# INVOLVEMENT OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES IN SCHOOL-BASED MANAGEMENT: EXPERIENCES FROM TWO DISTRICTS OF GHANA

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## ABSTRACT

*In this study, School Management Committees in Akatsi South and Upper Manya Krobo of Ghana  to examine their involvement and participation in school based management practices. A phenomenological approach was used to unearth four variables that links to school-based management that is carried out by SMC members. The findings of the study showed that the current state of stakeholder involvement and participation in school-based management within selected communities in these two districts are not well coordinated. Besides, school governance structures were not fully operational at their best. The work of the School Management Committees was usually left to the Chairman and in some cases to the Parent Teachers Association chair. There was a limited collaboration between the entire SMC membership and the schools they serve. Additionally, committee planning and implementation issues were significant concerns. The study recommended that SMCs be revitalised and their roles and responsibilities are unpacked for better targeting. The study also suggests changing the management activities to transform the face of activities of SMCs to improve educational provision and administration in the localities they operate.*

## BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Schooling and learning outcomes are at the crossroads in Ghana. Several factors have either been accused or excused at one point in time or the other. The persistent widening gap in performances among state approved schools (characterised by the public and private schools; endowed and less endowed schools; resourced and under resourced schools) is alarming. It is due to large stocks of teaching and learning resources in the private schools as against the public schools. Also, ongoing collaborative partnerships parents and guardians show in private schools are different from what happens in the public schools.

Education and training play a unique role in human capital development that tends to have a considerable effect on the economic development of nations (Abreh, 2011; Venkatraja & Indira, 2011). Besides, formal education is a social institution that seeks to equip individuals with essential cognitive, psycho motor and affective abilities which in turn influences the economic well being of nations. Thus schools become the hub for training and graduating enrollees. At the school level, some activities capitalised as either school management or operation issues as denominators of school effectiveness and efficiency. The formative years of future leaders, technocrats and indeed human capital needed for accelerated economic development is contingent on foundations of education and schooling. For instance, lifelong learning processes of the child begin from the early years where basic literacy, numeracy and essential life skills are acquired. Furthermore, Colclough (1996) and Blaug (1970) confirm the need to manage education and schooling well as education is both beneficial to the individual undergoing it and the society as a whole where the person resides or operates from.

To achieve the group goal that education and schooling present to the next generation of leaders, provision of essential human capital demands for effective management and operations of schools makes the need to examine the role that communities play in the management and operations of schools all the more important. The hard truth is children spend the majority of their time at home than in schools. In Ghana, the Ministry of Education (MOE) supports the operations of schools basically through the Ghana Education Service (GES). The development partners, as well as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), have made several efforts to make school-based management efficient and effective. One area of school level management activities that stands out relates to partnerships and collaborations between the school and the community. Usually, it takes the combined efforts and contributions of stakeholders involved in the process to work towards making the school systems functional.

One of the characteristics of effective institutions depends on the extent to which their administrative, governance and management strategies make a practical contribution to the organization (Arnwine, 2002). Historically communities have played a vital role in the development and provision of education to children worldwide, and Ghana has not been an exception in this experience (Miller, 1995; Roekel, 2008). The community partnership in educational provision became even more functional in Ghana particularly during the era of the Whole School Development (WSD) project (MacBeath, 2010; UNESCO, 2005). Most basic schools in Ghana were initiated by communities, which willingly provided accommodation for teachers and pieces of land for the construction of the schools and also supported the upkeep of those schools and the children in them. In time, most of those schools were absorbed into the public system with the government taking over their management (McWilliam & Kwamena-Poh, 1975), thus shifting the management and regulation of the schools to Ministry of Education structures and making communities loosely involved in the process. The centralised control model of education management often had the tendency of weakening the extent of community commitment and participation in the management of education in the country.

