

Community Involvement in Public Secondary Schools: The Case of Ward Secondary Schools in Iringa Municipality

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Abstract

This study investigated factors that determine community participation in the management of schools and the challenges associated with community involvement. The study employed questionnaires and interviews to collect data. A total of 43 respondents were sampled by using purposive, snowball and simple random sampling methods to provide data. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.0 and content-analysis methods were used to analyse data respectively. The study findings reveal that, the nature of economic activities of the area, schools' performance in national examinations, and the level of education of dwellers within the community have a great influence on community's participation in school management and that lack of community's willingness and low level of education of community members are main challenges that influence community participation. Therefore, the study recommends that education create more awareness to the community on free education policy and their role in community schools.

Keywords: Community involvement, school management

1.0 Introduction

Education takes place in society, within the family and in educational institutions. These stakeholders have different roles

and none can be the sole agent to take all the responsibilities in educating the child. Society should support families in the upbringing of the child. On the other hand, schools are the social institutions established to prepare students to be useful members in society. Therefore, they should not operate as separate entities in the society. There must be efforts to bridge these agents so that the community feels welcome and responsible for participation.

A community school is a joint venture effort in providing education between the community and the government. Therefore, a community school calls for a higher degree of community participation. For example, literature has found out that according to the directive from the government on the construction of ward-based secondary schools, community members contribute 80% and the government top-up 20% to support community efforts (Kambuga, 2013). Mansuri and Rao (2004) added that community-based development relies on how community members use their social capital to organise themselves and participate in the development process.

Community participation and citizen involvement in educational development have been there for years. It has a long history that can be traced far back to the 1940s. In Africa and Tanzania in particular, it can be put into three phases: pre-colonial era, during the colonial era and post-colonial era. After independence, Tanzania adopted a top-down approach. In other words, what was called centralized state up to 1972 when the country underwent a new reform called 'decentralization'. The reform focused on decentralizing key authorities, institutions and functions of the government from the center to the grassroots level to enable the communities to participate in

decision-making and implementation (Massoi & Norman, 2009).

In the 1990s, the World Bank wove participatory approach as one of the panaceas of sustainable development (Rose, 2003). This marks community participation in Tanzania as a driving force for the realization of Tanzania Development Vision of 2025.

Community secondary schools trace their history to the need to involve the community in education. These schools are a joint venture of the government and the community. Community involvement in the schools' management may take very different forms, which may vary from minimal forms involving information exchange to maximum forms of community control (Tosun, 2000). Parij and Prasetya (2020) noted that in some ways, communities are participating through Education Boards and School Committee. The roles and functions of the Education Board and School Committee are categorized into four main points, namely: (1) advisory agency, (2) supporting agency, (3) controlling agency, and (4) mediatory.

In understanding Tanzania's education system, it is important to understand the education policy context and how it has developed over the last couple of decades. This involves its 'translation' and implementation at national, regional and local levels.

The Minister for Education and Culture (by then) asserted that 'a sound system of education in any country must be effective on two fronts: on the quantitative level, to ensure access to education and equity in the distribution and allocation of resources to various segments of the society, and on the qualitative level, to ensure that the country produces the skills

needed for rapid social and economic development’ (United Republic of Tanzania [URT], 1995).

In the 1990s, some measures were taken to address the two fronts in Tanzania. The measures include decentralizing the system by empowering regions, districts, communities and educational institutions to manage and administer education and training and broaden the base for the financing of education and training through cost-sharing measures involving individuals, communities, NGOs, parents and end-users (URT, 1995).

In 1997, the Education Sector Development Programme was introduced as a sector-wide initiative to operationalize the 1995 Education and Training Policy. Its central focus was the establishment of the Primary Education Development Plan (henceforth, PEDP), whose priority areas included expansion of pupil’s enrolment, quality assurance, capacity building, and strengthening of institutional arrangements (URT, 2008).

This led to the publication of the *Secondary Education Master Plan* in 2000 and eventually to the development and adoption of the *Secondary Education Development Plan* (henceforth, SEDP) from 2004–2009. This plan aimed, partly, to consolidate the PEDP by improving transition from primary to secondary schools and providing incentives for enrolment, retention and completion of primary education (URT, 2004).

During this time (2004-2009), most community secondary schools mushroomed as a means to avoid the drop in transition from primary to secondary schools. In that plan, it was clear that SEDP I relied on a community based developmental approach, which could elicit greater participation from below.

