



Policy promise and the reality of community involvement in school-based management in Zambia: Can the rural poor hold schools and teachers to account?



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ABSTRACT

Community participation in school management—and in hiring and firing of teachers in particular—has been actively advocated as an effective reform to improve school and teacher accountability in the Global South. This paper examines whether such reform functions in practice as suggested in theory, drawing on the findings of a case study of community schools in rural Zambia. Using the concept of the 'context of practice', efforts have been made to understand the local meanings of community participation in school management rather than that of the central government or development partners. Such analysis illuminates the important roles that local economic and cultural capital, complex cultural norms and unexpected micro politics play in shaping the way parents and communities are actually willing and able to participate in school management, and how these issues influence school and teacher accountability. The findings also underscore the difficulty that teachers face when attempting to respond to the local demands, especially in the context of grossly inadequate resources being allocated to them by the state. The paper concludes by arguing, first, that community management of schools in Zambia was an unfunded and unclear policy that shifted financial responsibility to already marginalized rural communities and, second, that direct hiring relationships between parents and teachers will dilute the importance of the political accountability of the state to ensure quality education for all.

1. Introduction

Decentralising major decision-making authority to the school level while allowing community and parental participation in key decision-making areas has been a mantra in international education development discourse and practices for some time. Such reform is often described as school-based management (SBM). Among other outcomes, it is generally expected that, when the voices of parents and local community members are included in school management, the schools' responsiveness to the local priorities will improve, in addition to strengthening the accountability of the teacher, which in turn will lead to better student learning (Ranson and Martin et al., 1999; Gershberg and Winkler, 2004; World Bank, 2003; Barrera-Osorio et al., 2009; Bruns et al., 2011).

A growing number of experimental studies have been conducted to analyse the causal relationship between such reform and student outcomes, or other intermediate effects such as teacher and pupil attendance (e.g., Jimenez and Sawada 1998; Kremer et al., 2003; Khan, 2003; King and Özler 2005; Di Gropello and Marshall, 2005; Parker

2005; Duflo et al., 2011; Di Gropello and Marshall, 2011). The high expectation for participatory school management notwithstanding, the results so far have been mixed (Carr-Hill et al., 2015). Thus, there is limited evidence from low income countries of this general relationship. Absence of strong evidence aside, decentralisation and community participation in education continue to attract national and international policy-makers' attention.

Several World Bank publications have suggested that the reason why some SBM practices do not produce expected results is because they tended to devolve insufficient power to the parents over teachers (Patrinos and Kagia, 2007; Bruns et al., 2011; Barrera-Osorio et al., 2009). They contend that giving parents the power to directly hire teachers, monitor their work and attendance, implement payment by results, and discipline or dismiss them if their morale and teaching are unsatisfactory, will incentivise teachers to make a greater effort than their government counterparts (*ibid.*). However, other systemic reviews of SBM in developing countries indicate that even where the power to hire and fire teachers is transferred to school committees, the results are still mixed across different contexts (Carr-Hill et al., 2015; Westhorp

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et al., 2014).

Arcia et al. (2011) argue that the details of the reform matter and emphasise the need for clearer rules for holding teachers to account. Elsewhere it has been suggested that rules and guidelines (which are often lacking) need to respond to culture and contextual factors (Pryor, 2005). However, studies that examine community participation in school management in relation to local social, cultural, economic, and political contexts tend to be overlooked in the broader, systematic reviews of the effects of SBM—a result of the fact that these studies tend to be qualitative in nature. As such, important insights related to the beliefs, identities, behaviours and inter-relationships of local actors tend to be side-lined in the global debate around the desirability of SBM.

This present study attempts to complement and extend these qualitative studies by discussing research on community-managed schools in rural Zambia. Specifically, the purpose of this research is to shed light on the ways in which community involvement in school management has (and has not) functioned in practice, for what reasons, and with what consequences and implications. Zambia presents a very interesting and relevant case as the government has encouraged parents and local community to establish and manage their own schools since 1990s, by hiring locally contracted teachers called “volunteer teachers.” While such teachers are expected to be directly accountable to the parents and local community they serve, little is yet known about whether such expectation is met in reality.

Rather than viewing community participation in schools through an exclusively institutional or administrative lens—wherein analysis is restricted to rules and regulations—the present paper conceives of community participation in school management as a process and adopts a sociological approach, meaning that it takes into account the particularities of the context and the point of view of the key actors involved. By doing so, the contribution of this paper is that it challenges some of the mechanistic and taken-for-granted assumptions on which attempts to promote local management of schools and teachers in low income countries are premised (discussed further later in the paper). Put differently, the contribution of this paper is that it demonstrates the unintended consequences that can arise and the unexpected obstacles that can emerge when implementing SBM—with both of these issues causing practice to diverge from expectations once policy confronts the realities of communities’ socio-economic endowment, inequalities of power, and endowments both within and between communities and government institutions, as well as complex social norms and mutual relationships embedded in poor rural societies. Examples of the obstacles discussed in this paper include: (a) the lack of confidence of community members (and especially women) when speaking with teachers about attendance, teaching and student learning; (b) the social cost felt by parents when attempting to hold teachers accountable (particularly since the teachers came from the same community and since their livelihoods depend, to some extent, on employment in the school); (c) the way the SBM reflected elite capture (in that meetings were often dominated by more powerful and privileged community members); (d) the inability of school committees to discipline or dismiss teachers (since alternative teachers could not be found); and (e) the inability of teachers and school leaders to respond to parental demands, even if they wanted to (due to the minimal and unpredictable salaries and resources provided by the government and community).

A further contribution of this paper is that it uniquely and importantly examines the complex relationship that community schools have with the government through the district education authority and near-by government schools called “mother schools.” In that these mother schools are thought to be a key vehicle for resource delivery and resource sharing with community-managed schools, it is important to analyse this relationship. Investigating this issue is essential because the practical distribution of resources needed from the government to schools to deliver quality education is rarely considered in the

discussion of education decentralisation and local control of schools.¹ However, as the present study demonstrates, this aspect is of critical importance if schools and teachers are to be held accountable for the people they serve, for one cannot expect better outcomes without sufficient resources. This point has particular relevance to community-managed schools in low-income countries, as they are often integrated into government strategies for expanding education access while often receiving some kind of governmental assistance (Westhorp et al., 2014).

The present paper is organised as follows. The next section offers the historical context within which community managed schools have been promoted in Zambia, and analyses the roles attached to the school committees, as defined in policy documents. Section 3 reviews the empirical and theoretical literature on decentralisation, community participation, and accountability in education in low-income countries and provides analytical framework for the study. Section 4 describes the methods of data collection and analysis. Section 5 then presents findings, while the final sections engage in discussion and offer conclusions.

2. Community schools in Zambia²

In Zambia, formal education system consists of 7 years of primary education, 5 years of secondary education and 4 years of higher education. As secondary schools are frequently not available in rural area, the efforts have been made to upgrade primary schools in such areas to be upgraded as “basic schools” that offer schooling up to Grade 9. Ministry of General Education (MOGE) operates through the nine Provincial Education Offices (PEOs) and 72 District Education Boards (DEBs), which are responsible for basic education in a particular district.

Since early 1990s, the Government of Zambia has pursued the decentralisation of education with strong emphasis on community participation in local education governance, in line with the international promotion of decentralisation and community participation in education. The national education policy *Educating our Future* (EOF) promoted not only decentralisation and community participation in government schools, but also emphasized the right of local communities along with the private sector and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to establish and control their own schools (MOE, 1996: 3, 136). Consequently, at the basic education level, the establishment of community schools that are “provided, run and financed by communities to meet their own needs” (ibid) has been actively promoted in parallel with private and NGO-owned schools.

The *Educating our Future* policy document states:

One of the challenges facing educational provision today, particularly in impoverished rural areas, is to re-awaken an awareness that the first responsibility for the education of children rests with families and with the wider communities in which families live (MOE, 1996: 20).

Thus, parents and the wider local community are explicitly regarded as having primary responsibility for the education of their own children rather than the state.

The number of community schools offering basic education has grown considerably over the last two decades or so, escalating from just 55 in 1992 to 2664 in 2014 (MOE, 2007; MESVTEE, 2014), a figure which accounts for more than 30 per cent of the total number of primary schools nationwide (MESVTEE, 2014). The real driving force for the massive growth in community schools reportedly arose from the

¹ For two exceptions see, Cuéllar-Marchelli (2003) and Edwards, Victoria, and Martin (2015).

