Correlation between Parents Decision Making in School and School-Community Linkages in Public Primary Schools in Eldoret East Sub County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Early childhood educators have traditionally linked school success to parental involvement and they frequently fail to establish strong links between home and school. This study sought to establish the correlation between parents’ decision making in school and school-community linkages in public primary schools in Eldoret East Sub County. The study adopted the Ecological Systems Theory on child’s development within the context of the system of relationships that form his or her environment. This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Descriptive survey research design was adopted because it was appropriate for obtaining factual information about the correlation between parent’s decision making in school and school-community linkages in public primary schools in Eldoret East Sub County. This study used a descriptive survey research design. The sample size comprised of 30 head teachers, 240 teachers and 30 school chairpersons. Simple random sampling was used to select teachers, while purposive sampling was used to select head teachers and SMC chairpersons. Questionnaires were used to collect data. The data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS V. 24) computer program and presented using tables. The findings revealed that there was a positive relationship between the decision making and school-community linkages \( \text{r}=0.774, n=264, \)
The study concluded that the parents’ contribution in decision making helps the schools achieve higher grades and test scores, improve their school attendance and increased motivation of pupils. The families play an active involvement in school decisions and governance and the families participate in school as volunteers and committee members. The study recommends that the recognition of the primary roles of parents as vital members of the decision-making body in the schools.

Keywords: Correlation; parents' decision making; school; school-community; linkages; public primary schools.

1. INTRODUCTION

The background of the study was to assess correlation between parents’ decision making in school and school-community linkages in public primary schools. Good school, family and community partnerships lead to improved academic learner achievement, self-esteem, school attendance and social behaviour. Parents and teachers experience mutual support and satisfaction in achieving positive changes in children and the school. Resources available to children, teachers, parents and the school are expanded and useful collaboration with community agencies are established [1]. These benefits place parent involvement firmly on the national reform agendas of most education authorities. However, definitions of parent involvement vary greatly. Schools and families seldom share the same perspectives on what is wanted or needed.

The preference of most parents is not for involvement through school governing bodies but for involvement in their own children's learning [2]. Dietz and Whaley [3] explains that where schools limit parent involvement to a particular type of involvement, such as governance or fund raising, only a fraction of the parent community participates; the school truly neither involves parents nor realizes the full benefits. Consequently, a comprehensive, strategic model of parent involvement that includes diverse types of parent activity which produces optimal results is recommended [4].

In addition, teachers’ perceptions of positive parental attitudes and beliefs about preschool are associated with fewer behavior problems and higher language and math skills among children [5], (Pianta, Cox & Bradley, 2003). Not only do strong home–school relationships matter for children’s outcomes during the early childhood years, but the benefits persist over time. The United States propensity for child care policies to emphasize parental choice in an open market of early childhood options reflects this orientation. Also connected to this idea is the concern that early childhood programs, especially full-day child care, may be disruptive to parents’ child-rearing values and interests. Provisions for helping parents in this decision-making role include informational supports for selecting a program, ongoing communication with program staff about goals for a child and the child's experiences, classroom volunteering for the purpose of monitoring and reinforcing program operations, and voice or vote regarding program governance decisions.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Quality relationships between families and schools in rural settings, and meaningful involvement of rural family members in educational decision making, are often difficult to achieve. There is frequently stigma associated with identification of child or school needs, and rural culture often posits dealing with problems internally rather than pursuing professional help. The school is the main institution for the transmission and acquisition of knowledge, values and skills. It is the most important asset of any community. It is therefore natural that close links should form between schools and communities. Unfortunately, while involving the community is crucial, in reality there is often a distance between the school and the community. Communication often becomes one-way from school to parent or school to community and very rarely from parents to school or communities to schools. Early childhood educators have always attributed school success to parental involvement; however, they fail to establish the role of parent’s involvement in enhancing school community linkages. In Eldoret East Sub County the correlation of parent’s involvement and school community linkages has not been established. Therefore, this study sought to establish the correlation between parents’ decision making in school and school-community
linkages in public primary schools in Eldoret East Sub County.

