

# **An Assessment of the Status and Challenges of School Community Relationship in Secondary Schools of Sinan District, North West Ethiopia**

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**Abstract:** School as an open system and a social organization should work on the effective interrelationship within it and with its community to alleviate school problems and to create conducive school environment as well as to enhance students result. In the study woreda the school community relationship was not assessed and the status and the determinant factors were not identified. The main purpose of this study was to assess the status and challenges of school community relationship in secondary schools of Sinan District/Woreda/, East Gojjam Zone, Ethiopia. The study employed mixed research design particularly concurrent triangulation. Data for the study were collected through questionnaire, interview, and focus group discussions. Questionnaires administered to 79 teachers who were selected through stratified random sampling technique. Focus group discussions carried out for heads and team leaders from Woreda/district/ Education Office/WEO/ in one group; 126 class monitors in eleven groups; 14 Parent Teacher Association /PTA/ members in two groups & 16 Kebele Education Training Board/KETB/ members in two groups who were selected by purposive sampling techniques. Interview questions were also administered to vice principals, principal and cluster supervisor in order to triangulate the data. The collected data were analyzed by SPSS using mean, standard deviation and one sample t-test. The findings of this study revealed that there was low participation of the community in school management; in resources contribution; and in participating in the instructional issues. The school community relationship was influenced by lack of knowledge and awareness; shortage of resources and by negative attitudes of the community towards education and lack of conducive environment to engage communities. To solve the problems: Improve/update/ the competency of the existing school management bodies; principals should establish strong coordination with educational stakeholders; adequate awareness should be created for the community about the benefit of education and school principals should create conducive school environment to engage the community.

**Keywords:** Community, Challenges, Relationship, Stakeholders

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## **1. Introduction**

Education is vital in terms of putting concrete foundation for healthy human development for any country to reach a required standard of development. Supporting this idea, Ayalew stated that "Education is an instrument for reducing poverty, improving their living conditions of rural people and building a food secure world"[1]. It also allows people to avoid complaint, have self-esteem, be well nurture sustains livelihoods and enjoys peaceful interaction [13]. School as an open system and a social organization thrives on the effective interrelationship within it and with its relevant community.

What happens in a school affects the community, and what happens in the community affects the schools [2]. This means that community builds its schools and the schools build their communities.

Community involvement in secondary school improves students' behavior and academic success. In addition, it reduces absenteeism, drop out and repetition rate. So, there should be deliberate and sustainable efforts to establish and maintain mutual understanding between the school and community in order to achieve educational goals [2].

There is, therefore, a need to identify ways of alleviating challenges and promoting integration between schools and communities to support the healthy development of children [3]. In line with this, the government of Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) is trying devised two basic plans: the Education Sector Development Plan (ESDP) and the General Education Quality Improvement Package (GEQIP), where the emphasis is on enhancing students' achievement through effective Community involvement [5].

Furthermore, the Ministry of Education, in its Education Sector Development Program V (ESDP V), has stressed the necessity of community involvement and support as a strategy to insure quality of teaching and learning [6]. In doing so, ESDP V focused on improving community involvement at the *woreda* (district) and school levels so as to expand access to education [6].

The current Ethiopian education policy encourages schools to establish Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) and *Kebele* Education and Training Board (KETB) that promote the involvement of parents in children's academic work and other school resources [4].

Regarding to the above ideas, different researches were conducted. For instance, Worede conducted his research on the status of community participation in the management of primary schools of North Gondar Zone and he concluded that the participation of communities in school management in the primary schools were limited and he stated only PTA and KETB members were participate only in the school management [14].

In addition, Demeke conducted his research on the status of community participation in the school management in *Deahna Woreda* secondary schools and he summarized the result i.e. the participation of communities in school management was very low in secondary schools of *Deahna woreda*, *Wagehemera* Zone [2].

In line with this issue, based on the annual report of *Sinan Woreda* Education Office; many children did not complete secondary school; there was high repetition and drop-out rate; and there was low achievement of students especially in national made exams [11]. Besides, schools didn't have conducive learning environment. The result of all these together brings low quality in the education system in the *woreda*. And no studies were conducted in the *woreda* regarding this problem. Due to this, the researcher initiates to assess the status and the challenges of school -community relationship in secondary schools of *Sinan Woreda*, North West Ethiopia.

