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Influence of Learners' Participation in Artisanal Gold Mining Activities on School Attendance in Rachuonyo South Sub-County, Homa Bay County, Kenya

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of artisanal gold mining activities on learners' attendance in public junior schools in Rachuonyo South Sub-County, Homa Bay County, Kenya. The study was guided by the following research question: To what extent does learners' participation in artisanal gold mining activities influence school attendance? The study was anchored on Human Capital Theory. A mixed methods approach, specifically a convergent design, was employed. A cross-sectional and phenomenology designs were used for quantitative and qualitative data respectively. The target population comprised 84 public junior schools, 84 heads of institutions, 416 teachers, 5,840 Grade 7 and 8 learners, 480 parents, and one Sub-County Director of Education (SCDE. The sample size included 9 public junior schools selected using stratified and simple random sampling, 9 heads of institutions and 1 SCDE selected through criterion purposive sampling, 90 teachers selected using simple random sampling, 48 parents selected using cluster sampling, and 374 learners selected through systematic sampling. Data was collected using questionnaires for teachers, interview guides for heads of institutions, SCDE and parents, and focus group discussion guides for learners. Data was analyzed using SPSS version 28 for descriptive and inferential statistics, and NVivo for thematic analysis of qualitative data. Research instruments were validated through face validity, and reliability ensured using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.80. Findings were presented in tables and graphs. Ethical considerations were observed. Findings were presented using tables, with ethical considerations observed throughout the study. The findings revealed that artisanal gold mining activities negatively influence learners' attendance in public junior schools in Rachuonyo South Sub-County through increased absenteeism, child labour involvement, economic pressures, fatigue, and reduced parental supervision. The study concluded that participation in gold mining activities remains a significant barrier to regular school attendance and learner participation in education. The study recommends strengthening community sensitization programmes, enforcing child protection policies, supporting economically vulnerable households, and improving school-based attendance monitoring strategies to enhance learners' regular attendance in gold mining-affected communities.

Key Words: Artisanal Gold Mining Activities; Learners' Participation; School Attendance Parental Attitudes; Learner Absenteeism; School Attendance Monitoring; and Learner Retention

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Background to the Study

Artisanal gold mining activities refer to informal or small-scale mineral extraction practices that rely on manual labour and limited technology to obtain gold for livelihood purposes. Learners' participation in artisanal gold mining occurs when school-age children engage directly or indirectly in mining-related activities, including digging, processing minerals, transporting materials, or supporting mining households. School attendance refers to the regular presence and participation of learners in educational activities necessary for achieving learning outcomes. Artisanal mining provides income opportunities for disadvantaged households but may expose children to hazardous conditions, labour demands, and interruptions in education (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2021). Research indicates that child involvement in mining creates tension between economic survival and educational participation, particularly in vulnerable rural communities (Erickson et al., 2022).

Education stakeholders including governments, international organisations, school administrators, and child protection agencies emphasize that consistent school attendance is essential for improving learning outcomes, human development, and future economic opportunities. UNESCO (2023) argues that educational participation requires addressing barriers that prevent learners from fully engaging in schooling, including poverty and social inequalities. Similarly, UNICEF (2022) highlights that children from vulnerable households require protection from economic pressures that interfere with their right to education. In mining communities, stakeholders recognize the need for balancing household livelihood needs with child protection and educational responsibilities. The World Bank (2022) further emphasizes that reducing learning poverty requires interventions that promote school participation and address socioeconomic factors affecting learners' attendance.

Globally, artisanal and small-scale mining remains an important livelihood activity, particularly in developing regions where rural households depend on mineral resources for income generation. However, the involvement of children in mining activities has raised concerns regarding school attendance, child labour, health risks, and educational attainment. The United Nations Environment Programme (2023) identifies artisanal gold mining as a major economic activity that supports millions of households but presents environmental and social challenges. The ILO (2021) notes that children involved in mining often experience competing demands between work and education, resulting in absenteeism and reduced school participation. Therefore, international attention has focused on creating policies that protect children while supporting sustainable livelihoods for mining-dependent communities.

In developed countries, although child labour in mining is limited due to strong legal frameworks and compulsory education policies, economic conditions in resource-dependent communities can still influence educational participation. In Canada, Emery et al. (2022) found that rural communities dependent on natural resource industries experienced challenges where employment opportunities sometimes encouraged young people to prioritize work-related activities over education. Similarly, Australia's remote mining communities have experienced educational inequalities associated with geographical isolation and socioeconomic disadvantage. Lamb et al. (2020) reported that students in disadvantaged and remote areas faced barriers to

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educational success compared with their urban counterparts. These findings demonstrate that economic structures surrounding resource industries can influence learners' engagement with education even in countries with developed education systems.

Further evidence from developed countries shows that school attendance is influenced by socioeconomic circumstances and community-level factors. In the United States, Gottfried (2021) established that chronic absenteeism significantly affects learners' academic progress and is often associated with socioeconomic disadvantage. Similarly, the Education Review Office (2024) in New Zealand identified persistent attendance challenges among learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, particularly those experiencing barriers related to family and community conditions. These examples demonstrate that learner attendance is not determined solely by school factors but is also shaped by broader economic and social environments. Therefore, lessons from developed countries provide insights into understanding how community livelihood activities, including mining, may influence school participation in less developed contexts.

