

Parental Participation in School Functions and Academic Performance of Students in Public Secondary Schools in Mvita Sub-County, Mombasa County, Kenya

Emily Maria Ifedha¹, Dr. Paul Kirigia², Mr. Benjamin Mwawasi³

¹Master of Education Candidate, Kenya Methodist University, Kenya

²Lecturer, Kenya Methodist University, Kenya

³Lecturer, Kenya Methodist University

Corresponding author: Emily Maria Ifedha

Abstract

Parental participation in school functions provides an important interface through which families and schools communicate, coordinate educational expectations, and demonstrate support for learners. This article examined the influence of parental participation in school functions on academic performance among students in public secondary schools in Mvita Sub-County, Mombasa County, Kenya. The article was developed from the second objective of a mixed-methods study that investigated four dimensions of parental involvement and their relationship with academic performance. The study employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods design and targeted educational stakeholders across all 15 public secondary schools in Mvita Sub-County. Quantitative data were obtained from Heads of Departments, student leaders, and Parent-Teacher Association chairpersons, while qualitative evidence was obtained from principals and Sub-County Education Officers. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson product-moment correlation, and stepwise multiple regression, while qualitative data were analysed thematically. The findings showed that parental participation in school functions was moderate overall, although substantial differences existed between respondent groups. Academic days and parent-teacher conferences attracted comparatively higher participation than prize-giving ceremonies and some motivational events. Despite moderate actual attendance, respondents strongly perceived parental presence as motivational and academically beneficial. Pearson correlation established a positive and statistically significant association between parental participation in school functions and academic performance ($r = .579$, $p < .001$), with participation accounting for 33.6% of the variance in academic performance when modelled independently. In the stepwise regression model, school functions participation remained a significant independent predictor of academic performance ($\beta = .279$, $p = .035$), after controlling for student discipline. Qualitative findings indicated that parents selectively attended activities with direct academic relevance and that systematic communication, particularly through WhatsApp broadcasts, newsletters, SMS, and advance scheduling, facilitated attendance. The article concludes that parental participation in school functions is a meaningful dimension of parental involvement and an underutilised pathway for improving student motivation and academic outcomes. Schools should redesign parent-engagement activities around academically purposeful interactions, strengthen multi-channel communication, and institutionalise inclusive parent-school partnership mechanisms.

Keywords: parental participation, school functions, academic performance, parent-school partnership, secondary schools, Mvita Sub-County, Kenya.

Date of Submission: 15-08-2026

Date of Acceptance: 31-08-2026

I. Background of the study

Academic performance remains a central indicator of the effectiveness of educational systems because it reflects the extent to which learners engage with instruction, complete learning tasks, progress through educational levels, and demonstrate mastery through formal and continuous assessments (Atchia & Chinapah, 2023). Although academic achievement is shaped by multiple factors, family involvement remains one of the important social influences on learners educational experiences. Parental involvement extends beyond the provision of material resources and includes communication with schools, participation in school activities, monitoring of educational progress, and the demonstration of expectations concerning learning (Alfred et al., 2023; Ali et al., 2023). The visible presence of parents in school activities is therefore potentially important

because it connects the learner home and school environments and communicates that education is valued by the family.

Parental participation in school functions constitutes one of the most observable forms of school-based parental involvement. Such participation may include attendance at academic days, parent-teacher conferences, prize-giving ceremonies, Parent-Teacher Association activities, mentorship programmes, motivational events, and other school-organised occasions. These activities create structured opportunities for parents to interact with teachers, obtain information about learner progress, participate in school decision-making, celebrate achievement, and establish relationships with the school community. Within Epstein's framework of parental involvement, communication and decision-making are important mechanisms through which schools create meaningful partnerships with families. Participation in school functions can consequently facilitate the exchange of information and strengthen the alignment of expectations between home and school.

The importance of school-based participation is also consistent with ecological perspectives of child development. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory conceptualises the learner as developing within interconnected environmental systems, with the quality of interaction between major settings influencing developmental outcomes (Tudge et al., 2009). The home and school represent important microsystems, while the interaction between them constitutes a mesosystemic relationship. When parents attend school functions, communicate with teachers, and participate in educational activities, the boundaries between home and school become more connected. Such interaction can enhance consistency in educational expectations and provide learners with a stronger social environment for engagement.

International evidence generally indicates that constructive parental involvement is associated with improved educational outcomes. Boonk et al. (2018) showed that several forms of parental engagement, including communication about school and parental encouragement, were positively related to achievement. More recent evidence has continued to emphasise the value of parent-school interaction. Adelabu and Mncube (2023), for example, highlighted the contribution of parents' participation in school activities to learner educational experiences, while Alfred et al. (2023) reported a positive influence of parental involvement on academic performance in Ethiopian secondary schools. Such evidence suggests that the school-based dimension of parental involvement deserves attention as a distinct mechanism rather than being treated simply as a component of an undifferentiated parental involvement construct.

