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## Editorial Note

The Ruaha Catholic University Journal of Education and Development (RUCUJED) is a Journal that publishes research papers of academic interest, targeting academic issues from a multidisciplinary approach and therefore hospitable to scholarly writing on a variety of academic disciplines. RUCUJED is an indispensable resource for Education and Development researchers, academicians and others with an interest in education and development.

RUCUJED aims to publish research articles, original research reports, reviews, short communications, and scientific commentaries in the fields of education such as anthropology, education, linguistics, political science, sociology, geography, history, psychology, development studies, and information and library science.

The Journal is dedicated to the advancement of education knowledge and provides a forum for the publication of high-quality manuscripts. It is published bi-annually and accepts original research, book reviews, and short communications.

The Editorial Board reserves the right to accept or reject any manuscript and the right to edit the manuscript as it deems fit. Moreover, manuscripts must be submitted with a covering letter stating that all authors (in case of multiple authors) agree with the content and approve of its submission to the Journal. Research theoretical papers should be between 5,000 and 7,000 words in length. Reviews and short communication should not exceed 2,000 words. The word count of the manuscript should include an abstract, references, tables, and figures. Manuscripts should be in English or Kiswahili.

**Editor-in-Chief**

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# Impact of Cognitive Dissonance and Its Impact on Learning Effectiveness among University Students

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## Abstract

*This study explored the impact of cognitive dissonance on learning effectiveness among university students in Dar es Salaam. Specifically, the study assessed on whether a relationship exists between cognitive dissonance and of students effective learning. Additionally, it proposed strategies that educators and institutions can adopt to minimize the negative influence of cognitive dissonance on students' academic performance.The study employed a mixed-methods research approach, featuring an embedded design within a descriptive cross-sectional framework, combining quantitative data from 83 stratified undergraduate students with qualitative insights from three purposively selected student deans.Learning effectiveness was assessed through students' self-reported academic engagement, confidence in understanding course material, and emotional resilience in the face of academic challenges. Three emotional indicators were used to capture responses to cognitive dissonance: guilt or self-doubt following academic failure, psychological stress resulting from mismatched study habits, and emotional reactions to repeated poor performance such as discouragement or the urge to give up. Findings revealed that these emotional responses impair learning effectiveness by reducing motivation, confidence, and sustained academic engagement.*

*Students emphasized the need for active learning techniques, structured teaching, emotional support, and early intervention to improve academic resilience. The study recommends that universities integrate emotional resilience programs and early intervention mechanisms, adopt active learning methodologies, enhance instructional clarity, and expand psychosocial support services. These measures can foster a more*

*inclusive and effective learning environment for students navigating academic dissonance.*

*Keywords:* academic support, cognitive dissonance, higher education, learning effectiveness, university students

## 1.0 Introduction

Cognitive dissonance is increasingly recognized as a critical psychological factor influencing learning effectiveness in higher education (Köpeczi-Bócz, 2025; NeuroLaunch, 2025; Inside Higher Ed, 2025). University students often experience mental discomfort when confronted with ideas that challenge their existing beliefs, values, or academic expectations phenomenon that can hinder academic engagement (Harmon-Jones et al., 2015; Treacy & Leavy, 2023). Theinternal conflict, known as cognitive dissonance, affects students' motivation, concentration, and reflective thinking, all of which are key components for learning effectiveness (Geertshuis& Liu, 2024; Adcock, 2022). Understanding how cognitive dissonance shapes academic outcomes is essential for developing responsive teaching strategies and fostering inclusive learning environment.

Several studies have explored the relationship between cognitive dissonance and learning effectiveness (Köpeczi-Bócz, 2025; Abdul-Gafaar et al., 2024; Harmon-Jones et al., 2015; Treacy & Leavy, 2023; Geertshuis& Liu, 2024; Adcock, 2022; Balaman, 2020; Luintel& Timsina, 2024; Mjema, 2013; Mushimiyimana et al., 2022). Köpeczi-Bócz (2025) emphasized that structured exposure to dissonance can foster conceptual change, while Abdul-Gafaar et al. (2024) found that it influences students' acceptance of new

technologies. Harmon-Jones et al. (2015) proposed an action-based model highlighting dissonance as a motivational catalyst for behavioural change. Similarly, Treacy and Leavy (2023) showed how student perspectives can improve teaching practices through dissonance. Moreover, Geertshuis and Liu (2024) noted that unresolved dissonance diminishes motivation, while Adcock (2022) stressed the importance of structured reflection in transformative learning. Balaman (2020) and Luintel and Timsina (2024) both found that unresolved dissonance negatively impacts academic focus and emotional stability, leading to reduced learning effectiveness.

In Tanzania, research underscores similar issues, identifying cognitive dissonance as a key factor affecting university students' learning outcomes (Mjema, 2013; Mushimiyimana et al., 2022). Mjema (2013) connected cognitive dissonance theory to student unrest, revealing how institutional pressures contribute to disengagement. Mushimiyimana et al. (2022) found that unresolved tensions hinder the adoption of educational technologies essential for modern learning. These studies collectively highlight that unresolved dissonance leads to decreased motivation and resistance to innovation. However, effective pedagogical strategies can help students navigate dissonance productively, enhancing engagement and academic performance in higher education.

Despite the growing recognition of cognitive dissonance as a barrier to learning, Tanzanian universities lack targeted empirical studies that examine its direct impact on students' academic engagement and performance. Students in Tanzanian higher

education institutions face unique academic, cultural, and institutional pressures that may intensify cognitive dissonance and compromise their ability to learn effectively. This study was therefore motivated by the need to understand how unresolved cognitive dissonance contributes to academic disengagement, emotional discomfort, and reduced learning outcomes within the Tanzanian context. The problem addressed in this study is the lack of institutional strategies that recognize and respond to emotional discomfort as a barrier to learning effectiveness. Without such evidence, educators may overlook critical psychological factors that undermine learning outcomes. This gap in localized research presents an urgent need to investigate how cognitive dissonance manifests within Tanzanian higher education and to identify strategies that can mitigate its effects.

This study was therefore conducted to address the gap by examining how cognitive dissonance affects learning effectiveness among university students in Dar es Salaam. Specifically, it seeks to answer two guiding questions: firstly, how does cognitive dissonance affect learning effectiveness? Andsecondly, what strategies can educators and institutions use to reduce the impact of cognitive dissonance on learning effectiveness? By focusing on the Tanzanian context, the study aims to generate actionable insights that support inclusive, responsive, and culturally relevant teaching practices.

## 2.0 Materials and Methods

This section outlines the materials and methods used in the study on cognitive dissonance and its impact on learning effectiveness among university students

### 2.1 Research Approach and Design

This study employed a mixed-methods research approach to examine the influence of cognitive dissonance on university students' learning effectiveness. The rationale for this design stems from the complex and multifaceted nature of cognitive dissonance, which involves both measurable behavioural patterns and deeply subjective psychological experiences (Festinger, 1957). By integrating numerical data with students' lived experiences and institutional perspectives, the study sought to capture both the prevalence of dissonance-related learning challenges and the specific emotional and cognitive responses shaping academic engagement (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

An embedded design within a descriptive cross-sectional framework was adopted, combining quantitative data from 83 stratified undergraduate students with qualitative insights from three purposively selected student deans. This structure enabled a comprehensive analysis: survey results provided a broad overview of learning effectiveness, while the qualitative perspectives offered contextual depth into the factors influencing student experiences and outcomes.

### 2.2 Participants

#### 2.2.1 Target Population

The target population for this study comprised undergraduate students enrolled in selected universities in Dar es Salaam. This group was chosen because they represent diverse academic disciplines, gender categories, and levels of study, making them

suitable for examining how cognitive dissonance affects learning effectiveness in higher education.

### 2.2.2 Sample

From the target population, a total of 83 undergraduate students were selected to participate in the quantitative phase of the study. These students completed the structured questionnaire. In addition, three deans of students were included in the qualitative phase through interviews. Their participation provided institutional perspectives on student learning challenges and the role of cognitive dissonance in academic engagement.

### 2.2.3 Sampling Technique

A stratified sampling technique was used to select the student participants. This ensured balanced representation across gender, faculties, and academic years. For the qualitative component, purposive sampling was employed to select the three deans of students. They were chosen based on their institutional roles and direct insights into student learning challenges, which allowed the study to capture both individual student experiences and broader institutional perspectives.

### 2.3Data Collection Methods

Quantitative data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to measure students' experiences of cognitive dissonance and perceived learning effectiveness. The questionnaire included Likert-scale items developed by the researcher. Qualitative data

were collected through semi-structured interviews with student deans, aimed at capturing institutional perspectives on how cognitive dissonance influences student engagement and learning. Interview guides were developed to ensure consistency while allowing flexibility for deeper exploration (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

### 2.4 Data Analysis and Ethical Considerations

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics and correlational analysis to examine patterns and relationships between students' experiences of cognitive dissonance and perceived learning effectiveness. These analyses provided insights into the strength and direction of associations among key variables. Qualitative data were analysed thematically to identify recurring concepts and institutional perspectives related to cognitive dissonance and student engagement.

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Dar es Salaam Tumaini University (DarTU) Ethical Research Committee. All participants were provided with informed consent outlining the purpose of the study, their rights, and data protection measures. Confidentiality and anonymity were rigorously upheld, and participation was entirely voluntary.

## 3.0 Results

This section presents descriptive findings from 83 university students enrolled in three Dar es SalaamUniversities. Participants represented several academic disciplines and levels. Gender distribution was approximately balanced, with 52% identifying as female and 48% as male. Ages ranged from 18 to 26 years, with a median age of 21. The

findings are organized into two thematic categories as per objectives including: examining how cognitive dissonance affects learning effectiveness among university students in Dar es Salaam and identifying strategies that educators and institutions can implement to mitigate its negative impact in higher education. Descriptive analysis has been presented using frequencies and percentages to highlight trends in student experiences and preferences in relation to objectives.

### 3.1 Relationship between Cognitive Dissonance and Learning Effectiveness

The purpose of this objective was to explore how students' emotional responses to academic inconsistency reflect cognitive dissonance and influence learning effectiveness.

#### 3.1.1 Quantitative Results

Three emotional indicators were assessed: guilt or self-doubt after academic failure, psychological stress due to mismatched study habits and performance, and discouragement following repeated poor academic performance. The results are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Cognitive Dissonance versus Academic Inconsistency (N = 83)*

| Emotional Indicator | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Guilt or Self-Doubt After Academic Failure | 2 (2.41%) | 4 (4.82%) | 10 (12.05%) | 24 (28.92%) | 43 (51.81%) |
| Psychological Stress Due to Mismatched Study | 5 | 1 | 11 | 28 | 38 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Habits | (6.02%) | (1.20%) | (13.25%) | (33.73%) | (45.78%) |
| Discouragement After Repeated Poor Performance | 0 (0.00%) | 4 (4.82%) | 14 (16.87%) | 34 (40.96%) | 31 (37.35%) |

Table 1 presents the frequency and percentage of student responses to three emotional indicators of cognitive dissonance. The majority of students either agreed or strongly agreed with each statement, reflecting widespread emotional discomfort associated with academic inconsistency. Values represent frequency counts followed by percentages in parentheses. No participants selected "Strongly Disagree" for the item on discouragement after repeated poor performance.

### 3.1.1 Qualitative Results

Interviews with student deans reinforced these results. Deans reported that unresolveddissonance often manifested as emotional disengagement, resistance to academic innovation, and reduced persistence. They identified repeated academic setbacks and unmet expectations as common triggers of discouragement. At the same time, they emphasized that supportive teaching practices and structured reflection opportunities could help students reframe dissonance as a catalyst for growth, thereby enhancing engagement and adaptability.

### 3.2 Psychological Stress Due to Mismatched Study Habits

#### 3.2.1 Quantitative Results

Among the 83 students, 66 (79.51%) agreed that mismatched study habits and academic intentions led to psychological stress. Of those, 38 students (45.78%) strongly agreed and 28 students (33.73%) agreed. Six students (7.22%) disagreed, and 11 (13.25%) responded neutrally. Table 2 summarizes these findings.

**Table 2**

*Psychological Stress Due to Mismatched Study Habits and Academic Intentions (N = 83)*

| Response | Frequency (N) | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly Disagree (1) | 5 | 6.02% |
| Disagree (2) | 1 | 1.20% |
| Neutral (3) | 11 | 13.25% |
| Agree (4) | 28 | 33.73% |
| Strongly Agree (5) | 38 | 45.78% |
| **Total** | **83** | **100%** |

Table 2 presents students' responses to psychological stress resulting from mismatched study habits and academic intentions.

### 3.2.2 Qualitative Results

Interviews with student deans revealed that mismatched study habits often created persistent stress and frustration, particularly when students' academic intentions were ambitious but unsupported by effective strategies. They emphasized that such stress frequently led to emotional disengagement and reduced persistence, mirroring the high levels of agreement reported in the survey. At the same time, deans highlighted that structured guidance, mentoring, and reflective practices could help students realign their study habits with academic goals, thereby reducing stress and improving overall learning effectiveness.

### 3.3 Discouragement After Repeated Poor Performance

Discouragement was reported by 78.31% of students following repeated academic failure. This finding is in consistent with Ajjawi et al. (2020), who observed that repeated failure increases emotional strain and disengagement. It also supports Gilar-Corbi et al. (2020) and Edwards and Ashkanasy (2018), who emphasize that, diminished self-efficacy and internalized failure negatively affect resilience and academic performance. The current study's results mirror these patterns, suggesting that emotional responses to failure are both widespread and impactful.

