

The Influence of Parents on Students' Academic Performance in Tanzania: The case of Ilala Public Primary Schools

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Abstract

This study investigated the way parents' participation in school activities influence students' academic performance in public primary schools of Ilala district in Dar es Salaam region. It also sought opinions of parents on how to improve students' academic performance. The study involved purposive and stratified simple random sampling procedures to obtain a sample of 53 participants. Data were collected through interviews, questionnaire and documents reviews. The findings show that the ways to achieve high performance of students include increasing the number of qualified teachers, building hostels for students staying far from schools and providing adequate learning materials to students. The study reports that the influence of parents to the schooling of their children is to pay contributions, to offer guidance and counselling, to check the academic progress and to provide learning materials for their children. The results reveal that parents were not involved in various school activities because of their low awareness among themselves, daily activities and being ignored by school administration. This study recommends that the government and other education stakeholders should employ qualified teachers and improve facilities in school environment, and ensure good working conditions for teachers to enhance effective teaching.

Key words: Primary education, student success, teacher participation, academic performance, parents' involvement, Tanzania

Introduction

Education is an important asset that raises peoples' aspiration to increase their ability in social, economic and cultural performance. It

raises people and individuals level of awareness of their environment and equips them with the necessary skills and ideology in addressing problems encountered in life. Parents are important in the schooling and academic performance of children. In developing world including Tanzania, parents still have the belief that services provided to children are insignificant to support them in school learning. Although there are some efforts made by teachers to increase student's performance it seems parents have not sufficiently played their role to children because of their low participation in the teaching and learning process of their children (TADREG, 1993).

Literature

Epstein's (1995) and Bloom's (1985) theories explain community engagement in child learning. The former explains partnership between families and community and parents in their children on learning, the later addresses important variables related to the partnership between parents and schools towards children learning environment. The synergy of models was expected to enhance complementarities of understanding concepts, variables and procedures to the solution of the studied phenomenon in this study.

According to Epstein's (1995) theory of overlapping spheres of influence, there are three major atmospheres where students learn and grow. These spheres are; the family, the school and community. Schools, families and community do some practices independently. There are some, which collaborate to influence children learning and development. Epstein's (1995) theory locates students at the centre of learning. The inarguable facts are that students are the main actor in their education, development and success in school. However, parents and school cannot simply produce successful students. Rather, partnership activities might be engaged in guiding and motivating students for their own success. The assumption is that, if children feel cared for on learning to read, write, calculate and learn

other skills or talents, they tend to remain in schools for learning (Epstein, 1995). Connecting Epstein's (1995) theory to the study regarding the partnership between parents and primary schools in Ilala district in influencing the education of the pupils, parents as family leaders, have a significant role to play in engaging, guiding, encouraging and motivating pupils to work hard in learning. The engagement of parents in their children learning is the crucial factor for children's success at school. In reality, a family has a significant influence on the achievement and future prospects of children than the school (Adams, 2006). Therefore, cooperation between parents and students are inevitable for them to succeed in learning.

Equally important, Bloom's (1985) model consists of three variables; predictor, mediating and performance to which predictor and mediating variables significantly influence student's academic performance. Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between variables.

