



Impact of Communication Channels on Community Participation in Government-Funded Schools Projects in the Morogoro Region

Bonephace Gonjo¹, Paul Dominic Mushi², and Kassimu A. Nihuka³

^{1 2 3}Jordan University College

Morogoro-Tanzania

ABSTRACT

This study assesses the impact of communication channels on community participation in government-funded schools in the Morogoro Region, employing an interpretivist philosophical framework and a qualitative research approach. The study's population consisted of ward education officers (2), head of schools (10), ward councilor (1), and ten (10) school board chairman, making a total of 23 participants. The findings reveal a significant disconnect between traditional communication methods, such as notice boards and community meetings, and their effectiveness in engaging diverse community members. While these channels are commonly used, they often fail to reach marginalized groups, highlighting the need for more inclusive strategies. Interviews and focus group discussions with educational stakeholders, including headmasters and ward education officers, reveal challenges such as low attendance at community meetings and barriers like language and literacy that hinder effective communication. The findings suggest that while radio broadcasts and mobile communication present opportunities for broader engagement, their success relies on culturally and linguistically appropriate content. The study underscores critical policy gaps, emphasizing the necessity for reform that integrates innovative communication methods alongside traditional approaches. By aligning with international frameworks, such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, the research advocates for tailored training programs for educators and community leaders to enhance messaging effectiveness. Overall, this study contributes to understanding the complexities of communication in fostering community participation, ultimately advocating for policies that promote inclusivity and sustainability in educational development efforts.

Key words: Communication Channel, Community Participation, Government, Funded School Projects.

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is universally recognized as a fundamental human right, with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 26) emphasizing the right to quality education for all. Effective governance in education, particularly through local community involvement, is increasingly viewed as essential for achieving inclusive and equitable educational systems. Engaging communities ensures that educational services align with the needs and priorities of stakeholders, fostering ownership and accountability (UNESCO, 2015). Research by Hes (2017) and Deep (2023) indicates that active community engagement leads to improved outcomes in resource allocation, infrastructure development, and overall educational quality. However, effective communication channels are crucial for enhancing government-funded school projects, as they facilitate transparency, encourage stakeholder engagement, and ensure that community voices are heard in decision-making processes. Clear information and collaborative efforts among stakeholders' help align project goals with community needs, build trust, and encourage active participation, ultimately leading to better resource allocation, project outcomes, and a stronger sense of ownership among community members.

In Europe, community participation has been foundational to educational initiatives, significantly improving resource management and learning outcomes. Ahmad (2013) found that schools with active community governance not only achieve higher academic performance but also utilize resources more efficiently. This trend extends to North America, where community involvement has resulted in increased funding opportunities and collaborative strategies aimed at addressing educational inequalities, particularly in disadvantaged areas (Farnell & Schmidt, 2020). This underscores the potential for similar models of community engagement to enhance educational outcomes in Morogoro.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly East Africa, community engagement in education has shown promise in tackling ongoing challenges related to infrastructure and resource provision. Bain et al. (2022) noted that local initiatives, such as fundraising and volunteering, have significantly improved the availability of teaching resources and school facilities. However, these efforts often encounter obstacles like insufficient training, poor coordination, and limited government support. In Kenya, decentralization policies intended to boost community involvement in education have led to notable improvements in rural schools, though implementation challenges persist (Chisika & Yeom, 2024). This highlights the necessity of identifying and strengthening effective communication channels, which could be pivotal in overcoming these barriers and empowering communities in Morogoro to take a more active role in educational development.

In Tanzania, especially in rural regions like Morogoro, community participation in government-funded school projects is vital for their success. The Tanzanian government has invested significantly in school infrastructure and teaching resources through initiatives like the Secondary Education Quality Improvement Program (SEQUIP). Yet, effective community involvement in planning, implementation, and monitoring of these projects often falls short due to inadequate communication, limited awareness of project objectives, and a lack of trust between community members and local authorities (Luvunga & Kessy, 2024). This gap in communication is critical, as it hampers effective community engagement and the alignment of educational initiatives with local needs and aspirations.

