

Community participation in educational policy making: Views of education directorate officials

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Abstract: This study has investigated the perceptions of regional education administration directors concerning the role and influence of community participation in educational policymaking in Jordan. The qualitative descriptive-analytical approach was adopted in this research to study the leadership with over 15 years of experience through semi-structured interviews. The findings reveal that school administrations largely permit only symbolic participation, as highlighted by 66.6% of respondents, while 58.4% expressed dissatisfaction with the Ministry's efforts to ensure meaningful involvement. The study underscores the critical need to strengthen community engagement in shaping inclusive and equitable policies that address societal needs. It proposes strategies such as establishing advisory councils, fostering transparency, and promoting inclusiveness in decision-making processes. By contributing to global discussions on participatory governance, the research directly aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal No. 4, which advocates for inclusive and equitable quality education. The recommendations chart a clear course for achieving transformative educational reform not only in Jordan but also in similar global contexts.

Keywords: Community participation, Directors of educational administration, Educational policymaking, Perceptions.

1. Introduction

Educational policy serves as the backbone of societal progress, shaping the trajectory of education systems and aligning them with broader national and global goals. It is defined as "a set of principles, rules, and standards that dictate the course of education and the primary directions determining its trajectory in society toward broader goals, alongside the ideal models deemed suitable for its children during a specific period" (Al-Aqeel, 2005, p. 3). Essentially, educational policy mirrors the legislative, regulatory, and strategic frameworks of a country, embracing laws and systemic reforms directed toward the betterment of education. These policies are not static; they evolve to meet the needs of society, changes in culture, and global priorities, balancing stability with adaptability to meet dynamic challenges.

In developing and developed countries alike, good design and implementation of educational policy require strong collaboration among stakeholders. Community participation has been underlined in research as a core constituent of making policies inclusive, equitable, and responsive. Genuine community engagement encapsulates the integration of diverse perspectives, fosters democratic practices, and strengthens the social accountability of education systems. However, despite its potential, the inclusion of community voices within educational policymaking is often symbolic, as centralized governance models dominate the decision-making processes of developing countries (Pius, 2013).

1.1. Global Context of Community Participation

The participation of the community in education has, globally, been recognized as an important strategy in pursuit of quality, equity, and accountability of the school system. For example, in South Africa, participatory governance models have played a significant role in redressing historical inequities and promoting inclusive education systems (Netshandama, 2010). In Kenya, for instance, community forums have provided the impetus for local stakeholders to take a more active role in the development of education policy, with decisions more representative of local needs and priorities. Models like this, therefore, point to the potential for community participation in bridging the gap between policy design and implementation.

However, the contribution of communities to policymaking is not limited to a logistical or material role. Evidence reveals their potential for collaborative policy-making that expresses shared aspirations. In Malawi, for example, the interaction between local and national has shown how the absence of genuine collaboration has perpetuated bureaucratic inefficiencies and hindered sustained educational advance (Rose, 2003). Examples such as these show that the need for institutional mechanisms for meaningful participation beyond tokenistic approaches is paramount.

1.2. Regional and Local Context in Jordan

Community participation in the Arab world, and more precisely in Jordan, is highly underdeveloped. The governance structures in Jordan are centralized in authority, with the main drivers of policy decisions being formal institutions such as the Ministry of Education and government officials. On the other hand, informal actors include community organizations and interest groups that have limited influence in setting educational priorities. In effect, policies often cannot reflect such varied needs within the local levels, hence making the potential of intended objectives dissociated from the real situation that takes place in society.

Jordanian educational policy comes within the context of various linked political, social, and economic stressors that beset the nation, including rapid population growth and resource constraints, further exacerbated by its regional instability. Despite all these complications, studies into community involvement have shown community involvement in education to be limited to supporting rather than participating or contributing either in policy development or the evaluation process (Al-Khalayleh, 2024). This limited involvement undermines the capacity for inclusive reforms and perpetuates systems inefficiencies in addressing relevant educational challenges.

The same is confirmed by other comparative studies carried out in the Arab world. For instance, in Oman, community participation is mainly confined to bureaucratic frameworks where informal contributions are overshadowed by the weight of formal structures, while in Saudi Arabia, decision-making remains highly centralized and the national educational strategy has been shaped without the slightest involvement of communities or any other civil society actor. The examples show that a change in paradigm toward participatory governance is urgently needed in this region.

