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Influence of the Level of Parental Engagement Practices on Learners' Digital Literacy Skills Development in Public Junior Schools in Gatundu South Sub-County, Kiambu County, Kenya

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Abstract

This study investigated the influence of the level of parental engagement practices on learners' digital literacy skills development in public junior schools in Gatundu South Sub-County, Kiambu County, Keny. The research question that was used to guide the study was: What is the level of parental engagement in supporting learners' digital literacy skills in public junior schools in Gatundu South Sub-County, Kiambu County? The study was anchored on Epstein's Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence, complemented by Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory of Cognitive Development and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. The study adopted a mixed-methods approach; specifically, a convergent parallel design was used, which was a combination of a cross-sectional survey and phenomenology to collect quantitative and qualitative data, respectively. The target population included 58 public junior schools, 58 heads of institutions, 164 teachers, 2644 parents, and 2644 Grade 9 learners. The study adopted stratified sampling to sample 17 public junior schools, purposive sampling to sample 17 heads of institutions, stratified and simple random sampling to sample 49 teachers, systematic sampling to sample 347 learners, and purposive sampling to sample 347 parents to ensure fair representation of respondents. The study used questionnaires for teachers, parents, and Grade 9 learners; semi-structured interviews for heads of institutions, document analysis, and an observation guide to collect data. The Alpha coefficients of the study constructs were between 0.853 and 0.948. Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple linear regression were used to analyze quantitative data, whereas thematic analysis was used to analyze qualitative data and combine them with quantitative results. The study revealed that the level of parental engagement practices significantly influenced learners' digital literacy skills development in public junior schools. Higher parental involvement through digital guidance, monitoring, resource support, and encouragement enhanced learners' confidence and competence in using digital technologies. The study concludes that parental engagement is essential for effective digital literacy development and recommends strengthening parent awareness programmes, digital skills training, and collaboration between schools and families.

Key words: Level of Parental Engagement; Parental Engagement Practices; Learners' Digital Literacy Skills; Digital Literacy Skills Development; and Digital Learning Support

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Background to the Study

Parental engagement refers to the active and sustained participation of parents in supporting learners' educational experiences at home and within school environments. It involves providing learning resources, communicating with teachers, guiding learners, monitoring academic progress, and creating supportive conditions for learning. Unlike parental involvement, which often focuses on specific activities, parental engagement incorporates parents' emotional, cognitive, and behavioural commitment toward learners' educational success (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). Digital literacy skills refer to learners' ability to access, evaluate, create, communicate, and safely use information through digital technologies (UNESCO, 2018). In the context of Competency-Based Education (CBE), parental engagement is essential because parents are considered co-educators who support learners in developing competencies required in the 21st century, including digital literacy (KICD, 2019).

International organisations have emphasized the importance of digital literacy and parental engagement in improving educational outcomes. UNESCO identifies digital literacy as a fundamental competency that enables individuals to effectively access, manage, analyse, and create information using digital technologies. UNICEF further highlights that digital skills are essential for children's participation in modern learning environments and require collaboration among schools, families, and communities (UNICEF, 2017). Similarly, the International Labour Organization (ILO) recognises digital competencies as critical skills for future employment and lifelong learning. Global initiatives by UNESCO and UNICEF encourage governments to develop inclusive digital learning systems that empower learners, teachers, and families through equitable access, safety, and meaningful participation in digital education.

In developed countries, parental engagement has increasingly been recognised as an important factor influencing learners' digital literacy development. In Finland, digital competence is integrated into national education frameworks, with parents encouraged to support responsible technology use at home. Schools collaborate with families to ensure learners develop safe and effective digital practices. In the United States, initiatives promoting family-school partnerships have highlighted the role of parents in guiding children's technology use, online safety, and digital learning activities. Canada has similarly promoted digital citizenship programmes involving parents, teachers, and communities to strengthen learners' digital skills. These examples demonstrate that developed education systems view parental support as a critical complement to school-based digital literacy instruction (OECD, 2021).

In Singapore, digital literacy development is supported through strong collaboration between schools and families. The country's digital education policies encourage parents to participate in guiding learners' online behaviour, cybersecurity awareness, and responsible use of technology. Australia has also emphasised partnerships between schools and families in developing students' digital capabilities through curriculum frameworks that promote digital citizenship and information literacy. Evidence from developed countries indicates that access to devices alone does not guarantee digital literacy development; rather, learners benefit when parents provide encouragement, supervision, and guidance in technology use. Therefore, parental

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engagement remains an important factor in ensuring that digital transformation in education produces meaningful learning outcomes (OECD, 2021).

