



Barriers to Parental Engagement: Perspectives from Parents and Teachers in Primary Schools in Rwanda

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Abstrak

Tujuan: Studi ini melihat hambatan keterlibatan orang tua dalam pendidikan dari pandangan orang tua dan guru di lima sekolah dasar di Matimba, Nyagatare, Rwanda. Ini menyoroti pentingnya kemitraan keluarga-sekolah yang kuat untuk meningkatkan keberhasilan siswa.

Metodologi / Desain / Pendekatan: Penelitian menggunakan metode campuran, mengumpulkan data melalui survei, wawancara, dan diskusi kelompok dengan orang tua dan guru.

Temuan: Tantangan utama termasuk kurangnya kesadaran tentang pentingnya keterlibatan, perbedaan budaya, dan komunikasi yang buruk antara sekolah dan keluarga. Orang tua merasa tidak nyaman dengan lingkungan sekolah dan tidak yakin bagaimana menghidupi anak-anak mereka, sementara guru menghadapi batasan waktu dan sumber daya. Kedua kelompok setuju tentang hambatan tetapi melihat dampaknya secara berbeda.

Orisinalitas / Nilai: Penelitian ini menawarkan wawasan penting tentang keterlibatan orang tua dalam Matimba. Ini menekankan perlunya komunikasi yang lebih baik, dukungan masyarakat, dan kebijakan sekolah inklusif untuk meningkatkan keterlibatan orang tua. Studi ini menyerukan kerja sama antara orang tua dan guru dan menyarankan cara untuk meningkatkan keterlibatan dalam pendidikan.

Keywords: *Keterlibatan orang tua, perspektif, dan hambatan*

Abstract

Purpose: This study looks at the barriers to parental involvement in education from the views of parents and teachers in five primary schools in Matimba, Nyagatare, Rwanda. It highlights the importance of strong family-school partnerships to improve student success.

Research Methodology / Design / Approach: The study used a mixed method, gathering data through surveys, interviews, and group discussions with parents and teachers.

Findings: Key challenges include lack of awareness about the importance of involvement, cultural differences, and poor communication between schools and families. Parents feel uneasy about the school environment and unsure how to support their children, while teachers face time and resource limits. Both groups agree on the barriers but see their impact differently.

Originality / Value: This research offers important insights into parental involvement in Matimba. It stresses the need for better communication, community support, and inclusive school policies to boost parental engagement. The study calls for cooperation between parents and teachers and suggests ways to improve involvement in education.

Keywords: *Parental involvement, perspectives and barriers*



Introduction

Parental engagement in education is a critical component of a child's academic success and overall development worldwide. In many educational settings, especially in primary schools, as like before, the active involvement of parents primarily can enhance learning outcomes, foster a positive school environment, and promote a sense of community belonging. Familial involution in their children's education has been described solidly in various literature sources using a multiplicity of jargons such as *home-school cooperation* (Orell and Pihlaja, 2020), *parental engagement* (Goodall, 2021) and *parental involvement* (Epstein, 2018; Wilder, 2014). However, various barriers can impede parental engagement willingly or unwillingly, resulting in establishing unavoidable disparities in student achievement and participation. Understanding these barriers from the perspectives of parents is essential in highlighting and consequentially resulting in developing effective strategies to enhance engagement. Matimba Sector, Nyagatare District.

Understanding research site is critical. The Matimba sector, located in Nyagatare District, is characterized by a diverse population with varying socio-economic and religious backgrounds. Unrelenting is its educational landscape which is shaped by cultural norms, economic challenges, and differing levels of awareness about the importance of parental involvement. As such, comprehending the solitary unique context of this area is essential for identifying the specific barriers to parental engagement. Contextually, in Rwandan schools, parental involvement is chiefly organized through Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs), where parents are systematically clustered to participate in the school's day-to-day running and management activities. Nevertheless, parental engagement in education is widely recognized as a critical factor influencing student achievement and overall school success. Parents without an iota of doubt remain one of the most essential and indispensable pillars that influences children's holistic well-being (Fallesen, P, and Gahler, M 2020). It encompasses a range of activities, including participation in school events, communication with teachers, and involvement in children's learning at home.

