

Exploring the implications of using parent-teacher associations (PTAs) as a pathway for school-community development

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this article is to increase understanding of the relationship between parent-teacher associations (PTAs) activities and school-community development, with a particular emphasis on the ways in which PTAs are utilized as supplemental or alternative sources of funding or support for school self-development initiatives.

Design/methodology/approach – The article is based on a case study conducted in two Ghanaian elementary schools. Field notes, in-depth interviews and observations of PTA members ($n = 21$) and activities make up the data. The article theoretically adopts a community development practice that is predicated on promoting solidarity and agency by upholding the ideas of felt needs, self-help and participation.

Findings – The study revealed that PTA initiatives can improve the diversity of activities available within a school while also building the skills and capacity of local communities and enabling individuals to make social connections. The study mainly recommended that in making educational systems resilient, such school-community-based resources of resilience should be preserved, fostered and valued.

Practical implications – The findings are practically relevant to local school managers and other stakeholders involved in school leadership, promoting the relationships between PTAs, school management, children's well-being and community development, particularly in sub-Saharan African schools like those in Ghana.

Originality/value – This article explores PTA's involvement in school-community development in Ghana, a relatively under-researched area in this approach, using a community development practice approach, highlighting PTA's impacts, implementation and challenges at elementary schools in the post-COVID era.

Keywords Community development, Parent-teacher associations, School administration, School-community collaboration

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Prior to COVID-19, socioeconomic disparity was little and there was reasonably equitable funding and distribution of educational resources in Ghanaian schools. A sudden and significant reduction in the distribution of resources, including funding for schools, was brought about by the onset of COVID-19 and its effect on global economic restructuring (Fuchs-Schündeln *et al.*, 2023). Many educational institutions, according to observers, are at great risk of not being able to fund school projects or provide basic amenities and no longer hope for a brighter future for the next generation (Sianturi *et al.*, 2023). The way school administrators handle these trying times is a matter for concern. Although a great deal of research has been conducted on the management, funding, and support of school activities and projects by parent-teacher



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associations (PTAs), there are still relatively few comprehensive studies on the roles played by PTAs in the era of post-COVID restructuring (e.g. Layne, 2022; Mifsud, 2022; Sianturi *et al.*, 2023). This study reflects the research aims, which were constructed based on past research, related to PTAs' activities including impact, implementation processes, challenges, and the behavior and attitudinal factors that affects school-community collaboration, shared school-community spaces and fostering school-community interdependence, and how these impacted the school and the community in general. Therefore, this article aims to explore the implications of using Parent-Teacher Associations as a pathway for school-community development.

There is evidence in the literature that the implementation of PTAs and the provision of resources made schools with strong PTAs more resilient than those with weak PTAs (Eacott, 2015; Ishida *et al.*, 2023). PTA actions have a huge impact on schools, despite their seemingly small-scale nature. For instance, research conducted in Nigeria demonstrated the significance of PTA and the various ways in which it has helped the government ensure high moral standards, academic achievement, and a reduction in the physical and financial strain on the school (Obi, 2016). Similar to this, Chang's (1995) previous study conducted in Hong Kong demonstrates how PTAs offer a forum for parents and teachers to collaborate, express their stances on education, and create parent policies about parental involvement in their children's education. Additionally, a recent study conducted in the United States by Garcia-Carmona *et al.* (2019) revealed the value of immigrant families' active involvement in school enrichment as well as the strategies PTA leaders employ to encourage parent participation and inclusion in their children's classrooms. In this study, PTA serves as a lens through which various school-based practices and processes can be examined. Therefore, PTAs are viewed as potentially important tools for the development of the school-community relationship, such as enhancing the decision-making capacity and level of accountability within the local community for school-based matters (Bierbaum, 2023; Brambring *et al.*, 2013).

PTA meetings have been proven to be suitable venues for informing the community about official policies and outlining the needs, difficulties, and expectations of the school. Considering that the Ghana Education Service (GES, 2001) first called for PTAs to be an essential component of the country's educational system nearly 25 years ago, it seems fitting to examine the role that PTAs play now in school-community development, especially in the post-COVID-19 socioeconomic restructuring era. More precisely, how do they support the growth of the school-community relationship? Research on the relationship between PTA, school, and community development is lacking. For instance, while research on PTAs in Ghana is expanding, not as much is known about how PTAs can be used as tools to enhance student performance in local schools and within their community-based context. Because of this lack of inquiry, no framework for analysis of the nexus of PTA-school-community engagement exists. In considering this, we rely on Bhattacharyya's (1995) theoretical framework for community development practice, which upholds the three practice principles of self-help, felt needs, and participation to foster agency and solidarity.

