

PARENTAL PARTICIPATION IN IMPROVING LEARNING OUTCOMES IN UNIVERSAL PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN KALIRO DISTRICT, UGANDA

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This study aimed to determine the level of participation of parents in the learning activities of their children in the primary schools in Kaliro District, Uganda. The present study involved 278 parents randomly sampled from 25 Universal Primary Schools in Kaliro District Uganda. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were applied in the analysis of data. The result showed that there is limited involvement in all the three aspects namely; participation in school activities, participation in school governance and participation at home. Also, there were three major challenges in parental involvement namely: parents' lack of financial and other resources to support scholastic requirements of their children, schools do not invite parents to discuss children's school progress; and inadequate level of education of parental roles in promoting learning outcomes. It is recommended that the policy holders should reflect on their decisions and consider putting up mechanisms that will attract parents to participate and school personnel such as Principals and teachers to forge partnerships with parents to improve the learning outcomes of their children in universal primary schools.

Keywords: Parents, participation, improvement, learning outcomes, universal primary schools

Introduction

The power of primary education on economic, health and social development cannot be underestimated. In 2000, the United Nations held a general assembly summit in New York to deliberate on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). One of the deliberations was that, by 2015, all school-aged children in the whole world should be able to complete at least five years of primary schooling giving both boys and girls equal chances (UN, 2000).

Uganda, a sub-Saharan African country, adopted the MDG number two on education, and the Ministry of Education and Sports introduced the Universal Primary Education (UPE) policy in 1997 (Bategeka & Okurut, 2006). The main aim was to make education accessible, equitable and affordable which in return would reduce poverty by endowing every citizen with basic education. The UPE policy abolished all tuition fees and other non-statutory fees but only allowing parents to provide basic learning materials (exercise books, pen, pencil, eraser and ruler). In return, this led to an increased gross enrolment rate to 145% (4.5 million children) and created an opportunity for all parents to participate in the education system. The ripple effects

made parents feel relieved of the school fees burden due to the reduction in inequity in access to education across all districts in Uganda.

If the students are to reap the maximum benefits in their schooling, they must enjoy parental support. In all spheres of learning, there is substantial research evidence that involvement of parents in their children's schooling gives a positive effect on their learning outcomes (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). The six types of parental involvement include: parenting (helping families with childrearing and parenting skills), communicating (developing effective home-school communication), volunteering (creating ways that families can become involved in activities at the school), learning at home (supporting learning activities in the home that reinforce school curricula), decision-making (including families as decision-makers through school-sites councils, committees) and collaborating with the community (matching community services with family needs and serving the community) (Epstein, 1995). Each type of involvement encompasses a variety of practices to be undertaken by teachers, parents, and students and is theoretically linked with a variety of distinct outcomes for students, teachers, and parents



as well.

Methods and Procedures

This research study utilized quantitative methods approach in order to provide an in-depth perspective on how the parents in Kaliro District in Uganda participate to improve the learning outcomes of their children in universal primary schools. The research study randomly sampled 278 parents with children attending universal primary schools in Iganga District from 25 primary schools. Questionnaires were administered to the parents to gather their views regarding their participation in improving the learning outcomes of their children in universal primary schools.

Validity and Reliability of the Research Instruments

Validity was ascertained by giving the questionnaire to some selected experts for content validation. The researchers carried out pilot-testing using five universal primary education schools in Gulu district. Gulu district is in the North of Uganda while Kaliro district is in the East of the country. The pilot study consisted of 50 parents. The researcher used Cronbach Alpha to test the reliability of the questionnaire. According to Orodho (2009), a correlation coefficient (r) of about 0.60 is considered high enough to judge the reliability of the instrument. The questionnaire used in this study yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.88, hence its reliability was considered high.

Statistical Treatment of the Data

The study applied both descriptive and inferential statistics in the analysis of data. Descriptive statistics included counts and percentages. The inferential statistics used for the study was One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to test differences in level of participation of parents in promoting the learning outcomes in universal primary schools. To ascertain the level of participation in improving the learning outcomes in universal primary schools, the responses were interpreted as follows: 3.50 – 4.0 = High participation in improving learning outcomes, 2.50 – 3.49 = Moderate participation in improving learning outcomes, 1.50 – 2.49 = Low participation in improving the learning outcomes and 1.00 – 1.49 = Negligible participation in improving the learning outcomes.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher guaranteed that the anonymity of the participants was taken care of by not demanding them to write their names anywhere and also assuring them that the data provided would be used for academic purpose only. Before data collection started, the researcher obtained a letter of introduction from the University of Eastern Africa, Baraton Dean of School of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences and permission to conduct research in Kaliro District Uganda. Since the universal primary schools in Uganda fall under the jurisdiction of the area District Education Officers, the researcher had to obtain permission from Kaliro District Education Office to collect data from the schools. The researcher further obtained permission from the head teachers of the universal primary schools to collect data from the parents with children in their schools. Confidentiality was assured to the respondents.

