

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

Communities are tactical in a multiplicity of ways towards the stipulation and management of education as well as teaching, learning and enforcement processes. Though, communities play a variety of roles in the enhancement of democratic practice and solidity. This paper discusses how communities can be involved in the promotion and management of education as well as the development of the capacity of communities to assume improved role in handling the whole education environments towards enhanced funding, management and monitoring under democratic settings. Strengthening and better functioning of local administration have become prime concerns of educational reform by establishment of effective local administration in education for several years in many countries including India. It is now widely recognized that effective local administration considerably impacts on access to education as well as the enrolment, retention and learning experiences of children in school. Community participation in education in India is not a new concept. Community has always been thought as an integral part of the educational set up. Although the initially years of Post-independence India marked the centralization of education when the efficiency of the local bodies in applying their power properly was criticized (Wankhede and Sengupta: 2005) and a notion prevailed that the whole thing belonged to the government and not the community, the idea could not prolong for long as centralization failed to affect a change in the quality of school education. (Noronha: 2003). Policymakers, educators, and others involved in education are seeking ways to utilize limited resources efficiently and effectively in order to identify and solve problems in the education sector and to provide excellence education for children. Their efforts have contributed to realizing the significance and benefits of community participation in education, and have recognized community participation as one of the strategies to improve educational access and quality.

Keywords: Participation; education; administration; local bodies; communities, India

INTRODUCTION:

Community participation for management of elementary education has been visualized as an important strategy in all policy initiatives at national as well as international levels. There is a worldwide consensus that for bringing the desired improvement in education, involvement of families and the community is inevitably important (Jomtien Declaration: 1990 and UNESCO Delhi Declaration: 1994). The policy-makers, practitioners, scholars, researchers, and communities around the world have been striving hard to attain the goals of universalization of education through community involvement and as such participation of community in education has been acknowledged as the most crucial strategy in achieving these goals. The Declaration of the World Conference on Education for All, Jomtien (1990) and the UNESCO Delhi Declaration (1994) have provided a great deal of momentum to the community participation movement across the Globe. "An emphasis on participation has links with the interest in democracy in community organization and in self-help and political

incorporation in the community developmental aspects.” Though most states in India have held elections for the local bodies, the involvement of the panchayat in the functioning of the school system seems to be limited. “In most cases, panchayats have been responsible for constructing, repairing, and the maintenance of school building only, and the lowest tier of panchayats hardly has any say in educational matters of children and in the functioning of the local school.” Community participation in school management has great potentials for removing mistrust and distance between people and schools by nurturing transparency of information and a culture of mutual respect and by jointly pursuing improvement of school by sharing vision, process, and results.

Individual and organizational behavioral changes are critical to increase the level of participation. In countries where the administrative structures are weak, the bottom-up approach to expanding educational opportunity and quality learning may be the only option. Nevertheless, when community participation is implemented with a top-down manner without wider consultation on its aims, processes, and expected results, the consequences are likely to be conflicts between actors, a strong sense of overwhelming obligation, fatigue, inertia, and disparity in the degree and results of community participation between communities. Political aspects of school management and socio-cultural difference among the population require caution, as they are likely to induce partial participation or nonparticipation of the community at large. Community participation in school management will result in a long-term impact only if it involves a wide range of actors who can discuss and practice the possibilities of revisiting the definition of community and the way it should be.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

- ❖ To study the general facilities available in schools necessary for improving the standard of education to children.
- ❖ Develop an understanding of the role of community in education; and
- ❖ Analyze the problems and issues related to community participation in education.
- ❖ Define community and identify community structures in social cultural contexts.

SOURCES OF DATA COLLECTION:

Data were collected from secondary sources. The Data collection was a pains taking effort, and all endeavors were made to collect the relevant information with missionary zeal. Secondary sources of data were used to prepare this paper. They include annual reports, office records, files, brochures and other published and unpublished material as well as books, and Government reports, internet.etc.,

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Many research studies have identified various ways of community participation in education, providing specific channels through which communities can be involved in children’s education.

Colletta and Perkins (1995) illustrate various forms of community participation: (a) research and data collection; (b) dialogue with policymakers; (c) school management; (d) curriculum design; (e) development of learning materials; and (f) school construction.

Heneveld and Craig (1996) recognized parent and community support as one of the key factors to determine school effectiveness in Sub-Saharan Africa. They identify five categories of parent and community support that are relevant to the region: (1) children come to school prepared to learn; (2) the community provides financial and material support to the school; (3) communication between the school, parents, and community is frequent; (4) the community has a meaningful role in school governance; and (5) community members and parents assist with instruction.

