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Influence of Community Participation on School Learning Environment in Public Primary Schools in Nandi North Sub County

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Abstract:

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) was adopted in Kenya in the year 2002 with the aim of ensuring education access by all children. The main aim of the study was to establish the influence of community participation on learning environment in Public Primary schools Nandi North Sub County. The study adopted Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory (SLT) and based on pragmatic philosophical research paradigm. It employed concurrent mixed methods research design which uses both qualitative and quantitative approaches to answer the research questions. Yamane's formula was used to determine the sample size from one hundred and seventy-five Public Primary schools. Stratified and simple random sampling techniques were used to select ninety four schools from the eight zones of the area selected for the study. Purposive sampling technique was used to select one teacher from each sampled schools and all the eight zonal Quality Assurance and Standards Officers. Finally snow-ball sampling technique enabled the selection of one parent from the sampled schools. The tools which were used in data collection were: questionnaire and interview guide. The collected data was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics and presented in form of frequency tables. The community participated in the following ways in strive to promote CFS in their schools: attended school events, made direct contact with families whose children dropped out of school, had PTA's which comprised of diverse communities. However, the community failed in making decisions which affect their children's learning, assisting the school teachers or the school in making the teaching and learning materials and finally it also failed in rendering of voluntary services to school. The government should provide more funds for community mobilization programmes as this will equip the community with knowledge on their roles in the provision CFS.

1. Introduction

Child friendly schools (CFS) is grounded on the principles of the children's rights based United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), a convention which was adopted by the United Nations Assembly in 1989 (Ndani, 2009). These principles emphasize the right of all children to free and compulsory education in settings that encourage enrolment and school attendance and includes; humane and fair disciplinary action; the development of the personality, talents and abilities of students to their fullest potential; the respect of children's human rights and fundamental freedoms; respect and encouragement of the child's own cultural identity, the national culture and values of the country. All these prepare the child to live as a free, responsible individual who is respectful to other persons and the natural environment (UNICEF, 2009b). UNICEF made a contract with American Institutes for Research (AIR) in 2008 to conduct a global assessment of the CFS initiative. The assessment was expected to serve as a baseline assessment to examine the effectiveness of UNICEF's CFS programming efforts in the areas of inclusiveness, pedagogy, architecture and services, participation and governance, and systemic management. The assessment was also intended to provide some information on the cost of the CFS intervention (UNICEF 2009).

The global assessment utilized mixed methods to describe how CFS concepts were implemented in multiple contexts, that is, in Guyana, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Philippines, South Africa, and Thailand. The findings provided data on the extent to which the key principles of CFS were being realized and also helped in the development of tools to monitor future progress of the concept (UNICEF 2009b).

At the 2000 National Summit for Children, the Government of Nigeria announced its intention to place a greater focus on the nation's children, in particular girls whose school attendance was low, by implementing the UNICEF CFS programme (Enueme & Ojo, 2005). After the summit, the CFS programme in Nigeria was spread across the country, but schools identified were purposefully chosen in areas with low girls 'enrolment and in areas where the demand for education was greater than the supply available. The assessment team that was formed to oversee this issue visited schools in Abuja, Niger and Ebonyi states and it came up with resolutions to renovate school buildings and grounds; train teachers and principals on CFS methodologies such as child-centred pedagogy; and encouraging families and communities to become involved in school management The head-teachers (Principals) and classroom teachers were sponsored periodically to attend workshops/seminars on how to manage and teach in child-friendly schools, respectively. In addition, families and communities were encouraged to get involved in some aspects of school management (Enueme & Ojo, 2005).

Park, (2006) supports Emueme & Ojo, (2005) observation by stressing fact that, the feature of a (CFS) is one where the learning environment is conducive; the staff is friendly to the children; the health and safety needs of the children are adequately met; the school is community based; and the rights of all children are recognized, irrespective of gender, family status, physical and mental abilities/disabilities, and religious/ethnic differences.

