

INVOLVEMENT OF PARENTS IN THEIR CHILDREN'S SCHOOL DISCIPLINE: A CASE OF PETAUKE BOARDING SECONDARY SCHOOL IN PETAUKE DISTRICT, ZAMBIA.

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the study was to investigate how parents were involved in disciplining of their school children at Petauke Boarding Secondary School. The objective of the study was to establish the attitudes of parents towards getting involved in disciplining of their school children.

In order to have an in-depth understanding of the situation, a case study design was used in conducting this research. Qualitative methods were used to collect and analyze data. The sample consisted of five teachers and thirty-two parents giving a total of thirty-seven participants. Purposive sampling was used to select the sample of teachers, while simple random sampling technique was used to select the parents. The study employed interview guides and focus group discussions to collect the data from participants. The data collected was analyzed thematically.

It was found that, few parents were involved in the disciplining of school going children at Petauke Boarding Secondary School. They participated in disciplinary committee meetings and Parent- Teachers Associations meetings. Through these forums, parents were able to understand types of offences committed by pupils, possible punishments, and ways to help the children. The findings further revealed that some parents had negative attitudes towards the disciplining of their school going children. The study also revealed challenges of involving parents in disciplining their school going children. Such as: failure by parents to control their children, low interest by some parents in the education of their school children as well as long distances from home to school.

Based on the findings, the research recommends that the school should sensitize parents to be involved in the discipline matters of their school going children, in order to promote positive attitudes of parents, head teachers should come up with programmes on importance of parental involvement in disciplining of their children and the school should address the factors that hindered parental involvement in disciplining their children at school.

Key words: Parents, children, school, discipline.

BACKGROUND

Involvement of parents in disciplining of school going children is key to their children's success in school. Therefore, parents and teachers must cooperate in disciplining school children. As a way of involving parents in the affairs of the school, in Zambia, the Parents-Teachers Association (PTA) came into being in 1976. However, there is little information on the attitudes of parents towards getting involved in disciplining of their school going children at Petauke Boarding Secondary School. This knowledge gap motivated this study.

A study by Catsambis and Garland (1997) in Washington reveals that parental involvement dramatically declines as students enter the middle grades and even more so as they enter high school. Parents become less involved in monitoring students' individual behaviour and more concerned with their learning opportunities at secondary school. It should always be remembered that Parents are the first teachers of the child, but somehow parents lose it as their child grows, especially after the child has left elementary school slowly the parents turn over the parenting of their child to the school authorities. However, Scott (1995) suggests that there is no clear line to show where the parents' inputs stops and the teachers input begins. The school and parents all have crucial roles to play but the extent of their impact is yet to be established, hence, the need to assess involvement of parents in the discipline of their school going children.

Catsambis and Garland (1997) explains that during high school, parents become less involved with monitoring students' individual behaviors and more concerned with their learning opportunities at school. By students' eighth grade, nearly all parents had postsecondary expectations, but few had taken specific actions to secure funds for college. During adolescents' senior year in high school, most parents report frequent discussions with them concerning postsecondary schools. At that time, parents also report that they have some knowledge about finances.

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) in a study carried out in Chicago revealed that invitations to involvement from important others are often key motivators of parents' decisions to become involved. Although strong role construction and efficacy may precipitate involvement, invitations to involvement from members of the school community also serve as an important motivator of involvement because they suggest to the parent that participation in the child's learning is welcome, valuable, and expected by the school and its members. These invitations may be particularly significant for parents whose role construction is relatively passive and whose sense of efficacy is relatively weak. Invitations from important others at school may contribute significantly to more active parental beliefs about personal role and increasingly positive beliefs about the effect of one's actions.

Epstein (2001) reported that teacher invitations and school programs to encourage involvement were the strongest predictors of home and school-based involvement in the elementary and middle schools they studied. Of particular note is the strong suggestion that teacher invitations for parents' involvement encourage more student time on homework and improved student performance. Teacher invitations are especially powerful because they are responsive to many parents' expressed wishes to know more about how to support children's learning. Teacher invitations also enhance parents' sense of being welcome to participate in school processes, knowledge of their children's learning, and confidence that their involvement efforts are useful and valued. The parents wish their children to be well behaved and disciplined if the head teacher and teachers take them also into confidence, they will be of great help in pacifying and moulding the behaviours of the children. When parents are perceived as friends and co-partners in the education of their children, discipline efforts can be maximised (Sidhu, 1996).

