

An investigation of the role played by parents in improving the performance of their children in school work: A case study of Rusape primary schools

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Abstract

The purpose of this present study was to investigate the role played by parents in improving the performance of their children in school work in Rusape primary schools in Zimbabwe using the quantitative research methodology. The population consisted of all heads, SDC/SDA members and teachers in the nine schools in Rusape. Random sampling was used to arrive at a sample of ninety six (96) respondents made up of six (6) heads of schools, seventy two (72) teachers and eighteen (18) members of School Development Committees or Associations (SDCs/SDAs). The questionnaire and interview were used for data collection. The study revealed that there are many barriers to effective parental involvement in school activities such as lack of education by parents. The study recommends that heads of schools should always involve parents before making decisions that require the inputs from the parents. There should also be staff development workshops for teachers and parents where parental involvement in the education of their children would be the main topic.

Keywords: Investigation, role played, parents, performance, school work, primary schools

Introduction

The Statutory Instrument 87 of 1992 stipulates that each school in Zimbabwe shall have a School Development Committee/Association (SDC/SDA) which is tasked to promote and assist in the welfare of the school for the benefit of its present and future pupils, parents and teachers (Moyo, 2000) [10]. The major objective of creating SDCs/SDAs by the Zimbabwean Government was to involve parents in the management of schools and to promote the development of the schools with their locality so as to improve the performance of children in their learning and other school activities (Zvobgo, 1994). Parental involvement in school affairs is a strategy that has been used to assist schools to achieve their aims and to build a collaborative relationship between parents and teachers (Corner, 2004) [2]. Teachers and parents are natural partners because they are both concerned with the good of the children (Tshabalala, 2012) [14]. As Mafa and Makuba (2013) [9]. State, problems concerning behavior and school related outcomes are easier dealt with if parents and teachers work together and there is a positive correlation between parental attitudes and their children's attitudes. Although parents are legally empowered in Zimbabwe to be fully involved in the development of their schools and improving learning programmes of their children, the actual involvement of parents in the schools still leaves a lot to be desired. This study therefore sought to investigate the major obstacles to meaningful parental involvement in school business.

Statement of the problem

In spite of the positive legislation meant to promote the involvement of parents in the education of their children, there is no evidence on the ground that parents are indeed effectively participating in school work of their children.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the role played by parents in improving the learning of their children in primary schools in order to determine the degree of participation by parents in school work so that if there are shortcomings some suggestions could be proffered.

Objectives of the study

- To establish the major activities that parents partake in to promote the education of their children.
- To explore the various ways schools can involve parents in their children's education.
- To establish whether teachers appreciate the involvement of parents in the education of their children.
- To establish whether parents are aware of the legal provisions governing their involvement in school programmes.
- To find out the hindrances that parents and teachers encounter in the participation of parents in school activities.

Research questions

To find answers to the main research question, the study sought to find answers to the following research questions:

- How are parents involved in the academic work of their children?
- Are teachers happy about parents taking part in school activities?
- What are the obstacles that block full parental participation in school activities?

Review of Related Literature

Parental involvement in school affairs is a strategy that has been used to assist schools achieve their aims and objectives. Many

countries, both developed and under developed have used this strategy which helps to improve children’s performance in various disciplines in schools (Caspé, 2003) ^[1]. As Lumpkin (2010) postulates, parental involvement is necessary because it enhances accountability of schools and probably increases cost effectiveness, because if parents felt that they were part of the school they would thus voluntarily work for the success of the school by offering their labour or financial assistance.

Teaching and learning is the main objective of the school and all other activities are geared towards teaching and learning, hence parental involvement would naturally extend to this area (Caspé, 2003) ^[1]. Some schools used parents’ skills and energy to teach their children and others invited the parents to talk to them about their children’s work (Ferrera and Ferrera, 2012) ^[5]. It therefore becomes necessary to bring the world into the school and the school into the world, which means that the school cannot exist in isolation without parents within the community (Sirvani, 2007) ^[13]. Parents’ interest in their children’s learning was important because if parents understand their children’s education they are most likely to support efforts towards provision of a quality academic experience (Graham-Clay, 2005) ^[7]. Parent who are informed understand goals and methods of the teacher and they can work to enhance their children’s learning (Corner, 2004) ^[2].

