

# Parents' Participation in Decision Making Process in the Promotion of a Healthy School Climate in Public Secondary Schools in the South West Region, Cameroon

## ABSTRACT

This study investigated the impact of parents' involvement in decision making process on the health of school climates of public secondary schools in the South West Region of Cameroon. The survey research design and the triangulation method were used in data collection, analysis and presentation of findings. The sample size consisted of 135 participants (Parents), for all the thirty-one (31) schools selected. Semi-structured questionnaires and interview guide were designed and administered to the targeted population. To ascertain the reliability of the research instruments, the Cronbach Alpha test was used on a coefficient value of 0.7. Furthermore the ANOVA statistics was computed to predict the overall effect of parents Participation in decision making process on school climate in public secondary schools in South West Region, Cameroon. The findings showed that: H1 = parents' involvement in decision making process has a very significant and positive impact on school climate in public Secondary Schools in South West Region, Cameroon ( $R = 0.276^{**}$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ,  $f_{ar} < 0.05$ ). This positive signs of the correlation value implies that parents' involvement in the participatory decision making will lead to healthy school climate and this is supported by a high explanatory power of 89.1%. On the bases of the above, we conclude that there is a positive and significant relationship between parents' participation in decision making processes and a healthy school climate. A major recommendation was for the Ministry of Secondary Education to establish enforcement structure to ensure that all secondary schools comply with the policy guidelines that provides for the involvement of stakeholders in decision making process in schools in Cameroon.

**Keywords:** Parents, Participation, Decision Making, School Climate, Secondary Schools.

## **Introduction**

Parents play key roles as educational stakeholders. Parents' primary objective is the assurance that their children will receive a quality education, which will enable the children to lead productive rewarding lives as adults in a global society. Parents as educational stakeholders provide additional resources for the school to assist with student achievement and to enhance a sense of community pride and commitment, which may be influential in the overall success of the school (Water 2011). According to Crook and Manor (1998) parents' involvement in school development programmes through volunteers and public meetings in Ghana there have challenges which are the same case in Cameroon. At the local level, parents participate in school activities and public meetings although limited, was typical of the population in terms of age, occupation and education. The richness of evidence available on the lack of responsiveness of the African education system demonstrates clearly the need to go beyond increasing participation for its own sake to making participation effective. It has been noted that nothing motivates a child more than when learning is valued by schools and families/community working together in partnership as a result of explicitly strategic intervention (Goldenberg, 2001). However, it is not clear on evaluated the extent to which the parents have been involved especially in school activities and some challenges that arose. Although it is important for schools and parents to share the responsibility for education in Kenya (Spernes, 2011) the responsibility of school to provide students' education and parents it has been observed that parents are hardly involved in their children's school work. There is no clear cooperation between schools and parents and indicated that no shared responsibility between parents and school. In addition, parents' responsibility is limited to providing economic resources: buying school uniforms, books and other necessities. Also, Abdi and Cleghorn (2005) observed the wrong notion of parents that the responsibility of running schools solemnly lays in the hands of the education authorities. They recommended on the need for support from parents and community members. In this study, the researcher considers the parents of students in secondary schools in the South West Region of Cameroon.

School efficacy and many factors have been put forward as affecting the success of schools and School climate has been considered as one of the factors that indirectly affects the success of the school (Şişman, 2011). For a school to be effective, an appropriate atmosphere for education is essential (Bush, et al, 1999). The leadership of the principal is the key factor in the formation of school climate of which parents' participation in decision making of paramount important. The greatest challenge for principal should be that of creating and nurturing a healthy school climate and school culture that are open to diversity of opinions and ways of doing things (Njouny & Titanji, 2016). A positive correlation has been found between educational leadership and school climate, resulting in greater school efficacy (Şişman, 2011).

