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Original Research Article

A Qualitative Study Investigating the Contribution of Parenting to Academic Adjustment of Pre-Service Teachers: Practices and Perspectives from Ugandan Parents

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Abstract: The transition to university is a critical period for pre-service teachers, yet the parental contribution to this adjustment is underexplored, particularly in non-Western contexts. This qualitative study investigates the role of Ugandan parents in fostering the academic adjustment of their pre-service teacher children. Through thematic analysis of 30 semi-structured parent interviews, the study identified four key parental mechanisms: (1) instilling core values like discipline, hard work, and religion as a foundational scaffold; (2) providing multifaceted support, including financial provision, resource acquisition, and academic guidance; (3) managing conflicts and challenges through communication and counseling; and (4) navigating peer influence by encouraging productive friendships. Despite a limited understanding of university pedagogy, parents demonstrated a strong commitment through tangible and psychosocial support. The study concludes that parenting is an indispensable asset in the academic ecosystem, advocating for stronger collaborative partnerships between universities and families to enhance student success.
Keywords: Parenting, Academic Adjustment, Pre-Service Teachers, University Transition.

INTRODUCTION

The journey through higher education is a complex process of adaptation, requiring students to develop new learning strategies, build social networks, and manage increased autonomy (Baker & Siryk, 1999). For pre-service teachers, this adjustment is twofold: they must succeed as students while simultaneously constructing a professional identity as educators (Pillen *et al*., 2013). Academic adjustment, a key dimension of this process, involves the ability to cope with educational demands, apply oneself to studies, and be satisfied with the academic environment (Credé & Niehorster, 2012).

While much research focuses on institutional and individual factors affecting adjustment, the role of the family particularly parenting remains a critical yet often back grounded element. Parental involvement is a well-documented predictor of academic success in primary and secondary education (Jeynes, 2007; Hill & Tyson, 2009). However, its role in higher education, especially in collectivist cultures where familial ties remain strong into adulthood, is less understood (Turton *et al*., 2021). In many African contexts, including Uganda, family support is not merely financial; it is deeply embedded in cultural values, expectations, and continuous guidance (Ngorosho & Laakso, 2019).

This study seeks to address this gap by exploring the following research question: **How do parents perceive and contribute to the academic adjustment of their children enrolled in pre-service teacher training programs in Uganda?**

By analyzing rich qualitative data from parents themselves, this paper aims to illuminate the strategies, values, and challenges that characterize parental involvement, arguing that parents are active and essential partners in facilitating successful academic adjustment for future educators.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptualizing Academic Adjustment

Academic adjustment in university settings encompasses more than just grades. It includes the ability to manage academic workloads, develop effective study habits, feel a sense of belonging within the academic community, and achieve educational goals (Baker & Siryk, 1999). For pre-service teachers, this also involves adjusting to the pedagogical philosophies and practical demands of the teaching profession (Unal & Unal, 2019).

Parenting and Student Success in Higher Education

The transition to university often coincides with emerging adulthood, a period where individuals are expected to become more independent (Arnett, 2000). Consequently, parental involvement often shifts from direct supervision to a more distal, supportive role characterized by advice, emotional support, and financial backing (Wintre & Yaffe, 2000). This support remains significantly correlated with higher GPA, increased persistence, and better psychological well-being (Mattanah *et al*., 2011; Turton *et al*., 2021).

However, the nature of this involvement is culturally contingent. In Western, individualistic societies, autonomy-supportive parenting that fosters independence is most beneficial (Soenens *et al*., 2007). In contrast, in collectivist cultures common across Africa and Asia, continued close guidance and high expectations are not seen as intrusive but as a sign of care and commitment, and are positively associated with student motivation and achievement (Ngorosho & Laakso, 2019; Chao & Aque, 2009).

The Ugandan Context

In Uganda, where this study is situated, education is highly valued as a pathway to upward mobility. Families often make significant financial sacrifices to send their children to university (Kasente, 2012). The concept of parenting extends beyond the nuclear family, often involving a wider kinship network. Respect for elders, discipline, and hard work are central values that parents strive to instill in their children (Ndidde *et al*., 2020). Understanding parental contributions within this socio-cultural framework is crucial for a complete picture of student adjustment.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design based on secondary analysis of existing textual data. The hermeneutic approach was used to interpret the meanings, themes, and patterns within the parents' responses, providing deep insight into their subjective experiences and perceptions (Klein & Myers, 1999).

Data Source and Sample

The dataset consisted of 30 completed responses from a structured interview survey distributed to parents of pre-service teachers in Uganda. The parents ranged in age from 45 to 62 years, with a mean age of 51. The sample included 17 males and 13 females. Occupations were predominantly in education (e.g., teachers, lecturers, headteachers) and civil service, with others in business and farming. The majority self-identified their socioeconomic background as "Humble" or "Moderate."

