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# AN ASSESSMENT OF THE INVOLVEMENT OF PARENTS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN BUHERA DISTRICT IN ZIMBABWE'S MANICALAND PROVINCE

**Dr Regis Fanuel Gutuza & Dr Mufunani Tungu Khosa**

Zimbabwe Open University,  
National Centre Box 1119 Harare,  
Faculty of Arts and Education,  
Zimbabwe

## ABSTRACT

The aim of this present study was to assess the involvement of parents in the education of their children in secondary schools in Buhera District in Zimbabwe's Manicaland Province. The population comprised all the teachers, heads and parents from six secondary schools. The sample was made up of three heads of schools, twelve teachers and six members of the parents' body. The study employed the qualitative methodology. Data were generated through the use of interviews and focus group discussions. The study revealed that teachers and heads of schools generally thought that parents lacked proper education and expertise to meaningfully contribute towards education of their children. Parents also saw their role as being facilitative and complementary the teacher's duties of providing education to their children. The study recommends that schools should involve parents in school activities in a more systematic and sustained manner than is the case now. There is also need for the curriculum in teacher training colleges to include a component of parental involvement in the education of their children.

**Key words** :Assessment, involvement of parents, secondary schools, district, education.

## 1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In Zimbabwe, the involvement of parents in schools is governed by Statutory Instrument 87 of 1992 (5187) for non-governmental schools and Statutory Instrument 379 of 1988 (51379) (Bowora and Mpofu, 2008) for government schools. Non-governmental schools are run by School Development Committees (SDCs) and governmental schools are run by School Development Associations (SDAs) (Madziyire, 2010). As Moyo (2000) posits, before independence parents in Zimbabwean schools operated in an ethos of authoritarianism. The state regarded parent involvement (particularly in schools for blacks) primarily as a means of financing schools; at best parents were seen as clients who had little say in school management and functioning (Chindova, 2009). Parent responsibilities were perceived in terms of payment of



school fees, attendance of school events and fundraising (Moyo, 2000). The universalisation of the education system which was pronounced by and adopted in 1980 by the government led to the democratization of the education system; and thus the need for parents to play a more visible role in the affairs of schools (Mapolisa, 2013). As Tshabalala (2012) argues, parents have a natural right as the first-gatekeepers to make decisions that affect their children. Thus, education managers and parents have to work together in a legally organized and planned fashion. This study therefore assessed the actual involvement of Zimbabwean parents in the management and function of secondary schools.

## **2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Lack of participation by parents in schools is a profound challenge in most secondary schools in Zimbabwe. In spite of the legal instruments that exist to promote parental involvement in schools, most parents seem to be unclear about their specific functions in the education of their children. They are content with the peripheral roles they currently play which including sending their children to school and paying the necessary fees and nothing further than that.

## **3. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The main purpose of the study is to find out challenges and obstacles to full parental involvement on children's education at secondary schools in Buhera District and establish effective strategies of promoting parental involvement in the education of their children.

### **3.1 Research Objectives**

The research had the following objectives:

1. To establish the extent of parental involvement in education.
2. To identify challenges and obstacles to parental involvement in the education of children in secondary schools.
3. To provide suggestions of improving parental involvement in the education of children in secondary schools.

### **3.2 Research questions**

The research was guided by the following questions:

1. How do parents perceive their involvement in the education of their children attending secondary schools?
2. What are the major challenges and obstacles to parental involvement in secondary schools?
3. How can parental involvement be improved in secondary schools?

## **4. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

Parents play a critical role in the education of their children. According to Davis (1959), parental involvement is the participation of parents in a wide range of school based and home-based activities to improve the children's education. It implies support given to the school by means of cooperation participation and partnership (Gactano, 2007). As Riley (2004) states, the support given to children by their parents tends to motivate them to perform better in school; parent involvement leads to improved learner academic performance, promotion of acceptable thought patterns and behavior and uplifting communities and promotion of a more satisfied society.



Extensive researchers conducted in the United States of America revealed that parents of high-achievers do not want to be involved in the education of their children (Berger, 2007). Consistent with this view are the working-class parents who are less likely to attend to school events as compared to their middle-class counterparts (Gu, 2008). In both instances, parents claim that they do not have time to do so. Although some scholars seem to agree with the time constraints which usually lead to disengagement by some working-class parents, they also criticize the cultural set up in schools which they think favours higher-socio-economic parents as compared to the lower ones (Van Wyk, 2008). Burns and McClure (2003) state that time constraints are especially problematic for economically disadvantage parents, because they work at jobs that do not promote flexibility that is characteristic of professional occupations. In the same vein, Shatkin and Gershberg (2007) postulate that single parents also have time constraints because most of them work outside the home.

