just as an individual responsibility but as a product of broader educational structures and practices.

2.3. Student Engagement in Sub-Saharan Africa

In sub-Saharan Africa, research on student engagement is growing but remains limited compared to other regions. Key challenges affecting engagement include poverty, gender disparities, cultural expectations, and inadequate school infrastructure. Studies in countries like Kenya, Uganda, and Nigeria have found that poor teaching quality, corporal punishment, and a lack of basic learning materials are common deterrents to student engagement (Blignaut *et al.*, 2010; Mtebe & Raisamo, 2014).

In Tanzania, the situation reflects broader regional trends. Despite access improvements, the quality of education remains uneven, with rural schools often at a disadvantage. For instance, many students in rural Tanzania are unable to read or perform basic arithmetic at their grade level. This lack of foundational skills contributes to low levels of academic motivation and participation.

2.4. The Tanzanian Context

The Tanzanian government has implemented various initiatives to address educational challenges, such as the Education Sector Development Programme (ESDP), which includes components on teacher training, curriculum reform, and school infrastructure development. Nevertheless, issues related to student engagement persist. Engagement in secondary schools is undermined by several interrelated factors: inadequate teacher preparation, poorly maintained school facilities, limited access to textbooks and ICT, and socio-economic inequalities.

Parental involvement is also a critical factor. Research has shown that students whose parents are actively engaged in their education tend to perform better and show higher levels of motivation (Vibulphol, 2016). In Tanzania, parental engagement is often constrained by economic pressures, especially in rural communities where parents may prioritize labor over schooling.

2.5. Gaps in the Literature

While existing studies provide valuable insights into the determinants of student engagement, there is a notable lack of comparative research examining how these factors differ between urban and rural settings in Tanzania. Most studies have focused on either primary education or national-level statistics, without disaggregating data by geographic or socio-economic context. This gap highlights the need for localized, context-sensitive investigations that consider the diverse realities of Tanzanian secondary schools.

Moreover, few studies have employed a comprehensive theoretical framework, such as Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, to examine how multiple environmental factors interact to influence student engagement. By addressing these gaps, the present study seeks to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of student engagement in Tanzania and to inform strategies for improving educational quality and equity.

In conclusion, the literature reviewed demonstrates the complexity of student engagement and its dependence on a range of interrelated factors. The existing body of work provides a strong foundation, but also reveals critical areas that require further exploration, particularly in the Tanzanian secondary education context. This study builds upon previous research by examining both the universal and context-specific dimensions of engagement, thereby offering practical and theoretical contributions to the field.

2.6. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979), a widely used framework in educational research that explains how different layers of environmental influence shape an individual's development. The theory conceptualizes human development as occurring within nested systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. Each system plays a distinct role in shaping student engagement, making the theory particularly suitable for analyzing factors at multiple levels. Several points are in the following:

- (i) **Microsystem.** The microsystem includes the immediate environments in which a student directly interacts, such as home, school, and peer groups. For this study, the classroom environment, teacher-student interactions, and parental involvement are key components. Positive teacher-student relationships, active parental participation, and supportive peer networks are all known to enhance student engagement (Fredricks *et al.*, 2004).
- (ii) **Mesosystem.** This system represents the interconnections between the microsystems. For example, the relationship between parents and teachers or school policies and community expectations can influence a student's educational experience. Strong home-school collaboration often reinforces behavioral and cognitive engagement in students.
- (iii) **Exosystem.** The exosystem involves settings that indirectly affect the student, such as the parents' workplace or local government policies. In rural Tanzania, for instance, if a parent has unstable employment or long working hours, this may reduce their ability to engage with their child's schooling. Similarly, district-level education policies influence school management, teacher deployment, and availability of resources.
- (iv) **Macrosystem.** The macrosystem encompasses cultural values, societal norms, and government policies. Tanzania's national policies on education, gender equality, and socio-economic development shape expectations and practices in schools. Cultural beliefs about the value of education and gender roles can either promote or hinder student engagement, especially in rural communities.
- (v) **Chronosystem.** This level includes changes over time, such as curriculum reforms, shifts in educational policy, or transitions in students' personal lives. Tanzania's implementation of fee-free secondary education and ongoing curriculum changes provides a temporal context that may impact engagement trends.

