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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Community and Local Government Authorities Partnership in the Provision of Primary Education in Urban Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

This systematic literature review examined the partnership between the urban community and local government authorities in the provision of public primary schools in urban Tanzania. This study is guided by social capital theory and the review analyzed empirical studies published between 2020 and 2026. The provision of primary education in urban Tanzania is facing major challenges due to high enrollment compared to rural areas. This study aims to examine the condition to which urban communities participate effectively in management, accountability, workforce performance and productivity as partners in LGAs in primary education development. The data from this study were sourced from ERIC, SCOPUS, Web of Science, AJOL, Research Gate, and Google Scholar. A total of 24 peer-reviewed studies met the inclusion criteria, including 12 empirical studies conducted in Tanzania. The study found that community participation has positive effects on students' performance, teachers' accountability and transparency. The demographic, social and economic factors play a vital role for effective community participation. Moreover, holistic engagement of community members would perhaps enhance more sustainable solutions by identifying cultural barriers to transformative participation. Evidence from sub-Saharan Africa, including Tanzania, demonstrates that government should conduct community awareness on the importance of participation as well as to sensitize communities on the value of primary education and the importance of their participation in community development programs to support education. However, the effectiveness of community participation and LGAs partnership constrained by low awareness, gender imbalance, and unequal tight working schedules. The review concludes that community participation is very crucial in provision of quality primary education by removing barriers which limit access, equity and quality of primary education for our future generation.

Keywords: Community participation, local government authorities, primary schools

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the Government of Tanzania has undertaken significant reforms in the education sector with the aim of developing citizens who are critical thinkers, knowledgeable, skilled, and capable of contributing effectively to national development. These reforms are guided by the Education and Training Policy (2023), which emphasizes the development of

competencies necessary for social and economic transformation. Within this policy direction, primary education is regarded as a foundational level responsible for equipping learners with essential knowledge, skills, and attitudes that support lifelong learning and national productivity.

Although a common curriculum is implemented across the country, notable disparities exist in the quality of its

delivery between rural and urban schools. In urban settings, one of the most pressing challenges is the extent to which communities actively participate in the provision and support of primary education. Rapid population growth in urban areas has intensified pressure on existing school infrastructure, resulting in overcrowded classrooms, inadequate sanitation facilities, and insufficient learning resources. These conditions raise concerns about how effectively urban communities engage with Local Government Authorities (LGAs) as partners in addressing challenges related to educational management, accountability, and school performance.

Participation in education refers to the process through which citizens are empowered to engage in decision-making processes that affect their lives, while also enhancing their capacity to contribute to development initiatives (Obot et al., 2025). A community is understood as a group of people living within a defined geographical area who share common interests and work collectively toward shared goals (Mahuwi, 2020). In the education sector, community participation involves parents and local stakeholders supporting learners' education at home and in schools, contributing ideas, and taking part in decisions that influence school development and learning outcomes. This form of engagement is increasingly recognized as a key mechanism for improving accountability and strengthening educational quality.

Community participation has also been widely acknowledged as an essential component of sustainable development. Contemporary development thinking emphasizes that communities should not be viewed as passive recipients of services but as active stakeholders in planning, implementation, and evaluation processes. This perspective aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 4, which promotes inclusive and equitable quality education and encourages participatory decision-making in education systems (Ozaki & Shaw, 2022). In this regard, meaningful participation goes beyond physical involvement and includes active contribution to ideas, shared responsibility, and collaboration in solving educational challenges.

In Tanzania, primary education is delivered under a decentralized governance structure implemented through Local Government Authorities under the Prime Minister's Office. LGAs operate as the level of government closest to the people and are responsible for addressing local development needs, including

education service delivery in both rural and urban contexts (URT, 2018). Decentralization in education involves the transfer of authority, responsibilities, and decision-making power from central government to local levels, including schools and communities, with the aim of improving efficiency, responsiveness, and accountability. Within this framework, school committees and governing bodies serve as key institutional structures through which community participation in education is formalized and operationalized.

Despite various reforms aimed at improving access and quality in primary education, Tanzania continues to experience a sharp increase in enrolment. Since the introduction of the Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP), enrolment has risen from approximately 4.8 million pupils in 2001/02 to over 11 million in 2024 (URT, 2024). This expansion has not been matched with proportional investment in infrastructure and learning resources, resulting in significant pressure on school facilities. The imbalance between enrolment growth and infrastructure development has been particularly severe in urban schools, where population density is high and space is limited.