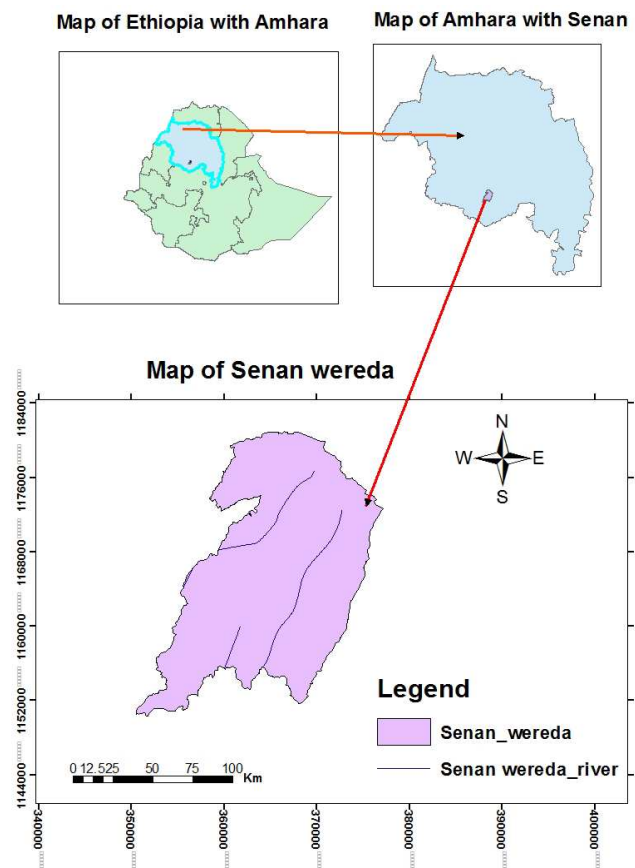
## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1. Description of the Study Area

*Sinan woreda* is located in East *Gojjam* Administrative zone, which is located in the *Amhara* National Regional State of North Western Ethiopia. *Sinan woreda* is one of the rural *woreda* lies within range of 10° 25' 13" N and

10° 40' 30"N latitudes and 37° 40' E and 37° 50' 20" E longitudes. According to *Sinan Woreda* Plan Commission, *Sinan woreda* is located at about 327 km away from Addis Ababa in North West direction; at about 292 km from *Bahir Dar* the capital city of *Amhara* National regional state in South East direction [12]. There are 18 *Kebeles* in the *woreda*. *Sinan Woreda* agro-ecologically the *woreda* is classified in to three agro-ecological zones; these are *Wurch* (Alpine) 2%, *Dega* (temperate) 75%, and *Weina Dega* (subtropical) 23% [9]. The land form of the *woreda* is made up of plateau and plain surface 25%, mountain and hills 60% and valley 15% [12]. Vegetation of the study area is largely dominated by *Juniperus procera* and *Eucalyptus globules*.

According to *Sinan Woreda* Agricultural Office, the *woreda* dominated by red soil type that constitutes 75% and brown soil type constitutes 25% [9]. According to *Sinan Woreda* Plan Commission population data, the study *woreda's* population in 2018 is 119242, out of which 59168 and 60074 are male and female respectively [12]. The *woreda* occupied a total area of 43134ha. Out of the total areas of the *woreda* 24178 ha (56.05%) is cultivated land; 6477 ha (15.01%) is forests, wood lands and bushes; 8503 ha (19.71%) is grazing lands; 1326 ha (3.07%) is covered by villages and 2440 ha (5.65%) is out of use & the rest 210 ha (0.48%) is for other purposes [10].



Source: Arc GIS version 10

Figure 1. Map of the study woreda/district.

### Design of the Study

The researcher used mixed research design particularly concurrent design with a triangulated research process by merging both quantitative and qualitative research approaches. "Triangulation in social research can be described as the use of more than one method of investigation and hence more than one type of data.

