

How School Management Committees monitor the Implementation of Universal Primary Education in Uganda

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Abstract

Involvement of the community in school management may not necessarily improve education service delivery in schools. The purpose of this study was to conduct an empirical study on the ascribed roles of SMCs in monitoring the implementation of UPE in Uganda. SMCs are mandated to participate and monitor all the activities that make a school operational. The research questions that guided this study were twofold: 1) How do SMCs describe their roles in monitoring the implementation of UPE? 2) To what extent the SMCs influence the implementation of UPE? The questionnaire and interview guide were used as instruments to collect data. The results of the study seem to suggest that SMCs understand their roles and execute them in some schools. However, some members seem not to understand their roles according to the study findings. Even those understanding their roles, they were not fully implementing them as a result of not understanding their mandate fully. The study finding further seem to suggest that in schools where SMCs were active in their monitoring roles, there was an improvement in UPE implementation seen in increased enrolment and support supervision that are vital for promoting teaching and learning. The study recommends a need for policy makers to empower fully SMCs to take full responsibility of managing all the affairs of the schools if school resources are to be fully utilised and lead to improved education outcome.

Keywords: school management committees, monitor, implementation, universal primary education

INTRODUCTION

Universal Primary Education (UPE) is among the key issues in national development plans of many less developed countries as it lays the initial firm foundation for the required knowledge and skills for the job market (Webster, 2000). As a result of the need for provision of basic quality education to all children and its resultant importance, Universal Primary Education (UPE) has been stressed in international forums on education, which include: the World Education Round Table Forum in Jomtien Thailand in 1990, the Dakar agenda for Action in Senegal in 2000, and the Millennium Summit in September 2000 which advocated Education for All (EFA). In this regard, developing countries have made remarkable strides in the provision of access to basic education for all over the last two decades (UNESCO, 2009).

To aid child education, some policies that attract pupils to schools have been formulated and put to use (Glewwe 2002). Among the policies include capitation grants that have proved effective policy instruments that have attracted and retained children from poor families in schools. On the other hand, there has been a policy of provision of inputs such as classroom blocks, scholastic materials and instructional materials as well as the supply of qualified and competent human resource in schools (Hanushek, 2003).

The UPE policy is to ensure that there is increased access to education by all irrespective of sexes, socio-economic status and geographical location. Its aim therefore is to make sure that resources are well distributed to ensure enough inputs needed to deliver quality education. In ensuring effective implementation of UPE in the Country, there was need for community participation through SMCs whose work is to provide guidance on management of schools, drawing and approval of development plans. They also engage in resource mobilization to complement the capitation grant from the government that is not sufficient. This is accompanied by monitoring the way school resources are utilized. The SMCs therefore are seen as vital in undertaking the development activities in schools (UPE Handbook, 2007).

Monitoring is a continuous process that involves data collection and analysis on some specific indicators to track the progress and inform the stakeholders on how implementation of the program is being done in line with the allocated funds. Monitoring is essential because it checks the progress of a program activity to ensure they are done according to the plan. It gives a logical way in which decisions are made and guides the way resources are efficiently utilized ((Marriott & Goyder, 2009). Community participation through SMCs are regarded by the governments as vital in management of schools through mobilization and monitoring of school resources to ensure there is

effective teaching and learning in schools to provide quality education (UPE Handbook,2007).

Various studies show that School Based Management (SBM) has proved to be the best policy that has registered an improvement in management of schools to the hopes of all stakeholders of the school, which has resulted into creating conducive environment and increase in pupils' performance and accomplishments (Cheng & Mok, 2007). It is believed that SBM is the best mode that serves pupils best since it meets the various expectations of stakeholders of the school in the provision of better education services (Bandur & Gamage, 2009; Cheng & Mok, 2007). This is witnessed in both developed and developing countries where school based management has led to effective management of schools through formulation of clear mission, vision, and strategic plans by the school committees or boards that are relevant for efficient education service delivery (Smith & Piele, 2006).

