

DECENTRALIZATION AND EDUCATION QUALITY IN GHANA: ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN SENIOR HIGH SCHOOLS

Nyarkoh Patrick Dede ^{0009-0006-2524-99 1*}

Doctoral School of Public Administration, Ludovika University of Public Service, Budapest, Hungary

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Abstract

This study delved into the influence of decentralisation on school governance, teacher accountability, resource management, and equity in resource allocation among Senior High Schools in Ghana. Using a quantitative design, data were gathered from 150 respondents, including teachers, headteachers, and community stakeholders, and analysed with SPSS. The results showed moderate community participation and a positive association between community involvement and academic performance. Regression analysis revealed that community participation accounted for between 18% and 27% of the variance in teacher accountability and school resource management, while decentralisation contributed modestly to equity in resource distribution. The study concludes that decentralisation is linked with stronger participatory governance, although gaps in resource fairness remain. Strengthening local capacity and expanding stakeholder engagement are suggested to support transparency and sustainability in SHS administration.

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1 Introduction

Decentralisation has emerged as a widely adopted governance strategy, particularly in developing countries, to improve public service delivery, enhancing local participation, and promoting accountability. In the education sector, decentralisation is frequently promoted as a mechanism for strengthening school governance and addressing disparities in access and quality. [1, 2]. Ghana, like many other sub-Saharan African countries, has pursued various decentralisation reforms aimed at transferring certain administrative and financial responsibilities from central to local authorities. These reforms are grounded in national policies such as the Local Governance Act and the Education Act, which provide the legal and institutional framework for participatory governance in education. [3, 4].

A central pillar of these decentralisation efforts is the promotion of community participation in school governance. School-level bodies such as Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs), School Management Committees (SMCs), and Boards of Governors have been established to serve as key platforms through which community members can contribute to the administration and development of schools. [5]. However, although such structures exist, the actual level and effectiveness of community involvement vary significantly across contexts. For instance, [6] and [7] Noted that while decentralisation policies encourage grassroots involvement, in practice, many community stakeholders lack the capacity, motivation, or authority to influence school decision-making meaningfully. In some cases, roles and responsibilities remain poorly defined, limiting the impact of these structures on school outcomes. [8, 9].

* Corresponding author. Email: padeny4u@yahoo.com

Furthermore, the relationship between community participation and student academic performance has drawn increasing scholarly attention. Some studies suggest that when communities are actively engaged in monitoring school activities, student learning outcomes tend to improve due to increased accountability and parental support [10, 11]. In Ghana, initiatives led by PTAs and SMCs have shown potential in enhancing student motivation and promoting academic success, although the extent of their impact remains underexplored at the Senior High School (SHS) level [12, 13]. Another significant dimension of community participation is its influence on teacher accountability and the management of school resources. Community oversight mechanisms, when properly utilised, can serve to reduce teacher absenteeism and improve transparency in the use of resources [6, 14]. However, existing literature also highlights challenges such as poor communication, low awareness of roles, and inadequate training, which often undermine the effectiveness of such participation [9, 13].

Equity in the allocation of educational resources is another key concern in the decentralisation discourse. Although one of the intended outcomes of decentralisation is to address regional and socioeconomic disparities, there is ongoing debate as to whether this goal has been realised in Ghana's SHS sector. While a study affirms that local governments have played a positive role in redistributing resources based on school-specific needs [15], others argue that significant inequalities persist, especially between urban and rural schools. [16, 17]. These disparities raise questions about the effectiveness of decentralisation in promoting fairness and inclusivity in educational resource allocation.

Despite the growing body of literature on educational decentralisation and community engagement, much of the research in Ghana has focused on the basic education level, leaving a gap in the empirical understanding of how these dynamics play out at the Senior High School level. This study, therefore, seeks to fill this gap by assessing the extent and impact of community participation in the governance of SHSs across different districts in Ghana. Specifically, the study examines how community involvement influences student academic performance, teacher accountability, resource management, and the equity of resource distribution within the context of decentralisation.