In South Africa UNICEF began supporting a few of these schools in 2005, with the number being expanded in 2007 and 2008. The programme was implemented in KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo and Eastern Cape provinces, which were identified as the provinces with the highest concentrations of poverty in the country (Park, 2006). There are currently 585 CFS in South Africa. Specific concerns and focuses of CFS in South Africa are access, safety, gender sensitivity, acceptance of orphans and vulnerable children, and provision of emotional development and life skills services (Park, 2006). The majority of UNICEF CFS work occurs on a national scale in cooperation with the Department of Education.

The mobilization of the community may bring many benefits which include providing funds for the construction of classrooms and sanitation facilities, providing food, offering paid and unpaid labour for building school's structures, planting trees, sourcing land and supplying locally procurable materials among other duties (UNICEF, 2009a). Years of research on learning environments' contribution to student's learning achievement and development have led to a general recognition that, beyond students' own innate abilities, motivation, and prior knowledge, learning occurs when systems of the home, community, schools and peers come together to form a protective circle that nurtures and develops student's growth (RMOE, 2009).

In Rwanda, it was observed that strengthening and establishing collaboration relationships between the school, families, children and stakeholders helps to create one of the key dimensions of a Child-Friendly School education. The way in which the school infrastructure is designed and managed can assist in developing strong partnerships between the community and school. The communities involved must be considered throughout the decision-making process; from planning, designing to construction and maintenance (RMOE, 2009). This will always make the community own the school.

In Madagascar, UNICEF has provided technical and financial support to the Ministry of Education for the development, experimentation and implementation of the Contracts for School Success Programme (CSSP). The CSSP is a voluntary commitment among local stakeholders to improve primary school education. The process commences at the beginning of the school year, when the school directors, pupils, parents and community leaders or local authorities come together to review and discuss school results and learning conditions. The intent of the review was to identify those actions that were required to improve the school in general and retention rates in particular. Such a kind of a programme is one which will bring all the community members together since they will feel honoured when the school recognizes their technical support in terms of school management.

The Government of Kenya was not left behind in the strive to ensure schools were child friendly in nature; through the Ministry of Education, it provided schools with guidelines on social and environment standards and also infrastructure. Together with this, it allocated funds for procuring fire-fighting equipment and materials (MOEST, 2008). A study done by the National Assessment System for Monitoring Learner Achievement showed that, some schools in Kiambu County and other Counties across the country had inadequate classroom facilities, substandard sanitation facilities and piped water (KNEC, 2010). This showed that the provision of CFS standards in schools was still a challenge as all these aspects needed to be addressed. A School community is comprised of parents, teachers, learners, retired civil servants amongst other school neighbours (MOE, 2010).

The Kenya Basic Education Act (2013) provides for school-community collaboration in the management of schools in Kenya through school committees. Learners and staff should create a school climate that is conducive and share in the same vision regarding the role of the school. They should have positive attitudes towards members of the local communities, behave with respect towards them and their culture, and encourage them to cooperate with schools in ensuring Child-Friendly School Education (MOEST, 2008). A good school community has the mandate to ensure that all children who are out of school are enrolled and this will succeed if Limo (2013) recommendation that parents and especially the entire community need to be mobilized on the importance of the role they play as far as their children's education is concerned. Require schools and communities to identify excluded children and to ensure their enrolment (MoE, 2012)

Nduku (2003) asserts that, there is need for more interaction between home and school. This means that, the school should welcome parents and other members of the community to the school setting for more than a few planned meetings. When such members are meaningfully involved with school activities, they feel good about their children. Nduku (2003) continues to argue and likens a school trying to function without involving the community as an engine destined to start without petrol. In this context, an alert teacher recognizes gifted parents and gives them an opportunity to enrich school curriculum. This is likely to promote community-teacher relationship and enhance a child- friendly environment in school.