Similarly, the already overburdened and fatigued education managers due to burnout, find parental involvement equally taxing and limited by time constraints (Riley, 2004). Education managers do not understand how paraprofessionals such as parents with limited educational background can be brought on board on issues of academic importance such as assisting in homework and skill acquisition (Shatkin and Gershberg, 2007). As Berger (2007) posits, instead they continue to see parents as problematic and an excess baggage schools can discard. This perception is corroborated by Gu (2008) who revealed that education managers were concerned by parents who used the “grapevine” to peddle falsehoods which caused conflicts in schools and such education managers played the role of gate keepers and insulated their institutions by structuring them in such a way that they were not approachable (Gu, 2008). In addition to that, education managers make the life of illiterate parents unbearable by using professional jargon when communicating with them (Berger, 2007).

Heystek (2006) argues that parents’ lack of appropriate knowledge and expertise to provide appropriate learning activities for their children even compromises their existence in schools and in such a scenario, education managers therefore, believe that such parents only become vocal when there is an academic crisis involving their own child or when school funds have been misappropriated by the school authorities, a ticking time bomb administrators need to be wary of.

The teachers’ plight was worsened by those parents who viewed teaching as a job which takes place during the week at specified times and the week end was for resting; let alone a holiday (Gaetano, 2007), hence the dire need of in-service workshops to address the predicament of partnership relationship are to be enhanced (Gu, 2008). This line of thinking is supported by Berger (2007) who claims that some parents with low-occupational and education status seem to be challenged by the fact that teachers are supposed to be their equals in the engagement process. The worst culprits are those who had distrust and fear of the school system that had failed them so badly in their own childhood (Gu, 2008). These negative perceptions by parents made them view schools as alien worlds and left everything to happen in the hands of teachers (Gu, 2008).

## **5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The study used the qualitative research methodology had the advantage of giving the respondents the opportunity to freely express their views about parental involvement in secondary schools (Leedy, 2009). This allowed the researcher to focus on small units of analysis that helped to explain the various challenges that parents experienced in their quest to participate in the education of their children in secondary schools. This also allowed the researcher to handle manageable data (Kumar, 2008). The sample for the study was conveniently selected. The researcher selected three secondary school heads in Buhera District, twelve teachers and six members of the School Development Committee (SDC). The data was generated through the use of interviews and focus group discussions. Permission was sought and granted from



the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. Respondents were assured of anonymity and ethical use of the data generated.

### 5.1 Data presentation and analysis

The bio-data of the respondents is presented in tabular form for easy analysis. The data generated from, the interviews and focus group discussions focusing on parental involvement in secondary schools is presented qualitatively. The data is then discussed and analysed on the basis of the themes from the response of the heads of schools, teachers and parents.

**Table 1: Respondents by gender**

Respondents	Male	Female	Total	% Male	% Female	% Total
Teachers	3	9	12	25	75	100
Heads	2	1	3	67	33	100
Parents	4	2	6	67	33	100

The table above shows that 25% of teachers were male and 75% were female. The majority of heads and parents were male (67% respectively). The significance of this statistic is that leadership positions in schools and school development committees appears to be the preserve of males and yet females constitute the bulk of the stakeholders. It is also argued that our attitudes, opinions and values are at times influenced by gender (Riley, 2004).

**Table 2: Highest qualifications of respondents**

Qualifications	Teachers		Heads		Parents		Totals	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Primary Education	0	0	0	0	5	83	5	24
Secondary Education	0	0	0	0	1	17	1	5
Tertiary Education	12	100	3	100	0	0	15	71
<b>Totals</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>100</b>

The table above shows that 83% of the parents in the study were holders of a primary school certificate as their highest educational qualification. Only 5% had a secondary qualification. On the other hand, both teachers and heads had a tertiary education qualification as their highest qualification. This information reveals that there is a huge gap between teachers and heads on one hand and parents on the other in terms of educational qualifications which may influence relations between the two groups as they interact on school business.

Perceptions of respondents on parental involvement in secondary schools.

The participants had varying responses when asked about their perception of parental involvement meant that parents had to talk to teachers about their children's school work, they had to visit schools and consult teachers about their children's progress and problems so that they may help to improve the work of their children" (Teacher C). yet another teacher interviewee retorted, "Parents have a role to play in the education of their children; they should support their children with homework, buy them all materials for their education as well as providing them with good parenting (Teacher L).

The responses from the principals revealed that parents should engage in activities like consulting teachers, helping children with homework, encouraging children to read books and supporting school projects (Principal B). Principal A observed that "parents need to high aspirations and expectation for their children and schools need to work in partnership with parents so that the home and school can share in these expectations and support learning.



Parents had a feeling that providing children's basic needs and good parenting is enough involvement. One interviewee had this to say:

I make sure that my child has adequate books, pens and other basic equipment to use at school. I pay their fees well in advance so that he is not sent away from school thus disturbing his learning. I make sure that after school, I provide them with time to do their homework. However, because I did not go up to secondary school myself, I can not help them with their homework writing (Parent b).

The same interviewee (Parent b) further indicated that parents should take part in the education of their children since if everything is left in the hands of teachers, particularly issues to do with the behavior of children, it might mean more work for the teachers. On the other hand some parents felt that their children with basic needs and the learning was the full responsibility of teachers who are trained and paid through the taxes to teach the children.