In spite of the positive efforts of parental involvement in academic achievement, Sheldon (2009) ^[12]. Claims that many teachers and administrators still see themselves as individual leaders of their classrooms and schools and thus little attention is paid to partnerships and collaborations with parents. In order to enhance educational achievement of students, educators need to scrutinize possibilities to develop and form partnerships with parents (Richardson, 2009) ^[11]. Research also suggests that the extent of parental involvement depends among other things, on how frequently the school approaches parents (Glasgow and Whitney, 2009) ^[6]. The more the school reaches out, the more involved parents become. School leadership is therefore instrumental in establishing and developing a partnership between homes and the school, for instance by creating opportunities for joint activities for all concerned and thus lead the efforts of the grassroots towards a partnership (Graham-clay, 2005) ^[7]. The more welcome parents feels at school and the easier the school makes it for them to be involved, the more likely the parents are to be, actively involved with their children’s education (Lumpkin, 2010).

Lindle (1989) ^[8]. Reports that, according to surveyed parents, they want teachers to treat them as equals and with respect; and parents do not appreciate professional and cold approach from teachers. On the other hand, teachers who cultivate a personal touch in their communication style improve school/home relationships and likewise, teachers need to express a value for parents’ wisdom and authority about their children (Richardson, 2009) ^[11]. Parents’ own negative school experiences may also affect the building of a positive relationship with their child’s teacher, and indeed parents may lack the understanding of how to interact with the educational system effectively (Caspé, 2003) ^[1]. Effective teachers recognize the importance of maintaining a strong positive relationship with their students’ parent (Ferrara and Ferrara, 2012) ^[5]. Fullan (2007) makes a valid point, where he asserts

that teachers today cannot educate our children on their own; they need the cooperation of the parents. In order to maintain a successful partnership, however mutual collaboration is required and it may also be effective for schools to conduct regular orientation sessions with parents where teachers assist parents in how they can give their children more effective support with their education (Servani, 2007). These sessions may bridge the gap between school personnel and parents and improve communications.

Research Methodology

The study used the quantitative research paradigm and made use of a descriptive survey research design. According to Cresswell (2009) ^[3]. The descriptive survey design looks with intense accuracy the phenomenon of the moment and then describes precisely what the researcher sees. The questionnaire and interview were used as the instruments for collecting data. The population comprised of all heads, members of SDCs/SDAs and teachers in the nine primary schools in Rusape. A sample of 72 teachers, 18 SDC/SDA members and 72 teachers was randomly selected to arrive at a total of 96 respondents. Permission was sought from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education prior to the field work. Respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. The researchers personally distributed the questionnaires and collected them after one week. Data produced from the questionnaire produced statistics around the variables under study and these were computed and inferential implications from them derived and discussed. Data from the interview produced narrations that bolstered information from the questionnaire.

Data presentation and analysis

The study set out to investigate the role played by parents in improving the performance of their children in school work in Zimbabwean primary schools.

Table 1: Composition of respondents by sex

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	44	47
Female	51	53
Totals	96	100

There were 53% female and 47% male who participated in the study. The statistical significance of this study is that it reveals that there were more female teachers and female members of the SDAs/SDCs in the schools understudy.

Table 2: Category of respondents

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Heads	6	6
Teachers	72	75
Parents	18	19
Totals	96	100

The study used 6 heads of schools, 72 teachers and 18 parents. The sample was representative of the three groups that were targets of the study.

Table 3: Composition of respondents by highest academic qualifications

Academic qualifications	Heads		Teachers		Parents		Totals	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Zimbabwe Junior Certificate	0	0	0	0	5	28	5	5
Ordinary Level	6	100	66	92	11	61	83	87
Advanced Level	0	0	6	8	2	11	8	8
Totals	6	100	72	100	18	100	96	100

Table 3 shows that the majority of the respondents in the three categories were in possession of Ordinary Level (heads: 66%; teachers: 92%; and parents: 61% respectively). A few parents (28%) were in possession of the Zimbabwe Junior Certificate

which is a two-year secondary school course. The implications of this information is that generally, the level of literacy among all the respondents was good.

Table 4: Responses to the question: "Should parents and teachers be equal partners in education?"

Responses	Heads		Teachers		Parents		Totals	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Yes	6	100	58	81	18	18	100	85
No	0	0	12	17	0	0	0	13
Not sure	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	2
Totals	6	100	72	100	18	100	96	100

Table 4 reveals that 85% of the respondents indicated that parents and teachers should be equal partners in education.

Only 17% of the teachers stated that teachers and parents should not be equals in education.

