

Low Community Participation in Sustaining Community Primary Schools in Kinkiizi West Constituency, Uganda

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Abstract: This study explored low community participation in sustaining community primary schools in Kinkiizi Constituency, Uganda. A qualitative study, framed within an interpretivist paradigm, drawn on a multiple case study design was used to identify the causes of low community participation in community primary school sustainability in Kinkiizi West constituency, Uganda. Two community primary schools, namely; Karangara and Buhoma community primary schools were purposively chosen as cases of study. The data was generated using FGDs, interviews and analysed using thematic analysis. Purposive sampling was used to select 28 participants who are community members (parents and non-parents), community leaders, head teachers, and the District Education Officer. Findings revealed that low community participation is due to; poor socio-economic conditions, low value for education, poor school management, poor school-community relationship, closure of schools by government plus weather, and topography. These findings are of great importance to the Ministry of Education, teachers, communities, parents, and students. It will guide policy formulation that improves the levels of community participation and sustainability of community schools in Uganda.

Keywords: Community Participation, Low Community Participation, Community Primary Schools, Sustainability

1. Introduction

Community participation in the running of community primary schools has been seen by many as an enhancer to sustainability as it can make certain that local people maintain the different dynamics of the school. Participation that is significant for different local community members can be achieved through effective collaborations between the schools and the community which ultimately contribute to sustainable development (Wheeler, Guevara, & Smith, 2018). As a result, there is efficient and effective utilization of limited resources so as to identify and solve problems in the education sector and to provide quality education for children (Oakes, Maier, & Daniel 2017).

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Community schools too, recognize the above impact of community participation in education and do more to initiate parental involvement (Heers, Van Klaveren, Groot, & Maassen van den Brink, 2016). Notably, community schools aim to improve governance, and create neighborhood fair associations, for example, school board advisory groups and school staff become responsible to communities when communities oversee schools (Miller-Grandvaux & Yoder, 2002). These schools, at their center, underline putting resources into pupils, through quality educating, challenging and drawing in an educational program, solid connections to family and community and a reasonable spotlight on results (Frankl, 2016).

According to Daniel (2017), based on the notion that the school and community can support each other and that such forms of participation improve democratic processes and educational experiences, community schools seek to involve the community members in the functioning of the school. This is because of the collaborative nature of community schools and their goal to integrate school and community resources so as to meet the needs of students. All these efforts of different communities to participate in sustaining community schools are always met by glaring challenges and weaknesses that lower the community's participation. Despite some studies pointing to the potential of community-based monitoring in general, school management and local accountability specifically remain one of the key challenges in Ugandan primary education (Mukisa, Mugisha, & Zeitlin, 2009). In one of the studies in Oyam District, one of the districts in northern Uganda, by Ocan (2017) about the impact of Community-Level Engagement in Primary Education, it is revealed that the level of involvement is low that is 27.7% of the respondents (community members) were involved in schools activities and only 11% regularly participate in school activities. This is in a way attributed to the perception that the responsibility of promoting primary education is to the government. It was found that the majority of the community members 78.3% do not participate in educational activities. This is the same situation with Kanungu District where the Ministry of Education points out that generally, community participation and parental involvement in primary education are still very low in the district.

2. Literature Review

In most education systems in developing countries, several obstacles impede the achievement of educational quality and sustainability of different school projects. Most often, the parents and other members of the community in historically disadvantaged schools tend to be aloof especially and this is not an exception in community schools (Netshitangani & Vuyisile, 2015). This, in most cases, starts way back during planning when the community is given minimal opportunities. Poor standards of living have become a thorn in the skin for the community members to participate in education and, unfortunately, the respective educational departments overlook some of the challenges that still exist in some community schools where the local people's standard of living is poor, which, in the end, the locals find it hard to afford especially in contributing their ability despite their willingness to take over the responsibility of the school (Mini & Smriti 2016).