Williams (1994) argues that there are three models of Education and Community. The first one is traditional community-based education, in which communities provide new generations of young people with the education necessary for transmitting local norms and economic skills. In this model, education is deeply embedded in local social relations, and school and community are closely linked. The government, being of little use in meeting the specialized training needs of industrialized economies, plays a minor role, providing little basis for political integration at the national level. The second model is government-provided education, in which governments have assumed responsibility for providing and regulating education.

Local stakeholder perspectives although rarely considered in any depth in policy formulation, have an important but underplayed bearing on the realization of policy intentions (Motala, 1995; Molteno, Ogadhoh & Crumpton, 2000; Sookrajh, Gopal, & Maharaj 2005). The work of this review is to bring together insights from research that provide more nuanced understanding of access and dropout and to indicate how they might contribute to fresh theoretical takes on inclusion and persistent problems in educational access.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY?

Communities can be defined by characteristics that the members share, such as culture, language, tradition, law, geography, class, and race. As Shaeffer (1992) argues, some communities are homogeneous while others are heterogeneous; and some united while others conflictive. Some communities are governed and managed by leaders chosen democratically who act relatively autonomously from other levels of government, and some are governed by leaders imposed from above and represent central authorities. Associated with the problems from collective occupation and utilization of habitational space. Second, members of the community have some degree of collective identification with the occupied space. Lastly, the community has a degree of local autonomy and responsibility. The context of community also influences its function. Community may promote social cohesion in school through various forms of collaboration within itself, but can exclude or be competitive with others over available resources. Such resources include public or private financial resource allocation to schools, assistance by donors, and access to natural resources such as water.

Thus, using the term “community participation in school management” requires caution in what we mean by community and careful consideration of the social context. In more conceptual terms, there are geographical, cultural, and school (or functional) communities. Geographical community is a group of people who reside in the same geographical boundary. Cultural community means a group of people with the same ethnic, linguistic, and/or religious backgrounds who share common norms and practices. Finally, school community denotes a group of people who gather and work for the purpose of school management, regardless of their geographic location or cultural backgrounds. School community may or may not include diversity in the socio-economic and cultural backgrounds of its members.

This article assumes the functional community as the operational definition of community participation in school management.

WHAT IS PARTICIPATION?

The term “participation” can be interpreted in various ways, depending on the context. Shaeffer (1994) clarifies different degrees or levels of participation, and provides seven possible definitions of the term, including:

- a. Involvement through the mere use of a service (such as enrolling children in school or using a primary health care facility);
- b. Involvement through the contribution (or extraction) of money, materials, and labor;
- c. Involvement through ‘attendance’ (e.g. at parents’ meetings at school), implying passive acceptance of decisions made by others
- d. Involvement through consultation on a particular issue;
- e. Participation in the delivery of a service, often as a partner with other actors;
- f. Participation as implementers of delegated powers; and
- g. Participation “in real decision making at every stage,” including identification of problems, the study of feasibility, planning, implementation, and evaluation.

Shaeffer stresses that the first four definitions use the word involvement and connote largely passive collaboration, whereas the last three items use the word participation instead, implying a much more active role. Shaeffer further provides some specific activities that involve a high degree of participation in a wider development context, which can also be applied in the education sector, including:

- Collecting and analyzing information;
- Defining priorities and setting goals;
- Assessing available resources;
- Deciding on and planning programs;
- Designing strategies to implement these programs and dividing responsibilities among participants;
- Managing programs;
- Monitoring progress of the programs; and
- Evaluating results and impacts.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION?

Education takes place not only in schools but also within families, communities, and society. Despite the various degrees of responsibilities taken by each group, none can be the sole agent to take 100 % responsibility for educating children. Parents and families cannot be the only group of people for children’s education as long as their children interact with and learn from the world outside their families. Communities and society must support parents and families in the upbringing, socializing, and educating of their children. Schools are institutions that can prepare children to contribute to the betterment of the society in which they operate, by equipping them with skills important in society. Schools cannot and should not operate as separate entities within society. Since each group plays a different role in

contributing to children's education, there must be efforts to make a bridge between them in order to maximize the contributions. Education takes place most efficiently and effectively when these different groups of people collaborate. Accordingly, it is important to establish and continuously attempt to develop partnerships between schools, parents, and communities.

WHAT CAN COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION DO?

Maximizing Limited Resources: Most governments all over the world have been committed to delivering education for their children. Particularly after the World Conference on Education for All, assembled in Jomiten, Thailand in 1990, an increasing number of countries have attempted to reach the goal of providing education for all. However, governments have found themselves incompetent to do so because of lack of resources and capacities.