This article is organized into six sections as follows: First, a concise review of the literature is provided. The second section introduces the theoretical framework, while the third section covers the methodology. Anecdotes from the participants are used as illustrations in the fourth section to convey the findings. The findings and how they relate to the theoretical framework and pertinent literature are discussed in the fifth section. We finally conclude with a review of the findings, highlighting the recommendations for further research, limitations of the study and offering policy implications for the study.

Literature review

Importance of PTAs to school-community development

In recent years, PTAs—a vehicle for collaborative leadership in schools—have come to be seen as a significant factor in the well-being of the school-community. Popular media (Gautam, 2014; Murray *et al.*, 2019) and numerous credible scientific research publications

(Chanimbe and Prah, 2020; Obi, 2016; Smith, 2021) have drawn attention to this. The ability for local education to advance is adversely affected when PTAs are absent. PTA-funded school-based initiatives can foster interpersonal relationships and provide a favorable return on investment through a variety of social effects (Skinner *et al.*, 2022; Onyeukwu, 2022; Villegas, 2021). Public knowledge of a problem in educational settings can be increased by PTA publicity (Villegas, 2021).

The sociocultural, economic, and educational circumstances should be considered when evaluating PTAs and the well-being of schools (Agyekum, 2023; Murray *et al.*, 2019; Reeves, 2017). To evaluate the quality of education in communities, the Ministry of Education in Ghana has emphasized the importance of community and family involvement in school activities (Ghana Education Service, 2010). Act 87 of 1961, which established educational reform and policy, has given parents and school communities greater flexibility to engage in school activities. The act enjoins communities to support high-quality education for all students and defines the responsibilities of PTAs and School Management Committees (SMCs) (Donkor and Waek, 2018).

PTAs are tasked with enhancing the volunteer and community sector's capacity through their experience in fund-raising, project execution, service delivery, and idea sharing (Hill *et al.*, 2018; O'Farrell and Kinsella, 2018). These behaviors influence the social and physical aspects of schools and can pave the way for efficient administration and leadership, which boosts teachers' and parents' self-esteem and confidence (Addi-Racah and Grinshtain, 2022; Webster-Stratton, 2014). In Ghana, PTAs and SMCs are two of the most prominent organizations; they work with the government and the educational sector to improve the quality of education in schools. They are made up of parents and community members who assess the state of the educational system and suggest needed adjustments. Every basic school in Ghana is required to participate in these associations (Donkor and Waek, 2018). School staff, head teachers, parents, community members, opinion leaders, non-governmental organizations, and local political representatives make up PTAs and SMCs. The primary function of PTAs and SMCs is to assist with daily operations in elementary schools regarding quality and the development of the schools in general (Saani, 2022; Donkor and Waek, 2018; Owusu, 2017). Thus, PTAs carry out duties akin to those of district educational directorates. These responsibilities include establishing policies with the added goal of upholding the school's high academic standards, providing funding to keep the institution afloat, keeping an eye on operations and helping students and teachers, and fostering communication between the community and the school to encourage future school-based community action (Agyekum, 2022; Skinner *et al.*, 2022). Some have even proposed that, as villages and smaller communities lacked alternative public structures, gatherings for these communities may have taken place on school property (i.e., school compound, parks, classrooms, etc.) (Fay *et al.*, 2020). Also, PTAs have the potential to impact future school-based activities by creating links between educational organizations and increasing public knowledge of educational directorates/offices (Deslandes *et al.*, 2015; Agyekum, 2022; Skinner *et al.*, 2022). These relationships could be especially helpful for underfunded schools where it might be hard to get instructional materials (Obi, 2016).

PTAs and school leadership

The parents are the backbone of the local school administration. It is imperative to consider their unique perspectives and experiences while formulating and carrying out any educational reform or initiative (Agyekum, 2022; Ma *et al.*, 2016). Administrators and teachers must pay attention to their particular position when collaborating with them (VanValkenburgh *et al.*, 2021). By focusing on management of the school and practices of building a school management team, the interplay and dynamic relation between parents and the school can be explored and understood. (Leenders *et al.*, 2019). Furthermore, Gross *et al.* (2015) recognized that parents might engage in more creative ways with the community, such organizing events

or sharing leadership roles with teachers by collaborating within community-based schools. As demonstrated by [Baquedano-López *et al.* \(2013\)](#), parents who work effectively and fairly with schools were a valuable addition to the leadership channels, making community-based resources available for students and teachers and positioning the school as a community space. Parents also provide local leadership and serve as a liaison between schools and communities.

