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Perceptions of Parents and Teachers on Partnerships in Inclusive Education in Kasama, Zambia

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Abstract

In this study an attempt was made to investigate perceptions of parents and teachers on partnerships in the learning of children with and without disabilities in inclusive primary schools. The sample comprised 152 parents and teachers drawn from urban, peri-urban and rural schools. A combination of qualitative and quantitative methods was used in the collection of data. These involved use of questionnaires, interview guides and content analysis. The quantitative data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to generate frequencies, standard deviation and percentages while qualitative data were analysed using an inductive analysis method. The results revealed significant differences in perceptions held by parents and teachers on their partnerships in the learning of children. Although eighty-seven (87) of the respondents were in favour of partnership, sixty five (65) of the respondents did not support it. Parents and teachers who supported partnership in the learning of children saw parental involvement as a matter of human rights for everyone. Partnership was also seen as an avenue for sharing information, experiences and concerns and a platform for reducing learning barriers, promotion of socialization and understanding among parents and teachers in the school. However, the few parents and teachers who were not in support of current partnerships in schools cited several concerns. These included unfavourable school policies, negative attitudes and ill-preparedness of parents and teachers for partnerships in inclusive education. All these concerns can have huge practical implications in the learning of children. It is therefore necessary for schools to work together with parents in addressing serious barriers that seem to have impeded the development and sustenance of a more proactive partnership in the learning of children in inclusive primary schools.

Keywords: inclusive education; disability; collaborative partnership; inclusive school, perception, parents, teachers, primary schools

1. Introduction

We report the findings of a study to determine the perceptions of parents and teachers on partnership in inclusive education. As partners in the learning of children with and without disabilities in same classrooms and schools, parents and teachers, were targeted as research participants. The study was based on the premise that perceptions held by parents and teachers regarding their collaborative partnerships in the learning of children, have the potential of influencing the learning outcomes of children in inclusive school settings.

Over the past two decades, inclusive education has become a significant educational agenda in most developing countries, including Zambia. The roots of this development in the provision of education to children with disabilities, has been associated with the emerging global and national trends in the education of children. On the global front, major international conferences have advocated for making education accessible to the all children. The 1990 UNESCO's *World Conference on Education for All (EFA)* held in Jomtien for example, called for the provision of education to every child. At this conference, attention was drawn to the basic learning needs of children including those with disabilities as a means of empowering and improving their livelihood in the society.

As a follow up to the 1990 World Conference on Education for All, in 1994, Zambia attended the *World Conference on Special Needs Education* in Salamanca, Spain, where all countries that were represented at this conference became signatories to the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action in Inclusive Education (Unesco, 1994; Mittler, 1995; Avissar, 2000). The conference called for all governments to adopt, as a matter of law and policy, the principle of inclusive education as an attempt to provide acquirable education to every child. The resolution was on the premise that such an action would help to increase access to education,

promote equalisation of educational opportunities and help to improve the quality of education for all children (Unesco, 1994). The South African Human Rights Commission Report of 2002 sees the shift to this pragmatic model of education for children with disabilities as a responsive action towards the realisation of empowerment of children and persons with disabilities in communities. This is in view of the large number of children with disabilities who may have been excluded from the mainstream of education on grounds of institutions lacking capacity or resources to meet individual learning needs of such children.

On the national front, Zambia has embraced inclusive education through the 1996 Education policy, "*Educating Our Future*" which is now supported by the *Education Act of 2011*. Through these instruments, the Ministry of Education has introduced special education in regular schools under the philosophy of inclusive education (Ministry of Education, 1996; 2011). Consequently, a large number of children with disabilities have found themselves in regular schools receiving education through the mainstream of education as opposed to exclusive or separate education. In 2013 for example, there were 202, 511 children with disabilities (6.3% of pupil population) (Ministry of Education, 2013) in the regular primary schools as compared to less than 2,000 such children in 1996.

