


## Perspectives on Parental Involvement in Education Governance Amid Decentralisation: A Study of Secondary Schools in Fako Division, Cameroon



Prosper Mbelle Mekolle<sup>1\*</sup> , Ngemunang Agnes Ngale Lyonga<sup>2</sup>

\*Corresponding Author's Email:  
[mekolle.mbelle@ubuea.cm](mailto:mekolle.mbelle@ubuea.cm)

<sup>1</sup>Senior Lecturer of Educational Administration, Planning and Policy, Faculty of Education, University of Buea, Cameroon.

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor, Department of Educational Foundations and Administration, Faculty of Education, University of Buea, Cameroon.

### Article's History

**Submitted:** 17<sup>th</sup> April 2025

**Accepted:** 4<sup>th</sup> May 2025

**Published:** 9<sup>th</sup> May 2025

### **Abstract**

**Aim:** This study explored parental participation in education governance in public secondary schools in Cameroon, with a focus on involvement in the three core dimensions of educational decentralisation: school politics, administrative decision-making, and fiscal management.

**Methods:** This study is framed within Freeman's Stakeholder Theory and Parker's Soufflé Theory of Decentralisation. These theories emphasise the importance of meaningful stakeholder engagement and a balanced approach to decentralisation, respectively, the study employed a survey research design. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data from a sample of 300 parents, selected through stratified random sampling from various government secondary schools across Fako Division. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages.

**Results:** The findings reveal that parents are relatively engaged in school politics (60.7%), primarily through Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) and School Management Boards (SMBs). However, their participation in administrative decision-making (32%) and fiscal management (49.4%) remains below the recommended levels of involvement as per national policies and the academic literature. While parents contribute financially, they exert minimal influence over budget allocation, expenditure decisions, and financial oversight. Likewise, their involvement in shaping school policies, teacher recruitment, and project execution is marginal. The results further indicate that despite decentralisation efforts, parental participation remains largely consultative rather than substantive. Key barriers include poor communication, economic limitations, lack of expertise, and weak policy enforcement.

**Conclusion:** There is a pressing need for robust policy interventions to better align practice with established theoretical frameworks on educational governance.

**Recommendations:** The government should develop clearer guidelines for parental involvement, and promote greater financial transparency through measures such as the establishment of financial oversight committees within organised parent structures, standardised financial reporting templates, and open budget discussions. Also, implementing capacity-building initiatives, such as regular parent forums and training sessions would empower parents to engage more meaningfully and effectively in school governance processes.

**Keywords:** *Educational decentralisation, school politics, administrative decision-making, fiscal management, parental involvement, Fako Division, Cameroon*

**JEL Classification:** I2, I21, I22, I24, I28

## INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental driver of individual and societal development; it plays a crucial role in shaping the social, economic, and political fabrics of a nation. A well-functioning education system requires the active participation of multiple stakeholders, including governments, school administrators, teachers, and parents. Among these, parental involvement has been widely recognised as a key factor in improving students' academic performance, school governance, and overall educational outcomes (Epstein & Sheldon 2022). Research suggests that when parents actively engage in their children's education—both at home and within school environments—students tend to perform better, demonstrate higher levels of motivation, and exhibit greater social and emotional development (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). The establishment of strong and positive relationships among students, parents, teachers, and the community also drives overall school success, as these stakeholders work in synergy to ensure the attainment of school goals and objectives in an effective and efficient manner (Sheldon & Epstein, 2002).

In recent years, many countries, including Cameroon, have embraced educational decentralisation as a governance strategy aimed at improving the efficiency, equity, and responsiveness of education systems. Decentralisation involves the transfer of decision-making authority, resources, and responsibilities from central governments to regional, sub-regional, and local levels, with the expectation that greater local control will lead to better educational outcomes (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2017). In Cameroon, decentralisation has been accompanied by policy reforms that encourage local stakeholders, including parents, to take on more active roles in education governance. Legal frameworks such as the 1998 Law on the Orientation of Education in Cameroon have reinforced this shift by promoting community participation in school decision-making processes.

While some studies highlight the potential of decentralised governance to enhance school-community collaboration (Rose, 2003), others argue that without adequate structures such as well-defined parental roles, strong accountability mechanisms, and capacity-building initiatives, parental engagement remains superficial and largely symbolic (Arnott & Menter, 2007). However, there is a paucity of current research that provides information on the specific ways and the extent to which parents get involved in school governance in Cameroon. Without this knowledge, it is difficult to fully assess parents' contributions to school improvement efforts, and the absence of empirical data may hinder the development of targeted initiatives to enhance parental involvement where it is found to be insufficient.

This study explored the perspectives on parental involvement in education governance amid decentralisation, focusing on public secondary schools in Fako Division. Specifically, it examines parental engagement in school politics, administrative decision-making, and fiscal management. Aim was to provide empirical insights for policymakers, school administrators, and local education stakeholders into the effectiveness of decentralisation in driving parental participation and to advance policy recommendations on initiatives that could strengthen parental and community involvement in education governance. This will contribute to broader discussions on the role of local stakeholders in improving the quality and accountability of education systems within decentralised governance frameworks.

