Local Community Perceptions of their Participation in Community Primary Schools Sustainability in Kinkiizi West Constituency, Uganda

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Abstract: The main purpose of this study was to explore community perceptions of their participation in sustaining community primary community schools. A qualitative study, framed within an interpretivist paradigm, drawn on a multiple case study design was used. Two community primary schools, namely, Karangara and Buhoma community primary schools were purposively chosen as cases of study. The theory of Action of Talcott Parsons guided this research. The data was generated using focus group discussions and 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 reveal that community members are willing to develop and maintain their primary schools as expressed in their perceptions of offering labour and resources to the school, Inter-linkages and dependencies between community and School. These findings are of great importance to the Ministry of Education, teachers, communities, parents, and students, as it will guide policy formulation that improves the levels of community participation and sustainability of community schools in Uganda. Structure and guidelines should be developed by the Ministry of Education to assist in strengthening school-community collaborations to enhance community participation in education.

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

1. Introduction

Community participation in education has been seen by many as a viable strategy to enhance the sustainability of schools worldwide. Meaningful participation of different local community members can be achieved through effective school-community partnerships which ultimately contribute to sustainable development (Wheeler, Guevara, & Smith, 2018). This leads to the 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; Pailwar& Mahajan, 2005a).

Therefore, community participation in education is envisioned as a proficient procedure to accomplish a scope of goals involving; expanding the significance and nature of instruction, improving access and inclusion, distinguishing issues reflecting local needs and creating important educational modules and learning materials, guaranteeing manageability, improving sustainability, neighborhood responsibility and responsiveness, achieving hindered groups, preparing extra assets and building institutional capacity. 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). It is important to note that, one of the goals of community schools is to improve governance, 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). However, in many African rural communities, community members still live under poverty and therefore, despite the willingness of the locals to take over the school responsibility, they cannot afford to contribute their ability (Durston & Nashire, 2001)

In Uganda, it is recognized that education assumes a principal role in accomplishing the general national advancement objective, which is improving the personal satisfaction for its residents. The Government of Uganda perceives the imperative job that the Private Sector plays in giving education to residents as she could not almost certainly address all the difficulty of giving education to the expansive and expanding number of school-going age children in the nation. The private segment, which is diverse involves well off people, communities, investors, common society associations, neighbourhood, and international Non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and religious associations. Since the inception of a new education system in the early 1960s, the state has exerted enormous grants and aid to government-aided primary schools. This has and still leaves community owned primary schools largely dependent on the community for sustainability.

In addition, there is no clear policy on legal community participation in schools' management and sustainability, which leaves the participation of community members in education voluntary and vulnerable. In line with this, the 2017 Ministry of Education and Sports financial report and Uganda vision 2040 point out low community participation in education as one of the major obstructions to achieving quality primary education Uganda and makes community schools lag behind in terms of maintenance, infrastructure, low completion rates, low learner attendance, and irregular student attendance. Therefore, this study intended to establish community perceptions of their participation in sustaining community primary schools in Kinkiizi West constituency, Uganda.

2. Summary of Literature

Community perception towards their participation in education has been a topic of considerable concern and interest. The relationship between the community (parents and non-parents) and the schools is paramount and the two can work together as an effective team in order for the children to be educated in their full potential. Positive perception and attitude of local communities towards participatory community schools' management is an essential prerequisite for active local participation in sustainable community school condition improvement and ensuring sustainable community-schools' relations. The stronger the connections between the family member and his or her child's school community, the more actively they are likely to participate in the school community (Dove, Zorotovich, & Gregg, 2018).

For example, If parents have favorable attitudes toward school, they are probably more likely to participate in available opportunities for the family to engage and communicate these attitudes to their children which likely promotes motivation in students that leads to working harder in school and higher achievement (Castrechini & London, 2012). However, it cannot go without mentioning that poor relations between the community and the school especially teachers restrain participation of parents in the learning of their children and in the end negatively affect the pupils' performance (Ngalawa, Simmt, & Glanfield, 2015). For example in Ghana, the community became mistrustful of the authorities that try to engage them in schools activities because of the limited roles that the local communities have in the running of the schools (Adam, 2005). However, it is also true that most of the parents do not think that they have the social capital that is necessary to partake in making decisions at school (Msila & Netshitangani, 2015).

