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School-family collaboration and academic success: forms, practices and methods of parental involvement in the Ursuline Sisters' schools in Tildonk, Goma

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ABSTRACT

This study analyses the collaboration between school and family in five schools run by the Ursuline Sisters of Tildonk in Goma and its association with certain indicators of academic progress. It adopts a quantitative, descriptive and analytical approach involving 361 parents and eight school leaders. The data were analysed using SPSS 27. The results

show that 97.0 per cent of parents maintain contact with the school, mainly via the communication book (69.5 per cent). Discipline (66.8 per cent), academic performance (46.0 per cent) and school fees (37.1 per cent) are the main topics of discussion. Furthermore, 95.6 per cent of parents report monitoring their child's schoolwork and 85.0 per cent are aware of their child's results. Overall, 74.8 per cent demonstrate a moderate or high level of collaboration. Significant associations were found between certain

collaborative practices and monitoring of schoolwork ($p = 0.025$; $p = 0.021$; $p = 0.014$). The academic results of 3,758 pupils indicate an overall success rate of 88 per cent. However, the lack of individual matching means it is not possible to establish a causal relationship between collaboration and academic success. The study highlights the importance of a structured school–family partnership.

Keywords: school–family collaboration; parental involvement; academic success; school communication; educational partnership.

1. Introduction

Collaboration between school and family plays a significant role in research on academic success. It refers to the relationships, exchanges and coordinated actions through which parents and school staff support the pupil's educational journey. The research reviewed shows that parental involvement can be linked to motivation, commitment and academic performance, whilst emphasising that different forms of participation do not all have the same impact.

From an ecological perspective, children develop simultaneously within several environments. The quality of the relationships between these environments, particularly between the family and the school, forms part of the developmental context. The models of school–family partnership proposed by Epstein (2011) and the research on parental engagement by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005) also emphasise communication, support for learning at home, par participation in school activities and decision-making. These approaches lead us to view collaboration not simply as the presence of parents at school, but as a set of complementary practices.

Boonk *et al.* (2018): their review of 75 studies specifically examines indicators of parental involvement and their relationship with academic achievement. In particular, it shows that not all forms of parental involvement are associated with success in the same way.

In the context of Goma, the study is set within an educational environment characterised by socio-economic and institutional constraints. The schools studied belong to the network of the Ursuline Sisters of Tildonk and present diverse school contexts. The preliminary survey reveals varying levels of academic achievement across the five schools and highlights the value of examining the relationships between collaborative practices and academic indicators.

The study focuses specifically on Chemchem Secondary School, Mama Paula Primary School, Sainte Ursule Primary

School, Matunda I Primary School and Matunda II Primary School. The period under consideration is the 2024–2025 school year. The aim is to describe the forms of collaboration, examine certain associations between parental practices and academic performance indicators, identify obstacles and develop strategies for strengthening these practices.

The research question stems from a twofold observation. On the one hand, school–family relationships are presented in the literature as a component of educational support. On the other hand, their implementation depends on institutional communication arrangements, families' resources and the actual opportunities for participation. In the schools studied, the survey data show that reported engagement with the school is very widespread, but that communication remains heavily focused on discipline and certain administrative aspects.

The main question is therefore as follows: to what extent are forms of collaboration between the school and the family associated with indicators of academic progress and success in the schools run by the Ursuline Sisters of Tildonk in Goma?

Two specific questions structure the analysis: what forms and methods of collaboration are observed, and what factors promote or hinder this collaboration, as well as their links to academic indicators?

The overall objective is to analyse the influence of school–family collaboration on pupils' academic success in the five schools studied. The specific objectives are: (1) to describe the forms of collaboration; (2) to identify facilitating factors and obstacles and examine their links with academic indicators in order to correlate parental, institutional and documentary data.

The main hypothesis is that regular and structured school–family collaboration is associated with better indicators of academic progress and achievement. A second hypothesis posits that organisational and socio-economic barriers may reduce the quality of collaboration. In this article, these hypotheses are reformulated in a manner compatible with a cross-sectional design: the analysis focuses primarily on observed associations rather than on demonstrated causality.