Community schools are a place where there is a partnership between the school and the community resources. A school

exists in a community; we can expect that a school draws much from the community and the community alike. The norms, the culture, the skills, finances and other resources found in the community all have a role to play in the school life.

In community schools, the community is supposed to contribute financially and participate in school management. According to Osaki (2000), for a school to provide effective (quality) education, there must be a relationship between a school and the parents and the community. He argues that:

Parents send their children to school with a purpose. For the children to get the desired education, they must support them and the school differently. Parents must, in turn, be closely informed about and involved in the running of the school. The community, which has an interest in the school and the kind of products it produces, should also be involved in the school's management.

The new Tanzania's education and training policy (2014) and the recent changes in School-based Management (SBM) both imply the value of local community participation for effective and efficient delivery of education services (Bruns *et al.*, 2011; Nishimura, 2018). Furthermore, Parij and Prasetya (2020) argue that the purpose of the relationship between schools and the community is to fulfill the interests of the school and the needs of the community.

On the other hand, some scholars (i.e., Bryson *et al.*, 2013; King, Samii and Snilstveit, 2010; Patel, 2016; Webler, *et al.*, 2001) indicate that in many community development projects, there are internal conflicts between the community and other stakeholders especially project administrators.

Therefore, the mixed views raised concern for searching the truth concerning community participation in school management to understand its importance in providing quality education and the fulfilment of community needs by citing ward secondary schools in Iringa Municipality.

1.4 Statement of Purpose

The Free Education Policy (FEP) and the government's commitment have resulted in tremendously many challenges towards provision of education services. The challenges include a high enrolment rate than the available resources, such as demand for classrooms, unbalanced students - textbook ratio, increased teacher - students' ratio, shortage of students' latrines and teachers' houses.

The big challenge has been the controversial perceptions and beliefs between the government (education sector) and the community towards the management of ward secondary schools. The communities believe and perceive that the government should take care entirely of everything under the FEP, and that the community remain on management as advisory meanwhile, the government (school authorities) perceive that it is the local communities' roles not only to take part of the school management but also to participate fully on running the ward-based secondary schools.

This research intended to investigate different factors determining community participation in school management and the challenges associated with community involvement. The aim was to come up with useful information, which can help different stakeholders see the better way they can participate in school management and how heads of schools can improve in their ways of management.

2.0 Materials and Methods

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to check out the limitation of one approach (Dooley, 2001) and maximize the other approach's strength (Kombo & Tromp, 2006). Furthermore, an exploratory research design was used to explore factors that determine community participation in the management of ward schools and the challenges associated with community involvement in running those schools.

Moreover, the study was conducted in Iringa Municipal Council (IMC). It is one of the five (5) councils of Iringa region with 18 wards. According to the 2012 National Census, the population of Iringa Region and Iringa Municipal Council were 941,238 and 151,345 respectively (National Bureau Statistics [NBS], 2013). The study area was chosen since it is purely one of the councils in Tanzania with the same trend of the establishing community secondary schools, and it has many public secondary schools.

The target population for the study comprised of fifteen (15) public secondary schools, secondary school teachers, parents, heads of schools, Municipal, ward educational officials, and school boards.

The selection of the 43 study sample was based on representation from the whole range of gender and school administrators and location. The sample comprised of two (2) heads of schools, twenty seven (27) school teachers, two (2) school boards chair persons, ten (10) parents, one (1) Municipal Secondary Education Officer and one (1) Municipal Primary Education Officer. Twenty seven (27) secondary school teachers and ten (10) parents were randomly selected, while

heads of schools, two (2) school board members, and education officers were purposively selected.

The aim of selecting heads of schools from two different ward schools was to gather ideas and information among disciplines regarding their perception and understanding of community participation in ward school management. The purpose of including school board members and education officials at the municipal level was to elicit information about various regulations, strategies, rights and procedures on community participation in ward school's management. These regulations and procedures include the approaches and levels in which communities are supposed to participate in ward school management.

Data were collected through both questionnaires and in-depth interviews. The study employed questionnaires for teachers, while in-depth interviews were used for heads of ward schools, ward schools board chairpersons and education officers. Punch (2009) suggested that respondents should be free and non-anxiety; so, respondents had an opportunity to talk freely about events, community participation and behaviour in relation to the topic area.