School functions may influence academic performance through several pathways. First, parental presence may communicate educational value and strengthen learner motivation. Students can interpret parental attendance as an indication that their educational achievements and school experiences matter to their families. Recognition events can reinforce achievement-related aspirations, while academic days can provide direct feedback that helps families respond to emerging learning challenges. Sureda-García et al. (2021) demonstrated that recognition and positive relationships can strengthen engagement, while Thompson et al. (2022) reported that parental attendance at recognition events was associated with increased student motivation and academic engagement. These processes indicate that participation may have both affective and informational effects.

Second, school functions can improve the quality of parent-teacher communication. Academic days and parent-teacher conferences allow teachers to explain learner strengths, weaknesses, attendance patterns, and behavioural concerns while parents provide information about circumstances at home. This reciprocal communication can facilitate early identification of problems and enable coordinated responses. Yang et al. (2023) emphasised the value of structured communication opportunities between families and schools in supporting learner engagement and achievement. In the Kenyan context, Choge and Edabu (2023) similarly highlighted the importance of parental communication in educational transitions and recommended strengthened communication infrastructure.

Third, participation can promote a sense of belonging and shared responsibility. Parents who attend school activities may become more familiar with teachers, administrators, school expectations, and other parents. This social connection can strengthen trust and make subsequent communication easier. It may also create a school culture in which educational success is viewed as a shared responsibility rather than solely a responsibility of teachers or learners. The effect is potentially important in public secondary schools where teachers manage diverse learner needs and where family-school coordination can supplement institutional resources.

The Kenyan context makes this issue particularly relevant. Mombasa County is characterised by substantial economic activity, including tourism, port-related activities, and informal employment. At the same time, the county faces social challenges that can affect learners' educational experiences. The thesis from which this article is derived reports persistent academic underperformance in Mvita Sub-County, including an average KCSE mean score of 4.2 between 2019 and 2023 compared with a national mean of 5.5 (Mombasa County Education Office, 2025). The study also identified socio-environmental challenges, including economic constraints, parental disengagement, and substance abuse, as factors affecting the capacity of families and schools to support learners.

The available Kenyan evidence has often concentrated on general parental involvement or on rural and inland settings. The source thesis identifies a contextual gap concerning coastal urban schools, where working

patterns, economic informality, and social conditions may shape parents' ability to participate in school activities. This article addresses that gap by isolating parental participation in school functions as a specific explanatory dimension and examining its relationship with academic performance in public secondary schools in Mvita Sub-County.

Statement of the Problem

The effectiveness of parent-school partnerships depends not only on whether schools invite parents to participate but also on whether parents actually attend, communicate, and engage meaningfully in activities. In Mvita Sub-County, the study from which this article was developed found a notable gap between stakeholders' recognition of the value of parental participation and the actual level of participation in school functions. Heads of Departments and PTA chairpersons assessed participation as moderate, while student leaders reported substantially higher levels. The differences suggested that parents' participation was uneven and that attendance depended partly on the type and perceived purpose of the event.

The problem is consequential because schools can provide opportunities for parents to support academic development, yet these opportunities have limited effect when participation is inconsistent. The challenge is not simply one of attendance. Parents may attend ceremonial events without receiving meaningful academic information, while academic days and parent-teacher conferences can generate direct feedback and coordinated support. The present article therefore examines the extent of participation, the perceived motivational and academic effects, the relationship between participation and academic performance, and the mechanisms that facilitate or constrain participation.

Objective of the study

The objective was to assess the influence of parental participation in school functions on academic performance of students in public secondary schools in Mvita Sub-County, Mombasa County, Kenya. The corresponding research question asked what influence parental participation in school functions had on academic performance. The construct was operationalised through participation in prize-giving ceremonies, academic days and parent-teacher conferences, prayer and motivational events, and perceptions of the motivational and academic effects of parental attendance.

II. Literature Review

Parental participation in school functions refers to parents' active presence and engagement in school-organised activities that connect families with the educational institution. It is broader than physical attendance because meaningful participation includes listening to teachers, discussing learner progress, contributing to decisions, responding to school information, and supporting activities that promote learner development. In practical terms, the school function becomes a platform for interaction rather than merely an event on the school calendar.

Epstein's Six-Type Model provides a useful lens for understanding this form of involvement. The model identifies parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community as interconnected dimensions of family-school partnership. Participation in academic days and parent-teacher conferences is particularly relevant to communication and decision-making because parents receive information, express concerns, and may participate in decisions concerning learner support. Participation in recognition ceremonies and school events can also represent volunteering and parenting by demonstrating support and encouraging learners.

