

UNIVERSITY OF YAOUNDE I

POST GRADUATE SCHOOL FOR
HUMAN, SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL
SCIENCES

DOCTORAL UNIT OF RESEARCH AND
TRAINING IN SCIENCE OF EDUCATION
AND EDUCATIONAL ENGINEERING

THE FACULTY OF SCIENCE OF
EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM AND
EVALUATION



UNIVERSITE DE YAOUNDE I

CENTRE DE RECHERCHE ET DE
FORMATION DOCTORALE EN SCIENCES
(CRFD) HUMAINES, SOCIALE ET
EDUCATIVES

UNITE DE RECHERCHE ET DE FORMATION
DOCTORALE EN SCIENCES EDUCATIVES
ET INGENIERIE EDUCATIVE

FACULTE DES SCIENCES DE L'EDUCATION

DEPARTEMENT DE CURRICULA ET
EVALUATION

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND
SCHOOL GOVERNANCE IN
SELECTED PUBLIC SECONDARY
SCHOOLS IN MFOUNDI DIVISION**

A Dissertation presented and defended on the 25th September 2025

Option: **Educational Management**

Specialty: **Administration and Inspection of School Life**

by

NGWINGSANG NGOCHI

Registration Number: 23W3073

B.A English Modern Letters



jury

Ranks	Names and grade	Universities
President	BIAKOLO KOMO Louis Dominique, Pr	UYI
Supervisor	SHAÏBOU Abdoulaï HAJI, CC	UYI
Examiner	KENNETH YUOMEYSE, CC	UYI

ATTENTION

This document is the result of extensive work approved by the defence jury and made available to the entire extended university community.

It is subject to the intellectual property of the author. This implies an obligation to cite and reference when using this document.

Furthermore, the Center for Research and Doctoral Training in Human, Social and Educational Sciences of the University of Yaoundé I do not intend to give any approval or disapproval to the opinions expressed in this Dissertation; these opinions should be considered as their author's own.

Declaration

I, Ngwingsang Ngochi, a student in the Department of Curriculum and Evaluation, Faculty of Sciences of Education, University of Yaoundé I, hereby declare that this thesis entitled: “Community Engagement and School Governance in Selected Public Secondary Schools in Mfoundi Division” is my original work. It has not been submitted for any degree or diploma in this or any other university or institution of higher learning. All the sources used have been duly acknowledged and referenced.

Yaoundé, _____

Ngwingsang Ngochi

(Signature)

Certification

This is to certify that the thesis entitled:

“Community Engagement and School Governance in Selected Public Secondary Schools in Mfoundi Division”

submitted by Ngwingsang Ngochi (Reg. No. 23W3073), in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of a Master’s Degree in Administration and School Life Inspection, is an original piece of work carried out under my supervision.

I hereby affirm that this work meets the standards required for the award of a postgraduate degree in the Faculty of Science of Education, University of Yaoundé I.

Dr. Shaïbou Abdoulaï Haji

Department of Curriculum and Evaluation

Faculty of Science of Education

University of Yaoundé I

(Signature) _____

To my husband, Tangwing Felix.

Acknowledgements

I express my profound gratitude to Dr. Shaïbou Abdoulaï Haji, my research supervisor, for his patient guidance, consistent support, and insightful feedback throughout the course of this work. His commitment to academic excellence, wealth of experience, and deep understanding of research methodology were invaluable at every stage of this thesis. From topic selection to final write-up, his constructive criticisms, timely encouragement, and constant availability greatly enhanced the quality of this work. I am truly grateful for his mentorship, and I consider it a privilege to have been under his supervision.

I am also thankful to all my lecturers in the Department of Curriculum and Evaluation, Faculty of Science of Education, University of Yaoundé I, for their invaluable contributions to my academic growth. I am particularly grateful to Dr. Mouiche Loudi, who recently defended his PhD at the University of Yaoundé I, for his mentorship and dedication. I equally appreciate Mrs. Nene Miriam, a PhD student at the University of Bamenda, for her generous academic support and encouragement. Whenever I encountered difficulties or felt stuck in the course of my research, both Dr. Mouiche Loudi and Mrs. Nene Miriam were always available to provide timely explanations, suggestions, and useful guidance that kept me moving forward.

Furthermore, I extend my sincere appreciation to the schools and educational stakeholders who graciously facilitated this research. Their collaboration and openness provided essential insights that not only enriched the data collection phase, but also strengthened the overall credibility and outcomes of this study.

To my beloved family and friends, I extend my heartfelt appreciation. Special thanks go to my wonderful children; Afeseh Excel, Apiseh Goodness, Akweseh Keren-Gift, Afaseh Ngochi, and Nkwati Faith, for their patience, love, and understanding during my periods of intense academic focus. I am especially grateful to Afeseh E and Afaseh N for assisting me with the typing and formatting of this work. I also recognize my parents and the entire Ngochi family for their unwavering support and encouragement. Finally, I thank my Christian family at Bethel Baptist Church Etoudi for their prayers, fellowship, and spiritual nourishment that uplifted me throughout this academic journey.

Table of contents

Declaration.....	i
Certification	ii
Dedication.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
List of Abbreviations and Acronyms.....	viii
List of illustrations	ix
Abstract.....	x
Résumé.....	xi
Chapter one: Introduction	1
Background to the Study.....	2
Historical Background.....	2
Conceptual Background	4
Theoretical Background	7
Contextual Background.....	10
Statement of the Problem	10
Objectives of the Study	11
Main Objective	11
Specific Objectives.....	12
Research Questions	12
General Research Question	12
Specific Research Questions	12
Research Hypotheses.....	12
General Hypothesis.....	12
Specific Hypotheses	12
Justification for the Study	13
Significance of the Study	13
Scope of the Study.....	14
Operational Definition of Terms	14
Organization of the Study	15
Chapter two: Review of related literature.....	17
Conceptual Review	17
The Concept of Community Engagement	17

The Concept of School Governance	19
Modalities of Community Engagement in School Governance	21
Dimensions of Community Engagement and School Governance	22
Theoretical Perspectives on Governance and Participation	24
General Systems Theory (GST)	24
Stakeholder Theory.....	27
Collaborative Governance Theory.....	30
Participatory Governance Theory.....	33
Decentralization Theory	36
Integrative Framework for the Study	39
General Systems Theory: The School as an Interdependent System	39
Stakeholder Theory: Balancing Diverse Interests	40
Collaborative and Participatory Governance Theories: Inclusive Decision-Making	40
Decentralization Theory: Contextualizing Power and Responsibility	41
Conceptual Review	42
Concept of Community Engagement in Education	42
Concept of School Governance	44
Relationship between Community Engagement and School Governance	45
Dimensions of Community Engagement in School Governance.....	47
Empirical Review on Community Engagement in School Governance	49
International Evidence	49
Evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa	50
Empirical Insights from Cameroon	51
The Cameroonian Legal and Policy Context for Community Engagement in School Governance.....	53
Barriers to Effective Engagement	54
Gaps in the Literature.....	55
Summary of the Chapter	57
Chapter three: Research methodology	59
Research Design.....	59
Area of the Study.....	59
Target Population	60
Sample Size and Sampling Technique	60
Data Collection Instruments.....	61

Validity and Reliability of Instruments	62
Method of Data Analysis.....	63
Ethical Considerations.....	63
Summary of the Chapter	64
Chapter four: Presentation, analysis and interpretation of data	66
Presentation of Demographic Data	66
Data Presentation and Analysis Based on Research Questions	67
Hypothesis Testing	72
Hypothesis One.....	72
Hypothesis Two	73
Hypothesis Three	75
Hypothesis Four.....	76
Interpretative Summary.....	78
Chapter five: Discussion, conclusion and recommendations	79
Parents' Associations and School Governance	79
Alumni Contributions to Governance	81
Regional Council and Central Government Roles in School Governance.....	84
Central Administration Engagement in School Governance	87
Hypotheses and Stakeholder Synergy	89
Conclusion.....	92
Recommendations	93
References.....	96
Appendixes	xii

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

ANOVA:	Analysis of Variance
CMEC:	Council of Ministers of Education, Canada
CMEC:	Council of Ministers of Education, Canada
DED:	District Education Directorates
EFA:	Education For All
EMIS:	Education Management Information System
ESD:	Education for Sustainable Development
ESS:	Education Sector Strategy
GPE:	Global Partnership for Education
M&E:	Monitoring and Evaluation
MINEDUB:	Ministry of Basic Education
MINEPAT:	Ministry of the Economy, Planning and Regional Development
MINESEC:	Ministry of Secondary Education (Cameroon)
NDS:	National Development Strategy
NEA:	National Education Association
NGO:	Non-Governmental Organization
OECD:	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PRSP:	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
PTA:	Parent-Teacher Association
SABER:	Systems Approach for Better Education Results
SDG:	Sustainable Development Goals
SGB:	School Governing Board
SGB:	School Governing Board
SMB:	School Management Board
SMC:	School Management Committee
SPIP:	School Performance Improvement Plan
SPSS:	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
UNESCO:	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF:	United Nations Children's Fund

List of illustrations

Figure 1: Conceptual Diagram.....	58
Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Sex	66
Table 2: Distribution of Respondents by Age Group	66
Table 3: Distribution of Respondents by Educational Qualification	67
Table 4: Distribution of Respondents by Years of Experience.....	67
Table 5: Role of Parents' Associations in School Governance (N = 294).....	68
Table 6: Responses on the Role of Alumni Networks	69
Table 7: Responses on the Role of Regional Councils	70
Table 8: Responses on the Role of MINESEC (Central Government).....	71
Table 9: Descriptive Statistics	72
Table 10: Model Summary	72
Table 11: ANOVA.....	73
Table 12: Coefficients Table.....	73
Table 13: Descriptive Statistics	74
Table 14: Model Summary	74
Table 15: ANOVA.....	74
Table 16: Coefficients.....	74
Table 17: Descriptive Statistics	75
Table 18: Model Summary	75
Table 19: ANOVA.....	75
Table 20: Comparative Summary of Hypotheses Testing	78

Abstract

This study investigates the role of community engagement in the governance of public secondary schools in Mfoundi Division, Cameroon. Drawing on General Systems Theory, Stakeholder Theory, Collaborative Governance Theory, Participatory Governance Theory, and Decentralisation Theory, the research explores how Parents' Associations, Alumni Associations, Regional Councils, and the Central Government contribute to school governance effectiveness. A mixed-methods design was employed, involving a structured questionnaire administered to 294 respondents, alongside semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders. Findings reveal that Parents' Associations significantly contribute to financial support, infrastructure development, and communication with school authorities, though their role in teacher appraisal and disciplinary decisions remains limited. Alumni were noted for their *mentorship, financial assistance, and event organization but lacked institutional mechanisms* for sustained policy influence. Regional and Central authorities were recognized for infrastructure support, policy direction, and accountability enforcement; however, deficiencies in stakeholder training and decentralized capacity were evident. Statistical analyses; including simple linear regression indicated positive and significant relationships between stakeholder engagement and governance effectiveness. Notably, central administration involvement accounted for nearly half of the variance in governance quality ($R^2 = 0.498$). These results reinforce the critical importance of inclusive, participatory governance models where all actors are empowered and coordinated. The study concludes that while community engagement is essential to school governance, structural limitations, insufficient policy enforcement, and capacity gaps constrain its effectiveness. It recommends systemic reforms, capacity-building initiatives, and institutionalized mechanisms to foster stakeholder collaboration. The findings contribute to policy discourse on decentralization and educational governance in Cameroon and sub-Saharan Africa at large.

Keywords: Community engagement, school governance, stakeholder participation, decentralization, Cameroon, Parents' Associations, Alumni, Regional Councils, Collaborative Governance Theory.

Résumé

Cette étude examine le rôle de l'engagement communautaire dans la gouvernance des lycées publics de la division du Mfoundi au Cameroun. S'appuyant sur la théorie des parties prenantes, la théorie générale des systèmes, la théorie de la gouvernance collaborative, la théorie de la gouvernance participative et la théorie de la décentralisation, la recherche explore les contributions des Associations des Parents d'Élèves (APE), des Associations d'Anciens Élèves, des Conseils régionaux et de l'Administration centrale à l'efficacité de la gouvernance scolaire. Une approche méthodologique mixte a été utilisée, combinant un questionnaire structuré administré à 294 participants et des entretiens semi-directifs avec des acteurs clés. Les résultats révèlent que les APE contribuent de manière significative au soutien financier, au développement des infrastructures et à la communication avec les autorités scolaires, mais leur implication dans l'évaluation des enseignants et les questions disciplinaires reste limitée. Les anciens élèves sont reconnus pour leur mentorat, leur soutien financier et l'organisation d'activités, mais ne disposent pas de mécanismes institutionnels pour influencer durablement les politiques éducatives. Les autorités régionales et centrales jouent un rôle clé dans l'élaboration des politiques, l'affectation des enseignants et le développement des infrastructures, mais des lacunes persistent en matière de formation des parties prenantes et de décentralisation effective. Les analyses statistiques, notamment les régressions linéaires simples, indiquent des relations positives et significatives entre l'engagement des parties prenantes et l'efficacité de la gouvernance. Notamment, l'implication de l'administration centrale explique à elle seule près de la moitié de la variance observée dans la qualité de la gouvernance ($R^2 = 0.498$). Ces résultats soulignent l'importance d'un modèle de gouvernance inclusive et participative, dans lequel tous les acteurs sont responsabilisés et coordonnés. L'étude conclut que l'engagement communautaire n'est pas simplement un soutien, mais un pilier essentiel de la gouvernance scolaire. Pour optimiser son impact, des réformes systémiques, des renforcements de capacités et des dispositifs institutionnels solides sont nécessaires. Ces résultats enrichissent le débat politique sur la décentralisation et la gouvernance éducative au Cameroun et dans la région d'Afrique subsaharienne.

Mots-clés : Engagement communautaire, gouvernance scolaire, participation des parties prenantes, décentralisation, Cameroun, Associations de Parents d'Élèves, anciens élèves, Conseils régionaux, théorie de la gouvernance collaborative.

Chapter one: Introduction

Education is widely recognized as a powerful instrument for social transformation, individual empowerment, and national development. Within this framework, the concept of school governance has emerged as a key determinant of the quality and effectiveness of educational systems. Effective school governance ensures that institutions are well-managed, resources are appropriately allocated, decisions are participatory and transparent, and stakeholder interests are harmonized. In particular, community engagement defined as the active participation of parents, alumni, regional councils, and central government authorities has gained prominence as a strategic approach for promoting school accountability and improvement.

In Cameroon, education governance is shaped by a combination of centralized policies and decentralized responsibilities. The 1998 Education Law and the subsequent decentralization reforms emphasize the inclusion of multiple stakeholders in managing schools. Nevertheless, there are persistent concerns about the actual involvement of community members in the governance of public secondary schools, especially in urban divisions such as Mfoundi. While Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs), alumni networks, and regional councils are expected to contribute to school development, their roles often remain symbolic or underutilized. Similarly, although the central government plays a critical role through the Ministry of Secondary Education (MINESEC), its interventions are sometimes viewed as top-down and bureaucratic.

This research investigates the extent to which community engagement enhances school governance in selected public secondary schools in Mfoundi Division. It specifically focuses on the roles of Parents' Associations, alumni associations, the Regional Council, and the central government. By exploring their contributions to transparency, accountability, policy implementation, and resource mobilization, the study aims to identify the strengths and weaknesses of current governance practices and propose strategies for improvement. Grounded in General Systems Theory, Stakeholder Theory, Collaborative Governance Theory, and Participatory Governance Theory, the study provides a multidimensional understanding of school governance and its interconnections with community participation. Through a combination of quantitative data and contextual analysis, this research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on participatory governance in education and aligns with global goals such as Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) and Goal 16 (Strong Institutions).

This chapter introduces the study on Community Engagement and School Governance in Selected Public Secondary Schools in Mfoundi Division. It begins with the background of the study, situating the research within the broader context of school governance and highlighting the role of community engagement in improving school management. It then presents the statement of the problem, which outlines the challenges faced by public secondary schools in Mfoundi Division due to inadequate or ineffective participation of key community stakeholders. The chapter continues with the research objectives, including the general and specific objectives of the study, followed by the research questions and the research hypotheses that guide the investigation. The justification of the study is then highlighted, while its significance is discussed, showing the relevance of the research to students, teachers, NGOs, policymakers, school administrators, community stakeholders, and future researchers. The scope of the study is defined, covering the geographical, content, population, conceptual, and time boundaries, while the operational definitions of key terms provide clarity and ensure consistency in understanding concepts such as community engagement, school governance, alumni, and local councils.

Background to the Study

The background to this study is structured around four key dimensions: historical, conceptual, theoretical, and contextual.

Historical Background

Community engagement in governance has a rich and varied history that spans continents and civilizations. In ancient times, collective decision-making formed the cornerstone of societal development. Ancient Greece is often cited as a foundational model of participatory governance, with citizens assembling in public spaces such as the Agora to deliberate on civic matters (Hansen, 1991). The Roman Republic similarly emphasized civic responsibility, allowing citizens to engage in decision-making through elected assemblies (Lomas, 1996). These early civilizations laid the philosophical groundwork for what is now termed civic engagement and participatory governance. In traditional African societies, including pre-colonial Cameroon, governance was inherently communal. Elders, lineage heads, and spiritual leaders presided over communal affairs, often resolving conflicts, allocating communal resources, and guiding social norms through deliberative consensus (Kofele-Kale, 2008). Education was informal but deeply rooted in community life, emphasizing intergenerational knowledge transfer, moral instruction, and vocational training. The

authority and legitimacy of governance structures in these societies were directly tied to their participatory nature and cultural resonance (Omolewa, 2007).

Colonialism significantly disrupted these indigenous governance systems. In Cameroon, German colonial rule (1884–1916) and subsequent French and British mandates introduced centralized, bureaucratic forms of governance that marginalized traditional leaders and curtailed local participation (Fombad, 2013). With the establishment of formal education systems, school governance became highly hierarchical, with decision-making concentrated in colonial administrative centers. Community members were relegated to the periphery, often serving only as labour providers or financial contributors through compulsory levies for school construction (Tambo, 2003).

The post-independence era in Cameroon brought aspirations for reclaiming local agency in governance. National education reforms in the 1970s and 1980s introduced structures such as Parents' Associations (APEs) and School Management Boards (SMBs) aimed at fostering community involvement in school affairs (Ndongko & Tambo, 2000). However, these initiatives were often symbolic, lacking the legal empowerment and institutional support necessary to effect meaningful change. It wasn't until the 1990s, in response to international pressure and domestic reform movements, that participatory governance gained renewed attention.

The 1990 World Declaration on Education for All (EFA), adopted at the Jomtien Conference, emphasized the importance of community participation in achieving universal access and quality education. This was further reinforced by the 2000 Dakar Framework for Action, which explicitly called for strengthening partnerships among governments, civil society, and communities to improve educational outcomes (UNESCO, 2000). These global commitments inspired policy shifts in many African countries, including Cameroon, to embrace inclusive and decentralized education governance models.

In Cameroon, the decentralization process formally began with Law No. 2004/017 of 22 July 2004, which devolved significant responsibilities for education management to local and regional councils (Republic of Cameroon, 2004). This was intended to bridge the gap between schools and communities, enhance local accountability, and improve responsiveness to community-specific needs. The 2010 Law on Regional and Local Authorities further articulated the roles of councils in education, including infrastructure development, budget oversight, and community mobilization (Ngwana, 2010).

However, implementation challenges have persisted. Studies by Transparency International (2021) and the World Bank (2020) have identified issues such as capacity deficits among local authorities, limited financial autonomy, bureaucratic delays, and lack of awareness among community members. These challenges have impeded the full realization of decentralization's potential in improving school governance. Moreover, vertical accountability mechanisms have remained stronger than horizontal ones, with school principals often more responsive to central directives than to community expectations (Bray, 1996).

Recent efforts by the Cameroonian government indicate a renewed push toward functional decentralization. In April 2023, a Presidential Decree transferred specific responsibilities in secondary education including infrastructure management and resource allocation to regional councils (Cameroon Tribune, 2023). This move aligns with the National Development Strategy 2020–2030 (NDS30), which advocates for effective decentralization as a lever for governance reform and citizen engagement (MINEPAT, 2020). Nevertheless, critics argue that without robust capacity-building programs, adequate funding, and community sensitization, decentralization risks becoming another top-down directive rather than a genuine empowerment tool (Berka, 2021).

Community engagement in school governance must therefore be understood within this historical continuum of traditional communalism, colonial centralization, post-independence reforms, and ongoing decentralization. Each phase has shaped the current landscape, where the legal framework exists, but practical implementation and cultural integration remain evolving challenges. Understanding this trajectory is crucial for designing interventions that resonate with local realities, build on historical strengths, and address structural weaknesses.

Ultimately, the history of community engagement in governance in Cameroon reveals both continuity and transformation. From village councils to school boards, the idea that education is a shared responsibility remains deeply rooted in Cameroonian society. The challenge lies in translating this ethos into actionable policies and institutional practices that empower communities, hold authorities accountable, and ultimately enhance the governance of public education.

Conceptual Background

Community engagement in education refers to the process by which families, civil society organizations, alumni, and local authorities actively participate in decision-making processes that affect the management and outcomes of schools (Epstein, 2018). It encompasses a broad spectrum

of activities including governance, resource mobilization, program development, and accountability oversight. Unlike traditional forms of involvement that view stakeholders as passive recipients of educational services, community engagement recognizes them as co-creators of educational quality and sustainability. In contemporary education reform discourse, community engagement is widely regarded as a fundamental strategy for improving educational outcomes and fostering democratic accountability (UNESCO, 2022).

This engagement can take many forms, such as membership in school boards, participation in Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs), contribution of resources, volunteerism, and involvement in curriculum decisions or performance reviews. According to Saito (2021), effective community engagement strengthens institutional capacity and enhances the responsiveness of schools to local educational needs. It also encourages local innovation, promotes social inclusion, and cultivates a sense of shared ownership that contributes to the long-term sustainability of school improvement efforts. In settings with limited governmental capacity, as is often the case in sub-Saharan Africa, engaged communities often fill critical gaps in school governance and operations (Bray, 1996).

School governance, on the other hand, refers to the structures, policies, and practices that guide the administration and oversight of educational institutions. It includes decision-making procedures, leadership roles, resource allocation, monitoring mechanisms, and the definition of responsibilities among various stakeholders (Bush, 2020). Governance is not limited to administrative efficiency but also incorporates principles such as transparency, equity, and democratic participation. According to UNESCO's International Institute for Educational Planning (2022), school governance frameworks should balance centralized oversight with localized input to ensure both standardization and contextual relevance.

Effective governance requires the involvement of multiple stakeholders; including school leaders, teachers, students, parents, local authorities, and civil society, each contributing their perspectives and expertise. When communities are actively involved in governance, schools benefit from increased legitimacy, enhanced accountability, and broader resource bases. As Henry and Kimathi (2021) assert, schools with inclusive governance structures are better positioned to address equity gaps, improve learner outcomes, and adapt to local socio-economic contexts. Moreover, collaborative governance has been associated with stronger institutional resilience in the face of shocks, such as those presented by pandemics or political instability (OECD, 2022).

The intersection of community engagement and school governance is best captured through the concept of participatory decision-making. This concept recognizes that decision-making processes in schools are more effective and sustainable when informed by the voices and interests of a wide range of actors. Participatory decision-making empowers stakeholders to not only influence outcomes but also take joint responsibility for implementation and evaluation. In the Cameroonian context, participatory governance is operationalized through structures such as Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs), alumni associations, School Management Committees (SMCs), and Regional Councils (Tchombe, 2001).

Each of these actors contributes uniquely to school governance. PTAs typically advocate for accountability and transparency in financial management and school operations. Alumni networks offer professional expertise, mentoring, and financial resources to support school development. Regional Councils, empowered by decentralization laws, are tasked with overseeing infrastructural development, teacher deployment, and implementation of educational policies at the local level (Ngwana, 2021). The central government, through MINESEC, retains responsibility for setting national standards, ensuring regulatory compliance, and managing personnel.

These multiple layers of engagement form an ecosystem of governance that can either foster synergy or result in fragmentation, depending on the effectiveness of communication and collaboration among stakeholders. According to Bryson, Crosby, and Bloomberg (2014), successful participatory governance systems are those that promote a shared vision, build mutual trust, and establish clear roles and accountability mechanisms. In Cameroon, the challenge remains in transitioning from tokenistic participation to authentic community ownership of educational processes.