Thus, the findings are highly consistent with previous studies on cognitive dissonance and academic stress. The emotional indicators guilt, stress, and discouragement were all strongly supported by students and reflect well-established psychological patterns. These results reinforce the need for institutional strategies that address emotional well-being, promote adaptive study habits, and support students in managing academic setbacks.

### 3.3 Intervention Strategies to Enhance University Students' Learning Effectiveness

This objective sought to develop practical strategies to mitigate the adverse effects of cognitive dissonance and academic underachievement on students' learning effectiveness. The ultimate goal was to foster a supportive learning environment that promotes academic success and enhances overall learning outcomes. Respondents were asked: "What strategies do you suggest to deal with students' feelings of confusion so as to enhance learning effectiveness?"

### 3.3.1 Quantitative Results

Responses were categorized into four key themes: active learning techniques, counseling and support services, clear communication and structured teaching, and financial assistance, as illustrated in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

*Strategies to Address Students' Feelings of Confusion*

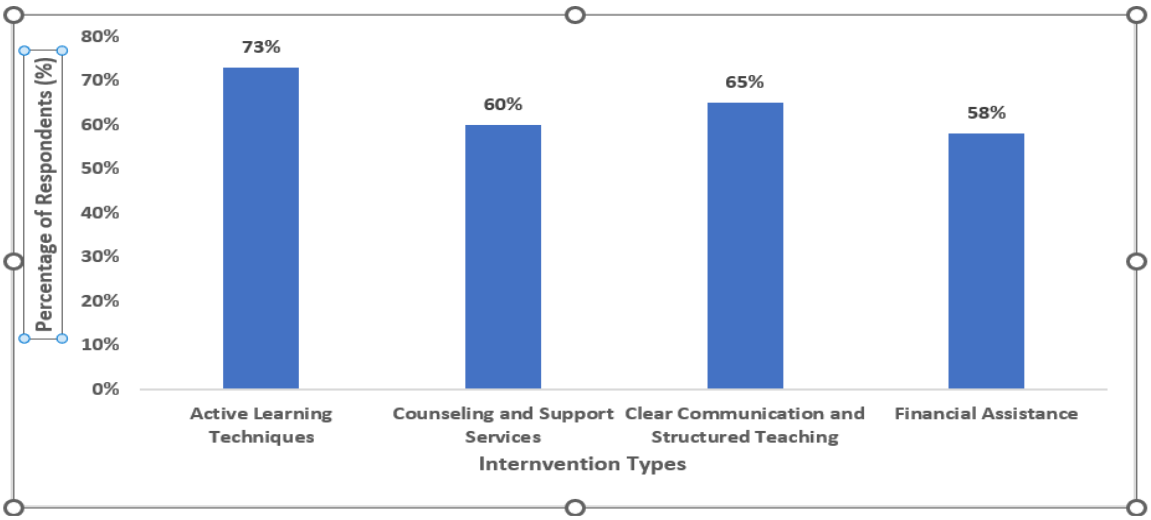



Figure 1 displays the percentage the percentage of students endorsing various strategies to address confusion.

The most frequently cited interventions were active learning techniques (73%), structured teaching (65%), counseling services (60%), and financial assistance (58%). These findings underscore students' strong preference for pedagogical clarity and active engagement over passive instructional methods. Although counseling and financial

support were slightly less emphasized, they remain critical in mitigating emotional and socioeconomic barriers to learning.

### 3.3.2 Qualitative Results

Interviews with student deans reinforced these quantitative findings. Deans emphasized that, pedagogical clarity and structured teaching were essential in reducing confusion and sustaining engagement. They observed that students often struggled when instructional methods were inconsistent or poorly communicated, leading to emotional fatigue and disengagement. Deans also highlighted the importance of counseling services and mentoring programs in addressing psychological stress, noting that emotional support not only reduced anxiety but also enhanced persistence. Furthermore, they pointed out that financial assistance was crucial for students facing socioeconomic challenges, as financial strain often compounded cognitive dissonance and hindered learning effectiveness. Overall, the qualitative insights advocate for a holistic institutional response that integrates instructional reform with robust psychosocial and financial support systems.

## 4.0 Discussion

This study shows how cognitive dissonance affects students' learning and what can be done to reduce its negative impact. By looking at both survey results and the views of student deans, the findings give a full picture of the emotional challenges students face and the kinds of support that can help.

### 4.1 Relationship between Cognitive Dissonance and Learning Effectiveness

The survey results showed that most students felt guilt, stress, and discouragement when their academic performance did not meet expectations. More than three quarters of the students reported these feelings. This supports Festinger's (1957) theory of cognitive dissonance, which explains how conflict between expectations and outcomes creates emotional discomfort. It also agrees with earlier studies (Salmela Aro & Nurmi, 2007; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2021) that link academic failure to burnout, lower confidence, and weaker learning. Interviews with deans confirmed this pattern. They explained that unresolved dissonance often leads to disengagement, resistance to new teaching methods, and reduced persistence. Together, these findings show that cognitive dissonance is not just a theory but a real issue that affects motivation and learning in universities.

### 4.2 Intervention Strategies

Students suggested several ways to reduce confusion and improve learning. The most common were active learning techniques, structured teaching, counseling services, and financial support. These results show that students want clear teaching methods and more active involvement in class. Deans also pointed out that counseling and mentoring programs help students manage stress, while financial support reduces the burden of economic challenges. Both findings highlight the need for universities to combine teaching reforms with strong emotional and financial support systems.

### 4.3 Relation to Previous Studies

The findings match Bran and Vaidis (2022), who argue that emotional discomfort from academic inconsistency reduces motivation. Rugira et al. (2013) found similar issues among Tanzanian students, showing the local relevance of these results. Neuroscience studies (Izuma& Murayama, 2017) also show that inconsistency can overload the brain and reduce focus. Kim and Bae (2020) found that emotional support lowers anxiety and improves performance. Campbell and Mogashana (2025) emphasized structured coaching models, which fit well with students' preference for clear guidance.

### 4.4 Implications

Overall, the study suggests that universities should use strategies that address both academic and emotional needs. By helping students reflect on challenges, offering mentoring, and using supportive teaching methods, institutions can turn dissonance into resilience and stronger engagement.

## 5.0 Conclusions

From the results of this study, it can be concluded that, cognitive dissonance is not just an emotional reaction but a real barrier to effective learning among university students. The majority of participants reported feelings of guilt, stress, and discouragement when their academic efforts did not match their expected outcomes. These emotions clearly reduced their motivation, confidence, and ability to engage with their studies.

Based on these findings, it is believed that improving learning effectiveness requires more than good teaching, it also demands attention to the emotional struggles the students face. The study shows that unresolved dissonance weakens academic resilience, so universities must respond by creating supportive environments that combine clear teaching methods, active learning strategies, and counseling services.

In the Tanzanian context, this conclusion is important because students often face additional cultural and institutional pressures that intensify dissonance. Therefore, this study insists that universities should treat emotional discomfort as a central issue in learning, not a side concern. By doing so, they can help students build resilience, regain confidence, and achieve long-term academic success.

## 6.0 Recommendations

The findings of this study underscore the need for a multi-dimensional institutional response to enhance university students' learning effectiveness. Based on emotional indicators of cognitive dissonance and the intervention strategies proposed by respondents, the following recommendations are made:

### 1. Introduce emotional resilience programs and early interventions

Universities should organize short training sessions on stress management, peer-support groups, and mentorship programs where senior students guide juniors. Early warning systems, such as monitoring repeated poor performance, should trigger counseling or academic coaching before problems escalate

**2. Adopt active learning and structured teaching methods**

Lecturers should use group discussions, case studies, and problem-solving activities instead of relying only on lectures. Clear course outlines, step-by-step instructions, and regular feedback will help reduce confusion and keep students engaged.

**3. Strengthen counseling and support services**

Counseling units should run workshops on coping with academic failure, time management, and self-confidence. They should also collaborate with faculties so that psychological support is embedded directly into the learning environment rather than being treated as separate.

**4. Revise institutional policies to recognize emotional barriers**

Universities should officially acknowledge that guilt, stress, and discouragement affect learning. Policies must allocate resources for counseling staff, peer mentoring programs, and financial aid schemes to ensure students receive both academic and emotional support.

**5. Encourage students to take responsibility for their learning**

Students should practice reflective study habits, such as keeping learning journals, setting personal goals, and reviewing progress regularly. They should also make use of counseling services, mentorship opportunities, and peer study groups to build confidence and resilience.

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# Barriers to Teachers' Participation in Continuous Professional Development and its Implication for the Quality of Teaching in Public Secondary Schools, Njombe Town Council

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## Abstract

*This study investigated the barriers to teachers' participation in continuous professional development (TCPD) and their implications for the quality of teaching in public secondary schools. The study was guided by the Social Constructivist Theory and adopted a qualitative research approach using a case study design. Data were collected from three public secondary schools involving 12 participants, including three heads of schools and nine teachers, who were selected through purposive sampling. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data, and the data were analyzed thematically. The findings revealed that teachers face several barriers to participating in TCPD, including time constraints, heavy workload, financial limitations, lack of leadership support, policy-related challenges, and logistical issues. The study concludes that teachers' participation in TCPD is hindered by personal, institutional, and systemic barriers, which ultimately affect the quality of teaching. The study recommends that*

*policymakers should review and revise existing policies to address teachers' workload and time constraints. School administrators should streamline approval processes and provide incentives to encourage teachers' participation in TCPD programmes. In addition, sufficient funding should be allocated to support continuous professional development programmes.*

*Keywords:* barriers, continuous professional development, public secondary schools, qualityof teaching, teachers' participation

## 1.0Introduction

The education system has been undergoing continuous reforms due to ongoing developments, increasing diversity, and the growing emphasis on effectiveness, accountability, and transparency (Yüner, 2022). Teachers' Continuous Professional Development (TCPD) is one of the key factors contributing to the success of these reforms (Bautista & Ortega-Ruiz, 2015). Research consistently shows that TCPD plays a significant role in improving the quality of teaching, students' learning outcomes, and overall educational effectiveness (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; OECD, 2019).

To meet the changing demands of education, teachers need to continuously improve their knowledge and skills. This aligns with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. The goal also emphasizes the importance of continuous professional development for teachers through regular training and capacity building (Du Toit, 2015). The need for TCPD has increased due to several factors, including

curriculum reforms, pedagogical innovations, changes in student demographics, inclusive education policies, and the increasing demand for 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, and digital literacy (Ambon et al., 2024).

Despite the importance of TCPD, the quality of teaching depends not only on pre-service teacher education but also on continuous in-service professional development. However, teachers across the world face various challenges that limit their participation in TCPD programmes. UNESCO (2018) reported that 68% of teachers worldwide expressed a need for further training in Information and Communication Technology (ICT), while 61% indicated a need for training on teaching learners with special educational needs. Similarly, Boeskens et al. (2020) found that teachers identified limited time, inadequate resources, and insufficient support from school administrators as major barriers to participation in continuous professional development. Likewise, Kraft et al. (2018) reported that teachers who participate in high-quality professional development are more likely to implement evidence-based teaching practices in their classrooms. However, many teachers still struggle to access and actively participate in professional development opportunities (Desimone & Garet, 2015).

In Africa, challenges facing teachers' continuous professional development are mainly associated with limited financial resources, inadequate infrastructure, and high teacher attrition rates, all of which affect teachers' participation in TCPD programmes (Komba &Mwakabenga, 2019). Likewise, a study conducted in Sub-Saharan Africa found that TCPD implementation was constrained by inadequate funding, insufficient training

opportunities, and limited support from school administrators (Mwila et al., 2022). Similarly, Adu-Agyemang and Osei-Poku (2018) reported that teachers' participation in TCPD in Ghana was influenced by school leadership, collegial support, and access to learning resources.

In Tanzania, the government has continued to prioritize improving the quality of education through TCPD. This commitment is reflected in the Education and Training Policies of 1995 and 2014, which emphasize sustainable in-service training as an important strategy for improving teachers' professional competence (Kapinga, 2019; Mwajoba, 2023; MoEST, 2017a). Despite these government efforts, several studies indicate that many teachers in Tanzania continue to face significant barriers to accessing TCPD opportunities, which limits their professional growth (Komba &Mwakabenga, 2019).

Dachi (2018) observed that once teachers are posted to schools in Tanzania, very few return for formal learning or participate in structured in-service professional development. The study further reported that approximately 52% of teachers in public schools and 58% of teachers in non-government schools had never participated in professional development activities. Furthermore, only 6.4% of teachers in the public sector had attended in-service professional development programmes during the previous five years. Similarly, Mosha (2016) reported that Teachers' Resource Centres (TRCs), established to improve teachers' instructional knowledge and skills, continue to

face several challenges, including inadequate funding, shortages of qualified personnel, and insufficient teaching facilities.

Likewise, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST, 2017b) reported that only 19% of the country's 268,766 teachers were allocated funding for professional development. More recently, Shukia and Komba (2023) noted that TCPD programmes in Tanzania remain inadequate, irregular, and poorly coordinated. The study further identified inadequate funding, limited incentives, poor planning, and weak follow-up mechanisms as major factors hindering the successful implementation of TCPD initiatives.

