Assessing the Participation of Local Community Members in Schools Managerial Activities and Decisions Making: A Case of Community Secondary Schools in Coast and Kagera Regions, Tanzania

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Author's contribution

The sole author designed, analysed, interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the participation of local community members in the managerial activities and decision-making processes of community secondary schools in the Coast and Kagera regions of Tanzania. The study objective was to explore the decisions and managerial activities of the school in which local community members were meaningfully involved. Despite the critical role that community involvement plays in enhancing educational outcomes, there is scanty information about the nature of school managerial activities and decision-making the communities are involved in.

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Through a qualitative approach and case study design data was collected using interviews, and triangulated from school board members, councilors, school heads, village/street leaders, community members, and education officials. The findings reveal that while community members are recognized as key stakeholders, their involvement in decision-making is often limited to passive roles, with real authority concentrated among school board members and heads of schools. External factors such as government policies which do not provide clear guidance and specify mechanisms through which community members can collaborate with the administration of the ward secondary schools hinder effective participation. Thus, this study advocates for collaborative measures between the government and communities to empower both communities and school management, enabling meaningful participation in school governance.

1. INTRODUCTION

Recent literature emphasizes the growing role of local communities in school decision-making processes. Integrating local stakeholders such as parents, businesses, and community organizations is becoming popular for improving school outcomes. This study explores the extent and nature of community secondary schools' local community members' participation in managerial activities and decision-making in Tanzania's Coast and Kagera regions. By identifying the factors that enhance or hinder community involvement, research findings from this study are expected to contribute to developing strategies for effective community engagement in school management, with potential implications for education policy and practice in Tanzania and elsewhere globally. Community secondary schools (CSS), known as *ward secondary schools* in Tanzania, represent a collaborative partnership model between the local community and the government. Kambuga (2013) maintains that *ward* secondary schools in Tanzania were established with the introduction of the Secondary Education Development Plan (SEDP) programme. This initiative aimed to expand access to secondary education by creating more ward-based schools across the country. Epstein (2018) reiterates that community involvement in school management has been increasingly recognized as a critical factor in improving educational outcomes and fostering a sense of shared responsibility between schools and the communities they serve. Schools that actively engage local community members in decision-making processes tend to experience enhanced student performance, improved school governance, and increased resource mobilization (Sanders, 2019). A study conducted in Kenya by Njugia, Ndiga & Kimotho (2024) revealed that parental involvement influences students'

discipline in public secondary schools. However, despite these recognized benefits, the specific decisions and managerial activities in which community members participate remain inadequately explored, creating a gap in understanding the effectiveness and impact of such involvement (Marschall, 2020). In their study, Njugia *et al* (2024) found that parents were not effectively involved in issues related to student discipline. Therefore, this study is expected to fill a gap in understanding the type and nature of managerial activities and decision-making in which school local community members must be involved.

Several studies have identified some common school managerial activities in which local community members get involved. For example, Lema & Mwila (2022) noted that major activities in which community members were willing to participate are: building school infrastructure, contributing to student meals, school meetings, and disciplinary issues to a moderate extent. Bray (2016) cites school development planning, Rose (2019) identifies resource mobilization and allocation and that this participation helps bridge the resource gap in underfunded schools whereas Goodall & Montgomery (2014) reveal that student discipline and welfare can be well dealt with when community members are involved in school decision-making. Nyaga (2021) maintains that local communities contribute to the monitoring and evaluation processes, while Maile (2021) asserts that in community schools where local communities are taking greater control, community members are involved in recruiting non-teaching staff and influencing the recruitment of teaching personnel. Brookings (2022) and Anderson-Butcher *et al.,* (2022) emphasized collaborative leadership in community schools, where power is shared among teachers, students, parents, and local