Additionally, (Prew, 2009) highlights challenges like; the growing concern of security with crime problems and poor or weak relations between the schools and the local. Prew (2009) emphasizes the other two categories of causes for low levels of community involvement in education. There have been difficulties of involving parents in the community schools and other small rural schools as most of the parents do not stay near the school, work long hours, and are often illiterate and poor. Some schools usually

clash with their communities because of mismanagement of funds. This forces the local communities to stay away from the school governing bodies and involvement in schools where financial transparency is not adhered to by the heads of those schools. Similarly, community leaders tend to slow down community participation in education. Gordon and Louis (2009) cite that the predominant practice of seeing parents and other members of the community as “outsiders” or as “visitors” within the schools and not as true members of the school community is another challenge that impedes community participation. This subsection gives a benchmark to listen to the community members in Kinkiizi West Constituency about the challenges that could account for low participation in community primary school sustainability.

3. Methodology

A qualitative research approach was adopted by this study. As Creswell (2013) notes, we selected qualitative research to enable us and the respondents to explore the set research questions through sharing experiences and probing in order to acquire a multifaceted and detailed understanding of the phenomena. This means that the research procedures were continuously revised as the research progressed. This made it possible for us to probe further and find solutions to challenges and unclear information that presented themselves during the research. The study was positioned as case study enabled the investigation of the phenomenon in its context and a variety of data sources were used which ensured that there was no exploration of an issue through one lens, but rather multiple lenses which allow for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The interpretivist paradigm locates this study and according to Thanh and Thanh (2015), it is understood that through interpretivist paradigm, the world is viewed by the researchers through the perceptions and experiences of the participants and that the core belief of the Interpretive paradigm is that the construction reality is social.

Data were generated from two community primary schools (schools founded and being funded by the community), the purpose was to probe deeply, and to analyze the situation intensively in order to seek out both what was common and what was particular about community participation and sustainability of community schools in the two settings. The two schools were visited; interviews and focused group discussions were conducted with the aim of investigating community perceptions on participation, causes of low participation, and opinions on practical strategies to enhance community participation and sustainability of community primary schools. 28 participants (twenty one community members, two community leaders from each community as well as the two head teachers of the two respective community primary schools and the District Education Officer) were purposive. Data were analysed using Braun & Clarke’s six-phase framework for doing a thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006).

4. Analysis of Results and Discussion

It was clear from the responses that participants expressed what could be causing low community participation and the major themes from their responses are; poor socio-economic conditions, low value for education, poor school management, poor school-community relationship, closure of schools by government plus weather and topography.

4.1 Poor Socio-Economic Conditions

Several participants acknowledged that most community members have the spirit to participate and sustain their community primary schools but they are strained by their poor social and economic status. It was clear from the responses that parents do not have financial strength; their daily thoughts are how to earn today and what job to find. They do not have a job or employment security and are always worried about earning a livelihood. It is out of this that most parents; fail to raise school fees and the required scholastic materials, make late payments of school fees and end up changing schools for their children because of increased debts at the former school. With low income among most of the community members, it comes to be hard to be able to participate in school sustainability. This became evident when the participant articulated that;

Of course, these are community members who do not have enough income, so you find that the school is always demanding from the community and the money is not enough, and therefore there may be a problem, especially in sustaining the school (Interview, DEO, line 7-9, Page 2 {August 2018})

My challenge in supporting my school is paying school fees, you find that I also do not have what to do to raise some money (FGD2, P9, line 20-21, Page 4 {August 2018})

It was clear from the responses that community members would love to participate in and sustain their community primary school but they are not able to because most of them have little or no clear source of income. In Uganda, to date, over 6.7 million individuals stay poor and an extra 43 percent of the populace is profoundly defenseless against falling into poverty (Second national development plan (NDPII) 2015/16–2019/20). Because of this, The vast majority of the children from poor families add to family income either straightforwardly by functioning as work or indirectly by contributing to doing family unit errands and this keeps them from sending their children to class (Pailwar & Mahajan, 2005). Unfortunately, the respective educational departments neglect the issues that still exist in some community schools where the expectation for everyday comforts of neighborhood individuals are poor, which, in this way, local people can't bear to contribute their capacity regardless of their ability to assume control over the school obligation.

