

Parental Involvement in School Activities in Kibondo District, Tanzania: Challenges and Remedies

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed at investigating the influence of parental involvement in school activities on students' academic performance in community secondary schools (CSS) in Kibondo District Tanzania. The researcher considered that parents, as stakeholders are equally responsible and accountable for their children's performance. The study used Convergent parallel mixed method research design, qualitative used phenomenology and quantitative used cross-sectional. The targeted population consisted of teachers, students, head teachers and parents 180 respondents. Data were collected using interview guide, questionnaires and document analysis. Descriptive statistics such frequencies, percentages were used to analyze quantitative data while qualitative data were organized into themes. The findings indicated that parents face various challenges that could negatively affect their involvement in school activities. The study concludes that academic performance can improve if teacher, parents, students and community can come together and encourage students to improve on academic performance. The study recommended parents to be actively involved in the academic irrespective of their financial status.

INTRODUCION

Parenting is a vital component of students' success. According to (Harris, 2014), Parent involvement can broadly be defined as the ways in which parents support their children's education in word and deed. Parents can be involved in the school setting or at home; their aspirations and expectations for their children also matter very much. Parents get involved primarily because they develop a personal construction of the parental role that included participation in their children's education; they develop a positive sense of efficacy for helping their children success in school.

On the right and duty of parents St. Pope John Paul II (2002), re-affirms in the encyclical letter regarding education as being essential since parents have conferred life to their children, they have a most solemn obligation to educate their offspring. Hence, parents must be acknowledged as the first and foremost educators of their children. Their role as educators is so important that hardly anything can compensate for their failure in it. For it devolves on parents to create a family atmosphere so animated with love and reverence for God and others that a well-rounded personal and social development will be fostered among the children. Hence, the family is the first school of those social virtues, which every society needs.

The behavior portrayed by parents plays a vital role in influencing their children's learning as well as shaping their improvement in the academic performance and achievements and their overall behavior and attendance. Some of the parents roles such as financial support for a child's

education and school involvement are all important, as it is their ability to understand their children day to day progress, undertake family learning together, and talk regularly with their child about their learning (Carbonel, Banggawan & Agbisit, 2013).

The roles that can be played by parents in the learning process of their children is potentially enormous. However, parents may not always be aware of or able to fulfill this potential. A study by Uwezo (2013), in Tanzania, found that one out of four parents' help their children with homework, and one out of four had discussed about education at a school committee meeting. Four out of 10 had spoken with their children's teachers at least once in the past year, indicating that the majority of parents are not involved in their children's learning process in secondary schools.

Researchers have found that teachers are sometimes reluctant to encourage parents' involvement because they are uncertain about how to involve parents and still maintain their role as "experts". They are uncertain about how to balance their concern for the group of children against more personalized concern for each individual child, which they believe would be expected if parents were more involved. Sometimes parents lack time to involve themselves in school program because they have their own program at home (Teklemariam, 2010). It is also a challenge on how to plan well so that students may also be given priorities. Parents may affect the behavior and decisions taken by their children through genetic transmission, preferences, or environment. In other words, more educated and richer parents can provide a "better" environment for their children, which create an inequity that is the focus of great policy attention.

In USA, a research carried out by Lindsay (2011), on Perceived Barriers to Parent Involvement in Schools, there is evidence that in spite of the fact that many parents make good effort to attend school functions and support the educators who work with their children, and some parents perceive barriers to participate in school related activities.

Literature indicated perceived language barriers, cultural understanding conflicts, financial and work related limits, unwelcoming atmosphere judgmental attitudes, inconvenient scheduling, and lack of resources in time and money are challenges. Parents who are involved in their children's education tend to have higher expectations, encourage children to participate in activities, and notice higher performance in academics in the school setting.

Educators who are aware of the perceived barriers can do much to help parents who are not involved with the school. School administrators or counselors, who provide training to staff, encourage a welcoming environment and multiple opportunities to connect with parents in a positive manner, notice that parent engagement increases. School counselors, administrators and other educators need to be knowledgeable about how perceived barriers regarding participation in school settings impacts children at school. Educators need to utilize interventions and strategies to help children succeed while promoting parent involvement by removing perceived barriers encountered by dysfunctional or disadvantaged families (Muola, 2010).

