



Assessing Parental Involvement And Its Effect On School Governance.

Dominic Mwila

Dmi-St. Eugene University
Zambia

Abstract- Parental involvement in education is widely recognized as a critical factor in improving student outcomes. However, much of the existing literature has focused primarily on parents' roles in supporting learning at home, with limited attention given to their participation in school governance. This study investigates the extent and impact of parental involvement in school governance, with particular emphasis on how such involvement influences decision-making, accountability, and overall school performance. Guided by Epstein's Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence and Participatory Governance Theory, the research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews and document reviews. Quantitative data is analysed using SPSS to identify patterns and relationships, while qualitative data is subjected to thematic content analysis to uncover more profound insights into stakeholder experiences and perceptions. The study reveals that active parental involvement in governance, such as participation in school boards and parent-teacher associations, contributes to more transparent decision-making, improved resource management, and stronger school accountability. However, it also identifies barriers such as limited awareness, socio-economic constraints, and weak institutional frameworks that hinder effective participation. By focusing on the underexplored governance dimension of parental involvement, particularly in low-income and urban communities, this study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of inclusive school management. It highlights the need for policies and practices that actively engage parents as key stakeholders in school governance to enhance educational outcomes and institutional effectiveness.

Keywords- Parental involvement, school governance, student outcomes, participatory decision-making, school accountability, parent-teacher associations, school boards, educational leadership, inclusive school management, stakeholder participation, resource management, educational policy, Epstein's Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence, Participatory Governance Theory, mixed-methods research, SPSS analysis, thematic content analysis, low-income communities, urban education, institutional effectiveness.

I. Chapter One Introduction Of The Study

1.1 Background of the Study

The role of parents in the academic performance and general progress of the learners has always been noted as one of the key influential areas. Nowadays, in the last few years, academic performance has no longer been the only subject of interest, and it has recently been paired with another factor, that of parent involvement in school management. This is because school governance is defined as the policies, procedures, and frameworks by which schools are steered and managed in terms of decision making, accountability, money management, and strategic planning. Parental participation in these processes of governance would increase transparency, sense of ownership by the community, and lead to improvement in educational outcomes.

Parental participation in the governance of schools in most of the education systems, particularly in the developing economies, is either at the minimum level or is symbolic, often confined to attending Parent Teachers Association (PTA) meetings or events of raising funds. However, research indicates that effective parental participation in governing their schools results in responsive education policies, greater accountability of the school leaders, and enhanced results of learners. This research aims to find the scope and influence of parental involvement in school governance and to select effective practices and ongoing challenges (Gordon & Nocon, 2008).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Although the need for parental involvement is globally recognized, parental management involvement in school governance is minimal and unreliable, to put it mildly. Most schools are highly dictated in internal administration, and in fact, in certain schools, parents do not even know their rights or duties when it comes to running educational institutions. This is a lost connection to the idea that school governance should be participatory and inclusive, thus playing a critical role in providing quality education. The issue is viewed in the inadequate knowledge and practice



of the role of parental input in the school structures of governance. The paper thus examined the influence of parental participation, or the absence thereof, on the process of school governance.

1.3 Significance of the Study

The study was significant since it addressed one of the critical gaps in the area of education governance, particularly in the processes of stakeholder involvement at the practical level. However, it had been increasingly widely acknowledged that one central aspect in schools about better quality in school teaching and learning was inclusive and participatory governance processes (Mahon & Ochota, 2018). In most educational systems, the actual engagement of parents in school management and decision-making was low or limited to formal participation. This paper attempted to add to our knowledge on how parents could be active participants in school leadership as opposed to being mere spectators by observing the influence of parental involvement on such school governance-related aspects as decision-making, accountability, transparency, and policy implementation.

Moreover, the study added to the existing body of literature on the issue of community involvement in education by providing a concrete understanding of how parental voices could be incorporated into the governance mechanisms of schools in the form of Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs), school boards, and governance committees. It aimed to identify the facilitating conditions and the obstacles that affected the degree and quality of parental involvement, which produced evidence that could inform institutional reforms and capacity-building practices.

Finally, numerous benefits were anticipated to accrue to stakeholders in practice. Policymakers obtained evidence-based suggestions to create or reform policies that promoted and facilitated parental engagement in school governance. Educators and school administrators learned methods to carry out more collaborative and transparent governing models. This involved informing parents and community members with the necessary knowledge and frameworks about their rights and roles to help determine the educational environment. Taken together, these insights were used to create more accountable schools, utilize resources more effectively, foster greater trust between schools and communities, and ultimately lead to higher educational achievement among learners.

1.4 Research Objective

To examine the effect of parental involvement on school governance.

1.4.1 Sub-Research Objectives

1. To assess the impact of parental participation on decision-making and school accountability.
2. To explore challenges hindering effective parental involvement in school governance.
3. To recommend strategies for improving parental involvement in school governance.

1.5 Main Research Question

How does parental involvement affect school governance?

1.5.1 Sub-Research Questions

1. How does parental involvement influence school-level decision-making and accountability?
2. What barriers limit effective parental participation in school governance?
3. What strategies can enhance parental involvement in school governance?

1.6 Limitations of the Study

Despite careful planning and execution, the study faced several limitations:

1. Time Constraints

The research was conducted within a limited timeframe, which restricted prolonged engagement with participants and limited opportunities for follow-up discussions that could have provided deeper insights.

2. Limited Geographical Coverage

The study was confined to selected schools in Lusaka District. As a result, the findings may not fully represent rural schools or schools in other provinces of Zambia where governance structures and parental participation may differ significantly.

3. Sample Size Limitations

The study involved a relatively small sample of respondents. Although efforts were made to ensure representation of key stakeholders, the sample size may limit the generalizability of the findings.

4. Response Bias

Some respondents may have provided socially desirable answers, particularly when discussing sensitive issues such as financial accountability, leadership effectiveness, or governance weaknesses. This may have affected the accuracy of some responses.



5. Literacy and Communication Barriers

Some parents had difficulty understanding certain governance-related concepts in the questionnaires due to literacy challenges. Although clarification was provided, this may have influenced the depth of responses.

6. Limited Access to Official Records

In some cases, school documents such as financial records and meeting minutes were incomplete or not readily accessible, which limited the comprehensiveness of the document review component.

7. Financial Constraints

Limited financial resources restricted broader data collection across more schools or districts, which could have enhanced the robustness of the findings.

1.7 Scope of the Study

This research was aimed at measurement of parental involvement and its influence on school governance in the chosen schools in Lusaka District in Zambia. The study particularly focused on the role of parents in the process of governance where Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) and School Management Committees (SMCs) are concerned, and its role in the decision-making process, accountability, and the management of resources in the school.

The research focused on the governance aspect of parental involvement and not home-based academic support. It also discussed the role of parents in financial planning, development of infrastructure, review of school projects, policy debate, and accountability systems. The study also prescribed very important determinants of parent involvement such as literacy, socio-economic status, time bounds, communication channels, and cultural perceptions.

The sampled population was comprised of school administrators, teachers, PTA members and parents of the sampled schools. The research was based on a mixed-method design, i.e. quantitative (structured questionnaires) and qualitative (interviews, focus group discussions and review of documents) data.

Geographically, the study was restricted to some schools in Lusaka District and thus it was not inclusive of the rural districts and other provinces of Zambia. The results can therefore be best applicable to similarities in urban or peri-urban school environments with similar socio-economic profiles.

1.8 Operational Definitions of Key Terms

The following key terms are defined as they are used within the context of this study:

Parental Involvement

Active participation of parents in school governance activities, including decision-making, financial oversight, monitoring, and policy discussions through structures such as PTAs and SMCs.

School Governance

The system of rules, policies, leadership structures, and decision-making processes that guide and manage school operations.

Decision-Making

The process through which school stakeholders identify issues, evaluate options, and choose actions related to management, budgeting, infrastructure, and academic planning.

Accountability

The responsibility of school leaders and governing bodies to be transparent and answerable for their decisions, financial management, and school performance.

Resource Management

The planning, allocation, use, and monitoring of school resources, financial, physical, and human to ensure efficiency and transparency.

Critical Factors

Key conditions influencing parental involvement, such as literacy levels, socio-economic status, time availability, communication systems, cultural attitudes, and institutional structures.

Parent-Teacher Association (PTA)

A school-based body of parents and teachers that promotes collaboration and parental participation in school governance and development.

School Management Committee (SMC)

A governance group comprising parents, teachers, and community members that supports administration and monitors school resources.

Participatory Governance

An inclusive approach to school leadership that involves stakeholders especially parents in collaborative and democratic decision-making.



Transparency

Openness in communicating school decisions, financial matters, and policies to stakeholders.

Capacity Building

Training and empowerment initiatives designed to equip parents with the skills and confidence needed for effective governance participation.

II. Chapter Two Literature Review

2.0 Overview and Structure of the Chapter

This chapter presents a comprehensive review of literature related to parental involvement and its influence on school governance. The purpose of the chapter is to establish the theoretical, conceptual, and empirical foundations that guide the study and to situate the research problem within existing scholarly debates. By examining relevant theories, models, and previous studies, the chapter provides a clear understanding of how parental participation contributes to decision-making, accountability, transparency, and overall school effectiveness.

The chapter begins with the conceptual and theoretical framework, which clarifies the key concepts underpinning the study and explains the relationship between parental involvement and school governance outcomes. It discusses the major theories that inform the research, including Joyce Epstein's Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence, Participatory Governance Theory, Stakeholder Theory, Social Capital Theory, and Democratic School Governance perspectives. These frameworks collectively explain why collaboration between parents and schools is essential for effective and accountable educational management.

Following the theoretical discussion, the chapter reviews empirical studies on parental involvement from global, regional, and local contexts. The review synthesizes findings from North America, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia, Australasia, and Sub-Saharan Africa to highlight trends, best practices, and persistent challenges in implementing participatory school governance. Particular attention is given to evidence regarding parental roles in decision-making, financial oversight, and institutional accountability, as well as barriers such as socio-economic limitations, low literacy levels, centralized governance structures, and limited capacity-building initiatives.

The chapter also examines debates within the literature, distinguishing between symbolic and meaningful participation and emphasizing the importance of inclusive and capacity-driven engagement strategies. Through this critical analysis, gaps in existing research are identified, especially the limited empirical focus on parental involvement in school governance within the Zambian context.

The chapter concludes by summarizing the key insights from the reviewed literature and highlighting the specific knowledge gaps that justify the present study. These gaps provide the rationale for investigating how parental involvement influences school governance in selected schools in Lusaka District and guide the methodological approach adopted in the subsequent chapter.

2.1 Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study explains the relationship between parental involvement and school governance outcomes. It identifies parental involvement as the key independent variable and school governance as the dependent variable, while recognizing several contextual factors that may influence this relationship.

Parental involvement refers to the active participation of parents in governance-related activities within the school. This includes attending Parent-Teacher Association meetings, serving on School Management Committees, contributing to policy discussions, participating in budgeting and planning processes, monitoring school projects, and engaging in accountability and oversight functions. Through these activities, parents become directly involved in shaping the direction and management of the school.

School governance, on the other hand, refers to the systems, structures, and processes through which decisions are made, resources are managed, and accountability is maintained within the school. Effective governance is



reflected in transparent decision-making, responsible financial management, improved accountability, and enhanced overall school performance.

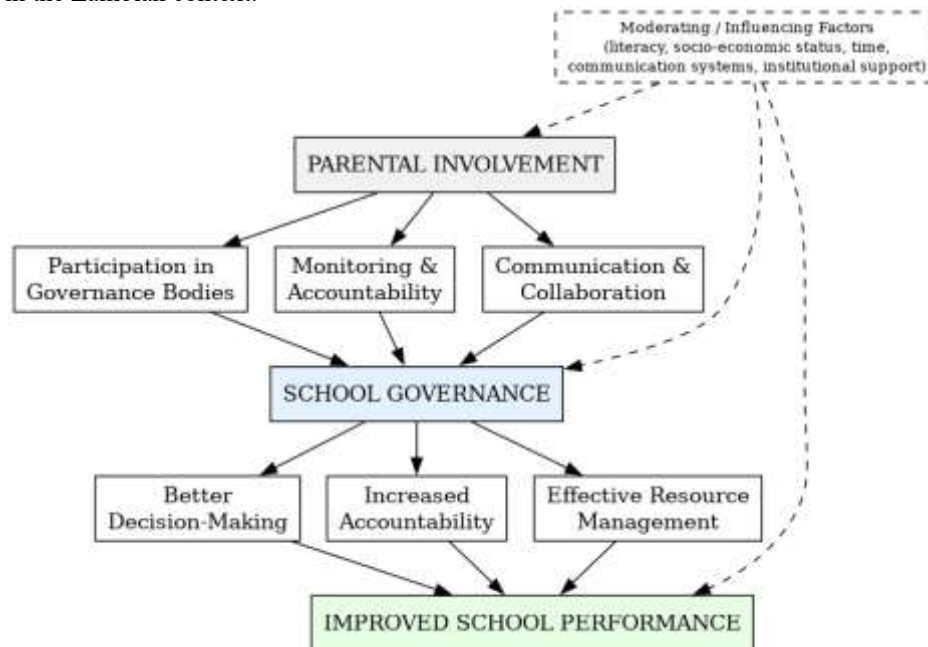
The framework proposes that increased parental involvement leads to improvements in school governance. When parents participate actively, they contribute diverse perspectives, monitor the use of resources, promote transparency, and hold school leaders accountable for their actions. This collective engagement strengthens decision-making processes and ensures that schools respond more effectively to the needs of learners and the community. Consequently, schools that encourage meaningful parental participation are likely to experience better governance outcomes and improved institutional effectiveness.