2 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study illustrates how decentralisation enhances educational governance and outcomes through active community participation. Decentralisation is seen as the process of transferring authority from the central government to local education stakeholders, empowering communities to take part in decision-making and school management. Through this involvement, community members help improve school governance, promote teacher accountability, ensure efficient management of resources, and support equity in resource distribution. These combined effects contribute to better educational outcomes and institutional performance among Senior High Schools in Ghana.

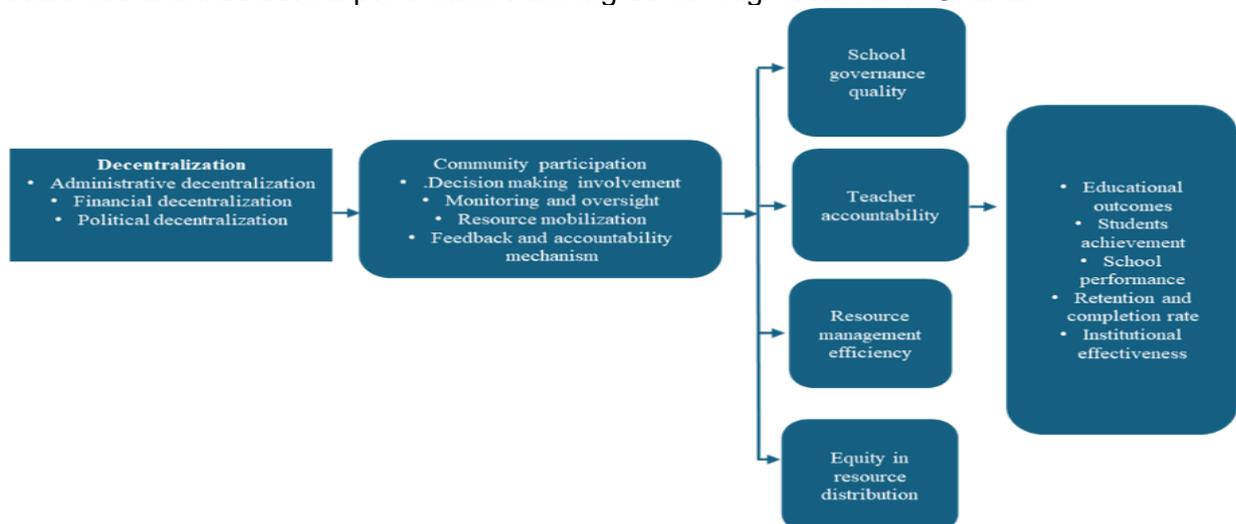


Figure 1. *Conceptual framework of decentralisation, community participation and educational outcomes in senior high schools in Ghana.*

Source: Researcher's construct

In this framework, decentralisation serves as the independent variable, representing the shift of authority to local levels. Community participation acts as the mediating variable, reflecting the extent of stakeholder involvement in school decision-making. Improved governance, teacher accountability, resource management, and equitable resource allocation function as intermediate variables showing the operational results of participation, while improved educational outcomes serve as the dependent variable, capturing the overall effectiveness and performance of Senior High Schools.

3 Method

The study adopted a quantitative research design to examine how decentralisation influences school governance, teacher accountability, and equity in resource allocation among Senior High Schools in Ghana. The population included teachers, headteachers, Parent Teacher Association members, School Management Committee members, and district education officers, and a stratified sampling technique was used to ensure balanced representation. Participants were required to have at least one year of experience, while newly appointed individuals or those not involved in school governance were excluded. Out of 180 questionnaires distributed, 150 were completed and returned, giving a response rate of 83%, and the sample size was adequate based on recommended standards for regression analysis. Data were gathered using a structured questionnaire adapted from validated instruments in previous studies, with five sections containing between five and eight items each. Content validity was reviewed by experts, construct validity was supported by theoretical alignment, and reliability was confirmed with Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.80. Ethical approval was obtained, informed consent was secured from all participants, and confidentiality was assured. Data analysis was performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), applying descriptive statistics, correlation, and linear regression to determine the relationships among the study variables.