The ecological perspective complements this framework. Parent attendance creates interaction between the family and school microsystems and thereby strengthens the mesosystem around the learner. The implication is that school functions can become mechanisms through which educational expectations are aligned. Tudge et al. (2009) caution that ecological theory is concerned with interactions among settings rather than isolated environmental influences. Thus, the value of parental participation should be understood in terms of the quality and continuity of interactions that it creates.

The concept is also consistent with the view that family involvement can influence academic outcomes through motivational, informational, behavioural, and relational mechanisms. When parents attend a school event, the learner receives a visible signal of parental interest. When the event involves academic feedback, the family also receives information that can guide subsequent support. When participation is collective, it can strengthen social networks around the school and establish shared expectations concerning attendance, discipline, effort, and achievement.

Participation in Prize-Giving and Recognition Events

Prize-giving ceremonies are primarily recognition-oriented functions. Their educational value lies in publicly acknowledging achievement and effort, thereby reinforcing norms concerning persistence and success. Parental attendance can intensify this effect because learners experience recognition not only from teachers and

the school but also from their families. Sureda-García et al. (2021) found that recognition and teacher-student relationships were associated with emotional and behavioural engagement, suggesting that recognition environments can contribute to learners' connection with educational activities.

Thompson et al. (2022) further linked parental attendance at recognition events with student motivation and academic engagement. The mechanism is plausibly social and symbolic: parental presence communicates that educational success is worthy of attention and celebration. In African settings, Akuezuilo et al. (2021) reported that parental involvement in school activities strengthened school-home connections and supported academic motivation, while Adelabu and Mncube (2023) showed the broader value of parents' participation in school activities for educational monitoring and learner outcomes.

Recognition events may not generate the same direct academic information as academic days or conferences. Parents may attend to celebrate achievement without engaging with the underlying causes of success or underperformance. Consequently, their effect may operate primarily through motivation, aspiration, and social reinforcement. This distinction is important in interpreting the Mvita findings, where prize-giving attendance was comparatively lower than attendance at activities with direct academic relevance.

Academic Days and Parent-Teacher Conferences

Academic days and parent-teacher conferences represent a more information-intensive form of parental participation. They provide structured opportunities for teachers to discuss grades, attendance, assignments, behaviour, learning needs, and strategies for improvement. Such meetings can convert parental involvement from a symbolic activity into a problem-solving partnership. The process allows teachers to communicate school-based observations while parents provide contextual information about the learner's home environment.

The relevance of structured communication is supported by research showing that home-school cooperation can influence adolescents' academic experiences. Chen (2024), as reviewed in the thesis, identified home-school cooperation and parent-child communication as important factors in adolescent academic performance. Yang et al. (2023) similarly emphasised structured communication opportunities as mechanisms for improving student engagement and learning achievement. In Kenya, Choge and Edabu (2023) highlighted communication as important in educational transitions. Together, these studies indicate that the value of academic days lies not simply in attendance but in the exchange and use of information.

From a systems perspective, academic days can also create accountability. When parents meet teachers, they become more aware of school expectations and learner progress. Teachers, in turn, become more aware of family constraints and can moderate expectations or identify support pathways. This reciprocity is particularly relevant where parents have limited formal education or work schedules that make frequent informal contact difficult.

Communication and Digital Engagement

Attendance at school functions is partly an information problem. Parents cannot participate in an event they do not know about, do not understand, or cannot plan for. Communication therefore acts as an enabling mechanism between the invitation and actual attendance. In contemporary school environments, communication can involve printed notices, SMS, telephone calls, email, WhatsApp broadcasts, school calendars, and newsletters. Digital platforms can reduce information delays and provide reminders to parents who have demanding work schedules.

The Mvita evidence provides particularly useful contextual insight. Ten of the 13 interviewed principals reported using WhatsApp class broadcasts and weekly newsletters as primary communication tools, with some schools supplementing these approaches with SMS, email, and direct phone calls. Principals also described the value of announcing event dates early and incorporating them into school calendars distributed to parents. The qualitative evidence suggested that schools using systematic and diverse communication strategies achieved better attendance.

Digital communication should not be treated as a substitute for interpersonal engagement. The strongest value of a school function may arise when digital communication brings parents into substantive face-to-face interaction with teachers. Digital tools are therefore best understood as engagement infrastructure that reduces barriers to participation and supports continuity between formal events.