Evidence from Kapinga and Kimaro (2019), Matiba (2024), and Kannonyele (2023) further indicates that teachers in Tanzania face limited training opportunities, inadequate resources, low motivation, and insufficient support from school administrators. These challenges continue to limit teachers' participation in continuous professional development programmes.

Therefore, this study was conducted to explore the barriers to teachers' participation in continuous professional development in public secondary schools in Njombe Town Council. Specifically, the study sought to identify the major barriers affecting teachers' participation in TCPD and explore possible solutions for improving the quality of teaching. Understanding these challenges is expected to contribute to the development of more effective TCPD programmes that support teachers' professional growth and improve teaching quality in public secondary schools.

## 2.0 Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by the Social Constructivist Theory (SCT), developed by Lev Vygotsky (1978). The theory explains that learning occurs when individuals actively construct knowledge through interaction, inquiry, and experience rather than passively receiving information (Fosnot, 2013). It emphasizes that social interaction and collaboration with more knowledgeable individuals play an important role in cognitive development, enabling learners to acquire new knowledge and skills (Vygotsky, 1978). The theory further assumes that knowledge is socially constructed and that learners actively participate in developing their own understanding (Saleem et al., 2021). Therefore, SCT highlights the importance of collaboration, interaction, and shared experiences in promoting learning and professional growth.

The theory was considered relevant to this study because teachers' professional development occurs through interaction, collaboration, and the sharing of knowledge and experiences with colleagues. Continuous Professional Development (TCPD) provides opportunities for teachers to learn from one another, reflect on their teaching practices, and improve their professional competencies. Guided by SCT, this study explored how teachers experience and overcome barriers to participating in TCPD programmes. The theory also helped explain how collaborative learning environments can enhance teachers' professional growth and improve the quality of teaching in public secondary schools.

## 3.0Materials and Methods

This section presents the materials and methods employed in the study. It describes the research approach, research design, participants, data collection methods, data analysis procedures, and ethical considerations used to investigate the barriers to teachers' participation in continuous professional development and their implications for the quality of teaching in public secondary schools.

### 3.1 Research Approach and Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research approach because it allows an in-depth exploration of teachers' experiences, perceptions, and personal reflections. The approach is suitable for answering "how" and "why" questions rather than "how many" or "how much" questions (Moser &Korstjens, 2017). Through interviews, the researcher obtained rich and detailed information that enhanced understanding of the barriers affecting teachers' participation in continuous professional development programmes.

The study also adopted a case study research design because it enables researchers to investigate contemporary phenomena within their real-life contexts, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly defined (Yin, 2018). Furthermore, the case study design is appropriate for answering "how," "why," and "what" questions while providing an in-depth understanding of the specific context of teachers' participation in TCPD.

### 3.2 Participants

The target population comprised teachers and heads of schools from three selected public secondary schools. Following the principle of data saturation, the study involved 12 participants, including nine teachers and three heads of schools, who were purposively selected from the three schools.

The inclusion of both teachers and heads of schools was important because they are directly involved in the teaching and learning process and are key stakeholders in the implementation of continuous professional development initiatives. Teachers provided first-hand information on the challenges they experience in participating in TCPD programmes, while heads of schools shared their experiences regarding school policies, administrative support, and institutional challenges related to teachers' professional development. The perspectives of these two groups provided a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing teachers' participation in TCPD and their implications for the quality of teaching.

### 3.3 Data Collection Methods

The study employed semi-structured interviews as the only data collection method. Interviews were conducted with 12 participants, comprising nine teachers and three heads of schools. This method was selected because it allows an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, opinions, and perceptions. It also enabled the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the barriers affecting teachers' participation in continuous professional development and how these barriers influence the quality of teaching.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their knowledge and experience with continuous professional development programmes. Heads of schools assisted in identifying teachers who had relevant experience with TCPD. Teachers were selected because of their direct involvement in classroom teaching and their experience with professional development activities. Heads of schools were included because of their knowledge of school policies, administrative support systems, and the implementation of TCPD programmes within their schools.

## 4.0 Data Analysis and Ethical Considerations

The study employed thematic analysis following the six-step framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This method was selected because it enables researchers to identify, analyse, and interpret patterns and themes within qualitative data.

The analysis began with familiarisation, during which the researcher carefully read all interview transcripts to gain a thorough understanding of the collected data. The researcher then generated initial codes by identifying important concepts and ideas related to the research objectives. These codes were grouped into meaningful categories to develop themes that addressed the research questions. The identified themes were reviewed, refined, defined, and appropriately named to ensure they accurately represented participants' experiences. Finally, the researcher interpreted the findings by linking the themes to the research objectives and existing literature. To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, the researcher applied strategies that addressed the criteria of credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability.

Ethical considerations were also observed throughout the study. The researcher obtained an introductory letter from the Office of the Director of Postgraduate Studies at Ruaha Catholic University. The letter enabled the researcher to seek permission from the Regional and District authorities before conducting the study in the selected public secondary schools. Permission was subsequently granted by the relevant school authorities, allowing the researcher to collect data from the participants.

## 5.0 Result and Discussion

The findings revealed that teachers face several barriers that hinder their participation in Continuous Professional Development (TCPD) programmes. These barriers include time constraints, heavy workload, financial constraints, lack of leadership support, policy-related challenges, and logistical issues. Collectively, these barriers limit teachers' participation in professional development programmes, restrict their professional growth, and ultimately affect the quality of teaching. The findings are presented and discussed below.

### 5.1 Time Constraints

The study found that time constraints were one of the major barriers preventing teachers from participating in continuous professional development programmes. Teachers reported having limited time because of demanding teaching schedules and the short notice often given before training sessions.

One teacher explained:

> Sometimes, mandatory TCPD sessions are announced on very short notice, leaving teachers with little time to prepare or adjust their schedules. This abrupt planning causes logistical challenges, as teachers must balance training attendance with their teaching responsibilities. Moreover, the lack of available substitute teachers makes it difficult for them to participate without disrupting classroom instruction and learners' progress (Interview, T1SC, 29th July 2025).

These findings indicate that poor planning and inadequate scheduling make it difficult for teachers to attend professional development activities while fulfilling their teaching responsibilities. As a result, teachers have fewer opportunities to update their knowledge and teaching skills, which may negatively affect the quality of instruction. These findings are consistent with Guzman and Aguilar (2025), who reported that teachers often struggle to balance their daily responsibilities with opportunities for professional learning because of limited time and competing work demands.

**5.2 Workload for Teachers**

The study identified heavy workload as another major barrier to teachers' participation in continuous professional development programmes. Teachers reported being overwhelmed by teaching responsibilities, administrative duties, and extracurricular activities, leaving little time and energy for professional learning.During the interview, one head of school highlighted this concern:

> Teachers often have heavy teaching schedules, administrative duties, and extracurricular responsibilities that leave little time for professional development programmes. This overload reduces their availability and motivation to engage in additional training sessions beyond regular working hours, ultimately limiting their capacity to benefit from continuous professional development (Interview, HSB, 3rd July 2025).

These findings suggest that excessive workload limits teachers' opportunities to participate effectively in TCPD programmes. Without flexible schedules and adequate institutional support, teachers are unable to balance their teaching responsibilities with professional development activities.

These findings agree with Komba and Mwakabenga (2019) and Klink et al. (2017), who found that teacher professional development is difficult to implement successfully when school policies do not adequately address workload and timetabling challenges. In Tanzania, teachers are generally not allocated dedicated time for professional development, which further limits their participation.

### 5.3 Financial Constraints

The study further revealed that financial constraints significantly limit teachers' participation in TCPD programmes. Many teachers reported that they could not afford the costs associated with attending training programmes, including registration fees,

transport, accommodation, and learning materials.During the interview, one head of school remarked that:

> *Teachers' participation in continuous professional development is largely constrained by limited resources. Insufficient financial support restricts opportunities for attending training sessions, accessing learning materials, and covering related costs such as transportation and accommodation, thereby reducing teachers' engagement in professional growth programmes* (Interview, HSB, 21st July 2025).

These findings show that inadequate financial support discourages teachers from participating in professional development activities. Limited funding reduces teachers' motivation and restricts their access to learning opportunities that could improve their professional competence.

These findings support those of Guzman and Aguilar (2025) and Soodmand and Ghasemi (2020), who reported that financial challenges are among the major barriers preventing teachers from participating in professional development programmes, especially where teachers are expected to finance their own training.

**5.4 Lack of Support from Leadership**

The findings also showed that inadequate leadership support discourages teachers from participating in continuous professional development programmes. Teachers felt that

school leaders provided limited encouragement, recognition, and financial support for professional development. During the interview, one teacher shared that:

> Lack of support from leadership is the major barrier to my professional development as a teacher. I have been funding my development programmes, which is burdensome. It's discouraging when my effort is not prioritized, making me feel undervalued. What I believe is that investing in teachers' development is crucial for the school's success (Interview, T3SC, 15th July 2025).

These findings suggest that teachers become less motivated to participate in TCPD when they receive little encouragement and support from school leadership. Recognition, guidance, and financial assistance from school leaders are important factors that promote teachers' engagement in professional learning.

These findings are consistent with Soodmand and Ghasemi (2020), who emphasized that strong institutional support and committed leadership are essential for successful teacher professional development.

### 5.5 Policy-Related Challenges

The study also identified policy-related challenges as barriers to teachers' participation in TCPD programmes. Teachers reported that bureaucratic procedures, rigid administrative policies, and lengthy approval processes delayed or prevented their participation in training activities. One head of school commented:

> Rigid national policies, often linked to bureaucratic government procedures governing training initiatives, pose a major obstacle to teachers' participation in continuous professional development. Lengthy approval processes and strict administrative requirements delay the organization and implementation of TCPD programmes. As a result, many teachers miss valuable learning opportunities, which in turn limits their professional growth and the effectiveness of TCPD initiatives (Interview, HSA, 3rd July 2025).

The findings indicate that bureaucratic procedures and inflexible administrative systems reduce teachers' access to professional development opportunities. Delays in approval processes discourage participation and weaken the implementation of TCPD programmes.

These findings agree with Komba and Mwakabenga (2019), who argued that the existing policy framework in Tanzania does not clearly provide practical strategies for implementing sustainable teacher professional development. Similarly, Gabriel (2023) observed that bureaucratic inefficiencies, weak institutional capacity, corruption, and resistance to change continue to affect the implementation of public programmes in many developing countries, including professional development initiatives.

### 5.6 Logistical Challenges

The study further revealed that logistical challenges hinder teachers' participation in continuous professional development programmes. Teachers identified inadequate

transport arrangements, poor coordination, limited availability of substitute teachers, and short-notice scheduling as major logistical barriers. One teacher explained:

> Sometimes, mandatory TCPD sessions are announced on very short notice, leaving teachers with little time to prepare or adjust their schedules. This abrupt planning causes logistical challenges, as teachers must balance training attendance with their teaching responsibilities. Moreover, the lack of available substitute teachers makes it difficult for them to participate without disrupting classroom instruction and learners' progress(Interview, T1SD, 29th July 2025)

These findings indicate that poor planning, inadequate coordination, lack of transport, and the absence of substitute teachers significantly reduce teachers' participation in TCPD programmes. Such challenges make it difficult for teachers to attend training while fulfilling their teaching responsibilities.

The findings are consistent with previous studies showing that logistical and structural barriers continue to limit teachers' participation in professional development programmes (Hardman et al., 2015; Opoku et al., 2021). Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) also emphasized that effective professional development requires proper planning, consistent scheduling, and strong institutional support. Likewise, studies conducted in Tanzania have shown that limited transport, lack of substitute teachers, and weak administrative support continue to hinder teachers' participation in TCPD programmes (Kapinga, 2019; Komba &Mwakabenga, 2019; Shukia& Komba, 2023).

## 6.0 Conclusion

Development (TCPD) is affected by several personal, institutional, and systemic barriers, which ultimately influence the quality of teaching in public secondary schools. At the individual level, teachers face challenges such as heavy workload, limited time, financial constraints, and low motivation resulting from inadequate support and recognition. At the institutional level, limited leadership support, insufficient funding, and inflexible school practices reduce teachers' opportunities to participate in professional development programmes. In addition, systemic barriers, including bureaucratic procedures and lengthy approval processes, further restrict teachers' access to TCPD opportunities.

Addressing these barriers requires collaborative efforts from policymakers, education authorities, and school leaders. Strengthening policy implementation, increasing institutional support, providing adequate funding and creating favourable conditions for teachers to participate in TCPD will enhance teachers' professional growth and improve the quality of teaching in public secondary schools.

## 7.0 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

Policymakers should review and revise existing policies to reduce teachers' workload and address time constraints that limit participation in Continuous Professional Development programmes. School administrators should simplify approval procedures,

provide adequate support, and introduce incentives that encourage teachers to participate in professional development activities.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology should allocate sufficient financial resources to support TCPD programmes. The Ministry should also ensure the availability of substitute teachers during training sessions so that teachers can attend professional development activities without disrupting classroom instruction. Furthermore, TCPD programmes should be planned based on teachers' professional needs and interests to improve their relevance, effectiveness, and participation.