4 Results And Discussion

4.1 Respondent Information

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 150)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	70	46.7
	Female	80	53.3
Role	Headteacher	4	5.7
	Teacher	44	62.9
	PTA Member	11	15.7
	SMC Member	7	10.0
	District Education Officer	4	5.7
	Academic Qualification	BECE	18
	WASSCE	20	13.3
	Diploma	11	7.3
	Bachelor's	56	37.3
	Master's or Higher	45	30
Years of Experience	1 – 3 years	59	39.3
	4 – 6 years	26	17.3
	7 – 10 years	21	14
	Above 10 years	22	29.3
School Type	Public	98	65.3
	Private	52	34.7
Location of School	Urban	80	53.3
	Rural	70	46.7

Source: Field Data (2025)

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the 150 respondents involved in the study. The results show that females constituted the majority, representing 53.3%, while males accounted for 46.7%. Most respondents were teachers, making up 62.9% of the sample, followed by PTA members at 15.7%, SMC members at 10%, and both headteachers and district education officers at 5.7% each. In terms of academic qualification, 37.3% of respondents held bachelor's degrees, 30% had master's or higher qualifications, while 13.3% and 12% possessed WASSCE and BECE certificates respectively. Regarding experience, 39.3% had between one and three years of experience, and 29.3% had above ten years. Furthermore, 65.3% of respondents were from public schools, while 34.7% were from private schools. In addition, 53.3% of the schools were located in urban areas, with 46.7% situated in rural settings. These characteristics suggest a balanced representation across gender and location, with a dominance of qualified teachers who have considerable experience, making the data suitable for examining community participation in school governance and educational quality.

4.2 Community Participation in SHS Governance

The analysis of data on the level of community participation in Senior High School (SHS) governance revealed a high degree of internal consistency, as indicated by a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.906 for the seven items that measured community involvement. This reliability coefficient suggests that the instrument used to assess community participation was highly dependable and that the items measured a coherent construct. [14]. The descriptive statistics further showed that respondents generally perceived a moderate level of community engagement in SHS governance, with mean scores ranging from 3.02 to 3.68 on a five-point

scale. The item with the highest mean, “The PTA/SMC/Board of Governors holds regular governance meetings” ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 1.17$), indicates that such meetings are relatively frequent, reflecting a modest degree of structured participation in school governance. However, the lowest mean score was recorded for “The school communicates governance outcomes and updates to the community” ($M = 3.02$, $SD = 1.07$), suggesting that feedback mechanisms and transparency in decision-making remain weak areas.

These findings align with the participatory governance theory, which posits that genuine participation extends beyond mere representation to include active involvement, feedback, and mutual accountability among stakeholders. [18]. The results suggest that while the formal structures for participation, such as PTAs, SMCs, and Boards of Governors, are functioning, the depth of engagement and information flow between schools and communities may not be sufficiently strong to achieve full participatory governance. This supports [6] Assertion that, although decentralisation policies in Ghana aim to strengthen local participation, the actual practice often remains limited due to weak communication channels and insufficient stakeholder empowerment.

From the perspective of the decentralisation theory, the moderate mean values reflect a partial realisation of the goals of administrative and participatory decentralisation, where authority and decision-making are intended to be shared between the central government and local actors. [3]. In this study, the relatively balanced means across items indicate that communities are increasingly taking part in school governance activities, yet their influence may still be constrained by capacity gaps and institutional hierarchies, as noted by [9]. This interpretation resonates with findings by [13], who emphasised that while decentralisation in Ghana has institutionalised community structures in education, their roles and responsibilities often remain poorly defined or inconsistently practised.

The conceptual framework of this study, which links community participation to educational quality through accountability, inclusiveness, and shared decision-making, also finds partial support in these results. The moderate levels of participation observed suggest that while community involvement contributes to improved governance, it is not yet operating at its optimal potential to drive significant improvements in education quality. Strengthening communication between schools and communities, building stakeholder capacity, and clarifying governance roles could therefore enhance the overall effectiveness of decentralisation in education. These findings reinforce earlier conclusions by [19] and [15] that the success of decentralisation depends not only on structural reforms but also on empowering local actors to participate meaningfully and sustain accountability within the education system.

4.3 Community Involvement and Student Academic Performance

The study examined the relationship between community involvement and students' academic performance to understand how participation in school activities by community members influences educational outcomes. The reliability analysis produced a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.859 for the six items measuring community participation, indicating a high level of internal consistency and reliability of the measurement instrument. This shows that the items used effectively captured the construct of community involvement in school governance.

