

Parental Engagement in Higher Education: Public University Students' Perspectives in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Parental engagement in higher education focuses on collaborative partnerships where parents or guardians and the university work together to foster student's personal, academic and professional development. Despite the fact that the students at the university are mature and of legal age to make their own decisions, most of them still rely on their parents for support. Parental engagement has been found to have a positive impact on educational outcomes including academic attainment and educational aspirations and progression. This study examined the extent to which university students perceive parental engagement in their academic and personal wellbeing, the factors influencing such engagement, and the activities deemed appropriate for parental engagement. Data was gathered using a questionnaire containing both Likert scale type and open ended questions. A total of 355 students randomly selected from undergraduate students across the four years of the university learning responded to the questionnaires. Focus group discussions were used to elicit detailed views on parental engagement in their studies. The results showed that parents were mostly engaged in celebrating career achievements such as graduations and award ceremonies as well as attending to concerns over health issues and payment of fees. The parent's social economic status, profession and attitude were identified to be key factors that affect parental engagement in higher education. The students identified program celebration, regular communication, involvement in university decision making processes and mentorship programs as appropriate avenues for parental engagement. The study underscores the importance of balanced parental engagement that fosters student independence while providing necessary support. The study recommends that universities, policymakers, and families seeking to enhance student success develop constructive partnerships through structured collaborative parental engagement programs.

Keywords: Parental engagement, Higher education, University students' support, Student perspectives, Family-university partnerships

INTRODUCTION

Parental engagement (PE) has increasingly been recognised as an important contributor to student success across educational levels, not only in terms of academic outcomes but also for wellbeing, motivation, and persistence (Esau, 2018; Choge & Edabu, 2023). While much research has focused on parental engagement in primary and secondary education, there remains a gap in understanding its role within higher education. Though they are considered to be adults, university students continue to benefit from the social, emotional, and economic support of their families. In the context of Kenya, where higher education expansion has diversified the student population and increased financial pressures on families, understanding how parental engagement manifests, and is perceived, at the university level would be a powerful tool to improve higher learning. Unlike in early years of learning where parental roles often focus on direct assistance with learning, PE at the tertiary level tends to be more indirect, emphasizing emotional support, guidance, financial provision, and communication with the student and institution. It involves active parent or guardian participation in the student's learning journey. It extends beyond academic achievement to include building partnerships where students, educators and parents work together to foster overall success of the learner through coordinated efforts in and out of the university setting.

Parental engagement in tertiary settings include financial support, provision of emotional and moral support, academic guidance, advisory support and follow-up on the student's progress which involves communication

with the institution (Esau, 2018; Harper et al., 2019). Research indicates that parental engagement contributes to students' motivation, persistence, and academic success by providing emotional stability, financial support, autonomy support and guidance on career aspirations (Zulfikar, et al, 2025; Luedke, et al, 2024; Chen, et al, 2023; Song, et al,2024; Lin & Zainudin, 2024). However, the appropriate boundary between involvement and autonomy is often contested. In higher education settings, the nature and appropriateness of such engagement often differ from earlier schooling. Universities emphasize student autonomy and independence, leading to debates about the appropriate boundaries of parental engagement (Esau, 2018; Ramesh Sharma, 2022). University students are viewed as emerging adult learners who are increasingly expected to assume responsibility for their own decisions, learning, and personal development (Lowe & Dotterer, 2018; Kinsella, 2023). This tension is particularly significant in the African context, where collectivist family structures and cultural expectations place high value on continued parental responsibility and moral guidance even into adulthood. However, according to Onu (2015), parents viewed themselves as consumers, involved partners and investors in their child's higher-education experience. Rather than viewing higher education as a period of complete independence, many African families conceptualize educational success as a shared family responsibility shaped by collectivist values and interdependence (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2020; Duma & Shawa, 2019; Okello, 2023).

