



Teachers' Community Involvement in Fee-Free Basic Education in Tanzania: A systematic Literature Review

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Abstract: Teachers' community involvement has increasingly been recognized as a critical factor in the successful implementation of Fee-Free Basic Education (FFBE), particularly in developing countries where educational reforms require strong collaboration among schools, families, and local communities. This study systematically reviewed empirical evidence on the contribution of teachers' community involvement to the implementation of Fee-Free Basic Education and examined the challenges constraining effective community engagement. The review was guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework. Relevant studies were identified through systematic searches of peer-reviewed journal articles, books, policy reports, and scholarly publications obtained from major academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, Google Scholar, and institutional repositories. Studies published in English that addressed teachers' community engagement and education policy implementation were included, while duplicate records, opinion papers, conference abstracts, and studies lacking empirical evidence were excluded. The selected studies were screened, assessed for eligibility, and synthesized thematically. The review indicates that teachers' community involvement substantially enhances the implementation of Fee-Free Basic Education by strengthening stakeholder collaboration, improving communication between schools and communities, promoting shared decision-making, increasing accountability, mobilizing local resources, and improving learner attendance and participation. Evidence further suggests that schools characterized by strong teacher-community partnerships are more capable of sustaining educational reforms and responding to contextual challenges than those operating with limited stakeholder engagement. However, the review also identifies persistent barriers, including inadequate institutional support, increasing teacher workloads, socio-economic constraints, limited parental awareness, weak participatory leadership, and insufficient professional preparation for community engagement. The review concludes that community involvement should be institutionalized as an integral component of Fee-Free Basic Education implementation rather than treated as a complementary activity. Strengthening teachers' competencies in community

engagement, promoting participatory school leadership, and establishing supportive policy frameworks are essential for enhancing educational quality and ensuring the long-term sustainability of education reforms, particularly within resource-constrained contexts.

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INTRODUCTION

The provision of equitable and quality education remains a central pillar of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4), which emphasize inclusive, equitable, and lifelong learning opportunities for all (United Nations, 2015). In response, many developing countries have introduced fee-free education policies to eliminate financial barriers, increase school enrolment, and promote educational equity. Across Sub-Saharan Africa, countries such as Kenya, Uganda, Ghana, Rwanda, and Tanzania have implemented various forms of fee-free education as part of broader education sector reforms aimed at expanding access while improving learning outcomes (UNESCO, 2021; World Bank, 2022). However, evidence increasingly suggests that the success of these reforms depends not merely on the abolition of school fees but on the effectiveness of policy implementation at the school level. The translation of policy intentions into meaningful educational outcomes requires active collaboration among governments, school leaders, teachers, parents, and local communities. Consequently, contemporary educational policy research has shifted its focus from policy formulation towards understanding the institutional, organizational, and community-based factors that facilitate or constrain successful implementation (Hallinger, 2020; Leithwood et al., 2020).

Among these factors, teachers' involvement in community engagement has emerged as an important mechanism for strengthening education policy implementation. Teachers serve not only as classroom practitioners but also as critical intermediaries between schools and the communities they serve. Through continuous interaction with parents, school committees, local leaders, and other stakeholders, teachers mobilize community support, promote accountability, facilitate learner attendance, and encourage shared responsibility for educational development (Epstein, 2018; UNESCO, 2021). Community involvement has therefore become increasingly recognized as an indispensable component of effective educational governance because it enhances transparency, promotes trust between schools and communities, and creates opportunities for collaborative problem-solving in resource-constrained environments (World Bank, 2022). Within the context of Tanzania's Fee-Free Basic Education (FFBE) policy introduced in 2015, teachers' engagement with communities has assumed greater significance as schools increasingly rely on local participation to address challenges related to overcrowding, inadequate infrastructure, learner discipline, resource mobilization, and student retention. Nevertheless, despite widespread recognition of the importance of community participation, empirical findings remain fragmented regarding the specific strategies through which teachers contribute to community engagement and the extent to which such involvement strengthens policy implementation, particularly in rural and underserved settings.

