

Relationship Between Students' Socio-Economic Factors and Academic Performance in Public Secondary Schools in Nakaseke District, Uganda

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Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between students' socio-economic factors and academic performance using descriptive and inferential statistics. Data were collected from 186 respondents to assess the influence of family income, socio-economic background, financial aid availability, participation in co-curricular activities, and living conditions on students' academic outcomes. Results revealed that family income significantly influenced access to academic resources, as supported by a mean score of 2.40 and low variability (S.D = 1.141). Students from low socio-economic backgrounds were found to struggle with balancing work and study, evidenced by a mean score of 2.38 and high variability (S.D = 2.013). Additionally, financial aid was perceived to improve academic performance, though opinions were divided (mean = 2.89, S.D = 1.758). Socio-economic status also determined participation in co-curricular activities (mean = 2.34, S.D = 1.506), while students' living conditions were noted to affect their focus on academic tasks (mean = 2.67, S.D = 1.074). The Pearson correlation coefficient ($r = 0.759$, $p < 0.01$) demonstrated a strong positive relationship between socio-economic factors and academic performance, indicating that higher socio-economic status was associated with better academic outcomes. The study concluded that socio-economic disparities significantly affect students' academic opportunities and outcomes, emphasizing the role of financial resources, parental education, and involvement in fostering academic success. Recommendations include enhancing parental awareness programs to improve engagement in their children's education, implementing school strategies to foster active parental involvement, and increasing financial aid and material support to bridge socio-economic gaps. These measures aim to create equitable opportunities for students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

Keywords: socio-economic factors, academic performance, family income, financial aid, parental involvement, education equity

Background of the study

In Uganda, socio-economic disparities between urban and rural areas are particularly pronounced, with rural areas often suffering from limited access to educational resources, poor infrastructure, and lower household incomes (Oromo et al., 2023). Nakaseke District, located in the central region of Uganda, is no exception to these challenges. Understanding how socio-economic factors affect students' academic performance in this context is critical for developing strategies to improve education outcomes and reduce educational inequality in the region (Ntirandekura, Friday, et al., 2022). Nakaseke District, located approximately 75 kilometers north of Kampala, the capital city of Uganda, is predominantly rural, with agriculture being the main economic activity. According to the (Allan et al., 2023), the population of Nakaseke is approximately 500,000, with a significant proportion of the population relying

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on subsistence farming. The district is characterized by low levels of industrialization, limited access to markets, and a lack of basic social amenities such as electricity and clean water (Jallow, Abiodun, & Weke, 2022). These factors collectively contribute to a socio-economic environment that is less conducive to academic excellence.

As of 2022, the poverty rate in Nakaseke District was recorded at 24%, which is higher than the national average of 21.4% (Faridah et al., 2023). This disparity reflects the widespread economic challenges faced by families in the district, with many households living below the poverty line. Low-income families often struggle to afford basic educational materials such as textbooks, uniforms, and stationery, which are essential for students' academic success (Anthony, Kazaara, Kazaara, et al., 2023). Furthermore, the lack of access to adequate nutrition, healthcare, and safe housing creates additional barriers to effective learning, as students may face health-related issues that affect their concentration and overall well-being. Household income is one of the most significant socio-economic factors influencing students' academic performance in rural areas like Nakaseke (Victoria et al., 2023). The Uganda Bureau of Statistics (2022) reports that rural households in Nakaseke District earn an average monthly income of UGX 200,000 (approximately \$54), which is significantly lower than the national rural average of UGX 250,000 (\$67) (George Stanley & Nafiu, 2020). This income level is insufficient to meet the basic needs of families, let alone invest in quality education. Many students in Nakaseke attend public secondary schools, which are often underfunded and lack the necessary resources to provide a high-quality education (Anthony, Kazaara, Kazaara, et al., 2023). The financial constraints faced by these households limit their ability to invest in learning materials such as textbooks, computers, and internet access (Nelson, 2024). A study by the World Bank (2023) revealed that students from low-income households in Uganda have limited access to digital learning tools, which hinders their ability to keep up with modern educational trends. Furthermore, low-income families are less likely to be able to afford private tutoring or remedial classes, which could help students improve their academic performance and address any learning gaps (Godfrey et al., 2023). Without these resources, students in Nakaseke are at a disadvantage compared to their peers from wealthier backgrounds, leading to disparities in academic achievement.