PTAs play a vital role in the robustness of the educational system. This enables adaptability in the school's mission, inventiveness, aptitude for overcoming problems, and proactive action founded on agency and solidarity (see [Bhattacharyya, 2004](#); [Sen, 1999](#)). Organizations that support the equitable distribution of limited educational opportunities within and between schools are examples of those that can be "able to 'act otherwise,'" that is, "to be able to intervene in the world, or to refrain from such intervention, with the effect of influencing a specific process or state or affairs" ([Giddens, 1984](#), p. 14).

In Ghana, several published studies were found that examined the processes for school changes ([Salifu *et al.*, 2024](#); [Wadja, 2019](#)), the effects of PTAs on school activities and community development, and the difficulties local schools have in obtaining support ([Ahasu *et al.*, 2024](#)). There are, however, few studies that concentrate on how PTAs in Ghana actively and thoughtfully plan, manage, promote well-being, and encourage community engagement, as well as how they adapt to budgetary changes brought about by COVID-19. Thus, the purpose of this study is to fill in these gaps and discuss how they may affect future research and practice.

Theoretical framework: community development practice (CDP)

This work on the impact of PTA on school-community development takes up a community development approach that is based on encouraging agency and solidarity by adhering to the ideas of felt needs, self-help, and participation ([Bhattacharyya, 1995](#)). Thus, solidarity and agency ([Bhattacharyya, 2004](#)) are required considering the growing socioeconomic inequality and polarization brought about by a wave of post-COVID-19 economic restructuring, as well as the decreased funding for public schools and other state institutions and the complete elimination of capital expenditures as a condition of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for the government of Ghana ([IMF, 2023](#)). Durkheim defined solidarity as a shared identity that stems from place, ideology, and interest ([Durkheim, 1965](#)). This definition aligns with Putnam's concept of social capital, emphasizing the importance of networks, trust, and reciprocal duties in empowering individuals to act together to solve common issues ([Putnam, 1995](#)). The cementing factors that link people based on normative commitments that promote collective activity and social order are characteristics of solidarity that [Hechter \(2015\)](#) has recognized as contributing to community development. Thus, the possibility of collective action is reduced by poor social capital and insufficient solidarity. The ability of humans to organize their environment, to generate, reproduce, adapt, and exist according to their own meaning system—to be able to define oneself rather than relying on the definitions of others—is another crucial component ([De Certeau, 1986](#)). To lessen educational exclusion and marginalization of groups like schools in rural communities, the Durkheimian concept of social solidarity might be considered in the context of economic restructuring. According to Durkheim, solidarity is the opposite of individuality and the expression of self-interest ([Cotterrell, 2017](#)).

Thus, the concepts of self-help, felt needs, and participation are seen to interact dynamically. [Bhattacharyya \(2004\)](#) asserts that self-help mobilizes people's cultural and material resources, fosters agency development and utilization, and—above all—avoids dependence. Furthermore, felt needs support individual differences and oppose external developmental pressures. These ideas support active engagement that results in agency and solidarity. Increasing the diversity of resources, both human and material, is another aspect of PTAs' abilities, particularly considering that a school or community is more susceptible to financial and other shocks the more reliant it is on one source of support. For instance,

mobilizing resources to include working with the government and schools to raise educational standards and giving additional support has been a crucial tactic for keeping Ghanaian schools afloat in the face of COVID-19 funding reduction (Adarkwah, 2021; Salifu *et al.*, 2024). In essence, CDP provides a framework for analyzing the local PTAs' contributions that help schools become resilient in the wake of COVID-19. These studies draw attention to the relationship between education and resilience, highlighting the role of infrastructure, shared values, leadership, cooperation, and community resources such as PTAs and shared education of children.

Settings and method

Location for the study

With a 2020 population slightly greater than 60,000 (World Population Review, 2020), the study area is a small town in the Eastern Region of Ghana. It is approximately 140 km west of Accra, Ghana's capital. Given the study's purpose, we conducted a case study involving two schools in Akim Oda, Ghana, to explore how school management bodies, such as PTAs, address educational challenges and promote well-being in schools. The schools were chosen based on three main criteria: (1) a community elementary school, (2) primarily situated in a local community and made up of students from economically disadvantaged background, and (3) schools that have a strong formal PTA management body, recommended by the district educational directorate. We were looking for PTAs that could provide evidence of their influence on the local school and community. This narrowed down our options, as many schools in the area did not have strong PTAs.

