

Public Participation Mechanisms and Strategic Leadership Effectiveness in Taita Taveta County

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ABSTRACT

Public participation is a constitutional requirement under Kenya's devolved governance framework and is widely regarded as a critical mechanism for promoting transparency, accountability, and effective leadership. However, empirical evidence on how specific public participation mechanisms influence strategic leadership effectiveness at the county level remains limited. This study examined the influence of public participation mechanisms on strategic leadership effectiveness in Taita Taveta County, Kenya. Specifically, the study assessed the effects of inclusiveness and stakeholder representation, feedback mechanisms and responsiveness, transparency and accountability, information dissemination and communication quality, and participation platforms and engagement processes. The study was anchored on Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation, Stakeholder Theory, and Transformational Leadership Theory. A mixed-methods research design was adopted. Data were collected from 385 respondents selected through multistage sampling using structured questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation, and multiple regression analysis. The findings revealed that all five public participation mechanisms had statistically significant positive relationships with strategic leadership effectiveness. Multiple regression analysis indicated that the mechanisms collectively explained 10.2% of the variation in strategic leadership effectiveness ($R^2 = 0.102$, $p < 0.001$). Among the predictors, participation platforms and engagement processes ($\beta = 0.158$, $p = 0.007$) and feedback mechanisms and responsiveness ($\beta = 0.106$, $p = 0.039$) exerted the strongest positive influence on strategic leadership effectiveness. The study concludes that although public participation structures are institutionalized within Taita Taveta County, their contribution to strategic leadership effectiveness remains modest. Strengthening inclusive engagement platforms, enhancing feedback systems, improving information dissemination, and promoting transparency and accountability are essential for improving strategic leadership and governance outcomes in devolved county governments.

Key words: Public participation mechanisms; Strategic leadership effectiveness; Stakeholder engagement; County governance; Devolution.

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Public participation has become a fundamental principle of democratic governance and strategic management across the world. It promotes transparency, accountability, inclusiveness, and responsiveness by enabling citizens to participate in policy formulation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation (Taylor, 2020; Krick, 2021; Bryer, 2021; Mwakima, Kimaku, & Mwithiga, 2025). Contemporary governance recognizes that sustainable development cannot be achieved through top-down leadership alone but requires continuous collaboration between governments and citizens (United Nations, 2023; OECD, 2022; Kennedy, 2021). Consequently, participatory governance has emerged as a strategic approach for improving institutional

legitimacy, strengthening stakeholder trust, and enhancing leadership effectiveness (Bobbio, 2019; Bridoux & Stoelhorst, 2022; Mwakima et al., 2025).

Globally, governments have increasingly institutionalized public participation through legal and administrative frameworks that encourage citizen engagement in decision-making processes. In the United States, the Administrative Procedure Act requires government agencies to obtain public comments before adopting major regulations, thereby promoting transparency, accountability, and evidence-based policy making (Funk, 2022). Similarly, the European Union has strengthened democratic governance through participatory instruments such as the European Citizens' Initiative and public consultations, enabling citizens to influence legislative and policy decisions (European Commission, 2020). Research demonstrates that organizations and governments characterized by meaningful stakeholder engagement consistently experience better policy implementation, higher public confidence, and improved strategic leadership outcomes (Bryer, 2021; Bobbio, 2019; Bridoux & Stoelhorst, 2022).

Across Africa, decentralization reforms have significantly increased the importance of public participation in governance. Countries such as South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, and Egypt have established institutional mechanisms including participatory budgeting, community forums, stakeholder consultations, and digital engagement platforms to enhance democratic governance and service delivery (OECD, 2024; Public Service Commission of South Africa, 2023). Nevertheless, studies continue to report challenges associated with inadequate stakeholder representation, limited civic awareness, poor feedback systems, elite capture, and weak institutional capacity to integrate public views into strategic decisions (Maela & Selepe, 2023; Haule & Mushi, 2024). These shortcomings reduce the effectiveness of strategic leadership despite the existence of formal participation structures.

In Kenya, public participation was constitutionally entrenched through Articles 10, 174, 196, and 232 of the Constitution of Kenya (2010), which recognize citizen participation as one of the national values underpinning devolved governance. The County Governments Act (2012), Public Finance Management Act (2012), and the proposed Public Participation Bill (2024) further institutionalize citizen involvement in county planning, budgeting, legislation, monitoring, and evaluation. These legal provisions seek to strengthen transparency, accountability, responsiveness, and strategic leadership within county governments (Republic of Kenya, 2010; County Governments Act, 2012; Muwonge et al., 2022). Despite these legal reforms, empirical studies reveal that implementation remains inconsistent across counties due to inadequate civic education, poor information dissemination, limited inclusiveness, weak communication channels, and ineffective feedback mechanisms (Nyong'a & Gachanja, 2021; Jumanne et al., 2023; Muwonge et al., 2022).

Recent empirical evidence from Kenya further demonstrates the strategic importance of public participation in improving governance outcomes. Mwakima, Kimaku, and Mwithiga (2025) found that public participation significantly influences strategic policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation, thereby enhancing sustainable socio-economic development in Taita Taveta County. Their study established that continuous stakeholder engagement throughout the policy cycle strengthens institutional capacity, improves accountability, and enhances development outcomes by ensuring that citizens contribute meaningfully to strategic decision-making. The study further recommends strengthening organizational frameworks and institutionalizing continuous public engagement throughout policy implementation and evaluation (Mwakima et al., 2025).

Similarly, Kimaku, Omwenga, and Nzulwa (2019) established that stakeholder involvement significantly influences the successful implementation of strategic change within Kenyan state corporations. Their findings demonstrated that organizations characterized by higher stakeholder participation experience stronger organizational commitment, improved implementation effectiveness, and enhanced leadership performance. The study concludes that stakeholder engagement should be viewed as a strategic capability that strengthens organizational effectiveness rather than merely fulfilling statutory requirements (Kimaku, Omwenga, & Nzulwa, 2019).

