

Parents and teachers collaboration in the education of children: An analysis of its benefits, barriers and strategies to enhance it

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Abstract

The article discusses the importance of teacher – parent collaboration in the guidance and counselling of adolescent pupils in secondary schools. It presents benefits of parent – teacher collaboration such as increased learner academic performance, reduction of school dropout rates, increased on time school graduation and increased highest grade completion. The article further discusses barriers to teacher- pupil collaboration and suggests strategies of engaging parents so that this collaboration is sustained. Recommendations such as schools coming up with policies to enhance this collaboration are also made.

Keywords: collaboration, adolescence, achievement, identity formation

Introduction

The ever growing complexity of the society with social problems and rapid development place a heavy demand on education. Pupils face many difficulty situations in today's life. They have to make wise choices in curricular and other activities, acquire basic skills for optimum achievement and adjustment to their peer, teachers and parents (Walker, 2010) ^[45]. With increased demands on the school, there is greater challenge of addressing problems children face in order for institutions to prepare citizens for future challenges.

Most secondary school pupils are in the adolescent stage, they are at their pre puberty or puberty stage. This is a crucial time for identity formation. Guidance and counselling has assumed a significant role in schools in responding to problems and challenges associated with development at this stage.

Research conducted by Griffin and Galassi (2010) ^[7] revealed that parental involvement is critical in successful education experience of children. Bryan and Henry (2012) defined parental involvement as parents advocating for mentoring, tutoring, academic and for cultural enhancement. They further argued that whatever form of parental involvement in the welfare of children is implemented, collaboration between parents and school counsellors is important in enhancing student success (Griffin and Galassi, 2010) ^[7].

Even if research shows that parental involvement in academic life of children is essential, parents collaboration with school counsellors/teachers has not been adequately explored in Zambian secondary schools. A number of studies such as that of Cripps and Zyromski (2009), revealed that parental involvement in the school has been linked to psychological well-being of children. The study by Deplanty, (2007) argued that decline in parental involvement in secondary schools is detrimental to the students' academic, personal, and social success.

Literature review

Studies that show benefits of parental involvement in the education of their children

Research done on the benefits of making parents part and parcel of counselling and guidance of adolescents in secondary school cement the idea that school counsellor must in all areas of children welfare involve the parents.

A study done by Hornby and Lafaele (2011) ^[35] revealed that parental – teacher collaboration on the counselling and guidance of adolescents has been shown to have a positive impact on their children's academic and personal welfare.

Hill and Craft (2003) ^[28] added their voice to the benefits of involving parents in the counselling of their children. Their findings were that parental involvement positively impact on children's academic skills. The improved academic skills in turn lead to an improvement in academic performance. The study further revealed that the parent – teacher collaboration increases social capital, increases parents' skills and information and making parents better equipped to assist their children in school related activities.

Hill and Taylor (2004) ^[29] argued that when parents are incorporated in what is happening at school, they build agreement about appropriate learner behaviour for their children. The agreed learner behaviour can then be shared with children at home and at school, this in turn reduces unwanted learner behaviour. A longitudinal parental involvement study conducted by Barnard (2003) showed that when parents are involved in the discipline of their children, most children gained long term benefits such as lower rates of school drop outs, increased on time high school graduation and increased highest grade completion. Barnard (2003), Hill and Tyson (2009) ^[30] conducted a meta-analysis on 50 studies about parental involvement in mid school. The result revealed that there was a positive association found between involvement and achievement. The parental involvement in the academic lives of their children cannot come easily without school counsellors and

other teachers to deliberately position themselves to take a leadership role to promote this partnership because they are at the centre of all the administration of the welfare of learners. This means that the school counsellors must have all the details of the parents so that whatever issue that comes up, it's easy to get in touch with the concerned family (Walker, 2010) ^[45]. Walker (2010) ^[45] further argued that since school counsellors focus on academic, personal /social, and career development and all three of these areas benefit from strong parental support and involvement, school counsellors make natural partners or leaders in establishing school – family and community partnerships.