Design and participant selection

A qualitative case study approach was used to conduct this research in elementary schools. PTA members' experiences of supporting the local schools were gathered through the use of personal stories or the participants' own "voices," through the application of thematic, narrative interpretivist approaches (Creswell, 2013). In examining a case study, Mills (2011) emphasized the need for a comprehensive analysis of a single phenomenon in order to provide a comprehensive description of that specific phenomenon. Mills (2011) and Creswell (2013) looked at a case study from thematic, descriptive and interpretive research dimension. The study aimed to document the intricate relationship between PTA activities and school-community development, which has not been extensively studied in the Ghanaian setting. Using purposeful and network sampling (Creswell, 2013), we contacted the education director of the area because of our previous work with them on a girl-child disability project in some selected schools in the area. Per our selection criteria, these two schools aligned most closely to our selection criteria and both schools were recognized for their school-community work.

The researchers used purposive sampling to target key participants on the schools' PTAs to be interviewed for the study. The researchers interviewed a total of 21 participants: two Headmasters, two PTA Chairpersons, six Teachers, ten Parents, and a Chaplain. Data collection was performed using multiple approaches including interviews and participant observations, and detailed field notes. The use of these different approaches allowed for additional evaluation and a form of content validity, thus verifying the data collected on school-community partnership. Stability was further achieved by keeping the same participants for the interviews and observation at PTA meetings. Finally, by employing the same process and people for both recruitment and interviewing, equivalency and internal consistency were attained.

Data collection

Data collection for this study occurred at several school-community spaces between January and June 2023. These spaces include the two local elementary schools and under a tree in the

community. We conducted open-ended interviews with school headmasters, PTA chairpersons, form teachers, teachers, parents, and a chaplain. These 21 participants' perspectives were purposefully selected because they are either headmasters, held formal leadership position within the PTA, or were identified as the most actively involved parents in the school activities and project works. Pseudonyms were assigned to participants and schools to protect confidentiality. All interviews were audio-recorded, and the interview questions focused on (1) organization of the PTA, (2) how activities by the PTA affected the school and the local community, (3) and the measures that the PTA took to support the school to recover from the budgetary constraints and other challenges. The average time for the interviews was about 45 min. At each school, the first author observed and participated in two PTA meetings, keeping a field note. Head teachers, teachers, parents, and pupils were engaged in informal conversations. Finally, we undertook 21 in-depth interviews with head teachers, teachers, PTA Chairpersons, and parents. Interviews were conducted in English; however, the first author conducted the interviews in the native language when the participants were not able to speak in English. Each response thereafter was translated in English for the researchers by the first author.

To gather more information about the current PTAs' conditions, an in-school visit observation approach was adopted. We conducted observations in in two PTA meetings in the schools with the headmasters, parents, schoolteachers, and other community leaders. Observations lasted between 60 min and 90 min and provided another perspective about the parent-teachers' leadership and research site context. During the in-school visits the researchers observed and documented information through notes related to current activities and projects undertaken by the PTA. These in-school visits were extremely beneficial to identify any developmental impacts that could affect the conditions of the schools and the community. Typical examples of these developments were the construction of three new additional classrooms in the first school and the construction of an ultra-modern toilet facility for the second school (during the current research, the students and teachers were using a pit latrine).

Data analysis

All the interviews and observations results were interpreted through thematic analysis, a structured process to identify, analyze, organize, describe, and report issues found within the data set which helps produce trustworthy and insightful findings (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The process of data analysis began with the data collected through interviews, which were further complemented by the observational notes from the in-school visit observations. This was followed by the process of data familiarization by reviewing the interview transcripts and school visit observation notes. Coding was then conducted to identify the key terms from each interview response and observation. Further, the key terms were arranged based on their frequency of occurrence, thus developing categories. This became the backbone for the thematic analysis. One of the researchers followed the steps suggested by Harboe *et al.* (2012) using the Affinity Technique to group the themes according to their natural relationships.