Furthermore, the conceptualization of community engagement has evolved from peripheral involvement to systemic integration. Scholars now argue for a shift from involvement; where stakeholders are informed or consulted to engagement, which implies co-leadership and co-production of educational outcomes (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). This transition is particularly crucial in contexts like Cameroon, where educational disparities persist and centralized models have proven insufficient in addressing diverse local needs. Community engagement, therefore, is not merely supplementary but fundamental to effective school governance.

The conceptual relationship between community engagement and school governance is anchored in mutual reinforcement: community engagement enhances the inclusivity and responsiveness of

governance structures, while effective governance creates the enabling conditions for sustained community participation. As such, strengthening both concepts simultaneously is essential for realizing quality, equity, and sustainability in education systems, particularly in developing contexts like Mfoundi Division, Cameroon.

Theoretical Background

This study is anchored on five interrelated theories: General Systems Theory, Stakeholder Theory, Collaborative Governance Theory, Participatory Governance Theory, and Decentralisation Theory. These theoretical frameworks offer complementary lenses for understanding the dynamics of community engagement and its influence on school governance in public secondary schools in Cameroon.

General Systems Theory

Proposed by Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1968), General Systems Theory views any organization or social entity as a system composed of interrelated and interdependent components. Applied to the educational context, schools are seen as open systems interacting continuously with their environment, including families, communities, and government institutions. Each element; teachers, students, parents, alumni, local authorities, and policymakers constitutes a subsystem whose function influences the effectiveness of the overall school system.

This theory underscores that changes or dysfunctions in one part of the system (e.g., poor parent involvement or ineffective government oversight) inevitably affect the entire governance process. According to Owens and Valesky (2015), schools that promote systemic integration of all stakeholders tend to demonstrate greater coherence in governance and improved student outcomes. Therefore, community engagement should not be treated as an ancillary activity but as a fundamental component of the educational governance system. The theory supports this study's exploration of how the various actors; parents, alumni, local councils, and MINESEC interact and contribute to governance in Cameroonian schools.

Stakeholder Theory

Developed by Freeman Edward (1984), Stakeholder Theory asserts that organizations must manage relationships with all entities that have a stake in their operations. Traditionally applied in business and corporate governance, the theory has increasingly been adopted in public sector management and education (Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Mitchell et al., 1997). In the educational domain, stakeholders include students, parents, teachers, alumni, policymakers, and community

members. Each of these actors possesses interests, expectations, and resources that can significantly influence the governance and performance of schools.

In Cameroon, school governance has often marginalized non-state actors, despite legal frameworks encouraging their participation. Stakeholder Theory reinforces the normative and instrumental value of inclusive governance. It argues that when all relevant voices are heard and balanced, institutions are more likely to function equitably and effectively (Freeman, Harrison & Wicks, 2007). This theory justifies the inclusion of Parents' Associations, alumni networks, and local councils in school governance, ensuring that educational decisions are not monopolized by state actors but shaped by those most affected.

Collaborative Governance Theory

Collaborative Governance Theory, as articulated by Ansell and Gash (2008), centers on the idea that public decision-making is most effective when it involves structured cooperation between governmental and non-governmental stakeholders. It focuses on consensus-oriented processes that build mutual trust, joint ownership, and shared accountability. Collaborative governance is especially relevant for addressing complex, cross-cutting issues like educational reform, where no single actor holds all the solutions.

This theory identifies key conditions for effective collaboration: face-to-face dialogue, trust-building, shared understanding, and commitment to the process (Balogh, Emerson, & Nabatchi, 2012). In Cameroon's decentralized educational system, collaborative governance provides a blueprint for understanding how different stakeholders such as regional councils, school administrators, and community members can co-design and implement governance strategies. It also addresses common challenges such as power asymmetries, conflicting agendas, and capacity gaps, which often hinder effective school management in resource-constrained environments (Ansell & Torfing, 2021).

Participatory Governance Theory

Participatory Governance Theory emphasizes the active involvement of citizens and stakeholders in decision-making processes, particularly in public institutions such as schools. As Fung and Wright (2003) argue, participatory governance entails the creation of institutional arrangements that enable diverse actors including parents, teachers, alumni, and community members to collaborate with government officials in deliberating, implementing, and evaluating public policies

and services. This approach strengthens democratic accountability and fosters shared responsibility for outcomes.

In the educational sector, participatory governance provides a framework for understanding how inclusive mechanisms such as parent-teacher associations, and stakeholder forums contribute to more responsive and transparent school governance. Within the context of Mfoundi Division, the theory supports the idea that effective school governance cannot be achieved through top-down mandates alone. Rather, it requires the meaningful engagement of the community in areas such as decision-making, resource allocation, monitoring of teacher performance, and ensuring school accountability. Participatory Governance Theory, therefore, aligns with the goals of community engagement by emphasizing collective ownership and collaborative problem-solving in school governance.

Decentralization Theory

Decentralization Theory provides a useful lens for understanding how the transfer of authority and responsibility from central to local governments enhances community engagement and school governance. According to Rondinelli (1981), decentralization encompasses political, administrative, fiscal, and market-based dimensions that aim to improve efficiency, responsiveness, and accountability in public service delivery. In the educational context, decentralization theory suggests that when decision-making power is devolved to local authorities, school administrators, and communities, it allows for more context-specific solutions, stakeholder involvement, and improved governance outcomes.

Applied to the context of public secondary schools in Mfoundi Division, this theory implies that local councils, school boards, and community stakeholders such as parents and alumni can play a meaningful role in shaping policies, managing resources, and evaluating school performance. This is consistent with Cameroon's sectoral decentralization policies, which increasingly entrust Regional and local governments and communities with responsibilities related to education (Ngwoh, 2020). Decentralization Theory, therefore, strengthens the theoretical basis for advocating greater community participation in school governance as a way to enhance transparency, accountability, and effectiveness in public education.

Collectively, these theories provide a robust analytical foundation for this study. General Systems Theory highlights the interconnectedness of actors within the school environment; Stakeholder Theory stresses the ethical and practical imperative of inclusive participation; and Collaborative

Governance Theory outlines mechanisms for multi-stakeholder engagement in decision-making. Together, they offer a holistic framework for examining how community engagement enhances school governance in public secondary schools in Mfoundi Division.

Contextual Background

Cameroon's education sector is regulated by national policies that emphasize decentralized governance and stakeholder participation. The 1998 Orientation Law on Education underscores the joint responsibility of the state, families, and local communities in delivering education (Republic of Cameroon, 1998). The 2004 Decentralization Law empowers councils to manage educational infrastructure and local teacher deployment, while the 2023 Presidential Decree further transfers specific governance functions to regional councils.

Despite these legal frameworks, public secondary schools in Mfoundi Division face persistent governance challenges. Many schools operate with limited infrastructure, inadequate learning materials, and strained teacher-student ratios. Parental involvement is often restricted to financial contributions, while alumni associations lack formal structures for participation. Regional councils, though empowered, face capacity constraints and bureaucratic hurdles. Meanwhile, the central government through MINESEC remains the dominant actor in education, overseeing policy implementation, curriculum development, and teacher deployment.

The urban character of Mfoundi Division, which includes the capital Yaoundé, adds further complexity to governance dynamics. Urban schools are characterized by higher enrolment rates, greater socio-economic diversity, and heightened public scrutiny. These factors demand robust governance mechanisms that integrate diverse community voices while maintaining policy coherence. This study therefore provides a timely examination of how community engagement can be strengthened to enhance governance in this high-stakes educational environment.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the progressive legal and policy frameworks supporting community participation in school governance in Cameroon (Republic of Cameroon, 1998; 2004; 2023), practical implementation remains a challenge, particularly in urban divisions like Mfoundi. Parental engagement is often limited to financial contributions rather than decision-making roles (Tambo, 2003; Henry & Kimathi, 2021), while alumni associations frequently lack the structural mechanisms or formal platforms to contribute meaningfully to school governance (Fonkeng, 2021). Regional councils, although legally empowered by decentralization laws, are constrained by bureaucratic bottlenecks,

limited technical capacity, and insufficient funding (Transparency International-Cameroon, 2021). Furthermore, many schools in Mfoundi operate with dilapidated infrastructure, inadequate pedagogical materials, and an overstretched teaching force, factors that significantly undermine the potential for effective governance and learning outcomes (MINESEC, 2022).

The central government, represented by the Ministry of Secondary Education (MINESEC), continues to exert substantial control over educational governance, particularly in policy formulation, teacher deployment, and curriculum oversight. This creates institutional tensions between centralized authority and decentralized operational responsibilities (Altinyelken, 2021), resulting in governance systems characterized by weak collaboration, inconsistent accountability, and minimal stakeholder inclusion in planning and decision-making. This systemic disconnect has adverse implications on school effectiveness and weakens public confidence in the education sector (World Bank, 2018).

Given the global emphasis on participatory governance as reflected in the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (UNESCO, 2015) and national education policies that stress community involvement, it becomes imperative to assess the practical impacts of community engagement on governance structures. Without concrete evidence on how these actors contribute or are marginalized, reforms risk remaining rhetorical. This study therefore seeks to evaluate the roles of Parents' Associations, alumni networks, Regional Councils, and the Central Government in shaping governance processes and improving educational outcomes in public secondary schools in Mfoundi Division.

This problem is significant because it touches on the sustainability and legitimacy of education governance. As Cameroon continues to implement decentralization reforms, understanding the functionality of participatory governance becomes critical for improving accountability, resource utilization, and stakeholder trust. By diagnosing the operational realities of community engagement in school governance, this study contributes empirical evidence to inform policy revisions, capacity-building strategies, and inclusive practices necessary for the effective management of public secondary schools.

Objectives of the Study

Main Objective

To investigate the extent to which community engagement enhances school governance in selected public secondary schools in Mfoundi Division.

Specific Objectives

To assess the role of Parents' Associations in promoting transparency and accountability in school governance.

To examine the contributions of alumni associations to participatory decision-making and resource mobilization.

To investigate the influence of the Regional Council on school governance structures and processes.

To evaluate the interventions of the Central Government, through MINESEC, in shaping governance policies and ensuring compliance.

Research Questions

General Research Question

To what extent does community engagement enhance school governance in selected public secondary schools in Mfoundi Division?

Specific Research Questions

What role do Parents' Associations play in promoting transparency and accountability in school governance?

How do alumni associations contribute to participatory decision-making and resource mobilization?

To what extent does the Regional Council influence governance structures and processes?

How do the interventions of the Central Government shape governance policies and ensure compliance?

Research Hypotheses

General Hypothesis

H_a: Community engagement significantly enhances school governance in selected public secondary schools in Mfoundi Division.

H₀: Community engagement does not significantly enhance school governance in selected public secondary schools in Mfoundi Division.

Specific Hypotheses

H_{a1}: Parents' Associations have a significant effect on transparency and accountability in school governance.

H₀1: Parents' Associations have no significant effect on transparency and accountability in school governance.

H_a2: Alumni Associations make a significant contribution to participatory decision-making and resource mobilization in school governance.

H₀2: Alumni Associations make no significant contribution to participatory decision-making and resource mobilization in school governance.

H_a3: The Regional Council exerts a significant influence on school governance structures and processes.

H₀3: The Regional Council exerts no significant influence on school governance structures and processes.

H_a4: The Central Government, through the Ministry of Secondary Education (MINESEC), plays a significant role in shaping governance policies and ensuring compliance.

H₀4: The Central Government, through the Ministry of Secondary Education (MINESEC), plays no significant role in shaping governance policies and ensuring compliance.

Justification for the Study

This study is justified by the growing need to improve governance mechanisms in Cameroon's education sector, particularly in urban public secondary schools. It contributes empirical insights into how key community actors; parents, alumni, regional councils, and central government authorities can collectively influence school governance. Given that most existing studies focus either on administrative processes or academic performance, this study fills a critical gap by investigating participatory governance as a determinant of educational quality.

The findings will inform policy reforms and institutional practices, enhancing the capacity of schools to foster inclusive and sustainable governance structures. Moreover, the research aligns with Cameroon's National Development Strategy 2020–2030 (NDS30), the Education Sector Strategy (2022–2026), and the Sustainable Development Goals (especially SDG 4 and SDG 16), which advocate for inclusive education, strong institutions, and citizen engagement.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is manifold:

For Students: It promotes learner-centered environments through participatory governance, improving motivation and academic outcomes.

For Teachers: It highlights collaborative leadership structures that reduce administrative burden and enhance professional autonomy.

For School Administrators: It provides practical strategies for engaging communities in transparent and inclusive decision-making.

For Policy Makers: It delivers evidence-based recommendations for reinforcing decentralization and community involvement in education.

For NGOs and Donors: It identifies opportunities for targeted interventions that build governance capacity in schools.

For Researchers: It contributes to the academic discourse on educational governance, stakeholder theory, and collaborative models in African contexts.

Scope of the Study

Content Scope: The study examines the roles of PTAs, alumni, regional councils, and the central government in school governance, particularly in areas such as decision-making, transparency, resource allocation, and policy implementation.

Geographical Scope: The research is conducted in selected public secondary schools in Mfoundi Division, an urban area in Cameroon's Centre Region.

Temporal Scope: The study covers the 2024/2025 academic year, focusing on current governance practices and community engagement.

Population Scope: The target population comprises teachers and school administrators who directly experience and influence governance processes.

Conceptual Scope: The study is anchored on stakeholder engagement, systems thinking, collaborative and participatory governance within the framework of educational management and reform.

Operational Definition of Terms

Community Engagement: The active participation of various stakeholders, including parents, alumni, regional councils, and the central government, in school governance activities such as decision-making, resource mobilization, and policy implementation.

School Governance: The processes, structures, and relationships used to direct and manage schools, encompassing accountability mechanisms, leadership, resource allocation, and stakeholder participation.

Parent-Teacher Association (PTA): A legally recognized body in Cameroonian schools comprising parents and teachers that supports the school through advocacy, fundraising, and participation in governance.

Alumni: Former students of a school who may engage in its development through mentoring, donations, or participation in planning and advisory structures.

Regional Council: A decentralized government authority in Cameroon tasked with supporting education by managing local resources, monitoring school infrastructure, and collaborating with school authorities.

Central Government (MINESEC): The Ministry of Secondary Education, which oversees national education policies, supervises schools, ensures teacher recruitment, and provides guidelines for governance.

Stakeholder: Any individual or group with an interest or investment in the education process and outcomes, including parents, teachers, students, alumni, councils, and government entities.

Decentralization: The delegation of administrative and decision-making powers from the central government to regional or local authorities, particularly in the education sector.

Transparency: The degree to which school governance processes are open and accountable to all stakeholders, ensuring clarity in decision-making and resource management.

Accountability: A system of responsibility where school leaders and stakeholders are answerable for their decisions, actions, and the outcomes of governance practices.

Organization of the Study

This study is structured into five main chapters:

Chapter One: Introduction – presents the background, problem statement, objectives, research questions and hypotheses, justification, significance, scope, and key definitions of the study.

Chapter Two: Literature Review – explores existing theoretical and empirical literature related to community engagement and school governance, with a focus on the Cameroonian context.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology – describes the research design, study area, target population, sampling techniques, instruments for data collection, data analysis procedures, and ethical considerations.

Chapter Four: Data Presentation and Analysis – provides the analysis of the collected data and interprets the findings in relation to the research objectives and questions.

Chapter Five: Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations – discusses the findings in depth, concludes the study, and offers recommendations for policy, practice, and further research.

Chapter two: Review of related literature

This chapter provides a comprehensive review of existing literature relevant to the study of community engagement and school governance. The literature is organized thematically to reflect the key concepts and variables explored in this research. These include conceptual review, theoretical perspectives on educational governance, empirical studies on community participation, the role of parents and alumni in school management, and the contributions of local and central government actors. The chapter also identifies gaps in the existing literature, particularly in the Cameroonian context, and explains how this study contributes to addressing those gaps.

The review is grounded in the theoretical framework discussed in Chapter One, which comprises General Systems Theory, Stakeholder Theory, Collaborative Governance Theory, Participatory Governance Theory, and Decentralization Theory. These theories inform the selection and interpretation of literature, emphasizing interdependence, inclusiveness, and cooperative mechanisms in education governance. The review draws upon international, African, and Cameroonian literature to provide a broad and contextually relevant foundation for the research.

Conceptual Review

A clear understanding of the key concepts is essential for exploring the role of community engagement in school governance. In the context of this study, community engagement refers to the meaningful involvement of various stakeholders; including parents, alumni, local councils, and the central government in the development, decision-making, and overall functioning of schools. School governance, on the other hand, captures the structures, processes, and practices through which schools are managed and held accountable, emphasizing collaboration, transparency, and effective utilization of resources. These concepts are inherently interconnected: the effectiveness of school governance is often shaped by the depth and quality of community engagement, while the willingness of the community to participate is influenced by how governance structures operate. By focusing on these foundational concepts, this section provides the conceptual clarity needed to frame the subsequent discussions in the study.

The Concept of Community Engagement

Community engagement is a multifaceted concept that has gained prominence in contemporary educational discourse as a mechanism for improving governance, accountability, and inclusiveness in schools. It broadly refers to the active participation of individuals, groups, and organizations within a community in activities that promote the welfare and effectiveness of educational

institutions. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2019), community engagement involves “collaborative relationships between schools, families, and broader community actors that enhance the learning environment and educational outcomes.” In this sense, it is not limited to sporadic involvement in school events, but rather entails structured, continuous, and purposeful partnerships aimed at improving the functioning of schools.

From an educational perspective, Epstein (2018) views community engagement as part of a comprehensive framework of school–family–community partnerships that support student learning and development. She identifies shared responsibility and mutual respect as the foundations of effective engagement. Similarly, UNESCO (2020) emphasizes that communities play a pivotal role in strengthening educational systems through advocacy, monitoring, and resource mobilization. These international perspectives converge on the idea that community engagement enhances both the quality and equity of education by ensuring that decision-making and implementation processes reflect the voices and needs of all stakeholders.

In the African context, community engagement in education is often shaped by social, economic, and cultural realities. The World Bank (2018) argues that in Sub-Saharan Africa, involving community members in school governance fosters accountability and promotes local ownership of educational outcomes, especially where centralized systems have proven ineffective in addressing school-level challenges. In Cameroon, community engagement is also enshrined in the national education policy framework which recognizes the role of parents, local councils, and other stakeholders as partners in school management. The Cameroon Education and Training Sector Strategy (MINESEC, 2013–2020) underscores the importance of participatory governance in schools through Parents’ Associations, alumni networks, and regional authorities who collaborate to improve infrastructure, ensure discipline, and support policy implementation.

Community engagement therefore operates at several levels. At the micro level, it involves parents and alumni who directly contribute to the academic and moral development of learners through decision-making, mentorship, and resource mobilization. At the meso level, it encompasses the participation of local councils and community-based organizations in providing financial, infrastructural, and social support to schools. At the macro level, the central government remains the primary facilitator, ensuring that community engagement aligns with national education policies and standards. This multilevel structure reflects a systems perspective where each actor plays a complementary role in sustaining effective governance.

Scholars such as Hiemstra and Van der Walt (2019) note that effective community engagement requires clear communication channels, transparency, and shared accountability between schools and their surrounding communities. When communities are actively engaged, they become agents of change rather than passive beneficiaries, contributing ideas, resources, and oversight that promote continuous improvement. In this regard, community engagement is not an optional supplement to school administration, but a vital component of good governance that ensures inclusivity, responsiveness, and sustainability in the education sector.

In the context of this study, community engagement is understood as the intentional participation of parents, alumni, local councils, and the central government in decision-making, resource mobilization, and policy implementation processes that enhance school governance in public secondary schools in Mfoundi Division. This conceptualization aligns with the decentralization framework adopted in Cameroon, where local participation and collaboration between schools and their communities are considered essential for improving educational outcomes and ensuring accountability at all levels.

The Concept of School Governance

School governance refers to the structures, processes, and relationships through which educational institutions are directed, controlled, and held accountable for achieving their objectives. It embodies the principles of participation, transparency, accountability, and equity in the management of school affairs. According to Bush (2020), school governance encompasses the frameworks that define who makes decisions, how those decisions are made, and how responsibility for outcomes is shared among stakeholders. It thus ensures that schools operate in a manner consistent with both educational goals and public expectations.

From an institutional perspective, the World Bank (2018) defines school governance as the exercise of authority and the management of resources within the education sector, aimed at improving learning outcomes through efficiency and accountability. This view emphasizes that governance is not limited to administrative control but extends to how decisions about curriculum, finance, staffing, and discipline are made and implemented. UNESCO (2017) adds that effective governance systems in education should promote participation from all stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and local communities, in order to ensure relevance and sustainability of school programs.

In the African context, school governance has evolved as part of broader reforms to democratize education management. Ngware and Oketch (2018) note that decentralization in education management across many African countries has led to the establishment of participatory governance models where local actors contribute to decision-making, resource allocation, and policy oversight. These reforms aim to bring education closer to the people, enhance accountability, and improve service delivery. Similarly, Winkler and Gershberg (2020) argue that participatory governance at the school level strengthens local ownership and aligns school operations with community needs and national development priorities.

In Cameroon, school governance is guided by the principles of decentralization and collective responsibility as articulated in the Law No. 98/004 of 14 April 1998 governing education in the country. The law underscores that education is a shared responsibility among the State, local and regional authorities, parents, and other community partners. The Cameroon Education and Training Sector Strategy (MINESEC, 2013–2020) further specifies that effective school governance should ensure transparent management of financial resources, participation of all stakeholders in decision-making, and the promotion of accountability mechanisms within schools. This framework is implemented through structures such as Parents' Associations, School Management Boards, and Local Education Councils which serve as bridges between schools and their communities.

School governance can therefore be understood as a multidimensional construct encompassing several interrelated dimensions such as leadership and decision-making, stakeholder involvement, policy implementation and compliance, transparency and financial integrity, inclusivity and equity, monitoring and evaluation, and conflict resolution. These dimensions ensure that schools are not merely administrative units but responsive institutions that reflect community values and aspirations. Bush and Glover (2016) highlight that effective governance depends largely on the leadership capacity of school heads to foster collaboration, manage resources efficiently, and create an environment conducive to teaching and learning.

Within the context of this study, school governance refers to the processes, relationships, and mechanisms through which public secondary schools in Mfoundi Division are managed and held accountable. It involves the interaction of various stakeholders; including parents, alumni, local councils, and the central government, who collectively influence decision-making, resource utilization, policy implementation, and overall school performance.

Modalities of Community Engagement in School Governance

Community engagement in school governance is manifested through the active participation of various stakeholders, each contributing distinct yet complementary roles that enhance the functioning and management of schools. Parents constitute the first critical group, participating actively in decision-making processes, providing financial support and resources, advocating for school improvement, and collaborating with teachers to maintain student discipline. Their engagement ensures that school policies and practices are responsive to students' needs and reflect the expectations of the immediate community (Epstein, 2018). By sharing responsibility for educational outcomes, parents help to establish a participatory governance culture that promotes transparency, accountability, and inclusivity.

Building on the foundational role of parents, alumni represent a second modality of community engagement. Alumni maintain long-term connections with their alma mater and contribute conceptually to governance through mentorship, career guidance, strategic advisory roles, policy advocacy, community linkages, resource mobilization, and oversight functions (Hiemstra & Van der Walt, 2019). Their engagement strengthens governance by providing experiential knowledge, facilitating strategic decision-making, and supporting institutional development, thereby complementing parental participation and extending the scope of stakeholder involvement beyond the immediate school community.

In addition to parents and alumni, local or regional councils play a pivotal role in school governance, serving as intermediaries between schools and the broader community. Their engagement encompasses financial support and budget allocation, infrastructure development and maintenance, community mobilization, promotion of decentralization and autonomy, and the provision of scholarships and other educational support programs (World Bank, 2018). By linking schools with community resources and local administrative structures, councils facilitate participatory decision-making and ensure that governance practices are sensitive to the local context. This modality complements parental and alumni contributions by providing institutional support and enabling schools to operate effectively within their communities.

At the macro level, the central government ensures that the broader regulatory, policy, and resource framework for school governance is established and maintained. Its conceptual role includes recruitment and payment of teachers, supervision and quality assurance, policy implementation and compliance, safeguarding school security and child protection, and collaboration with other

stakeholders to strengthen school management (Law No. 98/004, 1998; MINESEC, 2013–2020). By providing leadership, regulatory oversight, and strategic direction, the central government integrates the efforts of parents, alumni, and local councils into a coherent governance system, ensuring that educational objectives are met and governance is standardized, accountable, and sustainable.

Community engagement in school governance is multidimensional and synergistic. Each stakeholder group; parents, alumni, regional councils, and the central government, plays a distinct yet interconnected role, contributing to decision-making, resource mobilization, oversight, and policy implementation. Conceptually, these modalities collectively create an integrated governance system in which schools operate efficiently, responsively, and inclusively, reflecting both institutional goals and community priorities.