However, the relationship between parental involvement and governance is not automatic. It may be influenced by several moderating factors, such as parents' literacy levels, socio-economic status, time availability, communication systems, and the presence of supportive institutional structures. These factors can either facilitate or hinder parents' ability to participate effectively. For example, limited literacy or financial constraints may restrict participation, while clear communication and capacity-building initiatives may enhance it.

In essence, the conceptual framework suggests that when barriers are minimized and enabling conditions are provided, parental involvement positively influences school governance. The greater the level and quality of parental engagement, the stronger the governance outcomes are likely to be.

This chapter reviews literature related to parental involvement and school governance. It establishes the theoretical and conceptual foundation of the study by examining key frameworks such as Joyce Epstein's Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence and Participatory Governance Theory.

The chapter clarifies important concepts including parental involvement, decision-making, accountability, and transparency, with a specific focus on parents' roles in governance structures like PTAs and SMCs. It also reviews empirical studies from global, regional, and local contexts to identify trends, debates, and gaps in existing research. The chapter concludes by highlighting the research gap, noting that while much attention has been given to parental involvement in academic support, limited focus has been placed on its role in school governance particularly in the Zambian context.



2.1.2 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in well-established theories that explain the importance of collaboration, participation, and stakeholder engagement in educational institutions. Specifically, the study draws on the Theory of Overlapping



Spheres of Influence developed by Joyce Epstein, Participatory Governance Theory, and Stakeholder Theory. These theories collectively provide a foundation for understanding how parental involvement contributes to effective school governance.

The Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence posits that children's educational success is shaped by the interaction among three key institutions: the family, the school, and the community. According to this theory, these institutions do not operate independently but instead function best when their roles overlap and complement one another. When parents actively collaborate with schools, a supportive learning environment is created that enhances accountability, trust, and shared responsibility. Although parental involvement has traditionally been associated with home-based support for learning, Epstein emphasizes that meaningful engagement should extend to school-level decision-making and governance. In this study, the theory implies that parents who participate in governance structures such as Parent-Teacher Associations and School Management Committees help strengthen institutional transparency, responsiveness, and effectiveness.

Participatory Governance Theory further supports the inclusion of parents in school management. This theory is based on democratic principles, which argue that individuals affected by decisions should have the opportunity to contribute to those decisions. Within educational settings, participatory governance encourages decentralization of authority and shared leadership among stakeholders, including parents, teachers, and administrators. By involving parents in budgeting, planning, monitoring, and policy formulation, schools become more transparent and accountable. Participation also fosters trust and mutual understanding between the school and the community. In the context of this study, the theory suggests that when parents are meaningfully involved rather than symbolically represented, school governance improves through collective responsibility and better decision-making.

Stakeholder Theory complements these perspectives by viewing schools as organizations that must respond to the interests of all stakeholders. Parents are regarded as primary stakeholders because they have a direct interest in the quality of education and the performance of schools. The theory asserts that organizations perform better when they recognize and integrate the views of diverse stakeholders into management processes. Excluding parents from governance may weaken accountability and reduce community trust, whereas including them enhances legitimacy, transparency, and institutional effectiveness. This theory therefore justifies the need to treat parents as active partners in governance rather than passive beneficiaries of educational services.

Together, these three theories explain that collaboration between families and schools, democratic participation in decision-making, and stakeholder inclusion create stronger governance systems. They provide a comprehensive lens through which this study examines how parental involvement influences decision-making, accountability, and resource management in schools.

2.2: Review of theories on the research topic

To conceptualize parental involvement in school governance, it is important to interact with the modern theoretical approaches to explain the concept of participation, accountability, collaboration, and institutional leadership. The recent scholarship still tries to rely on the existing frameworks but redefine them in the context of contemporary governance. This part will examine major theories that will guide the study and they will be backed by the literature published in the past few years.

One of the key models that direct the research on parental involvement is the school-family-community partnership that was developed by Joyce Epstein. The model was first worked on earlier, but it remains very popular and is discussed in recent studies in the field of education (Epstein, 2018; Goodall, 2018). According to the theory, good education is achieved due to overlapping family, school, and community relationships. In the modern sense, researchers state that the role of parents needs to be shifted beyond the home-based support to common governance and decision-making (Goodall, 2018). In governance systems, including PTAs and school boards, engaging parents in meaningful ways enhances accountability, transparency and responsiveness in meeting the community needs. However, more recent criticisms believe that structural inequalities such as poverty and literacy rates frequently undermine the achievement of real partnership especially in developing situations (Baker, 2018).

This study is also very theoretically based on the Part participatory Governance Theory. Grounded on the ideas of democracy as related to John Dewey, recent scholarship on governance highlights the importance of



participative decision-making and involvement of stakeholders in the decision-making process within the political institution. Recent research indicates that participatory model enhances institutional trust, legitimacy, and accountability in schools (Quesel, Naepli and Buser, 2017; Monamoleli, 2019). Parental involvement in education systems is more symbolic than substantive in highly centralized systems of governance. Contemporary participatory governance methods encourage decentralization of power to school level stakeholders whereby parents are actively involved in budgeting, policy deliberations and strategic planning. This theoretical perspective can be extensively applied to the analysis of the question of parental involvement in the Zambian context based on shared leadership or consultation participation exclusively.

The Stakeholder Theory developed by R. Edward Freeman is still a significant part of the modern governance research. New meanings put more focus on ethical leadership, inclusive consultation, and sensitivity to the stakeholder interests (Harrison, Phillips and Freeman, 2019). Parents are identified as the major stakeholders in the school governance whose views determine the institutional legitimacy and effectiveness. The existing studies on educational leadership indicate that schools with school leaders actively incorporating parental voices in the process of governance have better accountability policies and better organizational results (Hands, 2018; Nir and Bogler, 2019). In this way, Stakeholder Theory supports the point that the community trust is lower and that the governance structures are weakened due to parental exclusion.

The Social Capital Theory is one more theory which is very much applicable in the recent research in the educational field. The work of James Coleman and Robert Putnam has been developed by modern researchers who study the role of networks of trust and collaboration in the work of institutions. According to the recent researches, the presence of strong social capital between parents and schools improves transparency, accountability, and shared problem-solving (Goodall and Montgomery, 2019; Nyambi, 2016). Parents in high social trust levels are more ready to get involved in governance, oversee the school affairs, and advocate institutional changes. On the other hand, participatory governance is hampered by poor communication and mistrust. This theory can be especially applicable in the urban and peri-urban schools where the socio-economic differences can influence the level of engagement.

These views are further supplemented by the Democratic School Governance Theory. In modern literature on the topic, the focus is on representation, equality, and inclusive leadership in school boards and committees (Baker, 2018; Quesel et al., 2017). Although formal governance systems usually incorporate parent representatives, empirical research indicates that the power of making decisions is often vested in the hands of administrators. The contemporary democratic models of government thus promote empowering the parental ability, role definition, and institutionalizing joint authority to prevent the tokenism of participation (Monamoleli, 2019).

Put together, all these current theoretical views are an indication that parental involvement improves school governance whereby the participation is meaningful, inclusive and structurally enabled. The partnership model of Epstein brings out the importance of collaboration, participatory governance focuses on democratic participation, stakeholder theory deals with the legitimacy and accountability, social capital theory focuses on the necessity of trust, and democratic governance theory requires having shared authority. These theories are used to direct this research on the evaluation of whether parental engagement in chosen schools can be considered the real involvement that can make a difference in the outcomes of decision-making and accountability.

2.2 Review of previous empirical studies on the research topic

This section discusses the recent empirical research studies on parental involvement and its influence on school governance, decision making and school accountability. The review targets the publications published in the past ten years and is based on the global, regional, and African context to find the present study in the existing academic discussions.

Worldwide studies have in the recent past indicated an increasing appreciation of parental involvement as one of the critical measures of enhancing school governance. According to a study by Chris M. Hands (2018), the schools which make active efforts to include parents into the governance discourse have a higher level of institutional trust and collaborative leadership. This research study was carried out in North America where meaningful parental engagement was found to enhance transparency in budgetary processes and advance communication between school administrators and families. It did, however, observe that in many instances, parental involvement is more of a consultation than a decision making process and the final decision is left to the administrators.



On the same note, the study by Avi E. Nir and Bogler (2019) focused on the role of parents in the process of school decision-making. Their results revealed that parental involvement has a positive impact on accountability and school climate with formally parents as members of governance committees. Nevertheless, structural obstacles such as the lack of governance knowledge by parents and centralized policy control were also noted as a limitation to substantive influence in the study. This adds credence to the fact that the participation has to be institutionalized to be effective.

Quesel, Naeffli, and Buser (2017) explored the role of civic and parental involvement in the school governance of Switzerland. The research found out that despite formal governance structures, there is a wide range of actual parental influence with respect to type of leadership and institutional culture. Collaborative leadership models resulted in a better parental voice and shared responsibility in decision-making in schools. On the contrary, in schools that were hierarchical, the parental influence was little regardless of the formal representation.

Empirical studies of Sub-Saharan Africa show signs of improvement and the continuation of difficulties. Vusi Mncube (2019) carried out a study in South Africa and discovered that parental representation in School Governing Bodies (SGBs) improves the levels of financial management and infrastructure development. Nevertheless, most parents mentioned being sidelined in making curriculum-related decisions. The study got to the conclusion that though parent involvement enhances accountability the imbalances of power between teachers and parents tend to restrict the equity in governance.

Nyambi (2016) investigated the impact of the school governing bodies in Zambia and the findings revealed that the involvement of parents has a positive influence on the control of resource distribution and enhances the openness of school processes. However, the research established literacy, economic demands and insufficient policy knowledge, as key barriers to effective governance participation. The involvement of parents in fundraising and financial monitoring was more than strategic planning or formulation of policies. Such results are indicative of the same trends in developing education systems where there is still an unequal participation in governance.

In a research study on rural South Africa, Monamoleli (2019) also established that schools that had effective parental involvement structures had better accountability systems and community trust. The study has however also pointed out that the quality of participation is heavily dependent on capacity building programs and communication networks. Parental involvement will be symbolic without proper training and well-organized involvement opportunities.

To further the points, Goodall and Montgomery (2019) distinguished between parental involvement and parental engagement. Their empirical evidence indicates that the high quality engagement, where parents have a direct impact on the decision to govern, leads to more effective outcomes of an institution than their passive involvement. The paper pointed out the significance of dialogue in communication as opposed to one-way information exchange.

In these empirical researches, a number of themes are common. To begin with, parental intervention increases accountability and transparency especially in financial matters and monitoring of projects. Second, the parental involvement in curriculum and policy making is still minimal in most situations. Third, barriers like poverty, time, lack of literacy and hierarchical leadership structure develop limitations in participation engagement. Fourth, there is enhanced collaboration and institutional legitimacy in schools with inclusive and democratic models of governance.

Although, there is a growing amount of empirical evidence on parental involvement in school governance across the world, and regions, little research has been done specifically in the urban and peri-urban Zambian settings. To a large degree, Zambian literature dwells on the support of parents to academic success and not on involvement in governance. Consequently, this research paper helps fill this gap by looking at the role of parental involvement in decision-making, accountability and general school management in the selected schools in the Lusaka District.

2.2.1 Global Empirical Studies and Debates on Parental Involvement in School Governance

Parental involvement in school governance is still a major policy and research focus throughout most parts of the world especially in accountability, decentralization and education reform agenda. Participatory governance as one of the strategic tools to enhance transparency, improve the effectiveness of schools, promote the sense of community ownership, and make sure that the educational institutions are highly responsive to local needs have been highlighted by such international organizations as UNESCO (2021) or the World Bank (2018, 2020).



Parental involvement is generally considered as a way of enhancing accountability, institutional legitimacy, and trust between schools and communities. However, recent empirical research indicates that there are still controversies on the extent and genuineness of such engagement. According to the critics, parental involvement in most cases is still symbolic, too formal, and lacks actual influence on the strategic or pedagogical decision making.