Table 2: Correlation between Community Participation and Academic Performance

	Community Participation Index	Academic Performance Index
Community Participation Index	1	0.163
Academic Performance Index	0.163	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	—	0.046
N	150	150

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Source: Field Data (2025)

As shown in Table 2, the Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.163 at a significance level of 0.05 indicates a positive and statistically significant relationship between community participation and students' academic performance. This implies that when communities are actively engaged in the management and decision-making processes of schools, students' academic achievement tends to improve, even though the relationship is modest in strength.

This finding supports Epstein's theory of overlapping spheres of influence, which posits that students perform better academically when schools, families, and communities work collaboratively to support learning. It also aligns with [20] The assertion that community participation enhances the social and moral environment of schools, promoting discipline, motivation, and responsibility among students, which subsequently reflects in their academic outcomes. From the perspective of the conceptual framework on decentralisation and education quality, the result affirms that active community involvement fosters transparency, accountability, and shared responsibility among school stakeholders. This collaborative governance model strengthens resource mobilisation and decision-making, which are essential components for improving the quality of teaching and learning.

In the Ghanaian context, the results are consistent with findings from [6], who emphasised that when community members are meaningfully engaged in school affairs, they develop a stronger sense of ownership that leads to improved supervision, provision of educational resources, and support for teachers and students alike. This sense of collective responsibility contributes significantly to better academic performance and school effectiveness.

Overall, the findings of this section demonstrate that community participation is a critical factor influencing students' academic outcomes. Strengthening mechanisms that encourage local involvement in school governance can therefore serve as a sustainable strategy for improving educational performance and ensuring quality education across Ghana's senior high schools.

4.4 Community Participation on Teacher Accountability and Resource Management

The study examined the effect of community participation on teacher accountability and school resource management using linear regression analysis. Two separate models were estimated, with teacher accountability and school resources serving as the dependent variables, and community participation as the independent variable. The results are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3: Summary of Regression Results for the Effect of Community Participation on Teacher Accountability and Resource Management

Dependent Variable	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F (Sig.)	B	Beta	T	p-value
Teacher Accountability	0.340	0.116	0.110	19.353 (.000)	0.334	0.340	4.399	0.000
School Resources	0.404	0.164	0.158	28.946 (.000)	0.402	0.404	5.380	0.000

Source: Field Data (2025)

The results in Table 3 indicate a positive and statistically significant relationship between community participation and teacher accountability ($R = 0.340$, $p < 0.001$). The R Square value of 0.116 suggests that approximately 11.6% of the variance in teacher accountability can be explained by community participation. This implies that when communities are actively involved in the governance of schools through oversight, monitoring, and decision-making, teachers tend to demonstrate greater commitment, responsibility, and adherence to professional standards. This finding supports the theoretical underpinnings of the Participatory Governance Theory, which posits that inclusive stakeholder engagement enhances transparency, accountability, and shared ownership within institutional structures. [21]. It also aligns with the Decentralisation Theory that emphasises the role of local community structures in improving institutional performance through participatory decision making. [22].

The regression model for school resources similarly revealed a significant positive relationship between community participation and resource management ($R = 0.404$, $p < 0.001$). The R Square value of 0.164 indicates that community participation accounts for about 16.4% of the variance in school resource availability and utilisation. This suggests that increased community involvement enhances the mobilisation, allocation, and effective use of resources in schools. The finding resonates with Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence Model, which asserts that strong partnerships among families, schools, and communities yield better educational outcomes through shared responsibility and resource contribution. In the Ghanaian context, [23] and [6] Found that schools with strong community participation recorded better infrastructure management, maintenance culture, and resource accountability compared to those with weak local involvement.

These results confirm that community participation in school governance fosters accountability, transparency, and efficient resource utilisation. The positive and significant effects observed in both models indicate that empowering communities to take active roles in school governance enhances the overall quality of educational management. When communities are included in planning, monitoring, and evaluation, teachers become more responsible in performing their duties, and resources are better managed to support effective teaching and learning. This finding underscores the importance of strengthening participatory governance mechanisms under Ghana's decentralisation policy, as doing so can create sustainable improvements in accountability and resource efficiency within the education sector.