The Ministry of Education (MOE), as well as its other major agencies including the Ghana Education Service (2011), recognises the importance of mutual partnership between community leadership and school level leadership for effective school governance. The MOE and GES over time have developed systems that are intended to make community input in school management efficient and effective. The introduction of the Whole School Development (WSD) project was thus "viewed as a strategy to counter the paralysis that had come to characterise local decision-making in basic education by devolving control of education to districts, schools and communities" (Akyeampong, 2004a, p.4). The WSD attempted a strategy to improve the partnership that should exist between District Education Office (DEO) structures, head teachers, teachers and the community. Consequently, individuals who attended training programmes to introduce the WSD concept were taught approaches in developing a "Whole School Action Plan" that emphasises the aforementioned partnership arrangement in addressing teaching and learning needs and school based management issues in general.

In recent times, School Performance Improvement Plan (SPIP) has become an integral part of the life of basic public schools in Ghana. Its preparation has been tied to the propensity of schools to receive capitation grants[1], which makes it easy for every public school to own one. It is apparent

[1]Capitation grants here means money given to every public school that meets a specified criteria of the award. The number of students enrolled in a school

that until this time, most public basic schools in Ghana operated without any school level plans to guide their actions. The SPIP was therefore meant to ensure that schools would be conducted in their operations. The WSD effort supported the drawing of action plans that educated participants on target preparation and appraisal of structures of schools. It also helped with designing and preparing school budget for inclusion in District budgets. The same effort supported the planning of activities to promote community involvement in the work of the school (Akyeampong, 2004a; WSD Training Programme Document, 1999). One need that WSD programme thus addresses is that it brings about community ownership of schools and as well as influence the extent of community participation in school activities. Akyeampong argues that the WSD programmes have sought to sensitise the school community to help address such problems as poor pupil learning and achievement outcomes usually apparent in primary schools but more profusely in the rural areas. Ghana's Ministry of Education has established governing structures at the various levels of education as a result of the WSD efforts. For instance, at the basic school level, these structures, either formally instituted or recognised include the District Education Oversight Committee (DEOC), School Management Committee (SMC), Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), District (Municipal, Metropolitan) Assembly, District Education Office, Development Partners and Non-Governmental Organizations. In support of these structures to enable them to function more effectively, handbooks have been developed to guide their operations and various forms of training organized by different interest groups to the members of the DEOC and SMC which are expected to play leading roles in these governance processes.

The establishment of District Education Oversight Committees (DEOCs), School Management Committees (SMCs) and to some extent Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) is all directed towards rejuvenating the status of communities and their members in school level management (Akyeampong, 2004a). This essentially springs from the fact that communities assist the school in following ethics and compliance aimed at promoting management efficiency and effectiveness. Changes and reforms in education are warranted since Sustainable Development Goal 4 aimed at ensuring the provision of inclusive quality education for all and is situated at the heart of effective school-based management.

School Management Committees (SMCs) are the managerial hand of basic public schools in Ghana, and these are governing agencies of the school, and their roles are central to the main activities and operations at the school level. The SMC is supposed to work for the enhancement of the school and its community by working in the interest of the school. By law, the SMC is the governing body of basic schools in the various communities in Ghana and are supposed to promote the interest of the school and its learners for the children to receive the best education. Every public school has such a committee constituted based on state agreed for formation and operations of the SMC.

In recent times, the education sector in Ghana has been fraught with such issues as teacher absenteeism, lateness to school, and refusal to give proper attention to teaching and learning activities. Many of these problems are some of the major causes for low student learning outcomes (Basiru, 2013; Gyansah, Esilfie, & Atta, 2014). Some training opportunities have been provided in the past to head teachers and SMC members to enable them to adequately and effectively perform their expected functions. Various incentive packages such as teachers' quarters have been given to teachers deployed to remote areas so that they will be closer to the environment of the school (Casely-Hayford & Ghartey, 2007). However, this problem still exists as a core challenge in the education sector in Ghana.