### 2.2. Target Population, Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

*Sinan Woreda*, which is found in East *Gojjam* Zone, taken as the main setting of the study. There are three secondary schools. The target population of the study included; teachers, principal, vice principals, cluster supervisor, PTA, KETB, students and *Woreda* education office staffs in the research area. To conduct this study, two office heads and five team leaders; 79 teachers/50%, 14 PTA, 17 KETB members, one supervisor, one principal, two vice principals, and 126 class monitors became the sample of the study. Because of their responsibility and their better understanding about the issue: heads and team leaders; class monitors; cluster supervisor, principal, vice principals, KETB and PTA members were selected by through purposive sampling techniques. Teachers also became the sample of the study and they were also selected by through stratified random sampling technique.

### 2.3. Data Gathering Instruments

In order to gather relevant data questionnaire, interview and focus group discussion were used. Questionnaires administered to 79 teachers; semi-structured interview for cluster supervisor, vice principals and a principal for this study; and focus group discussion held for PTA and KETB members; class monitors; and for *Woreda* education office heads and team leaders.

### 2.4. Data Analysis Techniques

The study used both qualitative and quantitative method (mixed research method). It was used concurrent triangulation analysis method, i.e. the statistical data taken from the questionnaire was analyzed by using mean, standard deviation and one sample t- test with Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) in order to determine the status and challenges school community relationship. The qualitative data analysis carried out by through narrative analysis.

## 3. Result and Discussion

The main objective of the study was to assess the status of school community relationship at schools and to identify the factors that hinder school community relationship at schools.

**Table 1.** Background Information of Teachers.

Characteristics	Divisions	Frequency	Percentage	Remark
Sex	M	55	69.6	
	F	24	30.4	
	T	79	100	
Age	Below 25 years	9	11.4	
	From 26-35 years	63	79.7	
	Above 35 years	7	8.9	
	Below 5 years	19	24.1	
Service	From 6-10 years	39	49.4	
	From 11-20 years	19	24.1	
	Above 20 years	2	2.5	

The above table shows that; 69.6 percent of respondents were male teachers and 30.4 percent of were female teachers. And age ratio shows; 11.4 percent of respondents were under 25 years old, 79.7 percent of sample teachers were between 26-35 years age and 8.9 percent of these above 35 years. Based on service/experience; 24.1 percent of respondents have taught below 5 years, 49.4 percent of them taught for 6-10 years, 24.1% of respondents have taught for 11-20 years and 2.5% of

respondent teachers have 20 and above service in teaching.

### 3.1. The Status of School Community Relationship

Parents and teachers are willing partners in school-community link. So, in order to assess the status of community involvement, this research was conducted and the analysis carried out as follows:

**Table 2.** Means, Standard Deviations and One Sample t-Test Value for the Current Status of School Community Relationship at Schools (n= 79). Test value=3.

Items	Mean		Standard Deviation	t- value	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Expected	Observed				
Status of school community relationship in school management	3.00	2.10	.397	-20.089	78	.001
The status of school community relationships in contribution of resources	3.00	2.25	.438	-15.169	78	.001
The status of school community relationship in an instructional issues	3.00	2.14	.491	-15.499	78	.001
Status of school community relationship/Grand mean/.	3.00	2.1266	.28393	-27.342	78	.002

As shown in table 2, the status of school community relationship in school management with the observed mean

value (2.10) which was found below the expected mean (3.00). And also the one sample t-test value | -

20.089  $|=20.089$  which is greater than the critical t-test value 1.99 with 78 degree of freedom with p-value 0.001 at 0.05 level of significance. This shows that, the status of community participation in school management was low.

The interview and the focus group discussion results/responses/ also confirmed the finding in a similar way. As a result, they could not provide real feedback to concerned bodies and made proper decision for future planning; providing timely measures for short falls and constraints; and could not judge whether the plans are met or not in line with the school's vision and mission. Class monitors also claimed that the status of community at involving in schools with monitoring and evaluating of school performance and decision making process did not as expected. Besides, community members did not have the information on the extent, how the school activities are planned; how the plan is implemented; what remains and what problems encountered; and what measures to be taken. When I have discussed with the PTA and KETB members they stated that the school community relationship in secondary schools found in a very poor condition/status/ in school management. Sometimes schools describe the semester report for the community and the communities join in schools per a semester for meeting by fearing the penalty and we as PTA and KETB member we only participated in deciding the school annual budget and in determining teachers' semester efficiency.