In Africa, artisanal and small-scale gold mining contributes significantly to rural livelihoods but has also been associated with increased risks of child labour and reduced educational participation. In Ghana, Hilson and Osei (2022) found that artisanal gold mining provides important livelihood opportunities for rural households but may encourage children's involvement when families depend heavily on mining income. Similarly, in Zimbabwe, Mkodzongi and Spiegel (2022) established that economic hardships and limited employment alternatives increased household reliance on artisanal mining, affecting children's participation in formal education. These studies suggest that while mining contributes to household survival, it may create competing responsibilities that interfere with learners' attendance and engagement in schools.

Other African countries have also reported challenges linking household poverty, mining activities, and school attendance. In Nigeria, Okoye and Okoye (2022) found that socioeconomic difficulties significantly influence learners' attendance and educational outcomes, particularly among rural households. In Uganda, Nabulele and Ngumenawe (2024) reported that household poverty contributed to school dropout and irregular attendance among children. Additionally, Njieassam (2022) highlighted concerns regarding child labour and weak protection mechanisms within artisanal mining environments in Uganda. These African experiences demonstrate that economic vulnerability, household dependence on informal activities, and inadequate child protection systems may increase barriers to regular school attendance. Consequently, understanding these relationships is important for developing interventions in mining-affected communities.

In Kenya, artisanal and small-scale gold mining has expanded in counties such as Kakamega, Migori, Siaya, and Narok, where households engage in mining as a livelihood strategy. In Kakamega County, studies have identified school attendance challenges associated with mining communities. Wanyama (2021) noted that schools in mining areas experience difficulties in monitoring learner attendance due to economic pressures affecting families. Similarly, in Migori County, Okello (2021) found that artisanal gold mining influenced pupils' school attendance through increased involvement in mining-related activities and household dependence on mining

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income. These findings indicate that mining activities may create educational challenges by competing with learners' time and commitment to schooling.

In other Kenyan mining regions, similar concerns have been documented regarding learner participation and educational continuity. Shikuku (2022) examined gold mining zones in Ikolomani Sub-County, Kakamega County, and identified school attendance challenges linked to mining-related socioeconomic pressures. In Narok County, mining and other livelihood activities have also affected children's educational participation by increasing household responsibilities. Onyango and Atieno (2021) observed that mining economies in Western Kenya contributed to school dropout risks among vulnerable learners. These studies reveal that artisanal mining influences education through multiple pathways, including child labour, poverty, parental decisions, and limited school monitoring mechanisms. However, variations across counties indicate the need for context-specific investigations.

Homa Bay County has experienced increased artisanal gold mining activities, particularly in areas where communities depend on natural resources for household income. The county government recognizes the importance of improving livelihoods while protecting vulnerable groups and strengthening education systems (Homa Bay County Government, 2023). Existing research has linked mining activities in the county with educational concerns. Oduor (2023) examined the effects of gold mining on primary school participation in Homa Bay County and highlighted challenges affecting learners' engagement with education. Although mining contributes economically to communities, concerns remain regarding children's involvement, absenteeism, and reduced participation in schooling. Therefore, Homa Bay County provides an important context for examining how mining activities influence learners' attendance.

Rachuonyo South Sub-County is among the areas in Homa Bay County where mining-related economic activities occur alongside public junior school education. The sub-county contains numerous educational institutions serving communities experiencing different socioeconomic challenges. Local concerns indicate that poverty-driven participation in income-generating activities may affect learners' regular attendance and engagement with schooling. Recent reports from Homa Bay have highlighted cases where learners miss school due to participation in economic activities aimed at supporting household needs. Although previous studies have examined mining and education challenges in Kenya, limited attention has been given specifically to how learners' participation in artisanal gold mining activities influences school attendance in public junior schools in Rachuonyo South Sub-County.

Despite existing studies on artisanal mining, child labour, and educational participation, several research gaps remain. Previous studies have mainly focused on the economic, environmental, and health effects of artisanal gold mining, with limited examination of its direct influence on learners' school attendance. Additionally, limited studies have integrated multiple factors such as learners' participation in mining activities, household dependence on mining income, parental attitudes, and school-level attendance monitoring challenges. Existing evidence from counties such as Migori and Kakamega provides useful insights but does not adequately represent the unique context of Rachuonyo South Sub-County. Therefore, this study sought to fill this contextual and empirical gap by examining the influence of artisanal gold mining activities

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on learners' attendance in public junior schools in Rachuonyo South Sub-County, Homa Bay County, Kenya.

Statement of the Problem

Regular attendance is further undermined by household reliance on mining income, parental attitudes favoring mining, and insufficient monitoring of school attendance (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2021; UNESCO, 2023). As a result, in areas impacted by mining, school administrators, educators, parents, and education officers have voiced concerns about ongoing absenteeism and diminishing student involvement in instructional activities (MoE, 2024).