Learning outcomes of private school pupils are high as compared to those of public schools (Ankomah, & Hope, 2011; Etsey, Amedahe, & Edjah, 2005; Ntim, 2014; Okyerefo, Fiaveh, & Lamptey, 2011). Furthermore, parents of children in private schools are noted to be very actively involved in school management whereas parents of pupils in public schools are in general not motivated to actively take part in school level management (Ankomah, & Hope, 2011). Weak supervision from district education offices tends to weaken the commitment of school head teachers and teachers in carrying out their duties (Mensah, 2008). The provision of Capitation Grant to schools, the preparation of School Performance Improvement Plan and the organization of School Performance Appraisal Meetings are all geared towards improving school management and performance. However, there has not been corresponding visibility regarding school level management output and improvement in learning outcomes for pupils in public schools. This low-performance issue raises concerns about how the school management structures are functioning. For instance, are activities carried out as planned? How are the processes of implementation monitored and evaluated? Who are the custodians of the benchmarks and how do they carry out their benchmarking work? These and other issues create an opportunity for auditing and interrogating how accountable the existing structures in public schools are and of course how the community supports the realisation of it.

The researcher has examined the procedures that the School Management Committees (SMCs) in Ghanaian basic schools[2], employ in varied contexts to see the differences. From these studies, it became evident that Ghana inherited decentralisation as one of the legacies of the British Policy of Indirect Rule. Furthermore, the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana contends that power and decision-making should be transferred to the decentralised authorities[3] (Opare, Egbenya, & Kaba, 2009). Opare, et al. supported the argument that one of the surest means to increased decentralisation is the guarantee of democratic governance at various levels of operations. Legitimate provision has been made in the constitutions of Ghana since independence to allow for this to occur. The quest for decentralisation was to help accelerate growth and equitable spread of development in rural communities and to urge the participation of the communities in decision making that relate to the overall management of development in their localities (Egbenya, 2009). However, how this process of harnessing community resources with the view to speeding up growth and equitable distribution of development to communities in Ghana are confronted with challenges and especially in the education system. Snapshots of some reviewed empirical accounts on the Ghanaian context are presented in the following paragraphs.

Akukwe (2003) found that with dynamic leadership backed by robust community member support in planning processes and effective communication, school improvements were achieved. However, in both well-performing and underperforming communities, there was underachievement of transparency and accountability objectives. This was found to be largely due to passive parental involvement that was typical of PTAs and SMCs. The study further noted that the lack of capacity on the part of many SMCs made them feel unable to understand the expected decision-making as well as protocols for deploying those set strategies.

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[2] Basic education in Ghana is made up of Kindergarten (4 and 5-year-olds), Primary (6 to 11-year-olds) and Junior High schools (12 to 14-year-olds). The indicated ages are legal ages of the

[3] The decentralised structures in Ghana include the regional, district and circuit and community (where the schools are located) levels.

Akyeampong (2004b) in contextualising decentralisation in Africa found that decentralisation in systems that are not appropriately adjusted to its fundamental requirements for effectiveness can lead to outcomes that undermine the very reason why they were introduced. Akyeampong (2004b) further contends that decentralisation practised in developed countries where their socio-economic status and pace is advanced may require just grappling with parity and equity issues as warranted by the government. This is not the same in sub-Saharan Africa where circumstances differ broadly. For instance personnel, material and technology are usually considered basic variables before issues of equity and parity come into the picture. The Ghanaian situation is not any different. It is characterised by imbalances including those related to the "so called – base, secondary and tertiary" variables. In a study conducted by Tayi, Anin, and Asuo (2014), District Education and Assembly Officers asserted that inadequate funds/resources, difficult terrain and lukewarm attitudes on the part of the community level stakeholders were the major challenges adversely affecting community participation in the District Education Sector Planning (DESP) process.