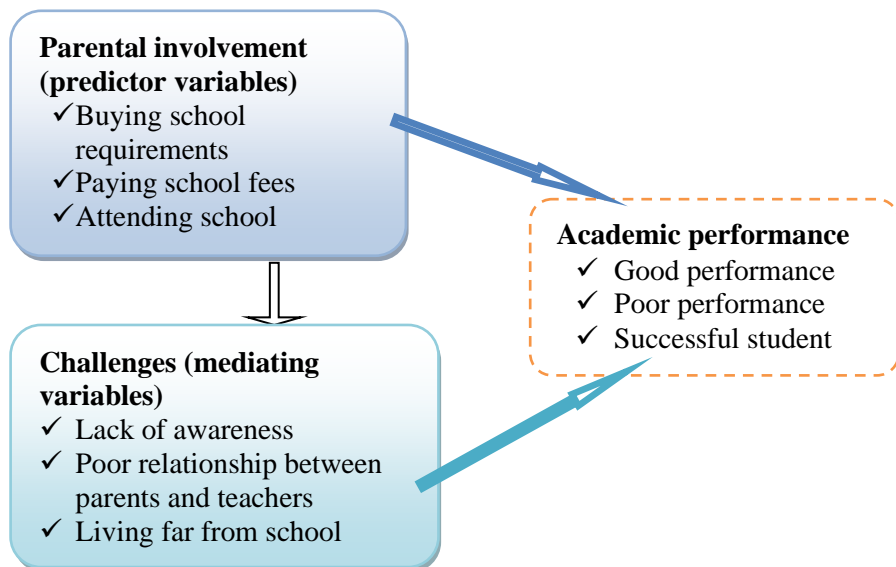


Figure 1: Relationship of academic performance variables

Source: A modified Bloom's (1985) framework

This study assumed that Bloom (1985) framework is of great importance to explain issues related to challenges, parental involvement and children's performance in schools. For instance, if parents involve in paying school fees, buying school requirements, making good environment for children in studying and attending school, meeting to know progress of their children, students could perform better in their studies. However, if there is poor relationship between teachers and parents, parents are not aware of their responsibility to their children, may lead to poor academic performance. Parents should be educated to cooperate with the child in education. Parents' socio-economic factors should help them to contribute in education and academic performance of their children. For instance, home environments help students to perform better when parents prepare library resources for children.

Connecting the models in practice, literature (from within and outside Tanzania) related to parents' influences on students' academic performance in schools have been reviewed (Komba, 2007; Krashen, 2005; Marzano, 2003; Ornstein, 1995; Ndibalema, 2012; TADREG, 1993). Krashen (2005) studied students whose parents were educated and found that they scored higher on standardized test than those whose parents were not educated. School authorities can provide counselling and guidance to parents for creating positive home environment to enhance students' quality of work (Marzano, 2003). Studies show that high achievers come from highly educated homes than low educated ones. This is because educated parents are interested in their children's academic performance and decided to cooperate with educational administrators to enhance commitment of children in their studies (Good & Brophy, 1997). As the Bloom's model explains, educated parents could communicate effectively with their children regarding school activities or the information taught at school, for example by checking homework, communicating about school and reading with children. Furthermore, Ornstein (1995) indicates that children have an advantage in school when their parents support, participate and communicate with teachers, especially on their progress. Besides school programs, schools need

much of the parent's decision making. Parents are able to advise and determine the real curriculum, which is appropriate to various levels in school. Parents are likely to know difficulties faced by students at school environment, which might have resulted from home and see how to solve them for the students' benefits, if at all, there is good parent-teacher- relationship as it was explained in Epstein's model. Ornstein (1995) observes that home environment, school and community links make the school subjects more meaningful for students. The existence of such relationship and links create supportive school environment for students' academic progress.

In addition, Danesty (2000) shows that when parents support their children through motivation, they contribute to their academic performance in schools. Depending on the situation, intrinsic or extrinsic motivation supports children to learn. Intrinsic motivation arises when children learn themselves according to the nature of subjects (simple to learn and apply in life or it has links with other subjects). However, children develop extrinsic motivation if they anticipate accruing a particular reward - in form of praising words and physical objects - due to their high academic performance. Educational psychologists (Fredrick Frobel and Maria Montessori) have indicated it that extrinsic motivation plays an important role in the learning process compared to intrinsic motivation (Danesty, 2000). Such motivational studies suggest that motivation is an inevitable support in enhancing the academic performance of students and the quality of learning process, as the Bloom's model explains.

Studies in Tanzania reveal a number of challenges regarding the contribution of parents on academic progress of their children in primary schools (Komba, 2007; Ndibalema, 2012 and Tanzania Development Research Group - TADREG, 1993). According to Ndibalema (2012), poverty among parents sometimes leads to dropout of children from the formal schooling. As it was noted in this study, parents forced their children (girls) into marriages to accrue wealth (cows) through dowry. Sometimes children were sent to town in search for jobs to work as housemaids, barmaids or as street

beggars, to make their families earn income for survival. Correspondingly, Daven (2008) studied the causes for girl's low participation and performance in primary school compared to boys. It was revealed that high cost of schooling eliminated female students from the enrolment process on gender basis as Epstein's model explains. Parents preferred to enrol boys the tendency, which was highly valued in the community than enrolling girls.

