**Research article**

# A Case Study of Teacher Involvement that affect Parental Involvement in Basic Education in Rural Ghana

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## Abstract

This study explores teacher involvement in basic education from the perspectives of community stakeholders in two school communities in rural Ghana. There has been relatively little previous research on teacher practices that affect parental involvement in school governance in Ghana generally and in poorer rural areas in particular to benefit children. In recognition of this, the study sought to understand the inter-relationship between teacher involvement and local school governance bodies but also the specific challenges within such context. In such context, teacher involvement are understood as contextually located and produced through intersecting spheres of influence between school, parents and community. It also recognises the importance of relational matters (Baquedano-Lopez, Alexander and Hernandez, 2013). The study adopted qualitative methods of focus groups to gain a better understanding of teacher involvement from key community stakeholder perspectives. The study findings identified tensions in the monitoring and supervision of teachers as well as issues of transparency and accountability in the administration of capitation grant in school governance. The study recommends that policies designed to encourage teacher involvement in school governance must not only reflect important contextual differences but also social dynamics between participants and structures in rural communities. **Copyright © WJER, all rights reserved.**

**Keywords:** Teacher involvement, parental involvement, and challenges, school governance bodies, monitoring and capitation grant

## Introduction

There is resurgent interest in teacher involvement that affect parental involvement in school governance in both developed and developing contexts (Tao et al., 2008; Holloway et al., 2008; Seitsinger et al., 2008) as this is seen to have the potential to impact positively on educational access, retention and quality in schooling to benefit children (Fan and Chen, 2001; Hill and Craft, 2003; Akyeampong et al., 2007).. According to Christenson (2004), teachers who view parents as obstacles rather than as supporters or collaborators in the educational process deny opportunities for parental involvement in the schooling of their children and also prevent the school from benefiting from community support (Christenson, 2004).

The decentralised system of education delivery in Ghana assumes an important role for school management committees (SMCs) and parent teacher associations (PTAs) in collaboration with  head teachers and teachers in school policy formulation (GES, 2001). However, previous research suggests that the relationship between schools and parents is not without problems as interests and priorities for each group differ and the relationship can at times be tenuous and contradictory (Dunne et al., 2007).

## Statement of the Problem

Although research on teacher involvement in education through community-based school governance has been widely researched in developed countries (Tao et al., 2008; Holloway et al., 2008; Seitsinger et al., 2008), there seems to have been comparatively few studies in developing countries such as Ghana and rural communities in Effutu municipality are no exception. The inter-relationship between local governance institutions such as the SMC, PTA, and school has been a lesser concern within the policy and research agenda. This is a significant gap because of its implications for parental involvement in education and the benefits it is supposed to provide.

## Objectives of the study

The objective of the study was to explore the inter-relationship between teacher involvement and school governance body (SMC) with particular reference to rural communities in Effutu Municipality. The study sought to provide a comprehensive understanding of how further reforms in policy and practice could help improve teacher involvement in basic education in Ghana.

## Research Questions

The study sought answers to the following question with regard to rural school communities in Effutu Municipality.

**RQ** : What teacher involvements are barriers to and facilitators of parental involvement in school governance?

## Significance of the study

The need for active involvement of teachers to engage parents in their children's schooling through active SMC and PTA membership is highly emphasised in the 1987 and 1995 Ghanaian education reforms (GOG, 1996). Therefore, the importance of this study lies in its potential to contribute to the literature by enhancing the grassroots influence – negative as well as positive – of parents on the education outcomes of their children in the Ghanaian context.

It is hoped that the findings and conclusions of this thesis will be useful in providing information for education managers and policy-makers. At this local level, in sharing their experiences of involvement, parents, teachers and members of the wider community might be better informed as they work together to establish the school as an institution that can be of benefit to all. Accordingly, education managers might wish to employ the recommendations of this study to improve parental involvement in schooling, especially in the most deprived areas of the country. Similarly, the study might assist education policy-makers to identify obstacles to effective sector development, which could result in recommendations for improved practice.

