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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.59557/kykk3z52>**Participation in School Committees in Monitoring Primary School Projects in the Nyang'hwale District in Tanzania**

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Abstract

School committees hold a central role in decision making on various issues about the development and delivery of primary education, including the monitoring of school projects. This study examined the participation of school committees in monitoring primary school projects in selected schools in Nyang'hwale District in the Geita Region. Specifically, the study determined the extent of school committee members' participation in monitoring school projects and examined factors influencing the school committee's participation in monitoring primary school projects. A purposive sampling technique was used to select 17 primary schools and 136 school committee members and key informants involved in the study. Data were collected through structured interviews using a structured questionnaire, key informant interviews and documentary review, and were analyzed for descriptive statistics, chi-square test and binary logistic regression. Results showed that most of the school committee members participated in project identification and planning, but less in budgeting activities. The main factors that influenced the participation of school committees were their perceived ability to speak up in meetings, their willingness to participate and their source of information. It was concluded that school committees' participation in monitoring school projects was limited and constrained by gender imbalance. Thus, there is a need for capacity building for school committees to enhance their capacity for their roles and responsibilities.

Keywords: Monitoring, Participation, School committees, School projects

1.0. Introduction

Over the last few decades, monitoring has been an integral part of the education process in most countries. The purpose of monitoring in education is to ensure the provision of equitable and quality education to all and at all levels. One prominent method of improving education monitoring and outcomes is to strengthen local school governance structures, reinforced through community participation (World Bank, 2011). As Kumar (2015) puts it, education without the active

participation of the community is a one-sided activity, supply-driven and not demand driven. Community participation in monitoring education interventions and service delivery is regarded as one of the most important aspects of bringing about improvements in qualitative and quantitative terms because communities that are informed and engaged in education monitoring can promote accountability and advocate for improved services (World Bank, 2011). The main aspects that need to be monitored at the school level

include admission procedures, teaching-learning methods, use of modern and innovative methods, assessment of the available resources, deciding and planning of infrastructure projects, monitoring the progress of the projects, evaluating outcomes, facilitating parents and teachers' communication, and promoting extra-curricular activities (Mugabe, 2018).

There are many local institutions involved in monitoring activities in primary schools such as school committees, pupil committees and village committees. School committees (sometimes referred to as school management committees – SMCs) are elected bodies meant to enhance local participation and facilitate broader locally based decision-making in primary schools (World Bank, 2011; Nemes, 2013; Masue and Askvik, 2016; Halick *et al.*, 2019). They were established for the purpose of supervising and advise the management of primary schools and are responsible for the management and maintenance of the school (MoEVT, 2002; Kumar, 2015). They are seen as tools for empowering people at the grassroots level (World Bank, 2011; Kumar, 2015; Askvik, 2016). As such, they stand out as mechanisms of decentralization for improving the effectiveness and accountability of service providers. According to Kumar (2015), when community and local institutions are empowered to function for the development of schools, much improvement could be seen in academic and non-academic areas. The main argument in favor of such committees is that they provide spaces for representation and participation (World Bank, 2011; Masanyiwa *et al.*, 2014; Kumar, 2015; Halick *et al.*, 2019).

School committees hold a central responsibility for the effective teaching and learning of pupils for quality basic education. Masue (2010) argues that through school committees, local communities can play an important role in decision making over various issues about development and day-to-day responsibilities in the school. School committees can also be involved in the mobilisation of resources from the community for school infrastructure. The success of this mobilisation can best be achieved if there is active cooperation between the school and the local community, which is the function of the school committee. Parvaiz *et al.* (2016) allude to the responsibilities of committees in education to identify, predict, implement and monitor all learning activities and to raise the community's involvement. As Halick *et al.*, (2019) argue, a school is a public organisation, that is owned by the community and works for the community. Thus, it takes the trust of the community to carry out educational and learning tasks. In turn, community trust can be established through the presence of the school committee as a representation of parents and other actors, which can be a mediator, advisors and supporters of educational programs at the school. Thus, the participation of the school committees in executing their mandate and how they relate to the situations in their particular schools and communities is crucial.