Ethical consideration

This was part of the research on Girl Child, Inclusive Education, and Community Engagement: Perspectives of Teachers, Parents, and Administrators in Junior High Schools in Ghana, which was approved by the University of Ghana Ethics Committee for the Humanities (ECH 100/22–23). The study's data collection followed strict ethical guidelines. For instance, individuals' informed consent was obtained verbally because many local participants preferred it to written consent that needed to be signed. Both voluntary involvement and complete transparency occurred. Thirdly, participants were made aware of their choice to decline to answer any questions that caused them discomfort as well as their option to leave the

study at any time. Moreover, participant quotes were given in an anonymous manner and all the names mentioned in the article are pseudonyms.

The study employed the member-check approach to guarantee the credibility of the data, whereby respondents validated their accounts in the transcript prior to their inclusion in the research. This was done to make sure that participant perspectives were accurately represented in the study. Additionally, the community development practice (CDP) principles helped to understand the relationship between the community and the school and served as the framework for this study.

Findings

The findings of the study, which aimed to explore the implications of using PTA as an avenue for school-community development and to document the complex link between PTA activities, the school, and the local community, are reflected below according to the main themes: school-community collaboration, PTA-community collaboration, and sense of community.

School-community collaboration

Participants reported that the PTA helped to create opportunities for them to share their visions for the school and the community by engaging in fund raising activities and projects to improve infrastructure. At the time of our visits to the schools, an IT laboratory, ultra-modern toilet facility for School A and a six-unit classroom block for School B were being completed. These projects were initiated and funded by the PTAs. As the leaders worked to improve the school conditions, Barton (a pseudonym), the PTA chairperson for School A described the vision:

The PTA's goal is to help people become self-sufficient citizens who can live without the assistance of the government and who will be able to contribute to the betterment of their own children's education and the society in which they reside.

School A's head teacher had a similar opinion, praising the PTA and local authorities for their support of the school and describing the recently constructed IT lab for pupils as the first in the area. The vision itself, along with the head teachers' suggestions for creating a school that "everyone wants," serves to further legitimize the PTA's values. An old schoolboy, Barton (pseudonym) serves as the PTA Chairman for School A. He stated:

Since the mainstream was no longer supporting us, it was restoring balance to the community. We still don't have any support, I believe. Here is where cooperation is required. For our kids to feel safe and engaged, we need a community.

According to Barton, acknowledging different points of view helps members examine their own perspectives and realize that not everyone may share their goals for the school. The PTA chairman considered the type of school he wants to establish in the community:

We put in a lot of work. Yes, we truly did. And we made a lot of progress, but it was challenging. When I think about it, I want to cry. We had no idea what we were doing. I found one positive aspect of it: we distributed flyers around the entire neighborhood. And, we had folks, you know, people who didn't have a good income to support us. And to my surprise, we acted.

Despite the difficulties, this program encouraged more community members to contribute and attend meetings. Everyone, then, plays a distinct and unquestionable part in this goal, sustaining the school as a valuable resource for the community.

PTA – community contribution

In both schools studied, the PTA and the community are working together to develop a school that is well-organized, secure, attractive, and equipped with all the necessary educational resources. In fact, some members base their entire notion of what constitutes "a school" on the

leaders' encouragement of this kind of teamwork. By pooling resources within their different domains, the leaders turned the schools into community institutions. John (a pseudonym), the School B the headmaster, gave the following justification:

The community needs to be engaged in this post-COVID-19 world of financial difficulties and other issues. They ought to recognize the longer-term benefits the PTA is providing for pupils. Our community stands to gain from our excellent school.

John emphasized the need of community and school cooperation in overcoming financial constraints in the school. The leaders thus considered the school to be a multifaceted contribution to the community. To raise funds for the continuing construction of a two-story, six-unit classroom building, for instance, the headteacher of school B collaborated closely with the PTA and other community leaders through a community durbar (a type of community meeting where chiefs and other leaders are invited to discuss significant or urgent concerns in the community). John, the school B headteacher, articulated

By working together with the PTA and receiving assistance from other local businesses, we managed to raise money for the building of this six-unit classroom. As you know, the government can't support us, as there has been a freeze on capital expenditure including construction of classroom blocks for school. Thus, the PTA initiative allowed us to launch an independent project.