Dimensions of Community Engagement and School Governance

School governance encompasses the structures, processes, and practices through which schools are directed, managed, and held accountable. Its effectiveness depends not only on the formal leadership within the school but also on the active participation of multiple stakeholders, including parents, alumni, local councils, and the central government (Epstein, 2018; Hiemstra & Van der Walt, 2019). Each of these actors contributes to governance by strengthening various dimensions that ensure schools operate efficiently, inclusively, and sustainably.

Parental involvement enhances governance by supporting leadership and decision-making through active participation in policy discussions, administrative planning, and school management (Epstein, 2018). It promotes stakeholder collaboration by ensuring that decisions reflect the needs and priorities of the school community. Parents also play a role in resource mobilization and advocacy for school improvement while collaborating with teachers to guide student discipline and behavior. Their engagement reinforces transparency, accountability, and a culture of shared responsibility (Epstein, 2018; UNESCO, 2017).

Alumni engagement complements parental involvement by providing mentorship, strategic guidance, and advisory support (Hiemstra & Van der Walt, 2019). Their role strengthens governance by offering long-term perspectives, facilitating policy alignment, and reinforcing oversight mechanisms. Alumni involvement in mobilizing resources ensures that schools can undertake strategic initiatives and maintain institutional development, thereby reinforcing the sustainability of governance practices (Hiemstra & Van der Walt, 2019).

Local or regional councils act as bridges between schools and the wider community, facilitating resource allocation, infrastructure development, and public awareness campaigns (World Bank, 2018). They promote decentralized decision-making and school autonomy, enabling schools to respond effectively to local challenges. Councils also support inclusivity and community participation, ensuring that governance decisions are contextually relevant and equitable (World Bank, 2018).

At the macro level, the central government provides the regulatory and policy framework within which schools operate (Law No. 98/004, 1998; MINESEC, 2013–2020). Its governance role includes teacher recruitment and remuneration, supervision and quality assurance, policy enforcement, and ensuring school security and child protection. By coordinating with parents, alumni, and local councils, the central government ensures alignment between institutional objectives and national educational goals, reinforcing accountability, standardization, and sustainability over the long term (MINESEC, 2013–2020).

School governance is also characterized by its attention to curriculum and instructional leadership, ensuring that educational programs meet national standards while addressing student needs (Bush, 2020). Effective governance requires continuous monitoring and evaluation to inform decisions and foster improvement (UNESCO, 2017). Inclusivity and equity guarantee that all students, staff, and stakeholders have fair access to opportunities and resources, promoting social justice and reducing disparities within the school environment (World Bank, 2018).

School-community partnerships enhance governance by fostering reciprocal relationships with local actors, mobilizing resources, and reinforcing social cohesion (Epstein, 2018). Conflict resolution ensures that disputes among stakeholders do not impede educational objectives, maintaining harmony and focus on learning outcomes (Bush, 2020). Finally, sustainability and long-term planning secure the continuity and resilience of governance structures, anticipating challenges and preparing schools to adapt to changing educational demands (Hiemstra & Van der Walt, 2019; World Bank, 2018).

Together, these dimensions illustrate that effective school governance is multifaceted, interconnected, and dependent on the active engagement of diverse stakeholders. Parents, alumni, local councils, and the central government each play distinct but complementary roles, ensuring that governance is participatory, accountable, and aligned with both institutional objectives and community priorities (Epstein, 2018; Hiemstra & Van der Walt, 2019; World Bank, 2018).

In essence, the conceptual review reveals that the vitality of school governance is deeply intertwined with the active engagement of the community. Parents, alumni, local councils, and the central government each play a pivotal role in shaping policies, guiding decision-making, and fostering accountability, demonstrating that governance in isolation is insufficient for meaningful school development. The multidimensional nature of school governance; encompassing strategic planning, resource management, policy implementation, and stakeholder collaboration, thrives most effectively when nurtured by these collaborative community efforts. This synthesis highlights that sustainable progress in public secondary schools emerges from a dynamic partnership between school authorities and the community, where each contributes uniquely to creating an environment conducive to academic excellence and holistic development. With this conceptual understanding, the stage is set to explore empirical studies that illuminate how such engagements translate into tangible outcomes in the schools of Mfoundi Division.

Theoretical Perspectives on Governance and Participation

Educational governance and community participation have long been informed by a range of theoretical perspectives, each offering unique insights into how schools are managed, how power is distributed, and how various actors interact to shape educational outcomes. This section explores key theoretical lenses that underpin our understanding of governance and stakeholder involvement, drawing from education, political science, organizational studies, and development theory. The theories discussed include General Systems Theory, Stakeholder Theory, Collaborative Governance Theory, Participatory Governance Theory, and Decentralization Theory.

General Systems Theory (GST)

General Systems Theory (GST), pioneered by biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy in 1968, provides a foundational lens for understanding the dynamic and interconnected nature of social and organizational systems, including educational institutions. According to Bertalanffy (1968), a system is a complex set of interacting and interdependent components that work synergistically toward achieving common objectives. In this theoretical framework, schools are seen not as isolated units but as open systems that constantly interact with their internal and external environments. These environments comprise various subsystems such as students, teachers, school administrators, parents, alumni, regional councils, and central government agencies.

From the GST perspective, each subsystem has specific roles and functions, and the performance of the overall system i.e., the school depends on the smooth interaction among its components.

When one subsystem fails or is underutilized, it creates imbalances that can compromise the effectiveness of the entire system. This view emphasizes the need for coordination, communication, and cooperation across subsystems. In the realm of school governance, General Systems Theory thus becomes particularly relevant for analyzing the multifaceted relationships among stakeholders and understanding how their engagement or lack thereof impacts school functioning.

In educational research and leadership studies, GST has been widely adopted to assess institutional effectiveness, policy implementation, and stakeholder collaboration. Owens and Valesky (2015) assert that when applied to school administration, GST helps decision-makers understand the school as a living organism, where the health of one part influences the vitality of the others. For instance, inadequate involvement of parents in school decision-making may affect students' academic outcomes, just as a weak alumni network can limit external resource mobilization for school development. Similarly, when the regional council lacks the authority or resources to fulfil its governance mandate, it can lead to an overburdened central administration and delayed school improvement projects.

GST introduces the concept of feedback loops, which are essential in maintaining system stability and promoting adaptability. Feedback from parents, students, and teachers provides essential information that can help school leaders make informed decisions. According to Checkland (1999), positive feedback supports growth and innovation, while negative feedback helps identify problems and maintain balance within the system. In this sense, community engagement in school governance functions as a feedback mechanism that informs policy direction, highlights implementation gaps, and enables course correction. When such feedback is ignored or discouraged, the system becomes less responsive and more prone to dysfunction.

Moreover, GST emphasizes the principle of equifinality; the idea that a system can achieve the same goal through different paths or configurations. This principle is particularly useful for understanding governance diversity across schools in different contexts. A rural school might rely more heavily on community elders and traditional leadership, while an urban school might draw on formalized alumni networks or professional Parent-Teacher Associations. As long as the various subsystems are aligned and effectively coordinated, the school system can still function optimally. This insight promotes flexibility in governance models while maintaining a focus on shared outcomes such as student achievement and institutional accountability.

In the Cameroonian context, General Systems Theory offers a valuable lens through which to assess the impact of decentralization policies on school governance. The 1998 Orientation Law and the 2004 Decentralization Law both recognize the importance of local actors in educational administration. However, in practice, the degree of collaboration between regional councils, parents, alumni, and school administrators varies widely (Njong, 2010). GST helps explain how the absence of one or more active subsystems such as disengaged alumni or underfunded councils can undermine governance effectiveness, even when legal frameworks are in place.

Bush (2020) reinforces this view by arguing that systems thinking in education encourages a holistic approach to leadership and governance. It urges school leaders to consider the interdependence of internal school operations (e.g., curriculum, teacher performance, student welfare) with external community dynamics (e.g., economic conditions, political stability, parental expectations). A systemic approach ensures that governance decisions are not made in isolation but are informed by the broader social ecosystem in which the school operates.

Importantly, GST aligns with contemporary educational discourses that promote stakeholder inclusivity, participatory governance, and collaborative leadership. The 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 on quality education, advocate for inclusive and equitable educational systems where community actors play meaningful roles in planning, monitoring, and resource allocation. GST supports this ambition by offering a framework for identifying leverage points where stakeholder engagement can be optimized to improve governance and learning outcomes.

Additionally, the theory helps conceptualize schools as learning organizations that must continuously adapt to external and internal changes. In this regard, the role of community engagement becomes not merely supportive but transformative. For example, if local councils report infrastructural deficits, alumni may respond with fundraising campaigns, and parents might adjust their support strategies accordingly. This form of coordinated responsiveness is what Bertalanffy termed “dynamic equilibrium” a state of balance maintained through ongoing adaptation and feedback.

Recent studies have applied GST to educational innovation and reform. A study by Alhija and Arar (2021) used systems thinking to examine school resilience during crisis conditions and found that schools with stronger stakeholder integration were better able to adapt to disruption. In Mfoundi Division, where schools face complex challenges such as overcrowding, funding shortages, and

fragmented governance, GST can serve as a roadmap for diagnosing systemic weaknesses and designing integrated solutions.

However, a key critique of GST is that it may overemphasize harmony and underplay power dynamics. Schools are not just technical systems but also political entities where interests may conflict. As Senge (2006) notes, systems theory must be complemented by leadership that is ethically grounded and socially responsive. In the Cameroonian case, meaningful engagement of parents, alumni, and local authorities requires not just structural inclusion but also capacity-building, trust-building, and transparency in decision-making.

General Systems Theory provides a robust theoretical foundation for understanding the complexity of school governance. It underscores the need for coordination among all educational stakeholders and validates community engagement as essential to systemic effectiveness. By applying GST, this study situates governance challenges and opportunities within a broader analytical framework that values inclusivity, adaptability, and continuous feedback. Schools in Mfoundi Division, and Cameroon at large can benefit from this approach by fostering more integrated, collaborative, and context-sensitive governance systems that reflect the needs and contributions of all actors.

Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder Theory, first developed by Edward Freeman in 1984, presents a shift from the traditional shareholder-focused or authority-centered governance models to a more inclusive approach that recognizes the legitimate interests of all parties who influence or are influenced by an organization's operations. Initially proposed in the field of business ethics, this theory has gained traction in public administration, health, education, and nonprofit sectors as a foundational model for inclusive and participatory governance (Freeman, 1984). In contrast to narrow views that prioritize top-down authority, Stakeholder Theory underscores that the success and legitimacy of institutions are directly linked to how well they identify, engage, and balance the interests of multiple stakeholder groups (Freeman, Harrison & Wicks, 2007).

In the educational context, stakeholders include a wide range of actors such as students, teachers, school administrators, parents, alumni, community leaders, local councils, central government agencies (like the Ministry of Secondary Education MINESEC in Cameroon), and development partners. Each of these actors plays a role in shaping school experiences, governance processes, and ultimately student outcomes. Stakeholder Theory in education thus promotes a governance

paradigm that values relational accountability over bureaucratic control and encourages schools to be responsive to diverse and sometimes competing expectations (Mitchell, Agle & Wood, 1997). Stakeholder Theory becomes especially relevant in the governance of public secondary schools in Cameroon, where responsibilities are legally shared among different actors but, in practice, are unevenly distributed and implemented. For example, while decentralization laws assign local councils the responsibility for supporting school infrastructure and teacher deployment, MINESEC retains significant control over policy formulation, curriculum design, and budgetary allocations. This creates a tension between central authority and local responsiveness. According to Donaldson and Preston (1995), Stakeholder Theory provides a framework for resolving such tensions through inclusive dialogue, mutual respect, and structured power-sharing mechanisms. In practical terms, applying Stakeholder Theory in school governance means establishing platforms and mechanisms for participation, such as School Management Boards (SMBs), Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs), alumni committees, and community oversight committees. These platforms serve not only as feedback channels but as formal venues for participatory decision-making. When these structures are absent, weak, or nonfunctional, stakeholder expectations are unmet, leading to apathy, conflict, and disengagement. For instance, if parents feel their voices are only needed for fundraising and not for academic or disciplinary policies, their commitment to school development diminishes over time (Epstein, 2018).

Stakeholder Theory also encourages equity in participation by considering the salience of different stakeholders based on three key attributes: power, legitimacy, and urgency (Mitchell et al., 1997). In the context of Cameroonian public secondary schools, while MINESEC may possess power and legitimacy, actors such as parents or alumni may have urgent concerns about infrastructure or teacher absenteeism. Ignoring these stakeholders simply because they lack formal authority violates the normative assumptions of Stakeholder Theory and leads to ineffective governance. By contrast, empowering all stakeholders especially marginalized ones strengthens legitimacy, promotes accountability, and fosters collaborative problem-solving (Bush, 2020).

In Mfoundi Division, which hosts the capital city Yaoundé, schools are situated in a politically sensitive and demographically diverse environment. Stakeholder Theory helps explain the governance complexities in such settings. Urban schools often experience higher levels of scrutiny, expectations, and competition for limited resources. Here, the interests of parents with professional backgrounds may clash with administrative priorities, while local councils may struggle with

overlapping mandates. Stakeholder Theory advises against suppressing these conflicts; instead, it encourages institutions to treat them as opportunities for negotiation and system improvement (Freeman et al., 2010).

For instance, consider a case where the PTA requests that school fees be used to hire part-time teachers for overcrowded classes, but MINESEC regulations restrict how these funds can be allocated. A stakeholder-focused governance approach would involve structured consultations among parents, the school principal, alumni, and local education officials to arrive at a solution that meets both regulatory requirements and local needs. This approach not only resolves the issue at hand but builds stakeholder trust and institutional resilience.

Furthermore, Stakeholder Theory advocates for transparency and shared responsibility. Transparency entails the timely sharing of information such as school budgets, policy changes, and evaluation reports with all stakeholders. This enables stakeholders to make informed contributions and hold each other accountable. Shared responsibility, on the other hand, implies that governance is not the sole duty of principals or ministries but a co-created process where roles and obligations are negotiated and agreed upon collectively (Bray, 2001).

Recent research supports the value of Stakeholder Theory in school governance. A study by Abah and Tabe (2021) on participatory governance in Cameroonian secondary schools found that schools with inclusive governance structures had better student performance and lower teacher absenteeism. The study concluded that active involvement of parents, alumni, and local councils contributed to improved resource mobilization and conflict resolution. These findings resonate with the principles of Stakeholder Theory, which stress the instrumental, moral, and strategic importance of stakeholder engagement (Donaldson & Preston, 1995).

Nonetheless, Stakeholder Theory is not without limitations. Critics argue that it lacks clarity in prioritizing stakeholder interests when conflicts arise. For example, if parents demand the dismissal of a teacher for poor performance, but the teacher's union defends due process, who should the school principal listen to? While the theory promotes balance, it does not always provide precise guidelines for conflict resolution. This is why Stakeholder Theory is often best used in conjunction with other models such as Collaborative Governance Theory or General Systems Theory, which can provide operational clarity and systemic perspectives.

Despite these challenges, Stakeholder Theory remains a powerful tool for rethinking governance in the context of education reform and decentralization. Its emphasis on inclusivity, legitimacy,

and mutual respect aligns well with Cameroon's education laws and international development goals, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4.5), which advocate for inclusive and participatory approaches to educational quality.

Stakeholder Theory provides a vital theoretical foundation for analyzing and improving governance in public secondary schools. It urges educational institutions to shift from hierarchical models to participatory frameworks where diverse voices are not only heard but valued. In the Cameroonian context, especially in urban settings like Mfoundi Division, the application of Stakeholder Theory can help reconcile central policy directives with local needs and aspirations, ultimately leading to more responsive, equitable, and sustainable education systems.

Collaborative Governance Theory

Collaborative Governance Theory, as articulated by Ansell and Gash (2008), offers a robust framework for understanding how government institutions and non-state actors can work together to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes. It is defined as “a governing arrangement where one or more public agencies directly engage non-state stakeholders in a collective decision-making process that is formal, consensus-oriented, and deliberative and that aims to make or implement public policy or manage public programs or assets.” This model of governance is grounded in the idea that complex societal issues, such as education quality, cannot be addressed effectively through top-down mandates alone. Instead, solutions emerge from partnerships where all stakeholders like government officials, parents, educators, alumni, and regional councils participate in deliberation, negotiation, and joint problem-solving.

The relevance of Collaborative Governance Theory in education is growing globally, especially in the context of decentralization and stakeholder engagement policies. In Cameroon, education reforms since the 1998 Orientation Law and the 2004 Decentralization Law have emphasized local participation in school governance. Collaborative governance provides a conceptual and practical guide for translating these policies into reality. It aligns with the expectations that regional and local authorities, Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs), alumni groups, and civil society actors will all have a say in how public secondary schools are managed, resourced, and held accountable (Republic of Cameroon, 2004; 2023).

According to Balogh, Emerson, and Nabatchi, (2012), collaborative governance comprises three key components: (1) principled engagement, (2) shared motivation, and (3) joint capacity. Principled engagement refers to inclusive dialogues where stakeholders contribute perspectives,

learn from each other, and agree on collective goals. Shared motivation involves building mutual trust, legitimacy, and commitment to collective action. Joint capacity refers to the institutional and organizational arrangements that enable collaboration, such as policies, financial support, and human resources. These elements are interdependent and reinforce one another. Where one is weak such as low trust or limited capacity collaborative outcomes may falter.

In the context of Cameroon's public secondary schools, the application of Collaborative Governance Theory reveals both opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, there are legal frameworks that mandate the involvement of various community actors in school management. PTAs are expected to contribute ideas and resources; alumni are anticipated to offer mentorship and infrastructural support; local councils are responsible for supervising school projects and staffing needs; while MINESEC sets national guidelines and ensures policy coherence. However, as observed in Mfoundi Division, these actors often operate in silos, with limited coordination and occasional duplication of roles.

Collaborative governance theorists argue that institutional mechanisms such as school management boards, participatory planning committees, and transparent financial reporting systems can facilitate better synergy among stakeholders (Ansell & Torfing, 2021). For instance, in successful models of school collaboration from South Africa and Kenya, deliberate structures like School Governing Bodies (SGBs) are used to harness the input of teachers, parents, community leaders, and local authorities in decision-making (Ngcobo & Tikly, 2010). These structures ensure that no single entity dominates and that decisions reflect a broad base of interests. For collaborative governance to function well, trust among stakeholders is paramount. In interviews conducted in this study, several respondents lamented a lack of transparency and communication between school administrators and PTAs or alumni. One PTA leader noted that they were often invited only to endorse decisions already made, not to co-create them. This finding illustrates a breakdown in principled engagement, which Collaborative Governance Theory identifies as a foundation for legitimacy. Trust-building, therefore, involves more than holding meetings; it requires creating safe spaces where concerns can be expressed, feedback acted upon, and collective accountability nurtured.

Another core concept in Collaborative Governance Theory is power-sharing. Traditional governance models often vest decision-making authority in a centralized agency (such as MINESEC), which limits the scope for bottom-up participation. Collaborative governance, by

contrast, distributes decision-making power to those closest to the problem. In practice, this means that school heads, PTA leaders, and local government representatives should jointly decide on school priorities, budget allocations, and evaluation frameworks. When authority is not shared, the risk of stakeholder disengagement and policy failure increases.

Institutional capacity is also a vital determinant of collaborative success. Many local councils in Cameroon, including those in Mfoundi Division, face constraints in human resources, budgetary allocations, and technical expertise. Without capacity strengthening, the devolution of responsibilities becomes a paper exercise. Collaborative Governance Theory underscores the importance of capacity-building investments such as training programs, digital infrastructure, and knowledge-sharing platforms as prerequisites for effective collaboration (Ansell & Gash, 2008). Importantly, collaborative governance is not a one-size-fits-all model. It must be adapted to the local context. In Mfoundi Division, the diversity of stakeholders and the urban complexity of Yaoundé require flexible models that can respond to rapid enrolment growth, diverse community needs, and frequent policy changes. For example, collaborative governance in a school serving marginalized populations may need to include NGOs, religious organizations, and local employers, in addition to traditional stakeholders. Each brings a unique perspective and resource that can contribute to holistic school improvement.

Moreover, Collaborative Governance Theory highlights the importance of conflict resolution mechanisms. In any setting where multiple actors with varying interests are brought together, conflicts are inevitable. Effective collaboration involves anticipating such tensions and having systems in place for negotiation, mediation, and consensus-building. Schools should be equipped with guidelines on how to address disagreements within PTAs, between alumni and school heads, or among council officials and ministry representatives.

There is also a normative dimension to collaborative governance it is inherently democratic. It enhances legitimacy, deepens civic engagement, and fosters ownership of outcomes. In the context of education, this means that students, parents, and communities are more likely to support and protect institutions that they helped shape. This has implications for sustainability. Collaborative arrangements are more resilient to political and economic shocks because they are grounded in broad-based support rather than reliance on centralized mandates (OECD, 2019).

Collaborative Governance Theory provides a valuable lens for analysing and improving the governance of public secondary schools in Cameroon. It shifts the focus from command-and-

control systems to cooperative partnerships that leverage the strengths of diverse actors. By fostering principled engagement, shared motivation, and joint capacity, collaborative governance enhances the responsiveness, transparency, and sustainability of educational institutions. In Cameroon's evolving education landscape, especially in urban areas like Mfoundi Division, applying this theory can bridge gaps between policy intentions and implementation realities, ultimately improving school performance and community trust.

Participatory Governance Theory

Participatory Governance Theory emphasizes the active and meaningful involvement of citizens and civil society in the decision-making processes of public institutions. Rather than relegating governance to government officials and technocrats, it advocates for direct input and deliberation by the people who are most affected by public policy (Fung & Wright, 2003). In education, this means incorporating parents, students, teachers, alumni, and community organizations into discussions about how schools are run, funded, evaluated, and improved. The theory rests on the principles of transparency, inclusivity, empowerment, and shared responsibility.

According to Cornwall (2008), participatory governance shifts the logic of policy-making from a top-down to a bottom-up approach, in which community members co-design the rules and priorities guiding their institutions. This process is not only ethically desirable as it promotes democratic values and accountability, but is also empirically effective in improving public service delivery, including education (Barrette & Gaventa, 2012). When communities are engaged, schools become more attuned to local needs, resources are more equitably allocated, and there is greater buy-in from families and other stakeholders.

Participatory Governance Theory has been widely applied in the Global South as a response to the shortcomings of centralized governance models. UNESCO (2015) notes that many education systems in Africa, Asia, and Latin America have adopted participatory mechanisms such as school management committees, community education forums, and parent-teacher associations (PTAs) to improve transparency and responsiveness. These mechanisms serve as platforms for citizens to influence decisions around school budgeting, teacher recruitment, curriculum design, and infrastructure development. In contexts where state capacity is limited, participatory governance can serve as a compensatory strategy, mobilizing local knowledge and resources to fill institutional gaps (Bruns, Filmer, & Patrinos, 2011).

In Cameroon, participatory governance is embedded in national legal and policy frameworks. The 1998 Orientation Law on Education articulates the co-responsibility of the state, local authorities, and communities in educational delivery (Republic of Cameroon, 1998). This legal foundation was strengthened by the 2004 Decentralization Law, which transferred certain administrative and financial powers to regional and local councils. Further reinforcement came through the 2023 Presidential Decree delegating specific school governance functions to regional councils, such as monitoring infrastructure and mobilizing local resources. Despite this promising legal landscape, the implementation of participatory governance in Cameroonian schools faces several challenges. First is bureaucratic inertia. Institutional cultures inherited from colonial administrative systems tend to prioritize hierarchical decision-making, with limited space for community involvement (Fonkeng, 2021). School heads often view participation as a formality or symbolic gesture rather than a meaningful exercise in co-management. PTAs and alumni associations are sometimes convened after key decisions have already been made, limiting their influence on actual outcomes. Second is elite capture, where power within participatory structures is monopolized by a small group of individuals with political or economic influence. This distorts the democratic intent of participatory governance, marginalizing less privileged voices such as single parents, low-income families, and rural dwellers. Studies in West and Central Africa show that when participatory mechanisms are not properly designed, they may reinforce existing inequalities rather than remedy them (De Grauwe, 2005).

Third is the lack of technical and organizational capacity among grassroots actors. While parents and local stakeholders may be willing to engage, they often lack the training, information, and institutional support required to participate effectively. This creates an asymmetry of knowledge and power between community members and professional educators or government officials. Consequently, participation may become passive or tokenistic, rather than transformative.