In their assessment of factors affecting the standard of education Upper region, Nsiah-Peprah and Kililiyang-Viiru (2005) revealed that SMCs were operationally non-existent in 14 of the schools visited to formulate policies, ensure environmental cleanliness in schools, monitor regular attendance of teachers and pupils, as well as ensure adequate supply of teaching and learning resources. The absence of SMC and ineffective PTAs were found as the possible cause of the increasingly poor performance. The researchers noted that the capability of communities to participate should be distinguished from their willingness to participate. On the economic and social factors that underpinned the variations in community involvement and participation, they found the educational background of the school community, as well as social conditions and economic factors as important influencing agents. Kamaludeen (2014) examined the influence of the Ghana School Feeding Programme on access and retention and found that the SMC and its School Feeding Sub-Committee (SFC) directly managed the programme at the school level. The author found that each school had an SMC made up of the head teacher as the secretary, a chairperson who is a parent, and other members. Although the study could not pinpoint how operational the SMC was, it revealed the extent of SMCs participation in the administration of the school-feeding programme.

The role of collaboration among critical stakeholders in the provision of educational services cannot be overstretched since it provides the route to higher performance and achievement. The persistent widening gap in achievements of public and private basic schools is not merely due to large stocks of a variety of teaching and learning resources in the private schools as against the public schools alone, but also due to the visible concern and collaboration parents and children in private schools show in the education process. Educational provision and management cannot be undertaken by the school head and teachers in the school alone but by all the wider stakeholders together to ensure effectiveness and eventual success. This is the essence of the decentralisation concept in education seeking to bring stakeholders on board to play their varied and collective roles to promote efficiency and effectiveness toward improved learning outcomes.

The expectation has been that with these structures in place, there would be more effective supervision of teaching and learning, effective management of resources and facilities, all culminating in improved learning outcomes for pupils. This would be further evidenced by high performance in various examinations, particularly in the public schools. Thus to promote effective governance and supervision at the basic level and ensure improved general learning outcomes, formal structures of educational governance have been set up within the communities. Pieces of training have been given

to the members of these formal structures by the MOE/GES and other organizations like Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) to enable them to understand their roles and discharge them effectively. Various supports and incentive packages have been provided in various forms for the schools; and their teachers and head teachers in the basic public schools. These include the giving of capitation grants to schools, the preparation of school performance improvement plans, the introduction of school feeding programme, as well as the provision of staff bungalows for teachers in remote areas, among others. In spite of all these, however, the realisation of the key expectation of improved learning outcomes seems to be only a mirage.

In recent times, there have been notable cases of very limited teacher time-on-task and teacher absenteeism in basic public schools across the country leading to disheartening performance outcomes in BECE results. It appears that the structures of educational governance and accountability at the basic level are malfunctioning and deficient.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Most of the theoretical basis of school-based management studies focus on three dimensions as theorizing the role communities plays in them. According to Hanushek and Woessmann (2007), the three dimensions are namely: (i) choice and competition; (ii) school autonomy; and (iii) school accountability. In this current study, relationships among school-level management committee members were examined. The conception of this study hinges on Moustakas (1994)'s thoughts "to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it. From the individual descriptions, general or universal meanings are derived". The four identified variables are: 1. plan preparation for school-level governance; 2. implementation of plans prepared, 3. setting benchmarks for monitoring and evaluation performance indicators, and 4. providing window for transparency, openness and accountability popped up in the school. Indeed in its most true sense, phenomenological approach describes other than to explain phenomena and does not engage in probing hypothesis and conducting inferential analysis or to deliberate about the preconceptions of others (Husserl, 1970). Phenomenology was applied in this study to examine the first two identified themes around SMCs and their influence on improvement in school based management.

## PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The goal of this study was to investigate the current state of stakeholder involvement and participation in school-based management within the communities of the two selected districts in Ghana. To realise what the study was set out to do, a research question is developed: "How do school management committees operate to achieve a high level of school management in the Akatsi South and Upper Manya Krobo, Ghana?"