This undermined national efforts to achieve equitable and quality education under CBE if learners continue to face poor competency acquisition, decreased academic advancement, higher dropout and fewer opportunities for socioeconomic advancement (UNESCO, 2023). Few studies have systematically examined how learners' involvement in artisanal gold mining, household dependence on mining income, parental attitudes toward mining, and school-level attendance monitoring challenges collectively influence learners' attendance in public junior schools, particularly in Rachuonyo South Sub-County. Previous studies have looked at child labour, absenteeism, and the socioeconomic effects of artisanal mining. The creation of evidence-based therapies is constrained by this empirical and contextual gap. This study therefore, seeks to address these gaps by systematica]lly examining influence of artisanal gold mining activities on attendance of learners in public junior schools in Rachuonyo sub-county, Homa Bay county, Kenya.

Research Question

To what extent does learners' participation in artisanal gold mining activities influence school attendance in Rachuonyo South sub-county in Homa Bay county?

Theoretical Framework

Human Capital Theory, developed by Theodore Schultz in 1961 and expanded by Gary Becker in 1964, provides the foundation for this study. The theory explains that education is an investment that enhances individuals' knowledge, skills, competencies, and productivity, resulting in improved economic and social outcomes (Becker, 1964; Schultz, 1961). Schultz (1961) argues that individuals and households make decisions by considering the costs and expected benefits associated with education. In this study, learners' participation in artisanal gold mining activities represents an economic alternative that may compete with schooling. When households depend on mining income, learners may be involved in mining activities, reducing their attendance in public junior schools in Rachuonyo South Sub-County, Homa Bay County.

A major strength of Human Capital Theory is its ability to explain how economic conditions influence educational decisions and learners' participation in schooling. The theory provides a framework for understanding why households in economically vulnerable communities may prioritize immediate income-generating activities over long-term educational benefits. Marginson (2021) notes that Human Capital Theory remains relevant in explaining the relationship between education, labour markets, and socioeconomic mobility. Similarly, Psacharopoulos and Patrinos (2020) emphasize that investment in education produces long-term returns through improved skills and productivity. Therefore, the theory supports the examination of how artisanal

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gold mining activities influence learners' attendance by highlighting the opportunity costs associated with choosing mining activities over continued school participation.

Despite its relevance, Human Capital Theory has limitations that should be considered when interpreting findings. One major criticism is that the theory places significant emphasis on economic decision-making while giving limited attention to social, cultural, and institutional factors influencing educational participation. For example, learners' involvement in artisanal gold mining may not only result from household economic calculations but may also be influenced by parental attitudes, community expectations, child labour practices, and school-level challenges. Keddie and Mills (2020) argue that school attendance is shaped by broader social and institutional conditions beyond economic factors. Additionally, the theory may not fully account for interventions such as child protection policies, community support programmes, and government initiatives that enable vulnerable learners to remain in school despite economic challenges.

Human Capital Theory is applicable to this study because it provides a framework for explaining how learners' participation in artisanal gold mining activities may influence school attendance in public junior schools in Rachuonyo South Sub-County, Homa Bay County. The theory suggests that households may allocate learners' time between education and income-generating activities based on perceived immediate and future benefits. Hilson and Osei (2022) and Mkodzongi and Spiegel (2022) demonstrate that dependence on artisanal mining income can increase children's involvement in mining activities, affecting educational participation. The theory therefore guides this study in examining how mining involvement, household economic dependence, and opportunity costs influence learners' attendance. By linking education with long-term human development, Human Capital Theory provides a foundation for understanding attendance challenges in mining-affected communities.

Review of Related Empirical Literature

In vulnerable socioeconomic communities in the United States, Gottfried (2021) investigated the impact of persistent absenteeism on student outcomes. The study used administrative data from over 15,000 school children chosen through stratified sampling, following the guidelines of Human Capital Theory and employing a longitudinal quantitative research approach. Standardized academic tests and official attendance records provided the data, which had reliability coefficients greater than $\alpha = .85$. The findings showed that higher absenteeism considerably hindered long-term educational success and academic advancement. Early identification tools and socioeconomic interventions aimed at at-risk students were suggested by the study. The results showed that long-term absenteeism hinders the development of human capital and the acquisition of knowledge, especially in economically challenged environments.

The study did not particularly look at child labor-related absenteeism in unregulated industries like artisanal mining. Furthermore, it disregarded qualitative perspectives from students and school administrators and only used secondary quantitative data. By concentrating on learners' involvement in artisanal gold mining in Kenya and utilizing a mixed-methods approach that

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includes questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions to gather contextual and lived experiences, the current study filled these gaps.

School absenteeism in rural Australian communities facing economic labour challenges was examined by Kearney and Graczyk (2022). The study, which employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design with 2,400 students chosen using cluster sampling, was based on ecological systems theory. Validated absence questionnaires (α =.88) and follow-up teacher interviews were used to gather data. The results showed that community labour expectations and financial obligations were major contributors to inconsistent attendance patterns. The study suggested establishing early intervention counselling programs and enhancing school-family relationships. The study made clear that social and economic contexts have a big impact on students' involvement in class.