The American School Counselling Association (ASCA) National Model (2012) ^[3] promote active involvement in leadership, advocacy, educational reform, Systematic changes and collaboration between school counsellors and community members as well as school personnel (Wood and Rayle, 2016). When it comes to improving lives of children at school, school counsellors play a critical role especially in enhancing learner academic, career and personal / social development of children at school (ASCA, 2012) ^[3]. What the school counsellors put in place in the process of helping a child may not work effectively if parents are not part of the remedial plan. The idea of collaboration becomes key in helping learners in pursuit of their studies. A good counsellor must know who the stake holders are and must plan coordinated activities to ensure their total participation in improving the lives of children. Parental involvement in the guidance and counselling of learners has documented positive effects by renowned Scholars such as Cripps and Zyromski, (2009) and Bower and Griffins (2011).

Wood and Rayle (2006) proposed eight school counsellor – specific goals: these goals are: 1) Enact leadership within the school whereby the school counsellors advance the school's educational improvement efforts and contributions to the overall mission of the school; 2) Develop advocacy skills that will assist students and their families; 3) Successfully team and collaborate with other teachers, administrators, and the community to help students and their families; 4) Engage in assessment and the use of data to determine the need of students and design interventions that will provide the most tailored assistance to students and the school; 5) Optimize the role of the school counsellors in system support; 6) Design and execute individual planning activities for students; 7) Develop and deliver a guidance curriculum based on national standards and prioritizing students school needs and; 8) Master brief counselling skills and crisis management as part of responsive services (Wood and Rayle, 2016). All these goals are meant to make a school counsellor more supportive to the learners.

Epstein and Voorhis (2010) ^[24] highlighted the benefits of school family and community partnership and used the theory of school overlapping spheres of influence to assert that children perform better academically when educators, parents and community members recognize their shared responsibility in rearing young people and work together instead of isolation. This research further showed that parental involvement in the school life of children decline as children advance in grade. Epstein (1995) ^[24] posits that in order for parents to remain involved, schools need to work to develop and implement appropriate practices of partnership at each level. According to Epstein and Voorhis (2010) ^[24] it is important for schools to consider partnering

and collaborating with families and communities as an important component of the schools programming as opposed to an accidental intervention that affects only a certain number of parents. Among many documented benefits of parental involvement in the education of their children include, increased academic studies, early social competence in children, increased social networks and resources, and a decrease in the achievement gap between lower income students and privileged children (Bower 2010) ^[6].

Wanat (2010) ^[47] studied parent's experience in secondary schools and parents who had positive interactions with school personnel resulted in positive relationships with their children's' school administrators and teachers. These parents reported feeling supported with answers to their questions concerning their children's progress and that their involvement were valued as essential to their children's success in school, in contrast, parents who reported negative experience with their children's school and who felt disconnected from the school, often due to their own work constraints felt dissatisfied with their children's school and frustrated at the level of communication between home and school (Wanat, 2010) ^[47]. The results of this study are difficult to generalize because the study represented only one school district (Wanat, 2010) ^[47], it did however, provide an important perspective which is probably relevant to any school.

Parental involvement has been said to be a powerful influence to educational outcome of children, Hill and Tyson (2009) ^[30] stated "family – school relations and parental involvement in education have been identified as a way to close demographic gaps in achievements and maximizes students potential" (P.740). Research has shown positive association between parental involvement and student grades, rates of participation in advanced courses, lower drop out rates, motivation towards school work, and valuing of education (Hoover-Dempsey 2005) ^[35]. Research has further demonstrated that parents can model learning behaviours, reinforce productive choices, and help set future goals such as college attendance (Bergerson, 2009) ^[5]. Communication between families and school may promote social adjustments in addition to academic achievement (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994) ^[13]. Facilitation of parental involvement is beneficial to the schools as well as the students; thus, many school counsellors are increasing their outreach to parents (Bryan and Griffin, 2010) ^[7].

However, typical definition of school based parental involvement may not reflect full range of activities and strategies used by families (De Gaetano, 2007) ^[11]. Middle-to upper class families often are able to work with the counsellors' framework by participating in traditional parent involvement opportunities (e.g. Parent Teacher's Association Meetings, volunteering in the schools, or monitoring home work at home).