partners. This model empowers local voices in decision-making, strengthens the educational environment, and promotes student success. The model aligns with Tanzania's 2014 Education Policy, revised in 2023, which emphasizes the importance of collaboration between schools and the community. This partnership focuses on improving school infrastructure, providing teaching and learning materials, offering health services, and supporting access to water, food, communication, and the general operation of schools (URT,2023). However, the policy does not offer clear guidelines, power dynamics, and unsatisfactory capacity among local community members which can significantly hamper community engagement in school management participation. On the other hand, Nyaga (2022) noted the absence of structured mechanisms for incorporating community voices into managerial decisions can lead to the failure to take advantage of local knowledge and resources effectively. Uemura (1999) observes that involving the community in making decisions about school locations and schedules is one of the ways through which they can contribute to education delivery.

This study was motivated by the different strategies employed by community schools' management and local government in tapping community effort in establishing and managing these schools. This study sought to address such gaps by examining the specific decisions and managerial activities where local community members are involved, the extent of their participation, and the perceived impact on school management and student outcomes. To initiate strategies to effectively and efficiently incorporate local knowledge and resources for better management of the community schools. The study is a comparative one because of a broader understanding of local community involvement in different localities of the country, and awareness of cultural diversity to foster analysis of social issues including reduction of bias and the possibility of transferring innovation solutions.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The researcher adopted a constructivist philosophical position and a qualitative approach in this study. Reviewed empirical literature, the nature of participants, and the research problem, including the researcher's experience, were other factors that contributed to the choice of this approach. Creswell (2009) maintains that the qualitative research paradigm is largely an investigative process where the researcher gradually makes sense of a social phenomenon by contrasting, comparing, replicating, cataloguing, and classifying the object of the study.

The study employed a case study design but was carried out in six ward schools of the Coast region and four wards of the Kagera region. Thus, it is a multi-case study. Yin (2014) maintains that a multi-case study design provides a richer and more nuanced understanding of the research question because it allows for cross-case synthesis and the identification of patterns and themes that emerge across different contexts. Kumar (2011) asserts that a case could be an individual, a group, a community, an instance, an episode, an event, a subgroup of a population, a town, or a city. Case studies are based on an in-depth investigation of a single individual, group, or event to explore the causes of underlying principles. In this study, a case is a school local community in a ward where the school is established by the community in collaboration with the government. Furthermore, Yin (2009) observes that a case study method is appropriate when the focus is on contemporary phenomena within a real-life context. This study is about community participation in school management, the descriptions are of the volunteering behaviour of members of the school's local community in various school management activities and decision-making. Kumar (2011) maintains that case study design is of immense relevance when a study focuses on extensively exploring and understanding rather than confirming and quantifying. The study was guided by a central question that asks: "In which decisions and managerial activities of the school are local community members meaningfully involved?" Through interviews with all categories of participants and focus group discussions among general community members, the researcher posed open-ended sub-research questions.

Participants of the Study: There were three groups of participants in this study: The first group of participants was administrators which included district and ward education officers, and school heads; these were purposefully selected, that is, a sample that has the characteristics relevant to the research question(s). School board members were also included in this group of administrators because they were involved in the leadership and administration of the

secondary schools. District and ward education officers were government representatives and overall, were in charge of education matters in the district and ward respectively. Therefore, they had adequate information on how local communities ought to be involved in the management of CSS within their area of jurisdiction. School heads were the ones who could explain how community members were involved in the management of schools because they were the ones who were in control of the schools. School board members were purposefully selected because they oversee all aspects of the school, including the promotion of better education and accountability systems, and approve the expenditures and budgets. Besides, they are considered to be representatives of the community members in the management of community secondary schools.

Palinkas et al (2013) observe that there are strategies that can be used for purposeful data sampling in qualitative research. These strategies may involve theoretical sampling; criterion-based sampling, maximum variation sampling, snowball sampling, and sampling contrasting cases. Patton (2001) asserts that criterion sampling involves selecting, reviewing, and studying "all cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance" (p.238), previously set by the researcher. The criterion-sampling technique was employed in selecting education administrators at district, ward, and school levels including school board members because of the administrative and leadership roles this group of participants had in schools. An experience in the leadership position for this group of participants was another criterion that was taken into consideration.