Empirical Evidence and Research Gap

Empirical evidence broadly supports a positive association between parental involvement and academic performance. Alfred et al. (2023) reported positive effects of parental involvement on student performance in Ethiopian secondary schools. Adelabu and Mncube (2023) documented the relevance of parental participation in school activities in South African schools. Amponsah et al. (2018) found a positive relationship between parental involvement and academic performance among senior high school students in Ghana. These studies suggest that family-school engagement is relevant across different African contexts, although the mechanisms and magnitude of influence vary.

The Mvita findings contribute a more specific result. Whereas the general literature often combines multiple forms of parental involvement into a single construct, the present analysis isolates school functions participation. This disaggregation is useful because participation in school functions has its own motivational and communication pathways. The study's correlation of $r = .579$ and the independent predictive coefficient of $\beta = .279$ indicate that school functions participation made a meaningful contribution to academic performance even when other parental involvement dimensions were considered.

The contextual gap is also important. The source thesis notes that much Kenyan evidence has emerged from rural or inland counties, whereas relatively limited evidence addresses coastal urban settings such as Mvita. The economic informality, tourism- and port-related employment patterns, and socio-environmental pressures of the coastal urban context can affect parents' availability and engagement. The present article therefore extends existing knowledge by providing empirical evidence on school-based parental participation in a specific urban coastal setting in Kenya.

Theoretical Framework

Epstein's Six-Type Model of Parental Involvement

Epstein's model provides the primary conceptual explanation for parental participation in school functions. The model conceptualises effective family-school partnerships through six overlapping types of involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community. Participation in academic days and parent-teacher conferences is directly connected to communication and decision-making, while attendance at school events may also represent volunteering and parenting. The model therefore suggests that school functions can be meaningful when they provide parents with opportunities to exchange information, contribute to decisions, and support learners.

The Mvita findings support this proposition. The source thesis interpreted participation in school functions as reflecting communication and decision-making within Epstein's framework and concluded that the findings generally supported the model. Importantly, the findings also showed that not all forms of parental involvement contributed equally to academic performance. School functions participation ranked second in predictive strength after student discipline, indicating contextual variation in the relative importance of involvement types.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner's ecological perspective provides a complementary explanation by locating parent-school participation within a network of social environments. A learner develops through interactions within and between settings. The family-school relationship is therefore important because it determines how consistent expectations, information, and support are across settings. Parent participation in school functions strengthens the mesosystem by increasing interaction between the learner's home and school environments. The Mvita findings support this interpretation because communication between parents and schools emerged as a key mechanism influencing attendance at school functions.

The ecological interpretation also helps explain why participation cannot be considered solely a matter of parental willingness. Parents operate within economic, occupational, cultural, and community environments that can constrain their availability. Thus, schools need to create participation structures that recognise the realities of working parents, provide advance information, and use flexible communication channels. The theory consequently shifts attention from blaming parents for non-attendance toward examining the interaction between family circumstances and school engagement practices.

III. Methodology

Research Design and Setting

The article draws on data generated through a descriptive mixed-methods study using a convergent parallel design. The study was conducted in public secondary schools in Mvita Sub-County, Mombasa County, Kenya. The sub-county comprised 15 public secondary schools. The setting was selected because of persistent academic performance challenges and its distinctive coastal urban socio-economic environment. The design was appropriate because the quantitative strand established the magnitude and statistical significance of relationships, while the qualitative strand provided explanations for participation patterns and the mechanisms underlying them.

Population, Sampling and Participants

The study targeted 197 educational stakeholders across the 15 public secondary schools. A sample of 132 respondents was selected using census and stratified random sampling procedures. The quantitative component involved 45 Heads of Departments, 30 student leaders, and nine PTA chairpersons, while qualitative interviews involved 13 principals and two Sub-County Education Officers. Data collection took place from 7 to 15 July 2026. The overall response rate was 75.0%.

Data Collection and Analysis

Structured questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data, while semi-structured interviews were used to obtain qualitative evidence. The school functions construct included participation in prize-giving ceremonies, academic days and parent-teacher conferences, prayer days and motivational events, and perceptions concerning the motivational and performance effects of parental participation. Academic performance was operationalised through school attendance, assignment completion, transition rates, and quality grades/KCSE outcomes.

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson product-moment correlation, and stepwise multiple regression. The correlation coefficient was used to establish the direction and strength of the relationship between school functions participation and academic performance. Stepwise regression was used to determine whether school functions participation retained an independent predictive contribution when considered alongside other parental involvement dimensions. Qualitative interviews were analysed thematically and used to explain the quantitative patterns.

IV. Results

Descriptive Results

Parental participation in school functions was moderate overall, although respondent groups differed substantially in their perceptions. Heads of Departments reported an overall mean of 3.30 (SD = 0.67), PTA chairpersons reported 3.11 (SD = 0.78), while student leaders reported 4.20 (SD = 0.58). The similarity between HOD and PTA ratings indicates that institutional and parent-representative assessments tended to converge, whereas students perceived considerably greater participation.