Soodak and Erwin (2000) state that invitations also contribute to the development of trust in the Parent-Teacher relationship, a quality of effective parent-school partnerships. Although trust and empowerment in the partnership require two-way communication across time, invitations offer an effective starting point for the creation of a partnership. Teacher invitations to involvement are effective in supporting parental involvement across elementary, middle, and high school and with varied school populations. For example, Kohl *et al* (2000) reporting on a sample of high-risk elementary students, found strong positive links between consistent teacher contacts with parents and parents' decisions about involvement. Critical components of the invitation-involvement connection included parents' reports that they enjoyed talking with the teacher, were comfortable asking questions, and believed that the teacher really cared about their child and was interested.

Crosnoe (2001) also reports that parents tend to become less involved in their children's education over time, especially after middle school. This decline could be the result of parents giving their children more autonomy as the children grow older or because parents feel less knowledgeable about complex materials. In the typical high school setting students are faced with a variety of problems caused by the transition from one type of school or grade into another, changes in teachers and school environment and an increase in the academic expectations from parents, teachers and society. School going children need additional help from parents, teachers and the community if they are to do well in school. Unfortunately it is at this time that parents become less involved.

In Zambia the Ministry of Education realised the importance of parent involvement in the education of their children. As a result, the 2002 Basic Education Sub-Sector Implementation Programme (BESSIP) emphasises that access to quality education can be improved by enhanced community participation in governance of schools (MOE, 2002). The Ministry of Education

therefore, encourages all schools to have Parent-Teachers Association (PTA) as a link between the school and the community and as a way through which communities can participate in the governance of schools.

Richardson (2009) argues in a study of 614 schooled nested in 15 classrooms of primary school and 13 classrooms of middle school from the municipality of Geneva in Italy that better behaviour, among students, is one major benefits of parental involvement. To the contrary in the United States it was found that in order to improve student's behaviour, the school only focused on what teachers needed to do in school neglecting parental and the community involvement in working together towards the goal of school discipline (Sanders and Sheldon, 2009). Furthermore, Banja (2002) in his study on indiscipline in four selected government high schools in Kitwe accepted that the influence of home environment on pupils' behaviour cannot be disputed. The involvement of parents in the disciplining of school going children would reduce problems in secondary schools. However, it is not known how parents are involved in schools in Zambia and in particular Petauke Boarding Secondary School.

Epstein et al., (2009) state that the Epstein Model outlines six concrete types of family involvement behaviors: positive home conditions, communication, involvement at school, home learning activities, shared decision making within the school, and community partnerships. The positive aspects of Epstein's Model are that it encompasses the traditional definitions of parental involvement and recognizes the role of parents in the home, including supporting educational efforts and providing an environment where educational activities are supported and encouraged. Epstein shifts some of the onus from the parents to the school by acknowledging communication as a bidirectional endeavor and encouraging schools to create a place for parent ownership within the school through shared decision making. Studies have found connections between the use of this model and increased student achievement. However, limitations do exist with this model. Although the model works to empower parents to have a voice within the school and recognizes the work of parents in the home, the school is still expected to inform parents of effective strategies within the home.

Joseph (2013) revealed that it is also important to link the whole school and community. Bringing parents into the equation is essential and an effective parent communication system is a requirement for effective classroom discipline. Many schools are putting more thought into and developing better communication with parents. Parents represent a great deal of potential help and support for teachers and schools struggling to maintain discipline. Organised systems that consistently advise parents result in extremely positive attitudes from parents. Maria (2015) revealed that parents or guardians know that a children's ability to learn and succeed in school can be harmed when their children are excluded from the classroom or punished in another way.

When this happens, the most important thing a parent or guardian can do is to become involved as they know their children better.

Lyamba (2013) revealed that the causes of indiscipline were peer pressure, community influence, lack of positive role models, the re-entry policy, human rights awareness, drug abuse, the media, ineffective classroom management and home environmental factors. The study recommended that parents should be greatly sensitized on the need to be involved in educational affairs of their children so as to reduce levels of indiscipline in schools. In Zambia, there is knowledge gap on how parents are involved in the disciplining of their school going children. It became interesting to establish attitudes of parents towards getting involved in disciplining of their school going children at Petauke Boarding Secondary School. Children in boarding schools spend most months of the year in the hands of the school authorities than their parents. The scenario provoked some questions such as: do parents get involved in disciplining of their school going children and if yes, how are they involved? The study therefore endeavoured to establish attitudes of parents towards getting involved in disciplining of their school going children at Petauke Boarding Secondary School.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to establish attitudes of parents towards getting involved in disciplining of their school children at Petauke Boarding Secondary School.