1.2 Theoretical Review

The study adopted the Ecological Systems Theory by Bronfenbrenner [6]. This theory looks at a child’s development within the context of the system of relationships that form one’s environment. He defines complex “layers” of environment, each having an effect on a child’s development. The interaction between factors in the child’s maturing biology, his immediate family/community environment, and the societal landscape fuels and steers his development. Changes or conflict in any one-layer ripple throughout other layers. To study a child’s development then, we must look not only at the child and her immediate environment, but also at the interaction of the larger environment as well. The Ecological systems theory presents the four layers of child development; Mesosystem, Exosystem, Macrosystem and Microsystem.

The mesosystem provides the connection between the structures of the child’s microsystem [7]. The exosystem defines the larger social system in which the child does not function directly. The structures in this layer impact the child’s development by interacting with some structure in her microsystem. The macrosystem, is comprised of cultural values, customs, and laws. The microsystem is the layer closest to the child and contains the structures with which the child has direct contact. The microsystem encompasses the relationships and interactions a child has with her immediate surroundings [7].

The study utilized the microsystems layer of child development and is considered interaction with the immediate surroundings [7]. Structures in the microsystem include family, school, neighborhood, or childcare environments. At this level, relationships have impact in two directions - both away from the child and towards the child. For example, a child’s parents may affect his beliefs and behaviour; however, the child also affects the behavior and beliefs of the parent. Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory focuses on the quality and context of the child’s environment. He states that as a child develops, the interaction within these environments becomes more complex. This complexity can arise as the child’s physical and cognitive structures grow and mature.

A larger degree of failure means a larger amount of support. By working from this deficit model, families are expected to hold their children’s hands up from deep inside a black hole of helplessness. Then, we expect them to have the psychological strength to climb up the thin rope they throw down. Bronfenbrenner sees the instability and unpredictability of family life has let our economy create the most destructive force to a child’s development, Addison [8]. Children do not have the constant mutual interaction with important adults that is necessary for development.

1.3 Empirical Review

1.3.1 Families involvement in decision making and school-community linkages

Epstein’s (1996) suggests that school staff include families in the development of goals and visions for the school as well as other policies and decisions that pertain to their children through parent-teacher organizations, special projects, and teams for school improvement. This may involve some training by the teacher as well as the preparation of information packets for the parents so that they can stay informed. One challenge is to have a fair representation of leadership roles of parents from all ethnic, economic and geographic groups. If this is successful, then more families will have input into decisions that affect the quality of their children’ education, and there will be more awareness on the part of the students that their parents have a say in school policies. Also, teachers will increase their understanding of family perspectives on school policies and programs.

Rural parents have been found to talk with their children about school programs, attend school meetings, and interact with teachers more frequently relative to their counterparts in suburban and urban schools [9]. In the National Household Education Surveys Program of 2007 (NCES, 2007), only 54% of rural parents reported being satisfied with the way that school staff interacted with them. Contributing to the challenges associated with family-school connections in rural settings is the lack of research providing empirical guidance since the majority of research on family-school connections has been conducted in urban and suburban settings to date [9]. Compared to research in non-rural settings, the state of empirical research on the effects of and processes contributing to family involvement and family-school partnerships in rural schools is unclear. This dearth of research attention greatly limits our ability to understand the differential role
and impact of family-school partnerships within school contexts that vary in their location, size, access, and other salient characteristics.

1.4 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework illustrates the relationship between the dependent and the independent variable. The independent variable of the study is parents' decision making while the dependent variable of the study was the school and community linkages. The relevance of this conceptual framework lies in the recognition that parents' decision making has had an effect on school and community linkages.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Descriptive survey research design was adopted because it was appropriate for obtaining factual information about the correlation between parent’s decision making in school and school-community linkages in public primary schools in Eldoret East Sub County. The study was conducted in Eldoret East, Sub County, Uasin Gishu County, of Kenya. The Sub County was selected because no study has been conducted involving the influence of family involvement in enhancing school community linkages. After analysis, data was presented using tables.