² In accordance with local practice in the Zambia, we use the term “community schools” to describe those schools in the Zambia that are managed with participation from the community through a school management committee. The meaning of “community schools” in the context of the Zambia is thus distinct from other meanings (Heers, Van Klaveren, Groot, & Van den Brink, 2016).

response of ordinary Zambians to the unmet demand for basic education, since many children were failing to gain access to government school due to prohibitive distances and costs such as parent-teacher association fund (DeStefano, 2006; MOE, 2007; MOGE, 2016). This suggests that the families of pupils in community schools are generally poorer than those of government school pupils, and that their educational attainment levels are also lower (Kanyika et al., 2005 cited in DeStefano, 2006).

Despite the government's promotion of establishment of community schools and the massive growth of the number of community schools, there was no clear guidelines or procedures on establishment, registration, and government's financial and pedagogical support to such schools until 2007. It was 2007, following the dissolution of the Zambia Community Schools Secretariat (ZCSS)—an umbrella organization that coordinated community school governance at the national level—that the government developed the first guideline on how community schools were to operate and spelled out the procedures and requirements that community schools should comply with in order to access state support (MOE, 2007; MOGE, 2016).³ Community schools are also legally provided for and recognized in the *Education Act (2011)* as one of the four existing schooling categories, others being government, private and grant aided schools (church-run schools).

The guidelines on community schools stipulate that the prime responsibility for the operation and management of the community school rests with the community itself, mainly through the work of the parent community school committee (PCSC) (MOE, 2007; MOGE, 2016). Members of PCSCs comprise elected parents and community members, the teachers serving the community school, and a representative of any NGO or community-based organization supporting the school (MOE, 2007). While the *Education Act (2011, Article 73.(2))* states that school committees should have between 6 and 13 members, neither this act nor the guidelines for community schools provide any further details of the composition of the PCSC. Moreover, the length of tenure of each PCSC member is also unclear.

In order to establish community schools and to make them registered with the government, parents and community through the PCSCs are required to: provide land and other resources for the school facilities; recruit volunteer teachers from locality preferably holding a secondary school leaving certificate; remunerate, monitor, discipline and dismiss them as necessary; provide children teaching and learning resources (syllabus, textbooks, chalkboards, chalks, exercise books, story books, etc); mobilise resources for running the school and administer the school resources in a transparent manner (MOE, 2001, 2007; ZCSS, 2005; MOGE, 2016). However, these documents do not specify whom within the PCSC has decision-making authority over such aspects of the school nor how decisions should be made.

In contrast with community schools, their government counterparts were provided with qualified government teachers with either primary school certificate or university degree who are on government payroll, school land and infrastructure, teaching and learning resources, and operational costs of the schools. The government abolished school fees for primary grades (grades 1–7) in 2002 and the government schools can no longer officially charge fees for those pupils in grade 1–7.

Thus, the low socio-economic background of the community school catchment notwithstanding, parents and other stakeholders in these institutions are often required to play a much bigger role than is expected of their counterparts in government schools.

Following the introduction of free primary education in 2002, the government started allocating each government school with school grants and stationaries such as pens and exercise books based on the criteria such as enrolment and distance from the DEB Secretary's

(DEBS's) office in each school. Several years later, the government also started allocating school grant and stationaries to each of the registered community schools, where DEBS's office are required to disburse 30% of grants they received from the central government to community schools and 70% to government schools. However, this policy disadvantages the community schools in that it does not consider the number of community schools in relation to government schools in a district as well as the number of students enrolled in both community and government schools (MOGE, 2016). Initially, 25 per cent of school grant allocated to each registered community school was earmarked for the salaries for volunteer teachers hired by PCSC—an allocation that was subsequently withdrawn. As such, at the time of this study, there was no government subsidy to the salaries of volunteer teachers, and local communities had to bear all such costs.

Consequently, there has been a shortage of teachers in community schools. In order to address this problem, the guideline for community schools states that the government will endeavour to deploy and/or second qualified teachers on government payroll to registered community schools wherever possible through respective DEBS (MOE, 2007). However, there has been no clear guidance on the number of government teachers to be deployed to each community school, the role that such teachers should play in each community schools vis-à-vis volunteer teachers employed by the PCSCs.

Furthermore, the government is now required to include community school volunteer teachers in any professional development activities available (MOGE, 2016). Nevertheless, the government has maintained that the prime responsibility for the operation of the community school rests with the community itself, whose responsibility it is to recruit and support volunteer teachers either in-kind or financially (MOGE, 2016).

3. Empirical and theoretical debates about decentralisation in education, community participation and accountability in low income countries

Education decentralisation models differ widely (Lauglo, 1995; Bray, 2003b). It is vital to ascertain which aspects of education (e.g. resource mobilisation and control; teacher hiring and firing; teacher training; teacher monitoring; curriculum and language of instruction; textbooks; and method of instruction) are to be transferred to which levels and to what degree, and what other aspects of education decision-making authority are retained by central government, and the justification that is offered in each case (McLean and Lauglo, 1985; McGinn and Welsh, 1999; Dyer and Rose, 2005).

Shifting major decision making power to the school level—an approach often called School Based Management (SBM) (Caldwell, 2005; Barrera-Osorio et al., 2009; Fisih et al., 2009 and Patrinos, 2009; Arcia et al., 2011)—has been widely promoted as one form of education governance since the early 1990s (Bandur, 2012; Edwards, 2012; Edwards & DeMatthews, 2014; Ganimian, 2016). Although community participation is often talked about as an automatic product of SBM, the locus of control could merely be shifted from the centre to the school principal and/or teachers (McGinn and Welsh, 1999; Westhorp et al., 2014). Since the mid-1970s, however, the autonomy of teacher professionalism has been questioned by neo-liberals and public choice theorists, which calls for teachers to be subjected to greater scrutiny—both through market-based competition and increased surveillance by the state (Whitty, 2006). One outgrowth of this trend is increased advocacy for democratic participation of non-professionals in school decision-making (e.g. Ranson, 1986; Martin, 1996; Di Gropello, 2006). Such advocacy also partly derives from the view that the centralised, top-down, standardised education system is incapable of offering education that is responsive to the diverse needs of the community (Bray, 1999; Rose, 2003). In this model, the locus of control rests with laypeople rather than school or education professionals (McGinn and Welsh, 1999; Lo, 2010). Employing a theory from organisational analysis, Hirschman (1970) calls this type of behaviour the “voice” by

³ In 2006, the Zambia Community Schools Secretariat ceased to function as the major donor (Netherlands) decided to pull out its financial aid to the institution following alleged mismanagement of the resources that were allocated.

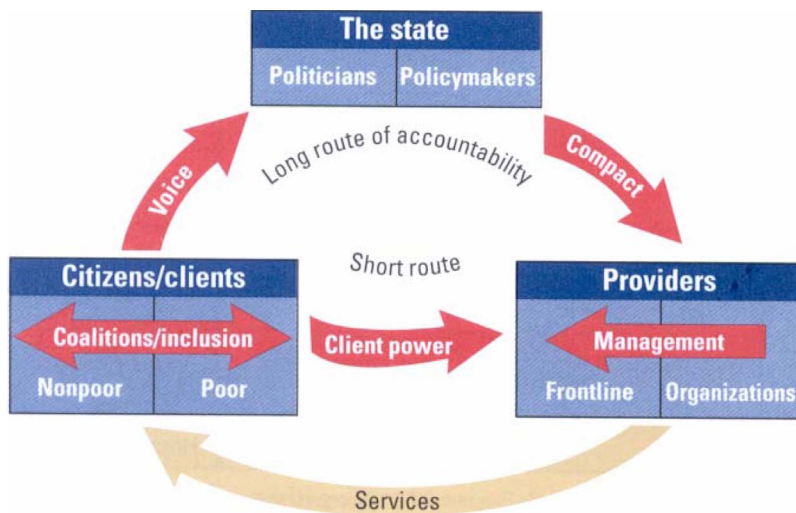


Fig. 1. Short route and long route accountability.

Source: World Bank, 2003World Bank, 2003, p49.

which parents can politically express their dissatisfaction with the school. Thus, the question concerning which stakeholder(s) the locus of control in education should be decentralised to should be understood as fundamentally about the different ideologies about the role of the state and its citizens (MacLean and Lauglo, 1985; McGinn and Welsh, 1999; Suzuki, 2002; Daun and Mundy, 2011).