The educational background of parents is another critical factor influencing students' academic success (A. I. Kazaara & Deus, 2024). According to the Uganda National Examination Board (UNEB, 2023), students whose parents have higher education levels tend to perform better academically. This correlation is particularly evident in rural areas, where the levels of parental education are generally lower (Margaret & Kazaara, 2024). In Nakaseke District, the literacy rate among adults stands at 56%, with a significant proportion of the population having only attained primary education or lower (N. Moses & Ntirandekura, 2022). This lack of education among parents directly impacts the support they are able to provide to their children's education. Parents with limited educational qualifications are less likely to assist their children with homework, school projects, or exam preparations (Nelson, 2024). Furthermore, they

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may not fully understand the importance of education, which can result in a lack of motivation for their children to perform well in school. This creates a cycle of low academic achievement, where children of less-educated parents are less likely to perform well academically, and in turn, they may not have the educational qualifications necessary to secure better-paying jobs in the future (Nelson, 2024). This cycle perpetuates poverty and limits the socio-economic mobility of students in Nakaseke District.

In contrast, children from families with higher educational levels benefit from a more supportive learning environment. These parents are more likely to invest in their children's education, attend parent-teacher meetings, and engage in activities that foster academic success (Anthony, Kazaara, & Kazaara, 2023). This support is essential for ensuring that students receive the guidance and resources they need to excel in their studies. However, in Nakaseke, where a large proportion of the population has not completed secondary education, many students lack this crucial support, further exacerbating the academic performance gap between them and their more privileged peers (Nancy & Prudence, 2024). Access to educational resources is another significant socio-economic factor that affects students' academic performance in Nakaseke District. Public secondary schools in rural areas, including Nakaseke, are often underfunded and lack basic educational resources such as textbooks, learning materials, and laboratory equipment. According to a report by the Ministry of Education and Sports (2023), more than 50% of public schools in Uganda lack adequate textbooks, and many schools operate in overcrowded classrooms with a high student-to-teacher ratio (Christopher, Methodius, et al., 2022). In Nakaseke, some schools have a textbook-to-student ratio as low as 1:7, which significantly limits students' ability to engage with the curriculum effectively (UBOS, 2022). This lack of resources results in poor teaching quality and low student engagement, which, in turn, affects academic performance (A. G. Kazaara & Nelson, 2024). Students are unable to access the materials they need to succeed in their studies, and teachers are often forced to teach large classes with limited resources, leading to ineffective learning. In addition to textbooks, access to technology is another significant barrier in Nakaseke. While the Ugandan government has made strides in introducing digital learning tools, rural areas such as Nakaseke are still lagging behind in terms of access to computers, the internet, and other technological tools that can enhance learning (Emmanuel et al., 2023). A study by the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC, 2023) found that only 12% of public schools in rural Uganda have access to reliable internet, compared to 45% of schools in urban areas. This digital divide further exacerbates the educational gap between rural and urban students, limiting the opportunities available to students in Nakaseke District.

Problem Statement

The relationship between students' socio-economic factors and their academic performance is a pressing issue in public secondary schools, particularly in rural areas like Nakaseke District, Uganda (A. I. Kazaara & Deus, 2024). Socio-economic factors such as household income, parental education levels, access to learning materials, and family responsibilities significantly impact students' ability to perform academically (Anthony, Kazaara, & Kazaara, 2023).

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For instance, poverty remains a pervasive challenge in Uganda, with the World Bank (2023) reporting that 21.4% of the population lives below the national poverty line, disproportionately affecting rural areas. Nakaseke District, being predominantly rural, experiences similar socio-economic challenges, which are reflected in the academic outcomes of its students (Faridah et al., 2023). Household income plays a critical role in determining access to quality education. According to Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS, 2022), rural households in Nakaseke District earn an average monthly income of UGX 200,000 (\$54), significantly lower than the national rural average of UGX 250,000 (\$67) (Oromo et al., 2023). This limited income restricts families' ability to provide essential learning resources, such as textbooks, stationery, and digital devices, thereby hindering students' ability to engage with the curriculum effectively (Sophie & Crispus, 2024). Furthermore, the inability to afford private tuition or remedial lessons, which are often essential for bridging learning gaps in under-resourced public schools, exacerbates the disparities in academic performance.