### **Educational Development in Cameroon and the Dynamics of Parental Involvement**

Before European colonisation, African societies had robust indigenous education systems rooted in cultural traditions. These systems, traced back to ancient Black Pharaohic Egyptian civilisation, were community-based and aimed at promoting social harmony, respect for

hierarchy, environmental awareness, and spiritual values (Fonkeng, 2010). Parents were the primary educators who through a practical and experiential apprenticeship-style approach to teaching passed down practical skills such as farming, carpentry, hunting, herbal medicine, and traditional rites to the younger generation (Mac Ojong, 2008). Women mentored young girls in domestic responsibilities and social etiquette to prepare them for their future roles as wives and mothers.

The introduction of Western formal education by missionaries in the mid-19th century marked a significant transformation in Cameroon's educational landscape. In 1844, Joseph Merrick of the London Baptist Missionary Society established the first school in the country (Fonkeng, 2010). Early missionary schools primarily focused on religious instruction, literacy, and basic arithmetic. The German colonial rule (1884–1916) later formalised education policy through the 1910 education ordinance, but parental involvement remained largely limited to ensuring children's school attendance, although some educated elites, such as Charles Atangana and Mpondo Akwa, played active roles as teachers, interpreters, and local administrators in support of education (Monteh, 2018). Generally, while government schools were staffed by colonial officials, mission schools increasingly relied on trained Cameroonian teachers, many of whom were parents.

Following World War I, the partition of Cameroon between Britain and France led to the emergence of two distinct educational systems: English (British) and French (Francophone). French Cameroon adopted a centralised, assimilationist model that excluded indigenous languages (Fonkeng, 2010), while British Southern Cameroons emphasised decentralisation, community involvement, and financial self-sufficiency. Parents played a critical role in Native Administration Schools (NAS), providing financial support and serving as teachers, advisors, and school administrators (Ashu, 2020). Chiefs and local authorities were also actively involved in promoting education, thereby reinforcing community participation in school governance (Fonkeng, 2010). Institutions, such as Saint Joseph's College Sasse (1939) of the Roman Catholic Mission and the Ombe Technical College (1952), were central to secondary education, with parents influencing curricula and contributing financially. In 1954, the Southern Cameroons Board of Education was established to oversee educational matters, further promoting parental and community engagement.

After independence in 1960 (East Cameroon) and 1961 (West Cameroon), there was need for a harmonisation of both systems of education taking into consideration the regional cultures and national objectives. The establishment of the Federal Bilingual Grammar School in Man-O-War Bay was an effort to integrate English and French educational models (Fonkeng, 2010). To incorporate a rural development dimension into education, the Rural Institute of Applied Pedagogy (IPAR) was established in Yaoundé in 1969 and later in Buea in 1974. Parents played a central role in curriculum reform at IPAR. However, these institutions were short-lived and eventually phased out. Policy inconsistencies and curriculum biases hindered effective harmonisation, as some critical aspects of regional socio-economic activities, such as agriculture were overlooked in educational planning (Mekolle, 2024b).

Since 1961, Cameroon's education system has evolved through various reforms aimed at addressing national development needs (Fonkeng, 2010). A notable milestone in parental involvement was the introduction of Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) through Inter-ministerial Circular No. 242/L/729/MINEDUC/JMS of October 25, 1979, which mandated the formation of PTAs in all primary and secondary schools. This was further reinforced by Circular No. G.370/477/MINEDUC/SAAF/BEP of November 17, 1987, which defined the structure, membership, and functioning of PTAs. These associations were tasked with

providing material support to schools, hiring PTA teachers, maintaining school infrastructure, and ensuring sanitation (Mekolle, 2018).

A significant shift in education governance occurred with the enactment of the 1998 Law on the Orientation of Education in Cameroon. Section 11(1) of the law states that ‘The State shall formulate and implement educational policy with the assistance of regional and local authorities, families as well as public and private institutions...’ The law equally empowers regional, sub-regional, and local-level stakeholders to take on a greater role in education and school management within the framework of ‘educational community’. It defines the “educational community” to include parents as contributors to school governance through financial, material, and consultative roles (Republic of Cameroon, 1998). The Implementation of this vision began with the establishment of School Management Boards (SMBs) through Ministerial Decree No. 2001/041 of February 19, 2001. SMB includes four parent representatives (for secondary schools), positioning these stakeholders as members of the highest school-level decision-making body.

Subsequent decentralisation reforms have reinforced this direction. Law No. 2019/024 of December 24, 2019, which establishes the General Code of Regional and Local Authorities formally transferred key educational responsibilities such as school infrastructure, staffing, and supplies to local councils (Republic of Cameroon, 2019, Section 161). Building on this, Decree No. 2023/223 of April 27, 2023, empowered regional councils to oversee aspects of secondary education, including staff recruitment, infrastructure, educational materials, scholarship management, and active participation in school governance bodies (Republic of Cameroon, 2023, Articles 5–13).

These reforms have expanded avenues for parental involvement at both council and regional levels. Parents now participate in school planning, resource mobilisation, and monitoring of education-related projects. At the council level, they are consulted on teacher recruitment, school maintenance, and development initiatives. In many rural areas, where funding is limited, parents often supplement council efforts with financial and material support. They also play an advocacy role by monitoring project implementation and pushing for accountability through school governance structures and community forums. At the regional level, parents contribute through their representation in school management and consultation platforms, where their input helps align resources with local educational needs. Regional authorities increasingly depend on parental perspectives to guide the effective implementation of school initiatives.