In Tanzania, each primary school, both public and private, is required by law to have a school committee (MoEVT, 2002; URT, 2014). School committee members comprise parents, teachers and local community representatives, including the representatives of civil society organizations (URT, 2014; Nemes, 2013;

Masue and Askvik, 2016). The main functions of the school committees include planning, budgeting and implementation of the school development plans in a manner that involves pupils, parents, staff and other stakeholders (Rajan and Omondi, 2003). School committees must enhance education quality in the country. These committees are given several predetermined responsibilities to implement to ensure the quality of education and monitor education projects (Masue, 2010; Nemes, 2013; Masue and Askvik, 2016). According to URT (2001), the responsibilities of school committees include: mobilising voluntary community contributions to projects, in the form of labour, money, or building materials such as timber, sand, and so forth; facilitating planning, budgeting, and the implementation of national policy decisions and directives at the school level; informing the community about directives, their implementation, progress on certain issues, problems encountered, how funds are used; managing funds received for project implementation while ensuring maximum transparency and accountability; preparing and submitting regular project-progress reports to the LGAs through council education officers; preparing and submitting progress and financial reports to the village or ward council, and overseeing the school's day-to-day activities.

Despite their important roles, various studies have reported the challenges that constrain them. For example, UNESCO (2017) shows that participation in SMCs in Tanzania has been declining, having declined from 36% in 2006 to 15% in 2013 (UNESCO, 2017). Maeda

(2015) reports that SMCs suffer from a lack of important information that could help them to participate in making school decisions on various school development matters such as school planning. Further, most of the SMCs are considered voluntary with symbolic representation to fulfill what is centrally planned. Other studies show that SMCs have limited power in communicating and sensitising school stakeholders (Uwezo, 2016; HakiElimu, 2017), are hardly or not at all visiting and reviewing the school's daily activities (Holvoet *et al.*, 2015), and they fail to sensitise the community on improving the teaching and learning environment (HakiElimu, 2017).

Various studies on monitoring education projects for the delivery of quality primary education services have focused on school and off school-based challenges of primary education service delivery. For instance, Nemes (2013) investigated the involvement of school committees in the preparation and implementation of whole school development plans. Masue and Askvik (2016) examined whether school committees are a source of empowerment for people at local levels. Thus, the available literature lacks comprehensive empirical evidence to address questions such as: how do the school committees participate in monitoring school projects? What are the factors influencing school committee members' participation in monitoring school projects? To address this gap and contribute to the academic literature, this study assessed the participation of the school committee in monitoring school projects using the case of selected schools in Nyang'hwale District. The specific objectives of the study were to: i) determine the extent of the school

committee's participation in monitoring school projects, and ii) examine factors influencing the school committee's participation in monitoring school projects in the study area.

2.0. Research Methodology

This study was carried out in four selected wards in Nyang'hwale District in Geita Region. This District has 62 primary schools, each with a school committee responsible for overseeing the delivery of primary education in the area. The district is also one of the districts with reported low performance in primary school national examination results. For example, in 2016, 2017 and 2018, the overall performance of pupils selected to join secondary schools in the district was 87.7%, 85.85% and 84.95%, respectively (URT, 2018). The study was conducted in four purposively selected wards: Nyang'hwale, Nyijundu, Izunya and Kharumwa, which had a total of 17 public primary schools. The rationale for selecting these wards was the presence of primary school infrastructure projects and school committees involved in the monitoring of these projects and other school functions.

A cross-sectional research design was used in this study because it is relatively quick and easy to conduct and enables the collection of data on all variables at once. Both primary and secondary data of quantitative and qualitative nature were collected. Primary data were collected from school committee members, local government officials, and primary school teachers. Secondary data were collected from reports obtained from the District Education Officers, Ward Education Officers, Ward Executive Officers and school head teachers.

A purposive sampling technique was used to select four wards of Nyang'hwale, Nyijundu, Izunya and Kharumwa, with a total of 17 primary schools. Because each school committee is comprised of 9 members, the targeted study population was 153 school committee members in the 17 schools. While the aim was to involve all school committee members in the study, it turned out that only 135 of them were available during data collection, which was considered an adequate representative sample to provide valid and reliable information. Other respondents were four ward executive officers, one District education officer and four ward education officers, making a total of 145 respondents.

Data collection methods included structured interviews, key informant interviews and documentary reviews. Structured interviews were used to collect data from school committee members using a structured questionnaire with closed-ended questions. Through this method, information on the socio-demographic characteristics of committee members, responsibilities of school committees and their participation in various project monitoring activities was gathered. Key informant interviews were used to gather in-depth information from knowledgeable and informed people on the role of school committees in monitoring primary education projects, including school head teachers and ward education officers. The documentary review involved analysing reports, minutes of committee meetings, and attendance records.