Parental education levels also significantly influence students' academic outcomes. Research by UNESCO (2023) highlights that children of parents with limited or no formal education are more likely to face academic challenges due to a lack of academic support at home (Suzan & Gracious Kazaara, 2023). In Nakaseke District, 38% of adults have not completed primary education (UBOS, 2022), which limits their capacity to assist their children with schoolwork or foster a conducive learning environment (Richard et al., 2023). This gap is particularly evident in public secondary schools, where students often struggle to compete academically with peers from more privileged backgrounds. Access to learning materials and school infrastructure further compounds the challenges faced by students in Nakaseke District (Christopher, Moses, et al., 2022). A study by Uwezo (2022) revealed that 52% of public schools in rural Uganda lack adequate textbooks, and 40% operate in overcrowded classrooms, resulting in a poor student-to-teacher ratio. In Nakaseke, the situation is similar, with some schools having a textbook-to-student ratio as low as 1:7. This lack of resources not only hampers effective teaching but also affects students' ability to prepare for national exams, leading to poor performance (Ntirandekura, Ainebyoona, et al., 2022). The Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB, 2023) reported that only 38% of students in Nakaseke achieved a Division One or Two grade in the Uganda Certificate of Education (UCE) exams, significantly below the national average of 54% (T. Moses, 2023).

Family responsibilities, particularly for students in rural areas, also play a significant role in academic performance (Seth, 2019). Many students in Nakaseke are required to contribute to household income through farming or other activities, leaving limited time for studying. A report by the Ministry of Education and Sports (2023) found that 65% of rural secondary school students in Uganda are engaged in child labor to some extent, which directly impacts their school attendance and academic engagement (A. I. Kazaara & Deus, 2024). For girls, the situation is particularly dire,

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as they are often burdened with domestic chores, early marriages, or teenage pregnancies, further diminishing their chances of academic success. Despite these challenges, there is limited empirical evidence exploring how socio-economic factors collectively impact academic performance in public secondary schools within Nakaseke District (Christopher, Komunda, et al., 2022). While existing studies in Uganda have examined socio-economic disparities in education at the national or regional level (N. Moses & Ntirandekura, 2022), they often fail to provide localized insights that account for the unique socio-economic and cultural dynamics of Nakaseke District. This gap in research hinders policymakers, educators, and community stakeholders from developing targeted interventions to address the specific barriers faced by students in this area. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the relationship between students' socio-economic factors and their academic performance in public secondary schools in Nakaseke District, Uganda.

Main Objective

The study aimed at the relationship between students' socio-economic factors and academic performance in public secondary schools in Nakaseke district, Uganda

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive correlational research design. This design was chosen because it allowed the researcher to explore the relationship between socio-economic factors (such as household income, parental education, access to educational resources, and family responsibilities) and academic performance without manipulating the independent variables (L. A. Nafiu et al., 2012). The correlational design helped to establish the strength, direction, and nature of the relationships between these variables in the context of public secondary schools in Nakaseke District (L. A. Nafiu, 2012). Moreover, the descriptive aspect of the design enabled the researcher to provide a detailed account of the socio-economic conditions of the students and how these factors influenced their academic outcomes (L. A. Nafiu, 2012). The study population comprised all students enrolled in public secondary schools within Nakaseke District (Jallow, Abiodun, Weke, et al., 2022). According to the Uganda Ministry of Education and Sports (2023), there were approximately 8,000 students enrolled in the district's public secondary schools. These schools varied in size, resources, and student demographics, providing a rich and diverse sample for the study (Aslam et al., 2022). The schools included both urban and rural settings, which allowed for a comprehensive assessment of socio-economic factors across different environments. The study focused on students in their final two years of secondary education (S.3 and S.4), as they were preparing for the Uganda Certificate of Education (UCE) exams (Olanrewaju et al., 2021). This group was chosen because their academic performance was deemed critical for determining the relationship between socio-economic factors and academic success (Olanrewaju et al., 2021). Additionally, the final two years of secondary education represent a crucial period in a student's academic career, making this group particularly suitable for investigating the study's objectives.