## METHODOLOGY

The study uses the phenomenological approach to examine qualitative data gathering, management, analysis and reporting. This approach ensures thorough, credible and a more persuasive research output since it offers the researcher the privilege of describing an incident, activity, or phenomenon. Thus the phenomenological approach to the study made a combination of methods, such as interviews, focus group discussions, documentary analysis, and visits to the research sites to enable the researcher to gain an understanding that made the study possible. The approach af-

forded determinable results that provide a lead on the systemic audit of how school management committees play their role on the realisation of school goals in school-based management. Data were collected from a broad range of respondents representing various categories of school-based management stakeholders to offer varied perspectives.

Data was collected from teachers, head teachers, PTA members, SMC members, parents and community members, as well as DEOC/DA members and representatives of NGOs and Development partners. It was intended initially to have 10 head teachers from each district totaling 20 head teachers in all, 2 teachers, School Management Committee (SMC) members, Parent Teachers Association (PTA) members, parents each from both districts totaling 40 each of the designated categories, 2 each of Circuit Supervisors and District Education Oversight Committee (DEOC)/ District Assembly (DA) totaling 4 each and 1 Non Governmental Organization or Development Partner whose project activities focuses on education from either district, totaling 2. This would have yielded an overall total of 190 participants with 95 for each district. However, some of the expected respondents failed to turn up leaving a final total of 183 with a shortfall of 7 individuals, three of the 7 were from the SMC members; and one each from PTA, DEOC, NGO (in Upper Manya Krobo) and one from the parents and community members in Akatsi South were not available for the interviews and Focus Group Discussions. The participants were purposively sampled from the districts with support from the Circuit Supervisors in charge of the selected circuits of the two districts. Ten schools each from Akatsi South and Upper Manya Krobo Districts were involved in the study.

The research data collection instruments were developed with the expert support of colleagues at the Ghana Education Service (GES) headquarters. This approach afforded a set of streamlined research data collection instruments for the study in the two districts. The instruments were primarily made up of interview guides and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) guides which were pre-tested in Komenda Edina Akuafo District in the Central Region of Ghana that has similar characteristics as the two Districts where the study was conducted. After that, the instruments were revised to reflect what it seeks to measure and rated valid and reliable when subjected to reliability and validity tests. The instruments that were used came from the following categories of respondents Interview Guide for Head teachers, Circuit Supervisors, District Education Oversight Committee/ District Assembly, Development Partners/Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs); and Focus Group Discussion Guide for Teachers, SMC members, PTA members, and Parents and Community members. Beyond the data emerging from interviews and Focus Group Discussions, secondary information in the form of reports on the activities of School Management Committees (SMCs), Parent Teachers Associations (PTAs), Circuit Supervisors and District Education Oversight Committee (DEOC) as well as Non Governmental Organization and Development Partner whose project activities focuses on education were examined. The reports were requested from the relevant institutions and underwent thematic review to strengthen the data from the primary sources.

The research data collection instruments were profiled according to the themes that the framework for the study pointed out. This exploratory study collected the data on the four thematic areas from the various data sources in a complementary manner. That is, whereas data were collected from some of the respondents on all the profiled areas, other targeted respondents responded to a cross section of the four profiled areas. The respondents were engaged through interviews and focus group discussion, and after draft reports had been ready, the feedback was shared with the respondents using an engagement with the respondents to validate the feedback that has been captured in the draft report. During the engagement, permission was sought from the respondents

to audio-record all the interviews and focus group discussions. The process afforded the researcher an opportunity to resort to more probes for detailed information. The head teachers were met at the various schools where they were engaged individually in interview sessions. Similarly, teachers in each school were engaged on Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The parents and community members, PTA Executives, as well as SMC members, were met in their respective categories at the circuit center schools for the FGD sessions. The remaining respondents – DEOC leadership, Circuit Supervisors and Non-Governmental Organizations and Development Partners were interviewed at the premises of the District Education Directorates in the two districts. The audio files were transcribed and made ready for coding and theme building using NVivo software for qualitative data analysis. Two of the four profiles were highlighted in this study. The researcher used themes and narratives to report the findings.

## FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The study resulted in many findings related to school-based management issues that are peculiar to the two Districts under review. The indicators that were examined at this level included stakeholder involvement and participation in plan preparation and plan implementation strategies used in school level management at the reference districts. The feedback from all the respondents helped answer the research question. Additional specific examples illustrate how lines of accomplishments have occurred in the contexts of the Districts.

### Plan Preparation for School-level Management

All the 20 schools visited had copies of the SPIP to exhibit. Teachers and head teachers reported that plans were prepared for the execution of school level activities. It was noted that issues captured on the plans were highlighted to strengthen the schools to compete for the capitation grant through the District Education Offices (DEOs). It was identified that 23 out of 37 School Management Committee (SMC) members that participated in the study did not join in the preparation of the SPIP. Rarely were they invited to participate in the preparation of the SPIP. In some cases, the secretary and the chairman happened to be SMC members involved in the SPIP preparation. But in some cases, even the SMC chairman was not involved at all. Seven out of ten SMC chairmen in one district said they were not involved in the SPIP preparation process. The head teachers were only presented with the prepared SPIP for their signatures.

Thus information provided by SMC members, circuit supervisors and PTA members suggests that SPIP preparations were done without the needed involvement of the SMC membership. This is an indication that several of the plans did not reflect the voice of the governing committee of the basic schools for which the plan had been prepared. The following three examples illustrate how schools involved in this study were not following the same procedures when it came to the involvement and participation of the SMC and other structures within the community during SPIP preparation:

"The SMC chairman, PTA chairman, SMC and PTA secretary and the staff are the people involved in the SPIP preparation meeting. The SPIP is done after school at the beginning of the academic year [FGD and SMC]."

One SMC chairman lamented that:

"I am not invited for the SPIP [preparation] meeting, and I do not have the opportunity of

sharing my input. It's the same with my other colleagues on the SMC; all I get is I am invited by the head teacher to sign my portion on the completed SPIP [FGD with SMC]."

The situation is hwever different in other contexts:

"The head teacher informs the SMC ahead of time about meeting to prepare SPIP [FGD with SMC]."

However merely informing an SMC about the date for the preparation for the SPIP meeting does not necessarily mean that the SMC was involved in the actual preparation of the SPIP document.

Two out of the four Circuit Supervisors involved in the study admitted that they were rarely present during SPIP preparation sessions for the schools under their jurisdiction. Similarly 13 out of the 20 head teachers admitted not inviting their CSs to their SPIP preparation sessions. Prominent among the reasons that the head teachers gave for not inviting the CSs include the fact that the CSs were usually busy. Twenty-seven (27) out of 40 teachers knew about how SPIP was prepared but 17 out of 27 of those who now is prepared said they were not involved in its preparation. At least a teacher in 7 out of 20 schools said they were involved in the preparation of SPIP. Relatedly, one SMC member said:

"In my school all the relevant stakeholders were invited and involved during the  preparation, execution and evaluation stages of SPIP. The team preparing the SPIP do the planning on the basis of the three terms in an academic year. Besides, all teachers are involved during such stakeholder meetings. Due to assigned duties to all teachers during the preparation of the SPIP [it] made them to be actively involved in the process which to a large extent positively affected their performance in the classroom."

It was again noted that 17 out of 20 schools reported that they did not share information on SPIP with the community. This is not unexpected given that some SMC members and PTA members do not know what activities have been put in the SPIP.

