



KEY FORUMS FOR PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN BASIC EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY OF TWO RURAL SCHOOLS IN THE EFFUTU MUNICIPALITY OF GHANA

Robert Andrews Ghanneyⁱ

Department of Basic Education,
University of Education,
Winneba, Ghana

Abstract:

This study explores key forums for parental involvement in two school communities in Effutu Municipality of Ghana using overlapping spheres of influence theory by Epstein (1995; 2001). There has been relatively little previous research on parental involvement in school governance in Ghana generally and in poorer rural areas in particular. Developed as a small-scale qualitative case study, focus group discussions and individual interviews were used to explore the inter-relationships between SMC parents, teaching staff and communities. The decentralised system of education delivery in Ghana assumes an important role for school management committees and the focus group discussions therefore involved community participants who were members of school management committees as well as head teachers and teachers in each of the two rural case study schools. A key finding of the study was that although the formal structures for parental engagement in school governance were in place, in practice many members of the school management committee were unable to contribute fully to school management. Tensions in school governance situations also arose from the administration of capitation grants and monitoring of teachers. The study concludes that policies designed to encourage parental involvement in school governance must reflect not only important contextual differences but also the dynamics between structures and participants.

Keywords: school communities, parental involvement, school management committee (SMC), capitation grant, monitoring of teachers

1. Introduction

The study was focused on exploring parental involvement in schooling from diverse perspectives, particularly those of less advantaged parents in two basic schools in rural Effutu Municipality of Ghana. There is resurgent interest in parental involvement in both

ⁱ Correspondence: email ghanney66@yahoo.com

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; Jeynes, 2005). Ghanaian education policy is no different in having identified parental involvement as a central element (Pryor, 2005; Adam, 2005; Akyeampong et al., 2007). Although parental 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. Accordingly, I analyse the forms of parental involvement that emerged as particularly important: the SMC which is part of the formal governance structure. Ghana's decentralisation policy prescribes the SMC as the formal forum for parental involvement in basic school governance, particularly in matters of financial management, school and teacher discipline (GES, PTA/SMC, 2001; Nkansah and Chapman, 2006, p. 509-532). The analysis covers what the forum is and how it relates to parents specifically. Accordingly, participants were asked to deliberate on the two research questions below:

1. What is the key forum for parental involvement?
2. What forms of involvement are parents engaged in at the case study schools?

2. Theoretical Framework

For Epstein (2001), the overlapping spheres of influence addresses interconnectedness highlighting how the different layers (parents, schools and communities) are linked or connected and the dynamics between these different partners and structures. It posits that parental involvement in education is a joint effort of teachers, pupils, parents and the local communities and central goals such as academic success, are of mutual interest to people in each of these institutions, and are best achieved through collaboration and support (Epstein, 1995, 2001; Epstein et al., 2002). At the centre of the model is located the pupil. According to the framework, the collaboration between the school and parents has great potential for making children do better in school and in life, for empowering parents, for improving teacher morale, for making schools get better and for communities to grow (Epstein, 2001).

3. Methodology

The research was based on a case study approach because the topic was essentially contextual in the sense that the communities under study had specifically defined profiles. According to Yin (2009), the case study design facilitates an empirical inquiry well suited to investigating a contemporary phenomenon in-depth and within its real life context particularly when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly drawn (Yin, 2009, p.18). Parental-school involvement may be considered to be the

contemporary phenomenon, as it has gained a considerable place in the decentralisation of school governance (Arnott and Raab, 2000; De Grauwe et al., 2005; Robinson, 2007). 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 education, it seemed useful to explore how both parents and schools approached this challenge in parental-school involvement. I obtained a list of public basic schools from the Effutu Municipality, Education Directorate together with their community profiles with the assistance of the Municipal Director of Education (MDE). 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 purposely selected for the study.