Although the study examined labour pressures, it did not focus on hazardous child labour activities such as artisanal mining. Education policymakers were not included in the sample, which was mostly composed of instructors and students. By particularly evaluating gold mining participation and incorporating teachers, headteachers, students, and the Sub-County Director of Education within a cross-sectional and phenomenological mixed-methods framework in Kenya, the current study will fill these gaps.

Hilson and Osei (2021) investigated the effects of child labour on schooling in Ghana's artisanal gold mining industry. The study used a mixed-methods methodology with 320 families chosen using purposive and snowball sampling, guided by the Livelihoods Theory. Key informant interviews and structured questionnaires were used to gather data (α =.81). Findings indicated that children who were actively involved in mining were more likely to drop out of school and have inconsistent attendance. Programs for economic diversification and more stringent enforcement of child labour restrictions were suggested by the report. The study showed a direct correlation between lower school attendance rates in communities that depend on mining and involvement in artisanal mining.

Without carefully analyzing school-level monitoring systems, the study concentrated mostly on household-level economic drivers. Moreover, the Human Capital Theory was not used to explain the long-term effects on schooling. In order to fill these gaps, the current study will integrate analysis of school-level attendance tracking and base its inquiry on Human Capital Theory in the context of gold mining in Kenya.

A cross-sectional evaluation of child labour in Burkina Faso's artisanal gold mining districts was carried out by the International Labour Organization in (2022). Structured interviews and observational checklists were used to survey 1,200 households for the study. The findings, which were informed by international child rights frameworks, showed that children engaged in mining activities had substantial absence rates. Analysis of the data revealed that during the busiest mining seasons, school attendance dramatically decreased. The research suggested increasing social safety programs and enforcing compulsory schooling more strictly. The study found that in homes with low incomes, mining activity directly conflicts with school attendance.

The study lacked qualitative insights into the lived experiences of learners and mainly relied on quantitative household surveys. Furthermore, no local school-level answers nor

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attendance-performance correlations were examined. In order to fill in these gaps, the current study will combine focus groups and qualitative interviews with an analysis of academic consequences and attendance trends in Kasipul Kando West sub-county.

Oduor (2023) looked into how primary school involvement in Homa Bay County, Kenya, was impacted by gold mining operations. The study used stratified random sampling to select 420 students and 30 teachers using a descriptive survey approach. School attendance records and structured questionnaires were used to gather data (α =.81). Based on the Social Disorganization Theory, findings showed that students who participated in mining activities had far higher dropout and absence rates. Stricter enforcement of child labour rules and community sensitization were suggested by the study. The study verified that participation in mining interferes with regular attendance at school in rural Kenyan areas.

The study mostly used quantitative techniques and did not examine trainees' experiences qualitatively. Furthermore, education officials were not included in the sample, which had a rather small size. By using a mixed-methods approach and a representative sample that includes students, teachers, head teachers, and the sub-county director of education, the current study will fill these gaps.

In Western Kenya, Onyango and Atieno (2021) investigated the connection between school dropout rates and mining economies. Purposive sampling was used to choose 12 schools and 300 households for the correlational study design. Structured surveys and examination of school records (α =.80) were used to gather data. The results showed that children's participation in mining-related activities was significantly positively correlated with irregular attendance patterns that resulted in dropout. The report suggested encouraging alternative livelihoods for those reliant on mining income and fortifying school-community monitoring committees. The study emphasized the socioeconomic factors that push children to engage in gold mining at the expense of their education.

The study's methodological clarity was limited by its unclear distinction between quantitative and qualitative research designs. Additionally, it did not specifically base the study in Human Capital Theory and did not include school officials. In order to understand how mining participation impacts long-term educational investment, the current study will employ well-defined cross-sectional and phenomenological designs, incorporate multi-stakeholder representation, and apply Human Capital Theory.

Research Design and Methodology

The study adopted a convergent mixed-methods research design to obtain quantitative and qualitative evidence regarding the influence of artisanal gold mining activities on learners' attendance. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2021), a mixed-methods approach enables researchers to collect, analyse, and integrate quantitative and qualitative data to provide comprehensive explanations of research phenomena. The quantitative component employed a cross-sectional design to examine attendance patterns and relationships between mining-related factors and school attendance, while the qualitative component used a phenomenological design to explore experiences of learners, teachers, parents, and education officials. This design was

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appropriate because it provided statistical evidence while capturing social, economic, and institutional factors influencing attendance in mining-affected communities.

The study was conducted in Rachuonyo South Sub-County, Homa Bay County, Kenya. The area was selected because artisanal gold mining is among the major socioeconomic activities influencing household livelihoods alongside small-scale farming and fishing. The sub-county has public junior schools serving learners from communities whose families are directly or indirectly connected to mining activities. Despite existing educational infrastructure and government interventions, schools continue to experience irregular attendance patterns associated with socioeconomic conditions in mining communities (County Government of Homa Bay, 2023). The target population comprised 84 public junior schools, 84 heads of institutions, 416 teachers, 5,840 Grade 7 and 8 learners, 480 parents, and one Sub-County Director of Education. These participants provided diverse perspectives on how artisanal gold mining activities influence learners' attendance.