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), was conducted on the interview responses. The process involved:

Familiarization: Repeated reading of the entire dataset.

Generating Initial Codes: Systematic coding of key phrases and ideas across all responses (e.g., "paying fees," "discipline," "group discussions," "counseling").

Searching for Themes: Collating codes into potential overarching themes.

Reviewing Themes: Checking if the themes worked in relation to the coded extracts and the entire dataset.

Defining and Naming Themes: Refining the essence of each theme.

Producing the Report: Weaving together the thematic analysis with extracts from the data and relevant literature.

Ethical Considerations

As this was a secondary analysis of anonymized data, identifiers like names were already removed. The data is presented confidentially, and direct quotes are used to illustrate themes while protecting participant anonymity.

Findings

Analysis of the parental interviews revealed four central themes regarding their contribution to their children's academic adjustment.

Theme 1: Instilling Foundational Values as a Bedrock for Adjustment

Parents overwhelmingly reported that guiding their children with core values was their primary role. These values created a moral and ethical framework that preceded and underpinned academic endeavor.

Discipline and Hard Work:

This was the most frequently cited value. One 62-year-old farmer stated, *"I tell her to put more effort in his studied... I tell her to put on more effort."* A 50-year-old administrator emphasized *"Morality & Discipline but also smart hard work."* This focus on effort instills a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006) crucial for overcoming academic challenges.

Religion and Spirituality:

Many parents cited faith as a guiding principle. One 49-year-old teacher listed *"Religion, openess, discipline,"* while a 52-year-old female participant noted, *"I dedicated them to God... I encourage them to stay in school and remain focussed."* This provides a source of emotional resilience and purpose.

Self-Reliance and Responsibility:

Parents linked values directly to academic adjustment, framing it as an exercise in responsibility. A 62-year-old farmer advised, *"She must learn to use the little resources we give her, budget for the money... and also make productive friends."* This shifts the focus from mere support to empowering the student to self-regulate.

Theme 2: Providing Multifaceted Support Systems

Parental support was not monolithic; it was a multi-pronged strategy addressing financial, academic, and psychosocial needs.

Financial and Material Support:

This was the most tangible form of support, universally mentioned. Parents described *"Paying tuition,"* *"providing money and scholastic materials,"* and *"buying reading materials."* A 50-year-old father highlighted a specific intervention: *"Not possessing laptop and i procured one for him to ease his studies."* This directly removes barriers to academic access and participation.

Academic-Psychosocial Support:

Despite often lacking formal education, parents engaged in academic support through follow-up, encouragement, and creating conducive environments. A 46-year-old primary teacher said, *"I normally call him to ask how he is fairing at school,"* while others mentioned *"checking his or her study materials"* and *"giving him career advise and counseling."* A 52-year-old lecturer provided *"internet data for research and education purposes,"* demonstrating an understanding of modern academic needs.

Theme 3: Managing Conflicts and Challenges through Communication and Counseling

Parents demonstrated a proactive and reactive approach to problems, favoring dialogue over dictation.

Open Communication:

The predominant strategy was discussion. A 48-year-old accountant stated, *"I use the parent teacher interaction then engage the child later,"* while a 52-year-old social worker advocated for *"Through discussions and helping them to understand causes, and identify solutions themselves,"* promoting problem-solving skills. A 52-year-old civil servant's approach was to *"sit with him and the dad and we talk to him about how to deal with different aspects of life."*

Collaboration with the Institution:

Several parents saw conflicts as a shared responsibility with the university. A 53-year-old auditor said, *"I engage the concerned teachers and agree on how to move on,"* and another participant mentioned *"talking to her lecturer or School administration so that we can combine efforts."* This indicates a desire for a partnership model in student support.

Theme 4: Navigating Peer Influence and Encouraging Social Integration

Parents displayed a sophisticated understanding of the university as a social system and the dual nature of peer influence.

Awareness of Peer Influence:

Parents recognized peers as crucial academic resources. A 62-year-old farmer noted, *"The friends discuss with her, they share notes and... support each other in their studies."* A 46-year-old teacher observed that *"Good friends support him academically by calling him for class, doing course works together."* However, they were also wary of negative influences, with one parent cautioning against friends who might teach *"bad manners like engaging in sexual relationships... drinking of alcohol."*

Active Encouragement of Social Engagement:

Most parents actively encouraged extracurricular and social activities for holistic development. Reasons included: *"they enable him to be physically fit,"* *"to build their confidence and self-esteem,"* and *"for networking in future."* A 52-year-old social worker eloquently summarized the need for a *"balanced life. Social, academic, political and economic."* They facilitated this by *"encouraging him to bring his friend at home"* and supporting connectivity through *"whatsup and facebook."*

DISCUSSION

This study elucidates the profound and multifaceted role Ugandan parents play in the academic adjustment of their pre-service teacher children. The findings align with, yet contextualize, existing literature on parental support in higher education.

