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Enhancement of Community Participation in Sustaining Community Primary Schools in Kinkiizi West Constituency, Uganda

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Abstract

Community participation in education is a significant strategy for efficient and effective utilisation of limited resources to identify and solve problems in the education sector and offer quality education for children. The conception that communities and local governments cannot manage and sustain community schools is contestable. Community schools have been set up by different communities mainly in several parts of the developing world, in most cases in areas, which have been educationally abandoned by the government. However, these community schools are not well maintained due to a number of factors including low community participation. As such, the study explored practical strategies to enhance community participation in sustaining community primary community schools. A qualitative study, framed within an interpretivist paradigm, drawn on a multiple case study design was used. Guided by the theory of Action by Talcott Parsons, data was generated using focus group discussions and interviews and analysed using thematic analysis. 28 participants who are community members (parents and non-parents), community leaders, head teachers, and the District Education Officer were selected using purposive sampling. Two community primary schools, namely; Karangara and Buhoma community primary schools were purposively chosen as cases of study in Kinkiizi West constituency, Uganda. Findings revealed that effective implementation of school-community collaborations can accelerate the sustainability of community primary schools. This is through Inter-linkages and dependencies between community and School, establishment and ensuring effective communication channels and mobilization for community participation enlistment.

Key words: *Community participation, Community primary schools, sustainability, practical strategies*

1. Introduction

The relationship among the community, the school, and the local economy is very vital for the sustainability of several community school development activities. In several parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, a vital role has traditionally been played by communities in providing education in many ways, in particular by contributing for the construction of schools, offering assistance and maintenance (Baldridge et al, 2017) Looking at countries that have implemented active participation of the communities in implementing different programs of educations, there has been a considerable success in achieving sustainable improvement in educational levels (Waluyo et al, 2018). Therefore, it is very hard to achieve in the long term the principle of local ownership, sustainability, and accountability of community schools without broad-based capacity building by the community (Russell, 2009). Russell further opines that sustainability is not only about fundraising, it means making permanent changes in daily practice and in institutional arrangements. This is largely done by the communities that own the schools, not the governments.

Despite the clarity that the help of the government is needed for community schools to survive, the risk is that government involvement will influence the process and lose the community dynamic of the alternative system. According to Daniel (2017), basing 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

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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. (Đurišić and Bunijevac, 2017) emphasizes that students will in general win higher evaluations, consistently go to class, remain in school longer, and try out higher level programs when schools, guardians, families, and communities cooperate to help in the learning process.

In Uganda, 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. A study conducted in Uganda by Ocan (2017) found out 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 is still very low in the district. Consequently**,** 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. As a result, these community schools either become extinct or are taken up by Government hence losing the strong attachment to the community. Thus, this study aimed at establishing effective practical strategies that can enhance community participation in the sustainability of community primary schools in Kinkiizi West constituency, Uganda.

2. Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research approach. 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 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. Focus Group Discussion and interviews were used to generate data in this study. Data was analysed using Braun & Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework for doing a thematic analysis.

3. Analysis of results and discussion

Throughout the interviews and focus group discussion, the participants expressed what they thought they should do to regain the determination and impetus to fully involve in the community primary schools sustainability. Participants described different strategies like sensitization to the community members, strengthened school-community collaborations, establishing and ensuring effective communication channels, institutionalization of community participation, mobilization for community participation enlistment, Community financial and agricultural empowerment.

3.1 Sensitization to the community members

Participants were of the view that sensitization should be initiated and spearheaded by the community leaders, school management and the literate community members. Sensitization implies that the community members are made increasingly aware of the value of education and why they should participate in the schools' sustainability. Having explained how some community members were unaware of why they should educate their children, the participants suggested that enough sensitization should be made. This was evident in:

> *I also think that we who know the value of education should work hard and make sure that the others who do not know, we make them love education (FGD1, P6, line 4-6, Page 10 {August 2018})*

> *Then another strategy is sensitization about the value of education and getting to know different ways of how to reduce poverty and then develop and have the ability to participate and sustain our community schools, (FGD1, P2, line 42-3, Page 11 {August 2018})*

The above voices depict that for high community participation to be achieved in these two rural communities, there is a requirement for sensitizing the community members and expanding their mindfulness about the significance of education and consequently creating responsive frames of mind among community individuals for dynamic help and participation. Jabeen, Ul Haq and Hussain (2018) recommend that there is incredible need to make the parents mindful about the significance of their cooperation in child's educational accomplishment, bring issues to light about the connection between school and community. Thus, effective implementation of the aforementioned strategy would facilitate the way toward developing the oblivious and in reverse communities into understanding the significance of education, strengthening, and proprietorship (Ngalawa, Eliane & Glanfield, 2015).