Data were collected using questionnaires, interview guides, focus group discussion guides, observation guides, and document analysis tools to ensure triangulation of findings. Questionnaires were administered to teachers to obtain quantitative data, while interviews were conducted with heads of institutions, parents, and the Sub-County Director of Education to obtain detailed qualitative information. Learners participated through focus group discussions to provide experiences related to mining involvement and school attendance. Research instruments were validated through expert review, while reliability of quantitative instruments was established using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS version 28 through descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative data were analysed thematically using NVivo. Ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and protection of participants' identities, were observed throughout the study.

Presentation, Interpretation, and Discussion of Findings

This section looked at how much learners' involvement in artisanal gold mining operations influence their attendance at public junior schools in Rachuonyo south cub-county. The potential link between participation in mining-related activities and absenteeism, tardiness, irregular attendance, or withdrawal from educational activities was given special consideration. A five-point Likert scale, with 5 representing "strongly agree" and 1 representing "strongly disagree," was used by respondents to score the statements. Table 1 presents the findings.

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Table 1
Teachers' Learners' Responses to ***Participation in Artisanal Gold Mining and School Attendance (n=75)***

No.	Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev.
i	Some learners miss school to engage in artisanal gold mining.	17 (23.0%)	28 (37.8%)	10 (13.5%)	11 (14.9%)	8 (10.8%)	3.47	1.30
ii	Mining activities contribute to frequent absenteeism among learners.	16 (21.3%)	25 (33.3%)	12 (16.0%)	13 (17.3%)	9 (12.0%)	3.35	1.32
iii	Learners involved in mining often arrive late to school.	14 (18.7%)	24 (32.0%)	11 (14.7%)	16 (21.3%)	10 (13.3%)	3.21	1.34
iv	Mining participation influences learners' regular attendance.	13 (17.3%)	29 (38.7%)	13 (17.3%)	12 (16.0%)	8 (10.7%)	3.36	1.25
v	Learners engaged in mining show irregular attendance patterns.	15 (20.0%)	26 (34.7%)	11 (14.7%)	14 (18.7%)	9 (12.0%)	3.32	1.32
vi	Peak mining seasons lead to increased absenteeism.	13 (17.3%)	29 (38.7%)	10 (13.3%)	13 (17.3%)	10 (13.3%)	3.29	1.31
vii	Learners combine school and mining activities.	18 (24.0%)	29 (38.7%)	8 (10.7%)	11 (14.7%)	9 (12.0%)	3.48	1.33
viii	Mining activities reduce learners' time for school attendance.	17 (22.7%)	27 (36.0%)	9 (12.0%)	13 (17.3%)	9 (12.0%)	3.40	1.34
ix	Fatigue from mining contributes to school absence.	14 (18.7%)	27 (36.0%)	12 (16.0%)	11 (14.7%)	11 (14.7%)	3.29	1.33
x	Mining participation negatively influences school attendance rates.	16 (21.3%)	28 (37.3%)	11 (14.7%)	9 (12.0%)	11 (14.7%)	3.39	1.34

Source: *Researcher (2026)*

Table 1 show that 17 (23.0%) strongly agreed (SA) and 28 (37.8%) agreed (A) with the statement that some learners skip class to work in artisanal gold mining, for a total of 60.8% agreement. On the other hand, 8 (10.8%) severely disagreed (SD), 11 (14.9%) disagreed (D), and 10 (13.5%) were neutral (N). Although responses varied somewhat, the mean of 3.47 and standard deviation of 1.30 show overall agreement. Therefore, the positive response pattern implies that engagement in mining contributes to missing school days, but the negative replies reflect that not all learners may be similarly affected by this experience. According to Human Capital Theory, attending school is an investment in knowledge and skills; as a result, time spent mining lowers educational investment. This is consistent with Gottfried's (2021) findings that socioeconomically

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vulnerable learners' long-term human capital development and academic success were severely hampered by chronic absence.

In contrast to 12 (16.0%) neutral (N), 13 (17.3%) disagreed (D), and 9 (12.0%) strongly disagreed (SD), 16 (21.3%) strongly agreed (SA) and 25 (33.3%) agreed (A) regarding whether mining activities contribute to frequent absenteeism. With a mean score of 3.35 and a standard deviation of 1.32, there is some disagreement along with a moderate tendency toward agreement. Positively, over half of the teachers thot that mining was a factor in their frequent absences; negatively, 29.3% disagreed or strongly disagreed, indicating that other contextual factors might also have an impact on attendance. This pattern is explained by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which holds that interconnections between families, schools, the local economy, and labor practices all influence learners' attendance. This explanation is congruent with the findings of Kearney and Graczyk (2022), who found that inconsistent school attendance in economically challenged rural areas was significantly influenced by household financial responsibilities and community labor expectations.