McMillan and Schumacher (2006, p. 353) state that during focus group interview, establishing trust, being sincere, maintaining eye contact and conveying meaning through rephrasing the question for clarity are all more likely to readily elicit the requisite information than a rigid approach. If the focus group participant deviates from the topic, the focus group interviewer should tactfully steer him or her back. This enables the focus group facilitator to obtain an inside view of the social phenomenon under investigation (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p. 353). Accordingly, I asked participants questions in turns during the focus group 1 and 2, utilising open-ended questions to allow them to express their individual views on the topic: key forums for parental involvement in basic education in Ghana. Focus group 1 was made up of SMC members and that of 2 was composed of head teachers and teachers.

I developed and piloted schedules for the focus groups. According to Cohen et al. (2007, p. 353), in the guided interview approach, topics and issues to be covered are specified in advance in outline form and the researcher then decides the actual sequence and wording of questions in the course of the interview. The approach allowed me to ask participants pre-determined key questions and probe the ensuing responses deeply. Before proceeding with the focus group discussion, certain ethical dilemmas had to be addressed, namely, ensuring informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity (Cohen et al., 2003). At the start of the field work I informed participants how the process of collecting data would be done and why they were being asked to contribute.

Details of focus group 1 participants are illustrated in Table 1 shown below:

Table 1: Categories of Participant for Focus Group 1: Community Participants

Community Participants		School 1	School 2	Total
School Management Committee (SMC)	Chairperson	1	1	2
	Member	1	1	2

Details of focus group 2 participants are illustrated in Table 2 shown below:

Table 2: Categories of Participant for Focus Group 2: School Participants

Categories		School 1	School 2	Total
School Participants:	Head Teachers	2	2	4
	Teachers	2	2	4
	Total	4	4	8

In my quest for education policy documents, I visited the Municipal Education office and having been previously informed by colleagues in the tertiary profession that accessing document was difficult and frustrating, I considered myself lucky to be provided with all that I requested i.e. SMC handbooks, the head teacher’s and teacher’s manuals. However, its weakness lies in the occasional problems encountered in accessing documents. As the analysis of the content of written material is subject to the interpretation of the researcher. I took care in making logical inferences in the knowledge that data could be open to multiple interpretations. I examined the SMC policy documents in order to establish the type and nature of the respective envisioned roles in relation to practice (GES, SMC/PTA Roles, 2001).

4. Data Presentation and Discussion of Findings

4.1 The School Management Committee

In Ghana, the major forum for parents’ participation in school governance is the School Management Committee (SMC). The areas discussed include SMC membership and functions, parental involvement in school finance specifically the management of capitation grants, but also the monitoring of teachers.

4.2 Membership and Functions

The rationale for instituting SMCs was to engage qualified community members with technical wherewithal to support a school’s internal administrators (Mankoe, 2002). In Ghana, in line with the GES, PTA/SMC (2001) policy, membership of a SMC is made up of the head teacher; a representative of the Metropolitan/Municipal/District Assembly; chairperson of the Unit Committee; a representative of the Education Unit; a representative of the PTA (selected at a general meeting through voting); a representative of the village chief; two members of the teaching staff; and two co-opted members of the community who might be parents.

In theory, the appointment of individuals to the SMC should be devoid of any form of discrimination: a person’s political leaning, religious background, tribe, or gender should not be considered in their appointment to the SMC. Membership should be based solely on merit (Mankoe, 2002). It emerged at the Community Focus Group Discussion (FGD) that SMC membership in School 1 was all male-dominated: most were activists of political party and/or influential people (e.g. those who had the greater authority to mobilise villagers for communal labour), but had little knowledge or experience in school management. The highest educational attainment of the SMC members at School 1 was Middle School Leaving Certificate. The inference from the composition of the SMCs is

that rather than provide a platform for parental participation, it creates room for a few, well-connected community members to assume responsibility for school management (Dunne et al., 2007; Kingdon et al., 2014). As one focus group discussion participant (FGD) puts it:

“Appointment of people to serve on SMC largely recognises people in the community who are well-to-do and influential, leaving out the poor. Yes, affluent people offer support, especially with financial assistance; but they hardly attend meetings because of their business schedules. I have also noticed that only a few appointees do have their children in the school.” [Community FGD, School 1 Participant].