The Tanzania Development Vision 2050 emphasizes the need to improve the quality of education at all levels by strengthening infrastructure, enhancing learning environments, and ensuring adequate availability of teaching and learning resources (URT, 2025). However, urban schools continue to face serious infrastructural challenges, including overcrowded classrooms and inadequate sanitation facilities. In major cities such as Dar es Salaam, Mwanza, Arusha, Dodoma, Mbeya, and Tanga, pupil-to-classroom and pupil-to-latrine ratios remain far above recommended standards. For instance, in some schools in Dar es Salaam, classroom congestion reaches up to 109 pupils per classroom, while sanitation ratios are significantly below required benchmarks, increasing health risks and contributing to absenteeism and poor academic performance (URT, 2024; PO-RALG, 2025).

Although several policy interventions have been implemented, including the Education and Training Policy (1995), the Primary Education Development Programme phases, and the introduction of fee-free basic education in 2016, persistent inequalities remain between rural and urban areas in terms of infrastructure development and community engagement. Evidence suggests that rural communities tend to be more

actively involved in supporting school development, while urban communities often demonstrate lower levels of participation despite facing greater infrastructural challenges. This situation raises important concerns regarding the effectiveness of urban community participation in supporting school management, accountability systems, workforce performance, and overall educational productivity. Against this background, this study examines the extent to which urban communities participate effectively as partners with Local Government Authorities in the management and development of primary education. It seeks to understand how community participation influences governance processes and educational outcomes in urban primary schools. The findings are expected to provide insights that can inform policymakers and education stakeholders on how to strengthen collaboration between communities and LGAs. Ultimately, the study aims to contribute to improved implementation of the Education and Training Policy (2023) and the Tanzania Development Vision 2050 by promoting more effective and inclusive participation in urban primary education development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This review is anchored in Social Capital Theory, which provides a useful lens for understanding how relationships, networks, and norms within a community influence collective action and development outcomes. Social capital refers to the structure and quality of social relationships that generate value through interaction among individuals and groups. It is conceptualized as a productive resource embedded in social networks that can benefit individuals, organizations, and society at large (Tsounis, 2026). The theory has been developed through the contributions of several scholars, including Hanifan, Bourdieu, Coleman, and Putnam, who collectively emphasized the role of social relations in facilitating cooperation and development (Sarracino & Mikucka, 2017).

Within Social Capital Theory, three main forms of social ties are commonly distinguished: bonding, bridging, and linking social capital. Bonding social capital refers to strong, close relationships within homogeneous groups, such as those among parents or community members who share similar backgrounds and interests. Bridging social capital involves weaker but more diverse connections across different social groups, such as relationships between parents, teachers, and external stakeholders. Linking social capital refers to vertical

relationships that connect individuals and communities with formal institutions and authorities across power hierarchies. These distinctions are important in understanding how different forms of interaction influence collaboration and resource mobilization in education systems (Tsounis, 2026).

In addition to structural relationships, Social Capital Theory also emphasizes cognitive and relational dimensions such as trust, norms, and reciprocity. Trust is a central element that facilitates cooperation by reducing uncertainty, lowering transaction costs, and enhancing collective problem-solving. It strengthens the ability of individuals and groups to work together toward shared goals, particularly in service delivery sectors such as education. Reciprocity, on the other hand, reflects mutual exchange relationships where individuals provide, receive, and return support in both material and non-material forms. These relational elements are critical in sustaining long-term community engagement and cooperation in educational development (Tsounis et al., 2023).

In the context of this study, Social Capital Theory is particularly relevant because it explains community participation as a form of resource that enhances coordination, accountability, and collective monitoring in school management. Strong bridging ties between parents, teachers, and local leaders promote shared norms and trust regarding the value of education. Such relationships improve communication and information flow, enabling communities to identify school needs and participate in decision-making processes. When effectively developed, social capital strengthens collective action and enhances pressure for accountability, thereby improving school performance and responsiveness. In this sense, community participation becomes a functional mechanism through which information, influence, and collective responsibility are shared to support educational development (van Bakel, 2024).

Empirical studies provide substantial evidence supporting the relevance of community participation in improving educational outcomes. In Tanzania, Kinunga (2023) found that effective community participation in school development activities positively influenced students' academic performance, teacher accountability, transparency, and overall school effectiveness. Similarly, Mahuwi (2020) argues that holistic community engagement enhances sustainable solutions in development initiatives by incorporating local knowledge and addressing cultural barriers that

may hinder participation.

However, the level and effectiveness of community participation vary across contexts. Elisha (2023), in a study conducted in Kibaha District Council, found that although both teachers and community members understood the importance of community involvement in schools, actual participation remained limited. This was partly attributed to the introduction of fee-free education policies, which reduced perceived responsibility among community members. The study further revealed that limited participation contributed to resource constraints in schools, negatively affecting teaching and learning processes.

Evidence from other contexts also highlights the multifaceted nature of community participation. Fidelis (2025), in a study conducted in Morogoro, observed that school communities contributed to addressing social challenges such as teenage pregnancy through monitoring, follow-ups, and community sensitization initiatives. Similarly, Tieng'o (2020) found that effective community participation in Rorya District was influenced by awareness levels and government efforts to mobilize stakeholders. The study recommended strengthening community sensitization and resource mobilization to enhance participation in educational development.