To address these challenges, Participatory Governance Theory recommends several enabling conditions. These include capacity building, access to information, institutionalized spaces for deliberation, and legal safeguards that protect the rights of participants. Capacity building can involve training workshops for PTA members on budgeting, leadership, and conflict resolution. Access to information ensures that community members are well-informed about school policies, finances, and performance indicators. Institutionalized spaces such as school governance councils with clear mandates, help formalize participation and ensure continuity. Legal safeguards, such as

enforceable regulations and appeal mechanisms, help prevent abuses of power and ensure accountability.

Evidence from participatory education programs across sub-Saharan Africa supports these prescriptions. For instance, in Kenya, the introduction of Boards of Management (BoMs) with parent and community representation has led to better monitoring of school finances and improved infrastructure development (Ngware et al., 2007). In Uganda, Community-Based Monitoring systems have enhanced teacher attendance and student achievement in poorly resourced schools (Bjorkman & Svensson, 2009). These successes suggest that, when well-designed and supported, participatory governance can enhance both process legitimacy and learning outcomes.

In the specific case of Mfoundi Division, Cameroon's most urbanized and politically complex educational district Participatory Governance Theory is particularly pertinent. The diverse socio-economic backgrounds of residents, high student enrolment rates, and demand for quality education necessitate inclusive governance mechanisms. Schools need to create platforms where urban parents, alumni, NGOs, municipal authorities, and education inspectors can collaboratively diagnose challenges and co-create solutions. This is especially important in resolving issues related to resource shortages, teacher distribution, and discipline enforcement.

Importantly, participatory governance should not be limited to parents and adults. Involving students, particularly senior students, in school governance can cultivate leadership, civic responsibility, and a stronger school identity. UNESCO (2021) advocates for age-appropriate student participation as a critical component of democratic education. In Cameroon, this could take the form of student councils being represented in school board meetings or contributing to policy discussions on discipline and extracurricular activities.

Participatory Governance Theory also connects with broader goals of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (quality education) and SDG 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions). Goal 4.7 calls for education that fosters global citizenship and participatory governance is both a means and an end to achieving this. Similarly, SDG 16 highlights the importance of inclusive institutions as the backbone of sustainable development. By embedding participatory governance in school systems, countries like Cameroon align with international development norms while strengthening domestic democratic culture.

Participatory Governance Theory offers a compelling lens for evaluating and improving community involvement in educational governance. Its emphasis on voice, agency, and inclusivity

complements other governance frameworks such as Stakeholder Theory and Collaborative Governance Theory. While Cameroon's legal and policy frameworks support participatory governance in principle, implementation is hindered by structural and cultural constraints. Overcoming these will require deliberate reforms to empower grassroots actors, institutionalize participatory spaces, and monitor their functioning. For schools in Mfoundi Division, embracing participatory governance can significantly enhance legitimacy, responsiveness, and long-term educational outcomes.

Decentralization Theory

Decentralization Theory refers to the process through which authority, responsibility, and resources are transferred from central governments to subordinate or quasi-independent levels of government or organizations, such as regional councils, municipalities, or school-level management bodies. It is a core concept in public administration, particularly within governance and education reform debates, and is often promoted as a way to improve efficiency, enhance responsiveness, and promote equity in service delivery (Rondinelli, 1981; Smoke, 2003). Decentralization enables decision-making to take place closer to the people, reflecting their unique needs and priorities.

In the education sector, decentralization is seen as a response to the limitations of top-down, bureaucratic governance that often fails to account for local diversity and complexities (Bray, 1999). Educational decentralization can take various forms: administrative decentralization, which delegates operational responsibilities to sub-national units; fiscal decentralization, which involves local control over educational budgets and revenue generation; political decentralization, which enables local communities to elect or influence educational decision-makers; and pedagogical decentralization, which provides autonomy to teachers and schools in curriculum implementation and teaching methods (UNESCO, 2005).

The relevance of Decentralization Theory in education lies in its ability to explain how governance structures can be reconfigured to enhance service delivery through proximity, participation, and contextualization. It assumes that actors at the local level possess better knowledge of their circumstances and are thus more capable of designing appropriate interventions, provided they have adequate capacity and autonomy. Proponents argue that decentralization improves transparency, boosts stakeholder engagement, and accelerates innovation by reducing the rigidity of centrally imposed policies (World Bank, 2013).

In the context of Cameroon, decentralization in education has been a long-term strategic goal. The 1996 Constitution laid the groundwork by defining the country as a decentralized unitary state, paving the way for sectoral reforms. The 2004 Decentralization Law (Law No. 2004/017) represented a pivotal moment in formalizing the delegation of responsibilities to regional and local councils, including those related to education. This law allocated roles such as infrastructure development, maintenance of school facilities, supervision of educational activities, and partial oversight of school personnel to local councils. More recently, the 2023 Presidential Decree reinforced the decentralization agenda by explicitly transferring specific education-related powers such as the recruitment and deployment of support staff and the management of infrastructural projects to regional governments.

These policy frameworks are rooted in the theoretical foundations of decentralization that advocate for subsidiarity: the principle that decisions should be made at the most immediate or local level possible. Decentralization in Cameroon's education system seeks to bring services closer to the people, encourage localized innovation, and increase stakeholder accountability through community engagement (Republic of Cameroon, 2023). The legal justification is also complemented by commitments under international frameworks, such as the Dakar Framework for Action (2000) and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which emphasize inclusive and participatory education governance.

However, while the theoretical rationale for decentralization is compelling, its implementation in Cameroon has faced substantial challenges, many of which are echoed in the experience of public secondary schools in Mfoundi Division. First, there is a significant problem of resource inadequacy. Although responsibilities have been delegated, the corresponding financial resources often remain centralized. Councils are expected to construct, maintain, and supervise schools, yet they frequently lack the budgets to carry out these tasks effectively (Transparency International-Cameroon, 2021). This mismatch creates what scholars refer to as "unfunded mandates," undermining the efficiency benefits promised by decentralization (Winkler & Gershberg, 2000). Second, human capacity limitations hamper the effectiveness of decentralized education governance. Local authorities often lack trained personnel with the requisite expertise in educational planning, budgeting, and supervision. For example, councils may not have education officers or inspectors equipped to assess teaching quality, enforce curriculum standards, or develop strategic school improvement plans. As a result, decision-making may be transferred in theory but

not in practice, leaving regional authorities heavily reliant on guidance from the central Ministry of Secondary Education (MINESEC) (Tchombe, 2020).

Third, the coexistence of central and local governance mechanisms has created institutional overlap and ambiguity. In theory, regional councils and school management bodies are responsible for a range of governance activities. However, in practice, MINESEC retains significant control over key functions such as teacher recruitment, curriculum development, and policy enforcement. This results in overlapping mandates, with frequent confusion about roles and responsibilities. Principals and PTA leaders in Mfoundi Division report conflicting instructions from regional and central authorities, leading to governance bottlenecks and poor coordination. Decentralization Theory, therefore, helps illuminate the complexities and friction that arise when governance transitions are only partially implemented (Smoke, 2003).

Fourth, there is a democratic deficit in the way decentralization is executed. While community participation is encouraged rhetorically, many governance processes remain top-down. Local school communities often lack adequate representation in council-level education planning, and their input is rarely institutionalized. Decentralization without participation risks becoming a mere administrative reshuffle rather than a transformational reform (Crook & Manor, 1998).

Despite these challenges, evidence from other countries suggests that effective decentralization can improve educational outcomes when supported by strong institutional design, adequate resources, and capacity-building. For instance, in Ghana, the Education Decentralization Project empowered district-level education authorities and promoted community participation in school monitoring, resulting in improved teacher accountability and learning outcomes (USAID, 2014). Similarly, Uganda's Universal Primary Education program, backed by decentralized governance mechanisms, saw marked improvements in access and efficiency, although equity remained an issue (DeStefano, 2006).

In the specific case of Mfoundi Division, where public secondary schools face mounting pressures due to population growth, urbanization, and socio-economic disparities, decentralization could offer a framework for localized innovation. Local councils could design context-specific interventions to address infrastructural deficits, overcrowded classrooms, or community-specific discipline challenges. However, this will require not just political will but also strategic investment in local governance systems.

Decentralization Theory also aligns with the broader goal of promoting educational equity. By allowing decisions to be made closer to disadvantaged communities, decentralization can help tailor services to marginalized groups. For example, councils could prioritize resources for underserved neighbourhoods or adapt school calendars to suit the needs of working-class families. Yet this potential will only be realized if councils are empowered not just on paper, but in practice. Decentralization Theory offers a powerful analytical lens to assess the evolving governance of public secondary schools in Cameroon. It explains both the opportunities and pitfalls associated with shifting authority from central to local levels. While Cameroon's legal and policy frameworks are aligned with decentralization principles, actual implementation remains partial and inconsistent. For decentralization to succeed in improving educational governance in Mfoundi Division, it must be accompanied by sufficient resources, trained personnel, clear mandates, and meaningful community participation. Only then can the full promise of decentralized governance efficiency, responsiveness, and equity be realized in Cameroon's education sector.

Integrative Framework for the Study

The governance of public secondary schools in Cameroon, particularly in urbanized and complex divisions like Mfoundi, cannot be fully understood through a single theoretical lens. Instead, a composite framework integrating multiple governance and organizational theories is required to account for the various actors, levels of authority, contextual dynamics, and processes involved. This study adopts a multidimensional integrative framework built upon five complementary theories: General Systems Theory, Stakeholder Theory, Collaborative Governance Theory, Participatory Governance Theory, and Decentralization Theory.

Each theory contributes uniquely to understanding the structure, challenges, and opportunities in community engagement and school governance. Their combined application allows for a rich and layered interpretation of both the formal and informal mechanisms shaping governance outcomes in public secondary schools in Mfoundi Division.

General Systems Theory: The School as an Interdependent System

General Systems Theory (Bertalanffy, 1968) is foundational in providing a holistic lens through which to view schools as dynamic, open systems composed of interconnected subsystems—teachers, students, parents, alumni, regional councils, and the Ministry of Secondary Education (MINESEC). Any change in one component of the system has implications for the others. For

example, if parents are excluded from financial decision-making, the system may experience reduced legitimacy, accountability issues, or unmet student needs.

GST also emphasizes the role of feedback loops, coordination, and the importance of information flow between subsystems. When feedback from PTAs or regional councils is ignored by school leadership or central authorities, the system's capacity for self-correction diminishes. Therefore, community engagement is not merely a desirable feature, but a systemic necessity for the sustainable functioning and improvement of schools.

Stakeholder Theory: Balancing Diverse Interests

Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984) foregrounds the rights, responsibilities, and contributions of all individuals and groups affected by or capable of influencing an organization's outcomes. In public secondary school governance, this includes not only traditional actors like the school administration and government but also parents, alumni, community leaders, local councils, and development partners.

This theory provides an ethical and pragmatic basis for inclusive governance, especially in pluralistic environments like Mfoundi where stakeholders may hold differing priorities. While MINESEC may emphasize national equity and policy standardization, parents may be more concerned about local infrastructure, safety, or academic performance. Stakeholder Theory aids in reconciling these tensions by advocating for transparency, negotiation, and shared accountability. It also promotes relational governance where authority is exercised through relationships and legitimacy, rather than strict bureaucratic command. This has clear implications for how school management teams should engage with local communities not as mere donors or supporters, but as co-owners of the educational process.

Collaborative and Participatory Governance Theories: Inclusive Decision-Making

Collaborative Governance Theory (Ansell & Gash, 2008) and Participatory Governance Theory (Fung & Wright, 2003) focus on the processes and norms that support multi-actor engagement in public decision-making. These frameworks are critical in evaluating the extent to which Cameroonian public schools foster dialogue, trust-building, shared motivation, and consensus-oriented outcomes.

Participatory governance highlights the need to institutionalize avenues through which non-state actors especially marginalized communities can exercise voice and agency. In the Cameroonian context, this is backed by the 1998 Education Orientation Law and subsequent decentralization

policies that promote parent and community involvement in school governance (Republic of Cameroon, 1998; 2004). However, as noted in empirical literature, bureaucratic inertia and elite capture often prevent meaningful participation (Fonkeng, 2021).

These theories are thus not only explanatory but normative as they help diagnose gaps in participatory infrastructure, such as weak PTAs, opaque school boards, or uncoordinated alumni associations. They also point to best practices, such as establishing school-community fora, transparent budgeting processes, and joint development plans that align the visions of stakeholders with educational goals.

Decentralization Theory: Contextualizing Power and Responsibility

Decentralization Theory (Rondinelli, 1981; Bray, 1999) situates school governance within a broader policy and institutional framework. It helps explain the ongoing shift in Cameroon from highly centralized educational decision-making to a more distributed governance model involving regional councils and local actors. This framework accounts for the formal legal mandates provided by the 2004 Decentralization Law and reinforced by the 2023 Presidential Decree.

However, Decentralization Theory also emphasizes that transferring responsibility without corresponding resources, capacity, and authority can lead to dysfunction. In many schools in Mfoundi, councils lack adequate funds or trained personnel to fulfill their mandates. Moreover, institutional ambiguities often result in overlaps between MINESEC and regional councils, undermining accountability and efficiency.

The theory thus provides a lens to assess whether the decentralized roles of parents, alumni, local authorities, and councils are symbolic or substantive. It highlights the importance of clarifying mandates, strengthening local governance capacities, and ensuring downward accountability mechanisms that make community engagement meaningful.

Together, these five theories offer a robust integrative framework that supports a nuanced understanding of school governance as a dynamic interplay between structures, actors, and processes. They allow this study to examine not just who is involved in school governance, but also how they interact, why their roles matter, and what outcomes result from various patterns of engagement.

- General Systems Theory frames schools as interdependent systems requiring all actors to function in coordination.

- Stakeholder Theory ensures that the analysis recognizes the legitimacy and power dynamics among all participants.
- Collaborative and Participatory Governance Theories highlight the importance of democratic practices, trust-building, and inclusivity in governance.
- Decentralization Theory anchors the study within Cameroon’s evolving legal and institutional landscape.

By applying this integrated theoretical foundation, the study can better diagnose structural gaps, process inefficiencies, and potential opportunities for reform in the governance of public secondary schools in Mfoundi Division. This framework also informs the empirical analysis and helps interpret findings in a way that is both analytically rigorous and policy-relevant.

Conceptual Review

A clear understanding of the key concepts is essential for exploring the role of community engagement in school governance. In the context of this study, community engagement refers to the meaningful involvement of various stakeholders; including parents, alumni, local councils, and the central government in the development, decision-making, and overall functioning of schools. School governance, on the other hand, captures the structures, processes, and practices through which schools are managed and held accountable, emphasizing collaboration, transparency, and effective utilization of resources. These concepts are inherently interconnected: the effectiveness of school governance is often shaped by the depth and quality of community engagement, while the willingness of the community to participate is influenced by how governance structures operate. By focusing on these foundational concepts, this section provides the conceptual clarity needed to frame the subsequent discussions in the study.

Concept of Community Engagement in Education

Community engagement is a multifaceted concept that has gained prominence in contemporary educational discourse as a mechanism for improving governance, accountability, and inclusiveness in schools. It broadly refers to the active participation of individuals, groups, and organizations within a community in activities that promote the welfare and effectiveness of educational institutions. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2019), community engagement involves “collaborative relationships between schools, families, and broader community actors that enhance the learning environment and educational outcomes.”

In this sense, it is not limited to sporadic involvement in school events, but rather entails structured, continuous, and purposeful partnerships aimed at improving the functioning of schools.

From an educational perspective, Epstein (2018) views community engagement as part of a comprehensive framework of school–family–community partnerships that support student learning and development. She identifies shared responsibility and mutual respect as the foundations of effective engagement. Similarly, UNESCO (2020) emphasizes that communities play a pivotal role in strengthening educational systems through advocacy, monitoring, and resource mobilization. These international perspectives converge on the idea that community engagement enhances both the quality and equity of education by ensuring that decision-making and implementation processes reflect the voices and needs of all stakeholders.

In the African context, community engagement in education is often shaped by social, economic, and cultural realities. The World Bank (2018) argues that in Sub-Saharan Africa, involving community members in school governance fosters accountability and promotes local ownership of educational outcomes, especially where centralized systems have proven ineffective in addressing school-level challenges. In Cameroon, community engagement is also enshrined in the national education policy framework which recognizes the role of parents, local councils, and other stakeholders as partners in school management. The Cameroon Education and Training Sector Strategy (MINESEC, 2013–2020) underscores the importance of participatory governance in schools through Parents' Associations, alumni networks, and regional authorities who collaborate to improve infrastructure, ensure discipline, and support policy implementation.

Community engagement therefore operates at several levels. At the micro level, it involves parents and alumni who directly contribute to the academic and moral development of learners through decision-making, mentorship, and resource mobilization. At the meso level, it encompasses the participation of local councils and community-based organizations in providing financial, infrastructural, and social support to schools. At the macro level, the central government remains the primary facilitator, ensuring that community engagement aligns with national education policies and standards. This multilevel structure reflects a systems perspective where each actor plays a complementary role in sustaining effective governance.

Scholars such as Hiemstra and Van der Walt (2019) note that effective community engagement requires clear communication channels, transparency, and shared accountability between schools and their surrounding communities. When communities are actively engaged, they become agents

of change rather than passive beneficiaries, contributing ideas, resources, and oversight that promote continuous improvement. In this regard, community engagement is not an optional supplement to school administration, but a vital component of good governance that ensures inclusivity, responsiveness, and sustainability in the education sector.

In the context of this study, community engagement is understood as the intentional participation of parents, alumni, local councils, and the central government in decision-making, resource mobilization, and policy implementation processes that enhance school governance in public secondary schools in Mfoundi Division. This conceptualization aligns with the decentralization framework adopted in Cameroon, where local participation and collaboration between schools and their communities are considered essential for improving educational outcomes and ensuring accountability at all levels.

Concept of School Governance

School governance refers to the structures, processes, and relationships through which educational institutions are directed, controlled, and held accountable for achieving their objectives. It embodies the principles of participation, transparency, accountability, and equity in the management of school affairs. According to Bush (2020), school governance encompasses the frameworks that define who makes decisions, how those decisions are made, and how responsibility for outcomes is shared among stakeholders. It thus ensures that schools operate in a manner consistent with both educational goals and public expectations.

From an institutional perspective, the World Bank (2018) defines school governance as the exercise of authority and the management of resources within the education sector, aimed at improving learning outcomes through efficiency and accountability. This view emphasizes that governance is not limited to administrative control but extends to how decisions about curriculum, finance, staffing, and discipline are made and implemented. UNESCO (2017) adds that effective governance systems in education should promote participation from all stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and local communities, in order to ensure relevance and sustainability of school programs.

In the African context, school governance has evolved as part of broader reforms to democratize education management. Ngware and Oketch (2018) note that decentralization in education management across many African countries has led to the establishment of participatory governance models where local actors contribute to decision-making, resource allocation, and

policy oversight. These reforms aim to bring education closer to the people, enhance accountability, and improve service delivery. Similarly, Winkler and Gershberg (2020) argue that participatory governance at the school level strengthens local ownership and aligns school operations with community needs and national development priorities.

In Cameroon, school governance is guided by the principles of decentralization and collective responsibility as articulated in the Law No. 98/004 of 14 April 1998 governing education in the country. The law underscores that education is a shared responsibility among the State, local and regional authorities, parents, and other community partners. The Cameroon Education and Training Sector Strategy (MINESEC, 2013–2020) further specifies that effective school governance should ensure transparent management of financial resources, participation of all stakeholders in decision-making, and the promotion of accountability mechanisms within schools. This framework is implemented through structures such as Parents' Associations, School Management Boards, and Local Education Councils which serve as bridges between schools and their communities.

School governance can therefore be understood as a multidimensional construct encompassing several interrelated dimensions such as leadership and decision-making, stakeholder involvement, policy implementation and compliance, transparency and financial integrity, inclusivity and equity, monitoring and evaluation, and conflict resolution. These dimensions ensure that schools are not merely administrative units but responsive institutions that reflect community values and aspirations. Bush and Glover (2016) highlight that effective governance depends largely on the leadership capacity of school heads to foster collaboration, manage resources efficiently, and create an environment conducive to teaching and learning.

Within the context of this study, school governance refers to the processes, relationships, and mechanisms through which public secondary schools in Mfoundi Division are managed and held accountable. It involves the interaction of various stakeholders; including parents, alumni, local councils, and the central government, who collectively influence decision-making, resource utilization, policy implementation, and overall school performance.

Relationship between Community Engagement and School Governance

Community engagement in school governance is manifested through the active participation of various stakeholders, each contributing distinct yet complementary roles that enhance the functioning and management of schools. Parents constitute the first critical group, participating

actively in decision-making processes, providing financial support and resources, advocating for school improvement, and collaborating with teachers to maintain student discipline. Their engagement ensures that school policies and practices are responsive to students' needs and reflect the expectations of the immediate community (Epstein, 2018). By sharing responsibility for educational outcomes, parents help to establish a participatory governance culture that promotes transparency, accountability, and inclusivity.

Building on the foundational role of parents, alumni represent a second modality of community engagement. Alumni maintain long-term connections with their alma mater and contribute conceptually to governance through mentorship, career guidance, strategic advisory roles, policy advocacy, community linkages, resource mobilization, and oversight functions (Hiemstra & Van der Walt, 2019). Their engagement strengthens governance by providing experiential knowledge, facilitating strategic decision-making, and supporting institutional development, thereby complementing parental participation and extending the scope of stakeholder involvement beyond the immediate school community.

In addition to parents and alumni, local or regional councils play a pivotal role in school governance, serving as intermediaries between schools and the broader community. Their engagement encompasses financial support and budget allocation, infrastructure development and maintenance, community mobilization, promotion of decentralization and autonomy, and the provision of scholarships and other educational support programs (World Bank, 2018). By linking schools with community resources and local administrative structures, councils facilitate participatory decision-making and ensure that governance practices are sensitive to the local context. This modality complements parental and alumni contributions by providing institutional support and enabling schools to operate effectively within their communities.

At the macro level, the central government ensures that the broader regulatory, policy, and resource framework for school governance is established and maintained. Its conceptual role includes recruitment and payment of teachers, supervision and quality assurance, policy implementation and compliance, safeguarding school security and child protection, and collaboration with other stakeholders to strengthen school management (Law No. 98/004, 1998; MINESEC, 2013–2020). By providing leadership, regulatory oversight, and strategic direction, the central government integrates the efforts of parents, alumni, and local councils into a coherent governance system,

ensuring that educational objectives are met and governance is standardized, accountable, and sustainable.

Community engagement in school governance is multidimensional and synergistic. Each stakeholder group; parents, alumni, regional councils, and the central government, plays a distinct yet interconnected role, contributing to decision-making, resource mobilization, oversight, and policy implementation. Conceptually, these modalities collectively create an integrated governance system in which schools operate efficiently, responsively, and inclusively, reflecting both institutional goals and community priorities.

Dimensions of Community Engagement in School Governance

School governance encompasses the structures, processes, and practices through which schools are directed, managed, and held accountable. Its effectiveness depends not only on the formal leadership within the school but also on the active participation of multiple stakeholders, including parents, alumni, local councils, and the central government (Epstein, 2018; Hiemstra & Van der Walt, 2019). Each of these actors contributes to governance by strengthening various dimensions that ensure schools operate efficiently, inclusively, and sustainably.

Parental involvement enhances governance by supporting leadership and decision-making through active participation in policy discussions, administrative planning, and school management (Epstein, 2018). It promotes stakeholder collaboration by ensuring that decisions reflect the needs and priorities of the school community. Parents also play a role in resource mobilization and advocacy for school improvement while collaborating with teachers to guide student discipline and behavior. Their engagement reinforces transparency, accountability, and a culture of shared responsibility (Epstein, 2018; UNESCO, 2017).

Alumni engagement complements parental involvement by providing mentorship, strategic guidance, and advisory support (Hiemstra & Van der Walt, 2019). Their role strengthens governance by offering long-term perspectives, facilitating policy alignment, and reinforcing oversight mechanisms. Alumni involvement in mobilizing resources ensures that schools can undertake strategic initiatives and maintain institutional development, thereby reinforcing the sustainability of governance practices (Hiemstra & Van der Walt, 2019).

Local or regional councils act as bridges between schools and the wider community, facilitating resource allocation, infrastructure development, and public awareness campaigns (World Bank, 2018). They promote decentralized decision-making and school autonomy, enabling schools to

respond effectively to local challenges. Councils also support inclusivity and community participation, ensuring that governance decisions are contextually relevant and equitable (World Bank, 2018).