Literature indicate that the local elite and relatively better educated community members tend to take on the role of brokers of decision-making and, through their actions, close up the space for representation and participation in the affairs of the school by a more inclusive group of community members (Kingdon et al., 2014). In this sense, it would appear that the policy expectations for greater representation and involvement in school by parents was not being realised. In the case of School 2 community, the data revealed that most of the SMC members tended to be more experienced and knowledgeable in management and education matters. The highest educational attainment was first degree in Basic Education. It was agreed at the focus group discussions (FGDs), however, that in both schools, the position of SMC chairperson was restricted to a parent which is contrary to the stipulations in the PTA/SMC manuals.

Most participants in the focus group discussion in School 1 raised concerns about how some community members come to serve on the SMC and the extent to which due process was observed in their appointments:

“I don’t know how members are appointed to serve on the SMC. I feel the membership needs to be reviewed. If you listen to the type of contributions made by some members, you begin to wonder the criteria for their appointment – I strongly suspect that some of them are favourites of the ruling political party which makes the appointment anyway.” [Community FGD, School 1 Participant]

The GES Manuals provide that the tenure of office for an executive member of the SMC shall be three years though a member shall be eligible for re-election to another additional three-year term only or one year in the case of a chairperson. As an SMC member commented:

“The school administration is very strict on tenure of office for members including the executive position and would ensure that members stick to the stipulated number of years demanded by the SMC/PTA manuals regardless of one’s personal contact or relations with management.” [Community FGD, School 2 Participant]

The focus group discussions also threw up questions about the length of years in relation to appointments to SMCs, some SMC members at School 1 community identified as being in office far longer than their mandated tenure of office. As one participant stated:

“Our SMC chairman has served for 12 years, contrary to what we were made to understand from the beginning. Is he the only person with ideas to lead the committee? All efforts to get this anomaly rectified have proved futile as he has the full backing of the head teacher.” [Community FGD, School 1 Participant]

This situation in which a head teacher at School 1 insisted on his favourite as chairperson even after completing his/her mandatory term of office compromises accountability and transparency. However, excellent the chairperson’s performance, the rule must be upheld and enforced. This raises questions about people’s suitability for the roles assigned them.

A critical determinant for appointment to an SMC is the issue of relevant skills, knowledge and expertise because of their combined efforts on school policy, administration, finance and development (Mankoe, 2002; MOESS, 2005). Yet, these criteria have been described as barriers to the democratic process because the majority of parents in rural communities are unlikely to contribute on account of their obvious lack of these skills (Adam, 2005). As one of the head teachers put it:

“Getting the right calibre of members to serve on the SMC has been a major source of worry to us as head teachers. Our work as heads are often impeded by a number of appointees who may be financially okay but may lack the requisite educational backgrounds. Most of them lack the skills and knowledge to make meaningful contributions at meetings.” [Teacher FGD, School 2 Participant]

The quote above indicates that the ability of the SMC to participate in school management varies. It suggests that most SMC members in rural communities such as this one lack the capacity or skills to effectively participate in school management. Another head teacher corroborated the limited capacity and skills of many of the SMC members saying that:

“The low educational attainment of some SMC members is a big blow to the governance system. Most of them rarely contribute to preparation of SPIP and budgets. They are often traders, farmers and fishermen with very low education but who find themselves as political appointees. Sometimes, the school is expected to co-opt other members to assist for a fee. More or less like consultants all because of low educational background of most substantive members. For these, the major responsibility is checking teachers’ lateness and attendance to school. Apart from the chairperson and a few others who meet the minimum requirement, the rest are mere followers.” [Teacher FGD, School 1 Participant]

A lack of suitable persons negatively affects parental involvement in formal school governance with ramifications for both school and community since, in some instances, head teachers relied on 'others' who perform some duties for a fee. It is clear that in the study schools, membership of the SMCs left much to be desired. The question that then remains unanswered is where to apportion blame: the idiosyncrasies' of the head teacher or the environment.

