The Relevance of Bourdieu's Social Practice Theory to Parents' Participation in Basic Schools

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ABSTRACT

Parents' participation in basic school management has been identified to be very paramount in the growth and development of basic schools. Many scholars have espoused the critical roles they play in various dimensions to the development of basic schools, most especially in developing countries. This study investigated the relevance of Bourdieu social practice theory to parents' participation in basic school management. The study sought to identify how Boudieu's Social Practice theory assertions manifested in parents' participation in basic schools' activities. The purposive sampling technique was used to sample PTA executives, parents and school authorities. The study adopted the exploratory research method with in-depth interviews, observation and focus group discussions as techniques for data collection. The findings from the study revealed that the parents' traits, experience and operational environment in schools determined the ways that parents participated in the management of basic schools. This article recommends that since the mode of synergy between parents and school environment had a pertinent impact on the parents' desire to fully participate in the management of basic schools, government and other relevant stakeholders in the education fraternity should ensure a cooperative school environment.

Keywords: *Bourdieu's social practice theory, basic schools, parents' participation, social practice theory.*

INTRODUCTION

The formation of parents and teacher/school associations has been in existence for many years ago. Parents' role in the management of basic schools has led to the establishment of Acts and legislative instruments to secure a sound atmosphere for operation of various stakeholders in the management of basic schools (Nkansa-Akukwe, 2004). This is insisted in consideration that parents play a vital role in the total welfare and development their children; they provide emotional, physical and psychosocial needs of their children. Their involvement in the management of school activities positively impacts the development of school as a structure and students as people (Abdul-Rahaman, Ababio, Arkorful, Basiru, & Abdul Rahman, 2018). According to Edwards and Redfern (2017), globally, parents' participation in the management and governance of schools cannot be over emphasized as the design of administrative and management systems encompass avenues for their participation since time in memory.

The prime focus of education is to impart knowledge, values, attitudes and skills in the child. This begins the moment the child is given birth. This suggests that parents naturally set the pace of the child's education through socialization either formally or informally before the child formally assumes formal education in schools. Hence, the school environment should produce the conditions for social cohesion and for the re-construction of actors to ensure that all the social groups have access to management of schools (Zambeta, Askouni, Androusou, Leontsini, Papadakou & Lagopoulou, 2017). Equally, the steering committee in developing the Commonwealth Education Fund (CEF) views parent-school associations as a body made up of strategic partners of the civil society that assists the government to ensure that all children have

access to quality education for future security (Nurkholida & Hakim, 2020). As was anciently envisaged by Plato (437-347 BC), children should be valued and nurtured by the society because they would become the future citizens, leaders and guardians of their nations (Abdul-Rahman, N., Arkoful, V., Basiru, I., & Abdul Rahman, A. B. 2018). That is the diverse capital endowment of parents and the entire society should be tapped to compliment that of the central government to facilitate effective functioning of schools in the country. Hence the study explores; how parents' experiences and personality influence their participation in the management of schools, how operational environment in schools' influence parents' participation in school management and the extent to which parents contribute to basic schools' activities.

Rationale for parent participation in basic schools

Globally, the ability for schools to attain and achieve a universal recognition has led to the adoption of diverse approaches by nations and international organizations. A typical example is the Sustainable Development Goal 4 which is patronized by the United Nations Organization (Ghana Education Service, 2020). As further held by the World Bank (2008), communities should be empowered through involvement in the education of their wards by situating parents in pivotal positions in school affairs to further enhance rural educational improvement and poverty reduction at large. This has therefore positioned all stakeholders in the educational fraternity on their toes, though some alliances between some of these stakeholders in the educational field existed. Commonly, among such alliances, is the one that usually exist between parents and school. As opined by Pang (2004), these associations bear various names in different countries. For instance, in Australia, it is called Parents and Friends Association,

whilst in England; it is known as Parent-Teacher Association, in Papua New Guinea, it is termed as Parents and Citizens Association. In Canada, it is referred to as Parents Advisory Council, while in Ghana it is known as Parents Teacher Association. According to Edwards and Redfern (2017), Parent Teacher Association (P.T.A) is conceptualized as a group of people who deliberately come together to mobilize resources either actively or inactively to enhance the achievements of goals and objectives of schools. Equally, the steering committee in developing the Commonwealth Education Fund (CEF) also viewed Parent Teacher Association as a body made up of strategic partners of the civil society that assists the government to ensure that all children have access to quality education (Mariam, 2008). This indicates that the participation of parents in the activities associated with their children education provides a number of contributions in the school systems. Parents' involvement in school activities enhances quality and accessibility to education, solve problems and issues related to welfare of student/pupils and teachers.