By using this comprehensive theoretical framework, the study is able to analyze how different layers of the social environment interact to influence student engagement. This approach allows for a nuanced understanding that goes beyond individual characteristics to include systemic and structural factors.

3. METHODS

This study employed a mixed-methods research design to gain both breadth and depth in understanding the factors influencing student engagement. Quantitative data was collected through surveys to measure engagement levels, while qualitative data from interviews and observations provided insights into the contextual realities of schools in urban and rural areas.

The study was conducted in three Tanzanian regions, Dar es Salaam, Morogoro, and Dodoma, chosen for their diversity in geography, population density, and educational infrastructure. Dar es Salaam represents urban settings with better access to educational services, while Morogoro and Dodoma offer insights into both urban and rural schooling contexts. The target population included secondary school students, teachers, and parents.

A combination of stratified random sampling and purposive sampling was used. Schools were stratified into urban and rural categories. Within each stratum, schools were randomly selected to ensure representativeness. Purposive sampling was used to select teachers and parents who were actively involved in student-related activities. A total of 12 schools (6 urban, 6 rural), 360 students, 48 teachers, and 24 parents participated in the study.

Data Collection Instruments are in the following:

- (i) Student Engagement Survey: Adapted from [Fredricks et al. \(2004\)](#), this instrument captured behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement using a Likert-scale format.
- (ii) Interview Guides: Semi-structured interview protocols were designed for teachers and parents to explore their perspectives on engagement factors.
- (iii) Observation Checklist: A structured tool to assess school infrastructure, teacher-student interaction, classroom practices, and learning resources.

Permission was obtained from the Ministry of Education and local school authorities. Data collection occurred over six weeks. Surveys were administered during school hours with the assistance of trained research assistants. Interviews were conducted in Swahili and later translated into English. Observations were carried out unobtrusively to minimize disruptions.

Quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics were used to profile student engagement levels, while independent t-tests and regression analysis explored differences and relationships between variables. Qualitative data from interviews and observations were analyzed thematically, allowing for the identification of recurrent themes and contextual factors influencing engagement.

The study adhered to ethical standards of research involving human subjects. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality was maintained. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed of their right to withdraw at any time.

The study is limited by its geographical scope, as it focuses on only three regions. Additionally, self-reported data may be subject to social desirability bias. However, the use of triangulation through mixed methods enhances the validity and reliability of the findings.

In summary, the methodology adopted for this study ensures a robust and comprehensive analysis of the factors influencing student engagement in Tanzanian secondary schools. The integration of quantitative and qualitative approaches allows for a deeper understanding of both statistical trends and lived experiences across diverse contexts.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the key findings of the study based on the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data. The results are organized into five main areas aligned with the research objectives and conceptual framework: (i) Levels of student engagement, (ii) Factors influencing engagement, (iii) Urban-rural comparisons, (iv) Student perspectives, and (v) Teacher and parent perspectives.

4.1. Levels of Student Engagement

Survey responses revealed distinct patterns in student engagement across the 12 sampled schools (**Table 1**). Behavioral engagement, measured by attendance, participation in classroom activities, and completion of assignments, was relatively high among students in both urban and rural areas, with mean scores of 3.8 and 3.4, respectively (on a 5-point Likert scale). However, emotional engagement scores, reflecting feelings of belonging, motivation, and interest, were notably lower in rural areas (mean = 2.9) compared to urban counterparts (mean = 3.6).

Cognitive engagement, which assesses deep learning strategies, critical thinking, and persistence, showed a moderate difference. Urban students reported higher levels (mean = 3.7) than rural students (mean = 3.1). These differences were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), suggesting disparities in how students interact with learning materials and internalize educational goals.

