

Influence of Participatory Decision-Making on Students' Academic Performance in Public Secondary Schools in Makueni County, Kenya

Victoria Mbula Musyoki^{1*}, Daniel Mange Mbirithi¹

¹Department of Educational Management, Policy and Curriculum Studies, Kenyatta University, Kenya

Corresponding author email: victoriamusyoki46@gmail.com

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Abstract

Educational research identifies participatory decision-making as a key factor in improving students' academic success in secondary education. Collaboration between parents and teachers creates a supportive environment that enhances student engagement, development, and achievement by aligning school and home expectations. This study examined the influence of parent–teacher collaboration on educational outcomes in public secondary schools in Makueni County, Kenya. It focused on participatory decision-making, communication quality and timeliness, collaborative learning and development, and parental involvement in resourcing and volunteering. Guided by social capital theory and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, the study adopted a descriptive research design. The target population comprised 1,965 respondents from 390 public secondary schools. Using stratified sampling, 295 respondents were selected from 59 schools, including principals, deputy principals, Board of Management chairpersons, Parent–Teacher Association chairpersons, and student presidents. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and analyzed quantitatively. The findings revealed a moderate, positive, and statistically significant relationship between participatory decision-making and students' academic performance ($r = 0.646$, $p = 0.000$). Schools were found to consistently involve parents in decision-making through regular meetings, reflecting a commitment to participatory governance. The environment also encouraged open expression, with parents feeling comfortable sharing their views. Communication between schools and parents was perceived as timely and consistent, facilitating effective information sharing and coordinated responses to emerging issues. Additionally, parental volunteering was encouraged, contributing to students' sense of responsibility and community engagement. The study concluded that effective parent–teacher collaboration enhances academic performance by improving communication, fostering shared decision-making, and promoting active parental involvement. It recommends that school administrators and Boards of Management strengthen structured mechanisms for parental engagement. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education should establish and enforce policies that promote school–community partnerships, including clear guidelines on the frequency of parent engagement and expectations for involvement in academic and co-curricular activities.

Keywords: *Participatory Decision Making, Academic Performance, Parental Involvement, Quality and Timely Communications*

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1. Introduction

School education requires collective effort because parents, teachers, and community members jointly bear responsibility for educational activities beyond traditional classroom instruction (Harris & Goodall, 2022; Wang et al., 2023). Research by Sheldon and Epstein (2022) underscores that strong partnerships between parents and educators foster improved academic performance by enhancing student motivation, participation, and overall achievement. Additionally, effective parent engagement in decision-making boosts students' academic pursuits and cultivates essential social-emotional competencies for lifelong learning (Sanders & Epstein, 2023). Despite these insights, the existing literature indicates an urgent need to explore collaborative approaches across diverse cultural settings, particularly to address barriers to effective communication (Aoki et al., 2022).

Student academic performance shows continuous improvement because of participatory decision-making structures within educational settings. Christenson and Sheridan (2022) demonstrate through research that when parents actively participate in school decisions, their children achieve better academic results. Supporting this, research from Australia shows that parental engagement in school governance positively affects both students' academic results and their participation in school activities (Zyngier, 2023). Furthermore, studies in Canada confirm that involving parents in decision-making often motivates the student's self-awareness, leading to improved academic performance (Wilkins, 2022).

In the African context, the dynamics of parent-teacher collaboration reveal regional socio-economic, cultural, and educational disparities. Many parents in economically disadvantaged areas encounter systemic challenges that hinder active participation (Nambudiri, Sehgal & Mishra, 2022; Myende & Nhlumayo, 2023). A lack of proper communication channels between parents and schools makes learning difficulties even worse, which in turn leads to inferior academic performance. Studies emphasize that collaborative decision-making, where parents are involved at various levels of school governance, can yield significant improvements in student performance. Bandura (2022) posits that effective leadership is key in facilitating educational collaboration.

The East African educational scholarship system focuses on parent involvement and student achievement as fundamental to enhancing educational outcomes (Amadi & Mwita, 2020). The integration of parents and educators in educational settings faces challenges, including mismatches between parental and educational expectations, as well as cultural and communication obstacles (Karanja & Ndung'u, 2021). Research indicates that parent participation varies across socio-economic groups and educational policies (Farah, 2022). For instance, studies indicate that East African countries face considerable obstacles to fostering effective parent-teacher communication and involvement, particularly in rural and marginalized regions, revealing an essential gap in the current scholarly discourse that warrants further investigation.