As a result of this paradigm shift in the education of children with disabilities in Zambia, parents as key stakeholders have found themselves as partners in the attempt by schools to meet the learning needs of children with and without disabilities through mainstreaming. Within the framework of inclusive education, parents have gone into partnerships with teachers in the provision of educational interventions to children. Kelly (1998) reports a significant rise in parental involvement in the education of children in regular schools that are currently practising inclusive education. He sees the potential of improved physical school environment, increased school attendance, retention, and performance, and graduation rates of children with disabilities included in regular school system. The increase has been attributed among other factors to active involvement of parents. Contributing on the issue of parental involvement in the education of children with disabilities, Katwishi, (1995), has advocated for a positive family and school relationship. The scholar describes a family and school relationship as a safety net in fighting increasing access to education and negative attitudes.

The study by Wilczenski (1995) in Victoria, Australia, examined parents' attitudes towards partnership. The results showed mixed feelings over parents' participation in the learning of children. The study showed that though slightly more parents were supportive of partnership with educators, other parents did not support a partnership approach in dealing with learning problems of children. Those who supported partnership saw the potential of parents to collectively solve learning problems of children and of offering educational and socialization opportunities both parents and teachers in schools. Partnerships were seen to give opportunities to parents to participate in school curriculum design and implementation process. The study also showed that parents supported a relationship approach to the learning of children, because of the continuum of learning opportunities associated with a partnership in the learning of children in the school system. The partnership approach envisages that the potential of parents would be put together or harnessed to solve diverse learning problems. In another study carried out by Bennett,

Deluca and Bruns (1997), it was observed that parents were satisfied with their level of involvement in the learning of children. Parents for instance, were seen to participate in designing of curriculum, its implementation, and in mobilising resources to make children access the curriculum.

Other studies on parents and teachers relationships such as of Freeman; Alkin and Kasari, (1999) and Evans (2002), have however, reported increased unwillingness on the part of parents in unurbanised locations to get involved in the learning of children. The studies found that parents believe that they do not have the right of participation and were incompetent to make a meaningful contribution to finding solutions to learning problems.

Contributing on the same issue, Adam (2006), reported negative attitudes of parents towards learning of children, as one of the limiting factors in the creation of sustainable partnership in the learning of children. Parents' negative attitudes towards partnerships with teachers, have been explained on the basis of teachers' unwillingness to work with parents, concerns on support service mobilization, lack of self-confidence and indeed self-esteem on what parents can do to support the learning of children in regular schools (Gerken, VanDyke and Xiao, 2006).

Few studies such as of Davern (1998) and Friend (2011) however, have reported positively of the parents' and teachers' partnerships in the learning of children. The two reports have observed increasing parental support towards the learning of children. This has been based on the premise that parents have been seen as primary teachers of their own children hence, the need to have them involved in the learning of children. Because of parents' long connections and interactions with their own children, partnership believe that parents have sufficient knowledge and experiences on children's conditions and learning problems to contribute significantly to the quality of education provided in schools. It is worth noting that parents' desire to partner with educators is seen as a result of the social and academic benefits accrued to partnership in the learning of children.

From the review of literature, one of the features that surfaces is that few studies have been conducted on inclusion of children with disabilities in regular primary schools in Zambia. The few studies that have been carried out in the field of inclusion such as of Kalabula (2000), Kasonde-Ngandu and Moberg, (2001), Kalabula; Mandyata and Chinombwe, (2006) and Mandyata (2011), have mainly focused on the philosophical aspects of inclusive education, have provided baseline information on inclusive education, integration of disability issues in vocational training and have given hints on the way teachers perceive inclusive education. These studies have further provided suggestions on how best to promote inclusive education as a way of improving education provided to children with disabilities in Zambia. The perceptions of parents and teachers on partnerships in the learning of children, however, have not been fully investigated. This study therefore, sort to establish the perceptions of parents and teachers on their collaborative relationships in the learning of children with and without disabilities in regular primary schools practising inclusive education.

Research Objectives

The research objectives that guided the study were as follows,

- (i) to establish the perceptions of parents and teachers on partnerships in the learning of children in inclusive school settings,

- (ii) to determine factors that may have influenced parents' and teachers' perceptions of partnerships in inclusive schools,
- (iii) to map out strategies partnerships use in building shared responsibilities in the learning of children.