Table 1. Mean Scores of Student Engagement in Urban and Rural Secondary Schools.

| Engagement Dimension | Urban (Mean Score) | Rural (Mean Score) |
|----------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Behavioral | 3.8 | 3.4 |
| Emotional | 3.6 | 2.9 |
| Cognitive | 3.7 | 3.1 |

4.2. Factors Influencing Student Engagement

4.2.1. Teacher Quality and Pedagogical Practices

Qualitative data indicated that teacher quality had a profound influence on student engagement. Urban schools benefited from more qualified teachers, many holding bachelor's or master's degrees and demonstrating use of participatory teaching methods. In contrast, rural schools often faced shortages of trained teachers, some of whom lacked subject mastery and employed traditional lecture-based methods. Students reported feeling uninspired in classes lacking interaction.

4.2.2. Learning Environment and Infrastructure

Observations and interviews confirmed that physical learning environments significantly affected engagement. Urban schools were generally better equipped with libraries, functioning laboratories, electricity, and ICT access. Rural schools, however, faced challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, dilapidated buildings, and inadequate furniture. These conditions discouraged active participation and negatively impacted emotional engagement.

4.2.3. Socio-Economic Status and Support Systems

Students from urban schools often came from relatively affluent families who could afford private tutoring, textbooks, and internet access. These resources contributed to higher levels of cognitive and behavioral engagement. In rural areas, economic hardships forced many students to balance school with domestic chores or farm work, leading to fatigue, absenteeism, and reduced academic focus.

4.2.4. Parental Involvement

Parental involvement emerged as another significant factor. In urban settings, parents were more likely to attend school meetings, monitor academic progress, and support homework. Conversely, in rural areas, many parents had limited education and economic constraints, reducing their involvement in their children's schooling. Students expressed a desire for more parental encouragement and presence in school-related activities.

4.3. Urban-Rural Comparisons

The comparative analysis highlighted systemic inequities between urban and rural schools. Urban students consistently outperformed rural students in engagement metrics, particularly in cognitive and emotional dimensions. Regression analysis showed that school location

significantly predicted engagement levels ($\beta = 0.46$, $p < 0.01$), even after controlling for gender, age, and socio-economic status.

The disparity was further illustrated by differences in access to co-curricular activities. Urban schools offered clubs, debate competitions, and sports programs, all of which enhanced student motivation. In rural schools, such opportunities were scarce, often limited by a lack of facilities and teacher supervision.

4.4. Student Voices: Perceptions and Experiences

Interviews with students provided deeper insight into the lived experiences of engagement. Urban students frequently cited positive peer relationships, availability of learning resources, and encouragement from teachers as motivators. One Form Three student in Dar es Salaam stated: "Our teachers give us room to ask questions. It makes me want to study more."

In rural schools, students emphasized the demoralizing effects of poor infrastructure and teacher absenteeism. A student from a rural Dodoma school remarked: "Sometimes we wait for the teacher the whole day, and they don't come. It makes you feel like nobody cares." Despite these challenges, some students showed remarkable resilience and determination, especially those aspiring to break the cycle of poverty.

4.5. Teacher and Parent Perspectives

Teachers in urban schools expressed satisfaction with their working conditions and access to teaching aids. They reported using a variety of methods group work, projects, and ICT tools, to enhance engagement. In contrast, rural teachers cited lack of resources, high workload, and insufficient training as barriers to effective teaching.

Parents echoed these sentiments. Urban parents were more confident in the school system and more engaged in their children's learning. Rural parents, while supportive, faced logistical and economic challenges that limited their involvement. One parent noted: "I want to help, but sometimes I can't even read the assignments my child brings home."

The findings reveal a multifaceted picture of student engagement in Tanzanian secondary schools. Engagement is influenced by a complex interplay of factors, including teacher quality, school infrastructure, socio-economic background, parental involvement, and geographic location. The next section provides a discussion of these findings about existing literature and the study's theoretical framework.

4.6. Discussion

The findings of this study reaffirm the complexity and multidimensionality of student engagement, underscoring its interdependence on both internal (student-related) and external (environmental and systemic) factors. This section interprets the results in the context of the conceptual framework and broader literature, offering insights into how urban-rural dynamics, teacher effectiveness, socio-economic status, and school environments collectively influence student engagement in Tanzanian secondary schools.