Data for the first specific objective, which involved determining the extent of school committee members'

participation in monitoring primary school projects were analysed using descriptive statistics, including means, frequencies and percentages. Binary logistic regression was used to analyse data for the second specific objective, which aimed at determining the factors influencing school committee members' participation in monitoring school projects. Binary logistic regression was suitable because the dependent variable

participation of school committees in monitoring school projects was reduced to a categorical variable with only two levels (whether the school committee member was participating or otherwise) and independent variables were both categorical and continuous. Descriptions of each independent variable used together with their measurement scales are provided in Table 1.

The binary logistic model was expressed as follows:

$$\ln\left(\frac{p_1}{1-p_1}\right) = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 \dots \dots \dots + \beta_{11} \dots \dots \dots (1)$$

Whereby;

P₁= Probability that a school committee member had participated in monitoring primary education projects. (Yes=1, 0=No)

X= Independent variables

α = a regression constant

β ... 1 = regression coefficients

Table 1. Definition of independent variables used for the logistic model

Variable	Definition	Type	Measurement
Participation	Level of participation	Binary	1=Yes 0=No
Gender	Gender of respondent	Binary	1= Male 0=Female
Age	Age of respondent	Metric	Years
Experience	Experience in being a school committee	Metric	Years
Occupation	Occupation of respondents	Binary	1=Farmer 0= Otherwise
Ownership	Sense of ownership	Binary	1=Owns projects 0= Otherwise
Transparency	Transparency of project information	Binary	1=Informed 0= Otherwise
Willingness	Willingness of respondents	Binary	1=willing 0=Otherwise
Speak Up	Freedom of speaking up	Binary	1=Speak up 0= Otherwise
Relationship	A good relationship with leaders	Binary	1=Good relationship 0=Otherwise
Position	Position of respondents in the committee	Binary	1=Chairperson 0=Otherwise
Education Level	Education level of respondent	Binary	1=College and above 0=Otherwise

3.0. Results and Discussion

3.1. Extent of School Committees' Participation in Monitoring School Projects

In this study, participation was measured by asking school committee members whether they participated in project identification, budgeting, planning, regular attendance at committee meetings and speaking up in the meetings. The results in Table 2 show that the majority of respondents had participated to a large extent in planning (50.7%) and project identification (36.8%), but to a small extent in budgeting (38.2%). Significantly ($p=0.022$) more male committee members were involved in planning 'to a large extent' (56.5%) compared to their female counterparts (38.6%). This could mean that, partly because they were involved in project identification, male members were also more likely to be involved in the planning of activities.

It was established from the key informant interviews that despite some limitations, school committees played a significant role in planning, implementing and monitoring different activities in schools. One of the head teachers reported that:

"This year, school committee members were involved in identifying two construction projects: classrooms and pit latrines buildings. We also have an ongoing classrooms construction project, but few school committee members are actively participating in monitoring the implementation of this project."

This shows the important role played by school committees in monitoring school projects, although their extent of participation differs at different stages of

the project circle. While monitoring is supposed to be a continuous process assessing the functions of project activities in the context of implementation schedules and the use of project inputs (Kabonga, 2018), this study observed limited participation in some project stages.

Another ward official stated that:

"Although school committees are responsible for planning and budgeting, these activities also involve other actors including the village chairperson and executive officer. After endorsement by the school committee, the school budget is forwarded to the District Council for review and approval."

This suggests that the participation of school committees is part and parcel of school planning and budgeting, which is supposed to be an ongoing process in all project stages (Kabonga, 2018).

Overall, these findings support earlier observations in Tanzania about the role of school committees in supervising and monitoring the construction of school buildings. For example, Nemes (2013) found that school committees were effectively participating in overseeing and supervising the construction of school buildings. A study by Geoffrey (2015) in Rufiji, Tanzania reported that school committees made financial budgets for all school projects and decided on the financial costs and expenditures for the projects like the construction of physical infrastructures such as classrooms, latrines and teacher's houses. School committees also set and were responsible for bargaining the prices of various resources and construction materials to be purchased. Another study by Maketh (2015) in Monduli Tanzania showed that most of

the respondents participated to a large extent in the construction of school projects.