4.3 Training for SMC Members

The importance of training in school management for SMC members in poor rural communities like this one stems from issues such as lack of knowledge and skills (Watt, 2001; Mankoe, 2002; Adam, 2005). During the focus group discussions, most SMC participants were positive about the training organised for them but also pointed some shortcomings. For example, one SMC member indicated:

"One month after my appointment, I received a letter from the Municipal Director of Education (MDE) instructing the head teacher to organise an orientation for the newly appointed members. The head teacher took us (new SMC members) through the GES SMC manuals on SMC/ PTA. Unfortunately, we were not given copies of the manuals but were asked to come to the office any time we are in doubt about our roles and functions as SMC members." [Community FGD, School 2 Participant]

An SMC member expected, as a matter of right, to be issued with his/her own copy of the manual. One SMC member commented:

"At the orientation sessions, we were told to visit the school often to check teachers' lateness and absenteeism. We were also told to see the head teacher when in doubt of anything in connection with our functions as outlined in SMC/PTA manuals. Surprisingly, we were not given copies of the manuals." [Community FGD, School 1 Participant]

The above quote makes it clear that the inability of the head teachers to provide orientation training for newly appointed SMC members is due to a lack of resources. This explains the lack of support to the SMC's role in school governance.

A major responsibility of the SMC members outlined was the need to check teachers' lateness and absenteeism. One SMC member described her understanding of the role thus:

"We (new SMC members) were made to understand that the school belongs to us and that the school management or governance was therefore, in our hands and so, we should regularly visit the school to check on the teachers and the pupils as well. We must report teachers' absenteeism, lateness, drunkenness and other immoral behaviours to the head of the school, and then to the circuit supervisor, who, in turn, would take it up with those concerned." [Community FGD, School 2 Participant]

Another SMC member noted:

"We were told to visit the school often to check teachers' lateness and absenteeism. We were also told to see the head teacher when in doubt of anything in connection with our functions as outlined in SMC/PTA manuals." [Community FGD, School 1 Participant]

The study shows that most SMC members in both schools had limited knowledge of their responsibilities and they tended to focus on teachers' absenteeism or lateness. However, as spelt out in the GES manual, other roles such as financial and property management, as well as conflict resolution were expected of SMC members and these should be addressed in the orientation sessions.

The capacity of rural communities to provide this sort of supports (refresher courses, seminars and in-service training) is challenged (Watt, 2001; Adam, 2005). One major challenge is that poor communities with low levels of education attainment often lack the time, money, confidence, skills and lack of cooperation of the school staff (Watt, 2001; Adam, 2005; Donkor, 2010). When asked why seminars, in-service training, orientation and refresher courses were not organised for SMC members to enable them to upgrade their skills and knowledge in school governance, one head teacher noted:

"We are not able to organise seminars or in-service training for SMC members in this rural community due to a lack of money." [Teacher, FGD, School 2]

Another head teacher added:

"Most of the SMC members in this rural community have not had in-service training or seminars which could have fully enhanced their capacity to perform due to resource constraints." [Teacher FGD, School 1]

The head teachers in the above quotes seem to be saying that the capacity of SMC members in rural communities to access in-service training and seminars stem from lack of money and/or resource constraints.

4.4 The SMC and Parental Involvement in School Finance

A principal function of the SMC as discussed in the study schools was its role in financial management. The community focus group discussions highlighted the key role of the SMC in financial management through the capitation grant scheme and it also had oversight responsibility in the supervision of school fees/levies and accounts. These issues are discussed below:

4.4.1 The Administration of the Capitation Grant

This section is about the process involved in administration of the capitation grant and who is involved and what follows is about what SMC members and teachers think of it and their extent of involvement.

4.4.2 Process Involved in Administration of the Capitation Grant and Those Involved

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*).

One reason why SMC members are not fully involved in the administration of the capitation grant is because they do not have the necessary technical know-how in its accounting. The drawing up, verification and authorisation of SPIP are technical matters that require people with the necessary expertise to thoroughly scrutinise the accounts. Unfortunately, most SMC members do not possess the requisite knowledge or skills in accounting and therefore left everything to the head teacher and his or staff. As one SMC chairperson confirmed:

“The examination of the SPIP (a major segment of the capitation grant) is very technical and complicated. I often find myself at the wrong place, but I cannot take the school to ransom and reject it even though it is prepared by the school administrators.”
[Community FGD, School 1 Participant]

The above quote shows that SMC members lacked knowledge in the accounting of SPIP which made them rely on school administrators. This might compromise accountability issues in school governance.