Developing Relevant Curriculum and Learning Materials: Communities' and parents' involvement helps achieve curriculums and learning materials that reflect children's everyday lives in society. When children use textbooks and other materials that illustrate their own lives in their community, they can easily associate what they are learning with what they have already known.

Identifying and Addressing Problems: Communities can help identify and address factors that contribute to educational problems, such as low participation and poor academic performance. This is well illustrated in the case of the Gambia, in which the techniques of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) were adapted to education. The work was carried out in order to understand why girls do not attend schools, to mobilize communities around these problems, and to assist them in organizing their own solutions (World Bank 1995a).

Promoting Girls' Education: Community participation can contribute to promoting girls' education (UNICEF, 1992). Through participating in school activities and frequently communicating with teachers, parents and communities can learn that girls' education contributes to the improvement of various aspects of their lives, such as increased economic productivity, improved family health and nutrition, reduced fertility rates, and reduced child mortality rates. Involving parents and communities in discussions as part of school activities also helps to identify factors that prevent girls from schooling.

Creating and Nourishing Community-School Partnerships: There are various ways to bring parents and community members closer to schools which they serve, including: (a) minimizing discontinuities between schools and communities, and between schools and families; (b) minimizing conflicts between schools and communities, schools and families, teachers and parents, and what is taught in school and what is taught at home; (c) making easy transition of pupils going from home to school; (d) preparing pupils to engage in learning experiences; and (e) minimizing cultural shock of new entrants to schooling (Cariño and Valismo, 1994).

Realizing Democracy: Where schools are perceived as authoritarian institutions, parents and community members do not feel welcomed to participate in their children's education. They are not capable of taking any responsibility in school issues and tend to feel that education is something that should be taken care of by educational professionals at schools many people, especially minority groups in many developing countries, develop this kind of negative attitudes towards schools because they are not treated by teachers with respect.

Increasing Accountability: Parental involvement in education, particularly in school governance, is seen as a means of making schools more accountable to the society which funds them. This has been witnessed in some places such as England and Wales, Canada and the United States.

THE CHALLENGE OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION:

The roles communities play in the provision and management of education cannot be over emphasized. More often than not, communities sustaining intervene in the learning processes of the entire educational system in terms of financial contributions designed to support schools, teachers and students/pupils. Communities however, establish and fund schools for the general good. This aspect increasingly strengthens the communities' capacity, sense of identity and purpose. The efficacy of community participation in education is potential in bringing members from all specifications and diversities together for the attainment of a common objective. In addition, community participation in education brings about stability amongst community members thereby throwing the entire environment to social, economic and political harmony with enhanced relationships. With widespread quality education in the community, enhanced social capital amongst members of the community will be guaranteed. This therefore provides sustainable and greater opportunities and hope for all now and in the future. In addition, this enhances desirable change, greater participation with no group left out. Self sufficiency in education and other services enhance political stability with unconditional and active participation. For a community to support education and governance, they must be encouraged in order to achieve these multiple objectives. Communities, through Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) or other institutions should not be undermined but encouraged and supported. They should always be directly engaged in education specifically designed to promote quality education accessible to all members; irrespective of social status. This is aimed at minimizing conflicts and designed to promote the value of education for all community members. International organizations may however be allowed to intervene periodically by supporting local institutions with ideas, finance and organization among others but not to develop into "parallel bureaucracies" (World Bank, 2005; 39).

CONCLUSION:

Community participation in school management has great potential for removing mistrust and distance between people and schools through nurturing transparency of information and culture of mutual respect and for jointly pursuing improvement of schools by sharing vision, process, and results. It should also be noted that individual and organizational behavioral changes are critical to increase the levels of participation. In countries where administrative structures are weak, the bottom-up approach to expanding educational opportunity and quality learning may be the only option. On the other hand, when community participation is implemented with a top-down manner without wider consultation on its aims, processes, and expected results, the consequences are likely to be conflicts between actors, a strong sense of overwhelming obligation, fatigue, and sabotage, disparity in the degree of participation and its results between communities, and political interference. School management body will also become a mere name without substances or activities, and people will feel helpless if the range and degree of devolved power is limited to the minimum scale. For communities to effectively participate in education, a feasibility study should be conducted amongst relevant communities in order to understand how their common and diverse interests can strengthen partnership in education for the general good. This also goes on to determine the nature and perspectives of learning or educational activities in the communities, support services and the

nature of involvement. There is however the need to identify community leadership and organizations (religious, political, tribal, ethnic, and commercial) and how all these can bring about harmony and acceptable leadership. These local Community-Based Associations (CBOs) are essential ingredients in partaking educational management programmes, particularly in monitoring and evaluation, planning, instructions, supervision etc

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