This study aims to address these gaps by assessing the impact of communication channels on community participation in government-funded schools within the Morogoro Region. Specifically, it seeks to explore how communication influences community engagement in school projects. By treating communication as an independent variable and community participation as the dependent variable, the research will investigate how effective communication channels can promote transparency, inclusivity, and collaboration among stakeholders. By examining key aspects such as information dissemination, stakeholder engagement, and feedback mechanisms, this study aspires to provide actionable insights into enhancing the success of government-funded school projects in the Morogoro Region, thereby explicitly addressing the knowledge gap related to the role of communication in fostering community participation.

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study focusses to respond to one main research question, that is; *How different communication channels impact on community participation in different government-funded schools school projects in Morogoro region?*

2.1 An overview of effective communication channel

Effective communication is widely acknowledged as crucial for enhancing community participation, particularly in the realm of educational development (Amin, 2022). When community members are well-informed and actively engaged, they are more likely to contribute to educational initiatives through ideas, resources, or volunteer efforts. This active participation is vital for the success of any project. In the Morogoro region of Tanzania, various communication strategies including meetings, notice boards, and local radio broadcasts, have been employed to keep communities informed about ongoing government-funded educational projects (URT, 2018). These methods are particularly effective in reaching diverse populations in rural areas, where literacy levels and access to technology may differ. However, in many instances, these channels are underutilized, resulting in limited community involvement and a lack of awareness regarding the importance of their participation in educational initiatives (URT, 2022).

Despite the potential of these communication strategies, significant challenges persist in rural Tanzanian context where information cannot easier accessible. Research by Scallion and Tangi (2022) and Kapelela et al. (2025) indicates that ineffective communication between school administrators, local government officials, and the community significantly contributes to inefficiencies in the execution of school projects. Poor communication can lead to misunderstandings and delays, hindering the effective implementation of educational initiatives. Moreover, a lack of clear and consistent communication can create confusion about the roles and responsibilities of community members, which may diminish their willingness to engage in or support these projects. For instance, when community members are not adequately informed about project timelines, budgets, or their expected contributions, they may grow disengaged or skeptical about the initiative's viability.

Additionally, issues of transparency and accountability often exacerbate these communication challenges. Mchopa et al. (2024) emphasized that a lack of transparency, particularly in the tendering processes and resource allocation, fosters mistrust among community members. When communities perceive decision-making as opaque or resources as inequitably distributed, it undermines the trust essential for meaningful participation. This erosion of trust can lead to disillusionment, causing community members to withdraw from educational projects. To cultivate trust, it is imperative that communication be transparent, keeping community members informed about decision-making processes, resource utilization, and the outcomes of educational efforts.

To effectively tackle these communication challenges and enhance community participation in government-funded schools, adopting more inclusive and participatory communication strategies is essential. One effective approach involves utilizing a variety of communication channels to ensure that information reaches a broad audience within the community. By combining traditional methods, such as village meetings and notice boards, with modern communication tools like SMS alerts or social media, the gap between different population segments can be bridged. Furthermore, community sensitization campaigns that educate individuals about their roles and responsibilities in educational development are critical for fostering engagement. Establishing clear feedback mechanisms will also empower community members, providing them with opportunities to ask questions, express concerns, and offer suggestions for improvement.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Philosophy, Approach, and Design

