Volume 8 Nomor 2 (2026) Pages 277 – 288
Edulead : Journal of Education Management
Email Journal : edulead.bbc@gmail.com
Web Journal : https://jurnal.uibbc.ac.id/index.php/edulead

School Board Members' Participation in Collective Decision-Making for Improving Students' Academic Performance in Public Secondary Schools in Bukoba District, Tanzania

Katabazi Genscher[1], Demetrius Njiku[2], Clara Rupia[3]

[1] Bukoba District
[2,3] Department of Education Foundations, St Augustine University of Tanzania

Email Corrresponding : katabazigenscher@gmail.com

Submitted : 2026-10-22; Accepted : 2026-11-20; Published : 2026-11-26

Keywords: *School Boards, Collective Decision-Making, School Governance and Academic, Performance*

Abstract
This study examined school board members' participation in collective decision-making for improving students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Bukoba District, Tanzania. Guided by Kurt Lewin's Participatory Decision-Making Theory, it used a mixed-methods explanatory sequential design with 207 respondents selected through systematic, stratified, simple random, and purposive sampling. Quantitative data from teachers and students (questionnaires) were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression, while qualitative data from interviews with board chairpersons, Heads of Schools, and the District Secondary Education Officer were analysed thematically. Findings showed that teachers and students viewed board members' participation positively, noting that it improved education quality and academic performance by helping schools obtain resources, develop effective academic policies, and create better teaching and learning conditions. The study concludes that meaningful board participation strengthens accountability, resource management, and academic planning. It recommends regular training for board members on academic governance, their active involvement in academic planning and resource allocation, better communication among boards, teachers, students, and management, and mechanisms to monitor board decisions and their impact on academic outcomes.

Copyright © 2026 Authors

INTRODUCTION

Governing schools has gradually moved from being highly centralized to more decentralized and participatory in nature where the different stakeholder groups participate in efforts to improve schools and promote learning. Globally, it is expected that school boards and other school governance structures participate in making schools effective through the processes of policy formation, monitoring, resource distribution, accountability and decision-making on teaching and learning issues. Cross-national research involving 68 countries indicates that there are diverse school governance structures among different education systems; however, the more the participation in decision-making in schools, the higher the student achievements especially in math, reading and science (Luschei & Jeong, 2021). Likewise, Kılınç and Özdemir (2025) found out through the use of PISA and TALIS data collected from Turkish high schools that distributed leadership affects student achievement indirectly through teacher job satisfaction and a positive disciplinary environment. These pieces of evidence indicate that the participation of the collectivity in school decision-making has the potential of bringing about academic achievements through decision-making.

The importance of collective decision-making is further demonstrated by research examining how leadership responsibilities are distributed among different actors within schools. Liu (2021), using PISA data from the United States, found that distributed leadership was related to student science performance through organisational, instructional and family-related pathways. Importantly, the study found that governing board leadership in school administration was indirectly associated with student performance, indicating that the contribution of governing bodies may operate through broader school conditions rather than through direct classroom instruction. However, collaborative participation does not automatically produce better academic outcomes. Schlebusch (2020), in a study of secondary schools in South Africa, found that collaborative leadership was not sufficiently enabling sustained learner academic performance because participants tended to attribute poor performance to other actors rather than accepting collective responsibility. This suggests that effective participation requires more than the physical presence of board members in meetings; it requires meaningful involvement, shared responsibility, communication and collective commitment to academic improvement.

Within the African context, school governing bodies have become important mechanisms for strengthening community participation and accountability in school management. Evidence from South Africa indicates that the relationship between school governing bodies and school management can influence the conditions under which academic improvement occurs. Theron (2024), for example, examined the relationship between a secondary-school principal and school governing body in a disadvantaged community and found that a constructive relationship between the two leadership structures supported the functioning of the school and had implications for Grade 12 learner performance. Similarly, Ramasimu (2023) examined stakeholder engagement in rural secondary schools and reported that involving school governing bodies, parents, teachers, community members and other stakeholders can support school management, learner performance and educational quality. These findings are important because they demonstrate that governing bodies can contribute to academic improvement when their participation is connected to collaborative school leadership rather than being restricted to ceremonial or administrative responsibilities.