In Kenya, the high cost of university education, coupled with socio-economic inequalities, makes parental financial support indispensable. Furthermore, as universities increasingly seek to strengthen student support systems, questions arise regarding how and in what areas parents should be appropriately involved in university life. Parents continue to play crucial roles in fee payment, upkeep provision, and emotional support through communication and visits (Boit, 2015; Mbogo, & Njeru, 2022). However, limited research has examined the extent to which students perceive their parents as engaged in their academic and personal wellbeing, or the factors that shape such engagement. Empirical work in Kenya, has mainly explored parental involvement in early childhood, primary and secondary education levels showing parental engagement in communication, homework assistance, financial contribution and linkage between teacher and home (Choge, & Edabu, 2023; Kararwa, et al. 2025, Mugambi & Ngaruiya, 2020; Muigai, 2021; Mwangi, et al., 2024). Unlike earlier educational levels where parental participation is formally recognized, parental engagement in Kenyan universities is largely informal and often concentrated around financial obligations and student welfare rather than direct academic engagement. This study, therefore, explores the extent and nature of parental engagement as perceived by students in Kenyan public universities.

Statement of the Problem

Parental engagement has long been recognized as an important factor in supporting learners' academic achievement, personal development and general educational success across different levels of education particularly in basic education. While extensive research has examined parental engagement in primary and secondary education, comparatively less attention has been given to parental engagement in higher education, particularly from the perspective of university students. Higher education presents a distinct context in which students are legally adults and are expected to demonstrate increasing autonomy, independence, and responsibility for academic and personal decisions. Despite this assumption of student maturity and autonomy, the changing social, economic, and educational realities have continued to shape the relationships between the parent, the learner and the institution in higher education. University students continue to experience challenges that require sustained family support, including financial constraints, emotional stress, academic pressure, adjustment to university life, and uncertainty regarding future careers.

In the Kenyan context, the rising cost of higher education, socio-economic inequalities, and strong collectivist family values may increase the need for sustained parental engagement even after students' transition into higher education. At the same time, university experience is expected to develop in learner's self-regulation, independent decision-making, and personal responsibility. Despite emerging global discourse emphasizing the importance of holistic student development and shared responsibility between families and institutions, there is limited empirical evidence in Kenya regarding the nature, extent, and perceived relevance of parental engagement in university education. Existing studies in Kenya have largely focused on access, financing, academic performance, and student welfare (Mutiso, et al., 2015; Mobegi, & Kara, 2022; Xiaoguang, et al., 2021), with inadequate attention given to understanding students' perspectives on the role parents continue to play during university education. Consequently, the potential benefits of parental engagement in enhancing

students' educational progress remain underexplored and undervalued in the Kenyan higher education context. The problem is further compounded by r, articulated policies or guidelines regarding parental interaction and engagement in Kenyan public universities (Onu, 2015). This institutional ambiguity creates challenges for university administrators and faculty who must navigate parental inquiries and involvement without a standard framework, potentially leading to inconsistencies in practice and strained student-parent-university relationships. It is therefore important to engage the students in determining appropriate PE activities. This study parental engagement in higher education from the perspectives of public university students in Kenya in order to understand the forms, extent, perceived benefits, and challenges of parental engagement. It generates insights on how university students perceive their parents' involvement, either as supportive or intrusive, without which, universities may miss opportunities to design inclusive strategies that foster positive parental partnerships while respecting students' autonomy and privacy. The evidence generated can inform institutional policies on parental engagement partnerships that support student success. It helps clarify the role of parents in higher education and inform institutional policies that support student success through balanced parental engagement.

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to fill the empirical gaps by investigating the engagement in Kenyan public universities specifically from the perspective of the students, who are the primary subjects of both their parents' involvement and the university's mission. Understanding student perspectives is crucial to developing contextually relevant policies that balance the benefits of parental support with the imperative of fostering student independence. Insights from this study are intended to inform policy and institutional practices aimed at balancing student autonomy with beneficial parental support in Kenyan higher education. Understanding these dimensions of parental engagement is vital for developing institutional policies and practices that balance parental support with student autonomy, thereby fostering holistic student development in higher education.