Despite the acknowledged importance of parental involvement, many schools experience significant barriers that hinder effective engagement. This study explores these barriers from the perspectives of both parents and teachers, focusing on five primary schools in the Matimba sector of Nyagatare District. This is visible in a number of observed cases and to add more weights to my observation current research on the subject under study consistently shows that when parents are actively involved in their children's education, students tend to perform better academically, have better attendance, and exhibit more positive attitudes toward school. Upon further scrutiny, recent research has laid it crystal bare that parental involvement extensively influences children's achievement more than school procedures, especially in the elementary years." (Sheppard, 2009,105) Put clearly or simply, engaged parents can provide extensive support at home, reinforce learning, and foster a collaborative partnership with teachers.

However, the extent of parental involvement in Matimba sector of Nyagatare district varies significantly based on various factors, including socio-economic status, educational background, and cultural beliefs. Goodall (2007) adumbrates that "while the literature highlights that parental engagement makes a significant difference to education achievement and learning, we still need to know more about the ways in which parental engagement can be enhanced and facilitated across different sectors of society" (281). Despite the clear benefits of parental engagement, many schools in the Matimba sector encounter obstacles that limit their participation. These barriers can be categorized into several key areas. By addressing the barriers identified, stakeholders can work collaboratively to create a more inclusive and supportive educational environment both for students and their families. In conclusion, this research seeks to shed light on the complex dynamics of parental engagement in education, particularly in the context of the Matimba sector in Nyagatare District from the perspectives of both the teachers and parents.

The purpose of this study is to identify and analyze the barriers to parental engagement from the perspectives of both parents and teachers in the Matimba sector. By delving into their experiences, perceptions and challenges, the study seeks to illuminate the factors that contribute to low levels or completely no participation of parental involvement in the educational journeys of their children despite a greater love for them. The findings will be valuable for educators, policymakers, and community leaders who seek to improve student outcomes through increased parental engagement insight to be derived from this academic research work.

Pendekatan behavioristik berfokus pada pembentukan perilaku belajar melalui stimulus, respons, dan penguatan (*reinforcement*). Dalam konteks pembelajaran biologi tingkat SMA, pendekatan ini relevan untuk mengajarkan keterampilan atau konsep yang membutuhkan pengulangan dan pembiasaan. Teori ini berpandangan bahwa perilaku dapat diukur dan diubah melalui manipulasi lingkungan belajar (Mantasiah et al., 2021). Salah satu prinsip dasar adalah pengulangan atau latihan berulang membantu siswa memahami konsep biologi dasar, seperti klasifikasi organisme dan siklus biogeokimia, sebagaimana didukung oleh penelitian Slavin dalam (Wardani et al., 2015). Dalam konteks SMA, penerapan pendekatan behavioristik melalui tugas terstruktur dan reward meningkatkan hasil belajar siswa pada materi adaptasi makhluk hidup (Sakri, 2020) dalam hal ini kasus dan penelitian terkait.

The study is significant in a number of ways. By and large, it gives parents their voice, in that it prioritizes the voices of parents by giving them the conduit to expeditiously articulate their challenges and perspectives regarding their roles in parental engagement. It is also important since it can be used as a bedrock to policy formulation. Insights gained from this research can be used to guide school administrators and policy makers in developing targeted initiatives to foster robust parental engagement initiatives. In addition, it is important to support students' success, in that addressing the identified barriers can enhance students' outcomes by promoting a collaborative environment between schools and families. Based on this, this study will identify the following research questions.

1. To identify the specific barriers to parental engagement in educational process as perceived separately by parents and teachers in the Matimba sector.
2. To explore how socio-economic, cultural, and personal factors influence parental engagement in the five primary schools under study.
3. To suggest for synchronized strategies for both parents and teachers to mitigate these challenges to encourage greater involvement in children's progressive education.