In African countries, parental engagement in digital learning has become increasingly important due to expanding technology integration in education. In South Africa, Ngonzwana (2023) found that technology can strengthen communication between parents and teachers while improving parental access to learning resources. The study showed that digital platforms provide opportunities for parents to become more actively involved in learners' academic activities. However, challenges such as limited digital skills and unequal access to devices continue to affect effective parental support. These findings demonstrate that African education systems require not only technological infrastructure but also strategies that build parents' capacity to support learners' digital literacy development.

Similarly, studies from Nigeria, Uganda, and Rwanda highlight the influence of parental support on learners' digital competencies. In Nigeria, Adigwe et al. (2024) found that parents' educational levels and digital literacy significantly influenced their ability to mediate children's technology use. In Uganda, Datzberger et al. (2023) established that home support contributes significantly to learners' continued participation in technology-supported learning. Rwanda's experience during COVID-19 demonstrated that limited parental digital skills and inadequate access to technology constrained learners' participation in online education (Kapur, 2020). These findings suggest that strengthening parental digital capacity is essential for improving learners' digital literacy skills in African education contexts.

Within Kenya, digital literacy has become a major priority under the Competency-Based Curriculum, which identifies digital literacy as one of the core competencies learners should acquire. The Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) emphasises that technology should support teaching and learning across subjects, requiring cooperation among teachers, learners, parents, and communities (KICD, 2019). Studies conducted in different counties indicate varying levels of parental engagement in supporting digital learning. In Nakuru County, Komen and Ong'injo (2024) established that parents play an important role in facilitating access to ICT resources and guiding children's interaction with digital tools. These findings highlight the relevance of examining parental engagement within specific local contexts.

In Nairobi County, Etyang (2025) examined digital literacy and safety among Kenyan children and found that learners frequently seek guidance from parents when experiencing challenges related to digital technologies. The findings demonstrate that parents remain important sources of support in children's digital experiences. Similar concerns have emerged in other Kenyan contexts, where parents' ability to support digital learning is influenced by access to devices, digital knowledge, and awareness of online safety. Despite increasing emphasis on digital education, many studies have focused more on parental involvement generally rather than the specific concept of parental engagement in developing learners' digital literacy skills. Therefore, county-level investigations are necessary to understand how parental engagement practices influence digital competency development.

Kiambu County provides an important context for examining parental engagement and digital literacy development because it contains both urban and semi-rural learning environments.

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The county has experienced increasing adoption of digital learning initiatives due to national efforts to promote technology integration in schools. However, disparities in access to digital devices, internet connectivity, and parental digital skills may influence learners' ability to benefit from digital education opportunities. According to available evidence, digital access remains uneven across Kenya, with differences between urban and rural populations affecting technology-supported learning. Therefore, understanding parental engagement practices within Kiambu County is necessary for identifying factors that support or constrain learners' digital literacy development.

Gatundu South Sub-County presents a significant setting for investigating the influence of parental engagement on learners' digital literacy skills because it represents a semi-rural educational context where digital opportunities and challenges may differ from highly urbanised areas. Although national policies recognise parents as important partners in competency-based education, limited empirical evidence exists regarding how parents in Gatundu South support learners' digital literacy development. Issues such as availability of digital resources, parental digital competence, supervision of technology use, and home-school collaboration may determine learners' ability to acquire digital skills. Examining this context will provide evidence on the actual level of parental engagement practices and their influence on learners' digital literacy development.

The reviewed literature reveals a knowledge gap regarding the specific influence of the level of parental engagement practices on learners' digital literacy skills development in public junior schools. Previous studies have mainly examined parental involvement in general educational outcomes or technology access rather than measuring parental engagement as a multidimensional construct involving behavioural, cognitive, and emotional support. Additionally, limited research has focused on public junior schools within Gatundu South Sub-County, Kiambu County. Consequently, the current study seeks to fill this gap by determining how the level of parental engagement practices influences learners' digital literacy skills development, thereby generating context-specific evidence to support schools, parents, and policymakers in strengthening digital education outcomes

Statement of the Problem

Digital literacy has become a core competency under Kenya's Competence-Based Education, which explicitly requires active parental engagement as a foundation for learners' skill development (KICD, 2019, 2023). Despite this policy expectation, significant digital access disparities persist even in relatively well-connected counties. A joint survey by the Communications Authority of Kenya and the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics found that internet usage in Kiambu County stood at 54% (CA & KNBS, 2025), meaning nearly half of the county's population remains without internet access. Nationally, only 11.6% of Kenyans aged three years and above use computers, with usage only slightly higher in urban areas, suggesting that computer and digital device access in semi-rural sub-counties such as Gatundu South is likely considerably lower (CA & KNBS, 2025).