The emphasis on community participation in school decision making was also supported by the neo-liberal camp in the 1990s, which, in its recognition of market failure, made some limited re-assessment of the role of the state as a mediator of market mechanisms (Rose, 2003; Chikoko, 2009; Edwards, 2015; Edwards & Klees, 2015). It has been claimed that direct parental participation in schools improves efficiency and effectiveness, as it holds the service providers accountable for the results (World Bank, 2003; Di Gropello, 2006; Patrinos and Kagia, 2007; Barrera-Osorio et al., 2009; Bruns et al., 2011). As Mundy (2008) suggests, the World Bank's World Development Report (WDR) 2004, entitled *Making Services work for the Poor People* (World Bank, 2003), presents the clearest articulation of this paradigm on the education decentralisation reform, by introducing the notion of "short route" accountability. "Short-route" accountability which is found in the bottom right of the corner at Fig. 1, emphasises the "client" power and proposes the direct accountability relationship between citizens (consumers/clients) and their service providers in market-based relations (Mundy, 2008; Daun and Mundy, 2011). In contrast, what they call "long-route" accountability, which is traditional accountability relationship between citizen and the state often through the operation of formal democratic politics such as elections are viewed as typically impotent to provide quality services for the poor, due to clientelistic and bureaucratic nature of the central state in developing countries. "Short-route" accountability which essentially removes the state from the accountability relationship is then proposed as the promising policy options. More specifically, it argues that parents should collectively monitor and reward or punish service providers (teachers, in the case of education) according to their performance. In other words, the WDR sees community participation as a key to hold "sellers" or "providers" (schools and teachers) to account for results.

The WDR 2004 cites EDUCO (*Educación con Participación de la Comunidad*) in El Salvador as the *best practice* of such "short route" accountability (World Bank, 2003).⁴ Based on the evidence provided by the study conducted by Jimenez and Sawada (1999), it claims that giving community the power to hire teachers, pay them according to their efforts and regularly monitor them in EDUCO schools enhanced

regular attendance of teachers, which in turn improved student performance in reading and reduced teacher and pupil absenteeism.⁵ It alluded that such "success" was made possible due to the threat of future employment being withheld (since teachers were contracted on a yearly basis). Furthermore, Desmond (2009) reports that job insecurity often acted as a perverse incentive, driving teachers to leave the schools when the opportunity arose.

As opposed to the unproblematic use of the concepts of "community" and "participation" by the proponents of SBM, these concepts are highly contentious (Bray, 2003a). For example, several qualitative studies report the widespread occurrence of local elite capture, which is likely to transform a participatory space like a school council into one that merely exists to maximise the narrow interests of certain parents and community members who know how to manipulate the democratic process (e.g. Rose, 2003; Carney et al., 2007; Dunne et al., 2007; Edwards, 2009).

Moreover, research from SSA often reports the social differences and power imbalances between teachers and laypeople, with the consequent malfunctioning of the newly created participatory spaces (for example, Suzuki, 2002; Pryor, 2005; Rose, 2005; Chikoko 2008; Essuman and Akyeampong, 2011). It has also often been reported that culture (e.g., gender roles), the history of collective action, and the capacity of innovative leaders in community mobilisation are also identified as factors that influence the nature and degree of participation (Bray, 1999; Chapman et al., 2002; Cuéllar-Marchelli, 2003; Yamada, 2014). Several studies suggest further that community values in terms of formal schooling needs and the capacity to effectively participate in different aspects of educational processes vary greatly, according to their socio-economic and cultural endowment, as well as their level of formal schooling (Maclure, 1994; Tshireletso, 1997; Watt, 2001; Chapman et al., 2002; Pryor, 2005; Chikoko, 2008; Yamada, 2014).

Also, Michener (1998), based on his research in Burkina Faso, suggests the need to pay particular attention to the ability of the local community to pay teachers' salaries, which often results in unsustainable and unremunerated voluntary teaching in the poverty stricken area. Furthermore, Chikoko (2009), drawing on his study from Malawi, reports a serious lack of the parental capacity to recruit teachers in a competent and transparent manner. Thus, this task appears to require significant economic and cultural capital on the part of local communities. This point warrants further attention in relation to community

⁵ Note, however, that subsequent analysis has cast doubt on Jimenez and Sawada's (1999) findings related to the effectiveness of EDUCO (Edwards, 2016; Edwards & Loucel, 2016).

⁴ For more on the history of this famous SBM reform, see Edwards (2015, forthcoming).

schools in the Global South, which often merely reflect *de facto* delegation of control over education to the community, a result of the failure of the state to provide education opportunities to all (Davies et al., 2003; Rose, 2006). In such cases, a community may lack the resources—time, money, effort, knowledge, and social power—required to run its school and manage its teachers effectively. However the proponents of community hiring and firing of teachers either take community ability for granted or otherwise suggest that a few capacity-building training sessions would be sufficient to equip people with the required capacity (Arcia et al., 2011).

For their part, governments may be interested in SBM precisely because it often implies or is accompanied by a shifting of part of the financial burden of schooling to communities, with the main decision-making authority still resting with the centre (Bray, 2003a; Rose, 2005; Akeyampong and Dunne, 2007). To that end, if decentralisation is a state response to resource constraints rather than a genuine desire to delegate greater authority to the beneficiaries, the question arises as to whether local level “service providers” in education (teachers) have adequate resources—either provided by the government or by the community. The issue of resource provision is of greatest concern when poor parents are expected to bear a significant portion of the costs, since this will have equity implications. Daun and Mundy (2011, p. 37) comments:

(...) for decentralized education systems, the role of the central and regional governments is critical in ensuring equity and protection of minority interests. Decentralization might require careful planning and extensive training and more staff, resources, and equipment, rather than less.

However, advocates of “short-route” accountability rarely mention the importance of the supply side of decentralisation reform, while, at the same time, the ability of the poor community to manage their own schools is generally taken for granted (World Bank, 2003; Barrera-Osorio et al., 2009; Bruns et al., 2011). In other words, the concept of “short-route” accountability appears to pay insufficient attention to the ‘context’ in which such accountability reforms takes place, which has been pointed out as the important determinants of the reform outcomes (Davies et al., 2003; Carney et al., 2007; De Grauwe et al., 2007; Chikoko, 2008, 2009; Gershberg et al., 2009; Edwards, 2009; Essuman and Akeyampong, 2011).

Theoretically, in response to the issues highlighted above, this study draws on the ‘policy cycle’ as put forward by Bowe et al. (1992) and subsequently further developed by Ball (1993, 1994) as a theoretical framework against which the issues emerging in the study will be considered and analysed. Bowe et al. (1992) suggest that policy changes continuously when it interacts with new contexts at all levels, i.e., the context of influence (in which interest groups struggle over the construction of policy discourse), the context of text production (in which texts represent policy, although they may contain inconsistencies and contradictions), and the context(s) of practice (in which policy is subject to interpretation and recreation). Since the present study is primarily concerned with policy as practice, the concept of the context of practice seems particularly useful since Bowe et al. (ibid) and Ball (op. cit.) maintain that education policies are not simply implemented—they are enacted, interpreted and recreated by different actors in education practice in a specific context. Following Bowe et al.’s (1992) and Ball’s (1993, 1994); advice, this study distances itself from the view that policy is simply implemented as prescribed. Rather, it adopts an essentially sociological approach—i.e. it takes into account the point of view of the people being studied—in its enquiry into the meaning of community participation and its implications for accountability.

4. Methods

4.1. Research strategy, the context of the study area and data collection methods

Yin (1994) defines ‘case study’ in terms of research process as “... an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 1994: 13). Similarly, Stake (1995) defines ‘case study’ in terms of both research scope and process, explaining that in such a study, the researcher explores in depth a programme, an activity, a process, or one or more individuals using a variety of data gathering procedures over a sustained period (ibid). As the present study aims to conduct an *in-depth* exploration of the processes of parental and community participation in school in rural Zambia in its *unique political, socio-economic, historical, cultural and geographical contexts*, all of which the researchers believe are powerful determinants of phenomena, we decided to employ ‘case study’ as a research strategy. In other words, we decide to use a case study methodology so as to unfold how policy intervention in community participation affects the real-life behaviour of different stakeholders in a specific situation.

Research was conducted from January to June 2008 in Masaiti District in the Copperbelt Province, Zambia. Masaiti is a rural district in which the primary means of livelihood is subsistence farming, supplemented by seasonal small-scale cash crop production and the burning of charcoal for sale as fuel. The main ethnic group is the Lamba, who have traditionally been stigmatized as backward and timid, and who missed out on the economic prosperity of the Copperbelt (Siegel, 1989). The historical situation of the Lamba may be reflected in their enduring low literacy level (ibid). While there are 10 districts in Copperbelt Province, Masaiti was chosen out of a desire to understand SBM dynamics in rural district.⁶ Additionally, this district had one of the oldest DEB in the country, being established in 1996 during the decentralisation pilot project, with the implication that this district was a good choice for understanding decentralisation dynamics between the DEB and the schools.

There are three types of school offering basic education in Masaiti—government, community and private. At the time of the fieldwork, there were 40 government basic schools, 32 community schools, and 1 private basic school. Of the community schools, 10 offered grades 1 to 4 while the others offered grades 1 to 7. Three of the community schools were included in this study, with the selection of these schools being based on (a) location from the DEB office (with variation being sought to see if schools closer to the DEB had better communication with DEB, more timely allocation of resources, etc.), (b) grades offered (with variation being sought in terms of highest grade level provided to see if schools with fewer grade levels, e.g., grades 1–4 rather than grades 1–9, would exhibit parental participation of a different nature), (c) socio-economic status of the community (with variation being sought in order to see whether or not this status was associated with different SBM dynamics), and (d) availability of external support (to see whether the availability of this support impacted the degree or nature of community participation). Table 1 summarizes these aspects of the schools included in the sample.