In East Africa, the relationship between participatory school governance and academic performance is also receiving increasing scholarly attention. Research from Rwanda, indicates that distributed leadership can be associated with secondary students' academic performance. Mvukiyehe and Oniye (2025), studying secondary schools in Musanze District, found that distributed leadership and accountability were relevant to academic performance, highlighting the importance of leadership practices that involve different actors in school improvement. In Tanzania, related evidence has emerged from studies of school management and governing

structures. Ibrahim et al. (2023) examined public secondary schools and found that strategic implementation practices significantly influenced students' academic performance, with the model explaining 24% of the variation in academic performance. The study involved, among others, 76 School Governing Board members, demonstrating that governing-board participation exists within the wider management and planning structures of Tanzanian public secondary schools.

The Tanzanian context is particularly important because education decentralisation has formally increased the responsibilities of school-level governing structures, while questions remain concerning the extent to which these structures actually exercise meaningful decision-making authority. Maeda (2021), examining school boards in secondary schools in Kilimanjaro, found that the effectiveness of school boards was connected to their access to school resources and the degree of autonomy they possessed in influencing school decisions. Similarly, Ngowi, Chacha and Mafwolo (2022), studying School Management Committees in Ilemela Municipality, found that committee members were more involved in school development planning than in some other responsibilities, while close partnerships between committee members and school staff were strongly associated with effective committee performance. The study also identified inadequate resources, limited qualifications, weak commitment and difficulties in decision-making as constraints on committee effectiveness. These findings suggest that participation should be assessed not simply in terms of whether school boards exist, but in terms of whether members actively contribute to planning, deliberation, problem-solving, monitoring and collective decisions affecting school performance.

However, an empirical gap still exists in the case of Tanzania regarding the particular involvement of the school boards in collective decision-making process and the link to the academic performance of the students at the local school level. Recent research indicates that Tanzanian public secondary schools are still faced with problems in terms of distribution of authority and stakeholder participation. As reported by Kapelela, Mislay and Manyengo (2025), decentralization reforms have led to the increased involvement of School Governing Boards, yet, political interference, uneven power dynamics and centralization may limit the autonomy and decision-making ability of these bodies. On the other hand, Michael and Mhando (2024), conducting their research in public secondary schools in Mbeya City, concluded that activities of School Management Teams including analysis of academic data, tracking of students' achievements, strengthening of teachers, coordination of support services and development of stakeholders' network were critical factors that impacted the academic performance of the students.

Statement of the Problem

The academic performance of students is still an issue in public secondary schools despite attempts to improve school governance and stakeholders' participation. The role of school board members involves participating in collective decisions related to academic planning, resource distribution, evaluation of student academic performance and problems that learners experience in academic learning. Nevertheless, the participation of school board members in such academic activities may not be adequate because it may be restricted to attending formal meetings and fulfilling administrative duties. In Tanzania, there is very little evidence on the extent to which the participation of school board members in collective decision-making impacts the academic performance of students especially in Bukoba District. Hence, this study aims at investigating the participation of school board members in collective decision-making to improve students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Bukoba District.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

This study is guided by Kurt Lewin's (1947) Participatory Decision-Making Theory, which emphasizes the involvement of organizational members in decisions affecting their work and institutional outcomes. The theory suggests that active participation promotes ownership, commitment, accountability, communication and collaboration, which can improve organizational effectiveness. In public secondary schools, school board members' participation in collective decisions concerning academic planning, resource allocation, monitoring students' progress and addressing learning challenges can strengthen school accountability and support improved students' academic performance. The theory is relevant to this study because it provides a basis for examining how the extent of school board members' involvement in collective decision-making may contribute to better academic outcomes in public secondary schools in Bukoba District. However, the theory may be limited where board members lack adequate knowledge, information, or authority to participate meaningfully, or where existing power structures restrict their contribution.