The second group of participants included councillors and village/street leaders; these were also criterion-based selected because of their influence and leadership roles they had in school local communities. Only those with an experience of 5 years and above in ward secondary school headship and who were leaders during the establishment of the community secondary schools in their area were selected. In that matter, an experience of leadership when a community secondary school was established in her/his area was set to be the criterion for their selection. An individual with long service in a leadership position was preferred since he/she was expected to be well-informed about school local community members' involvement in school affairs since when the school was established.

Table 1. Number and types of research participants

Region	District Educ. Officers	Ward/ Local secondary School community (SW)	Ward Education Officers (WEO)	School Heads (HoS)	Councillors (WC)	Village/ Street Leaders (VC/SL)	School Board Members (SBM)	School Local Community Members (CM)
Coast	Do1	SW1	-	1	1	1	1	2
		SW2	-	1	-	-	1	1
	Do2	SW3	1	-	1	1	1	2
		SW4	1	1	-	1	-	2
	Do3	SW5	1	-	1	-	1	1
		SW6	-	1	1	1	-	1
Kagera	Do4	SW7	1	-	1	-	-	2
		SW8	1	1	-	1	1	1
	Do5	SW9	1	1	-	1	1	2
		SW10	1	-	1	1	1	2
Total	**5**	**10**	**7**	**6**	**6**	**7**	**7**	**16**

Source: Researcher (2020).

Community members on their generality constituted the third group of participants. It included general local community members. These were selected based on experience, commitment, and knowledge about their involvement in planning, decision-making, and monitoring of community secondary school affairs. The snowballing sampling technique was used to enhance the sample selection of the participants in the third group. Having identified the initial participants I was referred to other participants that met the criteria of the research under study. The details of the nature and types of participants are given under each data collection method. Table 1 gives the summary of members who participated in the study.

3. RESULTS

This theme was drawn from the main research objective that was set to analyse decisions and managerial activities of the school in which local community members were involved. It had a research question asking, *in what decisions and managerial activities of the school are the local community members meaningfully involved?* This question was directed to district education officers, ward education officers, school heads, village leaders, councillors, parents and general community members. Instruments used were interview, documentary review, observation and focus group discussion. Next find the summary of research findings, interpretation and allied discussion.

When asked what decisions and managerial activities of the school in which local community members were involved when establishing and running community secondary schools (*ward secondary schools*), one district education officer who also seems to represent the views of others had these to say:

> *"When establishing ward secondary schools, local community members were involved through village and ward meetings to discuss where the school was to be located. When the construction of school buildings started, they participated in electing school construction committee members. They were also required to contribute materials, labour and some money. It was up to ward and village/ street leaders to see the modalities of coming up with bylaws and strategies to assist in the attainment of the set mission. We were from time to time issuing circulars*

> *and directives which were guiding them.......but we were not the ones who directed them to forcefully take chickens and goats of the community members as you might have heard, it was their strategies depending on their circumstances" (Do1).*

The above views show that school local community members were involved in deciding the location where the school had to be built, contributions of money and material things including volunteering for labour. To a large extent, these views were also supported by the school's local community members. For example, one school local community member who also seems to represent the views of others had this to say:

> *".... together with the school construction committee and teachers, we were involved in the construction of school buildings. When the school was established, we were responsible for deciding the area where the school was to be built, an activity that had a lot of quarrels among members of different villages. We also contributed money, we collected stones and sand, and we provided labour for school building construction" (CMSW9).*

This statement supports the previous one that school local community members were involved in planning and deciding where the school was to be located. Moreover, school local community members were required to contribute materials, money, and labour for the construction of school buildings.

