

## INFLUENCE OF PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT ON STUDENTS SATISFACTION IN PUBLIC BOARDING SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN MAARA SUB-COUNTY, KENYA

Carolyn Kageni Muchiri, James Mwenda Murungi and Mercy Wanja Njagi  
P.O. Box 109-60400 Chuka University, Chuka, Kenya  
Corresponding Author Email: carolynmuchirik@gmail.com

### ABSTRACT

Boarding schools present unique social and academic experiences, making parental engagement vital for enhancing students' satisfaction. This study sought to establish the influence of parental engagement on students' satisfaction in public boarding secondary schools in Maara Sub-County, Tharaka Nithi County, Kenya. A descriptive survey research design was adopted, involving 439 respondents: 357 Form Three students, 38 class teachers, 38 boarding HODs, and six principals from 38 purposively selected public boarding secondary schools. Students were selected using simple random sampling, while principals, class teachers, and boarding HODs were chosen purposively or through census methods. Data were collected using questionnaires and interview schedules. Content and face validity were confirmed by experts from Chuka University, and reliability was tested through a pilot study in Meru-South Sub-County. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics with SPSS version 28, while qualitative data were thematically analyzed. The study revealed a significant influence of parental engagement on students' satisfaction. Most parents provided adequate pocket money and shopping, attended school meetings, and adequately prepared their children before joining school. However, parental academic support at home, teacher-parent communication, and welfare follow-ups were found to be limited. Students whose parents actively monitored academic progress, communicated with teachers, and participated in school activities reported greater satisfaction, motivation, and emotional well-being. Barriers such as socio-economic constraints, distance, and parents' work commitments hindered consistent engagement. The study concludes that parental engagement is a critical determinant of students' satisfaction in boarding schools. It recommends strengthening parent-teacher communication, encouraging regular school visits, and sensitizing parents on the importance of academic and emotional support at home. The Ministry of Education should institutionalize parental involvement through policies that promote school-community partnerships. Further research should examine socio-economic and cultural factors shaping parental engagement in diverse educational contexts.

**Key Words:** Parental engagement, Student satisfaction, Boarding schools, Academic support, Parent-teacher communication, Secondary education

### INTRODUCTION

Education is a lifelong process that shapes individuals' behavior, values, and overall well-being. Boarding schools, where students both study and reside, provide structured routines that differ significantly from home environments (Morris, 2013; Schaverian, 2015). While these institutions play an important role in expanding access to education, particularly in contexts where day schools are limited, they also present unique challenges. Students in boarding schools often struggle with adjustment, bullying, peer pressure, and limited parental contact, which may contribute to dissatisfaction and indiscipline (Serena, 2022).

In Kenya, public boarding secondary schools have increasingly experienced unrest, including strikes, dormitory fires, and cases of violence (Elizabeth, 2016). Although the government has introduced reforms such as the abolition of corporal punishment, compulsory midterm breaks, and guidance and counseling programs, indiscipline and student dissatisfaction remain widespread. This suggests that existing interventions may not adequately address the underlying challenges.

One potential factor that has received limited attention is parental engagement. Research indicates that active parental involvement enhances students' aca-

ademic achievement, emotional well-being, and school satisfaction (Willis et al., 2020; Ahmadi, 2019). Even within boarding schools, parents can remain engaged through regular visits, communication with teachers, and emotional support. However, little is known about the extent to which parental engagement influences student satisfaction in Kenyan public boarding schools. This study therefore sought to examine the influence of parental engagement on student satisfaction in public boarding secondary schools in Maara Sub-County, Tharaka-Nithi County, Kenya.

### Methodology

#### Location

The study was conducted in 38 public secondary schools in Maara Sub-County, Tharaka-Nithi County, Kenya.

#### Research Design

A descriptive survey research design was employed to examine the influence of parental engagement on students' satisfaction in public boarding secondary schools. This design was considered appropriate because it allows the collection of data from a large population and facilitates the description of existing conditions (Kothari, 2014).

### Target Population

The target population comprised 4,918 respondents, including 4,804 students, 38 principals, 38 heads of boarding departments (HODs), and 38 Form Three class teachers across the 38 public secondary schools in Maara Sub-County.

### Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

A total of 357 Form Three students were selected using simple random sampling from the 38 schools. Six principals were purposively chosen to represent the three categories of public boarding schools (National, Extra-County, and County). All 38 Form Three class teachers were purposively selected (one per school), while all 38 boarding HODs were included through census sampling. Purposive and census sampling were employed to ensure adequate representation across school categories and administrative roles (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

### Research Instruments

Data were collected using questionnaires and interview schedules. Questionnaires targeted students, teachers, and HODs, while interviews were conducted with principals. Content validity of the instruments was established through expert review by lecturers from the Department of Education, Chuka University, as recommended by Orodho (2009). Reliability of the questionnaires was determined using the test-retest method during a pilot study conducted in neighboring Meru-South Sub-County. A reliability coefficient of 0.7 and above was considered acceptable, following the guidelines of Kothari (2014).

### Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 28.0. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages were used to summarize the data. In addition, chi-square tests were employed to examine relationships between variables. Qualitative data obtained from principal interviews were analyzed thematically to identify emerging patterns and insights.

### Results

The study sought to determine students' opinions on parental engagement based on five statements describing specific parental activities. Their level of agreement or disagreement with each statement was analyzed. The findings reveal notable trends regarding parental engagement in public boarding secondary schools in Maara Sub-County. Nearly half of the students (48.7%) strongly agreed that their parents attend school meetings and functions, while 44.0% strongly agreed that parents prepare them well before joining school (Table 1). Similarly, 36.7% of the respondents strongly agreed that parents provide enough shopping and pocket money. These results suggest that parents are positively engaged in their children's schooling, particularly in areas of financial support and preparation for school entry.

On the other hand, 21.8% of the students strongly disagreed that parents often call to inquire about their welfare, while 31.4% strongly disagreed that parents assist them with holiday assignments. This reflects a weakness in parental engagement, particularly in consistent communication during school terms and academic support at home.

A Chi-square test of independence was conducted to examine whether the distribution of student responses across the five statements significantly differed from what would be expected by chance. The results showed that the differences in responses were statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 142.56$ ,  $df = 16$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This indicates that students' opinions on parental engagement are not evenly distributed and that certain forms of engagement (financial provision, preparation for school, and attendance at meetings) are significantly more prevalent than others (communication and academic support at home). Overall, the results confirm that while parents are actively engaged in financial and social aspects of their children's schooling, gaps remain in consistent communication and academic involvement, which may influence overall student satisfaction.

*Table 1: Students' Opinions on parental engagement in public boarding secondary schools (n = 357)*

| Statement                                                            | SD % | D %  | U %  | A %  | SA % |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Parents provide enough shopping and pocket money for their children. | 4.2  | 8.1  | 23.2 | 27.7 | 36.7 |
| Parents call often to ask about their children's welfare.            | 21.8 | 17.4 | 36.1 | 14.3 | 10.4 |
| Parents prepare students well before joining school                  | 2.8  | 2.2  | 16.8 | 34.2 | 44.0 |
| Parents attend school meetings and functions                         | 3.9  | 3.4  | 15.7 | 28.3 | 48.7 |
| Parents assists student with holiday assignment                      | 31.4 | 14.0 | 26.3 | 17.1 | 11.2 |

(Key: %= Frequency, SD=Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, U= Uncertain, A= Agree, SA= Strongly Agree)

To determine the extent of parental engagement in supporting learners, five statements reflecting key parental activities were presented to the Form Three class teachers. The teachers were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with these statements, and their responses provided insights into how parents interact with and support their children's schooling. The results show that most teachers (47.4%) were uncertain whether parents provide enough shopping and pocket money for their children, while 31.6% agreed. Similarly, 42.1% were uncertain if parents often called to check on their children's welfare, although 26.3% agreed (Table 2). About 36.8% of the teachers were uncertain whether students were well-prepared before joining boarding school, while 31.6% agreed and 7.9% strongly agreed. A majority (39.5%) agreed that parents attend school meetings and functions, with 23.7% strongly agreeing, indicating strong engagement with school activities. On the other hand, most teachers (44.7%) reported that parents do not assist

students with holiday assignments, with only 5.3% agreeing that they did. Overall, these findings suggest that parental commitment is stronger in meeting basic needs and participating in school functions, but weaker in providing academic support at home. This imbalance highlights the need for strategies to strengthen parental involvement in learning activities.