Literature Review

This study was informed by the Social Capital Theory (Bourdieu, 1986) a French sociologist. The theory in a nutshell views social capital as that entwined inter relationships and norms that shapes the interactions and behaviors of individuals within a social structure. It explains the embodied state of cultural capital which stipulates the "long lasting dispositions of the mind and the body" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 47). Applicably, this theory expagorates how different levels of social capital can affect parental engagement. For example, parents with limited social interactions or connections may struggle to maneuver the educational terrain of their children resulting in harvesting the unwarranted total disengagement. In a converse manner, parents with concrete community marriages may better comprehend the obstacles or barriers experienced by parents and work tirelessly to bridge the gaps.

Parental involvement in their children's education is cognisant. Various body of current literature highlights a multiplicity of barriers from both parents and teachers' viewpoints. These barriers regardless of from which perspectives are they viewed from pose undesirable challenges and impediments to child development in educational discourses. Briefly, according to Tyson (2009), time constraints is a barrier viewed from parents' perspective. Despite engaging in their children's education, parents are so overwhelmed with other home commitments and economic pressure, that eventually restrict them to fully participate in school events. Further, research by Fan and

Chen (2001), suggest that parents' educational backgrounds have an effect on their levels or degrees of involvement in their children's education. They claim that parents with low educational levels tend to feel unsecure and intimidated by school environments, resulting in being clueless on how to support their children in schools. Smith and Wohlstetter (2001) argue that parents' negative past experiences is another factor that inhibit or limit parents from total engagement to their children's education. They claim that parents who have a negative engagement with the school systems are more likely to be disengaged from parental involvement. Despite this, lack of information, cultural and language barriers are also contributing immensely to total disengagements on children's education.

From the teachers' perspectives, Christenson and Sheridan (2001) suggest that to a greater extent teachers have negative perceptions on teachers. They claim that most parents are biased towards school engagement processes due to their poor socio economic backgrounds. Many teachers also contribute that, parents are not engaging in most cases because of lack of adequate training. Dufour and Marzano (2011) opine that many teachers are not trained in in engaging with parents. They eventually lack skills and strategies to engagement. According to Shelson (2007) teachers are experiencing a myriad of communication challenges with parents, because in most cases parents do not respond to teachers' invitations. Redding (2023) expagorates that similar to parents, teachers have limited time to fully engage with parents in schools. Mostly they are overwhelmed with administrative roles and class management duties, resulting in limited time and space to engage with teachers. In this regard, barriers to school engagement by both teachers and parents are multi-faceted. Collaboration, increased communication channels, and professional development or incapacitation is the way to go in militating against these challenges.

Method

This methodology outlines the research design, data collection, and analysis methods in the context of exploring the barriers to parental engagement experienced in a case of five primary schools in the Matimba area of Nyagatare district. The study aims to gather insights from both parents and teachers to understand the challenges and propose actionable solutions. In this regard, this study employs a qualitative research design, utilizing interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) to gather in-depth perspectives from participants. This design is suitable for exploring complex social phenomena, such as parental engagement. This method was chosen because of its ability to enable the teachers to express their experiences in an authentic and direct manner, while maintaining the process of in-depth investigation of the researched phenomenon (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). There are two groups of population that was used in this research, that is, parents and teachers. A diverse group of parents with varying backgrounds, including socio-economic status, educational level, and family structure was selected. Educators from the selected primary schools, including teachers from different grades and subject areas also form part of this sampled population. A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants who can provide rich, relevant information regarding parental engagement. The sample consisted of 20 parents, (4 from each school) and 10 teachers, (2 from each school).

Data was collected through semi structured interviews that were administered to both teachers and parents. This was done mainly to explore their perspectives on barriers to engagement. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. In addition, two FGDs were conducted separately with parents and teachers. Each group consisted of 6-8 participants to encourage interaction and dialogue. A set of open-ended questions was developed to guide the interviewees, covering topics such as communication barriers, cultural factors, and school policies. A list of prompts was created to facilitate discussion, focusing on collective experiences and perceptions regarding parental engagement. The transcribed data was analyzed using thematic analysis to identify common themes and patterns related to barriers to parental engagement. This process involved coding the data and organizing it into key themes. This methodology aims to provide a comprehensive approach to understanding the barriers to parental engagement in the Matimba area. By considering the perspectives of both parents and

teachers, the study seeks to contribute valuable insights that can inform strategies to enhance parental involvement in primary education.