4.6.1. Student engagement in context

Student engagement is widely recognized as a determinant of academic achievement, student retention, and school completion (Fredricks *et al.*, 2004). The present study reinforces these associations by revealing consistent disparities in cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement between students in urban and rural schools. While behavioral engagement levels were relatively stable, lower emotional and cognitive engagement in rural areas

suggests that students in these settings may struggle with deeper learning processes and feelings of connection to the school environment.

The gap in emotional engagement echoes similar findings in sub-Saharan Africa, where socio-cultural factors, teacher attitudes, and lack of student support structures hinder emotional investment in schooling (Mtebe & Raisamo, 2014). Students in rural Tanzania reported feelings of isolation, frustration, and disengagement due to poor infrastructure and irregular teacher attendance, factors long recognized in educational equity research (<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000379875>).

4.6.2. The role of teachers and pedagogy

The role of teachers as facilitators of engagement was prominent in both qualitative and quantitative data. Urban teachers, often more qualified and better resourced, adopted learner-centered pedagogies that encouraged inquiry, participation, and critical thinking. This aligns with Vygotsky's in 1978 social constructivist theory, which posits that learning occurs through social interaction and scaffolded instruction.

Conversely, rural students described passive classroom environments dominated by rote memorization and minimal student-teacher interaction. This pedagogical divide reflects systemic disparities in teacher deployment and professional development, as noted in other Tanzanian studies. The Ministry of Education's ongoing efforts to enhance teacher training in underserved areas should address not only content knowledge but also inclusive, engagement-focused instructional strategies.

4.6.3. Infrastructure and learning conditions

The study found a strong correlation between physical infrastructure and levels of engagement. Adequate classrooms, electricity, ICT access, and school libraries positively influenced student motivation and willingness to participate. These findings are supported by research across low-income countries, where the school environment is critical to learning outcomes.

Students in rural schools identified dilapidated classrooms and a lack of learning materials as sources of demotivation. These structural barriers contribute to the cycle of educational marginalization, with disengaged students more likely to drop out or underperform (Hardman *et al.*, 2011). Targeted investments in rural school infrastructure could substantially boost student engagement and overall educational quality.

4.6.4. Socio-economic and parental factors

Socio-economic status emerged as a significant predictor of engagement, as urban students had greater access to learning support, private tutoring, internet access, and parental involvement. These findings reflect global patterns, where students from affluent backgrounds are more likely to receive academic support and experience enriched learning environments.

Parental involvement played a dual role, either enhancing engagement through monitoring and encouragement or constraining it when absent. In rural areas, parents' limited literacy and economic demands limited their capacity to support school activities. However, even minimal parental engagement (e.g., discussing school progress or encouraging attendance) was associated with higher student morale, suggesting a potential area for low-cost, community-based intervention.

4.6.5. The urban-rural divide in student engagement

Perhaps the most striking result of the study is the persistent engagement gap between urban and rural students. While this finding was anticipated, the magnitude and consistency of the differences across behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions highlight structural inequities in Tanzanian education. These disparities stem not only from physical and economic conditions but also from broader social and policy frameworks that prioritize urban centers (Komba & Nkumbi, 2008).

Urban schools' access to extracurricular programs and mentorship opportunities further deepens the engagement divide. Rural students, by contrast, face monotony, academic fatigue, and a lack of peer motivation. Bridging this gap requires multi-level interventions, including decentralization of education planning, increased rural education budgets, and local innovations such as peer mentorship and school clubs.

4.6.6. Student voice and agency

The qualitative data underscore the importance of listening to student voices. Students provided rich insights into what motivates or discourages them, with emotional and relational aspects repeatedly emphasized. While structural reforms are necessary, fostering student agency by giving learners a voice in school matters and acknowledging their struggles can be a powerful engagement tool.

Involving students in school governance, promoting feedback mechanisms, and establishing counseling programs can enhance the sense of belonging and relevance that underpins emotional and cognitive engagement. Especially in rural contexts, these low-cost interventions can begin to counteract feelings of neglect and alienation.

