



Influence of Parental Participation in School Management on Academic Performance in Catholic-Owned Schools

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ABSTRACT

Parental involvement is a recognised factor in students' academic success, yet its influence through school governance structures in faith-based institutions remains under-investigated in Kenya. This study explores the relationship between parental participation in school management and academic performance in Catholic-owned primary and secondary schools in Isiolo County. The primary objective was to determine how parents' involvement in school governance, through roles in Boards of Management (BOM), Parents Associations (PA), and school management committees, influences students' performance in national examinations. A descriptive

survey design was adopted, targeting a population of 1,745 stakeholders. A sample of 224 participants was selected, comprising BOM and PA members, school managers, students, head teachers, and an education secretary. Although purposive sampling was employed due to the study's focus on Catholic-owned schools, the concentration of such institutions in the area supported representativeness. Data collection involved structured questionnaires, interviews, observations, and document analysis of KCPE and KCSE results from 2008–2012. Academic performance was analyzed in relation to school-level governance practices, while efforts were made to account for confounding variables such as school size, location, and resource availability. Findings revealed that while all schools had active, only 25% of parents participated in funding or strategic initiatives. Most PA meetings focused on discipline, motivation, and academic issues, yet participation in decision-making on school projects and resource allocation was minimal. Schools with structured parental engagement reported improved monitoring of academic progress and communication practices. However, challenges such as student indiscipline (53.33%) and parental apathy (26.67%) hindered broader involvement. The study found a modest correlation between parental participation in school governance and improved academic oversight, though causality could not be definitively established due to the multifactorial nature of academic achievement. The study concludes that while parental involvement exists, its impact is constrained by limited roles in strategic planning and resource mobilisation. It recommends the development of inclusive frameworks and policies that empower parents as active contributors to governance in faith-based schools. These findings offer context-specific insights into participatory governance and its potential in enhancing educational outcomes in marginalised settings.

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Introduction

Education is a key driver of social transformation, poverty reduction, and sustainable development (World Bank, 2022). However, millions of children globally—particularly in marginalized regions—continue to face barriers to quality education (UNESCO, 2021). In Kenya's arid areas such as Isiolo County, challenges like poverty, pastoralist lifestyles, and conflict intensify educational exclusion (Seed Magazine, 2023).

Parental involvement is widely recognized as an important factor in improving student achievement. Recent studies show a consistent positive relationship between parental engagement and learners' academic, social, and emotional outcomes (Barger et al., 2024; Wang & Wei, 2024). Meta-analyses indicate that home-school collaboration and supportive parenting practices are more effective than direct homework assistance (Kim, 2022).

In Kenya, research echoes these findings. In Kilifi and Uasin Gishu counties, parental involvement has been linked to better academic performance at both primary and secondary levels (Mutua, 2022; Njambi & Wanjiku, 2023). Nonetheless, most of these studies focus on public and urban schools, leaving out faith-based and rural contexts.

Catholic-sponsored schools, especially in underserved areas, have historically filled critical educational gaps. In Isiolo County, institutions like St. Kizito Primary—established in 1991—have provided holistic support, including boarding, feeding programs, and spiritual formation (Seed Magazine, 2023). Despite this, dwindling donor support and local constraints now challenge sustainability and student outcomes.

While parental governance through PA and Boards of Management is encouraged, the depth and impact of such involvement in Catholic schools in rural Kenya remain underexplored. This study aims to assess how parental participation in school governance affects academic performance in Catholic primary and secondary schools in Isiolo, filling a critical gap in research on education governance in faith-based institutions.

Ideally, Catholic-sponsored schools in marginalized areas like Isiolo should operate with active parental involvement in governance—through PTAs, Boards of Management, and school committees—enhancing transparency, accountability, and student

outcomes (Barger et al., 2024; Wang & Wei, 2024).

