

## **Challenges Facing School Committee Involvement in Decision-making in Public Primary Schools in Mbeya City**

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### **Abstract**

*This study explores challenges facing school committee involvement in decision-making in public primary schools in Mbeya City, Tanzania. The study employed a qualitative approach, and case study design. Purposive sampling and snowball sampling techniques were used to obtain a sample of 25 respondents. Data collection instruments used were interviews and documentary reviews. Data from the field were analyzed through content analysis. The study came up with the following findings school management committees' lack of managerial skills, financial skills and gender insensitivity. The study suggests that educational officers and educational stakeholders should work closely with the school heads to rectify the challenges identified because they are education leaders in their respective areas. Also, it is suggested that the school management's committee should be given seminars on leadership.*

**Keywords:** School committee, involvement, decision-making and public primary school.

### **1.0 Introduction**

A school is one of the educational organizations which cannot be separated from society's participation in realizing its vision, mission and goals. The establishment of the school committee is one of the steps to

involve society. According to Tanzania Government Regulation 75 of 2016, the school committee is an independent institution consisting of the parent/guardian of the learner, the school community, and the socialite who cares about education.

School committee is a refinement and expansion of partnership agency and communication between school and society. The organization of school committees has become a global concern and thus each country has a policy that regulates the participation of society in education. According to Walidin (2017), school committees are given different names based on the context. For instance, Malaysia calls them committees whereas Singapore calls them the parents' committee. In the USA, school committees are known as the Sommerville School Committee, Newton Public School, or Northbridge Public School. In Canada, they are called the school councils.

In Tanzania, the school management committee (SMC) is an agent consisting of parents/guardians of learners, school communities, and socialites who care about education (Ministry of Education and Culture [MoEC], 2016). School committee is a refinement and expansion of partnership agency and communication between school and society. One communication form between school and society is the establishment of a school committee program in the form of activity/action to develop the quality of education service in the school. This action reflected the performance that had been executed. The performance becomes good or bad, influenced by several factors. Mullins (2005), designed the framework for the study of job satisfaction and work performance, influenced by many factors.

In the 2000s, the Tanzania Education and Training Policy came up with PEDP. In 2002, the said programme started to be implemented with the

aim of improving education, which was to improve the educational inputs and strengthen the institutional arrangements for effective primary school education delivery, by giving more power to stakeholders at the grass root (URT, 2001). The local participation service delivery had problems at the school level because the grass root participants (school committees) were less effective.

For example, in the implementation of PEDP, the school committees were made accountable for the management of the capitation and development grants for schools' development (Mushi, 2006). Thus, the role of school committees changed from that of bridging relations between parents and the school to playing an active role in school development, which is school development planning and implementation through involvement in such tasks and functions as tenders for school supplies and local mobilization and use of resources concerning need (Geoffrey, 2015).

## **2.0 The Community Participation Theory**

The concept of participation was coined by Arnstein (1969) in his theory of community participation. Participation is described as a process in which members of the public take part in the formulation, passage and implementation of public policies (Stoker, 1997). This is a wide-ranging definition, which extends the emphasis of public participation beyond the development of policy, decision-making and implementation. Arnstein (1969) suggests different levels of participation, from manipulation of citizens, through to consultation, and to what we might now view as genuine participation, that is, the levels of partnership and citizen control. By a ladder of citizen empowerment, the theory introduces a shift towards understanding participation in terms of the empowerment of individuals and communities. This has stemmed from

the growing prominence of the idea of the citizen as a consumer, where choice among alternatives is seen as a means of access to power.

The community participation theory attempts to represent, organize and explain the concept of community participation simply and understandably. Community participation managed to provide the academic world with a quicker view and knowledge of the complicated relationships involved in the participation process. Specifically, the current study utilised the theory of community participation to describe how school committees become representative of the people in management and decision-making at the school level and how citizen participation rests on linking participation to making decisions in school activities.

### **3.0 Materials and Methods**

This study employed a qualitative research approach was employed in this study because it takes a deeper exploration of responses for easy analysis of findings. Additionally, a multiple case study design was employed in the study. The study was conducted at Mbeya City Council in selected five primary schools. A sample of 25 informants was involved in this study. The study engaged heads of schools, representative teachers and representative parents. The mentioned respondents gave the relevant information about school committee involvement in decision-making. Additionally, interviews and focus group discussions (FDG) were used as data collection methods. Data collected were also analyzed thematically to generate themes in the qualitative narrative.

#### **4.0 Challenges Hindering the Involvement of School Management Committees (SMCs) in Decision-making**

The study revealed that the involvement of the school management committee faces several challenges, such as a lack of managerial skills among members of the SMCs, financial challenges and gender insensitivity. Each of the challenges noted is explained in detail hereunder.