Findings and discussion

1. Communication Barriers

A great number of parents expressed difficulties in understanding school communication due to language barriers, especially when communicated in English. A great number bemoaned lack of clarity in some of the communication conveyed in the messages. In like manner, the teachers on the other hand cited inconsistencies in communication methods. For instance, in some cases, the school heads use emails, phone calls resulting into lack of synchronism. This leads to great confusion and undesired disengagement. Even if parents have the ability to assist their children with homework, they are incapacitated in the type of assistance they can offer as teachers and schools are not forthcoming with information on how to operate with their children at home (Drake 1996). Many parents stated that they would willingly spend additional time working with their children if teachers provide the cardinals on how to assist them (Dauber, 1993). Parents who are struggling to communicate effectively in English or who are unfamiliar with the education system may shy away from establishing meaningful connections with teachers.

2. Cultural factors

Culture plays a bigger role in influencing parental engagement in schools. The distinguished ecological approach of Bronfenbrenner (2013) describes the child's environment as a concerted space of family and education system, with emphasis how the integration between them influences the child's cognitive achievements and social and emotional abilities. Some parents were of the opinion that their cultural practices were not given enough due respect by many schools. For example, when meetings are called for Saturdays, some parents aired out their views that, because of their religious affiliations, they will not find time. On the other hand, teachers also bemoaned lack of cultural sensitivity and more robust inclusive practices that can propel parents to gear up in terms of their engagement. Arguably, people are surrounded by family members and are influenced by the culture in which they live (Rieber & Robinson, 2004). For this reason, children gain knowledge about the world through interaction with their immediate environment. (Vygotsky, 1978).

3. Economic constraints

Financial problems were chief among some of the reasons put forward by the parents. This became quite challenging especially in attending school events or participate in activities that calls for financial contributions. Teachers, were of the view that economic status of parents often discourage and eventually prevent them from engaging fully with the school community. The socioeconomic quagmire is a critical factor that influences the parents' degree of involvement in education, its nature, scope, and quality, both at school and at home. (Zedan, 2011). According to Blake (2022), the number of children in the family increases, the level of parental involvement in the educational field tends to decrease because of the sharing of the family available resources such as financial, social, and temporal amidst the children. Parents in families with dozens of children deal with the challenges of time management between the demands of the job, the care of children, and the participation in school activities, which leads to a diminuendo in their involvement in the school life (Anderson & Minke, 2007). In this regard, parents' life context such as poverty and being semi-illiterate or total illiterate is another barrier to parental involvement for (Hornby & Lafaele (2011). Coupled with this, parents may also not be able to provide learning opportunities at home because of their low socioeconomic status as stated by (Watson et al., 2012).

4. Time constraints

From the side of parents, work commitments and other responsibilities at home also contributed to challenges that water down their engagement in their children's education. This eventually limit their presents to engage with the school community. From the side of teachers, it was observed that a greater number opened that busy schedules at schools are a menace. This results

in hindering parents from attending meetings leading to total disengagement. (Niyibizi et al., 2018) categorically states that the second challenge identified in this study is parents 'busy schedules.

5. Perception of school environment

Many parents felt that the school environment is not conducive for such engagements. This is chiefly because in most cases, parents feel unwelcome or unsafe resulting in them being affected in their willingness to engage. According to a greater number of teachers, establishing workable and friendly environment could mitigate this challenge. Eventually, parents' desire to engage will be enhanced.