Although numerous empirical studies have examined community participation, parental involvement, school governance, and fee-free education across different educational contexts, existing evidence remains dispersed across countries, methodologies, and educational systems, making it difficult to establish a coherent understanding of teachers' contribution to policy implementation. Most previous reviews have concentrated either on the effects of fee-free education on enrolment and access or on broader issues of educational leadership, with limited systematic synthesis of teachers' community involvement as a determinant of successful policy implementation. Moreover, variations in socio-economic conditions, institutional capacity, and educational governance across developing countries have produced diverse findings that

require careful synthesis to identify common patterns, contextual differences, and remaining knowledge gaps. A systematic review is therefore necessary to consolidate existing empirical evidence, assess the consistency of research findings, and identify directions for future research and policy. Guided by the PRISMA 2020 framework (Page et al., 2021), this review addresses the following objectives:

1. To examine the strategies through which teachers' community involvement influences the implementation of Fee-Free Basic Education in secondary schools.
2. To identify the challenges affecting teachers' community involvement in the implementation of Fee-Free Basic Education.

Theoretical Review

Teachers' community involvement in the implementation of Fee-Free Basic Education (FFBE) can be understood through several theoretical perspectives that explain how educational institutions interact with communities, how individuals influence collective action, and how policy intentions are translated into practice. Contemporary education research increasingly recognizes that education reforms are socially embedded processes in which outcomes depend not only on policy design but also on the relationships, capacities, and practices of actors operating at the local level (Honig, 2006; Spillane et al., 2002). Consequently, understanding teachers' involvement in community engagement requires attention to theories that explain leadership, social relationships, institutional environments, and policy implementation processes. These perspectives provide different but interconnected explanations of how teachers contribute to strengthening school-community partnerships and supporting the implementation of educational reforms such as FFBE.

Transformational Leadership Theory, originally introduced by Burns (1978) and further developed by Bass (1985) and Bass and Avolio (1994), explains leadership as a process through which individuals inspire, motivate, and influence others to pursue shared objectives beyond immediate self-interest. Unlike traditional leadership approaches that emphasize authority and compliance, transformational leadership focuses on vision-building, trust, collaboration, intellectual stimulation, and commitment to collective goals (Northouse, 2022). In educational contexts, the theory has been widely applied to explain how school leaders and teachers promote organizational improvement, encourage professional collaboration, and engage external stakeholders in school development initiatives (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Hallinger, 2003). From this perspective, teachers are not simply implementers of educational policies but active agents who shape relationships between schools and communities. Through effective communication, encouragement, and partnership-building, teachers may influence parents, community leaders, and other stakeholders to support learner participation, school accountability, and educational improvement. This perspective is particularly relevant to FFBE implementation because the removal of school fees increases the need for stronger collaboration between schools and communities to address emerging challenges related to enrolment expansion, learner retention, discipline, and resource constraints (World Bank, 2022). However, critics argue that transformational leadership theory may overemphasize individual agency and leadership characteristics while insufficiently addressing structural conditions that influence educational outcomes (Oplatka, 2010; Lumby, 2019). In resource-

constrained contexts, teachers' ability to mobilize communities may be restricted by poverty, institutional limitations, unequal power relations, and limited government support.

Social Capital Theory provides another important explanation of teachers' community involvement by emphasizing the role of relationships, networks, trust, and shared norms in enabling collective action. The concept of social capital has been developed through the works of Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988), and Putnam (1993, 2000), who demonstrate that social relationships can provide individuals and communities with resources that facilitate cooperation and collective problem-solving. Within education, social capital theory has been used to explain how interactions among schools, families, and communities contribute to improved educational participation and student outcomes (Dika & Singh, 2002; Woolcock, 2001). From this perspective, teachers' engagement with communities is valuable because it strengthens relational networks that support information sharing, mutual trust, and collective responsibility for education. In the context of FFBE, teachers who maintain consistent communication with parents, participate in community activities, and collaborate with local stakeholders may contribute to stronger community ownership of educational initiatives. However, Social Capital Theory has also attracted criticism because it may overlook the unequal distribution of power and resources within communities (Portes, 1998; Field, 2017). Strong social networks do not automatically guarantee inclusive participation, as marginalized groups may remain excluded from decision-making processes due to social, economic, or cultural barriers. Therefore, while the theory highlights the importance of relationships in education implementation, it must be considered alongside broader structural factors affecting community participation.