Objectives of the Study

The study sought to:

- i. Find out the student's perception of the extent of parental engagement university education.
- ii. Determine the factors that affect parental engagement at the university level.
- iii. Examine students' perception of parental engagement activities in higher education.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following questions

- (i) To what extent do public university students in Kenya perceive their parents as engaged in their education?
- (ii) What factors affect parental engagement at the university level?
- (iii) In which activities do university students consider parental engagement to be appropriate?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study framework is supported by Epstein's Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence (Epstein, 2011; 2018), supported by principles of Emerging Adulthood Theory (Arnett, 2000; 2015) to explain the balance between parental engagement and student autonomy in higher education. Epstein's Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence, developed by Joyce L. Epstein. posits that learners' educational outcomes are strengthened when there is meaningful interaction among three major contexts: family, educational institutions, and the learner. Epstein argues that student development is enhanced when schools and families work collaboratively and share responsibility rather than operating independently. The overlap represents the shared goals and mutual interests connecting these environments. According to Epstein, parental engagement extends beyond financial provision and includes communication, emotional support, decision-making, learning support, volunteering, and partnerships with educational institutions. Although originally developed for school education, the framework has increasingly been applied in higher education to explain how parental support contributes to students'

academic achievement, persistence, wellbeing, and educational aspirations. It provides a useful lens for understanding students' perceptions regarding: the extent of parental engagement in university life; areas where involvement is considered beneficial; and boundaries that preserve student independence.

Emerging Adulthood Theory developed by Jeffrey Jensen Arnett complements Epstein's framework. Emerging adulthood refers to the developmental period between approximately 18-29 years, during which young people gradually transition from dependence to independence. During this stage, individuals continue to rely on family support while simultaneously developing self-direction and decision-making capacity. Arnett argues that university students occupy a unique developmental stage characterized by self-development instability and transition, thus the need to understand their perspectives in parental engagement. These theories provide a framework for understanding parental engagement as a collaborative and evolving process that supports student success while acknowledging students' transition into adulthood.

The framework is further strengthened by Alexander Astin's Student Involvement Theory (1984; 1999), which explains how students' learning and development are influenced by the quality and quantity of physical and psychological energy they invest in the university experience. According to Astin, student success is also determined by the extent to which students actively engage in academic, social, and developmental activities. This includes participation in learning activities, interactions with peers and faculty, commitment to educational goals, and engagement in institutional life. Within the context of parental engagement in higher education, Astin's theory suggests that parental support may influence student outcomes indirectly by shaping students' motivation, persistence, wellbeing, and ability to participate meaningfully in university experiences. Appropriate parental engagement may strengthen student involvement through emotional encouragement, guidance, and resource support, while excessive parental control may reduce opportunities for independent engagement and self-directed development. The relevance of this theory to this study is the shift of attention from parental actions alone to students' interpretations of those actions and how such experiences influence their participation in university life. It therefore complements Epstein's emphasis on family-institution relationships and Arnett's emphasis on developmental transition by explaining how parental engagement is experienced and translated into student development outcomes in the university environment.

The three theories operate at complementary levels to provide a multidimensional framework for examining public university students' perspectives on parental engagement in Kenya by addressing family influence, developmental transition, and student participation in higher education.

METHODOLOGY

Descriptive survey research was conducted to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. Questionnaires, focus group discussions and interview schedules were utilized to collect. A random sample of 355 university students was involved in responding to the questionnaires. The sample cut across the four years of the undergraduate learners in the university. Further, six focus group discussions were used to provide an in-depth understanding of the . Quantitative data was analysed through descriptive statistics providing frequency tables, while qualitative data was thematically analysed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

PE Respondents Biodata

A total of 355 university learners across the four years at the university responded to the questionnaire. Females were 162 (45.6%) and males were 193 (54.4%). This indicates that both males and females participated in the study making the study devoid of gender bias.

