



EXPLORING STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING PARENTAL PARTICIPATION AND INFLUENCE IN SCHOOL DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES: A CASE OF PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

The purpose of this conceptual paper is to explore strategies for enhancing parental participation and influence in school decision-making processes, focusing specifically on primary schools. The main research question guiding this study is: How can parental participation and influence in school decision-making processes be effectively enhanced? This qualitative study draws upon a comprehensive review of scholarly books and articles, forming the cornerstone of the research. Data collection is conducted through qualitative methods aligned with the interpretive paradigm, allowing for an in-depth exploration of parental perspectives and experiences in school decision-making. Findings from this study highlight the importance of fostering meaningful partnerships between schools and parents to promote collaborative decision-making. Parents' active involvement in decision-making processes not only enhances school governance but also contributes to improved student outcomes and overall school effectiveness. The significance of this study lies in its potential to inform the development and implementation of strategies aimed at enhancing parental participation and influence in school decision-making processes. When recognizing parents as valuable stakeholders in the education system, schools can leverage their insights, expertise, and diverse perspectives to make more informed and inclusive decisions. Educators, policymakers, and school leaders are urged to foster a culture of partnership and collaboration between schools and parents. These recommendations emphasize the importance of communication, transparency, and meaningful engagement to ensure that parents are empowered to play an active role in shaping the educational experiences of their children.

Keywords: *parental participation, decision-making, governance, stakeholders, collaboration, leadership*

1. INTRODUCTION

Atchia & Chinapah (2023) posit that parental involvement in the educational process is widely recognized as a critical component underpinning student success and attainment of quality education. Research consistently demonstrates that when parents are actively engaged in their children's education, students perform better academically where they exhibit improved behaviour, and have higher rates of attendance including maximised performance (Ha et al., 2024). However, despite the acknowledged benefits of parental participation, there remains a gap between the ideal level of involvement and the reality in many school settings. This gap is particularly evident in the realm of school decision-making processes, where parents often feel they are deliberately excluded underrepresented and undervalued (Phillips et al., 2024). Langa & Lazar (2024) found that primary schools serve as the foundational building blocks or rather a cornerstone of a child's education which shapes their attitudes, behaviours, and academic trajectory. It is during these early years that parental involvement can have the greatest impact and yet parents often find themselves on the periphery of decision-making processes within primary school settings. Malinina (2024) stipulates that this discrepancy is a cause for great concern mainly because parents possess valuable insights, perspectives, and experiences that can inform and enrich school policies and practices.

In this educational landscape and context, the importance of parental involvement in schools and the challenges associated with achieving meaningful participation, there is a pressing need to explore strategies for enhancing parental participation and influence in school decision-making processes particularly at the primary school level. Mansueto et al., (2024) postulate that in an event where parents are empowered to play a more active role in shaping educational policies and practices, schools can become a more inclusive, responsive, and effective learning environments for all students. The concept of parental involvement in education has evolved considerably over the years, moving beyond traditional notions of parent-teacher conferences and volunteer opportunities to encompass a broader range of activities and responsibilities. Today, parental involvement encompasses various forms of engagement, including communication with teachers, participation in school events, support with homework, and involvement in decision-making processes (Handoko, 2024).

Despite the growing recognition of the importance of parental involvement, disparities in parental participation persist particularly among underserved and marginalized communities. Factors such as socio-economic status, cultural background, language barriers, and educational attainment can all impact the level of parental involvement in education (Mendez et al., 2024). Additionally, systemic barriers within schools, such as rigid structures, lack of transparency, and limited opportunities for meaningful engagement, can further hinder parental participation. Peng et al., (2024) advise that within the context of primary schools, parental involvement is particularly critical due to the developmental stage of the students and the significant role that parents play in their children's lives. However, research suggests that parental participation tends to decline as children progress through the primary school years, with parents becoming less involved as their children become more independent. Kilag et al., (2024) maintain that this trend underscores the need for targeted strategies to maintain and enhance parental involvement throughout the primary school years.

One area where parental participation seems particularly lacking is in school decision-making processes. While parents may be consulted on certain issues, such as fundraising or event planning, their involvement in more substantive decisions, such as curriculum development or budget allocation, is often limited (Qolamani & Kaya, 2024). This lack of meaningful participation can lead to feelings of disempowerment and frustration among parents who may feel excluded from the decision-making process (Carmel et al., 2024). In recent years, there has been a growing emphasis on the importance of shared decision-making in education, with calls for greater collaboration between schools and parents. Alqods et al., (2024) found that the benefits of shared decision-making are numerous which include increased transparency, accountability, and trust between schools and families. However, achieving meaningful parental participation in decision-making processes requires a concerted effort on the part of schools to overcome barriers and create opportunities for effective collaboration (Kilag et al., 2024).