This infrastructural gap directly affects the ability of parents in Gatundu South Sub-County to fulfill the co-educator role envisioned under the Competence-Based Curriculum. Media reports

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have highlighted that parents across Kenya are struggling to adapt to their new role as co-educators under the Competence-Based Education, citing challenges related to limited digital skills, inadequate resources, and difficulty supporting technology-based learning at home (Mugambi, 2017; Otieno & Onyango, 2019; Ondieki, 2019; Kageni, 2019). Despite this, no study has empirically examined whether, or to what extent, parental engagement influences learners' digital literacy skills specifically in Gatundu South Sub-County. If left unaddressed, it is likely to worsen digital inequities, undermine competency-based learning goals, and jeopardize learners' overall development and digital safety, causing growing social concern among educators, parents, and policymakers. Therefore, this study aimed to examine the influence of parental engagement on learners' digital literacy skills in public junior schools in Gatundu South Sub-County, Kiambu County.

Research Question

The study was guided by the following research question:

What is the level of parental engagement in supporting learners' digital literacy skills in public junior schools in Gatundu South Sub-County, Kiambu County?

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on Epstein's Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence developed by Joyce Epstein, which explains that learners' educational outcomes are shaped through the shared responsibilities and interactions among families, schools, and communities. The theory identifies six dimensions of family-school partnerships: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community (Epstein, 2011). The theory suggests that effective collaboration among these stakeholders creates supportive learning environments that enhance learner achievement. In the context of this study, the theory provides a foundation for understanding how parental engagement practices, such as providing digital resources, supervising technology use, communicating with teachers, and supporting digital assignments, influence learners' digital literacy skills development in public junior schools. However, the theory has been criticised for being school-centred because it places schools at the centre of defining how parents should participate, with limited attention to parents' voices, preferences, and social contexts (Auerbach, 2011; Yamauchi et al., 2018).

The strengths of Epstein's theory make it relevant to the current study because it provides a comprehensive framework for examining different forms of parental engagement that contribute to learners' educational development. The theory recognises that learning does not occur exclusively within the classroom but is strengthened through meaningful partnerships between families and schools (Goodall, 2022). The dimensions of learning at home and communication directly relate to parental support for digital literacy development, where parents can guide learners in using digital devices, accessing online learning materials, practising digital safety, and completing technology-based assignments. Furthermore, the theory supports the development of

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interventions such as parent digital literacy training, home-school communication platforms, and collaborative strategies aimed at improving learners' digital competencies. Therefore, Epstein's framework provides a useful lens for assessing the level of parental engagement practices in supporting digital literacy skills among junior school learners.

Despite its usefulness, Epstein's theory has limitations that may affect its ability to fully explain parental engagement in digital literacy development. Critics argue that the theory mainly reflects a school-driven model of partnership where schools determine the nature and extent of parental involvement, potentially reducing the agency and experiences of families (Auerbach, 2011). The theory also provides limited explanation of how social, economic, and technological factors influence parents' ability to participate in learners' education. For example, parents in semi-rural communities may experience challenges related to digital skills, access to devices, internet connectivity, and financial resources, which may affect their capacity to support digital learning. To address these limitations, this study was further informed by Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory**.** Vygotsky emphasises that learning occurs through social interaction and guidance from more knowledgeable individuals, while Bronfenbrenner highlights the influence of family, school, community, and wider societal environments on child development (Vygotsky, 1978; Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Epstein's theory is applicable to this study because it directly explains the relationship between parental engagement practices and learners' digital literacy skills development within the Competency-Based Education framework. The learning-at-home component explains how parents contribute through supervision of digital activities, assisting learners with ICT-based tasks, encouraging responsible technology use, and providing access to digital learning resources. The communication component highlights the importance of parent-teacher interactions in monitoring learners' digital progress and addressing challenges related to technology use. Vygotsky's theory complements this perspective by explaining how parents scaffold learners' acquisition of digital skills through guidance, encouragement, and shared digital experiences. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory further explains how household conditions, school environments, community support, and broader digital policies influence parental engagement. Collectively, these theories provide a comprehensive framework for examining how the level of parental engagement practices influences learners' digital literacy skills development in public junior schools in Gatundu South Sub-County, Kiambu County, Kenya.