According to Chimombo (1999; 2005), parents incurred other direct costs for example activity fee, uniform, stationeries, transport, lunch, and expenses for boarding which excluded most of poor children from schooling. However, rural parents had a belief that those contributions had little returns to them, except the school and district educational authorities (TADREG, 1993). As both models explain, parents' belief appeared to highlight the existence of moral misconduct among government leaders and public servants, which prevail in most developing countries context (Epstein, 1995 and Bloom, 1985).

Nevertheless, Komba (2007) documented that school makes learners meet their objectives through meetings between parents and teachers. School's organized events including the parent open day and teacher interactions are used to bring key stakeholders (parent, teacher and children) to any school. A subject teacher spent two or three hours with the parents to discuss about children's academic performance, discipline and participation. As the Bloom's model (1985) explains, these ways involve parents in the social and emotional development of their children. The literature suggest that poor performance of primary school students is due to reasons, which are based on parents' beliefs and expectations towards the education of their children in Tanzania (Chimombo, 2005; Komba, 2007; Ndibalema, 2012). Parents had a belief that services provided to their children were insignificant to motivate student learning in schools. The present study examined the extent to which parents involved in schooling and later performance of their children in primary schools.

Specifically, it addressed the following objectives, to examine how parents' participation influences students' academic performance in primary schools; and to find out opinions of parents on how to improve students' academic performance. The present study addressed the following research questions:

- a) How parents' engagement in school related activities affect students' academic performance?
- b) What are the opinions/suggestions of parents in improving students' academic performance in primary schools?

Methodology

The study used quantitative and qualitative approaches with a cross-sectional survey design to investigate the influence of parents on students' academic performance in primary schools of Ilala district in Dar es Salaam region. The design was found suitable because the respondents of this study had different demographic characteristics, such as residence and age. Secondly, the study investigated the influence of parents on student academic performance in primary schools. Such information could best be collected using cross-sectional survey design (Cohen, Manion & Marrison, 2007). Qualitative approaches were used because they allowed getting data that could not be experimentally examined. The researcher was able to obtain and interpret meaning and experiences of information from respondents in their natural setting. It allowed room for flexibility due to verbal explanations and provided an opportunity for modification and changes in the field. The study used a sample of 53 respondents including 30 primary school students, 12 teachers, 3 heads of schools from three primary school and 9 parents. The study used purposive sampling to obtain teachers and parents. Students were obtained through systematic random sampling technique where by 20 standard six students were selected from two primary schools (Maboto and Kunguni) and 10 standard seven students from Mzani (*names are not real*). Teachers were selected through stratified simple random sampling technique in which male and female teachers were

considered. The list of teachers obtained from the heads of each sampled primary school was used to select teachers who volunteered participation in the study. Purposive sampling was applied to heads of schools by virtue of position and parents who live nearby schools.

The study collected data through interviews, questionnaire and documents reviews. In this study, semi-structured interview was used. The use of interview enabled the researcher to collect information regarding individual experience, knowledge and feelings regarding the problem under investigation (Best & Khan, 2006). Kothari (2004) maintains that interview help to obtain more information in great depth and it allows flexibility as there is an opportunity to restructure questions. Semi-structured questions were asked to teachers and head teachers to identify the teaching materials used by teachers in teaching and learning process, to explore their perception on the teachers, teachers' attendance in classroom and to assess the effectiveness of teacher - student interactions. Moreover, they were used to demonstrate academic performance of students in primary schools, how teachers guide and counsel the students and the ways parents were involved to enhance student's performance.

Questionnaires were used to gather data from students through open and close-ended questions on their academic performance. Same method was used to gather information from teachers on how students performed and their ways of interactions in classroom during teaching and learning process. Moreover, the method helped to gather information from parents on how they provided learning materials to their students, and challenges faced these parents in participating in primary school activities as well as their opinions on how to improve students' academic performance. According to Best and Kahn (2006), documentary review is a method for data collection, which involves deriving information by studying written documents. The researcher reviewed documents such as schemes of work with emphasis on teaching and learning materials, teaching activities, teaching aids and references. Above that, information related to

instructional objective and specific objectives were reviewed from lesson plans. The researcher analysed subject syllabi, teachers' guide, inspection reports, official statistics, school timetable, educational circulars and textbooks. These documents were analysed to determine whether they accommodated the required competencies for students in primary schools. In this study, both qualitative and quantitative methods were used in analyzing data. Data from the questionnaire were quantified in terms of numbers, frequencies, percentages, tables, figures and word descriptions. Data collected through interview were processed qualitatively through content analysis, coding, categorizing and reporting quotes from the respondents. Thereafter, views and opinions were interpreted and concluded to determine the influence of parents on students' academic performance in primary schools.