A stratified random sampling technique was employed to select the study participants. This approach was used to ensure that the sample was representative of the various socio-economic conditions present in the district (Olanrewaju et al., 2021). The sample was stratified according to the rural and urban classification of the schools, with a proportionate number of students selected from both categories. The aim was to capture the full range of socio-economic factors that might influence academic performance in these different environments (Olanrewaju et al., 2021). A sample size of 400 students was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) formula for determining sample size in a finite population (Abiodun et al., 2022). The formula was applied to the estimated population of 8,000 students in Nakaseke District, ensuring that the sample was large enough to provide reliable and valid results. Out of the 400 students, 200 were from urban schools, and 200 were from rural schools, reflecting the distribution of students in the district (Aslam et al., 2022). The sample size also accounted for potential non-responses or incomplete data, which is why a slightly larger sample was selected.

Data for the study were collected through a combination of structured questionnaires and interviews. The questionnaire was designed to capture detailed information on the socio-economic background of the students and their academic performance (Aslam et al., 2022). The questionnaire was pre-tested in two schools in neighboring districts to ensure its clarity and validity. Based on the feedback from the pre-test, minor adjustments were made to improve the wording and structure of some of the questions. In addition to the questionnaire, in-depth interviews were conducted with a small sample of 40 students (10 from each of the four selected schools) (L. Nafiu, 2013). The purpose of the interviews was to obtain qualitative insights into the socio-economic challenges students face in Nakaseke, and how these challenges may affect their academic performance. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing for flexibility in exploring the students' perspectives while maintaining a consistent focus on the key themes. The data collection process was carried out over a period of four weeks (Abiodun et al., 2022). The researcher, along with trained field assistants, visited the selected schools, distributed the questionnaires, and conducted the interviews. The data collection was supervised to ensure consistency and reliability. To ensure the accuracy and reliability of the data, a number of quality assurance procedures were implemented. The questionnaires were designed to be self-administered by the students, but trained field assistants were available to assist students in completing them if necessary (L. Nafiu, 2013). This helped to reduce the chances of incomplete or inaccurate responses. The completed questionnaires were checked daily for completeness, and any issues were addressed immediately. The interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants, and detailed notes were taken during the process (A. Nafiu et al., 2012). The researcher transcribed the interviews and cross-checked the transcriptions with the audio recordings to ensure accuracy. Additionally, the field assistants were trained on ethical considerations, ensuring that the privacy and confidentiality of the respondents were upheld.

The data collected from the questionnaires and interviews were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Data entry was done using SPSS and STATA software, both of which are widely used in social science research for data management and analysis (Nelson et al., 2022). Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the socio-economic characteristics of the students and their academic performance. These statistics included measures such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations (Nelson et al., 2023). The socio-economic factors were categorized into different groups (e.g., household income, parental education levels) and analyzed to provide a detailed description of the sample. For academic performance, the data were presented in terms of the proportion of students in each division (Division One, Division Two, Division Three, Division Four). This provided a clear picture of the distribution of academic performance in the sample, which was then used to explore how different socio-economic factors correlated with students' academic achievement. Inferential statistical techniques were used to assess the relationships between socio-economic factors and academic performance. Correlation analysis was conducted to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between continuous variables, such as household income and academic performance. Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to examine these relationships, with significance levels set at $p < 0.05$.