Review of Related Empirical Literature

In their study on the effects of parental guidance and digital media on children's early childhood literacy, Hidayatussoalihah et al. (2025). The study was conducted in the United States and employed a quantitative correlational design. The children in the study were aged four to six years old. A purposive sampling technique was used to find parents who have been spending time with their kids on digital media, kids who have consistent access to mobile devices, parents who have a basic understanding of technology and can fill out the research forms on their own, and kids who were willing to take part in the study. A total of thirty-two sets of parents and children were surveyed. Parental guidance is positively correlated with children's digital literacy, according to the findings. The development of digital literacy abilities in early infancy is greatly aided by

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parental guidance and the use of digital media. Nevertheless, the current study's intended participants are ninth graders, who are older and more capable of handling their own thoughts and learning than the study's focus on early childhood learners (ages 4-6 years). Additionally, the results cannot be applied to larger populations due to the small sample size. Rather than looking at parents' engagement in their children's education as a whole, the focus is on providing parents with information on how to use digital media in the classroom. This study aims to fill these gaps by interviewing more stakeholders, such as students, parents, educators, and principals. Within the context of the CBE framework, this study will also look at how involved parents are in helping their children develop digital literacy abilities in Kenyan public junior schools.

Sun et al. (2024) investigated the gap in digital media literacy between elementary school students in rural and urban areas of China. A total of 2848 primary school pupils from both urban and rural areas were included in the investigation, which utilized stratified random sampling. In order to gather this data, a survey questionnaire with 44 question themes was used. The data were analyzed by first doing a bivariate correlation analysis of the factors affecting digital media literacy among primary school pupils in rural and urban areas, as well as between these students and their families. The data were analyzed using a t-test. Students' digital media literacy is significantly improved by parental education, parental mediation, and students' own device use, according to the research. The most effective kind of parental mediation is... Having said that, this study does have a few holes. Research took place in China, a country with a unique mix of rural-urban dynamics, cultural norms, parental involvement, and technology infrastructure in its educational systems. No investigation into how school administrators, instructors, and other school personnel might facilitate parental engagement was conducted. The study did not measure the amount of parental involvement in helping their children develop digital literacy abilities; instead, it looked at parental mediation as a possible cause. Incorporating teacher and principal viewpoints, this study aims to fill these gaps while also defining parental engagement as a multi-faceted notion including lending a helping hand, keeping in touch, providing direction, and taking part in online educational pursuits.

Szabo et al. (2024) performed a literature review that looked at twelve empirical studies on parental involvement in their children's digital education in the US and UK. The studies centered on pare4nts' roles as mediators and the correlation between parents' socioeconomic status and their children's digital competence. We utilized a mixed-method strategy. Overall, parents were quite worried about their children's online safety, according to results on parents as mediators in digital education. Parents should establish limits on their children's screen time because research shows that parents have a significant impact on their children's online conduct (Tomczyk & Potyrala, 2021). Primary empirical research produces novel data particular to a certain environment; however, Szabo et al.'s work relied on a thorough examination of previous material. There is a lack of methodology here. Instead of focusing on how parents may help their children become digital citizens in the classroom, the study looked at how parental mediation and socioeconomic status affect children's digital competence. To fill these gaps, this study looks at parental engagement in Kenyan public junior schools via a broader lens that includes the supply of digital materials, supervision, and monitoring.

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Sonnenschein et al. (2023) looked at parental support in their children's usage of digital devices for learning at home in the United States before and after COVID-19. The study focused on elementary school kids. The study used a quantitative survey approach to inquire about 392 elementary school students' parents' involvement in their children's digital learning and the availability of digital gadgets for their children. Online structured questionnaires were used to gather data for the study. According to the results, nearly all households have access to the internet, and most of those families let their children use the internet. It was reported by just 1% of parents that their children were not allowed to use any of the devices. Between three and five of the devices on the list were within reach of 67% of the kids. The study found that parents are very important in helping their children become digital citizens by supplying them with digital tools and showing them how to use them effectively in the classroom. The study's limitations include its reliance on a quantitative survey design with organized questionnaires given to parents, which left out students, instructors, and school administrators. These gaps will be filled using a convergent mixed-methods design that uses many data sources. Additionally, the research did not account for the realities in underdeveloped nations because it was carried out in a developed setting with abundant access to digital resources. Using Kenyan public junior schools as a case study, this research will analyze the relationship between various aspects of parental involvement and students' digital literacy within CBE.

