

PARENTAL PARTICIPATION IN FREE DAY SECONDARY EDUCATION AND STUDENT RETENTION: A CASE OF MIGORI COUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract

Research shows that parental participation in the educational experiences of their children increases student achievement and strengthens school programmes. Majority of research done have however concentrated on lower and upper primary schools with little being known about parental participation at secondary school level. The study was anchored on systems theory and sought to add to literature related to parental participation at secondary level. The study examined the experiences of school principals, class teachers, students and parents on parental participation in public day schools and student retention in Migori County. The study targeted 215 public day secondary schools. The actual sample size was made up of 19 schools, 19 principals, 76 class teachers, 228 students and 31 parents. The study adopted a convergent parallel mixed method design using cross sectional survey for the quantitative method and a case design for the qualitative method. The researcher collected data using questionnaires, interview guide and focus group discussions. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics generated from Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21 while qualitative data were analysed thematically and reported in narrative form. The findings revealed that most parents provide material support, financial support and services as contribution towards school expenses. The study recommends that the government through the Ministry of Education Science and Technology should formulate policies aimed at involving parents actively in planning, decision making and financing of day secondary schools. Principals need to encourage parents' participation in free day secondary education programme. They also need to maintain good relations and information flow with parents, local community, sponsors and the local council.

Key words: Parental participation, free day secondary education, student retention

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Kenya has limited studies on free secondary education and parental participation. Free day secondary education policy was implemented by the government of Kenya in 2008 in tandem with the international conventions and protocols that encourage governments to provide universal education to its citizens (Republic of Kenya, 2013). A study by Areba (2011) revealed that parents still incurred some hidden costs that contributed to drop out rates among students. A study by Nthiga (2014) established that there was positive support from parents to the school administration yet, a study by Manasi, Ndiku, Sang and Ejakiat (2015) established that “there

was low parental involvement in provision of teaching and learning resources and a significant relationship between parental involvement in payment of access, PA teachers and school academic performance (p. 43). A study by Owuor and Sika (2019) on “parental financing and their influence on academic performance of secondary schools in Mbita Sub-County, Kenya” also established that “there was significant relationship between parental financing of school activities and academic performance” (p. 102).

1.2 Rationale for the Study

The study sought to determine parental participation in free day secondary education since Kenya has limited studies on parental participation and free day secondary education. Majority of research done globally have also concentrated on lower and upper primary schools with little being known about parental participation at secondary level. The purpose of the study was to increase knowledge and add literature related to parental participation and student retention at secondary level by examining the experiences of school principals, class teachers, students and parents on parental participation in public day secondary schools in Migori County, Kenya.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by systems theory. Systems theory is associated with the works of a German biologist Ludwig Von Bertalanffy who in 1936 proposed a general systems theory which was further developed by Ross Ashby to systems theory in 1955 (Bertalanffy, 1968). According to Adams (2012) “Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1901-1972) was the originator of the general systems theory whose original work was in organismic system theory” (p. 210). Bertalanffy developed the general systems theory as a way of solving organisational problems, pointing out that the organisational managers must consider the whole system as well as the interaction between the parts when solving organisational problems (Bertalanffy, 1968). Bertalanffy was reacting against reductionists who believed that a complex system is nothing but its parts. Systems approach is therefore a management tool that allows individuals to examine all aspects of the organisation, to inter-relate the effects of one set of decisions to another and helps individuals optimally use all the resources at hand to solve an existing organisational problem. The researcher’s choice of systems theory as guide in the current study is supported by Lunenburg (2010) who describes schools as complex open systems.

The main concepts of systems theory according to Bertalanffy (1968) include, systems input, systems boundary, information, processes, and output. A brief discussion of the concepts or tenets of systems theory by the researcher is as follows: Inputs refer to all that goes into the system to produce outputs.

Systems boundary in systems theory is a concept that recognises the inner and outer environment that affect the running of an organisation or a school. This environment may consist of social, economic and political forces that are interdependent and continually interact with the institution or organisation. While it is true that organisations such as schools have little or no power to change their external environment, they have no alternative but to respond to it.