Research Objective

To establish attitude of parents towards getting involved in the pupils' discipline of their school going children at Petauke Boarding Secondary School.

Research Question

What attitude do parents have towards getting involved in pupils' discipline?

Significance

At the time when it was not known how parents were involved in the disciplining of their school going children, a study of this nature was beneficial to many people and in many ways. Considering government's policy of encouraging parental participation in education, policy makers may find data generated from this study useful in coming up with ways of how parents may be involved in the disciplining of their school going children. Findings from this study may also help education planners including schools to develop suitable ways of how parents could be involved in the disciplining of their school children. It is further hoped that the findings of this study may provide evidence on the role of parents in disciplining of their school going children. Finally, it is also hoped that this study may provide a stage for further research on involvement of parents in the disciplining of their school going children.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a case study design. According to Gosh (2003) a case study is a method of collecting information about an individual, a family, an institution, a group of persons that know precisely the factors and causes of a practical phenomenon. This study employed a case study design among other designs because the data required was in form of people's views and feelings about parental involvement in their children's school discipline. A case study research design further helped the researcher to focus on how parents were involved in disciplining their school going children, establish what attitude parents have and factors that affect their involvement in disciplining their school going children. It was also paramount to use Petauke Boarding Secondary school which has children from all over Zambia where some parents stay very far away hence very important to establish how parents were involved in disciplining of their school going children.

Study Area

Data for this study was collected from Petauke Boarding Secondary School. Petauke Boarding Secondary School was sampled being a boarding Secondary School.

Population

With regards to this study, the study population was all the teachers and parents who had children at Petauke Boarding Secondary School. These populations were chosen because they had typical characteristics desired for participants of this study.

Sample Size

According to Cohen et al (2007) sample is the total number of subjects selected to participate in a given study. The study sample consisted of thirty-seven participants; five teachers who were members of the Disciplinary Committee and thirty-two parents of school going children at Petauke Boarding Secondary School. This choice is in line with Best and Kahn (2008) who defined a sample as a small proportion of the population that is selected for observation and analysis. In this study 32 interviews by parents was a sure way of reaching saturation of participants' views on how parents were involved in disciplining of their children at Petauke Boarding Secondary School.

Sampling Procedure

This study used purposive sampling and simple random sampling procedures. White (2005) defines simple random sampling technique as a selection technique that provides each population element an equal chance of being included in the sample. In this study simple random sampling was used to select the parents. Thus, the names of parents were written on pieces of paper and a raffle was conducted to pick only thirty-two names. The parents with school going children were

chosen because they were in the best position to provide information needed on parental involvement in children's school discipline at this school. Simple random sampling was chosen in order to give equal chance to every parent at Petauke Boarding secondary School. This meant that all the parents had an equal chance of being included in the sample.

Purposive sampling was used to select the five teachers because they were the only teachers who were members of Disciplinary Committee at Petauke Boarding Secondary School. Cohen et al (2007) explain that purposive sampling is based entirely on the judgement of the researcher, in that a sample is composed of elements which contain the most characteristics, representative of typical attributes of the population.

Instruments for Data Collection

The researcher used focus group discussion and structured interview guides to collect data from the parents with school going children and teachers who were members of the Disciplinary Committee at Petauke Boarding Secondary School. Interview guides were used to collect reliable information and to probe further responses from the participants. The information obtained from the interview guides and focus group discussions was useful in the cross checking the data. According to Kothari (2004), a research instrument can be defined as a tool or device chosen by the researcher to collect required information. In order to solicit views from teachers and parents, two research instruments were used to collect qualitative data for the study which were focus group discussion guides and interview guides.

Focus Group Discussions Guide

The focus group discussions were held with parents who had come for the meeting. Focus group discussion guides were used in that they are advantageous because participants were able to bring to light issues related to the topic of study that they deem to be important and be able to argue (if necessary) by challenging each other's views. This method also offered the researcher opportunity to study the ways in which individuals collectively make sense of a phenomenon and construct meaning. Four groups of eight parents were made in order to collect a lot of information within the shortest period of time.

Interview Guides

In this study, a structured interview guide was used to collect in-depth qualitative data from five teachers of the school disciplinary committee. The method allowed teachers bring out new questions and information as the discussion was conducted through the use of structured questions. Best and Kahn (2008) refers to structured questions as a list of questions prepared by the researcher to guide the participants for the purpose of collecting data. Structured questions help to even make follow-ups on unclear responses during the interview. Through interview guides, the researcher was able to collect useful data related to the study.