1.3. Rationale of the Study

Educational policy plays a critical role in shaping societal development by nurturing human capital, fostering equity, and driving innovation. However, the effectiveness of these policies depends on their ability to integrate the perspectives of all stakeholders, including communities. In Jordan, the lack of meaningful community participation in educational policymaking represents a significant gap that demands immediate attention. Bridging this gap is essential to ensure that policies are not only inclusive but also responsive to the evolving needs of society. This study aims to explore the perceptions of educational administration directors regarding the role of community participation in Jordanian educational policymaking. By examining the challenges and opportunities of community engagement, the research seeks to provide actionable insights to enhance stakeholder involvement in policy processes.

1.4. Study Problem

Educational policy serves as a cornerstone for societal progress by providing legislative, regulatory, and strategic frameworks that guide education systems and align them with national development

objectives. However, for these policies to be legitimate and effective, they must reflect the diverse needs and aspirations of society. Research has shown that community participation is vital for improving inclusivity, equity, and accountability in educational policymaking. Through meaningful engagement, communities contribute not only logistical and material support but also critical insights that shape educational outcomes (McAlister, 2013; Uemura, 1999). Despite its recognized importance, community participation in Jordan's educational policymaking remains limited and largely symbolic. Centralized decision-making structures dominate the process, leaving little room for community input in planning, implementation, or evaluation. This disconnect between policy objectives and local realities undermines the inclusivity and responsiveness of Jordan's education system (Taamneh et al., 2020).

Research from other developing contexts highlights the transformative potential of community engagement in addressing such challenges. Participatory models in Tanzania, Kenya, and South Africa illustrate how empowering local stakeholders fosters more effective and sustainable educational reforms (Njunwa, 2010; Pius, 2013; Netshandama, 2010). These examples emphasize the importance of institutional mechanisms that encourage meaningful participation and ensure that policies align with society's collective aspirations.

In Jordan, the minimal role of communities in educational policymaking raises critical questions about how their engagement can be activated and sustained. This study focuses on understanding the perceptions of educational administration directors, who serve as key intermediaries between policy design and implementation. By examining their views, the research aims to identify actionable strategies for enhancing community participation, addressing critical gaps in representation, and fostering collaboration.

2. Research Question

- How do educational administration directors perceive the role of community participation in Jordanian educational policymaking?
- What are the challenges and opportunities associated with community engagement in educational policy processes?
- What strategies can be implemented to enhance meaningful community involvement in policymaking?

3. Research Method

According to Creswell (2009), when research tries to explain complex phenomena, the qualitative approach provides the most suitable manner of exploring subjective experiences, contexts, and processes. A narrative research method was used for this study since it best fitted an investigation into the perceptions, experiences, and feelings of the educational administration directors on the role of community participation in policymaking in Jordan's educational setting. Narrative methods allow the researcher to elicit rich and nuanced accounts of experience, providing depth into participants' realities. As Carless and Douglas note, "The narrative method is particularly suited to accessing lived experience. Rather than any constructs, opinions, or abstractions, narrative methods emphasize the ways in which an individual experiences concrete events." This approach, therefore, befits a relational and contextual investigation into community involvement in policy elaboration, where stories represent power dynamics, historic influences, and social structure.

3.1. Research Population and Sampling

The research population is the group where data are collected for empirical investigation. According to Burns & Grove (2003), it is defined as the people or things that make up the central focus of inquiry. Therefore, the population of this study included all directors of educational administration who were actively serving in the directorates of education and affiliated with the Jordanian Ministry of Education during the 2022/2023 academic year. These individuals were selected because they hold positions that place them directly in policymaking and a position where they can provide insight into the study's objectives.

The sampling was purposive, targeting qualifications, experience, and ability of participants to provide meaningful data. Purposive sampling ensures the inclusion of individuals in a position to best address the research questions. The participants were further assessed using non-probability sampling to determine specific contributions that each participant was able to provide based on substantial experience and expertise in the area under research (Parahoo, 1997). These two methods allowed for a complex grasp of the subject matter. It is however recognised that there may be bias due to purposive sampling based on subjective criteria; this was overcome by selecting participants from a diverse range of backgrounds and experiences.