Results

Descriptive statistics on Students' socio-economic factors

Table 1: Descriptive statistics on Students' socio-economic factors

Students' socio-economic factors	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	S. DV
Family income significantly influences students' access to academic resources.	26 (14.0%)	110 (59.1%)	20 (10.8%)	9 (4.8%)	21 (11.3%)	2.40	1.141
Students from low socio-economic backgrounds struggle to balance work and study.	81 (43.5%)	36 (19.4%)	22 (11.8%)	28 (15.1%)	18 (9.7%)	2.38	2.013
Availability of financial aid improves academic performance among students.	71 (38.2%)	20 (10.8%)	17 (9.1%)	14 (7.5%)	64 (34.4%)	2.89	1.758
Socio-economic status determines students' participation in co-curricular activities.	87 (46.8%)	26 (14.0%)	21 (11.3%)	27 (14.5%)	25 (13.4%)	2.34	1.506

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Students' living conditions affect their ability to focus on academic tasks.	9 (4.8%)	108 (58.1%)	18 (9.7%)	38 (20.4%)	13 (7.0%)	2.67	1.074
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Source: Primary data 2024

Family income significantly influences students' access to academic resources:

The majority of respondents, 59.1%, agree, and 14.0% strongly agree, that family income plays a crucial role in determining students' access to academic resources. However, 10.8% remain neutral, and 16.1% (4.8% disagree and 11.3% strongly disagree) do not perceive family income as a significant factor. The mean score of 2.40 suggests a leaning toward agreement, while the standard deviation of 1.141 indicates relatively low variability in responses. This finding highlights the importance of family income in shaping students' academic opportunities, emphasizing the need for equitable access to resources through targeted financial interventions for students from low-income families.

Students from low socio-economic backgrounds struggle to balance work and study:

A substantial portion of respondents, 43.5%, strongly agree, and 19.4% agree, that socio-economic challenges compel students to juggle work and study, affecting their academic focus. In contrast, 24.8% (15.1% disagree and 9.7% strongly disagree) downplay this issue, while 11.8% remain neutral. The mean score of 2.38 indicates agreement on this challenge, and the high standard deviation of 2.013 reveals significant variability in perspectives. These results underscore the pressing challenges faced by students from disadvantaged backgrounds, necessitating institutional support such as flexible academic schedules and work-study programs to alleviate their burdens.

Availability of financial aid improves academic performance among students:

Among the respondents, 38.2% strongly agree, and 10.8% agree, that financial aid positively impacts academic outcomes. However, a significant 34.4% strongly disagree, and 7.5% disagree, reflecting skepticism about the effectiveness of financial aid, while 9.1% remain neutral. The mean score of 2.89, close to neutrality, and the standard deviation of 1.758 indicate diverse opinions on this factor. This mixed perception suggests that while many students recognize financial aid as a crucial enabler of academic success, there may be gaps in its accessibility or effectiveness, warranting a review of financial aid policies and their implementation.

Socio-economic status determines students' participation in co-curricular activities:

The data shows that 46.8% strongly agree, and 14.0% agree, that socio-economic status influences participation in co-curricular activities, pointing to a majority consensus on this issue. However, 27.9% (14.5% disagree and 13.4% strongly disagree) and 11.3% neutral responses indicate that a considerable number of students do not fully endorse this view. The mean score of 2.34 suggests agreement, with a standard deviation of 1.506 reflecting some variability in responses. These findings suggest socio-economic disparities hinder students' engagement in co-curricular activities, highlighting the need for initiatives to provide equal opportunities for all students.

Students' living conditions affect their ability to focus on academic tasks:

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A notable 58.1% of respondents agree, and 4.8% strongly agree, that living conditions impact academic focus, underscoring this as a significant factor. Meanwhile, 27.4% (20.4% disagree and 7.0% strongly disagree) disagree with this assertion, and 9.7% are neutral. The mean score of 2.67 leans toward agreement, with a low standard deviation of 1.074 indicating relatively consistent responses. This finding emphasizes the importance of addressing living conditions to improve students' academic concentration, suggesting that institutions should prioritize creating conducive environments, particularly for students facing adverse living conditions.

Table 2: Relationship between Students' socio-economic factors and Academic Performance

		Students' socio-economic factors	Academic Performance
Students' socio-economic factors	Pearson Correlation	1	.759**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	186	186
Academic Performance	Pearson Correlation	.759**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	186	186

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source Primary Data, 2024

The Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.759 indicates a strong positive relationship between students' socio-economic factors and their academic performance. This suggests that students who come from higher socio-economic backgrounds where factors like family income, parental education levels, and access to resources (e.g., books, internet, tutoring) tend to perform better academically. The p-value of 0.000, which is below the standard significance threshold of 0.01, confirms that the correlation between socio-economic factors and academic performance is statistically significant. This means that the relationship is not due to random chance, and we can confidently assert that socio-economic factors play a meaningful role in shaping academic outcomes.