Materials and Method

A descriptive survey design was used in the study. This type of design refers to the structure of investigation carried out. By using a descriptive design, the researcher, was able to collect data and explain phenomena more deeply and exhaustively to support the findings. Orodho (2003), sees a descriptive research design as a conceptual structure within which research is conducted or planned to be carried out. A descriptive design was seen as one of the focused approaches which were able to guide a study of this nature. It has the ability of determining type of participants, how data need to be collected, analysed and interpreted to support the findings. Because of these attributes, this design was used in this study in the collection of information about parents and teachers' perceptions, attitudes, opinions and feelings about partnerships in schools.

In this study, a phenomenological approach was used with an understanding that, humans make sense of the world around them by explaining it according to the way they see, feel and experience things around them (Kasonde-Ng'andu, 2013). This approach was employed in order to make an assessment of parents' and teachers perceptions about their collaborative relationships. Because of the rich information that was likely to be generated through use of phenomenological approach, the researcher hoped that a clear understanding of the perceptions of parents and teachers regarding their partnerships in the learning of children in inclusive schools, would be easily established.

One hundred and fifty two (152) parents and teachers comprising, eighty one (81) teachers, twenty two (22) parents of children with disabilities and forty nine (49) parents of children without disabilities participated in the study. Parent-respondents were selected through use of purposive sampling while teachers were chosen using a simple random sampling technique. A combination of these two sampling techniques in data collection, helped to generate detailed information which supported the findings.

Both questionnaire and interview guides were used in the collection of data. The data collected through use of questionnaires were analysed quantitatively using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) which were used to generate frequencies, standard deviation and percentages used in describing distributions of lone and summated variables. An inductive method was used in the analysis of qualitative data. Through use of an inductive method, data from interview responses were analysed by coding and grouping of the emerging themes and sub-themes on parents' and teachers' partnerships in inclusive education. Use of this method allowed for analysis dimensions which resulted into the emerging of patterns in the study without the researcher presupposing in advance what the important dimensions would be.

Results and Discussion

We now present and discuss the findings of the study conducted from 2011 to 2014. After presenting and discussing the findings, we will conclude by discussing how our findings inform on issues concerning perceptions of parents and

teachers on their partnerships in the learning of children in inclusive primary schools.

Parents' and Teachers' Perceptions on Partnerships

The respondents were asked to indicate whether parents and teachers were in favour of their partnerships in the learning of children in inclusive schools. Their responses were as shown in figure 1 below.

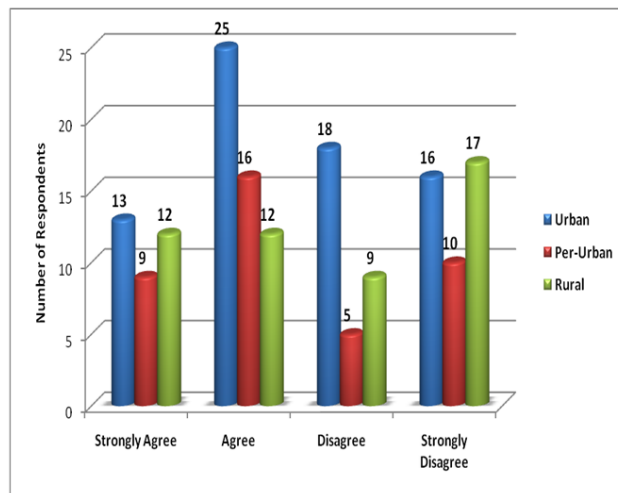


Fig. 1: Are Parents and Teachers in Favour of a Partnership Approach in learning of Children in inclusive Schools?

From figure 1, the majority of respondents, twenty-five (25) in urban, sixteen (16) in peri-urban and twelve (12) in rural schools were in favour of the partnerships in the learning of children in inclusive schools while a minority of the respondents, seventeen (17) from rural, sixteen (16) from peri-urban and ten (10) from urban schools did not support the partnerships among parents and teachers. On the whole, the general findings were that, the majority of the respondents regardless of their geographical locations were happy with the partnerships in the learning of children in schools practising inclusive education.