It enhances children's learning, motivation, aiding their wards to understand the need and value of education, and assist them in pupils' discipline. Consequently, this enhances academic performance of pupils and schools in general (Nurkholida & Hakim, 2020). In Ghana, the government took over the entire management and governance of basic schools after independence so as to ensure fair and equitable allocation of educational facilities throughout the country (Akyeampong, Fobih & Koomson, 1999). This notwithstanding around the late 1970s and mid-1980s, the country was bemoaned by educational catastrophes resulting from worldwide economic chaos, mismanagement of schools, poor

performance, inadequate professional teachers and quantitative expansion of all schools at all levels (Nkansa-Akukwe, 2004). As a part of addressing some of these catastrophes further proceeding in 1987, the earliest reform was adopted. This reform was with the primary goals of increasing school's enrolment through easy accessibility to primary education and providing schools with the necessary facilities and equipment to enhance efficiency and effectiveness. All these were geared towards enhancing Ghana's socio-economic development (Nkansa-Akukwe, 2004). According to Community School Alliance's report (2003), parents, teachers, community opinion leaders, government and other educational key stakeholders were made to collaborate (to work together) as a single entity in the management of basic schools in the country (Nkansa-Akukwe, 2004). The Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education programme, which was launched in 1996 to help resolve the existing challenges facing the educational systems, further gave recognition and necessitation for all stakeholders in education. This was especially for parents to be actively involved in contributing in diverse ways to the school system in the country. This led to the formation of School Management Committee (SMC) and Parents Teacher Association (PTA) (Akyeampong, Fobih & Koomson, 1999).

Bourdieu Social Practice Theory

This theory is associated with Bourdieu (1977). It is commonly used in educational discourses and social management. The theory serves as a lens that provides the basis to critically analyze social institutions or agents (parents) and their impact in organizations (basic schools). The theory holds that social actions in any environment are induced by the linkages between the agency and the structure. Bourdieu explains the theory in three mutually

inclusive terms; habitus, field and capital (Bourdieu, 1977). In summary, the theory asserts that before an agent (parent) plays a role in an organization (school) the agent has to internalize roles in the field (school environment) which forms part of the socialization process. These internalized relationships and habitual expectations and relationships forms the habitus. In a nutshell, the theory emphasizes on both the agency and the structures but relies much on reconciling the structure and the agency (Bourdieu, 1990).

Habitus

In this concept, the theory assumes that agents' (parents) actions, perception of things, and their feelings are influenced by agents' past experiences (Crossley, 2005). That is to say, the way a parent behaves and react (participate) on situations are always engineered and controlled by their past interactions and experiences. Allan (2006) explains that habitus does not only aid us to organize our own behavior on the field, but it assists us to accept the behaviors of others as well. The concept is therefore identified as the product of inculcation and appropriation of parents past interactions and experiences that are required for the attainment of the objective/goals of the institution (Bourdieu, 1977). In view of that, agents permanently avail to the same conditionings, which limit them to the same material condition of existence.

Field

The theory explains field as a social space with its set of rules, regulations, authority and legal framework that indicates the boundaries of operation within a social space. As revealed by Allan (2006), the field is characterized by many positions which are occupied by components constituting the organization. The parameters of the field are set by the relationships between these

positions. Focusing on mode of interaction and expected output, Bourdieu (1990) propounded the analogy of field and game. In this analogy, every team has a collective responsibility among actors and that, though there are rules of the game on the field, it is the feel of the game steered by habitual competence and know how that determines action on the field.

Capital

In the views of Bourdieu (1990) and Crossley (2005), capital in social settings can be grouped into different forms; it could be symbolic, social, economic and or cultural. The wealth, income and financial value of goods agents have and are accrued from economic field, form the economic capital of the agent (Crossley, 2005). The measurement nature of economic capital differentiates it from the other forms of capital. From the perspective of Allan (2006), social capital is the computation of resources tangible or intangible a person or an entity gets by means of belonging to a strong network of relationships of mutual benefits or recognition. In categorizing social capital, Crossley (2005) holds that there are at least two forms of social capital. The first one is referenced to social networks which are treated structurally and from the point of view of the network; the second one conceptualizes networks as resources from the point of view of their members (Bourdieu & Loïc, 1992). Capital that manifests in the form of status and recognition an agent possesses is classified as the symbolic capital. Such power deals with possession of command, authority, honor and prestige in the society (Bourdieu & Loïc, 1992).