In North America, studies have shown that formal parental involvement in the governance of the schools has the potential to impact positively on the schools in terms of accountability, trust and shared leadership. Hands (2018) discovered that schools that had institutionalized family school collaboration policy enjoyed greater transparency and more plain accountability procedures, which is the incorporation of parents in day-to-day governance systems. Likewise, Nir and Bogler (2019) established that parental involvement in the decision-making committees helped to improve the school climate, the legitimacy of the institution, and student responsiveness. These studies also highlight, however, the constraints caused by centralized policy frameworks, which might inhibit the ability of parents to have an influence over wider strategic or policy-level decisions. This is to point to the fact that although formal structures of parental participation are in place, the extent of substantive influence tends to be contingent upon the malleability of the governance conditions as well as the readiness of the school administration to involve parents in a meaningful way.

Governmental reforms of governance in Europe have seen more parents represented in the boards of schools, but are still faced with discussions regarding power balance and the real role of parents in the decision-making process. Quesel, Naepli, and Buser (2017) proved that participatory management style and collaborative leadership style are rather effective to create meaningful parental involvement and achieve active engagement and not passive attendance. On the other hand, hierarchical and bureaucratic management systems in most cases restrain the actual impact of parents even where the formal representation is in place. Goodall (2018) also made the distinction between parental involvement and parental engagement, noting that the latter involves more than merely attending those meetings and being able to contribute to the decisions that are made to influence the school policy, resource distribution, and the set of priorities of the school in its educational activities. This difference highlights the necessity to go beyond tokenistic methods of the mechanisms that enable parents as active agents in the governance.

There are reforms in Latin America which have aimed at empowering local communities in school management, usually through decentralization reforms which have been championed by the world bank. Empirical studies in Brazil and Mexico indicate that the parental supervision has helped to enhance financial responsibility, the quality of infrastructure observation, and transparency in the management of the school resources. Nevertheless, these reforms come with problems. According to scholars (Bruns, Filmer and Patrinos, 2017), decentralization may unwillingly place administrative strains on communities that lack the needed capacity-building assistance and thus increase the inequalities that already exist. Although the involvement of parents in budgeting and monitoring activities has potential, much relies on the capacity of the locals, the availability of training and even the provision of institutional support structures in order to help in these activities.

The incremental results of school-based management reforms in Asia have been inconsistent, and this is indicative of the difference in policies, cultural norms, and resource capability. Under the Right to Education Act, School Management Committees (SMCs) were empowered in India and research done between 2020-3 reveal that parental oversight has enhanced monitoring of teacher attendance, school grants, and resource use. Although such benefits have been realized, parents are often not involved in curriculum development or pedagogical decision-making because of poor technical expertise and confidence. In a study conducted in the Philippines (UNESCO, 2021), it was also found that parental participation enhances transparency and accountability but is limited by socio-economic differences, levels of literacy and equitable access to governance information. These observations underscore the need of capacity-building interventions to make sure that participatory governance can result in substantive power.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, the recent research highlights the benefits of accountability and structural constraints to parental involvement in school governance. School Governing Bodies in South Africa give parents majority seats in law and empirical research has shown better financial control and administrative accountability (Monamoleli, 2019; Mncube and Harber, 2017). Nonetheless, there remain aspects of power imbalance in academic decisions and policies, which is a reflection of the deeply established hierarchical approaches and professionals dominance. Governance reforms through the Basic Education Act have enhanced parental representation in Boards of



Management in Kenya, but assessment (World Bank, 2020) indicates that low governance training and lack of balance in knowledge of regulatory frameworks hinder effective participation. All these studies demonstrate that it is necessary to have more than just legal or formal structures, meaningful parental engagement involves building capacity through capacity-building, mentoring, and continuous support to negotiate among the complex governance procedures.

One of the key debates in the world is equity in terms of participative governance. The studies always show that socio-economic status, level of education, and literacy have a great influence on the quality of parental engagement. Highly educated or well-off parents feel confident about challenging the school leadership, expressing their concerns, and making decisions, but low-income or low-literacy parents are marginalized, found either in advisory or ceremonial positions (Goodall, 2018; UNESCO, 2021). In the absence of well-organized capacity-building programs, participatory governance can serve to create and not to decrease education inequalities, favoring those who already have the capacity to participate.

On the whole, empirical data around the globe during the past decade allows highlighting the idea that parental involvement could increase transparency, accountability, trust by the community, and responsiveness of schools in the case when they are institutionalized and supported by training programs, and covered by inclusive leadership. However, the major constraints on the effectiveness of governance interventions are still symbolic representation, centralization of control, socio-economic inequalities, and poor technical capacity. These international discussions form a solid conceptual and empirical basis of analyzing the involvement of parents in school governance in the Zambian context where the problems of equity, capacity and significant participation are still relevant and need solutions of a situational character.

2.2.2 Regional empirical studies and debates on the research topic

The regional empirical investigations are useful in terms of their insights as to how the phenomenon of parental involvement in school governance occurs in the various educational, socio-economic, and policy settings. Although global literature on participatory governance as a method of improving accountability, transparency, and student learning outcomes has been eminent, the regional studies show the subtle differences in the concept of parental engagement in terms of application and achievement. As an example, the socio-cultural norms, economic inequality, and the historical trends in educational administration predetermine the possibilities of parents to contribute to the school decision-making processes. Parental participation in other areas is virtually restricted to advisory activities in Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) or School Management Committees (SMCs), but in other places, parents play an active part in policy making, budgetary distributions and oversight of school performance. In addition, some of the issues that have been highlighted by regional studies include limited resources, insufficient training of parents, bureaucratic retardations, and gendered constraints that influence the level of participation. All these studies imply that on the one hand, the principle of parental engagement is generally tented, however, on the other hand, its practical implementation is highly situational, and educational activities have to be adapted to the local specifics to achieve maximum results and consolidate political institutions. Reviewing these regional trends will allow the researcher to gain a better insight into how policy rules and structures interact with community life and individual institutional capacity to provide valuable lessons to policy-makers and educational administrators who want to encourage the effective involvement of parents.

2.2.2.1 North America

Parental involvement in the governance of schools has become an officially entrenched aspect of educational administration in North America, and especially in the United States and Canada. Parents are also provided with formal means of involvement in decision making processes through school based advisory councils and school based advisory boards as well as Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs). In the US, school boards are traditionally locally elected, themselves capable of budgeting, passing policies, and superintendent control, whereas in Canada, provincial systems are required to have school councils with parent members. These institutional structures are indicative of a larger democratic spirit that conceptualizes education as a civic good that needs community management.

Empirical studies propose that institutionalized parental involvement may further transparency, trust and shared leadership. Formal involvement tends to promote better communication between parents and school heads, enhance accountability and lead to the development of a sense of communal ownership over student performance. Research has shown that parents whose involvement in governance is meaningful, that is, not only consulted, help



provide more context-sensitive policies and better school climate. In this aspect, participatory governance is associated with not only the democratic legitimacy but also school-level organizational effectiveness.

Nonetheless, institutionalization of parental involvement has also brought forth a lot of controversy especially in the areas of equity and representation. There is stratification in participation in the structures of governance, which is socioeconomic and educational. Those parents that are wealthy, well-educated are more likely to have the cultural capital, flexibility of time as well as knowledge of the procedures necessary to participate well in the governance practices. Consequently, they can have disproportionate impacts on budgetary priorities, the programs provided, and the strategies of school improvement. On the other hand, parents belonging to marginalized or economically disadvantaged groups are easily hampered by factors like rigid working hours, language barrier, lack of familiarity with the bureaucratic system or past historical distrust towards the educational establishments. This skewing can re-create greater social inequalities in so-called democratic regimes of governance.

Critics also state that the growth in the standardized accountability systems has limited the extent of meaningful parental impact. Centralized standards of the curriculum, high stakes testing systems, and performance based accountability systems have in the previous few decades moved decision making power to the top either the state, provincial or federal levels. In the United States, e.g. a series of federal laws including No Child Left Behind Act then followed by the Every Student Succeeds Act bolstered standardized assessment and reporting criteria, thus reducing the number of options that a local discussion could consider. In spite of the fact that these policies are supposed to provide equity and quantifiable results, they may diminish local control of the content of the curriculum, teaching methods and testing. Although education in Canada is a provincial matter, the same pattern of standards-based reform and centralized assessment has restricted the discretionary powers of the individual schools.

This strife between formal involvement and substantive influence is the core of continuous discussion on school governance in North America. On the one hand, institutionalized parental involvement is democratic and has been proven to be beneficial in terms of transparency and collaborative effort. In contrast, a history of disparities in participation and limitations inherent in systems of centralized accountability cast the question as to the voices that are heard and the extent of real power that local actors hold. As a result, researchers are increasingly demanding new reforms that go even further than symbolic inclusion to more capacity-building strategies, including outreach to families that are underrepresented, multilingual engagement strategies, and shared leadership models that redistribute authority in more meaningful ways across the stakeholders.

2.2.2.2 Latin America and the Caribbean

School-based management reforms in Latin America have drastically increased the involvement of parents in school governance in wider reforms of decentralization and accountability. Policies have been established in such countries as Brazil, Mexico, and Chile to actually include parents as school councils, management committees and community oversight boards. Such reforms will improve transparency, local ownership and responsiveness to local needs.

According to empirical evidence, parents and community involvement in budgeting, procurement and financial monitoring has led to cutdown of resource mismanagement and enhancement of accountability at the school level. The synthesis of research by Barbara Bruns, Deon Filmer, and Harry Anthony Patrinos (2017) shows that the greater the involvement of parents in monitoring school grants and expenditures, the higher are the chances of school resources to be used more transparently and according to the priorities of a given community. Community oversight has in most instances enhanced the relationship between schools and families as well as fiscal discipline. Although there have been these gains, the academic discussions in the region highlight the perennial capacity bottleneck among the representatives in the parent quarters. A good number of parents are not technically savvy on how to actively participate in policy making, curriculum debate, and pedagogical assessment. Inaccessibility to training on governance, poor educational attainment in certain groups and lack of institutional capacity tend to confine the parental influence to administrative control but not the process of making strategic decisions. Consequently, parents might be watchful about finances or infrastructure developments, but they very seldom influence the vision of long-term education or the teaching practice.

The same trends are observed in the Caribbean. Despite the fact that the policy frameworks often promote parental involvement, the influence on practice is often oriented on fundraising, student welfare, and logistics. The strategic governance functions like being involved in school improvement planning or curriculum adaptation are still



minimal. This disjuncture underscores a persistent conflict between policy discourse and action, in which official incorporation is not necessarily a source of effectual impact.

On the whole, Latin American and Caribbean experience demonstrates the possibility as well as the weakness of school-based management reforms. Although the role of parents has become more financially accountable and transparent, the lack of long-term capacity-building efforts and enabling institutional frameworks still limits the capacity of parents to play other roles other than the oversight roles. To deal with these issues, specific training, role definition, and governance cultures that proactively involve parents in strategic and pedagogic aspects of school leadership are needed.

2.2.2.3 Europe

The European examples are quite extensive in the variability of the school governance structures indicating the wider variations in the political traditions, the degree of decentralization, and the education cultures of the continent.

In other countries like Germany and Switzerland, parents are elected as formal members of school councils or school governing. But the scope of their impact differs by federal provisions, canton provisions (in Switzerland) and state provision education (in Germany). Governance in such systems is semi-decentralized, and schools have some amount of autonomy, but the system is controlled by regulatory authorities at the region level.

According to the empirical research conducted by Carlo Quesel, Andreas Naepli and Thomas Buser (2017), meaningful parental involvement is strongly connected with the collaborative culture of leadership in schools. The stronger the school leaders consider parents as real partners who participate in dialogue, strategic planning, and problem-solving parent representatives are prone to having a more substantial influence. In contrast, in environments where the process is procedural or compliance based, the roles of the parents can be advisory as opposed to making decisions.

In the United Kingdom, the reforms of its governance have always focused on the place of parent governors in its school governing boards. The reforms are designed to make schools more democratic with parents having an elected position as a leader in addition to the teachers and members of the community as well as the representatives of the local authorities. Nevertheless, there has been a perpetual controversy following this model.

Janet Goodall (2018) draws the line between the representation and substantive engagement. Representation defines the official presence of parents in governing boards whereas substantive participation refers to the active participation in the major decisions made such as school improvement plans, budget priorities and aspects of curriculum policy. According to Goodall, despite the institutional inclusion of parents, the professional authority, especially that of the headteachers and senior administrators, takes center stage in the discussion. This poses an organizational conflict between professionalism and democracy.

The main argument in all of the models of European governance is thus in the balance of expertise and inclusiveness. On the one hand, teachers have expertise in the field of pedagogy, curriculum development, and regulatory compliance. Conversely, the principles of democratic governance dictate that the stakeholders, particularly parents, should be given a substantial contribution to the decisions that are made concerning their child and communities.

The danger in very professionalized systems is that parental influence has turned into a symbolic activity, limited to monitoring and consultation. Shared leadership practices can alleviate these imbalances in more collaborative systems based on mutual respect, openness and co-decision-making systems.