Research on how parental collaboration influences academic performance in Kenya, and particularly in Makueni County, is limited. Although studies such as those by Syomwene (2022) suggest that effective parent-teacher relationships positively impact student outcomes, there remain significant gaps in exploring the intricacies of participatory decision-making within this region. Furthermore, the troubling trend of declining academic performance, with Makueni County reporting a mean KCSE score of 46 compared to a national mean of 58 (KNEC, 2023), underscores an urgent need for interventions that leverage parent-teacher collaboration. Investigating the role of participatory decision-making in enhancing students' academic performance in Makueni will yield valuable insights for educational stakeholders.

1.1 Problem Statement

Data indicate a troubling trend in student academic performance across regions, with significant declines on standardized assessments. For instance, Makueni County has reported a consistent decline in students' mean KCSE scores, with recent figures showing an average of 46, compared with the national mean of 58. The decline reveals underlying issues that have a profound impact on students' academic achievements. Academic understanding and students' progress require consistent, meaningful interaction between teachers and parents, as evidenced by research findings. Without such engagement, parents may lack awareness of their children's educational needs, resulting in missed opportunities for support and intervention. Studies indicate that limiting parental involvement leads to lower motivation, increases absenteeism, and diminishes engagement in their studies. Moreover, existing literature suggests that effective parent-teacher partnerships can significantly enhance student achievement by fostering a supportive learning environment. Unfortunately, many schools fail to implement structured collaboration frameworks, leading to a disconnect that limits the full potential of these partnerships. As a result, the gap in empirical evidence regarding the specific influence of parent-teacher collaborations on academic outcomes is alarming. The proposed research aims to close vital gaps through a systematic analysis of the effects of parent-teacher collaboration on academic outcomes. By examining the interplay between communication practices and academic success, this research seeks to identify concrete strategies to enhance collaboration and ultimately improve student outcomes in Makueni County. The urgency of this investigation is underscored by the declining academic performance trends and the pressing need for effective solutions that support student success through robust parent-teacher engagement.

1.2 Research Objective

To explore the influence of participatory decision-making on the academic performance of students in public secondary schools.

1.3 Justification of the Study

The study yields valuable new insights that enhance understanding of participatory decision-making and its impact on student performance. The investigation of specific aspects of decision-making seeks to explain how these factors significantly influence academic outcomes. Additionally, the study quantifies the relationships between these collaborative practices and student achievement, offering evidence-based insights into how various forms of collaboration contribute to improved academic performance. Focusing on Makueni County, Kenya, the research

also examined the cultural and contextual factors shaping parent-teacher collaboration, thereby addressing existing gaps in the literature on non-Western educational environments.

The benefits of this study extend across various stakeholders, beginning with students. They are likely to experience improved academic performance and increased school engagement as a result of enhanced collaboration. For parents, the research is expected to enhance their understanding of their roles in education and provide practical strategies for effective collaboration with teachers. This increased understanding is expected to boost their confidence, leading to more active participation in school-related activities.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Review

Pierre Bourdieu established Social Capital Theory in the late 20th century, which defines social networks as valuable assets because they provide members with access to resources within their network boundaries (Bourdieu, 1985; Florin et al., 2003). Social networks develop through building relationships (Portes, 1998). The theory emphasizes three major tenets: social networks, norms of reciprocity, and trustworthiness. Social networks refer to the connections and relationships individuals maintain within their communities or social groups (Bourdieu, 1986; Lin, 2001). Norms of reciprocity involve the mutual exchange of resources, favors, and support within these networks (Coleman, 1990; Putnam, 2000). Trustworthiness pertains to the confidence individuals have in the reliability and integrity of their social connections (Fukuyama, 1995; Adler & Kwon, 2002).