Methodology

This research took place in the Nadowli-Kaleo District at the Upper West Region of Ghana. This district is made up of seven

circuits. The district is boarded to the West by Burkina Faso, to the East by Daffiama-Issa-Bussie district, South by Wa Municipal and to the North by Jirapa district (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014). The study area covers a total land area of about 2,742.50km². The area is made up of 183 basic schools. Source of information from a preliminary assessment from the Nadowli-Kaleo Educational Directorate indicated that all these schools have a functional Parents Teachers Associations in the schools. According to the Ghana Statistical Service (2020), about 49% of the total population constitute the working force, 6% representing 60years and above and the remaining 45% between the ages of 0-14. Below is the map of the district under study.
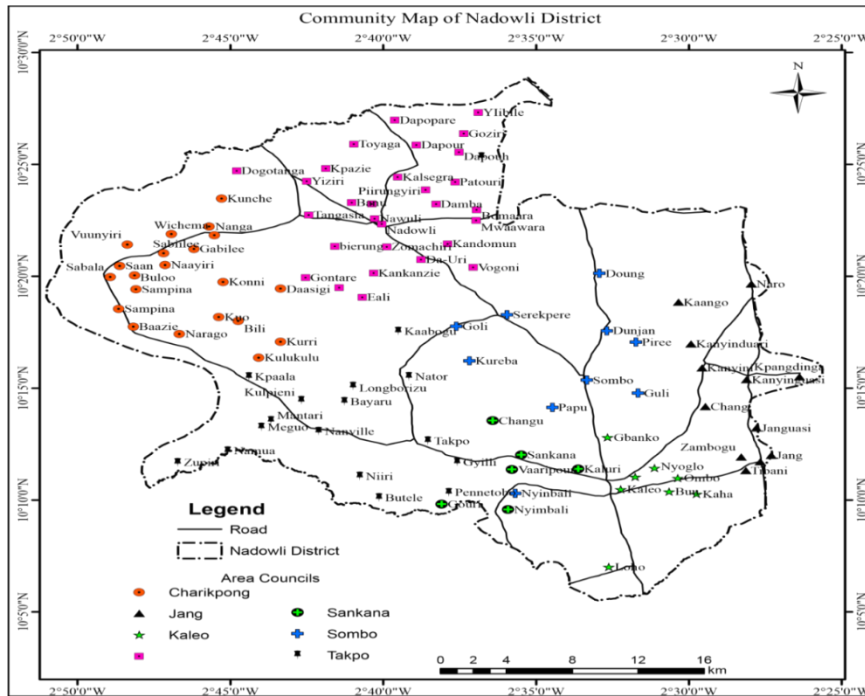
Source: Physical Planning Department, Nadowli-Kaleo District

The exploratory research design was adopted for the study; this was induced by the fact that opportunity was created for the researcher to have a thorough interaction with participants involved in the study. This further led to extensive understanding of the factors or indicators that influenced parents' participation in the activities of basic schools in the district. Out of 183 basic schools, the simple random sampling with the lottery technique was used to select two schools from each circuit in the district to get a total of 14 schools involved in the study. This method gave all schools in the district equal chance to be involved in the study. The purposive sampling technique was adopted to get participants for the study. These participants included parents, PTA executives and school authorities. The focus group discussion was used to collect primary data from parents in groups of seven to eight (7-8). This was organized for parents in all the selected schools on the surety of confidentiality as held by Murray and Agyare (2018). The groups intensively discussed the three main research questions in the study. The local language (Dagaare) was used during the discussion to allow parents freely discuss issues pertinent to the study. PTA executives were purposively selected on the basis of number of years served in the school to undergo in-depth interview, guided by confidentiality and anonymity.

The researcher further adopted the observation method too upon the consent and assistance of head teachers and PTA executives to probe visible structures in the school environment. This was carried out by the use of a check list, note book and a camera. Before the study was carried out, the researcher sought the consent of all participants. All the instruments for data collection were sent to the SD-Dombo University for Business and Integrated Development Studies Ethics Team for ethical scrutiny before implementation. Data collected from the field were qualitatively analyzed. After the data collected from the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were tape-recorded and transcribed. Afterwards, the frequent emerging themes were achieved and

were coherent, they were presented. Further, qualitative data presentation approaches like direct and indirect quotes and paraphrases were used to present data.

Results and Discussion

This section discusses the findings of this study. The discussion is arranged based on the research questions guided this study.

How do parents' Experiences and Personality Influence their Participation in the management of Schools?