The emphasis on instilling values like discipline, hard work, and religiosity (Theme 1) resonates with studies on collectivist parenting styles, where high expectations and strict guidance are expressions of care linked to positive academic outcomes (Chao & Aque, 2009; Ngorosho & Laakso, 2019). These values provide a stable internal compass for students navigating the uncertainties of university life, effectively acting as a psychological scaffold for adjustment.

The provision of multifaceted support (Theme 2) confirms the work of Wintre and Yaffe (2000) and Mattanah *et al.,* (2011), who identify financial and

emotional support as critical for university success. In a context of economic constraint ("Humble" and "Moderate" backgrounds), this support represents a significant family sacrifice, underscoring the high value placed on education (Kasente, 2012). The move beyond pure finance to include academic follow-up and resource provision (e.g., laptops, data) shows an adaptive and responsive parenting approach aimed at directly enabling academic participation.

The preference for communicative conflict resolution (Theme 3) challenges potential stereotypes of authoritarian parenting. Instead, it reflects a more authoritative style (Baumrind, 1991), combining high expectations with responsiveness and dialogue. This approach fosters the very autonomy and problem-solving skills that are central to successful university adjustment (Soenens *et al*., 2007). The willingness to collaborate with university staff suggests parents see themselves as partners in education, a model that institutions would do well to formally encourage.

Finally, the nuanced view of peer influence (Theme 4) demonstrates parents' sophisticated understanding of the university as a socio-academic system. Their strategy is not to isolate their children but to guide them toward "productive friends" who enable academic success through collaboration. This aligns with the vast literature on the positive impact of peer learning and study groups (Zheng *et al*., 2018). Their encouragement of extracurricular activities recognizes that academic adjustment is not solely about grades but about holistic integration into the university community, which is vital for well-being and persistence (Tinto, 1993).

Implications for Practice
The findings suggest several implications for Teacher Training Institutions:
Formalize Parental Partnerships:
Universities should create formal channels for communication with parents (e.g., structured orientation programs, regular newsletters, a dedicated parent portal) to foster the collaborative spirit parents already desire.

Value-Based Orientation:
Incorporate discussions on professionalism, ethics, and discipline into the curriculum, echoing the values parents have instilled, to create a cohesive support system.

Facilitate Peer Integration:
Design structured peer-mentoring programs and study groups to channel peer influence positively, alleviating parental concerns about "wrong friends."

Financial Transparency:
Clearly communicate costs (tuition, materials, handouts) to help parents plan and budget effectively, reducing a significant source of student stress.

Limitations and Future Research
This study is based on self-reported data from a relatively small, convenience sample of parents, which may not represent all perspectives. The data is also cross-sectional. Future research could involve longitudinal studies tracking the correlation between specific parental practices and student adjustment outcomes over time. Directly interviewing dyads of parents and their pre-service teacher children would provide a richer, comparative understanding of this dynamic.

CONCLUSION
This study offers a compelling insight into the vital, active, and strategic role parents play in the academic ecosystem of pre-service teachers in Uganda. Far from being passive fee-payers, they are engaged architects of their children's adjustment, building foundations with values, scaffolding with multifaceted support, guiding through challenges with dialogue, and wisely navigating the social landscape of university life. Their involvement is characterized by deep commitment, cultural specificity, and a clear focus on holistic success. Recognizing, respecting, and integrating this powerful parental contribution is essential for teacher training institutions seeking to fully support the next generation of educators. The journey to becoming a teacher, it appears, remains very much a family affair.

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Appendix A: Thematic Content Analysis Table

Study Title: A Qualitative Study Investigating the Contribution of Parenting to the Academic Adjustment of Pre-Service Teachers: Perspectives from Ugandan Parents