Empirical Literature Review

Green and Hall (2021) found in the United Kingdom that effective participation of school boards strengthened strategic planning, accountability and students' academic outcomes. Similarly, Schmidt et al. (2021), in a comparative European study, reported that schools with active governance structures demonstrated better management efficiency and academic performance. However, these studies were conducted mainly in developed and urban settings, making their findings less applicable to rural and resource-constrained contexts such as public secondary schools in Tanzania.

Patel (2021), in India, found that school board participation improved resource management and academic outcomes, although political interference and limited board capacity constrained effective participation. Likewise, Ndlovu and Mokoena (2023) reported in South Africa that active school governance enhanced accountability, resource utilisation and students' academic performance. However, the South African study focused largely on urban schools, while the Indian study highlighted governance barriers that may differ across national contexts. Therefore, evidence remains limited on how these factors operate in Tanzanian public secondary schools.

Adeyemi (2023) found in Nigeria that effective school governance was associated with improved students' academic performance and recommended strengthening school board governance. However, the study relied mainly on perception-based data, which may not fully reflect actual governance practices. In Uganda, Namara (2023) found that weak school board participation was associated with poor accountability and lower academic performance, while active involvement improved school management. Nevertheless, the small sample used in the Ugandan study limits the generalisation of its findings to wider East African contexts.

In Tanzania, Lwoga (2024) found that limited participation of school boards weakened accountability and negatively affected students' academic performance. The study also showed that some board members lacked adequate training and were not fully involved in decision-making, leading to a recommendation for strengthening board capacity and regular participation. This evidence demonstrates the importance of school board involvement in Tanzania, but it does not specifically examine public secondary schools in Bukoba District.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study adopted a mixed-methods approach using an explanatory sequential research design, whereby quantitative data were collected and analysed first, followed by qualitative data to explain and deepen the quantitative findings. The study was conducted in Bukoba District and involved students, teachers, school board chairpersons, heads of schools and the

District Secondary Education Officer. A total sample of 207 respondents was selected from the target population using systematic, stratified, simple random and purposive sampling techniques. Data were collected through questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and document review. Questionnaires provided quantitative information on participation in collective decision-making, while interviews and school documents provided contextual information on decision-making practices and academic performance. The validity of instruments was ensured through expert review and member checking, while reliability was established using Cronbach's Alpha, which produced acceptable coefficients of 0.792 for students' data and 0.791 for teachers' data. A pilot study was also conducted to improve the clarity and suitability of the instruments before the main data collection. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation and multiple regression in SPSS, while qualitative data were analysed thematically and integrated with quantitative findings during interpretation. Ethical principles, including informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity and research clearance, were observed throughout the study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study examined the influence of school board members' participation in collective decision-making on students' academic performance in public secondary schools. Data were collected from teachers and students through questionnaires, while supplementary qualitative data were obtained from seven Heads of Schools, District Secondary Education Officer (DSEO) and school board chairpersons through interviews. Respondents rated their agreement with the given statements on a five-point Likert scale. The findings are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1
Teachers' Responses on School Board Members' Participation in Collective Decision-Making on Students' Academic Performance (n = 82)

Statements		SD F(%)	D F(%)	N F(%)	A F(%)	SA F(%)
i.	School board members actively participate in making academic decisions that affect teaching and learning in my school.	1 (1.2)	3 (3.7)	7 (8.5)	40 (48.8)	31 (37.8)
ii.	The participation of school board members in decision-making helps improve the academic quality of our school.	0 (0.0)	2 (2.4)	6 (7.3)	42 (51.2)	32 (39.1)
iii.	When school boards participate in academic decision-making, schools are better equipped to meet students' learning needs.	1 (1.2)	2 (2.4)	8 (9.8)	39 (47.6)	32 (39.0)
iv.	I believe that the active participation of school board members in academic decisions contributes to better student performance.	0 (0.0)	3 (3.7)	5 (6.1)	41 (50.0)	33 (40.2)
v.	The participation of school boards in educational decisions ensures that adequate resources are provided for teaching and learning.	1 (1.2)	2 (2.4)	7 (8.5)	40 (48.8)	32 (39.1)
vi.	I think that school boards' participation in academic decision-making positively	0 (0.0)	2 (2.4)	6 (7.3)	43 (52.4)	31 (37.9)

impacts the overall learning environment and student outcomes.					