In reality, while PTAs exist in these schools, parental participation is limited, often restricted to irregular meeting attendance without meaningful input in strategic planning or school development. Factors such as poverty, limited education, and logistical barriers hinder deeper engagement (Mutua, 2022; Njambi & Wanjiku, 2023).

This minimal involvement undermines community oversight and weakens support for learning. Consequently, issues like absenteeism, poor performance, and low resource mobilization persist (Kim, 2022).

Despite growing global and local evidence on the benefits of parental involvement, there is little empirical research examining how governance-related parental participation affects academic performance in Catholic-owned schools in Kenya's arid regions (UNESCO, 2021; World Bank, 2022). This study seeks to fill that gap by evaluating the structures, challenges, and outcomes of parental involvement in Catholic schools in Isiolo County.

Objective of the Study

The study was guided by the following specific objectives:

- i. To examine the influence of parental participation in Boards of Management (BOM) on students' academic performance in national examinations (KCPE and KCSE) in Catholic-sponsored schools.
- ii. To examine the key activities undertaken by Parents Associations (PA) and the challenges they face in supporting school governance and student academic success
- iii. To assess the relationship between the level of parental engagement through Parents Associations (PA) and trends in students' academic performance

Research Question...

- i. How does parental participation in Boards of Management (BOM) influence students' academic performance in national examinations (KCPE and KCSE) in Catholic-sponsored schools?
- ii. What are the key activities undertaken by Parents Associations (PA), and what challenges do they face in supporting school governance and student academic success?
- iii. What is the relationship between the level of parental engagement through Parents Associations (PA) and trends in students' academic performance

over time?

Literature Review

Parental Involvement in the Developed World

Numerous high-quality empirical studies from developed countries confirm that robust parental engagement positively affects student outcomes. A recent meta-analysis of 25 studies (2015–2024) found a modest yet significant link between parental involvement and mathematics performance ($r \approx .12$, $p < .001$), with home–school collaboration and expectation-setting being key factors (Wang & Wei, 2024, *Frontiers in Psychology*). Similarly, Barger et al. (2024) identified small but meaningful associations between home–school partnerships and student academic, emotional, and social adjustment, with an average effect size of $r \approx .13$ (Educational Psychology Review). These findings are reinforced by evidence that interventions promoting parental participation yield academic gains of $g \approx .25$ and socio-behavioral improvements (Cosso et al., 2022; Sheridan et al., 2019). Mixed results in some contexts point to the quality of involvement (e.g., high expectations vs. direct academic assistance) as a moderating factor (Fan et al., 2024).

Experiences in Developing Contexts (Africa)

Meta-analytic reviews focusing on lower-income nations (2010–2019) report generally positive, albeit modest, associations between school-based parental participation and academic performance. These effects are more pronounced when parents are engaged in indirect academic support such as setting home expectations and participating in school governance structures, rather than direct instructional roles (Erdem & Kaya, 2020). In the African context, particularly Nigeria, empirical studies have shown that regular parental involvement in school management—such as serving on Boards of Management, participating in Parents Associations, and engaging in school decision-making forums—correlates with improvements in students' mathematics achievement, enhanced school climate, and increased community trust (Abu Bakar et al., 2021; Alam & Dubé, 2023).

However, the nature of these experiences often reflects limited institutional capacity and inconsistent frameworks for defining and measuring governance-specific parental participation. Many studies

in these contexts lack methodological rigor or fail to isolate the distinct effects of parental governance roles from other forms of involvement, making it difficult to draw strong causal inferences. Kenyan research mirrors international trends in showing that parental engagement improves academic outcomes. For example, Mutua (2022) observed significant correlations ($p < .05$) between parental participation and biology performance in Kilifi, while Njambi and Wanjiku (2023) documented positive effects of parent–teacher communication on primary pupils' performance in Uasin Gishu. Notably, Mwarari et al. (2024) examined parenting styles in Nairobi's Catholic parishes and found that authoritative and authoritarian approaches influenced child outcomes, including discipline—a dimension linked to academic persistence.

