Strategies Used by School Heads in Engaging Parents in the Management of Ward Secondary Schools

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Abstract

This study investigates the strategies used by school heads in engaging parents in the management of ward secondary schools in Namtumbo. The study was guided by the system theory of management. Questionnaires, interviews and focused group discussions were used to collect data. Data were analyzed through content techniques and statistical analysis in which frequencies and mean descriptions were obtained. The findings of the study indicate that school heads employed different strategies in engaging parents in managing ward secondary schools. These strategies include the use of teacher parent associations, students' diaries and written communication to parents, parent school meetings and home visitation. The study concludes that lack of explicit policy to guide schools in engaging parents in managing ward secondary schools do not prevent them in engaging parents in the management of schools. They employ different strategies as presented above. The ability to use the strategies vary across schools. The study recommends that the training to school heads prior to their office resumption should be conducted. Training should essentially focus on empowering the school heads with the knowledge and skills of engaging parents in school affairs. Laws and regulations to guide the formation and functioning of TPAs in ward secondary schools should be made by the central government in Tanzania.

Keywords: Ward Secondary Schools, Parents Involvements, School Heads, Strategies and School management.

Introduction

Parents' participation in school management to foster effective management of schools has been a topic of interest among scholars. Studies out of Tanzania specifically in England reveal that, there is no explicit policy on how school heads could encourage and engage parents to participate in school matters (Taylor &

Saunder, 1976). Lack of clear policy to guide parents' involvement in school related matters such as academic and managerial affairs has resulted into a sense of parents not being valued by the school authorities (Okeke, 2014). In Tanzania the participation of parents in school management is articulated in section 38 of the Education Act number 25 of 1978 with the view that, parents as stakeholders in education have the same role of advising and cooperating with school heads in managing schools (Mwaisaka, 2014). The above referred Tanzania Education Act, does not explain how school heads can engage parents in the management of the schools under their supervision.

The current education system of Tanzania focuses mostly on school heads and teachers as key educators with little attention for the role of parents in students learning (Kiboge, 2019).Scholars such as Felix (2008) have proposed different strategies that can be used to engage parents in school related activities to include home visits, parents evening occasions, school debates, speech days and Parent-teacher associations. Similarly, Marphatia, Edge, Legault and Archer (2010) urged that, the atmosphere in and around schools must be conducive for parents and teachers to establish healthy relationships. An atmosphere that is open, trusting and inviting, provides an important, supportive infrastructure within which attitudes can be shared and actions implemented.

Bunijeva and Durisic (2017) on Parental Involvement as an Important Factor for Successful Education explained that collaboration between parents and teachers in school enhance school management and supportive conducive environment in school is a key factor to motivate parents' participation in schools. Wittmer & Clark (2007) report that parents tend to be more willing to participate in school management when the school leadership provide parents with calendar that list progamme activities per each term, solicit parents as volunteers in helping school special projects and invite parents to sit on an educational planning session with school leaders and their children. This means that, it is the school head, with the responsibility of engaging parents in the school management rather than parents' autonomist.

Mwageni (2015) indicated that parents' participation in managing ward secondary schools in Namtumbo is poor. Many reasons could be explained including nature of their social economic pattern that require them to move seasonally from their home places to remote areas for crop cultivation. In turn this inhibits many parents from participating fully in school matters. Consequences as the result of parents' poor participation have been reported; the strategic plan of Namtumbo district of 2014/2015 - 2018/2019 indicated that low parents' participation in managerial affairs in schools has accelerated dropout and misconducts among students, shortage of school physical infrastructure, unchecked involvement of students in domestic and child's labor, early pregnancies and poor nutrition to students.

Students in ward secondary schools stay at home with their parents and walk for a distance from home to school in every school day in which a lot of bad conducts

among students are reported that require intervention from parents. This study was therefore conducted in Namtumbo district as area of study to identify strategies used by school heads to engage parents in the management of Ward Secondary Schools. The selection of this district as a study area was based on the existing studies conducted in this district such as Mwageni that found, parents' participation in managing ward secondary schools in Namtumbo district is poor.

Methodological Perspective
This study investigates the strategies used by school heads in engaging parents in the management of ward secondary schools in Namtumbo district. The study was guided by the system theory of management. Questionnaires, interviews and focused group discussions were used to collect data. The study used convergent parallel mixed methods design. This design allows the researcher to collect both quantitative and qualitative data at the same time and then integrate the information in the interpretation of the overall results (Creswell, 2014). Secondary data were collected by reading books, published and unpublished dissertations and journals on the information related to this study. Data were analyzed through content techniques and statistical analysis in which frequencies and mean descriptions were obtained.

Findings and Discussions
Despite lacking explicit policy to guide school heads in engaging parents in the management of ward secondary schools. Five strategies are used by school heads in Tanzania and Namtumbo district in particular to engage parents in managing ward secondary schools. Those strategies are as presented and discussed hereunder.