The DEB had pronounced that all community schools in the district should be twinned with a nearby government school known as a ‘mother school’, and that at least one qualified teacher on the government payroll at such an institution should be seconded to its community school associate in order to provide as much moral, pedagogical and material support as possible. However, as discussed further in the findings section, the study found that the actual nature of such

⁶ Among the ten districts in the Copperbelt, three are rural (Masaiti, Mpongwe and Lufwanyama), while the remaining seven are urban copper-producing towns.

Table 1
Basic profiles of case study schools.
Source: Authors.

School	Location	Establishment	Grades offered	Socio-economic status of community	External support
A	Rural but adjacent to the tarred road	1994 by western missionary	1–7	Mainly peasant farmers; some engaged in charcoal and vegetable sale in town	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Grant for infrastructure development from CARE and USAID - Grant for infrastructure development from African Brothers (Chinese charity) - Training of care-givers by CARE - Four teachers sponsored by USAID to study on a teacher training course via distance learning - Training of PCSC by CARE - Bicycles and T-shirts provided for volunteer teachers by CARE
B	Rural	2000 by a village head/ community church leader	1–7	Mainly peasant farmers; some engaged in charcoal and vegetable sale in town	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Grant for infrastructure development from CARE and USAID - Training of care-givers by CARE - Four teachers sponsored by USAID to study on a teacher training course by distance learning - Training of PCSC by CARE - Bicycles and T-shirts provided for volunteer teachers by CARE
C	Rural/Remote	2000 by a religious leader	1–4	Peasant farmers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Short-term teacher training by USAID

secondment varied greatly, often depending on the ‘good will’ of the head teacher of the mother school, its own staffing level, and the relative location of the community school.

To complement what meagre government support there was, a few NGOs and foreign donors provided some financial, material and capacity building support to a small number of selected community schools in the district. With regard to support to volunteer teachers, CARE International provided bicycles and T-shirts to those in several schools, including two of the case study institutions (schools A and B). The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) offered scholarships to a total of ten volunteer teachers in the district to facilitate enrolment in the Zambia Teacher Education Course (ZATEC) programme – a distance learning module provided at the near-by teacher training college. Four teachers in each case from schools A and B received such scholarships (see Table 1). In contrast, located more than 20 kilometers from a paved road and the remotest of the three case study institutions, the School C community was the most vulnerable; however, ironically and to exacerbate the situation, it received virtually no donor support and had never been visited by a DEB official.

For this study, a series of semi-structured interviews was conducted using prepared guiding questions, in order to explore the respondents’ perceptions of and experiences with parental and local community participation in school and teacher management and the consequences of such practices on school and teacher accountability. In total, 119 interviews were conducted with parents, the wider local community members, PCSC executive members, volunteer teachers, teachers seconded by respective mother schools, head teachers and teachers in respective mother schools, and district education officers and board members from the DEB (Table 2). Sessions were conducted—some individually and others in groups—depending on the issues to be discussed, the availability of interviewees, and time constraints. In

Table 2
Interviewee Groups.
Source: Authors.

Parents/guardians	Non-parent community members	PCSC executive members	Volunteer teachers	Teachers seconded from the mother school	District Education Board Members (including District Education Officers)
35 (28)	14 (10)	29 (19)	15 (5)	2	20

Note: Figures in parenthesis represent the number of interviewees interviewed as a group and the figures not in parenthesis represent the total number of interviewees in each group, including both those interviewed individually and as a group.

addition, individual interviews with key informants (e.g., 2 school founders, 3 PCSC chairmen and 3 volunteer teachers who teach at respective schools for many years—those who knew the history of the evolution of the community schools) who were well acquainted with the history of the school and surrounding communities were performed. Since most discussions with parents were conducted in the local language (Lamba and Bemba), we conducted them with the assistance of an interpreter.

As an additional and supplementary strategy, 4 PCSC meetings were observed (1 general PCSC meeting in each school and 1 PCSC extraordinary meeting in School B concerning an absentee volunteer teachers) over a period of 2 months, in order to grasp relationships between different actors and to shed light on the decision-making process, particularly those related to school resource management and the hiring and firing of volunteer teachers. These observations revealed additional issues on which to follow up during interviews, such as questions about participant responses that needed further investigation. School facilities, their daily routines, including the consistency of teacher presence in the classroom, and surrounding villages’ means of livelihood were also observed over 2 weeks period in each community. Finally, these observations were complemented by the collection of primary documents (e.g., the minutes of official meetings; district and school plans and financial records, and spreadsheets with basic statistical data); this strategy was employed to obtain basic information about each school including the availability and the content of the school plans expected to be made by participatory manner, as well as to gain insight into the decision making processes in PCSC meetings.

4.2. Analysis

LeCompte (2000) maintains that the task of analysis requires

researchers to first determine how to organise their data and use it to reconstruct an intact portrait or structure of the original phenomenon under study; and second, to inform their readers of the meaning of this portrait. Accordingly, qualitative data should piece together a portrait and then an explanation, which LeCompte describes as being analogous to the strategies used to assemble a jigsaw puzzle (LeCompte, 2000: 147). Thus, first, the data collected through interviews, observations and field notes was organised according to level of analysis (school, community, district); type of data (e.g. interview, field note, observation, document); date; and participant (e.g. parent, teacher, PCSC member).

Once collated, these data were coded and analysed. Codes were developed from the key patterns and themes that emerged during repeated readings of transcripts and field notes, as well as the principle concepts that were embedded in the research purpose. These themes include: accountability, hiring/firing, capacity, willingness, voluntary service, perception of the role of the state, poverty, ethnicity, the opportunity cost of participation, power, and constraints faced by teachers. This exercise was initially undertaken whilst still in the field and continued with greater intensity after completing data collection. This process helped to “interpret and theorize in relation to...[the]...data,” as recommended by Bryman (2004: 409). Once the initial themes had been identified, they were organised into groups or categories.

The data from each school case was analysed in relation to the characteristics of its specific context, in order to explore the reality of how parents and local community members participated in education affairs, and how this influenced school accountability towards them. Then, once the analysis of each case was complete, cross-case analysis was conducted in order to “build abstractions across cases” (Merriam, 1988: 195).

The process of analysis entailed several measures to ensure the “trustworthiness” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) of the study. In particular, an effort was made to reinforce the reliability of evidence from different sources (Hammersley, 1992), a variety of data collection methods being employed to triangulate the findings. In addition, validation from research participants was sought, especially in terms of situations in which the researchers did not have any personal experience. Confirmation for findings and impressions was also sought by regularly soliciting feedback. Moreover, findings were shared and discussed with key informants—including interpreters and some staff of international non-governmental organizations supporting one of the community schools under study – in order to minimise research and representation bias.

5. Findings

This section presents findings related to community participation and accountability in the community schools in this study. Throughout, attention is given to ways that practice aligns (and doesn't) with policy expectation. Subsection 5.1 examines how PCSC meetings were conducted and whose voices were heard in such meetings. The relationship between communities and teachers is the focus of Subsection 5.2—namely, we examine such aspects as the communities' experiences of recruiting and retaining volunteer teachers as well as the extent to which and how parents and local community members disciplined or dismissed volunteer teachers. The willingness and ability of volunteer teachers to respond to the demands of parents and local community is analysed in Sub-section 5.3.

5.1. Participation as deliberation in public participatory space

5.1.1. The (unequal) nature of participation in school committee meetings

Our observation of the PCSC meetings at all three schools suggests that the meetings did not necessarily confer a free and participatory space in which parents and other members of the local community could identify common needs and freely air their ‘voice’ on matters

concerning their schools. The question of quality or the relevance of teaching and learning was barely mentioned—the findings corroborated by Chikoko (2009). What dominated was discussion of the amount and the mode of payment by parents of PCSC fund, which are used mostly for school infrastructure and remuneration for volunteer teachers. Since the Zambian government has enacted the “fee free policy” at the level of basic education as stated in Section 2, PCSC “fees” do not officially exist and no one in the field referred to them as “fees”; rather, they use the term PCSC “fund”. Several school leaders commented that many parents did not feel able to talk about the content and the process of teaching and learning in public due to a lack of confidence deriving from their own limited education.