In a word, the evidence provided by Europeans suggests that the effectiveness of parental involvement is not based on the mere presence of formal representation but on the institutional culture, role clarity, leadership approaches, and professional readiness to distribute authority. The current policy debate is therefore aimed at coming up with governance structures that would retain expertise in education but they should guarantee genuine involvement of stakeholders.



2.2.2.4 Asia

Parental participation in school governance has increasingly featured in a wider reform of decentralization and accountability in Asia. The level and impact of such participation however differs significantly in different national contexts.

In India, the School Management Committees (SMCs) in government and aided schools were established by the enactment of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (also referred to as the Right to Education Act, 2009). The mandate of these committees is that most representatives of parents are to be incorporated in them, which formally introduces parents into the school governance frameworks. Empirical research has shown that the SMCs have enhanced monitoring capabilities especially in supervising teacher attendance, use of school grants, infrastructure construction and midday meal schemes. The parents can be quite active in making sure that they are accountable in these areas of operation.

Nonetheless, under this formal inclusion, control of the curriculum, assessment systems, and education policy in general, is retained to a very large extent by institutions like the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), and state education departments. Parental involvement in India is often therefore described as being supervisory and not strategic. As much as parents might be involved in the school improvement plans seeking a better allocation of resources in the locality, they have little say when it comes to the pedagogical reforms or reorganizing the curriculum.

The same trend can be followed in the Philippines and other systems in the Southeast Asia, where the involvement of parents is supported by Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) and school governing councils. School-based management structures are under reforms that are encouraged by the Department of Education (DepEd) within which communities are allowed to participate in the financial management and monitoring of the project. However, substantive policy and curriculum control is usually concentrated at either national or regional levels. Consequently, parental involvement inclines towards accountability, fundraising, as well as, infrastructure support as opposed to long term strategic governance.

The question of the implications of high levels of state control and hierarchical administrative traditions is contentious among the scholars of Asia. Historically, many Asian education systems have been influenced by centralized bureaucracies in which professional educators and officials of ministry remain the main point of control in the making of academic and policy decisions. In this kind of structure parental involvement often works within institutional parameters that are stipulated. Parents will be invited to the consultative forums or monitoring committees but they may have limited ability in determining the strategic direction.

This dynamism has created negative debates regarding the definition of the difference between participation and shared governance. Formal representation may exist, but the field of influence is often limited by a regulation system and cultural values that accentuate respect to professional power. In strongly hierarchical settings, challenging curricular or pedagogical choices can be considered as intrusion to the realms of expertise.

Thus, even though the Asian governance reforms show an upward movement of inclusivity, the dominant system in most of the countries is that of limited participation where parents play a vital role in the oversight and accountability, but they are not part of central strategic and curricular decision-making. To enhance real shared governance, the policy changes will be necessary to decentralize some decision-making forces, invest in parental capacity-building, and develop institutional cultures that will appreciate collaborative leadership in conjunction with professional skills.

2.2.2.5 Australasia

Australia and New Zealand Parental participation in school governance is institutionalized in the sense that parents are identified as important stakeholders in decision making. Schools manage themselves using school councils (Australia) and Boards of Trustees (New Zealand) and have elected parent representatives who are involved in strategic planning, financial control, policy development and monitoring accountability. These governance systems are indicative of decentralized education systems, stressing on shared leadership and community involvement.

Both countries have shown empirical data that the structured parental representation leads to better financial accountability, greater transparency, and better school-community relations. Members of the parent boards tend



to offer professional knowledge in fields like finance, law, management and education that enhance institutional control and strategic decision making. Moreover, their inclusion encourages a feeling of ownership and confidence between families and school administration, as well as collaboration in solving problems and attentiveness to local demands.

Nevertheless, there is growing scholarly discussion on the subject in Australasia, which points at socio-economic inequality in the participation in governance. The schools in well off neighbors are more likely to have more educated parents, professionals with more time to spare. These parents tend to be more assured in their involvement on complicated governance issues and in shaping the budgetary decisions, as well as in the long term strategy planning. Consequently, such schools can have better governance capacity as well as more efficient oversight mechanisms.

On the contrary, schools serving disadvantaged communities or rural settings often find it difficult to enlist parents to as high rates of parental involvement. Parents under economic burdens, with little formal education, or who have less time to do so, might struggle to engage in the governance structures on a regular basis. This unequal distribution can unintentionally contribute to the increase of inequalities because the schools that are less beneficial socioeconomically might not have access to access to professional knowledge and advocacy that could be provided in more wealthy settings.

This questioning highlights the need to establish fair governance systems beyond the formal representation. Good models must incorporate high capacity-building plans, governance education of parent representatives, integrative communication plans and versatile participation plans that reflect various socio-economic realities. Through bypassing the existing inequalities and supporting the organization of parental involvement, the education authorities can make it meaningful and inclusive instead of perpetuating the same.

In this way, although a good example of institutionalized parental involvement is seen in Australasia, it is still possible to mention that the ideas of equity and accessibility accompanied by structural support are the keys to the development of genuinely democratic and inclusive school governance.

2.2.2.6 Sub-Saharan Africa

Parental engagement in the governance of schools in Sub-Saharan Africa is also directly connected with the more general process of decentralization as well as community participation reforms that seek to enhance accountability, transparency, and local ownership of education. In South Africa, parents have been legally given lots of representation and decision-making power by School Governing Bodies (SGBs), especially in projecting budgets, infrastructure development and supervision of school management (Bush and Heystek, 2003; Mncube, 2019). Nevertheless, regardless of the presence of such formal structures, empirical evidence indicates that the process of making decisions in reality is often limited due to the superiority of principals and professional educators, who still have a significant influence on the issues of academic and policy-related nature. This form of structural dynamic is a representation of the ongoing conflict between the statutory parental participation and the practical constraints of the professional hierarchies in schools.

Parents are also Boards of Management representatives in Kenya, and it has been assessed that their participation has led to the improvements in financial transparency, infrastructure surveillance and accountability reporting (World Bank, 2020). However, the long-term deficiency in capacity of parent members such as insufficient governance education, lack of knowledge of regulatory frameworks and confidence in directing school leadership restrict their involvement in the strategic decision-making process. The same trends can be observed in Zambia, where the studies indicate that the parental involvement can be traced most of the time in the fields of mobilizing resources, monitoring the school projects, and tracking the school spending. Conversely, participation in curriculum design, pedagogical approach, and policy formulation is also poor, mainly because of low literacy status, awareness of parental role is low and socio-economic factors decrease the ability of the parent to effectively impact the governance decisions.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, the literature is keen to highlight that the degree to which parental involvement can translate into the substantive power will be determined by a conglomeration of power relations, institutional support, and capacity-building interventions. Unless there are specific interventions aimed at enhancing the knowledge and abilities of parents in the area of governance, participation is usually consultative or token instead of really effective. In addition, the challenges are aggravated by socio-economic inequalities, cultural beliefs, and



disparities in the accessibility of information, which enhances inequalities in decision-making in education. Therefore, formal governance arrangements offer a legal context by which parents can be involved, meaningful participation, however, is achieved through specific policies, capacity building and representative leadership that empowers parents to play an active role in the strategic and pedagogical focus of their respective schools.

2.3 Overview of the Gaps in the Reviewed Global and Regional literature.

The literature review shows that the parental intervention in school management has been significantly identified as a vital element of participatory and decentralized education frameworks all over the world as well as in the regions. Surveys in North America, Europe, Asia, Latin America, Australasia, and Sub-Saharan Africa continue to indicate the significance of parental involvement in ensuring accountability, transparency, and better school performance. Nevertheless, even with the scope of scholarship, there are still a number of areas that are critical.

One, a large portion of the world literature is concentrated in the high-income nations; the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia. Although these studies have some valuable theoretical and empirical information, their conclusions are based on the settings that have more institutional capacity, literate populations, and well-developed structures of governance. As such, it can be stated that there is a minimal contextual transferability of such findings to the developing countries where the socio-economic constraints, policy implementation issues, and institutional support can greatly influence the way parents participate.

Second, available literature tends to focus on the positive connection between parental involvement and educational achievement without giving much consideration to the nature and intensity of the participation. Most studies gauge the extent of involvement by attending meetings or being a member of the school boards, without critically assessing the extent to which parents actually affect decision making processes. The difference between the symbolic and substantive governance is still under-explored especially in the developing regions.

Third, the literature about Sub-Saharan Africa, such as South Africa, Kenya, and Uganda, has to a large extent been devoted to decentralization reforms and policy frameworks, but not on lived experiences within individual schools. Scarcity of empirical studies are made to look into the way in which parents negotiate the power relationships, professional relationships and even the socio-cultural standards that can potentially influence their participation. Moreover, the research often identifies the lack of capacity in the representative parent but provides rather meager evidence on the effective strategies that enhance their role in governance.

Fourth, comparative and context-specific studies in Zambia have a strong deficit in the research. Whereas policy documents suggest community and parental involvement in the school management structures, empirical research that examines the practical scenario, challenges, and efficiency of the involvement is limited. This brings about the necessity of local researches that examine the interpretation and application of governance policies on school level.

Fifth, equity in parental participation is also not adequately covered in the literature. Socio-economic status, gender, education level, and urban rural differences are recognized to be factors but not many studies analyze these factors in a systematic manner to determine how the variables affect access to governance positions and influence power. Consequently, the literature is not sufficient enough to clarify whose voices are given prominence and those that are sidelined in the school governance mechanisms.

Lastly, there are methodological lapses. Most studies are dependent on quantitative surveys and they do not give in-depth information of the qualitative aspect of participants perceptions, experiences and challenges. It is then necessary that mixed-method or case studies be undertaken to offer contextual and sophisticated insights into parental role in governance.

To conclude, despite the acknowledgment of the need to involve parents in school governance in the global and regional literature, gaps exist in terms of contextual relevance, the level of influence, equity, and local empirical research findings. Filling these gaps will help in making the work more holistic in terms of understanding the functioning of parental involvement in particular educational contexts and will aid in policy and practice making to enhance school governance.



III. Chapter Three Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The researcher employed a mixed-method case study design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of parental involvement in school governance. This design was particularly suitable because it enabled the study to capture not only measurable patterns and relationships but also the nuanced experiences, perceptions, and contextual factors influencing parental engagement. Structured questionnaires were administered to collect quantitative data, allowing the researcher to identify trends, frequencies, and correlations among variables such as levels of parental participation, decision-making influence, and demographic factors. Simultaneously, qualitative data were gathered through interviews, focus group discussions, and document reviews, providing rich, in-depth insights into the lived experiences of parents, teachers, and school administrators, as well as the institutional practices and policies that shaped governance processes.

The combination of these methods facilitated triangulation, enhancing the validity and credibility of the findings by corroborating evidence from multiple sources and perspectives. Quantitative data revealed generalizable patterns, while qualitative findings contextualized these patterns, explaining the underlying reasons, motivations, and barriers behind observed behaviors. Moreover, the case study approach allowed the researcher to investigate parental involvement within the specific, real-life context of selected schools, examining the dynamics of governance as they naturally occur. This design was particularly valuable for understanding the interactions between policy, school leadership practices, and parental engagement, thereby producing findings that are both empirically robust and practically relevant for improving participatory governance in schools.

3.1.1 Reasons for Doing the Study

The rationale behind the choice to do this study is the increasing appreciation of the role of parental involvement in not only the academic performance of the learners but also in enhancing the school governance, accountability and decision making. Modern day studies in education have pointed out that inclusive school governments with active participation of key stakeholders, especially parents are the foundation to successful school systems. The school family community partnership model invented by Joyce L Epstein highlights how effective connections between schools and families enhance transparency and trust levels of institutions in addition to enhancing institutional performance. Nevertheless, in most of the developing environments parental involvement is only symbolic or supportive, as opposed to an active engagement in governance and policy making.

Moreover, participatory and stakeholder-based methods of governance, inspired by the concepts of R. Edward Freeman, implies that organizations work better in the case when the opinions of every stakeholder are taken into account during the decision-making process. Parents in the school setting are key stakeholders whose input would make schools more accountable, resourceful, and responsive to the needs of the community. Although this is emphasized in theory, experience in numerous education systems suggests that governance systems tend to be top-down, and that parents are not given a chance to play any role in the strategic decision-making.

Parental participation in Zambia, is usually limited to Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings, fundraising, and watching school projects, whereas there is little involvement in curricula decisions, policy making and strategic planning. This imbalance develops a disparity between the principles intended to be espoused by a democratic school governance and what is happening in schools. Therefore, several parents are not aware of their role as governors and schools fail to gain access to community knowledge and support.

Thus, the present research was conducted in order to investigate the level of parental participation in school governance, to evaluate the impact of the participation on decision-making and accountability, as well as to note which obstacles impede the effective involvement. The study will help in policy reforms, consolidation of participatory practices in governance, and inclusion of more transparency in school management systems by coming up with empirical evidence in the Zambian context.