Findings

The study addressed three objectives which examined how parents' participation in school activities influenced students' academic performance in primary schools, gathered opinions of parents on how to improve students' academic performance, and reasons for poor involvement of some parents in primary school activities. Preliminary results indicated 100% of the survey were completed and returned from respondents.

The influence of parents on students' academic performance

The study presents findings related to how parents influenced academic performance of students. The responses of 29 (96.6%) students out of 30 (100%) agreed that parents contributed to the running of primary schools' activities through paying school fees. 93.3% (28) out of 30 students indicated that parents played their role in providing learning materials, guidance and counselling services to their children in primary schools. Moreover, 83% (25) of students' responses revealed that parents provide motivation and encouragement to students while 70% (21) of 30 students showed that

parents attend various meetings to discuss plans and challenges in primary schools. Response of 12 teachers on the influence of parent on students' academic performance in primary schools revealed that the duties of parents included paying of school fees and providing learning materials to their children. In addition, 11 (91.6 %) teachers indicated that parents played their role in the construction of school classrooms in term of material support and financial contribution as well as guidance and counselling to their children in schools. Concerning responses from the parents, 5 respondents agreed that parents contributed in running primary schools through paying school fees, and 3 respondents showed that parents bought books and other learning materials for schools. Moreover, 1 respondent indicated that parents cooperated with school teachers and none of them offered advice to the children in schools.

Reasons for poor parents' participation in school activities

The study reports students' responses regarding challenges or reasons, which led to poor participation by some parents in primary school activities. 27 (90%) responses of students revealed that parents were not involved in various school activities because of lack of awareness among them. In addition, 23 (76.6%) responses identified that parents were occupied with daily activities, which limited their participation in school activities. It was noted that 20 (66.6%) responses agreed that parents felt ignored by school administration in decision making and 14 (46.6%) showed that parents were not notified on various school activities. In the same vein, the study reports the results regarding teachers' responses on challenges, which discouraged some parents from participating in school activities for their children. The reasons indicated included lack of awareness among parents (91.6%) and those parents who were occupied with their daily activities (75%). The study revealed by teachers' responses that some parents lived far away from the school (50%). It was noted from the findings that parents were being ignored by school administration in decision-making (33.3%), which challenged them to participate in school in various school activities. In their responses,

parents indicated poor relationship between teachers and parents (5), being occupied with daily activities leading to poor attendance to the school activities (2) and the travelling distance from home to school places (1). These were their main challenges. Some parents claimed to have little information on primary school activities. Thus, the findings reveal that the challenges for parents and that of teachers differed depending on their duties and responsibilities.

Parents' perceptions in improving academic performance of children in schools

The study reports views of parents on how to improve children academic performance. Findings suggested the following issues to improve children's academic performance in primary school: The idea of building enough hostels especially for Kunguni and Maboto schools was supported by (44.4%) of the parents' respondents. As for providing students' academic needs, it was supported by 22.2% of respondents. The idea of employing new qualified teachers was supported by 22.2% of the parents' respondents. Moreover, parent noted that to improve a child's academic performance and parents should be checking students' progress regularly; this was supported by 11.1% by of parents' respondents.

Discussion of findings

Parents played a significant role in schools as proponents and initiators of Maboto, Kunguni and Mzani primary schools. They built these schools on their own efforts after being encouraged by the government to do so. Parents support these schools through contributions. Moreover, most of the parents are involved in promoting students academic progress through provision of learning materials, checking the students' progress frequently and counselling students. Despite how busy they are, some parents work hard to check regularly children's academic progress, buy learning materials and provide them with some pocket money. These results correlate

with that of Chimombo (1999; 2005) that parents incur direct costs for children at school. Moreover, findings indicate that some parents attend various school meetings when the school administration invited them to discuss how these schools could realise children's success (Komba, 2007; Ornstein, 1995). For instance, parents at Maboto primary school indicated that they contributed money and building materials for the construction of classrooms. In addition, some parents were involved in encouraging their students to attend schools daily by waking them early in the morning and they never allowed their students to miss schools without genuine reasons. Thus, parents have a significant role to play in the progress of their children and school when they are educated about their role and responsibilities.