The researcher used Yamane formula to calculate the sample size of 300 respondents. Stratified sampling technique was used to select day and boarding primary schools. Purposive sampling was used to select 6 public boarding primary schools. The respondents were calculated using proportional sampling to establish each category. The researcher used purposive sampling to select 30 head teachers and simple random sampling to select 270 teachers.

The researcher used a questionnaire and an interview schedule to collect relevant data for the study. The interview guides contained items covering all the objectives of the study. The questionnaire choice was based on the fact that they are free from bias as the respondents gives well thought out answers. After all data has been collected, it was organized and coded according to study objectives and variables and entered in the computer for analysis using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 24. The research yielded both qualitative and quantitative data. Qualitative data was analyzed using content analysis based on themes emanating from respondent’s information and presented using statements based on objectives. Quantitative data was analysed using frequencies, percentages and means as well as Pearson product moment correlation coefficient. The Pearson correlation coefficient was used to establish relationship between family involvement and school-community linkages. After analysis, data was presented using tables.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Influence of Parent’s Decision Making on School-Community Linkages in Public Primary Schools

The role of families in the school-community linkages is important since it defines their contribution in decision making of these schools. The roles of families include playing an active involvement in school decisions and governance. The head teachers and teachers had varied views on the roles for families in the decision making in the school-community linkages as shown in Table 1.

From the study 110 (41.6%) of the head teachers and teachers agreed that the families play an active involvement in school decisions and governance, while 93(35.2%) were undecided 61(23.1%) disagree that families play an active involvement in school decisions and governance. Most of the respondents 154(58.4%) head teacher and teachers agreed that the family's participation in decision making at school were as volunteers and committee teachers, while 48(18.2%) were undecided and 62(23.5%) disagree.
Table 1. Roles for families in the decision making

| Role                                                                 | Strongly agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-------|-----------|----------|------------------|
|                                                                     | Freq | %    | Freq     | %        | Freq  | %    | Freq   | %   | Freq  | %    | Freq  | %    |
| Play an active involvement in school decisions and governance        | 8    | 3.0  | 102      | 38.6     | 93    | 35.2 | 45      | 17.0 | 16    | 6.1  |
| Participation at school as volunteers and committee teachers         | 15   | 5.7  | 139      | 52.7     | 48    | 18.2 | 38      | 14.4 | 24    | 9.1  |
| Monitoring homework completion                                       | 32   | 12.1 | 133      | 50.4     | 38    | 14.4 | 53      | 20.1 | 8     | 3.0  |
| Participation in leisure reading with their children                | 48   | 18.2 | 94       | 35.6     | 60    | 22.7 | 38      | 14.4 | 24    | 9.1  |
| Regular communication with school personnel about their child's     | 48   | 18.2 | 77       | 29.2     | 78    | 29.5 | 53      | 20.1 | 8     | 3.0  |
| progress                                                            |       |       |          |          |       |       |         |      |       |      |
| Frequent communication with their children about academic and       | 55   | 20.8 | 116      | 43.9     | 32    | 12.1 | 53      | 20.1 | 8     | 3.0  |
| behavioral expectations and progress                                |       |       |          |          |       |       |         |      |       |      |
| Active support of the school through communication, sharing         | 56   | 21.2 | 101      | 38.3     | 61    | 23.1 | 38      | 14.4 | 8     | 3.0  |
| resources and seeking partnership with educators                    |       |       |          |          |       |       |         |      |       |      |
| Supporting and providing guidance and counseling services to the    | 56   | 21.2 | 93       | 35.2     | 54    | 20.5 | 53      | 20.1 | 8     | 3.0  |
| school                                                              |       |       |          |          |       |       |         |      |       |      |

**Fig. 1. Conceptual framework**

*Source: Author (2021)*
 Majority of the head teachers and teachers 165(62.5%) agreed that the family’s participation in decision making was monitoring homework completion, while 38(14.4%) were undecided and 61(23.1%) disagreed. At least 142(53.8%) of respondents agree that the participation in decision making include their participation in leisure reading with their children, while 60(22.7%) were undecided and 62(23.5%) disagree that families were participating in leisure reading with their children. At least 125(47.4%) of the respondents agreed that the family’s role includes the regular communication with school personnel about their child’s progress, while 78(29.5%) were undecided and 61(23.1%) disagreed that family’s role was the regular communication with school personnel about their child’s progress.