George and Kaplan (1998) ^[21] study focused more narrowly on parental involvement and its relationship to student attitude to science. The researcher concluded that; one of the important effect seen in the study is the influence of parental involvement in science attitudes; the more the parent showed a positive attitude to science, the better the pupils achieve in science. The parental effect work through discussion of school experience and through arranging or supporting activities in libraries and museums.

Gouzalez – Pienda (2002) ^[23] explored effects of parental

involvement on achievement for a sample of 261 Spanish adolescents. Standardized attainment tests were used to measure achievements, psychometric tests to appraise self-concepts and related personal attributes and parental involvement was rated by students, characteristically, student aptitude accounted for a significant portion of variances in academic achievement following that parental involvement as rated by students themselves and taking the form of interest and encouragement was a major causal factor of achievement. The effect of parental involvement on achievement however was not direct, rather it made its contribution through the shaping of the adolescent self-concept. The researcher concluded that the results clearly supports the thesis that parental involvement behaviours significantly affects children's academic achievement. However, this influence is not direct.

Dubois (1994) ^[16] showed that family support and the quality of parent-child relationship significantly predicted school adjustments in a sample of 159 young US adolescents (aged 10 – 12) followed in a two-year longitudinal study. At-home parent involvement clearly and consistently has significant effects on pupil achievement and adjustment which far outweigh other forms of involvement.

The significance of parental values as perceived by students as a mechanism for both manifestly and explaining the impact of parental involvement has been validated in a number of studies. Examples include Fan (2001) ^[20] who established the significant impact of parental aspiration on the general academic achievement of US adolescents. Fan (2001) ^[20] who showed a strong impact of parental expectations on achievement in advanced Mathematics; Carr and Hussey (1999) ^[8] showed that parents were the most influential social agents on children task orientation.

A number of studies discussed above show that there is a positive association between parental involvement and positive education outcomes. These studies showed that parental involvement bring about low dropout rates, and improved academic performance. These studies however, did not examine other aspects of either home or school that might have had an impact in the outcome observed. It is possible that, schools could have put other measures that might have led to the observed outcomes.

Studies on barriers to parental involvement

Yanghee (2009) ^[48] proposed eight obstacles that hinder parents from participating in their children's school life. These barriers were based on teachers' perception of what keeps parents

from being involved in schools. Although Yanghee (2009) ^[48] researched this phenomenal from teacher's perspective, school counsellors may receive similar dynamics, parents who experience some or all these barriers may perceive school counsellors very different and less positively than parents who do not encounter these impediments. It is very important for school counsellors to be aware of these barriers. The first barrier involved teacher's perception of parents' efficiency. When teachers have a negative perception of parents, parental involvement in their children's education is inhibited (Yanghee, 2009) ^[48].

The second barrier consist of teacher's perception that ethnic minority parents are disinterested in their children's education this potentially minimizes parent - school relationships (Yanghee, 2009) ^[48]. in addition to Yanghee (2009) ^[48] study on minority parents, other studies have

found that teachers perceive parents with college education and high socioeconomic background as more actively involved in their children's school when compared to parents who are only high school and from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Duru-Bellat, 2004, Tett, 2004; Weiger and Larean, 2003) ^[17, 43].

The third barrier preventing parental participation was teacher's belief about the effect of parental involvement, and within parental involvement is philosophically understood by the school stuff (Yanghee, 2009) ^[48] teachers who perceived parental involvement as having a positive impact were more likely to encourage it than teachers who believe parental involvement had a negative impact (Hoover – Dempsey and Sandler, 2007) ^[34].

The fourth barrier pertained teacher modelling the attitude of their administration. When the teachers perceived that the administration was adopting innovative and diverse programmes to help engage parents in school programmes, they would soon align with administration's perception (Brown and Medway, 2007; Yanghee 2009) ^[48]. However, the barrier exists when teachers modelled negative attitudes of the administration.

The fifth barrier was a lack of school friendliness and positive communication (Yanghee 2009) ^[48]. Parents who experienced a welcoming, friendly environment were more likely to engage in school activities. The sixth barrier related to lack of diversity in the student body. Minority parents rarely get involved in schools which offered limited culturally sensitive programmes, (Turkey and Kao, 2009). Parents who do not speak an official language used at school find themselves lost. This means that traditional school programmes must integrate cultural sensitive programmes in order for all parents to feel welcome within the school (Turnkey and Kao 2009).

