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## EXAMINING THE CHALLENGES OF FLEXIBLE WORK SCHEDULES ON PARENTAL PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOL LIFE: A CASE STUDY"

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### Abstract

This conceptual paper sought to examine the challenges of flexible work schedules on parental participation in school life particularly in the context of dual-income families. The main question underpinning this study is: How do flexible work arrangements impact parents' ability to engage in school activities and support their children's education? A qualitative study in nature, this research employs an extensive literature review comprising recent studies on work-life balance, parental involvement and education. An interpretive data analysis will be conducted to gain a deeper understanding of how flexible schedules both enable and constrain parental engagement in school life. Findings reveal that while flexible work schedules offer parents more opportunities for involvement, they also introduce new challenges encompassing conflicting demands between work and family responsibilities, mental fatigue and varying levels of accessibility for different socio-economic groups. The study is significant in shedding light on how modern work arrangements can both enhance and limit parental participation by offering insights for schools and policymakers to better accommodate working parents. Limitations include a reliance on secondary data with findings primarily drawn from existing literature and the need for further empirical research to validate these conceptual conclusions.

*Keywords: flexible work schedules, parental participation, school life, work-life balance, performance*

### Introduction

Notably, Hokke et al., (2024) believe that the flexible work schedules have emerged as a significant component of modern employment practices particularly in dual-income families. Clearly, these arrangements allow parents to adapt their working hours to accommodate family responsibilities including participation in school activities and supporting their children's education (Eriksen & Stefansen, 2022). Thus, the impact of flexible work schedules on parental involvement has been explored in various contexts revealing both benefits and challenges (O'Connor et al., 2022). Undoubtedly, flexible work schedules can significantly enhance parental involvement in children's education. Similarly, Wang & Bai (2024) found that parents with the ability to adjust their work hours may find it easier to attend school events, parent-teacher meetings or extracurricular activities.

Bender et al., (2022) highlight that parents who work flexible hours report higher levels of engagement in their children's schooling. As a result, this increased involvement is associated with improved academic performance and social development in children. On the other hand, Wang & Cheng (2024) found that it is essential to acknowledge that flexible work arrangements can also pose challenges for some families. Thus, Webster (2022) holds a view that not all parents have equal access to such options and those without may feel sidelined in their children's education. In countries like Sweden, where flexible work policies are prevalent parents frequently participate in school activities thereby contributing to a supportive educational environment (Persson & Rossin-Slater, 2024). Ultimately, while flexible work schedules present opportunities for greater parental engagement, the disparities in access to these arrangements can impact the overall involvement of parents in their children's education.

However, Kan & Chen (2022) hold a view that the benefits of flexible work schedules are not uniformly experienced across all dual-income families. For many, the pressure to manage work commitments and family responsibilities can create stress and conflict. In African contexts, where economic pressures often necessitate dual incomes, parents may struggle to balance flexible work arrangements with the demands of their jobs (Clague, A. K. (2024). Subsequently, in Nigeria, many parents working in informal sectors lack the security and flexibility that formal employment offers thereby impeding their ability to participate in school activities (Akanbi & Ojo, 2022; Salami et al., 2024). This situation underscores the disparity in how flexible work schedules can impact families depending on their employment context and economic stability. Clearly, Sherman & Schafft (2022) found that the challenges faced by parents in informal sectors can exacerbate feelings of exclusion from their children's educational experiences thereby leading to a further divide in parental involvement. Ultimately, while flexible work schedules present opportunities for greater parental engagement, the reality for many families particularly in economically vulnerable positions may differ significantly illustrating the need for policies that consider the diverse experiences of all families in the workforce (Childress et al., 2024).

According to Cooper-Kahn & Dietzel (2024) the ability of parents to engage with their children's education through flexible work schedules can undoubtedly influence educational outcomes. Studies consistently indicate that parental involvement is a critical factor in children's academic success. A comprehensive review by Villares et al., (2024) found that students whose parents are actively involved in their education tend to achieve higher grades and maintain better attendance records. Likewise, in South Africa, where educational disparities persist dual-income families often face challenges in balancing work commitments with involvement in school activities (Khalid & Malik, 2024). On the other hand, the introduction of flexible work policies could mitigate some of these challenges allowing parents to support their children more effectively. According to Cook (2024) this is particularly important in under-resourced schools where parental engagement can significantly enhance educational opportunities and improve the overall learning environment for students. Ultimately, while flexible work schedules present both opportunities and challenges their potential to improve parental involvement in education remains clear especially in contexts where additional support is most needed (Kirksey et al., 2024).