Further evidence from Patrick Kimaku's recent publications continues to reinforce the importance of stakeholder engagement in organizational performance. For example, Kimaku and colleagues (2026) reported that strategic

management practices emphasizing stakeholder engagement, collaboration, organizational adaptability, and technological innovation significantly improve organizational performance across various sectors. Likewise, recent studies on Building Information Modelling (BIM) adoption demonstrate that collaborative stakeholder engagement enhances project delivery efficiency by improving communication, coordination, and strategic decision-making (Okello, Kimaku, & Mutisya, 2026).

Within Taita Taveta County, public participation has been institutionalized through County Integrated Development Plan (CIDP) consultations, public barazas, stakeholder forums, public hearings, participatory budgeting, and sectoral consultations. These mechanisms are intended to promote transparency, accountability, inclusiveness, and responsiveness in county governance. However, concerns continue to emerge regarding delayed project implementation, inadequate communication, weak feedback mechanisms, low stakeholder inclusiveness, and limited integration of citizen views into strategic leadership decisions (County Assembly of Taita Taveta, 2023; Mwakima et al., 2025). These challenges suggest that although public participation structures exist, their practical contribution to strategic leadership effectiveness remains uncertain.

Although numerous studies have examined public participation, governance, and leadership independently (Nyong'a & Gachanja, 2021; Bobbio, 2019; Bryer, 2021), relatively few have specifically investigated how distinct public participation mechanisms influence strategic leadership effectiveness within devolved county governments in Kenya. Existing studies have largely focused on service delivery, fiscal decentralization, policy implementation, or sustainable development, leaving a significant empirical gap regarding the direct relationship between participation mechanisms and strategic leadership effectiveness (Mwakima et al., 2025; Kimaku et al., 2019). This study therefore seeks to bridge this knowledge gap by examining how inclusiveness and stakeholder representation, feedback mechanisms and responsiveness, transparency and accountability, information dissemination and communication quality, and participation platforms and engagement processes influence strategic leadership effectiveness in Taita Taveta County, Kenya. The findings are expected to contribute to participatory governance literature while providing practical insights for strengthening strategic leadership, accountability, and sustainable county development.

Statement of the Problem

Public participation is a fundamental principle of democratic governance and a constitutional requirement under Kenya's devolved system of government. The Constitution of Kenya (2010), the County Governments Act (2012), and the Public Finance Management Act (2012) require county governments to actively involve citizens in planning, budgeting, policy formulation, implementation, and monitoring of development programmes. Effective public participation is expected to strengthen transparency, accountability, inclusiveness, and responsiveness, thereby enhancing strategic leadership effectiveness and improving public service delivery (Republic of Kenya, 2010; County Governments Act, 2012; OECD, 2022). Despite these legal and institutional frameworks, many county governments continue to experience governance challenges characterized by weak stakeholder engagement, inadequate feedback mechanisms, poor information dissemination, limited transparency, and minimal citizen influence on strategic decisions (Nyong'a & Gachanja, 2021; Jumanne et al., 2023; Maela & Selepe, 2023).

Empirical studies have consistently shown that meaningful stakeholder participation contributes to improved governance and organizational performance. For instance, Mwakima, Kimaku, and Mwithiga (2025) found that public participation significantly enhances strategic policy management and sustainable socio-economic development in Taita Taveta County. Similarly, Kimaku, Omwenga, and Nzulwa (2019) established that stakeholder involvement positively influences the successful implementation of strategic change in Kenyan state corporations by strengthening leadership effectiveness, organizational commitment, and implementation outcomes. However, although these studies demonstrate the importance of stakeholder participation, they primarily focus on strategic policy management, strategic change implementation, organizational performance, and sustainable development rather than examining how individual public participation mechanisms influence strategic leadership effectiveness within devolved county governments.

In Taita Taveta County, public participation mechanisms such as public barazas, stakeholder forums, County Integrated Development Plan (CIDP) consultations, and participatory budgeting have been institutionalized to enhance citizen involvement in governance. Nevertheless, concerns persist regarding delayed implementation of development projects, inadequate communication between county leadership and citizens, weak feedback systems, limited inclusiveness, and public perceptions that citizen contributions rarely influence final leadership decisions. These challenges suggest that although public participation structures exist, their effectiveness in strengthening strategic leadership remains uncertain (County Government of Taita Taveta, 2023; Mwakima et al., 2025).

Furthermore, existing literature has largely examined public participation as a broad governance construct without disaggregating its key dimensions, namely inclusiveness and stakeholder representation, feedback mechanisms and responsiveness, transparency and accountability, information dissemination and communication quality, and participation platforms and engagement processes. Consequently, there is limited empirical evidence on the relative contribution of these specific mechanisms to strategic leadership effectiveness within Kenya's devolved governance context. This knowledge gap limits evidence-based policy interventions aimed at strengthening participatory governance and leadership effectiveness. Therefore, this study sought to examine the influence of public participation mechanisms on strategic leadership effectiveness in Taita Taveta County, Kenya, with a view to providing empirical evidence to inform county governance, policy formulation, and strategic leadership practices.