Using a cross-sectional study design, Kyei-Arthur et al. 2024 investigated the relationship between parental supervision and their children's internet use in Ghana, spanning the ages of 8 to 17. Statistical and qualitative secondary data were culled from the Gender, Children, and Social Protection Ministry for this research. We used SPSS 26 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) to examine the quantitative data. The qualitative data, on the other hand, were analyzed using NVivo version 10 and the constant comparison approach. The results showed that nearly all of the children surveyed had used the Internet on a single occasion. According to the data, the most common ways to access the Internet were via smartphones (45.7), cafés (21.7), and personal computers (21.6). The majority of youngsters (56.7%) reported that they were either not supervised or only occasionally had an adult around when they used their smartphones to surf the web. This may cause kids to become addicted to the Internet, see graphic images of violence online, or participate in fraudulent operations. Numerous children were found to be surfing the Internet unsupervised, according to the quantitative results. The qualitative results corroborated the quantitative findings, which demonstrated that parents lack the technological know-how to adequately supervise and monitor their children's internet activities. But rather than parents actively participating to help their children develop digital literacy skills as part of a school curriculum, Kyei-Arthur's research shows that parents are more concerned with monitoring and controlling their children's internet use. There is a lack of conceptualization here. The results were also shallow and generalized because they were based on secondary sources. Using a convergent design to gather primary data, this study aims to fill these gaps by measuring parental participation at levels other than only supervision and control of internet usage.

Ezema-Kalu (2024) looked into the relationship between digital parenting and pupils' achievement in secondary school in Nigeria. The purpose of the research was to synthesize and

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review the current literature on the topic of digital parenting and students' academic achievement in Nigerian schools. The primary means of gathering information was document analysis. The study's reliance on literature analysis precludes the use of any primary data collected from students or their parents, and the lack of sampling further compounds this problem. Secondary sources were the backbone of the study's methodology for tracking digital device use, determining screen time regulation strategies, and bolstering online education. By controlling screen time, giving access to educational materials, encouraging digital literacy, and keeping technology use in check, it demonstrated that good digital parenting may improve learning. The study found that students are more likely to benefit from digital resources for learning when their parents offer excellent guidance on how to use them. Parents can keep their children from getting distracted by social media or video games when they use their electronic gadgets if they keep a close eye on them. The study primarily viewed parental involvement in terms of control and regulation, and its focus was on academic performance rather than learners' digital literacy skills. Therefore, this study fills that void by investigating how actively public junior schools in Kenya are helping their ninth graders' digital literacy skills within the CBE framework.

Using previously published research from scholarly journals, Komen & Ongijo (2024) examined the barriers to parental participation in early childhood education in Nakuru that were based on the use of information and communication technologies. Parental participation, obstacles, and ICT-based childhood education were the three search criteria used to identify 9000 articles in the study. The findings showed that parental views on media affected their children's tech habits. To encourage their children to think creatively, learn new things, and discover the world around them, parents are increasingly equipping their children with digital devices like smartphones, tablets, and computers. Another key finding from the study is the significant role that parents have in monitoring and guiding their children's digital use. But, in this particular educational setting, the study did not conduct any empirical testing of links between parental involvement and students' digital literacy results. The idea of parental involvement was framed through the provision of supervision and information and communication technology resources. To fill this knowledge vacuum, this study used a convergent parallel design to collect quantitative and qualitative data on parental participation levels, which is a multi-dimensional construct.

Research Design and Methodology

This study will employ a mixed-methods approach using a convergent parallel research design to examine the influence of the level of parental engagement practices on learners' digital literacy skills development in public junior schools in Gatundu South Sub-County, Kiambu County, Kenya. The mixed-methods approach is appropriate because it enables the researcher to collect and integrate both quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between parental engagement and learners' digital literacy skills. The quantitative component will adopt a cross-sectional survey design to collect data from learners, parents, and teachers at a specific point in time, while the qualitative component will use phenomenological inquiry to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of heads of institutions regarding parental engagement and digital literacy development (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The

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design will allow triangulation of findings from different respondents and provide deeper insights into how parental engagement practices influence digital learning outcomes.