Information as a concept in systems theory refers to feedback received. According to Lunenburg (2010) feedback is important if an organisation has to succeed. A good example is when negative feedback, is used to correct mistakes in the transformation or manufacturing process, to improve the organisation’s output. The other concept in systems theory is process. This involves bringing together and coordinating various resources to attain the organisation’s

goal. Process according to Lunenburg (2010) includes “the internal operation of the organisation and its system of operational management.”

1.4 Review of Literature

A study by Duman, Aydin and Ozfidan (2018) on parents' involvement in their children's education concluded that “parents value academic programmes, discipline and safety, parent involvement and communication, school culture and climate” (p. 1853). There are indeed important benefits that schools, teachers and students derive from parents' participation in school programmes such as open door policy, building confidence in students and improved performance. According to Hinkel (2017) “much research exists about importance of parental involvement in education and research overwhelmingly indicate that parental involvement not only positively affect student achievement but also it contributes to higher quality education and better performance of schools” (p. 1). Hinkel (2017) however noted that “both schools and parents struggle with how to make this kind of active participation and involvements happen” (p. 1).

Islam (2017) was in agreement with Hinkel (2017) when he pointed out that “a number of recent studies in United States have demonstrated that increased parental involvement in children's learning is generally associated with better grades, test scores and attendance, as well as increased motivation and easier transition to upper grades” (p. 1). A study by Compton (2016) on strategies for increasing parental involvement for elementary school students established that “schools should plan more effectively to help parents understand how to aid their children at home and to communicate more effectively for purposes of improving student achievement” (p. 4). The study showed that professional development among staff can result to “positive social change by causing school staff to improve upon the practices they use to engage parents in schools” (p. 4). The study adopted explanatory sequential mixed method research design. “Surveys were used to determine the ways parents were involved in their children's education followed by interviews with parents to learn how the school could improve parental participation and family engagement” (p. 4). Compton's (2016) research was based on “Epstein's model of parent involvement, which includes 6 elements of parental involvement: family obligations, obligations of schools, involvement at school, involvement at home, and involvement in decision making and community involvement” (p. 4). “The quantitative phase consisted of 76 parent surveys and the qualitative phase consisted of 11 parent interviews at the school site”. The data were “calculated and coded according to the 6 types of parent involvement”. It was evident that from the descriptive statistics used to report the quantitative data, “all 6 types of parent involvement were important in engaging parents in the education of their children.” Communication and learning at home were “more of a focus in the qualitative phase of the study” (p. 4).

2.1 Methodology

The study adopted a Convergent Parallel Mixed Method Research Design. The purpose of the convergent design according to Creswell and Clark (2011, p. 77) is to “obtain different but complementary data on the same topic”. The intent in using this design was to bring together the differing strengths and non-overlapping weaknesses of the quantitative method such as large sample size, with those of the qualitative method such as small sample, and in-depth information. Creswell (2014) explains that “the researcher collects both quantitative and qualitative data

concurrently and the compares the two databases to determine if there is convergence, differences or some combination” (p. 213). Schoonenboom and Johnson (2017) were in agreement by stating that in convergent parallel mixed method design “the quantitative and qualitative strands of the research are performed independently and their results are brought together in the overall interpretation” (p. 117). The quantitative design in this study was cross-sectional survey while the qualitative design was a case study.

2.2 Sampling Procedure and Sample Size

Both probability and non-probability sampling techniques were used to draw the samples since this is a mixed method research design. The researcher drew probability samples to select 19 schools, 76 class teachers and 228 students and non-probability samples to include 19 principals and 31 parents.

2.3 Data Collection Procedures

Creswell and Clark (2011) contended that “in mixed methods research, the data collection procedures consists of several key components” (p.171). The components include “sampling, gaining permissions, collecting data, recording the data and administering the data collection” (p. 171). Data collection in this study proceeded along two strands: quantitative and qualitative.

2.4 Data Analysis/Interpretive Procedures

In this study, the analysis of quantitative and qualitative data occurred concurrently. Burke and Larry (2014) called this class of analysis “multidata-multianalysis because both quantitative and qualitative analytical techniques are used” (p. 795). Quantitative data was edited, cleaned for completeness, accuracy and consistency. Coding was done using MS Excel 2018 software and analysis followed using SPSS software. Qualitative data analysis involved preparing and organising data, reducing data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes and finally representing data in narrative form as recommended by Creswell, (2013, p. 180) and Boeije (2013, p. 76). The “process of coding involved aggregating the texts into small categories” (Creswell, 2013, p. 184). These categories eventually formed themes. The researcher then interpreted the themes and finally represented data in narrative form and direct quotes.