Results and Discussion

This research study was guided by the following three research questions:

1. What is the level of participation of parents in improving learning outcomes in universal primary school in Kaliro District, Uganda in terms of the following:
 - a. Parental participation in school activities,
 - b. Parental participation in school governance and
 - c. Parental participation at home?
2. Is there a significant difference in level of participation of parents in improving learning outcomes in universal primary school in Kaliro District, Uganda when respondents are grouped according to:
 - a. Educational attainment,
 - b. Level of income
 - c. Residence?
3. What are the challenges faced by parents in Kaliro District in terms of their participation in the learning outcomes of their children?

Tables 1-3 show the results of the analysis of research question 1,

Table 1

Parental Participation in School Activities in Improving Learning Outcomes in Universal Primary Schools in Kaliro District, Uganda

S/N	Descriptors	Mean	Interpretation
1	Visiting the school to discuss performance related issues	2.70	Moderate involvement
2	Visiting the school to discuss discipline related issues	2.63	Moderate involvement
3	Visiting the school only when invited by school authorities	3.16	Moderate involvement
4	Visiting the school on my own initiative	1.93	Low involvement
5	Providing packed lunch for the child on daily basis	1.76	Low involvement
6	Contributing lunch fee for lunch provided at school	2.46	Low involvement
7	Providing scholastic materials on a timely basis	3.03	Moderate involvement
8	Participating in self-help development activities at school	1.95	Low involvement
9	Providing financial and other forms of support to teachers	2.05	Low involvement
10	Discussing with the class teachers the progress of the child and how it can be promoted	2.95	Moderate involvement
TOTAL		2.46	Moderate involvement

Table 1 shows the responses of parents towards the research question that sought to measure the level of their participation in school activities to promote the learning outcomes of their children in universal primary schools in Kaliro district, Uganda. The table shows that the responses with the highest rated means were: the parents visited the schools only when invited by the school authorities ($M = 3.16$), parents provided scholastic materials on a timely basis ($M = 3.03$), and parents discuss with class teachers the progress of the child ($M = 2.95$). Discussions with parents highlight that they tend to visit schools only when invited to attend and/or to discuss specific issues such as disciplinary or performance related issues. The results of

this study concur with the results of a study that was conducted by Akanksha, Edge, Legault, and Archer (2010). The researchers reported that the teachers' inherent expectation of parents was that parental participation be limited to making financial contributions to schools and to attending PTAs only.

According to UPE policy, the parents are to provide scholastic materials, school uniforms and basic requirement for survival of their children, such as providing for the feeding of their children during school time. This is the more reason why parents said they are comfortable with providing scholastic materials to their children.

Table 2

Parental Participation in School Governance in Improving Learning Outcomes in Universal Primary Schools in Kaliro District, Uganda

S/N	Descriptors	Mean	Interpretation
1	You are aware of the existence of SMC in the school where your child attends	2.67	Moderate involvement
2	You are clear about the roles of the SMC in a school	2.12	Low involvement
3	Your ideas often influence the decisions of SMC	2.11	Low involvement
4	You are aware of the existence of PTA in the school where your child attends	3.13	Moderate involvement
5	You are clear about the roles of PTA in a school	2.65	Moderate involvement
6	You regularly attend meetings of the PTA	2.42	Low involvement
7	You are clear about the distinction and roles of SMC and PTA	2.13	Low involvement
8	Your ideas often influence the decisions of the PTA.	2.27	Low involvement
9	PTA often invites your participation in discussing way to promote pupils' learning outcomes	2.80	Moderate involvement
10	SMC always solicits parents' views on formulation of school policies that promote children's learning outcomes	2.36	Low involvement
TOTAL		2.45	Moderate involvement

The parents were asked for their level of agreement or disagreement with a series of statements about their participation in school governance generally. A summary of the overall findings appears in table 2 above. The responses with the highest means show that parents are generally aware of the existence of PTA in the schools where their children attended ($M = 3.13$), their participation is often invited in discussing ways to promote pupils learning outcomes ($M = 2.80$), and that they are aware of the existence of SMC in the schools where their children attended ($M = 2.67$). Whereas the means for the parents' levels of agreement with the three statements highlighted above were the highest,

yet they depict only moderate level of agreement. There are several reasons for this state of affairs: The reasons range from a lack of precise knowledge about the mandates of the PTA and SMC and even the distinction between these bodies in schools (Akanksha et al., 2010).