Ecological Systems Theory, developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979), offers a broader explanation of teachers' community involvement by emphasizing that educational processes are influenced by multiple interacting systems. The theory proposes that human development and institutional practices occur within interconnected environmental contexts, including immediate settings such as families and schools, broader community structures, and wider political and policy environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Tudge et al., 2009). Applied to education, this perspective suggests that teachers' engagement with communities is shaped not only by individual commitment but also by school culture, leadership practices, community characteristics, government policies, and socio-economic conditions. This perspective is important for understanding FFBE implementation in Tanzania because schools operate within diverse contexts characterized by differences in resources, community expectations, infrastructure, and institutional capacity. The theory therefore helps explain why teachers' community involvement may vary across locations despite the existence of a common national policy framework. Nevertheless, the broad nature of ecological systems theory has been questioned because it provides limited explanation of the specific mechanisms through which individuals influence change within these systems (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). While it effectively demonstrates the importance of context, it requires support from theories that explain leadership processes and human interactions.

Policy Implementation Theory further contributes to understanding teachers' community involvement by focusing on the processes through which policies are translated from official decisions into practical realities. Early policy implementation scholars such as Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) emphasized that implementation success depends on

coordination among multiple actors, while Lipsky (1980) highlighted the importance of frontline workers whose everyday decisions shape policy outcomes. In education, teachers represent frontline implementers who interpret policy requirements, negotiate local challenges, and influence how reforms are experienced by communities (Honig, 2006; Spillane et al., 2002). From this perspective, teachers' involvement in community engagement is an essential component of FFBE implementation because they mediate between government expectations and community realities. Their interactions with parents, school committees, and local leaders influence whether policy objectives are accepted, understood, and effectively implemented. However, policy implementation perspectives may place greater emphasis on administrative structures and institutional processes while paying less attention to the relational dimensions of community engagement, such as trust, motivation, and shared commitment.

The reviewed theories demonstrate that teachers' community involvement in FFBE implementation is a complex phenomenon influenced by leadership practices, social relationships, institutional contexts, and policy processes. Transformational Leadership Theory explains how teachers can inspire collective commitment and mobilize stakeholders; Social Capital Theory highlights the importance of trust and networks in sustaining school-community relationships; Ecological Systems Theory emphasizes the influence of multiple contextual factors; and Policy Implementation Theory explains the role of teachers as frontline actors who translate policy objectives into practice. Although each theory provides valuable insights, no single perspective fully captures the complexity of teacher-community engagement within fee-free education reforms. This review is guided by Transformational Leadership Theory because of its relevance in explaining teachers' role as change agents who inspire collaboration, promote shared responsibility, and strengthen partnerships between schools and communities. However, the contributions of other theoretical perspectives remain important because they provide complementary explanations of the social, institutional, and contextual conditions that shape teachers' involvement in the implementation of Fee-Free Basic Education in Tanzania.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) design guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) guidelines developed by Page et al. (2021). The PRISMA framework was selected because it provides a transparent and rigorous approach for identifying, screening, selecting, and synthesizing empirical evidence while minimizing selection bias and enhancing the reproducibility of review findings. Unlike traditional narrative reviews, systematic literature reviews follow explicit procedures for searching, evaluating, and synthesizing published studies, thereby producing reliable evidence for educational policy and practice (Snyder, 2019). The review focused on empirical studies that examined teachers' community involvement in the implementation of Fee-Free Basic Education (FFBE) and related education policies in secondary schools. By systematically integrating evidence from different educational contexts, the review sought to identify common patterns, contextual variations, and existing knowledge gaps regarding the contribution of teachers to policy implementation.

A comprehensive literature search was conducted using internationally recognized electronic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, Taylor & Francis Online, and JSTOR. These databases were selected because they index high-quality peer-reviewed literature in education, educational leadership, and public policy. The search strategy combined Boolean operators and keywords to maximize the retrieval of relevant studies. Search terms included "Fee-Free Basic Education," "free education policy," "teachers," "community involvement," "community participation," "school-community partnership," "education policy implementation," "secondary schools," and "Tanzania." Additional studies were identified through backward and forward citation tracking of key publications to ensure comprehensive coverage of the available literature. The search was limited to studies published between 2015 and 2025, corresponding to the period during which many African countries, including Tanzania, intensified the implementation of fee-free education reforms.