A total sample of 24 educational administrators was selected in accordance with the characteristics identified in Table 1. The participants were selected to ensure varied representation regarding gender, level of educational qualifications, and experience within the education industry. The sample was rich due to variation within it and enabled a greater exploration of themes being investigated.

Table 1.
Sample size and description of participants' characteristics in the study.

Variable	Levels of variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	8	33.3%
	Female	16	66.7%
Educational qualification	Bachelor's	10	41.7%
	Master's	4	16.6%
	Doctorate	10	41.7%
Experience in education	Less than 10 years	6	25.0%
	10 years or more	18	75.0%

4. Data Collection

Open-ended questions play a vital role in qualitative research by enabling the collection of comprehensive and detailed data that reflects participants' perspectives without restricting their responses (Creswell, 2012). This study employed in-depth interviews as the primary data collection method, allowing participants to share rich, personal accounts of their experiences. The open-ended format encouraged the use of follow-up questions and the probing of responses, which supported the exploration of emerging themes and provided flexibility for deeper insights.

To ensure the validity and relevance of the interview questions to the study's objectives, they were reviewed and validated by experts in the field. This validation process ensured a strong alignment between the research questions and the interview content, enhancing the study's credibility and rigor.

5. Data Analysis

Thematic data analysis was conducted through a systematic and rigorous process to ensure depth and accuracy in identifying themes. The interviews were completed face-to-face, over the phone, or via email, depending on each participant's preference. Transcriptions were reviewed and validated by participants to confirm their accuracy and eliminate any potential misinterpretation of information. The transcription process was guided by Sandelowski's (1994) approach, which emphasizes clarity by removing fillers while retaining essential meaning.

Thematic analysis was carried out using coding and constant comparison techniques outlined by Charmaz (2000), as well as cutting/sorting methods from Ryan & Bernard (2003). These methodologies were instrumental in identifying key themes and sub-themes aligned with the research objectives. The primary themes identified were:

1. Educational administrators' perceptions of community participation in educational policymaking.
2. Current practices of community participation in Jordan.
3. Jordanian Ministry of Education policies regarding community participation.
4. Recommendations for improving community participation in educational policymaking.

By ensuring a strong connection between data collection and analysis with the study objectives, this research provided actionable insights into the barriers and opportunities for enhancing community participation in educational policymaking.

6. Findings and Discussion

The analysis of the data revealed four overarching themes that highlight the complexities and nuances of community participation in educational policymaking. These themes provide a structured framework for understanding the relationship between policy, practice, and community involvement from the perspectives of educational administrators. By encapsulating their insights, these themes offer valuable guidance for enhancing community engagement in policymaking and for informing both local and global educational reform initiatives.

To maintain ethical research practices and ensure transparency, pseudonyms were assigned to the educational administrators participating in the study. This method safeguards the identities of the participants while enabling a systematic attribution of the perspectives shared during the interviews.

Table 2:
Structural codes of respondents.

Educational administrator	Pseudonym
Department head	R1
Deputy of directorate of education	R2
Deputy of directorate of education	R3
Deputy director of directorate of education	R4
Assistant director of directorate of education	R5
Department head	R6
Department head	R7
Department head	R8
Department head	R9
Deputy director of directorate of education	R10
Deputy director of directorate of education	R11
Deputy director of directorate of education	R12
Deputy director of directorate of education	R13
Deputy director of directorate of education	R14
Deputy director of directorate of education	R15
Department head	R16
Department head	R17
Department head	R19
Department head	R20
Director of directorate of education	R21
Director of directorate of education	R22
Director of directorate of education	R23
Deputy director of directorate of education	<u>R24</u>

The identified themes serve as the foundation for discussing the study's findings in detail, with each theme reflecting a critical dimension of community participation in policymaking:

1. Educational administrators' perceptions of community participation.
2. Current practices and limitations of community participation in Jordan.
3. Ministry of Education policies and their alignment with community involvement goals.
4. Recommendations and strategies for enhancing community engagement in policymaking.

These themes collectively illustrate the dynamics, challenges, and opportunities of integrating community voices into the educational policy development process. By addressing these dimensions, the

findings contribute to a nuanced understanding of how community engagement can be activated and sustained to support meaningful educational reforms.