3.2 Strengthened school-community collaborations

The members in the study believed that strengthening the collaborations between the school and the community would effectively enhance their participation in their community schools sustainability. The creation of an environment in which the school and the community are harmoniously planning and working together leads to a community's willingness to engage in school developmental activities. The participants emphasised that parents, community accomplices, school staff, youth, and different partners that are delegates of the schools and communities different bodies' electorate should have a voice in the arranging and usage of fortified school-community joint efforts. Thus, they noted:

> *I think our community leaders and us should be visiting the school and create a bond with the school, I don't think we should always wait for the head teacher to call us, we all understand this is our school, reaching our school, I think can make us realise how it is progressing and what needs to be done especially by the community (FGD2, P3, line 21-27, Page 7 {August 2018})*

The above quotations explain the participants' submissions on how the community members and the school can strengthen the collaboration between them towards school development and sustainability. Community schools look to include the community in the working of the school, in light of the possibility that the school and community can bolster one another and that such types of participation improve just procedures and educational experiences (Daniel, 2017). School leaders generally appreciate that school– community associations give a fundamental establishment to school maintainability and student learning (Ice, Thapa, & Cohen, 2015; Narwana, 2015). In the light of this, Ngalawa et al. (2015) note that links between schools and communities could be strengthened and traditional leaders can be used to foster this collaboration, ensure that schools become more welcoming to guardians/parents by being increasingly useful to guardians/parents and this incorporates running uncommon activities for guardians/parents for school success.

3.3 Institutionalization of community participation

Institutionalization of community participation means the action of establishing and committing a particular group to educational social roles within a community as a whole. Participants proposed that village education committees be formed among the community members to steer community participation in education, particularly community primary school sustainability. Several voices pointed out that these committees would follow up activities of community involvement in education, pupils' enrolment, bringing children that have been out of school back to the school and track down absentees and deal with other related factors that may impede community participation in education. Participants hoped that such committees would also formulate a thorough village education plan that would pay attention to effective ways for the members of the community to participate and develop a supervisory model. This was expressed in:

> *We need to formulate educational groups and committees to spearhead community involvement in our schools. These villages committees should ensure working together and learning from each other. If they act as a team, I think we can have high community participation in most cells of this community (FGD2, P11, line 20-22, Page 8 {August 2018})*

The quotations above suggest that community members believe they should initiate education committees to enhance effective community participation in community primary school sustainability. Green (2017) concur that Community-Driven Education Taskforce need be formed, made up of community leaders, service providers, parents, grandparents, and concerned citizens who are interested in education as a tool for the redevelopment of the community and make an

effort to keep members of the community involved in forming and implementing the educational agenda for the community. These would provide feedback on the child's needs and aspirations so that remedy could be sought, motivating students and teachers, giving moral support to children, assisting in modeling children's behavior, and help in giving suggestions on how programs can be improved at school (Bwana & Orodho, 2014).

3.4 Community Mobilizing and Sensitizing Other Community Members

In order to practice any sort of community participation, there should be an understanding and knowledge about participation among all stakeholders. This can be achieved by establishing reciprocated communication between the members of the community and the school. This can be school-to-home or home-to-school communications about school activities, development, and the pupil's learning. Throughout focus group discussions and interviews, Parents and community members indicated that they would appreciate a continued dialogue between the community members and the school as they would be kept updated on what is going on at school. They proposed that using local churches, community meetings, and other social centers to communicate with all members of the community would ensure effective community participation in sustaining their primary schools. This is evident in:

> *I also propose that the school should be communicating to all the community members about school activities, meetings or any other development at school, you never know who wants to come and help us, this, I think should be done in open social places especially churches, during different community groups and associations meetings (FGD2, P1, line 17-21, Page 6 {August 2018}).*

The above quotation advocate that one of the strategies to add to fruitful community support in education is to set up viable correspondence channels as incessant correspondence among accomplices in the school keeps everybody educated, motivated and included. Ross (2018) posits that there is a need for improved communication and networking such as initiating more communication between the members of the community and the school such as school personnel making more efforts to keep parents informed and increasing points of contact between parents and school personnel. Communication enhances and informs participation, which encourages creativity and innovativeness among teachers, parents, and students (Ngalawa, Simmt & Glanfield, 2015). As a result, both parents and educators discuss their concerns and ideas to address problems and strengthen schools in ways that can develop the school and help students succeed.