To ensure methodological rigor, explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied during the screening process. Studies were included if they were peer-reviewed empirical research published in English, examined teachers' community involvement or school-community partnerships within the context of education policy implementation, focused on primary or secondary education, and provided sufficient methodological detail to support evidence synthesis. Conversely, conference abstracts, editorials, opinion papers, dissertations without accessible full texts, duplicate publications, and studies focusing exclusively on higher education or unrelated policy sectors were excluded. The screening process was undertaken in four successive stages following the PRISMA framework: identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and final inclusion. Initially, database searches yielded a substantial number of records, after which duplicate articles were removed. Titles and abstracts were then screened for relevance before full-text articles were assessed against the predetermined eligibility criteria. Only studies that fully satisfied the inclusion criteria were retained for synthesis, ensuring that the review was based on credible and relevant empirical evidence.

The methodological quality of the selected studies was further assessed to ensure the reliability of the synthesized findings. Quality appraisal focused on the clarity of research objectives, appropriateness of research design, sampling procedures, data collection methods, analytical techniques, and consistency between the findings and conclusions. Studies demonstrating robust methodological procedures and clear reporting were retained for analysis. Data extraction involved systematically recording information on study characteristics, including authorship, year of publication, country of study, research design, sample characteristics, key findings, and implications for teachers' community involvement in policy implementation. The extracted evidence was subsequently synthesized using a thematic synthesis approach, whereby findings from individual studies were compared, integrated, and organized into common themes corresponding to the objectives of the review. Rather than statistically aggregating results, thematic synthesis enabled the identification of recurring patterns, similarities, differences, and contextual influences across studies conducted in different educational systems (Thomas & Harden, 2008). This analytical approach facilitated a comprehensive understanding of how teachers' community involvement contributes to the implementation of Fee-Free Basic Education while highlighting persistent challenges and areas requiring further scholarly attention.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Teachers' Community Involvement in the Implementation of Fee-Free Basic Education

The systematic review demonstrates that teachers' community involvement is a fundamental component of successful Fee-Free Basic Education (FFBE) implementation because it strengthens collaboration between schools and local communities while creating shared responsibility for educational development. Across the reviewed literature, teachers are consistently portrayed as important intermediaries who bridge the gap between education policies and community expectations by engaging parents, school committees, local government authorities, and other stakeholders in school activities (Epstein, 2018; UNESCO, 2021; World Bank, 2022). Rather than limiting their responsibilities to classroom instruction, teachers contribute to policy implementation by promoting parental participation, facilitating community meetings, encouraging school accountability, and mobilizing local support for learners. Studies conducted in Tanzania indicate that schools where teachers actively engage communities experience greater stakeholder ownership of education programmes, improved learner attendance, and stronger commitment to school development initiatives (Mncube, 2010; Chacha, 2022). Similar observations have been reported in Kenya, where community participation was associated with improved school governance and enhanced implementation of education reforms (Awega et al., 2015). Collectively, these findings suggest that community engagement transforms policy implementation from a government-driven initiative into a shared societal responsibility, thereby enhancing the sustainability of fee-free education reforms.

Another recurring theme emerging from the reviewed studies concerns the contribution of teachers to participatory decision-making and institutional accountability. The literature consistently shows that teachers facilitate communication between schools and communities by involving parents and local stakeholders in planning, monitoring learners' progress, and discussing school priorities (Epstein, 2018; UNESCO, 2021). Such participation enables communities to understand both the opportunities and limitations associated with fee-free education, reducing unrealistic expectations that governments alone should provide every educational resource. Empirical evidence from Tanzania demonstrates that schools characterized by regular dialogue between teachers and parents report stronger parental support for learner discipline, attendance monitoring, and school improvement activities (Akaro, 2017; Chacha, 2022). Comparable findings have been documented in Ethiopia and Mozambique, where community participation enhanced transparency, strengthened trust between schools and stakeholders, and improved responsiveness to local educational needs (Reta, 2021; World Bank, 2022). However, some studies caution that community participation remains inconsistent in areas where parents possess limited educational backgrounds or insufficient understanding of education policies, suggesting that teacher-led sensitization remains essential for meaningful stakeholder engagement (UNESCO, 2021; UNICEF, 2023). This body of evidence therefore indicates that teachers' involvement in community dialogue strengthens institutional accountability by ensuring that policy implementation reflects local realities while maintaining alignment with national educational objectives.