## **Statement of the Problem**

It is observed that schools are not effective in terms of conducive environment for achieving objectives of quality education. Healthy school climate is very important in all educational systems even though an elusive concept. A healthy school environment facilitates a productive teaching and learning process. The school has rules and regulations and yet unconducive school climate. Good results both academic and morally can be achieved where school climate is healthy. The need to render school environment conducive and effective is very urgent especially now that the fight against poor academic performance, indiscipline, violence, moral decadence, poor hygiene, bribery, corruption, and embezzlement, is being intensified by the government.

From a macro perspective, one of the most important recommendations of the 1990 Jomtien Declaration of Education For All (EFA) is that “new and revitalized partnership at all levels” should be built in order to achieve EFA goals. In Cameroon, the 1998 education law no 004/98 of 14 April elaborates the concept of educational community in its Part IV. Specifically, section 33 of the law states that members of the educational community shall be involved, through their representatives, in the consultative and management bodies set up at the level of educational, as well as at each level of the decentralized territorial authorities or of the national educational set-up. The authorities, administrative and support staff, teachers, parents and pupils, students, persons from socio-professional, regional and local authorities comprise the educational community. Government intention in providing the above mentioned law is to ensure effective participation of all stakeholders including parents in decision making towards school effectiveness. Contrary to the above, the parents and other stakeholders as external bodies of school are not really involved in decision making. In schools goals are set at all levels of education and assumed to be determined by very rational and logical process. The school is mostly grounded by norms of rationality. Hierarchy is strictly followed. There is strict instruction on how work is been done. External stakeholders have little or no say in the decision making process in the schools more especially public secondary schools. This leads them to experience difficulties in contributing more to the achievement of educational goals and objectives hence unhealthy school climate.

In spite of the continuous government funding, support to schools in form of teaching workforce, materials in public schools, and parents supports in the provision of students needs, the country have continued to register poor school attendance, poor performance and unhealthy school climate every year.

### **Aim**

This study sought to evaluate the relationship between parents’ involvement in decision making process and the health of school climates of public secondary schools in the South West Region of Cameroon. The researchers transformed this statement of research aim into hypothesis (in the null and alternative forms) as follows:

Ho: There is no significant relationship between parents’ involvement in decision making process and the health of the climate of secondary school in the South West Region of Cameroon

Ha: There is a significant relationship between parents’ involvement in decision making process and the health of the climate of secondary school in the South West Region of Cameroon

### **Review of Related Literature**

Parental involvement in the education of students begins at home with the parents providing a safe and healthy environment, appropriate learning experiences, support, and a positive attitude about school. Several studies indicate increased academic achievement with students that have involved parents (Epstein, 2009; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Rumberger et al., 1990; Swap, 1993; Whitaker & Fiore, 2001). Studies also indicate that parental involvement is most effective when viewed as a partnership between educators and parents (Davies, 1996; Epstein, 2009). By examining parents’ and teachers’ perceptions, educators and parents should have a better understanding of effective parental involvement practices in promoting student achievement. Androniceanu (2011), says decision making is an essential process of modern management representing, in every field, the core function for the manager. After 1990’s, the secondary educational system has faced important changes beginning with decentralization and transforming schools in self-

managing systems continuing with the development of different stakeholders initiative and improving the decision making process.

Kindzeka (2020), on his report on what the minister of secondary education says encouraging teachers to go to school, in Buea, Cameroon July 17, 2019. "Cameroon teachers are protesting what they say is growing violence against them by both students and their parents, and the teachers are urging the government to protect them and reinstate corporal punishment. The teachers say the absence of corporal punishment is encouraging abuse of teachers. Several attacks on teaching staffs were reported, including one in which a teenage student fatally stabbed his teacher, in the capital. Also students at a government-run school in Obala, a town on the outskirts of Cameroon's capital, Yaounde, protesting the principal's decision to destroy all mobile phones and knives seized from children at the school. One of their senior discipline masters, Narcisse Ateba, says the students use mobile phones to access social media platforms that promote violence, and they also use sharp objects such as knives to attack their peers and teachers." With the increase violence in schools, parents and other stakeholders will be afraid to attend meetings in school due to fear as they do not know who will be attack next. This has also made participatory decision making very difficult and the situation continue to get worsen by the day because of insecurities.