The scientific value of the study lies in the production of empirical data on a specific school network in Goma, drawn from three complementary sources: parents' statements, information provided by school officials and school records. The practical value lies in identifying concrete areas for intervention: the quality of the communication book, information on school supplies, monitoring of results, the functioning of the parents' association and the focus of meetings on learning.

2. Theoretical framework and literature review

2.1. School–family collaboration

In this research, collaboration is understood as a concerted effort between several stakeholders pursuing a common educational objective. Applied to the school–family relationship, it encompasses communication, monitoring of schoolwork at home, participation in meetings, involvement in governance, and forms of material, educational, moral and personal support. This definition helps to avoid a narrow conception of collaboration that reduces it solely to financial participation.

Epstein proposes a framework that distinguishes several dimensions of the partnership between the school, the family and the community. This model is particularly useful for interpreting the results of the present study, as the data collected relate to communication, participation, support at home and involvement in certain school governance structures. Hill and Tyson, for their part, show that parental engagement at home and socialisation around learning may be more consistently linked to academic success than mere attendance at school activities.

2.2. Ecological theory

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory situates child development within a set of interacting systems. The family and school constitute two immediate environments whose relationship can be viewed as a mesosystem. This perspective leads us to recognise that educational practices do not take place in isolation: consistency in expectations, the flow of information and coordination amongst adults can help to create a more coherent environment for the pupil.

2.3. Parental involvement and motivation

The models proposed by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005) emphasise the reasons that lead parents to become involved and the mechanisms through which their involvement can influence the school experience. Ryan and Deci's (2020) self-determination theory also serves as a reminder that academic motivation depends on psychological needs and the relational context. Within a school–family framework, encouragement, feedback on progress and consistent expectations can support the pupil's engagement.

2.4. Findings from the empirical literature

International reviews generally point to a positive association between certain forms of parental involvement and academic achievement. Jeynes (2012) emphasises the importance of

parental involvement and educational expectations. Wilder (2014) shows that the effects vary depending on the forms of involvement and the contexts. Hill and Tyson (2009) distinguish in particular between engagement at home, engagement at school and school socialisation. Castro et al. (2015) conducted a major meta-analysis on the link between parental involvement and academic achievement. In their meta-analysis, Erdem and Kaya (2020) found a positive but weak association between parental involvement and academic achievement. Kim (2020) shows that the relationships between parental involvement and academic achievement can vary according to cultural and educational contexts.

However, this research suggests that a simplistic interpretation should be avoided. The presence of an association does not necessarily mean that a particular parenting practice directly causes an improvement in outcomes. The socio-economic characteristics of families, school resources, pupils' ages, teaching practices and measurement methods may all play a role simultaneously. This caution is particularly important for the present study, as parental responses are not individually matched to children's performance.

2.5. Conceptual model of the study

The model adopted considers school–family collaboration as an explanatory variable comprising several dimensions: frequency and quality of communication, monitoring of schoolwork at home, participation in school meetings and activities, material support, and discussions regarding academic performance. The dependent variables include academic achievement, motivation and behaviour. Socio-economic, cultural and institutional barriers are considered as factors likely to influence collaborative practices.

Table 1: Operationalisation of school–family collaboration and academic achievement.

Variable / dimension	Key Indicators	Source
Collaboration	Relationship with the school, frequency of communication	Parent questionnaire
Communication	Communication book, meetings, telephone, topics of discussion	Parent questionnaire
Support at home	Schoolwork, keeping track of results, school supplies	Parent questionnaire

Participation	Meetings, parents' association, decisions	Parent questionnaire
School policies	Shared management, activities, calls, open days	School leaders
Academic success	Documented results and success rates	School records

3. Methodology

The study adopts a quantitative approach with descriptive and analytical aims. It was carried out in five schools run by the Ursuline Sisters of Tildonk in Goma during the 2024–2025 academic year. The choice of a cross-sectional design allows for the description of collaborative practices at a specific point in time and the examination of associations between observed variables.