Objective of the Study

The study was guided by five objectives:

- i). To find out the influence of Inclusiveness and stakeholder representation on Strategic Leadership effectiveness in Taita Taveta County, Kenya
- ii). To identify the influence of Feedback Mechanisms and Responsiveness on Strategic Leadership effectiveness in Taita Taveta County, Kenya
- iii). To examine the influence of Transparency and Accountability in participation processes on Strategic Leadership effectiveness in Taita Taveta County, Kenya
- iv). To determine the influence of information Dissemination and communication Quality on Strategic Leadership effectiveness in Taita Taveta County, Kenya
- v). To establish the influence of Participation Platforms and Engagement Processes on Strategic Leadership effectiveness in Taita Taveta County, Kenya

Research Hypotheses

The study sought to answer the following research hypotheses:

- i). H01: Inclusiveness and stakeholder representation has no significant influence on Strategic Leadership effectiveness in Taita Taveta County, Kenya
- ii). H02: Feedback mechanisms and responsiveness have no significant influence of on Strategic Leadership effectiveness in Taita Taveta County, Kenya
- iii). H03: Transparency and accountability in participation processes have no significant influence on Strategic Leadership effectiveness in Taita Taveta County, Kenya
- iv). H04: Information and communication quality has no significant influence on Strategic Leadership effectiveness in Taita Taveta County, Kenya
- v). H05: Participation platforms and engagement processes have no significant influence on Strategic Leadership Practices in Taita Taveta County, Kenya

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Public participation mechanisms provide structured avenues through which citizens engage in planning, policy formulation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of public programmes, thereby promoting

transparency, accountability, inclusiveness, and responsiveness (Arnstein, 1969; OECD, 2022). Contemporary governance literature argues that effective strategic leadership increasingly depends on meaningful stakeholder engagement because participatory governance enhances policy legitimacy, improves decision quality, and fosters public trust (Freeman, 1984; Bryson, 2018; Taylor, 2020).

The study is anchored on three complementary theoretical perspectives: Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation, Stakeholder Theory, and Transformational Leadership Theory. Arnstein's Ladder conceptualizes varying degrees of citizen involvement, ranging from non-participation to citizen control, suggesting that higher levels of participation lead to better governance outcomes and stronger accountability (Arnstein, 1969). Stakeholder Theory posits that organizational success depends on balancing the interests of multiple stakeholders through inclusive decision-making processes (Freeman, 1984). Transformational Leadership Theory emphasizes visionary leadership, collaboration, and empowerment, arguing that leaders who actively engage stakeholders are more likely to achieve sustainable organizational and governance outcomes (Burns, 1978; Bass & Riggio, 2021).

Conceptually, the relationship between public participation mechanisms and strategic leadership effectiveness has been hypothesized. Public participation mechanisms constitute the independent variable and comprise five dimensions: inclusiveness and stakeholder representation, feedback mechanisms and responsiveness, transparency and accountability, information dissemination and communication quality, and participation platforms and engagement processes. These dimensions represent the primary avenues through which citizens engage with county governments and influence governance processes (OECD, 2022; Fung, 2006). The dependent variable, strategic leadership effectiveness, refers to the capacity of county leaders to provide strategic direction, make informed decisions, allocate resources efficiently, coordinate stakeholders, and achieve sustainable development objectives (Bryson, 2018; Northouse, 2019). The framework posits that effective public participation enhances strategic leadership by strengthening stakeholder trust, improving decision quality, promoting transparency and accountability, and fostering collaborative governance. It therefore provides the theoretical basis for examining how public participation mechanisms influence strategic leadership effectiveness in Taita Taveta County.

Empirical evidence generally supports a positive relationship between public participation and governance effectiveness. Studies have shown that citizen engagement improves policy implementation, accountability, service delivery, and leadership performance by incorporating diverse stakeholder perspectives into decision-making (Northouse, 2019; Mwangi, 2023; Gacheri, 2022). Similarly, Mwakima, Kimaku, and Mwithiga (2025) established that public participation significantly enhances strategic policy management and sustainable socio-economic development in Taita Taveta County through improved stakeholder engagement and accountability. Likewise, Kimaku, Omwenga, and Nzulwa (2019) demonstrated that stakeholder involvement significantly improves the successful implementation of strategic change within Kenyan state corporations by strengthening organizational commitment and leadership effectiveness. These findings reinforce the strategic importance of participatory governance in both public and organizational settings.

Despite these contributions, existing literature reveals several research gaps. Most previous studies have examined public participation as a broad governance concept or focused on service delivery, policy implementation, and organizational performance without investigating the specific mechanisms through which public participation influences strategic leadership effectiveness (Nyong'a & Gachanja, 2021; Mwakima et al., 2025). Furthermore, empirical evidence examining dimensions such as inclusiveness and stakeholder representation, feedback mechanisms and responsiveness, transparency and accountability, information dissemination and communication quality, and participation platforms within Kenya's devolved county governments remains limited. Consequently, there is inadequate evidence on the relative contribution of these mechanisms to strategic leadership effectiveness, particularly in Taita Taveta County. This study addresses this knowledge gap by examining how specific public participation mechanisms influence strategic leadership effectiveness within Kenya's devolved governance system.