According to the researchers, the SMCs are largely closed, elite structures that are very reticent to involve parents in school management. Only the elected few tend to participate, with the large majority of parents being involved only when invited to meetings.

Table 3

Parental participation at home in Improving Learning Outcomes in Universal Primary Schools in Kaliro District, Uganda

s/n	Descriptors	Mean	Interpretation
1	Reduce on domestic chores especially for the girl child	3.20	Moderate involvement
2	Provide lighting for the child to do homework and read at home	2.68	Moderate involvement
3	Guide the child in doing homework	2.62	Moderate involvement
4	Encourage older siblings to help the child do homework	2.77	Moderate involvement
5	Check the child's notebooks on a regular basis to monitor progress	2.45	Low involvement
6	Encourage the child to work hard for school progress	3.44	Low involvement
7	Provide some incentives for success in school work	3.05	Moderate involvement
8	Provide time for school work while at home	3.22	Moderate involvement
9	Ensure that the child attends school every day	3.59	Moderate involvement
10	Provide guidance and counseling to the child not to engage in immoral activities and not to play at school	3.52	Moderate involvement
TOTAL		3.04	Moderate involvement

Table 3 shows the response of parents on their participation at home in improving learning outcomes of their children in universal primary schools. The responses with the highest means were: the parents ensure that the children attend school every day ($M = 3.59$), they provide guidance and counseling to the children not to engage in immoral activities and not to play at school ($M = 3.52$), and they encourage children to work hard for school progress ($M = 3.44$)

The results of this study concur with a study done by Mapp (2011) that stated that the type of at-home involvement included verbal encouragement and

support to perform well in school, as well as frequent reminders to their children about the importance of receiving a good education. According to Mapp (2011), this type of verbal encouragement was important as an indicator to their children that they, as parents, were serious about the importance of school and receiving a good education.

Tables 4-6 show the results of the analysis of research question 2.



Table 4

Significant Differences in Parental Participation in Improving Learning Outcomes in Universal Primary Schools in Kaliro District, Uganda According to Parents' Educational Attainment

Parental Participation	Groups that Significantly Differ	Mean	ANOVA F- Value	Sig Value	Interpretation
A. School Activities	Primary	2.97	20.134	.000	Significant
	Post Graduate	3.20			
B. School Governance	Primary	2.12	14.173	.000	Significant
	Post Graduate	3.01			
C. Participation at Home	Primary	2.64	14.902	.000	Significant
	Post Graduate	3.97			

As shown in Table 4, there are significant differences in parental participation in improving learning outcomes in universal primary schools in Kaliro District Uganda when they are grouped according to educational attainment. In school activities, parents who have post graduate level of education ($M = 3.20$) have a significantly higher involvement in school activities compared with those parents who have primary level of education ($M = 2.97$) only ($F = 20.134$, $p < 0.05$). Also, it is reflected that in school governance parents who have post graduate level of education ($M = 3.01$) have a significantly higher involvement in school activities compared with those parents who have primary level of education ($M = 2.12$) only ($F = 14.173$, $p < 0.05$).

Lastly, in participation at home, parents who finished post graduate level of education ($M = 3.97$) are more involved than those parents who have primary level of education ($M = 2.64$) only ($F = 14.902$, $p < 0.05$).

The literature is replete with references to research, which proposes that when parents are educated, the pattern of influence on their children's education and life in general tends to be different from parents with low or no formal education. Davis-Kean and Schnabel's (2001), international studies, indicate that parental education influences expectations, in that having higher parental education is significantly related to having higher expectations of children's achievement. However, it is also likely that parents with higher education have higher attaining children for whom they have higher expectations.

Children of highly educated parents might feel pressured to go to college to meet what they perceive to be their parents' expectations. Rockwell (2011) found that children of college-educated parents often feel they are expected to attend college as well. Higher educated parents are likely to be of higher ability, which results

in genetic transmission of endowments (de Haan, 2011). The simplest explanation for the relationship between children and parents' education is that higher educated parents could place higher academic demands on their children, which pushes their children to work harder (Steinmayr, 2010). Children of higher educated parents also have more cultural capital, which may contribute to certain personality traits such as openness to experiences that children of highly educated parents tend to have (Steinmayr, 2010).