Parents and teachers, who supported partnership, gave several reasons in support of their views. These included the advantages accrued to partnerships ranging from, creation of opportunities for schools and homes to mobilise learning resources, support services, soliciting mobility appliances and contributing to the creation of the least restrictive learning environment in the school. Based on these findings, it is evident that most of the parents and teachers see partnership as a significant element in increasing access to education, promotion of equalization of educational opportunities and indeed in the provision of quality education to children in inclusive schools.

It is worth noting that it is through a partnership approach, parents and teachers are able to understand and appreciate the conditions of children as well as efforts teachers make to provide learning to their own children. A close examination of results generally indicate that teachers regardless of their geographical locations, are quite comfortable with the involvement of parents in learning programmes and activities while parents also appear to understand and appreciate their roles in partnerships. Further, parents and teachers see partnership as an opportunity for homes and schools to mobilise and put together resources necessary to support the

learning of children. In the studies conducted by Gad and Khan (2007) and Elliot (2008), it was reported that, partnerships between parents and teachers in the learning of children, provided a platform for the unification and coordination of basic and specialized resources to enhance the learning of children. The findings however, were consistent with those of Sharma and Desai (2002), who noted that collective partnerships between parents and teachers of children, often gave them a chance to learn from one another on issues on the learning of children and how best to deal with their learning problems.

Though most parents appeared to have understood and appreciated their roles in partnerships, some teachers, regardless of their specialization and locations were not in support of continued partnership in the learning of children. Teachers' negative perceptions of their partnership with parents observed can be attributed to a belief that teachers are competent enough to deal with learning problems. Teachers think that parents believe that teachers of children are competent to solve learning problems of children without necessarily involving parents. Parents believe that the training given to teachers in readiness for teaching roles and responsibilities, were adequate to deal with learning problems of all children. Because of this, teachers, believe that parents have very little to contribute to partnerships in the learning of children. Teachers see parents of children with and without disabilities in schools practicing inclusive education, as being less competent and less knowledgeable of the learning needs of the children, and what is needed to be done to make children experience school success. In short it is evident from the results that though most parents and teachers are supportive of partnerships in the learning of children, few parents and teachers do not agree or appreciate the current level of parents' and teachers' partnerships in the learning of children.

The results further revealed negative perceptions held by teachers on their collaborative partnerships with parents.

Teachers' negative views of their relationships can be explained on the basis of school protective model advanced by Powell and Bartholomew (1987). According to the protective model schools by nature are designed as institutions of learning and should be allowed to enjoy a protection from interference of parents of children they teach by not supporting a partnership approach. By virtue of accepting to have children enrolled in schools, parents surrender part of their authority and responsibility on what children should learn and how learning should take place to teachers as secondary parents of the children. We can conclude by stating that schools become more independent by not supporting a partnership movement which is seen as interferences in the teaching and learning of children.

In line with Powell and Bartholomew (1987)'s work, a call for partnership approach in the learning of children is perceived as a breach of the contractual agreement existing between parents, families and communities on one hand, and schools on the other hand in relation to the learning of children. It is clear from the findings that, parents and teachers in schools practising inclusive education do acknowledge the importance of partnerships in the provision of school success among children with and without disabilities though may have not agree with the form and practices in partnerships. Schools can therefore be seen as serve as agents of change in the promotion of partnership in the learning of children.

Factors Influencing Perceptions

Another objective of this study was to establish factors that may have influenced the perceptions of parents and teachers on their collaborative relationships with teachers. The participants were asked whether as parents or teachers, they saw their partnerships to be important or children to experience school success through inclusive classrooms and schools. The table 1 below shows their responses.

Table 1: Do Parents and Teachers Perceive Partnerships to be Essential in the Learning of Children?

Status	Responses				Total
	Always	Sometimes but not always	In some situations only	Never at all	
Teachers	22	30	21	7	80
Parents	12	35	10	13	70
Total	34	65	31	20	150

The results indicated that sixty- five (65) of the respondents were of the view that parents' and teachers' partnerships were sometimes, but not always essential in making children experience school success while twenty (20) of the respondents said that parents never saw partnerships with teachers to be important in inclusive schools. Parents feel teachers are more qualified, experienced and competent to handle curriculum issues with or without the full participation of parents. Further, teachers think parents are too ignorant of the learning problems and what needed to be done for them to make a meaningful contribution towards arresting school failures among school children.