Furthermore, findings indicate that despite their spirit to volunteer to get involved in planning and making decisions yet in some cases community views were not taken on board as one informed Village chairperson noted:

> *"...when planning to establish the school we were involved in deciding where the school had to be located. Community members agreed and spared land for ward school construction. But to our surprise, one politician came later and disregarded our choice of the school location, and therefore the school was built very far from most of the families in the ward. Some parents are now forced to transfer their children to government boarding schools or private schools; others are hiring rooms for their children near the school. You can see how we were at first cheated that we were*

involved in deciding where the school was to be located, but in the end our suggestions were disregarded" (VCSW1).

The statement shows that community members were meaningfully involved, however, the entry of a powerful individual (the politician) overruled their choice. And that reluctance to consider the majority of the community members' ideas has brought some inconveniences to some families. The location of the school was eye witnessed by the researcher, that the school was located on the outskirts of the ward. The school head of that particular school had these to say,

"...Ideally, the school is supposed to serve the families of this ward but because of the distance, it is serving a good number of students from the neighbouring wards. Some parents have even decided to transfer their children to private schools or government boarding schools on the ground that the school is located far from their residents" (HoSW1).

This statement furthermore indicates the unpromising involvement of school and local community members. This could contribute to the failure of the local community members to realize the benefits of their involvement in planning the location and building the school plant. It has also contributed to the loss of opportunities and increased costs of their children's secondary education. Research has shown that decisions and activities where community members were involved were limited in contributions of material, money, and labour including decisions on the location of the school.

When one councillor who seemed to represent other's, opinions was asked to explain the type and nature of school decision-making and activities in which school local community members participate, had the following to say,

When establishing our ward secondary school, all villagers, men, and women were involved indiscriminately. First of all, we called a ward meeting to clarify the prime minister's office directives that every ward was required to construct its secondary school through self-help schemes. We agreed on the starting budget and location where the school had to be built including the amount of money to be contributed by the families and businessmen for buying building materials. And that a least one person from each family was required to contribute labour

for one day a month. A school building committee was formed, and each of the six villages had to elect one representative member to join the school building committee. But these days the committee has been replaced by the school board of which I am not clear on how it was formed and how it operates (WCSW7)

The findings furthermore confirm what other research participants have said, moreover, findings showed that community members do not know clearly about the genesis and functions of the school board which is ideally considered to be representing them in the school decision-making operations.

School board members supported the above observation for example one school board member who also seems to represent the ideas of others had these to say:

"Without considering any criteria except village membership during a village meeting two members from each village were selected to form a school construction committee. Some of the committee members like me were reappointed to become school board members. It is like you just change the name of the committee but the people almost remain the same. Wonderful enough I don't know what criteria were used to appoint me a member of the school board. Much as I know in the first place, the headmaster contacted me, and after a couple of months I received a letter of appointment" (SBMSW8)

Results indicate that each ward had its plan and procedures for getting school-building committee members when establishing community schools but generally community members were represented. Unlike school boards, school building committees were believed to represent local school community members. Irrespective of the fact that school board members may be appointed from the same community they do not seem to be meaningfully representatives of the local community members.

One parent who also represented others said:

"...to me and probably even to others, community participation in the management of ward secondary schools means to involve community members in contributing materials, labour or money for school buildings construction and rehabilitation,

paying teachers for remedial classes, buying gifts for best students and teachers' motivation including purchase of school's furniture.... but not in making decisions about all affairs of the school. Also, as parents, we are involved in planning what and how much to contribute to the feeding programmes of our students while at school. Furthermore, if there are children's indiscipline behaviours, we are called to school to be witnesses while the children get punished. But as a community, we are not involved to discuss together the plans to stop children's indiscipline behaviours like pregnancies, dropouts, absenteeism and academic failures" (CM SW7).

The above data was also supported by data gathered through focus group discussions among community members where it was made known that those parents with children at school were involved in more activities as they attended some school meetings and contributed some money for school feeding programmes and other contributions. Findings also show that parents and community members at large were not involved in discussing plans for school running, for example, to stop students' undesirable behaviours like pregnancies, dropouts, absenteeism and poor academic performances. Parents were seen to be involved in more activities when compared to other school local community members, but like other community members, their activities were mainly limited to labour, money and material contributions.