The research explores the social networking effects on educational communities. Examining the interactions and relationships that emerge within these networks, the research will elucidate how social capital is created, maintained, and leveraged among community members. Reciprocity norms in parent-teacher relationships may facilitate information exchange, thereby enhancing students' academic experiences (Smith & Jones, 2022). Trustworthiness is crucial in promoting effective collaboration between parents and teachers (Garcia, 2021). The theory provides insights into broader societal implications for parent-teacher collaboration. Nurturing strong networks and promoting norms of trustworthiness enhance social capital, leading to positive outcomes, including increased social cohesion, improved educational outcomes, and enhanced overall well-being (Taylor, 2020).

A notable weakness of Social Capital Theory is its assumption that all relationships inherently generate mutual benefits; however, this does not account for socio-economic disparities or power dynamics (Misztal, 2019). The theory does not account for the impact of institutional elements, including education policies and cultural standards, as well as community expectations, on parent-teacher relationships (Kumar & Mwendu, 2023). These institutional factors may inhibit relationships characterized by trust and reciprocity, subsequently impacting students' academic performance. The current theory requires supplementation with alternative models to thoroughly explain the impact of different relationship systems on personal development.

2.2 Literature Review

Participation in educational decision-making produces enhanced outcomes for educational processes. Parental involvement in school governance and policy formation creates supportive environments which drive student achievement and motivation according to international research (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). According to Fan and Chen's (2018) global meta-analysis, both academic outcomes and social and emotional wellness benefit from parental involvement. Furthermore, studies in various developing countries affirm the need for parental engagement in shaping policies, which ultimately leads to improved student academic success (Bergman & Chan, 2017; Jeynes, 2019).

In the African context, participatory decision-making has been associated with enhanced educational outcomes. Mlambo and Mavhundutse (2021) found that Zimbabwean students who engaged their parents in school decisions achieved better outcomes and remained in school longer. Similarly, studies in South Africa show that collaborative governance structures involving parents contribute to more effective school management and improved student behaviour (Myende & Nhlumayo, 2022).

Local studies in Kenya, notably Syomwene (2022), reveal that parental engagement in school Board membership fosters collaboration between home and school environments and yields better educational outcomes for students. The data show that parental involvement in decisions strengthens their dedication toward educational development. Research on participatory decision-making to improve academic performance, specifically in Makueni County, remains limited despite clear supporting evidence. Researching participatory practices in Makueni's distinctive social setting can provide important knowledge about their effects on student performance.

3. Methodology

Descriptive research methods were used to evaluate cooperative relationships and academic impacts between parents and teachers in public high schools across Makueni County. By employing this method, the study sought to accurately portray the existing relationships between parents and teachers. This descriptive research design yielded multiple insights into parent-teacher collaboration practices that shape academic success and identified valuable areas for improvement in public secondary education.

The study was conducted in Makueni County, which is situated in the eastern part and covers approximately 8,008 square kilometers, and is characterized by a mix of urban and rural communities. The region supports a diverse agricultural sector, particularly in horticulture and livestock rearing, and engages in trade, manufacturing, and services that contribute to its economy. The target group provides data based on their distribution statistics and total population. The analysis included 390 public secondary schools that sought data from teachers, parents, and form four students.

Research instruments included a questionnaire used to collect data from school principals, deputy principals, BOM Chairs, and school presidents. The investigation used mixed-methods research to examine parent-teacher collaboration and its influence on students' academic performance. Multiple research methods working in collaboration generate a better understanding of complex collaboration processes through their distinct information findings. A descriptive statistical

approach helped us simplify the essential qualities of the analyzed variables during the quantitative analysis stage. The evaluation required mathematical calculations of data characteristics, including means, standard deviations, and medians, to present major patterns in the information. Additionally, frequency distributions and tables were generated to visualize how various indicators of parent-teacher collaboration and academic performance are distributed across our sample. This initial step provided a clear snapshot of the data and helped identify patterns or anomalies that warranted further investigation.

4. Findings

4.1 Frequency of Parent Meetings Held to Involve Them in School Decisions

The researcher sought to assess the frequency of parent meetings held to involve them in school decisions. The findings were as indicated in Figure 1.