3.2 Type of Study Undertaken

The study was both descriptive and exploratory in nature, aiming to view and understand the existing forms of parental involvement in school governance while also uncovering the underlying factors that contributed to it. The descriptive component involved the process of recording and explaining how parents were already involved



in governance procedures, the arrangements in place, and the degree of involvement. The exploratory aspect further sought to identify the challenges, gaps, and opportunities that could serve to improve parental involvement. The combination of the two methods enabled the research not only to draw an accurate picture of the prevailing situation but also to create knowledge and suggest effective plans to enhance parental involvement in school governance.

3.3.1 Reason for Studying the Population

The study population included school administrators, teachers, Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) members, and parents. The identified groups were deliberately selected, since they were either directly affected by or directly vested in the way school governance was carried out. Administrators and teachers in schools were at the center of policy enactment and day-to-day school functions. In contrast, PTA members served as a formal liaison between schools and the larger parent population and were often involved in decision-making and advocacy functions. Parents, however, were crucial stakeholders whose participation and involvement significantly affected the outcomes of school governance, including resource distribution, accountability, and the overall learning environment. By incorporating these different yet interrelated groups, the study gained a holistic picture of the operation of school governance as well as the different perspectives these actors held towards it and their contributions to it.

3.4 Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

3.4.1 Sample Size

The study was conducted among 45 respondents who were carefully selected to maintain a diverse and representative sample of stakeholders in the process of school governance. This figure was determined based on the scope of the research, the need for data that was both manageable and meaningful, and the requirement to capture a representative range of views from school administrators, teachers, PTA members, and parents. Through the 45 respondents, the study aimed to capture not only depth but also breadth of knowledge. This ensured that the analysis was broad while keeping the data collection and interpretation process within the limits of the available time and resources.

3.4.2 Procedure of Sampling

The researcher used a purposive sampling approach in selecting respondents with different engagement levels of parents to make sure that the sample has respondents with pertinent experience and understanding of school governance. This method enabled the researcher to discard those who could not contribute meaningful and abundant information to the study on the subject of parental involvement, both the participants who are actively involved and the ones who are mildly involved. Stratified random sampling was also done within the schools to further improve the representativeness of the sample. This entailed breaking down the population into separate stakeholder groups, which included parents, teachers, school administrators and members of the governing bodies, and selecting the respondents randomly in each of the group based on their representation in the school community.

The purposive random sampling coupled with stratified sampling was a fair way of sampling since it ensured that the study not only got the diversity of experiences of parents but also the view of other important stakeholders in school governance. This approach not only reinforced the validity of the findings, but also enabled the meaningful comparison between the various groups, as to the ways in which parental engagement differed based on the roles, responsibilities and contextual influences in the schools. The use of the deliberate selection of the participants but still keeping a certain aspect of randomization enabled the researcher to produce the information which was not only detailed but also generic in the context of the case study.

3.4.3 Justification of Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

It was assumed that the selected sample size was sufficiently large to capture a diverse range of perspectives, encompassing variations in demographic characteristics, professional backgrounds, and personal experiences of the participants. At the same time, the sample was manageable enough to allow for in-depth data collection, careful analysis, and meaningful interpretation. The use of stratified sampling further enhanced the representativeness of the sample by ensuring that participants were deliberately selected based on their roles, positions, or levels of experience within the targeted population. This methodological approach minimized the risk of selection bias and ensured that all relevant subgroups—such as parents, teachers, school administrators, and governing body members—were adequately represented.



By combining considerations of diversity, manageability, and proportional representation, the sampling strategy strengthened the credibility and generalizability of the study's findings. It ensured that the insights generated reflected the real experiences and views of key stakeholders involved in school governance, while also allowing the researcher to identify patterns, contrasts, and commonalities across different groups. Ultimately, this approach supported the study's aim of producing evidence that was both comprehensive and contextually grounded, providing a reliable basis for understanding parental involvement in school decision-making processes.

3.5 Data Collection Methods

- Questionnaires (for parents and teachers)
- Interviews (with school heads and PTA leaders)
- Focus Group Discussions (with parents)
- Document review (school policies, meeting minutes)

3.5.1 Justification of Data Collection Methods

The mixed approach of quantitative and qualitative techniques increased the validity and richness of the gathered data. The mixed-methods approach offered a more complex picture of the research problem since it combined numerical trends with contextual insights. Patterns, relationships, and generalizable trends were identified through quantitative methods, which included structured questionnaires, surveys, and other data collection tools. The items in these tools provided objective data that added robustness to the study through statistical projection (Brown & Duku, 2008).

Meanwhile, qualitative methods were employed to understand the hidden meanings, perceptions, and experiences of respondents through interviews, focus group discussions, and open-ended questions. This approach enabled more profound insights into the why and how of the patterns that emerged from the quantitative analysis. The use of combined methods not only supported the validity of the findings through triangulation but also provided a more nuanced and comprehensive description of the research outcomes.

3.6 Data Collection Tools and Techniques Applied

The study employed multiple data collection tools to gather comprehensive information on parental involvement in school governance. The combination of quantitative and qualitative instruments enabled the researcher to capture both measurable trends and detailed insights into participants' experiences. The tools used included:

1. Structured Questionnaires

Structured questionnaires were designed to collect quantitative data from a broad range of respondents, including parents, teachers, and school administrators. The questionnaires consisted of closed-ended and Likert-scale items that measured variables such as frequency of parental participation, perceived influence in decision-making, and satisfaction with school governance processes. This tool allowed for the identification of patterns, correlations, and statistical trends across the sample, providing a quantifiable foundation for understanding parental engagement. Questionnaires were particularly useful in capturing data from a larger population efficiently while ensuring consistency and comparability of responses.

2. Interview Guides

Semi-structured interview guides were used to collect qualitative data from selected key informants, including school leaders, parent representatives, and experienced teachers. The guides provided a framework of open-ended questions that encouraged participants to share their experiences, perceptions, and insights regarding parental involvement in governance. This tool facilitated in-depth exploration of complex issues, allowing the researcher to probe further into responses, clarify ambiguities, and understand the underlying motivations, challenges, and successes associated with stakeholder participation.

3. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Protocols

Focus group discussions were conducted with groups of parents and teachers to capture collective perspectives and group dynamics related to school governance. FGD protocols guided the discussion, ensuring that key topics—such as barriers to participation, communication with school leadership, and experiences of collaborative decision-making—were systematically addressed. FGDs were particularly valuable for exploring shared experiences, disagreements, and consensus-building processes, providing rich qualitative data that complemented individual interviews.



4. Document Analysis Checklists

Document analysis involved reviewing school records, policy documents, meeting minutes, reports, and other relevant materials to understand the formal structures and practices governing parental involvement. A checklist was used to systematically extract information on policies, guidelines, attendance records of parents in meetings, and evidence of decision-making outcomes. This tool allowed the researcher to triangulate findings from questionnaires, interviews, and FGDs, ensuring that both reported experiences and documented evidence were considered in the analysis.

By employing these four complementary data collection tools, the study was able to capture a holistic picture of parental involvement in school governance. Structured questionnaires provided quantitative trends, while interviews, FGDs, and document reviews provided qualitative depth, context, and validation of findings. Together, these tools enhanced the credibility, reliability, and richness of the research, ensuring that both statistical patterns and lived experiences were accurately represented.

3.7 Justification of Tools and Techniques Applied

The tools chosen for the research were carefully selected according to their relevance to the research questions and their appropriateness for use with the various participant groups. This ensured that the instruments gathered realistic, significant, and comprehensive data from individuals with diverse backgrounds, experiences, and viewpoints. Before full-scale data collection was undertaken, the tools were thoroughly tested to determine their validity (whether they measured what they were intended to measure) and their reliability (whether they provided consistent results across circumstances, time, and participants). This procedure enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of the research findings.

3.8 Method of Data Analysis Selected

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the quantitative data, as powerful tools were present in the software to both perform descriptive and inferential statistical tests. The frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were considered as descriptive statistics in explaining the nature of the sample as well as providing an overview of the important variables. FT statistics were used to conclude the existence of connections between variables, test hypotheses, and identify whether some observed patterns were significant or not. FT statistics involved methods such as chi-square tests, t-tests, and correlation analysis. Conversely, thematic content analysis was used as a method of analyzing qualitative data, which entailed systematically identifying, recording, and interpreting common themes or patterns in the data. This involved coding the raw data, summarizing the main ideas into categories, and identifying general themes that reflected the primary meaning expressed by participants. The thematic analysis provided an opportunity to explore participants' experiences and worldviews, beliefs, and perspectives at a deeper level, offering additional richness and depth to the quantitative data. The result of these analytical techniques was that they provided a multifaceted comprehension of the research topic, tying its statistical stringency into the contextual context.

3.8.1 Justification for Data Analysis Approach Chosen

The use of a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative techniques, provided the research with a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of parental involvement in school governance. By integrating numerical data with contextual and experiential insights, the study was able to generate findings that were both generalizable and richly descriptive. The quantitative component facilitated the identification of trends, patterns, and correlations across the sampled population, enabling the researcher to make inferences that could be extended to a broader context. For instance, structured questionnaires allowed the measurement of the frequency and perceived impact of parental engagement, highlighting statistically significant relationships between demographic variables and levels of participation.

Conversely, the qualitative component provided depth and explanatory power, capturing the subtleties, motivations, and lived experiences that underpin the numerical patterns. Through interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis, the researcher could explore why certain trends existed, uncovering barriers, challenges, and facilitators of parental involvement that could not be captured through quantitative measures alone (Rosenblatt & Peled, 2002).

By combining these approaches, the research benefited from complementarity, where each method addressed the limitations of the other. Quantitative findings offered breadth and generalizability, while qualitative insights provided context, meaning, and explanation. This integration enhanced the validity and reliability of the results,



ensuring that the study produced a balanced, thorough, and credible understanding of the research problem. In essence, the mixed-methods design enabled the study to move beyond mere description or isolated statistical analysis, providing a holistic perspective on parental engagement that could inform both theory and practice in school governance.

3.9 Ethics There are ethical concerns related to both of these things.

This research process incorporated ethical considerations as a key component. Before the systematic data collection, Ethical clearance from the university was sought to ensure that the study was conducted within the acceptable limits of established academic and ethical standards. Moreover, all participants obtained informed consent, and they were provided with explanations about the specific rationale of the research, the exact steps that would be undertaken, as well as possible risks and benefits. The confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were completely guaranteed, and all personal data were either eliminated or concealed to protect their privacy. They were also informed that they could always abandon the study without any adverse effects on them. The measures were relevant to preserving the dignity, rights, and welfare of all members in the research process.

3.10 Possible Study Limitations

Several limitations constrained both the scope and the outcomes of this study. Time constraints were a notable factor, as the limited duration of the fieldwork restricted the depth and breadth of data collection. This may have prevented the researcher and research assistants from engaging extensively with participants, limiting opportunities to explore issues in greater detail or follow up on emerging themes.

Response bias was another potential limitation. Some participants may have provided socially desirable answers rather than candid responses, particularly when discussing sensitive topics or personal experiences. Concerns about being judged, or discomfort in revealing delicate information, could have influenced the authenticity of the data collected, especially in interviews and focus group discussions.

Additionally, the inconsistency and incompleteness of school records posed a challenge to document analysis. Some schools were unable to provide comprehensive historical data, meeting minutes, or policy documents, which limited the researcher's ability to triangulate information and fully verify reported practices. This, in turn, may have affected the richness and accuracy of contextual understanding.

Despite these limitations, careful methodological planning—including triangulation of data sources, purposive and stratified sampling, and ethical assurances of confidentiality—helped to mitigate potential biases and enhance the reliability of the findings. The limitations were also carefully considered during data interpretation and discussion, ensuring that conclusions were drawn with appropriate caution and that the insights generated remain meaningful and relevant within the study context.

IV. Chapter Four Presentation Of Results And Interpretation

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the study on the effect of parental involvement on school governance. The results are organized according to the research objectives and questions. Both quantitative and qualitative data collected from questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions, and document reviews are presented and interpreted. Tables and graphs are used to illustrate key findings.

