

Effects of Lack of Parental Involvement in Children's Education: A case study of Pagnatik Junior High School, Bunkpurugu-Yunyoo District, North East Region, Ghana

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Abstract

This study explored the effects of lack of parental involvement in children's education in Pagnatik Junior High School in the Bunkpurugu-Yunyoo District of the Northern Region of Ghana. The study employed the qualitative research strategy and case study designs for data collection and analysis. The purposive sampling technique was used to select thirty (30) students, ten (10) teachers and ten (10) parents for face-to-face interviews. The content analysis technique was used to analyse the data. The study found that the main causes of lack of parental involvement in children's education included lack of time and appreciation of the value of education, illiteracy, unemployment and poverty. The study also found that parental involvement in children's education resulted in improvement in children's academic performance, elimination of vices like premarital sex and truancy. The study therefore recommends the involvement of parents in children's education by allowing them more time to learn, providing them with learning materials and participating actively in Parent Teacher Associations' activities.

Keywords: Parental Involvement, Children's Education, Bunkpurugu-Yunyoo

Introduction

Before the 20th century, the provision of formal education was a collaborative work between the school and the family. In the early 1800s, the father and mother's roles were clearly cut out. The father's role was financial support whilst the mother's was catering for the home and managing it. In 1897, mothers from across England founded the Parent Teacher Association (PTA), to enhance concrete relationships between teachers and parents. This bond between teachers and parents gained parental recognition leading to the enactment of laws, such as child labour laws, food and drugs acts, housing legislation among others (Gina et al., 2012).

There has been a tremendous shift in family structure in the 21st century. Now, single parents work all day to cater for their children; and in most urban centres across the globe, both parents also work full-time outside the home in order to support the family financially, unlike in the past when the financial needs of a family were the sole responsibility of the father. Due to the recent changes in family life across the globe, it has become exceedingly difficult for parents to pay attention to their wards in school, both socially and academically. The role of the teacher has, therefore, increased from the primary role of training the child academically to training the child socially (Gina et al., 2012).

Parental involvement in children's education, therefore, cannot be overemphasized. Parents are considered as the first teachers of the child. Children learn their first language from their parents. Parents are considered as the most valuable resource for the child since they have the responsibility of investing time, energy and other resources into the education and development of the child (Mji and Makgato, 2006).

Fraja et al. (2010) argued that "parents' efforts are more important for a child's educational attainment than the school's effort which in turn is more important than the child's own effort and that in general, the efforts exerted by the three groups of agents – parents, school and child affect one another". This was one of the findings of a research conducted by Professor Gianni De Fraja and Tania Oliveira, both of the Economics

Department of the University of Leicester and Luisa Zanchi of the Leeds University Business School.

Fraja et al. (2010) also indicated that the propensity for children to exert effort is not influenced by their social background as children from better-off households do not necessarily try harder than those from less-advantaged backgrounds. They added that there is a linkage between the number of children in a household and their parents' efforts: the number of siblings influences the effort exerted by the child's parents towards the child's education; if a child grows up in a more numerous family the child receives less effort from the parents, in terms of individual assistance with their academic activities (Fraja et al., 2010).

LaBahn (1995) indicated that many parents across the globe, and most especially in the African sub-region, are not effectively involved in their children's education. According to the author, most parents are not fully involved in the educational pursuits of their children due to illiteracy, family pressures, financial challenges and parental perceptions towards the child and, probably, the subjects of study. LaBahn (1995) opined that lack of or passive participation of some parents in their children's education is blamed on difficult economic situations facing those families. Lack of or passive involvement of some parents does not necessarily mean they are neglecting their parental duties, but rather, that they are financially handicapped. Also, parental involvement, in almost any form, produces measurable gains in learner achievement (LaBahn, 1995).

The concept of parental involvement with the learner and the school is a vital one, and can produce great rewards for all concerned. However, it has been found that schools do not always know what the term 'parental involvement' really means. There are two (2) key elements that function together to make up the concept of parental involvement. One of these is the level of commitment of parental support. This includes such things as encouraging the learner, being sympathetic, reassuring and understanding. The other element needed is the level of parental activity and participation, such as doing something that is observable. The combination of level of commitment and active participation is what makes an involved parent (LaBahn, 1995).

In South Africa, Dandala (2013) reported that most parents were not involved in their wards' education due to illiteracy. For this reason, some parents do not see the importance of providing their wards with the needed materials, such as school uniforms, school fees, books and stationery. According to Dandala (2013), literate parents were more involved in their wards' education than illiterate parents in South Africa, since the literates know or appreciate the importance of education.