The seventh barrier is focused on school policies that did not involve parental involvement, objectives and expectations, school policies that clearly value parental input resulting in greater parental involvement than school policies which marginalize parent expectations (Yanghee, 2009) ^[48]. The eighth final barrier comprised infective leadership, which impeded effective parental involvement and weakened collaboration between school and home. School leadership sets the tone for staff and their involvement with parents (Thomson, Mc Donald and Sterbinsky, 2005).

This study was narrow in perspective in the sense that the barriers discussed were from the teachers' perspectives only. If parents who are perceived to be outsiders to the education of their children were asked, more barriers might have been raised that could have helped to enhance parental involvement in schools.

Crozier (1999) ^[10] commented that many parents do not feel involved, quoting a working class father "... the state has planned the school education ...I am not involved at all". Crozier thus highlighted the social class difference in involvement highlighted by other writers. Vincent *et al* (2000) ^[44] also commented that social class has a direct impact on involvement, and continued to say that schools may also tend to marginalize some parents by creating circumstances in which parents from lower social classes do not feel able to participate.

While some parents may be unable to be involved, others may be unsure when to become involved, and are reluctant based on how the school has treated them in the past. They

may also feel that the school will treat them unfavourably if they become involved. When parents only receive negative feedback, a parent may feel intimidated to come to school for fear of being lectured on parenting. School staff may seem to have a common understanding of what they accept from parents, but this may not be understood by parents or communicated to them, many parents may be unsure about what their role is in their children's education, how they should help, or when they should step in and assist (Griffing and Galassi, 2010) ^[7].

As children's advance in education, some parents feel some of the responsibilities such as homework, should shift from them to their child. Depending on the parents own level of education, some may find homework beyond their understanding and ability to assist.

Other parents avoid schools because of negative experiences they had in the past, as former students or with the children. Parents may feel when they are contacted by the school it is usually just to deal with some sort of problems, or when something is wrong. When they are called, they are sometimes talked down to or blamed for incidences and spoken to by school staff in a business -like manner (Amatea-olatunji, 2007) ^[2].

Galabrese (1990) and Crozier (2000) ^[10] argue that parents are not the sole reasons for their lack of involvement. This view is substantiated by research undertaken by Allian Schools Initiative (2004) who found that many parents encounter obstacles to participation in their children's education. Some of the huddles to effective parental involvement are negative communication from schools and the insufficient training for teachers on how to reach out to parents. Parents believe that they are not welcome in schools and reported a high degree of alienation and hostility towards them. Peters (2007) conducted a telephone survey of a nationality representative group over 500 parents in 2007. They found that 24 % of parents reported that having no specific barrier to being more involved in their children's school lives. Work commitment represented the main barrier (Reported by 41% of parents) similarly Russel and Granville (2005) pressure of time owing to work or family commitment was the most common reason for lack of involvement. Harris and Goodwill found that parents reported that lack of skills was the greatest barrier to involvement to children's learning (29% of parents) followed closely by parent's experience of their own education (28%) (Harris and Goodwill, 2007)

The findings from Peters (2007) study can easily be generalized to other similar settings because the sample was large enough. The mode (telephone interview) of collecting data was also good because it enabled the researcher to get detailed information concerning the issue at hand.

In Bayley (2009) fathers reported the following as barriers to involvement in parenting support services, work commitments, lack of awareness that services existed and what they offered, the perception that services were largely geared towards women, lack of organizational support, and concern over the content of services. Parents also reported a fear of being stigmatized if they were seen to be accessing services (O'mara 2010), Hallan (2004) also found that parents were likely to perceive attendance at parenting programmes as an admission of inadequacy. However, school based programmes may alleviate this fear if Parents can be encouraged to feel comfortable when coming to school, targeted support need not to be seen as stigmatizing

if designed to accord with the needs of parents who have been reluctant to engage (Blewett, 2010).