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# Exploring the Influence of Peer Teaching Method on Students' Achievement of Statistics in Mathematics Subject in Public Secondary Schools in Iringa Municipality

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## Abstract

*This study explored the influence of the peer teaching method on students' performance in statistics in public secondary schools in the Iringa Municipality. The study adopted a qualitative research approach and used a case study design. A sample of 32 participants was purposively selected, including four heads of schools, four mathematics teachers, and 24 Form Four students from four public secondary schools. Data were collected through face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs), and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that peer teaching enhances students' self-assessment, increases classroom engagement and participation, boosts self-confidence, and improves knowledge retention. The study concludes that peer teaching is a valuable instructional strategy for improving academic achievement and promoting a deeper understanding of statistical concepts. Based on these findings, it is recommended that teachers play an active role in monitoring and guiding peer teaching sessions.*

*Additionally, teachers should establish structured peer teaching programs—such as subject clubs and group discussions—and provide sufficient teaching and learning materials to support this method in public secondary schools.*

***Keywords:*** peer teaching method, public secondary schools, statistics, students' achievement

## 1.0 Introduction

There are two contrasting perceptions regarding the learning of mathematics. One group of scholars and students believes that mathematics is simple and accessible. This perspective is supported by Male and Lumbantoruan (2020), who noted that some mathematics majors find it easy to comprehend and apply statistical concepts. Pointing out further benefits of learning the subject, Lulu (2024) argued that students achieve greater future success when they possess strong quantitative skills. Conversely, another group views mathematics as highly difficult and complex. This view is supported by Zussette et al. (2017), who asserted that mathematics is often perceived as the most challenging subject by students. Because of this negative perception, many students struggle and perform poorly even in basic mathematical operations.

Students who perform poorly in mathematics often struggle with statistics as well, since both areas require similar cognitive and problem-solving skills (Garfield & Ben-Zvi, 2008; Franklin et al., 2015). Researchers frequently link poor performance to negative student attitudes, anxiety, and low motivation (Audu &Oyelekan, 2020), alongside ineffective teaching methods that fail to engage learners or connect abstract concepts to

practical, real-world applications (Batanero, Burrill, & Reading, 2016; Chance et al., 2007).

Globally, statistics is a fundamental discipline that enables individuals to collect, analyses, and interpret data for informed decision-making across various fields like education, geography, and general mathematics (Garfield & Ben-Zvi, 2008; Rumsey, 2010). However, student performance in statistics which is typically taught within the broader mathematics curriculum remains low (Chance et al., 2007). This low performance is often attributed to the continuous use of teacher-centered traditional methods that fail to engage learners, combined with a general lack of student interest (Audu &Oyelekan, 2020; Franklin et al., 2015).

Similarly, Auliga (2018) reported that some students find statistics difficult because current teaching methods do not actively involve them in their own learning. Such experiences lead to reduced motivation, increased anxiety, and disinterest, resulting in a poor understanding of core concepts and low academic achievement. In Europe, teaching statistics continues to present challenges. A study by Mata et al. (2020) revealed that mathematics teachers face numerous difficulties when teaching statistical topics like probability, variables, and correlation coefficients. These challenges hinder teachers' ability to explain complex concepts in an engaging way, often because they lack training in modern pedagogical methods. Consequently, this directly impacts student comprehension and contributes to poor performance in mathematics.

Furthermore, persistent challenges in many secondary schools such as inadequate teacher training and cultural barriers mean that students continue to face significant difficulties in understanding statistics (Audu &Oyelekan, 2020; Batanero, Burrill, & Reading, 2016). These challenges prevent students from developing the essential analytical and problem-solving skills required to succeed in statistical mathematics (Garfield & Ben-Zvi, 2008; Franklin et al., 2015). The peer teaching method has emerged as a promising solution to these challenges, as it allows students to learn from one another, share knowledge, and solve problems collaboratively. To address low performance, educators are increasingly exploring innovative approaches like peer teaching, which has been shown to improve both academic achievement and student engagement (Stigmar, 2016).

Peer teaching refers to an instructional method where students teach other students (Basil, Degeng, Setyousar, & Sulton, 2021). It is a collaborative learning approach that emphasizes active student participation and knowledge exchange (Sallem et al., 2021). In this method, students act as teachers by presenting specific topics to their classmates. Through this collaboration, they share insights and perspectives, which reinforces learning for both the tutors and the tutees. As Chandra (2015) explains, peer teaching boosts academic achievement by allowing students to learn from each other.

According to Rusli (2021), peer teaching is widely recognized as a valuable pedagogical tool that contributes significantly to academic success. It creates an interactive, participatory classroom environment where students actively engage with the content

and their peers (Topping, 2021). Therefore, adopting this method in statistics classes is crucial for fostering a deeper understanding of the subject. Additionally, Vipinder (2022) argues that peer teaching improves student performance because it allows learners to share knowledge, clear up doubts, and build on each other's strengths within a supportive environment. By working together, students can break down complex ideas into simpler terms, making difficult statistical concepts easier to grasp. This method encourages active learning, critical thinking, and analytical skills. Research consistently shows that learning from peers significantly enhances academic achievement (Rusli et al., 2021).

Peer teaching also keeps students engaged. Olpak et al. (2018) note that this approach allows students to take charge of their learning process. By explaining concepts to peers, they deepen their own understanding, share ideas, and resolve misunderstandings in a supportive, collaborative space. Despite these benefits, there is a growing concern regarding the poor performance of students in mathematics within public secondary schools in Iringa Municipality (MoEST, 2022; Komba &Mwandanji, 2021). While teachers use a variety of instructional methods (Mlama, 2020; Nyambo & Joseph, 2023), education stakeholders and students continue to ask: why does academic performance remain low when teachers are using diverse teaching methods? To address this gap, this study explored the influence of the peer teaching method on students' performance in statistics within mathematics classes in public secondary schools in Iringa Municipality, Tanzania.

## 2.0 Material Methods

This section outlines the research approach, design, participant selection, data collection, and data analysis methods used in this study.

### 2.1 Research Approach and Design

This study used a qualitative research approach to capture the real-life experiences and perspectives of participants. Qualitative research is well-suited for exploring the deeper meanings and motivations behind human experiences that cannot be easily measured using numbers (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hamed, 2022). This approach allowed the researcher to gather rich, detailed, and contextual descriptions of students' experiences learning statistics through peer teaching.

Additionally, the study adopted a case study design, which facilitates an in-depth investigation of a specific phenomenon within its real-world context (Coombs, 2022). This design was appropriate for providing a comprehensive exploration of how peer teaching is implemented and its effects on students learning statistics.

### 2.2 Participants

A target population represents the entire group of individuals or elements that a researcher wants to study and draw conclusions about (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). In this study, the target population consisted of 36 potential participants across four public secondary schools. Out of these, a sample of 32 participants was purposively selected, including: Four (4) heads of schools, who supervise all academic and

administrative activities. Four (4) mathematics teachers, who are responsible for choosing classroom methods and can provide feedback on the practical application of peer teaching. Twenty-four (24) Form Four students, who have direct experience learning statistics through peer teaching. Including these different groups provided a well-rounded perspective on the implementation and impact of peer teaching in the classroom.

### 2.3 Data Collection Methods

The study used semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) to collect primary data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Interviews were conducted with the four heads of schools to gather their views on how the peer teaching method influences students' performance in statistics (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Similarly, the four mathematics teachers were interviewed to learn about their firsthand experiences implementing peer teaching in their classrooms. Each interview lasted between 10 to 15 minutes. These sessions provided rich qualitative insights into how peer teaching is managed and its perceived effects on student achievement.

FGDs were held with the 24 Form Four students. A total of four FGD sessions were conducted (one at each school), with each group consisting of six students. The researcher acted as the moderator for all sessions. These discussions encouraged natural, interactive conversations where students openly shared their feelings, opinions, and experiences regarding peer teaching. As noted by Krueger and Casey (2015), FGDs are

highly effective for gathering rich, interactive qualitative data, which in this study helped clarify how peer teaching influences student performance in statistics.

### 2.4 Data Analysis and Ethical Considerations

The data collected from the interviews and FGDs were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the six-step framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing the final report. The key themes that emerged included self-assessment, student engagement/participation, and knowledge retention. The researcher categorized and coded the data systematically to draw meaningful insights from the participants' experiences.

Ethical standards were strictly maintained throughout the research process. First, the researcher obtained official research clearance from the Director of Postgraduate Studies at Ruaha Catholic University. This clearance letter was presented to the Regional Administrative Secretary and District Administrative Secretary to secure permission to conduct the study in the municipality. Written informed consent was also obtained from all heads of schools, teachers, and students before starting data collection. Participants were fully informed about the study's purpose, its procedures, and their right to voluntary participation, meaning they could withdraw at any time without penalty. Confidentiality was ensured by using pseudonyms to protect the identities of the participants and their respective schools. Finally, the researcher properly cited all academic sources to ensure scholarly integrity and avoid plagiarism.

## 3.0 Findings and Discussion

The field data revealed that the peer teaching method positively influences students' achievement in statistics. Below is a detailed presentation and discussion of these findings.

### 3.1 Enhancement of Self-assessment

The study found that the peer teaching method helps students self-assess and understand their individual strengths and weaknesses in statistics. It enables them to identify which concepts they understand well and which areas require more work, promoting self-awareness and academic growth. By recognizing these areas, students can build on their strengths and seek peer support to address their weaknesses. Additionally, peer feedback offers diverse explanations that help simplify complex statistical concepts. During the interviews, one head of school described this process:

> Peer teaching method helps students to identify challenging areas during learning, which can be resolved by supporting one another more effectively. That is, a student may realise there is a certain area they have not well-understood, but their friends understand it better. In that case, they can ask for help and be guided more by their fellow students than by their teachers (Interview, HSC: 14th July 2025).

This response highlights how peer teaching allows students to recognize gaps in their understanding and resolve them through collaborative learning. It creates a comfortable

space where students can ask peers for explanation, which is sometimes more relatable and effective than traditional teacher-led instruction.

### 3.2 Increasing Students' Engagement and Participation

The peer teaching method proved to be highly effective in encouraging active participation in statistics classes. Through this approach, students take charge of their learning, resolve personal academic doubts, and build a stronger grasp of statistics, which ultimately improves their performance. During the interviews, one mathematics teacher shared:

> Peer teaching method makes students to be active in classrooms, because it allows their fully participation. In my class I always choose randomly any student to teach others in front of the class. This makes other students to be more active because they know they can be selected any time to teach others (Interview, MTSB1: 15 July 2025).

This finding shows that peer teaching encourages students to remain attentive and focused, especially when they know they might be randomly selected to present a topic to their peers. These results match those of prior studies, such as Ra'ed and Reem (2016) and Ozgur and Bahattin (2022), which reported that peer teaching helps students clarify misunderstandings, address knowledge gaps, and tackle complex topics confidently, leading to better academic performance.

### 3.3 Boosting Students' Confidence

The findings indicate that peer teaching boosts students' self-confidence in statistics. When students explain mathematical concepts to their classmates and receive constructive feedback, they develop a sense of mastery and competence, which translates into stronger problem-solving skills. This increased confidence has a positive influence on their motivation and overall performance. During a focus group discussion, one student remarked: *"This method helps us to build confidence and recognise that we are all equal, enabling us to participate together in learning mathematics. This contributes to improving our performance in mathematics subject"* (FGD, STBG2: 17th July 2025).

This feedback demonstrates that peer teaching helps reduce academic anxiety, encourages self-belief, and creates a supportive, collaborative learning environment where students feel safe to participate.

Furthermore, students reported that they often feel more comfortable asking for help from classmates than from their teachers. This comfort stems from the relaxed, non-threatening relationship among peers, who view each other as equals rather than authority figures. Sharing similar struggles allows them to seek help without the fear of being judged. During an FGD, a student from School D noted: *"I feel comfortable being helped by another student than I could be helped by the teacher. The reason is that my colleague [referring to student] can use normal tone to make me understand easily"* (FGD, STDG1: 17th July 2025).

This outcome aligns with research by Elizabeth et al. (2016), who pointed out that peer teaching not only increases student engagement in mathematics but also deepens their conceptual understanding and builds long-term academic confidence.

### 3.4 Knowledge Retention

The peer teaching method also improves students' ability to retain statistical knowledge over time. Actively recalling and applying statistics concepts during peer sessions strengthens mental connections and promotes long-term retention. By explaining topics to classmates, students reinforce their own learning and identify concepts they still need to practice. One student explained this benefit during an FGD:

> This method [peer teaching] is more effective, because it greatly helps us to retain and memorize what we learn in statistics. When we teach each other, there is more repetition of some statistical components in mathematics subject. For instance, teach measures of dispersion through statistics can make one to understand calculation related to range, variance, and standard deviation. Ultimately, we perform better in mathematics subject (FGD, STAG1: 17th July 2025).

This quote shows that peer teaching fosters retention through active repetition and engagement. Explaining topics like range, variance, and standard deviation to classmates reinforces the steps in calculations, helping students remember them better during assessments. These findings match the work of Kavita and Khirtish (2024) and Vipinder

(2022), who argued that peer teaching improves academic achievement in mathematics by reinforcing fundamental concepts.

## 3.0Conclusion

Based on the study findings, peer teaching is an effective and valuable method for teaching statistics in secondary school mathematics. It improves students' self-assessment, active participation, confidence, and overall performance. By creating a supportive, non-intimidating environment, the method allows students to comfortably ask questions and seek help from their peers. Furthermore, peer teaching promotes a deeper, long-term understanding of statistics. Integrating this collaborative approach into daily mathematics instruction can create a dynamic learning environment that addresses diverse student needs.