Mji and Makgato (2006), in a study in South Africa, also indicated that the role of parental involvement in children's education cannot be overemphasized, as they are considered as the first teachers of the child. Children do not only learn their first language from their parents, but they also learn interpersonal values, beliefs and attitudes from their parents. Parents are considered as the most valuable resource for the child since they have the responsibility of investing their time, energies and other resources into the education and development of the child (Mji and Makgato, 2006).

In Nigeria, Asikhia (2010) found that most school children were not performing academically, not because they were not good, but simply because their parents were not concerned about the progress of their studies, let alone to provide them with the needed materials for learning. Also, most of the parents who showed lack of interest in their wards' education were polygamous parents.

Akuamoah et al. (2004) reported that many parents, especially the rural folks, were passively involved in the education of their wards. This they blamed on the difficult economic situation facing the African sub-region. Also noted was the lack of or passive involvement of some parents, which did not necessarily mean they were neglecting their parental duties, but rather, that they were financially handicapped. This situation has been identified as one of the key factors accounting for the poor academic performance of students.

Considering the learning disabilities and poor academic performance of some students in Pagnatik Junior High School, Bunkpurugu-Yunyoo, there was the need to explore the causes. With a careful investigation and observation of the causes of the low academic performance of some students in the school, it was realized that parental

involvement and the concern for students' academic performance were generally low.

Akuamoah et al. (2004) also found that children whose parents allowed them time to study at home coupled with strict monitoring and not overburdening them with household chores, ensuring constant checks on their assignments, take-home works and exercises, and maintaining close relationships with the teachers concerning the welfare of their wards, had their wards performing better academically.

According to William (2005), some parents had the perception that the academic development of the child was the sole responsibility of the teacher which informed their lack of concern for their wards' academic activities. Meanwhile, the academic development of the child is supposed to be the dual responsibility of both teachers and parents (William, 2005). There is no doubt that parental involvement in a child's education is vital to a student's higher academic achievement. In a study in Harvard, it was found that the academic scores of students whose parents were highly involved in their education were comparatively higher than their counterparts whose parents were less involved (William, 2005). Moreover, the study found that kindergarten students whose parents devoted time to teaching them how to write and read at home had better advantage in identifying letters of the alphabets, which had a positive effect on their literacy skills and performance in the classroom as compared to students whose parents did not (William, 2005).

This study of the students of the Pagnatik Junior High School (JHS) revealed that parental control, care and involvement in the academic activities of the children were very minimal. This was one of the reasons why some students of the school performed below average as noted in the 2015/2016 terminal report cards of students for the third term in class exercises, class tests, homework and end of term examinations. According to GES, General Performance score sheet for the 2015/2016 academic year of the BYD and the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE), it was found that 70% of the school's population performed below average (BYD, GES Score Sheet, 2016).

Considering the roles that parents have to play in providing the educational needs of their children and serving as the first care givers of

children, it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to achieve literacy goals if parents do not play their roles as required of them.

This study investigated the effects of lack of parental involvement in their wards' education at Pagnatik Junior High School.

Methodology

The qualitative research strategy employed in this study solicited the opinions of parents, teachers and students on the effects of parental involvement in children's education. The research design was a case study. The target population for the study comprised students, teachers and parents of Pagnatik JHS. A study sample of fifty (50), comprising 30 students, 10 teachers and 10 parents was selected through purposive sampling out of a sample size of 170 students, teachers and parents. An interview guide was used to collect data from the participants. The data was analysed using the content analysis technique.

Results and Discussion

The causes of lack of parental involvement in the wards' education were parents' lack of time, lack of appreciation of the importance of education, illiteracy, unemployment and poverty. The following responses by a student and a teacher respectively confirm these findings:

"I think our parents are not educated and some too have no time to ask how we are doing in school".

"What I know is that parents are not told about the importance of their children's education so they care less".

LaBahn's (1995) study noted that the lack of or passive participation of some parents in their children's education is blamed on difficult economic situations facing those families. Lack of or passive involvement of some parents does not necessarily mean they are neglecting their parental duties, but rather, that they are financially handicapped. Asikhia (2010) also reported that most school children were not performing well in their education, not because they were not good, but simply because their parents were not concerned about the progress of their studies, not to talk of providing them with the needed materials

for learning. Most of the parents who showed lack of interests in their wards' education were also polygamous parents.

The study also revealed that PTA meetings were poorly organized, leadership at school was poor, the poor academic performance of students made some parents become less expectant in their wards' education; illiterate parents lacked commitment to their children's education, some parents stay far away from where their wards attend school, poor relationships between the school and parents, and lack of involvement of parents in meetings. The following views by a student and a parent respectively illustrate some of these assertions:

"My parents stay away from this school and so have no time to be coming here."

"The school does not involve us in their meetings and activities and so we also lose commitment to our children education".