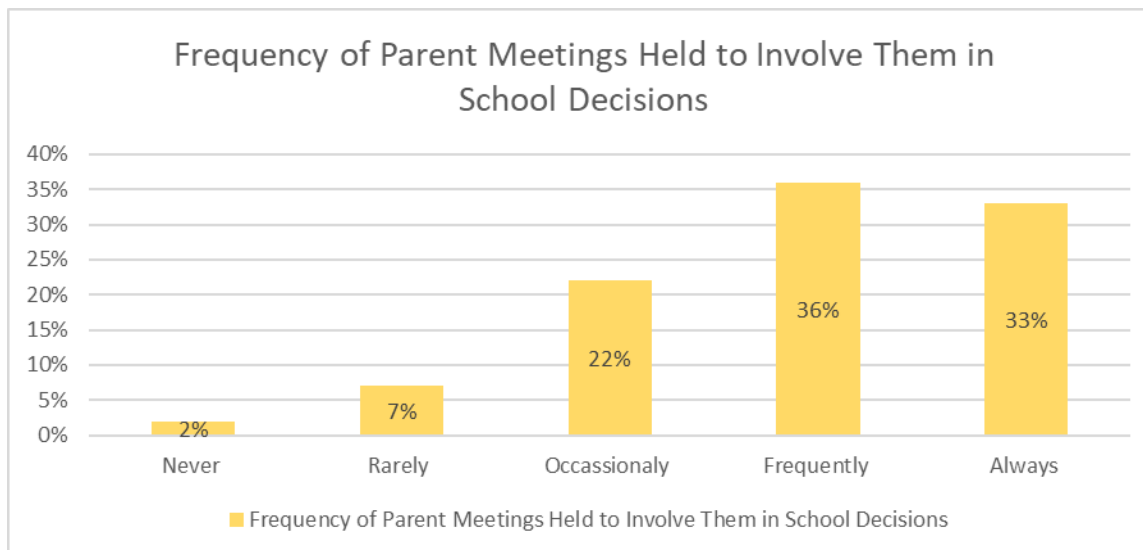


Figure 1: Frequency of Parent Meetings Held to Involve Them in School Decisions

The results in Table 1 indicated that 2% of deputy principals reported that parent meetings never took place, 7% said they rarely occurred, 22% said they occasionally occurred, 36% said they occurred frequently, and 33% reported they always occurred. This implies that, in most schools, parent meetings were held frequently or always, reflecting efforts to involve parents in school decisions. These findings are consistent with those of Shatkin and Gershberg (2017) in the Philippines, who found that frequent parent meetings strengthen school-family collaboration and support student welfare.

4.2. Comfort Level of Parents in Sharing Ideas

The researcher sought to assess how comfortable parents feel sharing their ideas within the school. The findings were as indicated in Figure 2.