Perceived Nature and Extent of Parental Engagement

The respondents were asked to rate the extent of parental engagement in university education in various areas. The results obtained are as presented on Table 1

The responses were rated on a 5 level Likert scale showing: No extent (1), Very little extent (2), Moderate extent (3), Great extent (4) and Very great extent (5)

Table 1: Students Rating on the Extent of Parental Engagement

	Parental engagement	1%	2%	3%	4%	5%
1	Payment of fees	13.2	9.0	12.4	16.9	48.5
2	Provision for upkeep	9.9	16.1	15.2	20.8	38.0
3	Follow up on class progress	19.4	15.5	18.3	23.9	22.8
4	Moral support through calls and visits	9.6	14.1	25.9	19.4	31.0
5	Concern over health issues and emotional concerns	8.2	6.8	18.9	23.1	43.1
6	Value based engagement (parental communication about their attitudes towards university education)	4.8	11.0	20.6	26.2	37.5
7	Aspirations (selection of courses)	15.2	10.4	17.70	26.2	30.4
8	Progression (communication on career expectation and development)	12.7	10.1	21.1	25.6	30.4
9	Parental support for nursing mothers	17.5	14.1	22.8	18.9	26.8
10	Engagement in the university based programmes (eg career days, cultural days, Presentations, curriculum reviews)	30.7	21.7	19.2	11.5	16.9
11	Celebrating career development (eg Graduations, Award ceremonies)	11.5	3.9	15.5	10.7	58.3

The respondents indicated four key areas they level of parental engagement. The four areas included: celebrating career development such as graduations and award ceremonies (69.0%), showing concern over health and emotional issues (66.2%), payment of fees (65.4%) and communicating their attitudes towards university education (63.7%). A fair extent of parental participation was reported on provision for upkeep, selection of courses and communication on career expectations as represented by 58.8%, 56.6% and 56.0% respectively. Notably half (50.4%) of the respondents rated parents' participation in provision of moral support as high. Parental extent of participation on class progress follow up was rated low (46.7%) while parental support for nursing mothers was rated 45.7%. Minimal level of engagement was noted concerning parents' engagement in the university based programs such as career days, cultural days, presentations, curriculum reviews (28.40%). Generally, the results indicate average levels of parental participation in university education and reveals areas that require attention specifically Engagement in the university based programs

Parents remain moderately engaged in university students' education, with the highest levels of involvement reported in celebrating career milestones, concern over health and emotional issues, payment of fees, and communicating attitudes toward university education. These findings indicate that parents continue to play a vital supportive and motivational role, primarily through financial provision and psychosocial encouragement. This aligns with earlier studies showing that financial support is the most visible form of parental engagement in higher education (Esau, 2018; Muigai, 2021). It also resonates with research by Choge and Edabu (2023), which highlights the enduring role of parents in promoting student persistence through material and moral support. The results, however, suggest limited engagement in academic follow-up and participation in university-based programs such as open days and curriculum activities. This finding reflects a broader trend in Kenyan higher education where parents are often perceived as "sponsors" rather than active partners in learning (Kararwa et al., 2025).

In focus group discussions, participants expressed that parental engagement at the university level is largely financial, with limited academic involvement. Most students acknowledged that parents are highly engaged in paying fees, providing upkeep, and offering moral support through regular communication. However, few parents follow up on students' class progress or academic performance. *'Some parents also take the trouble to visit us once in a while'* one of them said. Another student indicated that *"Most of us depend on parents for fees and upkeep, but beyond that, we manage our studies on our own."* Another student indicated *"My parents are*

very supportive financially, but they rarely ask how I'm doing in class, they believe that at this level, I should be responsible."

