

## **Community Participation in the Management of Ghanaian Schools**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Municipal members widely recognize that community school management participation promotes a sense of ownership in student learning in Ghanaian schools. This paper is a literature review on community participation in the management of Ghanaian schools. This paper's scope identifies the importance of community participation in school management, the context of school management in Ghana, and the challenges of community participation. It is recommended that Ghanaian parents and other stakeholders be encouraged to participate fully in schools' management to promote development in the education sector (at all levels) and in the entire community.*

**Keywords:** community, community participation, Ghana, management

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Authors across the globe (Ates & Artuner, 2013; Edwards & Aboagye, 2015; Ali & Abdalla, 2017; Valez, Lorenzo, & Garrido, 2017) have supported the need to manage education and schooling well because of the benefits to individuals and society as a whole. School management involves administration, governance, decision-making, planning, organization, and controlling activities pertaining to a particular school. Effective school

management must focus on all stakeholders to influence student-learning outcomes (Uemara, 1999; Abreh, 2017). This is important as learning plays a unique role in human capital development and economic development (Abreh 2017).

In the Ghanaian context, the formal educational system designed to provide students an environment for learning has three phases; basic education (kindergarten, primary (grades 1-5), secondary education (grades 6-12, and technical and vocational education), and higher education/tertiary education (technical universities, colleges, and universities). According to Abreh (2017), local communities started most of the basic schools by providing lands for the construction of the schools and teacher accommodation. Over time, the government took over most of the operations of the schools

The management and operations of public schools are in the hands of the Ministry of Education (MOE) through the support of Ghana Education Services (GES), School Management Committees (SMC), Parents Teachers Associations (PTA), local community, and other stakeholders. Various scholars have tried to give a working definition of what a community is. Macqueen (2002) defined a community as a group of people with diverse characteristics linked by social ties. Battez (2013) also described a community as a group of people sharing the same values, beliefs, and worldviews. Others such as Amsden, Stedman, and Kruger (2011), Capece and Costa (2013), and Stone (1992), have also defined a community in terms of boundaries shared, whether physical or imaginary and the interactions between people, whether near or far. In this research, a community is defined as a group of people bounded by a physical boundary linked by social and cultural ties and shares the same values, beliefs, and worldviews.

Mauraru and Patrascu (2017) note there are six models practiced globally when it comes to school management. These include the formal/centralized model, collegial model, political model, subjective model, ambiguity model, and cultural model. As practiced in Ghana, the centralized model often weakens community commitment and participation in education management (Abreh, 2017). Placing educational decision-making and governance solely in the government's hands and neglecting the local community's participation often leads to a lack of a sense of ownership and commitment to schools (Allen & Mintrom, 2010; Ofori, 2017; Alhassan, 2020). This phenomenon's effects are damaging as research shows this leads projects not well executed and appropriately managed (Ahwoi , 2010).

Given this, there is a growing interest to improve education delivery by revamping community participation (Maier, Daniel, Oakes, & Lam, 2017). As it stands now, solely trained teachers or lecturers and school leaders in schools do education delivery. The government controls all affairs related to education through the Ministry of Education. This paper discusses community participation in school management, a concept that is of prime concern for educators across the globe, including Ghana. Additionally, a review of school management in the Ghanaian context, the challenges of practicing community engagement activities and the importance of community participation for effective school management was done. Literature, forming data for the paper were collected from a wide variety of sources that included library and electronic sources.

### **Community Participation in the management of schools**

Community participation can be defined as community members' total involvement in tasks or projects that directly or indirectly affect them (Ahmad , 2011). Juxtaposing this with the school management systems would mean their involvement in the day-to-day running of the schools in their various communities. However, it should be noted that people cannot be forced to 'participate' in projects, which affect their lives but rather should be given the chance where possible to engage in the project. This is particularly important in cases where their inputs are needed, and community ownership is sort to increase the eventual use of projects being brought to the community (Kimengsi , Azibo , & Gwan , 2016).

Judging from the above, community participation should emphasize the involvement of locals with similar needs and goals in decisions affecting their lives, in this case the smooth running of schools in their community. Mansuri and Rao (2013) share in this view by explicitly explaining community participation as active involvement of the community in project design and implementation of key objectives based on the incorporation of local knowledge into the project's decision-making process to bring about development. This view of development has also been succinctly put by Weyers (2011) to mean how the efforts of the people themselves are united with those of government authorities to improve the economic, social, and cultural condition of communities. This implies integrating these communities into the life of the nation, to enable them to contribute fully to national progress. It should therefore be noted that for any community project to succeed, there needs to the full participation of community members.