## 4.0Recommendations

Based on the conclusions, the following recommendations are made:

(a) Mathematics teachers should play an active role in monitoring and guiding peer teaching sessions to ensure that students share accurate information and remain focused on academic goals. Adopting this method can serve as a valuable tool for both teachers and students to improve outcomes in mathematics.

(b) Schools should establish structured peer teaching programs, such as subject clubs and organized study groups. These activities provide a clear framework for collaborative learning. Public secondary schools should also set clear guidelines and schedules for

peer teaching (including group assignments and topics) and integrate these sessions into the formal school timetable to ensure consistency.

(c) The government, through the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST), should ensure that public secondary schools are equipped with sufficient learning resources, such as relevant mathematics textbooks and digital learning materials, to support the effective implementation of peer teaching.

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# The Supervisory Practices Employed by Heads of Schools in Sustaining a Supportive Teacher Working Environment in Iringa Municipality

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## Abstract

*This research examined the supervisory practices used by heads of schools to maintain a favorable teacher working environment in public secondary schools in Iringa Municipality, Tanzania. The research was informed by the fact that supervision is a crucial factor in improving teacher motivation, job satisfaction, and instructional performance, but supervisory practices in most schools are inconsistent and mainly administrative. A qualitative research approach was used, wherein a case study design was utilized to gain detailed insight into the phenomenon. Data were gathered through focus group discussions with teachers and a review of documents in the selected public secondary schools. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The results showed that supervisory practices varied across schools and encompassed checking teaching and learning materials, classroom visits, communication with staff, and the provision of feedback and guidance. Even though heads of schools were supportive and developmental with regard to supervision, some practiced irregular and inspection-*

*oriented supervision that undermined teachers' morale. Effective supervision was also limited due to limited communication, poor feedback, heavy administrative workloads, and inadequate resources. The research concludes that regular, involved, and mentorship-based supervision improves teacher motivation, cooperation, and development. It suggests enhancing supervisory training among heads of schools, advancing routine developmental supervision, improving communication and feedback systems, delegating administrative responsibilities, and providing adequate resources. These measures would make the supervision process more supportive, increase teachers' satisfaction, and enhance the overall quality of education in Tanzanian public secondary schools.*

*Keywords:* supervisory practices, heads of schools, supportive teacher working environment

## 1.0 Introduction

The practice of supervision by heads of schools has historically been centered around administration and control and was rarely concerned with providing support to teachers, mentoring, or ongoing professional development. Since the late twentieth century, education systems around the world have evolved to rethink the role of supervision in education as a developmental and collaborative function. Today, supervision includes mentoring, professional coaching, appraisals of teacher performance, and ongoing support to increase teacher motivation and instructional quality (Glickman, Gordon & Ross-Gordon, 2017). A productive workplace culture based on open communication,

professional development, and teacher well-being has become a necessity for maintaining teacher morale and productivity (Lumadi, 2014; Mulatu, 2016). A head of school who supports and motivates his or her teachers contributes to greater job satisfaction, increased commitment, and better classroom performance (Justine, 2017).

Globally, the role of school supervision has shifted from a traditional model of inspection and control toward a more developmental, supportive, and collaborative process. Contemporary education systems, particularly in countries such as the United States, Canada, Finland, and the United Kingdom, emphasize instructional leadership where school heads mentor teachers, conduct classroom observations, guide professional growth, and create an environment that enhances teacher motivation and instructional quality (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2017; Bennett, 2020; Brown &Luzmore, 2021). This shift is strengthened by policy reforms and investments that prioritize teacher well-being, continuous professional development, and shared decision-making. Evidence from these contexts shows that schools with supportive supervisory cultures record higher teacher morale, improved instructional practices, and stronger student outcomes (Anderson, 2019; Keuren, Silova, & McAllister, 2015)

Regionally, many African education systems, however, continue to experience significant supervisory challenges stemming from chronic resource shortages, inadequate preparation of school leaders, and outdated inspection-driven supervisory models. Empirical research across the continent consistently highlights these issues. In Kenya, for instance, teachers report that limited instructional materials, overcrowded

classrooms, and inconsistent supervision contribute to declining morale and reduced instructional quality (Mwangi &Omondi, 2019). In Ghana, Oduro (2020) found that school leaders often lack the training required to implement developmental supervision, resulting in supervision that is largely administrative rather than supportive. Similarly, Asedhous (2017) and Aboagye & Yeboah (2021) noted that poor working conditions, such as inadequate teaching resources, delayed promotions, and weak communication between administrators and teachers, discourage teacher commitment and increase turnover intentions.

In Nigeria, studies reveal that insufficient government funding, fragmented supervision systems, and the absence of structured professional development programs weaken the ability of heads of schools to mentor teachers effectively (Adebola, 2021). Ugandan research further shows that many school heads lack the competency to apply modern instructional supervision techniques due to limited pre-service and in-service leadership training (Kagoda& Sentongo, 2019). This lack of capacity results in superficial classroom observations and feedback sessions that do not translate into real improvement in classroom practice. Research from Ethiopia also indicates that supervision remains largely fault-finding and compliance-oriented, leaving teachers feeling unsupported and demoralized (Dessie, 2016; Tesema, 2014).

Across Southern Africa, similar patterns emerge. In Zimbabwe, Chikoko (2018) found that supervision is heavily constrained by resource limitations, leading to irregular classroom visits and inconsistent reporting practices. In Malawi, Gondwe (2020)

reported that the absence of incentives and poor working conditions discourage school leaders from conducting meaningful supervision, ultimately affecting teacher motivation. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that many African countries face systemic challenges that prevent school heads from executing effective, developmental supervision. These conditions demotivate teachers, increase teacher attrition, and undermine the implementation of quality teaching and learning across the continent (World Bank, 2021).

In Tanzania, heads of schools play a central role in shaping this environment through their supervisory practices, which include monitoring teaching activities, offering feedback, and guiding teacher development. This paper examines the supervisory practices employed by heads of schools in sustaining a supportive working environment for teachers in Iringa Municipality. Although national frameworks such as the Education and Training Policy (URT, 2014) emphasize supervision as a fundamental mechanism for improving teaching and learning, evidence from Tanzanian schools shows that supervision remains inconsistent, inadequately implemented, and often limited to administrative compliance rather than instructional guidance (Sumra, 2016; Lwoga, 2020).

The need for this study arises from persistent challenges in public secondary schools, including irregular classroom observation, limited feedback, shortages of teaching resources, and declining teacher morale. Studies across African contexts indicate that when supervision is weak or absent, teachers experience burnout, reduced commitment,

and diminished instructional quality (Mlowosa, Mamboya&Maziku, 2018; Nsenga, 2019). If these supervisory gaps are not addressed, schools in Iringa Municipality risk further erosion of teacher motivation, weakened collaboration, and compromised student learning outcomes. This is particularly concerning given growing policy emphasis on accountability and quality assurance in the education sector (UNESCO, 2015).

Understanding how heads of schools in Iringa Municipality execute their supervisory duties, the extent to which these practices foster supportive environments, and the barriers they encounter is therefore both necessary and timely. Thus, this paper examines the supervisory practices employed by heads of schools in sustaining a supportive working environment for teachers in Iringa Municipality.

## 2.0 Materials and Methods

The current section outlines the methodological approach used in conducting the research study on the supervisory practices used by school heads for maintaining a teacher-supportive school environment in the context of Iringa Municipality.

### 2.1 Research Approach and Design

Qualitative research methods were used to gain an in-depth understanding of heads of schools' practices in creating and sustaining a supportive teaching work environment. The qualitative research approach was chosen for this study because it is particularly effective for exploring complex social phenomena, human behaviour, and subjective experiences, which are central to understanding how heads of schools supervise teachers and how such supervision shapes the working environment. As several scholars argue,

qualitative inquiry is best suited for investigating value-laden issues that cannot be easily quantified (Pregoner, 2025; Siddiqua, 2023).

Qualitative methods also provide a rich understanding of the dynamics of supervision. They enable the researcher to explore how participants interpret their interactions, respond to leadership behaviours, and make sense of their institutional contexts (Alatiq, 2020; Aleixo, 2003; Lai et al., 2024). This interpretive strength is critical for a study like this one, which aims to examine not only what supervisory practices are used but also how they are experienced by teachers and how they contribute to motivation, morale, and professional relationships. As noted by Huang et al. (2023), qualitative approaches yield in-depth and illustrative information capable of unpacking multiple dimensions of a problem, precisely what is required to understand the complexities of school supervision in Iringa Municipality.

Moreover, qualitative research is sensitive to context, offering the ability to understand social behaviours "through the eyes of the participant" while paying attention to environmental and institutional influences (Robinson & Williams, 2024; Nguyen, 2016). Given that supervisory practices are shaped by factors such as resource availability, leadership style, communication patterns, and school culture, a context-driven approach was necessary to capture these dynamics accurately. The flexibility and inductive nature of qualitative research further support this study by allowing themes and insights to emerge naturally from participants' voices rather than being predetermined by rigid variables (Pregoner, 2025).

To complement the qualitative approach, a case study design was adopted because it allows for a detailed and contextualized examination of supervisory practices within real school environments. Case studies are particularly appropriate for answering "how" and "why" questions about contemporary phenomena that occur in natural settings where the researcher cannot manipulate variables (Svihla et al., 2023).

Finally, case studies conducted in natural school settings allow for more trustworthy and authentic insight into what teachers and heads of schools actually do, how they interact, and how supervision unfolds in practice. Such multiple-perspective and observational depth provides a realistic view of supervisory processes, making the case study design particularly suitable for investigating the provision of supportive work environments in schools (Gurr, 2019).

This study sample consisted of teachers in public secondary schools located in Iringa Municipality. This particular group was selected because teachers are directly involved in and affected by the supervisory methods used to create the work environment in schools. The teachers were selected because they are key stakeholders in the supervision process and provide a unique perspective on the implementation of supervision, mentoring, and teacher support processes. In addition, teachers are the ones most directly affected by the supervision process and have a wealth of information about how supervision affects their motivation, collaboration with peers, and overall job satisfaction. Therefore, the selection criteria for participants in this study were

individuals with first-hand experience and practical knowledge of supervisory activities as part of their daily professional responsibilities.

The sample for this study consisted of teachers at public secondary schools located in Iringa Municipality. The reason this particular group was selected is that they have direct involvement with and are impacted by the supervisory methods used to create the work environment in schools. The teachers were selected because they are key stakeholders in the supervision process and also provide a unique perspective on the implementation of supervising, mentoring, and supporting teacher processes. In addition, teachers are the ones most directly affected by the supervision process and have a wealth of information about how supervision affects their motivation, collaboration with peers, and overall job satisfaction. Therefore, the selection criteria for participants for this study were individuals with first-hand experience and practical knowledge of supervising activities as part of their daily professional responsibilities.

**2.2 Participants**

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supervision affects their motivation, collaboration with peers, and overall job satisfaction. Therefore, the selection criteria for participants in this study were individuals with first-hand experience and practical knowledge of supervisory activities as part of their daily professional responsibilities.

### 2.3 Data Collection Methods

To obtain comprehensive information relevant to the study objective, focus group discussions were conducted with groups of 6–8 teachers from the same schools to capture shared experiences, group perspectives, and collective interpretations of the supervisory environment. Participants were purposively selected to reflect a diversity of teaching experiences and subject areas. The FGDs were held in empty classrooms familiar to participants; the discussions lasted approximately 60–90 minutes and followed a discussion guide that encouraged natural conversation. The sessions were moderated by the researcher to maintain focus while allowing flexibility for deeper exploration of emerging views. All FGDs were audio-recorded with the consent of participants. Recordings were transcribed and anonymized for analysis.

Secondary data were obtained through a systematic review of documents relevant to supervisory practices and teacher working environments. These included school reports, supervision logs, teachers' performance appraisal records, and national education policy documents. Access to these documents was obtained through formal requests to school administrations. A document analysis procedure was applied, involving the systematic

gathering, organization, and critical review of documents based on their relevance, authenticity, and context.

**2.4 Data Analysis and Ethical Consideration**

Thematic analysis was used to interpret the qualitative data generated through the focus group discussions. This approach was appropriate because it enables the systematic identification of patterned meanings within large textual datasets and allows for a comprehensive understanding of participants' perspectives on supervisory practices and the teacher working environment. All audio-recorded FGDs were transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy and to capture both explicit and implicit meanings expressed by participants.

Once transcribed, the data were carefully read several times to enable deep familiarization with the content and to identify initial ideas relevant to the study objectives. Coding was then undertaken by examining the transcripts line by line and assigning labels to meaningful statements, ideas, and expressions that reflected participants' experiences with supervision, support, communication, and workplace challenges. These codes formed the building blocks for more interpretive analysis.

Codes that displayed conceptual similarities were grouped together to form broader analytical categories. These categories were refined through constant comparison across all transcripts to ensure that they accurately reflected recurring patterns within the data. Through this iterative process, coherent themes began to emerge. Each theme was examined in relation to its internal consistency, its distinctiveness from other themes,

and its relevance to the research objectives. Themes that lacked sufficient supporting evidence or conceptual clarity were reorganized or eliminated.