The population consists of 3,610 parents and 10 members of administrative staff, spread across the five schools. The planned sample comprises 361 parents and 10 administrative staff members. Parents were allocated proportionally by school. 380 questionnaires were distributed to parents to minimise non-response; 361 usable questionnaires were ultimately retained. Ten questionnaires were distributed to administrative staff, and eight were returned and analysed.

Table 2: Distribution of the parent population and the sample.

School	Parents in the population	Parents surveyed
Chemchem Secondary School	1,222	122
Mama Paula Primary School	377	38
Sainte Ursule Primary School	427	43
EP Matunda I	872	87
EP Matunda II	712	71

Total	3,610	361
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Parents were selected using proportional stratified sampling, with each school constituting a stratum. School leaders were selected purposefully, due to their role in school management and relations with parents. This difference in procedure means that the data from school leaders should be interpreted as descriptive institutional information and not as a basis for statistical inference comparable to that of the parents.

The questionnaire for parents consists mainly of closed-ended questions and a few open-ended questions. It covers knowledge of the school, the relationship with the school, channels and topics of communication, involvement in the running of the school, monitoring of schoolwork at home and certain obstacles. A separate questionnaire was administered to school administrators. The documentary analysis focused in particular on school reports, assessment forms, progress records and academic reports.

A pre-test was conducted to verify the clarity and relevance of the items prior to the final administration. The necessary administrative authorisations were sought prior to data collection. The questionnaires were distributed with standardised instructions and then checked before data entry. The data were coded and analysed using SPSS 27.

Descriptive analyses are based on frequencies and percentages. An overall collaboration score was constructed using the indicators selected for the study, categorised into three levels: low, medium and high. Bivariate analyses used the chi-squared test where conditions permitted, and Fisher's exact test in situations involving small sample sizes. Cramer's phi or V coefficients were used to assess the strength of the associations.

The threshold for statistical significance was set at 5 per cent. The results are interpreted by making a clear distinction between statistical significance and the magnitude of the association. This distinction is important in the context of the study: certain variables exhibit ceiling effects, i.e. a very high concentration of responses within a single category, which limits the ability of the tests to reveal differences.

Data collection took place within the academic and institutional framework of the study. Participants were asked to provide information relating to the school–family relationship and academic monitoring. The article presents the results in aggregated form and does not include any information that would allow parents or pupils to be individually identified.

Three limitations should be highlighted. Firstly, parental responses are largely based on self-reports, which may be subject to social desirability bias. Secondly, the parental data are not individually matched to the children's academic results. Thirdly, as the study is cross-sectional and was conducted within a single school network, it does not allow for the establishment of a causal relationship or the automatic generalisation of the results to all schools in Goma or the DRC.

4. Results

4.1. Parent profile

Of the 361 parents surveyed, 43.2 per cent are aged between 36 and 45. Men account for 48.2 per cent and women for 46.5 per cent, whilst 5.3 per cent of the questionnaires do not specify gender. The majority of respondents are married (82.3 per cent). In terms of occupation, the 'other professions' category accounts for 53.2 per cent, reflecting a wide variety of employment situations.

Table 3: Familiarity with the school and relationship with the institution.

Indicator	n	%
Is familiar with the school the child attends	355	98.3
Reports having a relationship with the school	350	97.0
Daily communication	46	12.7
Communication more than twice a week	53	14.7
Communication twice a week	25	6.9
Communication once a week	80	22.2
Occasional/other communication	147	40.7

Almost all parents are familiar with the school their child attends and report having a relationship with it. The frequency of contact, however, varies: 40.7 per cent report communication classified as occasional or other, whilst 22.2 per cent report weekly contact. This finding highlights the existence of a widely established relationship, without

necessarily demonstrating that this relationship is always regular or focused on learning.

Table 4: Channels of communication.

Channel	N	%
Communication notebook	251	69.5
Meetings	143	39.6
Telephone	105	29.1
Class register	61	16.9
Other	24	6.6

The communication log is the most frequently cited channel. Meetings and telephone calls follow. This pattern indicates that institutional communication mechanisms form an important part of the partnership's infrastructure.