Indeed, policy-makers at both state and local levels might be interested in the results of this study in terms of assessing the degree of parental and school/teacher engagement in education and future planning around school based decision-making. School boards, principals, and GES officials could use the results of this study to inform their practices, and make necessary changes in the administration of the SMCs and PTAs.

## Related Literature

The establishment of SMC is a national requirement in all public basic schools in Ghana. This committee unlike the PTA is composed of the immediate stakeholders of the school in the community. The SMC aims at fostering

effective community involvement and mobilisation for efficient education provision and delivery (Addae-Boahene and Arkorful, 1999). The SMC is:

> The body that provides a monitoring and supervisory role in the school, to ensure that quality educational services are being provided through efficient management and equitable allocation of resources (Nkansah and Chapman, 2006, p. 509-532).

This can be linked up to the decentralisation policy of the country, which aims at bringing the decision-making process of governance to the doorsteps of the ordinary citizen through participation in all diverse ways. In Ghana, the School Governing Body (SGB) is an appendage of the SMC and involved in decision-making of financial and disciplinary issues of the school. In contrast to the SMC, the PTA is "a mechanism for building parent support for the schools and involving them in activities of their schools" (Nkansah and Chapman, 2006, pp. 509-532; Kamba, 2010). The PTA is a voluntary organisation of the parents or guardian of children at the school level (Ghana Education Service, SMC/PTA Handbook, 2001, pp. 9-11). However, it needs to be mentioned that some schools in Ghana do not have PTAs. This is due to the fact that it is not much of a compulsion unlike the SMC. It is a forum where teachers and parents meet as partners to improve teaching and learning in the school.

In Ghana, the SMC is in charge of the administration of the capitation grant scheme. This is a fee free policy to provide financial relief to parents (Akyeampong et al., 2007). The extent to which school heads collaborate with SMC members to administer the scheme is another matter to be considered in this study. The capitation grant is based on a School Performance Improvement Plan (SPIP) (GES Guidelines for Distribution and Utilisation of Capitation Grants, 2005). The procedure for computing the plan begins with input from the teachers and then their head teacher, who, upon completion, has to discuss with the chairperson of SMC for approval (GES Guidelines for Capitation Grants, 2005, ibid). The approved SPIP is then sent to the Municipal Education Office for onward submission to the Ministry of Education (MOE) through the Ministry of Finance for final release of the funds. Upon release of the capitation grant to the district, the funds are finally deposited in the school account (GES Guidelines, ibid).

As part of dealing with relational aspects in parental involvement, Torre and Murphy (2016) in their study of Community of parental engagement: new foundations for school leaders' work conducted in the United Kingdom,

suggest that efforts must be made to change parent and teacher attitudes, beliefs and behaviours. They posit that school leaders and teachers must have welcoming attitudes and take responsibility for reaching out to parents to build strong relationships. Positive and loving relationships between parents and children must be forged. Furthermore, Torre and Murphy (2016) indicate that the school staff should demonstrate respect through their interactions with parents, value their views, suggestions and concerns and ensure that communication occurs on ongoing basis to provide for more dialogue in an atmosphere of mutual respect, care and trusting relationships. Again, Torre and Murphy (2016) suggest that communities of engagement must be based on relationships between educators, students, parents and community members and so must necessarily be context-specific. According to them, the major step to ensuring effective community engagement is for school leaders and teachers to take the necessary steps to learn from parents and family members about how they can engage with their children and this must be based on mutual respect and caring relationship before stakeholders can become authentic contributors and members.