The leaders intended to support school infrastructure across the communities, given the state of the schools' infrastructure. *"Back then it was a neglected school in the community,"* a PTA member said, describing the state of the school's infrastructure, particularly in terms of its inadequacies. It has undergone significant modification. It was the members' voluntary responsibility to provide necessities. They helped with the construction of extra classrooms, toilet facilities, and a computer lab. To encourage the community to participate in improving the school's conditions, the PTA organized multiple durbars. John, the headteacher of School B, stated,

"We dedicated a significant amount of time, with the assistance and cooperation of PTA executives, to providing parents and community members with information on how to assist their local schools." John recounted a durbar held at the school compound, where the leaders championed a popular idea:

This durbar was among the most well-liked ones. It all came down to how to use whatever you had—money, connections, time, and all—to help the local schools. We had, I believe, around 400 individuals there to support our projects; it was a well-attended durbar. Ghanaians abroad occasionally support our projects.

It is interesting to note that what began at School B as an attempt to address the infrastructural concerns has evolved into a continuous process where community members who reside outside of Ghana donate money to assist the school's infrastructure projects. Participants in the interviews revealed that certain craftsmen, such as masons and carpenters, had been providing free support for the school project because of increased awareness. In addition to projects and other activities, the PTA organized *"culture day"* in observance of African Union Day (AU) in partnership with the educational directorate. Teachers, parents, chiefs, educational officers, and community members get together on this day. One of the association's members, Mrs. Rose (a pseudonym), reaffirmed the group's commitment to the community and the school. She clarifies, *"Just a few months ago, we celebrated the AU Day. We brought the whole community to this school, including chiefs, queens, and officers from the municipal office. Students were made to dress in their traditional attires, cooked traditional foods, and we organized fun games, and prizes were given to teachers, students, and members. We really had fun."*

Such events foster a sense of community among educators, parents, and students. They plan get-together social gatherings, family-friendly events, and cooperative projects. This feeling of belonging builds a network of support, promotes school spirit, and strengthens the overall school culture.

Sense of community

For those from low-income neighborhoods who had no access to formal locations for social events like weddings and funerals, the creation of a school park was a great help. Even though the school park is intended for extracurricular activities like sports and school events, school administrators opened it to the public, strengthening the bond between the community and the school. A PTA chairman remarked:

Through agreement with the community, our park is open to the public in the weekend. You come in the weekend, and you see all sort of activities, the youth in the community playing soccer, having funerals, weddings, etc. It's free because it's a community school.

The community and families can use our park. They are not going to find space in the community, because one, there is no park in this community. And two, they could not afford rented spaces. So, something to help and can impact the community. And, again, the school is here in the community.

PTA executives who recognized reciprocal reliance frequently expressed gratitude for the efforts made by some community members to create a secure environment for schoolchildren. Residents of the community help to maintain the parks in exchange for the PTA granting access to the school campus and its parks. As PTA member Theophilus (a pseudonym) pointed out,

We have had some of the community members come to help maintain the parks. Just a few weeks ago, a gentleman across the street came and mowed the park without a cost to the school.

When asked about potential implementation difficulties, Barton, the school A PTA chairman, stated that while the PTA is free to carry out any initiatives they have, if a project involves large sums of money, like building classroom blocks, the executives are required to submit the budget for consideration at the local government level as well as for additional project inspection or technical assistance. He claims that occasionally, this causes the PTA's initiatives to operate more slowly.

It was discovered during an in-school observation that the schools' current location had problems, such as poor water drainage, damaged windows, low hanging ceilings, mold and mildew growth, a dilapidated metal gate, etc. The health and safety of teachers and kids may be adversely affected by the existing school circumstances that the researchers saw during their in-school observations. Many PTA members voiced their dissatisfaction with the education office's lack of reaction to any necessary school renovations. During the PTA meetings, several of these topics were brought up and put on the table for discussion.

One of the researchers' most significant findings was that a few of the female PTA members worked as food vendors at the schools. Based on information gathered from the in-school visits, 11 PTA members were given the chance to prepare food and sell it at the schools. Most of them said they had the opportunity to sell because of their connections to the schools—their children attending and being community members—when asked why they were selling at the school. According to the food vendors, selling at the schools gave them the opportunity for employment. Finding a venue to sell was thought to be especially crucial for those without access to formal employment. Based on the participants' conversations, the research concluded that opening up school spaces to the general public exemplifies community development because, by taking this initiative, the school-based community canteen addressed a need in the community by giving some of the young women in the community jobs.

The findings provide school managers, policymakers, and scholars with not only a better understanding of the multifaceted role PTAs can and do play in rural school-community development, but also insight into the activities that characterize successful efforts. Our findings illustrate how PTAs can be used as an alternative source of support for schools within the community self-development initiative.