Diaries and Written Communication
The study findings revealed that school heads send students' report forms and formal letters to parents about students' discipline and academic performance. Parents receive students' discipline and academic progress report of their children from school heads. In case of, a particular student is misbehaving while in school or not attending school regularly as per school time table parents are informed via formal letters. A parent in village A just as an example, when asked about the strategies employed by school head to engage him in school managerial activities had this to say:

> I get a letter, from the school head requesting me to participate in issues relating to discipline and attendance of my child in case she had not been attending school for some days. You know, sometimes our children leave our houses to school, but hiding in the forest. Therefore, to ensure students attendance in school, the school head communicate with us as parents through letters (Interviewee 1, Village A: September 2, 2021).

The quotation above expresses that, school heads used formal letters to engage parents in monitoring students' discipline and attendance. The information from this

quotation was also supported by 52 (86.6%) of parents out of 60 who confirmed to have been engaged by school heads in managing their school through formal written letters. Despite receiving those reports on time, parents were found not giving any feedback to teachers about what are written in. Students in school A during focus group discussion presented:

> Although parents are required to give opinions about their children's discipline and academic progress by filling a part provided for parents in the students' report form, parents are not giving it to school heads or other teachers. This affects effective monitoring of students' discipline and academic progress due to lack of cooperation between parents and teachers in our schools (Interviewee 2, Village B: September 2, 2021).

The students' comments above implies that, parents' participation in monitoring students' discipline and attendance in ward secondary schools is not effective especially when they are engaged by school heads through students report forms. This is inconformity with Mutanda (2015) who argued that some parents do not cooperate in with school leadership in instilling discipline among students in schools. Lack of parents' feedback about their children academic performance affects effective teaching and learning process. Formal letters are also used by school heads in Namtumbo district to inform parents about various activities and events that happen and are to happen at school as confirmed by 9 (90%) of ward education officers out of 10.

The activities include; construction and rehabilitation of school physical infrastructures like classrooms. They are also used to invite parents in meetings to be conducted at school as well as informing them about students' needs and progress of construction projects. Thompson, Gillis, Fairman & Mason (2014). On their study on effective strategies for engaging parents in students learning to support achievement; evidenced that, school heads often use various forms of target communications to parents as a way of increasing parental engagement in both the school environment and learning at home. This can include providing contract information for students, sending home students' progress and problems on report cards to parents.

Formation of Teacher Parent Associations (TPAs)
School heads were found forming different associations in their respective schools. These associations are formed up of two to three parents from each village that constitutes a particular ward in which a particular school is found. Two teachers are also member the association. One parent among them serves as the chair while a teacher is the secretary of the association. 9 (90%) out of 10 selected ward secondary schools were found having TPAs. Those associations are formed in regards to activities being implemented in their respected schools. A school head from school H for example during interview said:

> I have formed an association made up of six (6) parents two (2) from each village and two among my teachers. The association

helps to encourage parents to contribute food for their children when at school on time. It also receives maize, beans and money contributed by parents. This association has managed my school to implement school feeding program effectively (Interviewee 2, School H: March 2, 2012).

This quotation implies that, TPAs formed by school heads enable effective implementation of different school development projects like school feeding program initiated in schools. The findings reviled that, nine (9) TPAs were made to assist collection food for students in ward secondary schools, four (4) were in regards to construction and rehabilitation of school physical infrastructures, laboratory and classrooms being included. 61 (35.1%) students during focused group discussions agreed that PTAs help school heads in implementing different school development projects like school feeding and construction projects.

Despite playing positive roles as presented above, TPAs were reported causing misunderstanding between its members and parents. This was due to due the use of force in collecting different contributions like food and construction items needed in school to implement a particular school development project. Lack of legal frameworks to guide the functioning of TPAs was reported to be another source the misunderstanding. United Nation Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa (2005) presents the government should form laws and specific guidelines to guide the formation and functioning of TPAs in schools for them to be effective. Effective TPAs strengths relationship between parents, members of the association and the whole school (Mambane, 2000).

The Use of Parent Meetings

Majority of parents 40 out of 60 which was equal to 18.3% of the 337 total respondents were found to have attended meetings held at school after being organized by school management teams and invited by the school heads. In the same vein, school heads used those meetings to engage parents in planning about school budgets. Through parent meetings, parents were also informed about the progress of various activities and projects under implementation in schools. school heads in each selected school through interview were seen to have been conducted two meetings within the year. Six school heads out of 10 conduct more than three parent meetings. The number of school development projects being implemented in schools were also influencing the number of meetings being conducted. A member of school board of school J during interview said:

> The school head mostly uses parent meetings to engage parents in managing rehabilitation of classrooms and laboratory at school. Through parent through meetings discuss together on how to go through with the rehabilitation activity and the way of funding it (Interviewee 3, Village J; February 10, 2021).

The comments above shows that the management of rehabilitation activities being implemented at schools involves parents. Parent meetings are used by the school

heads to engage parents in funding and management of those activities in schools. These observations do not support what Jaiswal (2017) commented, parent meeting is not an effective way of engaging parents in school activities since parents have no time to attend them.