In line with the shared responsibility of ensuring development in the community, the advocates of community participation argue that a local community should be given active roles in programs to ensure improvement in outcomes that directly affects them (Abrams , 1971). Thus, the educational sector is no exception. The main reason for this advocacy is that it gives the control of affairs and decisions on projects of the community to people mostly affected by them (Lachapelle , 2008). Moreover, it is believed that community participation brings forth buy-in and lasting benefits to the people involved than just ensuring that things are getting done (Zaden , 2010). Arnstein (1969), posits that community participation encourages citizen participation and citizen power and control and that "...the redistribution of power enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from political and economic process to be deliberately included in the future" (p. 216). Since individuals in the local community are actively involved in decision-making process, it helps promote a sense of ownership and control among them (Ahwoi, 2010).

In addition, community involvement in school management is essential in promoting development in the Ghanaian education system. This is because parents have the right to be involved in the management of schools that their wards attend and the school can learn from the intimate knowledge parents have about the kids. Also, communities can provide resources such as volunteer support, free labor, and financial support for the schools, community involvement has the tendency of increasing student outcomes and also the improvement of school accountability (Kusumaningrum, Maisyaroh, Ulfatin, Triwiyanto, & Gunawan, 2017; Sharma, 2008). There is, therefore, the need for the decentralization of governance of the educational system to the community level to assist in addressing the needs of the learners and the schools. The school is in charge of enhancing the knowledge, skills, and values of individuals, but this can only be achieved through effective collaboration with parents, the community, and other stakeholders. This sentiment is well echoed by Mishra (2015), whose view is that efforts are to be made in involving them (parents, community, stakeholders) in order to maximize their contributions since each group plays different roles in influencing children's education. Schools she continued, are built by and for the community and when the community as a whole does not own the school it cannot be declared as a good school. Therefore the involvement of the community members in various activities of the school is important for the development of the school (Mishra , 2015). Through community participation, schools and communities will be brought closer to ensure effective management and successful development. There is

a need, therefore for an effort to collaborate with each other to effect change and maximize their contribution towards school development.

Studies such as Shaeffer (1992), Heneveld and Craig (1996), Givinda and Diwan (2004), and Asare (2011) have over the years shown the presence of various forms of community participation in school management. Community involvement could be incorporated in research and data collection, school construction, curriculum design (culturally responsive), financial and material support, among others. Therefore members of the community could be involved in school management, likewise, individuals who attend or attended educational institutions in that community.

### ***Research and data collection, and School construction***

Involving parents, families, and communities in the process of research and data collection can reveal to them factors that contribute to lower enrollment and attendance and poor academic performance in their schools. Furthermore, parents are usually concerned about their children's education and often are willing to provide assistance that can improve the educational delivery.

For school construction, the Government of Ghana first developed a system of providing matching grants for communities ready to undertake various development projects such as schools, health centers, etc. The government requested assistance from banks to support about 140 local communities in their efforts in constructing new senior secondary schools in rural areas. The project was approved in 1991. It then estimated the cost of a particular type of project and on the basis of this, determined a level of support to be provided to communities undertaking the project. The government provided a two-thirds matching grant in two installments to the communities that first completed the building's foundation from their resources and be committed to providing one-third of an agreed fixed cost of a particular type of building in cash, building materials, or labor. The project also intended to help ensure these new schools did not become academic islands but instead become real community schools serving the communities' interests.

### ***Culturally Responsive Curriculum Design***

Communities' and parents' involvement help develop curricula and learning materials that reflect children's everyday lives in society. It is a well-known fact that children are able to relate to what is being learnt when they are able to associate it with everyday happenings, thus contents of

textbooks and other materials that exemplify their own lives in their community is easy to grasp by these students and effective learning takes place (Hussein , Muturi , & Samantar , 2018). In Papua New Guinea for example, community schools set the goal to link the culture of the pupils' home community with the culture of the school (Guthrie, 2018). Accordingly, the schools consider the community as the center of learning as well as the focus of education. As a result, the community schools have become central to the national curriculum development which enables community life, such as festivals, customs, musical instruments, and local business activities, to be reflected in the curriculum (Uemura, 1999; Offorma, 2016; Yang & Hui , 2020). A teacher, administrator or a principal who is aware of the important role the community can play in shaping the learning experience of students would as much as possible design a community-wise, family-wise and a student-wise curriculum, with an emphasis on the community's involvement as well as its implementation (Laurence , 2010) with the social setting taken into consideration.