Kindzeka (2020), in his report further mentioned an official with the Cameroon Teachers Trade Union in Yaounde, who said attacks by students on teachers intensified in 2015 when Cameroon prohibited teachers from beating or severely punishing students. "When a minister says that teachers are not supposed to administer corporal punishment to students, the student will now see that the minister has the right to bring disorder because there is nothing the teacher can do in class," said Yisinyuy. As a result of this text, teachers and other stakeholders are prohibited from taking prompt decisions to square a wrong attitude of a student and this creates resistance in the students, thereby prompting unhealthy school climate which negatively affect participatory decision making. In September 2018, Cameroon announced its endorsement of the Safe Schools Declaration, an international political commitment to protect education in times of conflict and violence. In June, in response to the gravity and number of attacks on schools, the killing and maiming of children, and the recruitment and use of children, the UN Secretary-General added Cameroon as a situation of concern for the UN's monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave violations against children during armed conflict, Cameroon Tribune (2018). Despite this pointer, the internal stakeholders still find it difficult to come together to take decisions that can improve the above situation which is a call for concern.

Durisic and Bunijevac (2017), in their research on parental involvement as an important factor for successful education argue that to comply with the system of integrated support for their students', schools need to build partnership with parents and develop mutual responsibility for children's success in the educational system. In this way, parental involvements are increased, parents' efforts to support schools are encouraged, and they are directly making a positive impact to a successful educational system. Considering the importance of parents' participation and involvement in school activities, in this paper, the researcher analyse the positive effects of parental involvement, summarize leading principles for the successful partnership of parents and school and present six factors (Parenting, Communicating, Volunteering, Learning at home, Decision-making and Collaborating with the community) and six models (Protective Model, Expert Model, Transmission Model, Curriculum-Enrichment Model, Consumer Model and Partnership Model) of parental involvement. Data were analysed qualitatively. In addition, conclusions and make recommendations were made that are important for planning programs that are focused on the improvement of parent involvement. In his study he said a lot how parent should be encouraged to participate in decision making in schools but fails to explain how the

encouragement will lead to a healthy school climate which is the gap this research is coming to fill.

Theoretically, Maslow Hierarchy of Needs Theory by Abraham Maslow (1954) which is composed of five human motivational needs: namely, physiological needs, safety/security needs, belonging and love needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs. This theory accurately describes many realities of personal experiences. It is believed that humans strive for an upper level of capabilities, which means that, humans seek the frontiers of creativity, the highest reaches of consciousness and wisdom. This has been labeled "fully functioning person", "healthy personality", or as, "self-actualizing person. Therefore, only needs not yet satisfied can influence behaviour and when such needs are satisfied the person will be motivated to pursue the next higher need in the order. Our need comes up the moment one need is satisfied. This theory is related to this study in that school principals try to create more supportive school climates by paying attention to the social or belongingness needs of other educational stakeholders. This is done in a variety of ways as they try to satisfy both the parents and students need. Create activities which help to build relationships between staff members, parents and satisfy belongingness needs, which in turn lead to a more supportive climate.

## Methodology

The correlational research design was used and cross sectional survey was used to gather data from the sample of population. The sample size made up of 135 participants (all Parents); for all the thirty-one (31) schools selected. Semi-structured questionnaires and interview guide were designed and administered to the targeted population. The cluster sampling technique was used in selecting the number of schools with respect to divisions in south west region in Cameroon, and stratified random sampling selecting the participants. Later on the simple random sampling technique was used in selecting the individual participating schools in each division. Data was collected from primary source through administration of Nine (9) structured open questions items were included in the questionnaire to parents to complement the closed ended questions for wider information needed for data collection and analysis. Quantitative data was collected from the closed ended questions in the questionnaire. The qualitative data was analyzed thematically. To ascertain the reliability of the research instruments, the Cronbach Alpha test was used on a coefficient value of 0.7. Furthermore the ANOVA statistics was computed to predict the overall effect of parents Participation in decision making process on school climate in public secondary schools in South West Region, Cameroon.