Theme 1: Educational Administrators' Perceptions of the Role of the Community in Policymaking

A significant majority of respondents (79.1%) emphasized the importance of a collaborative and constructive partnership between educational officials and community members in formulating policies and plans. Such partnerships were considered crucial for the effective development and implementation of educational policies.

Examples from respondents include:

- **R1:** *"The relationship should be collaborative through engagements and meetings to develop and implement educational improvement plans."*
- **R2:** *"The relationship should be friendly and participatory; they [community members] can contribute to decision-making within the educational institution."*
- **R3:** *"The relationship involves support and collaboration in developing educational plans."*

Additionally, 91.6% of respondents stressed the need for local community involvement—such as students, parents, and related sectors—in policy formulation processes. For example:

- **R4:** *"Engaging the community in educational policy formulation involves soliciting feedback on proposals."*
- **R5:** *"Students are the target group, and understanding the community's needs is crucial."*

These findings reinforce the potential of community engagement to democratize policymaking, ensuring alignment with societal needs and priorities. They echo global trends that recognize participatory governance as essential to tackling educational challenges.

Theme 2: Current Practices of Community Participation in Educational Policymaking

While respondents acknowledged the importance of community participation, a gap between ideal practices and actual implementation was evident. A majority (66.6%) reported that community participation in Jordan is limited and often symbolic.

Illustrative responses include:

- **R10:** *"There are no guidelines requiring non-official entities to be involved in educational policymaking."*
- **R11:** *"This should be a matter for official entities alone due to the sensitivities surrounding education philosophy."*

These findings are consistent with studies in Oman (Al-Farsi, 2020) and Saudi Arabia (Anayat, 2020), where policymaking remains centralized, limiting community input.

Despite these limitations, some key groups were identified as participants in policymaking, such as parents, teachers, school directors, retirees from the Ministry of Education, and educational development councils.

- **R6:** *"The participating groups include the parents' council, student councils, and the school advisory council."*
- **R7:** *"Participants include retirees from the Ministry of Education and members of educational development councils."*

Only 33.3% of respondents reported being asked to broaden community participation.

- **R12:** *"Community participation helps clarify the educational vision and goals,"* but noted that insufficient follow-up undermines local involvement.

This highlights persistent challenges within Jordan's education system and parallels global struggles to bridge the gap between policy ideals and practice.

Theme 3: Ministry of Education's Policies and Practices Regarding Community Participation

Participants expressed divergent views on the Ministry of Education's efforts to foster community participation:

6.1. Positive Perspectives (41.6%)

- **R8:** *"The Ministry's decisions are successful and work in a good manner; everyone is responsible for the upbringing and education of youth."*
- **R9:** *"The decision is suitable as it should be based on shared experiences and must be evaluable."*

6.2. Critical Perspectives (58.4%)

- **R13:** “The Ministry should do more to engage the Parliament, unions, parties, and various educational institutions in improving educational policies.”
- Another participant added: “The Ministry’s decisions are insufficient for a core issue like state educational policy formulation.”

These responses reveal both the inadequacies of current policies and the potential for reform. To achieve inclusive and effective policymaking, systemic changes are needed to better involve diverse community stakeholders.

Theme 4: Recommendations for Improving Community Participation

Respondents offered several actionable recommendations to enhance community participation:

1. **Activate Local Communities:**
Empower communities by leveraging their strengths and positive attributes to contribute meaningfully.
2. **Establish Transparent Communication Channels:**
Create mechanisms for open dialogue between the Ministry and local communities to build trust and foster collaboration.
3. **Adopt Democratic and Transparent Approaches:**
Enable communities to act as checks and balances, ensuring objectivity, fairness, and inclusivity in policymaking.
4. **Select Representative and Capable Groups:**
Prioritize the inclusion of qualified individuals for participation, ensuring representation across genders and cultures.
5. **Ensure Consistency in Policies and Training:**
Implement stable policies that transcend changes in leadership, and equip officials with the skills needed for effective collaboration.

These recommendations align with global trends in participatory governance, offering a pathway for Jordan to achieve more inclusive and responsive educational policymaking. By addressing these areas, the findings highlight the potential for transformative change in the integration of community voices into policy development processes.