The role of the school principal, as outlined in Decree No. 2001/041 remains critical in this decentralised framework. Principals oversee administrative, financial, and pedagogical functions and are expected to ensure strong collaboration with parents and the broader community. The success of decentralisation, particularly in enhancing parental involvement, largely hinges on their ability to create conditions that promotes inclusive participation and shared decision-making in school. As key facilitators of policy implementation, principals must actively engage parents in school matters to ensure that decentralisation delivers its intended outcomes and does not become merely an administrative shift. This serves as the foundation for conducting this research.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The involvement of parents in education has been shown to yield significant benefits for both children and educational institutions. Consequently, there has been increasing advocacy for parents to take an active role in school activities and governance, as well as in their children’s academic development. Despite these calls, parental participation in school governance



remains limited in many schools in Cameroon. Many parents restrict their roles to providing essential schooling needs and home-based support, such as setting academic expectations, arranging enrichment activities, and monitoring homework, rather than actively involving in school operational processes, leading to the loss of the benefits associated with parents' school-based involvement.

To address this gap, the Cameroon government has enacted several legal instruments aimed at decentralising authority and responsibility in education. Through these measures, significant degree of control has been shifted from central authorities to local stakeholders. The expectation is that these reforms will encourage greater parental and community participation in school governance through an inclusive approach, thereby enhancing educational outcomes. Theoretical perspectives suggest that organisations function more effectively when managerial processes are embraced from a systemic angle and when all stakeholders are adequately represented in decision-making (Bertalanffy, 1968; Katz & Kahn, 1966).

However, it remains unclear to what extent decentralisation policies have translated into meaningful parental involvement at the school level. Specifically, there is limited empirical evidence on how parents engage in school politics, participate in administrative decision-making, and contribute to fiscal management in public secondary schools. This study seeks to bridge this knowledge gap by bringing these dynamics to the lamplight. Such insight is essential for assessing whether decentralisation has truly empowered parents as key stakeholders in education governance or whether their involvement remains largely symbolic, thereby necessitating policy reforms and the design of targeted interventions to enhance parental involvement in education governance. The study also aligns with broader national and international goals of achieving inclusive, transparent, and community-driven education systems that support sustainable development.

### **Study Objectives**

This study was guided by three specific objectives as follows:

1. To explore the different ways and extent to which parents participate in school politics.
2. To analyse the nature of parental involvement in school administrative decision-making.
3. To examine the role of parents in the fiscal management of public secondary schools.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This section presents a critical review of existing literature relevant to decentralisation and parental involvement in education governance. Literature review is structured into conceptual, theoretical, and empirical perspectives.

#### **Conceptual Review**

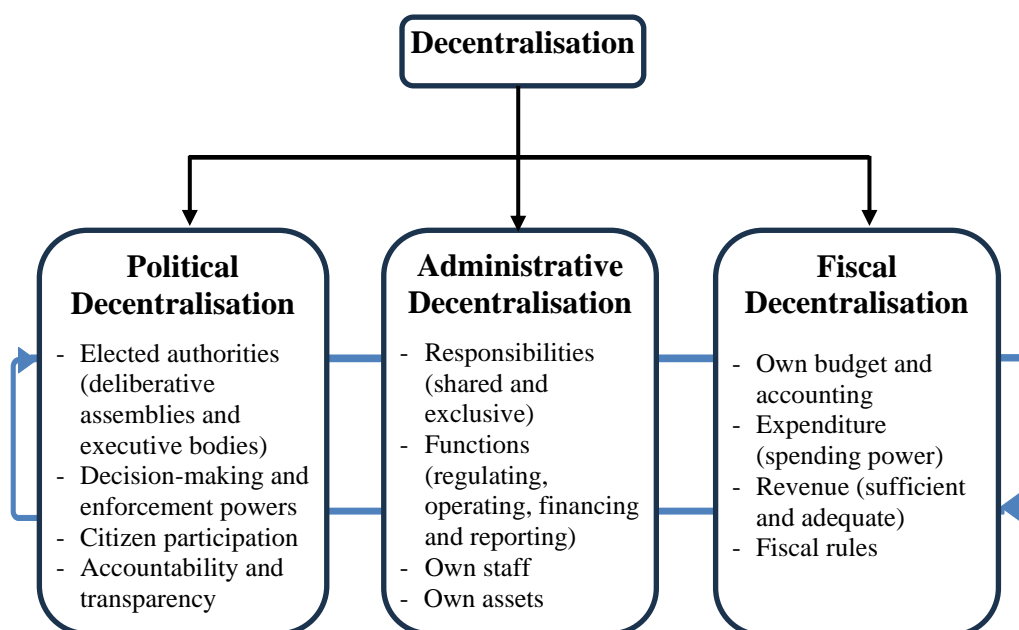
##### ***Decentralisation as a Governance Paradigm - Application to Education***

In its most general term, decentralisation is the process by which decision-making authority and responsibility for specific functions are redistributed or transferred from higher to lower levels of government or organisational units with the view to improve management, accountability and efficiency in service delivery (Mekolle, 2024a). Despite this general definition, decentralisation is a complex process that varies across different contexts and depends on the intentions and strategies of those responsible for its design and implementation. In the education sector, decentralisation refers to a sort of regulatory reforms affecting the

structure and delivery of education. It is often advocated as a means to increase local ownership of educational matters by empowering local actors, including school administrators, teachers, parents, and local councils, to take greater responsibility for basic education within their communities, thereby improving access and quality for diverse target groups (UNESCO, 1998).