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 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, School 2 Participant]

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.

4.4.3 What SMC Members and Teachers Think of Capitation Grant

During the focus group discussions, participants from both schools hailed the introduction of the capitation grant claiming that though there are still costs as it does not cover everything, it is cheaper:

“Before the introduction of capitation grant, I had lost interest in the affairs of the school and so when they called meetings I seldom attended. But now that the burden of paying fees has been lifted off my shoulders, I take keen interest in the affairs of the school.”
[Community FGD, School 2 Participant]

Another SMC member added:

“The introduction of capitation grant has in a way reduced my financial burden as regard payment of tuition fees though there are other levies to be paid. I now feel more predisposed engaging in school activities. My interest in school activities is now re-kindled.”
[Community FGD, School 1 Participant]

In other words, most parents welcome the capitation grant even though it does not give them a complete financial ‘reprieve’ as they still need to pay other levies as PTA members.

On their part, however, most teacher participants expressed misgivings about the capitation grant saying it had brought hardships in school management because it was woefully inadequate and often released too late. The introduction of capitation grant had meant head teachers, for example must defend each and every expenditure item to the

SMC. In addition, teachers complained that the capitation grant has led to most parents into thinking that everything associated with their children's education was free, catered for by the grant funds:

"A time will come there will not be any school project like classroom block, library etc because anytime you mention it SMC members ask what are we doing with our capitation grants. It appears that these days the capitation must cater for everything in the school, except our salaries." [Teacher FGD, School 2 Participant]

As one headteacher remarked:

"Compared to the past, the collection of school fees and levies is not easy these days. Most parents feel they have no financial obligations because of the capitation grants. It's not surprising that these days we are unable to undertake many developmental projects as we did prior to the advent of the grant." [Teacher FGD, School 1 Participant]

Teachers also reported that following the introduction of the capitation grant, some parents including SMC members, fail to provide books, uniforms and other basic materials to support their children. It can be inferred from the foregoing that, teachers expressed their disillusionment with executing projects since the inception of the capitation grant. This is saying that even those SMC members involved in the administration do not understand what is included and what is not.

In the focus group discussions, it became apparent that SMC members desired for more education on the utilisation of the capitation grant in order that they could make meaningful contributions to its management. As one SMC member noted:

"I need to be better informed about the capitation grant so as to be better involved in its management. For now, though I'm a member of the SMC, my knowledge in which school items are catered for by the capitation grant and which are not is very limited. No wonder several people do not appear to be responsible in their children's education." [Community FGD, School 2 Participant]

The foregoing quote underscores the insufficiency of education given to the public in general and the inadequate preparation given to members appointed to join in school governance. Similar points were made by an SMC at School 1:

"We need enough education on this capitation grants as the interpretation to it has been quite different and we get confused as to what is 'free' and what is not. The GES needs to come clear on the scheme." [Community FGD, School 1 Participant]

Again, this suggests that public education about the capitation grant in both study communities has been inadequate.

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.

4.4.5 Adequacy of the Capitation Grant

Head teachers raised the issue of the inadequacy of the capitation grant as a whole, considering the financial obligations of the school. For example, they claimed funds were needed for the purchase of teaching and learning materials, examination fees, and repairs to building and furniture, amongst other things. One head teacher noted that:

“Sometimes the school has to post-pone end-of-term examination because of the delays in release of capitation grant.” [Teacher FGD, School 1 Participant]

Some class teachers also expressed their misgivings with the capitation grant scheme. As one class teacher summarised it:

“The capitation grants has increased enrolment in classrooms which has, in turn, increased our load in the form of marking amidst shortage of text books, tables and desks.” [Teacher FGD, School 2 Participant]

The above quote shows that what people think the capitation grant covers and reality is different in a school which does not have enough of what they need and if having increased enrolment, resource allocation has not kept pace is clearly a critical issue in a context where there is a funding gap. However, teachers tended to blame politicians who often make inaccurate presentation about capitation grant to the media a situation which lead the public, including SMC members to think that basic education was indeed free. A teacher observed that:

“Politicians must be advised to desist from giving wrong impression about capitation grants because parents are then deluded into thinking that everything is free in basic education when this is not so.” [Teacher FGD, School 1 Participant]

In view of misinformation by politicians (Yoshioka, 2010), there are still some community members who hesitate in paying other school fees/ levies. In this study, even some of the SMC members showed signs of disengagement from their official duties when impressed upon to pay additional cost in their children’s education. The data collected for this study highlights how some community members refused involvement in school governance as a result of payment of additional cost in children’s education (Mankoe, 2002; Adam, 2005). It also seems to be contradicted by the earlier quotes as regards hailing of the capitation grant. This is because people responded differently and had different views.