A chi-square test of independence was conducted to determine whether there was a significant difference in teachers' opinions across the five parental engagement indicators. The results revealed a statistically significant difference ( $\chi^2 = 28.74$ ,  $df = 16$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), indicating that teachers' views varied depending on the type of parental engagement activity. Notably, parents' assistance with holiday assignments was the least supported aspect of engagement, contrasting sharply with their stronger participation in school functions and provision of basic needs.

*Table 2: Form three class teachers' responses on parental engagement activities*

| Statement                                                            | SD % | D %  | U %  | A %  | SA % |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Parents provide enough shopping and pocket money for their children. | 0    | 15.8 | 47.4 | 31.6 | 5.3  |
| Parents call often to ask about their children's welfare.            | 10.5 | 18.4 | 42.1 | 26.3 | 2.6  |
| Students are well prepared before joining boarding school            | 2.6  | 21.1 | 36.8 | 31.6 | 7.9  |
| parents attend school meeting and functions                          | 2.6  | 5.3  | 28.9 | 39.5 | 23.7 |
| Parents assist students with holiday assignment                      | 26.3 | 44.7 | 23.7 | 5.26 | 0    |

(Key: %= Frequency, SD=Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, U= Uncertain, A= Agree, SA= Strongly Agree)

The study sought to determine Boarding HODs' opinions on parental engagement based on four statements describing specific parental activities. Their level of agreement or disagreement with each statement was analyzed. From the analysis, a majority (34.2%) of the HODs were uncertain about whether parents provide enough shopping and pocket money for their children, while 31.6% agreed and 28.9% either disagreed or strongly disagreed (Table 3). This indicates mixed views with no strong consensus. Most HODs (36.8%) disagreed that parents often call to check on their children's welfare, suggesting weak parental follow-up and communication once students are in school. On students' adaptability to boarding life, only 31.6% of HODs agreed or strongly agreed that students adapt easily, while 36.9% (SD + D) felt otherwise. This highlights that

some learners experience adaptation challenges. Parental participation in school functions was inconsistent, with 31.6% uncertain, 28.9% agreeing, and 23.7% disagreeing.

The Chi-square test of independence revealed a statistically significant association between HODs' opinions on parental engagement indicators and the level of agreement across statements,  $\chi^2 = 47.62$ ,  $df = 16$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . This suggests that variations in parental engagement practices are not due to chance but reflect real differences in parental behaviors.

Table 3: Boarding HODs' opinion on parental engagement.

| Statement                                                            | SD<br>% | D<br>% | U<br>% | A<br>% | SA<br>% |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|--------|--------|--------|---------|
| Parents provide enough shopping and pocket money for their children. | 10.5    | 18.4   | 34.2   | 31.6   | 5.3     |
| Parents call often to ask about their children's welfare.            | 7.9     | 36.8   | 26.3   | 21.1   | 7.9     |
| Students adopt with ease when they joined school                     | 13.2    | 23.7   | 31.6   | 23.7   | 7.9     |
| Parents attend school meetings and functions                         | 7.9     | 23.7   | 31.6   | 28.9   | 7.9     |

(Key: %= Frequency, SD=Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, U= Uncertain, A= Agree, SA= Strongly Agree)

## DISCUSSION

The study sought to determine students', teachers', and boarding HODs' opinions on parental engagement in public boarding secondary schools. The findings revealed that while parents play an active role in providing financial and social support, their involvement in academic and welfare-related aspects remains relatively weak.

From the students' perspective (Table 1), parental engagement was strongest in material provision and preparation for school. Nearly half (48.7%) strongly agreed that parents attend school meetings and functions, 44.0% strongly agreed that parents adequately prepare them before joining school, and 36.7% strongly agreed that parents provide enough shopping and pocket money. These findings highlight strong parental commitment to meeting children's basic needs and school-related requirements. On the other hand, 21.8% strongly disagreed that parents often call to check on their welfare, and 31.4% strongly disagreed that parents assist with holiday assignments, suggesting weaker engagement in communication and academic support. A chi-square test confirmed that these differences were statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 142.56$ ,  $df = 16$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), meaning that students' experiences of parental engagement are uneven across different areas. These results resonate with Epstein's (2018) parental involvement framework, which emphasizes that while many parents prioritize financial and logistical support, direct academic involvement is often neglected.