Interviews and PCSC meeting observations also suggest that the agenda and the proceedings of the meetings were mostly determined by the more powerful members of the committee, such as the PCSC chairman, the teacher seconded from the mother school, and even district officials. These actors tended to call for PCSC meetings only when they felt the need to discuss and generate larger financial or in-kind contributions from the community. Often, a proposal to increase the amount of PCSC fund or to request community labour was made by the PCSC chairman after first discussing with community members the importance of larger community support. A motion to adopt the proposal to increase community contribution was fairly carried in a general vote in the all PCSC meetings. However, interviews suggest that there was sometimes widespread discontent among parents about the high burden that these contributions represented for them, as illustrated by the following comment by a father in school A:

ZMK 6,000 (USD 1.47) is too much for most of us who live on subsistence farming and charcoal burning; we do not have that kind of money (Father, school A).

This comment suggests that the mere absence of opposition to additional community contributions at the PCSC meeting did not necessarily imply consensus among all those present. Moreover, although women usually out-numbered men at PCSC meetings and were the dominant labour force when it came to school construction, they seldom spoke during the meetings because of a lack of confidence and because of cultural norms that do not encourage women to speak out; thus, decisions about the mode and scope of the contribution were often made solely by male participants, a similar fashion to that reported by Rose (2003) in the case of Malawi.

The members of the PCSC executive were generally more educated, slightly better off, and had greater experience in public spaces and with public deliberation than other community members, often through their past experience in working in urban areas and/or being traditional figures such as village headmen. Therefore, they tended to have slightly less difficulty when it came to engaging in the school committees than poorer sections of the community. Such unequal power relations in the community often meant that the voices of the extreme poor, women, the aged and the otherwise marginalised were frequently muffled in the name of “community consensus” and a seemingly democratic decision-making process. This observation is one that has been made by other researchers, as well (e.g., Kabula, 1985; Bray, 2007, 1999, 2003; Rose, 2002; Suzuki, 2002, 2004; Pryor, 2005; De Grauwe, 2005).

5.1.2. “Truth kills”—perceived high cost of expressing “voice” in hierarchical and interdependent rural community

While the poor are asked to contribute to schools, they have little knowledge about how such contributions together with various hand-outs and grants provided by NGOs and international donors are used. These grants and hand-outs are often controlled by a few powerful members of PCSCs or volunteer teachers—a finding that is in line with earlier studies in school management in the Global South (for example, Rose, 2003; Suzuki, 2004), and which leaves many ordinary parents suspicious of mismanagement. In practice, these suspicions were justified. For example, interviews with parents in school A and B indicate

that the bicycles provided by CARE International, which were intended for care providers to visit orphans and vulnerable children, were mostly given to the relatives of school leaders who do not hold such positions.

At the schools that received donor funding for school construction (schools A and B), training in financial management was provided and procurement committees were established to facilitate collective decision-making. However, some PCSC members revealed that once the donor stopped monitoring the work of these committees, they became essentially non-functional, with fund management again dominated by a limited number of powerful people.

Yet, many community members—but particularly women of low socio-economic and educational backgrounds—felt reluctant to speak out at public meetings due to their sense of inferiority and the perceived cost of exercising “voice”. For example, a mother at school C commented about her fear of risk in acting alone:

We paid ZMK 10,000 (USD 24.5) to the PCSC but nothing has happened since. We want to know what happened to our money, but we are voiceless because we don't know anything. I am not in a position to inquire; you cannot just ask alone when others keep quiet (Mother, School C).

Furthermore, without hard evidence of wrongdoing, some parents were afraid of being accused of defamation of character, which was regarded as culturally inappropriate and serious offence in Zambian society (Ngulube, 1997). One mother at school C commented:

People whisper about it [misappropriation of the PCSC fund] but they never mention it in public. [If talking badly about others, you are seen as a witch]. People believe it [witchcraft] because many bad things do happen, like falling sick at first and then dying (Mother, School C).

Similarly, one PCSC executive at school B, a primary school dropout, expressed her inability to question other members of the committee about school resources for fear of being thought badly of or reprimanded:

We cannot say anything. We fear to be hated. In the village, when hated, you would have no one who would come to help you at a funeral. Also, when you needed food and money, you would have no one to help you. In the village, truth kills (Mother, School B).

Ultimately, as opposed to the claim by the proponents of community management of schools, parents were not “consumers” of education but rather were members of the community and were, as such, embedded in personal relations that entailed reciprocal social obligations. Moreover, in these relations, the maintenance of harmony was of paramount importance. As a result, community members tend to “play it safe” by avoiding unnecessary conflict with other community members, particularly those in positions of power in the locality.

5.1.3. The potential and limitations of “anonymous” election of school leaders

While not able to speak out in public meeting, some parents expressed their desire to change the membership of the PCSC in an effort to sanction those who were suspected of misuse of school resources. In some cases (in school B), parents were successful in removing the school leader who had misused school funds by secret ballot in the absence of the candidate—the much preferred means of electing or re-electing their leaders in the community, owing to the fear of upsetting the local elite on whom many people's lives were dependent, and also on account of a desire to maintain harmony in the community. Thus, anonymous election appears to hold the potential for ordinary parents to exercise their power to sanction their school leaders who do not satisfy them.

In the study area, most people are subsistence farmers, growing maize (a staple food) and a few vegetables, mainly for their own consumption, on land that is allocated to them by traditional leaders such

as chiefs and village headmen under customary law. Thus, their relationships with chiefs and village headmen are of paramount importance for tenure security. With the rise of the price of fertiliser after its marketisation, many small-scale subsistence farmers in the study area became unable to produce enough for their own consumption, which necessitated them to work on the farm owned by the traditional leaders to earn some cash to purchase food, who have harvested a surplus. Thus, the poor subsistence farmers' survival often depends upon their cordial relationship with the traditional figures.

However, in other cases, parents felt unable to demand a public election for fear of being labelled by the executive as rebellious. In addition, given that those who helped initiate the school by donating land or classroom structure tended to gain automatic membership in the PCSC executive group, it was thus considered risky to demand the deselection of such people, even when there was just reason, for fear that land rights would be withdrawn. As one PCSC chairman commented:

There is tradition to respect if one gives something. People are afraid that, if we remove him [from PCSC executive members], he would claim the land back. (PCSC chairman, school B)

Generally PCSC executive members perceived that they owned the school. However, in all schools under the study, PCSCs had not obtained a title or deed from the village headman/women or the chief who donated the land to the school, as they either did not know the need for it or the processes involved in obtaining a title or deed. As a consequence, when the owner of the land claimed the land back from the school, PCSC executives found it difficult to prove to their ownership of the land.

Furthermore, since the PCSC executives were often among the few people in the community who were literate enough to write proposals to donors for funding, or to hold a social position such as village headman who can order his or her subjects to mobilise resources for schools, many parents felt that there was no alternative but to keep them as PCSC members despite any misconduct.

The findings are thus largely incompatible with the general image of communities promoted by proponents of community involvement, with these images implying that the local context is un-hierarchical. Rather, the study revealed that disparity within the community was not uncommon and that community schools are equally susceptible to local elite capture, which often makes a newly opened participatory space one that is used to maximise the narrow interests of the powerful, as earlier studies have indicated (e.g. Sayed, 2002; Rose, 2002, 2003; Bray, 2003a; Suzuki, 2004; Pryor, 2005; De Grauwe et al., 2005; Carney et al., 2007; Edwards, 2009).

When their attempt to change school leaders through anonymous election failed, parents often grew reluctant to contribute to the school and to teachers—a response which not only deteriorates the already low resource level of each school, but also increases peoples' distrust towards participatory space and school all together. This is a point that has not received much attention in the extant literature, but is one with significant implications, since it means that community involvement, in the circumstances found in rural Zambia, is backfiring. More distrust in the community and less support for the school has resulted.

5.2. The relationship between communities and teachers

5.2.1. Limited financial capital to hire and retain volunteer teachers

The evidence from the field suggests that the capacity of the community to recruit volunteer teachers from the locality and to remunerate them—one of the most prominent forms of popular participation envisaged in policy—was severely restricted. On one hand, this was because the educational level of most villagers in all three communities was limited and it was hard to find people in the locality with a secondary school leaving certificate, the minimum level of educational attainment expected of volunteer teachers by the government. As one father noted: Ah, there is nobody who is educated to teach our

children around here (Father, School A). Such low levels of education of the villagers are understandable given that the community schools were established by the parents themselves due to the absence of government basic schools in the locality, thus many parents have never been to school.