Table 2. Extent of school committee's participation in monitoring primary education projects by gender (n=135)

Variable	Categories	Male	Female	Total	Chi- Square
Project Identification	Not participated all	4(4.3)	1(2.3)	5(3.7)	$\chi^2= 8.990$ p= 0.061NS
	Small extent	18(19.6)	10(22.7)	28(20.6)	
	Neutral	23(25)	11(25)	34(25)	
	Large Extent	29(31.5)	21(47.7)	50(36.8)	
	Very large extent	18(19.6)	1(2.3)	19(14)	
Planning	Not participated all	9(9.8)	4(9.1)	13(9.6)	$\chi^2= 11.417$ p= 0.022**
	Small extent	11(12)	16(36.4)	27(19.9)	
	Neutral	2(2.2)	1(2.3)	3(2.2)	
	Large Extent	52(56.5)	17(38.6)	69(50.7)	
	Very large extent	18(19.6)	6(13.6)	24(17.6)	
Budgeting	Not participated all	30(32.6)	14(31.8)	44(32.4)	$\chi^2= 10.491a$ p= 0.033**
	Small extent	40(43.5)	12(27.3)	52(38.2)	
	Neutral	5(5.4)	9(20.5)	14(10.3)	
	Large Extent	14(15.2)	9(20.5)	23(16.9)	
	Very large extent	3(13.3)	0(0)	3(2.2)	

**Significant at 5%, Figures in brackets are percent.

The findings in Table 3 show that less than half of the committee members reported that were regularly attending school committee meetings (44.1%) while more than half (55.9%) did not. The reasons for not attending school committee meetings were significantly associated with gender ($p=0.018$). While most male members associated their non-attendance with a lack of time (39.6%), most female participants attributed it to a lack of information (32.1%) and non-membership in the sub-committees (35.7%). Qualitative findings revealed that most committee members had no culture of attending meetings, thus, missed some important information on the progress of school infrastructure projects that were implemented in their respective schools. One of the ward officials reported that: "...some committee members do not see

the importance of attending meetings because such meetings interfere with other economic activities such as farming and business." This could mean that most of the school committee members did not see the importance of participating in the meetings, thus, their participation in monitoring school projects was not likely to be a continuous ongoing process (Kabonga, 2018). This mirrors earlier observations by HakiElimu (2012) which found that although SMCs regular meetings were conducted, they were only attended by a few SMCs members.

This experience is similar to the observation made by Seleman (2015) in Morogoro who found that peasants could not attend meetings due to the collision of the meetings with farm work and market days. In Indonesia, Halick *et*

al. (2019) reported that school committees were not active in performing their main duties and functions because of their preoccupation with their respective professions. These findings, thus, suggest that practical

considerations such as the time of committee meetings are important as they may conflict with committee members' ability to participate in these meetings.

Table 3: School committee member's attendance in meeting and reason for not attending the meeting by gender (n=135)

Variable	Categories	Male	Female	Total	Chi- Square
Regular attendance in the meetings	Yes	44(47.8)	16(36.4)	60(44.1)	$\chi^2= 1.586$ p=0.208
	No	48(52.2)	28(63.6)	76(55.9)	
Reasons for not regularly attending meetings	Lack of time	19(39.6)	2(7.1)	21(27.6)	$\chi^2=11.911$ p=0.018**
	Lack of information	14(29.2)	9(32.1)	23(30.3)	
	Ideas not considered	4(8.3)	4(14.3)	8(20.5)	
	No school projects	5(10.4)	3(10.7)	8(10.5)	
	Not a member of sub-committees	6(12.5)	10(35.7)	16(21.1)	

**Significant at 5%. Figures in brackets are the percent

Further, findings show that less than half of respondents who attended the school committee meetings opined that they could speak up (42.6%) and the majority felt that they did not influence decisions in the meetings (39.3%). Significantly (p=0.007) more men (65.2%) than women (59.1%) reported either having spoken up or felt had an influence on some decisions (40.9%). A study in Mali (Dedehouanous and Berther, 2013) concluded that the greater the percentage of women in a meeting, the more likely that some or most of them will speak up. Nemes (2013) reports a similar observation that women either did not turn up at the meetings or, if present, would often not speak, which

could be interpreted as 'passive' participation. This could mean that the gendered power relations constrained women's equal access to effective and interactive participation in the committees. Indeed, speaking up and influencing decisions in committee meetings is more complicated than just attending them. As has been found elsewhere, village women tend not to speak in male-dominated forums even when they have something to say (Masanyiwa *et al.*, 2014). Consequently, men have more leverage to play their roles in committee meetings than their female counterparts.