This research was guided by the philosophical framework of interpretivism, which posits that thought is the sole source of knowledge. Consequently, knowledge is formed through individuals' experiences, perceptions, reasoning, social interactions, and understanding (Turyahikayo, 2021). Interpretivism emphasizes a subjectivist approach to knowledge development, highlighting the significance of personal experiences, emotions, understanding, and perceptions (Creswell, 2014). Thus, the study aims to build knowledge by collecting participants' experiences, feelings, and perceptions regarding the Impact of Communication Channels on Community Participation in Government-Funded Schools in the Morogoro Region". A qualitative research approach was employed to obtain detailed information about the impact of communication channel on community participation to school funded projects. The philosophical tenets, data collection methods, and research design informed the choice of this approach (Creswell, 2014). The qualitative approach offers numerous benefits, such as collecting data within participants' natural contexts, allowing for an in-depth exploration of complex issues that quantitative methods may not adequately address, and interpreting the experiences, opinions, and feelings of respondents to enhance understanding (Cohen, Manion, & Marrison, 2018). The study utilized a qualitative descriptive research design, chosen based on the data collection methods, data analysis approaches, and study objectives focused on exploring prevalent impact of communication channels on community participation to school funded projects (Creswell, 2014). This design is crucial as it facilitates the collection of respondents' views, perceptions, and experiences, thereby enabling a comprehensive understanding of the study topic (Akhtar & Islamia, 2016). It also improved access to respondents, gathered sufficient realistic data, and collected non-quantifiable data (like attitudes and perceptions). The design employed qualitative methods such as interviews, observations, and focus group discussions, allowed for triangulation in data collection, and utilized technology (e.g., tape recorders) for data gathering (Creswell, 2014).

3.2 Participants of the Study

The study's population consisted of ward education officers (2), head of schools (10), ward councilor (1), and ten (10) school board chairman, making a total of 23 participants. This purposeful selection was made as both groups play direct or indirect roles in implementing various community-based projects funded by the government in their place of domicile. By including these educational stakeholders, the study was able to capture a wide array of perspectives and insights, ensuring a thorough understanding of the educational processes and community participation in different school funded projects in the selected locality.

3.3 Trustworthiness of the Study

The trustworthiness of this study, which assesses the impact of communication channels on community participation in government-funded schools in the Morogoro region, was established through several key strategies aimed at enhancing validity. Triangulation in data collection, utilizing interviews, observations, and focus group discussions, provided a comprehensive understanding of participants' perceptions, effectively reducing bias (Bans-Akutey & Tiimub, 2021). An audit trail enhanced transparency by making raw data and interpretations accessible for external review, thereby strengthening credibility (Cope, 2014). Peer examination by PhD colleagues and supervisors further validated the findings through constructive feedback (Cope, 2014). Transferability was ensured by providing detailed contextual information about participants and methodologies, allowing readers to assess the relevance of the findings to their own settings (Nowell et al., 2017; Stahl & King, 2017). Dependability was achieved by adhering to systematic procedures in data collection and analysis, ensuring that consistent results would emerge if the study were replicated (Johnson et al., 2020). Lastly, member checks confirmed the accurate representation of participants' experiences in the study's outcomes, reinforcing the research's integrity (Moon et al., 2016; Nowell et al., 2017). Collectively, these strategies established a robust framework for understanding the factors influencing community participation in educational initiatives, thereby enhancing the overall validity of the study.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Emerging Themes on Communication Channels in Use

The research highlights a notable disconnect between the available communication channels and their effectiveness in engaging all community members to participate in different school funded projects in the Morogoro Region. Each medium, whether traditional or technological presents unique strengths and limitations in facilitating community participation in school funded developmental projects initiated by the government. For example, the combination of notice boards, community meetings, and radio broadcasts reflects efforts to connect with diverse audiences to participate effectively in different school funded developmental projects in different context. However, challenges related to accessibility, literacy, and community participation remain.

4.2 Notice Boards

Notice boards serve as a prevalent communication tool among Headmasters and school administrators, yet they have inherent limitations. While Headmasters utilize them to share crucial updates regarding school activities, one Headmaster noted,

"Notice boards are fundamental for ensuring effective communication in enhancing community participation in different school funded projects. They are the most accessible form of communication for most parents in the area to view information that will help them to fully participate in school development endeavors. However, we must also remember that not every parent comes to school regularly, so it's only effective for a section of the community." (WC1, 4 July 2024)".