### ***Financial and Material Support***

Parents and communities are powerful resources to be utilized not only in contributing to the improvement of educational delivery but also in becoming the core agent of the education delivery, financial and material support (Kwashabawa & Oduwaiye , 2016). In Madagascar for example, where Government investments at the primary level have been extremely low, parents and communities contribute money, labor and materials (World Bank, 1995). The absence of government support leaves the school infrastructure, equipment, and pupil supplies to the parents and the community. As a result, community and parents are at the center in keeping the schools going (Uemura, 1999). Epstein (1995) and Epstein, Coates, Clark, Sanders and Simon (1997) also summarized the other types of community involvement to include the following:

- (1) Parenting – to help all families to establish home environments that support children's learning at schools;
- (2) Communicating – to design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communication that enable parents to learn about school programs and their children's progress in schools as well as teachers to learn about how children do at home;
- (3) Volunteering – to recruit and organize parent help and support;
- (4) Learning at home – to provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning;

- (5) Decision making – to include families in school decisions, to have parent leaders and representatives in school meetings; and
- (6) Collaborating with the community – to identify and integrate resources as well as services from the community in order to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning.

In Ghana, the provision of quality education can and will occur with educators, the community and other stakeholders seeking ways for effective utilization of limited resources and to identify and solve problems in the education sector (Abubakari & Al-hassan , 2016). These efforts will contribute to the realization of the significance and benefit of community participation in education and will be recognized as one of the strategies to improve educational access, infrastructure, management, supervision and performance (Akyeampong , Rolleston , Ampiah , & Lewin , 2012).

Community participation can contribute to education delivery through various channels. These include but not limited to advocating for enrollment and education benefits, boosting the morale of school staff, raising monies for both infrastructure development and remuneration of staffs. The others are providing skills instruction and local cultural information, advocating and promoting the education of the girl child, contribution to volunteer and labor support and actively attending school meetings to learn about children's learning progress and classroom behavior (Abreh , 2017).

It is worth noting that there have been instances where community members have been directly involved in voluntary teaching and in the preparation of learning materials (Casely-Hayford, et al., 2014). For example, in many districts or towns in Ghana, communities have been involved in a variety of activities ranging from cultural programs, parent counseling and community events for parent motivation. Abreh, (2017) in his study in Akatsi and Upper Manya Krobo districts in Ghana affirmed that stakeholders and communities were involved in School Level Management (SLM). School Management Committees (SMCs), District Education Oversight Committees (DEOC), Parents and Teachers Associations (PTA) and Head Teachers were invited to participate in the preparation of School Performance Improvement Plan (SPIP), School Performance Appraisal Meetings (SPAM) and Action Plan for the school. These serve as examples of how community participation influences school management in Ghana.

### **Importance of Community Participation in the management of schools**

It is of great benefit to involve community members, families and parents/guardians of pupils in school management. According to Cornwall (2008), community involvement improves the educational delivery so that children learn better and are well prepared for the changing world. Numerous benefits come with involving the community in school management. Research shows that community participation could lead to strengthening and increasing accountability in school management (Ahiabor , 2017). For example, parental involvement in education, particularly in school governance, is seen as a means of making schools more accountable to the society that funds them. This has been witnessed in some places such as England and Wales, Canada and the United States (Burns & Wilkoszewski, 2012).

Accountability is developed through routine parents' meetings and reporting systems on student progress. When parents contribute their time, labor, materials, land, and funds, they tend to be more involved in school activities, including participating in meetings with teachers and monitoring teachers' performance. Teachers and school staff, in turn, feel more obliged to deliver better education for the students in order to respond to the needs of parents and communities (Uemura, 1999).

Abreh, (2017) also observed that effective community participation leads to improvement in students learning in the rural communities in Ghana. For example, a World Bank report (2012) emphasized that one benefit of community participation is the maximization of limited resources in education delivery. Community members, families or parents can provide resources such as human resource, local knowledge for their children, assist in material and financial resources, and assist in research and data collection (as stated above as one of the examples of community involvement) to review factors that contribute to lower enrollment, absenteeism and poor performance in their schools.