Source: Field Data (2026)

Table 1 presents teachers' perceptions of how school board members' participation in collective decision-making influences students' academic performance. The findings reveal a strong positive perception across all statements, with teachers consistently affirming that board-level engagement translates into tangible academic benefits.

School Board Members Actively Participate in Academic Decisions

The findings indicate that 71 teachers (86.6%) agreed or strongly agreed that school board members actively participate in making academic decisions that affect teaching and learning in their school, with 31 (37.8%) strongly agreeing and 40 (48.8%) agreeing. Only 7 teachers (8.5%) were neutral, 3 (3.7%) disagreed, and 1 (1.2%) strongly disagreed. This high level of agreement suggests that teachers experience board involvement as a visible and regular feature of school governance rather than a distant or symbolic function. During interviews, one respondent stated:

> *"Our board members do not simply approve reports; they ask specific questions about teaching challenges and follow up on issues teachers raise. Teachers notice this engagement, and it changes how seriously they take the decisions that come out of board meetings." (Interviewee H, May 2026*).

This finding implies that teachers perceive board participation as an active and consequential process rather than a procedural formality, thereby strengthening the perceived legitimacy of governance decisions. This is consistent with Participatory Decision-Making Theory, which holds that genuine stakeholder involvement in identifying problems and formulating decisions enhances organizational effectiveness (Lewin, 1947). The finding also aligns with Carter and Thomas (2020), who found in the United States that active board participation improved financial oversight, strengthened policy implementation, and contributed to better academic performance. Therefore, school boards should continue maintaining visible, substantive engagement in academic matters to sustain teachers' confidence in governance processes.

Board Participation Improves Academic Quality.

Regarding the second statement, 74 teachers (90.3%) agreed or strongly agreed that the participation of school board members in decision-making improves academic quality in their schools, with 32 (39.1%) strongly agreeing and 42 (51.2%) agreeing. Only 6 teachers (7.3%) were neutral, 2 (2.4%) disagreed, and none strongly disagreed. This finding suggests that teachers view board engagement as contributing meaningfully to the overall standard of academic delivery, not merely to administrative matters. During interviews, respondent B explained:

> *"When board members push for higher academic standards during their meetings, this pressure filters down to how seriously academic targets are pursued at the school level. Teachers feel that accountability keeps academic quality on everyone's agenda." (interviewee B, May 2026).*

This finding implies that board participation functions as an accountability mechanism that reinforces a school-wide culture of academic quality. This corroborates Green and Hall (2021), who found in the United Kingdom that effective board participation improved strategic planning, accountability, and student outcomes. The findings indicate that board engagement is an important contributor to sustaining and improving academic quality, and that schools should continue to actively involve boards in quality-related discussions.

Board Participation Better Equips Schools to Meet Learning Needs

For the third statement, 71 teachers (86.6%) agreed or strongly agreed that when school boards participate in academic decision-making, the school is better equipped to meet students' learning needs, with 32 (39.0%) strongly agreeing and 39 (47.6%) agreeing. Only 8 teachers (9.8%) were neutral, 2 (2.4%) disagreed, and 1 (1.2%) strongly disagreed. This finding indicates that teachers associate board involvement with a more responsive and needs-oriented approach to academic planning. During interviews, interviewee C remarked:

> *"Board members often bring a wider view of what the school needs, drawing on their interactions with parents and the community, which helps identify learning gaps that teachers alone might not immediately notice. This broader perspective strengthens how well we respond to students' actual needs." (interviewee C, May 2026).*

This finding implies that board participation contributes a complementary, community-informed perspective that enhances the school's overall responsiveness to learners' needs. This is supported by Schmidt et al. (2021), who found across several European countries that schools with active governance structures demonstrated improved management efficiency and academic performance. The findings conclude that board participation strengthens the school's capacity to identify and respond to students' learning needs.