Table 5: Topics of discussion and parental involvement.

Subject of discussions	N	%
Discipline of the child	241	66.8
Analysis of academic results	166	46.0
Payment of school fees	134	37.1
Smooth running of the school	114	31.6
Other matters	27	7.5

Discipline is the most frequently cited topic, followed by the analysis of academic results and school fees. Discussions are therefore not exclusively administrative or financial; they include an educational component. Nevertheless, the prominence of discipline suggests that the partnership could be even more focused on learning and monitoring progress.

Table 6: Indicators of parental involvement in school life and decision-making.

Participation indicator	n	%
Importance of collaboration recognised	345	95.6
Sufficiently interested in how it works	249	69.0
Involved in important decisions	63	17.5
Parents' association: recognised decision-making role	226	62.6
Parents' association: not consulted	33	9.1

Recognition of the importance of collaboration is very high. However, participation in important decisions is much less frequent. This discrepancy between a favourable attitude and actual participation in decision-making is a significant finding: recognising the value of partnership does not necessarily mean having regular access to decision-making forums.

Table 7: Home-based academic support.

Indicator	N	%
Attention paid to schoolwork	345	95.6
Knowledge of academic results	307	85.0
Information on school supplies	347	96.1
Availability of necessary supplies	325	90.0
Results communicated via reports	229	63.4

Monitoring at home appears to be a very common practice. School reports are the main means reported for finding out results. These data suggest that the school-family relationship extends into the home, but they do not, on their own, allow us to determine the effect of this monitoring on pupils' individual performance.

4.2. Data from school heads

The eight school leaders interviewed constitute a purposive sub-sample. Their responses are therefore presented descriptively. All eight schools report a management approach involving both the school leadership and the parents' committee. Four out of eight schools also state that teachers should be involved.

Table 8: Institutional practices for school–family collaboration according to school leaders.

Area or practice	n	%
School management team + parents' committee involved in management	8	100.0
Involvement in school policy: management + parents' committee	7	87.5
Parental involvement in disciplinary matters	8	100.0
Intervention on teaching effectiveness	6	75.0
Interventions to tackle academic underachievement	5	62.5
Support with school fees	5	62.5
Expected participation in school activities	7	87.5
Open days organised	4	50.0

Managers therefore confirm the existence of institutional mechanisms for collaboration. Discipline is cited by all as an area in which parents are involved, whilst educational effectiveness is mentioned by six managers. Only half of the schools report organising open days, which suggests there is scope for diversifying the forms of participation.

Table 9: Overall level of collaboration.

Level	n	%
Low (score 0–3)	91	25.2
Moderate (score 4–6)	213	59.0
High (score 7–9)	57	15.8
Total	361	100.0

In total, 74.8 per cent of parents fall into the ‘average’ or ‘high’ categories. The average raw score is 5.3, with a standard deviation of 1.7. The distribution therefore shows an overall level that is fairly concentrated around the ‘average’ category, whilst revealing that around a quarter of parents are classified as ‘low’.

4.3. Pupils’ results

The analysis of school records covers 3,758 pupils from the five schools. The overall academic success rate is 88 per cent. The rates by school are set out in the school records and have been used to describe the context of success. However, the data from the 361 parents are not individually linked to the pupils’ records. The 88 per cent rate should therefore be presented as a descriptive statistic for the network under study and not as the statistical outcome for children whose parents achieved a given collaboration score.

4.4. Bivariate analysis

Table 10: Association between information on school supplies and possession of equipment.

Test	Value	p
Two-tailed Fisher’s	—	0.025
Phi	0.167	—

The information provided by the school regarding the required supplies is statistically associated with the actual possession of school materials ($p = 0.025$). The phi coefficient of 0.167 indicates a weak association. This result supports the

importance of information sharing, but the strength of this association should be interpreted with caution.

Table 11: Association between monitoring of schoolwork and awareness of results.