Improving the relationship between home and school accords with a trend in parents acknowledging responsibility for their children. Peters (2007) found that increasing number of parents (28%) believed that their children's education was mainly or wholly their responsibility, and increase from 20% and 19% in 2004. This is also in line with parents who felt very involved with their children's school life; 29% in 2001; 38% in 2004; and 51% in 2007. 94% of parents in the survey were confident that their involvement would help their children, if the school informed parents that pupils were not making good progress. This shows a raise in parental awareness of the need for and value of their engagement with children's learning.

Studies on strategies to increase parental involvement

School counsellors have many responsibilities within the school, ranging from working with individual students, providing classroom lesson to participating on students' teams and collaborating with parents and others. The America School Counselling Association (2011), national model states "National standards offer an opportunity for school counsellors, school administrators, faculty, parents, business and the community to engage in conversation about expectations for students' academic success and the role of counselling programmes in enhancing students learning (p.4). Therefore, school counsellors/teachers, may be responsible for working with school staff, families, and the community to create the best possible learning environment for students.

Amatea and west -Olatunji (2007) ^[2] suggest that, there are three primary roles that school counsellors should have as leaders, which include teaming with teachers, to create a welcoming and family cantered school environment, working with teachers to connect students' lives with the curriculum, and bridging together the gaps between teachers and students.

Getting parents involved may appear to be a huge task, but there are many small things that school councillors can do to ensure every effort possible is made to get parents involved with the education of their children.

Teachers should understand that when parents are blamed for their children's behaviour or when they feel, they are, that parents often become defensive and this often disrupts the ability for teachers to work with parents (Amatea and Olatunji, 2007) ^[2]. Also when parents feel there may be conflicts between them and the school, like most individuals may automatically react by deflecting or avoiding the situation to avoid a sense of humiliation, guilty, shame, or embarrassment on their part (Clerk, 1995) ^[9]. Knowing how to approach parents and communicate in a way to avoid conflict or potential defensiveness that will only push Parents away from the school is helpful not for teachers, but also for increasing the likelihood for student's success.

Creating an atmosphere in which parents feel valued and respected is very important. school counsellors can help staff to see that it is important to communicate with and include parents through many forms of communication, and that parent involvement is important and more likely to happen when parents feel welcomed (Griffing and Galasi, 2010) ^[7]. there are many ways that parents can feel involved and since they know their children well, they can often be of assistance to teachers in learning more about his or her

students. School counsellors can also encourage teachers to have some sort of homework or family centered projects to work on together at home (Walker, Shenker, and Hoover - Dempsey, 2010) ^[45]. Homework that require students and their families to work together, not only create an opportunity for positive interaction at home but is also in a small way for parents to feel involved if they are unable to come to school.

Amatea and West -Olatunji (2007) ^[2] suggested that parents can also help their children reach goals, for example, if a parent has a goal for their children to increase literacy, instead of working on a goal only in the classroom, a teacher could invite the parent to the school one day a week to make story books that assist with reading or have them work on a family related projects to help the child with reading. This way the parents are involved, able to celebrate their family culture with their child and can be present to help the child succeed in school with established goals. School counsellors can also collaborate with school staff to discuss the benefits of parent involvement, any potential barriers, and how teachers may hold misperception about why parents sometime are not involved and inform them about differences in values and cultures that may exists between families and the school (Walker, Shenker and Hoover-Dempsey, 2010) ^[45].

Information about how parents interact with their children and how children learn at home could be then be useful in incorporating some of it into the classroom. It may be time consuming, may not be seen beneficial to some, and there may be some schools that do not feel comfortable with school staff reaching into the homes of families out of respect of privacy. School staff could also collaborate to put together workshops or professional development events that are focused on working with culturally diverse families, redesigning curriculum and using effective classroom management with all students, with the goal of helping teachers identify students and family weaknesses and strengths (Amatea and West-Oletunji, 2007) ^[2].

School counsellors can also give advice to school staff about how to approximately communicate with parents. Walker, Shenker and Hoover- Dempsey (2010) ^[45] suggested that staff could learn more about how to use interpersonal communication such as using open – ended questions, building rapport, and using appropriate eye contact or word encouragers, all reinforce the importance of becoming effective active listeners by using open ended questions, parents are encouraged to share more than just a yes or no response. When listening to parents, reflecting and paraphrasing what the parent has said is also helpful for example, a teacher could say “I hear you...” so the parent feels heard, understood and trusted.