Data collected on parents' experiences and personality traits revealed that, individual parents had diverse experience and personality traits. Parents, through PTA, were able to harness the experiences and opportunities that others possessed to assist in the management of basic schools. It was identified that that chiefs, opinion leaders, assembly men and some community members in high positions used their outfits to contribute to basic schools' development in their societies. During key informant interview this was the assertion of one PTA executive:

> *The assembly man and the chief were able to lobby for boreholes and other teaching and learning materials from the district assembly to schools in this community.*

This finding debunks the notion by Crossley (2005) and associates that people of different experiences and personality traits work together in the management of schools. Thus, parents capitalized on the various experiences and personality traits of individuals in diverse ways in the management of schools. Amongst these were the assertions that:

> *We get funds and other resources for the management of basic schools after we have organized meetings with different*

stakeholders constituting parents-school association, and agree on some unanimous decisions though some parents' participation in school activities were limited.

This resulted from their low level of knowledge in the roles and responsibilities expected of them. Further, parents with expertise on any project or infrastructure needed by the school willingly did so for the school at no cost. Others with influential positions in their communities and work places used their portfolio to assist the schools to get projects such as boreholes, classroom desk among others. These revelations from the study, conforms to Bourdieu's assertion that habitus does not only enable people to organize their own behavior, but appreciate the behavior of others as well (Allan, 2006). The findings also, revealed that most of the schools that had many students and as such more parents as PTA members participated in basic school activities in diverse ways. These schools had a very active parents-membership participation in school activities. Most parents are highly educated elites and were devoted to participate in basic schools by lobbing for projects and teaching and learning resources for the schools and vice versa. This finding complements the notion of Bourdieu (1990), the larger the social network the bigger and diverse the resources and assistance that the organization receives from the agents towards its growth and development.

How does Operational Environment in Schools Influence Parents' Participation in School Management?

Results from the study revealed that, to enhance an effective operational environment for parents and teachers to work harmoniously, Parents Teacher Associations existed. This association was operated in a defined social space, governed by

rules and regulations, code of conducts, executives and a legal statute in schools. According to both parents and teachers, this helped them to regulate the activities of each group without the emergence of conflicts of interest. They further revealed that existence of rules and regulations assisted in the performance of duties and responsibilities in the association smoothly. This finding confirms Allan's (2006) argument that the social space on the field is characterized with a set of rules and regulations (legal framework) that delineates the limits of operation within the social space to avert conflicts. It was revealed in this study that willingness and enthusiasm of parents' participation in school activities was informed by nature of existing space (parents-school authorities' relations) in the school. The operational environment determined the ways that parents participated in the management of basic school. It was identified that schools that had an open and tolerant school environment had vibrant PTA, where parents willingly participated and contributed in diverse ways to the growth of schools.

In a school at Charikpong-Saan, it was revealed that parents monthly contributed a bowl of maize or cereals to teachers as a motivation. This has exacerbated the parents-school relationship in the school. Arguably, this is an intrinsic motivation for parents and local authorities in the community to participate in school activities. In a similar dimension, it was revealed that, the operational environment was very accommodating for parents' participation in basic school activities. It was affirmed that this existing atmosphere served as an impetus for parents to willingly provide infrastructural assistance to schools. This finding corroborates Bourdieu's (1990) analogy of field and the game, and Crossley's (2005) emphasis on the feel of the game. These scholars

argue that when agents are allowed to have opportunity to participate in the activities on the field, it motivates the agent to give out the maximum output and vice versa. This revelation further affirms the idea of the theory that parents feel of the game (ability and willingness to participate in school management) is always steered by habitual competence of the parent. An additional observable affirmation to the above is the photo and response below:

In a FGD, a participant had this to say:

> *Although most of us are not educated, teachers in the school are always welcoming and ready to engage us in all school activities. They sometimes visit parents to find out why they are not able to attend parents-school meetings. In fact, they actually make us feel very proud and determined to participate in school activities (FGD Takpo, 2020).*

During interview, a PTA executive commented that some parents should be educated massively on their roles in schools, so as to enable them recognize their importance in participating in the

school operations. This finding affirms Bourdieu (1977) assertion that for a parent to function effectively in the relationship, the agent (parent) has to internalize roles in a field. Since these internalized relationships and habitual expectations and relationships form the habitus that becomes part of the socialization process in a field which enable the agent (person) perform the various expected roles in the working environment (school environment). The study discovered that some parents refused to attend parents-schools' meetings with the excuse of busy schedules affecting their collective efforts of in partaking in school activities. This reassures Bourdieu (1988) postulation that relationships are not naturally or socially given but are as the result of time and energy invested, consciously or unconsciously, toward the generation or reproduction of relationships that are "directly usable in the long or short term" In another scenario it was realized from the study that in order for parents' to be able to effectively take part in the activities of basic schools, there is the need to strategically organize orientation programs for teachers on the rules and regulations of the working environment to help prevent parents-teacher conflicts in some schools. This confirms the theory's assertion that the field is characterized by conflicts and struggles for power (Farnell 2000).