Some school heads, village leaders, street leaders, village executive officers and ward education officers gave the researcher copies of minutes for some meetings with the school construction committee, ward education officer, village executive officers and ward executive officer. The minutes indicated date, attendance, agenda, strategies, budgets and contributions from various villages. All were about material contributions and directives from the government, improvements to the school buildings; and financial requests to some well-wishers and politicians. For example, among other things, one school head had this to say:

"These are some of the records I was able to keep... I think they may be of help to you. These records do not contain every aspect of the issues discussed at all meetings. Some issues were not documented for example political crashes between "CCM" and

"UKAWA" were less important to me and therefore not documented. Emphasis was on records of materials and money contributions received from representatives of community members. I am hoping every participant of the meeting took his/her records as they were supposed to report in other meetings say village meeting where I am not a member, ...you may get more records from the Ward Education Officer or Ward and Village Executive Officers" (HoSW6).

Generally, records reflected information shared and discussed during Ward Development Council (Ward DC) and village/street committees. Most records had strategies for material and money including amounts contributed by school local community members, government, well-wishers and politicians.

When responding to the question, in what decisions and managerial activities of the school are the local community members meaningfully involved? One ward Education officer who seemed to represent the ideas of others had the following to say,

Generally, local community members are not involved in school decision-making; only school board members participate, as they are seen as representatives of the broader community. Community involvement is typically limited to providing materials or financial support when requested, but, as you may know, government restrictions have significantly curtailed these contributions in recent years (WEOSW5)

The above response highlights a lack of clarity regarding community participation in school decision-making, even among those entrusted with overseeing school operations, such as ward education officers. In this context, the mission to meaningfully engage community members in school decision-making continues to face significant challenges.

4. DISCUSSION

The activities that community members participated in included building school infrastructure, contributing to student meals, attending school meetings, and addressing disciplinary issues. These activities align with the findings from a study by Lema and Mwila (2022), who noted that community involvement in these

areas was moderate. The findings furthermore, indicate that, while local community members participated in deciding school locations and forming construction committees during the establishment of the schools, their involvement did not meet their expectations. Despite their engagement in committee formation, community members expressed dissatisfaction with their influence in school decision-making. This suggests a lack of meaningful representation in the school boards. Furthermore, it was noted that community members' activities were mainly focused on money and labour contributions including materials for school building construction. Results also indicated that parents with children in the ward secondary schools were involved in more activities when compared to other school local community members. They attended various meetings at the school and contributed money for various services. Moreover, parents were partially involved in enforcing penalties during students' indiscipline events at the school. Parents and community members at large were not involved in discussing plans and strategies to stop students' undesirable behaviours.

Findings have also revealed a remarkable difference between different communities, for example, some communities were involved in planning where to build the school while others were just sidestepped. Study results show that good plans and suggestions by the school's local community members in some communities were valued and taken on board but in others, some influential people just sidestepped them. In places where community members were sidestepped for example in deciding on school location, disadvantages were obvious. The school was located very far from most of the community homesteads to the extent of forcing some parents to transfer students to other schools or incur extra costs to hire rooms in the school neighbourhood for their students' accommodation. Sidestepping communities' good suggestions and plans without clear explanation undoubtedly is one of the irritants and therefore an obstacle to community involvement in the management of community secondary schools in Tanzania. The findings suggest that politicians and other influential community members should be empowered to support community initiatives, as they are integral parts of the community.