### ***Effective Use of Resources and Efficiency in the Use of Resources***

When people participate in projects, they are granted the opportunity to have a say in deciding the objective and strategies by which the objective would be achieved. This is most likely to make the project more effective because by participating in the planning and implementation, they ensure the effective utilization of available resources.

Community involvement in school management is most desirable because there is a planned and judicious use of community resources to the benefit of all. This is because there is communal spirit and ownership and

members are willing to ensure that available scarce resources are not wasted. In a study conducted by Asare in 2011 in the Kwabre District of the Ashanti Region of Ghana on community participation in basic schools management, the researcher found out that an overwhelming majority, 80.8% out of the sampled 146 community members supported and participated in the building of their community school by providing supports. This include the payment of levies, the provision of communal labor and leasing of land for school projects. The author had observed that 16 out of the 24 sampled schools built by the community had classroom structures that were still in good shape (Asare, 2011).

### ***Self-reliance***

The harsh realities of the economic situation in many African countries have compelled communities to seek solutions to pertinent problems that have plagued them over the years. The inability of the government of the day to fully support most community schools in the country has necessitated the coming together of community members who have a common aim to find solutions to both the infrastructure and management problems of these schools. Being self-reliant in this context means communities will focus on solving problems themselves and not depend solely on the government to solve it for them. Participation allows people to think about solution instead of focusing on their problems thereby sustaining the project. It actually removes the mentality of being dependent, but rather people become aware of the problems and they become more confident and this foster greater independence.

### ***Coverage***

The continuous widening of the gap in the developmental levels of urban and rural areas and the inability of governments of the day to provide structures for education in various rural areas has necessitated the setting up of these schools by community members so as to help educate indigenes. Most government programs do not reach out to all those in need hence participation of non-state actors especially community members will reach and provide services to underserved areas (Oakley, 1991 as cited in Ahiabor, 2017). Thus, communities give potential support to supplement and reinforce government action and can support schools in ways government cannot (Uemura, 1999) thereby increasing the coverage of educational facilities nationwide.

In addition, concerns of parents and the reasons why they send their children to school can be addressed and this helps in creating a nourishing

school atmosphere and a positive community-school partnership. That is, it suggests various ways to bring parent and community members closer to schools in which they serve; minimizing conflicts between schools and communities, schools and families, teachers and parents and the coherence in what is taught in school and what is taught at home (Ceka & Murati, 2016). Above all, community participation enables a sense of ownership and management that contribute to successful implementation of local developmental projects. Communities can also contribute to school management by sending religious and tribal leaders to inculcate into the children history, culture, traditions and customs that have been historically celebrated in the community. The schools can also help the community in solving societal problems such as sanitation, teenage pregnancy and drug abuse, etc. The above assertions confirm that school functioning improves significantly in places where communities have been involved actively (Asare, 2011; Maier, Daniel , Oakes, & Lam, 2017).

### **School Management Context in Ghana**

The Education Act of 1961 established the policy of compulsory and free education for children between the ages of four and fifteen (basic education) in Ghana. The main instruction language is English. Education in Ghana is under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education (MOE). The Ghana Education Service (GES) supported by three autonomous bodies; the National Inspectorate Board (NIB), National Teaching Council (NTC) and the National Council assume the implementation of education policies for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) (Ministry of Education, 2012). The Ghana Education Service is responsible for the coordination of national education policy on pre-tertiary education and is headed by a Director-General (UNESCO, 2010). The Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), established by Act No.718 of 2006 is to coordinate and oversee all aspects of TVET in the country.

The educational data collection and analysis is handled by the Education Management Information System (EMIS). Policies are implemented in collaboration with local offices. Ten regional and 138 district education offices represent the ministry in the local areas and implement the policies set at the Central level (UNESCO, 2010). The Ghana Education Decentralization Project (GEDP) has increased the influence of local authorities over management, finance and operated issues when it comes to education matters (Ministry of Education, 2012). As of 2019, the number of regions in Ghana has increased from 10 to 16 hence the

possibility of a corresponding increase in the number of district education offices in the near future.

The financing of Ghanaian education is by the government and donors like World Bank, United States via United States Agency for International Development (USAID), United Kingdom via Department for International Development (DFID) and the European Union. The donors' participation is usually project focused and granted under certain conditions, giving them certain influence (Kumi , 2019; Thompson & Casely-Hayford , 2008).