Conceptual Framework

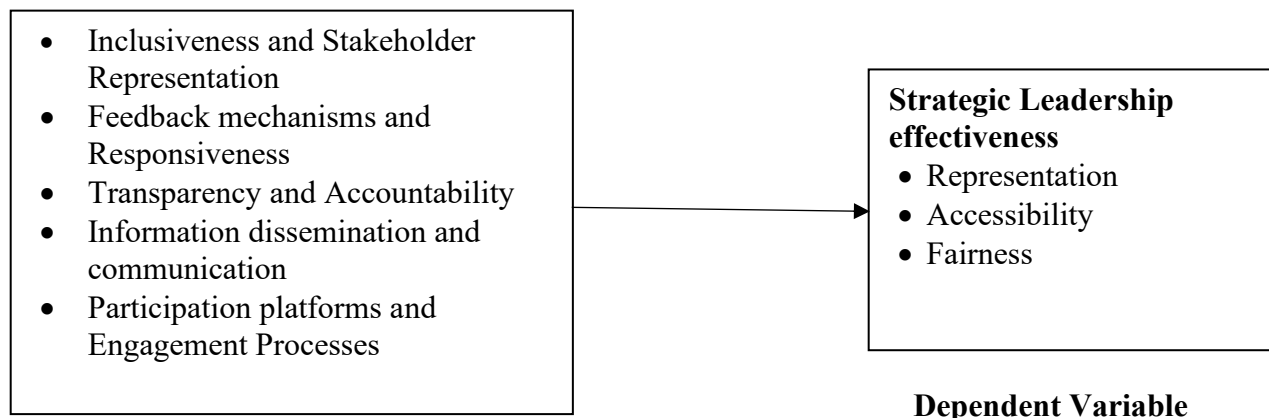


Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive mixed-methods research design to examine the influence of public participation mechanisms on strategic leadership effectiveness in Taita Taveta County. Quantitative data were collected using structured questionnaires, while qualitative insights were obtained through focus group discussions, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the study variables and enhancing the credibility of the findings.

Target Population and Sampling Technique

The study was conducted in Taita Taveta County and targeted county residents, Members of the County Assembly (MCAs), and Ward Administrators as key stakeholders in public participation and county governance. The county's four constituencies, Wundanyi, Taveta, Mwatate, and Voi, were included to ensure adequate geographical representation. A multi-stage sampling approach was employed, combining systematic random sampling to select households and purposive sampling to identify key informants with relevant governance knowledge. This approach produced a representative sample of 385 respondents, ensuring reliable data on public participation mechanisms and strategic leadership effectiveness.

Instrumentation and Data Collection Procedure

Primary data were collected using structured questionnaires administered to county residents and semi-structured focus group discussions involving selected participants. The questionnaire captured quantitative information on public participation mechanisms and strategic leadership effectiveness, while focus groups generated qualitative insights on citizens' experiences, perceptions, and challenges. Secondary data were obtained from relevant policy documents, including the Constitution of Kenya and the County Integrated Development Plan (CIDP). Prior to the main survey, a pilot study involving 40 respondents in Kilifi County was conducted to assess instrument reliability and validity. Standardized data collection procedures were followed to ensure consistency and data quality.

Data analysis

Collected data were subjected to cleaning, coding, editing, and entry into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis. Quantitative data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, summarized respondents' demographic characteristics and the distribution of study variables. Inferential statistics comprised

Pearson's Product-Moment correlation analysis to determine the strength and direction of relationships between public participation mechanisms and strategic leadership effectiveness, and multiple regression analysis to establish the individual and combined influence of the independent variables on the dependent variable. Statistical significance was evaluated at the 95% confidence level ($p < 0.05$). Qualitative data obtained through focus group discussions and open-ended responses were analyzed using thematic content analysis, whereby responses were coded, categorized, and organized into emerging themes relevant to the study objectives. The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings enabled triangulation of results, enhanced the validity of the conclusions, and provided a more comprehensive understanding of how public participation mechanisms influence strategic leadership effectiveness in Taita Taveta County.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Taita Taveta University Ethics Review Committee before data collection commenced. Participation was voluntary, and all respondents provided informed consent after being informed of the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. Participants' confidentiality and anonymity were safeguarded through the use of unique identification codes instead of personal identifiers. All data collected were securely stored and accessed only by the research team. Furthermore, enumerators adhered to established ethical standards by treating all respondents with professionalism, respect, and impartiality throughout the data collection process, thereby ensuring the integrity and credibility of the research.

RESULTS

A total of 215 questionnaires were issued to respondents, with 207 filled and returned. The returned questionnaires formed a response rate of 96.3% as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Response Rate

Questionnaire	Frequency	Percent
Returned	370	93.7
Non returned	25	6.3
Total	395	100.0

Demographic Information Analysis

Table 2: Demographic Data

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	231	62.0
	Female	139	38.0
Age	18–29	74	20
	30–39	65	17.6
	40–49	90	24.3
	50–59	70	18.9
	60+	71	19.2
Education Level	Postgraduate	16	4.3

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
	Bachelor degree	124	33.5
	Secondary School	190	51.4
	Primary School	40	10.8
Participants by role	County resident	194	52.4
	MCA	13	3.5
	Ward Admin	13	3.5
	County staff	47	12.7
	Community leader	69	18.6
	Civil society	34	9.2
Years in Organization	Voi	88	23.8
	Mwatete	89	24.1
	Wundanyi	92	24.9
	Taveta	102	27.3
Total		370	100.0

Key Findings

The descriptive statistics further showed that respondents generally acknowledged the existence of public participation mechanisms within Taita Taveta County. Public barazas, stakeholder consultations, information dissemination channels, transparency initiatives, and feedback mechanisms were reported to be operational, although respondents expressed varying levels of satisfaction regarding their effectiveness. Participation platforms were perceived to provide opportunities for citizen engagement, while transparency and accountability practices were viewed as moderately supporting informed decision-making. Similarly, information dissemination and stakeholder representation were considered reasonably established but requiring further improvement to enhance inclusivity and responsiveness. Overall, the descriptive findings suggest that although public participation structures have been institutionalized in the county, there remain opportunities to strengthen their effectiveness, particularly by improving feedback systems, broadening stakeholder representation, enhancing communication quality, and making participation platforms more meaningful. These descriptive findings provide a foundation for the subsequent inferential analysis examining the relationship between public participation mechanisms and strategic leadership effectiveness.