Board Participation Contributes to Better Student Performance

The fourth statement shows that 74 teachers (90.2%) agreed or strongly agreed that active participation of school board members in academic decisions contributes to better student performance, with 33 (40.2%) strongly agreeing and 41 (50.0%) agreeing. Only 5 teachers (6.1%) were neutral, 3 (3.7%) disagreed, and none strongly disagreed. This finding reflects strong teacher confidence in a direct link between board engagement and student outcomes. During interviews, respondent D observed:

> *"We can trace some of our recent improvements in performance directly back to decisions the board pushed for, such as extending revision time before examinations and approving additional teaching materials. Teachers recognize when board decisions are behind these positive changes." (interviewee D, May 2026).*

This finding implies that teachers can often identify concrete, traceable links between specific board decisions and subsequent improvements in student performance. This aligns with Zhang and Liu (2020), who found in Asia that active board participation improved school planning, monitoring, and academic performance. The findings conclude that active board participation in academic decisions is a significant and recognized contributor to improved student performance.

Board Participation Ensures Adequate Resources for Teaching and Learning

The fifth statement indicates that 72 teachers (87.9%) agreed or strongly agreed that school boards' participation in educational decisions ensures adequate resources for teaching and learning, with 32 (39.1%) strongly agreeing and 40 (48.8%) agreeing. Only 7 teachers (8.5%) were neutral, 2 (2.4%) disagreed, and 1 (1.2%) strongly disagreed. This finding highlights the resourcing function of board participation as a critical enabler of instructional effectiveness. During interviews, interviewee E remarked:

> *"Whenever we have raised concerns about shortages of teaching materials or laboratory equipment, active board members have followed through to ensure funds are allocated appropriately. Teachers rely on the board's engagement to translate our classroom needs into actual resources." (interviewee E, May 2026).*

This finding implies that teachers directly experience board participation in resource-related decisions as a determinant of their capacity to deliver quality instruction. This corroborates Patel (2021), who found in India that board participation contributed to improved resource management and academic outcomes, while also noting that political interference and limited capacity could constrain these benefits. The findings conclude that board participation in resourcing decisions is an essential contributor to effective teaching and learning.

Board Participation Positively Impacts the Learning Environment and Student Outcomes

The sixth statement indicates that 74 teachers (90.3%) agreed or strongly agreed that school boards' participation in academic decision-making positively impacts the overall learning environment and student outcomes, with 31 (37.9%) strongly agreeing and 43 (52.4%) agreeing. Only 6 teachers (7.3%) were neutral, 2 (2.4%) disagreed, and none strongly disagreed. This overwhelming agreement confirms that teachers view board participation as beneficial to the school's broader environment, not merely to isolated academic decisions. During interviews, respondent F concluded:

> *"A school where the board is genuinely engaged tends to feel more organized and purposeful overall, and that atmosphere supports both teachers and students. It is difficult to separate the calm, well-resourced environment we now have from the consistent engagement of our board members." (interviewee F, May 2026)*.

This finding implies that the cumulative effect of sustained board participation extends beyond specific decisions to shape the general institutional climate within which teaching and learning occur, consistent with Participatory Decision-Making Theory's emphasis on participation enhancing trust, collaboration, and organizational effectiveness (Lewin, 1947). This is consistent with Ndlovu and Mokoena (2023), who found in South Africa that active governance improved accountability, resource utilization, and students' academic performance. The findings conclude that school board members' participation in collective decision-making is a significant contributor to both the learning environment and academic outcomes, as consistently perceived by teachers.