The validated themes were then developed into detailed analytical narratives. Direct quotations from participants were incorporated to illustrate key points and preserve the authenticity of the reported experiences. This strengthened the credibility of the analysis by grounding interpretations in the participants' own voices. Finally, the themes were synthesized and interpreted in relation to existing literature and the theoretical framework guiding the study. This interpretive stage enabled the integration of empirical findings with broader scholarly insights, resulting in deeper understanding of how supervisory practices shape and sustain supportive working environments for teachers

Ethical procedures were followed at every stage of the study. Permission to conduct the research was first obtained in writing from the Directorate of Postgraduate Studies at Ruaha Catholic University. After that, an additional authorization letter was presented to the Iringa Municipal Education Officer, who granted approval for data collection in the selected public secondary schools. Before collecting any data, I visited each school in person, met with the head teacher, explained the purpose of the study, and scheduled FGD sessions. During these visits, I provided teachers with an information sheet outlining the study objective, procedures, potential risks, and their rights as participants. Informed consent forms were distributed and signed before any focus group discussion began.

Participants were assured that their involvement was voluntary and that they could decline to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any point without any consequences. To protect confidentiality, names, job titles, or any identifiable details were not recorded. All audio recordings, transcripts, and notes were stored securely and were accessible only to the researcher. Data collected were used solely for academic purposes, as stated to the participants. By taking these steps, the study ensured respect for participants' rights, protected their privacy, and complied with institutional and professional ethical guidelines.

## 3.0 Findings and Discussions

This section presents and discusses the findings from the research regarding the school supervisory practices that principals of schools employ to maintain an effective and supportive work environment for the teachers within the municipality of Iringa. The findings were arranged based on the perspectives and experiences of both heads of schools and teachers. The findings of this research were then integrated into relevant literature and were compared to other studies to determine if the findings confirmed, extended or conflicted with previous studies. Overall, the purpose of this integration of the literature and research findings is to provide a broad, overall understanding of the nature of supervisory practices in public secondary schools and the implications for developing and maintaining a supportive work environment for the teachers.

### 3.1 Supervisory Practices Used by Heads of Schools

Differences were found in the practice of supervision by head of the schools as they were involved in varying degrees with their staff, which in turn affected the level of motivation of teachers and job satisfaction and a feeling of being supported among teachers at all levels of school within Iringa Municipality. Some heads of schools provided the type of supportive leadership and/or active supervision needed to motivate and provide support to their staff while others practiced this activity in an inconsistent manner or not at all.

#### 3.1.1 Checking of Teaching and Learning Materials

Teachers indicated that heads of schools in several schools were involved with supervising instruction by reviewing lesson plans, schemes of work, student's notes, and assessment reports for teachers; such activities were perceived to be instrumental in both encouraging accountability and teacher development. The teacher stated: "*The Head of School examines my lesson plan, journal, students' notes, scheme of work and Continuous Assessment Books at least once a month. Also, he reviews how I run examinations to ensure I follow procedure"* (FGD with teachers, August 4, 2025).

Another teacher during the discussion explained that the Head of School would review instructional materials on a regular basis to determine academic performance and offer support, noting such practices maintained professional expectations; however, not all schools consistently utilized supervision. Several teachers mentioned that supervision was irregular and reactive in nature, and would typically occur prior to an inspector from

outside visiting their school. For example: the teacher had explained that occasionally the Head of School would examine a students' notes, journal and scheme of work, but it tends to happen before the Education Officer comes to inspect.

The findings also revealed that some heads of schools relied on a reactive approach to supervision, often waiting for problems to arise before taking action. In these schools, supervision took place mainly when the school was expecting visitors from the district or other external bodies, rather than being part of a regular and supportive routine. As a result, many teachers felt unsupported and undervalued, explaining that their lesson plans, exercise books, and other teaching materials were rarely checked unless an external visit was anticipated. This irregular, problem-driven approach left teachers to manage their work on their own without consistent guidance, reducing their confidence and weakening the overall quality of teaching and learning in the school.

### 3.1.2 Physical visits to classrooms

The results of the study also showed that there was inconsistent application of classroom observation. Heads of schools would occasionally enter into a classroom and observe their teachers' lesson delivery; however, these visits were typically unannounced and appeared to be fault finding from the teacher's perspective. The participants stated that ongoing, constructive supervision is an important factor in improving the quality of instruction and creating a positive work environment. As one of the teachers noted:

> Sometimes our head of school will come into the classroom without warning and then use language that appears to be more about criticizing

> what we do, than providing support for what we are doing. It creates discomfort and discourages me from attempting to improve my practice (Focus Group Discussion with teachers, August 4, 2025).

Teachers reported that in some schools, there was no formal schedule for classroom observations, and supervision tended to occur through unplanned, informal visits rather than structured monitoring. According to participants, such unstructured approaches made it difficult for teachers to anticipate when supervision would occur or understand the criteria being assessed. Teachers in several schools also noted that, because heads of schools were heavily occupied with administrative duties, supervisory responsibilities were frequently delegated to department heads or members of internal Quality Assurance Teams. While this arrangement provided some oversight, participants explained that it sometimes led to tension or misunderstandings, particularly when the delegated supervisors' roles and authority were not clearly communicated to staff.

### 3.1.3 Communication between Heads of Schools and Staff

Effective communication between the head of school and his or her teaching staff is essential for successful supervision. However, many of the teachers expressed very different levels of communication at their respective schools; many of these participants described the communication with their head of school as limited. Teachers who did experience limited communication felt that their voices were not heard and therefore chose not to express themselves or collaborate with others. As one of the teachers noted:

> When we do have an opportunity to voice our thoughts about our students' challenges or suggestions for improving our school community, there is

> little response. For example, decisions are usually made without input from staff regarding student discipline or school resources. Therefore, we no longer feel the need to communicate our suggestions (Focus group discussion with teachers, July 30, 2025).

On the opposite side, many of the participants also reported that they had experienced positive interactions with their heads of schools through encouragement of teamwork, consultation, and professional development. These participants reported that they felt valued by their heads of schools and that they felt supported. As one of the teachers stated:

> My head of school has encouraged me to participate in professional development opportunities. Additionally, he has supported my participation in peer learning activities and has been readily available when I have needed his assistance (Focus group discussion with teachers, July 31, 2025).

The comments by these two groups of teachers provide evidence that there is a relationship between good communication and collaboration or a sense of belonging vs. poor communication and mistrust or disengagement among teachers.

### 3.1.4 Feedback and Guidance after Supervision

The findings revealed notable differences in the nature and quality of feedback provided by heads of schools following supervision. In some schools, feedback was organized, constructive, and delivered promptly, enabling teachers to reflect on their practice and identify specific areas for improvement. Teachers described such guidance as highly motivating and supportive, noting that it strengthened their professional growth. As one

teacher explained, “the head of school visited my classroom after the observation, and we discussed what worked well and what could be improved. He even provided written notes with suggestions.”

In contrast, other schools demonstrated irregular, unclear, or absent feedback practices, leaving teachers unsure of their performance and without meaningful direction for development. This inconsistency contributed to feelings of neglect and limited opportunities for professional advancement.

In some schools, feedback was delivered through formalized weekly staff meetings, where teachers collectively discussed progress, challenges, and areas for improvement. While this approach promoted transparency and collective problem-solving, it was not universally perceived as supportive. Several teachers expressed discomfort when feedback was issued publicly, noting that such an approach could discourage open dialogue and reduce their willingness to engage in reflective discussions. As one teacher explained, “at times the head may provide feedback in front of the whole group during meetings. It is something that makes some teachers uneasy and less willing to be corrected.” This indicates that although group-based feedback can foster collaboration, it may also undermine psychological safety when not handled sensitively.

In general, the results indicated that there was inconsistency in feedback practices among schools. The positive feedback that was timely, specific, and supportive in tone was linked to increased teacher motivation and professional growth. On the other hand,

ambiguous or slow feedback was frustrating and did not allow the chance of improvement.

### 3.2 Findings from Documentary Review

A documentary review was conducted using lesson plan review sheets, supervision logs, staff meeting minutes, class journals, internal Quality Assurance reports, and relevant school documents from the selected public secondary schools in Iringa Municipality. The reviewed documents provided important supplementary evidence that helped to confirm, clarify, and expand on findings obtained through focus group discussions. Overall, the documentary analysis revealed considerable variation in the consistency, frequency, and quality of supervisory practices across schools.

#### 3.2.1 Checking of Teaching and Learning Materials

The review of lesson plan files, schemes of work, students' exercise books, and assessment records showed uneven patterns of supervision across schools. In some schools, there were clear records indicating regular monthly reviews of teaching materials, often signed and dated by the head of school. These documented checks aligned with focus group discussion data showing that some heads of schools actively monitored teachers' instructional preparation.

However, in several other schools, documentary evidence revealed long intervals with no recorded supervision. Some files showed gaps of two to three months, and in certain cases, supervision logs appeared updated shortly before external inspections, reflecting a reactive rather than developmental approach. These findings corroborated teachers'

accounts that their teaching materials were often checked only when the school anticipated a visit from the district education office.

### 3.2.2 Physical Visits to Classrooms

Documented evidence from classroom observation forms indicated further inconsistencies in supervisory practices. A few schools maintained completed observation sheets containing notes on teaching approaches, student engagement, and recommended improvements. These records reflected more structured supervisory routines.

In contrast, several schools had blank or partially completed observation forms, or none at all, suggesting that classroom visitation was infrequent or undocumented. In some cases, only internal Quality Assurance Team reports were available, confirming that classroom supervision was often delegated to department heads, as also reported by participants in FGDs. This documentary evidence supported teachers' claims that classroom visits lacked predictability and clear purpose.

### 3.2.3 Communication between Heads of Schools and Teachers

Staff meeting minutes provided insight into how communication occurred within schools. In schools where supervision was perceived as supportive, meeting records showed regularly scheduled meetings, documentation of teacher contributions, discussions of instructional challenges, and joint planning of school activities. These documents demonstrated a collaborative communication culture.

However, in other schools, meeting minutes were either irregular, overly brief, or focused mainly on administrative announcements. No teacher contributions were recorded, and minutes often contained only attendance lists and directives from the head of school. This aligned with participant reports that communication was limited and that decision-making was often top-down.

### 3.2.4 Feedback and Guidance after Supervision

The review of written feedback documents revealed notable differences in feedback practices across schools.

•In schools with stronger supervision cultures, feedback sheets included specific comments, actionable recommendations, and follow-up plans.

•In other schools, feedback forms contained only general statements such as "improve teaching," with no detailed guidance or evidence of follow-up.

•A few schools had no written feedback records, indicating that feedback was either not provided or not documented.

These gaps supported teachers' statements that feedback was inconsistent and, in some schools, entirely absent. Documentary evidence confirmed that meaningful, developmental feedback was not uniformly practiced.

## 3.3 Discussion

The findings of this study show that supervisory practices among heads of schools in Iringa Municipality vary widely in consistency, depth, and developmental orientation.

Although four key supervisory practices checking teaching and learning materials, conducting physical classroom visits, maintaining communication between heads of schools and teachers, and providing feedback after supervision were identified across schools, their implementation was uneven. These differences significantly shaped teachers' perceptions of the working environment and their sense of professional support. When supervisory practices were consistent, structured, and relational, teachers described their working environment as supportive, collaborative, and professionally enriching. However, where supervision was irregular, reactive, or purely administrative, teachers felt disconnected, undervalued, and professionally isolated. The findings therefore underscore the notion that supervision is not merely a managerial activity, but a relational and developmental process that directly influences teacher morale, motivation, and instructional quality.

### 3.3.1 Checking Teaching and Learning Materials

The review of teaching and learning materials emerged as one of the most universally recognized supervisory practices across the schools. In schools where heads of schools engaged in regular monitoring of lesson plans, schemes of work, class journals, and assessment records, teachers perceived this practice as affirming, supportive, and professionally grounding. Regular scrutiny of instructional documents helped ensure curriculum alignment, encouraged thorough preparation, and promoted accountability in teaching practice. Teachers expressed that when heads of schools consistently engaged

with their documents, it demonstrated commitment to maintaining academic standards and provided a sense of shared responsibility in the instructional process.

These results align with those of Hallinger & Wang (2015) as they stated that systemic assessments of instructional resources will improve the coherence of instruction and contribute to higher levels of teacher performance. In addition, the practices described above represent two of the key components of Transformational Leadership Theory; specifically, "intellectual stimulation" which is a leader's role to encourage teachers to continually evaluate and improve their instructional processes via ongoing observation and review. Although in some of the schools, the use of instructional materials was reviewed or checked, only when an external inspector was scheduled to visit. Therefore, this model of supervisory accountability represented a reactive rather than proactive approach to supporting teachers and providing them with continuous support, direction and opportunity to grow and develop professionally. The irregular nature of this type of practice has been identified as one of the many challenges noted by Chaula, Lawrent, &Warioba (2024) regarding the limitations that school administrators encounter in attempting to provide consistent instructional oversight due to the numerous resource constraints and competing administrative demands placed upon the time and attention of school administrators.

### 3.3.2 Physical Visits to Classrooms

Classroom observation is one of the most direct ways through which heads of schools can influence instructional quality and create a supportive teaching environment. In

schools where heads conducted regular Physical Visits to Classrooms, teachers reported increased confidence, clearer pedagogical direction, and stronger professional identity. Such visits provided opportunities for heads to witness teaching dynamics, identify strengths, and guide areas requiring improvement. These findings strongly align with Lema and Otieno (2022), who reported that structured and continuous supervisory contact encourages a heightened sense of professional identity and collective responsibility among teachers.