Despite mounting evidence of parental influence, several limitations are evident:

Measurement issues: Many studies rely on self-reports or attendance records rather than assessing governance quality or influence on decision-making (Erdem & Kaya, 2020).

Contextual diversity: North American and European models may not align with the socio-cultural realities of African, especially rural, Catholic schools (Wang & Wei, 2024).

Lack of governance focus: Few Kenyan studies explicitly examine the roles of BoGs, PTAs, and management committees in shaping academic outcomes.

Limited rural, faith-based evidence: Research on Catholic schools in marginalized settings like Isiolo—where pastoralism and poverty pose unique barriers—is virtually nonexistent.

Building on global findings, this study addresses these gaps by focusing specifically on governance-level parental participation within Catholic schools in Isiolo County. By examining how parents contribute to strategic planning, resource allocation, and oversight—and linking these roles to KCPE and KCSE performance—this research provides context-sensitive evidence to improve parent–school collaboration in faith-based, marginalized communities.

Evidence from developed countries demonstrates that quality parental involvement—especially through expectations and collaboration—improves student outcomes. African studies suggest similar benefits, though they rarely focus on formal governance roles. Kenyan research supports the positive

impact of parental communication but lacks attention to faith-based school governance. This study addresses that gap by evaluating parental influence in governance structures and how it correlates with academic performance in Isiolo County's Catholic schools.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey design to examine how parental participation in school governance affects academic performance in Catholic-sponsored schools in Isiolo County, Kenya. Both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used to capture diverse perspectives and contextual data.

The research was conducted in Isiolo County, a semi-arid region with high poverty levels and low literacy rates. The target population included 1,745 stakeholders across eight Catholic-owned schools—five primary and three secondary.

Using purposive sampling, a total of 224 participants were selected. These included Board of Governors (BoG) members, School Management Committees, PTA representatives, head teachers, students, and an education secretary.

The study used structured questionnaires, interviews, observations, and document analysis (e.g., KCPE and KCSE results from 2008–2012). Instruments were pilot-tested for validity and reliability, with a Cronbach's Alpha score of 0.76, confirming internal consistency.

Data collection was conducted with appropriate permissions from education authorities and school leadership. Participants were assured of confidentiality and voluntary participation.

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS (V27), with results presented through descriptive statistics, tables, and charts. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically to enrich interpretation.

Results and Discussion

The objective of this study was to assess the role of parental involvement in governance structures and its influence on academic performance in Catholic-sponsored private schools in Isiolo County, Kenya. Data was collected through questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis, and was analyzed using descriptive statistics with SPSS. The results are discussed below in relation to parental involvement, supported by relevant and recent scholarly literature.

Response Rate and Reliability

The response rate was 100%, with all targeted respondents from the eight Catholic-sponsored schools participating. Reliability analysis using Cronbach's Alpha indicated acceptable internal consistency across study constructs, with all values exceeding the 0.7 threshold (Table.1), in line with Nunnally and Bernstein (1994).

Parental Participation in Governance

Findings indicate that all schools had functioning PTAs and that 100% of PTAs held meetings at least twice annually. Topics discussed included discipline (40%), student motivation (33.3%), and academic performance (20%). However, only 25% of parents participated in funding school projects (Figure 1).

Despite regular meetings, PTA involvement was often limited to advisory roles. This aligns with studies from sub-Saharan Africa suggesting that while parental associations exist, they are underutilized in strategic decision-making (Ngware et al., 2020).

In Kenya, PTA involvement often remains symbolic due to lack of training, inadequate resources, and cultural factors (Wambugu & Ngugi, 2022). However, studies in Uganda and Tanzania have shown that active parental engagement in school management significantly improves academic performance (Kajubi et al., 2021).