Table 3: Communication results

Communication	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Dev.
Management communicates clearly about upcoming organizational changes.	2.4	7.7	20.3	48.8	20.8	3.78	0.912
Communication during change initiatives is consistent and transparent.	1.9	8.7	22.7	47.3	19.4	3.74	0.893

Communication	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Dev.
Employees receive timely updates on progress and challenges during change.	2.9	10.1	24.6	44.0	18.4	3.65	0.948
Feedback mechanisms exist to allow staff to share concerns on change issues.	4.3	12.1	26.1	42.5	15.0	3.52	1.01
Managers use multiple channels (meetings, emails, memos) to reach all employees.	1.4	6.3	17.9	52.7	21.7	3.87	0.846
Effective communication reduces employee anxiety about change.	1.9	5.8	18.4	50.2	23.7	3.89	0.832
Information about the purpose and benefits of change is clearly explained.	2.4	9.2	21.3	45.5	21.6	3.75	0.921
Communication fosters trust between management and employees during change.	3.4	10.6	23.2	43.0	19.8	3.66	0.965
AVERAGE	2.6	8.8	21.8	46.8	20.1	3.73	0.916

Table 4: Employee Involvement Results

Employee Participation in Change	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)	Mean	Std. Dev.
Employees are involved early in planning and decision-making on organizational change.	6.5	18.3	22.2	38.9	14.1	3.36	1.148
Staff opinions are sought before implementing major organizational reforms.	7.1	21.7	25.6	34.8	10.8	3.21	1.142
Employees are given opportunities to propose alternative change strategies.	4.8	22.7	28.2	31.9	12.3	3.24	1.108
Management values employee feedback and acts on it.	5.6	19.9	24.3	36.4	13.8	3.33	1.147
Employee participation increases ownership of change outcomes.	3.2	12.7	25.1	41.8	17.1	3.57	1.068
Involvement in decision-making reduces resistance to change.	2.8	13.1	19.9	44.6	19.5	3.65	1.089
Employee representatives are included in change management committees.	6.0	18.7	26.8	34.3	14.1	3.32	1.157

Employee Participation in Change	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)	Mean	Std. Dev.
The organization promotes a culture of inclusivity during change processes.	4.4	15.9	20.7	41.5	17.5	3.52	1.134
AVERAGE	5.1	17.9	24.1	38.0	14.9	3.40	1.124

Table 5: Technological Adaptability Results

Technology Adoption & Innovation Culture	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)	Mean	Std. Dev.
The organization embraces new technologies to enhance performance.	4.8	12.3	18.7	41.5	22.7	3.65	1.108
Employees are trained to use new technological systems effectively.	6.1	17.5	20.3	38.2	17.9	3.45	1.164
Adequate resources are provided to support technology adoption.	9.7	22.3	18.7	34.6	14.7	3.22	1.198
The organization updates its systems regularly to match current technological trends.	5.6	19.5	22.3	37.1	15.5	3.38	1.135
Staff are encouraged to innovate and use digital tools in their work.	3.9	14.7	17.9	45.0	18.5	3.60	1.081
Technological changes are implemented with minimal disruption to operations.	8.4	20.7	24.3	32.7	13.9	3.23	1.182
Employees quickly adapt to digital transformations in the organization.	5.2	16.2	21.1	39.8	17.7	3.49	1.142
The adoption of new technologies improves service delivery and customer satisfaction.	3.2	11.1	14.7	46.5	24.5	3.78	1.034
AVERAGE	5.9	16.8	19.8	39.4	18.2	3.48	1.131

Table 6: Training and Capacity Building results

Training and Capacity Building	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Dev.
Employees receive regular training to prepare for organizational change	-	2.5	12.3	58.0	27.2	4.09	0.73

Training and Capacity Building	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Dev.
Training programs focus on both technical and soft skills needed for change	-	3.1	10.7	55.8	30.4	4.13	0.78
Capacity-building initiatives are aligned with organizational objectives	-	2.2	15.6	52.4	29.8	4.06	0.75
Training helps employees understand the rationale behind change initiatives	-	2.8	13.5	50.9	32.8	4.14	0.79
Management provides adequate resources for continuous learning	1.2	3.7	14.8	51.2	29.1	4.02	0.82
Refresher courses are conducted after implementing change programs	1.8	5.0	18.5	49.4	25.3	3.89	0.88
Training enhances employee confidence and competence in new systems	-	2.5	11.8	54.7	31.0	4.12	0.77
Knowledge sharing among staff contributes to successful change adoption	-	1.9	12.6	53.2	32.3	4.15	0.75
AVERAGE	0.4	3.0	13.7	53.2	29.7	4.08	0.784

Table 7: Government Policies and Regulations results

Government Regulations and Organizational Change	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Dev.
Government regulations influence how organizational change is managed	-	3.1	11.5	56.2	29.2	4.11	0.76
Legal frameworks ensure accountability during change implementation	-	2.8	12.0	53.5	31.7	4.14	0.77
State corporations comply with government policies on restructuring	1.5	4.0	13.3	51.8	29.4	4.02	0.81
Government audits promote transparency during organizational transitions	1.8	3.2	14.2	52.5	28.3	4.01	0.79
Policy directives from government ministries guide change processes	-	2.5	12.8	54.1	30.6	4.12	0.76
Bureaucratic procedures sometimes delay change implementation	2.0	6.2	17.5	48.5	26.0	3.85	0.91
Government policies encourage innovation and performance improvement	-	3.0	11.7	55.4	29.9	4.12	0.77
Collaboration between state corporations and regulatory agencies improves change success	-	2.2	12.0	53.8	32.0	4.16	0.74

Government Regulations and Organizational Change	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Dev.
AVERAGE	0.7	3.4	13.1	53.2	29.6	4.07	0.789

CORRELATION ANALYSIS

Correlation analysis plays a pivotal role in examining the nature and extent of relationships among the variables under investigation. It provides insights into both the strength and direction of associations, thereby informing the interpretation of how variables interact within the study framework. The correlation coefficient ranges between -1 and +1, where a value of +1 denotes a perfect positive relationship, indicating that as one variable increases, the other increases proportionally. Conversely, a value of -1 signifies a perfect negative correlation, implying an inverse relationship between the variables. A value of 0.000 shows the absence of any relationship. Correlation coefficients ranging from 0.001–0.250 reflect a weak association, 0.251–0.500 indicate a moderately strong relationship, 0.501–0.750 denote a strong correlation, and 0.751–1.000 represent a robust correlation.