Conclusions

The study reveals that the education level of parents plays a significant role in shaping students' academic outcomes. Consistent with the findings from Education Encyclopedia (2019), higher levels of parental education contribute to better academic performance in children. Parents with higher educational levels are often better equipped to engage in their children's education, possessing the knowledge, skills, and resources to support their academic progress. This aligns with research by Haveman and Wolfe (1995), which suggests that educated parents are more likely to motivate their children's intellectual potential, providing a conducive learning environment that fosters school success. The findings also reflect the conclusion by Holmes (2003), which indicates that children of educated parents are more likely to remain in school and progress through different educational stages. Specifically, the study finds that in

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Nakaseke district, parents with higher educational attainment are more actively involved in their children's education, creating a positive academic environment. However, the study also highlights that children of less educated parents tend to have lower academic performance due to a lack of sufficient support and resources. This is in line with Garasy's (2011) observation that mothers' educational levels have a stronger correlation with academic success compared to less educated mothers, who may lack the enthusiasm or knowledge to support their children's learning (Portes and Zady, 1998).

Moreover, the findings echo Nicholas' (2010) study on the effect of parental education attainment, confirming that parents' educational background significantly influences children's academic success. In Nakaseke district, where a considerable portion of parents lack formal education, students' academic performance is affected, demonstrating the need for greater awareness among parents regarding their role in their children's education. The study also found that parental involvement is a key determinant of academic performance. The findings support Sanders (2000) and Chen (2001), who suggest that when parents are actively engaged in their children's education, students tend to perform better academically. In Nakaseke district, however, the level of parental involvement is relatively low. Many parents fail to engage in activities such as homework supervision, school meetings, or discussing academic progress, which impacts their children's academic performance. A significant number of students in the district report having poor attendance and incomplete homework, often due to a lack of parental support at home. This neglect of parental duties is detrimental, as it leads to negative attitudes toward education, a finding also supported by William (2005), who emphasizes the importance of parental expectations and involvement in shaping students' attitudes and behavior towards school.

Furthermore, the study highlights the impact of different parenting styles on academic performance, reflecting the work of Baumrind (1919). The majority of parents in Nakaseke are described as permissive, providing little structure or discipline for their children. As a result, children often lack motivation and discipline, which negatively affects their academic performance. In contrast, authoritative parents, who set clear expectations and are actively involved in their children's education, are more likely to have children who perform well academically.

The study also explored the role of parental financial and material support, an aspect that directly ties into the socio-economic status of families. Parental income levels significantly affect the availability of resources such as books, uniforms, and other school-related materials, which are crucial for academic success. Consistent with the findings of Holmes (2003) and Haveman and Wolfe (1995), students from wealthier families are more likely to perform better academically, as they have access to better educational resources.

Recommendations

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It is essential to design and implement educational programs aimed at improving the awareness and understanding of parents regarding their pivotal role in shaping their children's academic success. These programs should emphasize the importance of parental involvement, particularly for parents with lower educational attainment, to bridge the gap in support for children's learning. By providing parents with knowledge on how to support their children's education at home whether through setting high expectations, helping with homework, or fostering a positive learning environment students' academic outcomes can be significantly improved.

Schools should develop strategies to encourage and facilitate active parental involvement in their children's education. This could involve regular communication between parents and teachers, as well as creating opportunities for parents to engage with the school through activities such as parent-teacher meetings, school events, and volunteering in the classroom. Schools could also offer flexible meeting schedules and alternative methods of communication for parents who may have difficulty attending in person. When parents are actively engaged in their children's academic life, students tend to perform better and develop a stronger connection to their education.

To address the financial barriers that many families face, which hinder students' access to academic resources, it is crucial for local governments and educational institutions to provide more financial aid, scholarships, and material support, especially for students from low-income backgrounds. This could include providing textbooks, school supplies, uniforms, and access to tutoring services. Financial assistance can help level the playing field, allowing students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds to access the same educational opportunities as their wealthier peers.

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