At the macro level, the central government provides the regulatory and policy framework within which schools operate (Law No. 98/004, 1998; MINESEC, 2013–2020). Its governance role includes teacher recruitment and remuneration, supervision and quality assurance, policy enforcement, and ensuring school security and child protection. By coordinating with parents, alumni, and local councils, the central government ensures alignment between institutional objectives and national educational goals, reinforcing accountability, standardization, and sustainability over the long term (MINESEC, 2013–2020).

School governance is also characterized by its attention to curriculum and instructional leadership, ensuring that educational programs meet national standards while addressing student needs (Bush, 2020). Effective governance requires continuous monitoring and evaluation to inform decisions and foster improvement (UNESCO, 2017). Inclusivity and equity guarantee that all students, staff, and stakeholders have fair access to opportunities and resources, promoting social justice and reducing disparities within the school environment (World Bank, 2018).

School-community partnerships enhance governance by fostering reciprocal relationships with local actors, mobilizing resources, and reinforcing social cohesion (Epstein, 2018). Conflict resolution ensures that disputes among stakeholders do not impede educational objectives, maintaining harmony and focus on learning outcomes (Bush, 2020). Finally, sustainability and long-term planning secure the continuity and resilience of governance structures, anticipating challenges and preparing schools to adapt to changing educational demands (Hiemstra & Van der Walt, 2019; World Bank, 2018).

Together, these dimensions illustrate that effective school governance is multifaceted, interconnected, and dependent on the active engagement of diverse stakeholders. Parents, alumni, local councils, and the central government each play distinct but complementary roles, ensuring that governance is participatory, accountable, and aligned with both institutional objectives and community priorities (Epstein, 2018; Hiemstra & Van der Walt, 2019; World Bank, 2018).

In essence, the conceptual review reveals that the vitality of school governance is deeply intertwined with the active engagement of the community. Parents, alumni, local councils, and the central government each play a pivotal role in shaping policies, guiding decision-making, and

fostering accountability, demonstrating that governance in isolation is insufficient for meaningful school development. The multidimensional nature of school governance; encompassing strategic planning, resource management, policy implementation, and stakeholder collaboration, thrives most effectively when nurtured by these collaborative community efforts. This synthesis highlights that sustainable progress in public secondary schools emerges from a dynamic partnership between school authorities and the community, where each contributes uniquely to creating an environment conducive to academic excellence and holistic development. With this conceptual understanding, the stage is set to explore empirical studies that illuminate how such engagements translate into tangible outcomes in the schools of Mfoundi Division.

Empirical Review on Community Engagement in School Governance

Empirical studies across global, regional, and national contexts have increasingly illuminated the critical role that community engagement plays in the governance and effectiveness of educational institutions. These studies have shown that when communities including parents, alumni, civil society organizations, and local authorities are meaningfully involved in decision-making processes, school governance tends to be more transparent, responsive, and sustainable (Epstein, 2018; Bray, 2001). This section presents empirical evidence from international, Sub-Saharan African, and Cameroonian contexts, with a focus on public secondary education.

International Evidence

Globally, inclusive governance in education has emerged as a key determinant of school performance, equity, and accountability. Countries with structured models for involving local communities in educational governance demonstrate a correlation between stakeholder involvement and improved educational outcomes.

In the United States, Epstein (2018) observed that schools with institutionalized family and community engagement frameworks achieved higher levels of student performance and stronger school climates. Anderson and Minke (2007) found that parental involvement in school planning processes significantly contributed to student motivation and academic achievement. These results are echoed in Canadian studies, such as Pushor and Ruitenberg (2005), which noted that when parents were treated as co-educators, student learning outcomes improved substantially. The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC, 2012) further advocates for inclusive education policies that actively engage indigenous communities in culturally relevant curriculum development.

In the United Kingdom, the Education Act of 2002 formally recognized the role of governing bodies composed of parents, teachers, and community members in overseeing school leadership, finances, and curriculum priorities. Leithwood et al. (2004) observed that schools with strong participatory governance structures were more resilient to policy changes and demonstrated consistent performance across assessment indicators.

The Finnish education system exemplifies community-centric governance. Local municipal authorities manage schools with input from teachers, parents, and elected community representatives (Sahlberg, 2015). This governance model emphasizes trust, autonomy, and inclusiveness, leading to one of the world's highest-performing and most equitable school systems. Municipal councils play an active role in recruiting principals, budgeting, and setting educational priorities in collaboration with school boards.

Similarly, in New Zealand, educational governance is largely decentralized, with school Boards of Trustees including parents and community members as voting participants. According to Wylie (2012), schools that foster active parent and community involvement experience better learner outcomes and higher satisfaction rates among staff and students.

Evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa

Community engagement in school governance across Sub-Saharan Africa presents a complex picture one of potential and innovation, but also of persistent challenges. Several countries in the region have institutionalized structures such as School Management Committees (SMCs), Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs), and local education boards to promote participatory governance.

In Kenya, Oketch and Rolleston (2007) identified that schools with strong SMCs and active PTAs showed enhanced learner achievement, better teacher discipline, and improved transparency in fund utilization. The Free Primary Education policy implementation in Kenya highlighted the importance of these structures in mobilizing resources, supervising construction projects, and monitoring teacher attendance. However, studies also note that members often lack the necessary training and understanding of their roles (Gershberg, 2009; Wamahiu, 2015).

In Ghana, empirical studies emphasize the effectiveness of capacity-building initiatives for SMCs. Abreh and Wilmot (2020) documented that schools where committee members were trained in financial management, instructional oversight, and leadership reported higher accountability and better use of government grants. However, challenges such as limited funding and elite capture

where community elites dominate decision-making continue to hinder inclusive participation (Adu-Gyamfi, 2014).

Ugandan studies by De Grauwe (2005) and Musoke (2010) point to the enabling role of civil society organizations in enhancing local governance capacities. The engagement of religious institutions, community-based organizations, and NGOs has proven vital in fostering trust and sustainability in school governance. Yet, as noted by Ndeezi (2018), structural weaknesses such as bureaucratic red tape and unclear mandates often lead to confusion among stakeholders.

In Tanzania, Mushi (2018) observed that the integration of parents and community leaders into school improvement planning significantly improved teacher attendance, student discipline, and infrastructure development. Nonetheless, the study also cautioned against overburdening community members without corresponding training or compensation, which can lead to participation fatigue and disillusionment.

Across the region, community engagement has also faced setbacks due to political interference, lack of recognition of traditional authorities in formal structures, and failure to institutionalize community roles in national policy documents (Bray, 2001; Vavrus & Bartlett, 2013). Many of these issues reflect a gap between policy intentions and ground-level realities.

Empirical Insights from Cameroon

In Cameroon, the empirical literature on community engagement in school governance is still emerging, though its importance is increasingly acknowledged in both policy and academic discourse. The 1998 Education Orientation Law and the 2004 Decentralization Law laid the groundwork for participatory governance, but their implementation has faced considerable constraints.

Fonkeng and Tamajong (2009) observed that parental engagement in Cameroonian secondary schools remains superficial, with PTAs primarily focused on fee collection and discipline matters. They found that many parents were unaware of their rights and roles in school governance, and school management rarely solicited their input in budgeting or academic planning.

Tchombe et al. (2011), in their multi-site evaluation of decentralization in Cameroonian education, found that while PTAs and alumni associations existed in most schools, their involvement in governance was ad hoc and lacked strategic coordination. Many Parent Associations operated without legal registration or by-laws, limiting their authority and sustainability. School heads often perceived PTAs as subordinate actors rather than strategic partners.

Ngwana (2022) provided updated insights into the operational challenges of decentralization reforms in the education sector. Despite formal devolution of power, regional and municipal councils struggle with inadequate budgets, insufficient technical staff, and limited authority. School principals frequently bypass local authorities, citing delays and inefficiencies, which undermines the coherence of governance systems. The same study showed that alumni associations remained largely informal and underutilized, except in elite urban schools where networks were stronger and better organized.

A government evaluation conducted by the Ministry of Basic Education (MINEDUB, 2021) in the Mfoundi Division revealed stark disparities in community engagement levels across schools. Only 35% of schools had active alumni associations, and most operated without formal roles in governance. PTA meeting attendance was irregular, and feedback loops between stakeholders were often non-existent. Regional council officials reported limited collaboration from central authorities and poor communication with school heads.

Furthermore, Transparency International Cameroon (2021) reported that corruption and mismanagement of school funds remain serious challenges. Community members are often sidelined from financial oversight, which exacerbates mistrust and reduces willingness to participate. These governance gaps point to a systemic failure to institutionalize participatory mechanisms in school management.

Nevertheless, there are emerging success stories. Pilot projects in Buea and Bamenda municipalities have experimented with participatory budgeting, school report cards, and inclusive school development planning, leading to improved transparency and community satisfaction (World Bank, 2022). These cases offer promising models for replication across other regions.

The empirical landscape in Cameroon underscores the urgency of bridging the policy-practice gap in school governance. The evidence suggests that while community engagement structures exist on paper, their effectiveness is limited by poor implementation, lack of capacity-building, and insufficient institutional support. These findings strongly align with the current study's aim to assess and improve community engagement in public secondary school governance in Mfoundi Division.

The Cameroonian Legal and Policy Context for Community Engagement in School Governance

Cameroon's legal and policy framework provides a formal foundation for community participation in school governance. The 1998 Orientation Law on Education (Law No. 98/004 of 14 April 1998) stipulates that education is a shared responsibility between the state, families, and local communities. This legal provision marks a paradigm shift toward participatory governance by recognizing the role of communities in shaping and sustaining educational development.

The 2004 Law on Decentralization (Law No. 2004/017 of July 22, 2004) represents a cornerstone policy that devolves certain powers and responsibilities to local and regional authorities. Specifically, it mandates that councils should be involved in school infrastructure development, the provision of teaching and learning materials, and the monitoring of educational delivery. These mandates are reinforced by the 2010 Law on Regional and Local Authorities, which explicitly outlines the educational responsibilities assigned to regional bodies.

A major milestone in recent years is the April 2023 Presidential Decree on the Transfer of Educational Powers to Regional Councils. This decree operationalizes long-standing decentralization provisions by transferring functions such as school inspection, teacher deployment oversight, and local curriculum adaptation to regional authorities. While this is a positive development in aligning governance with grassroots realities, implementation challenges remain, particularly around capacity, resources, and coordination between levels of government.

The Education Sector Strategy (2023–2030), developed by MINESEC and MINEDUB, further outlines national goals for education development with explicit reference to decentralization and stakeholder engagement. It advocates for school-based management models that empower PTAs, alumni associations, and school councils to contribute meaningfully to governance. The strategy emphasizes gender equity, inclusive participation, and local accountability mechanisms.

Other national policy documents, including the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), Vision 2035, and the National Development Strategy 2020–2030 (NDS30), also highlight education governance as a key pillar for national transformation. These policies frame community engagement not only as a democratic right but also as an engine for sustainable development.

Despite these legal and policy provisions, gaps exist in terms of enforcement and operationalization. Many school stakeholders, including parents and local counsellors, lack awareness of their rights and responsibilities under the law. Institutional support for training,

communication, and coordination is also insufficient. Moreover, the duality of central and local control often results in overlapping mandates and administrative friction.

In conclusion, Cameroon has made considerable legal and policy strides in institutionalizing community participation in school governance. However, realizing these ambitions requires sustained political will, institutional capacity-building, and mechanisms for accountability. This study builds on this legal and policy context to examine how such frameworks function in practice in the governance of public secondary schools in Mfoundi Division.

Barriers to Effective Engagement

Despite the recognized benefits of community engagement in school governance, numerous barriers continue to impede meaningful and sustainable participation in the Cameroonian context. These challenges are both systemic and operational, reflecting institutional weaknesses, socio-cultural constraints, and administrative inertia.

1. Lack of Capacity and Training: One of the most cited barriers is the limited capacity of community stakeholders; particularly parents, alumni, and local council members, to effectively engage in school governance processes. Many lack the necessary knowledge of educational policies, financial management, and pedagogical priorities to contribute meaningfully to decision-making (Fonkeng, 2021). As a result, their involvement is often superficial, reduced to mere attendance at meetings or participation in disciplinary matters. Studies have shown that without targeted capacity-building programs, stakeholders remain passive observers rather than active contributors (Abreh & Wilmot, 2020).

2. Information Asymmetry: A persistent obstacle to effective engagement is the lack of transparency and information-sharing between school administrators and community members. Ngwana (2022) noted that principals and school heads often withhold key information related to budgets, school performance, and development plans, citing bureaucratic confidentiality or time constraints. This lack of access to timely and relevant information undermines stakeholders' trust in the process and inhibits informed participation. Moreover, the absence of formalized feedback mechanisms further isolates communities from school management affairs.

3. Top-down Administrative Culture: Cameroon's education system remains heavily centralized, with a strong tradition of hierarchical control emanating from the Ministry of Secondary Education (MINESEC). This top-down administrative culture often stifles innovation, initiative, and local ownership at the school level (Fonkeng & Tamajong, 2009). Even in the

context of decentralization, school heads may still prefer to seek guidance from regional or national authorities rather than collaborate with local actors. This diminishes the role of community stakeholders and reinforces the perception that governance is the exclusive domain of professionals and government officials.

4. Weak Legal Enforcement and Inadequate Resourcing: Although Cameroon has adopted several legal and policy frameworks to promote community participation; including the 1998 Orientation Law, the 2004 Decentralization Law, and the 2023 Presidential Decree, their implementation remains inconsistent. Transparency International-Cameroon (2021) highlighted the lack of regulatory enforcement mechanisms and resource allocation to support stakeholder engagement. For instance, Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) often operate without formal bylaws, and local councils lack the funds or technical expertise to monitor school activities effectively.

5. Elite Capture and Tokenism: In some urban settings, such as Yaoundé’s Mfoundi Division, PTAs and alumni associations are vulnerable to elite capture, where a few influential individuals dominate discussions and decision-making processes. This marginalizes the voices of less-privileged community members and weakens the democratic potential of engagement structures. Token participation; where stakeholders are involved symbolically but not substantively, further exacerbates disengagement and apathy (Cornwall, 2008).

6. Cultural and Linguistic Barriers: In bilingual and multicultural communities, language and cultural differences may inhibit inclusive engagement. School meetings often occur in French, which can exclude English-speaking parents or those from indigenous communities. This reinforces social stratification and limits participation among minority groups.

These barriers collectively compromise the effectiveness of community engagement in school governance and point to the need for institutional reforms, sustained investment in stakeholder capacity, and stronger accountability frameworks. Addressing these challenges is essential to realizing the full potential of participatory governance in Cameroon’s public education system.

Gaps in the Literature

While a growing body of international and regional scholarship has emphasized the value of community engagement in school governance, several notable gaps remain, especially within the Cameroonian context. These gaps highlight the fragmented nature of current knowledge, the

underrepresentation of certain actors, and the lack of rigorous empirical assessment at the sub-national level.

1. Limited Empirical Research in Cameroon: Despite policy advancements such as the 1998 Orientation Law and the 2004 Decentralization Law, there is a dearth of empirical research exploring how these frameworks are implemented in real-world school governance structures. Much of the existing literature in Cameroon is either conceptual or based on small case studies (Fonkeng & Tamajong, 2009; Tchombe et al., 2011), lacking the breadth and depth necessary to generalize findings. Moreover, systematic studies examining the effectiveness of stakeholder engagement, particularly in urban divisions like Mfoundi are virtually non-existent.

2. Focus on PTAs, Neglect of Other Actors: The majority of studies in Cameroon and across Sub-Saharan Africa focus almost exclusively on Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs), often overlooking the roles of other key stakeholders such as alumni associations, regional and municipal councils, and local traditional authorities. This narrow focus obscures the broader ecosystem of community actors whose roles and interactions may significantly influence school governance outcomes (Ngwana, 2022). There is a need for more inclusive research that captures the full spectrum of community participants.

3. Lack of Disaggregated Urban Data: Many empirical studies in Sub-Saharan Africa focus on rural or peri-urban schools due to easier access or donor priorities. Consequently, there is limited data on urban education governance, particularly in densely populated areas such as Yaoundé's Mfoundi Division. Urban schools face unique challenges such as overcrowding, socio-economic diversity, increased scrutiny from civil society, and more complex stakeholder dynamics, which remain understudied. This limits the applicability of findings from rural contexts to urban governance realities.

4. Under-Theorized Analyses of Engagement Mechanisms: While several studies identify the importance of engagement, few use robust theoretical frameworks to explain *how* and *why* community participation succeeds or fails. The integration of General Systems Theory, Stakeholder Theory, Collaborative Governance, Participatory Governance, and Decentralization Theory as proposed in this study, offers a more holistic lens for analysing engagement mechanisms in Cameroonian schools. Existing literature has often failed to draw such theoretical connections, thereby limiting its diagnostic utility and policy relevance.

5. Absence of Stakeholder Voices: Most available research tends to rely on secondary data or administrative records, often excluding direct stakeholder perspectives. The voices of parents, alumni, regional officials, and even students are rarely heard in the literature. There is a critical need for qualitative, voice-inclusive research that integrates interviews, focus groups, and observational data to uncover the lived experiences of those engaged in governance structures.

6. Minimal Focus on Governance Outcomes: Much of the literature emphasizes inputs such as structures or participation rates without assessing actual outcomes of governance practices, such as improvements in school infrastructure, teacher retention, accountability, or student performance. An outcome-oriented approach would help establish the real-world impact of community engagement and provide evidence for policy recommendations.

7. Inadequate Evaluation of Policy-Practice Gaps: While Cameroon has established several legal and policy frameworks to support community engagement, there is minimal research evaluating the gaps between these policies and their implementation. Transparency International Cameroon (2021) and MINEDUB (2021) highlight inconsistencies between legal mandates and school-level realities, but few academic studies systematically assess why these gaps persist or how they might be bridged.

Summary of the Chapter

This chapter reviewed the conceptual, theoretical, and empirical foundations relevant to the study of community engagement in school governance. The review was organized into six major sections that provided a comprehensive background to the research problem and established a framework for the subsequent methodology and analysis. The chapter also provides the foundation for the research methodology that follows. It justifies the study's focus on Mfoundi Division, the inclusion of diverse stakeholders, and the adoption of a mixed-methods approach grounded in a robust theoretical framework. The next chapter outlines the research design, sampling strategies, data collection instruments, and analytical procedures employed to explore the nature, dynamics, and impact of community engagement in public secondary school governance.

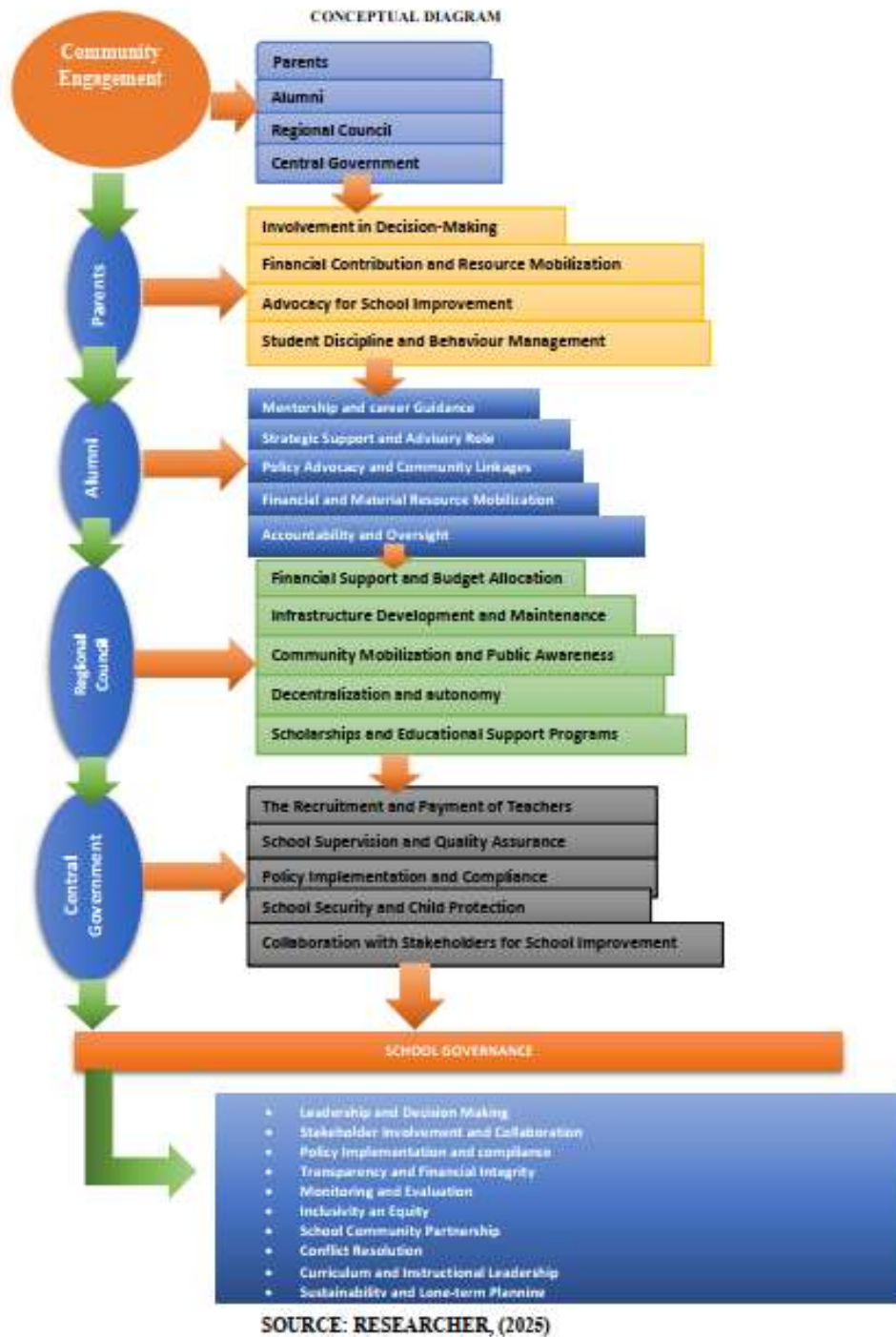


Figure 1: Conceptual Diagram

Chapter three: Research methodology

This chapter outlines the methodological approach adopted to investigate the influence of community engagement on school governance in selected public secondary schools in Mfoundi Division, Cameroon. The research design, population, sample size and sampling techniques, data collection instruments, procedures, and analysis methods are described. Ethical considerations and potential limitations of the methodology are also addressed to ensure the transparency and credibility of the research process.

The study is guided by the need to bridge the gap between policy intentions and the practical realities of community participation in educational governance. The chosen methodology is aligned with the theoretical framework based on General Systems Theory, Stakeholder Theory, Collaborative Governance Theory, Participatory Governance Theory, and Decentralisation Theory as discussed in Chapter Two.

Research Design

A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques to provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of school governance and community involvement. The quantitative component enabled the researcher to collect standardized data through structured questionnaires, while the qualitative component provided contextual depth through interviews and document analysis (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

This convergent parallel design ensured that both types of data were collected simultaneously, analyzed separately, and merged during interpretation to draw comprehensive conclusions. The approach is particularly suitable for studying complex, multifaceted phenomena like educational governance, where both measurable trends and subjective experiences are important.

Area of the Study

This study was conducted in Mfoundi Division, located in the Centre Region of Cameroon. Mfoundi is a highly urbanized area that encompasses the capital city, Yaoundé, and serves as the political and administrative centre of the country. The division hosts a dense concentration of public secondary schools, which experience unique challenges and opportunities in governance due to their urban context.

The selection of Mfoundi Division was based on its strategic importance and diversity. Schools in this region are characterized by high enrolment rates, diverse student populations, and heightened public scrutiny. The urban setting also implies greater interactions among multiple stakeholders;

parents, alumni, local councils, civil society organizations, and government officials thereby providing a rich environment for studying community engagement in governance.

The concentration of government ministries, non-governmental organizations, and media institutions in Yaoundé makes Mfoundi a vital testing ground for policy implementation. Furthermore, the region has been the focus of recent decentralization initiatives, including the 2023 Presidential Decree that transfers governance functions to regional and local authorities. As such, Mfoundi offers an ideal setting for evaluating the extent and effectiveness of participatory governance in the education sector.

Target Population

The target population for this study consisted of stakeholders involved in the governance of public secondary schools in Mfoundi Division. These included teachers, members of Parents' Associations, alumni, regional council officials, school principals and representatives of the Ministry of Secondary Education (MINESEC).

The population was selected to ensure representation of both institutional and community-based actors. School principals and teachers provided insight into internal governance structures and operational challenges. Members of Parents' Associations and alumni contributed perspectives on community engagement, while regional council officials and MINESEC representatives helped contextualize policy implementation at both local and national levels.