3.1 Findings, Interpretations and Discussions

Parental participation or parental involvement according to Ntekane (2018) “refers to a situation where parents are directly involved in the education of their children” (p. 1). Compton (2016) further asserted that “students are more successful in school when their parents are involved in their education” (p. 4). Both qualitative and quantitative data in the current study showed that there was a certain level of parental engagement/ participation in the FDSE programme in public day secondary schools in Migori County.

3.2 How Principals ensure Parents’ Participation in FDSE Programme

Two of the school principals indicated that the information on FDSE funds got to parents through the media. There were 5 principals who said that they gave the students receipts ones the funds were sent to schools. About 3 principals stated that they used the school notice boards for easy access and dissemination of information on FDSE funds. There were 7 principals who explained that FDSE funds distribution is indicated in the fees structure that each student gets. One principal indicated that parents also get information on FDSE funds through the BOM/PA

meetings. There was 1 principal who pointed out that schools also use school circulars to disseminate information on FDSE funds.

Table 1

Responses from Principals, Class Teachers and Students on FDSE Information to Parents

Method	Principals Views	Class Teachers Views	Students Views
Media	2	23	32
Receipts sent to parents	5	16	66
Notice Boards	3	20	27
Fees Structure	7	15	92
BOM/PA Meeting	1	1	8
Circulars	1	1	3
Totals	19	76	228

Table 1 shows that the common ways through which information on FDSE funds get to parents from schools are: media, receipts to parents from the schools, school notice boards and the fees structure.

These findings were further supported by parents whose responses are shown in Figure 1.

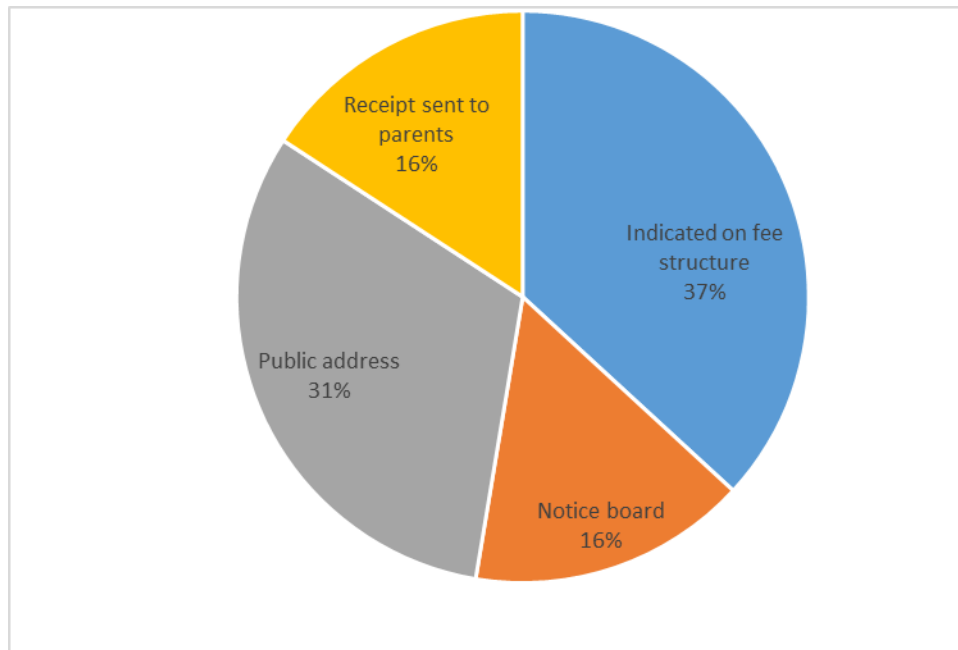


Figure 1. How parents get Information on FDSE Funds.