4.6.7. Key implications

The discussion reveals that boosting student engagement in Tanzanian secondary schools requires a holistic strategy. Improvements in teacher quality, infrastructure, and parental involvement are critical, but must be coupled with attention to student agency and local context. Addressing urban-rural disparities is central to achieving educational equity and ensuring that all students, regardless of location, have the opportunity to thrive academically and emotionally.

5. CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore the factors influencing student engagement in secondary schools across urban and rural regions of Tanzania. The findings underscore that student engagement is not a singular phenomenon but a multidimensional construct influenced by personal, pedagogical, institutional, and socio-economic variables. A critical conclusion is the clear disparity between rural and urban students' levels of engagement, with urban students consistently demonstrating higher emotional, cognitive, and behavioral involvement in school activities. These differences are largely attributable to variations in infrastructure quality, teacher effectiveness, parental support, and access to extracurricular programs.

The research affirms the importance of adopting a holistic view of student engagement that includes the voices and lived experiences of learners. It also reinforces the need for contextualized interventions what works in urban settings may not automatically transfer to rural areas. By considering the local social, cultural, and economic realities, education stakeholders can design more targeted and sustainable solutions to improve student participation and achievement.

Several recommendations are in the following:

- (i) **Policy-Level Interventions:** (a) **Equity-Based Resource Allocation** (The government should prioritize funding for rural schools to ensure parity in infrastructure, teaching resources, and ICT access. Equity-driven budgeting should guide future investment in Tanzania's education sector, and (b) **Decentralization of Education Planning** (Empowering local authorities to make context-specific decisions can improve responsiveness to rural schools' unique challenges).
- (ii) **Teacher Development:** (a) **In-Service Training and Support** (Teachers in rural areas need regular pedagogical support, particularly in learner-centered teaching methods and inclusive classroom management. The use of mobile teacher-training programs or digital platforms can extend professional development to remote locations; and (b) **Incentives for Rural Deployment** (To attract qualified teachers to rural areas, the Ministry of Education should introduce incentives such as housing allowances, career advancement opportunities, and recognition programs).
- (iii) **Student-Centered Pedagogy and Voice:** (a) **Participation in Decision-Making** (Schools should create platforms (e.g., student councils) that allow learners to express opinions and contribute to school governance); and (b) **Engaging Instructional Practices** (Encouraging methods like group work, project-based learning, and classroom discussions can increase both cognitive and emotional engagement).
- (iv) **Community and Parental Engagement:** (a) **Strengthening School-Community Partnerships** (School management should organize regular meetings and joint programs that involve parents in school activities, even if their literacy levels are low); and (b) **Awareness Campaigns** (Local campaigns emphasizing the importance of school attendance, homework support, and positive discipline at home can improve parent-student-school alignment).
- (v) **Infrastructure and Learning Environment:** (a) **Investing in Basic Facilities** (Adequate classrooms, toilets, libraries, and electricity can significantly enhance the quality of the learning environment and boost morale); (b) **Access to Technology** (Introduction of low-cost digital devices or community digital centers in rural areas can facilitate online learning and improve digital literacy).
- (vi) **Monitoring and Evaluation:** (a) **Developing Engagement Metrics** (Establishing standardized indicators for measuring student engagement will allow schools and districts to monitor progress and identify areas needing intervention). (b) **Data-Driven Decision-Making** (Education officials should use empirical data to inform interventions and policy adjustments rather than relying solely on anecdotal evidence).

Ensuring equitable student engagement is both a moral and practical imperative for Tanzania's educational development. While challenges remain, this study has illuminated potential strategies for bridging engagement gaps between urban and rural schools. By addressing infrastructural deficits, empowering teachers, involving communities, and listening to students, Tanzania can build a more inclusive and effective education system. The journey toward meaningful student engagement is continuous, requiring collaboration among policymakers, educators, parents, and students themselves. Future research should further explore the longitudinal impacts of these engagement strategies and investigate scalable models for enhancing engagement in low-resource contexts.

6. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. Authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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