A study conducted by Pinantoan (2013) found out that Parents with advanced degrees are 3.5 times as likely as parents without high school degrees to teach their children the alphabet, 2.4 times more likely to teach them to count to 20, 1.8 times as likely to teach them how to write their first name, and 2.8 times more likely to read to them daily. Even the difference in involvement between parents with advanced degrees and parents with bachelor's degrees hover around 10%. Almost without exception, parents at each successive level of education send their children to school better prepared than parents who are less educated. This suggests just how delicate beginnings can be in a child's educational development, and just how important it is for less educated parents to try to be more involved. It is, therefore, no wonder that this research has found that the parents who are educated provide much more support to their children than those parents who are less educated.

Table 5

Significant Differences in Parental Participation in Improving Learning Outcomes in Universal Primary Schools in Kaliro District, Uganda According to Parents' Level of Income

Parental Participation	Groups that Significantly Differ	Mean	ANOVA F- Value	Sig Value	Interpretation
A. School Activities	Low High	2.17 3.40	47.093	.000	Significant
B. School Governance	Low High	2.13 3.28	47.536	.000	Significant
C. Participation at Home	Low High	2.74 4.07	34.851	.000	Significant

Table 5 is a summary of the comparison between the level of parental participation in promoting the learning outcomes of children when the parents are grouped according to level of income. The variables in the level of income considered included low level of income and high level of income. As shown in the table, there are significant differences in parental participation in improving the learning outcomes of primary school children in Kaliro District, Uganda when the parents are grouped by level of income. In school activities, the parents who have a high level of income ($M = 3.40$ vs $M = 2.17$) have a significantly higher level of participation in school activities as when compared with the parents who have a low level of income ($F = 47.093$, $p < 0.05$).

In terms of parental participation in school governance, the table shows that there is a significant higher level of participation in promoting the learning outcomes of the children among the parents with high income ($M = 3.28$) compared with their counterparts with low level of income ($M = 2.13$) ($F = 47.536$, $p < 0.05$). Likewise, the table shows a significant higher level of parental participation at home in promoting the learning outcomes of children in universal primary schools in Kaliro District, Uganda by parents with high income ($M = 4.07$) as when compared with the parents with low level of income ($M = 2.74$) ($F = 34.851$, $p < 0.05$).

The focus on income in the relationship between poverty and educational achievement has been challenged in recent years (Goodman & Gregg, 2010). It is argued that income is only one aspect in accounting for

the experiences of children in the school system. In addition, there is evidence that poverty, in terms of family resources, has a powerful influence on children's ability to respond to educational opportunities (Goodman & Gregg, 2010)

Low income is likely to affect a parent's sense of being able to provide their children with the same advantages as those in the more affluent households. The parents, who are stressed about money and employment, working unsocial hours in more than one job, are likely to have less time to provide their children within an environment conducive to good educational outcomes (Goodman & Greg, 2010).

Parents with low level of income are more focused on providing for their children's basic needs than helping them with homework or being involved in their children's school. It is apparent that parents with low income who want to be involved in their children's schooling face disadvantages such as inflexible work hours that prevent them from being available. This is very different from high income parents. Parents who have a high level of income tend to encourage their children to attend college by talking about their own school or university experience.

Thus, a substantial body of evidence confirms that parents' level of income imposes a great impact on parental involvement and how it is translated into their child's educational success. For instance, Katsilis and Rubinson (1990) in their study reported that the parents' level of income influences the education-



al success of their children at school to a great extent. Ho Sui-Chu and Willms (1996) indicated that parents' level of income has significant and positive relationship on parental involvement in their children's education even though the relationship found was not strong. McNeal (2001) in his study found that parents from higher levels of income have better parental involve-

ment which has greater effects on their children.

A number of other studies (Shuang-Ji and Koblinsky, 2009; Sohail, Mahmood, Ali, & Rafi (2012) have also demonstrated that parents with a higher level of income show higher involvement in their children's education than parents from a lower level of income.

Table 6

Significant Differences in Parental Participation in Improving Learning Outcomes in Universal Primary Schools in Kaliro District, Uganda According to Residence

Parental Participation	Groups that Significantly Differ	Mean	ANOVA F- Value	Sig Value	Interpretation
A. School Activities	Urban	3.15	29.497	.000	Significant
	Rural	2.23			
B. School Governance	Urban	3.41	18.974	.000	Significant
	Rural	2.26			
C. Participation at Home	Urban	4.05	20.925	.000	Significant
	Rural	2.82			

Table 6 summarizes the differences in parental participation in improving the learning outcomes of their children in universal primary schools in Kaliro District when they (parents) are grouped according to the location of their residence. The residence was grouped according to whether it was located in urban or rural area. The table shows that in school activities, the parents who reside in urban locations ($M = 3.15$) have a significant higher level of participation in improving the learning outcomes of their children as compared to those parents who reside in rural areas ($M = 2.23$) only ($F = 29.497$, $p < 0.05$).