The **main research question** guiding this qualitative inquiry is: How can parental participation and influence in school decision-making processes be effectively enhanced?

The **research objectives** pertinent to this study” Strategies for Enhancing Parental Participation and Influence in School Decision-Making Processes are:

- To examine current levels of parental participation in decision-making processes within primary schools.



- To identify effective strategies for enhancing parental influence and involvement in school decision-making processes.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework guiding this study draws upon the concept of democratic governance in education. Nadeem (2024) maintains that this philosophical theory is rooted and underpinned by democratic principles which emphasizes prominence of inclusivity, transparency, and collaboration in decision-making processes within primary schools. According to this perspective, parents are viewed as essential stakeholders whose voices should be valued and integrated into school governance structures. Building upon the principles of shared decision-making and accountability, this framework underscores the need for schools to actively involve parents in shaping policies and practices that impact their children's quality education. In an attempt to embrace a democratic governance approach, primary schools can create more equitable, responsive, and effective learning environments that prioritize the interests and perspectives of all stakeholders particularly its beneficiaries, the students.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept “Decision-making” in education

In the context of education, decision-making refers to the process by which school leaders, administrators, and stakeholders evaluate various options and choose a course of action to address challenges, implement policies, and improve student outcomes (Mohammad et al., 2024). These scholars, Piala et al., (2024) emphasise that decision-making in education encompasses a wide range of activities and skills which comprise of curriculum development, resource allocation, budget planning, staffing decisions, and the establishment of school policies and procedures particularly for the students. Effective decision-making in education is essential for ensuring that schools are able to meet the diverse needs of students, create positive learning environments, and achieve desired educational outcomes. It requires collaboration and wide consultation with various stakeholders, including teachers, parents, students, and community members, to gather diverse perspectives, identify priorities, and make informed choices that align with the school's mission and goals (Liggett, 2024). In an effort to actively involve stakeholders in decision-making processes, schools can foster a sense of ownership, accountability, and shared responsibility ultimately leading to a more equitable and inclusive educational practice directed by democratic governance.

Parental involvement in education

(Dingili & Yungungu, 2023; Kennedy, 2021) construe parental involvement in education revolving in the active participation of parents in their children's educational journey which encompasses various forms of engagement both at home and within the school community. This involvement extends beyond traditional roles such as helping with homework or attending parent-teacher subject meetings, to include advocacy for their child's needs, collaboration with teachers, and participation in school decision-making processes. Research study by Sulyman (2023) consistently shows that when parents are involved in their children's education, students tend to perform better academically, exhibit improved behaviour, and have higher levels of motivation and self-esteem. Effective parental involvement requires open communication, mutual respect, and collaboration between parents and educators. It involves creating opportunities for parents to contribute to the educational process, such as volunteering in classrooms, serving on parent-teacher

associations, and participating in school governance structures. When leaders and administrators actively involve parents in educational matters, schools will possibly strengthen the home-school partnership, create a supportive learning environment, and ultimately enhance student success by attaining quality education (Alimba, et al., 2024).

Importance of parental decision-making and their involvement in education

Effective decision-making in primary schools necessitates meaningful parental involvement which recognizes parents as vital stakeholders in the process of their children's educational journey. According to (Khasawneh & AlOdwan, 2024) when parents are actively engaged in decision-making processes, schools will benefit from diverse perspectives and insights which leads to more informed and equitable choices. This collaborative approach fosters transparency, accountability, and shared responsibility and ultimately enhance the quality of education and promoting positive outcomes for all students. Arfa (2024) found that incorporating parental involvement into decision-making processes, serves as a foundation that empowers parents to contribute their expertise and advocate for the needs and demands of their children quality educational journey. It clearly emerges that through parent advisory committees, collaborative workshops, or regular communication channels, schools can create opportunities for parents to play a significant role in shaping effective educational policies and practices that are realistic and achievable. Therefore, school leaders and administrators are entrusted with the responsibility of valuing parental inputs and fostering a culture of partnership which is supportive and inclusive that prioritizes the interests and well-being of students (Marrero, 2024).