Many attempts over the years have been made by government to ensure community participation in school management. They include Acceleration Development Plan (ADP) of 1951, 2003, Education Strategic Plan (ESP) and District Education Strategic Plan (DESP) (Ministry of Education, 2003). The Government of Ghana made provisions for community participation in the 1994 Ghana Education Service Act, section 9 and sub section 2 (Ahiabor, 2017). The reason for the introduction of these Acts was to ensure full participation and ownership of local stakeholders in school management in their own communities (Addae-Boahene , 2007).

The establishment of District Education Oversight Committees (DEOC), School Management Committees and PTAs are all directed towards rejuvenating the status of communities and their members in school level management (Abreh , 2017). This essentially springs from the fact that communities assist the schools in the ethics and compliance aimed at promoting management efficiency and effectiveness. School Management Committees (SMC) are the managerial hand of basic public schools in Ghana and these are the governing agencies of the school. Their roles are central to the main activities and operations at the school level. The SMC, by law, is the governing body of public schools in the various communities in Ghana and are supposed to promote the interest of the school and learners to receive the best education. Every public school is supposed to have a School Management Committee.

Despite efforts made by government to ensure multiple stakeholder involvement in school delivery, it is argued that the involvement of some communities in the Central Region of Ghana in improving basic education delivery has not been encouraging (Abreh, 2017). Thus, it is imperative for community members together with other stakeholders to improve the quality of schools through school management. And so the quest for decentralization of school level management is to help accelerate growth and equitable spread of development in rural communities and to urge the

participation of communities in decision making that relate to the overall management of development in their localities (Egbenya, 2009).

### **Challenges of Community Participation in the Management of Schools**

Community participation is a hallmark of various educational programs but there are many challenges that lead to ineffective participation. Most basic schools' successes in Ghana depend on the existing community participation. Some of the challenges of community participation in school management in Ghana include the following:

- Parents and guardians seem not to care about anything that concerns the school. They feel reluctant to attend PTA meetings. This confirms Ankomah and Hope (2011) claim that parents of pupils, especially those in the public schools, are generally not motivated to actively take part in school level management as compared to private schools in Ghana.
- Structured meetings for SMCs, PTAs, and other stakeholders to discuss issues confronting schools are not fully attended. Membership attendance at these meetings are not encouraging, rarely forming a quorum. This does not help in addressing the issues of the schools for effective school management (Abreh, 2017).
- Most SMCs and DEOCs are quite dysfunctional and there is a need to activate and breathe life into them. Again, the roles and functions of DEOCs and SMCs structures are available but capacity building for members on these roles and functions does not seem to be well situated (Abreh, 2017).
- According to Abreh (2017), there is a delay in the arrival or unavailability altogether of the capitation grants by the Ghanaian government hence the schools are not able to carry out the activities planned in the School Performance Improvement Plan (SPIP) as scheduled.
- Weak supervision from district education officers tends to weaken the commitment of school heads, teachers and community members in carrying out their duties (Mensah, 2008 cited in Abreh, 2017).

### **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

The paper reviewed community participation in the management of schools in Ghana. In addition, the importance of community involvement and some challenges confronting locals' participation in school management has been laid bare. Ways by which communities participate in school

management were identified. These include: through research and data collection, school construction, curriculum design, and financial and material support, among others. The participation of the community in school management will lead to strengthening accountability, improvement in students learning and performance, maximization of limited resources, efficiency, and effectiveness of school management. This can be done by raising money for schools, ensuring students' regular attendance and completion, constructing, repairing, and improving school facilities, and contributing to labor, materials, and land. However, some of the challenges reviewed such as delay in financial aids by the Ghanaian government and reluctance of parents attending PTA meetings and the dysfunctional nature of most SMCs and DEOCs have threatened some successes attained by community participation in the management of schools in Ghana so far. To enjoy the benefits that come with community participation in the management of schools, the community would have to primarily be ready to accept the responsibilities that come with school management. There needs to be adequate time and effort invested to reap the full benefits.

Schools, governments, and other stakeholders must have active interactions with community members to ensure sustained involvement. That is to say, their capacity needs to be developed, they need to be empowered, and the importance of their involvement is to be communicated to them regularly. Above all, governments can also help increase community participation in schools by coming out with a clear view concerning the funding structure, teacher management, and how schools are held accountable. This would help build trust in community members, which in turn would help develop communal spirit and participation. It will also lead to the promotion of a sense of community ownership and management.

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