Majority of the respondents 171(64.7%) agreed that the family’s participation was frequent communication with their children about academic and behavioral expectations and progress, while 32(12.1%) were undecided and 61(23.1%) disagreed that families participate in decision making through in frequent communication with their children about academic and behavioral expectations and progress. At least 157(59.5%) of the respondents agreed that the families participation in decision making was active support of the school through communication, sharing resources and seeking partnership with educators, while 61(23.1%) were undecided and 46(17.4%) disagreed that families support the school through communication, sharing resources and seeking partnership with educators. Finally, 149(56.4%) of the respondents agreed that the family’s participation in supporting and providing guidance and counseling services to the school, while 54(20.5%) were undecided and 61(23.1%) disagreed that families was supporting in providing guidance and counseling services to the school.

From the findings it was found out that the families played an active involvement in school decisions and governance and the families participate in school as volunteers and committee teachers. The findings agreed with Mantizicopoulos, [11] who argues that family involvement activities such as keeping in touch with a teacher, volunteering in the classroom and attending school activities were related to children’s promotion after kindergarten into the first grade. The families participate at school by reading with their children and in regular communication with school personnel about their child's progress.

The findings agree with Paley [12] who argues that parent participation in child-centered activities, specifically play, is also important for children’s social and emotional development. The families also participate in frequent communication with their children about academic and behavioral expectations and progress, in active support of the school through communication, sharing resources and seeking partnership with educators, supporting and providing guidance and counseling services to the school.

The role of parents in the school environment is very different to their role in the home, although the two complement each other. In the school, parents may participate in school activities such as sporting events, be part of a committee, or attend meetings with their children’s teachers [13]. The effect that parental involvement in school has on a child’s academic achievement is difficult to determine. Parents’ involvement in school-based activities is most likely to have a positive influence in the early years of schooling when children require additional support to adjust to a new learning environment and to develop a sense of belonging [14]. As children get older, parental involvement in school-based activities may affect student outcomes indirectly through improved attendance and behaviour [15].

Further, the study hypothesis was there is no correlation between parents’ decision making in school and school-community linkages in public primary schools in Eldoret East Sub County. This was established using pearson correlation coefficient as summarized in Table 2.

The study findings revealed that there was a positive relationship between the decision making and school-community linkages \([r=.774, n=264, p<.05]\). This indicated that an increase in involving parents in decision making leads to improved school-community linkages. Thus, the more the school adopted stakeholder’s involvement in decision making the more the school-community linkages are enhanced. This agrees with Henderson and Mapp (2002) and Emerson, Fear, Fox and Sanders [16] that a parent’s involvement in school activities is positively associated with students’ social and emotional adjustment. But there is limited evidence that attending school-based activities that are not directly connected to learning has an impact on student academic outcomes.
Table 2. Correlation between decision making and school-community linkages

| School-community linkages | Pearson Correlation | Decision making |
|---------------------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| Decision making           | Pearson Correlation | 1               |
|                           | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .774            |
|                           | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000            |

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); N=264

The study findings from interview schedule revealed that effective parental engagement practices change as children grow and develop. The early years of education provide opportunities for parents to learn about effective ways to converse with their children about learning and become comfortable talking with teachers and other staff about their children’s academic and social development. For this reason, it is important that, from the beginning, parents feel comfortable participating in activities on school grounds, and consider the school as a partner in their children’s learning.

4. CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY

Concerning parents’ involvement in decision making at school, the parents’ contribution in decision making helps the schools achieve higher grades and test scores, improve their school attendance and increased motivation of pupils. The families play an active involvement in school decisions and governance and the families participate in school as volunteers and committee members. The parents participate at school by monitoring homework completion, leisure reading with their children and in regular communication with school personnel about their child’s progress.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

Decision making in school involves issues that concern both parents and schools therefore, this study recommends the recognition of the primary roles of parents as vital members of the decision-making body in the schools.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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