4.2 Low Value for Education

It was also evident from the analysed data that illiteracy and ignorance of the community members was one of the contributing components to low community interest in community primary school sustainability. The majority of the participants reported that most of the community members are not educated and do not value the education of their children and therefore ignore contributing to school development. We were surprised to find out that some community members still think that their children would make it in the future without education since they (parents) have made it in life without education. Furthermore, the participants revealed that some community members still think that it is the government's responsibility to construct schools, maintain them and educate their children. This is evident in one of the many quotations by the participants:

most parents are illiterate, so when the percentage of illiterate is higher than the literate, the service provided to the school becomes very little, they are not aware of the benefits of participation (FGD1, P10, line 18-20, Page 6 {August 2018})

When I am passing through my fellow parents, they ask me, “When my children do not study, will they not live?” (FGD1, P3, line 12-13, Page 6 {August 2018})

This confirms that some of the community members do not know the importance of education to their children and this limits their participation in their community primary school sustainability. This is in contention with Jabeen, Ul Haq, and Hussain, (2018) whose study saw that the fundamental reasons for the absence of community/guardians involvement are lack of education and ignorance. Pailwar and Mahajan (2005) noticed that a few parents have a languid frame of mind towards education, as they don't know about the esteem and importance of education in their lives. Accordingly, in light of this ignorance, they do not partake in the improvement of the school (Njunwa, 2010). Although illiteracy and ignorance of the community members limit their participation in education, this is not consistent with Kavanagh and Hickey (2013) who reveal that the parents who are for the most part ignorant can't comprehend the details of school working henceforth their support and a normal visit to the school would make just undue impedance in smooth school working.

4.3 Poor School Management

This was another obstacle to high community participation that emerged from the analysed data. Participants noted that there is some dissatisfaction, especially from the community members and leaders about how the schools are managed. For example, it was clear that some community leaders were not satisfied with the way funds are managed. Some participants attribute teacher attrition to this poor management. Consequently, the situation creates mistrust among the community members and discourages their participation especially when it comes to financial assistance to the school. This in a way negatively affects the spirit of community participation in the sustainability of community primary schools. This is noted in the following quotation:

One of the challenges that the community faces is mismanagement of the paid fees and failure to pay the teachers the way they are supposed to. This forces some parents to change to other schools even when they are very far. When parents see teachers leaving, they are left demotivated. This is clear mismanagement by the school administrators (Interview, CM1, line 13-16, page 3 {August 2018})

Sometimes when the teachers do not get their salaries and of course those with skills, they leave our school and look for better payments. This demotivates them because they also sweat to get this little money (FGD1, P5, line 31-1, Page 6-7 {August 2018})

Solid doubt and disdain towards the school and the board were heard generally from the parents. Numerous parents are, be that as it may, worried about the school yet do not engage the school management about the accountability of the fees paid. These are the schools where data about the account and other school matters was now and then not imparted to parents. The parents recommend that this could be the main driver of deferred pay rates for educators and high weakening rates among the instructors. These findings

are reliable to Suzuki's study in Uganda where head teachers, in general, overwhelm the school administration and control the work by the SMC, especially in local areas where different individuals from the SMC are regularly semi-uneducated. As a result, there is a lack of transparency and accountability to the parents paying school fees (Suzuki, 2002). At the end of the day, parents start meditating about either pulling back their children from school or will not add to school fees. Nonetheless, Fung (2016) attests that there ought to be an unconstrained activity of interest, and co-duty with the school board and there must be an incitement and the chance to dialogue, reflection, and sharing of critical thinking among managers, teachers, school students, and the community members.