Despite teachers showing their acceptance to involve parents in school progress, a few of them showed negative response in the exercise. This study shows that some parents appeared to be not willing to participate in various school activities because they were not informed concerning their duties in those schools. The results related to Bloom's (1985) views on poor relationship between teachers and parents. As some parents had a belief that it was not their duty to make follow up on students, progress thinking that it was the teacher's responsibility. Others claimed to be occupied with lots of activities thus lacked time to engage in school activities. Parents seemed to be reluctant to take care of their family and look upon children's needs, which made it difficult for them to observe what was going on for their children at schools. Such situation implies that parents had little knowledge regarding the importance of schooling for their children. Moreover, the study shows that parents were not involved in decision-making about school activities and felt that the school had isolated them from children caring responsibilities. These findings corroborate with TADREG (1993) which shows that rural parents developed a belief that services in schools and their contributions had little benefits to their children except to school and government leaders. The distance from the school affected parents'

attendance at schools since they had to incur cost in terms of time and money (Danesty, 2000). It appeared that parents needed either to share these costs with the government or to avoid them completely. This tendency is more observed among rural and non-educated parents than the educated parents in urban areas who were committed to the education of their children (Krashen, 2005).

Based on the findings by this study, it is suggested that, to improve children's academic performance in primary schools the following should be done; (a) construction of hostels, (b) supporting students' academic needs and (c) employing qualified teachers. The study calls for unifying efforts between teachers, students and parents through meetings to plan and discuss school issues on how to support learning of their children in schools (Komba, 2007). Moreover, the study suggests for teachers employed by the government to cooperate with parents in deciding school activities, children's academic progress and discipline management in schools (Komba, 2007). It was suggested in this study that discipline should be one of the fundamentals of students' welfare during school life. Students are to adhere to what they are taught by their parents and teachers.

Conclusions

Briefly, the study examined the influence of parents on student academic performance in primary schools, factors that lead some parents not to participate in various primary schools' activities and assessed the opinions of parents on how to improve children academic performance in primary schools. The study reports that the influence of parents to the schooling of their children is through paying contributions, offering guidance and counselling, checking the academic progress and to providing learning materials for their children. It reveals the reasons why some parents do not participate in various school activities. The reasons include low awareness among parents, daily activities and being ignored by school administration. Lastly, this study suggests ways to achieve good performance of children in primary schools. The study also shows the

ways through which students' performance can be improved include, increasing the number of qualified teachers, building hostels for students staying far from schools and providing adequate learning material to students.

It can be concluded from this study that, since education is one of the essential tools for economic, culture, social and political development for any society. Parents are responsible to large extent in the performance of students and acquisition of quality education. In many primary schools, performance of students is still poor. This situation is attributed to lack of parents' awareness on the education matters, low government support like providing enough funds and other learning facilities, lack of seriousness among the students themselves including the discipline of the students, poverty and poor participation of parents in decision-making on school development. Therefore, the unified efforts are needed from students, parents, teachers, government and community to lift the academic performance in primary schools. Above all, motivation from parents and government is highly needed for students' academic performance for the betterment of the society, future generation and for the national development.

Recommendations

For improving schools' academic performance, the government should first see the needs to eliminate all obstacles, which discourage teachers and students' morale to work and study hard for better academic performance. Second, the government should provide qualified teachers and educational facilities. Third, the government should build enough houses for the teachers to encourage them to teach effectively. In addition, parents should first, support, encourage and motivate their children to perform better in their studies. Second, they should make sure that students behave accordingly by avoiding such behaviours like smoking and leaving school before concluding classes. Third, to make sure that teachers and school administration

recognize parents as pertinent partners to oversee child's academic development. Lastly, parents should make sure that their children are attending school daily and check frequently their academic progress to raise the performance standards in primary schools. Therefore, there were the needs to assess the influence of parents on students' academic performance in primary schools other than Dar es Salaam region. There was also the need to find out ways of improving academic performance of students at school.

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