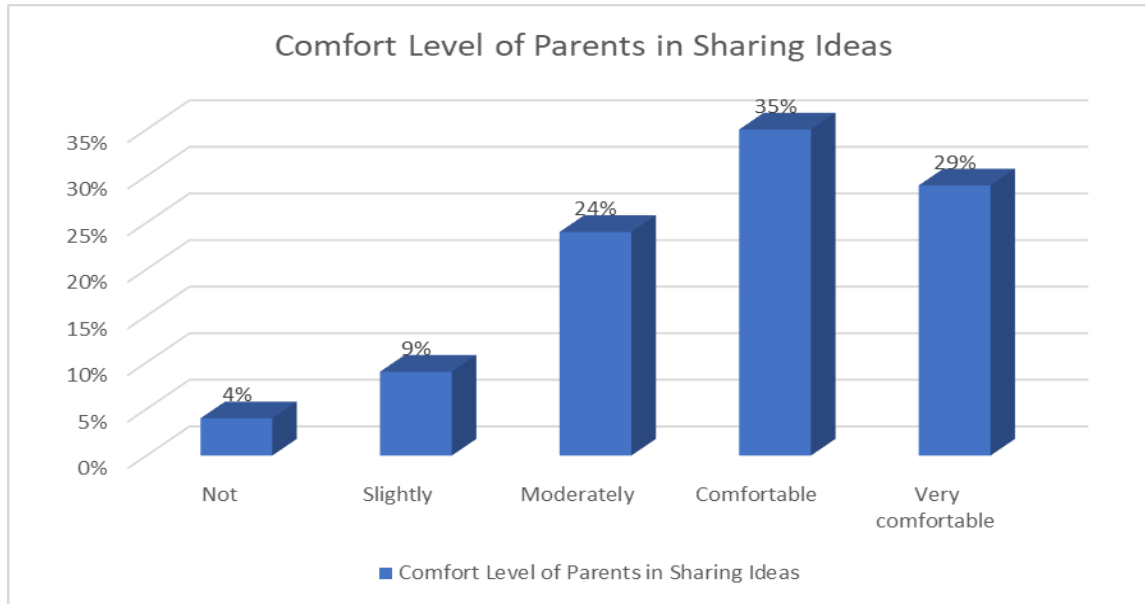


Figure 2: Comfort Level of Parents in Sharing Ideas

According to the findings in Figure 2, 4% of deputy principals reported that parents were not comfortable sharing ideas, 9% said they were slightly comfortable, 24% said they were moderately comfortable, 35% said they were comfortable, and 29% said they were very comfortable. This implies that most parents were generally comfortable sharing ideas, with a significant number being very comfortable. These findings are consistent with those of Symeou et al. (2019) from Cyprus, who reported that inclusive school environments enhance parents’ comfort in contributing ideas and improve collaboration.

4.3 Parent Participation in School Discussions

The researcher sought to assess parents' level of engagement in school discussions. The findings were as indicated in Figure 3.

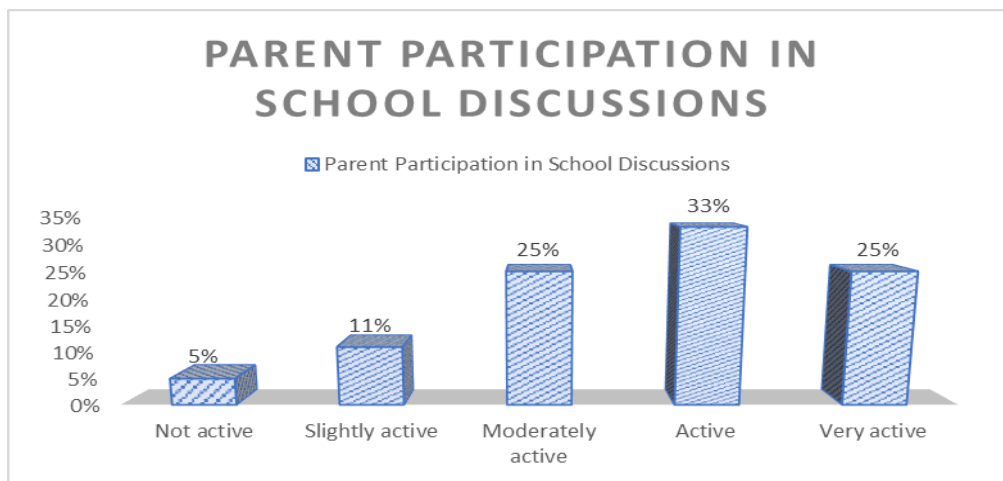


Figure 3: Parent Participation in School Discussions

The findings in Figure 3 revealed that 5% of deputy principals rated parents as not active, 11% as slightly active, 25% as moderately active, 33% as active, and another 25% as very active in school discussions. This implies that most parents actively participated in school discussions, with about one-third being very active. These findings are in tandem with those of Goodall (2018) from the United Kingdom, who found that active parental participation in school discussions enhances governance and student support systems.

4.4. BOM Chairpersons' Perception of the Participatory Decision-Making

4.4.1 Frequency of Parent Meetings on Governance

The researcher sought to assess how frequently parent meetings are conducted regarding school governance. The findings were as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1: Frequency of Parent Meetings on Governance

Frequency	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Never	1	3
Rarely	3	7
Occasionally	16	33
Frequently	19	39
Always	10	21
Total	49	100

The analysis in Table 1 revealed that 3% of the BoM chairpersons indicated that parent meetings were never held, 7% said they were rarely held, 33% said they were held occasionally, 39% said they were held frequently, and 21% said they were held always. This indicates that most schools hold parent meetings either regularly or frequently, suggesting a high level of engagement between the school and parents. These findings are consistent with those of Posey-Maddox et al. (2016) in the United States, who found that frequent governance-related meetings with parents strengthen school-community partnerships.

4.4.2 Level of Parental Encouragement to Share Ideas

The researcher sought to assess how encouraged parents feel to share ideas. The findings were as indicated in Table 2.