There seem to be general awareness (18 out of 20 schools) among head teachers, teachers, and their SMC members that they had one School Performance Appraisal Meeting (SPAM) in the academic year of the study. However, there seem not to be any discernible pattern of conducting SPAM sessions in the communities. In some schools, it became evident that before embarking on SPAM, teachers were assigned responsibilities to brainstorm and come up with issues to be discussed during the SPAM. Also in other schools, head teachers asked teachers to diagnose pupils' reading and numeracy achievement levels before the SPAM. Elsewhere, teachers help head teachers to think through pupil performance to adequately assist the students. More than half of the community members agreed that they were invited to participate in SPAM sessions. Commenting on the wider stakeholder involvement in the SPAM, one head teacher had this to say:

*"We organise SPAM in the school. During the SPAM, the assemblyman … attends in addition to other stakeholders in education. We meet and discuss the BECE results each year. Stakeholders such as pupils, teachers, parents and educational authorities who fail to play their role in the delivery of quality education are encour-*

*aged to sit up. This is what is done to help improve upon th-e performance of the pupils in exams."*

Regardless of the findings on the involvement of wider stakeholders in the SPAM sessions, it was realised that 13 of the 20 schools did not maintain up-to-date minutes of their meetings. For the seven schools that maintained minutes for the SPAM sessions, the entries into the files were not updated on a regular basis.

Generally, beyond the SPIP[4], schools rarely prepare action plans that spell out details of duty bearers, timelines, achievement indicators and guarantee of completion. The two schools that said they had something close to action plan said they did not call for the action plan. Action plans were not drawn for PTA-funded activities although teachers and community members see the importance of having such a document in place. The study additionally revealed that in general new head teachers and teachers find it difficult to articulate procedures and structures for SPAM, SPIP and action planning. It is worthy of note that as a result of planning (through SPAM and SPIP), some schools formed reading clubs in the various classes except KG to help address reading problems common to most low achieving schools. Some teachers were involved when it came to improving numeracy and literacy in the reading clubs organised on the class basis. English, Mathematics and Science were subjects that posed a problem for the pupils, which may be attributed to their low readability skills, lack of logistics (TLMs) and the use of untrained teachers at the lower primary levels.

## Implementation of plans for school level management

It was found that the activities planned in the SPIP are financed from the vote emerging from the capitation grant provided to schools by the government. Eighteen schools reported that the capitation grants were delayed in coming and sometimes did not come at all during the school year and hence the schools were not able to carry out the activities planned in the SPIP as scheduled. The vast majority of teachers, head teachers, and SMC members involved in this study revealed that their schools could not achieve up to half of the activities they set out to accomplish due to either delay of arrival and unavailability of the capitation grants. Besides, the SMC members, head teachers and teachers blamed in-completion of activities on the rising costs of budgeted items caused by the delays in the arrival of the grants.

The District Education Oversight Committee (DEOC) and the District Education Office (DEO) members indicated that the schools prepared their SPIPs based on the guidelines provided them. The practice according to the DEO is that failure to follow the instructions would cause the finance and administration unit of the DEO not to approve the SPIPs. To ensure efficient use of the money, one of the districts has designed a form that the head teachers have to fill in and submit to the office before they access the money. The accountant and the director have to sign or endorse this form. The head teacher is expected to account for the previous grants awarded before a letter of authorization is issued to enable the school to access the grant at the bank. It became evident that each school had an account at the bank and that was the only channel through which capitation grants were released to the schools.

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[4]SPIP are prepared based on a preset template thus although schools have SPIP what they have do not reflect duty bearers, timelines, indicators of achievement and guarantee of completion

The signatories to a school's bank account were noted as the Head teacher and Assistant Head teacher. In a particular instance, a head teacher was found to have forged the signature of the SMC chairman to enable the prepared SPIP to meet the acceptable format of the DEO. The DEOs in the two districts have a system in place for cross-checking how school funds were disbursed and how they were accounted for. There were scheduled officers including mostly teachers, the sports secretary, the school health coordinator and others serving as spending officers of the capitation grant at the school level.

To determine the extent to which participants are accountable to the community, the respondents were asked whether they share information on school management with the community members and parents. Although most of the respondents agreed that the community needed such information, it was apparent that informing the community rarely occurred. Statements that respondents gave such as the following illustrate the reason why members of the community need such information.