When asked if learners who work in mining frequently arrive late to class, 14 (18.7%) strongly agreed (SA), 24 (32.0%) agreed (A), and 11 (14.7%) were neutral (N). But 10 (13.3%) strongly disagreed (SD) and 16 (21.3%) disagreed (D). Only modest agreement and comparatively scattered perceptions are shown by the ensuing mean of 3.21 and standard deviation of 1.34. Therefore, the positive result implies that involvement in mining may affect learners' ability to arrive at school on time, but the very significant 34.6% disagreement demonstrates that not all learners' tardiness may be linked to mining. According to Human Capital Theory, mining reduces effective exposure to instruction even when learners eventually attend school since it takes up time and effort that could be used for formal education. In a similar vein, Hilson and Osei (2021) found that children who actively engaged in artisanal gold mining had inconsistent attendance and were more likely to drop out of school.

Thirteen (17.3%) strongly agreed (SA) and twenty-nine (38.7%) agreed (A) with the assertion that mining participation affects learners' regular attendance, making up a majority of 56.0%. In contrast, thirteen (17.3%) were neutral (N), twelve (16.0%) disagreed (D), and eight (10.7%) severely disagreed (SD). Compared to a few other claims, the mean of 3.36 and somewhat smaller standard deviation of 1.25 show overall agreement and somewhat higher consistency. While the neutral and negative replies demonstrate that regular attendance is also impacted by factors other than mining, the positive finding suggests that participation in mining may disturb continuity in schooling. Because children's economically productive employment can directly compete with schooling for their limited time, Child Labor Theory offers a clear explanation. Children involved in artisanal mining also showed significant absences from school, according to the International Labor Organization (2022), especially when mining demands rose during times of economic activity.

Additionally, 15 (20.0%) strongly agreed (SA) and 26 (34.7%) agreed (A) that learners involved in mining exhibit irregular attendance patterns. On the other hand, 9 (12.0%) strongly disagreed (SD), 11 (14.7%) were neutral (N), and 14 (18.7%) disagreed (D). The average score of 3.32 and the standard deviation of 1.32 show a general tendency toward agreement, but there is

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also discernible diversity in the experiences of the teachers. While the combined 30.7% disagreement demonstrates that not every learner active in mining inevitably develops an irregular attendance pattern, the positive finding suggests that participation in mining is connected with disruptions in normal schooling. Because learners miss out on repeated opportunities for classroom learning, inconsistent attendance reduces the accumulation of knowledge, competencies, and abilities, according to Human Capital Theory. In Homa Bay County, Oduor (2023) found that leearners engaged in gold mining operations had far greater absence and dropout rates than their non-involved peers.

Thirteen (17.3%) strongly agreed (SA), twenty-nine (38.7%) agreed (A), and ten (13.3%) were indifferent (N) regarding the impact of peak mining seasons on absenteeism. On the other hand, 10 (13.3%) strongly disagreed (SD) and 13 (17.3%) disagreed (D). With significant diversity among responders, the mean of 3.29 and standard deviation of 1.31 show moderate agreement. Positively, most people thot that absenteeism rose as mining prospects increased, indicating that attendance might change in tandem with regional economic cycles. However, the 30.6% unfavorable response suggests that not all homes or schools are equally impacted by seasonal mining. According to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, this pattern is connected to the exosystem and macrosystem, where family choices and learners' daily routines are indirectly impacted by community economic prospects. Similarly, Onyango and Atieno (2021) discovered a substantial correlation between inconsistent school attendance and subsequent dropout in Western Kenya households who relied on mining.

When asked if learners mix their education with mining operations, 18 (24.0%) strongly agreed (SA) and 29 (38.7%) agreed (A), yielding the greatest overall agreement of 62.7% among the assertions. Nine (12.0%) severely disagreed (SD), eleven (14.7%) disagreed (D), and just eight (10.7%) were neutral (N). Despite variations in respondents' observations, the mean of 3.48, the highest in Table 5, and the standard deviation of 1.33 show a clear overall agreement. While the negative replies indicate that such dual participation is not common, the positive response pattern definitely shows that some learners make an effort to reconcile their involvement in education with earning money from mining. According to Human Capital Theory, splitting time between mining and education lowers the level of investment in education. In a similar vein, Gottfried (2021) showed that frequent absences from school limit cumulative learning and erode longer-term educational achievement.

Nine (12.0%) were neutral (N), whereas 17 (22.7%) strongly agreed (SA) and 27 (36.0%) agreed (A) that mining activities diminish learners' time available for school attendance. However, 9 (12.0%) severely disagreed (SD) and 13 (17.3%) disagreed (D). Although teachers reported different experiences, the mean of 3.40 and standard deviation of 1.34 show a general tendency toward agreement. The positive finding suggests that mining reduces opportunities for regular school attendance by competing with education for learners' limited daily time. However, 29.3% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed, indicating that certain learners may be shielded from attendance interruption by household constraints or variations in mining engagement. This competitiveness is explained by child labor theory because engaging in economically useful employment might take up time that could be spent on schooling. In a similar vein, Kearney and

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Graczyk (2022) discovered that school-age children's uneven involvement in their education was a result of financial obligations placed on them.