And also as shown in table 2, the status of school community relationships in contribution of resources with one sample t-test value  $|-15.169| = 15.169 > \text{critical t-value } 1.99$  with p-value 0.001 at 0.05 level of significance and with the calculated mean is 2.25 which is lower than the expected mean is 3.00 indicated that the status of school community relationship in contribution of resources for secondary schools of *Sinan Woreda* by the community with in problem. The students' focus group discussion result revealed that, even the community participated in supporting the schools by giving money /funds/, their contribution in material and labor had its own problem. *Woreda* education office heads and team leaders, the principal and vice principals and the cluster supervisor also said that the communities contribution for secondary schools is not sufficient. They said, they

participated some times in funding money. The PTA and KETB members also asserted the above ideas.

In addition to the above ideas, as stated in the same table, the status of school community relationship in an instructional issues with one sample t-test value  $|-15.499| = 15.499$  which is greater than the critical t-value 1.99 with p-value 0.001 at 0.05 level of significance and with the observed mean 2.14 lower than the expected mean value 3.00. This shows that the participation of the community in the instructional issues had its own problem. In supporting this result the interviews and the focus group discussion results also indicated the school community relationship specifically in the instructional issues was weak. They said that the participation of the community in support of students at home, in communicating with teachers in academic issues was not good. Specially, they did not give any recommendation on the curriculum they said.

To sum up, as indicated in table 2, the status of school community relationship with one sample t-test value  $|-27.342| = 27.342$  which is greater than t-critical value 1.99 with p-value 0.001 at 0.05 level of significance and with the observed mean value 2.1266 is less than the expected value 3.00. This revealed that the status of school community relationship in secondary schools of *Sinan Woreda* was very low/weak. There was pseudo participation and the community accepts any decisions that have already been decided by school administrations.

### 3.2. Challenges That Hinder the School Community Relationship

The level of community involvement at any given time can be affected by various challenging factors or situations such as: leadership styles of school principals; lack of awareness; low economic conditions of community; lack of conducive school environment to involve stakeholders; existing political and institutional arrangements; and social and cultural condition; lack of understanding the role they play in the educational process and others [7&8]. So, the researcher tried to indicate the current level of challenging factors of community involvement in *Sinan Woreda* secondary schools as presented follows:

**Table 3.** Means, Standard Deviations, Rank and One Sample t-Test Value for Factors that Hinder the School Community Relationship at Schools in detail (n=79). Test value=3.

Items	Mean		Rank	Standard Deviation	t- value	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Expected	Observed					
Parents assume education is the only role of the school	3.00	3.51	6	1.175	3.829	78	0.001
Parents fear because of their low educational background	3.00	3.63	5	.963	5.841	78	0.001
Less attitude for children's education	3.00	3.76	2	1.028	6.567	78	0.001
Lack of awareness on the value of parent involvement in education	3.00	3.78	1	1.082	6.446	78	0.001
Lack of knowledge and experience for schooling	3.00	3.71	4	1.088	5.792	78	0.001
Poor relation teachers and parents	3.00	3.75	3	1.182	5.617	78	0.001
Lack of time	3.00	3.19	9	1.210	1.395	78	0.005
Lack of financial or other resources	3.00	3.42	8	1.297	2.863	78	0.005
Lack of strong school leadership to mobilize the community	3.00	3.49	7	1.229	3.571	78	0.005
Distance of the school from home/lack of transport/	3.00	3.06	10	1.304	.431	78	0.005