Hanson (2006) categorises decentralisation into three primary levels of progression: deconcentration, delegation and devolution. Deconcentration involves the shifting of some management functions to regional or branch offices in such a way that the central authority remains firmly in power. Personnel in such offices are directly accountable to the central authority. Delegation involves transferring decision-making authority from higher to lower hierarchical levels, though this authority remains revocable at the discretion of the higher unit. Devolution is the most far-reaching form of decentralisation. Here, power is permanently transferred to sub-national levels whose officials do not need to seek approval from the central level. The sub-national officials have the option of informing the center of their decisions. The role of the center is mainly the setting of broad national goals and the collection and dissemination of information.

There are many ways in which a government may devolve power to the sub-national level. Thus, decentralisation can be political, administrative and fiscal (OECD, 2019). In many cases, these different types of decentralisation are carried out simultaneously, adding to the complexity of the process.



**Figure 1: Decentralisation Typologies**

*Source: Adapted from OECD (2019)*

There is clearly overlap in defining any of the types of decentralisation and the precise definitions are not as important as the need for a comprehensive approach. Political decentralisation, also known as democratic decentralisation, refers to the transfer of power and responsibility over educational matters, among other sectors, from central government to citizens or their elected representatives at lower levels of government, who enjoy a significant degree of autonomy. This form of decentralisation enhances local democratic participation by

allowing stakeholders such as parents, community leaders, and school boards to have a say in education governance and to make decisions that reflect the needs and priorities of their communities. Political decentralisation is often reflected through constitutional or statutory reforms, the development of new political parties, increased power for legislatures, the creation of local political units, and the encouragement of advocacy groups. In Cameroon, PTAs, SMBs, and regional and local councils are evidence of political decentralisation in education.

Political decentralisation involves a multitude of stakeholders with different, often conflicting interests. This retards decision-making over important matters as time is often required to reach at a popular consensus. Nevertheless, political decentralisation offers many benefits; it enhances the administrative efficacy of government, particularly by empowering citizens to hold elected officials accountable for their actions. Increased opportunities for civic decision-making, facilitated through participatory democracy mechanisms such as public consultations and participatory budgeting, are believed to help legitimise government institutions (Fung & Wright, 2003). Moreover, political decentralisation constitutes a valuable means of placating aggrieved marginalised communities and increasing political stability; it also helps to protect local communities from the adverse effects of state-driven development and globalisation, such as the erosion of local customs, traditions, values and belief systems.

Administrative or bureaucratic decentralisation is basically a management strategy whereby responsibility and authority for the planning, management and financing of certain public functions in domains such as education, health, and social welfare, is transferred to lower levels of government, semi-autonomous public authorities or corporations, or regional authorities. A major strength of administrative decentralisation is the fact that it eliminates overlays in bureaucratic procedures and increases efficiency in service delivery by allowing decisions to be made closer to the point of implementation. In Cameroon's education system, administrative decentralisation is reflected in the devolution of certain management responsibilities to regional and divisional delegations of education, school principals, and Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs). School principals, for example, ensures the smooth management of the day-to-day school operations, in liaison with local stakeholders, while PTAs play a key role in areas such as teacher recruitment and welfare, school discipline, and infrastructure projects.

Fiscal decentralisation has to do with the transfer of financial resources, taxing and expenditure authority to subnational tiers of government, enabling them to manage and allocate funds based on local priorities. Fiscal decentralisation can be achieved through user fees, user participation through monetary or labour contributions, expansion of local property or sales taxes, intergovernmental transfers of central government tax monies to local governments through transfer payments or grants, and authorisation of municipal borrowing with national government loan guarantees. Transfers of money may be given conditionally with instructions or unconditionally without them (OECD, 2019).

Fiscal decentralisation in education is critical in ensuring that schools have adequate resources for infrastructure, teaching materials, and personnel. In Cameroon, this is seen in the allocation of public investment budgets to regions and local councils for school development projects. Article 14 of Decree No. 2023/223 of 27 April 2023 to lay down conditions governing the exercise of some power devolved by the State upon regions in the area of secondary education, for instance states that 'The devolution of powers upon regions by the State in the area of education shall be accompanied by the concurrent transfer of the requisite resources for the exercise of such powers in accordance with the regulations in force'. Article 15 of the decree further states that 'Each year, the State Finance law shall provide for the financial resources required to exercise of the powers devolved upon regions in the area of secondary education'.

In Article 16(1), regions are allowed, in addition to the financial resources transferred by the State, to receive support from partners for the exercise of the powers devolved in the area of secondary education, in accordance with public accounting rule (Republic of Cameroon, 2023).

Hence, school bodies like PTAs and SMBs play a crucial role in raising and managing funds for school operations, including hiring contract teachers and purchasing teaching materials. However, financial constraints, lack of transparency, and irregular disbursement of government funds often limit the effectiveness of fiscal decentralisation in improving school performance. Many schools still rely heavily on obligatory household contributions to cover funding gaps, which disproportionately affects students from low-income households.