## Methodology

### Study Contexts

The study was conducted in two school communities in rural Effutu municipality in Ghana's Central Region. According to the Poverty Profile of Ghana in the 1990s, Central Region is the poorest region in southern Ghana (GSS, 2000). Vulnerability to poverty in Effutu Municipality is further deepened by low returns on fishing which is the major occupation of the people of Effutu Municipality (Brown, 2005). The municipality has a total population of 68,597, which amounts to about 3.1 per cent of the total population of the region (GSS, 2010). The major economic activities are farming and fishing, with full occupational distribution showing that 49 per cent are involved in fishing, 22 per cent in farming and 29 per cent in commerce (GSS, 2010). The choice of Effutu Municipality for this study was informed by the fact that in most rural areas, school children engage in commercial activities, mostly to support their families and themselves (Casely-Hayford, 2002; MOE, 2005). Considering the potential impact this could have on schooling and parental involvement in school governance, it seemed useful to explore how this challenge was addressed. Two schools that represented the municipality's two broad livelihood profiles' engagement in fishing and farming (School 1) and trading and commerce (School 2) were selected for the study.

## Data Collection and Analysis

The research was a small scale qualitative study. In the research methods literature on the case study, a 'case' may be theoretical, or empirical or both; it may be a relatively bounded object or a process; and it may be generic and universal or specific in some way (Ragin and Becker, 1992, pp.1-18; Yin, 2009). By this definition, my research is a qualitative study of teacher involvement in basic education in rural Ghana with the SMC as school governing structure for parents being presented as a case study.

I developed a three stage design for the focus group sessions. The first was conducted with eight community respondents drawn from the SMCs of the case study schools. The second focus group was held with eight school respondents made up of head teachers and teachers of the two case study schools. I put SMC members in one group because it represented a forum or path of engagement in the school for parents; and teachers and head teachers in another group because they represented on the other side of the relationship. The third focus group of 16 participants comprised both community (SMC) and school respondents and it was conducted after the second focus group discussion. The rationale for the third combined group was to allow interaction between community and school respondents, thus yielding a wider range of responses. It allowed for discussion of contrasting views between community and school respondents. The choice of eight participants in each group was made in accordance with the recommendation of Johnson and Christenson (2004, p.185) that a 'focus group should involve 6-12 members in a group to enable them interact freely among themselves'. The three stage design for the focus group is thus made up of community participants, school respondents and a combination of both community and school respondents. Additional data was collected through interviews with individual teachers.

I began the process of data analysis after all the audio-recorded discussion had been fully transcribed. The process involved in data transcription and analysis was as follows: I transcribed and analysed the community focus group data, comparing and contrasting with teacher focus group across the two school communities ( School 1 and 2). The first step was the identification of codes. Coding has been described as a means of identifying and labelling concepts and phrases in interview transcripts and field notes (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Every response of each participant was checked and assigned a code, a process that generated several codes for each interview transcript. The initial codes were listed on separate sheets of paper after which they were compared, sorted and grouped. The groups of

codes were then summarised into general themes for the analysis. These included: the monitoring role of SMC, and the administration of capitation grant.

## Findings and discussion

RQ: What teacher involvements are barriers to or facilitators to parental involvement in school governance?

## SMC role in Monitoring of Teachers

Monitoring and supervision of basic education delivery by SMC involves school visits (MOESS, 2006). SMC members at both case study schools regarded their role as inspectorial and supervisory. They accordingly, monitored teachers as a measure of accountability through visits to the school to check for lateness, drunkenness and other unethical behaviour. During the focus group discussions, SMC participants complained that, often on their visits, they encountered teachers arriving late at school while others chatted with colleagues under a tree or on the veranda. Such practices flout the code of ethics of teachers. For example, one SMC chairperson reported that:

> Teachers fail to return to the classroom after break, so, children continue playing until it is time to go home. I have also observed some teachers come to school drunk while others fail to report for duty or come to school late [Community FGD, School 1 Participant].

This suggests that that teacher absenteeism and lateness is a huge challenge in Ghana and can be blamed on teachers. In the current study, an SMC participant suggested that absenteeism had declined in the community, thanks to the monitoring role of the SMC:

> Teacher absenteeism used to be very high in our rural schools but with the regular monitoring of SMC members, the situation has now changed for the better, though we learn some teachers are reportedly uncomfortable with our frequent visits [Community FGD, School 2 Participant].

This suggests that, despite the beneficial effects, teachers at the receiving end of the SMC's vigilance were not always comfortable with the role.