3.5 Mobilization for community participation enlistment

In this context, community enlistment means community members actively joining the cause of participation in community primary school sustainability. It was indicated that the community members should take the initiative to mobilize their fellow community members and advocate for their school. They believed that this mobilization to enlist community members would easily help to identify personal, family and community resources and services in the community that would ensure community schools continue to grow and develop. A participant noted that:

> *community members need to mobilise their fellow community members to actively participate in sustaining the school, they need to know that the school does not belong only to the parents of children at the school but to the whole community, therefore like I have said, let the community members especially parents mobilise non-parents so as to join the cause of developing the school (Interview, DEO, line 10-14, Page 3 {August 2018})*

The above quotations suggest that participants understand their ownership and attachment to the school hence propositions to mobilise for support from fellow community members to ensure effectively and wholly community participation. These discoveries might be interpreted with regard to the literature Samuel, Onchiri and Kikechi (2018) postulate that schools and partners should rally benefactors and well-wishers to help school facility advancement. In addition to that, local community awareness meetings regarding the importance of community participation should be held regularly (Nasir, Farooq & Tabassum, 2017). Community arranging and activism have been related to improved learners' results, expanded parental inclusion (Green, 2017). In this manner, the community has a vital job in making a decent educational environment by being joined together, helpful and they need to forfeit their time, resources and to share their musings about how the education of children can be improved (Alam, 2015).

3.6 Community financial and agricultural empowerment

Financial and agricultural empowerment is where the community members gain information, skills, confidence and/or power to increase and manage their small income and increase their agricultural produce. Having discussed poverty

as a major impediment to effective community schools sustainability in the two rural communities under study, participants suggested that ensuring that community members get empowered in terms of finance and agriculture would enhance effective community participation in community school sustainability. It was clear from their responses that these two rural communities largely depend on agriculture as their main source of income and food. It is therefore important to realize that any constraint in agricultural activities affects their social life including participation in education. Consequently, participants suggested that community leaders, elders, successful agriculturalist should organize meetings, interactions, and training to empower different community groups and members. One of the participants had this to say:

> *The community members should be empowered and start some home projects in some of the poor community homes like facilitating tomato growing, gaining skills for our poultry and goat projects management, and this should be based in local communities, people who are really poor and hardly manage a meal. These projects will help the local poor community members to get some income, pay school fees and increase their participation in sustaining this community primary school (FGD, P1, line 13-18, Page 11 {August 2018})*

These sentiments reveal that community agricultural and financial empowerment is of paramount effect in enhancing community participation in community schools sustainability. This empowerment encourages community participation in making decisions and solving the problem of environmental degradation and living conditions in society (Pailwar & Mahajan, 2005)

4. Conclusion

This study revealed that effective school-community collaborations and effective community participation could enhance the sustainability of community primary schools. Strengthened school-community collaborations make community school management more inclusive and bridge the gap between the community and the school. To guarantee universal education and practical improvement in the quality of community primary schools, it is important to bring the community nearer to the system of the school and work together. It is concluded that effective implementation of the above discussed practical strategies could facilitate the procedure of advancing the unmindful and in backward communities into understanding the significance of education, community mobilisation which is urgent as it makes mindfulness and awareness among partners, individuals become mindful of their material assets, their initiative, their specialized ability and the sort of assistance they are probably going to offer, strengthening, proprietorship and independence in building up their capacities and skills, improving their occupations and expanding their earning potential which would empower lion's share of the community members to take an interest in community primary school sustainability. Subsequently, to make a generous advance towards accomplishing the objective of universal primary education, it is basic that all interventions ought to have community support as a center procedure.

5. Recommendations

From the findings of this study, it is recommended 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.

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. Lastly, he community and the school should foster effective communication channels, which can open awareness and avenues for direct involvement of communities in almost all aspects of school affairs.

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