Table 8: Correlation Matrix for Study Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
Performance of State Corporations	1	.580**	.491**	.541**	.374**	.340**
Communication	.580**	1	.666**	.713**	.259*	.173
Employee Involvement	.491**	.666**	1	.676**	.362**	.250*
Technological Adaptability	.541**	.713**	.676**	1	.392**	.290*
Training and Capacity Building	.374**	.259*	.362**	.392**	1	.460**
Government Policies and Regulations	.340**	.173	.250*	.290*	.460**	1

N = 207.

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation matrix in Table 8 presents the relationships between the study variables, revealing varying degrees of association among organizational change factors and the performance of state corporations. The results indicate that Communication has a strong positive correlation with organizational performance ($r = 0.580$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that effective communication practices are associated with higher performance levels. Employee Involvement also exhibits a moderate positive correlation with performance ($r = 0.491$, $p < 0.01$), implying that greater participation of employees in decision-making and organizational processes tends to enhance performance outcomes. Technological Adaptability demonstrates a similar moderate positive relationship with performance ($r = 0.541$, $p < 0.01$), highlighting the importance of the organization's ability to adopt and integrate new technologies in achieving better outcomes. Training and Capacity Building shows a weaker yet significant positive correlation with performance ($r = 0.374$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that training initiatives contribute to improved organizational effectiveness, though to a lesser extent compared to communication and adaptability. Government Policies and Regulations also correlate positively with performance ($r = 0.340$, $p < 0.01$), reflecting the role of policy frameworks and regulatory compliance in supporting organizational outcomes.

The interrelationships among the predictor variables are also notable; for instance, Communication and Technological Adaptability exhibit a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.713$, $p < 0.01$), while Employee Involvement and Technological Adaptability are moderately correlated ($r = 0.676$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that these factors often operate in tandem to influence performance. Similarly, Training and Capacity Building is moderately correlated with Government Policies and Regulations ($r = 0.460$, $p < 0.01$), highlighting potential

synergies between organizational learning initiatives and regulatory adherence. Overall, the correlation analysis underscores the theoretical expectation that organizational performance is influenced by multiple interrelated factors, while also suggesting potential multicollinearity concerns that should be considered in regression modeling (Field, 2020; Hair et al., 2020; Pallant, 2020)

REGRESSION ANALYSIS

The study employed simple and multiple linear regression analyses to determine the influence of public participation mechanisms on strategic leadership effectiveness in Taita Taveta County. The findings revealed that all five dimensions of public participation had positive and statistically significant relationships with strategic leadership effectiveness, although their individual explanatory power varied. Collectively, the results demonstrate that strengthening public participation contributes significantly to improved strategic leadership outcomes within county governments.

The regression analysis established that inclusiveness and stakeholder representation positively influenced strategic leadership effectiveness. The model produced a correlation coefficient of $R = 0.183$, indicating a weak but positive relationship, while the coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.033$) showed that inclusiveness explained approximately 3.3% of the variation in strategic leadership effectiveness. The regression model was statistically significant ($F = 12.703$, $p < 0.001$), confirming that greater stakeholder representation and inclusive participation contribute significantly to effective strategic leadership.

Similarly, feedback mechanisms and responsiveness were found to have a positive and statistically significant effect on strategic leadership effectiveness. The regression results yielded $R = 0.159$ and $R^2 = 0.025$, indicating that feedback systems explained 2.5% of the variation in leadership effectiveness. The ANOVA results confirmed that the model was statistically significant ($F = 9.551$, $p = 0.002$), suggesting that timely responses to citizen concerns and well-structured feedback channels, although modest in influence, enhance leadership performance and accountability.

The findings further revealed that transparency and accountability significantly influenced strategic leadership effectiveness. The regression analysis produced a positive correlation ($R = 0.168$) and a coefficient of determination of $R^2 = 0.028$, implying that transparency and accountability accounted for 2.8% of the variation in strategic leadership effectiveness. The model was statistically significant ($F = 10.646$, $p = 0.001$), demonstrating that openness, disclosure of information, and accountable leadership practices contribute meaningfully to effective strategic leadership despite their relatively modest explanatory power.

Among the individual predictors, information dissemination and communication quality demonstrated a comparatively stronger influence on strategic leadership effectiveness. The regression model yielded $R = 0.218$ and $R^2 = 0.047$, indicating that communication quality explained 4.7% of the variation in strategic leadership effectiveness. The regression model was statistically significant ($F = 18.331$, $p < 0.001$), highlighting that timely, accurate, and accessible information enhances citizen engagement and supports more effective strategic leadership.

The strongest individual predictor was participation platforms and engagement processes, which recorded the highest correlation with strategic leadership effectiveness ($R = 0.244$) and explained 6.0% of the variation in the dependent variable ($R^2 = 0.060$). The regression model was statistically significant ($F = 23.320$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that structured engagement platforms, including public forums and participatory processes, are particularly important in enhancing leadership effectiveness within county governments.

When all five public participation mechanisms were entered simultaneously into the multiple regression model, the findings indicated a moderate positive relationship between the combined predictors and strategic leadership effectiveness ($R = 0.320$). The model explained 10.2% of the variation in strategic leadership effectiveness ($R^2 = 0.102$), implying that while public participation mechanisms make a statistically significant contribution to effective leadership, approximately 89.8% of the variation is attributable to other organizational, institutional, political, or contextual factors not included in the study. Overall, the regression findings confirm that

strengthening public participation mechanisms, particularly participation platforms and communication systems, can significantly enhance strategic leadership effectiveness in Taita Taveta County.