Twelve (16.0%) were neutral (N), whereas 14 (18.7%) strongly agreed (SA) and 27 (36.0%) agreed (A) that mining-related weariness causes to absences from school. On the other hand, 11 (14.7%) strongly disagreed (SD) and 11 (14.7%) disagreed (D). The standard deviation of 1.33 and mean score of 3.29 indicate both significant diversity and moderate agreement. The positive result suggests that some learners may not be able to attend school regularly due to the physical demands of mining, or their preparedness for education may be compromised. The total 29.4% disagreement, however, suggests that the nature and intensity of mining jobs may have an impact on weariness. Physical tiredness reduces attendance and exposure to learning opportunities, which hinders the efficient use of time and effort in education, according to Human Capital Theory. In a similar vein, the International Labor Organization (2022) found that children engaged in labor-intensive artisanal mining activities missed a significant amount of school.

Further, 16 (21.3%) strongly agreed (SA) and 28 (37.3%) agreed (A) with the general statement that mining activity has a negative impact on school attendance rates, resulting in a combined agreement of 58.6%. In contrast, 9 (12.0%) disagreed (D), 11 (14.7%) severely disagreed (SD), and 11 (14.7%) were neutral (N). Although opinions varied, the mean of 3.39 and standard deviation of 1.34 support a general tendency toward agreement. While the 26.7% disagreement indicates that the link may differ depending on learner, household, and community factors, the positive response pattern clearly shows that teachers commonly associate artisanal mining with lower school attendance. According to Human Capital Theory, long-term mining involvement imposes an opportunity cost by substituting immediate economic activity for educational participation. In a same vein, Oduor (2023) discovered that involvement in gold mining in Homa Bay County was linked to noticeably higher absenteeism and school dropout rates.

Overall, Table 1 shows a constant tendency toward agreement that learners' attendance at public junior schools in Rachuonyo South Sub-County is negatively impacted by artisanal gold mining. Teachers' perceptions varied moderately, with means ranging from 3.21 to 3.48 across the 10 assertions, all above the neutral middle of 3.00. Standard deviations ranged from 1.25 to 1.34. Learners who combined mining and education had the strongest agreement, with 18 (24.0%) SA and 29 (38.7%) A, while 8 (10.7%) N, 11 (14.7%) D, and 9 (12.0%) SD. An overarching explanation is given by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory: interactions between the person, family, school, and mining-community context determine learner attendance. Hilson and Osei (2021) also came to the conclusion that children's labor obligations, household livelihood pressures, and artisanal mining all interact to cause irregular attendance and increased risks of dropping out of formal education.

The researcher used the observation guide to gather data that largely corroborated the teachers' answers regarding the impact of artisanal gold mining on learner attendance. learners were seen arriving late, looking physically exhausted, and sometimes skipping morning classes at several tested schools, especially in neighborhoods close to active mining sites. Additionally, the researcher observed that several learners showed poor engagement and diminished focus during

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class, which may be attributed to exhaustion from mining-related activities before or after school. These trends, however, were not consistent across all schools, indicating that learners were impacted by mining activity in varied ways. The findings thus confirmed the theory that artisanal gold mining causes tardiness, absenteeism, and decreased involvement, but they also suggested that other factors relating to the home and school may have an impact on attendance.

The results of the questionnaire were generally corroborated by other attendance patterns found in the document analysis guide. A review of the school progress records, tardiness records, and attendance registers revealed that certain learners had irregular attendance and repeated absences, with some instances of persistent tardiness spanning several weeks. Attendance seemed to drop in certain schools during times when local communities were apparently experiencing more intense mining activity. However, it was challenging to clearly link each missed school day to artisanal gold mining because the data did not often specify the precise causes of absences. The teachers' perceptions were somewhat qualified by this. Although mining should be considered in conjunction with other potential factors such as illness, household obligations, poverty, and family situations, the documentary data generally supported the conclusion that learners in mining-affected areas had irregular attendance.

According to heads of institutions interviews, artisanal gold mining disrupted regular school attendance in a number of ways. According to the head instructors, some learners participated directly in mining or helped family members with mining-related tasks, which caused them to miss lectures, arrive late, or attend class irregularly. They went on to say that when mining operations were more lucrative or when families were struggling financially, absenteeism tended to rise. Additionally, some heads of institutions noticed that learners who mixed mining and education often seemed worn out and less focused in class. However, they agreed that illness, household duties, and family situations also contributed to irregular attendance, so not all cases of absenteeism could be linked to mining. Thus, the quantitative results provided by instructors were largely corroborated by these interview findings. One of the Heads of institutions clarified:

> There are learners who we know come from families involved in gold mining, and sometimes they fail to report to school, especially when there is increased activity at the mining sites. Some are missing for several days, while others arrive late because they have been assisting their parents before school. Additionally, we observe that some learners arrive exhausted and find it difficult to focus in class. However, since there are instances of illness and other family issues, we cannot claim that mining is the reason for every absence (HOI 3, personal communication, 2026).

According to this account, mining influences attendance in addition to other home factors.