LaBahn (1995) and Dandala (2013) reported that many parents across the globe, especially in the African sub-region, are not effectively involved in their children's education. Both studies also indicated that most parents are not fully involved in the educational pursuits of their children due to illiteracy, family pressures, financial challenges and parental perceptions towards the child and probably the subjects of study.

Similarly, Akuamoah et al. (2004) reported that many parents, especially the rural dwellers, were passively involved in the education of their wards. This they blamed on the difficult economic situations facing the African sub-region. They noted that lack of or the passive involvement of some parents does not necessarily mean they are neglecting their parental duties, but rather, that they are financially handicapped. This situation has been identified as one of the key factors accounting for poor academic performance of students.

Results from the current study show that parental involvement in children's education results in improved academic performance, the elimination of vices such as teenage premarital sex, school truancy, drug abuse, etc. Also, cordial relationships between the school and the home, discipline, choice of career, opportunity for wards to voice out challenges easily to parents could help motivate the children and make them

perform. The following responses by a student and a teacher respectively confirm these findings:

"I believe it will help us to be motivated and perform well in class."

"As a teacher that will encourage the students psychologically."

To improve upon the academic performance of wards in the study area, the following were the suggested roles of parents: payment of school fees on time, provision of learning materials and other needs, allowing wards enough time for learning after school, ensuring that wards attend school regularly and on time, desisting from such negative acts like beating, neglecting, denying a child and belabouring a child; visiting wards in school, cooperating with the school authority, checking wards' take-home exercises and terminal reports, etc. The following responses by a student, a parent, and a teacher respectively support these findings:

"My parents should make sure they pay my school fees at a proper time and also take care of my schooling."

"What I do for my child is to cooperate with the school, provide my child all the school needs and food."

"I think parents should supervise their wards work in the house, such as homework or assignments."

William (2005) stated that there is no doubt that parental involvement is vital to greater students' achievements.

The study further revealed that the school should encourage parents to give their wards enough time to study and provide learning materials for their children, organize regular PTA meetings, report children's performance to their parents, and meet parents personally to let them know about their children's problems. The following expressions by a student, a teacher, a parent, and a teacher respectively support these findings:

"Our school should encourage our parents to give us more time to study and to provide us learning materials".

"We need to call for PTA meetings and report child performance to parents during PTA meetings".

"School should engage parents with meetings and explaining to them how they can help to enhance learning".

"Educational institutions like GES should make sure there are principles that govern education that any child of school going age should attend school and motivational talks should be given to parents to visit their wards in school".

Epstein (1995) proposed that the school must create greater overlap between itself, the home and the community through the implementation of activities across six (6) types of involvement: parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaboration with the community by implementing activities across all these types of involvements. The import of this assertion is that parental involvement is deemed to be an essential element of educating the child. Therefore, parents must be given special training on how they can be actively involved in the education of their wards irrespective of their occupation, literacy level or economic status.

In the view of Charlsworth and Lind (1990), parent-teacher conference could be used as another parent-involvement approach. The method is used to help parents and teachers learn about each child's needs. Parents' concerns about how their child is doing in school can be discussed. Teachers can find out if any special home events might be affecting the child. Specific suggestions on how to best help the child handle any problems can be made. They concluded that a feeling of mutual concern is needed if children are to grow and develop to their full potentials.

Similarly, Uemura (1999) proposed the following strategies for building a cordial relationship between the school and the school communities: creating more interest between the school institution and members of the community; harmonizing formal education delivery and informal education delivery in societies; playing a vital role in school enrolment by ensuring that children understand the importance of education before receiving formal education; helping in learning at home; and providing effective orientation for new comers in schools.

Conclusion

This study revealed that the predominant reasons for lack of parental involvement in their wards' education include parents' lack of time, illiteracy, lack of appreciation of the importance of education, poverty, etc. The study also showed that the poor organization of PTA meetings, poor leadership in schools, poor student academic performance which makes some parents lose hope in their wards' education, parents staying far away from where their wards attend school, etc., are other factors accounting for lack of parental involvement in their wards' education.

The study also found the following to be the effects of lack of parental involvement in children's education in the study area: poor academic performance, lack of progress of children to higher educational levels, vices such as premarital sex, school truancy, and drug abuse. It also discovered a poor relationship between the school and the community, indiscipline, and children's inability to voice their concerns easily to their parents, as some of the contributory factors that could help motivate the children and make them perform better.

This study recommends that the roles parents can play to support their wards' education include: payment of school fees regularly and on time, catering for children's school needs, providing extra tuition opportunities, encouraging children to attend school regularly, stopping negative acts such as beating, neglecting, denying and belabouring child, visiting child in school, cooperating with school authorities, ensuring that child does homework, and checking child's terminal reports.

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