The relatively low participation in academic or institutional activities may be attributed to structural and cultural factors. Many universities in Kenya lack formal frameworks for parental engagement, while cultural beliefs often regard university students as independent adults who should manage their own academic affairs. Consequently, parental engagement tends to be reactive-focused on crises or financial obligations-rather than proactive or developmental.

Areas of Appropriate Parental Engagement

University students were areas in which parents should be engaged in the higher education. 10 five level Likert scaled statements were provided and the respondents indicated extent to which they agreed with the statements based on Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Undecided (U), Agree (A) and Strongly Agree (SA). The data obtained is presented on Table 2.

Table 2: Areas of Parental Engagement

	Areas of parental engagement	SD%	D%	U%	A%	SA%
1	Parents should be engaged in student programme launch (orientation)	20.6	6.5	17.5	24.8	30.7
2	Parents should be engaged in program celebration	8.5	5.6	13	33	40
3	Parents should attend students seminars and conferences	20.6	18.3	19.7	18	23.4
4	University should involve parents in family engagement events	16.1	12.4	20	27.3	24.2
5	Parents should attend university open and career days	16.9	13.2	15.2	26.5	28.2
6	University should engage parents in decision making processes	13.2	9.0	12.4	29.6	35.8
7	University should involve parents in volunteer works	18.6	14.1	19.2	22.8	25.4
8	Parents should be involved in university-led community activities	12.1	12.4	14.4	25.6	35.5
9	Parents should be involved in mentorship programs	9.9	10.4	15.8	32.1	31.8
10	University should engage parents in regular communication	13.5	9.0	12.1	27.0	38.3

The findings displayed on Table 2 reveal that majority (73.0%) of the university students agreed that parents should be engaged in student programme celebration. The students indicated that the university should engage parents in decision making processes (65.4%), regular communication (65.3%) and mentorship programs (63.9%). Slightly more than a third of the students (61.1%) felt that it was important for the university to engage parents in university-led community activities. Fair majorities (55.5%, 54.7% and 51.5%) of the students agreed that there is need for parents to be engaged in students programme launch, university open and career days and university engagement events respectively. The data reveals that less than half of the students (48.2% and 41.4%) considered parental engagement in volunteer work and attending of students' seminars and conferences necessary. Students generally agreed that parents should be engaged in activities that strengthen the parent-university relationship, such as program celebrations, decision-making processes, mentorship, community activities, and regular communication. These findings indicate an emerging recognition among students that universities can benefit from constructive family-institution partnerships. Generally, the university students indicated need for parental engagement.

From focus group discussions (FGD) learners reported a shift in expectations about the role of parents in their learning. While they appreciate parental concern, they also value autonomy in decision-making. Over-involvement was sometimes perceived as interference. *"We are adults now. Parents should support us but not control us."* Another student mused *'It's good when parents call to check on you, it however, becomes stressful when they want to decide which course or friends you should have.'* Many participants emphasized the importance of parents providing guidance without undermining independence. FGD participants indicated that parents should be engaged in activities that celebrate milestones and offer psychosocial support, such as graduation ceremonies, career fairs, and mentorship programs. They supported institutional efforts to include

parents in orientation programs. Statements like; *“It would be good for parents to attend orientation so that they know what we go through at the university.”* and *“Parents should be invited to career days; it helps them understand our goals”* were made. However, most disagreed with involving parents in university decision-making or academic administration, arguing that such roles should be left to students and university administration.

This perspective aligns with international research emphasizing that family engagement in higher education enhances students’ sense of belonging, mental health, and motivation (Sharma, 2022). The students’ preference for parental participation in celebrations and mentorship suggests that they value symbolic and emotional forms of involvement rather than direct interference in academic decision-making. This balance underscores the need for universities to design inclusive family engagement strategies that preserve student autonomy while acknowledging the positive influence of parents.

The results also suggest a cultural dimension to these preferences. In collectivist societies such as Kenya, family pride and shared achievement remain central to educational success. Therefore, engaging parents in graduation ceremonies, award events, and mentorship activities reinforces communal values of support, interdependence, and moral accountability agreeing with Mugambi and Ngaruiya (2020).