Deciding where to build the school seemed to be an accepted activity to community members as it

is coupled with some advantages including fair location of the school plant to most of the beneficiaries, which could reduce the costs covered by parents. Cost reduction is one of the major advantages of the establishment of community schools. Miller-Grandvaux and Yoder (2002) observe that one of the rationales for the establishment of community schools in Africa is the issue of cost reduction when compared to other types of school establishments. Involving school local community members in deciding the location of the school during its establishment is a recommendable contribution and activity which worthy to be done by the community members. Uemura (1999) reiterates that making decisions about school locations and schedules is one of the ways through which community members can contribute to education delivery.

The researcher had a feeling that government policies, acts, and circulars put limits on which activities are to be performed by the school's local communities without considering the specific situation of a particular community. Research findings made it clear that school local communities were partially involved in the planning and implementation of very few strategies. For example, they were not meaningfully involved in planning the strategies to reduce pregnancies, dropouts, truants, and student discipline due to the bureaucratic model of governance. However, strategies for implementation at the shop floor seem to differ from one community to another depending on background, understanding, and other prevailing factors of a particular community including the school head's motivation. The results are similar to research by Goodall & Montgomery (2014), which already found that student discipline and welfare can be well dealt with when community members are involved in school decision-making. Today's societies are faced with several challenges regarding the upkeeping of desirable behaviors among youngsters, a challenge that calls for collaborative strategies by schools, communities, and government.

Furthermore, research findings have revealed that the nature of activities in which local school communities are engaged seems to be of material resource provision rather than participation in school management. The reduction of community involvement in school management to material contributions was not only thought by school local community members but was also practiced by the school management. Such thinking and practice would

affect the way people could participate in performing school managerial functions. To stress the importance of engaging local school communities in management activities, Sharma (2008) reiterates that quality education requires the collective efforts of teachers, students, parents, and the community. Adds that the shift to increase community control of schools can be seen as a move to enhance and reframe democratic rights and participation.

5. ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES OF COAST AND KAGERA COMMUNITYS INVOLVEMENT IN THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

The achievements and challenges of the Coast and Kagera communities in their involvement in the school's managerial activities and decision-making are marked by both progress and significant hurdles. On the positive side, both regions have made strides in increasing community awareness about their participation in education, with local leaders and parents becoming more engaged in supporting infrastructure development and encouraging children to attend school. Community-led initiatives such as the building of classrooms, providing school supplies, and organizing fundraising events have contributed to the establishment of the *ward* secondary schools which would otherwise not exist, and getting involved moderately in enhancing the learning environment. Additionally, the involvement of local communities in school building construction has fostered a sense of ownership and accountability on the part of school parents and general local community members.

However, challenges persist, including inadequate resources, government policy restrictions, unclear guidance, and limited access to quality education, especially in remote areas. There is also a lack of effective coordination between the community, government, and schools, which sometimes results in gaps in curriculum delivery and insufficient teacher training. Furthermore, the impact of economic hardships on families can lead to higher student' dropout rates and a lack of sustained community engagement. Political parties' antagonism was another challenge that was pointed out by the research participants. Despite these challenges, the combined efforts of the communities demonstrate the importance of local involvement in achieving educational success, though sustained support and collaboration are essential to overcome existing barriers.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

School activities in which school-local community members were engaged indicated that school-local community members and education managers had a limited outlook on community involvement in school management decisions. The nature of school activities in which parents and other school local community members were engaged suggests weak influence and insignificant participation of school local communities in the school management decisions. The involvement of local community members in the managerial activities of community secondary schools offers significant benefits, including enhanced accountability, improved resource management, and better alignment of school practices with community needs. However, for participation to be effective, it must be supported by capacity-building initiatives, clear roles, and inclusive practices that empower communities to contribute meaningfully to school governance. To sufficiently and meaningfully involve school local community members in school decision-making and managerial activities a certain degree of flexibility is needed. To effectively harness community effort for meaningful participation in school management decisions, it is recommended that the government strategically support local communities and school administrators through capacity building and other initiatives.

DISCLAIMER

DISCLAIMER (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE)

Author(s) hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc) and text-to-image generators have been used during writing or editing of this manuscript.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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