Furthermore, field interviews suggested that it was difficult to find anyone who was willing to teach for little or no remuneration. Parents were asked to generate remuneration for teachers through PCSC funds and, if that is not available, to till the land for teachers (school A and B), or to work on the school farm with the aim of giving the produce to the volunteer teacher (school A). In addition, at schools A and C, a PCSC chairman and the village headman, respectively, offered a small hut near the school for volunteer teachers to live. However, such financial and in-kind contribution to teachers are still minimal in addition to being uncertain in their availability, which depended on the seasons, due to the precarious economic situations of many households. Also, PCSC executive members report that, while not a majority, some parents refused to pay into PCSC funds because they could not comprehend the concept of paying teachers for “voluntary” services”. This finding highlights the ambiguous status of the “volunteer” teacher and the nature of his or her duties. Consequently, financial support to its volunteer teachers tended to be meagre even in the best of times and was frequently paid on an intermittent basis depending on the season, all of which resulted in a far-from-adequate allowance to sustain a volunteer teacher and his or her family. A volunteer teacher at school A’s following comment is illustrative:

I was the only teacher for many years because people had no interest [in teaching for little or no money]. The others had left because they didn’t get paid (Volunteer teacher, School A).

The difficulty of remunerating teachers was most severe in school C, which was the remotest and poorest among all three sample schools:

Out of 86 pupils, only about 10 managed to pay. People here have no other means but cutting charcoal for survival during the rainy season. Most of the children here are orphans so it is very difficult to receive a contribution from them. (Volunteer teacher, School C)

In such severe economic conditions, recompense varied from the equivalent of ZMK 100,000 per term (USD 24.5) in school A to almost nothing in school C. This is a large divergence from government teacher salaries, which ranged from USD 510 to 1020 per term, depending on qualifications and years of service (DeStefano, 2006). Even in school A, with the highest level of PCSC funds, the amount of teacher allowance per term was far below the sustainable level of any citizen in the locality. As a consequence, the number of volunteer teachers that the PCSC in each school was able to retain remained minimal unless it received donor support to volunteer teachers, which appeared to have boosted the willingness of the young people both in and outside of the community to work for community schools. The impact of donor support to volunteer teachers on the number of volunteer teachers that PCSCs are able to recruit and retain will be discussed in detail in the Sub-section 5.2.3.

While the government’s policy makes clear that PCSCs are expected to hire volunteer teachers, there was no requirement of a contract that would bind either party to the terms of service or to a set level of remuneration for volunteer teachers. As such, they were free to leave the school at their discretion, even in the middle of the term. Thus, the reality of the lack of economic capital of the parents together with the limited pool of educated individuals in the locality resulted in the serious difficulty of recruiting and retaining volunteer teachers, particularly in the poorest schools. This suggests that the assumption of policymakers that parents and local community would be able to hire a sufficient number of sufficiently educated volunteer teachers by themselves from their locality is highly questionable. Moreover, as the following comment by a mother indicates, parents generally considered hiring and remunerating their own teachers not as their ‘right’ but

rather as a burden and thus wanted to be freed from the responsibility of paying volunteer teachers:

We want this school to be turned into a government school. We want our teachers to be paid by the government (Mother, school B).

Parents perceived community management of teachers simply in terms of government inability to meet their needs rather than the result of their preferred choice.

5.2.2. Sanction against those who fail to pay teachers

Interviews indicate that those who are old (such as grandparents who look after their grandchildren), widows, and those households that have sick family members are the least able to pay teachers or participate in community labour. Unlike the situation in the government schools in the same district, the inability to pay into the PCSC fund did not directly result in the exclusion of children from the community school. However, some pupils whose parents or grandparents were unable to pay teachers often withdraw from school of their own accord in order to avoid public disgrace, or have stayed away from school until they earned enough money themselves to pay their PCSC fund subscriptions. Thus, the burden of paying teachers was felt by—and was even assumed, at times, by—the most vulnerable, that is, the children themselves.

Furthermore, some PCSC executive members and volunteer teachers argued that children should be suspended from school if their parents failed to pay into the PCSC fund:

If we don’t chase the children who haven’t paid, it becomes very tricky. I think the best way is you start chasing the children; otherwise, they won’t change (Volunteer teacher, School B).

Thus, school was faced with the serious dilemma of having to choose between adhering to the ideal of serving rural children with economic difficulty and raising money to pay for volunteer teachers in order to retain them. Furthermore, the introduction of overt sanction against those who fail to pay to teachers may blur boundaries between community schools that aim to serve the poor children through “voluntary” contribution and fee-paying private school, though it is interesting to note that, in Kenya, low-fee private schools with school councils were found to be tolerant of students whose parents could not afford the fees, in part because of the advocacy of the parents on the school council (Edwards, Klees, & Wildish, forthcoming).

5.2.3. Donor support to volunteer teachers—perceived as the only solution to teacher shortage albeit too small and unpredictable

Under the situation of limited community contribution together with the absence of any financial support from the government, PCSC executive members in all three schools felt that the only way to mitigate the difficulty of recruiting and retaining sufficiently educated volunteer teachers was donor support to the volunteer teachers. In Schools A and B, USAID announced in 2006 that it would start awarding scholarships to a few qualified volunteer teachers in the following year, for enrolment in a distance learning course offered by a teacher training college. Consequently, there was an increase in the number of young people in the community willing to teach at these schools in 2006 and 2007. For example, the number of teachers increased from 2 in 2005 to 6 in 2007 in School A and 3 in 2005 to 7 in 2007 in School B, which included four grade 12 graduates in each school (see Table 3). The PCSC executive members expressed the view that the school would have remained with only 1 or 2 teachers, which was the case up to 2005, if such donor support was not made available to them.

However, the PCSC executive members also reported that they later found out that the scholarships were strictly limited both in number and duration, which led to the swift disillusionment of those teachers who were not successful, and they tended to leave the school to pursue more favourable opportunities elsewhere. Furthermore, school C, which was the remotest among all the community schools under study, received

Table 3
Community school teachers (2007).
Source: Authors.

School	Qualified government teachers seconded by mother school	Number of volunteer teachers by education level	Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR)
A	1	Grade 12: 4 Grade 11: 1 Grade 9: 1	1:30
B	1	Grade 12: 4 Grade 11: 1 Grade 9: 1 Grade 7: 1	1:23
C	0	Grade 9: 1	1:95

virtually no donor support and the PCSC only managed to retain one volunteer teacher who was merely a grade 9 graduate, with the others leaving owing to frustration over the lack of any monetary reward from parents. Thus, with no regular staff on the government payroll seconded by a mother school either, the pupil-teacher ratio at School C was an immense 95:1 (Table 3). Furthermore, it only accommodated grades 1 to 4, meaning that pupils were unable to proceed any further with their education as the nearest government school that offered higher grades was too far away.

5.2.4. Lack of transparency in teacher recruitment process

The field interviews also revealed that the volunteer teacher recruitment process sometimes lacked transparency and was dominated by a few powerful individuals in and outside of schools—PCSC chairmen, teachers seconded by the mother school and district officials. Lack of transparency was particularly an issue when volunteer teachers were expected to be given a scholarship or other benefits such as bicycles from the donors. Moreover, nepotism was associated with this transparency issue. For example, two out of the four teachers at school B were relatives of the district officials, as was the government teacher (teacher in charge) seconded from the mother school.

Ordinary parents and other community members typically exhibited little knowledge about how volunteer teachers were recruited, considering themselves ill-qualified to involve themselves in the process given their own low educational attainment. For example, one mother remarked: “We don’t know how these teachers were recruited: it is the teacher in charge who knows about education and who can find our teachers” (Father, School A). Thus, the reality sharply contrasts with the general policy image that volunteer teachers are selected among several candidate by the consensus by all parents and wider community members in a transparent manner.

5.2.5. Monitoring of teachers by PCSC—Constraints of time and ability to evaluate teaching and learning

In community schools in Zambia, the attendance and performance of teachers is expected to be regularly monitored, while ways of improving it should be discussed and agreed upon by the PCSC members. This process should take into account the need to discipline or dismiss teachers whose performance and attitude does not meet the expectations of the parents. Meanwhile, being “employees” of the community, teachers are expected to be able to justify their professional performance publicly at PCSC meetings (discussed further below), while listening and responding to the demands of parents and other members of the community. In such a way, teachers are expected to be accountable to the community, as the proponents argue, though as we discuss below, these accountability dynamics were not always straightforward nor unproblematic.

In line with policy expectation, regular monitoring of volunteer teachers has been conducted by the PCSC chairman at schools A and B. The PCSC chairman at school A remarked:

We are free as PCSC executives to go into the school as we are the owners⁷ of the school. Sometimes, I go in morning to the classroom when the teachers are teaching, to ensure that they are doing their work (PCSC chairman, at school A).

Volunteer teachers interviewed generally regard such monitoring by the PCSC executives as a legitimate right of the latter, largely because they provide services to the community. This is a sharp contrast with the findings of earlier research conducted in SSA, where centrally hired teachers often see it as an intrusion to their professional domain (Essuman and Akyeampong, 2011).

However, in contrast, at school C, the regular monitoring of a teacher by PCSC had not been done for several years because they had become preoccupied with their own farming and other economic activities. The absence of monitoring could also have been a consequence of the lack of teacher replacements. Thus, availability and commitment amongst PCSC members in terms of regularly monitoring teachers was not always guaranteed, even if they hire teachers directly; monitoring varied according to time and commitment.