To what extent do Parents Contribute to basic Schools?
Data revealed that parents participated in diverse ways to basic schools. These contributions could broadly be divided into three main aspects. These included contribution to infrastructural development, curriculum and support to teachers. It was revealed from the study that parents contributed in diverse ways to ensure that the infrastructural base of basic schools are in good conditions. Some parents provided free technical labor, building materials,

food and physical labor to assist in the provision of basic schools' infrastructure. It was affirmed from the field that such assistance from parents promoted accountability and sense of ownership on the part of the parents. An observable example below is a Kindergarten block that parents-school-authorities bemoaned to a parent and this was built for them. Below, is a Kindergarten built through collaborative efforts of parents and school authorities in Charikpong-Saan.

On the issue of curriculum, it was identified that parents were engaged in the contributions of funds to purchase teaching and learning materials such as pamphlets, computers, blackboard construction set, markers and extension of electricity to school computer laboratories. It was further identified that parents assisted in the provision of paraprofessional teachers; they collaborated with teachers to seek the assistance of Senior High school graduates and other unemployed graduates to teach in schools. They pay teachers agreed stipends and provide other social assistance such as communal assistance in their farms,

contribution of foodstuffs for them. This is in direct consonance with the theory's postulations that when the linkages that form the basis of system are derived collectively from all agents, it is sustained from communal establishment (Bourdieu, 1988). It was identified that though such assistance to these paraprofessional teachers were communally arranged, it actually motivated them to contribute to their maximum level in the teaching and learning process. This consolidates the postulation by Coleman (1988), that the linkages that forms the roots of the system is emanated and sustained in the form of any material or symbolic exchanges that are felt or received earlier on or in the process. It was also revealed that, some of the community elders and workers in other places were sometimes invited to come and assist in teaching certain curriculum and co-curriculum activities; they always appreciate a chance to assist with their expertise at no cost. This is in line with Crossley's (2005) argument that social capital in the form of social networks can easily be tapped by the organization if the agents on the field are endowed with resources needed by the organization at no cost. It further affirms Bourdieu and Loïc (1992) observation that network, as a resource from agents, generally plays a critical role in time of need in any institution.

The study revealed that, in some communities, parents termly agreed to provide two tubers of yam or one bowl of maize per each student. These items were collected by a delegate of parents and kept at school premises within the first week after school vacation. These foodstuffs are handed over to teachers so as to motivate teachers. This is in relation to Allan (2006) who argues that social capital is the computation of resources tangible or intangible a person or an entity gets by means of belonging to a strong network of relationships of mutual benefits or recognition. It was also

revealed that some teachers were given free accommodations in communities. Such accommodations were produced by the chiefs, assembly men, opinion leaders, chief farmers and imams. The status of these people in society made them to accept to provide accommodations for teachers who were posted to the communities. This finding supports Bourdieu and Loïc's (1992) assertion that capital that manifests in the form of status and recognition an agent possesses (command, authority, honor and prestige) in society can oblige it to offer assistance to the benefit of the entire organization.

Conclusion

The importance of social practice theory cannot be under emphasized in present-day social and organizational settings. The theory throws more light on understanding social action and practice in such diverse group such as parents' participation in basic schools' activities, its nature and contributions to basic schools. It also helped to appreciate the perceptions and factors that influenced parents' engagement in basic schools' activities. The assumptions of the theory vividly manifested in the study as it was evidenced that developing and non-developing schools' parents' participation in basic schools' activities were in harmonious marriage to the postulations of the theory. The study further recommends the use of the theory in contemporary studies.

Recommendations

The study recommends that contemporary researchers adopt this theory in their studies, most especially in the fields where, participants' or stakeholders in groups work as a team to achieve common aims or goals. This will unearth the total-reality of happenings among the stakeholders for the necessary actions to be

taken on the field. Such approach will further stimulate and enable efficient operations of institutions and organizations. It will also help the researchers to have a deep insight in the usual cause-effect syndrome in most of the organizations for the required actions to be put in place for the overall performance of institutions.

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