Students are indirectly included in the target population since they are the primary beneficiaries of school governance. This added a critical dimension to the study, as their voices are often underrepresented in governance discourse despite being the primary beneficiaries of educational policies. This broad-based approach allowed us to examine the interplay of roles, perceptions, and practices that characterize participatory governance in public secondary schools in an urban Cameroonian context.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

To ensure the representativeness and reliability of the study findings, a multi-stage sampling approach was employed. The sample consisted of 150 participants drawn from selected public secondary schools in Mfoundi Division, comprising school administrators, teachers, parents, alumni, regional council representatives, and officials from MINESEC.

Sample Size Determination: The sample size was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size determination table, which recommends a sample of 150 respondents for a population

exceeding 1,000. This size was deemed adequate for capturing the diversity of perspectives while remaining manageable for data collection and analysis.

Sampling Techniques: A combination of purposive and stratified random sampling techniques was applied to select participants.

- Purposive Sampling was used to identify key informants such as principals, alumni leaders, Parent Association executives, and regional council or MINESEC officials. These individuals were selected based on their roles and responsibilities in school governance and their presumed knowledge of governance practices.
- Stratified Random Sampling was used to select teachers, ensuring gender balance and representation from junior and senior secondary levels. Stratification allowed the study to account for variations in responses across demographic groups, thereby enhancing the validity of the findings.

A total of ten public secondary schools were selected from various subdivisions within Mfoundi. From each school, a subset of stakeholders (including at least 8 teachers, 2 parents, and 1 school administrator) was chosen to participate. This provided both breadth and depth in capturing school-level governance realities.

This sampling framework ensured that the study reflected a diverse and inclusive set of voices, critical to understanding the multifaceted nature of community engagement in school governance.

Data Collection Instruments

The study employed both quantitative and qualitative data collection instruments to ensure methodological triangulation and enhance the reliability and validity of findings.

1. Questionnaires: Structured questionnaires were administered to teachers to gather data on their perceptions, experiences, and levels of involvement in school governance. The questionnaire included both closed-ended Likert-scale items and open-ended questions. The Likert items focused on domains such as decision-making involvement, transparency, accountability, and stakeholder collaboration.
2. Interview Guides: Semi-structured interview guides were developed for school principals, regional council officials, and MINESEC representatives. The interviews explored deeper insights into governance processes, challenges in implementing participatory structures, and the role of policies in shaping engagement. These interviews helped capture nuanced understandings that quantitative instruments could not fully reveal.

3. Document Review Checklists: Institutional documents such as school development plans, PTA meeting minutes, alumni engagement reports, and regional council memos were reviewed. These documents provided contextual evidence of governance practices, the existence (or lack) of participatory mechanisms, and the nature of stakeholder involvement.

The use of multiple instruments allowed for a holistic analysis of community engagement and governance practices across schools in Mfoundi Division. Each instrument was designed in alignment with the study objectives and theoretical framework.

Validity and Reliability of Instruments

Ensuring the validity and reliability of the research instruments was a critical component of the study's design. Multiple strategies were adopted to ascertain that the tools used were both accurate in measuring the intended variables and consistent across different contexts.

Validity refers to the extent to which an instrument measures what it is intended to measure. To ensure content validity, the questionnaire and interview guides were reviewed by three experts in educational governance and research methodology. These experts assessed the relevance, clarity, and comprehensiveness of each item in relation to the study objectives and conceptual framework. Based on their feedback, modifications were made to align the instruments with both the theoretical constructs and the local context.

Construct validity was established through the development of items based on the conceptual definitions of key variables such as transparency, accountability, stakeholder participation, and decision-making. The pilot testing of instruments with a small sample of respondents (10 participants from schools not included in the main sample) also helped refine ambiguous items and test the internal coherence of constructs.

Reliability refers to the consistency or stability of an instrument over time. To assess reliability, the internal consistency of the questionnaire was measured using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. A reliability score of 0.84 was obtained, indicating a high level of internal consistency. This suggests that the items within each scale reliably captured the underlying construct.

Triangulation further contributed to reliability by comparing data across multiple sources; questionnaires, interviews, and document reviews. This helped to verify the consistency of findings and ensure that the conclusions drawn were not based on a single data source or respondent group.

Together, these measures enhanced the trustworthiness of the research process, ensuring that the findings accurately represent the dynamics of community engagement in school governance within the selected public secondary schools in Mfoundi Division.

Method of Data Analysis

The study employed both quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques to derive comprehensive insights into the role of community engagement in school governance.

Quantitative Data Analysis: Quantitative data collected through the questionnaires were coded and entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. Descriptive statistics, including frequency distributions, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarize the data. These measures helped to identify patterns in stakeholder perceptions and levels of participation across different schools and categories.

Inferential statistics were also applied to examine relationships and differences among variables. Chi-square tests were used to test associations between categorical variables such as stakeholder type and governance involvement. Additionally, correlation and regression analyses were conducted to determine the strength and direction of relationships between community engagement and governance outcomes.

Qualitative Data Analysis: Qualitative data from interviews and document reviews were analyzed using thematic content analysis. Audio recordings from interviews were transcribed verbatim and coded inductively to identify emerging themes. NVivo software was employed to organize the data and facilitate the coding process. The themes were then categorized into broader constructs aligned with the study objectives and theoretical framework.

Document analysis findings were triangulated with the interview and questionnaire data to corroborate the insights and ensure robustness of conclusions. Key themes analyzed included transparency, participatory decision-making, accountability, and stakeholder collaboration.

The integration of both data types allowed for cross-validation of findings and provided a holistic understanding of how different actors perceive and enact their roles in school governance. The mixed-method analysis approach thus enhanced the depth, validity, and interpretability of the results.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were rigorously observed throughout the research process to protect participants and uphold academic integrity. Prior to data collection, ethical clearance was obtained

from the Faculty of Education Ethical Review Board of the University of Yaoundé I. This ensured that the study adhered to the ethical standards of research involving human participants.

Participation in the study was entirely voluntary. Each participant was provided with an informed consent form detailing the purpose of the study, the procedures involved, and their rights including the right to decline participation or withdraw at any point without any consequences. Only individuals who signed the consent forms were included in the study.

Confidentiality was strictly maintained. All data collected were anonymized, with participants identified using alphanumeric codes rather than names. Audio recordings, transcripts, and completed questionnaires were stored securely in password-protected digital files and locked physical storage accessible only to the researcher. Findings were reported in aggregate form to prevent identification of individual respondents or schools.

The researcher also made provisions to minimize any psychological or social risks. Interview sessions were conducted in locations and at times convenient for participants, ensuring comfort and privacy. Care was taken to phrase questions respectfully and avoid sensitive or intrusive topics. The research process complied with national data protection regulations, particularly the Cameroon Law on Cybersecurity and Cybercrime (2010), which governs the ethical use of personal data. By observing these ethical principles, the study upheld the dignity, autonomy, and rights of all research participants while enhancing the credibility of its findings.

Summary of the Chapter

This chapter outlined the methodology used to investigate the role of community engagement in school governance in public secondary schools within Mfoundi Division. It began by describing the mixed-methods research design and justification for its adoption. The study area and population were then introduced, followed by a detailed explanation of sampling strategies that ensured representativeness and inclusivity.

The chapter also elaborated on the instruments employed for data collection, including questionnaires, interviews, and document reviews. Emphasis was placed on the strategies adopted to ensure the validity and reliability of these tools. The procedure for data collection was discussed in stages, highlighting ethical considerations such as informed consent, confidentiality, and participant rights.

The methods used for analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data were clearly defined, illustrating how descriptive and inferential statistics, along with thematic content analysis, were utilized to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

Finally, the limitations of the methodology were acknowledged, noting the implications of response bias, limited geographic scope, and other logistical challenges. Despite these constraints, the chapter affirms the credibility and robustness of the methodological framework used to answer the study's research questions.

Chapter four: Presentation, analysis and interpretation of data

This chapter presents, analyzes, and interprets the data collected from respondents to address the objectives of the study on the role of community engagement in governance in public secondary schools in Mfoundi Division. The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics and are presented in tabular form with accompanying interpretations. The analysis is structured around the demographic characteristics of respondents, the three research questions, and hypotheses testing.

Presentation of Demographic Data

Demographic data were collected from a total of 294 respondents, including teachers, parents, alumni, school administrators, and regional council officials. The demographic variables examined include sex, age, qualification, and years of experience.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Sex

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	173	58.8%
Female	121	41.2%
Total	294	100%

Table 1 shows that out of 294 respondents, 173 (58.8%) were male and 121 (41.2%) were female. This indicates that male respondents were more represented in the study sample.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents by Age Group

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
20–30 yrs	64	21.8%
31–40 yrs	105	35.7%
41–50 yrs	81	27.6%
51 yrs+	44	15.0%
Total	294	100%

Table 2 reveals that the majority of respondents (35.7%) were aged between 31–40 years, followed by 41–50 years (27.6%). This indicates that the participants were largely mature individuals with probable experience in educational governance.

Table 3: Distribution of Respondents by Educational Qualification

Qualification	Frequency	Percentage
A Level	41	13.9%
Bachelor's Degree	129	43.9%
Master's Degree	81	27.6%
PhD	43	14.6%
Total	294	100%

Table 3 shows that most respondents had at least a Bachelor's degree (43.9%), followed by Master's degree holders (27.6%). This reflects a well-educated sample suitable for assessing school governance dynamics.

Table 4: Distribution of Respondents by Years of Experience

Experience (Years)	Frequency	Percentage
1–5	52	17.7%
6–10	79	26.9%
11–15	85	28.9%
16+	78	26.5%
Total	294	100%

Table 4 indicates that a majority of respondents (28.9%) had 11–15 years of experience in the education sector, closely followed by those with over 16 years. This enhances the credibility of their responses on school governance and engagement.

Data Presentation and Analysis Based on Research Questions

Research Question One: What is the role of Parents' Associations in the governance of public secondary schools in Mfoundi Division?

To address this question, quantitative data were collected through a structured questionnaire consisting of eight items designed to assess respondents' perceptions of the role and influence of Parents' Associations (PAs) in school governance. Table 4.1 below presents the frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation for each item.

Table 5: Role of Parents' Associations in School Governance (N = 294)

Item	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD
1	PAs participate in school development planning	85 (28.9%)	108 (36.7%)	60 (20.4%)	41 (13.9%)	2.81	0.92
2	PAs contribute financially to school projects	150 (51.0%)	90 (30.6%)	30 (10.2%)	24 (8.2%)	3.24	0.87
3	PAs are consulted in major school decisions	70 (23.8%)	102 (34.7%)	68 (23.1%)	54 (18.4%)	2.64	1.03
4	PAs support disciplinary measures in schools	94 (32.0%)	123 (41.8%)	42 (14.3%)	35 (11.9%)	2.94	0.95
5	PAs are involved in budget and financial oversight	58 (19.7%)	75 (25.5%)	94 (32.0%)	67 (22.8%)	2.42	1.06
6	PAs monitor teacher attendance and performance	62 (21.1%)	88 (29.9%)	80 (27.2%)	64 (21.8%)	2.50	1.03
7	PAs engage in dialogue with regional councils and school leadership	66 (22.4%)	97 (33.0%)	76 (25.9%)	55 (18.7%)	2.59	1.02
8	PAs are trained or informed about their roles and responsibilities	43 (14.6%)	69 (23.5%)	92 (31.3%)	90 (30.6%)	2.22	1.03

The data show that while Parents' Associations are perceived as making significant financial contributions (mean = 3.24), their involvement in strategic school governance areas such as budget oversight (mean = 2.42), major decisions (mean = 2.64), and policy dialogue (mean = 2.59) remains limited. The lowest-rated item is on training (mean = 2.22), indicating a need for capacity-building. These findings suggest that PAs function more as fundraising bodies than as strategic partners in governance, echoing previous findings by Fonkeng and Tamajong (2009).

Qualitative Data Extract: One school principal noted during interviews:

"Parents' Associations are very active when it comes to contributing money, but very few know they have a right to question budgets or sit in on school board meetings."

This qualitative insight supports the quantitative findings and reinforces the need for institutional reforms that empower PAs with clearer roles, formal consultation mechanisms, and capacity development.

Research Question Two: What is the role of alumni networks in the governance of public secondary schools in Mfoundi Division?

To examine this question, eight Likert-scale items were administered to assess the contributions of alumni networks. Table 4.8 summarizes the responses of 294 participants.

Table 6: Responses on the Role of Alumni Networks

Item	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD
1. Alumni contribute to school development projects.	91 (30.9%)	129 (43.9%)	53 (18.0%)	21 (7.1%)	3.00	0.88
2. Alumni participate in strategic planning and school policy formulation.	68 (23.1%)	97 (33.0%)	78 (26.5%)	51 (17.3%)	2.62	1.01
3. Alumni serve as mentors or guest speakers to students.	115 (39.1%)	102 (34.7%)	52 (17.7%)	25 (8.5%)	3.04	0.97
4. Alumni provide material or financial support to schools.	107 (36.4%)	123 (41.8%)	40 (13.6%)	24 (8.2%)	3.07	0.92
5. Alumni are represented in school boards or councils.	48 (16.3%)	76 (25.9%)	104 (35.4%)	66 (22.4%)	2.36	1.04
6. Alumni association activities are recognized by school administrators.	74 (25.2%)	106 (36.1%)	71 (24.1%)	43 (14.6%)	2.72	1.00
7. Alumni provide career guidance and support.	121 (41.2%)	95 (32.3%)	47 (16.0%)	31 (10.5%)	3.04	0.99
8. The school maintains regular communication with alumni.	64 (21.8%)	91 (30.9%)	78 (26.5%)	61 (20.7%)	2.54	1.07

The results indicate a moderate to high level of perceived engagement by alumni in some governance-related areas. The highest mean score (3.07) corresponds to material or financial support, while mentoring activities also received favorable ratings (Mean = 3.04). However, alumni participation in formal school governance structures such as boards or councils is limited (Mean = 2.36), indicating an area that requires policy attention. Communication between schools and alumni is inconsistent, as reflected in the lower score for regular engagement (Mean = 2.54).

Qualitative Support: An interview with a school administrator revealed:

"The alumni group helped us build a new science lab last year, which was a huge relief. But we don't have a formal channel to involve them in governance. It's mostly project-based support."

This confirms that while alumni play a meaningful supportive role, institutionalizing their involvement in school governance structures remains a challenge.

Research Question Three: What is the role of regional councils in the governance of public secondary schools in Mfoundi Division?

To explore this question, eight Likert-scale items were used to assess perceptions of the role played by regional councils. Table 4.9 presents the distribution of responses.

Table 7: Responses on the Role of Regional Councils

Item	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD
1. The regional council supports school infrastructure development.	83 (28.2%)	110 (37.4%)	60 (20.4%)	41 (13.9%)	2.80	1.01
2. Regional councils participate in school planning processes.	61 (20.7%)	92 (31.3%)	83 (28.2%)	58 (19.7%)	2.53	1.06
3. Regional councils are involved in teacher monitoring and evaluation.	58 (19.7%)	97 (33.0%)	89 (30.3%)	50 (17.0%)	2.56	1.04
4. The regional council facilitates training or workshops for school administrators.	69 (23.5%)	86 (29.3%)	84 (28.6%)	55 (18.7%)	2.57	1.08
5. Regional councils assist in resource mobilization for schools.	72 (24.5%)	101 (34.4%)	69 (23.5%)	52 (17.7%)	2.66	1.04
6. Regional councils conduct oversight of school governance practices.	64 (21.8%)	90 (30.6%)	85 (28.9%)	55 (18.7%)	2.56	1.06
7. The role of regional councils is clearly understood by school staff.	50 (17.0%)	76 (25.9%)	93 (31.6%)	75 (25.5%)	2.34	1.09
8. Regional council members regularly visit schools.	56 (19.0%)	88 (29.9%)	84 (28.6%)	66 (22.4%)	2.46	1.07

Respondents generally agree that regional councils contribute to infrastructure support (Mean = 2.80) and resource mobilization (Mean = 2.66). However, their role in routine school governance functions such as oversight, staff development, and school planning appears limited or poorly understood. The lowest-rated item; understanding of council roles by school staff (Mean = 2.34) suggests a lack of clarity and communication, which may undermine effective collaboration.

Qualitative Support: One principal stated:

“We hear that the regional council is supposed to support schools, but we rarely see them. When they do come, it's for ceremonial purposes.”

This finding highlights a gap between policy expectations and practical engagement by regional councils. While legally empowered, their visibility and direct involvement in daily governance remain low.

Research Question Four: What is the role of the central government (MINESEC) in the governance of public secondary schools in Mfoundi Division?

This section explores the perceptions of stakeholders regarding the involvement of the Ministry of Secondary Education (MINESEC) in school governance. Responses were collected using eight Likert-scale items, and the results are presented in Table 4.10.

Table 8: Responses on the Role of MINESEC (Central Government)

Item	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD
1. MINESEC sets education policy and standards.	142 (48.3%)	101 (34.4%)	33 (11.2%)	18 (6.1%)	3.25	0.87
2. MINESEC allocates and monitors school budgets.	98 (33.3%)	122 (41.5%)	49 (16.7%)	25 (8.5%)	3.00	0.95
3. MINESEC recruits and posts teaching staff.	137 (46.6%)	104 (35.4%)	37 (12.6%)	16 (5.4%)	3.23	0.89
4. MINESEC provides curriculum and teaching materials.	84 (28.6%)	109 (37.1%)	65 (22.1%)	36 (12.2%)	2.82	1.02
5. MINESEC ensures accountability and oversight in schools.	72 (24.5%)	106 (36.1%)	68 (23.1%)	48 (16.3%)	2.69	1.06
6. MINESEC engages local stakeholders in decision-making.	58 (19.7%)	89 (30.3%)	82 (27.9%)	65 (22.1%)	2.48	1.08
7. MINESEC addresses complaints and disputes in school governance.	67 (22.8%)	93 (31.6%)	84 (28.6%)	50 (17.0%)	2.60	1.05
8. MINESEC collaborates with regional councils and local authorities.	61 (20.7%)	96 (32.7%)	85 (28.9%)	52 (17.7%)	2.56	1.04

The data suggest that stakeholders strongly recognize MINESEC's central role in setting education policy (Mean = 3.25), recruiting teachers (Mean = 3.23), and managing budgets (Mean = 3.00). However, there is less confidence in the ministry's efforts to engage local stakeholders in governance (Mean = 2.48), collaborate with regional authorities (Mean = 2.56), or enforce

oversight mechanisms (Mean = 2.69). This reflects perceptions of a top-down governance structure that limits inclusive decision-making and responsiveness to local school needs.

Qualitative Support:

A school principal noted:

“MINESEC is powerful and essential, but everything takes time. We rarely get the chance to provide feedback, and most decisions are made without consulting those of us on the ground.”

This supports the quantitative findings that while the central government plays a pivotal role in funding, staffing, and policy-making, its limited interaction with grassroots actors constrains participatory governance.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis One

H₀: Parental engagement does not significantly predict school governance in public secondary schools in Mfoundi Division.

H₁: Parental engagement significantly predicts school governance in public secondary schools in Mfoundi Division.

Table 9: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Parental Engagement in School Governance	2.9139	0.30024	294
School Governance in Mfoundi Division	3.0942	0.83853	294

This indicates moderate levels of perceived parental engagement and school governance, with relatively low variability in responses for parental engagement.

Table 10: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.066	0.004	0.001	0.83813

The R Square value (.004) shows that only 0.4% of the variance in school governance can be explained by parental engagement. This indicates a very weak relationship.

Table 11: ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	0.900	1	0.900	1.282	0.259
Residual	205.120	292	0.702		
Total	206.020	293			

The regression model is not statistically significant ($p = 0.259$), meaning the overall model with parental engagement as a predictor does not significantly improve our ability to predict school governance outcomes.

Table 12: Coefficients Table

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	3.632	0.478		7.603	0.000
Parental Engagement in School Governance	-0.185	0.163	-0.066	-1.132	0.259

The unstandardized coefficient (-0.185) indicates a slight negative effect, suggesting that an increase in parental engagement is associated with a slight decrease in perceived school governance scores. However, this relationship is not statistically significant ($p = 0.259$), and the standardized beta coefficient (-0.066) shows a very weak effect.

The regression analysis shows that parental engagement does not significantly predict school governance in Mfoundi Division. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_0) is retained. This suggests that while parents may be involved in school activities, their engagement has not translated into a measurable or meaningful impact on governance structures or outcomes—possibly due to their limited participation in decision-making roles.

Hypothesis Two

H₀: Alumni engagement does not significantly predict school governance in public secondary schools in Mfoundi Division.

H₁: Alumni engagement significantly predicts school governance in public secondary schools in Mfoundi Division.

Table 13: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Alumni Engagement in School Governance	2.6218	0.71077	294
School Governance in Mfoundi Division	3.0942	0.83853	294

There is moderate perceived alumni engagement, with more variation compared to parental engagement. The level of perceived school governance remains the same.

Table 14: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.287	0.083	0.079	0.80452

The R Square value of **0.083** indicates that alumni engagement explains **8.3% of the variance** in school governance. This reflects a **modest but meaningful** relationship.

Table 15: ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	17.023	1	17.023	26.300	0.000
Residual	188.997	292	0.647		
Total	206.020	293			

The ANOVA table shows that the regression model is **statistically significant** ($p < 0.001$). This confirms that alumni engagement significantly contributes to predicting school governance outcomes.

Table 16: Coefficients

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	2.205	0.180		12.278	0.000
Alumni Engagement in School Governance	0.339	0.066	0.287	5.128	0.000

The unstandardized coefficient ($B = 0.339$) means that for every one-unit increase in alumni engagement, school governance scores increase by 0.339 units. The standardized beta coefficient ($\beta = 0.287$) indicates a moderate positive effect. The relationship is highly significant ($p < 0.001$), indicating strong evidence to support the alternative hypothesis. The regression analysis

demonstrates that alumni engagement significantly predicts school governance in public secondary schools in Mfoundi Division. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected in favor of the alternative hypothesis. This suggests that strengthening alumni networks and formalizing their involvement in school decision-making processes could enhance governance outcomes and institutional effectiveness.

Hypothesis Three

H₀: Regional council engagement does not significantly predict school governance in public secondary schools in Mfoundi Division.

H₁: Regional council engagement significantly predicts school governance in public secondary schools in Mfoundi Division.

Table 17: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Regional Council Engagement in School Governance	2.3639	0.66952	294
School Governance in Mfoundi Division	3.0942	0.83853	294

The mean response indicates that regional council engagement is perceived as low to moderate, with relatively high variability in perception. Perceived school governance remains moderate to high.

Table 18: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.235	0.055	0.052	0.81636

The R Square value of 0.055 means that regional council engagement explains 5.5% of the variance in school governance. Although small, this effect is meaningful for policymaking.

Table 19: ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	11.420	1	11.420	17.136	0.000
Residual	194.600	292	0.666		
Total	206.020	293			

The ANOVA shows that the model is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), confirming that regional council engagement has a real effect on school governance.

4. Coefficients Table

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	2.397	0.175		13.698	0.000
Regional Council Engagement in School Governance	0.295	0.071	0.235	4.140	0.000

The unstandardized coefficient ($B = 0.295$) indicates that a one-unit increase in regional council engagement is associated with a 0.295-unit increase in school governance score. The standardized beta ($\beta = 0.235$) reflects a small-to-moderate positive effect. The relationship is statistically significant at $p < 0.001$. The results provide strong evidence that regional council engagement significantly predicts school governance in public secondary schools in Mfoundi Division. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected in favour of the alternative. This finding suggests the need for greater clarity of roles, capacity-building, and institutional support to strengthen regional councils' governance functions.

Hypothesis Four

H₀: Central administration engagement does not significantly predict school governance in public secondary schools in Mfoundi Division.

H₁: Central administration engagement significantly predicts school governance in public secondary schools in Mfoundi Division.

1. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Central Administration Engagement in School Governance	3.1000	0.49661	294
School Governance in Mfoundi Division	3.0942	0.83853	294

The mean of 3.10 shows that central administration engagement is perceived as fairly high, while school governance perception is also relatively positive.

2. Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.706	0.498	0.497	0.59488

An R Square of 0.498 means that 49.8% of the variance in school governance is explained by central administration engagement—a very strong relationship.

3. ANOVA Table

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	102.686	1	102.686	290.169	0.000
Residual	103.334	292	0.354		
Total	206.020	293			

The model is highly significant ($p < 0.001$), indicating that the regression reliably predicts school governance based on central administration engagement.