Teachers' responses (Table 2) provided a complementary perspective. A majority (39.5%) agreed and 23.7% strongly agreed that parents attend school meetings and functions, confirming strong engagement in school activities. However, 47.4% were uncertain about whether parents provided adequate shopping and pocket money, and 42.1% were uncertain about whether parents frequently called to check

on their children's welfare. More strikingly, 44.7% disagreed that parents assist with holiday assignments, with only 5.3% agreeing. This highlights that teachers perceive parental involvement as more visible in social and financial aspects than in academic support at home. The chi-square test showed significant variation in teachers' views across the five indicators ( $\chi^2 = 28.74$ ,  $df = 16$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), underscoring the imbalance between strong parental participation in school activities and limited academic engagement. These findings are consistent with Jeynes (2016), who noted that parental involvement often skews toward resource provision rather than sustained academic support.

Boarding HODs' responses (Table 3) further reinforced this pattern. While 31.6% agreed that parents provide enough shopping and pocket money, a majority (34.2%) were uncertain, indicating mixed perceptions. Most HODs (36.8%) disagreed that parents frequently call to inquire about their children's welfare, suggesting weak parental communication once students are in school. On student adaptability to boarding life, only 31.6% agreed or strongly agreed that students adapt easily, while 36.9% disagreed or strongly disagreed, highlighting adaptation challenges for some learners. Parental presence in school functions was similarly inconsistent, with 31.6% uncertain, 28.9% agreeing, and 23.7% disagreeing. Chi-square analysis confirmed significant variation across HODs' responses ( $\chi^2 = 47.62$ ,  $df = 12$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), suggesting that differences in parental engagement are substantive rather than random. These findings align with Hornby and Lafaele (2011), who argue that educators often perceive gaps between parental expectations and actual engagement practices.

Taken together, the results from students, teachers, and HODs present a consistent picture. Parents demonstrate strong commitment in providing financial resources, preparing students for school,

and attending meetings, but their involvement in communication and academic support at home is significantly weaker. The chi-square results across all three groups confirm that these differences are statistically significant, indicating a systematic pattern rather than random variation. This imbalance mirrors findings by Ginanto (2018) in Indonesia and De Dieu & Andala (2021) in Rwanda, both of which observed that while parental involvement in boarding schools is generally positive, it is uneven and strongly influenced by socioeconomic and cultural factors. Similarly, Ahmadi (2019) and Ikunyaa (2012) emphasize that meaningful parental engagement requires not only resource provision but also active involvement in students' learning and emotional development.

Overall, the study highlights the need for a more balanced approach to parental engagement in public boarding secondary schools in Maara Sub-County. Schools should strengthen channels for parental communication, create strategies to enhance parents' involvement in academic support at home, and continue fostering their participation in school-based activities. This holistic approach would extend teaching beyond the classroom, create more positive student experiences, and ultimately contribute to improved academic performance and well-being.

### Conclusion

The study examined parental engagement in public boarding secondary schools as perceived by students, teachers, and Heads of Departments (HODs). Findings revealed that while parents were actively involved in certain activities, such as providing shopping and pocket money, preparing learners before school, and attending school meetings, their participation in academic support activities, such as assisting with holiday assignments, was limited. Students largely acknowledged parental provision of material needs, but reported weaker engagement in

follow-up on welfare and learning. Similarly, teachers and HODs expressed varying levels of agreement with parental involvement, highlighting discrepancies in the extent and quality of engagement. Chi-square results confirmed statistically significant differences ( $p < 0.05$ ) in perceptions across groups, indicating that stakeholders experience and interpret parental engagement differently. These findings suggest that parental involvement in boarding schools remains uneven, strong in material and preparatory aspects but relatively weak in academic support and emotional follow-up.

### Recommendation

To enhance parental engagement in boarding schools, several key recommendations are proposed. First, parents should be sensitized on the importance of supporting their children's academic work beyond material provision. This includes assisting with assignments and creating a supportive learning environment during holidays, thereby addressing the current bias toward financial contributions. In addition, schools should strengthen communication channels by establishing structured systems for regular interaction between teachers and parents. Such communication will ensure that parents remain updated on learners' welfare and academic progress, thus enabling consistent follow-up. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with schools, should organize parental empowerment programs such as workshops and seminars aimed at equipping parents with skills and awareness on how to effectively participate in both academic and non-academic aspects of their children's education. To ensure uniformity, education stakeholders should also develop clear policies and guidelines on parental engagement to standardize practices across boarding schools and enhance accountability. Finally, further research is recommended to investigate the barriers that hinder parents from active academic involvement and to evaluate interventions that can

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