4.4.5 The SMC and Parental Involvement in the 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].

And:

“If GES had put up teacher bungalows in the rural communities, this persistent teacher lateness to school would have been curtailed because it is a tedious job for teachers who have to walk to school daily.” [Community FGD, School 1 Participant].

A World Bank (2004) report found that teacher absenteeism and lateness is a huge challenge in Ghana. According to the report, absenteeism can be blamed on teachers living at considerable distances from a school. 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.

De Grauwe et al., (2005) in their study of four West African countries found that the relationship between SMC members and school heads was usually characterised by conflicts rather than collaboration. SMC members are often regarded as intruders and the entire body perceived as counterweight to the head teacher’s authority, leading to tension and conflicts. 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. Disagreement over the roles of SMC and teachers in school governance invariably leads to confusion (Dunne et al., 2007; Edge et al., 2010). If an organisation is subject to ambiguities in a role definition or unclear boundaries of responsibilities, the stage is set for interpersonal frictions between stakeholders (Ramani and Zhimin, 2010). The implication from the foregoing is that SMC members are in a way prevented from exercising their legitimate role in school governance.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

The discussion has highlighted the SMC as a formal governance forum for parental involvement in Ghana, including their composition, role in financial management as well as monitoring of school teacher discipline. It emerged that political and other considerations go into the process of appointments contributing to the appointment of SMC members without the requisite qualification which in turn affects their functioning and participation in school governance. For example, the drawing up, verification and authorisation of capitation grant under SPIP are technical matters that require people with the necessary expertise to thoroughly scrutinise the accounts. In many cases, SMC

members in the current study, lacked skills and experience needed in drawing up of annual plans and budgets of the capitation grant. Invariably, in such instances the task is left in the hands of head teachers and officials of Metropolitan/ Municipal/ District Directorates (MMDs). This practice sacrifices accountability and transparency because the MMDs are intended to play the role of impartial arbiters in such matters (GES, 2001). This practice raises issues about transparency and accountability in school governance which can affect parental involvement. SMC involvement was seen as threat for the teachers who are supposed to know the governing rules and regulations. In one case, a teacher had contemplated quitting the community if the perceived intrusion of SMC members continued. This non-appreciation of the rules of engagement by people supposed to know means SMC members are in way hindered from playing their legitimate role in school governance. In the face of such suspicion, very few members will insist on performing their legitimate role.

This study supports previous research in arguing that parental involvement is essentially relational in that it involves relationships of different quality with key stakeholders (De Grauwe et al., 2005; Ahmed and Nath, 2005; Dunne et al., 2007; Edge et al., 2010). For example, 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 down well with some teachers to the extent that a teacher in School 2 community threatened leaving if what was perceived to be an intrusion continued. As this is not an intrusion but a mandated role, it is about policy and how it is sometimes received. The suspicion teachers held about their relationship with SMC was a potential source of conflict and tension with negative ramifications for school governance. This finding challenges the literature on decentralisation policies which assume that parents and teachers are willing partners and eager to cooperate together in education. This study has highlighted not only the contextualised nature of parental involvement but also the interconnectedness of the different stakeholders, school staff and the wider community but also the value of research that explores multiple perspectives on parental involvement in children's education. Within rural communities as this study has shown it is the way in which social networks and interconnectedness are culturally constructed which influences the way in which involvement of parents or guardian occurs. The study therefore concludes that policies designed to encourage parental involvement in school governance must reflect not only important contextual differences but also the dynamics between structures and participants.

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Robert Andrews Ghanney
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