Theme (& Frequency)	Sub-Theme / Descriptive Code (& Frequency)	Source Question(s) from Interview Protocol	Representative Raw Data Quotes from Participants	Initial Code / Meaning Unit
Theme 1: Instilling Foundational Values (n=29)	Discipline & Hard Work (n=25)	What key values or principles guide your approach to raising your children?	"Hardworking children." (P1) "Morality & Discipline but also smart hard work..." (P5) "Focus, listening, compliance to my instructions, Respect, and discipline..." (P22)	Emphasizing effort, persistence, obedience, and a strong work ethic as core values.
	Religion & Spirituality (n=12)	What key values or principles guide your approach to raising your children?	"I dedicated them to God." (P7) "Religion, openess, discipline." (P3) "Prayer." (P19)	Relying on religious faith and principles for guidance and moral foundation.
	Self-Reliance & Responsibility (n=10)	What key values...? How do you think your child should adjust to university life?	"She must learn to use the little resources we give her, budget for the money..." (P1) "Giving children autonomy to make final decision about their academics..." (P25)	Fostering independence, financial prudence, and personal accountability.
Theme 2: Multifaceted Support Systems (n=30)	Financial & Material Support (n=30)	How do you support your child's academic success? What challenges have you observed... and how do you support them?	"I provide he with money and scholastic materials." (P1) "Paying tuition fees in time." (P27) "Not possessing lap top and j procured one for him..." (P5)	Providing tuition, pocket money, scholastic materials, and technology. Universal form of support.
	Academic-Psychosocial Support (n=22)	How do you support your child's academic success? How does your family contribute to a student's	"I normally call him to ask how he is fairing at school." (P2) "I support her in doing home work." (P7) "Providing moral support." (P14)	Regular check-ins, direct academic help, encouragement, and creating an enabling environment for study.

			connection with their academic environment?	"internet data is provided for research" (P25)	
Theme 3: Managing Conflicts and Challenges (n=25)	**Open Communication & Dialogue** (n=20)	How do you address conflicts or challenges related to your child's education?	"We sit and discuss." (P19) "Through discussions and helping them to understand causes..." (P21) "I engage her in a dialogue to first know exactly what the challenge/conflict is about." (P27)	Using conversation, guidance, and counseling to address problems. Primary strategy for conflict resolution.
	Collaboration with Institution (n=5)	How do you address conflicts or challenges related to your child's education?	"I engage the concerned teachers and agree on how to move on..." (P22) "By talking to her lecturer or School administration..." (P27)	Partnering with university staff and administration to resolve academic issues. Less common but strategic.
Theme 4: Navigating Peer & Social Influence (n=28)	**Awareness of Positive Peer Influence** (n=18)	In what ways does your childs relationship with peers/friends influence his/her academic life at university?	"The friends discuss with her, they share notes and... support each other." (P1) "Good friends support him academ[ically] by calling him for class..." (P2) "Peers are usually a good influence especially... academic discussions." (P25)	Peers as sources of academic collaboration, shared resources, accountability, and motivation.
	Caution Against Negative Influence (n=11)	In what ways does your childs relationship with peers/friends influence his/her academic life at university?	"[Peers] can teach her bad manners like engaging in sexual relationships..." (P27) "Whereas wrong friend may negatively affect the child's education life." (P21)	Fear that peers can lead to moral deviance, distraction from studies, and financial misuse.
	Encouraging Social Integration (n=26)	Do you encourage your child to participate in social or extracurricular activities? Why? How does your child stay engaged with their peers?	"Yes I do because, they enable him to be physically fit but also to connect with friends." (P2) "Yes. They add value, exploiting the dormant talents." (P18) "He needs that social connection for networking in future." (P5)	Promoting extracurricular activities for health, talent development, building confidence, and future professional networking. Near-universal encouragement.
Additional Context: Observed Challenges	**Financial Pressures** (n=12)	What challenges or changes have you observed...?	"Financial challenges because of handout for notes and feeding." (P2) "Many assignments... looking for what to eat etc. we support her financially." (P1)	Strain of ancillary academic costs (handouts, materials) and basic living expenses (food).
	Resource Access (n=4)	What challenges or changes have you observed...?	"Lack of internet. By giving maintenance money." (P6) "Not possessing lap top..." (P5)	Technological barriers such as lack of devices or internet access hindering academic work.
	Adjusting to Independence (n=6)	What challenges or changes have you observed...? How do you think your child should adjust to university life?	"These children tend to be diverted once you take long without talking to them." (P22) "Change of learning environment especially independence..." (P15)	Students struggling with newfound freedom and self-reliance, requiring parental guidance to stay focused.

Key:

P#: Participant Number (assigned for reference based on order in the dataset)

n=[number]: Frequency of occurrence. This indicates how many of the 30 total participants mentioned a concept related to this theme or sub-theme. A theme with n=30 was mentioned by every participant.

Source Question: The specific interview question that elicited the responses coded into this theme.

Cite This Article: Rosemary Atuhaire, Aloysius, Rukundo, *Grace Milly Kibanja* (2025). A Qualitative Study Investigating the Contribution of Parenting to Academic Adjustment of Pre-Service Teachers: Practices and Perspectives from Ugandan Parents. *EAS J Psychol Behav Sci, 7*(4), 136-141.