Table 2: Level of Parental Encouragement to Share Ideas

Encouragement Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Not encouraged	2	10
Slightly	5	16
Moderately encouraged	17	20
Encouraged	15	26
Very encouraged	10	28
Total	49	100

Based on the findings in 2, 10% of BoM chairpersons noted that parents were not encouraged to share ideas; 16% said they were slightly encouraged; 20% said they were moderately encouraged; 26% said they were encouraged; and 28% indicated that parents were very encouraged. This implies that most parents felt encouraged, or very encouraged, to share their ideas in school governance. These findings are consistent with those of Murray et al. (2015) in Australia, who reported that encouraging parental input in governance meetings fosters stronger school-family collaboration.

4.4.3 Extent of Parental Participation in Governance Discussions

The researcher sought to assess the extent of parental participation in school governance discussions. The findings were as indicated in Table 3.

Table 3: Extent of Parental Participation in Governance Discussions

Participation Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Not at all	1	8
Slightly	5	14
Moderately	14	26
Very much	17	28
Extremely	12	24
Total	49	100

The results in Table 3 revealed that 8% of the BoM chairpersons stated that parents did not participate at all, 14% said slightly, 26% said moderately, 28% said very much, and 24% said extremely. This suggests that the highest proportion of BoM chairpersons felt that parental participation in governance discussions was significant, either very much or extremely. These findings are consistent with those of Shatkin and Gershberg (2017) in the Philippines, who found

that high parental participation in governance discussions improves school decision-making processes.

4.4.4 PTA Chairs' Perception of Participatory Decision-Making

4.4.4.1 Frequency of PTA Meetings

The researcher sought to assess how regularly PTA meetings are held to involve parents, and the findings are as indicated in Table 4.

Table 4: Frequency of PTA Meetings

Frequency	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Never	3	5
Rarely	5	9
Occasionally	11	21
Frequently	17	33
Always	15	29
Total	51	100

The findings in Table 4 showed that 5% of PTA Chairs said meetings are never held, 9% said rarely, 21% said occasionally, 33% said frequently, and 29% said always. This implies that PTA meetings are generally held frequently, enhancing parent-school interaction. The findings align with those of Muthoni (2021), who observed that regular PTA meetings promote shared responsibility for student welfare.

4.4.4.2 Comfort Level of Parents Sharing Ideas

The researcher sought to assess how comfortable parents feel sharing ideas in PTA meetings, and the findings are indicated in Table 5.

Table 5: Comfort Level of Parents Sharing Ideas

Comfort Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Not Comfortable	2	3
Slightly Comfortable	6	11
Moderately Comfortable	19	37
Very Comfortable	24	49
Total	51	100

According to the results in Table 5, 3% of parents were not comfortable, 11% were slightly comfortable, 37% were moderately comfortable, and 49% were very comfortable sharing ideas. This implies that most parents feel confident participating in PTA meetings.

4.4.4.3 Level of Parental Engagement in PTA Meetings

The researcher sought to assess how engaged parents are in PTA discussions, and the findings are as indicated in Table 6.

Table 6: Level of Parental Engagement in PTA Meetings

Engagement Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Not Engaged	2	3
Slightly	6	11
Moderately	16	31
Engaged	17	33
Very Engaged	10	21
Total	51	100

The results in Table 6 revealed that 3% of parents were not engaged, 11% were slightly engaged, 31% were moderately engaged, 33% were engaged, and 21% were very engaged. This shows that most parents are actively engaged in PTA discussions. These findings are consistent with Ochieng (2018), who found that engagement increases when parents perceive their input to be valued.

4.4.5 Student Presidents' View on the Participatory Decision-Making

4.4.5.1 Frequency of Parental Participation in Meetings

The researcher sought to assess how frequently parents attend school meetings, and the findings are shown in Figure 4.