Globally, the impact of flexible work schedules on parental involvement varies significantly. For instance, in countries like Canada and Australia policies promoting work-life balance have been directly linked to increased parental engagement in school activities (Bradley et al., 2023). According to Cooper-Kahn & Dietzel (2024) parents in these regions are more likely to attend school functions and assist with homework when they have flexible schedules. Conversely, in regions with less stringent labour laws like parts of the United States many parents especially those in low-wage jobs face barriers to flexibility (Mindell & Reynolds, 2023). As a result, this discrepancy highlights that while flexible work schedules can enhance parental involvement, structural factors such as job security and economic conditions play a crucial role in determining which families benefit most from these arrangements. Thus, the variation in how flexible work policies impact parental participation highlights the importance of broader systemic reforms that resolves the economic realities of diverse families (Stoller, 2023).

According to Lee et al., (2022) flexible work schedules have the potential to significantly impact dual-income families' ability to participate in school activities and support their children's education. Undoubtedly, Rees et al., (2023) discovered that these arrangements can facilitate greater parental involvement however, challenges remain particularly in contexts where economic pressures limit flexibility. Similarly, flexible work schedules offer parents more opportunities to engage in their children's schooling. On the other hand, Kincaid & Reynolds (2024) hold a view that in economically strained environments this flexibility is often compromised by leaving families unable to fully benefit from such arrangements. As a result, the implications of these dynamics are critical for understanding how to foster environments that support children's educational success (Oyserman & Dawson, 2024). Therefore, future policies should prioritize enhancing work-life balance for dual-income families particularly in under-resourced areas to ensure that all children have access to the support they need for academic achievement (Thomas-Pye, 2024).

**The purpose** is to explore how flexible work schedules impact dual-income families' ability to participate in school activities and support their children's education.

**The main question** is: How do flexible work schedules affect parental participation in school activities and engagement in their children's education?

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for examining the challenges of flexible work schedules on parental participation in school life is grounded in two key theories: Work-Family Balance Theory and Ecological Systems Theory. Work-Family Balance Theory (WFBT) posits that individuals strive to manage and harmonize the demands of their professional and personal lives, often experiencing conflict when these roles clash (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

Flexible work schedules, in theory, are designed to alleviate this tension by offering parents the opportunity to better align work responsibilities with family duties, including participation in school activities. However, this theory also underscores that the effectiveness of flexible schedules is contingent on factors such as the nature of employment, socioeconomic conditions, and the level of workplace autonomy. In many cases, these schedules do not fully alleviate the burden of balancing professional and personal roles, particularly for dual-income families or those in under-resourced environments.

Ecological Systems Theory (EST) by Bronfenbrenner (1979), on the other hand, places parental participation in a broader context of interrelated systems. Undoubtedly, the family, school, workplace and societal structures (macrosystem) collectively shape the challenges and opportunities parents face. This theory emphasizes the importance of understanding how workplace policies, educational environments and economic circumstances interact to influence parental engagement. For instance, even in settings where flexible schedules exist, economic pressures and a lack of supportive policies can severely limit a parent's ability to participate meaningfully in their children's school activities. Therefore, these theories collectively provide a comprehensive lens for analysing how flexible work schedules influence parental involvement by highlighting both the opportunities and constraints within the larger societal framework.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **DATA COLLECTION**

This qualitative study utilizes an extensive literature review, drawing from recent research on work-life balance, parental involvement and education. By examining scholarly articles, books and reports published recently (2022-2024), the study provides a comprehensive understanding of the intricacies surrounding flexible work schedules and their impact on parental engagement in school life. The literature review explores various dimensions, including the benefits and challenges of work-life balance, the role of parental involvement in student success and the socioeconomic factors that influence these dynamics.