For quantitative data, descriptive statistics was used to analyse data where the mean score was ranked from high to low impact factor or challenge. In contrast, an analysis of qualitative data followed throughout the process of research (Watling & James, 2007). The analysis of qualitative data was based on the three processes of data transcription, reduction which entailed the coding and summarizing of the interview field-notes in meaningful and logical concepts and themes in terms of the research questions and the theoretical framework. The content

analysis involved coding and creation of families, categories and themes. The process was then followed by drawing conclusions from the various merged themes.

3.0 Findings and discussion

In this section, analysis of information related to factors determining community participation in ward school management and challenges associated with community involvement are presented and systematically analyzed.

3.1 Factors Determining Community Participation in Ward School Management

This specific objective was obtained by using questionnaires given to parents and teachers and an interview with heads of ward schools and education officers. The results are presented in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Perceived Factors Determining Community Participation in Ward School Management from Teachers

Factor	N	Yes	%	No	%
Nature of economic activities of this area	27	26	96.3	1	3.7
Performance on national Examinations	27	23	85.2	4	14.8
Level of education within the Community	27	23	85.2	4	14.8
Spirit of volunteerism	27	21	77.8	6	22.2
Politics/Political Affiliation	26	14	51.9	12	44.4
Sense of ownership	27	14	51.9	13	48.1

Key: N=Total number of respondents, % = percent

The analysis results depict that nature of economic activities of the area, followed by performance on national examinations

and level of education of dwellers within the community have high influence on determining community participation. In contrast, a sense of ownership and politics/political affiliation has little effect on it. The same findings in Ghana indicate that the higher general level of parental education contributes to the higher level of participation in school management (Mfum-Mensah & Friedson-Ridenour, 2014).

On the other hand, results from parents presented indicate that community's educational level is the most influential factor than other factors, while social network and trustworthiness have little influence. The other factors that have more influence are financial status and condition.

Table 3.2: Perceived Factors Determining Community Participation in Ward School Management from Parents

Factor	1		2		3	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Education level	8	80	1	10	1	10
Politics and political party affiliated	6	60	3	30	1	10
Personal status in the community	4	40	3	30	3	30
Financial condition/status	7	70	1	10	2	20
Social networks	2	20	4	40	4	40
Trustworthiness	3	30	5	50	2	20
Presence of other projects funded by NGOs	5	50	2	20	3	30

Key: "1"= Agree, "2"= Not sure, "3"= Disagree, and % = percent.

The influence of politics and political parties was also supported in interviews. It was reported that some political

parties have the ideology that the government should provide free social services (education) to the community, while others feel that the community should also contribute to the well-being of the ward schools. The ideology that the government should provide free services reduces people's morale on contributing. In one case, it was reported that people were ready to contribute to the construction of the class. Still, leaders of the opposition political party told the community that the government should provide free services for its people, so the process of construction stopped. In fact, for the case of Tanzania, community participation was greatly influenced by socialist ideology

Interviews also revealed that a sense of ownership and how the community conceptualizes ward schools influence community participation. It was shared that most people still conceptualize ward community schools as government schools. They don't understand the difference between a ward school and a government school, actually both schools are owned by the government. Historically, government school were/are totally managed by the government itself with subsidized of some costs, the community do not have any power or opportunity on management meanwhile, ward schools are jointly managed between the government and the community. The community perceives that the government should provide everything as other government schools. In reality, there have been children - parents' participation instead of community participation. Regarding this, one of the head of school argued:

The way government conceptualizes ward schools is not the same as how the community conceptualizes it. The government thinks that every community member participates, but in reality, not all

participate; it is only those that have children at the school. The school has no mandate over community members who don't have their children (Interview with School Head, 2020).

The authors were also interested in gathering quantitative information on the community's perception of the development of ward schools. Variables like: education should be free; participation in decision making, participation in school activities and contributing money and materials and participation in kind were used. Table three presents the results:

Table 3.3: Perception of the Community on the Development of the School

Factor	1		2		3	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Education should be free	7	70	1	10	2	20
Participation in decision making	10	100	0	0	0	0
Participating in school activities	7	70	2	20	1	10
Contributing money	4	40	6	60	0	0
Contributing in kind	6	60	1	10	2	20

Key: 1 = Agree, 2 = Not sure, and 3 = Disagree, and % = percent.