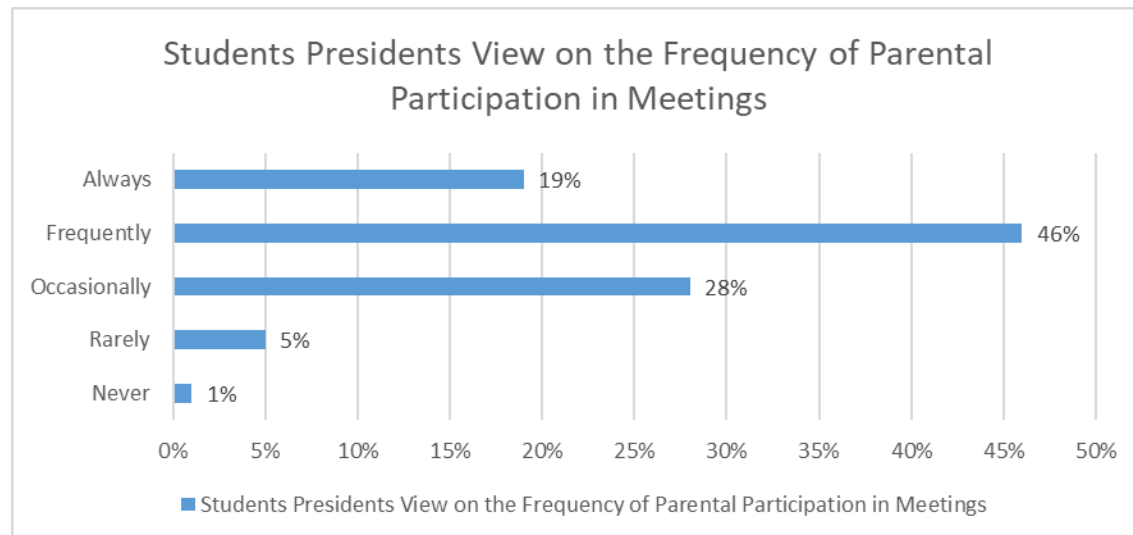


Figure 4: Frequency of Parental Participation in Meetings

The findings in Figure 4 showed that 1% of parents never attended meetings, 5% rarely, 28% occasionally, 46% frequently, and 19% always. This suggests that most parents regularly attend school meetings. These findings align with those of Mugisha (2020), who found that active parental participation in school meetings in Ugandan schools contributes positively to student discipline and performance.

4.4.5.2 Freedom of Parents to Share Ideas

The researcher sought to assess how free parents feel to share ideas during school discussions, and the findings are shown in Figure 5.

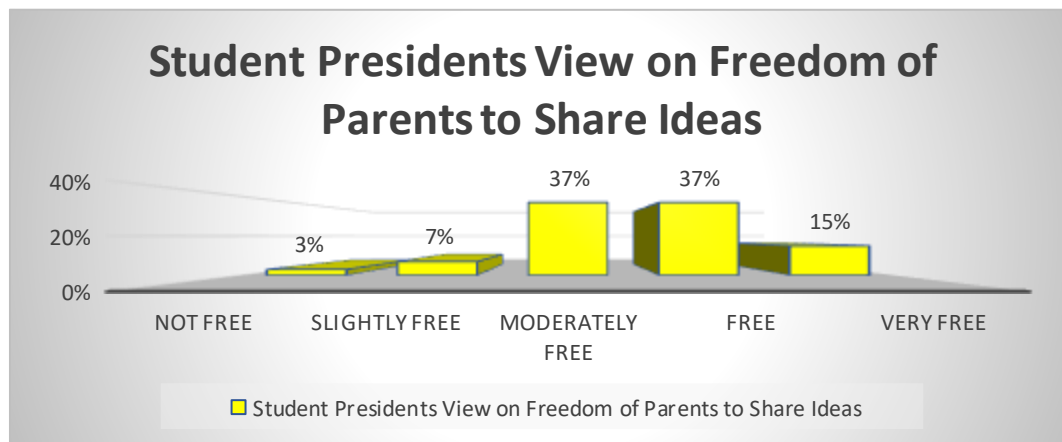


Figure 5: Student Presidents' View on Freedom of Parents to Share Ideas

The findings in Figure 5 revealed that 3% of parents felt not free to share ideas, 7% felt slightly free, 37% felt moderately free, another 37% felt free, and 15% felt very free. This implies that a significant proportion of parents felt at least moderately free to express their views. These findings are consistent with those of Agyemang (2018) in Ghana, who found that schools with inclusive cultures tend to receive more parental input in decision-making.

4.4.5.3 Parental Engagement in Decision-Making

The researcher sought to assess how engaged parents are in school decision-making processes, and the findings are indicated in Figure 6.