##### **4.1 Lack of Managerial Skills among Some Members of the School Management Committees**

The findings revealed that a lack of managerial skills was a problem among some members of the SMCs that hindered its effectiveness. During the interview with the school heads, it was observed that some of the SMCs have members who lack managerial skills. One school head reported that:

*Some members of our SMC are very argumentative to the extent that it takes time for them to know things. I have noted two members who are always pessimists in their view despite being argumentative. They generally lack managerial skills and tend not to change and accept things easily. It does not mean that they are less educated, no (Interview with School Head, School C, 16<sup>th</sup> March, 2022).*

Another school head responded that:

*We have two members who do not attend all meetings regularly. One at least attends the meetings on some days, whereas the other one is a businessman who attends very few meetings. His whereabouts are well-known, but no strong action has been imposed on him so that he comes to the meetings (Interview with School Head, School D, 16<sup>th</sup> March, 2022).*

The aforementioned quotes indicate that if members of the SMCs lack managerial skills it hinders SMCs' effectiveness. Bad enough, some SMCs have members who lack managerial skills; therefore, it becomes difficult for them to understand and stand on the proper way of managing the schools even though such members are involved in the decision-making process.

#### **4.2 Financial Challenges**

The findings showed that financial challenges hinder the involvement of the SMCs. At this point, most of the participants in schools had to share information on how the school budget went astray. During the discussion, it was observed that most of the participants had to blame the school heads for the misuse of money. For example, one of the chairpersons of the SMCs said:

*Although all the money was put in the school account, in 2020, the head of the school with the aid of some officials responsible for school funds managed to forge the signatures of the SMC's signatories and withdrew some money. We came to realize that during the opening of the year 2021 we were discussing the finances used in 2020 (Interview with Chairperson of the SMC, School B, 15<sup>th</sup> March, 2022).*

Equally, the chairperson of another SMC said that there are some indicators that some monies are taken by the school head because always the money spent reported is different to that disbursed by the SMC to be used in the running of the school. For instance, in 2021, we found a deficit of TZS 156,700/= in the school account. When members of the SMC asked him, he became angry (Interview with Chairperson of the SMC "D", 15<sup>th</sup> March 2022). The findings revealed that financial control

is still a problem in many primary schools. The signatories are there, but monies are taken by a few non-trustful members.

### **4.3 Gender Insensitivity**

The study also revealed that gender sensitivity is another problem hindering the involvement of SMCs in decision-making in schools. For instance, of all the five school heads involved in the study, there was only one female and four males. Similarly, many of the members constituting SMCs were males because they were selected based on being an influence in the society the study involved 25 participants that include (15) males (60) and females (40%) in the study. the reason might be associated with the fact that males prefer to be part of the decision-making. In so doing, the sensitivity of gender was ignored thinking that females are not that influential compared to males.

During the interview with the chairpersons, it was observed that many of the members of the SMCs were males. One chairperson recounted this:

*Indeed, the composition of the SMC is largely based on males than females. In our SMC, there are two female members out of nine members composing the SMC. This makes it difficult for them even to contribute to the meetings because they feel inferior by being surrounded by males (Interview with the Chairperson of SMC, School A, 15<sup>th</sup> March, 2022).*

The foregoing remark indicates that the number of females in the SMC is few compared to that of males.

The researcher wanted to know how gender was observed in the selection of committee members. The following was an answer given by a representative parent:

*To be honest, there is no gender balance unless parents are forced to adhere to it. Men are always above women. Here, we are four female parents in the SMC. In the meetings, sometimes male members may ridicule female members just because they are women (FGD with the Representative Parent of School B, 17<sup>th</sup> March 2022).*

Therefore, gender sensitivity is still a challenge in most SMCs in Mbeya City. This finding suggests that there is a need to develop and apply clear and comprehensive policy and operation guidelines to guide all key actors of primary education on how to address gender issues more effectively. Observation from the SMCs' Book Roaster also indicated that the majority of the members of SMCs were males. Therefore, the research confirmed that there was a gender imbalance.

## **5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations**

School committees face several challenges in decision-making. The challenges include a lack of managerial skills, financial skills, and gender imbalance in the membership. These challenges can hinder the performance of the schools. Since the school committee is appointed or selected according to Act 25 of 1978. The government is advised to provide seminars to school committees to consider gender in the appointment of school committee members and provide a financial challenge for school committee members.

The provision of seminars and short courses to school committees members will help to update them on how to be creative in organizing and planning for their duties. The school administrations are advised on effective supervision on the preparation and effective utilization of supervising and monitoring the school committee agenda. This study



focused specifically on public primary school levels. It is recommended that other studies be in secondary schools and other levels of education.

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