The Child-Friendly School concept was adopted in Kenya in 2002 and implemented on a pilot basis by the Ministry of Education, with the support of UNICEF, in the then 11 districts: Nairobi, Turkana, West Pokot, Kwale, Isiolo, Marsabit, Moyale, Mandera, Wajir, Garissa and Ijara. In 2011, the Ministry rolled out the programme on a national scale. The concept aimed at achieving Education for All (EFA) which is an endeavour sought through Millennium Development Goal (MDG) number two and Dakar Framework which advocated that all children should access free education by 2015. These instruments were expected to address all facets of education, including the environment, issues of equity and equality, and the holistic development of the child (UN Newsletter 2011). The Ministry of Education in conjunction with UNICEF developed a tool kit which provides a concept for policy-makers and educational practitioners at all levels on how to promote CFS environment in the country. Nonetheless there have been some challenges faced in taking on the spirit of a CFS. According to Limo (2013), Some schools have not been able to create strong linkages with the community and partners, especially in areas where poverty is high. Others are struggling in trying to enhance equity and equality, particularly in trying to attain gender parity and establish disability-friendly schools.

Muigua, (2009) also noted that, although the government had developed guidelines, procedures and strategies to create and sustain CFS environment in Kenya, there appeared to be lack of proper enforcement mechanisms and this deemed to be the main obstacle to the effective implementation of the programme. The question arises, however, on whether the available policy guidelines are really put into effective use and whether institutions are prepared to put them into practice. Local newspapers and other media on several occasions have highlighted incidences of pregnancies amongst Primary school girls and intruders storming schools.

The Kenyan CFS manual is an adaptation of the global version whose concept had it that schools must not only help children to realize their right to a basic good quality education, but are also expected to help them learn what they need in order to face the challenges of the new century; enhance their health and well-being; guarantee them safe and protective spaces for learning free from violence and abuse; raise teacher morale and motivation; and also mobilize community support (UN Newsletter, 2011). With the launch of the manual, the concept, which was piloted in some schools in Nairobi, Coast and North Eastern Provinces, was rolled-out countrywide with a view to reaching all Primary schools in the republic in this case, Nandi North Sub-County was not an exceptional. This therefore, raises the question on whether the rolled out programme on the implementation of CFS concepts in schools has been effective; it is for this reason therefore, that the study sought to determine the influence of community participation on learning environment in Public Primary schools in Nandi North Sub County.

1.1. Theoretical Framework

The study was underpinned by Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory (SLT). This theory was started in the 1960s and it was later developed into the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) in 1986. SCT posits that learning occurs in a social context with a dynamic and reciprocal interaction of the person, environment, and behaviour. Kabiru and Njenga (2009) points out that, children learn in their environment as they interact and observe those living in that same environment. The unique feature of SCT is the emphasis on social influence and its emphasis on external and internal social reinforcement. SCT considers the unique way in which individuals acquire and maintain behaviour, while also considering the social environment in which individuals perform the behaviour.

The theory takes into account a person's past experiences, which factor into whether behavioural action will occur. These past experiences influence reinforcements, expectations, and expectancies, all of which shape whether a person will engage in a specific behaviour and the reasons why a person engages in that behaviour. The goal of SCT is to explain how people regulate their behaviour through control and reinforcement to achieve goal-directed behaviour that can be maintained over time. With the implementation of external and internal factors, people regulate their behaviour from a combination of both cognitive processes and environmental manipulation. The theory presents four factors that affect observation learning and these are: attention, retention, production and motivation. If past reinforcements have led someone to pay attention to a concept, then future reinforcements will selectively engage in a behaviour that was observed and finally repeat it over and over.

Social Cognitive Theory was significant to this study because if learners are presented with any social environment which in this study is friendly learning environment, they will analyze it then emulate by paying attention to those aspects that provide the friendliness. When the schools, which form the learning environment are safe, caters for all categories of learners, are health providing and have a community that support their activities, the learners will therefore view them as conducive aspects for their learning. The mentioned aspects will make the children to be motivated and therefore like school and all other service providers in it hence encouraging regular school attendance. This will in turn lead towards the achievement of the third millennium goal which advocates for Education for All.