> "*Parents need to know what is happening at the school to enable them play their role. I think so and I am sharing such information with them. Everybody needs to know what is happening in the school, not only the executives.*"

Nonetheless, some respondents felt that such information should be shared with SMC members only. Furthermore, other respondents felt sharing school management information with members of the community was not necessary. One head teacher said,

> "*I don't think it is necessary. It is the parents who appoint the executives so if I share information with them then that is enough. However, if any parent is interested, I can provide the records.*"

Evidence seems to point to the fact that the organization of information sharing session was an undocumented activity and it happened much haphazardly for the most part in places where headteachers indicated they organised it. More than half of the schools that indicated that information sharing occurred SMC and PTA were not able to validate the claim made by head teachers.

## DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The findings of this study seem to connect with the findings of the study by Haddad and Demsky (1995) regarding the planning in attainment of institutional and systemic educational goals. According to Haddad and Demsky (1995), a rigorous analysis of methodological approach tends to capture the complexities of the policies and processes. Additionally, studies conducted by Chen and Chandler (2001), Gonzalez (2012) and Norton and Nufeld (2002) indicated that involvement of parents and school management committees had reciprocal effect on learning outcomes of students on the whole. In this study, however, most SMCs were found apathetic to the course of school-level management as practiced in schools. Again, this study made it clear that most schools in the two Districts did not have operational School Management Committee (SMC) in place. Furthermore, the findings of this study resonate those of several other studies confirming the lack of SMCs in developing countries (Abreh, 2015; Akyeampong, 2009; Grauwe, 2005; Keith, & Menzie, 1998, Kiprono, Nganga, & Kanyiri, 2015).

# CONCLUSION

The study uncovered the current state of stakeholder involvement and participation in school-based management within selected communities of Akatsi South and Upper Manya Krobo districts. The state of community participation in school level management activities was discussed in this paper to afford an understanding in school based management processes in the two districts. The existing structures for school-level management have been duly documented. The roles and functions of DEOC and SMC structures were available, but capacity building for members on these roles and functions did not seem to be well situated. Invariably every school visited in this study had prepared SPIPs but generally, the participation of the SMC membership in the preparation process was in question, and the schools did not feature the extent of completion of activities listed in the SPIP documents. All the schools conducted School Performance Appraisal Meetings (SPAM) to discuss school matters with the various school stakeholders within the communities. The discussion was focused on the academic achievement of the pupils and how to improve it with special attention to BECE results. Most SMCs had structured meetings particularly at the beginning and at the end of the term, yet membership attendances at these meetings were found to be low and rarely forming a quorum.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

A few recommendations are made because of the evidence that the study brought about. It is noticed that most School Management Committees (SMCs) and District Education Oversight Committees (DEOCs) are quite dysfunctional and there is a need to activate and breathe life into them. This would require that DEOC and SMC members be informed of the issues critical to management decision making about the school. This might call for the change of management activities of DEOC and SMCs to re-orient them of their roles in educational provision and management in the localities. Community initiated accountability frameworks that tend to support grassroots activities should be put in place. Such structures may end up serving as a performance appraisal scheme that promotes delivery of quality teaching and learning services.

Teacher time-on-task and learning outcomes monitoring mechanisms need to be deployed in all the community schools. DEOC structures should be empowered to continuously conduct evaluation of the monitoring mechanisms put in place in the schools. By the use of the community structures (SMCs and PTAs) and the district education office to carry out such functions, the system of accountability can be strengthened. Furthermore, District Assemblies and District Education Offices may need to put in place measures that can help curb the incidence of apathy in and among members appointed to serve on the school governance committee.

It is recommended that all the on-going activities and incomplete activities should be completed by all schools with the support of school community members who have been so chosen for that function. Such a document should be made available to all major stakeholders in school-based management. Schools need to put in place a unified standard code for stakeholders in the school and its communities. The code can serve as guidance on all the details of how to follow in conducting regular meetings. Schools and school governing bodies should be resourced with the appropriate guidelines detailing practices that show transparency, openness and accountability in their school management operations.

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