6.3. Reflections and Global Implications

This study’s findings have significant global implications, particularly concerning the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which emphasizes inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all. SDG 4 highlights the need for education systems to serve as catalysts for social transformation, with community engagement as a critical component of effective policy formulation and implementation. The challenges observed in Jordan, such as limited institutional support and symbolic community participation, reflect broader systemic issues present in both developing and developed nations, underscoring the necessity of intentional strategies for fostering meaningful community involvement in educational policymaking.

6.4. Implications for Developing Nations

Centralized governance models in many developing nations create a disconnect between policymakers and the communities they serve. To bridge this gap, it is vital to institutionalize mechanisms such as advisory councils, structured community forums, and participatory governance models. For example, in Sub-Saharan Africa, community engagement through school management committees and advisory councils has significantly improved school outcomes by aligning local priorities with national education objectives (Rose, 2003). Similarly, participatory governance in Tanzania has helped bridge the gap between decision-makers and local communities, ensuring that policies reflect on-the-ground realities (Njunwa, 2010).

Jordan's experience highlights the need not only to adopt these mechanisms but also to ensure their effective and sustained implementation. This requires building relational trust between policymakers and communities and fostering transparent and inclusive practices.

6.5. Implications for Developed Nations

For developed nations, the challenge often lies in achieving equitable representation of marginalized groups within decision-making processes. Even where participatory frameworks are well-established, issues of access, inclusivity, and representativeness remain. Lessons from Jordan reinforce the importance of engaging diverse demographics—including women, youth, and rural communities—through mechanisms that guarantee their inclusion and influence in policymaking processes.

Research from Ghana emphasizes the importance of relational trust in participatory governance, which enhances the depth and impact of community engagement (Shibuya, 2020). The findings from Jordan align with this global perspective, highlighting the need for transparent decision-making processes and accountability measures that ensure genuine community influence on educational policies.

6.6. Global Transferability of Findings

Jordan's challenges underscore the critical role of institutional mechanisms, such as advisory councils, transparent communication channels, and collaborative partnerships, in fostering sustained community engagement. Examples from Oman demonstrate how advisory councils bridge gaps between centralized authorities and local communities (Al-Farsi, 2020). Similarly, Saudi Arabia's initiatives to involve diverse community stakeholders in school management underscore the importance of tailoring participatory mechanisms to specific cultural and institutional contexts (Anayat, 2020).

These findings validate the study's methodological approach and provide actionable insights that align with global best practices for participatory governance in education. By integrating local knowledge, fostering collaborative decision-making, and ensuring sustained community involvement, policymakers can address the barriers to meaningful engagement and leverage community participation for transformative educational reform.

7. Conclusion

The study highlights a significant gap between the aspirational goals of community participation and its practical implementation in Jordan. While participants recognized the importance of engaging diverse stakeholders, challenges such as limited institutional support, insufficient Ministry-led initiatives, and inadequate follow-up hinder progress. These barriers underscore the urgent need for consistent, inclusive, and transparent policies that align with global best practices. Achieving this requires a paradigm shift in how policymakers conceptualize and implement community participation.

7.1. Key Recommendations

To bridge the gap between policy aspirations and implementation, Jordan must undertake the following actions:

1. Institutionalize Advisory Councils and Structured Forums:

Establish consistent platforms for sustained and meaningful community participation. Successful models from Tanzania and Sub-Saharan Africa demonstrate the effectiveness of advisory councils and grassroots engagement in aligning policies with local needs (Rose, 2003).

2. Foster Transparent Communication Channels:

Develop mechanisms for open dialogue between policymakers and communities to build trust and improve collaboration. Transparency and accountability are essential for sustainable reform (Shibuya, 2020).

3. Develop Inclusive Policies:

Ensure representation of marginalized and underrepresented groups to reflect societal diversity in educational policies. This includes engaging youth, women, and rural populations, as highlighted in global best practices (McAlister, 2013).

7.2. Broader Impact

These measures address the systemic challenges identified in Jordan while offering a scalable model for other nations facing similar issues. By situating the findings within both local and global contexts, the study emphasizes the universality of challenges related to community engagement in educational policymaking. The integration of diverse perspectives is not merely a theoretical ideal but a practical necessity for achieving equitable and responsive education systems.

By implementing these recommendations, Jordan can lead by example, contributing to the global discourse on participatory governance and inspiring innovative approaches to tackle complex educational challenges worldwide.

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