The respondents were asked to show degrees of seriousness of possible factors that hinder the school

community relationship at schools. Thus, as indicated in the above table 3, the six highly serious problems as identified by the respondents were: parents assume education is the only role of the school; parents fear that they do not contribute much because of their low educational background; less attitude towards the education of their children; lack of awareness on the value of parent involvement in education; lack of knowledge and experience for schooling; and poor relation between teachers and parents with the result of calculated mean values (3.51, 3.63, 3.76, 3.78, 3.71, 3.75 ) respectively and highly influenced the status of school community involvement in the study area. Whereas, lack of time; lack of financial or other resources; lack of strong school leadership to mobilize the community; and distance of the school from home/lack of transport with the result of calculated mean values (3.19, 3.42, 3.49 and 3.06) were moderately influence the condition of community involvement at schools. The other respondents who participated in focus group discussion and interviews also reflected the same results i.e. the major obstacles for community involvement in schools were their low educational background; less attitude for the education of their children; lack of awareness on the value of parent involvement in education; lack of knowledge and experience for schooling; and poor relation between teachers and parents.

Turney's and Kao's stated some of barriers to parental involvement in schools are lack of understanding the role they play in the educational process; not internalizing their roles and responsibilities as parents and as community members; lack of know how to participate actively as a community member; not continually seek to improve skills as engaged and involved community members in support of the well-being of all children; low communication between schools and communities; lack of understanding how the educational system functions; how to navigate the education system; and how the expectations of the community stem from democratic values; lack of providing adequate support for the learning and development of children; problem with safety at school; and not feeling welcomed by the school [2].

## 4. Conclusion and Recommendations

As stated earlier, the main objective of this study was to assess the status and challenges of school community relationship in secondary schools of *Sinan Woreda*, East *Gojjam Zone*, Ethiopia. The methodology employed was mixed type particularly concurrent triangulation. To answer the research objective; questionnaire, focus group discussion, and a semi- structured interview were employed to obtain data from the selected samples. The collected quantitative data was analyzed by SPSS that is mean, standard deviation, and one sample t- test and the qualitative data analyzed narratively. The major findings of the study were:

Regarding the status of community involvement at schools

the observed mean value/2.1266/ is less than the expected mean value/3.00/. Thus community involvement status in such dimensions such as, in sharing of their experiences and knowledge for school administration in planning; in deciding the school annual budget with the school administration; in participating with real decisions at any schools activities; in advising and controlling students; in discussing on student's behavioral change and academic progress; in participating in PTA and KETB with willingness; in visiting school's activities and progresses regularly; in contribution of resources; in participating on curriculum improvement; in supporting students study at home; and in communicating with teachers regularly to check academic achievement of students found in pseudo participation/lower level/. The data obtained from the interview held with supervisor, principal and vice principals and focus group discussion results from PTA and KETB leaders, class monitors and WEOs proved that planning, implementing, controlling and decision making was mostly done by principals without engaging the community.

Besides this, all respondents reported that: lack of strong school leadership to mobilize the community; less attitude for the education of their children; lack of awareness on the value of parent involvement in schools; lack of knowledge and experience for schooling; lack of conducive environment at schools for community involvement; shortage of resources; lack of well- trained principals who are able to coordinate community; none participatory leadership styles of principals; lack of creating awareness for the community about the role of community involvement at schools; lack of good communication with communities; low planning, leading, coordinating, controlling and communicating skills of principals; low commitment of parents, PTAs, KETBs, teachers and principals; unsatisfactory support from *Woreda* and *Zone*; low efforts of principals to involve communities in planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluation of schools' activities; and low involvement of stakeholders were the major challenges of school community relationship.

To reduce or alleviate these problems and to enhance the school community relationship in secondary schools of *Sinan Woreda*: Improve/update/ the competency of the existing school management bodies like PTA, KETB, principals, supervisor, teachers, through consecutive trainings; Principals should establish strong coordination with *Woreda* and *Kebele* management bodies and with other educational stakeholders; Adequate awareness should be created for the community about the benefit of education for their own and for their children as well as for the country to alleviate negative attitudes towards education by inviting guests who have better experiences; principals should create conducive school environment to enhance the school community relationship.

## Disclosure Statement

It is the sole work of the author and all sources are acknowledged.

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