In regions where mining activities were prevalent, artisanal gold mining was seen as a significant community-level factor influencing school participation, according to an interview with the Sub-County Director of Education (SCDE). According to the SCDE, schools occasionally reported instances of chronic absenteeism, tardiness, and learners growing more drawn to extracurricular employment opportunities. It was also observed that financial difficulties in households can persuade parents or guardians to allow learners to engage in mining because the immediate money made was advantageous to the family. Instead of viewing mining as the only

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cause of absenteeism, the SCDE stressed that the impact differed between schools and homes, necessitating cooperation between education authorities, school administrators, parents, and community leaders. The SCDE said,

> In communities where artisanal mining is active, the attraction of quick income can become a serious challenge to regular school attendance." Some learners start off helping out sometimes after school, but over time, the activity may cause problems with attendance and reporting time. Although we acknowledge that poverty, family obligations, and other societal issues contribute to the situation, schools have expressed worry about learners who are frequently absent or late. Schools, parents, local government, and education officers must collaborate to address the issue (SCDE, personal communication, 2026).

The statement supports the conclusion that interrelated family, school, community, and economic factors influence learners' attendance.

Regarding the influence of artisanal gold mining on school attendance, parent interviews revealed conflicting but generally positive opinions. Some parents admitted that older children occasionally helped with mining-related tasks and that financial hardships prompted families to rely on mining as a supplemental source of income. They clarified that such involvement could sometimes lead to learners arriving late, skipping class, or getting too tired to attend regularly. However, some parents argued that if parents limited mining activities to weekends, vacations, or after-school hours, mining and education could coexist. As a result, the findings showed both good and negative viewpoints: mining supplied the necessary household income, but uncontrolled learner involvement might compete with education and have a detrimental impact on consistent attendance. One of the parent observed,

> Most families here are struggling economically, and gold mining is one of the activities people depend on to get money for food, school requirements, and other household needs. Children occasionally assist their parents, particularly when there is a favorable opportunity at the mining site. The issue arises when a child begins to choose mining over education due to financial gain. Some might be late or skip classes. Children should only help when it doesn't conflict with their education, as parents should ensure (Parent 12, personal communication, 2026).

This answer emphasizes the conflict between learners' long-term educational goals and their immediate home financial requirements.

Some learners were aware of peers who coupled their education with artisanal gold mining activities, according to focus group conversations with learners. Learners stated that participation could take place on the weekends, after courses, before school, or occasionally during regular school hours. According to some participants, mining was appealing because of the potential for financial gain, especially for learners who wished to support their families or take care of themselves. Additionally, they linked mining to fatigue, tardiness, missing classes, and trouble finishing assignments. Other learners, however, said that learners who only took part on weekends or vacations could still go to class on a regular basis. Thus, by showing that the impact on attendance relied on the frequency and timing of mining engagement, the FGD evidence both validated and supported the teachers' conclusions. One of the learners during FGD clarified,

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> Some learners go to the mining places because they can get money there. While some people attend on weekends or after school, others occasionally go even while they should be in class. They may feel exhausted after spending a lot of time there and either arrive late or fail to show up the following day. Additionally, some begin to believe that mining provides them with instant financial gain, making education less significant to them. However, learners who only go on holidays might still go to class regularly (Learner FGD 2, personal communication, 2026).

This viewpoint clearly demonstrates how the timing and level of mining engagement might influence attendance.

All things considered, the quantitative and qualitative results consistently show that learners' involvement in artisanal gold mining has a detrimental impact on their attendance at public junior schools in Rachuonyo South Sub-County. Quantitatively, the ten assertions' mean scores varied from 3.21 to 3.48, indicating widespread consensus that mining causes tardiness, weariness, irregular attendance, absenteeism, and less time for education. These findings were generally corroborated by qualitative data from focus groups, interviews, observations, and document analysis, which showed that mining-related activities and household financial strains drive some learners to miss school, arrive late, or attend irregularly. However, all data streams also demonstrated that illness, household duties, poverty, and family situations all have an impact on learners' attendance patterns, therefore mining is not the sole factor contributing to absenteeism.

Conclusion

The study concludes that artisanal gold mining activities significantly influence learners' attendance in public junior schools in Rachuonyo South Sub-County, Homa Bay County. Learners' involvement in mining activities contributes to irregular attendance through increased absenteeism, fatigue, reduced concentration, and limited time available for academic participation. The study further concludes that household dependence on income from artisanal gold mining encourages some families to involve learners in economic activities, thereby affecting consistent school attendance. Additionally, parental attitudes towards mining, poverty conditions, and school-level challenges in monitoring attendance contribute to attendance difficulties in mining-affected communities. Therefore, artisanal gold mining presents both economic benefits and educational challenges that require balanced interventions to protect learners' right to education.

Recommendations

The study recommends that education stakeholders, county authorities, and community leaders strengthen awareness programmes on the negative effects of child involvement in artisanal gold mining and promote the importance of regular school attendance. The government should enhance child protection measures, enforce regulations against child labour, and support vulnerable mining-dependent households through alternative livelihood programmes. Schools should improve attendance monitoring systems, strengthen guidance and counselling services, and collaborate with parents to address absenteeism challenges. Additionally, stakeholders should develop community-based interventions that balance household economic needs with learners'

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educational responsibilities. These strategies would help reduce mining-related absenteeism and promote consistent participation of learners in public junior schools in Rachuonyo South Sub-County.

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