The study will be conducted in Gatundu South Sub-County, Kiambu County, Kenya**,** which provides an appropriate context for examining parental engagement and digital literacy development due to variations in digital access, parental digital skills, and technology-supported learning opportunities. The target population will consist of 58 public junior schools, 58 heads of institutions, 164 teachers, 2,644 Grade Nine learners, and 2,644 corresponding parents/guardians. Grade Nine learners will be targeted because they have experienced sustained exposure to digital literacy activities under the Competency-Based Education system and can provide relevant information regarding their digital competencies and parental support. Teachers and heads of institutions will provide information on school-level practices, while parents will provide insights into home-based digital learning support. The study will therefore use the learner-parent relationship as an important basis for examining parental engagement practices and digital literacy development.

The study will apply both probability and non-probability sampling techniques to obtain a representative sample. Stratified random sampling will be used to select public junior schools from the four zones of Gatundu South Sub-County, while simple random sampling will be applied within each stratum to ensure equal representation of schools. Seventeen schools will be selected from the 58 public junior schools. Purposive sampling will be used to select heads of institutions because they possess relevant knowledge regarding parental engagement strategies, school policies, and digital literacy implementation. Stratified and simple random sampling will be used to select teachers, while systematic sampling will be applied to select Grade Nine learners from class registers. Parents corresponding to the sampled learners will also participate to provide information on their level of engagement in supporting digital literacy skills development at home.

Data will be collected using questionnaires, interview guides, document analysis guides, and observation schedules. Questionnaires will be administered to learners, teachers, and parents to measure parental engagement practices, parent-teacher communication, and learners' digital literacy skills using structured Likert-scale items. Interviews will be conducted with heads of institutions to obtain deeper explanations regarding school practices, challenges, and strategies for strengthening parental engagement in digital learning. Document analysis will examine relevant school records, ICT policies, communication records, and parental participation documents, while observation will assess the availability of digital resources and evidence of digital learning support. Quantitative data will be analysed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis, while qualitative data will be analysed thematically. Ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and protection of learners' rights, will be observed throughout the research process.

Presentation, Interpretation and Discussion of Findings

The first research question sought to establish the level of parental engagement in supporting learners' digital literacy skills. Teachers, parents, and learners rated statements on a five-point scale (5 = Always, 4 = Often/Most of the time, 3 = Sometimes, 2 = Rarely, 1 = Never). The findings are presented in Tables 1, 2, and 3.

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Table 1
Teachers' Ratings of the Level of Parental Engagement (n = 49)

Statement	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Mean	Std. Dev.
Parents provide learners with digital devices for learning	0 (0.0%)	5 (14.3%)	19 (54.3%)	11 (31.4%)	0 (0.0%)	2.83	0.66
Parents provide internet/data support for digital learning activities	3 (8.6%)	3 (8.6%)	17 (48.6%)	12 (34.3%)	0 (0.0%)	2.91	0.89
Parents assist learners in completing digital assignments	3 (8.6%)	8 (22.9%)	15 (42.9%)	7 (20.0%)	2 (5.7%)	3.09	1.01
Parents supervise learners' use of ICT devices at home	0 (0.0%)	7 (20.0%)	21 (60.0%)	7 (20.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3.00	0.64
Parents guide learners on safe and responsible online behavior	0 (0.0%)	8 (22.9%)	14 (40.0%)	11 (31.4%)	2 (5.7%)	2.80	0.87

Source: *Field Data (2026)*

Table 1 presents teachers' perceptions regarding the level of parental engagement practices in supporting learners' digital literacy skills development. The findings indicate a moderate level of parental engagement, with item means ranging from 2.80 to 3.09 and an overall composite mean of **2.93 (SD = 0.59)**. The highest-rated practice was parents assisting learners in completing digital assignments (M = 3.09, SD = 1.01), where 17 teachers (48.6%) indicated that parents always or often provided support. This suggests that parental engagement is more visible in academic assistance related to specific learning tasks. However, provision of digital devices received a lower rating (M = 2.83, SD = 0.66), with most teachers indicating that parents only sometimes provide devices. This implies that while parents attempt to support digital learning, financial limitations may restrict their ability to provide technological resources.

The findings further show that parental engagement in digital safety practices was relatively limited. Guidance on safe and responsible online behaviour recorded the lowest mean score among teachers (M = 2.80, SD = 0.87), with only 8 teachers (22.9%) indicating that parents often provided such guidance. This indicates that many parents may participate in digital learning without having adequate knowledge of online safety, cybersecurity, and responsible technology

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use. The finding aligns with Epstein's (2011) learning-at-home dimension, which suggests that parental engagement extends beyond providing academic support to include creating appropriate learning environments. In this case, parents appear more comfortable supporting observable academic activities than providing digital mentorship.