2. Research Methodology

This study was based on pragmatic philosophical research paradigm whose approach applies pluralistic means of acquiring knowledge about a phenomenon (Morgan, 2007). Creswell (2013) supports this and argues that, pragmatism makes it possible to work within the positivist and interpretivist approach. This integrated point of view allows the usage of multiple ways to answer research questions at hand. The pragmatic approach adopted in this study rejects a position between which views oppose each other. Mixed methods research design used in this study strongly goes in line with pragmatic views of tackling issues with a view of acquiring in-depth information.

This study was based on mixed methods research design which according to Creswell, (2014) is the concurrent approach. It involves integration of philosophical assumptions, by using both quantitative and qualitative approaches in a study. It is thus more than simply collecting and analyzing both kinds of data concurrently; it also involves the use of both approaches in tandem so that the overall strength of a study is greater than either one of the two approaches (Creswell, 2009). A major advantage of using the mixed methods research in this study will be to enable the researcher to answer confirmatory questions with regard to the research problem in question through the administration of both open and closed ended questionnaires, interviews and also observation schedules.

This study was carried out in Nandi North Sub County, in Nandi County. The Sub County and its surroundings enjoy the best weather which is relatively moderate in terms of rainfall and temperatures; compared to other parts of the country. Nandi North Sub-County was selected for the current study because it is one of those sub-counties where CFS was launched. It is therefore believed that the study area gave a wide and varied view of the problem under study just like any other areas in Kenya.

Target population of a study is a group of individuals taken from the general population who share a common characteristic, such as age, beliefs, interests and sex. The study targeted all the one hundred and seventy-five Public Primary schools, the eight zonal QASOs, Public Primary school head-teachers, Public Primary school teachers and all parents in the area selected for the study. The target population is made up of 533 respondents.

Sampling means selecting a given number of subjects from a defined population as representative of that population (Orodho, 2008). The study used Yamane formula to get a sample size of 94 Public Primary schools. Stratified sampling technique was used to select

schools from the eight zones then Simple random sampling technique was employed to select the 94 Public Primary schools to take part in the study. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 94 head-teachers from the sampled schools, and all the 8 Zonal Quality Assurance and Standards Officers. Simple random sampling technique was used to obtain 94 teachers from the sampled schools and finally, snow-ball sampling was used to select one parent from the sampled schools.

Research instruments aid a researcher in collecting information that is used in answering the research concerns in a study. The tools which were used in this study are questionnaires and interview guide. A questionnaire was preferred in the study for collecting data because the questions, wordings and sequence are fixed and identical to all respondents. The questionnaire was in two parts: The first part covered background information of the respondents; the second part sought to answer the research questions. The questionnaires were administered to a section of teachers and head-teachers as this was meant to comply with requirements of the research design in use.

An interview is a particular type of conversation between two or more people. Usually the interview is controlled by one person who asks questions. This ensured that answers were reliably aggregated and allowed comparisons to be made. In this, participants can discover, uncover or generate the rules by which they are playing this particular game. A structured interview guide was used to gather information from all QASOs and parents and also the remaining section of the head-teachers and teachers as this was deemed to go in line with the research design adopted.

After all the data was collected, it was cleaned; this involved identification of incomplete or inaccurate responses in the research tools. The cleaned data was collated, coded and entered in the computer for analysis using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS V22). The research results yielded both qualitative and quantitative data since the study adopted mixed methods approach. Qualitative data was analyzed using content analysis based on themes emanating from respondents' information. Finally, Pearson product moment correlation was used to analyze the relationship between the independent and dependent variables; this helped evaluate the influence of child friendly schools concept on learning environment in Public Primary schools in Nandi North-Sub County. Pearson product moment correlation qualified for use because the instruments were of interval and ratio-scaled variables. After analysis, data was presented in tabular form using frequencies and percentages, pie charts and bar graphs.