Discussion

The findings of this research suggest that PTAs play a meaningful role in contributing to the well-being of schools and communities. Some participants described the positive influence of PTAs on teachers and students' well-being, fostering community cohesion, generating positive social influence within the community, and capacity in training local leadership, which resonates with community development practice (see [Bhattacharyya, 2004](#); [Durkheim, 1965](#)). For others, the belief that the community can mobilize resources to support their schools during difficult times (e.g. COVID-19), coupled with the greater need for people's participation than before, contributed to the growth of agency and solidarity. Our findings also show how the COVID-19 pandemic affected Ghana's public school budget, resulting in cuts to expenditure on non-essential items and a freeze on school physical infrastructure, making it difficult for schools to finance most of their programs and initiatives. Consequently, they explored different strategies for raising funds for school-related projects, such as PTAs, community resource mobilization, and requesting donations from individuals both inside and outside Ghana.

Our findings align with other studies regarding PTAs' contributions to educational institutions. [Addis-Raccach and Grinshtain \(2022\)](#), for example, demonstrated how PTAs may support community interactions outside of the school in Israeli Jewish elementary schools. The findings provide evidence of the relationship between PTA and CDP. The PTAs in our case studies served more as connectors and middlemen for community-based initiatives. These results show how the community and school administrators worked together to give students the kind of excellent education they desired. The study's findings are consistent with earlier studies (see [Agyekum, 2023](#); [Donkor and Waek, 2018](#); [Smith, 2021](#); [Villegas, 2021](#)) that indicate the PTA's initiatives directly benefited the neighborhoods surrounding the schools by providing access to school parks and other amenities (like the IT lab). This promoted a connection between the community and the school. Community members' sense of attachment to the school seems to be shaped by their level of pleasure at the school, which in turn affects the community. These findings are important because they can serve as the foundation for interactions across differences that are less hierarchical and that create places for contributions from a wider range of perspectives.

Regarding implementation, our research highlights the significance of several factors in PTA project management. First, for PTA-funded local projects to use the funds they have mobilized efficiently, [Meijer and Watkins \(2019\)](#) also advise that they be granted a great deal of flexibility. While it takes time for initiatives to become sustainable and driven by the community, our research suggests that increased community funding can accelerate the development of these initiatives (see [Thomson, 2021](#)). However, based on our research, the local government office needs to be better informed from a governance standpoint by keeping the PTA's flexibility in check. By taking this action, it is acknowledged that not all activities can function in the same way without the assistance of specialized knowledge from the municipal office, suggesting that more practical advice in this area may be required. Minor initiatives, however, ought to be permitted by the local government office, and our research indicates that having the flexibility to conduct small projects can be beneficial.

Additionally, we discovered that PTA activities in schools foster an enhanced sense of well-being within the school community, contributing to and growing social capital between communities and schools ([Putnam, 1995](#); [Skinner et al., 2022](#); [Villegas, 2021](#)). For example, PTAs provide school facilities like IT labs as locations where community members can obtain discounted IT training. These kinds of events foster a sense of community and mutual support between the school and the community. However, theorizing community development as participation also helps us get past the steadfast emphasis on maintaining the borders between the school, community, and education office. PTAs interact with interested parties who possess the resources to back school projects. Considering this, our research demonstrates that PTAs played a significant role in leadership by collaborating with the communities and the education office to offer resources—such as funds, time, and expertise—to address issues at the schools.

In this way, PTA initiatives are therefore one aspect of the school-community environment required to create and preserve cohesive communities. To have a larger overall impact, school management and other leaders must acknowledge the power of parents and community as importance resources. Thus, PTA programs ought to be seen as a complementing intervention rather than as a substitute for government support for schools. In summary, our findings underscore the importance of PTAs in their quest to improve access, equity and governance in the education sector.

Research limitations

Although PTA members provided most of the in-depth information used in this study, only a small number of members' data was used. The kinds of activities that these members engaged in could have an impact on the results. Understanding the association's long-term effects is made more difficult by the PTAs' small size and community-led style. Two primary schools served as the study's locations. Research on PTA activities carried out with a different target audience and in a different location might produce different findings. However, we believe that the data we have obtained regarding the PTA's effects—and more precisely, the elements of its implementation that contribute to its success—offers valuable information that can be applied and assessed in a variety of contexts. Future studies might investigate the long-term impacts of PTAs on schools and communities, including how they relate to other organizations in the larger organizational and community context.