Participation indicator	HODs M	Student leaders M	PTA chairpersons M	Interpretation
Prize-giving ceremonies	2.93	3.73	2.33	Lower participation
Academic days/PTCs	3.31	4.27	2.44	Relatively higher
Prayer/motivational events	3.09	3.80	2.67	Moderate
Participation motivates students	3.73	4.60	4.00	Strong agreement
Participation improves performance	3.40	4.60	4.11	Strong agreement

The pattern is noteworthy because the indicators of actual participation generally recorded lower means than the indicators of perceived effect. For example, student leaders gave a mean of 4.60 for both the statement that parental participation motivates students and the statement that student performance improves when parents are involved. PTA chairpersons similarly rated the motivational effect at 4.00 and the performance effect at 4.11. This indicates a clear attitude-practice gap: stakeholders recognise the value of parental presence more strongly than they report actual attendance.

Attendance also varied according to event type. Academic days and parent-teacher conferences recorded the highest participation among the main school-function indicators, while prize-giving ceremonies recorded the lowest ratings among HODs and PTA chairpersons. Prayer days and motivational events occupied an intermediate position. The pattern suggests that parents were more likely to attend activities perceived as directly connected to academic progress than activities perceived as primarily ceremonial.

Qualitative Results

Selective Attendance

The first qualitative theme was selective attendance. Principals reported that parental participation varied according to event type. Academic days and parent-teacher conferences attracted comparatively higher attendance, especially when parents were expected to collect report cards physically. In contrast, prize-giving ceremonies and prayer days attracted lower participation. Some principals attributed this difference to parents' tendency to prioritise events with direct academic relevance. Sub-County Education Officers also reported that fathers were particularly absent from some school events, with grandparents sometimes attending in their place. Selective participation indicates that attendance should not be interpreted as a uniform behavioural characteristic. Parents appear to make decisions based on the perceived utility of an event, the information expected to be obtained, and perhaps the opportunity cost of attendance. Academic days provide direct information about learner progress and therefore may be perceived as more consequential than ceremonies. This finding has an important practical implication: schools may increase participation by making events more purposeful and demonstrating clearly how attendance benefits the learner.

Communication as an Enabler

The second qualitative theme was communication as an enabler. Most interviewed principals reported using WhatsApp class broadcasts and weekly newsletters to communicate school activities, while some supplemented these channels with SMS, email, and direct telephone calls. Principals also described the value of

announcing event dates early and incorporating them into school calendars distributed to parents. The qualitative evidence indicated that schools using systematic and diverse communication strategies obtained better parental attendance.

The finding suggests that parental participation is partly shaped by the quality of engagement infrastructure created by schools. A parent may value education and still fail to attend because of late notification, competing work obligations, uncertainty about the event's purpose, or lack of convenient communication. Systematic communication can reduce these barriers and create predictability around school activities.

Inferential Results

Analysis	Statistic	p-value	Interpretation
Pearson correlation	$r = .579$	$< .001$	Positive, significant
Individual variance explained	$R^2 = .336$	—	33.6% of variance
Stepwise regression coefficient	$\beta = .279$	.035	Significant independent predictor
Overall stepwise model	$F(2,81) = 27.512$	$< .001$	Significant model

Pearson correlation established a positive and statistically significant relationship between parental participation in school functions and academic performance ($r = .579$, $p < .001$). The coefficient indicates a moderately strong positive association: higher levels of participation tended to correspond with higher levels of academic performance. When modelled independently, school functions participation explained 33.6% of the variance in academic performance. The finding provides substantial evidence that school-based parental engagement is associated with educational outcomes in the Mvita context.

The stepwise regression results provided additional evidence of the independent contribution of school functions participation. The final model included student discipline and school functions participation and was statistically significant, $F(2, 81) = 27.512$, $p < .001$, with $R^2 = .405$ and adjusted $R^2 = .390$. School functions participation had a standardised coefficient of $\beta = .279$, $t = 2.145$, $p = .035$, while student discipline was stronger at $\beta = .399$, $p = .003$. The regression equation was Academic Performance = $0.918 + 0.406(\text{Discipline}) + 0.324(\text{Functions})$.

The regression result is important because it demonstrates that school functions participation was not merely correlated with academic performance due to its overlap with other forms of parental involvement. It retained a statistically significant independent contribution after student discipline was entered into the model. At the same time, the coefficient should not be interpreted as evidence of causality. The study was cross-sectional and relied partly on perceptual measures; consequently, the result establishes an association and predictive contribution within the statistical model rather than a definitive causal effect.