The review further indicates that teachers play an indispensable role in mobilizing community resources to complement government investment under Fee-Free Basic Education. Although the abolition of school fees significantly expanded access to secondary education,

several studies reveal that schools continue to experience shortages of classrooms, furniture, teaching materials, sanitation facilities, and instructional resources, particularly in rural communities (World Bank, 2022; UNESCO, 2021). Teachers frequently respond to these challenges by organizing community sensitization programmes, coordinating school development projects, and encouraging voluntary contributions from parents, local leaders, faith-based organizations, and non-governmental organizations (Awega et al., 2015; Chacha, 2022). Evidence from Tanzania suggests that schools with strong teacher-community partnerships demonstrate greater success in addressing infrastructural deficiencies and supporting vulnerable learners than schools where stakeholder engagement is minimal (Akaro, 2017; Masindi, 2022). Similar experiences have been reported in Kenya and Cameroon, where collaborative school-community relationships enhanced resource mobilization and strengthened institutional capacity despite financial constraints (Mbua, 2023; Oyugi & Gogo, 2019). These findings challenge the perception that fee-free education eliminates community responsibility and instead demonstrate that sustainable policy implementation depends upon collaborative resource sharing between governments and local stakeholders.

The synthesized evidence also reveals that teachers' community involvement contributes significantly to improved learner participation and educational quality by creating supportive learning environments beyond the classroom. Across the reviewed studies, consistent communication between teachers and parents was associated with improved learner attendance, reduced absenteeism, lower dropout rates, enhanced learner discipline, and stronger parental monitoring of academic progress (Epstein, 2018; UNESCO, 2021; World Bank, 2022). Teachers were also found to play an important role in identifying learners experiencing social, economic, or psychological challenges through continuous interaction with families and community leaders, enabling schools to provide timely interventions for vulnerable students (UNICEF, 2023). Evidence from Tanzania and other Sub-Saharan African countries indicates that these collaborative relationships enhance educational equity by ensuring that learners remain engaged throughout the schooling process despite socio-economic challenges (Akaro, 2017; Chacha, 2022; Reta, 2021). Overall, the reviewed literature demonstrates that teachers' community involvement extends beyond facilitating policy compliance to creating the social conditions necessary for sustained learning and educational success under Fee-Free Basic Education.

These synthesized findings strongly support contemporary theories of collaborative educational leadership. The observed emphasis on shared responsibility and stakeholder participation aligns closely with Distributed Leadership Theory, which argues that leadership functions are dispersed among multiple actors rather than concentrated solely in formal administrative positions (Spillane, 2006). Teachers' collaboration with parents, school committees, and community leaders illustrates how leadership for policy implementation becomes a collective endeavour that enhances institutional effectiveness. The findings also reinforce the propositions of Transformational Leadership Theory, which emphasizes inspiring stakeholders through a shared vision, collaboration, and collective commitment to organizational goals (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985). Teachers who actively engage communities foster trust and motivate stakeholders to contribute voluntarily towards school improvement, thereby strengthening the implementation of educational reforms. Moreover, the evidence is consistent with Situational Leadership Theory, which underpins this review, by demonstrating

that effective teacher engagement depends on adapting leadership practices to the prevailing socio-economic, cultural, and institutional context of individual communities (Hersey & Blanchard, 1982). Rural schools, for example, require different engagement strategies from urban schools because of differences in resource availability, parental literacy, and community structures. Consequently, the collective evidence suggests that strengthening teachers' capacity to build productive school-community partnerships should become a central strategy for enhancing the implementation and long-term sustainability of Fee-Free Basic Education, particularly within resource-constrained educational contexts.