4.2 Impact of Parental Participation on Decision-Making and Accountability

Table 4.1: Level of Parental Participation in Decision-Making

Participation Area	Always Involved (%)	Sometimes Involved (%)	Rarely Involved (%)	Not Involved (%)
Financial Planning	42	38	15	5
School Infrastructure Decisions	35	40	20	5
Curriculum/Policy Discussions	20	32	30	18



Participation Area	Always Involved (%)	Sometimes Involved (%)	Rarely Involved (%)	Not Involved (%)
Accountability/Monitoring	50	28	15	7

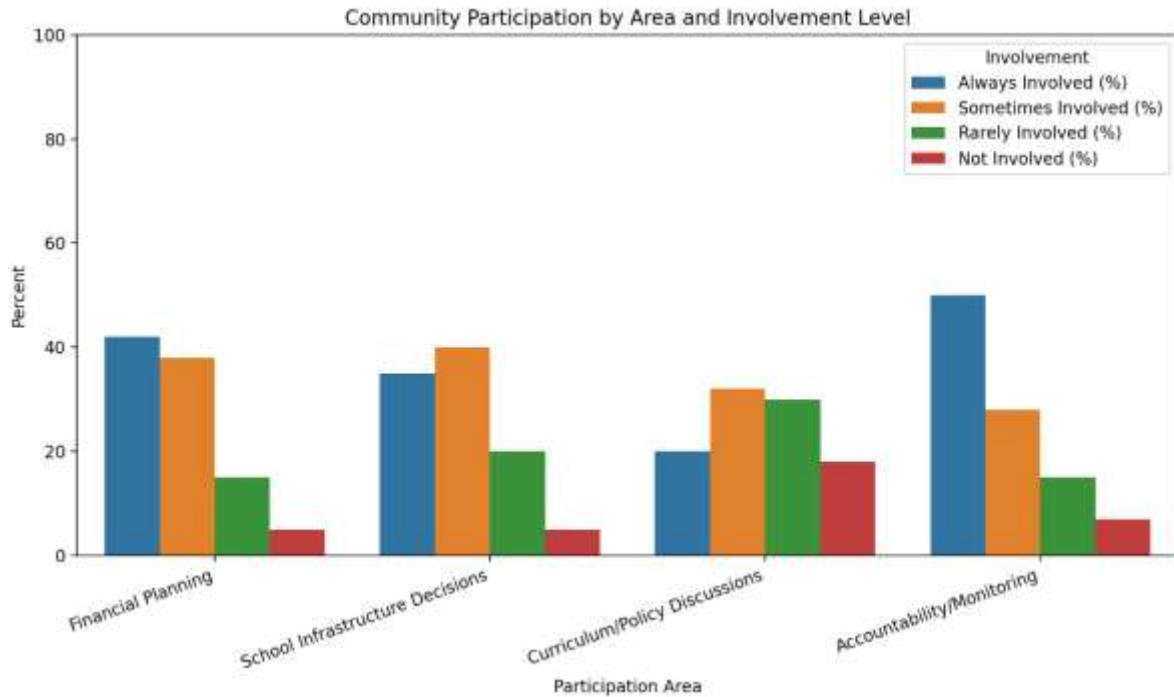


Figure 4.1: Parental Involvement in Decision-Making

Interpretation:

The chart shows how communities participate in different school-related areas, with responses grouped by how frequently they are involved: always, sometimes, rarely, or not at all.

The analysis of parental and community involvement in school governance reveals distinct patterns across different areas of decision-making. In the domain of financial planning, engagement was relatively high. Approximately 42% of respondents reported that they are always involved, while 38% indicated that they participate sometimes. Only a small proportion of respondents, about 15%, stated that they are rarely involved, and a mere 5% claimed no involvement at all. These findings suggest that financial oversight is perceived as an area where parental and community input is both relevant and valued, likely because decisions about school budgets and resources have a tangible and immediate impact on students' learning environments.

Participation in school infrastructure decisions, however, was found to be moderately consistent. Around 35% of respondents reported regular involvement, and 40% participated occasionally. Nevertheless, approximately 20% of participants indicated that they never engaged, while 5% reported complete absence from this process. This pattern suggests that while some parents and community members actively contribute to infrastructure-related matters, a considerable portion remains disengaged, possibly due to a lack of technical knowledge, awareness of opportunities, or confidence in influencing such decisions.

In contrast, parental involvement in curriculum and policy discussions was the least consistent. Only 20% of respondents reported regular participation, and 32% participated occasionally. Nearly equal numbers, 30% and 18%, reported rare or no involvement, respectively. This indicates that decisions related to curriculum content and policy formulation are largely dominated by professional educators and administrators, with limited input from parents. The findings suggest that stakeholders may feel less invited or less confident to participate in these areas, perceiving them as technical or specialized domains.



Conversely, the highest levels of engagement were observed in accountability and monitoring activities. Half of the respondents reported that they are always involved in this area, 28% indicated occasional involvement, 15% reported rare engagement, and only 7% stated that they were not involved at all. This demonstrates that parents and community members are most comfortable participating in processes that involve oversight, supervision, and evaluation, reflecting a sense of responsibility toward ensuring transparency and effective management of school resources and activities.

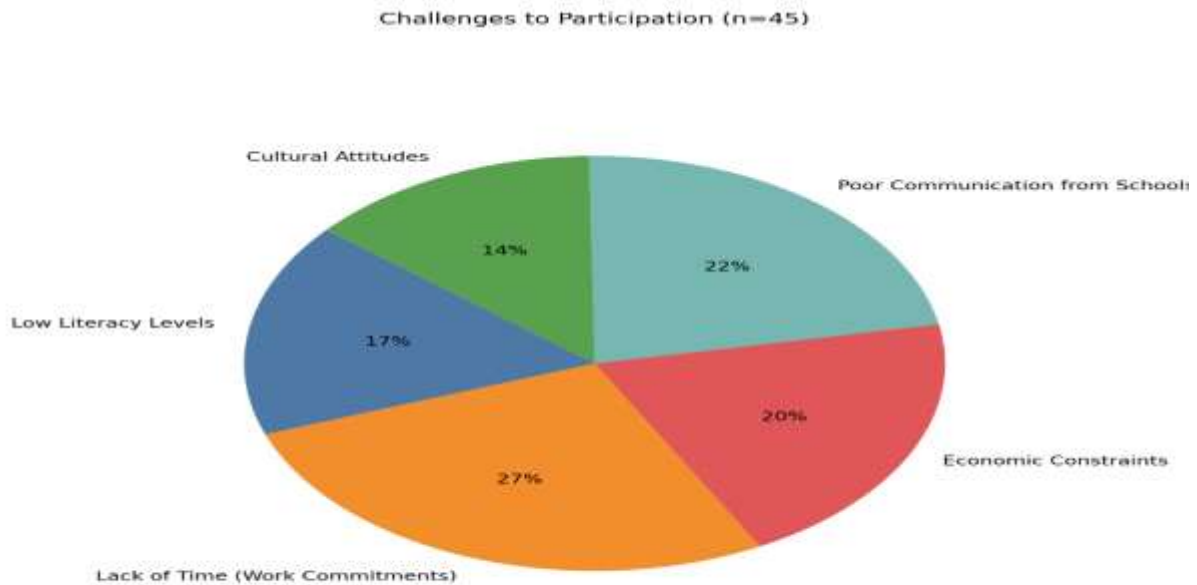
Overall, the findings indicate that financial planning and accountability and monitoring are the areas with the highest levels of parental and community engagement, whereas curriculum and policy discussions attract the least participation. This trend suggests that parents and community members are more inclined to engage in aspects of school governance that directly relate to tangible resources and oversight, while they remain less involved in areas that require specialized knowledge or fall primarily within the professional domain of educators. Such patterns highlight the need for school governance structures that not only facilitate participation in administrative and monitoring activities but also encourage meaningful engagement in curriculum and policy decision-making, thereby ensuring a more inclusive and comprehensive approach to school management.

4.3 Challenges Hindering Effective Parental Involvement

Table 4.2: Key Challenges Faced by Parents in School Governance

Challenge	Frequency (n=45)	Percentage (%)
Low Literacy Levels	15	33
Lack of Time (Work Commitments)	24	54
Economic Constraints	18	40
Poor Communication from Schools	20	44
Cultural Attitudes	12	27

Figure 4.2: Challenges Limiting Parental Involvement



Interpretation:

The pie chart presents the main challenges that hinder community participation in school-related activities, based on responses from 45 participants.



The study identified several key barriers that constrain parental and community participation in school governance. The most significant challenge, reported by 27% of respondents, was a lack of time due to work-related commitments. This finding highlights the impact of economic realities on parental engagement, as many caregivers are preoccupied with livelihood activities that limit their ability to attend school meetings or participate actively in governance processes. Closely related to this, poor communication from schools was identified by 22% of participants as a barrier. Even when parents are willing to engage, the absence of timely and clear information about opportunities for participation can prevent them from contributing meaningfully to school decision-making. Economic constraints were another important factor, cited by 20% of respondents. In many households, financial difficulties take precedence over school-related activities, as the fulfillment of basic needs naturally assumes greater urgency than participation in governance. Similarly, low literacy levels, reported by 17% of participants, limit some parents' confidence and ability to engage effectively in school planning and decision-making processes, reducing their influence in discussions and deliberations.

Finally, cultural attitudes were noted by 14% of respondents as a barrier to active participation. Community norms and ideological perspectives can discourage engagement, particularly among certain groups such as women, who may face social expectations that limit their involvement in school administration.

Overall, these findings indicate that parental and community participation is shaped by a combination of socio-economic, educational, and cultural factors. Among these, issues of time and communication emerge as the most urgent challenges, underscoring the need for strategies that accommodate parents' work schedules and improve information-sharing channels to foster more inclusive and effective engagement in school governance.

4.4 Strategies for Improving Parental Involvement

Table 4.3: Suggested Strategies for Enhancing Parental Involvement

Suggested Strategy	Frequency (n=45)	Percentage (%)
Capacity Building Workshops	22	49
Regular Communication Channels	18	40
Flexible Meeting Schedules	15	33
Inclusive Decision-Making Practices	20	44

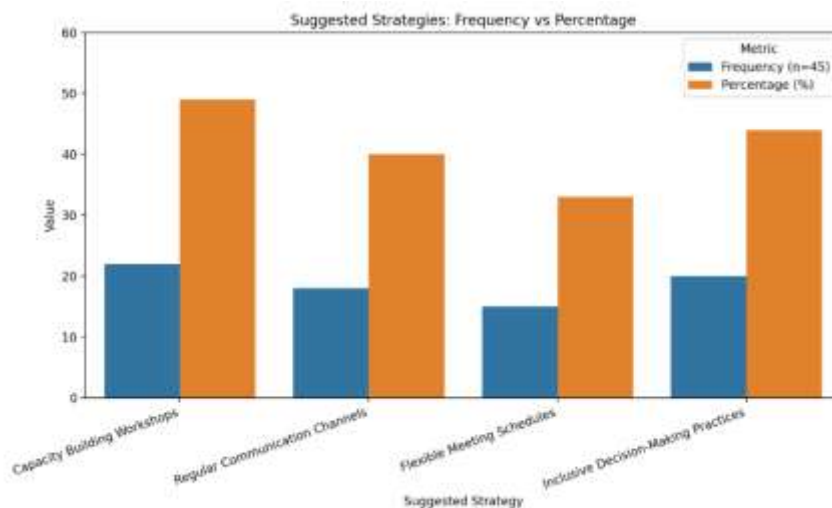


Figure 4.3: Recommended Strategies for Improvement

Interpretation:

The bar chart presents strategies suggested to strengthen community participation in schools, showing both the frequency of responses (n=45) and the percentage representation.



Capacity Building Workshops have been the most advised strategy; it was cited by 22 respondents (49%). This underscores the high need to have training programs that can empower parents and other members of the community with knowledge and skills on how to be effective members of the school governance and decision-making.

Another strategy that has been greatly recommended is Inclusive Decision-Making Practices, where 20 respondents (44%) concurred. This implies that numerous persons in the community believe that they are not included in the making of critical decisions and would prefer to be involved in the process of making school priorities and policies.

Eighteen respondents (40%) proposed regular Communication Channels. This makes good communication by the school the challenge previously identified, meaning that more regular, open, and available exchange of information may make participation much better.

Moreover, lastly, 15 respondents (33%) proposed Flexible Meeting Schedules. Although such a strategy was the least frequently used, it nonetheless indicates the need to modify the school engagement activities to fit the work-related instances and time limitations of parents.

To conclude, the information indicates that the most important needs of the community members are capacity building and structures of inclusive participation that should be supported by enhanced communication and a more flexible schedule. Combined, these strategies address the skills gap, as well as the structural factors that currently limit successful parental and community participation.

4.5 Summary of Findings

- Parents participate more in accountability and financial matters than in curriculum or policy discussions.
- Major barriers include time constraints, poor communication, and low literacy levels.
- Strategies such as training workshops, inclusive decision-making, and better communication systems were recommended to strengthen parental involvement.

V. Chapter Five

Discussion Of Findings

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the author presents the findings, also discussed in Chapter Four, as related to the research objectives and the literature. The discussion is conducted based on three key areas: the effects of parental involvement on the decision-making process and accountability, the barriers to effective parental involvement, and the ways to improve parental involvement in school governance. It is intended to decipher the meaning of the results, compare with past research, and draw conclusions on the importance of parents in enhancing school governance.