Test	Value	p
Two-tailed Fisher’s test	—	0.230
Phi	0.098	—

The relationship between the attention paid to schoolwork and knowledge of results is not statistically significant at the 5 per cent level ($p = 0.230$). The descriptive proportion of parents who monitor their children’s schoolwork and are aware of their results remains high, but the low variability in the responses limits the scope of the test.

Table 12: Association between overall collaboration and awareness of results.

Test	Value	p
Association test reported in the thesis	—	0.021
Cramer’s V	0.148	—

The overall level of collaboration is associated with awareness of academic results ($p = 0.021$). The strength of the association, measured by Cramer’s V, remains weak (0.148). The result indicates a statistical relationship between the variables studied, but does not allow us to conclude that an increase in collaboration leads to greater awareness of results.

Association between consultation of the parents’ association and collaboration:

Consultation with the parents’ association is also associated with the overall level of collaboration ($p = 0.014$; $V = 0.169$). As with the other associations, the strength of the association remains weak. These results suggest, above all, that institutional mechanisms for participation should be considered as a component of the quality of the partnership.

4.5. Other associations observed

Two other highly significant relationships were observed: the association between the collaboration score and communication regarding discipline ($p < 0.001$), and the association between communication regarding fees and communication regarding results ($p < 0.001$). These relationships are consistent with the fact that parents who report greater collaboration are also more likely to be exposed to various aspects of school communication.

Table 13: Summary of results.

Main finding	Empirical finding	Cautious interpretation
Relationship with the school	97.0 per cent report a relationship	Well-established partnership
Dominant channel	Notebook: 69.5 per cent	Central formal mechanism
Dominant subject	Discipline: 66.8 per cent	Communication still heavily behaviour-based
Home follow-up	Homework: 95.6 per cent	Parental involvement reported as high
Overall collaboration	74.8 per cent: moderate to high	Generally favourable but mixed trend
Materials	$p = 0.025$; $\phi = 0.167$	Weak but significant association
Known academic results	$p = 0.021$ with overall cooperation	Weak, non-causal association
Academic achievement	88 per cent of 3,758 pupils	Overall documentary indicator

Taken together, the results paint a picture of a partnership that exists and is widely recognised by families, but whose intensity, content and opportunities for participation remain variable. The cross-sectional nature of the data and the absence of parent-pupil pairing mean that we must speak of associations rather than causal effects.

5. Discussion

The first notable finding concerns the existence of a school–family relationship, reported by 97.0 per cent of parents. The communication book, cited by 69.5 per cent, appears to be the main channel. This finding is consistent with partnership models that place great importance on structured mechanisms for the flow of information. It also shows that the school has an institutional tool capable of supporting continuity between home and school.

However, the content of these exchanges qualifies this finding. Discipline accounts for 66.8 per cent of the topics discussed, compared with 46.0 per cent for the analysis of academic results and 37.1 per cent for fees. Meetings reveal a similar pattern: discipline is mentioned by 59.8 per cent of parents, compared with 41.8 per cent for academic results. Collaboration is therefore genuine, but its educational could be strengthened. This interpretation is consistent with the literature, which distinguishes between mere institutional participation and involvement directly linked to learning.

The second significant finding concerns monitoring schoolwork at home. The fact that 95.6 per cent of parents report paying attention to schoolwork and 85.0 per cent report being aware of their children’s results indicates a high level of declared family commitment. Hill and Tyson specifically highlight the importance of home-based practices and school socialisation. However, the result of the test examining the relationship between monitoring schoolwork and knowledge of results ($p = 0.230$) serves as a reminder that a high reported frequency does not necessarily guarantee a measurable statistical association in this sample.

The third finding concerns school supplies. The association between information provided by the school and possession of the necessary materials ($p = 0.025$) is statistically significant, albeit of weak strength. In practical terms, this suggests that accurate information provided sufficiently in advance can contribute to pupils’ practical preparation. This interpretation should be treated with caution: other factors, notably household financial resources, may also play a role.