In the current study, it was evident that the apparent power play between SMC members and teachers with regard to monitoring and supervision of the school did not go well with some teachers. Class teachers did not hesitate to express their sentiments. As one of them complained:

> Why are SMC members sitting on our happiness in the school? Why do they order us about with questions such as, "When did you report for school? Have you signed the attendance book?" They order as if they are our employers. It is high time the head teacher told them to stop [Teacher FGD, School 2 Participant]..

Another class teacher remarked:

> The posture of SMC on our members is often an intrusion or if you like an invasion into our personal and professional space? Do they know how I completed  training college? Have they been trained to handle pupils? What is annoying is that most of them are illiterate [Teacher FGD, School 1 Participant].

In other words, the suspicion teachers hold about their relationship with SMC appears to be a potential source of conflict and tension with negative ramifications for school governance. According to Kendall (2007), from the teachers' point of view, the increased involvement of SMCs in school life is often seen as a threat. Until the advent of SMCs, teachers were secure in the knowledge that their professional conduct was not in doubt and went unchallenged – not even by the government. The arrival of SMC on the educational scene has changed the dynamics, the slightest indiscretion or misdemeanour could land one in trouble. However, in response to the emerging realities, one class teacher cautioned:

> I have decided that if this intrusion by SMC members into our professional business continues, I will leave the community. After all, they are crying out for teachers, who do not want to accept postings into rural communities due to poor socio-economic conditions [Teacher FGD, School 2 Participant].

Again, the inference is clear, teachers consider activities of SMC members as intrusive; they (SMC members) can overstep their bounds. From the foregoing comment, some teachers have reached the threshold of their tolerance level. This is a source of tensions and conflicts in school governance. Disagreement over the roles of SMC and teachers in school governance invariably leads to confusion (Dunne et al., 2007). The implication from the foregoing is that SMC members are in a way prevented from exercising their legitimate role in school governance. In the face

of such suspicion, very few members will insist on performing their legitimate role. This raises concerns about education on the mandated role and responsibilities of key stakeholders in school governance especially in rural communities.

## Administration of Capitation Grant

Focus group discussions revealed that there is no reason to justify rushing the examination of capitation grant. It also revealed suspicion between those involved. As one SMC member put it:

> I disagree with the contention that the undue delay in the release of capitation grant prevents a thorough examination of the SPIP and budgets. What prevents the SMC in bringing copies of SPIP and budget to a general meeting so that we can all make inputs? Is SMC chairperson trying to hide things from us? [Community FGD, School 2 Participant].

In many cases, community members like the sample used in the current study, lacked skills and experience needed in drawing up of annual plans and budgets. Invariably, in such instances the task is left in the hands of head teachers and officials of Metropolitan/ Municipal/ District Directorates (MMDs). The practice sacrifices accountability and transparency because the MMDs are intended to play the role of impartial arbiters in such matters (GES, 2001). This kind of situation can be a source of malpractice, as one SMC member in one of the school committeees disclosed during the focus group discussion:

> My cousin at the GES office assists the head teacher all the time in preparing the school SPIP and budgets and according to him, figures are often massaged to favour them [Community FGD)].

SMC members in many cases are therefore nominally involved, by way of making their inputs in the local governance of the programme. This finding corroborates the assertion by Dunne et al., (2007) that core education decisions are not generally decentralised in a way that encourages broader local community participation in decision-making.

A major disclosure from the focus group discussion was that SMC members were only contacted when the capitation grant was due for release and the school heads required the signature of the SMC chairperson. As one SMC member revealed:

> After the money has been released and we begin to ask questions about how they were being used, we are told by school officials that management of the funds are the preserve of school authorities and the GES. We (SMC members) have no role in that [Community FGD, School 1 Participant].

But on his part, one aggrieved SMC member questioned that:

> How can the whole school SPIP and budget be approved by the chairperson only? Meanwhile instead of the chairperson bringing the accounts to a SMC meeting for our inputs, this is not done. I suspect foul play between the SMC chairperson and the head teacher [Community FGD, School 1 Participant].