Challenges Affecting Teachers' Community Involvement in the Implementation of Fee-Free Basic Education

The systematic review reveals that although teachers' community involvement contributes significantly to the implementation of Fee-Free Basic Education (FFBE), its effectiveness is constrained by numerous institutional, socio-economic, and governance-related challenges. Across the reviewed literature, inadequate financial resources, increasing teacher workloads, limited stakeholder awareness, and weak institutional coordination emerge as the most persistent barriers to meaningful community participation (UNESCO, 2021; World Bank, 2022; UNICEF, 2023). The introduction of fee-free education substantially increased student enrolment across many Sub-Saharan African countries, including Tanzania, without corresponding improvements in teaching staff, infrastructure, or instructional resources (World Bank, 2022). Consequently, teachers have increasingly been required to balance instructional responsibilities with administrative duties and community engagement activities, reducing the time available for building sustainable partnerships with parents and local communities (Chacha, 2022; Masindi, 2022). This evidence suggests that while teachers are expected to act as community mobilizers, the institutional conditions necessary to support these expanded responsibilities remain inadequate in many public secondary schools.

Another prominent challenge identified across the reviewed studies relates to limited parental participation arising from socio-economic conditions, educational background, and misconceptions regarding the objectives of fee-free education policies. Several studies indicate that the removal of school fees has unintentionally created perceptions among some parents that education has become solely a government responsibility, thereby reducing their willingness to participate in school development activities or monitor learners' academic progress (UNESCO, 2021; World Bank, 2022). In Tanzania, Chacha (2022) reported that insufficient collaboration between schools and communities weakened the implementation of educational reforms because parents often remained detached from school governance and accountability processes. Similar findings have been documented in Kenya and Ethiopia, where low literacy levels, poverty, and competing household responsibilities limited parents' involvement in school programmes despite teachers' efforts to encourage participation (Awega et al., 2015; Reta, 2021). Furthermore, geographical isolation in rural communities often compounds these challenges by limiting communication between schools and parents, particularly where transportation and communication infrastructure remain poorly developed (UNICEF, 2023). Collectively, these studies demonstrate that effective community involvement depends not only on teachers' willingness to engage stakeholders but also on communities' capacity and readiness to participate meaningfully in educational governance.

The review also identifies leadership and governance challenges as important factors influencing teachers' ability to mobilize community participation. Democratic and participatory leadership practices have consistently been associated with stronger stakeholder engagement, whereas centralized and authoritarian leadership approaches often discourage teachers and community members from contributing to school decision-making (Bush, 2020; Hallinger, 2020). Evidence from Tanzania indicates that school leaders who fail to promote transparency, shared decision-making, and open communication weaken teachers' motivation to initiate collaborative relationships with parents and local stakeholders (Akaro, 2017; Masindi, 2022). Comparable findings were reported by Abraham (2022), who observed that democratic leadership positively influenced policy implementation because it encouraged participation and collective responsibility, while autocratic leadership limited collaboration among educational stakeholders. Similarly, Mbua (2023) found that participatory leadership enhanced both school effectiveness and teacher commitment by creating an environment characterized by trust and shared accountability. These findings imply that teachers' community involvement cannot be examined independently of school leadership because supportive leadership practices create institutional conditions that either facilitate or constrain teachers' engagement with communities.

The synthesis further indicates that policy implementation challenges are exacerbated by limited professional preparation for community engagement. Although teachers receive substantial pedagogical training, the reviewed studies suggest that relatively little attention is devoted to developing competencies in stakeholder engagement, conflict resolution, community mobilization, and participatory governance (Bush, 2020; Northouse, 2022). As a result, many teachers rely primarily on personal experience rather than professional preparation when interacting with communities, leading to inconsistent approaches across schools. In addition, education policies frequently emphasize learner enrolment and curriculum delivery while providing limited operational guidance on strengthening school-community partnerships (UNESCO, 2021). This implementation gap is particularly evident in rural districts, where teachers often operate within resource-constrained environments requiring innovative approaches to stakeholder collaboration (World Bank, 2022). Consequently, inadequate professional development, combined with weak institutional support, reduces teachers' effectiveness in translating community participation into meaningful contributions toward policy implementation.