Impediments to parental decision-making and involvement

Yildiz (2024) supports the notion that impediments to parental decision-making and involvement in education will forever inevitably emerge from various sources which comprise of systemic barriers within educational institutions, socio-economic disparities, and cultural differences. In many cases, parents may face obstacles such as limited access to information, language barriers, or a lack of awareness about their rights and responsibilities in the educational processes. In the same vein, traditional hierarchical structures within schools may perpetuate a perception of parents as passive recipients of information rather than active partners who are widely consulted in decision-making processes (Watterston & Zhao, 2024). Consequently, aspects such as socio-economic factors, financial constraints or time limitations can also hinder parents' ability to participate fully in their children's education, particularly for those parents who originate from marginalized or disadvantaged backgrounds. Thus, overcoming these impediments requires concerted efforts from schools to create inclusive and accessible avenues for parental involvement as well as a commitment to fostering open communication, trust and collaboration between parents and various stakeholders in schools.



Strategies to involve parents in decision-making process.

Involving parents in decision-making processes within primary schools requires deliberate and inclusive strategies that recognize the valuable insights and perspectives that parents bring to the table for discussion. According to (Short et al., 2024) one of the effective approaches is to establish parent advisory committees or councils that comprises of representatives from diverse backgrounds who can contribute to discussions on school policies, programs, and initiatives. These committees serve as forums for parents to voice their concerns, share ideas, and collaborate with educators and administrators in shaping the direction of the school. Similarly, (Ndung'u et al., 2024) concur that utilizing technology platforms and social media channels can facilitate communication and engagement by which to ensure that parents have access to information and opportunities to provide feedback on important matters affecting their children's education.

3. IMPLEMENTATION METHOD

This is a qualitative study which comprised of literature review as a research method. A systematic literature review was conducted drawing evidence based on books and articles published in recent year sources. To explore our knowledge and understanding about the Strategies for Enhancing Parental Participation and Influence in School Decision-Making Processes. A case of primary schools. Minerbo & Briton (2022) elucidate that integrative literature review is a form of research that reviews, critiques, and synthesises representative literature on a topic in an integrated way such that new perspectives on the topic are generated. An integrative literature review is a special kind of systematic literature review that permits the combination and synthesis of findings. In the analysis of the reviewed books and articles in understanding the topic, the interpretivist paradigm was used within a local context with its limitations that have deep social and cultural foundations (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2023). The reflections are based on the researcher's subjective perspectives about the specified topic.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Cheng (2022) suggests for the adaptation of educational content and pedagogy to reflect diverse perspectives and involve parents in the learning process to increase their participation and influence in school decision-making processes. This change entails incorporating parental feedback into curriculum creation to ensure that educational materials and activities are culturally appropriate and sensitive to the needs of the community. Similarly, it entails creating opportunities for parents to apply their skills and knowledge with the curriculum, particularly through guest lectures, seminars, or collaborative projects. This approach values the contributions of all stakeholders and provide students for success in a diverse and interconnected economic market-driven world.

5. CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, enhancing parental participation and influence in school decision-making processes is paramount for creating inclusive and effective primary school environments. When leaders and administrators are actively involving parents in decision-making, schools can benefit from diverse perspectives, foster trust and collaboration, and ultimately improve student outcomes and the quality of. In an attempt to achieve this idea, various strategies such as establishing parent advisory committees, leveraging technology for communication, and providing opportunities for parent engagement, schools can empower parents to play an active role in shaping educational

policies and practices. Moreover, curriculum transformation that incorporates parental inputs and reflects the diverse needs and values of the community can further enhance parental involvement in education. When prioritizing parental participation is implemented as a strategy, primary schools can be able to cultivate stronger partnerships between schools and families which leads to greater equity, transparency, and success for all stakeholders involved.

SUGGESTIONS

According to (Jarpe-Ratner et al., 2024) school leaders and administrators should prioritize creating inclusive and accessible avenues for parental involvement, ensuring that all parents have the opportunity to contribute their perspectives and insights. This may involve establishing regular parent advisory committees or councils which provides multiple channels for communication and hosting inclusive meetings or workshops. Leveraging technology to facilitate communication and engagement with parents is essential, particularly in light of the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic. The utilization of digital platforms for sharing information, gathering feedback, and conducting virtual meetings can help overcome barriers such as time constraints and geographical limitations, enabling more parents to participate in decision-making processes (Lapointe & Klausen, 2024). Tayyab et al., (2024) believe that investing in training and resources to empower parents to play an active role in supporting their children's education is crucial because it contributes to the value of their inputs. Providing workshops on topics such as advocacy, educational policy, and effective communication can equip parents with the knowledge and skills needed to advocate for their children's needs and contribute meaningfully to school decision-making. When leaders and administrators implement these strategies fully, primary schools can be able to strengthen the partnership between teachers and parents, promote transparency and accountability and ultimately create more inclusive and effective learning environments for all students to attain quality education as envisaged by all stakeholders.

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