### ***Parental Involvement: A Cornerstone for Effective Education Governance***

Parental involvement in education includes a wide range of behaviours but generally refers to parents' and family members' use and investment of resources in their children's schooling. These investments can be direct or indirect and take place at home, in school, or in the community, with the intention of improving children's learning. Directly, parents get involved through contacts with schools, provision of school needs, and communication with their children with the aim of enhancing education and promoting a healthy relationship. This interaction enables parents to encourage, mentor, lead, and inspire their children in a meaningful way. Indirectly, parents fulfil their duties by ensuring that students receive support in the learning process through the provision of essential needs such as nutrition, healthcare, and security.

Parental involvement at home (home-based involvement) refers to parents' practices related to schools that take place outside of schools, usually, though not always, in the home (Pomerantz *et al.*, 2007). Such practices can be directly related to school, including assisting children with school-related tasks such as course selection and homework, creating a quiet place for children to study, and talking with children about academic issues (e.g., discussing what happened in school, emphasising the need to stay focused, and underscoring the value of academic success). Research indicates that when parents actively engage in their children's education at home, students tend to perform better academically and develop positive attitudes toward learning (Epstein, 2011).

Involvement at school (school-based involvement), on the other hand, represents practices on the part of parents that require them to make direct contact with schools and engage in school activities (Pomerantz *et al.*, 2007). These practices include, but are not limited to, attending general school meetings (e.g., PTA meetings), initiating contact and discussions with teachers, participating in school events (e.g., open houses, science fairs, cultural weeks), and volunteering at school. While these activities constitute school-based involvement at a lower level, more advanced engagement includes serving as members of SMBs, attending school board meetings, participating in school democratic processes, contributing to decision-making on critical school matters, and holding school administrators accountable for the use of resources—otherwise known as involvement in education governance and advocacy.

Community-based involvement describes parents' participation in activities that promote education but take place neither at home nor at school. For example, parents may participate in the development and maintenance of community educational resources such as libraries and archives or take children to museums and historical sites to enhance their learning experience.

Parental involvement in children's academic lives and in education governance and advocacy is essential in several respects. First, it has been linked to improved student achievement, higher



levels of motivation, and greater school attendance (Fan & Chen, 2001). When parents take an active role in education governance, they contribute to the development of policies and decisions that directly impact the quality of education and resource allocation in schools. Ramos *et al.* (2023) highlight the findings of Duflo *et al.* (2015), who, based on an experiment conducted in public schools in Kenya, concluded that involving parents in the teacher hiring process leads to the recruitment of higher-quality teachers, which subsequently enhances overall school performance. Parental involvement helps ensure transparency and accountability in school management, thereby improving the overall effectiveness of the education system (Boonk *et al.*, 2018).

Furthermore, parental involvement strengthens relationships between schools and communities, leading to increased trust and collaboration among stakeholders. Schools that actively engage parents in governance often experience better communication and cooperation between educators, students, and families (Epstein *et al.*, 2018). This collaboration is particularly important in decentralised education system where parents' participation is often instrumental in addressing issues related to school financing, curriculum development, and teacher accountability. Also, parental involvement in education governance helps promote equity in education. Research has shown that when parents, particularly those from marginalised communities, actively engage in school decision-making, educational outcomes improve for all students (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

### Theoretical Review

This study is situated within the framework of the Stakeholder Theory by Edward Freeman (1984) and the Soufflé Theory of Decentralisation by Andrew Parker (1995). Freeman's theory posits that organisations should consider the interests of all stakeholders, not just shareholders, in decision-making processes. Stakeholders include any group or individual who can affect or be affected by an organisation's actions. This approach encourages a broader view of organisational responsibility, advocating for the inclusion of employees, customers, local communities, and other relevant groups in decision-making. The theory emphasises that organisations must manage relationships with their stakeholders to ensure long-term success, as neglecting the needs and interests of key stakeholders can lead to inefficiencies and missed opportunities.

Freeman's theory aligns with the aim of decentralisation policies, which seek to give local actors, including parents, a more active role in school decision-making, fiscal management, and policy implementation, with the expectation that such involvement will lead to more responsive and effective governance. This highlights the need for empirical data, as provided by this study, to assess the effectiveness of decentralisation policies in promoting meaningful stakeholder involvement.

The Soufflé Theory of Decentralisation likens successful decentralisation to a soufflé; it requires the right combination of political, fiscal, and administrative elements. Parker (1995) argues that if any of these elements is weak or missing, decentralisation may collapse, just like a poorly prepared soufflé. The theory emphasises that decentralisation must be carefully designed and implemented holistically; otherwise, it can lead to inefficiencies, poor governance, or lack of meaningful local participation. Through analysing parental involvement in education governance, this study provides the insight based to whether Cameroon's decentralisation policy has created a well-balanced system that genuinely empowers parents or if gaps in implementation hinder their role in governance.

## Empirical Review

This empirical review synthesises findings from previous studies; it identifies trends and the research gaps addressed by this study. Ekwen *et al.* (2023) investigated the impact of parental involvement in decision-making on the school climate in public secondary schools in the South West Region of Cameroon. The study employed a correlational research design and collected data through a cross-sectional survey of 31 schools and 135 parents. A structured questionnaire was used for data collection. Findings revealed weak parental involvement (37.8%) in decision-making, despite its significant and positive impact on the overall school climate. The researchers urged the education ministry to establish enforcement structures to ensure that schools comply with the relevant policy guidelines.