It should also be noted that regular monitoring at School A and B did not extend to evaluating teaching performance or pedagogy and was limited to merely checking the attendance of teachers. PCSC executive members generally believed that they too were not qualified nor capable to judge the quality of teaching and learning, as they themselves have not had professional training in teaching and their education experience does not exceed secondary school level at best.

5.2.6. Complex feeling of the parents towards demanding teacher accountability

While parents rarely discussed the content and the process of teaching and learning in PCSC meetings, as mentioned earlier, interviews revealed that many of them were keen to know if their meagre investment in their children’s education was indeed worthwhile, which they mostly judged based on teachers’ attendance to school and the grade 7 examination pass rate. The schools A and B achieved 85% and 66% of the pass rates of the national grade 7 examination in 2007, when the number of volunteer teachers increased along with the teaching and learning materials provided thanks to the donor assistance. According to the DEB officials, these results were better than the near-by government school (60%). In these schools, parents understandably credited good examination results to the commitment of the volunteer teachers, which in turn lead to their greater motivation to pay into the PCSC fund to be used as teachers’ allowance, although these additional contributions did not mean that they were able to raise enough remuneration to hire more volunteer teachers.

However, even parents and PCSC executive members revealed that their greatest concern was the poor attendance record of the volunteer teachers they employed. Despite the frustration the communicated in interviews, neither parents nor their representatives in PCSC executives voiced their concerns about teacher attendance at the PCSC meetings I observed. It was explained that many felt it inappropriate and inconsiderate to complain about such absenteeism openly, given they had made virtually no financial or in-kind contribution to the remuneration of volunteers’ services. For example, one mother in School B community commented:

Teachers do not report on time because they are not paid. But we do not have the power to talk about teachers because we don’t pay them enough. What we should bear in mind is that teachers are also married and they at least need to eat (Mother, School B).

Dismissing a volunteer teacher appeared to be a highly sensitive

⁷ As noted earlier in the paper, while the PCSC members are not in reality the owners of the school and the land on which it sits, they feel—and, as this quote indicates—act as though they are.

issue, too, as it had the potential to unbalance the much-valued unity and social equilibrium of the community. For example, one PCSC executive member commented that people were generally reluctant to publicly criticize volunteers who came from the same community and were often members of their own extended families; as such, censure would have been regarded as costly and inappropriate in a culture that valued social harmony.

5.2.7. Communities' inability to fire teachers—undersupply of alternatives

The interviews with parents and PCSC revealed that some concerned parents secretly asked PCSC chairman to replace teachers with poor attendance records. However, such parental requests did not necessarily lead to discipline or dismissal by the PCSC, since taking disciplinary action was not a realistic option in most cases, given the improbability of finding suitable replacements in the context of undersupply of alternatives. Moreover, it was reported that, if parents even questioned the teachers about their absenteeism, the teachers may cease to teach altogether. This conundrum was described by the teacher seconded from the mother school at School A:

There is nothing you can do! If you persist in asking them the reasons why they don't come to school, then they will stop [teaching completely]. Then, it is the pupils who will suffer. So, the only thing to do is to nurse them; treat them like babies (Teacher seconded by the mother school, School A).

A meeting held in School B to solve the problem of a volunteer teacher's absenteeism and low morale is a case in point. Several angry mothers went to accuse one volunteer teacher who was teaching grade 5 who had not been coming to school regularly, as the parents were worried that the children would subsequently fail the grade 7 examination. However, the deliberations of the meeting were manipulated by the PCSC chairman and the teacher in charge, with the former defending the "accused" volunteer teacher, asking parents to try and appreciate the situation where the teacher was teaching their children with very low remuneration, at times for the sake of unity in the community and at others on account of the difficulty they would have in finding a replacement willing to work for no payment. In the end, the teacher in charge—who is the regular teacher on government payroll seconded by the mother school (near-by government school) and acts as the head teacher of the school—decided that the "accused" should be allowed to remain in post, while the parents simply became even more frustrated and upset. Angry parents expressed their intention to either stop contributing to school or stop sending their children to school altogether.

The above discussion highlights the limited power of parents and their representatives in the PCSC to actually exercise the power to "sanction" the teachers who tend to be absent from schools, in contrast to the policy expectation. The complicated feelings on the part of parents and PCSC executive members together with the difficulty of filling vacancies prompted the PCSC not to sanction them. Yet it should also be noted that volunteer teachers faced great challenges in attempting to meet the demands of the parents and the local community, as discussed in the following section.

5.3. The constraints of volunteer teachers to respond to the demands expressed by parents and local community

5.3.1. Intrinsic accountability of volunteer teachers suppressed by their survival instincts

As noted, proponents argue that by devolving the power to hire and fire their own teachers to the parents and local community, teachers are more incentivised to attend regularly and to work harder because of the risk of being fired (World Bank, 2003; Barrera-Osorio et al., 2009; Bruns et al., 2011). However, as discussed above, such power does not necessarily enable parents to fire teachers whose work and attendance record does not satisfy them. It is therefore not surprising that few

volunteer teachers reported they tried to attend schools regularly because of the fear to be "fired."

This does not however mean that other volunteer teachers have no sense of commitment to the education of poor children in the community they serve. Some of them, particularly those coming from the community themselves, reported that they felt strong motivation to commit their precious time to offer quality education to children in their community schools, mainly because of their strong communal responsibility, religious conviction, and the social respect they gain from the community for their dedication. Many volunteer teachers were Lamba by tribe, thus belonging to the same ethnicity group of the majority of the parents, which had been historically excluded from formal schooling. The following comment of a volunteer teacher at school A is illustrative:

I teach because of my love of the children. When I was a child, my father passed away, so I was looked after by my grandfather. He was very old, so money for me to go to school was a problem. I remember how I suffered. I thought, 'Let me assist these children in the community so that they will not suffer.' I am a priest at the church, and people said that they had no one who was educated who could read the Bible; so, this started paining me. That is when I thought, 'Let me concentrate on teaching these children so I can improve their education.' That is the heart I have. (Volunteer teacher, School A)

Such intrinsic motivation—combined with few other employment options—prompted many relatively young people in the locality who have slightly better education experience than the rest of the villagers to come to work for the schools despite little or no remuneration.

However, at times, their own survival needs trumped their sense of obligation or accountability to parents or the community, which often gave them no other option but being absent from school. Indeed, time spent teaching—particularly during the rainy season when food at home was scarce and demand for controlling weeds for field preparation before the start of the maize-growing season was high—directly impacted their livelihood. The lack of reliable transport for commuting to schools, most of which in this district were located in remote areas, was also cited as a challenge to the regular attendance of teachers. As the following comments indicate, they felt that their work was purely self-sacrifice for which they received inadequate support in return:

We get nothing from there [the school]. We are also human. I should look smart like somebody who eats and washes properly, but the community doesn't motivate us. We just teach without anything. So, if you are not in the mood for teaching, you can just sit like that on that day; why should you go to school? (Volunteer teacher, School B)

Volunteer teachers were generally among those of the highest educational level in the community, each representing an exception in his or her family and holding a position of responsibility therein, such as taking care of family members. Working voluntarily or with little remuneration did not provide the necessary economic means to meet such demands and expectations, as one volunteer teacher reported:

I am the only educated one in the family and they depend on me. My mother always asks me what I have brought when I come back from school; it pains me (Volunteer teacher, School B).

Many volunteer teachers, who were initially enthusiastic about offering education to the poor children of their own community, gradually became frustrated by parents' demands and by the lack of understanding of the challenges they faced. The following complaint from a volunteer teacher in school B highlights their plight:

They always want you to teach their children. Even if you are sick, they don't understand. I am teaching as a volunteer, but these people come with all sorts of complaints. It is hard working as a

volunteer. Teaching is demanding but at the end of the day, you don't get anything (Volunteer teacher, School B).

Thus, often, the expectations of both teachers and parents were unmet, leaving frustration with both sides.

5.3.2. Constraints faced by volunteer teachers in the absence of adequate and appropriate support by the DEB and mother school

Moreover, volunteer teachers also stressed the difficulty of improving the quality of school in response to the demands put forward by some parents, given that they were ill-equipped, with very few teaching and learning materials, poor infrastructure, and limited opportunities to develop professionally. Although under government policy, registered community schools were entitled to the same education materials as regular government schools, in reality, they were often not provided with them. Indeed, in the current decentralisation arrangement, there was great ambiguity around who was responsible for delivering teaching and learning materials to community schools—whether it was the mother school or the DEB. Several volunteer teachers reported that they asked if mother schools would share their resources with them, but the request was turned down, saying that it should have been provided by the DEB office directly. Meanwhile, the DEB officers claimed that such materials should be given to community schools by their mother schools as the office had already allocated enough materials to their mother schools. Thus, although the policy states that community schools have been an important component of the governments' efforts to achieve Education for All (EFA) (MOE, 2007), the important "supply chain" of decentralisation is critically broken, which further disadvantaged resource-strapped community schools that are at the bottom of the education hierarchy.