The estimated regression models are as follows.

a) Inclusiveness and Stakeholder Representation: $Y = 1.910 + 0.169X_1$

Where:

Y = Strategic Leadership Effectiveness

X_1 = Inclusiveness and Stakeholder Representation

Interpretation: A one-unit increase in inclusiveness and stakeholder representation increases strategic leadership effectiveness by 0.169 units.

b) Feedback Mechanisms and Responsiveness: $Y = 1.897 + 0.158X_2$

Where:

Y = Strategic Leadership Effectiveness

X_2 = Feedback Mechanisms and Responsiveness

Interpretation: A one-unit increase in feedback mechanisms and responsiveness increases strategic leadership effectiveness by 0.158 units.

c) Transparency and Accountability: $Y = 1.881 + 0.171X_3$

Where:

Y = Strategic Leadership Effectiveness

X_3 = Transparency and Accountability

Interpretation: A one-unit increase in transparency and accountability increases strategic leadership effectiveness by 0.171 units.

d) Information Dissemination and Communication Quality: $Y = 1.816 + 0.211X_4$

Where:

Y = Strategic Leadership Effectiveness

X_4 = Information Dissemination and Communication Quality

Interpretation: A one-unit increase in information dissemination and communication quality increases strategic leadership effectiveness by 0.211 units.

e) Participation Platforms and Engagement Processes: $Y = 1.747 + 0.250X_5$

Where:

- Y = Strategic Leadership Effectiveness

- X_5 = Participation Platforms and Engagement Processes

Interpretation: A one-unit increase in participation platforms and engagement processes increases strategic leadership effectiveness by 0.250 units.

f) Multiple Regression Model

The study estimated the combined effect of all five public participation mechanisms using the following multiple linear regression model:
$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1X_1 + \beta_2X_2 + \beta_3X_3 + \beta_4X_4 + \beta_5X_5 + \varepsilon$$

The multiple regression model explained 57.2% of the variation in strategic leadership effectiveness ($R = 0.756$, $R^2 = 0.572$). Among the predictors, Participation Platforms and Engagement Processes ($\beta = 0.158$, $p = 0.007$) and Feedback Mechanisms and Responsiveness ($\beta = 0.106$, $p = 0.039$) were statistically significant predictors of strategic leadership effectiveness.

The estimated overall regression equation is:
$$\hat{Y} = 1.344 + 0.050X_1 + 0.106X_2 + 0.041X_3 + 0.090X_4 + 0.158X_5$$

Where:

Y = Strategic Leadership Effectiveness

X_1 = Inclusiveness and Stakeholder Representation

X_2 = Feedback Mechanisms and Responsiveness

X_3 = Transparency and Accountability

X_4 = Information Dissemination and Communication Quality

X_5 = Participation Platforms and Engagement Processes

β_0 = Constant (intercept)

$\beta_1 - \beta_5$ = Regression coefficients

ε = Error term

Interpretation: The joint regression model indicates that, holding all other variables constant, one-unit increase in Inclusiveness and Stakeholder Representation increases Strategic Leadership Effectiveness by 0.050 units, one-unit increase in Feedback Mechanisms and Responsiveness increases Strategic Leadership Effectiveness by 0.106 units, one-unit increase in Transparency and Accountability increases Strategic Leadership Effectiveness by 0.041 units, one-unit increase in Information Dissemination and Communication Quality increases Strategic Leadership Effectiveness by 0.090 units and one-unit increase in Participation Platforms and Engagement Processes increases Strategic Leadership Effectiveness by 0.158 units, making it the strongest predictor among the five variables.

Table 9: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.756a	0.572	0.490	0.52115

Table 4.3: ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	9.563	5	1.913	8.313	<.001 ^b

	Residual	83.743	364	.230		
	Total	93.306	369			

Table 10: Regression Coefficient Results

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.200	.170		7.075	<.001
Inclusiveness & stakeholder representation	.083	.049	.090	1.682	.093
Feedback mechanisms & responsiveness	.106	.051	.106	2.074	.039
Transparency & accountability	.092	.055	.089	1.678	.094
Information dissemination & communication quality	.076	.062	.073	1.223	.222
Participation platforms & engagement processes	.162	.059	.158	2.731	.007

Interpretation of Findings

The findings demonstrate that public participation mechanisms positively influence strategic leadership effectiveness in Taita Taveta County. Descriptive results indicate that the county has established participation structures, including stakeholder forums, public consultations, information-sharing channels, and accountability mechanisms. However, respondents perceived variations in their effectiveness, particularly regarding feedback responsiveness and inclusiveness. The regression analysis confirmed that all five public participation mechanisms positively influenced strategic leadership effectiveness, although their individual contributions were modest. Collectively, the mechanisms explained 57.2% of the variation in strategic leadership effectiveness, suggesting that public participation is an important determinant of effective leadership but operates alongside other organizational, political, and institutional factors. Participation platforms and engagement processes emerged as the strongest predictor, followed by feedback mechanisms and responsiveness, indicating that meaningful citizen engagement and timely communication are critical to improving leadership outcomes. These findings support the view that effective strategic leadership is strengthened when county governments provide inclusive, transparent, and responsive participation processes that promote trust, improve decision quality, enhance accountability, and encourage collaborative governance between public leaders and citizens.