Further studies emphasize that community participation is influenced by socio-economic and demographic factors. In Sumbawanga, Mohamedi (2025) found that age, education level, income, and employment status significantly affected participation levels, with younger and more educated individuals being more actively involved. Social factors such as awareness, health status, and social networks also shaped participation, while economic constraints limited the ability of some groups to contribute effectively. Similarly, Mahole et al. (2025), in a study conducted in South Africa, reported that although community members acknowledged their role in development, participation was constrained by limited resources and low material contributions.

At a broader level, Obot et al. (2025) emphasize that community participation is both a right and a practical necessity for addressing social challenges such as education and health. They argue that sustainable development requires collective effort, empowerment, and active engagement of community members in development initiatives. This perspective reinforces the view that education systems benefit significantly when communities are empowered to participate meaningfully in decision-making and implementation

processes.

Overall, the empirical evidence indicates that strong partnerships between communities and Local Government Authorities contribute positively to school performance, accountability, and transparency. However, the effectiveness of such participation is often constrained by limited resources, low awareness, and socio-economic inequalities. These constraints reduce the potential impact of community engagement on educational outcomes. Consequently, strengthening social capital through trust-building, improved communication, and institutional support is essential for enhancing meaningful community participation and improving the quality of primary education in Tanzania.

METHODOLOGY

A comprehensive search was conducted in Scopus, ERIC, JSTOR, Web of Science, Research Gate, and Google Scholar for studies published between 2020 to 2026. The search orders included combinations of keywords community participation, local government authorities, urban primary schools. The inclusion criteria of this involve to examine community participation and local government. focusing on Tanzania and sub – Saharan countries provided empirical data and were published in English and focused on primary education. Exclusion criteria included studies lacking empirical data, studies without clear community participation and local government local authorities, studies without clear methodological frameworks, and non-peer- reviewed sources. A total of 24 articles were finally included in the final synthesis, representing varied geographical settings and institutional backgrounds. Quantitative results were integrated using meta-analytic approaches, while qualitative evidence was examined thematically to uncover consistent trends. Ethical rigor was maintained through the accurate reporting of findings and proper acknowledgment of all intellectual contributions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Community Participation, Social Capital, and School Performance

The reviewed studies consistently indicate that effective community participation in primary education is strongly associated with improved students' academic performance, enhanced teacher accountability, and increased transparency in school management. Kinunga (2023) found that schools characterized by active community involvement in development activities

recorded better academic outcomes and stronger institutional accountability compared to those with weak community engagement. Similarly, Onyango (2020) observed that partnerships between Local Government Authorities (LGAs) and communities improve accountability mechanisms by aligning educational services more closely with community needs, thereby increasing efficiency in the utilization of school resources.

From the perspective of Social Capital Theory, these findings can be interpreted as evidence of the functional role of bonding, bridging, and linking social ties in enhancing educational outcomes. Strong bonding social capital among parents fosters shared responsibility and collective support for school development, while bridging ties between teachers and parents enhance communication and mutual understanding. Linking social capital, particularly between communities and LGAs, strengthens accountability and institutional responsiveness. The observed improvements in school performance therefore reflect the presence of trust, reciprocity, and shared norms, which facilitate collective action and reduce transaction costs in school governance, as emphasized by Tsounis (2026) and van Bakel (2024). However, the effectiveness of community participation is influenced by contextual factors, particularly the diversity and complexity of urban settings. Tieng'o (2020) argues that urban communities require targeted sensitization and capacity-building initiatives to strengthen their participation in educational development. The heterogeneity of urban populations—characterized by differences in culture, language, and socio-economic status—weakens bonding social capital and makes coordinated collective action more difficult. This suggests that while social capital is a critical resource, its effectiveness depends on the extent to which it is intentionally cultivated and sustained through institutional mechanisms such as school committees.

School Committees, Accountability and Governance Structures

Findings from the reviewed literature reveal that school committees serve as the primary institutional mechanism through which community participation is operationalized in both rural and urban primary schools. These committees facilitate shared decision-making by linking parents, community members, and school administrators. Their presence enhances democratic governance in schools by distributing authority and

improving oversight of school activities. According to Onyango (2020), such participatory structures strengthen accountability and improve the alignment between service delivery and citizen expectations, ultimately enhancing efficiency in school management. This governance role of school committees aligns with the concept of linking social capital, which emphasizes vertical relationships between communities and formal institutions. When effectively functioning, school committees enhance trust in school leadership and increase transparency in resource utilization. However, the review indicates that there are no standardized mechanisms that specifically address the unique complexities of urban community participation. This gap results in uneven participation levels and limits the effectiveness of governance structures in addressing urban educational challenges.