6. Lack of awareness and understanding

To a greater extent, parents sometimes are deficient of the knowledge of the benefits of parental involvement or how to manouvre their way on order to get involved in their children's education. However, teachers emphasized the need for outreaching activities in order to inform, educate and allow parents to engage in their children's education. The essentialities of total engagement and opportunities must be explained to parents for total engagement. Parents with low education tend to see the education system as of no value in their children's development and therefore often their involvement is minute. Contrastingly, parents with high education view the school as an essential and main pillar that supports their children's development (Guajardo, 2005). The lack of education may also influence their perception of whether or not they possess the skills to positively influence their children's education. This view of self has a major effect on whether or not parental involvement becomes a reality according to Sheldon (2002).

7. Trust and relationships

Building bridges of trust between teachers and parents is very critical. Some parents may also lack the knowledge or confidence about how to be appropriately engaged (Hill and Tyson, 2009). Parents' skepticism about the school's motives in inviting them must be reduced or preferably totally wiped away. Teachers expressed their desire to create a very good rapport between school community and the parents. This will result in having some strong relationships and a clear road map to collaboration and engagement.

8. Implications of the study/expected outcomes

This study has several implications. Findings of this study can inform educational policy that is focused on enhancing and improving parental engagement in schools. Policy makers can establish well coined initiatives that are aimed at addressing the highlighted barriers pinpointed by both teachers and parents. Having a deeper understanding of the perspectives of the two key plays, that is parents and teachers can lead to the enactment of more effective communication channels and strategies. For instance, it will be a prerogative for all schools to come up with a programme that takes into consideration the concerns of parents and possibly their preferences that will eventually galvanize them to engage.

The model of partnership of Epstein (2018) begins with the family commitment to provide an appropriate growth and support for the children. The model includes the promulgation of opportunities for the parents' volunteering, support of the performance of home learning tasks. Proper communication channels should be established. If not communicated well, their children bring home envelopes or folders once or twice a week containing all the necessary information such as report cards, forms for parents to complete and sign, updates about school activities, and weekly classroom agendas (Nyemba and Chitiyo, 2018).

Training for teachers. We cannot assume that all teachers know the effective communication skills with parents, In this regard, teachers may require training tailor made to comprehend the barriers that parents or guardians are experiencing. Incapacitating programmes may be enunciated to foster more inclusive and supportive environments for parental involvement. Strong community partnership. This study may bring forth the need for robust partnership between schools and communities surrounding. Collaboration may yield to resource mobilization as a way to mitigate against barriers being faced by parents, such as transport costs, financial constraints and language barriers. Engagement strategies.

It is the prerogative of the schools to come up with fashionable innovative engagement strategies that address and cut across social, economic and political divides. This involves suggesting for flexible meeting times, virtual engagements alternatives and other relevant activities that area culturally relevant.

9. Awareness and advocacy

Raising an awareness about the necessities of parental engagement and the barriers that separate and result in less engagement or no engagement at all can give birth to advocacy efforts targeting at creating more supportive and conducive educational environments.

Conclusion

Exploring the barriers to parental engagement from the perspectives of parents in the Matimba sector of Nyagatare district is crucial for understanding the complexities of educational involvement. By identifying these barriers, stakeholders can work collaboratively to create supportive environments that encourage active participation from parents, ultimately benefiting students' aims to contribute to the dialogue surrounding parental engagement and the vital role it plays in the educational landscape of Rwanda. Based on the findings, it is strategic to enhance parental involvement through workshops, training programmes for parents to enhance their capacity to contribute during engagements. Improved communication strategies and flexible meeting times to be organized to meet and accommodate parents' schedules.

Recommendation for local stakeholders, share findings with school administrators, local education authorities, and parent-teacher associations to facilitate discussions around improving engagement, and for publications, consider publishing results in local educational journals or presenting them at conferences to reach a wider audience involved in educational planning and policy.

List of abbreviations

Not applicable

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Not applicable

Declaration

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Ethics approval and consent to participate

Not applicable

Consent for publication

Not applicable

Availability of data and materials

Not applicable

Competing interests

All authors declare that there are no relevant conflicts of interest related to this research.

Author contributions

OG was solely responsible for the conception and design of the study, data collection, analysis, interpretation, and manuscript writing. The author also reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript

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