Factors Influencing Parental Engagement

Various factors influence parental engagement in university education. The respondents were asked to indicate the level of agreement with seven statements on factors that influence parental engagement. The responses were rated on a 5 level Likert scale showing: Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Undecided (U), Agree (A) and Strongly Agree (SA). Table 3 shows the results obtained.

Table 3: Factors Influencing Parental Engagement

	Statement	SD%	D%	U%	A%	SA%
1	Parents with high social economic status participate more in university education	14.6	5.1	11	19.7	49.6
2	Female parents are more involved in university education than male parents	20	10.7	19.2	23.9	26.2
3	Parent/guardian with positive attitude towards university education participate more	11	7.3	8.7	14.9	58
4	Older Parent/guardian (over 60 years) participates more in university education	16.9	21.1	26.5	18	17.5
5	Parents in professional occupation participate more in university education	9.9	7.3	12.7	20.3	49.9
6	Cultural beliefs influence parental engagement in university education	11.9	17.6	17.6	26.3	26.6
7	Access to technology enhances parental engagement in university education	12.1	10.4	14.6	24.2	38.6

The results indicated that Parent/guardian with positive attitude towards university education participate highly in university education (72.9%). Further, Parents in professional occupation participate more in university education than those who are not in professional occupation (70.2%). A considerable majority (69.3%) of the respondents indicated that Parents with high social economic status participate more in university education. Slightly more than two thirds (62.8%) of the respondents implied that access to technology enhances parental engagement in university education. Cultural beliefs influence parental engagement in university education as indicated by 52.9% while Female parents are not necessarily more involved in university education than male parents (50.1%). The study identified socio-economic status, parental occupation, attitude toward education, access to technology, and cultural beliefs as major determinants of parental engagement. Parents with higher socio-economic status or professional occupations were perceived as more involved, primarily due to their greater capacity to provide financial resources and maintain communication. Similarly, parents who hold positive attitudes toward higher education tend to engage more consistently in their children’s learning.

Students identified several factors influencing the level of parental engagement: Students from families at higher socio-economic status (well-off) reported higher levels of parental financial and emotional support. Educated and professionally employed parents were seen as more likely to follow up on academic matters while those less educated did not even enquire how the learners were participating. One student said; *“My parents are not very educated, so they don’t really understand what I do at the university.”* Students from rural areas or lower-income backgrounds expressed challenges due to limited communication and financial constraints, leading to less parental engagement overall.

Access to communication apps such as WhatsApp and video calls have made it easier for parents to stay connected with their children. *“Technology has made things easier. My mum calls me on video every weekend to ask how I am doing.”* In regard to how cultural beliefs affect Parental engagement, some students reported that in certain communities, once children join university, parents assume they are independent adults who should manage their own affairs. Some are even requested to marry or get married before joining higher education. Some participants noted gender differences in parental engagement. They indicated that mothers reach out more about their wellbeing than fathers do. Female students tended to report higher emotional and moral support from mothers, while male students often described a more distant but financially supportive relationship with fathers. *“My dad only asks if I’ve paid rent.”* One even confessed that her mother would pay her a visit once in a semester to see how she is doing. Other factors that may affect parental engagement in university education include illiteracy, religion and distance from the institution.

Across all groups, students made recommendations such as: *‘The university can help create spaces where parents and students interact constructively.’* They also argued that the university should also sensitize parents about appropriate levels of engagement that respect students’ autonomy. Strengthen communication channels between the institution and parents and organize family engagement events, such as open days and mentorship programs. A key concern by the students is the amount of control exercised by the parents. One member commented that *‘Parents should be informed that supporting us doesn’t mean controlling us.’* These findings support previous studies indicating that socio-economic and attitudinal variables are key predictors of parental participation (Epstein, 2018; Kararwa et al., 2025).