Meanwhile, in school governance the table also shows that the parents who reside in urban locations ($M = 3.41$) show a significant level of participation in improving the learning outcomes of their children in universal primary schools than those parents who reside in rural locations ($M = 2.26$) only ($F = 18.974$, $p < 0.05$). Similarly, in participation at home, the table shows that the parents who reside in urban locations ($M = 4.05$) have a significant higher level of participation in promoting the learning outcomes of their children than those parents who reside in rural locations ($M = 2.82$) ($F = 20.925$, $p < 0.05$).

Research abounds that link parental residence,

whether urban or rural, to parental participation in promoting the learning outcomes of children in schools. Urban and rural settings each have a unique set of characteristics and problems that may impact the degree of parental involvement (Prater, Bermudez, & Owens, 1997). In a research conducted by Prater et al. (1997), they reported that urban students reported that their parents attended school meetings substantially more frequently than was reported by rural students. In addition, they reported that urban parents were reported to interact more frequently with teachers than their rural counterparts and that rural parents visited their children's classrooms less frequently than urban parents.

In terms of parental involvement at home, the study reported more urban parents checked their children's homework than rural parents. Urban parents limited television watching more often than rural parent, and finally, urban parents limited their child's going out with friends more than rural parents (Prater et al., 1997).

Table 7 shows the results of the analysis of research question 3. The table summarizes the challenges that are faced by the parents in their quest to participate in supporting the learning outcomes of

their children in universal primary schools in Kaliro district, Uganda. Lacking financial and other resources to support the scholastic requirements of the children ($M = 3.90$) emerged as the greatest challenge facing the parents. Other challenges included inadequate level of education of the parents ($M = 3.84$), and lack of knowledge of their roles in promoting the learning outcomes of their children ($M = 3.69$). These results concur with a study which was done by Akanksha et al, (2010), who found out that within all their research countries (Uganda, Malawi, Senegal, Burundi), the notion of ‘free education’ was found to be a misnomer

Conclusions and Recommendations

The results of this study provide overarching evidence to the concerned parties in the implementation of

Table 7

Challenges to Parental Participation Improving Learning Outcomes in Universal Primary Schools in Kaliro District, Uganda

S/N	Descriptors	Mean	Interpretation
1	Parents lack financial and other resources to support the scholastic requirements of the children	3.90	High challenge
2	Teachers are unwelcoming to school to discuss school progress of the children.	3.00	Moderate challenge
3	Lack of time at home to engage in helping children do homework	3.68	High challenge
4	Schools do not invite parents to discuss children’s school progress	2.88	Low challenge
5	Inadequate level of education hampers effective participation in promoting learning outcomes	3.84	High challenge
6	Parents do not see much value in promoting girl-child education	3.17	Moderate
7	The need for children to work on the farms and small businesses to supplement the family income	3.57	Moderate challenge
8	Parents lack knowledge of their roles in promoting learning outcomes for their children	3.69	High challenge
9	Uneducated parents’ view are not listened to and valued at PTA meetings	3.15	Moderate challenge
10	Parents fear that at one point they may be required to support the education of their children	3.29	Moderate challenge

It is recommended that the policy holders should reflect on their decisions and consider putting up mechanisms that will attract parents to participate in improving the learning outcomes of their children in universal primary schools. Such mechanism would include rephrasing the policy in a clear and concise language, outline what school inputs the parent is sup-

posed to contribute, create opportunities for parents to be involved in school activities and encourage active interaction with education stakeholders. Schools should organize seminars, open days and conduct workshops to educate parents regarding ways to help them.

UPE policy that parental participation in improving the learning outcomes of their children in universal primary schools is still low. The result showed that there is limited involvement in all the three aspects namely; participation in school activities, participation in school governance and participation at home. The results also showed that there were three major challenges in parental participation to improve the learning outcomes of their children in UPE schools, namely: parents’ lack of financial and other resources to support scholastic requirements of their children, schools not inviting parents to discuss children’s school progress; and inadequate level of education of parental roles in promoting learning outcomes.

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