Figure 1 shows that 37% (11) parents confirmed that they get information through the fees structure. About 31% (10) parents confirmed that they got FDSE information through public address or media and PA meetings. There were 16% (5) parents who confirmed that they got the information through receipts sent by the school and another 16% (5) parents confirmed that they got the information from the school notice boards.

3.3 How Parents support the Implementation of Free Day Secondary Education

The Figure 2 gives a summary of the views of school principals and class teachers on parents' participation in FDSE programme in the sampled schools.

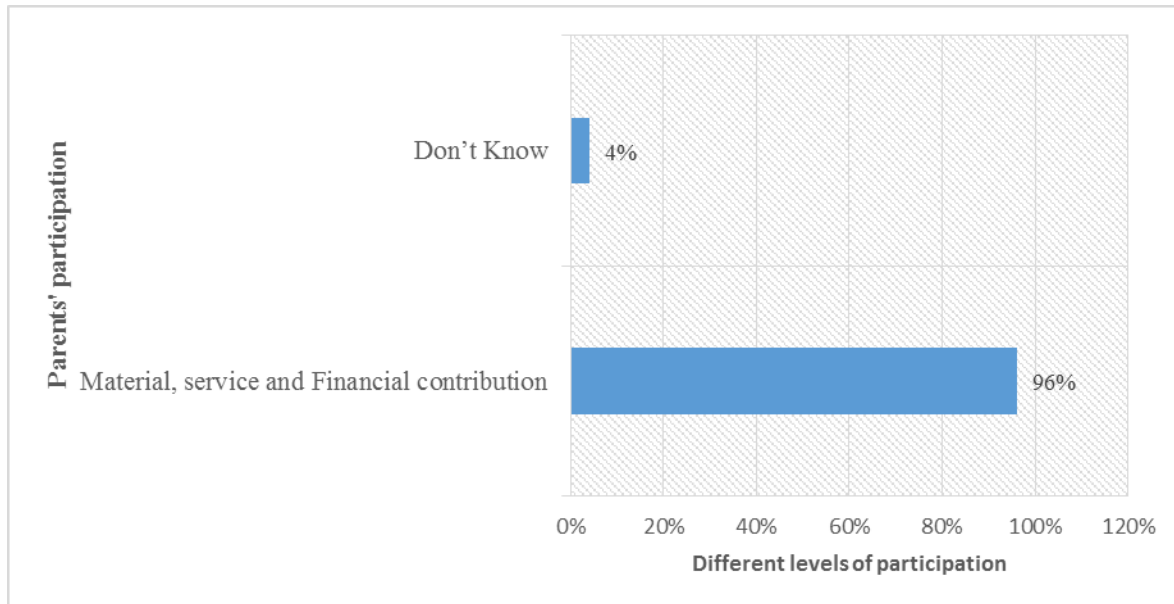


Figure 2. Parents' Participation in FDSE Programme.

Figure 2 shows that parents' participation according to class teachers and school principals is good at (96%). Class teachers and principals sighted instances where parents accepted employment without pay to enable their children attend classes. The class teachers explained that in some cases, parents felt obliged to provide labour in school farms to pay for the school lunch programme. Class teachers claimed that parents provided material, financial and service as contribution towards school expenses. A number of school principals also revealed that some parents paid in-kind food staffs and firewood for their children to be allowed in class. Some principals indicated that most parents are economically challenged and so relied heavily on well-wishers and government bursary to support their children. However class teachers and principals noted that a few parents, about (4%) are not as active. The principals observed that parents whose children were under scholarship were so keen to ensure that the students attended classes. Qualitative data from the focus group discussions supported the views of the QASO, the school principals and class teachers. The parents described the different initiatives they have taken to support the FDSE programme and this is presented in Figure 3.