Moreover, Elisha (2023) highlights that despite the presence of governance structures, participation is often constrained by policy shifts such as fee-free education, which may inadvertently reduce community responsibility and engagement. This finding suggests that institutional reforms must be carefully aligned with community empowerment strategies to avoid weakening social capital structures that support school accountability and resource mobilization.

Financial Constraints and Resource Mobilization

The reviewed studies also reveal that financial constraints significantly affect the quality of teaching and learning in primary schools, particularly in contexts where community participation is weak. Elisha (2023) found that many schools operate with limited resources, which negatively affects instructional quality and learner outcomes. This situation is partly attributed to low levels of community contribution and limited engagement in school development initiatives.

From a Social Capital Theory perspective, weak participation reduces collective resource mobilization capacity, thereby increasing reliance on already constrained government funding. Although LGAs have authority to collect local revenues, the review indicates that only about 40% of required development funds are typically available, making it difficult to meet the growing demands of the education sector. This fiscal gap underscores the importance of strengthening bridging and linking social capital to enhance cooperation between communities and local authorities in resource mobilization and allocation.

In addition, the findings suggest that effective community participation can reduce the burden on

LGAs by complementing government efforts through contributions of labour, materials, and local knowledge. This reinforces the argument that strong social capital networks not only improve accountability but also enhance resource efficiency and sustainability in education service delivery.

Workforce Performance, Socio-Economic Factors, and Participation Dynamics

The reviewed literature further demonstrates that workforce performance and community participation in education are shaped by a combination of demographic, social, and economic factors. Mohamedi (2023) found that low awareness, gender imbalance, and demanding work schedules limit the ability of certain groups to participate effectively in school-related activities. These findings suggest that participation is not uniform but is influenced by structural inequalities within communities.

These variations can be explained using Social Capital Theory, particularly the unequal distribution of bonding and bridging capital across different social groups. Individuals with stronger social networks, higher education levels, and better economic conditions are more likely to engage in school governance and development activities. Conversely, marginalized groups with weaker networks and limited resources tend to have lower participation levels, which reduces the overall effectiveness of collective action in education.

Comparative evidence from sub-Saharan Africa further supports these findings. Ngwama (2024) reports that community participation in Uganda enhances school infrastructure development through local ownership and cost-sharing, but also notes that inconsistent participation and limited technical skills can hinder project sustainability. Similarly, Mandela et al. (2022) identify socio-economic hardship, weak school-community relationships, and low valuation of education as key barriers to effective participation. These findings reinforce the argument that social capital must be supported by favorable socio-economic conditions to yield meaningful educational outcomes.

Overall, the reviewed evidence demonstrates that community participation, when supported by strong social capital networks, significantly improves school performance, accountability, and resource efficiency in primary education. However, its effectiveness is moderated by contextual factors such as socio-economic inequalities, policy environments, and institutional capacity. Weak social capital structures—

particularly in urban settings—limit the ability of communities to engage effectively in school governance and resource mobilization. Therefore, strengthening trust, improving communication channels, and enhancing institutional support are essential for maximizing the benefits of community participation in primary education development.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The review findings demonstrate that community participation, when effectively structured and implemented in collaboration with Local Government Authorities (LGAs), plays a significant role in improving the management, accountability, workforce performance, and overall productivity of primary education in urban settings. Across the reviewed studies, evidence consistently shows that schools with active community engagement tend to perform better in terms of students' academic achievement, transparency in resource utilization, and teacher accountability (Kinunga, 2023; Onyango, 2020). This improvement is largely attributed to strengthened school governance structures, particularly school committees, which serve as critical links between parents, communities, and school administrations. Through these structures, decision-making becomes more participatory, thereby enhancing democratic governance and improving the alignment between school services and community needs. However, the effectiveness of participation varies due to the complexity of urban communities, which are often characterized by diverse cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds that may limit cohesion and collective action.

The review further indicates that despite the recognized benefits of community participation, several structural and contextual challenges continue to hinder its effectiveness in urban primary education. Limited financial resources, low awareness levels, socio-economic constraints, and unequal participation patterns reduce the capacity of communities to contribute meaningfully to school development processes. In addition, LGAs face fiscal limitations, as available development funds are often insufficient to meet the growing demands of the education sector alongside other competing public service needs. These challenges highlight the necessity of strengthening community capacity through targeted sensitization, skills development, and policy support that promotes inclusive participation. Therefore, enhancing

community engagement requires deliberate government interventions aimed at building awareness on the value of education, strengthening school-community partnerships, and ensuring equitable participation across diverse population groups, including urban residents, migrant communities, pastoralists, and populations in hard-to-reach areas. Such measures would improve the sustainability of education development efforts and strengthen the overall effectiveness of decentralized education governance in Tanzania.

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