A study conducted by Mekolle (2018) revealed that communities in Fako Division had limited responsiveness to the educational tasks assigned to them, particularly in terms of financial contributions to secondary education. The study, which involved a sample of 65 randomly selected secondary schools in the South West Region of Cameroon, gathered data from school principals through questionnaires and supplemented the findings with interviews involving parents, community leaders, councils, and other key stakeholders. The results indicated that community financing was minimal to non-existent and did not significantly contribute to access to secondary education in the region. The study recommended effective decentralisation by equipping local communities with financial resources and support to boost their participation in education and development.

The review of empirical literature reveals that researches related to decentralisation and parental involvement in education in Cameroon have had limited conceptual focus. Existing studies primarily address parental participation in administrative decision-making, financial and material contributions, or role of local councils in the management of educational institutions (e.g. Ekwen *et al.*, 2023; Mekolle, 2018; 2019; Massa, 2024). Many focus mainly on lower levels of community participation while overlooking higher-level parental involvement in education governance and advocacy, as conceptualised by Epstein (1990). Consequently, parents' roles in school politics, administrative decision-making, and fiscal management remain underreported in Cameroon, particularly in Fako Division of the South West Region. This study seeks to bridge this gap by exploring these dimensions of parental involvement in education governance.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study adopts a survey design, utilising a structured questionnaire as data collection instrument. This approach is inherently quantitative in nature. The study was conducted in Cameroon, specifically in Fako Division in the South West Region. Positioned at latitude 4°10'N and longitude 9°10'E, Fako Division is supported by a vast network of institutions at all levels, largely due to rapid population expansion. The increase in the number of schools and the surge in student enrollment have placed a significant administrative burden on school governance structures, highlighting the need for collaboration between local actors and education stakeholders.

Interest was on government secondary schools in the division—totaling 39, with a student population of 38783, according to the 2023/2024 academic year statistics obtained from the Service of School Map in the Regional Delegation of Secondary Education for the South West Region. The choice of government schools was based on the key place they occupy in the decentralised education system, where local authorities and parents, are expected to play significant roles in governance and management. Also, these schools often experience

governance issue, leading to unsatisfactory educational performances. Parents of these schools constituted the population of the study. Although their exact number could not be determined, the population is broadly described as encompassing all parents who have children in government secondary schools in Fako Division.

A total of 300 parents were sampled using the stratified random sampling technique. The sample included individuals from different subdivisions, gender groups, age categories, educational levels, occupations, and marital statuses. This stratification enhanced the validity and representativeness of the sample. Participants responded to a structured questionnaire titled Parental Involvement in School Governance Questionnaire (PISGQ), developed by the researchers. The questionnaire comprised 15 items designed to elicit responses aligned with the three research objectives that guided the study. These items were derived from existing literature on parental involvement in education and were evenly distributed across the three key study variables (school politics, administrative decision-making, and fiscal management). Response options followed a four-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD).

To ensure validity and reliability, the research instrument was subjected to expert review and appropriate statistical checks. Also, a pilot test was conducted with eight parents, and the computation of Cronbach's Alpha (Cronbach, 1951) yielded a reliability coefficient of .731, indicating an acceptable level of internal consistency. Data collection was carried out with the assistance of a team of well-trained research experts, who contacted participants in their homes and workplaces. Ethical considerations in social science research were strictly observed, including obtaining participants' informed consent, maintaining their anonymity, and ensuring confidentiality in data handling and reporting. The questionnaire consisted of categorical variables, and data were analysed using frequency, proportion calculations and aggregate scores. For each item, Strongly Agree and Agree responses were combined, as were Disagree and Strongly Disagree responses.

## **FINDINGS**

This section presents findings on the various ways in which parents engage in school politics, how they get involvement in administrative decision-making, and their role in the fiscal management of government secondary schools in Fako Division.

### **Parents' Participation in School Politics in Government Secondary Schools in Fako Division**

Table 1 shows that most parents (94%) are PTA members, indicating strong general participation. A majority (61%) take part in school election processes, and 72% contribute to School Management Board decisions. However, fewer parents (32.7%) hold leadership positions in school bodies, while only 43.7% communicate with school administrators on policy matters. The aggregate percentage of 60.7% suggests overall agreement that parents are involved in school politics, though engagement varies by activity type.

**Table 1: Description of Ways by Which Parents Involve in School Politics in Government Secondary Schools in Fako Division**

Items	SA/A (%)	SD/D (%)	Decision
I am a member of the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) of the school which my child attend	282 (94%)	18 (6%)	Agreed
I participate in school election processes	183 (61%)	117 (39%)	Agreed
I contribute directly or through representation in School Management Board's decisions	216 (72%)	84 (28%)	Agreed
I hold a post of responsibility in a constituted body in the school my child attends	98 (32.7%)	202 (67.3%)	Disagreed
I communicate with school administrators concerning policy issues that affect the education of my child	131 (43.7%)	169 (56.3%)	Disagreed
<b>Aggregate Score</b>	<b>910 (60.7%)</b>	<b>590 (39.3%)</b>	<b>Agreed</b>

### Parents' Involvement in Administrative Decision-making in Government Secondary Schools in Fako Division

Table 2 suggests that the majority of parents (65.3%) collaborate with school management on issues like infrastructure and discipline, which indicates active engagement in maintaining school standards. Also, less than half of the respondents (46.3%) participate in planning school activities, showing some level of involvement in shaping school programs; while fewer parents engage in implementing school projects (23.7%), teacher recruitment and welfare discussions (11%), and development of school rules and regulations (13.7%). The aggregate of 32% agreement versus 68% disagreement indicates that overall, parental involvement in administrative decision-making is low.