4.4 Poor School-Community Relationship

While the community primary school sustainability desire a good school-community relationship, it came out from the participants that there are still instances of poor school-community relationship. This Poor school-community relationship refers to the unfulfilling association between the community members and the school that has a less supportive working connection. Community participation is a strenuous task that needs a favourable school-community relationship. However, in this study, participants explained instances of unfair complaints from the parents, rude community members, not implementing agreed plans, and disagreements on issues/plans raised in meetings. Under these circumstances, the community spirit to participate in their community primary school is strained and affected. This is evident in the following quotation:

Some community members do have that strong attachment and good relationship with the school, so when we call for meetings, a few will come, because the others do not embrace the meetings (Interview, HT2, line 1-3, page 4 {August 2018})

Sometimes, we go to a meeting and agree upon some issues and when implementation starts, they start complaining, we all end up not achieving them, when we actually agreed with them in the meeting. They accept in the meeting and they do not implement (Interview, HT1, line 24-27, page 4 {August 2018})

Putting the participants' deliberations into consideration, they can't help contradicting existing school practices and perceptions, they are left with a little plan of action yet wind up angry or remain uninvolved in their children's tutoring. Poor relations between the community and the school especially teachers restrain the participation of some parents in their children's learning and in the end negatively affect the pupils' performance (Ngalawa, Simmt, & Glanfield, 2015). In the same way, Essuman and Akyeampong (2011) reveal that the degree of community participation gives off an impression of being formed by an 'implicit understanding' dependent on the standard of correspondence of jobs between the community and schools, where teachers feel responsible to the conventional progressive educative structure, and not to the community. Sometimes, instructors look down on the guardians/parents as they do not think of them as keen on training, ignorant and cannot comprehend the details of school working consequently their cooperation and a customary visit to the school would make just undue impedance in smooth school working.

4.5 Closure of Schools by the Government

During the time of this study, it was the aftermath of the closure of some primary schools in the district, especially private schools. As a result, the number of teachers decreased and some pupils changed schools. Through their responses, the community members expressed their disappointments and felt that they had been let down by the government that should be supporting and embracing community schools. Concerns that came through the interviews and focus group discussion included hurried and closure of the schools, unfair treatment by the government and the government levying taxes on the community schools. This suggests that the community members are dissatisfied with the government's actions of closing the schools and collecting trading license from the community schools. This is expressed through;

Another one is that the government has been closing the schools recent, actually, even this one has just been re-opened after a long struggle of the community members, the other one that had just started at Mumayanja, has not managed to re-open, you see parents are doing what they can with the little resources and all the poverty but the government does not want to know (Interview, CM1, line 8-12, page 3 {August 2018})

There is also a way that we blame the government because instead of supporting the community to start up a school, instead, they come to close the schools, they should be providing things like chalk, books but they only support their schools and do not give us anything. Actually, they instead also come and collect taxes, we pay trading license as if we are making profits while we are sustaining our school to educating the Ugandan child (FGD2, P10, line 3-7, Page 7 {August 2018})

School closure can be stressful and a demotivating factor to the community as reopening a closed school can be a long, expensive and difficult process. Community-driven efforts to re-open their schools can be demanding and an additional responsibility since they already fund and manage them (schools). Even when the challenging process of re-opening is complete, there are always negative impacts on the school. As a result, student enrollment declines, the number of teachers decreases and school buildings become less occupied (Green, 2017). As far as closing schools are concerned, closing Green and Gooden (2014) contend that it is harming and made imposing educational difficulties to pupils (like high dropout rates, negatively impacting the local economy and crime qualitatively increasing) all over the whole community on different levels. With this in mind, Daniel (2017) postulates that community schools are part of the community-wide initiatives which need support instead of closing them. However, the District Education Officer noted that giving the community schools trading licenses was one way of recognising that the schools exist and are providing educational services to the community.