V. Discussion

Interpretation of the Positive Association

The positive correlation between parental participation in school functions and academic performance is consistent with the broader literature on family-school engagement. The result indicates that students whose parents are more engaged in school activities tend to report or demonstrate better academic outcomes across the study's performance indicators. This is consistent with Alfred et al. (2023), who found that parental involvement predicted academic improvements in Ethiopian secondary schools, and with Adelabu and Mncube (2023), who emphasised the contribution of parental participation in school activities to learner educational experiences.

The magnitude of the Mvita correlation, $r = .579$, is sufficiently substantial to indicate that school functions participation is an important dimension of parental involvement. The result also compares favourably with the other dimensions examined in the parent study: the thesis reports correlations of .574 for financial obligations, .476 for learner academic support, and .609 for student discipline. School functions therefore occupied an important middle-to-upper position, stronger than home academic support and slightly stronger than financial obligations, although weaker than discipline. This pattern supports the argument that parental involvement should not be treated as a homogeneous construct. Different forms of engagement operate through different pathways and may have different strengths in particular contexts.

Motivation as a Mechanism

The particularly high ratings for the motivational effect of parental participation provide an important explanation for the quantitative relationship. Student leaders gave a mean of 4.60 for the statement that parental participation motivates students. This result indicates that students themselves perceive parental presence as psychologically meaningful. When parents attend school functions, learners may experience affirmation, encouragement, recognition, and a stronger sense that educational achievement matters to the family.

This interpretation is consistent with recognition research. Sureda-García et al. (2021) found that recognition and positive teacher-student relationships were associated with emotional and behavioural engagement, while Thompson et al. (2022) linked parental attendance at recognition events with student motivation and academic

engagement. The Mvita study extends this argument to a setting where parents may face substantial constraints on their time and where participation is selective.

Motivation is important because it can influence behaviours that are closer to academic performance. A motivated learner may attend school more consistently, complete assignments, participate in lessons, persist in difficult tasks, and respond more positively to feedback. Thus, parental participation may have an indirect relationship with academic outcomes through learner engagement. The present study did not test mediation, so this pathway remains an interpretation rather than an empirically estimated mechanism; nevertheless, the high motivational ratings provide contextual support for it.

Communication and Academic Monitoring

The stronger attendance at academic days and parent-teacher conferences compared with ceremonial functions suggests that parents value activities that provide direct information about educational progress. Academic days can support early identification of attendance problems, incomplete assignments, declining grades, behavioural concerns, or transition risks. Such information allows parents and teachers to coordinate responses before problems become entrenched. This interpretation is consistent with the communication dimension of Epstein's model and with research emphasising structured home-school communication as a contributor to engagement (Yang et al., 2023).

The qualitative evidence strengthens this interpretation. Principals reported that physical collection of report cards was an effective way of encouraging attendance. This indicates that participation can be increased when schools link attendance to a clear educational purpose. However, compulsory attendance should ideally be accompanied by meaningful interaction. If parents are required to collect a report card but do not receive an opportunity to discuss the learner's progress or next steps, the potential of the function as a partnership mechanism may remain underused.

Selective Participation and Event Design

The finding of selective attendance has practical significance. Parents did not appear equally likely to attend all school functions. Attendance was relatively stronger for academic days and parent-teacher conferences and weaker for prize-giving ceremonies and prayer or motivational events. This may reflect parents' rational allocation of limited time. In a setting where many parents work in informal or demanding employment environments, attending a school function can involve a direct opportunity cost. Events that provide information with immediate educational value may therefore be prioritised.

The implication is not that ceremonial events lack value. Recognition, celebration, and community-building can strengthen learners' motivation and sense of belonging. Rather, schools may need to integrate multiple purposes into fewer, well-designed activities. A school function can combine academic feedback, recognition, parent orientation, learner exhibitions, counselling, and short parent-teacher consultations. Such integration may improve the perceived value of attendance while reducing the number of separate occasions that parents must accommodate.

Digital Communication as Engagement Infrastructure

The role of WhatsApp, SMS, newsletters, and school calendars is especially relevant to urban coastal contexts. Digital communication can provide reminders, explain the purpose of events, communicate schedules, and enable parents who cannot attend physically to remain informed. The finding that ten of 13 principals relied on WhatsApp broadcasts and newsletters suggests that schools are already using digital channels as part of their engagement practices. Digital communication should nevertheless be systematic and inclusive rather than dependent on a single platform.

Schools should combine WhatsApp, SMS, telephone communication, printed notices where necessary, and advance calendars. The purpose should be to create predictable and accessible communication rather than simply increase the volume of messages. Communication should also be two-way, allowing parents to ask questions, confirm attendance, and provide information about circumstances affecting learners.