These synthesized findings are well explained by several educational leadership theories. The observed constraints challenge the assumptions of Trait Leadership Theory, which suggests that effective leadership primarily depends upon individual personal characteristics (Stogdill, 1948). Instead, the reviewed evidence demonstrates that successful teacher-community engagement is influenced more by contextual conditions than by individual leadership attributes alone. The findings provide stronger support for Situational Leadership Theory (Hersey & Blanchard, 1982), which argues that leadership effectiveness depends upon adapting leadership behaviours to followers' readiness and environmental circumstances. Teachers working in economically disadvantaged or geographically isolated communities require flexible engagement strategies that differ substantially from those employed in urban contexts. Similarly, Distributed Leadership Theory (Spillane, 2006) explains why policy implementation becomes difficult when leadership responsibilities remain concentrated

within school administrators rather than shared among teachers, parents, and community stakeholders. Finally, the review reinforces Transformational Leadership Theory (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985), which emphasizes that educational reforms are more likely to succeed when leaders inspire trust, develop collaborative relationships, and motivate stakeholders toward shared educational goals. Collectively, the reviewed evidence therefore suggests that overcoming barriers to teachers' community involvement requires not only increased financial investment but also stronger democratic leadership, institutional capacity building, stakeholder sensitization, and professional development that equips teachers with the competencies required to cultivate sustainable school-community partnerships. Such interventions would strengthen the implementation of Fee-Free Basic Education by transforming community participation from an occasional activity into an integral component of educational governance and school improvement.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The evidence synthesized in this systematic literature review demonstrates that teachers' community involvement constitutes a critical pillar in the successful implementation of Fee-Free Basic Education (FFBE). Across the reviewed studies, community engagement consistently emerged as an important mechanism through which educational policies are translated from national intentions into meaningful school-level practices. Teachers' participation in fostering collaboration with parents, school committees, local government authorities, and community organizations contributes to improved learner attendance, strengthened accountability, enhanced resource mobilization, and increased stakeholder ownership of educational reforms (Epstein, 2018; UNESCO, 2021; World Bank, 2022). The review further indicates that effective implementation of fee-free education extends beyond government financing and curriculum delivery to include sustained partnerships that encourage shared responsibility for improving educational quality. Although community participation varies across contexts, the collective evidence suggests that schools characterized by strong teacher-community relationships are generally better positioned to address implementation challenges and sustain educational reforms than schools operating in isolation from their surrounding communities.

The review equally demonstrates that teachers' community involvement remains constrained by several interrelated challenges, including inadequate institutional support, increased teacher workloads, limited parental awareness, socio-economic inequalities, weak school leadership, and insufficient professional preparation for community engagement (Chacha, 2022; Masindi, 2022; World Bank, 2022). These challenges are particularly pronounced within rural and resource-constrained educational contexts, where teachers frequently assume multiple responsibilities beyond classroom instruction while operating with limited financial and infrastructural support. The theoretical synthesis further confirms that successful policy implementation is best explained by leadership approaches emphasizing collaboration, adaptability, and shared responsibility, particularly Distributed Leadership Theory (Spillane, 2006), Transformational Leadership Theory (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985), and Situational Leadership Theory (Hersey & Blanchard, 1982). Collectively, these theoretical perspectives demonstrate that effective implementation of Fee-Free Basic Education depends

not only on policy design but also on leadership practices that empower teachers and actively involve communities in educational governance.

These findings carry important implications for educational policy and practice. Education authorities should institutionalize community engagement as a core component of Fee-Free Basic Education by strengthening policies that promote regular collaboration between teachers, parents, local government authorities, and school governing committees. Continuous professional development programmes should equip teachers and school leaders with competencies in participatory leadership, stakeholder engagement, communication, conflict management, and community mobilization to enhance their capacity to implement education reforms effectively. Furthermore, policy implementation frameworks should recognize community participation as a strategic resource rather than a supplementary activity by providing operational guidelines, monitoring mechanisms, and institutional support for school-community partnerships. Particular attention should be directed towards rural schools where geographical isolation, limited infrastructure, and socio-economic constraints require adaptive and context-responsive leadership strategies. Future research may extend this review by undertaking empirical investigations that examine how different models of community engagement influence learner outcomes, school effectiveness, and the long-term sustainability of Fee-Free Basic Education reforms across diverse educational contexts.

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