The qualitative findings from heads of institutions supported the teachers' ratings. Interviews revealed that parental engagement existed but differed depending on parents' digital competence and access to resources. Head of Institution C explained that engagement was stronger among families where parents possessed digital skills and access to devices, while Head of Institution F noted that some parents provided support for assignments and supervision but experienced resource limitations. These views demonstrate that parental engagement is influenced not only by willingness but also by socioeconomic and technological conditions. A head of institution further explained:

> Parents are willing to support their children's digital learning, especially when teachers communicate clearly about assignments requiring technology. However, some parents do not have smartphones, internet connectivity, or enough knowledge on how digital platforms work. As a result, they may want to help their children but lack the confidence and skills required to provide meaningful support. Schools therefore need to work together with parents by offering digital awareness sessions and creating simple communication channels that enable parents to participate effectively (Head of Institution C, personal communication, 2026).

This finding was also reflected in document analysis, where school communication records showed evidence of parent-teacher communication through messages and meetings regarding learner assignments. However, ICT-related documents indicated variation in home digital support because some learners depended mainly on school-based resources. Observation findings similarly showed differences in access to digital devices and ICT facilities among schools, suggesting that parental engagement operates within broader resource constraints.

Table 2

Parents' Self-Ratings of the Level of Parental Engagement (n = 347)

Statement	Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Mean	Std. Dev.
I provide my child with digital devices (phone/tablet/computer) for learning	6 (2.4%)	40 (16.1%)	111 (44.8%)	71 (28.6%)	20 (8.1%)	2.76	0.90
I provide internet or data bundles to support my child's learning	4 (1.6%)	41 (16.5%)	111 (44.8%)	77 (31.0%)	15 (6.0%)	2.77	0.85

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Statement	Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Mean	Std. Dev.
I supervise how my child uses ICT devices at home	7 (2.8%)	37 (14.9%)	106 (42.7%)	83 (33.5%)	15 (6.0%)	2.75	0.88
I assist my child in completing ICT-based assignments	8 (3.2%)	38 (15.3%)	102 (41.1%)	81 (32.7%)	19 (7.7%)	2.74	0.92
I guide my child on safe and responsible use of the internet	2 (0.8%)	41 (16.5%)	111 (44.8%)	79 (31.9%)	15 (6.0%)	2.74	0.83

Source: *Field Data (2026)*

Table 2 indicates that parents perceived their engagement in supporting learners' digital literacy skills as moderate, with an overall composite mean of 2.75 (SD = 0.66)**.** The item means were closely distributed between 2.74 and 2.77, suggesting consistency in parents' perceptions across different engagement activities. Providing internet or data bundles was rated highest (M = 2.77, SD = 0.85), indicating that parents considered connectivity support as one of their main contributions. However, assisting learners with ICT-based assignments and guiding safe internet use recorded the lowest mean scores (M = 2.74), suggesting limited confidence among parents in providing advanced digital support.

The findings imply that parents generally recognise the importance of digital learning but their engagement is often restricted to basic forms of support, such as providing access to data or devices. More complex engagement practices, including helping learners solve digital challenges, evaluating online information, and promoting responsible digital citizenship, appear less developed. This may be attributed to differences in parents' educational backgrounds, digital literacy levels, and familiarity with learning technologies.

Interview data from heads of institutions reinforced this interpretation. Several administrators reported that parents were supportive but required additional empowerment. Head of Institution J explained that although many parents contributed resources, the extent of support differed significantly between households due to variations in income and digital awareness. The head observed that some parents were able to monitor digital activities effectively, while others relied entirely on teachers because they lacked technological confidence.

Document analysis supported these findings by showing that schools had records of parent meetings and communication concerning learner progress; however, there was limited evidence of structured programmes aimed at training parents on digital literacy support. Observations also revealed that while schools had some ICT infrastructure, learner access to devices outside school remained uneven. Therefore, the findings suggest the need for schools and education stakeholders to shift from expecting parents to naturally possess digital support skills toward deliberately

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building parental digital capacity through training, awareness programmes, and stronger school-family partnerships.