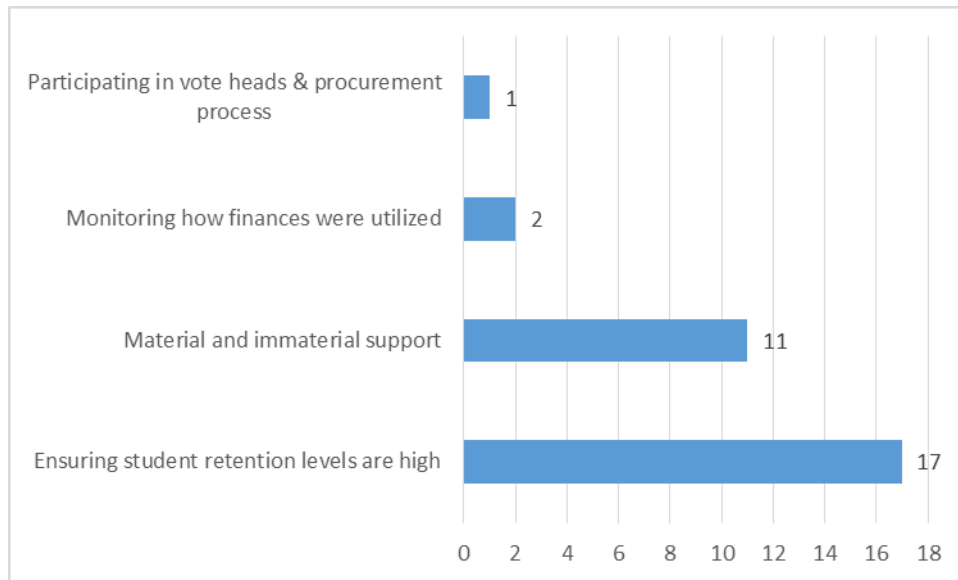


Figure 3. Parents’ Initiatives to Support the FDSE Programme.

Figure 3 shows that 17 parents were in agreement that they did all that was required of them to ensure that their children are kept in school. About 11 parents confirmed that they support the school programmes financially and in kind. Some 2 parents said that through the Parents Association, they were able to monitor how finances in the school are utilised. There was 1 parent who indicated that parents also participate in the procurement process when given opportunities by school principals.

3.3 How Schools Involve Parents in FDSE Programme

Qualitative data from the Focus Group Discussions revealed that parents’ involvement was quite limited in some schools and this meant that procurement processes was selective and partial. Some schools did operate without approved annual school budgets because of financial challenges. Some parents indicated that there were school principals who do not adhere to the vote heads as provided for in the tuition account. However parents felt that a number of school principals allowed them to take part in making the school budget. The views of parents was quite similar to that of school principals as is presented in Figure 4.

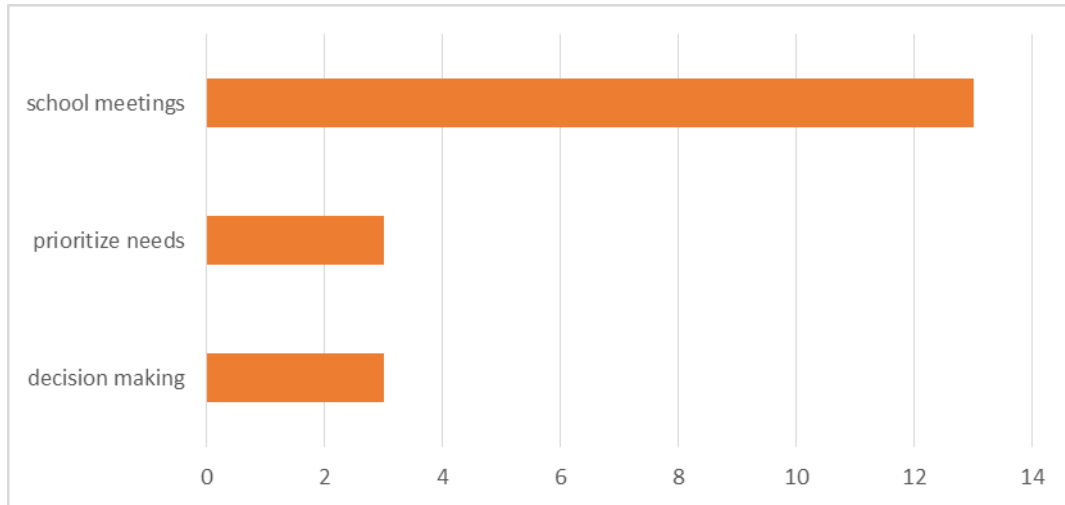


Figure 4. Principals views on Parents Involvement in FDSE Programme.