**Table 2: Nature of Parents' Involvement in Administrative Decision-making in Public Secondary Schools in Fako Division**

Items	SA/A (%)	SD/D (%)	Decision
I collaborate with school management in addressing school issues like infrastructural and disciplinary issues	196 (65.3%)	104 (34.7%)	Agreed
I participate directly or through representation in planning of school activities	139 (46.3%)	161 (53.7%)	Disagreed
I participate in the implementation of school projects	71 (23.7%)	229 (76.3%)	Disagreed
I participate in discussions on the recruitment and welfare of teachers in my child's school.	33 (11%)	267 (89%)	Disagreed
I participate in developing or reviewing school rules and regulations.	41 (13.7%)	259 (86.3%)	Disagreed
<b>Aggregate Score</b>	<b>480 (32%)</b>	<b>1020 (68%)</b>	<b>Disagreed</b>



### Parental Involvement in Fiscal Management in Public Secondary Schools in Fako Division

The statistics in Table 3 illustrate that a significant majority of parents (99%) contribute financially or in-kind to support school operations, indicating strong financial support. However, parental involvement in decision-making on fund generation (35.7%) and expenditure (36.3%) is low, with most parents disagreeing that they have a say in these processes. Similarly, only 41.7% follow up on how school funds are managed, and just 34.3% request greater transparency. The aggregate of 49.4% agreement versus 50.6% disagreement suggests that while parents contribute financially, their engagement in fiscal decision-making and oversight remains limited. This highlights potential gaps in participatory governance within school fiscal management.

**Table 3: Role of Parents in the Fiscal Management of Public Secondary Schools in Fako Division**

Items	SA/A (%)	SD/D (%)	Decision
I contribute financially or in-kind (labour, materials, etc.) to support school operations	297 (99%)	3 (1%)	Agreed
I get involved in decision-making on how funds are raised in my child's school	107 (35.7%)	193 (64.3)	Disagreed
I participate in decision-making on how funds are spent in my child's school	109 (36.3%)	191 (63.7%)	Disagreed
I follow up on how school funds are managed.	125 (41.7%)	175 (58.3%)	Disagreed
I request for greater transparency in the management of school funds	103 (34.3%)	197 (65.7%)	Disagreed
<b>Aggregate Score</b>	<b>741 (49.4%)</b>	<b>759 (50.6%)</b>	<b>Disagreed</b>

### DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight the nature and extent of parental involvement in school politics, administrative decision-making, and fiscal management in public secondary schools in Fako Division. The study revealed that parents are relatively engaged in school politics, particularly through PTAs and SMBs. A significant majority of parents indicated that they are members of PTAs, and over two-thirds contribute to decisions made by SMBs. This supports Epstein's (2011) assertion that structured parent organisations play a significant role in promoting school-community collaboration. Additionally, some parents take on leadership roles within schools and engage in communication with school administrators on policy matters. However, these aspects of involvement were underreported, suggesting that while parents recognise the importance of engagement in school politics, their roles remain largely consultative rather than decision-making, echoing Arnott and Menter's (2007) argument that without well-defined mechanisms for participation, parental involvement may remain superficial.

Regarding administrative decision-making, parental involvement is modest. Parents collaborate with school management on school infrastructure and disciplinary issues, school activity planning (46.3%), and project implementation (23.7%), with some also participating

in teacher recruitment, school rule development, and staff welfare concerns. However, these activities were reported by a minority, reflecting the limited administrative agency granted to parents. These findings align with Ekwen *et al.* (2023), who observed that parental involvement in decision-making in Cameroon remains weak. Several factors explain this limited engagement: the decentralisation process has not been accompanied by adequate capacity-building for parents, many of whom lack awareness, confidence, or knowledge to participate effectively. In addition, there is a prevailing culture of centralised control, where key decisions are still perceived to be the purview of education officials and school heads rather than communities. This culture discourages parental assertiveness in governance matters.

In terms of fiscal management, the study revealed that an overwhelming majority of parents contribute financially or in-kind to support school operations. However, only about 36% reported involvement in fundraising or budget planning, and a similar proportion indicated efforts to monitor school expenditures or advocate for transparency. This reveals a contradiction - parents are heavily involved in financial support in forms such as payment of PTA levies and children's school fees but have limited influence over financial decisions. This functional yet constrained form of involvement reflects what Mekolle (2018) described as low community responsiveness in financial governance in education. The lack of formal accountability mechanisms within most government educational institutions in Cameroon, alongside a perception of parents as financial contributors rather than full governance partners, perpetuates this imbalance.