In Anaxagorou's study in Cyprus about the perceptions of primary school teachers and community stakeholders as regards school–community relations, it was stressed by all participants that school–community collaboration is very positive and important both for the school and its work, as well as the community (Anaxagorou, 2007). He stresses that rural participants seem to comprehend the significance of such collaboration with regards to their position. Similarly, according to Gordon and Louis (2009), the personal behaviors of the heads of schools and attitudes about community and parent strongly influence community and parent involvement in school decisions. A Case Study of Oyam District, in Uganda by Ocan (2017) about Community-Level Engagement Impact in Primary Education reveal that the level of involvement is low that is 27.7% and this is attributed to the perception that the responsibility of promoting primary education is for the government. This low community participation in education, according to Vision 2040 impends realisation of quality education.

3. Methodology

A qualitative research approach was adopted by this study. According to Creswell, Hanson, Clark Plano, & Morales, (2007), qualitative research is fundamentally interpretive in that the researcher develops a setting or individual description or, analyzes data for themes or categories, and finally draws conclusions about its meaning personally and theoretically, stating the lessons learnt, and offering extra questions to be posed. The study was positioned as case study. This 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 allows for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The interpretivist paradigm located this study and according to according to Thanh and Thanh (2015), it is understood that through interpretive 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. The study was carried out in Kinkiizi West, Kanungu District, Western Uganda. Kinkiizi west is one of the two constituencies in the district. 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 purposively selected as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Sample selection

Description	Total Number	Selection procedure
D.E. O	1	Purposive sampling
Head teachers	2	Purposive sampling
Parents	21	Purposive sampling
Community leaders	4	Purposive sampling
Total	28	

Focus Group Discussion and interviews were used to generate data in this study. Data was analysed using Braun & Clarke's six-phase framework for doing a thematic analysis.

4. Analysis of Results and Discussion

Using Braun & Clarke's six-phase framework for doing a thematic analysis, community members revealed their perceptions of their participation in sustain community primary schools in Kinkiizi West constituency, Uganda. The community perceived their participation as, offering cheap and accessible labour, communities contributing materials and resources, advising school leadership, and building good affiliation with the school, Community mobilising and sensitising other community members and Community being a source of pupils and their support in their journey of education.

4.1 Offering Cheap and Accessible Labour

The responses of the participants revealed that offering cheap and accessible labour is one of the ways they thought they could participate in to sustain their community primary schools. They shared a perception that for the community primary schools to grow and develop, there should be community efforts to help the school by offering free or cheap labour as such schools largely depend on the community. Some community members emphasized that working for the school for free or at a cheap cost enables the school to spend less, develop and on the other hand, community members earn some little money to be able to pay fees for the schools for their children at the same schools. A certain participant noted:

> *"To sustain our community school, we, the community members near the school, should go to the school and work there. The school should not hire expensive labour while we have able-bodied labour in the community that is cheap and accessible" (FGD2, P11, line 17-20, page 2 {August 2018})*

The above quotations confirm that most members of the community know about what they ought to do to continue their locale elementary school. This exhibits a solid feeling of possession, henceforth responsibility to the sustainability of community schools. This is in agreement with Pailwar and Mahajan (2005), Mfum-Mensah and Friedson-Ridenour (2014) who noted that Community members need to offer help as "physical work, (for example, cleaning the schools, building approach streets to the schools, painting the schools, furniture fixing) and services (through teaching by some informed youth). Most often, guardians/parents and local people who are less honored have nothing to offer aside from their expertise/profession that could be cheap for the school.

4.2 Community Contributing Materials and Resources

Material and resources in this context signify what the school needs and uses to achieve an objective. Correspondingly, community members perceived that their participation in community school sustainability also calls for contributing and providing materially. This was the second predominant perception to emerge from the data. It is true that community schools largely depend on community resources and materials. Members in this study perceived that it is their responsibility to sustain their school through providing resources like money, food, time, and materials especially construction materials. This is clearly evident in.

> *Some of us who can provide what other community members cannot provide should really make an effort to help the school, we should dedicate our energy and small resources towards the sustainability of this school (FGD1, P10. line 8-10, Page 3 {August 2018})*

Despite the challenges faced, participants held the view that they should take the responsibility to provide the required resources and materials as there is none other than them to sustain their school. Amanda, Linda and Reuben (2016) postulate that increased access to resources is the foundation of all school–community partnerships, and Community schools sustainability require funding and effective use of community resources (Frankl, 2016). Therefore, the community members have a crucial job in making a decent education condition as they have to sacrifice their time and resources, Kamlesh (2015), (Valli, Stefanski, & Jacobson, 2016).