### **DATA ANALYSIS**

An interpretive data analysis will be conducted to explore how flexible work schedules influence parental engagement in school life focusing on both the enabling and constraining factors. This approach allows for a deeper insight focusing on both enabling and constraining factors as reported through a scholarly lens.

### **Findings**

Flexible work schedules significantly enhance parental participation in school activities and engagement in children's education. These arrangements allow parents to adjust their working hours, making it easier to attend events such as parent-teacher meetings and school performances. Parents who can leave work early or start later often report higher levels of involvement in their children's educational lives. Research indicates that parental engagement is linked to better academic outcomes for children. When parents participate actively in school activities, students tend to achieve higher grades and demonstrate improved social skills. Conversely, for families without flexible schedules, parental involvement may diminish, negatively impacting children's educational experiences. The benefits of flexibility are not uniformly experienced across all socio-economic groups. Higher-income families may leverage flexible work to enhance engagement, while lower-income families often face barriers, such as job insecurity and unpredictable schedules impeding their ability to participate. Thus, while flexible work schedules can be advantageous systemic issues must be resolved to ensure equitable access to participation opportunities for all families.

### **Discussion- Conclusions**

Eden et al., (2024) discovered that the engagement of parents in educational matters plays pivotal role regarding children's performance. In many African and South African contexts, however, various challenges impede active parental participation in school activities. Nonetheless, factors such as economic instability, long working hours and cultural norms contribute to this disengagement which is adversely affecting children's educational performance (Lester et al., 2022). In this discourse, the authors will rigorously examine the challenges and adversarial effects of parental non-involvement on children's performance alongside a detailed analysis of how flexible work schedules can potentially enhance parental engagement in their children's education.

### **Challenges of Parental Involvement**

Lombardi et al., (2024) found that one of the primary challenges to parental involvement in education is economic hardship. In many African countries, parents often work in low-paying, informal jobs that demand long

hours leaving little time for school-related activities (Nazari et al., 2024). Notably, in South Africa, a significant proportion of parents' report working multiple jobs to sustain their families which limits their availability for attending parent-teacher meetings or school events (Jacobs, 2024). This economic pressure compromises their capacity to engage with their children's education actively. Research indicates that students whose parents are less involved in their education tend to experience lower academic achievement and increased behavioural issues (Kincaid & Reynolds, 2024). Thus, the economic landscape plays a crucial role in shaping parental involvement which in turn affects children's educational outcomes.

#### Adversarial Effects on Children's Performance due to non-parental involvement

The adversarial effects of parental disengagement are significant and multifaceted. According to Cooper-Kahn & Dietzel (2024) children whose parents do not actively participate in their education often struggle academically and may exhibit lower self-esteem and motivation. However, in Kenya it was found that students with less parental involvement were more likely to drop out of school and achieve lower grades (Baraki & Gori, 2022; Msacky et al., 2024). Furthermore, the lack of parental engagement can lead to children developing negative attitudes towards school viewing it as unimportant or irrelevant. Clearly, Hynes & Crooke (2024) found that this disconnection can create a cycle of disengagement where the absence of support contributes to poor performance subsequently reinforcing the parents' lack of involvement. Additionally, children may miss out on developing essential social skills as they are not encouraged to engage in collaborative school activities that foster teamwork and communication (Vanhove et al., 2024).

#### The Role of Flexible Work Schedules in the education of children

Fan & Moen (2024) believe that flexible work schedules can significantly enhance parental participation in school activities by allowing parents to adjust their working hours to accommodate school commitments. In this instance, in South Africa, some organizations have begun to implement policies that enable parents to work from home or modify their hours to attend school functions (Bam et al., 2024). This flexibility empowers parents to be more involved in their children's education, leading to positive outcomes for students. Ebele (2024) indicates that when parents are able to attend school events, they are more likely to stay engaged with their children's academic progress and provide the necessary support for homework and study. Consequently, Hokke et al., (2024) suggest that the introduction of flexible work arrangements can serve as a pivotal factor in improving educational outcomes for children particularly in contexts where parental involvement is low.