However, the study revealed that in many schools, classroom visits were irregular and largely prompted by external inspection schedules rather than internal developmental goals. Teachers described these sporadic visits as punitive or fault-finding rather than supportive. This perception undermined the developmental intent of supervision and reinforced anxiety among teachers. From a theoretical perspective, this pattern reflects the contrast between transformational supervision, which is grounded in professional growth, and transactional supervision, which is centered on compliance. Teachers in schools with inconsistent classroom visits perceived supervision as merely evaluative, lacking mentorship or instructional guidance. This reactive approach diluted the potential value of classroom observation as a developmental tool.

### 3.3.3 Communication between Heads of Schools and Teachers

The findings also show that communication is a central determinant of whether supervision is experienced as supportive or oppressive. In schools where communication was open, transparent, and reciprocal, teachers reported feeling respected, informed, and

connected to the overall instructional vision of the school. Heads of school who maintained active communication channels created an environment where concerns could be expressed freely, issues were resolved constructively, and decisions were made collaboratively. This strengthened professional relationships and cultivated a sense of belonging and unity among staff.

This aligns closely with Chigudu (2016), who observed that participatory communication and collaborative leadership significantly enhance teacher morale, motivation, and job satisfaction. Good communication also reflects the individualized consideration component of Transformational Leadership Theory, as it signals relational trust and emotional support. Conversely, in schools where communication was minimal or sporadic, teachers felt misunderstood, excluded from decisions, and isolated in their instructional responsibilities. Poor communication not only weakened supervisory relationships but also contributed to fragmented school cultures, where teachers operated independently with limited guidance or cohesion. Thus, communication was not simply an accompanying practice but a foundational condition shaping the teachers' broader perception of supervision.

### 3.3.4 Feedback and Guidance after Supervision

Feedback emerged as one of the most influential yet inconsistently applied supervisory practices. In schools where feedback was timely, clear, specific, and constructive, teachers perceived it as meaningful support that enhanced their instructional competence. Teachers valued feedback sessions that included professional dialogue,

objective reflections, and actionable recommendations. This type of feedback reinforced teacher confidence, strengthened professional relationships, and encouraged reflective practice all essential components of a supportive work environment.

However, the study also revealed that in some schools, feedback was general, delayed, or entirely absent. In several cases, feedback was delivered publicly during staff meetings, which teachers described as uncomfortable and demoralizing. Such practices hindered openness and reduced teachers' willingness to engage in professional reflection. The inconsistency of feedback mirrors the broader inconsistencies in supervisory practices observed across the municipality. When feedback lacked depth or regularity, teachers felt unsupported and undervalued, weakening the potential of supervision to foster professional growth. From a theoretical standpoint, the absence of constructive feedback disconnects supervision from its developmental purpose and reinforces a compliance-based approach rather than a transformational leadership model.

## 4.0 Conclusions

This study examined how supervisory practices employed by heads of schools contribute to a supportive working environment for teachers in public secondary schools in Iringa Municipality. The findings revealed that supervisory practices varied widely across schools, shaping teacher motivation and workplace satisfaction. Schools where heads consistently checked teaching materials, conducted classroom observations, maintained open communication, and provided constructive feedback reported higher teacher morale, stronger collaboration, and greater job satisfaction. In contrast, irregular or

purely administrative supervision led to feelings of neglect, low motivation, and limited professional growth among teachers.

The study demonstrates that supervision extends beyond administrative oversight; it is a developmental process that strengthens mentorship, professional relationships, and teacher confidence. However, inconsistent supervision, heavy administrative workloads, and inadequate training for heads of schools undermine its effectiveness.

## 5.0 Recommendations

The findings suggest that strengthening supervision in public secondary schools requires action both at the school and policy levels. At the school level, heads of schools should adopt structured and consistent supervision schedules for checking teaching and learning materials, ensuring that monitoring occurs routinely rather than only during expected inspections.

Classroom observations should be formalized, developmental, and guided by training in clinical or instructional supervision so that visits become supportive rather than fault-finding. Communication between heads of schools and teachers must also be improved through regular consultative meetings and participatory decision-making that enhance trust, teamwork, and shared responsibility for school improvement.

Feedback following supervision should be timely, specific, and privately delivered to protect teachers' confidence and psychological safety, avoiding the discomfort linked to public criticism. At the government and policy level, the Ministry of Education and local authorities should reduce the administrative burden placed on heads of schools and

clearly define supervisory expectations through updated guidelines aligned with instructional leadership principles.

In addition, policy-makers should provide sustained capacity-building programs for heads of schools particularly in instructional leadership, communication, and mentorship and ensure the provision of adequate teaching and learning resources to support effective supervision. Strengthening these school-level and systemic measures will collectively promote a more motivating, collaborative, and supportive working environment for teachers.

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# The Impact of Marital Conflict on Students' Academic Achievements in Public Secondary Schools in Iringa Municipality

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## Abstract

*The study aimed to assess the impacts of marital conflict on students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Iringa Municipality. Specifically, the study was guided by three objectives: to explore the effects of marital conflict on students' psychological well-being, to assess the effects of marital conflict on students' social well-being, and to identify the coping strategies adopted by students affected by marital conflict. The study was conducted in Iringa Municipality, Iringa Region. A total of 34 participants were involved, including 30 secondary school students, two heads of schools, and two parents from families experiencing marital conflict. The study employed a qualitative research approach within the constructivist research paradigm. Data were collected through focus group discussions and interviews. The findings revealed that marital conflict has a significant impact on students' academic achievement by affecting them physically, socially, financially, and psychologically. It also influences their cognitive, affective, and spiritual development.The study*

*recommends that schools should strengthen support systems by organizing student discussions on the impacts of marital conflict on academic achievement. Such discussions provide students with an opportunity to share experiences, express their feelings, and learn from others facing similar challenges. This may help reduce feelings of isolation, promote emotional support, and encourage positive coping strategies that can improve students' academic performance.*

*Keywords:* marital conflicts, students, academic achievements.

## 1.0 Introduction

The responsibility for supporting students who experience parental marital conflict also rests with schools. Teachers are expected not only to meet students' cognitive needs but also to support their emotional, social, and physical well-being (Abu &Kolawale, 2012). However, the authors acknowledge that the effects of marital conflict on students are often overlooked because many teachers are not adequately prepared to discuss such issues with learners. As a result, students may not receive the support they need during difficult family situations. Therefore, teachers should receive appropriate training to enable them to identify, understand, and support students from families experiencing marital conflict, thereby promoting their academic development.

According to Cherun, Chase-Land, Solate, and McRae (2016), students from families affected by marital conflict often fear that teachers may also neglect or reject them. Teachers may find it difficult to respond effectively because many have not received adequate training in dealing with students facing family-related challenges.

Nevertheless, teachers who understand the emotional and behavioural changes associated with marital conflict can provide appropriate guidance and support. Such support can help students cope with family challenges and reduce disruptions to their learning.

Teachers are often the first professionals to notice changes in students' behaviour when family relationships begin to deteriorate. Since students spend a considerable amount of time at school, the school environment provides an important opportunity to identify those experiencing family problems and offer timely assistance. Schools can provide access to guidance and counselling services, emotional support, and other professional interventions that help students cope with the effects of marital conflict. Such support is particularly important during periods of family instability, as it helps students remain focused on their education despite challenges at home.

Furthermore, students from families experiencing marital conflict often want their teachers to understand their home situations and avoid judging them when their academic performance or behaviour changes. According to Animasahun (2014), students appreciate teachers who are willing to listen, understand their feelings, and provide encouragement. Through guidance, counselling, and supportive teacher-student relationships, schools can help students develop effective coping strategies that enable them to adjust to both their home circumstances and the school environment.

In Tanzania, studies such as Lawuo et al. (2015) have mainly focused on strategies for addressing family conflict, with limited attention given to the coping strategies adopted

by students themselves. Previous studies have recommended interventions such as parental education, guidance and counselling services, and collaboration with government institutions, religious organisations, and community stakeholders to support families experiencing marital conflict. These interventions have been considered important in reducing family conflict and improving students' emotional well-being.

Similarly, Bubelwa (2014), who investigated the effects of broken marriages on primary school pupils' academic performance in Ilala Municipality, Tanzania, found that family breakdown contributes to poor academic achievement, psychological problems, and behavioural misconduct among learners. These findings indicate that marital conflict has far-reaching consequences for children's educational development. Therefore, addressing the effects of marital conflict among secondary school students is essential because these students face numerous academic, emotional, and social challenges that may hinder their learning and overall development.

Likewise, Kusekwa (2017) found that marital conflict affects students' behaviour and emotional well-being. The study reported that students from families experiencing marital conflict often display signs of emotional instability, loneliness, low self-esteem, and poor academic motivation. However, the findings also suggested that the intensity of marital conflict differs across families, with some experiencing occasional disagreements while others face frequent and destructive conflicts. This implies that the severity of marital conflict may influence the extent to which students' academic achievement is affected.

Furthermore, Kamaldeen et al. (2023) examined the relationship between marital stability and the academic performance of sandwich students at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin. The study found a significant relationship between emotional intelligence, marital stability, and students' academic performance. Although the study demonstrated the importance of stable family relationships, it did not specifically examine the different types of marital conflict or explain how each type influences students' academic achievement. Similarly, many previous studies have discussed the general effects of marital conflict without identifying the specific forms of conflict experienced by families or how these affect students' educational outcomes.

Most previous studies on marital conflict and students' academic achievement have been conducted outside Tanzania. Therefore, applying their findings directly to the Tanzanian context may not provide an accurate understanding because family structures, cultural practices, and educational environments differ across countries. Moreover, the few studies conducted in Tanzania have largely focused on primary school pupils rather than secondary school students. Consequently, there is limited empirical evidence on how marital conflict affects students' academic achievement in Tanzanian public secondary schools.

This study was therefore conducted to assess the impacts of marital conflict on students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Iringa Municipality. The findings are expected to benefit students from families experiencing marital conflict by providing information on possible coping strategies for overcoming learning challenges. The

findings will also assist teachers in identifying and supporting affected students more effectively. In addition, parents and the wider community will benefit from the recommendations provided by the study. School counsellors, psychologists, and education stakeholders may also use the findings to develop appropriate interventions that promote stable family environments and improve students' academic achievement.

## 2.0 Material and Methods

### 2.1 Research Approach and Design.

This study employed a qualitative research approach. The approach was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences, perceptions, and contexts surrounding marital conflict and its impact on students' academic achievement. Since the phenomenon under investigation is social in nature, the qualitative approach allowed participants to express their experiences and views in their own words.

The study adopted a cross-sectional research design. This design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to collect data from different categories of participants at a single point in time. The design also provided an opportunity to gather rich information from students, heads of schools, and parents regarding the impact of marital conflict on students' academic achievement. Generally, a research design provides the framework that guides the systematic collection, analysis, and interpretation of data in order to answer the research questions.

### 2.2 Participants

The study involved participants from two public secondary schools in Iringa Municipality. A total of 34 participants were purposively selected because they were considered capable of providing relevant information regarding the phenomenon under investigation. The participants included 30 secondary school students, two heads of schools, and two parents from families experiencing marital conflict.

### 2.3 Data Collection Method

Data were collected through focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews. Focus group discussions were conducted with students to obtain their experiences and perceptions regarding the effects of marital conflict on their academic achievement. Interviews were conducted with heads of schools and parents to obtain detailed information about the challenges experienced by students from families affected by marital conflict. The use of these methods enabled the researcher to obtain detailed and rich information from different participants, thereby enhancing the credibility of the findings.

### 2.4 Data Analysis

The data collected through focus group discussions and interviews were analysed using thematic analysis. The analysis began with organizing and securely storing the collected data. Thereafter, the researcher became familiar with the data through repeated reading of interview transcripts and discussion notes. The analysis followed several steps, including familiarisation with the data, development of thematic categories, coding,

categorisation, interpretation, and presentation of the findings. Similar ideas were grouped into themes based on the research objectives. The findings were then presented narratively and supported by direct quotations from the participants to illustrate the major themes that emerged from the study.

### 2.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the study. Before conducting the research, the researcher obtained the necessary research clearance by following the research procedures of Ruaha Catholic University (RUCU). Permission was also obtained from the relevant authorities before data collection commenced. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their voluntary participation was sought before they were involved in the research. The researcher assured participants that the information they provided would be treated confidentially and that their identities would remain anonymous. Where necessary, codes rather than participants' names were used to protect their identity.

Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any negative consequences. In addition, all sources of information were properly acknowledged to avoid plagiarism, and the researcher-maintained honesty, integrity, and professionalism throughout the research process.

## 3.0 Results and Discussion

The findings of this study on the impacts of marital conflict on students' academic achievement in selected public secondary schools in Iringa Municipality are presented in

this section. The data were collected through focus group discussions with students and interviews with heads of schools and parents. The findings are presented according to the study objectives.

### 3.1 Marital Conflicts that Affect Students' Psychological Well-being

The findings revealed that marital conflict negatively affects students' psychological well-being, which in turn influences their academic achievement. Participants reported that students from families experiencing marital conflict often suffer from emotional distress, fear, anxiety, and low self-esteem. Such psychological challenges make it difficult for students to concentrate on their studies and participate effectively in school activities.