Table 5: Responses to the question: "Parents were actively supporting teaching and learning activities of their children?"

Responses	Heads		Teachers		Parents		Totals	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Yes	1	17	12	17	16	89	29	30
No	5	83	58	81	2	1	65	68
Not sure	0	0	2	2	0	0	2	2
Totals	6	100	72	100	18	100	96	100

The majority of the respondents (68%) thought that parents were not actively supporting teaching and learning activities of their children. However, there was a discrepancy in the responses of parents on the one hand and head and teachers on

the other. Whereas 89% of the parents indicated that they supported the schools activities of their children, 17% of both heads and teachers concurred with the parents.

Table 6: Responses to the question: "Parents are aware of their legal role to participate in school activities?"

Responses	Heads		Teachers		Parents		Totals	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Yes	6	100	2	2	3	17	11	11
No	0	0	45	63	15	83	60	63
Not sure	0	0	25	35	0	0	25	26
Totals	6	100	72	100	18	100	96	100

The majority of respondents cutting across the categories indicated that parents were not aware of their legal role to participate in school activities (63%) though heads (100%) thought parents were aware of their legal obligations.

The main questions raised during the interview sessions were two. The first sought to find out from the respondents how parents were supporting school activities. Responses from parents mentioned paying fees, sending children to school, helping with manual work in the school as well as buying uniforms for their children. On the other hand heads and teachers stated that parental involvement meant more than paying fees and buying uniforms as they expected parents to help their children with school work and to attend all meeting called for parents in the school.

The school question wanted to find out what the respondent thought should be done to improve parental involvement in

schools. Heads and teachers indicated that parents should pay levies on time, buy exercise books, buy textbooks, uniforms and attend all meetings. Parents should also help their children with homework and visit schools to discuss problems affecting their children. Parents on the other hand stated that teachers and heads should treat them as equals and respect their views. Parents also stated that some heads were dictatorial and did not want to listen to views from parents.

Discussion

The findings from this study reveal that both parents and teachers believe that they should be equal partners in education. This is in line with observations by Lindle (1989)^[8]. Who states that parents want teachers to treat them as equals and with respect; and parents do not appreciate professional and cold approach from teachers. Teachers, therefore, should cultivate a

personal touch in their communication style and they need to express a value for parents' wisdom and authority about their children.

Evidence from the study reveal that parents were not actively taking part in school activities in the majority of instances in spite of them being equals with teachers in the education of their children. There could be a number of factors at play that cause this apathy from parents. As Glasgow and Whitney (2009) [6]. Postulate, the extent of parental involvement depends among other things on how frequently the school approaches parents; and the more the school reaches out, the more involved parents become.

Parents are also unaware of their legal obligations to participate in school activities. In most cases parents thought that their role was to pay fees, send children to school and contribute funds for specific projects. As Corner (2004) [2]. States, parents who are informed about their legal obligations understand goals and methods of the teacher and they can work to enhance their children's learning. It therefore becomes necessary to bring to the attention of the parents all the legal instruments to their involvement in education matters of their children. The more the parents are enlightened about their legal expectations, the more likely they will be part of the school system. As Lumpkin (2010) argues, the school leadership should not hide legal instruments that govern the involvement of parents in education, but should take it upon themselves to expose all parents to these instruments.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Given the background of the above findings the researchers make the following conclusions:

- The study established that both parents and teachers believe that in theory they are equal partners in the education of children.
- Yet evidence on the ground reveal that parents were reluctant to participate in school activities as they thought that school work was the preserve of teachers and school administrators.
- Parents were also not exposed to legal instruments governing their involvement in school activities.
- Parents wanted to be treated with respect by both teachers and school administrators. They complained that school authorities did not seem to see their importance beyond the monies they bring to the school.

Recommendations

In light of the findings of this study, the researchers would like to make some recommendations:

- Heads of schools should staff develop members of SDC/SDAs and the generality of parents about their legal role in the education of their children to conscientise them fully about their legal obligations.
- Teachers should increase their contacts with parents to increase parents' interest in their children's learning, because if parents understand their children's learning, they are most likely to support efforts towards provision of a quality academic experience.
- Heads and teachers should treat parents with respect both directly and indirectly. Directly during face to face contacts with parents when they visit schools and indirectly through

the way teachers treat their children (parent's). Some teachers maltreat children and this affects relations between the school and parents. Respect for parents by teachers and heads should not just be cosmetic, it should be real and productive for both parties.

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