#### Barriers to Flexible work schedules

Despite the potential benefits of flexible work schedules, not all families have access to these arrangements. Annor et al., (2024) found that in many African contexts, particularly among lower-income families job insecurity and the prevalence of informal work may limit the ability to adopt flexible schedules. Thus, parents working in agriculture or informal markets often face rigid work demands that do not allow for flexibility thereby constraining their participation in school activities (Jacobs, 2024). Moreover, even when flexible work policies are available cultural expectations may discourage fathers from taking on active roles in their children's education placing the burden of involvement primarily on mothers (Villares et al., 2024). This gender disparity can further exacerbate efforts to create a supportive educational environment for children as both parents play crucial roles in reinforcing the importance of education (Kincaid & Reynolds, 2024).

#### Implications for Educational Policy on parental involvement

To address the challenges of parental disengagement and maximize the benefits of flexible work schedules systemic changes in educational policy and workplace practices are imperative in nature. Thus, Kitchen et al., (2024) indicate that policymakers should advocate for laws that promote flexible work arrangements particularly for low-income families. Similarly, Lane (2024) believes that schools can adopt proactive measures to engage parents such as organizing events during evenings or weekends when more parents can attend. Notably, some schools in South Africa have initiated community engagement programs that connect parents with local businesses to create more flexible employment opportunities (Richmond & Sibthorp, 2024). Notably, Maker (2022) suggests that by fostering collaborative partnerships between schools and the community families can receive the support needed to engage in their children's education actively. Furthermore, Liu et al., (2024) hold a

view that schools should provide resources and training for parents to better understand the educational system and how they can contribute to their children's success.

Undeniably, Shepherd et al., (2022) indicated that the challenges and adversarial effects of parental disengagement in education are significant particularly in African and South African contexts. As a result, Duchini & Van Effenterre (2024) believe that flexible work schedules have the potential to enhance parental involvement and ultimately improve children's academic performance. However, barriers such as economic instability and cultural norms must be resolved to ensure equitable access to participation opportunities (Miller et al., (2024). By fostering supportive environments through policy changes and community engagement stakeholders can promote greater parental involvement leading to enhanced educational experiences for all children. Ultimately, Pearson et al., (2022) assert that the goal should be to create a holistic support system that empowers families to engage actively in their children's educational journeys.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study highlighted the intricate relationship between flexible work schedules and parental participation in school life. Notably, flexible work arrangements provide parents with opportunities to engage more actively in their children's education. However, this flexibility does not unequivocally guarantee increased involvement. Challenges such as balancing work demands and family responsibilities often impede consistent engagement. Similarly, some parents experience ambiguity in delineating personal and professional boundaries which can hinder their ability to participate fully in school activities. Nonetheless, schools can mitigate these challenges by fostering communication strategies that consider the complexities of flexible work arrangements. Conversely, failure to accommodate these working conditions might result in disengagement from parents who feel unsupported.

On the other hand, there is a need for policies that unequivocally emphasize collaboration between parents and schools, ensuring a structured approach to promoting parental involvement. Undoubtedly, the implementation of flexible work schedules can be advantageous but the effectiveness largely depends on creating an environment that supports parents in managing their dual responsibilities. In this regard, establishing clear communication channels, mutual understanding and realistic expectations between parents and schools is essential for enhancing participation and promoting positive educational outcomes.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings, several recommendations can enhance parental participation amidst flexible work schedules. Notably, schools should establish clear communication channels such as digital platforms to keep parents informed of school activities and expectations. Similarly, flexible meeting times or virtual conferences should be offered to accommodate diverse work schedules. Nonetheless, it is crucial for schools to provide opportunities for parents to share feedback on their involvement experiences. On the other hand, employers can support parental participation by recognizing and accommodating employees' school-related commitments. Conversely, rigid workplace policies that overlook parental responsibilities could discourage engagement. Unequivocally, fostering a collaborative culture between schools and employers can help bridge the gap in participation. Additionally, schools should offer workshops to guide parents on balancing their work and school involvement responsibilities effectively by creating a mutually supportive environment that benefits both the child and the school community.

## **LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

Limitations in this study include a reliance on secondary data with findings primarily drawn from existing literature and there is need for further empirical research to validate these conceptual conclusions.

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