Procedure for Data Collection

Permission was sought from the University of Zambia (UNZA) before going for data collection in the field. The letter from UNZA was presented to the District Education Board Secretary (DEBS) and head teacher for permission to conduct the study in the district and at the school respectively. After the head granted authority to conduct the study, the chairperson of the disciplinary committee was given a responsibility to work with researcher interview the teachers and hold focus group discussions with the randomly selected parents. Although this method was time consuming, it was effective in that it helped to obtain in-depth information from teachers and parents. Interviewing allowed the researcher ask questions, listen and record the responses and probe to clarify or expand on particular issues. Questions were open ended and participants were encouraged to express their own words. The strength of this approach is that the interviews are flexible and applicable to different types of problems in that the interviews may change the mode of questioning if the occasion demands (Patton 1990).

Data Analysis

The researcher used thematic analysis to analyse qualitative data collected from focus group discussions and structured interviews in order to find out how parents were involved in disciplining of their children at Petauke Boarding Secondary School, establish attitude of parents towards getting involved of their school going children and determine factors that affect involvement of parents in disciplining of their school going children. The data were analysed thematically by drawing major themes from interviews with participants were each theme was described, analysed and interpreted independently.

Ethical Consideration

The population refers to teachers, and parents of Petauke Boarding Secondary School. The ethical consideration for any research refers to the general judgement that serve the justification for many ethical prescriptions and evaluations of human actors. In this study, participants were respected and the purpose of study that was to investigate how parents were involved in the disciplining of their school going children was clearly explained. They participated willingly into the study and were to withdraw if they wanted to before and during the research process.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Attitude of Parents towards Getting Involved in Disciplining their Children at School

Drawing from the study some parents had positive attitudes towards the education and disciplining of their children in boarding school. Parents indicated that they participated in the disciplining of their children using methods like open days, telephone calls, callout letters and P.T.A general meeting.

Twenty- three out of the thirty-two parents had expressed negative attitudes towards their involvement in disciplining of their children at Petauke Boarding School. One male participant with a negative view in the Focus Group Discussion said:

My duty as a parent is to take the child to school. When the child commits an offence in school it is the responsibility of the teachers and the school administration to discipline him or her. The same way I do not call the Head teacher when my child commits an offence at home during holidays.

While another male parent said:

I need not to spend a lot of money travelling from home to school to just come and hear what my child has done, instead the school should handle the case following what is laid down.

From the Focus Group Discussion it was also revealed by one participant that;

As parents there is need to change our parenting styles amidst the advancement in technology as some children are influenced by the social media of what they see and hear.

While only nine of the thirty-two parents expressed positive attitude towards getting involved in the disciplining of their children. One female parent said:

We as parents need to agree with the school authorities what sort of punishment to be given on erring pupils so that parents and school authorities move together as one. For example, what punishment should be given to a pupil found with a cell phone in school.

Among the parents were those that could help other parents understand the effects of the social media regarding the discipline of their children at school.

Most parents were said not to be turning up when called upon by the school authorities to discuss the behaviour of their children. In affirming, one participant said some parents have negative attitudes towards the disciplining of their school going children in that when they are called upon they don't respond quickly to the calls by the school and hear the views of the school on the disciplining of their school going children.

One teacher said some parents have positive attitudes towards their children's discipline at school and four teachers from the disciplinary committee said parents have negative attitudes. Teachers out rightly said parents have negative attitudes towards getting involved in the disciplining of their school children.

DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

Attitude of Parents towards Getting Involved in Disciplining their Children at School

From the findings of the study parents of Petauke Boarding Secondary School felt that some teacher's attitudes towards them were not welcoming. Most parents reported that some teachers thought parents were not important to be involved in their children school discipline. These findings are in line with Henderson *et al.* (2007) who found out that good welcome and respect by educators was an important link which makes parents become involved in school activities. One parent in the Focus Group Discussion mentioned that the conduct of some male teachers was unacceptable. They engaged themselves in having affairs with the children. Parents tended to regard them as a threat to their children and did not trust them. The effects of unwelcoming attitudes of teachers towards the parents can be bad on both the pupils and parents in their children school discipline. For parents to be involved in the disciplining of their school children, they should be made to feel accepted by the schools of their children regardless of their social status or educational background.