4.3 Advising School Leadership and Building a Good Relationship with the School

School leadership can be seen as the heart of growth and development. Although this may be true, to achieve this growth and development, the administration cannot work in isolation of the community on which they depend. That is why it necessitates SMC, PTA and annual or termly parents and community meetings. It was evident in the generated data that through such associations, committees, and meetings, fertile grounds for rapport among the school leadership, teachers and the community should be strengthened. Participants emphasized that community members should attend PTA meetings, regularly visit their school, and advise the school administration, strengthen school-community collaborations and monitor the school management and the teaching process. As such, perceptions of community leadership intervention in school management and making efforts to retain teachers were notably evident in their responses. In this regard, a community member in the focused group discussion noted.

> *I perceive it as fully participating in school meetings, and here we should come in large numbers, in such meetings that are where we should freely air out our views that develop the school and after, these views should be implemented(FGD2, P7, line 14-16, Page 2 {August 2018})*

Such associations have been found to improve student learning, reinforce schools (Linda, Amanda & Reuben, 2018). Incorporating the voice of the members of the community into the decision making and running of the schools is viable and paramount as it generates trust between the community and schools, (Adam, 2005). Kintz (2011) argues that the long-haul maintainability of educational upgrades regularly

relies upon the participation of local leaders and the board of management of the school. Thusly, a school that has solid useful relations with the immediate community is well on the way to thrive (Mkhabela, 2012). However, the community members should always be careful in their interactions with the staff at the school because some teachers might not like the supervision from the community members. This is so because teachers perceive such activities as undermining their expertise, self-rule and office, an invasion into their expert space by individuals who they feel came up short on the expert certifications to screen their work (Essuman & Akyeampong, 2011)

4.4 Community Being a Source of Pupils and Their Support in Their Journey of Education

The participants explained how sustaining any school is synonymous with having pupils in that school. From their responses in the FGDs and interviews, it was clear that not only pupils are needed in order to sustain the community primary schools but also the community support to their children in their journey of education. I learned from the participants that even those that do not have children at the community primary school demonstrated a desire and responsibility to support and protect the children in their endeavor to attain education. Different participants perceived their participation as willingness to voluntary provide pupils and the required scholastic materials like a uniform, writing materials, and others, provide security to the pupils, visit and career guide them at school and supporting the bright students. This is expressed in.

> *One of the factors for the sustainability of this school is surely providing children to the school (FGD1, P10, line 12, Page 3 {August 2018)*

In agreement, Aref (2011) acknowledges that communities should advocate enrolment and help children with studying. Community members can even take increasingly dynamic jobs in encouraging the educational experience of the youngsters (Koliba, 2000). It is, therefore, the community to mobilise the community members to enlist and choose children, follow up on school enlistment, participation and drop-out cases (Glassman et al., 2007). Parents and other members of the community energize participation, bolster studying outside the class halls, prompt understudies, give help to poor understudies, and screen and talk about dropout (Russell, 2009).

4.5 Community Mobilizing and Sensitizing Other Community Members

It was evident in the generated data that participants perceived their participation as taking a responsibility to educate their fellow community members about the benefits of educating their children. It is important to note that members were not willing to wait for the government and other educational bodies to highlight the value of education to the community members but perceived that it has to begin with them. These notions are evident in.

> *I should also take responsibility of educating my fellow community members about the value of education and motivate them to bring children to school (FGD1, P5, line 23-24, Page 2 {August 2018})*

The above quotations suggest mobilization and sensitizing community members about the value of education is one of the other strong ways in which the members of the community can participate in to

sustain their primary schools. Sensitization makes the community members understand the benefits of investing in education, which in turn motivates more effort in investing in education (Ngalawa, Eliane & Glanfield, 2015). This is in line with (Bwana & Orodho, 2014) who concur that conducting sensitization workshops between parents and teachers, establishing avenues to involve parents in school activities and supporting can enhance community participation in education.

5. Conclusion

It was evident that majority of respondents were almost unanimous that there was a need for them to support their community primary schools. I conclude that there are different ways that community members and parents should involve themselves in community primary school sustainability. The participants specifically pinpointed out the importance of them keenly offering cheap labour, materials, resources, and children to the school so that it can continue to grow and develop. They strongly felt that sensitization to their fellow community members about the value of education has to start with them as it could take longer if they were to wait for government intervention. Equally important, it was apparent that community members advising school leadership and building a good relationship with teachers would be central to community primary school sustainability. Therefore, community members are interested in supporting school development efforts and once these perceptions are effected, high community participation can be achieved.

This study recommends that 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.

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