Table 2
Students' Responses on School Board Members' Participation in Collective Decision-Making and Students' Academic Performance (n = 97)

Statements	SD F(%)	D F(%)	N F(%)	A F(%)	SA F(%)
i. School board members are involved in making decisions about what we learn in school.	1 (1.0)	4 (4.1)	9 (9.3)	48 (49.5)	35 (36.1)
ii. When school boards are active in decision-making, it helps improve the quality of education in our schools.	0 (0.0)	3 (3.1)	8 (8.2)	50 (51.5)	36 (37.2)
iii. The participation of school board members in academic decisions leads to better resources and learning opportunities.	1 (1.0)	3 (3.1)	10 (10.3)	46 (47.4)	37 (38.2)
iv. I believe that when school boards participate in school decisions, it positively affects my academic performance.	0 (0.0)	4 (4.1)	7 (7.2)	51 (52.6)	35 (36.1)

v.	School board participation ensures that our school follows stronger academic policies.	1 (1.0)	2 (2.1)	9 (9.3)	49 (50.5)	36 (37.1)
vi.	I think that active school boards contribute to better teaching and learning conditions in our school.	0 (0.0)	3 (3.1)	8 (8.2)	50 (51.5)	36 (37.2)

Source: Field Data (2026)

Table 2 presents students' perceptions of how school board members' participation in collective decision-making influences their academic performance. The findings show a strong positive perception across all statements, indicating that students, despite limited direct interaction with board processes, can perceive and value the downstream effects of board engagement.

Board Members Are Involved in Decisions About What Students Learn

The findings indicate that 83 students (85.6%) agreed or strongly agreed that school board members are involved in making decisions about what they learn in school, with 35 (36.1%) strongly agreeing and 48 (49.5%) agreeing. Only 9 students (9.3%) were neutral, 4 (4.1%) disagreed, and 1 (1.0%) strongly disagreed. This relatively strong, though slightly more varied, agreement suggests that students have some general awareness of board involvement in curriculum-related matters, even though this awareness may not be as direct or detailed as their awareness of teacher decisions. During interviews, Interviewee B stated:

> *"Students may not attend board meetings, but they often hear from teachers or see changes, such as the introduction of new subjects or revised timetables, that they associate with board-level decisions. This indirect awareness still shapes how they perceive the board's role in their education." (interviewee B, May 2026).*

This finding implies that students' awareness of board involvement is mediated through visible changes in their school experience rather than direct participation in board processes. This is consistent with Participatory Decision-Making Theory's broader premise that inclusive governance produces institutional effects felt throughout the organization, even among those not directly involved in decision-making (Lewin, 1947). This aligns with Wilson and Peterson (2021), who found in Canada that student participation and awareness of school planning processes enhanced learners' sense of belonging and academic achievement. Therefore, schools should consider making board decisions more visible and understandable to students to further strengthen this awareness.

Active School Boards Improve the Quality of Education

Regarding the second statement, 86 students (88.7%) agreed or strongly agreed that when school boards are active in decision-making, it helps improve the quality of education in their school, with 36 (37.2%) strongly agreeing and 50 (51.5%) agreeing. Only 8 students (8.2%) were neutral, 3 (3.1%) disagreed, and none strongly disagreed. This finding suggests that students associate active board governance with a generally higher standard of education, even without detailed knowledge of specific board decisions. During interviews, Interviewee C explained:

> *"Students often comment that our school 'runs well' compared to others, and while they may not know the specific board decisions behind this, they can sense the difference that active governance makes in terms of resources, discipline and overall organization." (interviewee C, May 2026).*

This finding implies that students perceive the cumulative effects of active board governance as reflected in the overall functioning and quality of their school. This corroborates Green and Hall (2021), who found in the United Kingdom that effective board participation improved strategic planning, accountability, and student outcomes. The findings indicate that active school board participation is, in students' perception, associated with improved educational quality.