## Findings and Discussion

*Table1 showing parents' opinion on their involvement in decision making process in secondary schools*

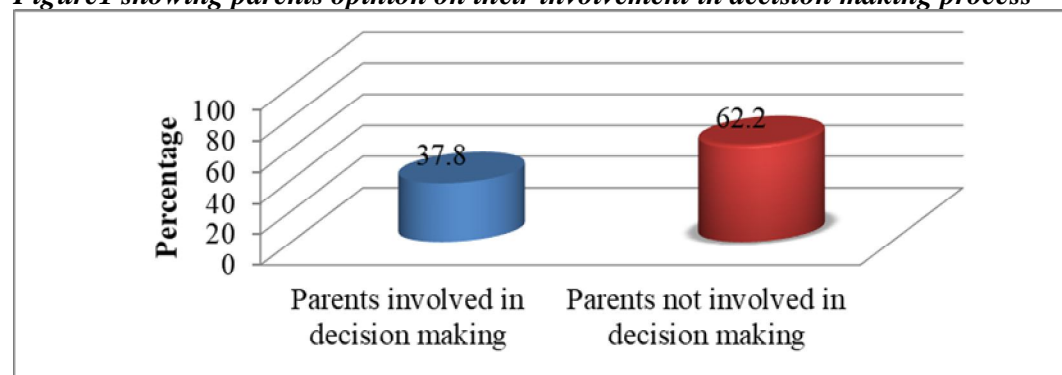
Items	Stretched			Collapsed		
	Strongly Agree (SA)	Agree (A)	Disagree (D)	Strongly Disagree (SD)	SA/A	D/SD
Many parents attend PTA meetings where most of the matter concerning their children discussed.	61 (46.6%)	51 (38.9%)	16 (12.2%)	3 (2.3%)	112 (85.5%)	19 (14.5%)
Parents participate in community and family social activities at school.	18 (13.7%)	47 (35.9%)	51 (38.9%)	15 (11.5%)	65 (49.6%)	66 (50.4%)
Parents communicate with school staff to check on things that concern the	15 (11.5%)	49 (37.4%)	42 (32.1%)	25 (19.1%)	64 (48.9%)	67 (51.1%)

child.						
Solving administrative problems with parents improves the school climate of the school.	17 (13.0%)	43 (32.8%)	46 (35.1%)	25 (19.1%)	60 (45.8%)	71 (54.2%)
Parents participate in the planning process of the school their children study in.	15 (11.5%)	27 (20.6%)	74 (56.5%)	15 (11.5%)	42 (32.1%)	89 (67.9%)
Parents are consulted before making decisions that affect the welfare of their children in school.	6 (4.6%)	34 (26.0%)	70 (53.4%)	21 (16.0%)	40 (30.5%)	91 (69.5%)
Parents talk about their personal matters and life that affects their children studies in school.	9 (6.9%)	25 (19.1%)	67 (51.1%)	30 (22.9%)	34 (26.0%)	97 (74.0%)
Parents are engaged in addressing administrative matters to the school authorities.	4 (3.1%)	25 (19.1%)	67 (51.1%)	35 (26.7%)	29 (22.1%)	102 (77.9%)
Parents are involved in making school programmes.	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	97 (74.0%)	34 (26.0%)	0 (0.0%)	131 (100%)
<b>Multiple Response Set (MRS)</b>	<b>145</b> <b>(12.3%)</b>	<b>301</b> <b>(25.5%)</b>	<b>530</b> <b>(45.0%)</b>	<b>203</b> <b>(17.2%)</b>	<b>446</b> <b>(37.8%)</b>	<b>733</b> <b>(62.2%)</b>