Practical implications

Our findings are practically relevant to local school managers and other stakeholders involved in school leadership. The findings add to the increasing amount of research on PTAs, community development, school administration, and children's well-being, especially in schools in sub-Saharan Africa like Ghana. To support every choice or action that is made in support of children's education in schools, PTAs have benefited schools by encouraging inclusivity and consensus building.

The results presented in this study support the notion that PTAs improve the well-being of educators, learners, families, and communities. PTA members who support schools may enhance the quality of their experiences in schools and communities by providing services specifically designed for the development of the school (e.g. creating school policies, financing projects, tying the school to the community, helping teachers and students). Other stakeholders who engage with PTAs including those directly involved in project in the schools, might explore opportunities to promote their well-being and enrich their experiences (e.g. food vendors and community members receiving IT training).

Our results also indicate that to guarantee that schools can continue to offer the community a high-quality education, it is imperative that stakeholders in school management, including PTAs, education officers, and community members, collaborate closely with schools. Thus, PTAs play a crucial role in the advancement of educational institutions.

Social implications

The research has examined the social implications of PTAs on schools in the post-COVID-19 reconfiguration, and has shown how PTA projects are able to support community, social, economic, and educational resilience. To promote well-being and improve the perception of the communities and schools, it appears that close community networks, agreement in school actions, and the mobilization of varied resources have all been important. As a means of fostering shared values and real school leadership, as well as connecting schools to local community networks and potential sources of mutual support, local management structures, such as the PTA, appears to have been crucial in fostering school-community partnership. This

demonstrates the influence of PTAs in fostering shared values and social capital, delivering beneficial community-based and local educational leadership, and enhancing the levels of social justice between communities and schools.

Recommendations for future research

In light of the study's practical and social implications, the following four suggestions should be taken into account in future research: One, PTAs as a response to unmet needs for school support from traditional structures, and how innovation in the face of necessity has shown that PTAs could form a powerful ongoing developmental tool for education in the country. Two, exploring how the function of community led PTAs could be better integrated with Government mandate, efforts, and obligations. Exploration of the intersect between Government obligation and community led to education initiatives. Three, exploration of how policy might need to be influenced to allow for such integration. And four, the impact of healthy PTA relationships and functioning on local community economy, opportunities for skills development and employment, and the enhancement of "circular economy" effects - the reciprocity at the heart of the concept of School at the Center of Community. It is hoped that by putting these suggestions into practice, stakeholders would be able to work together to increase involvement and support the improvement of Ghana's educational system for the benefit of community development.

Conclusion

In this article, we have proposed greater attention to PTA in the burgeoning research on school-community partnership in basic schools. By incorporating theoretical insights from community development practice and social capital (Bhattacharyya, 2004; Putnam, 1995), with a focus on shared values, leadership, cooperation, and community resource mobilization, we have argued for critical analyses of PTA as a response to unmet needs for school support from traditional structures, and how innovation in the face of necessity has shown that PTAs could form a powerful ongoing developmental tool for education in the country. Specifically, we have demonstrated how the school and the community themselves are enhancing the "circular economy" in ways that attempt to define and redefine what constitute a viable life in the school-community environment.

In addition, PTA initiatives can play a valuable role in promoting school activities and connecting communities and as such form an important pathway for realizing community development goals. They may improve the variety of activities offered in schools, strengthen the abilities and capacities of the surrounding communities, and help people form social bonds. Our results suggest the following factors to be considered when implementing PTA initiatives as a means of fostering community development. First, the ability to finance projects independently or with little help from state institutions may be beneficial for PTAs. Second, a PTA program may have a greater impact and reach if close collaboration is maintained with local institutions, organizations, and leaders. Third, community outreach both domestically and abroad may need to expand to support PTA projects that increase community knowledge of resources available and how they may be used to improve school conditions. Fourth, it is critical to closely monitor the impacts, challenges, and implementation of PTA within the context of the school and community so that this initiative can be better understood and supported, we grow can research depth on the value of the PTA, and PTAs can be better supported in the longer term by effective policy. Supporting this development requires expertise from the education and municipal directorates, collaboration from the local community, leadership of the local schools, and the people with the financial acumen to fund some of the projects. Many challenges remain, but significant opportunity exists for local schools in Ghana. Tackling these challenges will help deepen comprehensive understandings of PTA as a pathway for realizing school-community development.

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Further reading

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