Although parent meetings enabled participation of parents in school activities. Various challenges were found by the researcher regarding to the use of parent meetings as the strategy used by school heads to engage parents in school managerial affairs which were; presence of communication breakdown between parents and school heads on the information on when a particular meeting will be conducted. This is due to the delay of information being send to parents by the school heads of which in most cases are being sent through formal letters via students. During interview sessions with 60 parents, 30 (50%) were found to have received the meeting invitation very late hence not being able to attend the meeting at school. 89(40%) of students out of 122 also greed that parents sometimes do not get information about meeting at school on time.

This results into suspension of some parent meetings at school due poor attendance of parents as was marked from the questionnaires administered to 104 ward secondary school teachers. On the other hand, the findings of this study concur with Numly (2015) who found that lack of effective communication between schools and parents due to the location of schools being far away from parents' residences results into poor participation of parents in school activities discussed in the meetings being conducted at schools. Despite of the challenges school heads face on the use of this strategy as explained above, various activities were reported being funded and implemented in schools with the participation of parents through meetings conducted at schools. In supporting this, student from school J during focus group discussion commented:

> As students, we are satisfied with the number of parents attending parent meetings at this school. Although, sometimes the school head suspends a particular meeting due poor participation of parents. The number of parents who participate in different meetings make various decisions which are implemented by all parents even those who failed to participate the particular meeting due different factors such as the delay of information about the meeting because of living far away from school location (Focus Group Discussion 2, School B: February 10, 2021).

This entails that, sometimes parents fail to attend parent meetings at school. Distance factor is among reasons the failure in the sense that some of parents are living far away from school location. These parents are willing to implement decisions made by their fellow parents who managed to attend the meeting at school.

Home Visiting

This study found that, school heads have a tendency of visiting parents in their homes. Their intention of visiting parents includes the following; getting information from parents about students who do not attend school regularly and encouraging parents to contribute different contributions that parents have agreed to contribute during parent meetings to mention just few. One of the parents had this to say:

> *Mwaka jana mwanangu anayeingia kidato cha nne sasa alikuwa mtoro sana shuleni. Alikuwa na tabia ya kutoka nyumbani kila siku lakini hafiki shule. Alikuwa anakaa vichakani. Mkuu wa shule aliwai kuja nyumbani kwangu kunieleza kwanba mwanangu haji shule tuliweza shilikiana na dipo tulipo gundua alikuwa anakaa vichakani. Njia hii ya kutufuata wazazi inasaidia sana kukomesha utoro mashuleni* (Interviewee 3, Village G: February 11, 2021).

The above quotation in Swahili language from a parent was translated into English language. The below is the researcher's direct translation:

> Last year, my child who is now joining form four class was not attending school regularly. He used to leave home to school every day, but not reaching the school compound. He was hiding in the forest. The school head once come to my home telling me that my son was not attending school. We managed to cooperate and realize that he was hiding into forest on way to school. This way of visiting us as parents helps to eradicate students' absenteeism in schools (Interviewee 3, Village G: February 18, 2021).

This quotation suggests that, the strategy of visiting parents as used by school heads in engaging parents to manage different situation including students' attendance in schools is good and it promotes cooperation with parents. Through home visiting school heads maintain good relationship with parents around their schools. In support of this, United Republic of Tanzania (URT, 2015) in Secondary School Management Toolkit: Practical Guide for Heads of Schools Asserts, school heads are responsible for establishing and maintaining positive relationship between schools and parents for effective management of schools to affect students' effective learning (Kiboge, 2019). Through maintaining good relationship with the neighboring communities like parents, students' moral guidance is being improved.

There are many factors that led into the variation of school heads' ability in doing a particular managerial activity such as engaging parents in school matters. Presents different trainings offered to school heads and experiences contribute into different ability in applying managerial techniques. For school heads to be effective they require formal courses and non-formal experiences such as workshops and seminars. Informal experiences through unstructured mentorship, understudying other leaders, and proxy are important to enhance school heads managerial capacity. School heads' ability to engage parents in school management is also influenced by his perception over parents' ability to contribute views on how to manage schools as well as parents' location being far away from school (Namulya, 2015). The two factors reported by

Namuly (2015) were also seen in Namtumbo district as reasons for low parents' participation in school management.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Despite the fact that there is no clear and explicit policy to guide school heads on how to engage parents in school matters including the school management, the school heads in Tanzania specifically in Namtumbo district are using traditional strategies in engaging parents in the management of Ward Secondary Education. This is contrary to the modern world in which science and technology has dominated the means of communication processes. The selection of those strategies is also based on the choice of school heads. The use of the strategies varied among school heads in the sense that, a particular school head from a particular school is more capable of employing a certain strategy than the other. This study recommends for any ward secondary school head aspirant in Tanzania should be trained on those strategies. The school heads must be encouraged by their top officers to learn from each other on how to improve the use of those strategies to enhance effective involvement of parents in school management. The government should enact law and regulations that will guide the formation and functioning of TPAs in schools so as to formalize and strength them in implementing their roles.

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