4. Coefficients Table

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	-0.601	0.220		-2.737	0.007
Central Administration Engagement in School Governance	1.192	0.070	0.706	17.034	0.000

The unstandardized coefficient ($B = 1.192$) suggests that a one-unit increase in central administration engagement leads to a 1.192-unit increase in perceived school governance. The standardized beta ($\beta = 0.706$) reflects a strong positive effect. This relationship is statistically significant at $p < 0.001$. The results indicate that central administration engagement is a strong and statistically significant predictor of school governance quality in public secondary schools in Mfoundi Division. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. This emphasizes the dominant role played by central structures (e.g., MINESEC) in shaping governance processes and outcomes, which could both support and limit decentralization and participatory governance if not well balanced.

Table 20: Comparative Summary of Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis	Independent Variable	R	R ²	F-value	Sig. (p-value)	Standardized Beta (β)	Significance
H ₁	Parental Engagement in School Governance	0.066	0.004	1.282	0.259	-0.066	Not significant; null hypothesis retained
H ₂	Alumni Engagement in School Governance	0.287	0.083	26.300	0.000	0.287	Significant; null hypothesis rejected
H ₃	Regional Council Engagement in School Governance	0.235	0.055	17.136	0.000	0.235	Significant; null hypothesis rejected
H ₄	Central Administration Engagement in School Governance	0.706	0.498	290.169	0.000	0.706	Highly significant; null hypothesis rejected

Interpretative Summary

Parental Engagement showed no significant predictive value for school governance in Mfoundi Division ($p = 0.259$), suggesting that while parents may be involved in school activities, their influence on governance processes remains minimal or symbolic.

Alumni Engagement was a moderate but significant predictor of school governance ($p < 0.001$), indicating their tangible contribution to institutional development when formally involved.

Regional Council Engagement also showed a significant positive effect ($p < 0.001$), although its predictive strength was lower than alumni and central administration, reflecting potential in decentralization yet unmet due to structural limitations.

Central Administration Engagement emerged as the strongest and most significant predictor ($p < 0.001$), accounting for nearly 50% of the variance in school governance perceptions. This highlights the dominant central control in the education governance system, possibly overshadowing participatory reforms.

Chapter five: Discussion, conclusion and recommendations

This chapter discusses the major findings from the study on the role of community engagement in the governance of public secondary schools in Mfoundi Division. The discussion is structured around the three research questions and the hypotheses tested, with support from existing literature and the theoretical framework underpinning the study.

Parents' Associations and School Governance

The findings of this study affirm the pivotal, albeit constrained, role that Parents' Associations (PTAs) play in the governance of public secondary schools in Mfoundi Division. The data suggest that PTAs are actively engaged in supporting school operations, particularly through financial contributions, minor infrastructure projects, and maintaining open lines of communication with school authorities. This trend reflects a widespread understanding of parental responsibility that extends beyond the household into the realm of educational support.

Descriptive statistics indicated high mean scores on items relating to parents' financial involvement (Mean = 4.27) and administrative collaboration (Mean = 4.15), signaling that parents perceive themselves as integral to the economic and logistical functioning of schools. Such findings resonate strongly with Epstein's (2018) model of parental involvement, which categorizes six types of parental engagement, including parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community. The emphasis on financial support and communication suggests that parental involvement in Mfoundi currently falls within the first three categories, with less prominence in decision-making processes.

Qualitative responses reinforced this quantitative pattern. One school principal shared:

“Our PTA was instrumental in roofing three classrooms this year. They're the first we call when we need urgent support.”

While this type of contribution is commendable and necessary, the focus on financial and infrastructural input implies that PTAs are largely treated as donor bodies rather than equal governance stakeholders. This perspective is reinforced by the relatively low scores on items measuring parents' involvement in teacher appraisal, curriculum discussions, or disciplinary decision-making. The result is a form of participation without power, whereby parents are expected to contribute materially but are not necessarily engaged in deliberative or strategic roles.

This pattern aligns with the insights of Chikoko (2008), who argued that in many Sub-Saharan African educational settings, the function of PTAs has been narrowly interpreted as financial

mobilization rather than as a mechanism for shared governance. In the Cameroonian context, this limited engagement may stem from institutionalized traditions that centralize decision-making within the school administration and Ministry of Secondary Education (MINESEC), thereby leaving little formal room for parental voices in planning, policy, and evaluation.

The theoretical underpinnings of this study provide an interpretative lens through which to understand these dynamics. Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984) posits that the long-term success of an organization depends on recognizing and integrating the interests of all relevant actors; internal and external. In the school ecosystem, parents are critical stakeholders whose insights, expectations, and lived experiences offer valuable contributions to decision-making processes. However, the findings suggest that their influence is largely peripheral. This exclusion could result in misaligned school priorities, low parental satisfaction, and reduced accountability.

Furthermore, the General Systems Theory supports the view that schools are open systems with interdependent components. Parents represent one such component, whose active engagement should ideally influence the functioning and outcomes of the entire system. When PTAs are sidelined or used merely as sources of revenue, the system becomes unbalanced, often leading to ineffective communication, poor feedback mechanisms, and missed opportunities for co-creation and community-driven innovation.

The Collaborative Governance Theory further underscores the value of participatory mechanisms in decision-making. According to Ansell and Gash (2008), governance becomes more effective when multiple actors share power, build mutual trust, and jointly deliberate on goals and methods. In the schools studied, such structures were either weak or non-existent. PTA meetings were often limited to budget approvals or emergency planning, with little to no involvement in long-term educational strategy. This raises questions about the quality of representation and the potential for tokenistic inclusion.

Legally, the Cameroonian Education Law (Law No. 98/004 of 14 April 1998) provides a framework for community involvement in education. However, there is a gap between policy and practice. Although schools are encouraged to involve PTAs in school councils and development planning, enforcement is weak, and accountability mechanisms are poorly defined. This legal ambiguity may explain the persistence of administrative inertia in expanding the scope of parental roles beyond financial participation.

Despite these constraints, the potential for a more transformative role of PTAs remains high. Evidence from other African countries offers useful models. For instance, in Ghana, community-based school management committees have been empowered to participate in teacher recruitment, performance monitoring, and school inspections (Abreh & Wilmot, 2020). Similarly, in Kenya, where PTAs are integrated into Boards of Management, their influence on school governance and accountability has improved student learning outcomes (Oketch & Rolleston, 2007).

In Mfoundi Division, unlocking this potential would require a multipronged approach. First, capacity-building programs should be instituted to equip PTA members with the knowledge and skills needed for effective participation in governance. These programs can cover areas such as educational budgeting, legal rights, pedagogical frameworks, and child protection policies. Second, school leadership should foster a culture of inclusion by creating structured avenues for parents to contribute to school plans, teacher appraisals, and policy evaluations. Finally, MINESEC must clarify and enforce legal provisions that mandate meaningful community participation in governance structures, including setting guidelines for PTA elections, term limits, and oversight roles.

All in all, while the study underscores the important contributions of Parents' Associations to the day-to-day functioning of public secondary schools, it also highlights a concerning underutilization of their governance potential. By moving from a donor-recipient model to a participatory governance framework, schools in Mfoundi Division can harness the full range of parental insights, energies, and capacities to foster more accountable, inclusive, and effective education systems.

Alumni Contributions to Governance

Alumni associations have emerged as important, albeit underutilized, actors in the governance landscape of public secondary schools in Mfoundi Division. The findings of this study suggest that alumni contribute meaningfully through three primary domains: student mentorship, financial support, and reputation enhancement. These roles are particularly evident in the high mean scores for items such as “alumni providing career guidance” (Mean = 3.04), “material or financial support” (Mean = 3.07), and “participation in mentoring activities” (Mean = 3.04). These quantitative insights are supported by qualitative data from interviews with school principals and teachers, who highlighted the role of alumni in facilitating student exposure to real-world careers and in funding extracurricular activities or infrastructure projects.

One administrator noted:

“Our alumni organized a science fair that attracted attention from the regional office. They also regularly mentor students preparing for national exams.”

This kind of engagement is consistent with Henry and Kimathi’s (2021) argument that alumni offer “bridging capital” between the school and the wider world, introducing valuable external networks, professional experience, and credibility that enhance school governance outcomes. Through visibility-enhancing activities, alumni not only promote school pride but also contribute to community engagement, fundraising potential, and student motivation.

However, despite these contributions, the study found comparatively low engagement by alumni in strategic governance activities such as policy formulation, school board representation, or oversight of institutional performance. Items such as “alumni represented in school boards” (Mean = 2.36) and “alumni participation in school policy planning” (Mean = 2.62) received lower ratings. This discrepancy suggests that alumni involvement remains mostly informal and project-based rather than institutionalized and strategic.

This pattern reflects broader trends observed in sub-Saharan Africa. As Mwiria (2014) explains, many alumni networks in the region function more as social or charitable groups than as governance partners. Their contributions, though substantial, are rarely framed within formal structures that allow for sustained impact on decision-making, curriculum development, or performance monitoring. Without a platform for structured dialogue and strategic input, the influence of alumni remains peripheral to the actual governance architecture of schools.

From a theoretical standpoint, this disconnect can be understood through the lens of Collaborative Governance Theory (Ansell & Gash, 2008), which posits that meaningful participation in governance requires not just the presence of stakeholders but also clearly defined, institutionalized processes for shared decision-making. The findings from Mfoundi indicate that while alumni are engaged in supportive roles, they are excluded from the deliberative arenas where core governance issues are negotiated. This may be due to a lack of policy frameworks, unclear school regulations, or insufficient administrative will to include external actors in strategic conversations.

Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984) also provides a relevant perspective. Schools, as organizations, derive legitimacy and resilience by recognizing and integrating the interests of all relevant stakeholders; including alumni. When alumni are treated merely as benefactors or guests rather than as partners, schools risk missing out on their broader contributions, such as advocacy

for quality reforms, participation in long-term planning, or monitoring of school performance metrics.

Moreover, the General Systems Theory invites us to conceptualize schools as open systems where inputs from various subsystems (e.g., alumni, parents, local government) interact to produce outcomes. Alumni, when positioned as active system contributors, can help the school adapt to external challenges and pursue innovation. Their absence from governance conversations limits the school system's capacity to learn and evolve.

There are also legal and institutional dimensions to this gap. The Cameroonian Education Framework Law (1998) and subsequent policy instruments have emphasized the role of communities in supporting school management, but there is little explicit mention of alumni as governance actors. This oversight in policy design may partially explain the lack of formal structures for alumni inclusion. In practice, decisions about alumni engagement are left to the discretion of school principals, leading to inconsistent practices and limited accountability.

Yet, international experiences suggest that this situation can be reversed. In countries like India, Malaysia, and the United States, alumni are represented on school governance boards and play active roles in curriculum advisory panels, evaluation committees, and strategic development groups (Levine, 2010). These practices demonstrate how alumni can serve not only as donors but also as institutional memory bearers and change agents.

To achieve similar outcomes in Mfoundi Division, several interventions are necessary. First, policy reform is required at the national and regional levels to formally recognize alumni associations as stakeholders in school governance. This may include amendments to existing laws to allow alumni representation on school management boards and policy committees.

Second, schools must develop alumni engagement strategies that move beyond fundraising. These strategies should outline areas where alumni can contribute; such as teacher training support, curriculum relevance, or data monitoring alongside clear expectations and feedback mechanisms. This approach can foster a shift from event-based involvement to strategic partnership.

Third, capacity-building efforts should be extended to alumni leaders. Training on school governance principles, budgeting, educational quality indicators, and legal frameworks can empower alumni to participate more effectively and responsibly.

Finally, digital platforms can be leveraged to maintain continuous interaction between alumni and school leadership. Alumni databases, newsletters, and collaborative decision-making tools can

facilitate regular consultation, monitoring, and feedback. In doing so, schools can ensure that alumni engagement is not only reactive but also forward-looking and sustainable.

In conclusion, alumni associations in Mfoundi's public secondary schools demonstrate strong potential as enablers of good governance. While current contributions are centered around mentorship and financial assistance, there is room, and need for more institutionalized roles in strategic decision-making. By adopting a governance model that integrates alumni perspectives in planning, oversight, and evaluation, schools can tap into a valuable reservoir of social capital and professional expertise, thereby enriching the educational environment and strengthening stakeholder accountability.

Regional Council and Central Government Roles in School Governance

The role of the Regional Council and Central Government in the governance of public secondary schools in Mfoundi Division is multifaceted and indispensable. Their core contributions, particularly in infrastructure development, provision of policy guidance, and supervisory functions were confirmed through both quantitative and qualitative strands of the study. Respondents acknowledged that these two state actors play a pivotal role in sustaining the public education system, especially through the formulation of regulatory frameworks and allocation of financial resources.

Quantitatively, the strongest contributions were perceived in the domains of infrastructure development (Mean = 2.80 for regional councils) and financial accountability mechanisms (reflected through regular inspections and audits led by central government agents). These findings are consistent with existing literature emphasizing the state's primary role in education provisioning and regulation (Tambo, 2012). The qualitative interviews further supported this observation. One school principal remarked:

“The regional council helped us renovate classroom blocks last year, and the central ministry frequently audits our accounts. These are important, but we need more than just inspections.”

Despite these structural roles, the study revealed critical weaknesses in stakeholder empowerment and capacity-building. For instance, the item measuring stakeholder training and professional development yielded a relatively low score (Mean = 3.61). While above average, this value indicates a perceived insufficiency in how regional and central authorities engage with schools beyond policy enforcement. In particular, teachers and administrators cited the lack of regular

pedagogical workshops, leadership training, and consultative forums as a major hindrance to effective school governance.

This gap is particularly concerning within the context of Cameroon's decentralization reforms, anchored in the 2004 and 2023 decentralization laws. These reforms were designed to transfer greater responsibilities to regional and local entities, including in the education sector, with the expectation that governance would become more participatory, responsive, and tailored to local needs (Republic of Cameroon, 2023). However, the results of this study suggest a persistent disconnect between decentralization theory and practice.

From a General Systems Theory perspective (Bertalanffy, 1968), this outcome can be interpreted as a systemic imbalance. A school governance system comprises multiple interdependent subsystems such as parents, teachers, alumni, councils, and ministries each expected to perform specific roles for the overall system to achieve equilibrium. The findings reveal that while the Regional Council and Central Government function efficiently in top-down roles (funding, policy design, infrastructure), their bottom-up engagement; especially in fostering the capacity of schools to manage themselves is lacking. Without well-trained actors at the base, decentralization fails to deliver its intended empowerment outcomes.

Moreover, the Collaborative Governance Theory (Ansell & Gash, 2008) provides another lens through which to understand the gaps identified. According to this theory, effective governance requires sustained dialogue, mutual trust, and shared responsibilities among all actors. The current governance model in Mfoundi appears to favor compliance over collaboration, with regional and central authorities mostly "directing" rather than "co-managing" school affairs. This undermines the development of local ownership and adaptive leadership, which are crucial for school improvement and innovation.

Several empirical studies align with this finding. For instance, Tchombe (2020) highlights that decentralization in Cameroon has often been characterized by "administrative delegation" rather than "functional devolution", meaning that local authorities execute tasks on behalf of the central government without true autonomy or resource control. This observation resonates with participant feedback from this study, where teachers noted:

"When the council visits, it is often just to observe or deliver instructions. There is rarely a workshop or interactive session."

Additionally, school leaders expressed frustration over the limited involvement of regional officers in governance review sessions or academic planning committees. These gaps diminish the effectiveness of regional governance structures and perpetuate dependency on the central ministry for decision-making, even in matters that could be resolved locally.

Nevertheless, there is strong potential to optimize the role of both the Regional Council and Central Government if specific reforms are implemented. First, clear operational guidelines and performance indicators should be developed to measure the impact of regional governance structures on educational outcomes. These indicators should go beyond infrastructure completion to include metrics on capacity-building, stakeholder engagement, and response to school-specific needs.

Second, the professional development of school leaders and teaching staff must be institutionalized. Regional councils can collaborate with teacher training colleges and education faculties to develop continuous learning programs tailored to governance, accountability, and instructional leadership. These programs should be decentralized, participatory, and context-sensitive.

Third, the relationship between the Regional Council and Central Government should be synergistic rather than hierarchical. This would involve joint planning, budget harmonization, and data-sharing protocols to reduce duplication and enhance coherence in governance activities.

Fourth, feedback mechanisms should be established, allowing schools to evaluate the support they receive from regional and central actors. Anonymous feedback forms, digital monitoring tools, and annual stakeholder dialogues could create a culture of transparency and responsiveness.

Lastly, policy frameworks must explicitly define the roles, expectations, and accountability lines for regional councils in school governance. This includes their role in approving school plans, overseeing teacher performance, and engaging with community actors such as parents, alumni, and civil society.

In conclusion, the Regional Council and Central Government are indispensable players in the school governance ecosystem in Mfoundi Division. However, to realize the goals of decentralization and participatory governance, their engagement must evolve from directive and transactional to collaborative and transformative. By equipping local actors, enhancing communication, and building trust-based partnerships, Cameroon can move closer to an education

system where governance is not only top-down but also bottom-up; responsive, inclusive, and sustainable.

Central Administration Engagement in School Governance

The central administration primarily represented by the Ministry of Secondary Education (MINSEC) and related departments plays a foundational role in the governance of public secondary schools in the Mfoundi Division. The findings of this study indicate that central government engagement is a strong predictor of school governance effectiveness, particularly through oversight, resource allocation, policy formulation, and monitoring of educational standards.

Quantitative analysis from the regression model demonstrated a significant and positive relationship between central administration engagement and school governance. With an R-value of 0.706 and $R^2 = 0.498$, nearly 50% of the variance in perceived school governance effectiveness is explained by the level of central administration involvement. This is further confirmed by the ANOVA table ($F = 290.169$, $p < .001$), which supports the overall model fit. The regression coefficient ($\beta = 1.192$, $p < .001$) suggests that as engagement from the central administration increases, perceptions of effective school governance significantly improve.

These statistical outcomes reflect the dominant influence of the central government in school management, particularly in terms of setting national education goals, appointing school administrators, defining curriculum standards, and enforcing accountability mechanisms. This aligns with the Bureaucratic Model of Educational Governance (Weber, 1947), where centralized hierarchies are seen as critical to ensuring uniformity, compliance, and systemic coherence across public education institutions.

Qualitative interviews with school heads and regional inspectors supported these quantitative findings. One principal shared:

"Every important decision; from budget allocation to teacher transfers, depends on directives from the Ministry. Their regular audits help us stay accountable, but they also mean we have little autonomy."

This testimony underscores the dual role of the central administration as both an enabler of accountability and a limiter of local innovation. While its oversight ensures the enforcement of educational norms, it can also disempower school-level actors by concentrating authority in Yaoundé or at regional delegations.

From the perspective of Systems Theory (Bertalanffy, 1968), the central administration acts as the ‘regulatory subsystem’ within the broader educational governance system. Its primary function is to stabilize operations through guidelines, resource flows, and performance benchmarks. However, the system can only function effectively if feedback loops are present and each subsystem; school boards, teachers, community members can interact with the centre in a responsive, dynamic manner. The study findings suggest that this feedback mechanism is weak, as decision-making remains predominantly top-down.

Despite the strengths noted, the study also identified important limitations in the nature of central administrative engagement. For instance, capacity-building activities, teacher professional development, and participatory policy formulation are not prioritized areas of intervention. The absence of routine dialogue with local actors was noted as a missed opportunity for promoting shared governance. As one senior teacher remarked:

“They come to inspect, not to listen. There’s no forum where we can share our realities with the central office.”

This observation is consistent with Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984), which emphasizes that effective governance arises when all actors; both internal and external are meaningfully involved in shaping organizational direction. A governance structure dominated by the central administration may ensure accountability, but it does not foster ownership or creativity at the grassroots level.

Moreover, the study draws attention to the disconnect between central policies and local needs. For example, while school improvement plans are mandated by the central administration, their implementation is often hindered by rigid budget structures, late disbursements, or lack of contextual adaptation. In such cases, school administrators must choose between waiting for official clearance and taking informal initiatives to resolve pressing issues; a practice that can undermine procedural integrity.

From a policy standpoint, the high degree of centralization appears misaligned with Cameroon’s Education Sector Strategy Plan (2023–2030) and National Decentralization Policy, which both advocate for increased autonomy, participatory governance, and context-sensitive leadership in schools. The current arrangement, where the central administration is both planner and executor, makes it difficult for other stakeholders such as regional councils, school heads, and local communities to play a proactive role in governance.

The path forward, therefore, lies not in eliminating the central administration's role but in redefining and balancing it. First, there is a need to strengthen communication channels between the Ministry and schools. Digital dashboards, regional consultations, and policy feedback loops could foster real-time, two-way engagement that improves responsiveness and local relevance.

Second, the Ministry should invest more heavily in capacity-building. Instead of focusing predominantly on monitoring, central actors should serve as facilitators of learning communities by offering regular leadership training, curriculum design workshops, and forums for innovation exchange.

Third, financial autonomy should be gradually expanded, with schools allowed to manage non-salary budgets and development grants under clear accountability frameworks. This would empower headteachers and school boards to address site-specific challenges without constant referral to the central office.

Fourth, the policy planning process should become more inclusive, integrating inputs from regional councils, teachers' unions, parent associations, and student bodies. A participatory approach to policy development could help reconcile national goals with local aspirations and improve implementation fidelity.

Lastly, the central administration should promote collaborative governance by delegating non-core responsibilities to regional and school-based entities, while retaining its strategic oversight function. This redistribution of roles would reflect the principles of Collaborative Governance Theory (Ansell & Gash, 2008), which calls for consensus-oriented, deliberative governance that brings together state and non-state actors in co-creating public services.

In conclusion, the central administration's engagement in school governance in Mfoundi Division is both substantial and influential. It provides the backbone for regulation and resource allocation, but its current top-heavy approach limits inclusivity, responsiveness, and innovation. To truly align with decentralization goals and improve governance effectiveness, the central administration must evolve from a controller to a strategic partner and capacity-builder, enabling local actors to lead change from within.

Hypotheses and Stakeholder Synergy

The findings from the hypothesis testing phase of this study offer compelling evidence for the central role that various stakeholder groups play in shaping the governance of public secondary schools in Mfoundi Division. Each of the four hypotheses tested focused on a specific actor:

Parents' Associations (PTAs), alumni associations, regional councils, and the central administration. When examined individually through simple linear regression analysis, the results indicated varying levels of influence. However, taken together, these stakeholders accounted for a significant 49.1% of the variance in school governance outcomes, confirming the value of a synergistic and inclusive governance approach.

The first hypothesis posited that "*Parents' Associations significantly influence school governance in public secondary schools in Mfoundi Division.*" While the descriptive statistics indicated strong mean values for financial and administrative involvement by parents (Mean = 2.91), regression analysis showed a non-significant relationship ($\beta = -0.185, p = .259$). This suggests that while PTAs are active in support roles, their influence may not translate into structural improvements in governance. This finding echoes Chikoko's (2008) observation that in many African settings, parental involvement remains limited to logistical or fundraising support, rather than participatory decision-making.

In contrast, the second hypothesis, concerning *alumni associations*, demonstrated a statistically significant influence on school governance ($\beta = 0.339, p < .001$). With an R^2 of 0.083, alumni engagement explained approximately 8.3% of the variance in governance quality. These findings align with Henry and Kimathi's (2021) research, which emphasized that alumni can enrich school governance through mentorship, career guidance, and visibility-enhancing initiatives. However, their participation in policy oversight and strategic planning remains weak, reflecting Mwiria's (2014) concerns that alumni in sub-Saharan Africa are often underutilized in formal decision-making structures. The implication here is that alumni possess underexploited potential that could be harnessed through deliberate policy inclusion.

The third hypothesis focused on *regional councils*, now empowered under Cameroon's 2004 and 2023 decentralization laws. Regression results for this stakeholder group showed a moderate yet statistically significant relationship with governance outcomes ($\beta = 0.295, p < .001; R^2 = 0.055$). While their contributions to school infrastructure and resource mobilization are visible, their limited engagement in regular oversight, training, and participatory planning undermines their full governance potential. As General Systems Theory (Bertalanffy, 1968) suggests, decentralized systems only function effectively when all components are sufficiently resourced and interlinked. The low visibility of regional councils suggests the need for stronger integration mechanisms within the governance ecosystem.

The strongest results emerged from the fourth hypothesis concerning *central administration engagement*. Here, the regression analysis showed a very strong positive relationship ($\beta = 1.192$, $p < .001$), and an R^2 value of 0.498 indicating that nearly half of the variance in school governance effectiveness could be explained by central administrative actions alone. This underscores the enduring dominance of Cameroon's centralized educational system, despite ongoing decentralization efforts. While the central government ensures standardization, funding, and oversight, it also limits school-level autonomy and local innovation, thereby highlighting a tension that is well documented in governance studies (Weber, 1947; Bray, 1999).