Sponsorship and Financial Support

Most schools (87%) had sponsors, with 62.5% of sponsorships contributing to development projects through funding. However, 75% of respondents noted that parents were not active in financial contributions toward infrastructure. Donor dependency was high (50%), followed by bursaries (25%) and income-generating activities like school buses or farms (12.5%). This aligns with findings by Oduor et al. (2021), who highlighted that overreliance on donor funds undermines long-term sustainability of rural private schools.

PTA Activities and Challenges

Key PTA activities included promoting communication (26.67%) and organizing school events (16.67%). Challenges included indiscipline (53.3%), lack of parental cooperation (26.7%), and student dropout (20%) (Table 2). These challenges resonate with studies in Nigeria and Malawi, which found that

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
Teacher Retention	0.794	7
Resource Utilization	0.809	8
Parental Participation	0.625	4
Sponsorship	0.813	5

Table 1: Reliability Coefficients

Challenge	Frequency	Percentage
Indiscipline	16	53.33%
Uncooperative Parents	8	26.67%
Dropouts	6	20.00%

Table 2: PTA Challenges in Schools

School	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008
Andreina Manzo	335.55	330.54	321.23	260.22	267.29
Macci Primary	277.00	275.89	288.82	270.15	242.96

Table 3: Sample KCPE Mean Scores

weak parental involvement contributes to school indiscipline and disengagement (Akomolafe & Adesua, 2023).

Academic Performance Trends

Performance trends showed a decline or stagnation in mean scores over a five-year period in both primary and secondary schools. Schools with more active PTAs, such as Andreina Manzo Primary, demonstrated higher average performance (Table 3), highlighting the potential impact of effective governance partnerships. These results support findings by Mutua and Kimani (2020), who argue that schools with structured parental involvement mechanisms often report higher student achievement.

Discussion and Implications

Parental involvement in Catholic-sponsored schools in Isiolo is present but limited in scope. While PTAs are functional, their roles are primarily administrative and not strategic. Moreover, financial constraints and donor reliance affect sustainability. Comparatively, in the U.S. and Scandinavian countries, parents play a more integral role in shaping academic policy, budget decisions, and school planning (OECD, 2021).

This study fills a local gap in understanding how parental roles in governance—not just their support—affect academic performance. Unlike previous studies that have generalized parental involvement, this research reveals that participation without empowerment yields minimal academic gains (Wambugu & Ngugi, 2022).

Strengthening the capacity and roles of PTAs and BOGs, along with improving transparency in financial contributions and consistent sponsorship support, is essential for enhancing academic outcomes in Catholic-sponsored schools in Kenya.

Conclusion

This study concluded that parental involvement in school governance within Catholic-sponsored schools in Isiolo County has a positive, though modest, influence on students' academic performance. While parents actively participate through structures such as PTAs and Boards of Management, their roles remain largely peripheral, often limited to advisory or logistical support rather than strategic decision-making. The constrained participation limits the full potential of parental contributions in areas such as resource mobilisation, school planning, and accountability. This finding underscores the broader challenges of participatory governance in marginalised and faith-based educational contexts where traditional hierarchies and limited capacity reduce the effectiveness of stakeholder engagement.

Recommendations

To the Catholic Vicariate Education Office, Ministry of Education, and School Governance Bodies: Develop and enforce comprehensive policy guidelines that institutionalize meaningful parental involvement in school governance. These should include defined roles in budgeting, performance monitoring, and decision-making structures, with accompanying capacity-building programs to empower parents, particularly in faith-based and marginalized school settings, with the skills needed for effective participation.

To Parents Associations, Development Partners, and Researchers: Foster strategic partnerships to support participatory governance through initiatives such as mentorship programs, community-led resource mobilization, and school improvement planning. In parallel, fund and conduct longitudinal and comparative research that explores the impact of parental involvement on learner outcomes across diverse religious and regional contexts.

These recommendations, if implemented, would enhance the effectiveness of parental participation as a governance tool, unlocking its potential to improve accountability, resource use, and educational

outcomes in underserved communities.

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