Board Participation Leads to Better Resources and Learning Opportunities

For the third statement, 83 students (85.6%) agreed or strongly agreed that school board members' participation in academic decisions leads to better resources and learning opportunities, with 37 (38.2%) strongly agreeing and 46 (47.4%) agreeing. Only 10 students (10.3%) were neutral, 3 (3.1%) disagreed, and 1 (1.0%) strongly disagreed. This finding, while still strongly positive, shows a slightly higher proportion of neutral responses, suggesting that students' awareness of the specific link between board decisions and resource provision may be less direct than their awareness of general educational quality. During interviews, Interviewee D remarked:

> *"Students see new facilities, additional learning materials or improved infrastructure, but they do not always connect these improvements directly to board decisions unless it is explained to them. When we do explain the connection, students express appreciation and a clearer understanding of the board's role." (interviewee D, May 2026).*

This finding implies that while students recognize the outcomes of board-driven resourcing, greater transparency about the decision-making process itself could strengthen their understanding of the board's specific contribution. This is supported by Otieno (2022), who found in Kenya that board participation strengthened school management and contributed to improved academic outcomes. The findings conclude that board participation in academic decisions is associated with better resources and learning opportunities, though schools may benefit from communicating these connections more explicitly to students.

Board Participation Positively Affects Students' Academic Performance

The fourth statement shows that 86 students (88.7%) agreed or strongly agreed that when school boards participate in school decisions, it positively affects their academic performance, with 35 (36.1%) strongly agreeing and 51 (52.6%) agreeing. Only 7 students (7.2%) were neutral, 4 (4.1%) disagreed, and none strongly disagreed. This finding reflects a strong personal conviction among students that board participation has direct academic consequences for them individually. During interviews, interviewee E observed:

> *"Even students who cannot describe exactly what the board does will say that when the school is well governed, they feel more supported in their studies. This general sense of being well cared for by the institution seems to translate into a belief that it helps their own performance." (interviewee E, May 2026).*

This finding implies that students' belief in the academic benefits of board participation may operate partly through a general sense of institutional support and stability, in addition to any specific decisions they can identify. This aligns with Adeyemi (2023), who found in Nigeria that effective governance was associated with improved academic performance. The findings conclude that board participation is perceived by students as having a positive, if sometimes diffuse, effect on their academic performance.

Board Participation Ensures Better Academic Policies

The fifth statement indicates that 85 students (87.6%) agreed or strongly agreed that school board participation ensures their school follows better academic policies, with 36 (37.1%) strongly agreeing and 49 (50.5%) agreeing. Only 9 students (9.3%) were neutral, 2

(2.1%) disagreed, and 1 (1.0%) strongly disagreed. This finding suggests that students associate board oversight with the consistent and fair application of academic rules and policies. During interviews, interviewee F remarked:

> *"Students notice when policies, such as those on examinations or discipline, are applied consistently across the school, and they often attribute this consistency to good governance by the board. Inconsistent policy enforcement, on the other hand, quickly draws student complaints." (interviewee F, May 2026).*

This finding implies that policy consistency, an outcome closely tied to board oversight, is a dimension of governance that students are particularly attuned to and value. This corroborates Ndlovu and Mokoena (2023), who found in South Africa that active governance improved accountability, resource utilization, and students' academic performance. The findings conclude that board participation in ensuring sound academic policies is recognized and valued by students as an important governance function.

Active School Boards Contribute to Better Teaching and Learning Conditions

The sixth statement indicates that 86 students (88.7%) agreed or strongly agreed that active school boards contribute to better teaching and learning conditions in their school, with 36 (37.2%) strongly agreeing and 50 (51.5%) agreeing. Only 8 students (8.2%) were neutral, 3 (3.1%) disagreed, and none strongly disagreed. This overwhelming agreement confirms that students consistently link active board governance to the overall conditions under which teaching and learning take place. During interviews, the one of the interviewee concluded:

> *"Across the district, schools with visibly active boards tend to have better-maintained facilities, more consistent staffing and a generally more conducive teaching and learning atmosphere. Students in these schools often speak positively about their school environment, even if they cannot always name the board as the reason." (Interviewee x, May 2026)*.