The findings suggest that despite decentralisation efforts, meaningful parental involvement in education governance remains constrained. While national policies promote community participation, the practice falls short, particularly in administrative and fiscal domains. Parents are often included in school structures but excluded from substantive decision-making, contradicting the participatory ideals of decentralised governance. This gap is consistent with Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984), which advocates inclusive participation of all actors in decision-making. The implications are substantial. If parents remain marginal in decision-making, local accountability mechanisms weaken, and the responsiveness of schools to community needs diminishes. The imbalance in the decentralisation process reflected in the findings also contradicts with the Soufflé Theory (Parker, 1995), which holds that decentralisation must progress in a balanced manner across political, administrative, and fiscal dimensions. In Fako Division, fiscal decentralisation is predominant, with councils and schools relying heavily on parental contributions, yet without corresponding political empowerment or administrative autonomy. Parents fund education but have little say in its governance, leading to dissatisfaction and disillusionment.

Several barriers - structural, systemic, situational, and dispositional—hinder greater parental involvement. Weak communication between schools and homes, especially in rural areas, coupled with poorly defined participatory frameworks, limits engagement. Socioeconomic challenges further compound the issue. High poverty rates (37.5% of the population below the poverty line - UNOCHA, 2022), subsistence agriculture, and rising costs of living reduce parents' availability and capacity to engage in school matters. Also, low literacy levels among parents hinder their ability to contribute meaningfully to governance processes. Many do not fully understand their roles and feel their input will not impact school improvement. These realities highlight the need for stronger, more inclusive policy frameworks, targeted awareness campaigns, and capacity-building initiatives to realise the democratic potential of decentralised education governance.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMENDATIONS

### Conclusion

This study examined parental involvement in school governance in government secondary schools in Fako Division, focusing on school politics, administrative decision-making, and fiscal management. The findings indicate the various ways by which parents are involved in school matters along these facets of decentralisation. However, while parents are relatively engaged in school politics through PTAs and SMBs, their participation in administrative and fiscal governance remains limited. The study revealed that parental involvement in administrative decision-making is largely restricted to infrastructural and disciplinary matters, while engagement in planning, project implementation, and teacher recruitment is minimal. Similarly, despite significant financial contributions, parents have little influence over school budgeting and financial management, raising concerns about transparency and accountability mechanisms.

The study highlights that while decentralisation policies aim to empower local stakeholders, their effectiveness in promoting parental participation in governance is yet to be fully realised. Several barriers which are structural, systemic, situational and dispositional in nature contribute to these challenges. The findings reinforce the need for targeted policy interventions to ensure that parental involvement extends beyond consultative roles to active decision-making and governance. In this regard, the study contributes to the broader discourse on decentralisation and community participation in education governance. It underscores the necessity of bridging the gap between policy and practice to enhance parental engagement in school governance, thereby promoting more inclusive, transparent, and efficient educational management systems.

This study is not without limitations. First, it relied heavily on self-reported data from parents, which may be subject to bias or inaccuracies due to social desirability or recall limitations. Second, the study focused solely on public secondary schools within Fako Division, which may limit the generalisability of the findings to other regions or to private institutions operating under different governance dynamics. Future research could adopt a comparative or mixed-methods approach across multiple divisions to provide broader insights.

### Recommendations

The proposals advanced here, if considered, have potential to create an inclusive and participatory approach to education governance—one that ensure that decentralisation efforts lead to meaningful parental engagement in school governance at the political, administrative, and fiscal levels. To improve parents' involvement in school democratic processes, it would be useful for the Ministry of Secondary Education to establish clearer policy frameworks that strengthens the role of PTAs and SMBs in school administration, and to allocate reserved seats for parents in these and similar key school decision-making committees.

In the same vein, schools should implement sustainable mechanisms for regular parent-school consultations. They could, for example, institutionalise quarterly 'Parent-School Governance Forums,' where parents, school administrators, and local education authorities can engage in structured discussions on key school matters. These forums should provide an additional, more inclusive platform for parents to raise concerns, propose initiatives, and collaboratively develop solutions with school leaders. They could be complemented by the establishment of digital platforms such as mobile applications or dedicated online portals designed to seamlessly keep parents informed about school policies, election processes, and governance matters, thereby ensuring continuous engagement beyond physical meetings.

With respect to administrative decision-making, schools are encouraged to strengthen the role of PTAs and SMBs by integrating parental representatives into key administrative processes, such as planning school activities, evaluating disciplinary policies, and contributing to curriculum discussions. This ensures that parental perspectives are considered in shaping the school's administrative priorities. In light of the fact that many parents do not actively participate in school governance due to a lack of awareness and technical knowledge, it is imperative for educational authorities to regularly provide capacity-building on school governance, decision-making procedures, and leadership skills, to equip parents with the knowledge needed to engage meaningfully in administrative decision-making. Introducing structured feedback mechanisms, such as suggestion boxes, parent-administrator meetings, and online discussion forums, would ensure that parents' voices are heard in school decision-making.

Enhancing parental involvement in fiscal management would require that schools adopt transparent financial management practices that actively involve parents in budgeting and expenditure decisions. Establishing financial oversight committees within organised parent structures, with the mandate to monitor school finances, including income generation, expenditure decisions, planned projects, and to provide input on school budgets, would enhance trust and accountability, with potential to scale up participation. Similarly, periodic financial audits, open budget discussions and practices that make financial data accessible through school notice boards, digital platforms, or parent meetings, for example, can enable schools to further cement trust and promote participation. Councils and other local government structures should be actively engaged as key actors in policy enforcement, oversight, and resource allocation to support parental engagement. Their involvement is essential to operationalising the core principle of devolved authority under decentralisation, ensuring that school governance reflects the collective input and needs of local communities.

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