3. Results

To identify the influence of community participation on school learning environment was established using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The descriptive statistics involved the use of descriptions of data using frequencies and percentages while the inferential statistics involved making inferences of obtained data by using Pearson correlation coefficient that helped establish the relationship between learning environment and community participation.

3.1. Descriptive Statistics on Community Participation on School Learning Environment

The head-teachers and teachers had various views on the community participation in school learning environment as is summarized in Table 1. From the study 38(51.4%) head-teachers and 46 (62.2%) teachers disagreed that families were involved in making decisions that promote learning in class. However, 31 (41.9%) head-teachers and 12 (16.3%) teachers agreed. This implies that families were not involved in decision making in order to promote learning in Public Primary school.

| Statement | Category | Strongly agree | | Agree | | Undecided | | Disagree | | Strongly disagree | |
|---|---------------|----------------|------|-------|------|-----------|------|----------|------|-------------------|------|
| | | Freq | % | Freq | % | Freq | % | Freq | % | Freq | % |
| Families are involved in making decisions that affect this school | Head-teachers | 14 | 18.9 | 17 | 23.0 | 5 | 6.8 | 35 | 47.3 | 3 | 4.1 |
| | Teachers | 11 | 14.9 | 1 | 1.4 | 16 | 21.6 | 9 | 12.2 | 37 | 50.0 |
| Many parents attend school events | Head-teachers | 10 | 13.5 | 39 | 52.7 | 4 | 5.4 | 17 | 23.0 | 4 | 5.4 |
| | Teachers | 19 | 25.7 | 28 | 37.8 | 4 | 5.4 | 20 | 27.0 | 3 | 4.1 |
| Parents and other community members render voluntary services to school | Head-teachers | 2 | 2.7 | 20 | 27.0 | 10 | 13.5 | 37 | 50.0 | 5 | 6.8 |
| | Teachers | 5 | 6.8 | | | 4 | 5.4 | 47 | 63.5 | 18 | 24.3 |
| Parents assist in making of teaching and learning materials | Head-teachers | 5 | 6.8 | 18 | 24.3 | 6 | 8.1 | 39 | 52.7 | 6 | 8.1 |
| | Teachers | | | 10 | 13.5 | 10 | 13.5 | 9 | 12.2 | 45 | 60.8 |
| Staff from this school makes direct contact with families whose children drop out of school | Head-teachers | 11 | 14.9 | 44 | 59.5 | 8 | 10.8 | 11 | 14.9 | | |
| | Teachers | 16 | 21.6 | 21 | 28.4 | 9 | 12.2 | 24 | 32.4 | 4 | 5.4 |
| School committee and PTA reflect the diversity of the school community | Head-teachers | 21 | 28.4 | 38 | 51.4 | 6 | 8.1 | 6 | 8.1 | 3 | 4.1 |
| | Teachers | 14 | 18.9 | 35 | 47.3 | 5 | 6.8 | 18 | 24.3 | 2 | 2.7 |

Table 1: Head-teachers Views on Community participation

Most of the head-teachers 49(66.2%) and 47 (63.5%) teachers agreed that many parents attend school events. This indicated that parents take school events seriously. At least 55 (74.4%) of head-teachers and 37 (50%) teachers agreed that they made direct contact with families whose children dropped out of school, with 11(14.9%) head-teachers and 28 (37.8%) teachers disagreeing. The study findings showed that the school staff made direct contact with families whose children dropped out of school. Another proportion of the head-teachers 42(56.7%) and 65 (87.8 %) teachers disagreed that parents and other community members render voluntary services to their school, with 10(13.5%) school heads and 4(5.4%) teachers being undecided on the same. This implies that parents and community members always do not render voluntary services to school. Majority 59 (79.8%) of head-teachers and 49 (66.2%) teachers agreed that their school committee and PTA reflected a diversity of the school community. Also 11(14.9%) head-teachers and 20 (27%) teachers disagree on the same. This portrays that Public Primary schools in Nandi North Sub-County have school committees and PTA that reflects a diversity of the school community.