Another SMC member added:

> This idea of SMC chairperson and the head teacher being sole signatories of capitation grant accounts need to be reviewed as it creates room for financial malfeasance [Community FGD, School 2 Participant]

It thus seems that in both schools, the SMC chairperson's approval signified the community's acceptance of the use of the capitation grant and that this was problematic since the mechanism lacked deeper engagement in terms of how funds are generated and utilised. In other words, on finances, the SMC members were consulted only when funds needed to be released and involvement in school governance was therefore very limited. These parents appeared to want more involvement in school governance. Perhaps surprisingly, teacher participants suggested that SMC members needed to be more actively involved in decisions about capitation grant funding:

> SMC members should not leave the management of capitation grant business in the hands of head teachers and chairpersons alone. They need to be actively involved since their children stand the risk of losing out if wrong decisions are taken [Teacher FGD, School 2 Participant].

One can conclude that from the teacher's perspective, SMC members have, not fulfilled their duties if they allow only head teachers and the SMC chairperson to manage capitation grant. Directly or indirectly, teachers are alluding to issues of transparency and accountability in the disbursement of capitation grants. From the foregoing it seems that teachers either perceive malpractice on the part of the head teacher or are not satisfied with the lack of transparency in the disbursement of the grants. SMC chairperson's approval of the capitation grants which signified the community's acceptance without it being discussed at general meetings and accounts left in the hands of the head teacher or his or her staff and officials from Municipal Directorate of Education raises concerns about transparency and accountability issues.

The current study raises concerns about the apparent power play between SMC members and teachers with regard to monitoring and supervision but also issues of transparency and accountability in the administration of capitation grant which is also a source of conflicts and tensions and as something that could undermine involvement in school governance. This suggests that policies designed to encourage involvement in school governance must not only reflect important contextual differences but also dynamics between participants and structures in rural communities. These findings also echo the views expressed by Torre and Murphy (2016) that school leaders and teachers must have welcoming attitudes and take responsibility for reaching out to parents to build strong relationships and ensure that communication occur on regular basis in an atmosphere of mutual respect and care.

## Conclusion

The current study raises concerns about the apparent power play between SMC members and teachers with regard to monitoring and supervision but also issues of transparency and accountability in the administration of capitation grant which is also a source of conflicts and tensions and as something that could undermine involvement in school governance. These findings also echo the views expressed by Torre and Murphy (2016) that school leaders and teachers must have welcoming attitudes and take responsibility for reaching out to parents to build strong relationships and ensure that communication occur on regular basis in an atmosphere of mutual respect and care.

The study has highlighted parental involvement in financial matters as one key area of the SMC. The SMCs were involved in the administration of the capitation grant scheme in both school communities. The procedure for release of the capitation grant begins with input from the teachers and then their head teacher, who, upon completion, has to discuss with the chairperson of SMC for approval (GES Guidelines for Capitation Grants, 2005).

## Recommendations

At the heart of effective collaboration are good parent-school relations that bring parents and teachers together in an atmosphere of care, trust and respect. The study shows that it is possible to foster collaboration between parents and teachers through positive welcoming attitudes, regular communication and the valuing of their involvement in schools. Consideration of these relational aspects needs therefore to extend to governance as well as the more usual parental roles.

A major obstacle to transparency in the management of school finances was the practice whereby SMC chairperson could endorse the release of capitation grants without prior discussion or approval by the entire SMC membership. To address this problem, given that contexts and needs will vary, this study advocates for improving understanding of the capitation grant scheme. For example, the GES authorities could convene a forum, in a town hall meeting at which all residents, current and prospective parents are educated on the modalities of the capitation grants, its composition, generation, mode of release and impact. Such sensitization exercises could go a long way to keep parents abreast of their rights and responsibilities in regard to their financial contributions to basic education.

The study recommends finally that policies designed to encourage teacher involvement in school governance must not only reflect important contextual differences but also social dynamics between participants and structures in rural communities.

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