As a follow up question, respondents were asked why teachers did not see the partnerships as being important in the promotion of school success among children. The respondents gave responses as shown in table 2.

Table 2: Reasons for Teachers not Perceiving Partnerships as Important in the Learning of Children

Reasons	Status		Total
	Teachers	Parents	
Ignorance among parents on roles in partnerships	9	6	23
Lack of awareness on learning needs of children	29	15	52
Believing teachers were competent to deal with children’s learning needs	10	5	19
Interference from government Free Education Policy (FEP)	3	4	8
Total	51	30	104

From the results, the majority, fifty two (52) of the parent and teacher respondents were of the view that, there was lack of awareness on the conditions and learning problems of children by both parents and teachers. Few respondents eight (8) however, observed the unwillingness to partner among parents and teachers in the learning of children, as a result of interference arising from the Government Free Education Policy (FEP). Parents believe that with the free education policy, the government had a responsibility of providing for every child without necessarily getting parents involved in the learning of their children as observed by one teacher,

Excerpt 1

Refusing to secure school uniforms and school fees for the children even when parents were financially able was a sign of parents valuing less, the learning of their children with disabilities in inclusive schools (Teacher, 1).

Arising from the views expressed by the teacher in the excerpt above on partnerships, it appears that parents believe in professional competence of teachers to deal with learning problems of every child and not what they can bring to the learning of children. The views expressed by the teachers seem to indicate that there is increasing mistrust and suspicion among participants over their roles and responsibilities in the partnerships. Because of situation in the partnerships, it is not possible for parents to freely share experiences and concerns about in the learning of children. Parents appear to lack self-belief, limited in knowledge and experiences on what is required to be done through the framework of parents’ and teachers’ partnerships to make every child access the school curriculum. Parents seem to feel they are not capable of bringing anything significant to the social and academic life of children except teachers of the children.

In order to establish whether there were differences in perceptions held by parents of children with and those of without disabilities on their collaborative partnerships with teachers, the respondents were asked to rate the responses which resulted in the responses shown in table 3.

Table 3: Were there Differences in Perceptions of Parents of Children with and without Disabilities on Partnerships in Learning of Children?

Item	Strongly Agree N	Agree N	Strongly Disagree N	Disagree N	Total N
Parents of Children without Disabilities	11	15	10	12	48
Parents of Children with Disabilities	7	6	8	9	30
Total	18	21	18	21	78

The results showed that 18 of the parent-respondents strongly observed there were differences in the way parents perceived their partnerships with teachers while 21 of parents simply acknowledged the existing differences perceptions of partnerships in the learning of children. On the other hand, 18 of parents strongly disagreed with the existing of differences in the perceptions held parents over their collaborative relationships while 21 of them simply disagreed with the notion. Additionally, out of 30 parents of children with disabilities, thirteen (13) of them felt that there were differences in perceptions, seventeen (17) were of the view that there were no significant differences in the perceptions held by parents of children with and without disabilities on their collaborative relationships. With regards to parents of children without disabilities, 26 of the 48 parent-respondents were of the view that there were differences in perceptions of partnerships in schools.

In relation with other studies, the findings were consistent with those of Adams and Christenson, (2000) who saw lack of resources and fear of stakeholders such as government abdicating primary roles and responsibilities as contributing factors to differences in perceptions held by parents on partnerships in the learning of children. This view is in agreement with that of Friend, (2011), who noted parents seeing themselves as being ignorant of what children need to access the curriculum resulting in unwillingness to participate in school activities.

As a follow up question, respondents were asked why parents and teachers saw partnerships in the learning of children as necessary in the promotion of school success among children. The responses were as indicated below.

Table 4: Reasons Parents and Teachers Supported Partnerships in Children’s Learning

Reasons	Status of Respondents		Total
	Teachers	Parents	
Partnerships provided learning resources and mobility appliances to children	19	12	36
Promoted sharing of knowledge, skills and experiences on children’s learning	17	12	39
Parents able to give baseline information on children’s conditions	9	7	19
Created opportunities for parents and teachers to understand, respect and appreciate each other	9	9	23
Parents and teachers work together to remove architectural barriers in schools	9	5	17
Total	63	45	134

The results showed that majority, thirty nine (39) of respondents felt that partnerships provided opportunities for parents and teachers to share knowledge experiences and approaches on how best to assist children benefit from their presence in an inclusive school settings as noted by one parent below,

Excerpt 2

I am the first teacher of my own child and my knowledge as well as experience about my children’s conditions and learning problems can be helpful to a teacher in assisting my child learn (Parent 2).