Table 4: Respondents' opinions on their ability to speak up and influence decisions in committee meetings

Variable	Categories	Female	Male	Total	Chi- Square
Perceived ability to speak up	Yes	26(59.1)	60(65.2)	58(42.6)	$\chi^2= 7.191$ p=0.007***
	No	18(40.9)	32(34.8)	78(57.4)	
Perceived ability to influence Decisions	No influence	29(31.9)	24(54.5)	53(39.3)	$\chi^2= 16.758$ p= 0.000***
	Influence some decisions	20(30.8)	18(40.9)	46(34.1)	
	Influence most decisions	34(37.4)	2(4.5)	36(26.7)	

***Significant at 1%, Figures in brackets are percent

3.2 Factors Influencing School Committee Participation in Monitoring School Projects

The factors influencing the participation of school committee members in monitoring school projects were examined using a binary logistic regression where the dependent variable was the participation of school committee members and independent variables were gender, age, education level, occupation status, experience in years, leadership position, ability to speak up, willingness to participate in monitoring projects, sense of ownership, information dissemination and good relationship with leaders. Although some of the indicators for participation (dependent variable) were measured using five-point Likert scale questions (Table 2), the overall level of participation was collated into two levels (participated or not participated), making it a binary variable. Results in Table 5 indicate that independent variables included in the model were

good predictors of the participation of school committees in monitoring school projects. About 49% of the variation in the participation of school committee members was due to variations in independent variables included in the model.

Three independent variables had a significant influence on the participation of school committee members: perceived ability to speak up in meetings, willingness to participate and source of information on committee activities. Perceived ability to speak up in meetings had a significant positive relationship with participation ($\beta=0.337$, $p<0.001$), indicating that the higher the ability to speak up in meetings the higher the probability of participating in committee activities. Impliedly, this shows that having a voice and influence in reaching decisions in committee meetings is a form of 'interactive' participation (Masanyiwa *et al.*, 2014), thus, a motivation for

committee members to participate in the meetings.

Willingness to participate also had a significant positive relationship with participation ($\beta=1.794$, $p<0.001$). This implies that the participation of school committee members depends on their willingness to participate. Further, the source of information on school committee activities had a positive

significant relationship ($\beta= 1.233$, $p<0.05$) with participation. This shows that access to information on committee meeting schedules and other issues is an important determinant of participation. Convenience in the availability of information related to committee functions and duties, including meetings is critical in enhancing the functionality of school committees (Halick *et al.*, 2019).

Table 5: Factors influencing participation of school committee in monitoring primary school infrastructure projects

Variable	B	S.E.	Wald	Sig.	Exp(B)
Age	-0.004	0.032	0.018	0.894	0.996
Gender	0.095	0.533	0.032	0.858	0.909
Education level	0.244	0.548	0.198	0.656	1.276
Occupation	-0.147	0.572	0.066	0.797	0.863
Experience in years	-0.025	0.211	0.014	0.906	0.975
Position of respondents	0.137	0.878	0.024	0.876	1.147
Perceived ability to speak up	3.337	0.695	23.038	0.000***	0.036
Willingness to participate in school projects	1.794	0.706	6.450	0.011***	6.013
Sense of ownership of school projects	0.035	0.712	0.002	0.961	1.035
Source of information on committee activities	1.233	0.629	3.843	0.050**	0.291
A good relationship with committee leaders	-0.267	0.619	0.187	0.666	0.765
Constant	2.012	1.584	1.613	0.204	7.477

Significant at 5%, *Significant at 1%, $\chi^2=61.828$, $R^2=0.49$

4.0. Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions can be drawn. First, the extent of school committee participation in monitoring school projects is limited since most of the school committee members participate in project identification and planning processes, but less in budgeting activities. Second, the main factors influencing the participation of school

committees included the perceived ability to speak up, willingness and source of information. It is recommended that capacity building for school committees should be done to enhance their capacity for the roles and responsibilities entrusted to them as community representatives. Because this study was limited to a few public schools in one District, it is further recommended that a wider and more comprehensive study including both

private and public schools should be done in more than one District for comparison and more generalizable findings.

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