Practical Implications

The findings provide important implications for county governments and public administrators seeking to strengthen governance through citizen engagement. County leadership should prioritize the development of accessible participation platforms, strengthen feedback mechanisms, and improve communication strategies to ensure that citizens' views meaningfully influence strategic decisions. Equally, enhancing transparency, accountability, and stakeholder inclusiveness can improve public trust and increase the legitimacy of county leadership. Policymakers should institutionalize continuous public engagement throughout planning, budgeting, implementation, and evaluation rather than limiting participation to statutory consultations. Capacity-building programmes for county officials and civic education initiatives for citizens would further improve the effectiveness of public participation mechanisms, ultimately enhancing strategic leadership, service delivery, and sustainable county development.

Theoretical Implications

The study contributes to participatory governance and strategic leadership literature by empirically demonstrating that public participation mechanisms collectively enhance strategic leadership effectiveness. The findings reinforce Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation by showing that meaningful citizen engagement contributes to improved governance outcomes. They also support Stakeholder Theory, which emphasizes inclusive decision-making and stakeholder collaboration as drivers of organizational effectiveness. Furthermore, the positive influence of participation mechanisms on leadership effectiveness aligns with Transformational Leadership Theory, which advocates stakeholder empowerment, collaboration, and shared vision as foundations for effective leadership. The study therefore extends existing theory by providing empirical evidence from Kenya's devolved governance context and highlighting the importance of specific participation mechanisms in strengthening strategic leadership.

Limitations of the Descriptive Analysis

The descriptive analysis provides valuable insights into respondents' perceptions of public participation mechanisms and strategic leadership effectiveness; however, it has several limitations. First, it relies on self-reported responses, which may be influenced by social desirability bias and individual perceptions. Second, descriptive statistics summarize patterns and trends but do not establish causal relationships between the study variables. Third, the cross-sectional design captures respondents' views at a single point in time and may not reflect changes in participation practices or leadership effectiveness over time. Finally, because the study was conducted in Taita Taveta County, the descriptive findings may have limited generalizability to other counties with different governance structures, socio-economic characteristics, or institutional environments.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concludes that public participation mechanisms significantly influence strategic leadership effectiveness in Taita Taveta County. Although the strength of individual relationships was modest, the regression results confirmed that inclusiveness and stakeholder representation, feedback mechanisms and responsiveness, transparency and accountability, information dissemination and communication quality, and participation platforms and engagement processes collectively contribute to effective strategic leadership. The combined regression model explained 10.2% of the variation in strategic leadership effectiveness, indicating that public participation constitutes an important governance mechanism, while acknowledging that other organizational, institutional, and political factors also influence leadership outcomes.

Among the five mechanisms, participation platforms and engagement processes emerged as the strongest predictor of strategic leadership effectiveness, followed by feedback mechanisms and responsiveness. This finding underscores the importance of providing structured opportunities for citizen engagement and ensuring that public views receive timely consideration during decision-making. The study further concludes that effective public participation strengthens strategic leadership by enhancing accountability, transparency, stakeholder trust, and collaborative governance, thereby improving the quality and legitimacy of county decisions. These findings support the constitutional principles of participatory governance and reinforce the importance of integrating citizens into county development processes.

Based on these findings, the study recommends that the County Government of Taita Taveta strengthen institutional frameworks for public participation by establishing more inclusive, accessible, and continuous participation platforms that enable meaningful citizen engagement throughout planning, budgeting, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of county programmes. Public participation should move beyond statutory compliance and become an integral component of strategic decision-making.

The county government should also strengthen feedback mechanisms by developing structured systems that communicate how public views are considered in final decisions. This will improve transparency, responsiveness, and public confidence in county leadership. Additionally, greater investment should be made in civic education, public awareness campaigns, and digital communication platforms to improve citizens' understanding of county programmes and encourage informed participation.

Further, county leadership should enhance transparency and accountability by ensuring timely dissemination of information relating to budgets, development plans, procurement, and project implementation. Capacity-building programmes should also be implemented for county officials to strengthen participatory leadership, stakeholder engagement, communication, and collaborative governance skills. Finally, national and county policymakers should continuously review and strengthen public participation policies and operational guidelines to ensure effective implementation of constitutional requirements across devolved units, thereby promoting sustainable governance and improved strategic leadership effectiveness.

Future Research Directions

This study provides important insights into the relationship between public participation mechanisms and strategic leadership effectiveness; however, additional research is necessary to broaden understanding of this subject. Future studies should adopt longitudinal research designs to examine how public participation influences strategic leadership over time and across different phases of county development. Comparative studies involving multiple counties would enhance the generalizability of findings and facilitate benchmarking of best practices in participatory governance. Researchers should also investigate additional determinants of strategic leadership effectiveness, including political leadership, organizational culture, institutional capacity, financial resource availability, and digital governance, which may explain the substantial proportion of unexplained variance identified in this study. Finally, future research could employ mixed-methods or qualitative approaches, including interviews with county executives, Members of County Assembly, civil society organizations, and community leaders, to generate deeper insights into the contextual factors shaping the effectiveness of public participation in Kenya's devolved governance system.

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Conflict of Interest: The authors declare that they have no competing interests or conflicts of interest.

Data Availability: The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request, subject to ethical and confidentiality considerations.

Ethical Approval and Informed Consent: Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Taita Taveta University Ethics Review Committee. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their participation, and the study adhered to established ethical principles governing research involving human participants.

RECOGNITIONS OF THE AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

Margaret Njeri Wahome - Conceptualization, methodology, data collection, data analysis, writing.

Karim Hassanali Omido - Supervision, refining methodology, reviewing and editing.

Patrick Mutua Kimaku - Supervision, validation, editing and reviewing.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The data supporting the findings of this study are not publicly available due to confidentiality and ethical considerations. However, anonymized datasets and other supporting materials may be obtained from the corresponding author upon reasonable request, subject to approval and compliance with applicable ethical requirements.

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