When a parent says *"my duty as a parent is to take the child to school. When the child commits an offence in the school it is the responsibility of the teachers and the school administration to discipline him or her"* is a sign of leaving everything in the hands of the school authorities and teachers. Such attitudes indicate maybe children have really troubled their parents who in turn think boarding schools are places to solve and offer a solution to their children's mischief and that schools will discipline the children on their behalf. Such attitudes leaves the school authorities with no option but administer punish and instil discipline to erring pupils at school. This is supported by Canon (2015) who states that "Out-of-school suspensions are chosen by the principal and the teacher of the school and are therefore exogenous to parental choice". However, Davis (1989) adds that parents can exhibit parental involvement through activities such as providing nurturance to their children, instilling cultural values, and talking with their children, which do not align with traditional forms of parental involvement as defined by schools.

Parent attitude towards education of their children in schools is worrisome as parents just take their children at school when they are admitted and disappear for good. Some parents deny attending school meetings and interacting with teachers on issues concerning their children. Teachers and parents need to interact so often to share school going children development as supported by Haar (2000) that parents and teachers need to develop effective ways to integrate the parents into the school activities.

The responses from parents themselves indicated that they generally have negative attitudes towards discipline of the school going children. The parents when called upon at school were not availing themselves indicating that their attitude towards their children's school discipline was negative. The role of parents in the decision-making process is defined by and created within the existing framework of the school, ensuring that parental involvement is defined and evaluated in the school's terms rather than the families' terms (Epstein and Dauber, 1991). Additionally, the findings of this study suggested that involving parents in decision making could be an answer to the challenge of involving parents in their children school discipline at Petauke Boarding Secondary School. It is clear from these findings that parents were willing to be involved in decision making in their children school discipline but did not know how to be involved.

This is in line with Joseph (2013) who revealed that even though parents don't always support teachers in every endeavor, it is important not to get a one sided view about the role parents can play in shaping classroom efforts. The sonic boom of multiplying disciplinary problems among school going teenagers rings widely around the world because of excessive globalisation and its adverse impacts. This can be resolved through combining the interests and visions of both parents and teachers through comprehensive, shared, and practical plans. It is certainly a rewarding experience when teachers and parents pool their abilities and resources to bring about positive student change. Even though it will require some time to plan appropriate ways to involve parents, it will be worthwhile. Students may misbehave. How one handles their misbehavior would impact, to some degree, on how the school cooperates with parents.

Enhanced parent- teacher relation is more beneficial to the school and community at large. Akpan (2014) showed that parents were highly involved by working with school authorities to maintain school discipline due to effective home-school relationships and invitational school environments by the school. This is supported by Ishmail and Abdullah (2013) who found that parents provided moral and material support to schools as the parents showed concern towards their children's learning and cooperated with schools and improved student's discipline.

Parents in the Focus Group Discussions revealed that it was also their responsibility to guide their children. They indicated that the disciplining of their children must start from home. One participant in the Focus Group Discussions showed concerned over the behaviour of some children. Due to modern technology children of nowadays tend to copy what they watch on the movies and would want to practice. Good behaviour should start from home. The parents must check the programmes children watch and give proper advice as the parents have the responsibility to control their children. It is the responsibility of both the teachers and parents to guide these children so that they need to understand what their teachers and parents tell them for them to be well disciplined.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings the study found some parents of Petauke Boarding Secondary School felt that some teacher's attitudes towards them were not welcoming, distance to the school and lack of understanding affected their involvement in disciplining of their school going children. The study concluded that some parents themselves generally have negative attitudes towards discipline of the school going children as they did not turn up for meetings and activities when called upon by school authorities. Sometimes parents view the school as a place where their children could ably handle when they fail to discipline them. The outcome from parents was that it was the teachers' duty to handle children and not them.

Finally, the findings suggested that involving parents in decision making was a measure in facilitating maintenance of discipline of the school going children at Petauke Boarding Secondary School. It was evident from the study that parents were willing to be involved in decision making in their children school discipline but did not know how to be involved.

The findings were collected with the use of spheres of influence coined by Epstein (1995). The theory focused on the collaboration between the school and parents of the children in school with emphasis on effective communication and decision making. Since children come from different communities, with different backgrounds and behaviours and stayed much of the time in school than at home, parents were seen as partners in shaping the behaviour of children in school.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to promote involvement of parents in disciplining their school going children at Petauke Boarding Secondary School, below are the recommendations emanating from the findings:

1. Petauke Boarding Secondary School should sensitise parents to be involved in the discipline matters of their school going children through workshops.
2. Petauke Boarding Secondary School should come up with programmes to assist parents in the disciplining of their children.
3. In order to promote positive attitudes of parents the Petauke Boarding Secondary School should create educational programmes to educate parents on the importance of parental involvement in disciplining their children.
4. The school should identify initiatives and programmes that promote parental involvement in the disciplining of their children.

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