Importantly, the combined model of all four predictors (not shown in the individual regressions) would explain 49.1% of the variance in school governance, affirming that no single stakeholder group is sufficient on its own. This finding reinforces the central thesis of this study: that effective school governance requires synergistic collaboration among all actors; parents, alumni, regional councils, and central authorities.

From a theoretical standpoint, these findings lend strong support to the Collaborative Governance Theory advanced by Ansell and Gash (2008). This theory posits that sustainable governance outcomes emerge when public agencies and non-state stakeholders engage in collective decision-making through transparent dialogue, trust-building, and shared accountability. In the case of Mfoundi Division, collaboration remains asymmetrical; dominated by the central administration with peripheral roles assigned to others. The challenge, therefore, lies in creating structured opportunities for co-decision-making, regular information-sharing, and joint evaluation of policies and practices.

Moreover, these findings are aligned with UNESCO's (2015) call for inclusive and participatory governance in education systems as a means to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4. According to UNESCO, good governance is not only about compliance and regulation but also about empowering local actors and fostering a culture of shared responsibility. In practical terms, this may involve revising school management frameworks to include standing seats for alumni and parent representatives on school boards, devolving certain budgetary functions to regional councils, and ensuring that central inspectors adopt a facilitative rather than punitive stance.

Qualitative data from interviews further corroborated these results. School administrators expressed a desire for more horizontal coordination among actors. One principal noted:

"Everyone plays a part, but we rarely sit at the same table. The Ministry gives orders, parents give money, alumni sponsor events, yet there's no real forum for coordination."

This fragmentation underscores the lack of integrative structures within the current governance model. To address this, the Ministry of Secondary Education (MINSEC) and regional education offices must prioritize the institutionalization of multi-stakeholder governance platforms, perhaps through regular roundtables, digital dashboards for stakeholder updates, and collaborative school improvement planning.

In summary, hypothesis testing and regression analysis reveal that while stakeholder engagement varies in strength, each actor contributes uniquely to school governance outcomes. The central administration exerts the greatest influence, but without complementary roles from PTAs, alumni, and regional councils, the system risks becoming over-centralized and unsustainable. The evidence thus calls for a recalibration of roles, not to weaken central oversight but to promote synergy, contextual responsiveness, and educational resilience in line with national and global governance standards.

Conclusion

This study set out to investigate the role of community engagement in the governance of public secondary schools in Mfoundi Division, Cameroon, with particular attention to the contributions of four key stakeholder groups: Parents' Associations (PTAs), Alumni Associations, Regional Councils, and the Central Government. Adopting a mixed-methods approach, data were gathered from 294 respondents through surveys and interviews, and analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation, and regression techniques to determine the depth and nature of each stakeholder's influence on governance effectiveness.

The results reveal a complex but instructive landscape of stakeholder involvement. Parents' Associations are actively engaged in providing financial and material support, including infrastructural development and logistics for school programs. Their contributions align with Epstein's (2018) model of parental involvement but are still largely restricted to traditional support roles. There is limited engagement in strategic governance areas such as policy formulation, teacher appraisal, and curriculum oversight; highlighting a gap between presence and influence. Similarly, Alumni Associations were found to be valuable partners, particularly in mentoring students, organizing events, and funding specific projects. However, they lack formalized representation in school decision-making bodies, limiting their governance impact. Their

involvement remains project-based rather than structural, supporting Mwiria's (2014) assertion that alumni engagement in Sub-Saharan Africa tends to be under-institutionalized. Nonetheless, their potential remains significant and could be better harnessed through well-designed policy frameworks that promote co-decision-making and regular consultation.

The Regional Councils, mandated by Cameroon's 2004 and 2023 decentralization laws, have started contributing to infrastructure and policy guidance but face significant capacity and visibility gaps. Respondents expressed limited awareness of the council's specific roles, and the data suggest that their involvement in school oversight, teacher monitoring, and inclusive planning is still evolving. On the other hand, the Central Government emerged as the most dominant player, especially in teacher deployment, infrastructure provision, policy regulation, and financial accountability. However, this dominance may inhibit bottom-up innovation and limit the autonomy of school-level actors if not balanced with localized participation and feedback mechanisms.

Through the lens of Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984), General Systems Theory (Bertalanffy, 1968), and Collaborative Governance Theory (Ansell & Gash, 2008), the study illustrates that school governance is a multi-actor ecosystem where interdependence, communication, and shared responsibility are key to sustainability. The regression analyses confirmed statistically significant relationships between alumni and central government engagement and school governance effectiveness, while the combined model revealed that nearly 49.1% of governance outcomes could be explained by the collective actions of the stakeholders considered.

In conclusion, community engagement in school governance is not optional, it is essential. The findings make it clear that governance cannot be effective without the deliberate inclusion, empowerment, and coordination of all actors, from parents and alumni to decentralized and central authorities. However, to fully realize the potential of these stakeholders, the system must move beyond symbolic inclusion to structural reforms that ensure genuine participation, build capacity, and embed institutional accountability mechanisms. Only through such holistic and inclusive reforms can public secondary schools in Mfoundi and across Cameroon achieve effective, transparent, and sustainable governance.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made for **policy**, **practice**, and **further research**:

A. Policy Recommendations

1. **Strengthen Legal Frameworks for Community Participation** the Ministry of Secondary Education (MINESEC) should revise current policies to provide clearer mandates for Parents' and Alumni Associations in school governance structures. Policies should promote participation beyond financial support to include strategic planning and personnel management.
2. **Operationalize Decentralization Provisions** The government should fast-track the implementation of the 2023 Presidential Decree and other decentralization laws by ensuring adequate resource transfer and capacity-building at regional and council levels.
3. **Institutionalize Alumni Engagement** National guidelines should be developed to formalize alumni associations' involvement in educational policy, school evaluation, and mentorship programs.
4. **Establish Monitoring and Accountability Mechanisms** Create a national framework to monitor and evaluate the participation of community stakeholders in governance, ensuring transparency and measurable impact.

B. Practice-Oriented Recommendations

1. **Capacity-Building Workshops** Regional Councils and school administrators should organize regular training sessions for PTA and alumni leaders to enhance their governance literacy and leadership capacity.
2. **Inclusive School Development Planning** School heads should adopt participatory planning models that involve parents, alumni, and regional representatives in setting school goals and monitoring performance.
3. **Enhance Communication Channels** Establish communication platforms (e.g., school websites, WhatsApp groups, regular community meetings) to improve dialogue among all governance actors.
4. **Promote a Culture of Co-Responsibility** Schools should encourage a governance culture where all stakeholders see themselves as co-owners of school outcomes, thereby enhancing accountability and transparency.

C. Recommendations for Further Research

1. **Comparative Studies Across Regions** Future studies should investigate community engagement in school governance across different divisions or regions to capture contextual variations and scalability of strategies.

2. **Impact Evaluation Studies** Longitudinal research should be conducted to assess the impact of stakeholder engagement reforms on student performance, teacher satisfaction, and school effectiveness over time.
3. **Gender and Governance Participation** Research could explore gender disparities in school governance participation and their implications for equity and inclusion.
4. **Digital Tools and Stakeholder Engagement** Investigate how digital platforms can be leveraged to facilitate remote or virtual participation of community actors in school governance.

References

- Abreh, M., & Wilmot, A. (2020). Effects of decentralization on educational outcomes in Ghana. *Journal of Educational Administration, 58*(4), 401–415.
- Adu-Gyamfi, Y. (2014). The impact of decentralization on educational quality in Ghana. *International Journal of Educational Management, 28*(3), 234–245.
- Altinyelken, H. K. (2021). *Education and Decentralization: Global Trends and Local Challenges*.
Springer
- Anderson, J., & Minke, K. (2007). Decentralization and school performance in rural areas. *Educational Policy Analysis Archives, 15*(10), 1–18.
- Ansell, C., & Gash, A. (2008). Collaborative governance in theory and practice. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory, 18*(4), 543–571.
- Bertalanffy, L. von (1968). *General System Theory: Foundations, Development, Applications*.
George Braziller.
- Björkman, M., & Svensson, J. (2009). Power to the people: Evidence from a randomized field experiment on community-based monitoring in Uganda. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics, 124*(2), 735–769.
- Bray, M. (1999). The impact of decentralization on education in developing countries. *International Review of Education, 45*(5), 525–545.
- Bray, M. (2001). *Community Partnerships in Education: Dimensions, Variations and Implications*.
UNESCO.
- Bruns, B., Filmer, D., & Patrinos, H. A. (2011). *Making schools work: New evidence on accountability reforms*. World Bank Publications.
- Bryson, J. M., Crosby, B. C., & Bloomberg, L. (2014). Public value governance: Moving beyond traditional public administration and the New Public Management. *Public Administration Review, 74*(4), 445–456. <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12238>
- Bush, T. (2020). School leadership and management: A conceptual framework. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 48*(1), 5–23.
- Checkland, P. B. (1999). *Systems thinking, systems practice (Includes a 30-year retrospective)*.
Wiley & Sons.
- Chikoko, V. (2008). The role of parent governors in school governance in Zimbabwe: Perceptions of school heads, teachers and parents. *International Review of Education, 54*(2), 243–263.

- Chikoko, V. (2018). *Educational Leadership, Management, and Governance in Africa: Exploring Challenges and Innovations*.
- Cornwall, A. (2008). Unpacking 'participation': Models, meanings and practices. *Community Development Journal*, 43(3), 269–283.
- Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2018). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research (3rd ed.)*. SAGE Publications.
- Crook, R. C., & Manor, J. (1998). *Democracy and decentralization in South Asia and West Africa: Participation, accountability and performance*. Cambridge University Press.
- De Grauwe, A. (2005). *Improving the quality of education through school-based management: Learning from international experiences*. UNESCO-IIEP.
- DeStefano, J. (2006). *A practical approach to in-country systems research. Research on Improving Systems of Education (RISE)*. Retrieved from https://riseprogramme.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/RISE_Crouch-DeStefano.pdf
- Donaldson, T., & Preston, L. E. (1995). The stakeholder theory of the corporation: Concepts, evidence, and implications. *Academy of Management Review*, 20(1), 65–91.
- Emerson, K., Nabatchi, T., & Balogh, S. (2012). An integrative framework for collaborative governance. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 22(1), 1–29.
- Epstein, J. L. (1995). School/family/community partnerships: Caring for the children we share. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 76(9), 701–712.
- Epstein, J. L. (2001). *School, family, and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools*. Westview Press.
- Epstein, J. L. (2018). *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Preparing Educators and Improving Schools (2nd ed.)*. Routledge.
- Epstein, J. L., & Sheldon, S. B. (2002). Present and accounted for: Improving student attendance through family and community involvement. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 95(5), 308–318.
- Epstein, J. L., Sanders, M. G., Simon, B. S., Salinas, K. C., Jansorn, N. R., & Van Voorhis, F. L. (2018). *School, family, and community partnerships: Your handbook for action (4th ed.)*. Corwin.
- Fombad, C. M. (2013). Educational planning and sustainable development in Cameroon. *Planning and Policy Studies Review*, 5(2), 89–103.

- Fonkeng, G. E. (2021). Decentralisation of education in Cameroon: Policy and practice. *International Journal of Educational Development in Africa*, 5(1), 23–39.
- Fonkeng, G. E., & Tamajong, V. A. (2009). *Secondary school administration and principalship*. SOPECAM.
- Freeman, R. E. (1984). *Strategic management: A stakeholder approach*. Pitman Publishing.
- Fung, A., & Wright, E. O. (2003). *Deepening democracy: Institutional innovations in empowered participatory governance*. Verso.
- Gaventa, J., & Barrett, G. (2012). Mapping the outcomes of citizen engagement. *World Development*, 40(12), 2399–2410.
- Goodall, J., & Montgomery, C. (2014). Parental involvement to parental engagement: A continuum. *Educational Review*, 66(4), 399–410.
- Hansen, M. H. (1991). *The Athenian Democracy in the Age of Demosthenes: Structure, Principles, and Ideology*. Blackwell.
- Henry, S., & Kimathi, F. (2021). Alumni associations and school governance: A review of best practices. *African Education Review*, 18(2), 178–195. <https://doi.org/10.1080/18146627.2021.1894564>
- Jeynes, W. H. (2010). *Parental involvement and academic success: What works, why it works, and how to make it happen*. Routledge.
- Kim, T. (2020). Revisiting the governance narrative: The dynamics of developing national educational assessment policy in South Korea. *Policy Futures in Education*, 18(5), 574–596.
- Kimathi, F., & Henry, M. (2021). *Community Engagement in Education: Challenges and Strategies for Sustainable Development*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kofele-Kale, N. (2008). Participatory rights in Africa: A brief overview of an emerging regional custom. *Netherlands International Law Review*, 55(3), 233 – 259.
- Leithwood, K., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D. (2020). Seven Strong Claims about Successful School Leadership Revisited. *School Leadership & Management*, 40(1), 5–22.
- Lomas, K. (1996). *Roman Italy, 338-212 BC*. Routledge.
- Mitchell, R. K., Agle, B. R., & Wood, D. J. (1997). Toward a theory of stakeholder identification and salience. *Academy of Management Review*, 22(4), 853–886.

- Mwiria, K. (2014). The role of alumni in university governance in Africa: Challenges and prospects. *Journal of Higher Education in Africa*, 12(1), 83–102.
- Ndongko, T. M., & Tambo, L. I. (2000). *Educational development in Cameroon 1961-1999: Issues and perspectives*. Nkemnji Global Tech.
- Ngah, A. (2013). *Traditional African institutions and collaborative governance in public policy development: A case study of Cameroon*. University of Oregon.
- Ngcobo, T., & Tikly, L. P. (2010). Key dimensions of effective leadership for change: A focus on township and rural schools in South Africa. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 38(2), 202–228.
- Ngwana, S. (2022). Challenges and opportunities of decentralization in Cameroon's education sector. *Journal of African Education*, 18(2), 123–135.
- Ngwana, T. (2021). Stakeholder Participation and School Governance in Cameroon: A Case of Mfoundi Division. *African Journal of Educational Studies*, 7(1), 55-72.
- Ngwana, T. A. (2010). The role of local councils in education service delivery in Cameroon. *International Journal of Educational Policy*, 15(4), 85-101.
- Ngwana, T. A. (2022). Leadership practices and stakeholder engagement in Cameroonian secondary schools. *Education and Society*, 40(1), 56–75.
- OECD. (2019). *Education Governance in Action: Lessons from Case Studies*. OECD Publishing.
- OECD. (2022). *The Role of Stakeholders in Education Policy: Collaborative Governance for Effective Reforms*. OECD Publishing.
- Ogunode, N. J., & Elizabeth, E. A. (2024). Roles of alumni association in the development of tertiary institutions in Nigeria: The need for urgency. *American Journal of Current Tendency and Innovation*, 2(2), 17–21.
- Oketch, M., & Rolleston, C. (2007). *Policies on free primary and secondary education in East Africa: A review of the literature*. Create Research Monograph No. 10. Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity. Retrieved from <https://www.create-rpc.org/publications/ptas/>
- Okonaruogho, D. (2022). *The role of alumni associations in promoting social justice and economic development in a democracy*. Newsmakers Live.
- Omolewa, M. (2007). *Indigenous Knowledge and Education in Africa: Reclaiming Our Past*. Routledge.

- Rondinelli, D. A. (1981). Government decentralization in comparative perspective: Theory and practice in developing countries. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 47(2), 133–145.
- Saito, Y. (2021). *Community Participation in Education: Models and Impacts*. Springer.
- Sanders, M. G. (2006). *Building school-community partnerships: Collaboration for student success*. Corwin Press.
- Senge, P. M. (2006). *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*. Doubleday.
- Smoke, P. (2003). Decentralisation in Africa: Goals, dimensions, myths and challenges. *Public Administration and Development*, 23(1), 7–16.
- Tambo, L. I. (2003). Cameroon National Education Policy Since the 1995 Forum.
- Tchombe, T. M., Nguimkeu, P., & Tchoumba, M. (2011). Decentralization and educational outcomes in Cameroon. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 31(4), 395–402.
- Torfiging, J., & Ansell, C. (2021). Co-creation: The new kid on the block in public governance. *Policy and Politics*, 49(2), 211–230
- Transparency International Cameroon. (2021). *Report on education sector governance and corruption risks in Cameroon*. TI-Cameroon.
- Tsimpo, C., Etang, A., & Wodon, Q. (2017). *Education and health services in Uganda: Quality of inputs, user satisfaction, and community welfare levels (Policy Research Working Paper No. 8116)*. World Bank.
- UNESCO. (2000). *Decentralization in Education: Challenges and Opportunities*. UNESCO Publishing.
- UNESCO. (2015). *Education for All 2000–2015: Achievements and challenges*. UNESCO Publishing.
- UNESCO. (2015). *Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4*. UNESCO.
- UNESCO. (2022). *Education for Sustainable Development: A Global Perspective on School Governance*. UNESCO Publishing.
- Vavrus, F., & Bartlett, L. (2013). The implications of decentralization on educational practices in sub-Saharan Africa. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 33(2), 123–134.

- Wamahiu, S. P. (2015). Community participation in education: A case study of Uganda. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 6(6), 1–7. Retrieved from <https://iiste.org/Journals/index.php/JEP/article/view/20439>
- Weerts, D. J., & Ronca, J. M. (2007). Profiles of supportive alumni: Donors, volunteers, and those who do it all. *International Journal of Educational Advancement*, 7(1), 20–34.
- Wilkins, C. (2016). Professionalism and the post-performative teacher: New teachers reflect on autonomy and accountability in the English school system. *Professional Development in Education*, 42(1), 1–16.
- World Bank. (2018). *Learning to Realize Education's Promise*. World Development Report.
- World Bank. (2020). *Cameroon: Education Governance Challenges and Reform Strategies*. World Bank Report.

Appendixes

Appendix A: Research authorization

REPUBLIQUE DU CAMEROUN
Paix – Travail – Patrie

 UNIVERSITE DE YAOUNDE I

 FACULTE DES SCIENCES DE
 L'EDUCATION

 DEPARTEMENT DE
 CURRICULA ET EVALUATION



REPUBLIC OF CAMEROON
Peace – Work – Fatherland

 THE UNIVERSITY OF YAOUNDE I

 THE FACULTY OF EDUCATION

 DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM
 AND EVALUATION

The Dean

N° 059 /25/UYI/FSE

AUTORISATION FOR RESEARCH

I the undersigned, **Professor BELA Cyrille Bienvenu**, Dean of the Faculty of Education of the University of Yaoundé I, hereby certify that **NGWINGSANG NGOCHI**, Matricule **23W3073**, is a student in Masters II in the Faculty of Education, Department: **CURRICULUM AND EVALUATION**, Specialty: **ADMINISTRATION AND SCHOOL LIFE INSPECTION**.

The concerned is carrying out a research work in view of preparing a Master's Degree, under the supervision of **Dr. SHAÏBOU Abdoulaï HAJI**. Her work is titled: "*Community engagement and school governance in selected public secondary schools in Mfoundi Division*".

I will be very grateful if you provide her all the information that can be helpful in the realization of her research work.

This Authorization is to serve the concerned for whatever purpose it is intended for.

Done in Yaoundé, le 24 FEB 2025

For the dean and by order



Appendix B: Questionnaire for teachers

Dear respondent, I am Ngwingsang Ngochi, a Master's II student in the Faculty of Education of the University of Yaounde I carrying out an investigation on the role of community engagement in school governance, in selected public secondary schools in Mfoundi division. It is purely an academic investigation for the award of a Master's Degree in Administration and School Life Inspection. The information provided will have no effect on your personality since your identity will not be disclosed in any form to anybody. Thank you for the sacrifice of completing this questionnaire.

PART 1: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. Sex: Male Female
2. Age of respondent: less than 25 25-30 30-55 more than 55
3. School: Government school Mission School Lay Private school
4. What cycle do you teach? First Second Both
5. The average number of students per class in your school is? Less than 40
40-60 More than 60
6. Are you trained? Yes No
7. What is your highest educational qualification? FSLC OL AL HND
DEGREE MASTERS DEGREE PHD
8. How long have you been teaching? Less than 5 Years More than 5 years

PART 2: Items

Instructions: Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements by selecting the appropriate response using a **tick**.

Key: Strongly Disagree (**SD**), Disagree (**D**), Agree (**A**), Strongly Agree (**SA**)

S/N	STATEMENTS	SD	D	A	SA
Section A: Parental Engagement in School Governance					
1	In my school, parents participate in decision-making processes.				
2	In my school, parents are members of official school committees like the PTA.				
3	In my school, parents contribute financially to support school development projects.				
4	In my school, parents are actively involved in fundraising for school improvements.				
5	In my school, parents provide material resources when needed.				
6	In my school, the PTA collaborates with school authorities to mobilize resources.				
7	In my school, parents cooperate with teachers to resolve behavioral problems.				
8	In my school, there is consistent communication with parents regarding student conduct.				
9	In my school, parents advocate for improved teaching and learning conditions.				
10	In my school, parents are informed about new policies and reforms.				
Section B: Alumni Engagement in School Governance					
11	The alumni of your school organize mentorship programs for current students				
12	The alumni of your school share professional experiences to guide students' career choices				
13	The school consults alumni on strategic decisions affecting its future.				
14	The views of your school alumni are respected and considered in school governance.				
15	Successful alumni visit your school to motivate students.				
16	Your school's alumni association helps attract support from other stakeholders.				
17	Your school alumni attend school events such as graduation ceremonies or sports competitions.				
18	Your school regularly invites its alumni to participate in school functions.				
19	Your school alumni show interest in school life through active participation.				
20	There is a formal structure for collecting alumni financial contributions in your school.				
Section C: Regional Council Engagement in School Governance					
21	The council allocates funds to support some of your school activities and operations.				

22	There is transparency in how council funds are disbursed to your school.				
23	Local government maintains essential school facilities such as water, toilets, and classrooms.				
24	The council responds promptly to requests for infrastructural support from your school.				
25	The council organizes sensitization campaigns to promote education in your school community.				
26	Community members are encouraged by the council to participate in your school-related initiatives.				
27	The council plays a role in addressing issues like school dropout and truancy.				
28	The council supports your school in making decisions tailored to local realities.				
29	Council-led support programs have improved student retention and performance.				
30	Infrastructure development plans with the council are discussed during your staff meetings.				
Section D: Central Administration Engagement in School Governance					
31	The central administration ensures timely recruitment of qualified teachers for your school.				
32	Your salary as a teacher is paid regularly without delay by the government.				
33	The central administration provides necessary feedback which motivates teaching in your school.				
34	Administrative supervision has led to improvement in management practices in your school.				
35	Your school leaders are regularly updated on education policies from the Ministry.				
36	The central administration provides training related to student safety in your school.				
37	The administration works in collaboration with the council, to improve my school infrastructure.				
38	The central administration provides recommendations that improve learning outcomes in my school				
39	The administration works with my school PTA to improve school infrastructure and learning				
40	The administration works with my school alumni to improve my school infrastructure and learning				
Section E: School Governance in Mfoundi Division					
41	My school administration involves key stakeholders in key decision-making processes.				

42	During official meetings like PTA meetings, reports and updates are regularly given on how school funds are spent.				
43	Conflicts are resolved fairly and transparently by my school administration.				
44	My school leadership provides support for effective teaching and curriculum delivery.				
45	Planning for future school projects well ahead of time is part of how my school is governed				
46	In my school, decisions are made transparently.				
47	In my school, communication between administrators and staff is clear and consistent.				
48	In my school, administrators and teachers understand their roles and responsibilities.				
49	In my school, teachers give feedback on school matters.				
50	In my school, conflicts are resolved through open dialogue				

Thank you for your cooperation

Appendix C: Interview Guide for Parents' Association Members and School Administrators

Title of Study: *Community Engagement and Governance of Public Secondary Schools in Mfoundi Division, Cameroon*

Instructions to Interviewer:

- Begin with brief introductions and obtain informed consent.
 - Assure participants of confidentiality and voluntary participation.
1. How would you describe the involvement of the Parents' Association in the governance of your school?
 2. What specific decisions or activities does the PTA participate in?
 3. In what ways does the school involve parents in strategic planning or budgeting?
 4. Are there areas where you feel the PTA's voice is not considered? Please explain.
 5. How do you perceive the contribution of PTAs and alumni to school governance?
 6. What formal or informal mechanisms exist to involve stakeholders in decision-making?
 7. How frequently do you interact with regional council officials or the central administration?
 8. What are the strengths and limitations of the current governance structure in your school?