From the excerpt above, it is evident that child’s growth, learning and developmental problems are identified as early as at birth and diagnosed later in life as disabilities with full knowledge of parents. Through regular observations of the child, a parent gets to know the strengths and weaknesses of the child. As a results of the knowledge acquired with interaction with the child, a parent feel has sufficient experience on child’s condition to support teachers in their attempt to make a child learn. These findings are in line with those of Freeman et al, (1999), and Sharma and Desai, (2002) who observed that partnerships often provided opportunities for parents and teachers to exchange information, experiences and concerns children’s learning. Kasonde-Ng’andu and Morbeg, (2001), and Gaad and Khan, (2007) reported that when parents and teachers chose to work together partnership serve as a vehicle for socialization and an avenue for promoting friendship participants. Through regular interactions, information on children’s learning is freely exchanged and shared. Parental involvement in the learning of children can be perceived as an opportunity for parents and teachers collectively solicit for learning resources; improve physical learning environment and selectively secure professional advice and support for every child in the school.

Although the evidence presented by several studies on parents’ and teachers’ partnerships in a situation where children with disabilities have been included in regular schools see collaborative relationships as necessary, some parents have expressed reservations, doubts and concerns on the abilities of such partnerships to meet the individual and group learning needs of children. Parents have for example cited unwillingness of educators; dissatisfaction with the level of interactions, lack of self-belief and trust among parents, as some of the reasons for not supporting partnerships in schools. Additionally, parents have cited lack of supportive legal and policy framework for them to effectively participate in the affairs of the schools (Smith, et al (1997). Parents believe in having been disappointed with the kind of interactions existing among parents and educators. Parents have in particular pointed out lack of respect and receptivity among

educators for them to contribute to the learning of children. Parents believe that there is intimidation and lack of understanding among teachers on what parents can bring to the partnerships in the learning of children.

In this study, respondents were also asked to give reasons why some of the parents and teachers were not willing to support partnerships in the learning of children in schools.

Social Acceptance and Support

In relation to how partnerships contributed to improved social acceptance and support to children with and without disabilities included in regular schools, respondents gave the following responses.

Table 5: Does partnership contribute to improved Social Acceptance of Children with Disabilities in Inclusive Schools?

Responses	Gender of Respondents		Total
	Male	Female	
Sometimes	37	40	77
Always	15	27	42
Not at all	13	16	29
Total	65	83	148

Out of the 148 participants who responded to the question, seventy-seven (77) of the respondents reported that sometimes partnerships contributed to improved social acceptance and support of children with disabilities in schools practising inclusive education. Twenty-nine (29) of the respondents however, dispelled the notion that partnerships between parents and teachers contributed to social acceptance and support to children in schools. In short, the findings revealed that parents and teachers sometimes contribute to positive social acceptance and provision of support to children in inclusive schools as reported by one of the teachers,

Excerpt 3

Parents who are not able to accept their children with disabilities are provided with an opportunity to learn and benefit from other parents experiences thereby giving confidence to deal with their own children (Teacher, 2).

The excerpt provides considerable insights into the parents’ personal perceptions, feelings and expectations of partnerships with teachers. Specifically, a systematic attention to the above excerpt suggests that, parents were emotionally overburdened with the issue of social acceptance of children.

As a result parent look up to a partnership with teachers as a platform for easing pains and burdens in that is helps to have children with disabilities socially accepted in schools. Significant in the excerpt, is the parents' usage of words in their expression such as *experiences*, *opportunities* and *benefits* denoting cognitive expectations parents have to have children socially accepted by teachers and other children in the schools. Parents see emotional support drawn from partnership as a step towards improved social acceptance of children.

Decision-making

On the question of views parents and teachers have on schools consideration and accommodation of ideas and suggestions made by parents in decisions making in the learning of children, figure 2 indicates their responses.