The study done by Clelland, Cushman and Hawkins (2013) on challenges of parental involvement within a health promoting school in New Zealand sought to identify key issues regarding parental involvement within a health promoting school (HPS) approach directed at addressing children's nutrition and physical activity. A case study research design was used, involving six primary schools in Auckland, New Zealand. Data were collected via six individual interviews with principals, six group interviews with a total of 26 teachers, 13 focus groups with a total of 92 children, and a survey of 229 parents. The study found out that while schools agreed on the importance of schools and parents promoting the same healthy behaviors, there was a lack of agreement on the role of school staff in educating parents. Parents stressed the importance of modeling healthy food and exercise practices in the home environment but identified factors that often made this difficult, a scenario that did not go unnoticed by their children. Clelland, Cushman

and Hawkins (2013) recommended that parental involvement be encouraged and supported so that schools and families can achieve consistency in health promotion practices across both school and home environments.

However, Clelland, Cushman and Hawkins (2013) study was based on the challenges in health promoting school addressed student's nutrition, and also targeted primary schools. The present study sought to find out the challenges that parents face in CSS as they try to support their children to perform well in their studies. In addition, the current study sought to identify the challenges parents encountered in community schools as they deal with teachers and their children in schools. The current study's focus was on the influence of parental involvement in student's performance.

METHODS

This study employed both cross-sectional and phenomenology research design to assess the influence of parental involvement in enhancing academic performance in community secondary school in Kibondo District, Tanzania. Cross-sectional study was used to obtain data at one point from community secondary schools teachers and students. Cross-sectional is appropriate for getting information at one point in time to describe the involvement of parents. Phenomenology study involves: identification of a topic of personal and social significance, selecting appropriate participants, interviewing participants and analyzing the interview data (Creswell, 2014). By using phenomenology, the researcher sought to find out the lived experience of students, teachers, parents and head teachers on the influence of parental involvement on enhancing academic performance in CSS in Kibondo District, Tanzania.

The target groups in this study were 1010 form four students, 68 class teachers, counseling teachers, sport teachers, discipline teachers, 120 parents and 17 head teachers; it is from the target population that a researcher sampled the participants in the study.

Both probability and non-probability sampling procedures were used to sample target groups, as this was a mixed design study. The former involved random selection while the latter has no random selection (Kombo & Tromp, 2006) the choice of sampling techniques was descriptive research which requires 10% of accessible population which is adequate. For example, to get the sample, the researcher used 10% of total target population. The four CSS from Kibondo District was selected by using purposive sampling. Only one class of form four was selected purposively to give clear information because they have been at school for a long time. The summary of how the specific target groups were sampled is given below.

The statistics obtained from the District Education Officer shown that there were seventeen (17) CSS in Kibondo District, all being mixed schools. The researcher used stratified sampling to sample a representative number of schools which was four (4) schools representing about 20% of all community secondary schools, to participate in the study. The sample size for this category was determined by the researcher considering Mugenda and Mugenda's (2009) proposal that 10% of the population was appropriate. The basis was location as two schools were from rural areas and the other two schools were from urban areas.

Stratified random sampling procedure was used to sample the form four class to get 30 students. The researcher divided the students of form four into groups of male and female. Then proportionally, a representative sample of fifteen (15) was selected from male and (15) from female. Therefore, 30 students were selected from each school. Consequently, using proportional sampling procedure, 120 students were sampled from the four schools that participated in the research.

In each school, one class teacher, one counseling teacher, one discipline teacher and one sports teacher were chosen using purposive sampling. This gave 4 teachers per school and 16

teachers in four schools in the sample. These particular teachers were chosen because they deal closely with students, they could give reliable information.

Forty parents who had children from schools selected to participate in the study were chosen by selecting some students to go and bring their parents and their parents brought their colleagues to participate to the study. Parents were important in this study because they are responsible for taking the students to school and for payment of any contribution..

DATA COLLECTION

Data were collected using questionnaires, interview guides and document analysis. Questionnaires were used to collect data from students and teachers. The questionnaires comprised both open-end and closed questions. The interview guide was used to solicit information from parents. It had demographic information and their involvement on the students' academic performance in CSS. The document analysis guide enabled the researcher to acquire data that were thoughtful in that time and inexpensive in transcribing as proposed by Creswell (2012). The document analysis helped to determine the historical fact about influence of parental involvement on students' performance in CSS. The school calendar, and attendance register were used to obtain data of parents' attendance of PTA, and end term same.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Characteristics

Majority of the students (51%) were male while 49% were female. This implies that both genders were fairly represented in the study. Mixed schools where both genders were represented make up 98% of the total number of schools. In terms of the age of the students, 15-17 year old were 70%, whereas students in the age bracket of 18-21 years were 30%. All students who participated in the study were in form four. The demographic results of the students indicate that they are mature enough to give their own views on the influence of parents' involvement in school activities on students' academic performance.