Comparison with Previous Studies

The Mvita findings broadly agree with evidence from African and international contexts. Amponsah et al. (2018) found a positive relationship between parental involvement and academic performance in Ghana, while Akuezuiro et al. (2021) reported that parental participation in school activities strengthened school-home connections and supported academic motivation in Nigeria. Adelabu and Mncube (2023) similarly emphasised the educational value of parents' participation in school activities in South Africa. These studies support the interpretation that school-based participation can influence educational outcomes through motivational and relational mechanisms.

The present findings also align with Alfred et al. (2023), whose study in Ethiopia reported a positive influence of parental involvement on academic performance. However, the Mvita study contributes a more

differentiated result by isolating school functions participation and estimating both its bivariate relationship and its independent regression contribution. This is analytically useful because a general parental involvement measure can conceal the relative importance of specific practices.

The findings are also consistent with evidence on recognition and engagement. Sureda-García et al. (2021) and Thompson et al. (2022) both indicate that recognition and parental presence can support motivation and engagement. The Mvita study extends this reasoning to a setting where parents may face substantial constraints on their time and where participation is selective. The evidence therefore suggests that the effect of participation depends not only on whether parents attend but also on the relevance, design, and communication of the activity.

At the Kenyan level, the findings complement evidence emphasising parental communication in educational progression. Choge and Edabu (2023) highlighted communication as important in academic transitions. The Mvita findings suggest that school functions can provide a practical institutional platform through which such communication occurs. Communication becomes more effective when embedded in recurring, purposeful school activities rather than left to ad hoc contact.

Theoretical Implications

The findings support Epstein's Six-Type Model by demonstrating that school-based parental participation is associated with academic outcomes and that the strongest functions of participation are communication, information exchange, and shared educational responsibility. The finding that academic days and parent-teacher conferences attracted relatively higher participation is particularly compatible with the communication dimension of the model. The significant regression coefficient further indicates that this form of engagement has an independent contribution to educational outcomes within the study context.

The findings also support Bronfenbrenner's ecological perspective. The relationship between parental participation and academic performance illustrates the importance of the mesosystem linking home and school. The qualitative finding that communication practices influenced attendance reinforces the idea that development is shaped not only within individual settings but also through interactions among settings. The theory is therefore useful for explaining why improving school-parent relationships can contribute to learner outcomes even when schools and families operate under different constraints.

Policy and Practical Implications

Implications for School Principals

Principals should redesign school functions around clear educational purposes. Academic days and parent-teacher conferences should remain central because they generate direct information about learner progress. Ceremonial functions can be retained but integrated with academic engagement components. Schools should also provide event schedules early, use multiple communication channels, and communicate not only the date and venue but also the expected value of parental attendance.

Implications for Teachers and Heads of Departments

Teachers should treat parent meetings as opportunities for collaborative problem solving rather than one-way reporting. Communication should be specific, respectful, and actionable. Parents should receive information on what the learner is doing well, what requires improvement, what support is needed, and what actions can be taken at home and school. Heads of Departments can standardise academic-day reporting templates to improve the consistency and usefulness of parent-teacher interactions.

Implications for PTA Leadership

PTA chairpersons can strengthen participation by identifying common barriers to attendance and developing peer-supported engagement mechanisms. PTA structures can help disseminate event information, encourage parents who rarely participate, and provide feedback to schools about suitable times and formats. Parent education workshops and peer support networks can be used to strengthen engagement.

Implications for the Sub-County Education Office

The Sub-County Education Office can establish minimum standards for parent-school communication and participation, monitor attendance at academic days and parent-teacher conferences, and facilitate sharing of effective practices among schools. Such monitoring should focus on quality as well as quantity. High attendance is valuable only if school functions generate meaningful interaction and follow-up.

VI. Conclusion

The study established that parental participation in school functions is a significant dimension of parental involvement in public secondary schools in Mvita Sub-County. Participation was moderate overall, but the value attributed to parental presence was consistently high. Academic days and parent-teacher conferences attracted relatively greater participation than ceremonial activities, suggesting that parents may prioritise functions with direct academic relevance. The strong motivational ratings reported by students indicate that parental presence communicates educational value and may strengthen learner commitment.

Statistically, parental participation in school functions was positively and significantly associated with academic performance ($r = .579$, $p < .001$) and explained 33.6% of the variance in performance when modelled independently. Participation also retained a significant independent contribution in the stepwise regression model ($\beta = .279$, $p = .035$). These results demonstrate that school-based parental engagement is not merely symbolic; it has a measurable association with academic outcomes within the study context. Nevertheless, the cross-sectional design means the result should be interpreted as an association rather than proof of causation.