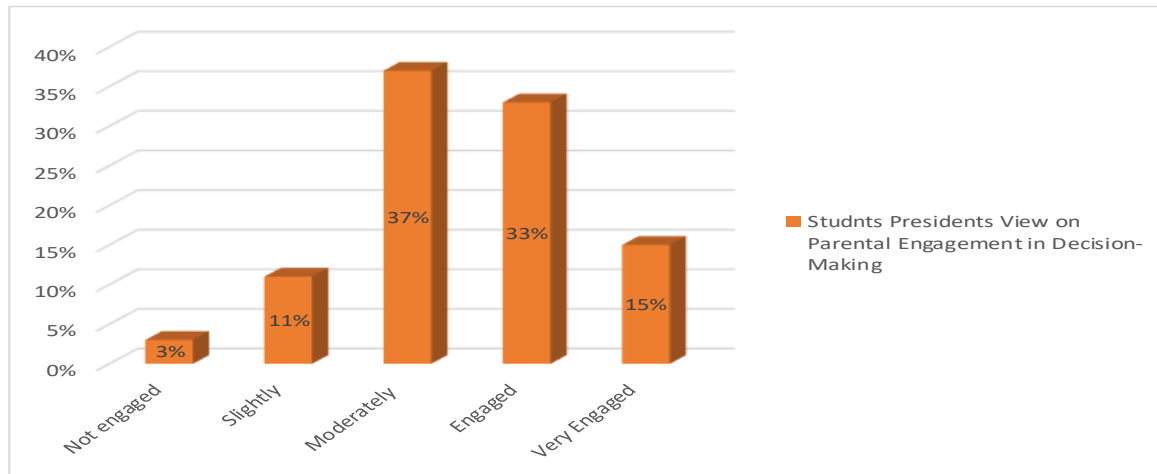


Figure 6: Parental Engagement in Decision-Making

The results in Figure 6 showed that 3% of parents were not engaged, 11% were slightly engaged, 37% were moderately engaged, 33% were engaged, and 15% were very engaged. This indicates that most parents were at least moderately engaged in decision-making. These findings are in line with those of Osei (2020), who observed that involving parents in school governance enhances ownership and accountability in public secondary schools.

5. Conclusion

The study concluded that principals frequently held meetings with parents, thereby cultivating a culture of regular engagement that promotes shared understanding and collaboration on school matters. In addition, the study concluded that the process of exchanging ideas between schools and parents was perceived as effective, strengthening partnerships in academic planning. Furthermore, the study concluded that parents were generally active in school discussions, which helped create an inclusive atmosphere conducive to improved student outcomes. Similarly, the study concluded that deputy principals observed a consistent effort to involve parents in decision-making processes through regular meetings, reflecting a commitment to participatory governance. The study also concluded that board of management chairpersons recognized the importance of regular governance meetings with parents, which reinforced transparency and shared responsibility. Alongside this, it concluded that parents were confident and willing to share their ideas, contributing meaningfully to decision-making. Therefore, the study concluded that PTA discussions provided an active platform for parents to influence educational decisions.

Finally, the study concluded that student presidents perceived parental participation in school meetings as frequent and constructive. It was also concluded that parents generally felt free to express their views during such forums. Consequently, the study concluded that parental involvement in school decision-making was both moderate and impactful, playing a critical role in shaping academic priorities.

6. Recommendations

The study recommended that school administrators and boards of management enhance structured and consistent avenues for parental engagement in school matters. These should include not only

regular meetings but also ongoing dialogue channels that ensure parental voices are integrated into school governance and daily operations.

Moreover, the study recommended that the Ministry of Education, through county directors of education, develop and enforce policies that promote school-community partnerships, including guidelines on the minimum frequency of parent engagement forums and expectations for parental involvement in both academic and extracurricular school activities. The study also recommended that school leaders collaborate with Parent-Teacher Associations to foster a culture of transparency and mutual respect through timely, clear, and effective communication. Schools should adopt digital and non-digital tools to ensure parents are well-informed and their feedback is acted upon.

The study further recommended that schools invest in community education and awareness programs to sensitize parents on their role in supporting student learning and school development. This includes educating parents on how to monitor academic progress at home and contribute meaningfully to school initiatives.

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