The demographic information of parents shows that 14% of the parents never went to school. The majority of the parents that were 57% attained primary school, 29% had attained secondary education. From the data, majority of the parents attended only primary and secondary schools respectively.

Challenges faced by parents in involvement in school Activities

The study sought to find out whether parental involvement has any challenges towards achieving academic performance of their children.

Table 1: Teachers' responses response on parental challenge and solution

Indicator	A	SA	U	D	SD	Total %
Teachers do not welcome parents in school always	1(4)	7(47)	1(4)	5(36)	1(9)	100
Teachers have no experience in dealing with parents	3(20)	2(10)	1(5)	7(45)	3(20)	100

Parents are not keen in becoming members of school management boards	0(1)	2(16)	0(1)	8(51)	4(24)	100
Parents have inadequate resources for supporting school activities	5(30)	6(42)	1(8)	1(9)	2(11)	100
Parents fear embarrassment due to communication barriers	2(12)	1(7)	0(2)	7(45)	5(34)	100
Parents dissatisfaction with the managerial skills of BOM/PTA	2(14)	4(27)	6 (41)	2(16)	0(2)	100
Many parents do not attend PTA meetings	(14)	(28)	0 (4)	8(17)	6(37)	100

A = Agree SA = Strongly Agree U = Undecided SD = Strongly Disagree D = Disagree

The above findings indicated that teachers were in disagreement that parental involvement, with its challenges did not affect academic performance of students. More than half of the respondents indicated that they either disagreed or strongly disagreed in the following areas “teachers have experience in dealing with parents and parents were not keen in becoming members of school management boards.”

One head teacher noted: “the challenges we faced with the response of some parents was that we tell them the problem of their children but they allied with their children to go against teachers”. Most of them left everything to the teachers to take care of their children. Another challenge was that parents failed to contribute food for their children. We as teachers could not contribute for them (Head teacher A, 15 Sept, 2016). On the other hand, one parent also had this to say,

Sister! I have five children at home, and I have two sacks of maize I cannot take 40 kilos of maize for only one person, better the child will not eat at school and come back home to eat with others. (Parent 17, 23 Sept, 2016).

Teachers also complained that parents’ failure to contribute food for lunch at school was a problem. From the findings, children could not follow up well with the lessons, because of hunger. Findings served to confirm system theory that a part of an element can affect the whole system, it was found that because some children were not provided with food (lunch) at school, their performance was being affected. Thinking together to solve the problem was highly recommended.

The students were also subjected to the same questions and their responses are as shown in Table 2

Table 2: Students' response on Parental Involvement Challenges and possible solutions

Indicator	SA	A	U	SD	D	Total%
Teachers do not welcome parents in school always	7(6)	5(4)	5(5)	42(35)	48(40)	100
Teachers have no experience in dealing with parents	41(34)	35(29)	7(6)	13(11)	24(20)	100
Parents are not keen in becoming members of school management boards	56(47)	32(27)	11(9)	19(16)	1(1)	100
Parents have inadequate resources for supporting school activities	28(23)	35(29)	1(1)	24(20)	32(27)	100
Parents fear embarrassment due to communication barriers	18(15)	36(30)	7(6)	47(39)	12(10)	100
Parents dissatisfaction with the managerial skills of BOM/PTA	11(9)	49(41)	5(4)	22(18)	34(28)	100
Many parents do not attend PTA meetings	26(22)	16(13)	5(4)	32(27)	41(34)	100

It was established that from the students' perspective, "Teachers did not welcome parents in school always. Teachers had no experience in dealing with parents, parents had inadequate resources for supporting school activities and parents feared embarrassment due to communication barriers" were almost cancelled out on the five point Likert scale. This indicated that the students understood well the situation both at home and at school. This has enabled them not to have too much expectations from their parents as they understood the extent to which they can provide for their academic needs. The students also realized that many parents attended meetings, though some feared to contribute their views. Students agreed with parents' discontent due to the poor performances of CSS.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It important that parents be sensitized through adult education, workshops and seminars to be involved in their children's homework and school activities.

The study recommends that the government in collaboration with Ministry of Education should revitalize the idea of parents being sensitized through adult education so that they would be enlightened. This would help the parents to know the academic needs of their schooling children.

Parents should be actively involved in academic matters irrespective of their financial status. Students need guidance and counseling in order to avoid falling into vices and habits that may affect their lives negatively.

Finally, motivation of teacher is also critical as well as ensuring that facilities are adequate for the teachers and students. Parents should respect and be friends with teachers, so that they can help their children closely.

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