Walker, (2010) ^[45] also suggested that using non-threatening questions so that parents do not become defensive. If a teacher would like more information about a student, a way to ask this is “help me get a better understanding of your son, tell me more about him”. it is also important for teachers to understand that when parents do not feel involved and communicated with their involvement with the schools is likely to decrease (Griffins and Galassi, 2010) ^[7].

School counsellors can help students by working to increase parent involvement by not working with all staff, but by looking at the process within the schools that deal with parent involvement. Since 2001, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was a focal point in the schools. One promise of

NCLB is the importance of parental involvement as an important way to help children succeed academically (Griffins and Gallasi, 2010) ^[7].

Team meetings for students are often held at school and present another opportunity for school counsellors to promote parental involvement. School counsellors can ultimately model how to involve parents, set the tone for cooperation from all, as well as the importance of not blaming parents for their children’s performance in school. (Walker, Shenker, and Hoover – Dempsey, 2010) ^[45]. It is important to help the team brainstorm how to get low income parents involved with their children’s education, whether they are physically able to come to the school or not (Amatea and West Olatunji, 2007) ^[2].

Research by Lombana and Lombana (1982) suggested that there are numerous ways school counsellors can work directly with parents.

Previous literature addressing low-income families and African America families (Hokomb Mc Coy, 2010) has encouraged school counsellors to consider flexible opportunities for parental involvement. Suggestions have included weekend, or evening office hours and community-based location for meetings, Delgado-Gaitan (2004) ^[13] also encouraged teachers and school counsellors to think about opportunities for communication such as when children are dropped off or picked up from school or via a brief telephone check ins. Parents who have access to computers or smart phones could also receive electronic news letters or brief text message up dates. Visit of the family home can be time consuming in a school counsellors’ busy days. But parent liaison staff, community volunteers or cultural brokers with the school can be recruited to minimize the burden (Mitchell and Bryan, 2007) ^[38].

It is widely recognized that if pupils are to maximize their potential from schooling they will need to the full support of their parents. Attempt to enhance parental involvement in education occupies government, administrator, educators and parents’ organizations.

The European commission, for instance holds that the degree of parental participation is a greater significant indicator of the quality of schooling. In England, the government’s strategy for securing parental involvement was first set out in the 1997 called, “Excellence in schools” the strategy described their included three elements; (a) providing parents with information (b) giving the parents a voice and (c) encouraging parental partnership with schools (Charles and Abouchaar, 2003) ^[15]. Epstein (2010) suggested that school counsellors must organize forums where they discuss school related issues with parents. In some forums she suggested must be used to discuss topics such as interpretation of progress and testing reports. When parents believe that school values their involvement, barrier to parental involvement could begin to be eliminated. Epstein (2010) ^[6] also suggested the following as ways in which school counsellors can build a relationship with the parents; (a) setting up a parent resource centres for parents to access information about the school along with the information about parenting; (b) establishing regular communication with parents. Parents soliciting ideas, suggestions, and parent questions; (c) producing a directory of community resources, programmes and job opportunities, and; (d) Using guidance interventions such as classroom guidance and group work with parents to inform families on how to help students learning at home (Epstein, 2010,

Griffin, 2016) ^[6].

It must be noted that the suggestions advanced by scholars on how to encourage parents to participate in the education of their children need commitment, hard work and the right attitudes from teachers in order for them to entice parents to be involved. Mere listing of such suggestions by schools without will power may end up in an academic exercise.

Conclusion

It is clear from the discussion above that, teacher – parental collaboration brings about positive educational outcomes in the academic lives of learners. The article has also demonstrated that parent involvement calls for a lot of effort and planning to make it realise the it intended outcomes.

Recommendations

Arising from the literature reviewed above, the following recommendations are made:

The Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early Childhood

Education Should

1. develop a policy that will guide teacher – parent collaboration
2. Sensitise teachers, parents and pupils on the importance of parent- teacher collaboration in learning institutions.
3. Create a position of a full time school counsellor in secondary schools who can facilitate parent – teacher collaboration.

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