5.1. Theoretical context

The results can be interpreted in the light of ecological theory: the data show that interactions between the two main educational environments are indeed structured by channels and practices. They can also be linked to models of parental engagement, as the forms observed encompass communication, monitoring at home and institutional participation. Finally, the social capital perspective highlights

that the relationships and resources available within the family environment can influence the ability to make the most of the opportunities offered by school.

5.2. Scope and limitations of the interpretation

The fact that there is an overall success rate of 88 per cent across the five schools is not sufficient to conclude that this level is the result of parental collaboration. The documentary data relate to 3,758 pupils, whilst the questionnaire responses come from 361 parents, and the two sets are not individually matched. Furthermore, academic results may depend on other variables: teaching practices, pupils' initial level, school resources, socio-economic conditions, family characteristics and the context of each school. Caution is also warranted regarding motivation and behaviour. The thesis considers these to be important dimensions of success, but the most robustly documented findings in the analyses presented relate primarily to monitoring practices, awareness of results, school supplies and the overall collaboration score. It would therefore be preferable, in an international publication, not to present as proven any relationships that have not been directly measured or tested.

5.3. Practical implications

The results nevertheless point to several courses of action directly linked to the data. Firstly, maintain and improve the communication log by specifying the educational information required. Secondly, improve communication regarding school supplies and distribute the lists sufficiently in advance. Thirdly, focus part of the meetings on results, learning difficulties and ways of providing support at home. Fourthly, strengthen consultation with the parents' association. Fifthly, diversify opportunities for participation, notably through open days and joint educational activities.

Table 14: Operational priorities for strengthening collaboration.

Operational priority	Evidence base
Accurate information on school supplies	$p = 0.025$; $\phi = 0.167$
Systematic monitoring of outcomes	$p = 0.021$ for overall collaboration / awareness of results

Consultation with the parents' association	$p = 0.014$
Maintenance of the communication book	69.5 per cent usage
Reorientation of the focus of meetings	Discipline 59.8 per cent; results 41.8 per cent
Diversification of participatory activities	Open days in 50 per cent of schools

5.4. Research prospects

A longitudinal study could follow the same families and pupils over several school years. Matching parental responses to individual results would allow for a more direct testing of the relationships between levels of collaboration and performance. A mixed-methods approach could also provide deeper insight into the experiences of parents, teachers and pupils, whilst a multivariate analysis could control for year group, gender, socio-economic status and other contextual factors.

6. Conclusion

This study analysed the forms of collaboration between the school and families in five schools run by the Ursuline Sisters of Tildonk in Goma. The data show that a school-family relationship is widely reported by parents: 97.0 per cent indicate that they maintain a relationship with the school and 69.5 per cent cite the communication book as a channel for exchange. The topics of discussion are dominated by discipline, academic results and fees. At home, monitoring homework and keeping track of results are reported by a very large majority of parents. The overall score indicates that 74.8 per cent of parents fall into the medium or high levels of collaboration. Several statistical associations were identified, notably between information on school supplies and the possession of such materials, between overall collaboration and awareness of results, and between consultation with the parents' association and the level of collaboration. However, these associations are of weak magnitude and do not allow for the establishment of causality.

School records indicate an overall pass rate of 88 per cent amongst 3,758 pupils. This result suggests a favourable performance context in the schools studied, but it cannot be directly attributed to school-family collaboration, as parental data and individual pupil results are not matched.

Ultimately, the study highlights a relatively well-developed school–family partnership, though one that could still be improved in terms of its educational focus and parental involvement in decision-making. The findings support the value of strengthening information systems, monitoring results, encouraging parental involvement in school structures, and promoting activities that bring home and school closer together. The conclusions are limited to the five schools studied and the 2024–2025 academic year.

In light of the above, it is recommended that schools strengthen collaboration between school and family through diverse, regular communication that is more focused on educational monitoring. Parental involvement in school structures and activities, particularly through their parents' association, should be further encouraged. Schools would also benefit from providing parents with better information on pupils' academic results and the arrangements for supporting them at home. Finally, longitudinal studies should match parental data with pupils' individual results and take into account socio-economic, school-related and individual factors.

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