Findings about the perception of parental involvement reveal that generally all categories of respondents (teachers, heads and parents) were in agreement about the importance of involving parents in the education of their children. This tallies with observations by Davis (1989) who states that parents play a critical role in the education of their children. The support given to children by their parents tends to motivate them to perform better in school, parent involvement leads to improved learner achievement as well motivate children in their school activities (riley, 2004).

## **5.2 Benefits of parental involvement**

The participants come up with a number of benefits of parental involvement. Heads of schools indicated that children whose parents were involved in their formal education obtained better grades, test scores, long term academic achievement, attitudes and behavior than those with disinterested mothers and fathers. Teachers identified similar benefits as those chosen by heads. However, they only differed on improved provision of teaching learning resources which was identified by teachers. This could be due to the fact that teachers deal with learners directly. Parents also indicated the benefits of involving parents in the learning of their children. They stated that the involvement of parents improved the cordial relationship between teachers and the parents. They also indicated that if parents were positively engaging in the education of their children, this tended to motivate teachers and they treated their children very well unlike when parents were not committed to school work. As Parent 5 stated: "if we collaborate with teacher and the head of school, they feel supported and they will do their work happily and our children will pass". Parents also stated that involving them in the education of their children also improved learner behavior. Parent 3 for example stated that "if my child is aware of my good relationship with his teachers, he is likely to behave well as they fear that any bad behavior at home will be reported to the teacher by the parent and any bad behavior at school reported to the parent by the teacher.

Parents also mentioned that involvement of parents in school matters improved learner attendance and learner motivation. When parents were involved in their children's education they made sure children attend school on a daily basis and they also motivate their children to work hard at school. Parents also indicated that involvement in the education of their children promoted ownership of school activities by parents. The findings about benefits of parental involvement from this study tally with what Gaetano (2007) discovered, which is, enhancement of children's self-esteem, improved children's academic achievement, improved parent-child relationships, positive attitude towards school by both parents and children, and a better understanding of the schooling process. Berger (2007) further argues that when parents are involved, students achieve more regardless of their socio-economic status, ethnic / racial background or the parent's education level. As burns and McClure (2003) state, school programmes that involve parents outperform identical programs without parent and family involvement.



Challenges and obstacles to parental involvement in the education of their children in secondary schools.

The participants identified a number of challenges that affected the involvement of parents in the education of their children. Teachers, heads and parents themselves were in agreement that most parents do not have enough time to devote to every child especially in families with more than one child where both parents are working and in single parent households. Some parents felt that as children have been at school all day, they need time to relax at home.

Heads and teachers indicated that the other challenge was that parents lacked interest and commitment to support their children's education. Only a few parents were committed to the children's education. As one teacher retorted, "Most parents seem not to be interested in their children's education. We invite them for meetings and they do not come; and they do not support teachers if learners are assigned homework (Teacher 8). Parents' responses revealed that they tried their best to support their children's education. They indicated that at times they got stuck as they faced problems when they tried to help the children with homework due to their lack of knowledge on the subject their children were learning. Parents also stated that some heads and teachers looked down upon parents and did not see their value in the education of their children. Parents felt marginalized and alienated by schools and thus it became difficult for them to participate in the education of their children. Some parents actually thought that teachers undermined them as they believed that they were not educated.

Heystek (2006) confirms some of the observations from this study when he states that some parents' lack of appropriate knowledge and expertise to provide appropriate learning activities for their children even compromises their existence in schools. Berger (2007) claims that some parents with low-occupational and education status seem to be challenged by the fact that teachers are supposed to be their equals in the engagement process and the worst culprits are those who had distrust and fear of the school system that had failed them so badly in their own childhood.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study made a number of conclusions and recommendations about the involvement of parents in the education of their children in secondary schools. It could be concluded that principals and teachers had a better understanding of parental involvement. They felt that parents had to talk to teachers about their children's work and has a feeling that providing children's basic needs and good parenting was enough involvement of parents in the education of their children were many. These included improved academic achievement of pupils, improved relationship between parents and school, improved teacher motivation, better learner behavior, improved learner attendance as well as better provision of learner and teacher resources. On the challenges that made it difficult for parents to partake in the education of their children participants stated that time was a major challenge as parents did not have time to attend school meetings and other activities due to many commitments. Some parents also lacked the educational qualifications to guide their children on homework. Teachers and heads in some instances exhibited negative attitudes towards parents like looking down upon them due to their lack of education.

In view of the above findings and conclusions, the study recommends that:

- The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should organize cluster based workshops to enlighten parents about the importance of participating in the education of their children.
- Teacher education institutions should revise their curriculum to incorporate components of parental involvement in the teacher education curriculum to enable teachers to promote parent involvement in the education of their children.
- Heads of schools should motivate parents of children attending their schools to effectively participate in the education of their children through school based workshops in order to improve the relationship between schools and parents.





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