**n=131**

Based on the parent opinion on their involvement in decision making process, 85.5% (112) of them agreed that many parents attend PTA meetings where most of the matter concerning their children discussed. Also, 49.6% (65) of the parents accepted that parents participate in community and family social activities at school. In similar trend, 48.9% (64) of the parents agreed that parents communicate with school staff to check on things that concern the child. Furthermore, 45.8% (60) of the parents agreed that solving administrative problems with parents improves the school climate of the school. 32.1% (42) of the parents equally indicate that they participate in the planning process of the school their children study. Also, 30.5% (40) of the parents agreed that parents are consulted before making decisions that affect the welfare of their children in school. The findings also showed 26.0% (34) of the parents talk about their personal matters and life that affects their children studies in school. 22.1% (29) of the parents also agreed that parents are engaged in addressing administrative matters to the school authorities. Finally, all the parents 131 (100%) indicate that parents are involved in making school programmes. In overall, the findings showed that 37.8% of the parents agreed that parents are involved in decision making of the school while 62.2% of them disagreed. This is also presented on the figure below.

**Figure1 showing parents opinion on their involvement in decision making process**



As indicated on the figure above, majority of parents 62.2% indicate that parents are not involve in decision making of the school while 37.8% of them state that parents are involve.

### Hypothesis test

**Table2 showing hypothesis test on the effect of parents' involvement in decision making process on school climate**

Test	Statistics	Parents involvement in decision making process	Healthy school climate	Explanatory power of the effect in terms of %
Spearman's rho	R-value	1	.276**	89.1%
	P-value	.	.000	
	N	250	250	

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).  $P < 0.001$  far  $< 0.05$

Statistically, the findings showed parents involvement in decision making processes has a very significant and positive effect on school climate ( $P < 0.001$ , far  $< 0.05$ ,  $R = 0.276^{**}$ ) and, this effect is also supported with a high explanatory power of 89.1%. The positive sign of the correlation value implies that the school administration is more likely to experience a healthy school climate when they adequately involved parents in decision making processes. Therefore, the hypothesis that states that parents' involvement in decision making process has a significant effect on the health of the climate of secondary school in the South West Region of Cameroon was accepted.

The above findings are supported by Water (2011) who asserts that parents play key roles as educational stakeholders. Parents' primary objective is the assurance that their children will receive a quality education, which will enable the children to lead productive rewarding lives as adults in a global society. Parents as educational stakeholders provide additional resources for the school to assist with student achievement and to enhance a sense of community pride and commitment, which may be influential in the overall success of the school. According to Durisic and Bunijevac (2017), to comply with the system of integrated support for their students', schools need to build partnership with parents and develop mutual responsibility for children's success in the educational system.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

This study provides an overview of the link between parents' involvement in participatory decision making and secondary school climate in public Secondary Schools in South West Region, Cameroon. Findings indicated that there is a positive link between the parents' involvement in decision making and Secondary School climate. The findings showed there is a significant/positive relationship between parents involvement in participatory decision making and secondary school climate in public Secondary Schools in south west Region, Cameroon ( $R = 0.276^{**}$ ,  $P < 0.001$ , far  $< 0.05$ ). This positive sign of the relationship implies that parents' involvement in the participatory decision making will lead to healthy school climate and this is supported by a high explanatory power of 89.1%. Despite the results, in perspective, it is not only parents involvement in participatory decision making which can influence secondary school climate as link further exist between them in area such as; governance in schools, teachers behaviour and personality, teaching methods, resources management, strategic planning, family issues and instability, curriculum, information and communication technology. These factors mentioned above can open ground for further research.

On the basis of the finding arrived at, the following recommendations were made:

- The Ministry of Secondary Education should establish enforcement structure to ensure that all secondary schools comply with the policy guidelines of educational stakeholders' involvement in decision making process in Cameroon.
- School administrators and teachers should actively involve parents to decisions relating to management of student and their welfare issues with one emphasis on student participation in the selection of their leaders, club decisions and setting of achievement targets for extra curriculum activities.

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