5.2 Involvement of Parents and the effects on the decision making and accountability.

Those results showed that parents are extensively engaged in financial planning and accountability activities, but their role in policy development and decisions related to curriculum is low. In Zambia, the majority of parental involvement is done by Parent-Teacher Association (PTAs) and School Management Committee (SMCs). Their primary functions are to mobilize resources to school development projects, including classroom rehabilitation, buying desks, or school feeding. They are, however, not often involved in determining the content of the curriculum or education policies, which are usually formulated and implemented at the ministerial level (Mulenga & Kabombwe, 2019). This observation supports the view presented by Griffith (2001), who asserted that parental involvement is typically manifested in the form of monitoring and provision of resources, rather than being fully involved in the governance decision-making process. Parents are therefore placed as more of a monetary contributor and a supervisor as opposed to decision-makers in the education system.

The survey data of this research also support this tendency, as it was found that two-thirds of parents are engaged in the PTA discussion. However, only one-third of them believe that their opinions are taken seriously during final decisions. This observation reflects on larger issues in Sub-Saharan Africa, where parental participation is usually superficial. Indicatively, in South Africa, Brown and Duku (2008) have discovered that although School Governing Bodies (SGBs) were meant to empower parents, the real governance process was still dominated by principals and educators, who were perceived to be the experts. On the same note, in Zambia, the decision-making



authority rests with the head teachers and district education boards, though opinions are usually sought from the PTAs. This is a manifestation of hierarchical governance whereby professional teachers are at the top of the governance, and parents are left at the periphery of the governance.

Despite these drawbacks, parental involvement has been influential in accountability, especially in the community schools in Zambia, which rely on the local resources and volunteer teachers. The parents of such schools tend to assume a high level of oversight in matters of funds, construction, and work, as well as teacher attendance. A Malawi study conducted by Chikoko (2007) reported similar results: parents play a central role in holding schools accountable for infrastructure and resource allocation, as they have minimal influence on academic decisions. This supports the fact that Rosenblatt and Peled (2002) note that a parent who is empowered to demand transparency has a positive impact on schools; they are more accountable in financial administration and service delivery.

This case is paradoxical. Parental involvement, on the one hand, ensures accountability and transparency in school management, protects community investments, and strengthens the relationship between schools and society. Conversely, the lack of control that parents have over curriculum development, instructional strategies, and the process of policy making means that they are not involved in the most important areas of governance. In Zambia, parents, in contrast, are actively involved in fundraising and monitoring school projects, but have little influence over the implementation and evaluation of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) (Mulenga & Kabombwe, 2019). This proves that parental involvement, though valuable, remains restricted to a large extent to the support roles.

To curb this inequity, the schools in Zambia and the Sub-Saharan region at large must go beyond consultation and adopt co-decision-making frameworks. In Kenya, an example is the reform of school governance through the Basic Education Act (2013), which provided parents with more formal powers in school leadership by representing them on Boards of Management (Ng'ang'a, 2019). The same strategy can be borrowed in Zambia to ensure that the input of parents is not only recognized but also incorporated into the governance outputs. This would help democratize school administration, enhance local ownership of education, and make schools more attuned to community needs.

Ultimately, these findings highlight the need for a cultural and structural shift in school governance across Zambia and Sub-Saharan Africa. Parents must be seen not only as supporters of financial and accountability systems but also as active partners in educational decision-making. Such a shift would foster more inclusive, transparent, and contextually relevant governance models that reflect the realities of the communities schools are meant to serve.

5.3 Challenges Hindering Effective Parental Involvement

The research identified various obstacles to effective parental involvement in school governance, with the most significant ones being time, communication, low literacy levels, and cultural attitudes. These are the challenges that were repeatedly pointed out by the respondents and are echoed by general trends recorded in education governance literature in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Time is one of the most obvious obstacles. In Zambia, like much of the region, many parents are involved in subsistence farming, informal trading, or other activities that require much time of physical presence and effort. Since most families are making ends meet through daily work, parents find it challenging to balance the livelihood responsibilities with the school workload, taking up meetings, committees, or doing school-based projects. This is an indication of a wider socio-economic fact where education administration is at conflict with survival demands. As a result, parental involvement ends up being unstable and disruptive, even to the most education-minded parents.

Another significant barrier is the lack of communication between schools and parents. The researchers discovered that schools tend to use written notice or official announcements to pass information regarding meetings and activities. However, these techniques do not necessarily apply to rural and peri-urban settings where literacy is low or parents do not engage in regular written communication. Moreover, schools may not provide proper notice or resort to alternative channels, such as community meetings, door-to-door communication, or local leaders, to disseminate information. This leads to a situation where most parents are unaware of their roles, responsibilities, and even the opportunities to contribute, thereby reducing the role of parents in governance.



Low literacy levels also emerged as a critical factor. Parents with limited reading and writing skills often feel intimidated in formal school settings, particularly when discussions involve technical language about policies, budgets, or performance indicators. This sense of inadequacy discourages active participation and fosters dependence on more literate community members to speak on their behalf. In some cases, this dynamic reinforces unequal power relations within school governance structures, where only a few educated parents dominate discussions and decision-making processes.

Additionally, cultural attitudes and perceptions play a significant role. In many communities, education and school governance are traditionally viewed as the domain of teachers and school administrators, while parents are seen primarily as providers of financial or material support. This perception limits parental engagement to paying school fees or contributing resources rather than actively shaping decisions that affect the quality of education. Gender roles further compound this issue, as mothers are often excluded or self-excluded from governance spaces due to cultural expectations that men should lead in public decision-making. This not only reduces the diversity of voices in school governance but also undermines efforts to create inclusive and community-driven education systems.

Taken together, these challenges demonstrate that parental involvement in school governance is not hindered by a lack of willingness alone but by a combination of structural, socio-economic, and cultural factors. Addressing these barriers requires targeted interventions such as flexible meeting schedules, use of multiple communication channels, capacity-building initiatives for parents with low literacy levels, and awareness campaigns to shift cultural perceptions around shared responsibility for education. Without such efforts, parental participation is likely to remain limited, thereby weakening one of the critical pillars of effective school governance.

1. Time Constraints and Socio-Economic Pressures

More than half of the parents (54%) said that they could not attend school governance meetings because of work and financial earning activities. This is indicative of the wider socio-economic situation in Zambia, and many households where most of them live in persistent poverty and livelihood pressures, prioritized over non-paying community activities. Parental involvement in school administration is seen more as a luxury than a necessity in a world where people are more concerned about survival from day to day. Parents are often involved in subsistence agriculture, trade, or casual employment, such as construction, household services, or piecework in commercial farms, which often involve long and irregular work hours. Such ways of making a living are not only energy-exhausting but also time-consuming, and parents have very little time to engage in voluntary activities, such as Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), school development committees, or consultative forums.

This issue is highly marked in the rural provinces like Eastern and Northern Zambia. The households are dependent on the agricultural seasons since the production involves much labor during the planting and harvesting seasons. Parents who have to travel a long distance or for days are often absent from school during these high agricultural seasons, as they are focused on food security and generating income. In the same case, parents working in the informal sector (such as vending, charcoal sales, or cross-border activities) in urban and peri-urban regions have just as rigid schedules, as the amount of money they earn depends on the amount of time they work. The fact is that time out of income-earning activities is directly proportional to loss of household income, which consequently impacts their capacity to sustain the necessities like food, shelter, healthcare, and at least school fees of children. This eternal trade-off between economic existence and school governance involvement characterizes how widespread what development scholars call time poverty has become.

The results of the study are in line with the current literature. Smit and Oosthuizen (2011) noted that economic hardships often limit parental engagement in governance because parents focus on raising income in the short term rather than undertaking voluntary and unpaid school-related responsibilities. Similarly, Bray (2003) has raised the issue of the hidden cost of schooling in developing nations, since, when the cost of schooling, in terms of fees, uniforms, learning materials, and transport, is high, it lowers the readiness and ability of parents to devote more time and effort to school management without any payment. The fact that parents are faced with financial and time constraints further compounds the situation as a reinforcing cycle; the more the parents strive to meet financial obligations imposed by school, the less time they have to participate in governing the school and the less influence they hold in the decisions made by the school, which directly affect the learning environment of their children.



Besides, the time poverty concept has a wider consequence in equity in education governance. Parents whose incomes are relatively stable (salaried employees or those who can access stable wage jobs) can more easily find the freedom to visit school meetings. Conversely, those parents whose means of livelihood are precarious and who have to work on a day-to-day basis continue to be formally marginalized in the governance systems. This lack of balance could lead to the entrenchment of inequality in decision-making in the school governance structures, as the school governance will end up becoming dominated by a few groups of parents who have more stable economic situations, thus mitigating the voices of the majority that struggle with the acute socio-economic inequalities.

All in all, these findings reiterate that the barriers to parental involvement are structural. Time and financial constraints are not only personal issues of limited opportunities but are encompassed in bigger systems of socio-economic poverty and inequality. The involvement of parents from low-income households will also be constrained without conscious efforts, such as arranging meetings more conveniently, offering incentives to attend, or incorporating school governance consultations into existing community events. This, as such, undermines inclusivity and the effectiveness of school governance in Zambia.

2. Low Literacy Levels and Educational Disadvantage

The second significant obstacle that was found was low literacy levels among parents, as it limits their access to technical governance documents, which include budgets, policies, and meeting minutes. Most parents confessed that they were either too intimidated or felt like outsiders in a gathering where financial statements or policy frameworks were discussed, since they were not literate or numerate enough to make any meaningful contribution. This is echoed by Desforges and Abouchaar (2003), who support the notion that parents with low levels of formal education tend to feel marginalized within a system of governance, as they are unable to follow or criticize technical deliberations. Literacy rates in Zambia are still lower in rural settings, especially among women, who are the largest number of active caregivers. The rural female literacy rates in Zambia, according to UNESCO (2021), are even lower than the urban male literacy by more than 20 percentage points. This educational deficiency is directly attributed to a lack of governance, as many parents are unable to challenge or question the administrators' judgments.

The problem is not specific to Zambia. A similar case occurred in Malawi, where Chikoko (2007) found that low literacy levels among parents meant they could not fully participate in the decision-making process and were therefore frequently at the mercy of teachers to understand the documents. Such dependency establishes a power asymmetry in which educators control the governance processes, which is even more disempowering for parents.

3. Communication Gaps between Schools and Parents

It was also found that there were huge gaps in communication between parents and schools. Sure, parents said that their schedules of meetings, governance issues, and changes in policies were not adequately informed. Another reason that was given is that the notices were written in English and put up in schools, such that those who did not attend the school frequently or those who were more at ease with the local languages would not be able to follow through.

This observation supports the framework of school, family, and community partnerships proposed by Epstein (2009), which emphasizes the importance of communication in both directions as a foundation for collaboration. In one-way or one-sided communication, parents would remain uninformed and would not be actively involved. In Zambia, a World Bank (2016) study on community involvement in education also found that ineffective communication between schools and parents was a major contributor to poor governance. Parents tended to feel that information regarding school budgets, the absence of teachers, or the allocation of resources was deliberately withheld, which led to a lack of trust between parents and administrators.

4. Attitudes and Perceptions of Authority on Culture.

Attitudes towards culture also became a serious obstacle. Another significant percentage of parents indicated a belief that teachers and administrators were primarily responsible for governing the schools. This impression corresponds to the inertial cultural practices when teachers are considered as the figures of authority whose experience cannot be challenged.

Similar observations were made by Mncube (2009), who elaborated that in most cases in Africa, culture reinforces the notion that teachers are right, thus scaring away parents from questioning or taking part in issues of



governance. This form of cultural interplay is particularly apparent in Zambia, especially in rural districts, where parents tend to be submissive to teachers as a learned behavior. Although this respect is commendable, it inadvertently undermines the parents' sense of ownership in the decision-making process and makes them passive instead of active.

Gender roles in communities affect parental engagement. Women who are the primary caretakers are usually not confident enough to attend a public meeting because of the cultural beliefs that the role of leadership and decision-making is a male-oriented field. This limits the participation of mothers in governance, despite their being the immediate caretakers of the educational aspects of children in schools. Likewise, this has also been reported in Uganda (Nsibambi, 2015), where women are restricted from playing a role in the school government due to patriarchal norms, despite school policies permitting inclusivity.

5. Structural and Institutional Barriers

In addition to individual and cultural barriers, structural barriers also exist within the education system itself. The Zambian school governance structures that are supposed to have inclusivity are usually deficient in explicit, meaningful parent representation. An example is PTAs, whereby they might essentially be fundraising organizations but not actual decision-making organs. In the absence of institutional changes, the role of the parents is limited to financial support and surveillance as opposed to shared responsibilities.

This is in line with Bush and Heystek (2003), who suggest that school management in most African nations remains hierarchically structured, where the powers are centralized on principals and education boards, parents, and communities have only symbolic roles.

5.4 Strategies for Improving Parental Involvement

The results indicate that the best practices for improving parental involvement are capacity-building workshops, enhanced communication systems, more flexible meeting schedules, and inclusive governance practices.

The demand for capacity building shows that parents appreciate the need to understand school policies, budgets, and other governance-related documents. They would be provided with training workshops so that they are knowledgeable and confident to take part in governance. This suggestion aligns with Jeynes' (2012) argument, which emphasizes that equipping parents with leadership and financial literacy skills would significantly enhance their governance functions.