The findings above aligns perfectly with similar studies that emphasize the partial effectiveness of notice boards in community engagement. Scholars like Mchombu (2005) argue that while traditional media can be accessible, they often fail to reach marginalized groups for easier access of information. Therefore, while notice boards may serve a segment of the community, they do not facilitate comprehensive engagement. Notice boards are widely used as a communication tool by Headmasters and school administrators, providing crucial updates on school activities and projects. While they are seen as an accessible medium for many parents, their effectiveness is inherently limited, as not all community members regularly visit the school to view the information. This limitation highlights a significant gap in reaching marginalized groups, as noted by scholars like Mchombu (2005). Consequently, while notice boards can effectively engage a portion of the community, they do not promote comprehensive participation in school development initiatives. Addressing these limitations is essential for ensuring that all community members are informed and included in the educational process.

4.3 Community Meetings

Community meetings are essential but often struggle to attract a wide audience that eventually ensure their mutual participation in any developmental activities in schools. A close interview session with key informants revealed a recurrent theme of low attendance, which diminishes their overall effectiveness. As one Headmaster remarked,

"We struggle with attendance at community meetings. We often get the same people who show up, but the others seem detached. It feels like we're preaching to the choir." (HM4, on 3th October 2023).

This observation resonates with findings from other scholars, such as Putnam (2000), who note that civic engagement often suffers from a "participation gap," where only a subset of community members actively engages in community based developmental projects in schools, whereas the multitudes do not. The low turnout challenges the notion that community meetings are sufficient for fostering broad participation, suggesting a need for alternative strategies to enhance community engagement in different school-based development projects, mostly those funded by the government whose sustainability support effective education planning and implementation process of the country. Generally, community meetings are vital for fostering local engagement in school development projects, yet they frequently face challenges in attracting a diverse audience. The consistent low attendance noted by key informants indicates a significant "participation gap," where only a limited segment of the community is involved, undermining the effectiveness of these gatherings. As highlighted by the Headmaster's observation, this often results in repetitive participation from the same individuals, leaving many community members feeling disconnected from the process. To address this issue, it is essential to explore alternative strategies that promote broader engagement and ensure that community meetings serve their intended purpose of inclusivity and collective participation in educational development.

Furthermore, the suggestion to hold evening meetings also resonates with the findings of community engagement scholars like Pretty (1995), who emphasize that accessibility is a fundamental component of effective participation. By scheduling meetings at times when working parents are available, schools can significantly enhance community involvement, ensuring that diverse voices are heard in discussions about educational initiatives. This approach addresses barriers related to time constraints that many parents face, particularly in rural areas where agricultural responsibilities often dominate daily schedules. Moreover, evening meetings can create a more relaxed environment conducive to open dialogue, allowing parents to engage more freely without the pressures of daytime commitments. This shift towards inclusivity not only strengthens the relationship between schools and families but also fosters a sense of shared ownership over educational processes. By actively involving parents in discussions and decision-making, schools can cultivate a collaborative atmosphere that encourages ongoing participation, ultimately benefiting the entire community and improving educational outcomes.

4.4 Radio Broadcasts and Mobile phones

Radio emerges as a fundamental and valuable medium for mass communication, especially in rural settings where formal education and written materials may be less accessible to reach the local community. One School Board Chairman stated coining the fundamental impact brought by radios in ensuring effective community participation in different school funded projects initiated by the government,

"Radio broadcasts are effective, especially for reaching a larger audience. But, the challenge lies in making sure that the content is understood by the listeners. Some parents find it difficult to follow because of language barriers or illiteracy." (SBC1, Personal Communication, 2 August 2023)."