4.6 Weather and Topography

This was another challenge that was expressed by the participants during their interaction with us. In this context, whereas topography means the graphic representation of the surface features of a place, weather, on the other hand, means unpleasant and destructive atmospheric conditions and their effects. While describing their challenges, some of their sentiments dwelled on topography and weather as impeding factors to their participation in the community primary school sustainability. It was explicit from the

interviews and focused group discussion that rainy seasons that make the small feeder roads pathetic were a challenge to parents and community members journeying to the school to exercise their participation. The participants revealed that some community members either live or work at a far distance and the area being mountainous and neighboring an impenetrable national park, heavy rains are always received. These make the small roads almost impassable hence impeding the community members from easily reaching the school. Participation being a social requirement imposed by the community with no legal agreement, some community members find it unnecessary to travel long journeys on mountainous and extremely slippery roads to come to school and participate to sustain the school. Participants noted that;

In this community, we stay near the forest and it always rains a lot, so we have children who come from the mountainous area and it is not safe for them to come to school when it rains because it becomes slippery and dangerous, so they find a hard time to come to school. So when it is the season for rain, studying does not go well, this is the same case with community participation, especially with parents from mountainous areas (FGD2, P10, line 9-13, Page 5 {August 2018})

The paths (Small feeder roads) are pathetic, this is a mountainous area and some old parents at far distances can no longer climb mountains to reach here, especially during rainy seasons as you know most of this participation is voluntary work, so they know they will lose nothing if they do not come (Interview, HT1, line 2-7, Page 3 {August 2018})

This suggests that not only human factors are responsible for low community participation but also natural factors as they impede safe movement to the schools. The findings are consistent with the Human Development Report (2017) which reveals that weather events, such as heavy rains accompanied by flash floods, strong winds, and hail storms can have negative impacts on educational attainment leading to absenteeism and possible withdrawal of children from school. Sheffield, Ujttewl, Stewart, and Maida (2017) contend that children bear a disproportionate burden of the weather and have a high risk of lower school attendance and impaired school performance. In the same manner, Amachukwu, Amadi-Ali, and Nwachukwu (2015) postulate that numerous children are missing from school amid substantial downpours, particularly in the villages where there are no means for transportation and such non-attendance influences children's scholarly performances.

5. Conclusion

The sustainability of community primary schools is enamored with the outputs of high community participation in education. Conversely, participants face numerous challenges towards this envisioned high community participation in the sustainability of community primary schools. It is thus concluded that participants view poverty and unawareness about the values of education as major impediments to high community participation in community primary school sustainability. It is also concluded that many members of the community and parents are reluctant to participate in school activities because of poor school management which results in distrust on the side of the community members. The participants also focused on the government closing their community school as a demotivating element to the community members. While these mentioned factors impending community participation appear human, the findings revealed that weather and topography (natural factors) also contribute to low community participation.

These two rural communities being mountainous and near the national forest, heavy rains are received which affects pupils' school attendance and community participation in school activities. Therefore, the above challenges to a larger extent affect community participation in community primary school sustainability in both communities of Karangara and Buhoma. Based on these challenges, the community members find it hard to participate in several school activities, decisions and development processes hence low community participation.

6. Recommendations

Guidelines should be developed by the Ministry of Education to assist in strengthening school-community collaborations to enhance community participation in education. This is because there is no clear policy on legal community involvement in education. Therefore, the Ministry of Education ought to formulate a structure that allows for community participation at the policy formulation stage to its implementation and maintenance. There is a need to hold regular community-school meetings to bridge the gap that still exists between the community and the school. Although these two always have annual PTA meetings, these do not provide enough opportunities for the community members to be aware of the school activities and participate in them. The school administration and community leaders should spearhead Sensitization of parents who persistently fail to turn up for meeting and other school activities regarding the importance of the school-community partnership in the development of education. This can be done by following them to their homes.

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