Psychological abuse may involve intimidation, threats, emotional manipulation, or behaviour that creates fear and insecurity. Examples include preventing a spouse from interacting freely with other people, restricting movement, making threats, emotional blackmail, and damaging personal property. One student explained:

> I had frequently witnessed conflicts and harassment between my parents. My mother often devalued my father in front of me. I could see that she did not love him and only tolerated him because she depended on him to support our family. I felt deeply hurt by the way my mother treated my father. Sometimes I wished they could separate so that my father could be happy, although I also wanted both of my parents to stay together. Because of this situation, I often found myself unable to concentrate on my studies and frequently forgot what I had learned. As a result, I performed poorly in my examinations. (Student from Secondary School A, 5 March 2024).

Similarly, a teacher from Secondary School B described how students from families experiencing marital conflict are affected emotionally and academically:

> From my experience, students who experience hardships due to their parents' marital conflict often become lonely and withdrawn. Some develop truancy behaviour, while others engage in petty businesses to meet their basic needs despite having living parents. For example, one Form Four student sells cashew nuts after school to earn money for essential needs. Many students also change their behaviour because they lack close parental supervision, guidance, encouragement, and emotional support.(Teacher from Secondary School B, 28 February 2024).

These findings indicate that marital conflict has a significant negative impact on students' academic achievement. Family conflict affects students not only psychologically but also physically, socially, financially, and emotionally. As a result, many students experience stress, poor concentration, low motivation, and emotional instability, which reduce their ability to perform well academically.

The findings further suggest that students living in conflict-ridden families often struggle to study effectively because the home environment is characterised by constant tension and emotional insecurity. Such conditions interfere with students' cognitive development and limit their ability to focus on learning. In many cases, parents become so overwhelmed by their own conflicts that they fail to provide adequate guidance, encouragement, and emotional support for their children. Consequently, students lose motivation, develop negative attitudes towards learning, and experience declining academic achievement.

### 3.2 Marital Conflicts that Affect Students Sociological Well Being

The findings revealed that marital conflict also affects students' social well-being, which subsequently influences their academic achievement. Participants explained that students from families experiencing marital conflict often receive limited parental support, supervision, and emotional care. As a result, many of them experience difficulties in their social relationships and school life.

During an interview, one parent from the Municipal Social Welfare Office described how marital conflict affected both the family relationship and the student's education:

> My husband used to beat me whenever he was drunk. Whenever this happened, my children became frustrated and sometimes tried to defend me by fighting back against their father. This only made the conflicts worse. One day, during one of the fights, my son picked up a stick and attempted to hit his father. Since that day, my husband has refused to accept him as his child. My son now feels like a stranger in his own family. This year he is expected to sit for the Form Four National Examination, but nowadays he no longer studies as hard as he used to because he is always afraid of meeting his father. That is why I came to the Social Welfare Office to seek help. (Female client, Municipal Social Welfare Office, 4 March 2024).

Similarly, a head of school explained that although disagreements may occur in many families, frequent and unresolved marital conflict negatively affects students' learning motivation:

It is normal for families to experience disagreements from time to time. However, when conflicts become frequent and lead to separation, students are the ones who suffer most. They lose motivation to learn, become emotionally disturbed, and eventually perform poorly in their academic work. (Head of School, Secondary School B, 28 February 2024).

The findings further showed that some students from families experiencing marital conflict engage in various income-generating activities to support themselves because their parents are unable to meet their basic needs. Some students sell sweets, bottled water, fruits, snacks, or other small items before or after school to obtain money for food, learning materials, and transport. Others engage in temporary jobs such as fishing, farming, or other forms of casual labour. These responsibilities consume time that would otherwise be devoted to studying, thereby affecting their academic achievement.

In some cases, marital conflict forces one parent to leave the family home in search of peace, while in more severe situations it may result in domestic violence, family separation, or children running away from home. Such circumstances expose students to emotional stress, insecurity, and unstable living conditions, making it difficult for them to concentrate on their studies. Some children eventually live on the streets or seek refuge with relatives because they can no longer tolerate the hostile home environment.

Overall, the findings suggest that marital conflict extends beyond the relationship between spouses and significantly affects students' social development. The absence of parental care, emotional security, and a stable home environment weakens students'

confidence, social interactions, and commitment to learning. Consequently, students become more vulnerable to poor academic achievement and other social challenges.

### 3.3 Marital Conflicts that affect Students Coping Strategies

The findings under this sub-theme indicate that marital conflicts affect students' coping strategies. Most secondary school students are unable to express openly what they experience in their families. As a result, marital conflicts negatively affect their academic performance and overall well-being.One teacher explained:

> Students miss their basic needs because parents (mother and father) are responsible for providing the family's daily needs. When conflicts begin at home, it becomes difficult for parents to engage in economic activities, which limits their ability to provide learning materials such as textbooks, exercise books, pens, school fees, and school uniforms. Some students ask for help from teachers when they are at school. Others come to school without pens or exercise books. Many spend the whole day at school without anything to eat until they return home. In both day and boarding schools, some students even lack basic items such as soap. (Teacher from Secondary School B, 28 February 2024).

Students affected by marital conflicts develop different coping strategies to reduce the effects of family conflicts on their academic life. Some withdraw from their homes and stay with relatives. Others engage in petty businesses in town to earn money for school needs. However, some adopt negative coping strategies, such as prostitution and drug abuse. Other students seek guidance and counselling services from teachers and school

matrons. Some also engage in temporary jobs such as farming, livestock keeping, and mining to earn money for school expenses.

Furthermore, some students seek support from school administrators by requesting essential learning materials such as exercise books and pens. They also ask school leaders to meet with their parents after reporting family conflicts to school matrons or patrons so that possible solutions can be discussed to restore harmony within the family.

Many students from families experiencing marital conflicts gradually develop coping strategies that help them adjust to the school learning environment. School administrations also support these students in different ways, including improving communication between students, parents, teachers, and other learners. In addition, school management monitors students' attendance and academic progress to identify those who require additional support.

Marital conflicts often disrupt relationships between parents and their children. When students are continuously exposed to conflict at home, they may eventually accept it as a normal part of family life. Consequently, some students perceive conflict as a normal aspect of social relationships and attempt to maintain their happiness despite the difficult home environment. Open emotional expression and opportunities to discuss their feelings can help these students develop self-confidence and improve their emotional well-being.

The findings further revealed that many students use avoidance as a coping strategy. They try to distance themselves from parental conflicts by avoiding situations that may

trigger arguments between their parents. They also avoid discussing issues that remind them of painful family experiences. Although avoidance may temporarily reduce emotional stress, it does not eliminate the negative effects of living in a conflict-ridden family environment.

Based on these findings, coping skills training should be provided to both parents and students. Such training would help parents understand the emotional harm caused by marital conflicts while equipping students with healthy coping strategies. Since students are the most vulnerable victims of parental conflicts and have little control over family situations, they require adequate emotional and psychological support. Therefore, parents should recognise the emotional damage caused by marital conflicts, as these conflicts not only affect students' psychological well-being but also contribute to poor academic achievement.

### 3.4 Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that students from families experiencing high levels of marital conflict generally performed poorly academically. This may be because they are exposed to a home environment characterised by hostility, tension, and negative interactions, which affect their emotional well-being and learning. These findings are consistent with those of Lesmin and Saker (2018) and Olatain and Akpan (2003), who reported that marital conflict leads to significant changes in parenting behaviour, parent-child attachment, and other important emotional structures within the family. Fathers in families with high marital conflict are often less involved in parenting and tend to

withdraw from family responsibilities. The studies further indicate that students of all ages experience parental conflict as a source of stress, although no specific age group appears to be more vulnerable than others.

The present study also confirmed that marital conflicts have a significant negative impact on students' academic achievement. These findings are consistent with those reported by Wami et al. (2021), who examined the influence of marital conflict on the academic performance of secondary school students in Port Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State. Their study found that marital conflicts had a direct negative effect on students' academic achievement. Furthermore, students from families experiencing marital conflicts were more likely to engage in drug abuse, prostitution, armed robbery, and other criminal activities. They also tended to display behaviours such as disobedience, unruliness, and rebellion. However, the study did not clearly identify the specific types of marital conflicts that were common in the study area.

Similarly, Cummings and Davies (2011), in studies conducted in several Sub-Saharan African countries, reported that marital conflicts were common and had a considerable effect on children's educational progress. However, they also found that when parents remained actively involved in their children's education despite family conflicts, students achieved better academic outcomes. Although their study highlighted the importance of parental involvement, it did not specifically examine the different forms of marital conflict and their direct effects on students' academic achievement.

The findings of the present study further revealed that marital conflicts often weaken the family's economic situation, isolate students from their peers, contribute to poor psychosocial well-being, influence negative behavioural changes, and reduce academic performance. These findings are supported by Svinicki (2004), who argued that a supportive school environment, including positive teacher attitudes and effective school administration, can enhance students' motivation to learn.

Students require continuous parental support, guidance, and encouragement to achieve important developmental tasks. However, parental conflicts may negatively affect students' psychological adjustment, behaviour, social relationships, self-esteem, and academic achievement, with some effects continuing into adulthood. These findings are consistent with Harold and Leve (2012), who argued that after separation or divorce, even when both parents remain in the same locality, reduced parental care and supervision may contribute to children's poor adjustment and negatively affect their educational progress.

The findings also suggest that marital conflicts create multiple challenges for families, especially during adolescence, which is a critical stage of development. During this period, adolescents are expected to accomplish several developmental tasks. Exposure to continuous parental conflict may interfere with these developmental processes and affect their academic and personal growth. These findings support the arguments of Sherman (2009), who described self-esteem as a healthy understanding and acceptance of oneself that recognises personal limitations without becoming excessively self-critical.

The study further found that students from families experiencing marital conflicts develop different coping strategies to adapt to their difficult home environments. These strategies include running away from home, engaging in temporary work, and operating small businesses to meet their educational needs. However, some students adopt unhealthy coping mechanisms, including joining deviant peer groups, stealing, gathering misleading information, and smoking marijuana. Students from conflict-ridden families may also exhibit behaviours such as aggression, victimisation of others, and poor social maturity, all of which can negatively affect their academic achievement.

These findings support Akanbi (2014), who argued that secondary school teachers are in a unique position to assist students in overcoming the challenges associated with marital conflicts. Through guidance, counselling, and academic support, teachers can help minimise the negative effects of family conflicts on students' educational outcomes. Overall, marital conflict disrupts students' learning by interfering with productive study habits and increasing emotional problems such as anxiety and depression, which ultimately reduce their academic performance.

## 4.0 Conclusion

This study aimed to assess the impacts of marital conflict on students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Iringa Municipality. Specifically, the study examined the effects of marital conflict on students' psychological well-being, social well-being, and the coping strategies adopted by students from families experiencing marital conflict.

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that marital conflict has a significant negative impact on students' academic achievement. The study found that students from families experiencing marital conflict face various psychological challenges, including stress, anxiety, fear, poor concentration, and low motivation, all of which interfere with their learning and academic performance.

The findings also revealed that marital conflict affects students' social well-being. Many students receive inadequate parental support, supervision, and emotional care, making them more vulnerable to poor social relationships, absenteeism, behavioural problems, and reduced academic engagement. Some students also lack basic school necessities, including learning materials and school uniforms, which further affect their academic achievement.

Furthermore, the study found that students adopt different coping strategies to manage the challenges associated with marital conflict. Some seek guidance and counselling from teachers, school counsellors, relatives, and trusted adults, while others engage in petty businesses or temporary work to meet their educational needs. However, some students adopt unhealthy coping mechanisms that negatively affect both their personal well-being and academic progress.

Overall, the study concludes that marital conflict extends beyond the relationship between parents and has far-reaching consequences for students' educational, psychological, and social development. Therefore, collaborative efforts among parents,

schools, communities, and relevant institutions are essential to minimise the effects of marital conflict and promote students' academic success.

## 5.0 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

(a) The government should strengthen community education programmes that promote peaceful family relationships and create public awareness of the effects of marital conflict on children's education. It should also strengthen guidance and counselling services through social welfare departments and other relevant institutions to support families experiencing marital conflict.

(b) Parents should recognise that frequent marital conflict has serious consequences for their children's psychological well-being and academic achievement. They should strive to resolve family disagreements peacefully and create a supportive home environment that promotes children's learning and overall development.

(c) Schools should strengthen guidance and counselling services to identify and support students from families experiencing marital conflict. Teachers should be encouraged to establish trusting relationships with students so that affected learners feel comfortable seeking help when facing family-related challenges. Schools should also organise awareness programmes, seminars, or student discussion forums on the effects of marital conflict. Such activities provide opportunities for students to share experiences, encourage one another, and learn positive coping strategies. These programmes can reduce feelings of isolation and strengthen students' emotional resilience.

(d) Teachers should receive training on identifying students experiencing emotional and psychological distress resulting from family conflict. They should maintain confidentiality while providing appropriate guidance, encouragement, and referrals whenever professional support is required.

(e) Religious institutions and community organisations should continue providing marriage education, premarital counselling, and family support programmes aimed at strengthening marital relationships and reducing family conflicts. Their collaboration with schools and local government authorities can contribute significantly to improving students' well-being and academic achievement.

(f) Future studies should examine the impacts of marital conflict on students' academic achievement using larger samples and different geographical areas. Researchers may also employ quantitative or mixed-methods approaches to provide broader evidence on the relationship between marital conflict and students' educational outcomes.

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