Furthermore, although several guidelines and manuals stipulate that one community school representative should be included as the member of the DEB (e.g., ZCCS, 2005; MOE, 2007; MOGE 2016), this was not the case. Consequently, neither the voice of volunteer teachers nor PCSC in community schools was heard and acted upon by the DEB office, which ought to look after community schools equally with government schools. One volunteer teacher at school A explained how difficult it is for their voices to be heard by government institutions:

We are just community. They [DEB officers] would not listen to us because we are not government people. You know? In Zambia, when you say community, it means the people who are ignorant and are not worth listening to (Volunteer teacher, school A).

The findings corroborate with what Essuman and Akyeampong (2011) report from their study in Ghana, that in African rural communities, sometimes who says matters more than what they say.

Moreover, allocation of the quarterly school grant from the central government—a lifeline for community schools—was too little and also dispersed erratically from the DEB, and often controlled by the "mother school". This meant that community schools were barely able to purchase necessary teaching and learning materials that fit their needs: "We had no say in what the mother school bought" (Volunteer teacher, School A). Even when the grant was suspected to be misappropriated by the mother school, volunteer teachers at the community schools typically felt unable to inquire about this with the mother school due to the subordinate nature of the relation with the government institution, which originated from their lower social status and educational attainment. The following account from a volunteer teacher at school C illustrates a case in point:

We have not yet been given anything (from mother school); it is almost two years now. The children don't have anything—pencils, exercise books, nothing. When I told the head teacher [of the mother school] that we had a problem, he said 'Just wait. I know what I am doing!' Yeah, it is some kind of way of silencing us. If we were the same, maybe he would start fearing me. But just because I am grade 9 and he has been to college, and I am just a villager, not in

government like him, there is that inferiority complex between me and him (Volunteer teacher, School C).

Opportunities for volunteer teachers to participate in in-service teacher training were limited, too, unless it was made available by external donors such as USAID. In this regard, some volunteers revealed that they had been denied access to in-service training offered at the DEB resource centre and their mother schools just because they were "volunteers" at community schools, a situation that effectively eliminated any chance of developing professional knowledge and skills.

Thus, a serious mismatch of power between the community schools and their mother school and the DEB office that existed severely constrained volunteer teachers' ability to access professional development. Within the overall decentralisation scheme, community schools are "orphan[s]," in the words of one volunteer teacher at school A, rather than the widely held image of them as an empowered community undertakings.

6. Discussion and conclusion

Under the policy of education decentralisation in Zambia, parents and other members of local communities have been accorded the "right" to establish and self-manage their schools, called community schools, by hiring, remunerating and overseeing their own teachers. Both theoretical and policy literature expect that such power enables parents and local community to "voice" their demands and dissatisfaction towards schools. Furthermore, by granting parents direct control over teachers, parents are expected to hold teachers to account, as it creates market-oriented relationship (defined as "short route" accountability) between "clients" (parents) and "service providers" (teachers) (World Bank, 2003; Barrera-Osorio et al., 2009; Bruns et al., 2011).

However, the evidence in this paper reveals that putting the power to self-manage schools and to hire and fire teachers in the hands of poor parents and community members from rural Zambia does not mean that they are capable of exercising power, let alone exercising it effectively. In reality, such responsibility was regarded by many—particularly the most marginalised—as a tremendous burden (in financial terms and in terms of time commitment) rather than an advantage of decentralisation.

This paper also demonstrated that unequal power relations and differing social and economic endowment are not uncommon in community school. Many parents—particularly women and those with low levels of education—had little confidence to speak with teachers about attendance, teaching and student learning. Moreover, they often perceived that the social costs of exercising "voice" against their leaders (including not only teachers but also the leaders of the PCSC) outweighed the benefits, particularly when the lives of the former critically depend on the latter. Consequently, the public meetings were often monopolised by the powerful and privileged members of the community, leaving the voices of the poor less likely to be heard. The proponents of community participation in education often underestimate the complexity of power relations at the local level, and fail to engage with social and political analysis.

The paper also reveals a number of other significant challenges. Serious economic constraints and the absence of a pool of sufficiently educated people in the locality led to a situation where teachers were generally in extremely short supply except for when support was provided by external donors. In a context of inadequate compensation, teacher absenteeism was reported to be high in all schools. However, contrary to policy and theoretical expectations, parents and their representatives in PCSCs were hardly able to discipline or dismiss teachers, due in part to their inability find alternative teachers and to their complex feeling about removing volunteer teachers who come from the same community and teach their children with little or no remuneration. Thus, this paper challenges unspoken beliefs behind the promotion

of “short” route accountability—namely, first, that poor parents possess and can exercise purchasing power as “clients” and thus able to hold service providers to account on their own, and, second, that there will be a ready supply of alternate teachers available for hire.

However, this paper argues that merely emphasising the lack of power of parents to hold teachers and school leaders to account can lead one to lose sight of other important aspects of the community school policy experience. This study highlights the inability of teachers and school leaders to respond to the demands expressed by parents and communities (mostly teachers’ regular attendance and improvement of students’ test score) even if they want to, under conditions of only scarce and unpredictable salaries and resources made available to them from the community and the government. Despite the government’s policy of supporting community schools on an equal basis, the government’s support for these schools in practice lacks consistency and adequacy, and is, at times, even inappropriate. Moreover, the voices of community school stakeholders have been systematically ignored in the current reform setting. When parents and teachers found that their participation in school did not yield effective benefits to them, they became disillusioned about the whole arrangement and decide to curtail their involvement altogether.

Ultimately, this paper calls into question the claim that, in granting the community direct control over school resources and teachers, school and teacher accountability will be improved. The model that focuses on “client voice” at the local level fails to take into account the reality of unequal and limited endowments of poor rural communities as well as complex micro-politics that characterise this sphere. The paper also argues that reform that emphasises a direct contractual relationship between parents and teachers will dilute the importance of the political accountability of the state agencies to its citizens, which undermines the ability of front-line service providers such as teachers to respond to local demands.

The decentralisation of education adopted in Zambia transferred financial responsibility for the delivery of high quality basic schooling from the state to pupils’ families in a deprived area under the rhetorical banner of “greater democracy in the management and administration of the system” (MOE, 1996: 3). Such a policy shift was also in line with the global narrative of neo-liberal principles and individual responsibility for meeting social needs (Rose, 2003)—which understandably accorded well with the bankrupt government’s attempt to achieve EFA with the minimum financial outlay. As such, the narrative around community management of teachers appears to deflect attention away from the state, in addition to reducing expectations around the provision of educational resources and support to schools, teachers, and communities.

The intention of this paper is, however, not to dismiss the existence or the value of parental and community participation in education. Indeed, it is undeniable that community schools have contributed markedly to the provision of educational opportunities to those children in remote areas who would otherwise be denied access to any education in Zambia. As was described, parents were generally hoped that school resources were used effectively and that school quality would improve, an outcome that was judged based on student examination results and teacher behaviour.

Furthermore, this paper suggests that support must be provided to the community to allow them to effectively take part in school management and for such participation to bring about the aim of accountability to them. The following could be considered as community support mechanisms for supplying relevant skills and knowledge: provision of adult literacy and numeracy education, open and publicly available information about both school resource flows and government policies through local radio programmes, information sharing about parental rights, capacity building to participate in effective public deliberation, and the introduction of anonymous election. But, arguably, it needs to be acknowledged that short-term technical intervention alone may not be sufficient. Deeply embedded social norms, taboos, and micro-power

relations may still prevent community members, particularly those with low socio-economic status, from effectively having their voices heard. To that end, this paper argues that policy makers should acknowledge the reality of rural communities and should carefully appraise the complexities of community participation at the local-level, as well as considering the level of technical input required by communities in the management of teachers and the ability (not to mention willingness) of the community to play an active role in these aspects of education. These suggestions are in addition to the more obvious point that the weaknesses in the policy underlying community participation should be addressed, such that, for example, the roles, procedures, and composition of school committees are standardised and clarified.

Finally, and most critically, this paper argues that unless the state provides adequate and consistent support to these schools on at least an equal basis, including the allocation of up-to-date teaching and learning materials, timely disbursement of school grants, and the provision of in-service training and financial incentives for volunteer teachers, the current two-tier schooling system will be reinforced, with community schools continuing to suffer from poor education delivery. To the extent that Zambians must put pressure on their political representatives to ensure that these steps are taken, “short-route” accountability cannot replace “long-route” accountability, particularly in socially and economically challenged communities.

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