The role of SMCs in the implementation of UPE

According to Prew (2009) schools with active participation of the local communities are able to implement successfully school development programs because the local communities are able to mobilize financial as well as human resources necessary for provision of better education services. Prew (2009) further observes that it is the developing countries that need the involvement and participation of the communities because schools operate with scarcity of resources that need to be monitored and used according to the plan unlike the developed World where schools are well resourced and can develop as individuals without community involvement. In the case of South Africa, Bush and Heystek (2011) argue that the establishment of the school management committees assumed a 'harmony' model of operation, which would be optimistic amidst the many interest groups represented. In essence, the talents of many different interest groups within the governing body would be combined to promote the best interests and take the best decisions for the school (Xaba, 2011). However, the effect of school based management on successful implementation of UPE policy through the local communities has mixed results. While some studies have found a positive effect of school based management in the delivery of education services (Duflo, Dupas, & Kremer (2012), other researchers have found minimal effect of school based management on the delivery of education services (Banerjee et al., 2010).

Statement of the Problem

Monitoring of school performance is vital for the successful implementation of any education program (Kayani et al; 2011). While monitoring is supposed to be done with the intention of tracking the progress of

the programme in order to put in place corrective actions, the study shows that monitoring has not improved the implementation of UPE (ANPPCAN, 2009). This study therefore assumes that the implementation of UPE, if monitored effectively, may result in improving educational outcomes. Based on this assumption, the study aimed at exploring the ascribed roles undertaken by SMCs in monitoring the implementation of UPE in Uganda.

Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study was to conduct an empirical study on how SMCs monitor the implementation of UPE in Uganda. The objectives of the study were twofold:

- (i) To assess how SMCs describe their roles in monitoring the implementation of UPE
- (ii) To examine the extent the SMCs influence on the implementation of UPE

Importance and Justification of the Study

The outcome of this study is of significant value to policy makers and administrators at government level as it may enable them revisit and revise the policies that can make UPE implementation work efficiently. Effective strategies used by some SMCs in implementing UPE may be identified and recommendations made to government on how to improve practice. Although a lot of studies have been done on school governance in many countries, there is scarce literature on how SMCs monitor the implementation of UPE in Ugandan school context which motivated the researcher to undertake this study.

Research Design

In order to explore and have a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of the monitoring role of SMCs in the implementation of UPE, a case study design was used in this research. Case study involves rigorous and comprehensive qualitative and quantitative data collection about the case under study (Luck, Jackson, & Usher 2006). In this study, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected to enhance the understanding of the problem under study. Conceptually, this study used explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, one of the commonly used mixed methods designs in educational research that contains two distinct phases (Creswell, 2003). In this study, data collection was done in two phases. In the first phase, numeric data was collected and analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Emerging issues from quantitative analysis were studied further qualitatively under phase two and there after integration of both quantitative and qualitative analysis was done and interpreted in line with research problem.

Target Population

The target population for this study were SMC members in Mbarara District, western part of Uganda. These SMCs are charged with the responsibility of ensuring that UPE implementation succeeds in their areas of jurisdiction. Eight schools were selected and from eight schools, 96 SMC members were selected to participate in the study under quantitative phase. In phase two, eight chairpersons of SMCs from eight selected schools participated in the study. School head teachers were excluded in the study because they are ex-officials on the committees and at the same time they are accounting officers in schools, including them in the study could have compromised the quality of data collected since some vital information could not be accurately given.