Most of the head-teachers 45(60.8%) and 54 (73%) teachers disagreed that parents assist in making of teaching and learning materials, with 23(31.1%) heads and 10 (13.5%) teachers agreed, with 6(8.1 %) head teachers and 10 (13.5%) teachers responded that they were undecided. This indicated that parents in Public Primary schools in Nandi North Sub-County do not assist in making of teaching and learning materials.

Basing on the concurrent mixed approach adopted in the study, the interview guide administered to another group of head-teachers identified other roles that the community plays towards provision of child friendly school to include: participating in employing teachers, assisting in guiding and counseling of learners, supporting the school financially through fundraising, welcoming visitors and attending school academic functions and occasions. They also responded that they kept the school clean and provided security.

From the interview's findings, the other section of teachers identified the roles community played towards the provision of a child friendly school which include; supporting teachers, fencing the school to keep away stray animals and strangers and ensuring all children have school uniform as well as attending school events like academic days in the school. This indicated that the community plays a major role in enhancing a child friendly school.

From the interview schedule the parents identified various roles they played to ensure that the school learning environment was child friendly. These roles included; ensuring that they attended all the meetings and maintain a good working relationship with teachers. They engaged in school activities like fencing the school, acting as security agents by reporting any dangers that would affect learners. This implies that parents play a vital role in the community by ensuring that there is a conducive learning environment.

Basing on the themes used to group obtained data, the zonal QASOs identified that the community played a vital role as stakeholders in ensuring learning environment in Public Primary schools was child friendly. These officers responded that, the community assisted in the provision of physical facilities and raising funds to meet school requirements such as fencing the compound and building adequate toilets. However, it was established that the community failed to provide the feeding programme in their schools. This might have been due to the fact that the study area is known to be self-sufficient in food production.

The findings from the questionnaire and interview guide administered to the head-teachers, teachers, QASOs and parents it was evident that the community plays a vital role towards child friendly school. The identified roles played the community in the study area adheres to Nduku (2003) whose recommendation was that; the home and school needed to interact in order to provide a conducive learning environment for learners. The same findings also concur with UNICEF, (2009a) that the community supports the school by providing funds, and food and supplying locally procurable materials among other duties. However, some of the views given by the respondents showed that they did not support the school feeding programmes and the developing of teaching and learning materials. It was evident the parents in the study area never participated much in making decisions which affect their children's learning. This was in line with MOE (2005) views that most parents feel that they do not need to participate in school activities because they consider primary education to be free. The parents' nonparticipation in school activities will demoralize the learners who always feel proud when their parents are involved in their learning. Apart from this, the nature of climatic conditions of the study area are considered to favour agricultural activities and this could be a likely reason why the parents do not see the need of providing the school feeding programme in their Public Primary schools.

3.2. Correlation on the Influence of Community Participation on School Learning Environment

To determine the influence of community participation on school learning environment, Pearson product moment correlation was used to infer the relationship between the two variables as summarized in Table 2. The result showed that there was a positive relationship between the community participation on school learning environment [$r=.641$, $n=74$, $p<.05$]. The kind of relationship obtained indicated that an increase in community participation leads to improved school learning environment. Hence, the higher the community participation the friendlier the learning environment is.

| | | Environment | Community |
|-------------|---------------------|-------------|-----------|
| Environment | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .623** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .000 |
| Community | Pearson Correlation | .623** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | |

Table 2: Correlation on the Influence of Community Participation on School Learning Environment

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

N=74

4. Conclusions

The community participated in the following ways in strive to promote CFS in their schools: attended school events, made direct contact with families whose children dropped out of school, had PTA's which comprised of diverse communities. However, the community failed in making decisions which affect their children's learning, assisting the school teachers or the school in making the teaching and learning materials and finally it also failed in rendering of voluntary services to school.

5. Recommendation

The government should provide more funds for community mobilization programmes as this will equip the community with knowledge on their roles in the provision CFS.

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