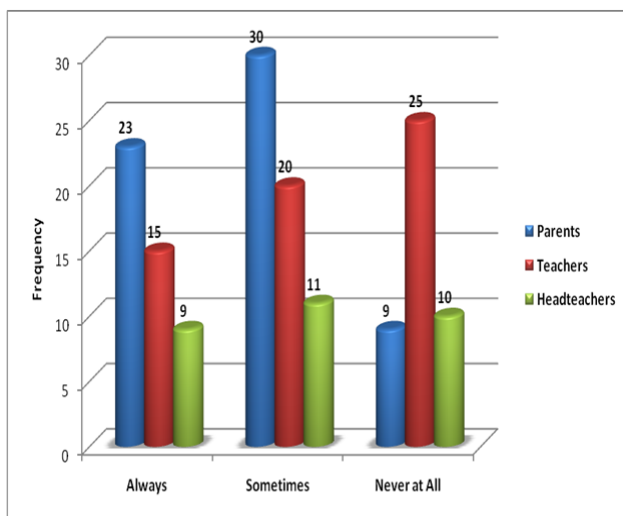


Fig. 2: Do Parents and Teachers Collectively Make Decisions on Issues Involving Children's Learning?

The results revealed that thirty (30) parents and, thirty one (31) teachers who took part in the study, were sometimes involved in the making of decisions over the learning of children as one teacher observed,

Excerpt 4

Teachers sometimes feel parents are knowledgeable and understand the learning problems of children (Teacher, 3.)

Few of respondents, twenty-five (25) teachers and nineteen (19) parents however, reported that parents were never involved in the making of decisions on children's learning. One parent in fact bitterly complained about school's failure to get parents involved when making important decisions on children's conditions and learning by observing that,

Excerpt 5

I do not know the role I should play in resolving the identified learning problems of my own child. No one wants to tell me what is wrong with the child, what my role is, but teachers go ahead in making decisions over my child's condition without consulting me (Parent, 4).

On the whole, the findings revealed that majority of parents and teachers were sometimes involved in the making of decisions surrounding the conditions and learning problems of children. This was evidenced by the provision of learner-friendly school infrastructure in some schools; increased levels of awareness on the plight of children and a regular supply of instructional and learning resources to support the learning of children.

Increasingly, parents within the partnerships are able to willingly serve, as fund-raisers; advocates and supporters of attempts to deal with learning problems of children. Parents' desire to participate in attempts to raise learning resources and serve as advocates of children's learning problems, were consistent with Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998)'s work on application of ecological systems theory on learning and development of children. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) saw the relevance of persons, objects, homes and families as children's environments, to be significant in supporting the learning of children. Participation of parents in the learning of children through collective decision making and its impact is supported by the ecological systems theory which sees families, schools and relationships as interface of social systems necessary in the learning and development of children.

Attitudes towards Partnership

In attempt to establish the attitudes of parents and teachers towards their collaborative relationships in the learning of children, participants were asked to rate their views on the same. The ratings of responses were as indicated in table 6.

Table 6: How is the Attitude of Parents like Towards Collaborative Relationship with Teachers in Inclusive School settings?

Respondents	Responses			Total
	Positive	Negative	Not sure	
Teachers	28	29	18	75
Parents	20	25	14	59
Total	48	54	32	134

According to the results, fifty four (54) of the respondents were of the view that, the attitude of parents and teachers towards their partnerships in the learning of children was negative while forty eight (48) of the respondents believed that it was positive. In expressing displeasure on how teachers

treated parents of children, over their concerns and suggestions in the learning of children, one parent reported that,

Excerpt 6

I am not an expert; I am a parent, I am suffering with my own child, I want help from the teacher to reduce on the problem of child's disability but the teacher often make funny of my child's condition and my ignorance on what needs to be done (Parent, 5).