Sampling procedure

Teddle & Yu (2007) revealed that in a study involving schools, schools can be purposively selected, then both the survey and non-survey data collection methods be used in selecting subjects to participate in the study. Therefore, from the eight selected schools targeting SMC members, government schools had thirteen members, foundation body schools, some had eighteen members and one school had twenty members. A large representative sample using simple random sampling technique in which each individual in the population had an equal probability of being selected was used. This was appropriate for this study in which the objective was to collect more quantitative data to generalize findings from the sample to the population (Creswell, 2014). In this study, a total of 96 questionnaires were administered to generate more quantitative data for generalization within the population of the study in the first phase and 8 members of SMCs from all sampled schools were selected to be interviewed. In eight selected schools, a chairperson of SMC was selected, and where the chairperson was absent or not willing to participate in the study, the vice chairperson was selected. The chairpersons and their deputies were included in the study because they are the controllers and managers of other members of the committees and therefore well versed with the way duties and responsibilities in schools are undertaken.

Research Instruments

Quantitative data was collected using the questionnaire. This instrument was appropriate because all the participants to the study were literate and therefore understood what the tool demanded. The Instrument contained the standardized questions that needed standardized answers which were vital for ease of analysis. Qualitative data was collected using structured interview that was conducted by the researcher.

Validity of the Research Instruments

In this study, the face validity was conducted. The face validity was established with the help of the SMC peer review group totalling to thirty-five in number. They were asked to review the items on the questionnaire and assess the extent to which they reflected the meaning they are expected to measure. This process was followed by rewording some statements that were seen not to be accurate. Validity was also enhanced in this study by a thorough examination of the questionnaire as suggested by (McMillan & Schumacher, 2008). With the assistance of the supervisors, items which were seen inaccurate were eliminated from the questionnaire. For qualitative study, credibility was ensued by staying longer at sites to verify data collected, then enhanced by the provision of in-depth description of data to enable readers to make their own interpretations. A detailed description of the researcher's interaction with participants in the field, including challenges encountered and how these were dealt with, also enhanced trustworthiness of the study. Prolonged engagement in the field as well as member checking ensured trustworthiness in the case of interviews (Creswell, 2008).

Reliability of the Research Instruments

For quantitative data, reliability was ensued by measuring the internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach, 1951; Nunnally, 1978), which reflects the homogeneity of a scale. Trustworthiness was guaranteed in qualitative data where the researcher constantly referred to verbatim utterances of participants, thus providing primary data which every reader could use to assess the accuracy of conclusions reached. Trustworthiness and the credibility of the study depended on its truth value, consistency and transferability.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

How SMCs describe their roles in monitoring the implementation of UPE

Quantitatively majority of participants (80.2 %) revealed, they take the role of approving the school development plans, 90.7% undertake the role of approving the school budgets and 86.5% monitor the way the school funds are used. On whether SMCs participate in procurement of school equipment, 51.1% did not agree. This is an indicator that although SMCs are mandated to participate in the procurement process, this function is not performed by many SMC members which makes monitoring the whole process at school level difficult. The study finding further shows, 51.1% of SMC members participate in construction of school infrastructure. This percentage is low compared to the needs of new infrastructure in schools to meet the increasing enrolment. The analysis further shows that, 81.3% of SMC members monitor the way the school resources are utilised, 69.8% participate in mobilization of

funds to complement insufficient government grants in schools, 62.5% ensure that school heads account for the funds allocated to their schools. Although these percentages seem to be high, it means some SMCs do not mobilise resources to their schools as well as monitoring and demanding accountability from the head teachers. The study findings seem to indicate that, 70.8% of SMC members monitor the head teacher, teacher and pupils in schools and 83.2% of SMCs participate in general management of the schools. Although the percentages of SMCs in undertaking their roles in schools tend to be high, there seem to be an indicator from the study findings that some SMCs may not be understanding their roles and therefore a need for the policy makers to orient and mandate all SMCs in schools to perform their ascribed roles efficiently.