4.5 Decentralisation and Equity in Resource Allocation

The analysis of data on decentralisation and equity in resource allocation among Senior High Schools (SHSs) revealed that the seven items used to measure this construct demonstrated good internal consistency, as indicated by a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.809. This suggests that the scale is reliable for assessing respondents' perceptions of how decentralisation influences equitable resource distribution across SHSs. The descriptive statistics presented in Table 4 show that the composite Decentralisation Equity Index recorded a mean score of 2.68 on a five-point Likert scale, indicating that respondents generally perceive the level of equity achieved under the decentralised education framework as moderate and below the expected average. Among the individual items, the statement "Resources are distributed equitably between urban and rural SHSs" obtained the lowest mean score ($M = 2.35$), suggesting that disparities in resource allocation between urban and rural schools remain a concern. Conversely, items such as "Distribution of resources considers the unique needs of each school" ($M = 2.94$) and "Infrastructure gaps between schools in different regions have reduced under decentralisation" ($M = 2.82$) recorded relatively higher mean scores, implying some improvement in responsiveness to local school needs, though the overall pattern still reflects unequal distribution.

Table 4: Relationship between Decentralisation and School Resource Availability

Variable	r	Sig. (2-tailed)	N
Decentralisation Equity Index and School Resources	0.545	0.000	150

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Source: Field Data (2025)

The results in Table 4 further indicate a strong and statistically significant positive correlation ($r = 0.545$, $p < 0.01$) between decentralisation equity and school resource availability. This suggests that higher perceived fairness in resource allocation under decentralisation is associated with better resource conditions in SHSs. The finding supports the argument that effective decentralisation can enhance responsiveness to school-specific needs when accompanied by participatory governance and transparency mechanisms. This outcome aligns with the Decentralisation Theory. [22], which emphasises that the transfer of

authority to local levels enhances efficiency, accountability, and fairness when local structures possess the requisite capacity and autonomy to make informed decisions.

Empirically, these findings are consistent with [15], who observed that decentralisation in Ghana has created opportunities for more context-sensitive allocation of educational resources, though implementation challenges persist. Similarly, [16] Reported that while local governments in Ghana have made progress in reducing disparities in resource distribution, significant gaps remain between urban and rural schools due to uneven fiscal capacity and institutional weaknesses. [6] and [7] Further argue that although decentralisation policies aim to improve equity through community engagement, their effectiveness depends largely on the functionality of local governance systems and stakeholder participation.

From the theoretical standpoint of Participatory Governance, as articulated by [21] The results underscore the importance of active local engagement in decision-making processes. When school heads, district education authorities, and community representatives collaborate effectively in resource planning and monitoring, equity outcomes improve because resource allocation reflects the unique needs and priorities of each school. Conversely, weak participation and inadequate local capacity undermine the equitable intent of decentralisation.

In summary, the findings demonstrate that while decentralisation has provided a structural framework for improving equity in educational resource allocation, its effectiveness in achieving fairness across SHSs in Ghana remains partial. Strengthening local governance capacity, ensuring transparency in budget allocation, and deepening community participation are therefore essential to realising the full potential of decentralisation in promoting equitable and sustainable educational outcomes.

5 Conclusion and Recommendation

The study concludes that decentralisation has contributed to modest improvements in school governance, teacher accountability, resource management, and equity in resource allocation among Senior High Schools in Ghana. However, the overall effectiveness of decentralisation remains limited by weak stakeholder capacity, inadequate communication, and persistent disparities between urban and rural schools. It is therefore recommended that the Ministry of Education and the Ghana Education Service strengthen the institutional capacity of local education authorities and community governance structures through targeted training and resource support. Greater emphasis should also be placed on enhancing transparency, monitoring, and feedback mechanisms to ensure equitable distribution of educational resources. Furthermore, continuous engagement of community stakeholders in decision-making and evaluation processes will promote shared responsibility and sustain the gains of decentralisation in improving the quality and inclusiveness of secondary education in Ghana.

6 Reference

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