The central conclusion is that schools should treat parental participation in functions as an instructional and partnership resource rather than as an administrative expectation. The greatest value is likely to arise when school activities are purposeful, academically relevant, well communicated, and designed to facilitate two-way interaction. Strengthening multi-channel communication, integrating academic and recognition activities, and developing inclusive parent-school partnerships can help convert parental presence into meaningful educational support.

VII. Recommendations

- i. Public secondary schools in Mvita Sub-County should prioritise academically purposeful parent-teacher conferences and academic days and integrate meaningful learner-progress discussions into other major school functions.
- ii. Principals should institutionalise multi-channel communication using WhatsApp, SMS, telephone calls, newsletters, and advance school calendars to ensure parents receive timely and accessible information about school activities.
- iii. Schools should redesign ceremonial activities such as prize-giving days to include brief academic consultations, learner exhibitions, mentorship sessions, and parent engagement opportunities, thereby increasing the perceived educational value of attendance.
- iv. PTA chairpersons should develop parent peer-support mechanisms that encourage participation among parents who rarely attend school activities and should provide structured feedback to school leadership on barriers to participation.
- v. Teachers and Heads of Departments should prepare concise, evidence-based learner progress reports for parent meetings, including strengths, areas for improvement, attendance information, and practical follow-up actions.
- vi. The Sub-County Education Office should establish participation benchmarks and monitor the quality of parent-school engagement across public secondary schools, while facilitating inter-school learning on effective communication and attendance strategies.
- vii. Future interventions should recognise that non-attendance may reflect structural constraints rather than parental indifference. Schools should therefore explore flexible scheduling, advance notification, and alternative communication arrangements for parents whose employment responsibilities limit physical attendance.

References

- [1]. Adelabu, M. A., & Mncube, V. S. (2023). Narratives of parents' participation in school activities and learners' academic performance in South African schools. *Educational Studies*, 49(2), 234–251. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03055698.2021.1889995>
- [2]. Akuezilo, E. O., Osakwe, R. N., & Chikwature, W. (2021). Perceived parental involvement in school activities and academic achievement of students in selected secondary schools in Delta State, Nigeria. *Journal of Educational Research and Practice*, 11(1), 89–104.
- [3]. Alfred, T., Mesfin, G., & Desta, A. (2023). Evaluating the influence of parental involvement on students' academic performance in secondary schools: Evidence from Ethiopian secondary schools. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 98, Article 102745. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2023.102745>
- [4]. Ali, S., Akram, B., & Naz, A. (2023). Students' academic performance in relation to parenting styles and socioeconomic status: A correlation study. *Journal of Family Studies*, 29(2), 678–695. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13229400.2021.1922345>
- [5]. Amponsah, M. O., Milledzi, E. Y., Ampofo, E. T., & Gyambrah, M. (2018). Relationship between parental involvement and academic performance of senior high school students: The case of Ashanti Mampong Municipality of Ghana. *American Journal of Educational Research*, 6(1), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.12691/education-6-1-1>
- [6]. Atchia, S. M., & Chinapah, V. (2023). Developing a structural equation model on factors influencing academic achievement of secondary school students. *Educational Research and Evaluation*, 29(3–4), 245–267. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13803611.2023.2187654>
- [7]. Boonk, L., Gijsselaers, H. J. M., Ritzen, H., & Brand-Gruwel, S. (2018). A review of the relationship between parental involvement indicators and academic achievement. *Educational Research Review*, 24, 10–30. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2018.02.001>
- [8]. Sureda-García, I., Martínez-García, M., & Gutiérrez-González, P. (2021). Emotional and behavioral engagement among vocational education students: The role of teacher-student relationships and recognition. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 108, Article 101785. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2021.101785>
- [9]. Thompson, L., Martinez, R., & Chen, Y. (2022). Recognition events and student motivation: The impact of parental attendance on academic engagement. *Educational Psychology*, 42(6), 789–807. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01443410.2021.1998765>
- [10]. Tudge, J. R. H., Mokrova, I., Hatfield, B. E., & Karnik, R. B. (2009). Uses and misuses of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory of human development. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 1(4), 198–210. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1756-2589.2009.00026.x>
- [11]. Choge, J. R., & Edabu, P. (2023). Study on parental communication and academic transitions in Kenya, as cited in the source thesis.
- [12]. Chen, C. (2024). Study on home-school cooperation and adolescent academic performance, as cited in the source thesis.

- [13]. Yang, Y. et al. (2023). Review of home-school communication and student engagement, as cited in the source thesis.
- [14]. Mombasa County Education Office. (2025). Educational performance information for Mvita Sub-County, as reported in the source thesis.