Table 3

Learners' Ratings of the Level of Parental Engagement (n = 347)

Statement	Always	Most of time	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Mean	Std. Dev.
My parent/guardian provides me with digital devices for schoolwork	3 (1.2%)	35 (14.1%)	92 (37.1%)	92 (37.1%)	26 (10.5%)	2.58	0.90
My parent/guardian supervises how I use digital devices	2 (0.8%)	36 (14.5%)	98 (39.5%)	84 (33.9%)	28 (11.3%)	2.60	0.90
My parent/guardian knows the digital platforms I use in school	3 (1.2%)	33 (13.3%)	103 (41.5%)	86 (34.7%)	23 (9.3%)	2.62	0.87
My parent/guardian helps me with digital assignments	8 (3.2%)	40 (16.1%)	73 (29.4%)	101 (40.7%)	26 (10.5%)	2.61	0.98
My parent/guardian encourages me to use technology for learning	3 (1.2%)	31 (12.5%)	102 (41.1%)	86 (34.7%)	26 (10.5%)	2.59	0.88
My parent understands how digital tools help my learning	4 (1.6%)	36 (14.5%)	87 (35.1%)	87 (35.1%)	34 (13.7%)	2.55	0.96
My parent/guardian believes digital literacy is important for my future	7 (2.8%)	33 (13.3%)	92 (37.1%)	95 (38.3%)	21 (8.5%)	2.64	0.92
My parent/guardian sets rules or limits around my digital device use	5 (2.0%)	33 (13.3%)	87 (35.1%)	91 (36.7%)	32 (12.9%)	2.55	0.95

Source: *Field Data (2026)*

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Table 3 presents learners' perceptions of parental engagement and shows the lowest ratings among the three respondent groups. The overall composite mean was 2.59 (SD = 0.63)**,** with item means ranging from 2.55 to 2.64. Learners rated parents' belief in the importance of digital literacy highest (M = 2.64, SD = 0.92), indicating that learners perceived their parents as recognising the value of digital skills. However, practical support activities, such as parents understanding digital tools used for learning and setting limits on digital device use, recorded the lowest mean scores (M = 2.55).

The difference between learners' ratings and those of teachers and parents is significant because learners experience daily digital support directly. While teachers rated parental engagement highest (M = 2.93), followed by parents (M = 2.75), learners rated it lowest (M = 2.59). This suggests that parents may demonstrate visible engagement through school communication and occasional support, but learners may experience limited daily guidance at home. The finding highlights the difference between perceived engagement and actual learner experiences.

Head of Institution interviews confirmed this variation. Administrators indicated that some parents communicate with schools and provide resources but struggle to guide learners in technology use. One head explained that parents often focus on ensuring learners complete assignments but have limited involvement in teaching responsible digital behaviour.

The observation guide findings further supported learners' perspectives. In some schools, learners demonstrated confidence using digital devices during lessons, but evidence of home-based digital support varied. Document analysis also showed limited records of structured parental participation in ICT-related activities beyond general school communication.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that parental engagement in Gatundu South Sub-County exists at a moderate level but remains largely focused on basic support rather than deeper digital mentorship. Strengthening parental digital literacy, improving access to technology, and enhancing school-family collaboration are therefore necessary to improve learners' digital literacy skills development.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the level of parental engagement practices significantly contributes to learners' digital literacy skills development in public junior schools in Gatundu South Sub-County, although the extent of engagement remains moderate. Parents, teachers, and learners acknowledged that parental support exists through provision of digital resources, supervision of technology use, assistance with digital assignments, and encouragement of digital learning. However, engagement was stronger in basic academic support than in advanced areas such as digital safety guidance, online responsibility, and effective use of digital platforms. The study further concludes that parental engagement is influenced by factors such as access to digital devices, internet connectivity, parents' digital competence, and socioeconomic conditions. Therefore, improving learners' digital literacy requires stronger collaboration between schools, parents, and other education stakeholders.

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Recommendations

The study recommends that public junior schools in Gatundu South Sub-County establish structured parental digital literacy empowerment programmes to equip parents with skills necessary to support learners' technology use at home. Schools should strengthen communication with parents through digital platforms, regular workshops, and guidance sessions on online safety, responsible technology use, and supporting ICT-based assignments. The Ministry of Education and other stakeholders should enhance access to digital resources by supporting schools and families with affordable connectivity and appropriate learning technologies. Parents should be encouraged to move beyond providing devices and data support by actively engaging in learners' digital experiences through supervision, guidance, and encouragement. These measures would strengthen home-school partnerships and improve learners' digital literacy skills development.

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