This aligns with the work of Campbell and Tufte (2004), who highlight radio's potential in enhancing communication in low-literacy communities. However, the identified challenges of language barriers and illiteracy echo criticisms from scholars like Servaes (1999), who argue that content must be culturally and linguistically appropriate to maximize effectiveness. Thus, while radio has potential, its success hinges on tailored messaging. Radio broadcasts play a crucial role in facilitating community participation in government-funded projects, particularly in rural areas where access to formal education and written materials is limited. As highlighted by the School Board Chairman, radio effectively reaches a broad audience, enabling the dissemination of important information that can engage community members in school initiatives. Also, areas with limited internet access, SMS and voice calls can be effective in disseminating information. Schools can send text messages or make phone calls to inform parents about meetings, project updates, and volunteer opportunities, ensuring that even those without online access remain

However, the effectiveness of this medium is tempered by challenges such as language barriers and illiteracy, which can hinder comprehension. To maximize the impact of radio as a communication channel, it is essential to ensure that

the content is culturally and linguistically appropriate, thereby fostering greater inclusivity and enhancing community involvement in educational development efforts.

Generally, the findings from the research underscore critical policy gaps in the communication strategies employed for community engagement in school-funded projects in the Morogoro Region. One significant gap is the reliance on traditional communication methods, such as notice boards and community meetings, which, while established, fail to reach a broad and diverse audience. Policies that promote community participation, such as those outlined in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, emphasize the importance of inclusivity and equitable access to information. The ineffectiveness of these channels, particularly in addressing the needs of marginalized groups, indicates a need for policy reform that encourages the exploration of multiple, innovative communication avenues. This includes integrating digital platforms and mobile communication to ensure that all community members, regardless of their socio-economic status or educational background, can engage in school development initiatives.

Moreover, the challenges posed by language barriers and illiteracy in utilizing radio broadcasts and other media highlight the necessity for policies that prioritize culturally and linguistically appropriate messaging. Current frameworks and policies often overlook the importance of tailoring content to the local context, which can significantly hinder effective communication. To align with international best practices, such as those advocated by the World Bank and UNESCO, it is essential to develop training programs for educators and community leaders focused on creating accessible and relevant content. This approach will not only enhance the effectiveness of communication channels but also foster a greater sense of ownership and participation among community members in school-funded projects, ultimately leading to more sustainable educational outcomes.

5. CONCLUSION

The study reveals a clear disconnect between the existing communication channels and their effectiveness in fostering meaningful community participation in school-funded projects in the Morogoro Region. While traditional methods such as notice boards and community meetings are widely used, they often fail to engage a diverse audience, particularly marginalized groups. The findings highlight that these channels, although intended to facilitate communication, are limited by issues such as low attendance, accessibility challenges, and a lack of culturally relevant content. This gap indicates a pressing need for policymakers to rethink and broaden their strategies to ensure that all community members are informed and can actively participate in educational initiatives.

Furthermore, the research emphasizes the potential of alternative communication methods, such as radio broadcasts and mobile communication, to enhance community engagement. However, the effectiveness of these media is contingent upon addressing barriers like language and literacy, which can alienate significant segments of the population. The study calls for the development of policies that not only promote diverse communication channels but also prioritize the creation of content that resonates with the community's cultural and linguistic context. By implementing these recommendations, stakeholders can better facilitate inclusive participation in school projects, ultimately contributing to improved educational outcomes and sustainable development in the region.

5.1 Recommendation of the study

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that stakeholders in the Morogoro Region develop a multi-faceted communication strategy that integrates both traditional and innovative channels to enhance community participation in school-funded projects. This strategy should include the effective use of social media platforms and mobile communication to reach diverse demographics, particularly those with limited access to formal education. Additionally, it is crucial to tailor content for radio broadcasts and other media to ensure it is culturally and linguistically appropriate, thereby overcoming barriers of language and literacy. Training programs for educators and community leaders on effective communication practices should be established to foster skills in crafting inclusive messaging. By prioritizing accessibility and relevance in communication efforts, stakeholders can significantly improve community engagement and participation in educational initiatives, leading to more sustainable development outcomes.

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