Figure 4 shows that 13 principals acknowledged that their schools have parents meetings where financial matters are discussed. About 3 principals said that they involved parents when prioritising the school needs. There were other 3 principals who claimed that the schools involved parents in major decisions about FDSE funds.

Class teachers shared the same views as school principals and parents. This is presented in Figure 5.

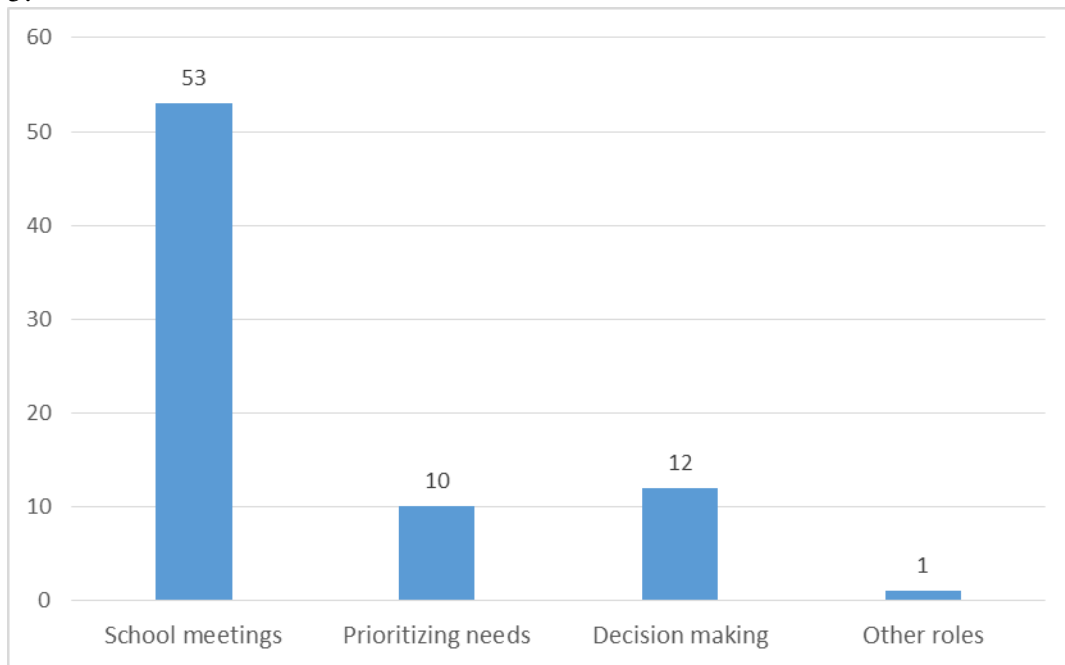


Figure 5 Teachers Views on how Schools Involve Parents in FDSE Programme.

Figure 5 shows that about 53 class teachers indicated that schools involved parents through the school meetings. There were 10 class teachers who indicated that sometimes parents are involved when schools have to prioritise their needs under the FDSE programme. About 12 class teachers acknowledged that the parents were involved in decision making at PA level. A teacher noted that there are times when the schools involve parents in initiating development programmes.

4.1 Conclusion and Recommendations

Information on disbursement of FDSE funds get to parents through members of BOM, PA meetings, notices from the principal's desk, fees structure, media or public address, receipts given by the school and termly reports. Parents participate in the implementation of FDSE programme through initiatives like providing labour, paying in kind through giving firewood and foodstuffs in support the lunch programme. Most parents provide material support, financial support and services as contribution towards school expenses.

School principals need to encourage parents' participation in FDSE programme. They need to have a clear focus as managers and cultivate a collaborative culture in order to deepen learning and ensure accountability in secondary education. Principals need to maintain good relations and information flow with parents, the local community, sponsors and the local council. Principals should also put in place systems and processes that give the most current and updated financial information to all stakeholder in the school at regular intervals.

The government through the MoES&T should formulate policies aimed at involving parents actively in planning, decision making and financing day secondary schools. The government should also employ more teachers to save parents from expenses such as paying BOM teachers.

As key players in education, parents need to continue taking initiatives to support the implementation of FDSE programme and engage more with the school.

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