The findings from the interviews suggest that there is planned and structured use of school funds due to approval process the planning procedure passes through. Planning focuses on school infrastructure development which is a key input in facilitating teaching and learning. The planning role of SMCs seems to be proactive in obtaining funds from other stakeholders of the school including parents through various ways to ensure the schools activities are undertaken. This is done in collaboration and approval by PTA members. This finding shows that the funding of education in Uganda is not solely on resources from the government but also depends on resource mobilization from the community. The findings are in line with those of (Osei-Owusu & Kwame, 2012) who observed that school management committee is an integral part of the school management which is responsible for administering the overall affairs of the school from identifying the development and infrastructure needs to the implementation and monitoring of school development projects. The findings are also in agreement with those of (Bategeka and Okurut, 2006) who found out that the roles of SMCs are to provide a general direction to the activities of the schools.

However, lack of independence in decision making in schools by SMCs tend to hinder their effectiveness in improvement of education service delivery. There is therefore a policy need that should merge the roles and responsibilities of SMCs and PTAs in schools together for efficient management of schools.

SMCs influence on the implementation of UPE

Results from the quantitative analysis further revealed a strong positive correlation between ascribed roles played by SMCs and implementation of UPE ($r=0.639$, $p<0.01$). This analysis shows that there is an evidence to show that SMCs in schools are vital in UPE implementation. In confirming this findings, results from interview reveals that SMCs role in monitoring the implementation of UPE to a big extent has been effective. Pupils' access and

enrolment in schools have increased and resource inputs that facilitate teaching and learning have been monitored and efficiently utilised. The findings from the interview give a clarification that seems to indicate that SMCs are committed in ensuring the successful implementation of UPE.

The findings are in support of scholars' view that School Based Management (SBM) is the best mode that serves pupils best since it meets the various expectations of stakeholders of the school in the provision of better education services (Bandur & Gamage, 2009). This is witnessed in both developed and developing countries where school based management has led to effective management of schools through formulation of clear mission, vision, and strategic plans by the school committees or boards that are relevant for efficient education service delivery (Smith & Piele, 2006).

However, the findings from the interview seem to suggest that SMCs are not operating according to their given mandate. This limited power and responsibilities of SMCs tend to suggest that there are some inefficiencies taking place in UPE schools created by failure to understand their roles clearly in schools. This therefore calls for policy makers to equip SMCs knowledge in understanding and effecting full mandate to control all school activities which according to the study findings are currently lacking in some schools.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to conduct an empirical study on how SMCs monitor the implementation of UPE in Uganda. The objectives of the study were two fold: To assess how SMCs describe their roles in monitoring the implementation of UPE and to examine the extent the SMCs influence on the implementation of UPE.

The study seems to suggest that there is planned and structured use of funds in schools by SMCs done through development and approval of development plans, drawing the school budgets, mobilization and use of school resources. In ensuring that school activities are undertaken efficiently, monitoring function is undertaken by SMCs to ensure that resources are efficiently utilized to promote effective teaching and learning. The SMCs role in monitoring school activities seem to have resulted into increased school enrolment, improved staff welfare, and support supervision that aim at performance improvements in UPE schools. Much as the education Act 2008 mandates the SMCs to undertake the duties and responsibilities in schools, the power and authority to run schools still lies with the local and central government but not at school level. The study further concluded that SMCs are not autonomous in decision making in schools since they

depend on the approval of PTAs and this hinders the effective delivery of education services in schools. Much as SMCs monitoring role promotes UPE programme in schools, the study concludes that some members of the committees in some schools do not seem to understand their roles, the reason why ineffectiveness has remained in schools which hinders the delivery of quality education in schools. The study recommended that

- The transfer of power and authority of managing schools from the central government to school level should fully be done such that SMCs and the communities take full mandate of planning and executing the plans including recruiting and transfer of teachers in schools. This empowerment creates the sense of ownership of schools that is likely to guarantee transparency and accountability in the way school resources are managed.
- Policy makers should revisit the policy that merges the activities of SMCs and those of PTAs together if quick and workable and constructive decisions in schools are to be made. This policy will create harmony, teamwork that are vital for the development of schools
- The government should ensure that SMCs are orientated and educated on their roles in schools and how they should execute them. This may improve on the management of schools to deliver to the expectation of the UPE implementation programme.

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