This finding implies that students experience the cumulative effects of active board governance as an improved overall school environment, consistent with Participatory Decision-Making Theory's proposition that inclusive governance enhances organizational effectiveness in ways that benefit all members of the institution (Lewin, 1947). This is consistent with Schmidt et al. (2021), who found across several European countries that schools with active governance structures demonstrated improved management efficiency and academic performance. The findings indicate that school board members' participation in collective decision-making is a significant contributor to teaching and learning conditions and, by extension, to students' academic performance, as consistently perceived by teachers, board members, and students.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that school board members' participation in collective decision-making contributes positively to students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Bukoba District. Teachers and students generally perceived board participation as important in improving academic quality, resource provision, academic policies, learning opportunities and teaching and learning conditions. The findings further indicate that meaningful board involvement in identifying academic challenges, planning, resource allocation, monitoring and accountability can strengthen school governance and create conditions that support better academic outcomes. However, the effectiveness of board participation depends on active and substantive involvement rather than merely attending formal meetings.

Recommendations

The study recommends that school boards should be actively involved in academic planning, monitoring students' progress, identifying learning challenges and making decisions on teaching and learning resources. The District Education Office and school management should provide regular training to board members on school governance, academic monitoring, resource management and collective decision-making. Schools should also strengthen communication and collaboration among school boards, teachers, students and management to improve transparency and implementation of board decisions. In addition, school boards should regularly monitor the implementation and outcomes of their decisions to ensure that their participation contributes meaningfully to improved students' academic performance.

REFERENCES

Adeyemi, A. (2023). Students' involvement in school administration and academic performance in senior secondary schools in Lagos State. African Journal of School Leadership, 5(1), 78-95.

Ibrahim, R., Kyando, N., & Kiwonde, F. (2023). Strategic planning implementation practices and school performance: Evidence from public secondary schools in Tanzania. Asian Research Journal of Arts & Social Sciences, 21(1), 19-34.

Kapelela, C., Mislay, M. A., & Manyengo, P. R. (2025). The politics of school governance in the context of education decentralisation policy reforms in selected public secondary schools in Tanzania. Cogent Education, 12(1).

Kılınç, A. Ç., & Özdemir, N. (2025). Does distributed leadership matter for student achievement? Evidence from a centralised education system. Educational Studies, 51(1), 1-21.

Lewin, K. (1947). Frontiers in group dynamics. Human Relations, 1(1), 5-41.

Liu, Y. (2021). Distributed leadership practices and student science performance through the four-path model: Examining failure in underprivileged schools. Journal of Educational Administration, 59(4), 472-492.

Luschei, T. F., & Jeong, D. W. (2021). School governance and student achievement: Cross-national evidence from the 2015 PISA. Educational Administration Quarterly, 57(3).

Maeda, C. (2021). Empowerment and effectiveness of school boards in managing secondary schools in Kilimanjaro, Tanzania. East African Journal of Social and Applied Sciences, 3(1).

Michael, E., & Mhando, S. (2024). The influence of School Management Team on student's academic performance in Tanzania. East African Journal of Education Studies, 7(4), 399-410.

Mvukiyehe, B., & Oniye, A. O. (2025). Effect of distributed leadership style on academic performance of secondary school students: Case study of Musanze District, Rwanda 2023-2024. African Journal of Empirical Research, 6(2), 603-613.

Ngowi, N., Chacha, P., & Mafwolo, G. (2022). Assessment of the effectiveness of School Management Committees performance in Tanzania: Evidence from selected public primary schools from Ilemela Municipality. Planning and Development Initiative Journal, 5(2).

Ramasimu, N. (2023). Innovative stakeholder engagement in rural secondary school: The impact on the learners' performance and the quality of education. Corporate Governance and Organizational Behavior Review, 7(2), 50-60.

Schlebusch, G. J. (2020). Collaborative leadership and sustained learner academic performance in secondary schools: A blaming game? Africa Education Review, 17(3), 74-89.

Theron, H. (2024). The effect of the relationship between principals and school governing bodies on Grade 12 learner performance. Journal of Culture and Values in Education, 7(2), 101-114.