From the observation above, a parent seems to be telling teachers and other parents about plight of individual parents over experiences in working with teachers. Parents do not seem to receive the kind of audience they deserves for them to feel acknowledged in the partnerships. Use of expressions such as *am not an expert, am suffering, I, need help, you make funny of me*, are expressions of dissatisfaction with the level of support parents are getting from their interaction with teachers. The parent, in the excerpt seems to express sadness on teacher's failure to provide the desired materials and psycho-social support the parent and child need to feel secure and supported in their relationships in inclusive school settings. The parent's sentiments seem to suggest the need for mitigation in the area of anxiety and stress accompanying the learning of children. It is evident from the results that teachers ought to make parents feel acknowledged and appreciated for them to remain relevant to the aspirations of partnerships as one parents noted,

Excerpt 7

The teacher of my daughter had no clues on the extent of her health problems and how to deal with certain patterns of behavior arising from the condition of my child, but chose to ignore me as a parents of the child. My greatest joy came only when my daughter was moved to a special education school where teachers were more willing to listen to me as well (Parent, 6).

It appears that parents sometimes feel powerful or powerless in their relationships with teachers, we see from the statement above the feeling of being powerless in the way a parent related with the teacher in the learning of the child. The parent spoke of teachers indifferent attitudes towards the *challenges* the child was facing and lack of professional support from teachers in attempt to meet the learning needs of the child.

It is evident from the results that, though parents are keen to share responsibilities, information, experiences and concerns with teachers, most parents feel powerless and hopeless in the presence of teachers. Parents believed were overwhelmed by daily tasks of caring for children, overburdened by conditions of children and lacked control over the learning programmes and activities given to the children. Kalabula (2000), reported that parents in Zambia, were often ignored by educators on issues of social and academic nature surround children. Teachers believed that parents had very little to offer on how best to support the children's learning. We can however, conclude that improving connections and interactions among parents and teachers, has the potential of pulling together home and school resources to support the learning of every child. This view is also echoed by Leyser and Kirk, (2011), who reports that regular interactions between homes and schools appear to promote joint ownership of children's conditions and learning problems. From the results on attitude of parents and teachers towards their partnership, we learn that, though it may appear difficult for parents and teachers to share negative information about children because of stigma associated with a disability, parents perceive partnerships as a

channel to improve the quality of education for all children in the schools.

Strategies in Partnerships

It should be recalled that one of the objective of this study was to establish the perceptions parents and teachers had on strategies used to share experiences in the partnerships. The respondents were asked to identify strategies used by parents' and teachers' partnerships in share experiences and concerns in the learning of children. Participants gave the following responses,

Table 7: What Strategies Do Parents and Teachers Use to Share Experiences and Concerns in the Learning of Children?

Strategies	Status		Total
	Teachers	Parents	
Parents' & teachers' (PTA) meetings	39	15	54
Notes & Reports to parents	18	25	43
School-home visitations	6	8	14
Family School Pacs	10	8	18
School Open days	11	6	17
Total	84	62	146

In relation to the strategies through which partnerships shared information, experiences and concerns, eighty four (84) of the respondents reported that though there were differences on approaches from one school to another, most schools dependent on the use of Parents' and Teachers' Associations' (PTAs) meetings to share information about the learning of children as one teacher observed.

Once in a while, parents are called for PTA meetings where children's performance and learning problem are openly discussed (Teacher, 4).

The results are nonetheless, in line with the report of Miles and Singal (2008), which reported the use of Parents and Teachers Associations (PTAs) meetings as a means of building a shared responsibility with educators in children's learning. On the other hand, it was revealed that sixty two (62) of respondents felt that partnerships were not very much dependent on Parents' and Teachers' Association (PTA) meetings. They instead uses of other modes of communication to promote interactions between parents and teachers in the learning of children. These included school-home visitations, sending reports to parents and use of school open days. Others were the use of call-parents; phone calls and use of e-mails to communication with parents. It is however worth noting, that interaction among parents and educators, seem to happen more or less when there is a serious learning or disciplinary problem involving children. Parents are hardly available to discuss issues regarding the learning of children which are not deemed to be threatening to either the child, other children or personnel in inclusive schools.

Conclusion

The study attempted to investigate the perceptions of parents and teachers on partnerships in the learning of children in inclusive schools. Although the majority of parents and teachers appeared to accept and are quite positive about

partnerships, there remains some concerns about the quality of partnerships in the learning of children in regular primary schools practising inclusive education in Kasama, Zambia.

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