It reveals that all parents (100%) agree that participation in the development of the school should be in decision-making. In contrast, some parents (70%) think that education should be free, while the same per cent feels that the community should be involved in school activities. Furthermore, the findings indicate that 60% believe that participation should be through in-kind community contributions. Meanwhile, 40% of the respondents favoured participating through money contributions. However, in many circumstances the

communities are always reluctant in cash contributions especially for projects that do not have direct benefits, though it is among one type of community participation that also increases a sense of ownership and security. Knight *et al.* (2014) also state that a cash contribution has a positive impact and improves long term project sustainability. Therefore in secondary schools participation of all types is necessary, in kind and cash, since the school needs both.

3.2 Challenges Associated with Community Involvement

In any given community, challenges are inherent in development, no matter how developed it is. Marx (1973) argues that society is always in a conflicting relationship. Researches establish some challenges associated with community involvement. Researchers asked teachers, heads of schools and the school board's chairpersons to confirm the extent to which the named challenges affect community involvement in school management. Table four presents the findings from teachers.

Table 3.4: Challenges Associated with Community Participation

Challenge	N	Yes	%	No	%
Lack of community's willingness to participate	27	23	85.2	4	14.8
Low level of education of community members	26	21	80.8	5	19.2
Lack of transparency and accountability	27	20	74.1	7	25.9
Nature of economic activities of the particular area	26	19	73.1	7	26.9
Lack of sense of ownership	27	19	70.4	8	29.6

Lack of spirit of volunteerism	27	19	70.4	8	29.6
Lack of community's awareness about the importance of participation in school management	27	18	66.7	9	33.3
Low households income	27	16	59.3	11	40.7
Gender dominance	27	13	48.1	14	51.9
Political party affiliation	26	12	46.2	14	53.8
Conflicts between community members and community leaders	27	11	40.7	16	49.3
Conflicts between school administrators and community leaders	27	8	29.6	19	70.4
Lack of trust of the school board	26	8	30.8	18	69.2

Key: N = Total number of respondents, and % = percent.

Table 4 depicts that the main challenges affecting community participation are lack of community's willingness followed by the low level of education of the community members. In contrast, conflict between school administrators and community leaders and mistrust of the school board showed were insignificant challenges. In addition to these, Eversole (2012) notes that the main challenge in community participation is the lack of sufficient and timely information, laws and procedural guidelines to the communities.

One head of school also supported this by acknowledging receiving adequate support from families with higher levels of education than families with low levels of education. Such

parents make a thorough follow-up on their children's progress than less educated ones.

As quoted in Aref (2010), Shaeffer argues that the degree of community participation is particularly low in socially and economically marginal regions because most people have little interest in what is going on in the school. Some have never even been to school. Lwaitama and Galabawa (2008) found out that parents were told to purchase books for their children in some ward secondary schools, but only a few seemed to afford them. Affordability could mean financially, but it could also mean seeing the importance of buying the books or putting efforts to get them. On the other hand, a study by Komba, Hizza and Jonathan (2014) established that the limited instructional materials that schools were running with was related to poor skills and lack of aggressiveness of the heads of schools to use potential resources around the schools, including parents and political leaders.

4.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

Generally, local community participation in ward school management is complex and challenging as it is perceived differently by the community itself and the government. The community perceives it as the government's role. In contrast, the government knows that ward schools require a joint effort among different stakeholders understand that the community is the major stakeholder. Community participation in ward school management should be addressed as a process rather than being viewed as a product. The shared ward schools management has short, mid and long term benefits which can be tangible or intangible.

Therefore, this study recommends that the community should be educated about the management of ward secondary schools, especially the procedural and guidelines on involvement and the importance of the community to participate in school management to impart a spirit of participation to the community, to be ready to participate morally, financially and materially for efficient and effective management of their schools. Education to the community should involve creating awareness and capacity building to let it realize and increase a sense of ownership, to understand that the ward schools belong to them and it is part of their life activities.

A good understanding of the free education policy is also crucial, especially of the roles of each stakeholder in the provision of free education and what is expected from the community. Finally, ward secondary schools management should be free from any political party affiliation and influence of politicians. This also needs civic education to ensure that the community's purpose in participating in the management of the school is one; the provision of quality education rather than political reasons.

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