Access to technology such as mobile phones and internet connectivity was also highlighted as a facilitator of engagement, allowing parents to maintain contact even from long distances. This finding is consistent with research by Mbogo and Njeru (2022), who asserts that digital communication platforms have transformed the way parents connect with university students in Kenya, bridging geographical and emotional gaps. Conversely, cultural norms were found to moderate parental engagement. In some communities, parents perceive university students as independent adults, reducing their involvement in academic and social matters. The findings echo Esau’s (2018) assertion that parental engagement often declines with age and educational level due to shifting social expectations and perceived student maturity.

The focus group discussions revealed that university students value parental engagement, particularly in areas that foster emotional wellbeing and financial stability. However, they advocate for boundaries that preserve independence and maturity. Parental engagement in higher education, therefore, requires context-sensitive approaches that consider socio-economic realities, cultural norms, and the developmental needs of young adults. This supports the argument by Ramesh (2022) that effective engagement in tertiary settings must evolve from control to collaboration, recognizing students as emerging adults.

CONCLUSION

The study confirms that while parental engagement in higher education is less intensive than at lower levels, it remains a critical determinant of student wellbeing and success. Kenyan university students perceive their parents as key sources of financial, emotional, and moral support, though engagement varies with socio-economic and cultural contexts. Universities should therefore pursue context-sensitive strategies that promote positive parental engagement without compromising student autonomy. A balanced and structured approach can strengthen the link between the home and the university, contributing to more holistic student development and improved educational outcomes. Parental engagement promotes not only students’ academic persistence but also

their emotional resilience, identity development, and sense of belonging in university settings. A structured and culturally responsive framework for parent-university collaboration can therefore enhance the overall quality of higher education in Kenya.

The study concludes that balanced parental engagement promotes not only students' academic persistence but also their emotional resilience, identity development, and sense of belonging in university settings. A structured and culturally responsive framework for parent-university collaboration can therefore enhance the overall quality of higher education in Kenya. Balanced parental engagement policies in the universities may help to strengthen constructive partnerships. Such policies could include parental orientation sessions, structured communication channels, mentorship programs, and annual family days to integrate parents into the university community. These initiatives could enhance students' sense of belonging and academic persistence, as also suggested by Esau (2018) and Epstein (2018).

Parental engagement in higher education is not about dependency but partnership. When Parental engagement frame is well structured, it becomes a catalyst for persistence, motivation, and holistic development. In Kenya's evolving higher education landscape, fostering constructive parent-university collaboration can bridge emotional, financial, and institutional gaps; ultimately enhancing student success and national human capital development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study findings, the following recommendations are made for policy, institutional practice, and future research:

- i. Universities in Kenya should develop clear policies outlining appropriate forms of parental engagement. These policies can guide communication, participation in events, and channels for feedback, ensuring that the engagement supports rather than interferes with student autonomy.
- ii. Universities should develop institutionalized parental engagement programs. They can organize family days, open and career events, mentorship sessions, and orientation programs that include initiatives that strengthen relationships among students, parents, and institutions, while enhancing awareness of academic and psychosocial expectations. Technology may be used to bridge geographical and logistical gaps and enhance the engagement. Engagement strategies should be culturally responsive through incorporation of cultural forums that strengthen community ties and positive parental values.
- iii. Universities and policymakers should implement programs to sensitize parents on the appropriate scope of engagement in higher education. Appropriate workshops and communication guides can help parents understand their evolving roles in supporting young adults.
- iv. Since socio-economic status was found to influence engagement, the government and institutions should expand bursaries and financial aid programs to reduce dependency burdens, ensuring equitable support for students from low-income families.
- v. Future studies should explore parental engagement across private universities and gender-specific patterns of support, as well as the perspectives of parents and university administrators. Longitudinal research could also assess how parental engagement evolves across a student's university journey. Further research can include parental engagement in Technical and vocational training institutions and other tertiary colleges.

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