Frequent communication tools, including newsletters, WhatsApp groups, and SMS notifications, were also considered to be vital. Parents also added that most of them miss meetings because of improper or delayed communication. Past studies (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005) have shown that the use of digital platforms in communication enhances parental responsiveness and reduces information gaps.

Flexible working hours were suggested to meet the needs of working parents. A large number of parents, particularly those who are involved in non-formal economic activities, are not able to be present at meetings at a regular time. This suggestion is in line with Sheldon (2007), who discovered that the rate of participation among low-income parents rose with a change in the time of the meeting.

Lastly, inclusive decision-making was proposed. Parents need the assurance that their contribution is not merely nominal but instead is actually taken into account when making and working on the policies. This aligns with Epstein's (2009) assertion that schools must transition to models of shared decision-making, where parents are considered equal partners in the school's governance.

These interventions, in case of adoption, will assist in closing the existing gap between consultative action and substantive involvement in governance.



5.5 Synthesis of Findings

The discussion reveals that:

Parents play a critical role in ensuring accountability, but lack substantial influence in shaping policy and strategic decisions.

Parents are also typically placed at the center of monitoring the use of school resources, and this requires openness on the part of teachers and administrators, as well as ensuring that the money is used for the intended purposes. They can, say, challenge anomalies through Parent-Teacher Association (PTAs) and School Management Committee (SMCs), demand that the school projects are fulfilled in time, and demand that school leaders take care of students. Nevertheless, their participation is typically kept on the periphery of the governance system, especially in the areas of oversight and compliance, rather than in policy-making. Some of the critical choices involving curriculum, teacher assignment, budgetary allocation, and long-term development plans are often arrived at at higher levels with little input from parents. This puts a scenario in which parents are custodians of responsibility rather than joint creators of educational focus. This consequently puts schools at risk of operating in accordance with policies that may not accurately represent the realities in which the communities they serve live.

Structural exclusion of parents in the governance processes is caused by barriers that include illiteracy, poverty, cultural attitudes, and poor communication.

Several networked constraints constrain the parents to be involved in governance. Illiteracy makes many parents fail to interact with technical documents, financial records, or policy statements. Therefore, they are left at the mercy of more educated members of the community who control the discussion. Exclusion is also aggravated by poverty, where parents face the dilemma of choosing livelihood activities over school meetings. In some cases, this can be observed, especially in farming or trading communities, where daily labor is the primary means of survival. The cultural attitudes in certain areas also reinforce exclusion; in certain places, the governance is seen as the preserve of the teachers or the male rulers, leaving women and the less educated parents out. Lastly, poor communication habits, including the use of written notices or give-notice announcements, tend to leave many parents unaware of important meetings. These obstacles are not isolated issues but comprise a structural web of exclusion that narrows parental voice systematically and diminishes the democratic nature of school governance.

Strengthening parental skills, enhancing communication, and ensuring inclusivity can transform school governance into a collaborative model where parents, teachers, and administrators jointly determine outcomes.

Capacity-building, or empowerment of parents through literacy classes, governance classes, or financial management classes, will allow them to feel more confident and capable of making significant contributions to the school decision-making processes. All parents, regardless of their level of literacy, can be kept informed and involved by improving communication channels through various methods, including oral announcements at community meetings, the use of mobile phones, and involvement through local leaders. Moreover, active attempts to enhance inclusivity, including female leadership in PTAs or arranging sessions at the hours that working parents can find convenient, can expand the sphere and limit the disparities. In the case of such strategies, school governance also makes a transition to a participatory framework, instead of the top-down perspective of governance. In this type of model, parents, teachers, and administrators share accountability in the decision-making process, resulting in more open and community-based learning processes. This is a joint strategy which enhances accountability whilst establishing trust between the school and community, which facilitates a facilitative environment of sustainable enhancement of the quality of education.

5.6 Conclusion of Discussion

The research indicates that parental involvement exists, but it is disproportionate and partial. Parents typically play the most active role in the accountability process, which involves following up on the utilization of school resources, identifying irregularities, and ensuring that funds or contributions are directed towards the intended purpose. This kind of engagement is significant but necessarily reactive in nature since it puts the parents in the role of spectators instead of active agenda-setters in educational priorities. Their input is insignificant in the curriculum implementation, staffing, infrastructure planning, or long-term strategic development. These are mainly left to the school administrators, government officials, or higher education policymakers, thereby placing parents at the periphery of the governance processes.

This imbalance demonstrates a broader problem in the sphere of education governance, the diminishing of the functions of parents to the role of payers and overseers, instead of having a share in the formulation of the vision



and direction of schools. The outcome is the participatory gap, where parents have their voice heard but are not given the full appreciation, and their involvement is not felt in the policies that have the most significant influence on the learning outcomes of their children. This exclusion not only weakens the idea of democratic participation but also threatens the school's ability to engage with communities, as parents will be driven by the perception of tokenistic, rather than substantive, engagement with the school.

This imbalance is to be overcome by intentional interventions. Parental capacity-building is one of the key strategies and would involve training on issues related to literacy, leadership, financial management, and governance processes, which would make the parents have a sense of confidence and knowledge to work well in decision-making. Of equal importance are policy changes that would formally enshrine parental involvement in the school's records and establish it as a right, rather than a privilege granted by school leadership to parents. Such reforms may also entail legislating that parents should be represented in school boards, that the number of women in school boards should have quotas, or that the communities should be consulted whenever major school policies are implemented.

Besides that, more democratic forms of governance, like sufficient scheduling, participatory budgetary practices, and dialogue among parents, teachers, and administrators, would be created, which would help cultivate a more collaborative culture of decision-making. Shifting the tokenistic involvement to a genuine partnership enables schools to leverage the knowledge and experiences of parents, which are grounded in the community's socio-economic conditions. Finally, by enhancing and institutionalizing parental involvement, not only is accountability enhanced, but the responsiveness, transparency, and legitimacy of the school governance are also enhanced.

5.7 Recommendations

Based on the findings and discussion of this study, the following recommendations are made:

A. Recommendations for Schools and Administrators

1. Strengthen Communication Channels:
2. The school has to introduce efficient and routine communication platforms like newsletters, SMS alerts, WhatsApp groups, and the school notice board so that the parents can be well informed on issues like meetings, policies, and governance.
3. Embrace Non-Discriminatory Decision-Making:
The school administrators ought to make sure that the voices of the parents are not just taken into account but are also incorporated in the making of final decisions. The parental input must be reflected in meeting minutes, and decisions must be made openly.
4. Opportunities for flexible engagement:
The schools must also arrange meetings when the working and non-working parents can attend, evenings and weekends, to get more parents attending and participating.
5. Parental Recommendations.
Parents are expected to acknowledge their key position in the management of schools and devote themselves to the meetings, where they will play their part, give ideas, and oversee accountability procedures.

B. Capacity Development:

This entails the provision of self-education and training to the caregiver to assist them in enhancing their capacity to care for the victim. Human Capacity Development: This involves equipping the caregiver with self-education and training in order to help them increase their capacity to take care of the victim.

7. Parents must also use available training opportunities offered by the school or NGOs to enhance their literacy, leadership, and governance skills, which will enable them to play roles with more appreciable strength.

C. Recommendations for Government and Policy Makers

6. Policy Framework for Parental Involvement:
7. The Ministry of Education should design and enforce policies that mandate schools to include parents in governance structures beyond advisory roles, promoting shared decision-making.
8. Capacity-Building Programs:
9. The government should invest in regular training workshops for parents, teachers, and school management committees on school governance, financial accountability, and participatory leadership.
10. Support for Low-Income Families:
11. Special interventions such as transport allowances, school feeding programs, or childcare services during meetings should be considered to reduce barriers for parents from disadvantaged backgrounds.



D. Recommendations for Community and Civil Society Organizations

9. Partnership Programs:
10. NGOs and community-based organizations should collaborate with schools to run community sensitization campaigns that promote the value of parental involvement in education.
11. Monitoring and Evaluation:
Independent bodies such as school boards or community watchdog groups should be established to monitor how schools implement parental involvement policies and practices regularly.

E. General Recommendations

11. **Promoting a Culture of Shared Governance:**
Efforts should be made to change cultural perceptions that place decision-making solely in the hands of teachers. Parents should be encouraged to view themselves as equal partners in shaping their children's education.
12. **Further Research:**
Future studies should investigate the impact of parental involvement on academic performance and explore differences between rural and urban schools in parental participation practices.

Reference

1. Addi-Raccach, A., & Ainhoren, R. (2009). School governance and teachers' attitudes to parents' involvement in schools. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 25(6)
2. Baker, I. (2018). The nature of parental involvement in school governing bodies: A comparative study of four primary schools in the Western Cape (Doctoral dissertation, Stellenbosch University).
3. Bauch, P. A., & Goldring, E. B. (2001). Parent-teacher participation in the context of school governance. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 73(1).
4. Brown, B. A., & Duku, N. (2008). Negotiated identities: Dynamics in parents' participation in school governance in rural Eastern Cape schools and implications for school leadership. *South African Journal of Education*, 28(3), 431-450.
5. Thomas Bush, & Heystek, J. (2003). School governance in the new South Africa. *Compare*, 33(2), 127-138.
6. James S. Coleman (1988). Social capital in the creation of human capital. *American Journal of Sociology*, 94, S95-S120.
7. Desforges, C., & Abouchaar, A. (2003). The impact of parental involvement, parental support, and family education on pupil achievement and adjustment: A literature review. Department for Education and Skills.
8. Joyce L. Epstein (2009). *School, family, and community partnerships: Your action handbook* (3rd ed.). Corwin Press.
9. Joyce L. Epstein (2018). School, family, and community partnerships in teachers' professional work. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, 28(3), 325-331.
10. R. Edward Freeman (1984). *Strategic management: A stakeholder approach*. Pitman.
11. Gay, J., & Place, W. (2015). Parental involvement in school governance: Emergence of a new model?
12. Jill Goodall (2018). Parental engagement in children's learning: Moving beyond parental involvement. *Educational Review*, 70(4), 447-462.
13. Jill Goodall, & Montgomery, C. (2019). Parental involvement to parental engagement: A continuum. *Educational Review*, 71(3), 1-15.
14. Gordon, V., & Nocon, H. (2008). Reproducing segregation: Parent involvement, diversity, and school governance. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 7(4), 320-339.
15. Griffith, J. (2001). Principal leadership of parent involvement. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 39(2), 162-186.
16. Chris M. Hands (2018). Including all families in education reform: The role of school leaders. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 46(3), 1-17.
17. Harrison, J. S., Phillips, R. A., & R. Edward Freeman (2019). On the 2018 business roundtable statement on the purpose of a corporation. *Journal of Management*, 45(7), 1-8.
18. Hofman, R. H., Hofman, W. A., & Guldmond, H. (2002). School governance, culture, and student achievement. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 5(3).
19. Hoover-Dempsey, K. V., & Sandler, H. M. (2005). The social context of parental involvement: A path to enhanced achievement. *The Elementary School Journal*, 106(2), 105-130.



20. Jeynes, W. H. (2012). A meta-analysis of the efficacy of different types of parental involvement programs for urban students. *Urban Education*, 47(4), 706–742.
21. Vusi Mncube (2009). The perceptions of parents of their role in the democratic governance of schools in South Africa. *South African Journal of Education*, 29(1), 83–103.
22. Vusi Mncube (2019). Parental involvement in school governance in South Africa. *South African Journal of Education*, 39(1), 1–10.
23. Monamoleli, V. M. (2019). The effect of school governance and parental involvement on raising Grade 12 achievement in Mpumalanga rural schools (Master's thesis, University of South Africa).
24. Naong, M. (2011). Challenges to parental involvement in school governance. *Acta Academica*, 43(2).
25. Nhlabati, M. N. (2015). The impact of parent involvement on effective secondary school governance (Master's thesis, University of South Africa).
26. Avi E. Nir, & Bogler, R. (2012). Parental involvement in school governance and decision-making in Israel. *Journal of School Public Relations*, 33(3).
27. Avi E. Nir, & Bogler, R. (2019). Parental involvement in school governance and decision-making. *Journal of School Public Relations*, 40(2), 1–20.
28. Nyambi, B. (2016). Effective school governing bodies and parental participation. *Acta Academica*, 48(3), 1–20.
29. Robert D. Putnam (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. Simon & Schuster.
30. Quesel, C., Nöpfler, J., & Buser, P. A. (2017). Principals' views on civic and parental participation in school governance. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 53(4), 1–30.
31. Rosenblatt, Z., & Peled, D. (2002). School ethical climate and parental involvement. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 40(4/5), 349–367.
32. Seitsinger Jr., R. M., & Zera, D. A. (2002). The demise of parent involvement in school governance. *Journal of School Leadership*, 12(4)
33. Sheldon, S. B. (2007). Improving student attendance with school, family, and community partnerships. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 100(5), 267–275.